

PATHWAYS



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 this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or any other affiliated organization.

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

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My Experience in Adult Education

My Place of Therapy

Clearwater, a place I had only seen in pictures, soon became my refuge. I have lived almost 26 years in another town in Florida. But after going through a divorce, came a challenging period in my life. I made the move to Clearwater three years ago with the help of family, friends and most importantly God.

My days began to be difficult here, because I did not know anyone. However, I began to learn my way around and meet new people at church. I got involved as a volunteer doing different activities at the church which gave me great joy. But I applied to help with religious classes and was unable to help due to my inadequate English skills. I decided that this was not going to stop me, and I wanted to do something about it. It was then, I started to look for a place where I could take English lessons.

God illuminated me with this place at the library called “Clearview Adult Education Center”. From this moment on my experiences in the adult classroom began. I embarked on a personal journey where I encountered exceptional teachers and classmates. They made me feel so welcome, like right at home. I call it “My Place of Therapy”. I have had the opportunity to meet other students from all over the world, and to learn about their cultures. Sharing experiences, interacting with each other, and working in groups was how we have become a family.

My experiences in adult education have supported me on this journey to become a better me, to stay motivated, to continue learning and most importantly never give up. My time in this school has been very productive. I greatly appreciate the skills and lessons I’ve cultivated from learning English as a second language.

A big thank you to my work with children and to being able to make a positive impact on their lives. I have now overcome a painful period in my life. And it is now that I realize when problems seem overwhelming and impossible it is with God’s grace that can bring us through it all. “With great FAITH, comes great REWARDS”.

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me”.
Phillippians 4:13

Benta Leticia Brzozowski comes to us from Honduras and is attending ESOL classes at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

My First Experience in the US

I arrived in the United States in February 2023. I am from Cambodia. I have two daughters. I was excited for the opportunity to live together with my husband and my first daughter because we had been living separately for a long time. Now I would like to write about my experiences while I am living in this county.

The first time when I came here, I was feeling nervous and strange because everything is different from my country - the weather, the environment, the culture, and the people. One more thing to make me worried was my English language because when I lived in my country, I never spoke it. I did not have enough time to learn English, so I was afraid to talk because of mispronunciation and difficulties in communication. I chose silence over speech.

But contrary to my opinion, most of the people who live here are friendly and always say “Hello!” first, even if they do not know each other. They never care when I say the wrong words, and that makes me feel comfortable living in this country. However, I generally thought that I should find a school to learn and improve my English language before I obtain a driver’s license and a job.

After I found the school, I was very surprised that the school tuition was free. I have had the opportunity to study English at the Clearview Adult Education Center for several months. Now I have obtained the driver license, which was my first goal. I am very thankful to the school and teachers who are dedicated to teaching as well as helping other immigrants to have a better life in the future.

Sokhunna Chin is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Sokhunna's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Come and Get the Benefits

I enrolled in the Adult Education class in September 2023. In this short time, I have gained a lot of experience. I am blessed to find a good teacher who is very helpful to me. She helps me overcome my shyness. Most importantly, she helps me to believe in myself and love myself. She advised me to practice and speak English everywhere I go.

Another piece of advice is to never get discouraged. Next, I meet many good students who know what they want, why they come to school, and who are trying to speak English well.

In class, I have friends who always make me laugh and make me happy. I get to know my classmates. We talk to each other even though we are from different areas and different countries, but they are always there for me. My class is a learning place where I discover my talent. I never knew that I would come to learn many things such as soft skills, digital skills, social skills, and culture.

One funny experience is when I am going to take the post-test, I feel so scared. I always say that I am not ready for the test. But after the test, I showed improvement. This class enabled me to build my confidence. Come and be part of my good experience.

Sarahphina Destinoble is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Grateful for the Opportunity

Hey everyone! My name is Rachel Dodd, and I would like to share a little bit of my amazing experience as an Adult English Learner in Sarasota, FL. I came to the US from Brazil five years ago with my husband and two kids, and one of my decisions I made was to enroll in English school.

Since the beginning of the classes, I have had a great time. Not only for the friends that I made from many countries across

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the world, but I also improved my vocabulary, learning each class new words, making me more confident with talking and listening to people and at my job.

Every month, the teacher talked about a different topic, like health, insurance, technology, food, American history, buying and renting properties, and many other things.

I remember one day we exited the building and there were two cars parked in the parking lot, and we got inside of them to learn about auto parts. Each part of the car was named with a sticker. It was unforgettable! I also remember when the teacher asked us to bring foods from our country to class and explain the ingredients and how we made them. We all had so much fun.

After a while, I went to Advanced Class. And I'm still very grateful to participate in this group. Not only for the variety of vocabulary, grammar, and reading that we have there, but it's a special time that we spend with ourselves, that we leave our daily life routine and take care of our mind and soul.

After five years, I feel way more confident dealing with everyday situations here in America.

I also want to take this opportunity to give thanks for everyone who works as directors, teachers, especially Jack Botelho and Hannah Tremblay, all tutors, and staff.

Rachel Dodd is a student at Literacy Council of Sarasota. Her teacher is Jack Botelho.

Go to Class and Learn English

I came to the United States in February 2023. After a while, I looked for a school that teaches adults in the community. That was where I went to start learning English. It was not easy for me during the first week. When I went home, I said to myself that I have to give myself determination because to live and work in this country, I have to know the language of the country.

With my teacher's help, I was patient to learn. She always said to me, "You can do it!" This motivates me. So, every day I make

an effort, I adapt to the class, and I go through the stages slowly. In class, I try to listen more, understand, and pay attention to the teacher.

One of the things that helps me is when the teacher sometimes asks me to translate for the Haitian people who do not understand English. This encourages me to follow her instructions and directions. Now, I'm at the low intermediate level. My dream is to become a better person in everything that will help me have a good life in this country.

Honny Fabrine is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Personal Story in Adult Education

Almost two years ago, I moved to America because I got married to my husband, who lives in Tampa, Florida. The journey of immigration and marriage happened at the same time, and it meant leaving my country and family behind. Although my husband is supportive and kind, I sometimes feel homesick.

To keep myself busy, I studied, biked, and cooked, but I still missed being part of a community and making new friends. Being a Ph.D. candidate, I could read and write in English, but speaking it was challenging due to a lack of confidence. After six months in Tampa, my husband had a work project in St. Pete, Florida, so we moved there.

Every day, I enjoyed biking in St. Pete, taking in nature and the fresh air. One day, while biking to the store, I noticed a big billboard about ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Pleasantly surprised, I decided to call the number on the billboard. A kind man gave me the address for a test and invited me to join the ESOL class. This marked the beginning of my journey in ESOL.

I have had two wonderful teachers who created a supportive and motivating environment for me and other students. The ESOL class, located at Pinellas Technical College in St. Pete, became a part of my everyday life. The college's media center was a great place to study. Now, the ESOL class and the college are

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integral to my daily routine, helping me learn English and feel more connected in my new home!

Delbar Hashemi is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Ivette Waller.

Learning English Is A Gift

I live in Delray Beach, Florida. The time of my school is from 6 PM to 8 PM Monday to Friday. I'm learning English 4 days a week, but I have a computer lab for one hour every Wednesday.

My teacher's name is Frank and he teaches level 4. He is a gift from God.

One of the worst experiences I had while I was at school was because they had me sign a paper saying that I would not be able to go to school after 6:00. One day my car broke down and I didn't want to lose the school day. I had to leave my house on foot to go to school under heavy rain and bad luck for me. I arrived at 6:30 and they didn't let me in. I had to return home in the rain.

I keep coming to school because, I know Adult Education is the best way for me and for learning English. My classroom is very beautiful. It has nice pictures, tables, chairs, and electricity. The students are very funny. I like my English class. I will want to speak English for a better job and I will have more conversations with people.

Leconte Richardson is a student at Village Readers Family Education. His teacher is Frank Sauro.

My Experience in Adult Education

Listening to the rhythm and fluency of language will help you much more than you think. You will hear words from conversations that you do not understand or that you barely remember, but when they come up again, you will recognize them. Focus on listening and speaking as much as you can. At the end of the day, this is what will allow you to learn the English language much faster. While this may be hard to believe, studying as an adult isn't too dissimilar to being at school.

One of the best things about studying as an adult is that I am surrounded by highly focused people. Returning to study is a serious commitment and this has been reflected in my peers' attitudes and approaches to the course. I'm surrounded by people that understand the challenges of studying alongside adult life and we have been able to support each other throughout.

My advice for anyone who is in a similar position to what I was, is to remember that you won't be alone in returning to education. Everyone in your adult course will be returning to education after some time away from it. It's so important to support each other along the way.

Veronica Lem is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

On the Way to Learn

English Language Education for Adults is very important for new immigrants. I used to be a very talkative person in my country, but after I came to the United States, I gradually became afraid to socialize with people. Why? The biggest reason is probably because of the language barrier. I can't speak English and understand what others are saying. I'm afraid to speak and worry that others won't understand what I'm saying. I'm afraid to make eye contact with others in the crowd. I'm not sure what I should do if someone suddenly starts chatting with me. Over time, I began to become very quiet and have low self-esteem.

One day, I learned about Clearview Adult Education Center from my friend, and I realized it was time to leave my comfort zone and go out. In this school, teachers not only teach students English, but also help us blend into American life and culture faster and easier. The students in the school are all from different countries. We all have the same goal, the desire to learn English well. We study together, communicate with each other, and make progress. Our teachers are very responsible and patient, teaching us reading, writing and grammar.

I'm lucky to have two awesome teachers who have been very supportive and encourage me to get out of my comfort zone to

try and learn all the time. Every student becomes stronger and powerful in learning. After a period of time, some students find jobs, and some move on to a better life. For me personally, I have also changed a lot. I have become more confident and made many good friends. I have begun to be full of expectations and hopes for my future again. Now I take the initiative to talk to others. I'm not afraid to visit a doctor by myself, and even to volunteer at my son's school. I do better and better every time.

In my opinion, Clearview Adult Education Center is like a big family. It is like a loving second family we immigrants have in a foreign country far far away from our home country. It provides us with support to settle down in the brand new world. Although my English is still not good enough, I believe it's never too late to learn, and I wish you all the best on your own journey of learning English.

Mengmeng Lin's teacher at the Clearview Adult Education Center is Inguna Ozols.

Not Bad, Not Bad

My Teacher is Mr. Frank. My school is Village Academy. I am writing this text because I want to let people know that your imagination can have much power over your reality. Even more, if you have some education. Adult education is the most important activity. Every human should be an active partaker.

Education is an activity that is designed to bring change in the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals, groups, or communities. It makes me feel good because learning is fun and my teacher is the biggest part of our fun. He gives us a such inspiration. He treats us really well! Even though you say something that is wrong he will say "Not bad, not bad." What inspires me to learn is that I want to be free, to have people working for me not me working for them.

Solomon Ortiz said, "Education is the key to success in life and teachers make a lasting impact in the lives of their students."

Light up the lamp of education. That's the only key to a better future.

Clairmanie Lormand Jean Baptiste is a student at Village Readers Family Foundation. Her teacher is Frank Sauro.

My Experience in Adult Education

Since I was a child, I have been dreaming about being able to attend English classes in the U.S. I always believed that the best way to assimilate is to learn the language, as to better fit into American society. Something that I need since I work with Americans, was coming to a place where English is spoken. I wanted to immerse myself, not only in the language, but also in the culture, pronunciation, and slang. I'm proud that after turning 27 years old, I could achieve it and my experience was more incredible than what I would have imagined.

I arrived in the States one Friday, and the next Monday I went to the Clearwater Adult School for the first time. I was received in a nice and gentle way by Andy, which made me feel calmer. He asked me to take the test to know at which level I belong. As I supposed, the listening part was not as good as I would have desired. I felt that those audio recordings were so fast and I couldn't get most of the answers, even though the reading part was excellent.

It was shocking to me when after a few weeks of an almost perfect attendance, I took a test as hard as the first one. I could understand almost everything and I was delighted. I got the maximum level of the test. At that point I realized the important effect that the classes were having on me. Apart from raising all of my English skills in the school, since we've been working on all of them, I met new amazing people, and I consider some of them as my friends.

Because of school, I took part in some American celebrations such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas despite being far from my country and family. The incredible teacher Nancy, to whom I owe all my gratitude, prepared an amazing table with typical food and decorated the whole classroom for us. She made different foods and decorations for each special holiday. For instance, we ate a delicious pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving! I had never tried one of those and it was amazing.

Those events were so heartwarming. I remember being overjoyed sharing those days with my classmates while we were speaking English all together; otherwise, I wouldn't have shared those days with anyone, which would not have been nice. I am thankful and grateful due to the amount of things I've experienced throughout my time in the school, and I would like to thank all of the people who work to make the school a safe, quiet, and nice place for all of us to grow personally and professionally.

My name is Facundo Ruiz, I come from Uruguay, I'm 27 years old, I'm a software engineer. I'm attending ASB classes at Clearwater Adult School. My teacher is Nancy Mudaro.

My Experience in Adult Education

My experience as an adult learner within the higher education system has been full of challenges. The decision to come back to school to pursue my undergraduate degree was difficult. I knew that this would mean having to juggle multiple roles and commitments while attending classes.

For the past 7 years, I have been working full-time while also managing to maintain a 4.0 GPA as a full-time student. Basic skills training preparation for the general educational development (GED) test, preparation toward Earning a high school diploma and job skills training opportunities. I'm learning English, and I'm in school now working to get my GED.

Bebetho Junior Saint-Jean is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Truth of Life

I had never thought of immigrating...

Before the Taliban came to Afghanistan, I was studying and going to school and had a wonderful life. I was happy, enjoying school and family, enjoying life itself with all the colors it offers and fortunately, everything until then was so bright. But things changed.

When the Taliban came to my country, my family didn't let me go to school. Everything started to go wrong. They considered girls' education a shame. It was a shame for girls to attend school. It became impossible for me to study well and finish school. They threw my dream of getting educated in the trash.

I was in 10th grade when I had to leave my country and come to a new world: America. We faced many problems before entering to U.S. I lost my family at the airport because many people, just like us, wanted to leave the country ASAP. They wanted to study and have a good life and above all, they all wanted to leave their country safely. But now I miss my family so much. I am waiting for the day my father and brothers come to the USA, to reunite as a family and live happily together again.

When I came to the USA I was 17 years old and wanted to go to school again, but they told me that I couldn't go to school. I asked them why and they said they wouldn't accept me because I was too old to go to school. That time I was very upset because I wanted to study. I stayed at home for 1 year and 3 months and I had no hope for the future. Every night I used to cry and say to myself why did the Taliban come to our country? Why did they deny the education for girls? Why should my dreams be extinguished? I was crying and praying every day that there was a way to start school again.

Fortunately, a ray of sunshine appeared, and that ray was "Clearwater Adult Education Center." I was very happy because my prayer was answered. Now, studying in the "Star Program" at this school, I can achieve my dreams, improve my English, and study toward getting a GED Diploma at the same time. My goal is to go to college and hopefully become a surgeon in the future.

I learned from life that you should not give up. To achieve your dreams, you should fight the problems as much as you can. Life is hard, but a window will definitely open for you, so never give up and pray that God will be with you in your troubles. We have to work hard to achieve our dreams. No immigrant lives the same immigration!

Bheshta Sayed Jan is a student in the STAR Program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Four Months Are More Than Two Years

When I arrived in St. Pete, I didn't understand anything. Because I speak Portuguese and Spanish, I never worried about learning English. And as my husband speaks English very well, I was fine. But when I came to live here, I noticed that it was necessary. I was taking classes online and thought that it was enough. I thought that by just living here I would end up learning, but that doesn't happen; it is very difficult. A year, two years passed, and I still didn't understand. It is a very bad feeling; you feel very small. It is like everyone thinks you don't know anything.

I was lucky enough to find a place to work where the people helped me a lot, but I still felt insignificant and sometimes angry with myself. Only after two years I found a person that told me about the Clearview School for adults, and I decided to try.

I needed to take a test to start the school, and this encouraged me, because I started in level 5. For me, it was a good result; better than I imagined.

In the first few weeks I noticed the difference. I used to do classes online, but I didn't have the discipline to stay for a long time or even every day. When I studied at home I kept stopping all the time. Having a commitment to go to school every day and being focused in class makes a big difference.

For me another thing that is very important is to try write in English. When I was studying at home, I never tried it. I felt like I was getting better when I achieved the goal to write in English and think in English. This is very different than writing in my language and translating.

I think it is great to have found this school. It is making a lot of difference for me. I learned more in four months at school than in two years with online classes. And, in addition to learning English, I also learn about other countries and different cultures.

Agueda Zabisky is from Brazil. She is learning English at the Clearview Adult Education Center, and her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Turning Point In My Life

An Unexpected Turning Point

A turning point in my life happened unexpectedly on February 2019. While living in Russia, one day a guy wrote to me on social networks and said, “Hello, I think I know you.” His name was Pavel and he used to live in the same city as me. But a few years ago, he moved with his family to America. We talked a lot online and half a year later he came to Russia and proposed to me. We got married in January 2020 in Russia, went on a honeymoon to Italy, and then my husband returned to America for a couple of months to resolve work matters. Unfortunately, the pandemic Covid-19 began and Pavel could not return for 11 months. If you think Covid is the end of the story, then no. He returned and we decided to move to America due to the war. Sanctions and political situations were bad and America would be a good change.

And a new chapter began in my life, called immigration. It turned out to be more difficult than I thought. I’ve started my life all over again, like a child, I’ve started by learning a language. It’s challenging and exciting at the same time. A new language provides new opportunities like meeting new people, getting a job, and traveling. However, at the same time, it was hard. I felt stressed, scared, and sometimes I wanted to return to Russia and my family. Pavel told me that we need to live here because it was not safe in Russia. Pavel and I wanted to live in one place together. I never in my life planned to move to America and learn English, but meeting my husband changed my life greatly.

I like this new way of life. I’ve met a lot of interesting people, such as Linda, my English tutor. It amazes me how strangers are ready to help you: learn the language, solve some everyday issues, and integrate in a new country. Over the course of a year, I fell in love with Florida, got used to the very hot summer and new life. I believe that America will become my new home!

Yuliya Aleksandrova is a student of Linda Whitney, in Venice, Florida.

The Turning Point In My Life

I was excited when I first arrived in the U.S. Previously, I had English classes at school for several years in my country. My English test scores were always one of the top ones in the class. Therefore, I thought that I would have no problem meeting people or going to school in America.

However, reality is not always what I think. Wherever I was, I couldn't understand what people were talking about or understand the questions they were asking. It was a pain.

I thought about it, and I realized that the structure of the Chinese language is quite different from English. The pronunciation and grammar for the two languages are totally different. Also, the English I had learned in my country was far from good enough for accuracy. English words have many meanings. There are gender differences, singular or plural, and they have present, past and future tenses, which the Chinese language doesn't have. The Chinese language uses characters to group a sentence, adding an adjective, time, or number to complete the meaning of the sentence. I was not quite used to the differences between the languages and my mind couldn't change fast enough, so I easily made the mistakes. So people either don't understand or misunderstand me.

Life is difficult without communicating with people. Days went by, and I grew depressed. I did not want to go out, and I was scared to meet people unless somebody who could speak English accompanied me. Without knowing English well, it was inconvenient to live in this society, to go to school, or to get a job.

But life must go on, I live here, and I need to learn English to make my life easier. Therefore, I started to search where I could find a place to learn English. When I lived in NY, a local community college had an evening English class for adults, a nearby literacy institute had volunteers to help teach English, and the library had an ESL class. After I moved to Florida, I found that the library offered English classes in person or online zoom classes.

After years of learning, my English has improved, and I am no longer scared to meet people. I can communicate with people. But I know that I still have a lot of things to learn, such as

American culture, idioms, writing clearly and speaking clearly...
so I keep learning.

I am grateful that the government gives us an opportunity to not only to learn English, but also provide all kinds of educational classes, to learn crafts, computer skills, and health wellness at the library. How lucky we are to live in this great country!

P. Chan is a student in the Virtual Writing Clearly class at Orange County Library System.. Her teacher is Lyndsay Amiro.

Another Chance

LIFE! LIFE! LIFE! Life is like the sour patch candy, first it's sweet and then it's sour. Growing up, life was sweet, but I had a turning point that turned my life sour.

Let me tell you about the sweetness of my childhood – I grew up in a community of Quincy, Florida called “Hillside.” I lived mostly with my grandma and mom, until my mom moved us to our own place. Now that was the bomb. I remember getting presents on Christmas, candy on Halloween and eggs on Easter. Also, I remember me and my cousin dressing alike in our Easter suits. That was the coolest. We would have family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas, I really like those times as a kid, spending time with my family for the Holidays. I wish I could turn back the hands of time – to that “Turning-Point” in my life. Doing it all over again, having a second chance or should I say another chance, maybe a do-over. I would go back to playing basketball with my cousins and friends behind the crib, chilling and cracking jokes on each other – “what we call playing the dozen”! Life was great until the streets called my name.

Here's where I answered the call – why did I answer? Do you ever wish you hadn't answered the phone because when you did, there was only drama on the other end? Well, that's what I mean - when the streets called my name, it was only trouble on the other side. My life began to turn, spin, and flip upside down. I couldn't stop spinning until I ended up on the wrong side of the law. Yep, I landed in the Gadsden County Jail – now that was scary.

Since being here, I have been working hard to stop the spin – studying to get my GED and I became a Trustee. Being here has been a humbling experience. I wanted to go home so bad – but God had another plan, a “turning point.” I was sentenced to what they call an 11-29 and I had already served over 75 percent of the time. The judge saw my sincerity and really had mercy on me, for which I am truly grateful. Part of my sentence is to speak with youth, encouraging them to stay in school and on the right side of the law – “Doing the Right Thing” - and hopefully they will not have this story to tell as they make better stories and a better life.

In conclusion, my time is up in January 2024. I will get a full-time job, take care of my son, talk with youth, and complete my GED. Now, there’s a “Turning-Point” that can’t be beat!

Marcus Coster, Jr. is an inmate in the Gadsden County Jail; Ms. Brenda G. Johnson is his GED instructor.

It Was Grace

I was 38 years old and working for Walter Reed and John Hopkins, two American institutions in Cameroon, researching viruses that came from animals and made humans sick.

My responsibility as a research assistant was to implement the program and lead the teams for more than a week and almost every month in the forest areas more than 900 km away from the capital, where I lived with my family.

The journey always took more than 36 hours to get there and 36 hours to return.

When my daughter Grace, who was only nine months old, started crawling, my missions and working hours took me further and further away from my family. One day, when I came back from my mission, Grace woke up, and seeing me in bed, screamed and cried non-stop because of my presence. She then jumped out of bed, running away from me. Her mother ran over, took her in her arms, and calmed her down. That day, my daughter watched my every move, listening to see if I was getting close to her. I felt relieved when she fell asleep. When she woke up, I

sat on my computer in the living room. I saw the curtains separating the living room from the hallway, and underneath was my daughter, who had undoubtedly already been there for a while and didn't want to do anything that would betray her presence and put us in contact. When I got up to go to her, she started to run away crying. That's when her mother ran out from the kitchen, took Grace in her arms again, and said this to me:

“You'll have to choose between your daughter and your job. She doesn't see you, she doesn't know you, you're a threat to her.”

This statement broke my heart; my daughter needed her father's presence and love while I searched for ways to take care of myself and my family. I spent several days thinking about how to get my daughter to accept me and how I could extend this to others as well.

That was the turning point in my life. I quit my job and became a farmer to manage my time so that I could be more present with Grace and to all those that my presence could bless. I retrained in agricultural production and structuring families into companies to keep them united.

Nkam Tadiesse Edmond is a student at Family Support Services Network, Inc. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

Was Blind but Now I See

Every change begins with great suffering. I think many of us reach the bottom at some point in our lives. One day at the end of November 2021 I was calm, but my sentimental and financial situation had begun to change. I found myself in the middle of pain due to the loss of a very important person, which caused me to start staying at home. The pain was immense, and it froze me before accepting the situation. I had a lot to learn and many things to fix for myself. The days went on and now that I look back, I can explain to myself how I felt frozen.

I received a call and the person who worked for me decided to make a bad move and left me on the street. I do not blame

him, and he does not justify it either. I think I was too careless and left everything in his hands. The next day they canceled my contract of services and by the end of the month, he also had to close a restaurant for which he had worked a lot. By the beginning of December 2021, all my businesses that cost me years of hard work disappeared.

Well, I was still frozen. I spent months and months looking out a window, watching my children do their things and finally, I no longer had anything in the bank. I foolishly started selling my assets to pay for things. I could not look into the future until it was too late.

As I slowly opened my eyes, I realized that I had already left my children in the care of my mother to come to the United States to earn some money and recover.

I am here now and the only way to do it is to turn everything around. I have to start from scratch, without my children, without money, without any certification to help me work, and without documents.

Hmmm, how many migrants haven't done it? This is the biggest change in my life, not only because of what I said above but because I married an American man. Things have been a constant learning process, and I have decided to stay positive. I felt like I died. I felt like I lost everything, but I woke up. Now when I open my eyes, I am grateful for everything that life has given me; the place and the person I have by my side.

Paola Garces is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Never Give Up!

In the unpredictable journey of life, which may appear monotonous and uniform, beneath the surface there are always events unfolding - some significant, some inconsequential. Life can take abrupt turns, leading us to situations that seem utterly hopeless. Yet, we must remember that there are no truly hopeless situations; after all, we found ourselves in these circumstances for a reason.

Consider the tale of two frogs trapped in a pail of milk. One frog resigned herself to the futility of the situation and perished, while the other persisted, tirelessly kicking her legs. In her relentless struggle, she transformed the liquid milk into solid cheese and saved herself. The moral is clear: never give up!

Picture a prosperous individual actively engaged in the social and political life of Ukraine, enjoying a fulfilling life with a promising future. Suddenly, on February 24, 2022, a malevolent empire launches an unprovoked attack on Ukraine, shattering his world. His office is destroyed, and Russian soldiers occupy and pillage his cherished children's camp. Vehicles and equipment are stolen, trenches dug, and land mined. Additionally, a drone attack demolishes a building. Amidst this chaos, friends and acquaintances join the battle, some losing their lives, and refugees from Luhansk take shelter in his Kyiv home. Everything changes drastically and will never be the same again.

Initially, disbelief clouds his mind, followed by anger, and a strong desire to support his homeland. Shock sets in, then apathy, but finally, he resolves to act, realizing that his future and homeland hang in the balance. Faith, hope, love, and family remain his constant values, guiding him through the turmoil. He has faith that goodness will triumph over evil, hope that the war will end quickly, and an unwavering love for his family and country.

In the face of adversity, he finds solace in these pillars of strength. Gratitude is expressed towards the United States for their immense support to Ukraine. The acceptance of approximately 300,000 Ukrainian refugees and ongoing assistance will forever be etched in the annals of history, strengthening the bond between the two nations.

In these trying times, we must hold onto our humanity, support one another, and trust that the dawn will break after the darkest of nights. As it is written, "The Lord never subjects a person to trials that he cannot withstand." We must endure and persevere, for even in the bleakest moments, hope remains, and the human spirit prevails. Never give up!

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

A Teacher at A Crossroads

Have you ever wondered if it is worth starting over in your 50s? Is it OK to get out of your comfort zone in the middle of your life? Come and read to discover how circumstances throw you at a crossroads and make you take hard decisions in unexpected stages of your life!

This story starts in the 1980's in Havana, Cuba. At the time, I was a teenager and attended Junior High School. I used to play the guitar; my father had taught me how to play when I was 10 years old. I dreamed of being an artist and I managed to play in a band. To be honest, I even began teaching some friends. I enjoyed teaching very much.

Additionally, I have developed some languages skills. I learned English as a child because my grandmother was born in the USA, and she taught me. I was looking forward to improving my English in secondary school, but I had to study Russian because unfortunately, English was removed from the educational system. Nevertheless, soon after I became my class's Russian language monitor. I started enjoying teaching while playing the role of teacher assistant in class. I realized then I wanted to become a teacher.

At 15, the two people who supported my family, my grandpa, and my dad, passed away, so I had to take a serious decision, attend three years of Senior High and then five years of university or do something shorter and start working. I enrolled in the Economic Polytechnic Institute of Havana to study Economic Statistics and at the same time did some work. This banished my dreams of becoming a teacher.

I graduated in 1985. I worked in the economical field for 6 years, but I missed teaching. Truthfully, I wasn't fulfilled at all. That's when I decided to start my own business, I adapted a room in my house into a small classroom to teach languages. Then, in 2017 I met Ileana, and we got married a year later. She has a bachelor's degree in education, and a master's degree in psychology from Salamanca University, in Spain. Thus, we started working together in my little academy.

After more than 20 years doing what I consider my profes-

sional dream, I had to decide between staying in my homeland or losing the woman I really loved. In April 2023, my wife was approved after a long time waiting for her father's petition of family reunification. So, in September 2023, we came to the United States to join him.

Today, here I am in the land of my grandmother, starting again at the age of 56, giving a new turn to my life. But, with the same dream of being a teacher again. Do you believe in destiny?

Luis Manuel Hernandez is an economist and professor of languages. He has over 20 years of experience and a passion for teaching languages. He is fluent in Spanish, Italian, German, and English. He is a student in Regla Requena's class at Miami Dade College - Eduardo J. Padrón Campus

Nature's Awakening: A Turning Point in My Life with Environmental Impact

"Mom, why are articles about the environment always sad and dark?" This is a question that my daughter recently asked me, and the topic has become a turning point in my approach to life, which I'm currently interested in.

My daughter loves reading books and enjoys news and essays about various topics. There's only one theme she actively avoids, and that's the environment. Do I think she doesn't consider the environment important? No. In fact, she's very passionate about it. It just seems that any topic related to the environment brings up heavy stories like environmental pollution, animal extinction, and habitat destruction, making it an overwhelming subject for a young and tender mind.

I can understand why she feels this way. It's easy to feel hopeless when you're constantly exposed to negative news. However, I also believe that it's important to talk about environmental issues, even if they're challenging. I think the key is to find a balance between the negative and the positive. While I empathize with the importance of environmental protection, I find myself questioning it. What if we introduce the bright and positive aspects of the environment and let children experience them? Wouldn't they become more familiar with nature, see it as

a friend, and naturally develop a sense of responsibility to protect it?

In Florida, there are many places, like Everglades National Park, that preserve various natural environments for children to experience. Squirrels and lizards run around in front of our house. Turtles, fish, and various birds live around the lakes near our house. The first thing I noticed when I arrived here was that it's a nature-friendly place. By greeting manatees, I hope to make an effort to help children realize the importance of nature in a positive way and encourage them to care for and preserve it.

Recently, many manatees are flocking to the warmth of the spring water in Central Florida. How about going to the park and meeting them, making your turning point to decide to protect and support them on your own?

Jiye Hwang (Jenny) is an ESOL student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She has been taking both online and offline classes, each providing a unique learning experience. Her teacher is Peter Anderson.

As My Life Turns

I had several turning points in my life. I'll start with the ones that happened in the order I lived them.

First was when I graduated high school, which is middle school in the United States. I decided to go to a university and I left my family to start my journey with my independent life. I was ready to explore how my life will go in the future.

My second turning point was when I graduated the university and started my career working a factory. I was assigned assistant manager and soon after became the manager of the entire factory. I continued my studies while working to gain more knowledge and skills. I gained such important life skills with my hands-on experience at this factory that no university could have taught me.

My third turning point is one I wish I didn't experience. I was informed that I must serve in the Soviet Army. In the USSR,

every male must serve in the Soviet Army. It definitely was the worst period of my life. Everyone who has served in the Soviet Army could relate to why I say this statement.

Thankfully, we return to the positive turning points in my life with the fourth turning point- when I was able to return to work at the factory. I became director of the factory a few years after returning.

After the USSR decayed, I became part of a new country, Ukraine, which was an uplifting change due to less political power. Here, I decided to create my own company, the fifth turning point in my life. My company was very successful for 25 years. My company produced products for sports nutrition, which was successful.

My sixth and final turning point of my life so far was when my wife and I decided to move to the United States of America where my daughter had been living for quite some time with her family. My wife left first, and I finished all that I needed by selling my assets in Ukraine, and then joined her. I am thankful I made this decision before the outbreak which happened a few years after my move.

Yevgeniy Maslenin is an ESOL student from Ukraine currently in an ESOL class at Suncoast Technical College. His teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

The Day that Changed My Life

The day that changed my life was a dark, stormy Sunday in Manhattan, New York. I had been living with my friend on a 6-month visa from Colombia in the walk-in closet of a one room efficiency apartment downtown. That thundery Sunday morning, I came out of church with my Bible that I've had for years, given to me by my mother. I opened the doors of the church to see the clouds open up and I knew it was going to rain for a long time. I knew that I was bound to get wet, but I didn't want my Bible to get ruined, so I clutched my Bible under my arm to keep it from getting wet. I walked in the extremely heavy thunderstorm trying to get to the subway. I was walking and it was pouring so hard, I could hardly see in front of me. Then, a fancy white car pulled up

beside me and the window went down. This gentleman asked if he could help and give me a ride.

I saw the kindness in his eyes, but knew that he was a stranger, and he spoke English and I only understood Spanish. I told him no thank you. I continued to walk, and his car circled around again. He continued to roll down his window and ask to give me help, and I did a daring thing. I never would've thought I would do such a thing, but I had this weird feeling that I needed to go in the car, so I did. Even though we didn't speak the same language, we had a connection that is unexplainable. He drove me to my apartment building and asked for my phone number. I gave it to him, and he called me that night to ask if he could take me out on a date for dinner. My friend that I was living with told me I was crazy, but was excited for me. I went on a date with the man of my dreams the next day. He brought me beautiful flowers and chocolates.

He is an Italian stallion- tall, kind, and Italian. We didn't speak the same language but used body language. We both love to use our hands while we speak and translate from our phones. We went to an Italian restaurant for our first date. Then we continued to date, and I was the happiest woman ever from the day I made the choice to get in this stranger's vehicle. I have been married to him for five years and moved to Sarasota. We have a house together and both our families get along with each other. We are both learning each other's languages. I look forward to every day with him.

Martha Mastrandrea is a student at The Suncoast Technical College ESOL program. Her teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

The Big Secret

I have a secret that I have never admitted to anyone, not even to myself. I always said that I didn't want to have kids and I always said it with such confidence that even I believed it. Except it was a lie, a lie I was telling my family, my friends and myself. I love kids and they love me; I knew I would be a good dad, but there was a big problem. I have a learning disability that kept me from being able to read, and I did not want to pass it on to my kids. I felt that this would be the case because I probably got

mine from my parents who could not read either. So whatever I didn't learn at school, I also couldn't learn at home. After all, you can't teach what you don't know. And I was not learning much at school because the teachers didn't know what to do with me.

But still I managed to cope and graduate from high school. I even have had multiple jobs from the age of 14, and was married at 24. Not being able to read never stopped me from living a full life. At the same time, I knew there was something missing. Not reading didn't really matter to me because I found multiple ways to get around my shortcomings. Except when I had to read my mail, apply for jobs, read & write email, read signs at work, fill out doctor's forms, get signed up for my 401k, or read paperwork for car loans, all of which my wife would have to do for me. I also dreamt of reading one fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish with some child, however, I could not even get through green eggs and ham.

Finally, I got tired of relying on my unreliable wife to read for me, and I decided to do something about it. I went online to research reading class for adults and came across the Adult Literacy League. I called and the sweet lady who answered the phone made me feel comfortable enough to ask questions. She set me up for an interview; I got tested and matched with a tutor. Because my tutor realized things that no one else had noticed, I got referred to a functional vision doctor and learned I had physical eye problems as well as dyslexia; my tutor also helped me to realize that I had ADHD. Knowing all of this has helped me to understand why I have problems reading, and understanding has helped me to overcome my feelings of inadequacy and failure. Being able to read, even though not perfectly, has given me the confidence to be able to believe in my future, and to admit that, deep down, I have always wanted kids.

Michael McLaren is a student at the Adult Literacy League of Central Florida. His teacher is Fran Eberts.

My Best Decision Ever

Five years ago, I would have never imagined the life that I am living now, in one of the most beautiful cities all around the world. I am living in Miami, writing papers in English while sitting at the desk of a decent apartment.

At that time, I just experienced a poisonous relationship and I suddenly found that I had put myself in such an embarrassing and difficult situation: I lived in a very strange, small and rural city in my home country, China, surrounded by a group of people who spoke the local language, which I couldn't understand. This was much far away from the future I wanted.

After being depressed for a few days, I began to self-examine my past life and tried to find some solutions to help myself out of that terrible life. Then I decided to pick up my major and improve it by returning to the capital, where there were some training schools to do so.

Unfortunately, my parents didn't support me. Out of some old-fashioned opinion, they wanted me to stay in that rural city and get used to living there instead of restarting a life in a new city. They thought my idea was too impulsive and that I didn't understand the value of a stable life. Like many old-generation people, they take "stable life" too seriously and don't want any risk in their life; even though they have to bear a lot of things for a lifelong time.

Thus, they strongly opposed my idea and wanted me to obey them by telling me that they wouldn't support me in any form, neither in an emotional or economical way. Nevertheless, I knew I couldn't stand that life anymore, so I packed all of my stuff up and went to the capital, leaving my parents' yelling behind.

In the very beginning, I had a difficult time. I did not have enough money to support my training, so I had to find a job. I worked six days a week and practiced my major in my free time. The salary I got was very little, consequently, I had to live frugally to save money and in this way I could pay for my training fee.

After a whole year of hard working, I finally passed the most difficult examination and got the most valuable certificate in my specialization. I became a very professional person and got a great promotion in my company. Above all, I met a wonderful guy during my rough patch, and he became my husband two years later.

Nowadays, I live very happily every day. I really appreciate my brave decision at that time, and I feel very proud of myself

because I had the courage to restart my life.

Yongmei Meng is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College-Kendall. She was born in a small city in China. Her teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

A New Sunrise Is a True Gift

I remember my last summer in my country, Peru. I was walking by the seashore seeing the waves that come and go, thinking that none were the same as the other, just like our walk on the path of life. Sometimes we will find two ways to follow and—at that instant—we need to decide to go to the right or left, and the choice depends on which one we choose. It could be the “correct” one, but the other—not to say the “incorrect” one—could be the “challenge.”

I have four children and I have been mom and dad to them since they were young. Six years ago, when my youngest sons—twins—were 15 years old, I had to decide which path to follow. I needed to bring the twins to live with their father in the USA because I was fighting stomach cancer. When the time to return home arrived, I felt an affliction in my heart. The days passed and my life changed radically. My days never ended, nor could I talk by cellular phone or video call with my youngest sons because the tears would not stop streaming down my face as my voice broke.

To help me at that moment, I went to a spiritual retirement center, and I found a wonderful gift there that God gave me. The priest at this event was my best friend from middle school whom I had not seen in an exceedingly long time. He gave me a big brother’s hug and talked to me about the greatest gift from God: returning home with a heart full of faith and hope.

Six months later, I took a flight to the USA to stay with my sons and my heart was happy again. My second child came to live here, too, and I thought to myself, “At last, we are together.” Nevertheless, one year later, my sadness returned as I realized that I had left behind my parents, my oldest daughter, my brothers, my best friends, and my lovely pet. Suddenly, I lost my appetite. I did not drink water, I was very tired, and I only wanted to sleep. I felt immensely depressed and was hospitalized three times. The

last hospitalization was the worst one of all: I needed to receive cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) two times.

During my recovery, I was grateful to God for this second chance to live and I learned from this challenge that true love for your family and everyone around you will always be the same. Whether you are near or far, it only depends on you to change your bad days into wonderful ones and to walk step by step, without hurrying, seeing only your present, and reminding yourself that A NEW SUNRISE IS A TRUE GIFT.

Claudia Munoz-Salgado, a student from Peru, is enrolled in the Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert K. Kelso

My Life is In My Own Hands

I was born in Haiti, in a bad neighborhood. I grew up among children who dropped out of school because their parents made them go outside to do business to bring food home. Parents didn't have time to worry about education. Children fell under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and girls got pregnant.

We were 4 children. I was the only girl. My parents really took care of us and our education. They did what they could to keep us in line. I was really loved by my father, but unfortunately, he passed away when I was 8. I didn't understand the loss of a loved one at that time. I later realized how I missed him. It wasn't easy for my mother to raise 4 children without a father.

My life changed; I started losing weight and became too skinny. At school and in the neighborhood, it was tough; people harassed me about my appearance. This made me lose my self-confidence, and I became very shy. After a few years, I left to live in another city with my relatives. I thought things would change, but I learned about the reality of life. I went through a lot of indignity.

Every day, I was told that I was good for nothing, and would never succeed in anything in life. I felt very angry; I screamed and even asked God why I lived if I was no longer useful. Why did everyone treat me like that? I was young; I didn't have the

stamina to handle that. I was overwhelmed; despite everything, I tried to be nice.

Years passed, and I totally lost confidence because people said things about me, and I grew up believing that I would never amount to anything. This is how life was, without any glimmer of hope that it could change. But one day I was lying in bed, and I heard a voice inside me. It told me, “You cannot let people destroy you like that. You are worth more than what they said. You are smart and strong, so take charge of your destiny and move forward!” That voice resonated in me all the time. I started gaining confidence and looking for something to motivate myself.

I started reading self-help books and loving myself and my body. I came to love the person I’d become without worrying about what people thought. Then I made friends, and people loved me back. I moved forward by detaching myself from people who brought a lot of negativity into my life.

Today, I can say that I am proud of the person I am—a strong woman who is not afraid to work to get what she wants. I’m not yet where I wanted to be, but I’ve accomplished a lot.

Marie Nelbrune Janvier is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Turning Point In My Life

Once, I was in school and that day had passed. When I got home my grandfather was sicker than ever. That day at night he passed away and that changed my life completely. I changed everything about me that day because he took care of me since I was eight months old. From then on, my life has not been the same since the day my grandfather passed away. I am no longer the child with the same thoughts as before. Now I think differently. I do things better than before and that changed me more. My grandfather told me to learn from my mistakes, to trust in myself and not in others, to think about my future and to give my best to get ahead. Thanks to him I got ahead.

Ruben Palma is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Take Chances - Don't Be Afraid

It was June of 2005 in Stow, Massachusetts. This was my turning point: A friend came to visit me, telling me that she had applied to take a test to work at USPS and inviting me to do the same. I accepted the challenge!

The test was set up for hundreds of people at the same time. It was a classification test and had about 200 questions. After many hours it was done, and we were exhausted.

A month later I received a letter with an appointment to an interview in the same town that I lived in. It was amazing for me because I had three young kids.

The Stow Postal Office had five routes to cover the whole town. The Stow Postmaster that interviewed and hired me was retiring, and that day was both his last day of work and my first day of work. So, I started working as a rural carrier. After my training time inside the office and outside driving a postal vehicle to deliver mail, I realized how simple and complex that job was.

At the beginning, I was a substitute--part-time. As a substitute I covered all the other mail carriers, so I knew the whole town. In my first week I had to cover for a week for a co-worker who got sick, but I had not had any previous training with her route. Due to my inexperience, a magazine and junk mail mountain piled up every day around me and drove me crazy. Every day I promised myself that I would not return the next day.

I persisted, however, and then I got my own full-time route when a co-worker won a lottery and quit. One of the most interesting parts of the route was that I delivered mail to my former postmaster's house.

Mail carriers drive to the same places daily, delivering mail and parcels. People do not realize that we mail carriers sometimes know a lot about them because we handle their mail every day. We see people born, grow up, go to school and college, get married, move out, divorce, and die. So, we feel that our customers are like a big family to us.

I am happy that I did not give up this job at the beginning because it gave me support and security for changes that would

come in my life. After 17 years working at USPS, I retired in 2022.

My friend never received a call to interview, but then she understood that this was not a good job for her.

Sometimes people come to our lives, help, change it and go.

Sometimes we are open to accepting what the life is offering to us and sometimes we let the opportunity go away.

“God helps people through other people.”

Suely Rezende, originally from Brazil, is a retired postal carrier with the United States Postal Service. She studies English at Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Illness as a Turning Point in My Life

Between two years of my life, I suffered from an illness that I could never have imagined - infective endocarditis.

Infective endocarditis is an infection of the heart. In other words, it is an inflammation caused by a bacterial or fungal infection of the inner lining of the heart (endocardium) or valves. This illness started with a simple fever, swelling of my upper and lower limbs and pain in my waist. I spent ten days of my life confined in the hospital. I had enough blood, but I had to take some to be able to take my medicine. The medications were very strong, even unbearable, but the hardest part was having to depend on someone for everything I wanted to do, and also seeing my mother with such grief. I had to be injected several times with the medications because my body could not tolerate such a large dose. Each time my hands swelled they had to give me another injection.

This illness was a real surprise and led to great depression. After my secondary school years, I was unable to continue with my university studies because of this diagnosis. Although I started with my university studies in medicine, I had to stop and after a few months come to the United States to get better care.

I have known suffering, I have known despair, and I have known loneliness. But the best thing I got out of it was that I was able to have a good relationship with God. And I hope now that I can resume my studies even if I am not really used to this new language yet, but I am sure that I will be able to get by in this new life.

Ruth Berlyne Riboul is a GED student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

I am Blessed

My name is Valentyna. I am from Ukraine, a lovely country in the center of Europe. My life was sturdy. I had the same routine every day with my son, my spouse, and my parents. My life began to change when my son grew up and moved to another country to study at a university. I got divorced from my husband and my life became empty. I decided to visit my friends who used to live in Key West, and I stayed with them for a couple of months. They invited me to see Florida. In a few months, I met a good man in an old town gym. I hated and did not trust any man on earth. But this man was so special, smart, and kind. He melted my heart. In one year after we met, we got married. And now I live in a beautiful country, the USA.

That was my first big turning point. Sometimes you think the situation which you are in now is really bad, but it could turn into a good one for you.

Next, the second huge turning point in my life is the war in my country. All Ukrainian people are struggling because of the Russian invasion. Russian occupants are killing civilians in Ukraine just because Ukraine doesn't want to be a part of the USSR (a Russian dream). All the people must be free and live in peace.

Valentyna Shpaliarenko is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

One Dollar

Life was waking up again after the terrible war in Bosnia. I experienced something that was the hardest. I had lost my entire family in the war. The entire life energy had disappeared. I forced myself to be strong and continue life as it was.

When the first patients started arriving at the rehab center where I worked, I saw their pain and said to myself, "What about you? It's nothing; you're alive." One morning, an old man, without legs, in a wheelchair, approached me. He asked if I was the physiotherapist who would restore his legs. I looked at him with wonder and laughed at his dark humor at that moment. We started the therapy that would enable him to get leg braces. Considering his age, the exercises were tough. Every day we had many conversations on various topics; that old man was very funny and interesting. He had traveled all over the world and always had something interesting to say. We talked about the future, and I said, "Oh, what future after this war? You can see how difficult everything is in a devastated country." He just laughed at my negativity.

Then he told me the story of how he had arrived in the US in the '60s and earned his first five dollars by fixing a lady's car on the road. He said that he never spent those five dollars; he kept them as a memory of his life in the US. He had four sons. Before the war, he gave each son one dollar from the five he had earned repairing the car. On the last day of his rehabilitation, the old man shared this beautiful story that was full of joy. When he finished the story and thanked me for the successful rehabilitation, he hugged me and told me that he had a small present for me. He took out an old one-dollar bill from his wallet, and, with a big smile, he handed me ONE DOLLAR. He said, "I gave four dollar bills to my sons, I'm giving you the fifth because now I have a daughter." He continued, "But I have to ask you one thing. When you go to the US for the first time and when you want to buy a house, invest this one dollar; you won't regret it."

I took the dollar although I was very skeptical about what the old man had told me; buying a house in America was impossible. Twenty years later, my husband and I came from Switzerland for a vacation to Florida and fell in love with this beautiful country. Of course, we bought a condo (not a house). I invested the old

dollar bill in the bank the day we bought the condo. Dear old man! He gave me the greatest gift, which is hope and optimism even after the worst things that have happened.

Sanita Varupa is a student at the Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Strength in Self

My name is Desiree and I'm going to tell you how I am inspired by myself. When I was 7 years old, my parents separated. My father was an absent father. He was supposed to pick me up on weekends and wouldn't show. Shortly after the separation, my mother remarried. My stepdad welcomed me with open arms and raised me as his own.

When I was 16 years old, I dropped out of high school and started working at a car dealership. By the time I was 18, I was married. My now ex-husband was very violent and verbally abusive. Not very long after being married, we got divorced.

At 20 years old, I was introduced to heroin by an "at the time" boyfriend. We used together for many years until we went to jail for stealing to support our habit. After getting incarcerated, we went our separate ways. I was clean for a few months until I started dating someone from high school. Of course, he was an addict as well and offered me some drugs. We dated for 5 years doing multiple drugs together, another abusive relationship. Then I was homeless and decided enough was enough, so I moved back with my family to Florida.

I went to rehab, got out of rehab, and found a job. After a few months of working and 8 months clean, I met my now boyfriend. After dating only a few short months, we found out I was pregnant. We now have a 7 month old baby boy and I am 2 years 5 months clean. I am going back to get my GED so I can continue to be an inspiration to myself and others! I never in my life thought I'd be where I am today.

Desiree Wagner is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Mariann Mahnke.

Which Way Should I Go?

I first want to start off with the struggles I encountered before my turning point. This will explain why my turning point is my turning point- if you know what I mean...

Once I was a young troubled child with anger issues.

Never using my head to believe there were consequences behind my actions.

I would fight, steal, lie, run away, talk back- you name it!

This led me to having a beautiful daughter at the age of 15. But, what changed?

Nothing, I still didn't "turn over a new leaf." I still wasn't going in the right direction. There I was still doing the same things, and now with the addition of a drug and sex habit. With these habits and entering into parenthood, I had no time to truly find myself.

So, what led me to a turning point in my life? Ten years later I found myself incarcerated for theft and possession of drugs. I sat for 82 days not knowing what the outcome would be for me. Even during my addictions, this was the longest time I had been away from my child. It caused me to fight, read, write, cry, pray, scream, and hide. As each day passed, I found myself turning a different kind of page.

Finally, I was finding myself. My mind is clearer. Which way should I go? Ah, here's my turning point! I signed up for GED classes so that when I returned home I could go back to school and study for a career. I started reading my Bible for understanding along with wisdom.

Doing these things opened my eyes to a lot. I started realizing that I was putting myself through things that I didn't have to if I just obeyed God. So, I began to put myself to a test for patience, humbleness, peace, sanity, forgiveness and so on. Some tests I passed, some not. When I failed I would cry, repent- whatever was needed. I continue to work hard to remove the feeling I get that comes with failure.

Sounds crazy to you? Maybe. Only if you haven't found yourself in my position.

Moral of the story: Know who you are. Know where you want to go. Recognize the potential consequences. I have traveled different roads wondering which way I should go. My mind is clear. I am on an upward trajectory. I am at a turning point.

Donieka White is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Sherri Jackson.

Once Again

People always say, "The student age is the most beautiful time of our life." It's true. No matter where we go, who we meet, we are always a student. When I was child, my family experienced a significant change.

At that time, my country was still at war and poor. My family lived in a small town in the north. That's where my parents got married, and my siblings and I were born. My mother worked there, and my father worked in Hanoi City, 120 miles away. My father spent most of his time in his government office. He came home once a month. One day he said that the government was sending him to do specific work and then, suddenly, he was gone. That year, I was four years old, my younger brother was two, and my younger sister was still in my mother's womb. After my father disappeared, for years my family did not have any information about him. Twelve years later, the government confirmed his death. This news was terrible.

In 1978, I was nine years old in 4th grade. My mother took all her children, and moved to her mother's home in Ha Nam province. We lived together with my grandparents who were always sick and incapable of working. Only my mother was working and supporting the family. Life was extremely difficult.

Back then, living in a new place was very difficult for me. Everything around me was new. I continued going to school. In the new environment, I made some friends, met new teachers, and enjoyed many different activities. I had many classmates who helped me along the way. After I graduated from high school, I

attended university in Hanoi, the capital city. I studied Foreign Trade. I spent four years to obtain my business degree. After graduation, I worked for an Import - Export company. I decided to create my own company after working there for a long time.

In 2021, my family immigrated to America. Once again, my environment changed. I encountered new challenges: learning a different language in a new country. Once again, I had an opportunity to go to school. It was essential; I needed English to communicate. If I did not speak it, I would not be able to connect with people. This is a real challenge, especially at my age.

Fortunately, I study English at Clearview Adult Education Center where I meet lots of friends from different countries with diverse cultures and backgrounds. However, we all have the same goal - to study English to get the opportunity to work and be a part of the community. I am very happy and thankful to my teachers who have helped me a lot and taught me how to understand the language. I give special thanks to my teacher Inguna.

*Rin Xo Na Xa is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center.
Rin's teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

Try The New

My name is Tuncer. I am 42 years old. I moved from Turkey to Florida with my wife, daughter and two cats to start a new life here in May. As my daughter started her new school, I started school at Clearview Adult Education Center School to improve my English.

We love Florida. The nature, the animals, and the warmth and friendliness of the people are wonderful. I had reservations about our new life at first. However, as I got used to this place and returned to the daily routines of life, my reservations diminished. As my English level improves, everything will become easier for me.

In the short time we have lived here, discovering the new things, meeting new people, and getting to know different cultures are the greatest wealth for me. It takes a lot of courage to make new decisions and go beyond the ordinary. However, it is

Pathways

our past experiences that make us who we are and will carry us to the new and to many successes. No one knows what to do unless they try the new. Our experiences and growing knowledge are the keys to our courage.

Tuncer Yildirim is from Turkey and is an ESOL student at Largo Library. His teacher is Mildred Pioli.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

90 Is Better Than 10

One of the best things in our lives is to always learn, especially if the lessons come from other people. Nowadays, there are a million causes of concern for everybody. The information arrives so fast, and the need to respond is scary. In this crazy world, everyone needs to survive.

The modern life requires balance to face it in the best way. Social problems are situations that need patience and optimism as well as attitude.

Some day, during a great conversation, a close friend told me something interesting.

At that moment, while I was listening to him, perhaps I didn't pay the idea due attention. But days after that nice talk, I understood the real meaning.

A clever and outstanding guy, while I was discussing a particular question with him, told me, "Don't worry, 90 percent of the problems do not come true; do not worry! They only exist in your mind."

This was the best advice someone has given me in my entire life. It's absolutely magic! Put it into practice! Believe it! Don't spend energy with fake problems. It is more intelligent to focus on the 10 percent instead of the 90.

So, if you think about that, the math is also correct: 90 is larger than 10. If the problem does come true, you will be ready to face it, as usual.

Actually, to be alive is a fantastic gift. Enjoy this blessing and improve your lifestyle. Remember the 90 percent!

Luis Carlos Carneiro is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Best Advice I Ever Received

A small decision can alter our life significantly. Reflecting on my journey, learning to drive stands out as the most wonderful and meaningful experience. This transformative decision originated from advice given by my friend, Alice.

When I was 22 years old, my life's struggles included expensive apartment rent, my university loan, and the high living costs. Money and economic conditions should not hinder life experiences. Inspired, I reconsidered my life philosophy, shedding my reluctance like a cocoon as I tried new things.

I took a driving lesson during the summer of 2008 and got my driving license by the autumn of the same year. As soon as I got the license I rented a car to visit the Great Wall in Beijing. The beauty was magnificent. Beneath our feet laid a mountain covered in red leaves.

The best was yet to come. I adopted a dog in 2010. However it was very common for the taxi drivers to refuse the passengers who brought a dog or other pets. I was so lucky because I could rent a car and drive my dog to the hospital where he or she recovered quickly. Driving brought so many benefits in my life; I cannot imagine how my life would have been without driving.

Now I have my own car and I am driving everyday. I drove with my daughter from the most northern part of my country to the most southern point last year. We saw heavy snow, an icy castle, the forest and the blue sea by the end of the trip. We experienced the four seasons in only 20 days instead of the normal one year. If I had not learned to drive we would not have had the chance to feel this magical experience.

Driving is an essential skill in the whole world now. Thanks to Alice who gave me wisdom felt inspiration that motivated me to learn how to drive and try as much as possible in my life. I have to admit that driving frees me and makes me feel great as I drive my car on the road.

Mia Deng is an ESOL student of Barbara Huddleston.

Mom Was Always Right

The best advice I have ever received was advice from my mom to “put God first in everything I do”. It is my belief that if I put my faith and trust in God, everything will be like a radiant rainbow. This advice has helped me be more fearless, more positive, and more confident.

Having two kids has been a big part of my life and my family as well. My mom has encouraged me to be myself, truthful, honest, and loyal. Most importantly, she has taught me to never forget to put God first. Though I have not been the perfect mother, daughter, or sister, I am trying to be better every day.

I have had tough moments in my life, but with Mom’s advice of putting God first, my life has changed for good! There would be some days when I would talk to God and ask him to keep me away from bad friends, bad influences and he did. Additionally, I’m a single mother of two kids. My oldest is 21 years old and my youngest is 18 years old. Definitely, God has blessed me!

And yes, my mom was always right! The best advice I have received was from my mom to “put God first in everything I do.” I also passed my mom’s advice down to my kids. Keeping this advice close to my heart will continually guide my future and make a better life for my kids and me.

Ana Garcia is a GED student from West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Mrs. Joykeria McDonald, GED/ABE Instructor.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

And one day you wonder why? If feeling important to someone is the most beautiful thing there is.

Remember...

You only have this life, make the most of it, laugh as many times as you can and love as much as possible.

I know that sometimes you will cry your eyes out, that there will be moments of great pain and uncertainty, but you will move

forward and if there is no path that will take you out of the darkness, you will build it.

You will sing even if you are out of tune, you will dance even if you are made of wood, you will run even on rainy days, you will dream thousands of beautiful dreams and you will make some of them come true...

You will live above all; you will live because you only have this life and you are going to enjoy it.

Mateo Lorenzo is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Nature of Happiness

Throughout my life I have asked myself many times what happiness is. What do I need to have to be happy? Why have humans never been satisfied? These questions made me reflect and want to look for the answers.

One day I was reading a book, and I was able to find the answer to those questions. Our dissatisfaction is largely due to the modern world in which we are immersed day after day without realizing it. Having more things will not make us happier, even though our environment and consumerist society make us believe otherwise. We have confused pleasure with happiness. Pleasure comes from external stimulus that causes a feeling of well-being, but it is temporary. However, happiness is something that comes from within us, it is a choice, it is a way of living, it is the journey but not the destination. The big advertising companies do not make money if you are happy, because they make money if you consume. If you feel ephemeral and fleeting happiness that is merely pleasure. That is the result when we believe that consuming and having material things that we do not need will make us happy.

I want to live a life of purpose, to enjoy the basic things that I take for granted and to feel grateful every day for life, for loved ones, for what I already have. We do not need external stimuli to motivate us temporarily. Thinking that getting more material possessions will make us happy is a mistake. On the contrary,

it will make us slaves of material things and we will waste time, energy and money. It is not about thinking that we have less, but about feeling that we have everything and realizing how lucky we are.

That is true happiness.

“Look at life with the eyes of a tourist , who sees beauty where everyone sees routine.” - Anonymous

Camila Luciano was born in Colombia. She participates in the Conversation Club with Literacy Services of Indian River County and also has an individual tutor.

What Should You do to be Happy?

One of the most common questions in people’s lives is how to achieve happiness. But is this really something that we can achieve? In the first place, what is happiness? According to science, happiness is the production of hormones in your brain, like dopamine, serotonin and endorphins. The production of these hormones generates the reduction of pain and the famous feeling we call Happiness. However, modern society is exposed to many daily stimulations that generate these hormones and confuse people about what they hope for in their lives.

According to Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979), an early, enduring, warm relationship (a secure relationship) with a caregiver promotes psychological well-being. Also, according to Diener & Seligman (2002), social relationships seem necessary, but not sufficient for high happiness. But this definition left us in with same point; a possibility to consider what can make us happy, but not a full answer.

In another study, researchers did a comparison between people that describe themselves as a happier when they engage in activities and others that describe themselves as a less happy, according to Robinson & Martin (2008) “based on 34 years of data collected by the General Social Survey (GSS) on social activities and media usage, it is found that people who are happy report being more active in most social activities, in religion and in newspaper reading. Additionally, happier people report

spending less time watching television, a relation that holds after controlling for education, marital status and other predictors of happiness.”

The confusion between what social media shows to younger people and the necessity for finding happiness in a place that does not complete them creates a lot of frustration because they cannot keep the impossible standards that society is showing them. This largely contributes to a big portion of the youngest generation being in a state of depression.

Even after all these evaluations, we are still at the same point. How do we achieve happiness? From my point of view, you cannot achieve happiness, because happiness should be the journey to your goals, not your final goal. Just find the elements that work for you, live step by step, do not follow stereotypes, and define your own happiness map- something that's yours and only yours.

Salome Medina Rivera is an ESOL ASB student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Best Friend and Advisor

First of all, I am Alexandre Philemon. I was born on February 13, 1996 in Haiti. I will explain to you one of the best pieces of advice I have received in my life.

I have a best friend and his name is Gladimyr Corneille. He is my best advisor. Every time I need some advice, I usually approach him to help me. He always told me that when a person came to the U.S. he had two important things to do, take English classes and find a job. I said that was difficult for me because I didn't have a sponsor to help me with my rent, food, etc. I told him I would find a job first and then I would take English classes. He said that will be great for you.

I found a job but when I started to work I was a bad worker. When somebody asked me to do something I usually did the contrary or I usually needed someone else to translate for me. I didn't make friends, and everyone avoided me because I didn't understand almost anything they tried to talk with me about.

A few months ago I started to learn English in ESOL and it is a good experience. I have made more friends at my work and at school also. Now I'm better at English. I'm not scared to have a conversation in English and I'm a good worker because when my manager talks I catch every word. I understand the customers too.

I'm glad to have a best advisor beside me and I suggest that everyone finds someone like my friend to help you when you want to make a good decision.

Alexandre Philemon is a student at the School District of Palm Beach County, Department of Adult Ed, NorthTech Satellite Site, Highland. His teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

We Are All “Conformists”, To A Certain Extent

There is a sense of great dissatisfaction for the person who consciously questions what they have. This is noted as we adapt to today's fast-paced, changing world. Modern technology impacts everything we use and influences material conformity. This conformity today is different from the subjective and personal conformity that's always been culturally present in humanity; whether in the religious, political, or social sense. In today's world, it's the perceived dissatisfaction with something we already have which fails to meet our expectations. A prime example of this type of conformity is 'The Beatles.' When they had the world at their feet and there was no more room in their bank accounts, they still did not feel satisfied with what they were doing and ended up separating.

One does not realize it, but it happens with anything material-take cell phones, for example. Telephone manufacturers design them so that in a matter of a year, you find them obsolete. It's not that they're actually obsolete, but rather that our conformity consumer behavior is saturated with ego- always wanting to have the best, not what is enough. Influence by the manufacturers' marketing tactics make us see our current cellphones as obsolete as soon as a new one hits the market. Of course, this has nothing to do with the normal process of social and cultural improvement a person achieves in life through work and sacrifice. In this case,

rather, the desire for the latest thing becomes perceived as necessary and deserving. There is a need to always have something newer or better, especially, if you believe you've "earned" it.

So, why does higher consumption not lead to greater satisfaction? I posit that among other things, consumerist propaganda distorts our priorities and with false claims and expectations, leads to difficulty in making decisions. There is significant ambiguity and uncertainty around wants and needs and how to best engage in consumption as a way of meeting them. In my own life, it takes me great effort to continuously check my perceptions and behaviors. We must use social influence to promote more responsible consumption and pull away from conformity by making more informed decisions in everything we do.

Ramon Velazquez is an ESOL student at Miami-Dade College. His teacher is Karin Miller.

My Bravest Moment

When the Pain of Life is Too Much to Bear

Undoubtedly, any child being born a girl in a traditional Chinese family structure has to tolerate high pressure in her life, while being born a boy is much easier with less pressure and fewer expectations from his parents. One such poor girl was born into a very strict, traditional Chinese family in South-East Asia where she, the youngest daughter of five children, was never allowed to make her own decisions in life. Everything was ruled and controlled by the classic reasons of “Love-of-Family” or “All-for-the-Best.”

In her two-parent family there was one eldest son and four daughters. Her sisters and she had to work very hard helping their parents on the family farm. Although the work was actually for men instead of women and beyond their physical abilities, the female children had no choice because the mantra was “No Work, No School,” whereas the only son had no need to help with anything on the farm. Having many children in this family was only to create enough laborers for the farm.

Raised in such a heartless environment, she endured much pressure and pain until reaching her limit. One day she tried to make her own first decision by informing her family about the man whom she wanted to marry. She knew she would face a challenging problem so she had well prepared herself before telling them her intentions; still she was shocked since their responses were beyond her expectations. Her sisters blamed her for disappointing everyone in the family. Furthermore, no one accepted him nor allowed her to marry him. Indeed, her sisters wanted everyone in the family never to marry but to stay united in the family that did not welcome any strangers. It was too difficult and emotional for her to live in this tough situation, so she finally decided to marry him because she truly sought a peaceful, simple life with someone who unconditionally loved her for herself.

After breaking the family’s edict of her not to marry, she was resigned to living in a bitter, emotional situation for several years, while her husband has never been allowed even to meet

anyone in her family to this day. When her father had passed away years later, she eventually chose to give up any inheritance as her last sacrifice to her sisters in order to leave behind everything painful permanently and fly to America to forge a new life with her husband. Even though she loved her sisters despite their life long difficulties together, in the end she cut herself off from them and never contacted them again. Although she knows that she made the right decision—a decision her sisters never understand—she is still pained by what she had to do.

Anonymous is an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, Florida. I would like to express my thanks to Professor Kathryn H. Niedbalec for her dedication to teaching.

Unforgettable Sunday

It was a peaceful and beautiful Sunday. The weather was better than yesterday and the sun was shining when I decided to tell him about my feelings, to tell him in a poem how much I love him.

It was around 5 or 6 o'clock, I am not sure because when I saw him for the first time at the restaurant, I lost my mind; he made me a little crazy. Crazy for love! Like Rihanna said, "Be bright like a diamond." Of course, a rare precious diamond.

He was surprised and nervous. At that moment, all the people in our place saw his body shaking. His hands moved without reason. He told me he felt naked. It was the first time a beautiful woman expressed her feelings to him.

This was unfamiliar territory, not correct in our culture, to see a girl take the first step about a romantic relationship. It was a surprise for him to witness a girl who knew exactly what she wanted. A girl who took her time to explain to him what she wanted for their future; like traveling around the world together, having a big family with kids, and starting their own company, because her future is with him. Unforgettable!

Bethaida Bernadel was born in Haiti where she studied Communication and Public Relations and worked for two years as a journalist. In 2023, she left her country to come to the United States. She is currently attending ESOL classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Tech-

nical College. Her dream is to achieve a doctorate in communications and become a famous poet

Scary Changes

What was your bravest moment in life? Moving from Kansas to Florida was mine- let me explain why. It happened in the early morning of April 2021, while we were having breakfast. My husband was telling me that he no longer wanted to work here at that time. I was shocked! I never thought my life would have such a drastic change. It was not long before I supported his idea.

I knew he needed my help and support at that moment. I firmly told him that I believed in him and supported him. Although I did not know what we would do next. Perhaps his courage gave me strength. I went from not knowing what to do, or where to go, to deciding with him to move from Kansas. With the help of my friends, I sold all our furniture, found a moving company, organized many things, and even sold our house- all within one month!

You never know what will happen if you do not make changes. Change has never been that easy for me, it is probably not easy for anyone. It is also a part of life- we adapt. This does require a lot of courage. Therefore, I am proud of myself.

Lastly, since my sister lived in Florida, we decided to move to Florida. We rented a trailer and drove from Kansas to Florida. I am very happy here and to have had this experience. It was my bravest moment!

Chen Cuiping is an Advanced ESOL student at The Clearwater Adult Education Center with Angela Faiola. She was born in China and has become a mother of three young children since being in The States for 12 years.

I Did It My Way

I want to share a story of my life that needed an answer. The big day arrived when an unknown experience would begin and that was my new life as a university student. It was my mother's dream for me to succeed and obtain a university degree. What

my mother did not know was that I cried every night, every morning, and every afternoon to find an answer to her great request. I felt that desire, that thirst for God to work in my life, but there was always something that made me lose strength and faint.

On my first day of class, it haunted me, “What am I doing here?” I constantly told myself in this place I will not find my answer; this will not help me at all.

It was then I began to realize my dream of becoming a lawyer. I enrolled into another university since the one my mother enrolled me in was not the one I wanted. I challenged my mother to achieve my dream. I encountered many obstacles, but I overcame each one. I was persistent, determined, and brave. Over five years I earned my degree, crossing all barriers to accomplish it.

Fanny Cortez Espinoza is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Fire Made Me Brave

Once my house was on fire. The house was under renovation, so there were a lot of construction workers. One of them was an electrician. He is close to my family because he’s a longtime friend.

My grandmother had just bought a tank of gasoline in order to cook some food for the workers. When the tank arrived, wanting to test it, the electrician naively brought a lighter and lit it next to the tank, catching it on fire. It was stupid and unreasonable, I admit.

He tried to put out the fire, but in vain. Unfortunately, the fire spread in front of a bathroom where my little cousin was bathing. She was very young (seven years old), so she cried. She was calling for help. She was screaming so much that I think her voice was heard 100 miles away. The whole house was rapidly emptied; the workers and the members of my family including myself were already outside, so nobody could help her.

Hearing my cousin’s cries, I went back inside and passed so

close to the fire to go help her that my back was burned. When I arrived in the room, I saw her scared against a wall. I took her with me and went out to the bathroom. I passed near the fire again, and I was so afraid she would burn that I passed by with an astonishing speed.

Arriving outside, I wanted to put her on the ground because she was in my arms, but she wouldn't let me. She spent the rest of the day against me. She was really scared, and I think she was traumatized. Luckily, she didn't have any physical injuries.

Haiti is not a country with good quality plumbing services, so we didn't receive help from them. Fortunately, some people passed around the house, and our neighbors came to give us some help, so we managed to put out the fire without big damages. We thank God for that.

This day will never leave my mind. It was crazy. My family, the workers, and I almost died of asphyxiation and burns.

Netty Camar Lyenska Docilaire was born in Haiti and is a student at ELCATE Academy at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

Leaving Haiti

On March 14, 2016, I took a brave step leaving my house in Haiti. I was going to reunite with my husband and daughter in America. I had mixed emotions of happiness and sadness when I left for the airport. I was going to miss my family. Leaving Haiti meant leaving the place I had all my memories. When I got on the plane I felt sad but happy. I was going to be with my family.

I left Toussaint Louverture airport and landed at Miami airport. This was a very important moment. This was a new start for me. I had to get used to this new place. It was not easy. Getting a job was the hardest part. My family made it worth it.

In conclusion, March 14, 2016, marked the day I had to be very brave. When I look back, I am very proud of myself.

Marie Dumas is a student at Village Readers Family Foundation. Her teacher is Frank Sauro.

A Night of Survival: Discovering Bravery Amidst Nature's Wrath

It was October 16, 2021, a day like no other. My family and I were hiking in the middle of the forest on the border between Panama and Colombia. That day wasn't just a normal day, as we were on a unique walk amid rocks and a river that ran down from Colombia to Panama. It was a journey made by many immigrants, including men, women, children, and even newborn babies, with the aim of arriving in North America.

Around 5 p.m., the sun began to hide behind the trees. It was already becoming difficult to see clearly, so we decided to camp near the river under a big tree. At that moment, we hoped to have a moment of rest after a long and tiring day, but we didn't know that we would have the worst moment of our lives. After setting up our tents, we sat down to eat as the sun had already gone dark.

It was then that I heard a very loud noise. As much as it worried me, I thought it could be something normal. After all, I had never spent a night in a forest. It was from then on that I realized that the river was rising more and more and was about to get close to our tents.

I screamed out loud so that my family could go out and save what we had, but there was no concrete reaction. I remember that with so much desperation, I decided to shake the tent so they could hear me. When they left, the river had already arrived at the tent. We did save some documents, but we lost a lot of things. We spent a full night under heavy, freezing rain that left many of us traumatized but, most importantly, my scream saved our lives from disaster. After that night the river took two days to lose its height so that we could continue our walk to the city.

All I can say is that a strong will came over me, and my courage was deliberate through this experience. It showed me how brave I am and how far I could go to protect those I love in the midst of danger. That was the way I discovered my bravery. I hope everyone has already discovered theirs.

Frandlely Fertil is a GED/ESOL student at West Technical Education Center. His teacher is Mrs. Joykeria McDonald, GED/ABE Instructor.

A Heroic Christmas: Facing Fear and Protecting Family from a Pitbull Attack

My bravest moment is a moment I will never forget. This moment happened suddenly. I was enjoying friends and family during the holiday when it happened. I saved my sister from a Pitbull dog.

During the winter holidays, my mom's side of the family has a reunion to celebrate and share gifts with each other. In my hometown, Belle Glade, Florida, is where the family reunion was hosted. It was a perfect day to spend time with my family.

On Christmas Eve, I awoke to laughter and saw everyone opening their presents. I was overjoyed to be in this moment. However, what happened next was a time that my bravery would be tested. An unexpected turnaround was when a Pitbull was chasing my sister. I rapidly went to her and was trying to let the Pitbull focus on me so that she could have time to go somewhere safe. When that happened, I was trying to avoid getting bitten by the dog, but I was glad she was good and safe; that is when I became very courageous and tussled with the dog knowing my sister was safe from danger. Although I ended up getting bit by the Pitbull, I will never forget this moment.

The next morning, everything seemed normal. Everyone started to get lively; trying to enjoy themselves. I was happy that my sister was doing well at that moment. Everything was okay and I had my family with me and there's nothing more that can make me happier.

In conclusion, I still managed to show my bravery through that unforgettable moment. Having to deal with dog problems was not on my 'list of things to do,' but still being able to enjoy my family and save my sister all in one day, will forever be etched in my mind as the day my bravery was tested.

Alexis Garcia is a GED student from West Technical Education Center. His teacher is Mrs. Joykeria McDonald, GED/ABE Instructor.

The Possibilities of Tomorrow

Leaving my homeland and venturing into the unknown by migrating to a foreign land was a decision that required immense courage, determination, and faith in the face of uncertainty. The choice to leave behind everything familiar — my family, friends, and the comfort of home — was a daunting one, yet it was driven by a deep-seated desire for a better future and a belief in the possibilities that awaited me abroad.

The decision to emigrate was not made lightly; it was born out of necessity and fueled by a relentless pursuit of opportunities that seemed out of reach in my own country. Economic challenges, political instability, or personal circumstances may have played a role, but ultimately, it was the hope for a brighter tomorrow that propelled me forward.

The journey itself was marked by a series of challenges and obstacles that tested my resolve at every turn. From navigating complex legal processes to enduring long and treacherous journeys, each step required unwavering courage and perseverance. The fear of the unknown, the uncertainty of what lay ahead, and the constant longing for the familiar were all battles I faced along the way.

As I settled into my new country, the process of adaptation was both exhilarating and intimidating. Learning a new language, acclimating to unfamiliar customs, and building a new support system from scratch demanded resilience and openness to change. The courage required to embrace these challenges, to step out of my comfort zone, and to forge a new path for myself was a daily exercise in self-discovery and growth. The courage of leaving my country and migrating to another was not just about physical distance; it was also a journey of the heart and soul. It was about confronting my fears, challenging my limitations, and daring to dream beyond the constraints of my past. It was a testament to my unwavering belief in the power of change, the resilience of the human spirit, and the transformative potential of stepping into the unknown.

Looking back on my journey, I am filled with gratitude for the courage that carried me through the darkest moments, the resilience that sustained me in times of uncertainty, and the hope

that guided me towards a brighter future. Leaving my country and emigrating to another was not just an act of physical relocation; it was a courageous leap of faith into the possibilities of tomorrow, a testament to the indomitable spirit of the human heart, and a journey of self-discovery and transformation that continues to shape my story to this day.

Alejandro Gonzalez is an adult learner in Miami Dade College's ESOL online program. His instructor is Karin Ann Miller.

My Decision

Imagine living in a country where you don't have freedom of expression, living in a country with fear of not been able to speak freely, living in a country where day to day you think about how you are going to survive, how you are going to feed your children, living in a country where you studied a University career and when you start working your pay is only enough to buy the three days' worth of food. Imagine living in a country that does not even have an ambulance to take you to the hospital. And what should you do to solve this? Keep quiet and let those who oversee the government continue to trample on you, because you can't open your mouth to say anything. If they want, they can imprison you and impute actions that you have never committed. In Cuba where I was born the government is the only power that exists. They manage the laws, and in short, they are the only ones who say and do what seems right to them with your life. Because of this and much more, I left my country. I believe that immigrating to the United States has been the most important decision of my life, even though it meant endangering our lives and the life of my ten-year-old daughter.

I am a very conservative person and when I made that decision it was because the life we were living in Cuba was already unsustainable. Yes, Cuba, is a beautiful and vibrant country full of history. Its landscapes are incredible and its beaches a paradise, and what to say about the hospitality of its people? But your soul is squeezed when you see that there is a little left of it all.

On April 26th, a day that will never leave my mind, I was filled with courage, and I put in a backpack the whole life that I had built. My mind was only blank, like you do not want to know

what is going to happen, and we embarked on a journey towards the American dream.

People who immigrate face many dangers. They can also be exposed to different forms of violence, such as theft, extortion or even being trafficked or killed. We made this journey over two months, and I thank God and our family for helping us and always supporting us, because we live in difficult times.

I give thanks to the life that encouraged me to make this decision and achieve being in the country of laws, freedom of expression, and where my daughter will be able to express her feelings, live freely and have her human rights respected.

For all these reasons the decision to immigrate to the United States has been the bravest moment of my life.

Lyan Lao Santana is an ESOL student at the School District of Palm Beach County. Lyan's teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

Working Hard and Leaving Haiti

I remember in 2013 I was 17 years old. I was going through some difficult times in my life. I couldn't eat well. I didn't have a place to stay with my family. In 2016, I decided to leave Haiti to enter Chile. I had no family or friends, unfortunately.

I didn't have money. I couldn't pay my rent. I didn't work and life had become miserable. They told me to work, since many diseases started to go away. I am a good worker. Everyone likes me. Things have been difficult for me. I want to talk to family now after 6 months of work. I don't have money problems anymore. Life is not bad for me, you have to work to win.

Today I feel happy. Every day I smile. I changed my life. Now I sleep in peace.

You have to work to be successful just like me. Good luck.

Pierre Miradieu is a student at Village Readers Family Education. His teacher is Frank Sauro.

Am I a Capable Woman?

I used to work and multi-task for many years. My job was to make women's nails beautiful and also manage the store. While doing nails, I had to answer the phone, make credit card transactions, and solve work-related problems, but I always satisfied people. Everybody said that I was a capable woman, but... for years, I had terrible anxiety because of my job.

Suddenly, one day, I collapsed at work and ended up in hospital. The first night, I fainted a few times. It made my family terrified that I would be gone forever. I recovered after three days- Hallelujah, thank you, Jesus!- but then I had to pay hospital bills for medical care. Despite the challenges, I was glad I could get up and walk again. If I could go back in time, I wouldn't multi-task, that wastes my time and money. I will do just one thing at a time: focus on what I'm doing and do it right. Money is a significant part of life, but health is more important. After that situation, the anxiety persisted. I couldn't live my life in misery. I decided to fight with all my strength and tenacity until the end. From now on, I will cherish my life and my family forever. Once again, I was very grateful for all the strength Jesus gives me. I feel I'm not alone.

Tiana Nguyen is a Vietnamese student who retired recently from being a nail and lashes specialist. Now, Tiana has dedicated her time making her lifelong dream of learning English a reality.

Who Gets the Last Pill?

My name is Melissa. I am 26 years old, and I grew up in Jaguey Grande, a little town in my country, Cuba. Since childhood one of my relevant qualities has been loyalty.

I studied Nutrition and Diet for five years in a university in Cuba. At the time I graduated, COVID 19 started. I was working in a Health Community Center in Jaguey Grande assisting pregnant women and seniors with chronic illness associated with nutrition, but with the COVID 19 on the rise, all the hospitals, emergency rooms, and other health centers were full of patients. The medical staff were too few to help all sick people. By order of my boss, I was assigned to support the medical staff working

with COVID patients. I was doing rapid tests, injections and providing pills such as antibiotics to fight the symptoms of the disease. I worked in “the red zone” (centers where medical teams worked with COVID 19 patients) for 9 months. All that time was crazy. Most patients had COVID symptoms and there were not enough supplies to help everybody. For that reason, almost all people died. Each patient’s family members were desperate for us to cure their sick person.

One typical day, I was working with my husband, who is a doctor. On that day we did not receive the antibiotics from the pharmacy, so we had nothing to give the patients. We had only half of what we needed in stock. My husband and I received the order to prioritize the sickest. We were doing that when a crazy man interrupted us and ordered me to give the last pill to his family member who was not one of the sickest, for sure. We immediately refused to do it, and he started yelling at us. This man was the mayor of my town, and my husband and I disobeyed his order to save another patient’s life which was already in danger. A few minutes later our boss called. As a result of what happened, we were punished for trying to save a life at risk, but I did not care because I remained loyal to my principles, and, at that moment, the most important thing was to save the life of that patient who almost died from COVID.

I violated an order from the mayor of Jaguey Grande and also from my boss, but thanks to this, a woman continues to breathe, and I felt like my hands did not shake when saying “NO.” My heart was beating stronger to help a truly needy person.

Melissa Puente Herrera is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Melissa’s teacher is Inguna Ozols.

When Life Tests You

My bravest moment that I can remember is when I passed my state test in the USA. For some people, taking tests online is not favorable. In some countries, most people prefer to take their tests on paper. I will discuss why taking online tests can be stressful, but also can eventually be good.

First, I graduated college in administrative management in

Haiti. When I was at school in Haiti, I took my tests on paper. It saved me more time to read and understand questions. I could enjoy taking tests without stress. When I came to the USA, I went back to school to restart my life. I went to medical school and I graduated. In August 2022, I took my phlebotomy test.

On that day I remember, I was very afraid because I didn't know how to take a test online. I spent all my time on the difficult questions. I failed three times. Two of them I failed by seven points and the other time was only by one point. Online tests have a timer. I was scared of the timer and I skipped the difficult questions. When I saw my results, they made me feel uncomfortable.

I wanted to forget everything about the test, but I kept pushing to get to another level to become a medical assistant. For nine months, I took medical assistant classes to help me become more comfortable to pass. I graduated as a medical assistant, but I still had to take the test. I failed by one point. I cried a lot.

The school spoke to me to ask me what I needed help on. I explained that my weakness was taking tests online and that I prefer to take tests on paper. They couldn't give me a paper test, but they gave me some good advice. They told me to take deep breaths, answer the easy questions first, control the timer, and skip hard questions. I followed their advice, and I passed both tests.

To conclude, my bravest moment was a very good experience in my life. I realize that taking tests online can allow for greater results. Also, I could see my results faster. Taking online tests were quicker than paper tests. Now I know how to take online tests.

Marie Stuart Robert is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Believe In Yourself!

In my professional life I worked with young children. For many years it was cries, snot, and tantrums. For me it was many wonderful experiences loaded with energy and vitality that only

they can give. When it was time to retire everything was over and we had to keep moving forward.

The retirement became a monotony and then boom! The change, the immigration, a new country, new people, new language, and a new problem: communication. People were speaking around me, and I didn't understand anything. Nothing at all! I decided I needed to learn the language. I signed up in Adult English Class. My first day of class was a mix of different emotions, and fear of facing this challenge. I had to put an end to all those emotions and put all my effort into it. When Mr. Almeida gave the class, my head looked like a carousel, I didn't understand anything. I thought "This isn't for me. "

I went back to class the next day and there were more and more people like me, with my limitations and I felt identified, and I said: Why not - because I can do it. It is now a challenge for me. As days went on more people of different nationalities contributed their experiences, and day by day I learned about their different experiences.

It is a challenge to make new friends, and have new experiences. It's showed me that anything is possible, and that age is not a limit to achieve our goals.

Rayza Rodriguez is a student at Ronald Reagan Adult Education Center in Miami Florida. Her teacher is Artrentry Jackson.

My Bravest Moment

The bravest moment I always remember was when my son's mother called to tell me that they were going to live in the Dominican Republic.

I lived in Port-au-Prince (Haiti) because of my work, and my son and his mother lived in Petit-Goave (a small town in the west of Haiti). In Port-au-Prince I only worked and returned home. It was when I got to Petit-Goave that I stayed to have fun with my son. I spent time with him and saw my parents.

The hardest part for me was knowing as a father that spending time with my son was more important than anything even during

my absence. It was a very courageous moment for me. My son still lives in the Dominican Republic and before I came here, I was with him. Often, he sends me messages, saying “I miss you; I want to be by your side, go out with you and play together.”

Augustin Ruth is a student at the School District of Palm Beach County Department of Education. His teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

Here and Now

My bravest moment is exactly right now when I choose to start to write this. Writing this instant I just recognize every moment that has brought me here. Do you have any idea about what it is like to be born and to grow up in the sexist society in the middle of a third-world country and you feel every day that something is wrong with you? Because if you don't like the same things that the people around you like, something is wrong with you. Well, that is how they made me feel for a long time in my life and that was exactly the story of my life until I turned 18. At this age, I broke away from my hometown for my first taste of freedom. I enrolled in a university and worked during my vacations so I wouldn't have to return to the place where I was born. During all that process I was exploring myself and my preferences.

My new lifestyle opened not only my eyes but also opened doors and possibilities, new friends and new people came into my life. Of course, not all of them were good people.

I am thankful right now for every hard experience. I read a lot of years ago the sentence: “Blessed is the discomfort that connects you with your certainty.” I do not remember the author, but I adopted this as a mantra. So, I learned about seeing things from different perspectives. Sometimes it's not easy. Nothing is easy in this life, but calm down, and don't let your fears take control of your life. Maintaining the balance of the mental and the emotional is not an easy task but is very important for your personal growth.

My bravest moment is the recognition of the set of facts that have formed me. Today I am 29 years old and when I look at my past, I congratulate myself. I recognize my inner struggle. I admire my process and I feel anxious about what life has in store

Pathways

for me. I am brave living this life and existing. I am still a caterpillar trying to become a butterfly to fly fully. I am still alive, and I have a lot to prove to myself. My mother is proud of me, but I know that I am still not even half of the man I want to become. This is my path. This is what makes sense in my life. My brave moment - it is here and now.

Guillermo Andres Valderrama Hernandez is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals and Ambitions

I Will Not Give Up

I am from Haiti. I spent five years at Inuka University in my country where I graduated with a degree in accounting. I worked in a bank for 10 years and in an organization, CMMB, for two years as an accountant. I want to pursue a master's degree in finance.

I left my country due to an insecurity reason and came to live in America. Unfortunately, in the USA, they do not recognize my baccalaureate. I am learning English at Adult Education class so that I can improve my speaking and writing skills.

I hope that in a few years I will have the opportunity to enroll in a university here. My dream is to relearn accounting so that I can achieve my goals. I would also like to become a dialyzer because there are quite a few people who go to do dialysis daily. I want to provide support in the medical field. I want to have a degree in educational sciences. I know it will take me a long time to achieve my goals.

Although it is never too late to do the right thing, I have responsibilities. I must work to answer this last one. As a result, it seems difficult to achieve all my goals, but I will not give up. I will find ways because I know there is help and many opportunities in the USA.

Wilkens Achille is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

In Search of Victory

I finished high school in 1968. I had a girlfriend whom I wanted to marry. With this feeling in mind I had to find a clear and productive future. I came to the United States where I worked several jobs. My work was very precise and accurate with good companies. I was always working with machinery where we needed lots of precision. There I learned to work accurately making parts with tolerances of thousandths and things as delicate as

contact lenses.

After living in the United States for 8 years, I brought my 9-year-old son and my wife from Colombia because I already had a good job to give them a better life. Until then, I had learned English at work. Today, I went back to studying English at the Largo Library, where my wife and I are studying. At my age I am happy to study in the Library and I have teachers that help me and guide me with English. This is a quick summary of my life.

Ovidio Alzate is from Colombia and an ESOL student at Largo Library. His teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

My Goals and Ambitions

Goals and ambitions are part of us - they are something that motivates us and drives us every day to be better and go after that goal. It is a force that is within us. I am from Colombia. I came here five years ago because I needed to make a change in my life.

When I decided to stay in this beautiful nation, I knew that I had more than a few obstacles and challenges to overcome to start a new path here. One was the culture shock in general, and of course the language. These are two great barriers, but the language problem is even more than that. It is an almost constant limitation, it becomes a necessity in everything, even the smallest things and is something that you must deal with every day to communicate anywhere and anytime.

Faced with this problem, I made the decision to start taking classes at Learn to Read in St. Augustine. I started with a group class and then switched to a one-to-one class with my personal tutor, Barbara Horton. I have been working with her two times a week for a year and a half now. It has been more than a learning process, it is a huge challenge, and takes great effort to learn to speak, read, write and listen to the English language correctly. I know I have made progress but sometimes it is difficult to be patient. Being better isn't enough, I need to learn so much to become comfortable and fluent.

I thank my tutors for their effort, patience, dedication and for believing in me and encouraging me in each class to continue with this process. For me, each lesson is as valuable as refined gold.

Therefore, my goal, my ambition and my priority is to continue with my classes until I achieve my goal of mastering this language, not only because of how necessary it is, but because it is a personal desire. I know that this will give me greater and better satisfaction in everything. In this country of opportunities, I dream of leaving aside fear, sorrow, rejection and to be able to interact with all people and friends, speaking the same language.

With strong English skills I will be able to get a better job, will be able to take care of business appointments with confidence, and will be able to participate freely in social groups and will be able to share ideas and feelings with others.

Martha Arevalo is a student of Learn To Read St. Johns County. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

What the American Dream Means for Me

You can't give up! NEVER! No one says that it will be easy.

Since I was a child, I used to hear about the famous "American Dream," but I didn't understand it until I got to the place where everything happens. Many people have a different ideology about what can be achieved in the United States, but I can describe it in two words: Hard Work and Perseverance.

Hard work: Maybe you are alone, or you don't have the life that you imagine. Sometimes you feel that you are not progressing, but it's not that! It's just that you've been here, left your country, you're working hard, and looking for other opportunities. This shows how strong you are. You're not afraid because you are making constant progress. If you feel discouraged with this change, DON'T listen. Talk to yourself and remember WHY ARE YOU HERE.

Perseverance: This is one of my favorite words because it's the key to success. You NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP! It's easy to

give up, but never say that you can't when you know that you can. Never say that other people have good luck, and you don't, that you work too much, and you don't see results. Do you know how many attempts Thomas Edison had before creating light!? Thousands! Do you know how many times Bill Gates had to create new systems until he reached the Microsoft that we all know? Thousands of times.

You don't need others to believe in you. You must believe yourself. Don't wait for others to tell you what to do, just do it, create your goals, develop your plan and start enjoying this great process which you have the joy of experiencing. When you feel tired just keep going and remind yourself WHAT YOUR GOAL IS. I hope this text can help you to find your inner giant and understand that it is part of the process, that's why you must enjoy it.

Alejandro Artigas, from Venezuela, is 18 years old. He is a student at Ronald Reagan Adult Education Center in Miami Florida. His teacher is Artrentry Jackson.

I Am Who I Am Because of My Motivation

My name is Deroy Brunshcas and I'm 30 years old. It's a pleasure for me to talk about my goals and my ambitions. I see life from a different angle. I think if I can focus on my goals first, I will be able to meet them and will be able to fulfill my sincerest wishes and dreams.

I am a very motivated person and have been since my childhood. I'm a person who is very disciplined. Every day I exercise and either go to school or go to work. Whatever I am doing, I am very focused and try my hardest. I like sports and music. I also like peace and happiness. I always try my best and want to be a good musician and a good sport. My dream is to become a millionaire. I don't know how, but I do know how to work hard. I'm really impatient, but know I have to work to get there and I have the motivation and discipline to succeed.

In summary, I know that nothing is impossible for me in life. I hope that all possibilities come to me so that I realize my most, I believe in myself and my ancestors.

Deroy Brunshcas is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Never Stop Learning

My name is Luciana, I am 42. I live in Brazil with my husband and our two boys. Since I was young, my parents focused on giving me and my sisters the best opportunities to have a good education. I am grateful for every opportunity that I had.

After I graduated from high school in Brazil, I was an exchange student, as a senior, at Plymouth South High School in Plymouth, Massachusetts. This was a great experience that I have carried with me my whole life because I improved my English skills and I also learned about American culture and way of life in the United States. I lived with an incredible American family with whom I stay in touch even now.

When I went back to Brazil, I was accepted into two universities, law school and business administration school. I was able to study in both. In the mornings, I used to attend law school. In the afternoons, I worked as a trainee. At night, I attended business administration school. I graduated from both law school and business school.

After graduating, I continued to study and I was selected through a public examination competition to be a city attorney for the City of Salvador, in Brazil. I have been working as one of the city's attorneys for 16 years and I really enjoy my work. I am responsible for providing general legal advice to the city managers and other judicial and administrative staff members. I have received two post-graduate degrees in law. I am always looking for some way to keep learning. Last year, I attended a two-week management and leadership course at the University of Akron, Ohio, so I could improve my skills and put those skills into practice at my job in Brazil.

Just as my parents educated me, I try to do the same with my two boys. They study in a bilingual school in Brazil, and we decided to visit the United States on our vacation, to spend four weeks learning and practicing speaking and listening in English.

It has been a great experience for our family. I hope my sons will be more confident about themselves. I think education is the most important legacy that parents can leave to their children. My husband and I try to be an example for our children. It does not matter your age or what you do; it is always time to learn something. Never stop learning!

Luciana De Melo Borba Carneiro is a Brazilian lawyer who spent her most recent vacation studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, Florida. Her teacher is Jeffrey Kallan.

My Life Goals and How to Achieve Them

My name is Carl Ciprius. I am from Haïti and I moved to the USA in 2023. While I am in this country I have a Goals and Ambitions that I will talk about.

My ambition is to speak English well! I have to focus on continuously learning and taking opportunities to expand my knowledge and skills. My ambition is to leverage these experiences to grow into a sharp professional and continuously develop my career. I believe that personal development is key to successful career growth. After I master my language skills, I would like to learn business management and administration and I would also like to learn electricity. I always dream of learning accounting in my life. I want to take advantage of this moment while I am in the U.S to continue working on my goals and my ambitions.

Everything is possible in life, with hard work and a positive attitude. I'm already working hard, trying to get good marks in the classes, which will help me gain admission into a good college and University.

Sometimes I ask myself this question; WHAT IS YOUR AMBITION IN YOUR CAREER? The best way to answer this question is to be specific and give a concise overview of the goal you've set for your career. In life, you display your ambition in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Whether it's by taking proactive steps in improving your mental health by seeking a mental health professional or making strides in your professional development by starting a small business. It also subtly impacts your mindset, causing you to strive to do better, sustain your efforts, and think

of the future but still be present.

Having a vision: You can only work toward achieving something if you truly understand what it is and how to get there, and visualization techniques to assist this process. Methods like defining your vision or journaling about your desires, help you build a more meaningful trajectory. Ambitious people don't require as much external motivation, instead holding themselves accountable and taking action. That doesn't mean you don't need to ask for help. It just means you don't need it as often. Understand your own motivators enough to leverage them when you're in a rut.

My goal is to learn as much as I can and work as hard as possible to make my dreams come true.

THANK YOU!!!

Carl Ciprius is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

What Keeps Us Alive?

I know, now in your mind, you are thinking about things you think you can't live without. Those things might be family, friends, money, faith etc. Even if you are a lucky person and you have everything, there is something else that keeps you alive, and gives you motivation to live. It's called HOPE!!

I think life is a challenge that we all must go through. For some it may be easy and for others it may be more difficult. We are the ones who will leave a mark on this world. Sometimes we try to turn back. We try to fix our mistakes from the past, but we hurt ourselves because memories bring pain. Life gives you a second chance, it's called TOMORROW. Let's forget the past. Let's try and hope to do something beautiful in the future.

It's exactly you, YES you. You are the only person who sees it and gives yourself a goal of what will become in the future.

Hope and work hard because no one knows how long the tunnel will be in order to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

You only need a little hope to achieve your dream and only a little dream to achieve reality.

HOPE and LIFE.

Gentijana Dakaj Saramati is from Kosovo and attending ESOL classes at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

I Want to Help People

My name is Glana Deus, I am from Haiti. I now live in Naples Florida. I moved to the U.S. last year. I started taking English classes so I could speak English better. At school, I learned about a nursing program.

After I learned about the nursing program, I set a goal to learn to speak English very well. After I complete my Nursing Assistant program, I want to become a nurse. I want to work at the Hospital because I would like to help people when they are sick, or have problems.

After, I hope to have money to support myself and to get married and have children. I will then be able to take care of my children and my husband. My ambitions are to work and be successful in all things and all areas of my life.

Glana Deus is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was four years old, I received my Fisher Price basketball. The court was at my house and the basket was only five feet high. My parents placed it in the living room since it was the only room in the house without a carpet.

I practiced shooting every day. I wore my dad's sneakers and imitated the basketball moves I saw on TV. At that age, I was not yet aware of my potential for this sport, but my father knew that it would most likely become a passion. When I was five years old, my dad took me to the park with a basketball and I remember

the day I made my first basket. After that, I continued playing in basketball leagues and working out every night with my dad at gyms. It was the best of times.

Basketball became an important thread in my life and ultimately proved to help guide the decisions I made for my future. I had to do a lot of work at first, but it was worth it because it paved the way for me to have the opportunity to play at the college level. While practices are tough now and the demands of being a college athlete seem overwhelming, thinking back to my earliest basketball memories brings me happiness and keeps me going.

Jeff Ertulus is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Becoming American

One Russian blogger said, it will take you ten years to become a real American. After fourteen months in the US, I wonder if this is even achievable. Lack of English fluency is only one of the many obstacles in the immigrant's way.

We all have habits, and habits of Americans differ in many ways from habits of newcomers. For example, in my homeland, we eat hot cereal for breakfast and soup, followed by a delicious second course for lunch. Americans usually eat burgers and french fries, even in expensive restaurants.

Americans have different points of view about many things. Sometimes they are difficult to understand, and even more difficult to implement. My American friend says locals spend short periods of time in restaurants, despite paying decent money, because they value their time. In Russia, people often do business in restaurants and stay there all day.

Also, in Florida, it isn't customary to walk, even short distances- everyone drives cars. Additionally, there are drive-through services that don't require the driver to get out of the car. Combined with the fact that almost all houses here are no taller than 2 floors, there's also nowhere to walk up the stairs, which makes you need to introduce additional physical activity and specially

allocate time for jogging or cycling.

Next, unlike in my homeland, detailed planning of my day is very important in America. One must quickly determine how our activities relate to our goals. It is especially important to identify “unnecessary” pass times, such as being sad and discouraged, and quickly return yourself psychologically to a positive and constructive direction.

It goes without saying that we need to learn English to communicate with people, get a job, and integrate into society. All I want to say about this is don't stay in the comfort zone of your language environment; you need to be constantly immersed in the context of the English language. This being said, I try to socialize, make new friends, especially among English speakers with whom I can not only have fun, but also practice my language skills. I already have several such friends, and it brings me a great sense of satisfaction and joy.

Based on my experience, I came to an important conclusion in connection to moving to the US. It is critically necessary to accept the idea that you are here if not forever, for a long time. You need to give up all thoughts of going back and develop the skills to allow you to integrate into life in America.

I think that we will succeed because we are not the first and not the last- the main thing is to believe in ourselves.

Nikolay Grachev is a student in a Pinellas Technical College ESOL class with Dr. Hayrapetian's. He immigrated to the US with his wife and 3 young children. Nikolay has a Masters degree in Law in Russia and aspires to pursue a legal career in the US.

Perseverance

I am a focused, intelligent, and persevering woman who achieves what she sets out to do with effort and dedication. That's why I want to learn English, my greatest interest is to be able to communicate, write, and perfectly read the language because my professional goal also depends on it.

I have achieved many incredible things and many impossible things, but with dedication, perseverance, and effort I achieved

what I set out to do and that is to find a job that I love and I'm passionate about. This is related to my professional vocation and to complete my goal I must be bilingual.

Arriving in this country with a 0% level of the language, full of fears and uncertainties, has been a great challenge for me. I am grateful for the opportunities that this country offers immigrants, the economic resources, and the volunteers that make this dream possible; There is no way to imagine how many lives are changed with your dedication and effort. Every second, minute, and hour invested is gold for us. Part of that dream is to show you that the dedication invested in each student on their part results in the advancement and achievement of the goals set for many lives.

Jessica Gutierrez was born in Colombia and is a student at Conversation Club with Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Michael Godown.

I am Working Hard to Reach My Goals

My name is Irma Walnise Jean Charles, my goal is to buy a car and a house. I'm working to make enough money to buy them. I know I need to have good credit to get them and am working hard so that I can reach my goals. I go to work every night from 9:45pm to 6:30am and after work, I go to school so that I can speak English fluently and live in the U.S. easily.

I can either buy a car or a house with cash or credit or some of both. I would like to do this like so many other people are able to. I know that after I purchase a car or a house, I will also have to work to pay insurance. Once I get a car and house, I can live the same way as everyone else. Reaching my goal will make me happy because I will not need to rent a house or take Uber to go to work or school.

I'm really discouraged because I feel alone trying to reach these dreams. I am afraid my dreams will fall into the water, but I know I will not stop trying to make them come true. I have yet to realize them but will keep trying. I tell my dreams and hopes to God and I know I will come away with strength and God will give me strength to keep working hard. Everyone tells me to stay there and wait in the U.S. to see if I can make it happen. One of

the ways my family and friends help me achieve my goals is to always encourage me and give me help. This allows me to go to school. They also give me work advice.

I don't really know what will happen, but I do know that I'm just working to reach my goals.

Irma Walnise Jean Charles is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

My American Dream

I'm Sterlancia Joseph. I came to the US on April 2023. I started my English class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College on August 2023.

Upon arriving in the US, my first goal was to learn English, listen to a lot of music, read a lot and watch TV to learn new words. It's not easy. I do not always find motivation, but I try because I have a goal and I must achieve my goal for my integration and my personal development. I have made a lot of effort every day to achieve my goal.

I always wanted to be a nurse, so when I arrived in the US, I told myself this is the best time to make my dream come true. After my English class in the next semester, I want to begin the LPN program at Lorenzo Walker Technical. My plan is to go step by step. After the LPN program, I want to continue to the nursing program. With the opportunity that this country offers us, discipline, motivation and determination, I will manage to make my dream come true.

Sterlancia Joseph is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Sterlancia's teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Hit The Piñata

In Mexico, there's a birthday celebrating tradition which consists of breaking a "piñata" open, showering everyone showered with surprises. The person who is celebrating his/her birthday is blind-folded so he/she can't see where to aim to hit the pinata. Due to the fact that he/she is not able to see anything, it's critical

to listen to the people who surround them to find out where to strike the piñata to break it apart.

This is how life is. Like striking a pinata, each person is blind-folded through their journey, aiming with no absolute knowledge of when the surprise will come. We often listen to the people that surround us and use our reasoning skills to choose when and where to hit. I use this metaphor because we must have goals and ambitions. We must listen to our surroundings, keeping our goals and ambitions in mind. Someone who doesn't have goals and ambitions is like that person hitting the piñata-trying to do something but unable to see clearly, listening the people around him, instead of having his own goals and ambitions.

One of my goals for this year is to become a be a better English speaker and writer. This is for many reasons, but one is due to my job. I'm hoping to be fluent in this language, and then further my language skills to learn French and Italian. It helps me understand the world around me when I am understand the languages around me. If I am listening to my surroundings and clearly don't understand it, then the clarity is blurred and I cannot aim for the piñata.

I invite others to think clearly and work to achieve their own goals and ambitions, otherwise you will accomplish someone else's dreams.

Francisco Juarez Alvarez is from Mexico and is taking ESOL classes at Suncoast Technical College. His teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

My Goals and Ambitions

Many people wonder like me, what we want to be or what we want to achieve. My goals and ambitions go beyond that, because I don't simply want to settle for a stable job or a mansion, cars or something of this style, I want my goals and ambitions to form me as a person.

I would like everything I achieve to fill me with satisfaction, because I know that I am going to work very hard to achieve it. Right now, like any person my age, I want money, luxuries,

shoes, cars, etc... but I also feel that it is not everything. I also wish that my family always have good health; and more than anything if I have good health and well-being. I consider myself someone capable of achieving everything, so I am not going to give up. Remember the material matters but it is not always everything.

Nicolas Lara is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Opportunities to Realize My Dreams

My name is Stevens MARCELIN. I am Haitian. I entered the USA on June 28, 2023. It is a pleasure for me to be able to live such a reality. I always had big dreams and ambitions to succeed in life. I want to take advantage of all the opportunities in this country to achieve my dreams.

It was difficult for me to find work in my country. I am thanking God, today that I found the USA and I want to take advantage of all the good things to succeed. The USA is a big and great country in the world where many people would like to live. To be successful, you must work very hard. That is what I base my goals on.

Education is one of the most important things. I finished high school in my country, but I didn't attend University yet. The English language is an important tool. Achieving my goals is what matters. I decided to go to school to learn to speak, write, and listen in English and practice in class. I work to take care of myself and pay for the trades I choose to learn.

I want to find a better job and for that to be possible I must speak and understand English better. I would like to have more certificates such as HVAC and CAN. Then, I will get the best job to take care of my family. Drawing a successful path for my children will be the best thing in my life. I will be proud to see them growing and getting a good education. I will serve as a model for them.

Finally, my life will be better when all my goals are realized with my ambitions. I hope for a better future for my family. May

God continue to bless me abundantly.

Stevens Marcelin is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

A King Is Born

This is going to be the story of a pawn who wants to become king. Today, I want to talk about my purpose in this life. My greatest ambition is and will always be to improve myself more and more every day.

I want to become a good doctor to help all the people who need me. To achieve this, I am putting all my effort into studying and learning the language since I need it. I come from a country where the majority cannot achieve their goals. I am here because I was given the opportunity to achieve my dreams and I plan to fight for them until the end.

I want to enter university and study a for a career that I am passionate about, such as medicine and science. I want to become the best or as good as the best and I am going to put all my effort into it. With courage, I will never give up.

I would like to see my parents again soon. It has been more than a year since I left my country and I miss them. I also want to buy my first car and start a job. In a few months I want to finish school and have my GED. Then I'll start at university and continue with my purpose, step by step, fulfilling the small and big objectives because they are all important in this process of personal growth.

Jonal Martinez is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Learn English Well Enough to Practice Medicine

I attended medical school in my home country of Venezuela, graduating from the Universidad Nacional Experimental Rafael Maria Baralt. I did my internship at the Servicio Autonomo de Hospital Universitario de Maracaibo. I practiced medicine for

eight years in Maracaibo, Venezuela, and also in Ecuador. My specialty is family medicine. I also worked in a hospital emergency room and with patients suffering from immunodeficiency symptoms.

I started to learn English after I moved to Florida in 2021. In order to practice medicine here, I need to continue improving my English skills, especially pronunciation. This is very important to me and to my family. And to my future patients!

My passion is to make my patients feel comfortable and supported by listening carefully to their concerns and by trying to treat not only their physical issues, but also assisting with emotional support.

Angelica McNulty is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. She is a student of Jim Wheeler. She has been married for three years. Her and her husband have a two-year-old son named Amos. Her hobbies include reading, gardening, fashion design, and sewing.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was younger, I was interested in medicine because it seemed so beautiful to me, watching doctors care for people. My one and only goal in life was to become a doctor and help others, just like I saw on television. However, over time, I realized that medicine was not the real profession I wanted to practice. The true profession I aspire to enter is none other than law.

Several reasons diverted me from the path of medicine to law, with the main one being to defend a person in the face of injustice. I don't believe defending someone is more important than saving a life, but I think I would be more useful and comfortable in front of a court than in front of a patient. My sudden career change is also attributed to my fear of blood as I think a person who can't stand the sight of blood is not qualified to be a doctor.

Everything I have mentioned are not my only about my ambitions and goals; I aim higher. Being a lawyer is not my sole goal in life; starting a family is also a goal. I believe dedicating your life to building a career without family support, unable to take a break from work to spend time with them, will ultimately lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness.

I have so many other goals, but the main ones are building a career and having a united family.

Michaella Woodflor Mervilus is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Life Stopped

My name is Siham. I am from Morocco. I am studying to learn English. I would like to say that there is still time to achieve your goals, regardless of your age and circumstances.

From my experience, I was studying well in my country and was getting good grades. All of this is thanks to my mother's motivation for me. I linked all my dreams to her, and she supported me a lot to choose what was best for me despite our financial situation. We were a happy family full of warmth and affection.

When I applied to university, I lost my mother. She died and took with her all her dreams and happiness for me. They disappeared from my face. I no longer cared about my studies or myself because the light that was illuminating my life had died. It no longer existed. I felt there was no meaning to any goal or dream without her. It was as if time had stopped when she died.

My life stopped and I was isolated from the world for a long time, but I did not let my sadness and the pain of losing her destroy me. I told myself that I must find a solution to this sadness, and the solution was to read books, exercise, and walk long distances to organize my thoughts and find my lost self.

I began reading soul books and became a new person. I said to myself, "I will achieve my dreams and I will make her proud of me." I became full of energy and helped everyone who needed moral support, advised everyone in trouble, and directed them to the right path without making them weak.

I completed my university studies and now I am in America and studying English. My first goal is to continue my academic career in the field I love. No matter how many days pass, I must do that. We should not stop under any circumstances. We still have time to achieve our dreams, whatever they may be. Help yourself and believe in yourself. You can achieve your dreams. I

say, “Start now! It is time to achieve your many goals.”

Siham Mziouka is from Morocco and is an ESOL student at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

From Nicaragua to the US

Since I was a child, I have always dreamt of being someone in my life. Today, I am eighteen years old and looking for my dreams to come true; that is why I will talk about my goals and ambitions.

To start, I was born in Juigalpa Chontales, Nicaragua. But I lived in San Pedro, a town in Chontales. After a period of time, my parents started to have many economic difficulties, so they came to the United States to give me a better life. Unfortunately, they got separated, which was difficult for my brother and I to overcome. My grandmother paid for a semi-private school in Santo Tomas where I was always a good student. One day, my grandmother told me that she was not able to pay for my school because she needed to pay some of my parents’ debts. But when my grandfather was talking to the director, I had a good feeling, and suddenly I heard that I had gotten a scholarship for being a good student, and I learned that my little effort was worthwhile.

Second, my main goal is to become a successful businesswoman. Now, I am currently doing the GED and the ESOL program at Miami Dade College, and my purpose is to get the highest score in the GED to get a scholarship for college and, at the same time, to improve my English speaking and reading skills. Then I would like to transfer to a good university to become a professional.

Third, I would like to start my own company. I know that is not going to be easy, but I really have a positive mind about creating my own business. I have considered many different things, but I have not decided what type of company I would like to build.

Finally, I would like to be my own boss and feel proud of myself for being able to do everything. I am ready for any challenge because it is part of life to fall and get up again much stronger.

To sum up, my goals are really high. Life has taught me that nothing is easy, and if we have dreams, goals, and ambition; we have to fight for our objectives and work hard to reach them every single day until we make them come true.

Ana Isabel Perez Gonzalez is 18 years old and has been living in the United States for 6 months. She is a student at MDC-Kendall and her teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

My Dream is to Become a Fashion Designer

I have a dream to become a fashion designer. Since I was a little girl, I had this dream because I grew up in this environment where my mother had a sewing business. She sewed clothes for people in our community. I also have two aunts that do the same thing. Since I was little, I have been used to this life of sewing.

I remember when my school organized a party and I told my mom I needed a dress. She went to buy the fabrics to make me a beautiful red dress. Ever since that day I have been developing a love for sewing. Sometimes I buy different fabrics to try to make a dress. Of course, I make mistakes because I'm not a good sewer like my mom, but it is my dream to become a fashion designer. My mother did teach me the basics, but I want to go to fashion school to develop my skills.

Every day I watch models model different designers' clothing. I'm interested in how fashion designers come up with ideas to create beautiful pieces. I'm also interested in how fashion shows run so smoothly. I've learned so much about different designer brands, but my favorite is Chanel. Chanel is my biggest influence. When you wear Chanel, it's pure elegance to me. When I think of this brand, I see a confident and ambitious woman. I want people to feel this way when they wear my clothes in the future.

I love everything about fashion. When I start my brand, I want a lot of support from my community. I want women to feel comfortable, elegant, and sexy wearing my clothes. My brand will be sold in the nicest stores. I will also have an online shop. I can't wait to start my journey to become a fashion designer.

Francilene Pierre-Louis is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Riding a Bicycle

Albert Einstein once said, “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

Regarding my goals, I must keep this quotation in my mind because I know if I don’t make progress, I’ll be back to my last position, and that’s something that I can’t allow myself to do. I don’t want to give some excuses if I fall. I prefer falling in advance, and I’ll learn, and I will try again.

What’s a human without goals and ambitions?

I’ll share with you my goals and ambitions. I always want to live a peaceful life, with my family by my side. I would like to have a regular job and income, have many trips to different countries and cities. I want to help other people reach a good level in their lives too by being a financial, spiritual, and emotional support for other people.

The most important ambition and goal is to never give up. Every day I want to be better than I was yesterday.

Madeleine Prophete Charles is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

From Garage to Triumph: An Inspiring Dream

I am a very dreamy and determined person, and this year I have a goal that fills me with fear. Three years ago, without realizing it, I started a business. One day, while deep cleaning the house, I noticed I had a lot of unused clothing, some with tags, that I hadn’t worn in a long time or wouldn’t wear again. I had accumulated shoes, handbags, and other items, both new and used, from myself and my family. I considered taking it to a second-hand store like Goodwill, but then I thought, “The money they would make selling my things, I can make it myself.” I’m a mother, wife, and homeowner with basic needs and a lot of bills to pay. So, I came up with the idea of doing a Facebook Live and showcasing everything I had, and it was a success! I sold every-

thing and earned some money for my family.

But it didn't stop there. People started asking me if I had more clothes and things to sell. Some of them suggested I do it again. Thus, AMA PRELOVED BOUTIQUE was born. AMA are the first three letters of my children's names, AMAurie and AMAhlia. Three years have passed since then, and there have been changes, such as registering my company, modifying its name, and even having employees. But everything is done from my garage, and I dream of getting out of there. It's uncomfortable, there's no longer enough space, and the clientele keeps growing. I need to get out of there.

So, my goal for this year is to have my physical store expand to have a public sales area, a multimedia zone, a space for coffee and reading, and even incorporate an area for art, like painting workshops (one of my many hobbies). It may be difficult, it may not be, but it's my dream, one that I want to achieve for myself and my children. I want them to see that determination and desire allow us to achieve success. Though I am scared, I know that the more fear I feel, the more beautiful the reward will be. I hope in the next 2025 book I can tell you about "My First Year as a Business Owner."

"Courage, determination, and faith in oneself are the most powerful weapons to overcome any obstacle that comes your way."

Yahairy Vazquez Rosario is the owner of Meraki by AMA LLC. She was born in Puerto Rico and participates in the Conversation Club with Literacy Services of Indian River County. She also has an individual tutor through LSIRC.

My Dream Is to Become a Nurse

When I first came to the USA from Haiti on November 17, 2005, I went to training for home-health aide. I saw so many people who needed help, and I wanted to take care of them, especially the elderly. When the pandemic was declared, there was a shortage of nurses. Compassion struck me seeing all these people that needed help. It just made me want to do good. I wanted to

provide comfort, time, patience and care.

One person I want to care for is my mother. She is 78 years old and lives in Boston. She is far away from me. My sister told me that my mother could not move her body at all. She could not talk. She couldn't even sit down by herself. Thank God when I went to see my mother I fed her, I helped her to walk, I gave her a bath, I cooked nutritious food for her, and she improved. It made me realize how important and powerful nurses are.

Another person I want to care for is my dad who was in West Palm Beach in 2020. I went to Good Samaritan Hospital to see my dad. He had prostate cancer. The female nurse who was helping my dad was someone that I admired. She was an inspiration to me. She treated my dad with respect and sweetness. She communicated with me and my family with information about any changes that my dad was undergoing.

Because I finished home health-aide training, I was able to help my parents. Then I started working with my new patient. It was very fun for me. Every day I would help her walk, provide transportation and assistance. I fed her, shopped for her, changed her sheets, and did some light cleaning. Sometimes I took her out for fun. We went to the movies and the mall.

Nurses have to have education. They must go to school and get a degree. Nurses must be on their feet all day. They must bend, lift, move, think, and look. They must make life-changing decisions rapidly. They must always be looking out for and keeping track of their patients. This is why becoming a nurse is my dream. I want to become a nurse to help elderly people like my mother and my father.

Franceline Pierre Simillen was born in Haiti and is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. She participates in the Conversation Club and wants to become a nurse. Her teacher is Michael Godown.

I Have One Goal

My goal is to work only until 55 years old and after that travel around the world! How do I plan to achieve it? My ambitions will

help me. When I came to this country to stay, I didn't know anyone. My first job was a valet parking attendant. It was a positive experience. But I worked every day without rest for 3 months, and still I didn't have enough money.

I started looking for how to earn more money. I knew about car parts, and I thought "In this country there are many cars." I remembered that once my daughters had a problem with the car key and I was in Ecuador. A new key cost us \$400 in the dealer so I investigated about that and found that the keys were cheap. I learned online by researching and watching videos for 3 months. That's how I started the business I have now.

Now I have experience and I have met many people. I invested in equipment to give to my cousin who lives in Orlando and taught him about how to program. The result was satisfactory and now I'm ready to move on to the next step. I created a corporation that offers different types of car services. That main one is making car keys locally, but people also request other services from other cities in the U.S. I'm creating a website to get partners in Miami and other cities around the country to give those jobs in exchange for a commission. The next step is to relaunch the car parts sales APP which had a start-up test in Ecuador, and have the improvements applied in the United States.

But that's another story to write...

Johnny Villamar is a student at Ronald Reagan Adult Education Center in Miami Florida. His teacher is Artrentry Jackson.

My Goals and Ambitions

Every person must have a life goal; motivation, ambition, setting the horizon. But are there specific goals for each? Aren't they just dreams? We are always told that to achieve your goal, you must have ambitions, motivation, discipline, but above all else, determination and strength, a lot of strength. Isn't that too much to ask? These things above were the how to achieve them but why not consider the obstacles, the disappointments, etc.... The road is so perilous.

So, I too have a goal, a dream to achieve. I have ambitions. But who am I? Does someone's goals and their dream define who they are? I did much of my studies in Haiti, but my last year was the most difficult because I went to live in the most dangerous area of my country. My biggest goal is to finish my studies, enter the university and make my parents proud. My dream was to become a doctor, but I woke up last year.

When I entered the United States, so many new opportunities opened to me, and I wanted to start dreaming again. I set new goals for myself. I not only want to be a doctor, but I want to be a writer and a businesswoman. I want to get there, be proud of myself, and start believing that I can be someone great. But if I can't achieve my goals, does that mean I'm not courageous enough? That I wasn't motivated enough? That I am weak? Isn't it courageous enough to have a goal? Just having one can be considered for many.

Madya Lineda Vixamar is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Favorite Place

My Backyard in My Home Country

In my home in Iraq, I had a big, beautiful backyard. It contained a number of fruit trees such as oranges, apples, peaches, grapes, and others. I also had the hobby of growing vegetables such as peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and others. In the far corner of the garden there was a charcoal grill for grilling fish, chicken, and meat. In the other corner there was a large canopy, lots of chairs, a few tables, and a swing. I used to invite a number of friends and relatives to family barbeque parties in my backyard, especially on the weekends.

I also used to prevent anyone from picking the fruit from the trees until it was completely ripe in order to enjoy the beauty of the fruit and the colors as long as possible. Of course, it was allowed to pick peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and other vegetables to make a delicious and fresh salad to eat with the barbeque.

Today I miss my backyard, gatherings of friends and relatives, parties on weekends, playing cards and a lot of memories. I now live in America with my wife in an apartment that has no backyard. I hope to have many friends and relatives in America and then maybe I will move to live in another house with a backyard and return to my previous activities and hobbies.

Mahdi Alrubaisi was born in Iraq where he was an engineer. He and his wife are students at Literacy Services of Indian River County. They participate in the Conversation Club and have an individual tutor.

The Catatumbo Phenomenon

Have you ever heard someone talk about a place that is known to have one of the most intense phenomena in the world? Well, let me tell you all about it. The Catatumbo lightning is an incredible natural phenomenon that occurs in Lake Maracaibo, in the state of Zulia, Venezuela. It is characterized by having the longest cycle of thunderstorms and the highest generation of lightning on Earth.

This phenomenon has been studied by scientists and experts in meteorology from all over the world. They have carried out research to better understand their origin and behavior. One of them includes the Venezuelan scientist Fulgencio Rincones, who carried out detailed studies on the Catatumbo lightning in the 1960s. There is also the American astrophysicist, Walter A. Lyons, who has conducted research on thunderstorms around the world, including the Catatumbo.

The Catatumbo has approximately 297 days of thunderstorms a year with night cycles of up to 8 hours of thunderstorms and an intensity of 60 lightning strikes per minute. Lightning can reach heights of up to 5 kilometers, illuminating the night sky in an impressive way. In addition to the flashes of light, the Catatumbo also produces a characteristic sound, similar to a drum or thunder noise, which can be heard several kilometers away.

It is great to know that this natural phenomenon is not only beautiful to see, but also plays an important role as an atmospheric filter against climate change. During thunderstorms, molecules called free radicals are produced, which can help break down greenhouse gases such as methane, ozone, and nitrogen oxide. These free radicals react with greenhouse gases, decomposing them into less harmful components. The ozone generated during thunderstorms helps to restore the atmosphere and reduce the gases of climate change and the greenhouse effect. In addition, the capacity of lightning helps to eliminate particles and toxic compounds, also improves the air quality in the area, the energy generated by lightning can be used as a renewable energy source and purify the air and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide.

It's really amazing how nature can have positive impacts on our environment!

Veronica Angarita Mujica is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Favorite Place

Once upon a time there was a little boy named Jhon and this little boy really liked summer vacation, it was the time when he

could play, go to the beach and do all the fun activities. and this he had decided to go on vacation with his parents, but it was in a small village and this small village was Jhon's favorite place.

His parents had decided to rent a small house in a village by the sea. Jhon had therefore started packing his bags a few days before departure. He had chosen his favorite clothes, his favorite toys and his favorite books.

The day of departure had finally arrived. Jhon's family got up early to load the car. Jhon was so impatient that he helped his parents load the luggage into the car. He got into the back seat with his little brother and said goodbye to his home with a smile.

Jhon Cleeford Beauplan is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is when I'm in my room. It is a place that calms people down and adds beauty to the entire free time. My room at home is not only beautiful to look at, but also gives me a chance to stay in peace with myself (phone and games).

My room also provides a location for activities. I play many games to foster my competitive drive which aids in my continual physical activity throughout the day. I have a lot of fun in my room. The room also offers mental serenity and a getaway from the routines of life. In our home, my grandmother practices meditation every morning.

A tranquil setting like a room can help us to relax our bodies and minds. Working indoors is enjoyable and can help you feel refreshed and in control. My room allows me to be close to myself. I also feel more energetic in the room. If someone is passionate about collecting a variety of games, he should have a lovely PlayStation 5, TV, strip and ring light. I love my favorite place, my room at home.

Samuel Desir is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Bahamas Dream

My favorite place is the Bahamas. My favorite vacation was the time when my girlfriend and I took a cruise to the Bahamas. We went through different types of cities such as Freeport and Nassau. I enjoyed seeing the view and going to little shops, too. I liked all the views the Bahamas had to offer. The Bahamas offered a few amazing attractions and we went while we were there.

We did family activities such as boat rides and fishing. The water is so crystal clear that it would be so easy to spot the fishes. We saw the dolphins and took tours around a few cities. The food we had made was different in almost every city.

This is the main reason why I love the Bahamas so much. That's where I would like to live the rest of my time on this earth.

Chalson Dieujuste is a student at Village Readers Family Education. His teacher is Frank Sauro.

Homeland of the Black Climber

Nestled within the majestic Caucasus Mountains, my favorite place on Earth is the enchanting region of Elbrus. This area, renowned for its stunning natural beauty and challenging landscapes, has carved a special place in my heart, providing a haven where the soul connects with the awe-inspiring forces of nature. Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe, stands as a colossal sentinel, dominating the landscape with its snow-capped majesty. The region surrounding this iconic mountain is a tapestry of alpine meadows, pristine lakes, and dense forests, creating a paradise for those who seek both tranquility and adventure. Whether covered in a blanket of snow or adorned with the vibrant hues of wildflowers.

Elbrus and its surroundings offer a spectacle that never fails to captivate. What makes Elbrus truly extraordinary is not just its visual appeal but the myriad of outdoor activities it offers. As an avid trekker, the vast network of trails and routes in the region beckons me to explore its every nook and cranny. From leisurely walks through alpine meadows to challenging ascents up rugged slopes, Elbrus provides a playground for enthusiasts seeking

both physical and spiritual elevation. The hospitality of the local communities adds a distinctive flavor to the Elbrus experience. Nestled in the valleys and foothills, quaint villages offer a glimpse into the rich cultural tapestry of the region. The warm smiles of the locals, their traditional cuisine, and the echoes of folklore enhance the overall charm, making visitors feel not just like spectators but integral participants in the vibrant life of Elbrus.

Moreover, Elbrus stands as a testament to the resilience of nature and the importance of environmental conservation. The delicate balance between human activities and the pristine ecosystem in this region is a lesson in sustainable coexistence. The glacial rivers, the diverse flora, and the endemic fauna underscore the need to cherish and protect these natural wonders for future generations. In my numerous visits to Elbrus, each experience has been a journey of self-discovery and connection. The crisp mountain air, the panoramic vistas, and the rhythmic cadence of the local culture create a symphony that resonates with the deepest recesses of my being. Elbrus is not just a geographical location; it's a sanctuary where the spirit finds solace, rejuvenation, and a profound appreciation for the marvels of our planet.

In conclusion, Elbrus, with its towering peaks, scenic landscapes, and vibrant culture, stands as my favorite place on Earth. It is a sanctuary where the beauty of nature converges with the indomitable spirit of adventure, leaving an indelible mark on the soul. As I traverse its trails and absorb the energy of the mountains, I am reminded that in the embrace of Elbrus, one discovers not only the grandeur of the world but also the beauty within oneself.

Stanislav Drozdetckii is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Bedroom Is Where I Relax

One of my favorite places to relax is my bedroom. When I am tired, I would lie on the bed which is comfortable and large. In addition, I like to listen to music and watch television on my bed. My son always said that I look like a lazy cat. In the afternoon, I bring my coffee to sit on the desk chair which was put on the

balcony. I enjoy the wind and I read magazines. If you don't want to relax and read a magazine, you can see the beautiful sunset from the ground level.

In my leisure time, I often play guitar and sing. Or, I surf the internet. Sometimes I will chat with my friends on the phone. We always share moods with each other. I usually do some small things like read the newspaper, clean my room, and read a novel to spend my time.

Above all, I like to stay in my bedroom to do all the things I like. I have a soft bed, a bright balcony, and many books. If you were me, you would like the bedroom as well. When you stay in my room, you will get a feeling that you want to relax easier.

You can become a lazy cat!

John Estime is a student at Village Readers Family Foundation. His teacher is Frank Sauro.

A Square with a History

I always told myself that one day I would write about my favorite place, La Plaza de Armas. This is one of the most important and historical squares in Old Havana. This site and I share a story. My life in Cuba was spent mainly in this Plaza since I was lucky enough to work there.

The square is in the historical old town and is the oldest one in Cuba. It was laid out in 1559 in the center of the town. In the 18th century it was beautified and restored. Fountains were added as well as trees. Today, it is a magical place full of beautiful vegetation with big trees all around and flowers and rose beds. The trees provide a welcoming shadow and nice temperature in the summer months. It is right across the bay so the nice breeze from the sea refreshes the air. Right in the middle there is a statue of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes who was the first president of the Republic of Cuba. There are benches all around where anyone can sit and chat for a while and take a rest. Listening to the humming of the city, watching people pass by or just listening to the birds in the early morning is a thing of beauty.

As an architect I could not do anything else but to admire the magnificence of the place. Plaza de Armas is surrounded by different buildings, and each one has a story of their own. The Capitanes Generales' Palace was the place where the Spanish governors would live in. There is a wood-cobble street "Calle Tacon" in front of the palace which is unique. Legend has it that the governor's wife could not sleep due to the noise of horse carriages passing by over the cobble-stone street, so the governor ordered the new wood ones to replace them. Walking to the right side you will find The Palacio del Segundo Cabo which was initially the vice-governor's home. Right in front of the Plaza is the Temple. This monument was erected in 1928 to commemorate the original place where the first mass was celebrated during the founding of the town of San Cristobal de la Habana on November 16, 1519. To the front right is the Castillo de la Real Fuerza, it was completed in 1577. The castle was built as a defense against the constant pirates' attacks the city constantly suffered. The first embassy of the United States of America in Cuba was also next to the Plaza.

This is just a brief story of the many buildings and events that took place in this wonderful square which changed me. Today there is an open book fair at the Plaza de Armas, but that is another story I will tell you one day.

Saumel Fernandez is an architect and is currently enrolled in Level 5 ESOL classes at Miami Dade College. He has a passion for history and architecture. He is a student in Regla Requena's class.

My Own Safe Place

In my grayest moments, I find a corner of serenity, a space that belongs to me. In that palette of emotions, I discover that loneliness is not always an enemy, but a confidant that allows me to immerse myself in my thoughts. I don't need a car to run away. I prefer to explore the roads in my mind. Between its curves and nooks and crannies, I find answers and acceptance.

In those lonely moments, I discover the strength that resides inside me, and I become my own refuge. However, the twist in my story arises when I share laughter and hugs with friends and family. Those moments, in which human connections are inter-

twined with my own inner peace, reveal that my happy place is not anchored in loneliness. I am in my happy place when I am surrounded by people who bring me peace, I do not need a place to mark my happy place. I am my own happy place.

Yunay Figueredo is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.

My Journey to Miami

I have been in Miami since August 2023. It has been about 6 months now. The reason my family and I came to the United States is because my husband had an opportunity to work in Miami. Before coming here, I lived in South Korea my whole life. The only things I knew about Miami were from the criminal TV series “Dexter” and “CSI: Miami”. I truly knew very little about Miami and Florida. It was a strange and mysterious city to me.

As soon as I stepped off the plane at the Miami airport, I could see palm trees on the streets. I was attracted to this magical city in an instant. I could feel a real tropical area was here. The blue sky and the beach sunsets feel like I am in heaven. Every weekend, I try to find new places to go to in nearby with my 6-year-old twins, especially anything related to wildlife. There are so many beaches, and the sand is as soft as powdered sugar. If you go south to Key West, you can find some beautiful ocean diving spots. If you go north, there are springs where everything reflects in the clear water like a mirror.

And the people here are so kind. They are nice to new and foreign neighbors like me and my family. Not only the local people, but also the students in my ESOL class. My classmates are of various nationalities, ages, and occupations. My teacher and some hard-working students motivate me to study English even harder.

The best thing is that my children are satisfied with and enjoy their school life, even though they are not good at English. They are in the 1st grade of elementary school. US elementary schools are so much fun for kids. They have so many special events like Halloween, pajama day, field trip days, etc. I think these experiences are very good for children to create happy memories with classmates and teachers, and these will strongly support their

lives. The enthusiasm for education in Korea is really high and children are pushed too much to study and get good, high grades. I just want my kids to have a happy and healthy life. And now my kids are happy and healthy.

Every day, I am surprised, but not tired of Miami's beauty. I realize how wonderful the scenery is here every minute. When I maybe go back to Korea, I will miss the vibe of Miami and I am positive that I will never forget the time that my family and I shared here.

Lisa Hong is a former public officer at the central government of Korea and an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Carmen Whu.

I Love Going to Restaurants with My Friends

I'm going to tell you about my favorite place. Restaurants are my favorite place. When I am invited to go to a restaurant, I feel good because I really like to eat.

I do not have a favorite food or drink, but I do like alcoholic drinks and seafood. I like Italian restaurants. I like Jamaican restaurants. I like Chinese restaurants. I like Haitian restaurants. Every time someone says to me, "Dove we are going out tonight," in my heart, I say to God make this person take me to a restaurant because there is no place I feel better than when I am in a restaurant or a buffet.

Everyone in my family and all of my friends know that I like going to restaurants. When I arrive at the restaurant, I spend an hour taking photos of the dishes and the scenery to put on my whatsapp status. I spend all my money in my favorite place.

The waiters treat me like a queen. I always have a problem deciding what to wear. Dressing to go out to a restaurant can be hard for me because I don't like wearing high heels all of the time. Sometimes there are special occasions and extraordinary dates when I need to wear a beautiful dress and beautiful heels.

In conclusion, I will always accept an offer to go to a restaurant.

Dove Jean Charles is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian

Haiti Is My Beautiful Place

Among all places on earth for me, when I'm going on vacation in Haiti, it's a favorite place for someone to stay. For me, it is one of the best countries in the world to live. In the years before it was silent and calm, has a beautiful landscape. My favorite places in Haiti are three parts. The three parts are: with my family, in the countryside and the beach. It is just so beautiful to be in your country with the people you love.

First of all, I'm very happy when I am with my family. I feel very comfortable with them. I like when we all sit at the table eating, telling jokes, sharing ideas, and playing ball together. I admire when my mother gives us advice so that we can have a better tomorrow. I like when we go out together and go to see my grandparents. I like when she cooks, does my hair, and teaches me a lot of things. I like when my father explains to me the story of his youth and how he met my mother. It is very special for me to be with them.

Secondly, I admire the countryside because it is the best way I can explore the nature and enjoy it with my family. I like when we are outside as a family so that we can share more moments together. We breathe more air, eat more natural food, and the nature is quiet. We spend a lot of good time going on a nature walk, enjoying local attractions, spending time at parks, visiting local farms in the area, and riding bicycles. I love everything I do when I go out. I can't ask to come the city again, the only reason I return is because I can't get a signal to talk with my friend.

Thirdly, I lived the best time when going to the beach with my family and my friend. We were sitting in the car. I was praying when I would get to the beach to eat more, to take beautiful pictures, to bathe in the sun which was just setting. The best thing was when we were returning home, my friend was drunk and we poured water on his head. We were singing loudly in the car until we got home. Wow! Frankly, I will never be able to forget these beautiful moments.

Finally, for me, the best time is when you are going on vacation in your country. You spend time with your family and friend. That is very important for yourself and for them because the vacation can help you to explore more things and relieve all the stress you've had.

Rose Darline La Jeune is a student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Frank Sauro.

The Beaches and I

Usually everyone has a favorite place, mine is without a doubt the beach. Since I was little, I have visited different beaches and although they still have their differences, for me they are all beautiful.

Every year during our August vacation, my whole family gets together, and we go to the beach to camp. I love this time of the year because we spend a lot of fun time as a family, and we eat very delicious food. What I like the most about the beach is the sound of the waves. I really like to sleep or lie on the sand listening to the sound of the waves, which for me is like a lullaby. But above all, the most wonderful thing and what I love the most is the sunset with its beautiful colors.

I feel comfortable and happy in natural spaces, such as mountains, plains and forest stretches. But the truth is, the place that fills me the most with happiness is the sea. I do not know if it is the weather, I do not know if it is the colors or if it is sky that is painted every afternoon. What I know is that I love it and every time I travel to natural places, and I am an extremely happy person when I am at the beach. It also happens that there I treasure very important and magnificent memories. The sea gives symphonies, sounds, paintings, colors, smells, sensations, tranquility, and hope. If I feel bad, without a doubt I think about these landscapes and everything begins to clarify. Feeling happy in the place we like the most is essential to develop as human beings, to have more sensitivity, and to love life for what it is, that is why today and always I choose the sea as my favorite place.

Rocio Loriga is 19 years old, and she was born in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. She has been living in Kendall for nine months. She is a student at MDC-Kendall and her teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

My God and My Family

I have two favorite places.

My first favorite place is church. Church is one of my favorite places because I started going to church when I was a little girl. When I used to go to church with my parents, I enjoyed singing and dancing. Now that I'm older, I like it more because of the preaching and I help to lead the service.

My second favorite place is home because when I'm home I feel comfortable. I watch TV, I play with my family, I enjoy cooking and cleaning, and after all that, I enjoy taking a bath.

In conclusion, these two places are my favorite because I get to do things that I love and that make me happy.

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

Today

My favorite day is today. All people, including me, search for happiness in many things where we hope to find the answer to the good life. But it is clear to me that every day and each moment where you live is a miracle to give thanks for.

It's easy walking around to know that here or everywhere I see the small things and feel alive. This is the most important gift of humanity: the capacity of humans to make relationships, to enjoy the people who are with us, our parents, our relatives, friends and even our pets.

Each day is a gift that we need to appreciate. Minute to minute, nobody knows when we are called to pass away. Bring hugs and kisses, call everyone that shares your life. Tomorrow will be too late to do the things you can do today.

Andres Marino was born in Colombia and is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. He participates in the Conversation Club.

A Written Place

Books are my favorite place. I know that books are not a place, but I honestly feel this way about books. A book is my safe place inside my mind because I can do anything and be anyone in the story.

There are great worlds in books, that with a little imagination you can make them come true in your mind, feel the emotions, make the decisions, and be the protagonist.

When I read a book, it makes me feel that I am inside it. It is relaxing to read and discover things you did not know about, like traveling to various places and times without leaving your room.

Reading is communicating with the person who wrote that book, who left a piece of herself in it. I can transform into the dragon and change history, fall in love with the princess and not be fierce. I could be Alice and decide to stay in Wonderland because books are my favorite place and within them, I can be whomever I want to be.

Ashlyn Kelly Martinez is a student from Marianao, Havana, Cuba. She is enrolled in the Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert K. Kelso.

Marsha's Vacation

I'm going on a vacation to a private island. I need to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city. My friend told me about an island in Fiji that she went to and had fun. I will take a boat to the island by myself.

On the island, there are small cabins that I can stay in. There's no phone or television, just peace and quiet. I can watch the sunset, walk on the beach, and look for shells on the beach. I can listen to the waves coming from the ocean and look at the dolphins playing in the water. I can relax in a hammock while reading a good book. During the day, I can explore the island and see if I can find things to eat. At night, I can go out for a walk and look up and see the bright stars and the moon.

On my first day on the island, I went for a swim in the nice blue water. While I was swimming, I saw lightning in the distance, so I went inside to be safe. The rain started coming down hard. I made some chicken noodle soup for lunch and read a good book. When I saw that the rain had stopped, I went outside to get some fresh air. I saw a fishing boat waving their hands at me. They came over to ask me if I wanted some fish for dinner. I said yes. It was nice of them. I watched the fishing boat leave. Later on, I fried the fish for dinner. It was good.

The next day, I woke up to a knock at the door. It was a surprise—my husband, Tom! He came to see me and join me for the rest of the vacation. We went exploring through the island to find coconuts to make us a drink. When we got back to the cabin, we found a note on the door:

“Follow the footprints. Look for orange marks on a tree. You will find something inside the tree. It’s a key to the treasure box somewhere on the island. The final clue is under a bunch of rocks piled up. It will tell you where to find the treasure box.”

We are having fun finding the clues to the treasure. When we got to the pile of rocks, we found a treasure map underneath. The map showed a big red X on the other side of the island. We went there and found a treasure box! Inside there was a letter that said, “You won a trip to come back to the island for free!”

It was getting too late to go back to the cabin, so we started a campfire. We sat around talking and made s’mores. We have a few weeks left on the island, so we are going to enjoy the rest of our time here before we have to catch the ferry going home.

Marsha McDonald is a student at Columbia County Public Library. Her teacher is Michael Elliott.

A Place to Reflect

This story begins in a place with palm trees, beaches, and people that is called “A PLACE OF MEDITATION”. There are 20 varieties of palm trees but 12 are native to Florida with many beaches and amusement parks. Walt Disney World is a place that helps to make adults feel like children. A walk through the

Everglades National Park shows us that wildlife lives free from the dangers of mankind.

Visiting the space center in Florida is a point between earth and space. As Neil Armstrong said, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." On July 20, 1969 Edwin Adrian and Michael Collins were two astronauts on Apollo 11, where the beginning of the Space Age took place. We now see many countries propelling their rockets. The park and entertainment make the Kennedy Space Center a place for unique science.

Every morning when I wake up and see the Florida sunrise, I feel it's like a gift from nature to me. Watching the sunrise when I get up and go to bed to the sunset gives me a place to see the stars and the constellations. This gives me a desire to embrace the stars in this extraordinary moment, if I only could.

All of this touches my heart and soul and each day I spend an extraordinary one in a unique place.

Romin Mendo is from Peru and is an ESOL student at Largo Library. His teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

The Church is My Favorite Place

Usually, when you ask people what their favorite place is they will talk about a distant place. Maybe a mountain, a forest, or something. But my favorite place is not far away at all. My favorite place is my church.

Although the church behind my house is not very large, when I was younger, I thought it was so beautiful and spacious.

There are so many interesting places to play and hide. I can sit in the large garden and have a picnic. I can have some people share their thoughts with me sometimes about life.

Even though I have played there many times I can still spend all afternoon running, playing, and singing with my family and friends.

The church is a magical place. If I'm in a bad mood, I'll go

there to be alone and think. When I was a child, I liked to imagine that there were magical people who lived in the church. When I grow up and have children, I hope that they can live near such a special place too.

Lucia Nicolas is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Ivette Waller.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is being behind the wheel of my boat. I grew up in Canada and my family moved to Florida when I was in middle school. That's when I became interested in boats. My family and friends rented boats and we would go on the ocean, the intracoastal and on the St John's River. My favorite was the St John's River. I decided that some day I would have my very own boat.

Last summer, I asked my reading tutor if she would help me to get my boating license. First, we studied and then worked on the online test, with her helping me with all the reading. We worked on this for about 5 weeks - and I passed the test.

Once I had my license, I started looking at many boats. In October, I found exactly the one I wanted. I used up almost all of my savings to buy the boat - but I did it.

My dream came true!

Alex Noel is a student of Learn To Read St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

Citadelle – The Most Peaceful Place

My name is Kenia and I am from Haiti. I am 21 years old. I want to talk about my favorite place. Citadelle is a place that attracts many visitors. Every year the number of tourists increases. The geographic position makes Citadelle an attractive place. It is also my favorite place and every Catholic believes it is important to make a pilgrimage there at some point in one's life.

First, it is so beautiful. Citadelle is the home to the largest

church in Haiti. It is surrounded by many mountains. Citadelle is a great artistic place considered to be the center of spirituality in Catholic conversion.

Citadelle is my favorite place. It has such a peaceful environment. Also, it has a wealth of historical knowledge about the Catholic religion. I have been to Citadelle and will never forget it.

Kenia Noel is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Tallahassee is the Place that Changed My Life

Tallahassee is my favorite place because of the opportunities. In the past, I lived in south central Florida without any chance of having friends or many opportunities. When I first moved to Tallahassee, I thought it was boring until I started getting around town on the bus two years later. Back then, Tallahassee was a different place.

Over the years, I learned how to adapt to different things like staying away from the wrong crowd, getting my priorities right. For a while, I struggled to improve my life and situation. However, now I am doing fantastic! I passed one of my tests for the GED and am working on passing three more to graduate. As a result, I study at the local library three days each week. Furthermore, I have friends to encourage me more than I ever did before. All in all, Tallahassee is a great place to live.

Rodriguez Parris is a student in the GED program at the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library. His teacher is Karen Strange.

A Magical Place

A few years ago, I visited a family with my sister. They are a wonderful family, and when anybody goes there one feels welcomed and a part of the family. It was a magical place located in the middle of mountains with a subtropical climate. The vegetation was exuberant, full of beautiful exotic flowers, tropical plants with large leaves, and grandiose trees that offer us their delicious aromas and fruits.

The family shared everything with their parents, children, and grandchildren. They also maintained a relationship of solidarity, companionship, love, and respect among themselves. They live in a beautiful family community created by their parents. In this place there is no technology, no buildings around, and nothing modern. There are only strong energy sources that come from the earth, the natural environment that surrounds the entire place.

When I arrived at this place, I was filled with extraordinary feelings. I returned totally renewed, filled with peace and love that this beautiful place offered us.

It really was a magical place, that invites meditation and relaxation, filling us with incredible inner peace. One breathes fresh air and it's full of ancestral knowledge.

This was my experience in that magical place.

Nikita Penaherrera is an ESOL student from Ecuador attending Largo Library English classes. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

I Never Found Someone Better

My favorite place is my boyfriend because he is the person I always look up to when my day is not going well. He is always there for me when I need him by my side. I feel super safe and spending time with him solves all my problems. With him, I have the best moments day by day. With him, everything is easier. There is laughter, craziness, and many things that make him gain everything from me. He has managed to change many things about me. I have improved my patience and learned to counteract my impulses, my bad form, and my character. He has helped me to be a better person. He does me well in a thousand ways.

Darianna Reytor Acevedo is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My New Home

My favorite place is where I am right now. How do you know it is your favorite place? You'll see it and feel better when you see it with eyes of gratitude. I'm Venezuelan and I love my homeland, but now I enjoy the wonderful city of Miami. Full of cultures; it's the US capital of Latin America, where it's always busy and active.

Miami has wonderful landscapes with a sky you almost feel you can touch. It looks so clean that the clouds seem to be made of cotton that floats through the air. It has incredible sunsets with a range of unique colors every day. It also has spectacular beaches with clean sand and waves that make you feel relaxed just by listening to them break. You breathe fresh air and warm waters according to the seasons.

People here are busy, but also friendly with co-workers and classmates, and eager to help. There are many happy teachers at Miami Dade College. There are a lot of parks where you can feel one with nature, the trees, and the desire to exercise by walking, biking, and skating. I love seeing the joy of the children running around. It also has large and modern shopping centers with a variety of prices and tastes that, with or without money, showcase creativity and a varied selection of items.

Gastrostomy seems to be an explosion of new and unique tastes from food trucks, and small restaurants offering Colombian, Cuban, Mexican, Peruvian, Japanese, and Venezuelan foods, among others, with countless delicious dishes prepared with a lot of flavors. There are places that look very exclusive and elegant, but from the simplest to the most elegant ones, you can excite your palate with new flavors or others that will remind you of childhood.

Miami has buildings near the sea that breathe prosperity and is a walkable city with multiple highways and roads in excellent condition and they are always renovating. At night you can see the moon so close that it shines like a giant star and the buildings are full of lights. It is a pleasure to walk by since it's a cheerful city, day and night.

We must remember to value Miami and give thanks for it has

given us work, study, lodging, and friends. Above all, we must learn to take care of it by saving water, electricity, or donating to help the neediest people, not always with money, but with our time as well. This is how we can protect our beautiful city, the one that embraces and welcomes a large number of immigrants. We should appreciate and look after my new favorite place, the city of Miami.

Mariana Roa is a dentistry graduate and is currently an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Kendall campus. Her teacher is Carmen Whu.

The Real Encanto

Have you ever seen the movie Encanto? Many people know this movie, but what they don't know is that the place that the movie is based on, actually exists. This place is located in Salento Quindio Colombia in an area called Valle del Cocora. It's an enchanting zone with a nice landscape of palma de cera, which is an emblematic plant of Quindio.

The architecture that we find in this area is a typical of a Colombian coffee farm. This architecture was the inspiration behind Encanto because the colors of the landscape are incredible, as seen in the movie.

The people who live in this zone only receive their resources from tourism. It's a very poor, rural area because this tourism season is intermittent. Currently, promoting this movie helps the natives improve their lifestyle because it attracts tourists to the area. The native people also live on agriculture, and they produce ecological products.

This movie shows us the real economic and political situation of rural Colombians because in my country, it is very difficult to do farm labor. On the other hand, this movie shows us the soft skills they have and other skills not typically found within the community. In conclusion, Encanto shows the values and principles of a rural Colombian society that really exists.

Carlos Sanchez is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. His teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

A Place to Feel Accepted and Safe

My favorite place in Leon County, ironically, has to be the public library (no specific branch). I've always loved to come to the library, even in my earliest memories as a child, back when they still had VHS tapes, and it continues to be one of my favorite places to go in this small town for countless reasons:

For one, the people associated with the library have always been very friendly. You can tell they are dedicated to better the community as a whole. If I ever needed any help, they've always been there. I always enjoy the conversation I have with the employees as well.

I am very fond of the library's notoriously peaceful atmosphere. Whether I'm looking for something specific, just browsing, or if I came to get some studying done, I have always felt safe and accepted there. I appreciate the free access to never ending knowledge, resources, and different sorts of opportunities for 'all' people. I enjoy observing the ever-changing art exhibits and events as well.

Simple words cannot express my gratitude and admiration for this lovely place and the people there. The public library will forever hold a place in my heart, no matter where I go.

Thank you for shedding light on my life, and giving me a place to feel accepted and safe, even on a rainy day!

Launa T. is an Adult Education student in the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library. Launa's teacher is Karen Strange.

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the U.S.

Respect Each Other's Cultures

When you move or visit another country, how many differences do you notice between this country and the United States? My husband, children, and I came here from Japan one and a half years ago. After we started living in the U.S., we found many cultural differences. I will introduce to you only a few.

First, in Japan, we only greet people or acquaintances we know. However, in the U.S. they greet strangers, even people who just pass by on the street. Everywhere you go, you hear:

“Hello!” and “Hi! How are you?”. It is also said at cash registers, restaurants, and shops. In addition, often strangers will say: “I like your outfits!” Japanese people never say such things to strangers. In addition, in Japan, some greetings are simply a bow or a nod. Greetings such as hugs, kisses, and handshakes are not seen in Japan.

Secondly, it is widely known that we eat with chopsticks almost all our dishes, for instance salads and miso soups. We also eat rice almost every day. Here in the U.S., there are so many different foods, mostly eaten with forks, spoons, and knives.

Thirdly, in Japan, people who are on the train and bus are very quiet. We are required to have our cell phones put on silent mode, Talking on the phone is not allowed on the train or bus. Whereas here, people speak to one another, even loudly, have music playing at times, and speak on their cells and get calls.

Finally, in the U.S., people wear any type of clothes, regardless of their age or body shape. I like this freedom. This is not how Japanese people dress. Japanese people dress is very formally and appearance is very important.

What impressed me most is how children quickly accept new cultures. For example, my children now hug their friends when they meet, they talk to strangers and say: “I like your shirt” and

so on. I am delighted to see how my children have adapted to this culture. On the other hand, every culture has pros and cons. That is why, I would like to accept both cultural differences, and I look forward to seeing other new cultures here too.

Tomoyo Adachi is a Japanese ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center and is taught by Angela Faiola. She would like to teach one day teach Japanese or English in Japan and reads to her children every night in Japanese so they don't forget their mother language.

Why I Left My Country to Come to the United States

My Name is Mohammed Arbab. I was born in Western Sudan in 1963. I am from the region of North Darfur state, Kotom Town, Sayee area, Sayeediko village. In Sudan, I lived with my family on our land. I have four brothers and one sister. We depended on breeding cattle, grain, and agriculture. I came to America in September 2022. I now live with friends in Clearwater.

Life in the Sudan is very difficult when you live in the countryside. In Darfur, where I am from, we don't have electricity. The government won't allow us to develop; if someone tries to ask, they are killed. There are many gangs; we are not free to go from city to city. If you get stopped in the street by a gang, you have to give what you have or you will be killed. The gang members burn our huts and steal our cattle as they please. The government knows who they are, but they don't do anything to help the situation.

Life in the United States is good. You are free and safe here. I see people going to work and also taking classes at the same time. I also see people can open any business, buy a house, or choose any career that they want. Some people hold permanent jobs and others have temporary ones.

Now, things are difficult for me because I don't speak English well. I cannot get a better job now but I am taking ESOL classes to improve my English. My life and future depend on education because without education we are nothing. I want to be an example for other young people who come here to make themselves better because when they come here and see a different culture

and system, sometimes they are scared to make decisions for themselves.

Mohammed Arbab is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinnellas's ESOL Program at St Catherine of Siena in Largo, Florida. His tutor is Cassie Moreau.

I Miss My Country

I miss my home country. Haiti is a beautiful, tropical country. We have healthy food, beaches with turquoise water and white sand, and a rich culture.

In the early 17th century, the French colony established a presence on Hispaniola, and in 1697, Spain ceded the western third of Hispaniola to France, which later became Haiti. The French colony, based on forestry and sugar related industries, became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean, but only through the heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation.

In the late 18th century, Haiti's nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint Louverture. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first Black Republic to declare its independence in 1804. Haiti's culture fuses African, French, and West Indian elements. Creole is our language and is used in literature, drama, music, and dance.

Voodoo is our form of spirituality. It's the way we use to connect with our spirits and ancestors. Family structure is strong, and children are kept close to home. Haitian society is matriarchal, especially where family life and child-rearing are concerned. Common law marriage is considered the norm, and the man is most likely to hold ultimate authority and control in almost everything relating to the outside world. Corporal punishment is used as a means of discipline. Respect for adults, support for family, and doing well in school are strong values held by Haitians.

Recently, I came to the United States. This was a good opportunity, but my life here is very different than my life in Haiti. The U.S. is a big and powerful country with a good infrastructure and up-to-date technology. The education system is very advanced,

and the U.S. is more secure too, but sometimes, I miss my home country. In Haiti, I used to play my music everywhere (hotels, bars, clubs, and at special occasions like weddings and private parties). I miss my recording studio and some of my family and friends. I had so much fun in Haiti.

Although I miss my home country very much, I am now trying to adapt to the U.S. system, create financial stability, and carry out my projects.

Guensy Chery is an Advanced ESOL student at Orange Technical College, East Campus, in Winter Park. His teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Memories of the Santa Clara de Asis Festival

I was born in Santa Clara in the Mexican state of Durango. It's a small agricultural town, although the climate is not very good for growing plants. It's too dry most of the time. But when it rains, then we plant beans and corn and sometimes squash.

What I remember most is enjoying living with my family. I have seven sisters and three brothers. Some of them still live in Santa Clara, and others have moved to bigger cities to find more job opportunities.

Every year we honor our patron, Santa Clara de Asis, with a nine-day festival. People come from nearby villages to celebrate. There are many crafts and other items to buy, such as hand-made dishes, blankets, and chairs. A king and queen are chosen, and we have a rodeo, fireworks, music, and dancing. Each day a different town visits and brings their own costumed dancers who parade through the town. Each dance is unique to that town. And, of course, there is plenty of food like burritos, flautas, enchiladas, and candies.

Juana Cruz has been married 35 years and has four children. Her oldest son has his own car repair business, her daughter Maria is finishing a degree in mechanical engineering, and her daughter Giselle is about to start work on a nursing degree. Her youngest son is a sophomore in high school. Juana is a student of Jim Wheeler at Literacy Services of Indian River County.

The Differences Between Life in Haiti and Life in the USA

Life in my home country, Haiti, is a very beautiful multitude of colors, cultures, and challenges that are very different from the reality I encounter in the United States. This includes the people, daily life, and the relationships among those people. Between these two realities it is very important to show the differences in their economic, social, and educational systems.

First of all, economically, the difference in the pace of life is very big between Haiti and the United States. In Haiti, we find the poverty in all the ways of life. There is not enough work. Because of this, insecurity has spread to all the country. In the United States, the things are very different. It is a country where there are a lot of opportunities to find whatever job possible and to get your life in good condition.

In terms of social dynamics, the level of life in Haiti is very low. There are a lot of shortages of basic services: for example, no electricity, no drinkable water, no roads in good condition, no good construction of houses that respect the norms of construction, and no opportunities to get a better life. In Haiti the people exist but do not thrive. According to what I see in the United States, the difference is unbelievable. The way they construct is organized. The connection between the roads is inexplicable. They always have electricity and water in the house. The people live a life that is not reproachable from the government.

Finally, on the plan of education, it's no comparison. Haiti is still facing the challenges in giving a better education because of the economic hardship, instability of the government, and lack of resources. To gain knowledge in Haiti, often requires strong resilience and resourcefulness. The educational opportunities are very limited in comparison to the opportunities are offered in the United States. In the United States, there is a well-established and widely accessible education system.

In conclusion, the contrasts between life in Haiti and the United States are evident in terms of life, economics, educational opportunities, and social dynamics. While both countries are different in many ways, they both contribute distinct elements to the global mosaic. Life in each place reflects not only the chal-

lenges faced but also the resilience that defines the essence of Haiti and the United States.

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

Haiti and the US

I'm Fabe, I come from Haiti, a country where it is nice to live naturally all year. Haiti has everything to be on of the most popular destinations in the world; beautiful beaches, hospitable people, delicious cuisine, exciting culture and a great climate.

I have currently been living in the USA for about 2 years. I don't need to tell you, the U.S. is the greatest power in the world. It's a beautiful country, offering opportunity to everyone who finds it, provided you have the vision and the goal. The U.S. is a country that most human beings dream of visiting.

Haiti and the U.S are two (2) countries with very different characteristics. As they differ, so do their lifestyles. If I dare to compare my way of life when I was in Haiti and the one today, I end up noting they are two totally different ways of life.

Normally, I can tell you as a Haitian, from the first 6 months living in the U.S, it was not an easy life, especially as an immigrant. I can give you a few details. When I was in my country, the way I ate was different. I never ate food prepared today and left for other days. Food was never prepared over a 24 hours period, which is totally different here, in the U.S. In Haiti I would never refrigerate food for two days (48 hrs).

At home , I work at my job and there I have hours of rest. In Haiti, I worked as an engineer and worked on specific projects for a month at a time. Here in the U.S, we do any kind of work to meet the demands and expenses of our lives. I work 40 hours a week and attend school. And the biggest problem is adapting especially to a language that isn't your own. I go to school to improve my English.

In conclusion, despite all their differences, as I said in the introduction, the U.S. remains what it is a superpower, and there

Pathways

you win the fight of your life.

Thank you.

*Fabe Benira is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.
Fabe's teacher is Julie Iskenderian*

My Second Chance to Pursue My Dream

I am Roseblandine, I am Haitian. As a Haitian I see life differently than another nation can see it. When we are talking about life, there are so many definitions that come our way. So, for me life is not about breathing and being healthy; it is about freedom, having the possibility to interact with nature, be secure. Life is happiness. This happiness that life gives in your home country may be different in another one. In a few words, I will try to briefly explain how life in my home country differs from life in US.

As I am 24 years old, I can say I did not enjoy the Haitian prosperity, every elderly Haitian person talks about it. The Haiti I see is the one that without life, the one that is unlivable, the one that most of us cannot live in. In Haiti there is a slang phrase that says: "You are there, but you are not living." In Haiti I was not living, I was insecure, stressed. All my dreams faded away. As the slang denotes, I was there, but I had no life.

In the US, everything has changed. I have the possibility to make my dream become true, my works will not be in vain. The US gives me the possibility to restart, to have a life.

In conclusion, the life I had in my home country was vastly different than the life I am living now. I am secure, my confidence has grown, my goals are clear AND my dream will become true. The US gives me life.

Roseblandine Fleurancin was born in Haiti where she studied Health Science. She is currently attending the Advanced Level ESOL Program with Ms. Fayne Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is extremely focused on building her English skills and will enroll into the Health Science IET program next year for nursing.

Living Between Two Different Worlds

I live in Nokomis, Florida with my husband Erich for six months each year. Nokomis is on the Gulf Coast of Florida near beautiful sandy beaches. The other six months I live in Bratislava, Slovakia. We are snowbirds. We have good neighbors and friends in Florida and like doing activities together. For example, we like boating and biking with Ingrid and Doug. We like spending many holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter with our long-time friends. We also enjoy traveling together because they are snowbirds too. When Erich and I went to Chicago to visit, they were good tourist guides and showed us their beautiful city. My neighbors Mary Ann and George like to garden. They love it when I bring them tomato and pepper seeds from Slovakia.

I travel to Bratislava, Slovakia with my husband Erich. Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. The old town is full of restaurants, bars and shops. I always look forward to seeing my daughters Susan and Dagmar and my two granddaughters Vivien and Charlene. I am happy to babysit my granddaughters. Charlene is eight months old and Vivien is thirteen years old. I enjoy hiking with my daughter and my grandchildren. When the weather is nice, we always meet for a coffee outside on the terrace with our friends, Danka and Marika.

When I came to America many years ago, I only spoke a little bit of English. My husband, Erich was my first teacher! I watched TV in English and I tried to read the newspapers. I wanted to learn English to find a better job opportunity. My goal was to also get a driver's license. When I started to learn English I was unhappy, confused, and frustrated. The hardest part was learning the pronunciation of words. I was supported by my friends, my husband Erich, my family, and my teachers.

For ten years I went to the Sarasota Technical Institute, twice a week. Then I started at the Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota working with Doris. For the next ten years, we worked together, in-person, two times a week. I finally took my driver's license test and got my American driver's license. That was very important for me. Finally, I was totally happy.

Now, I have a new goal. One day I want to be an American Cit-

izen! I am working hard with Trish at the Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota program to reach this goal. This is not easy, but I know that if I work hard, my goal will appear before me. I believe my good and positive feelings motivate me to reach each goal.

Ilona Fuerbeck is an ESOL student at the Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota. She has been a student with this organization for over ten years. Her current teacher is Trish Roberts.

I Got It!

I am a country girl from Thailand. After college I worked for a company that partnered with foreign companies to do business in Thailand. I married an American and moved to the USA. That was a big change in my life after 50 years!

The USA is a country where it is very difficult to obtain a visa. Obtaining a driver's license here is also difficult. My husband and I spent two months getting settled in to live in Florida. Where we live in Florida, the public transportation system is not so good or convenient like in the big cities in Thailand. Everybody here uses a car to get around. I knew I had to have a driver's license to get around, but my problem was that my English was not good enough. I could speak, read, and write a little English. In Thailand, driving is on the opposite side and completely different.

I told my husband I needed to study English so I can understand more and have confidence in myself before taking the driver's exam. After that, I registered for an English Speakers for Other Languages (ESOL) Class at Clearview Adult Education Center. I learned a lot of things that made me feel confident enough to take the exam.

The driver's license exam consists of a written exam and a practical driving test. I still remember, how on April 4, 2023, I took the written exam, and I passed the first time, so I got my driving license permit to learn. I practiced driving every day as much as I could.

Then, after one month I went to take the driving test. I remember that day I told the examiner that I was excited, I am a foreigner, and I do not understand some things he was telling me to do. He was very kind to me. Finally, I passed all exams and got

a Florida driver's license. I jumped and danced happily when I did it.

Thank you to the Clearview Adult Education Center, all the teachers, and to my husband for helping me achieve my goal of living in America.

Waraporn Gable is a student at the Clearview Adult Education Center. Waraporn's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Jamaican Style

My life in Jamaica is so different from here in the United States. In my country, we have mountains, hills, and valleys. I can remember about age nine going to primary school. I had to walk two miles from home just to get to a bus. Because we didn't have school buses, everyone travels on the same bus, both young and old. The bus ride took twenty minutes. When the bus stopped, I had to walk again for five more miles before reaching school. It was fun because on the bus music would be playing, and I would always have someone to talk with. My country's people are very friendly and nice. After school, my classmates and I would walk in a group and talk about school.

When I reached home, I would go to the fruit trees. There were so many! I could climb and pick apples, mangoes, and tamarinds right in my yard. It was literally very fruitful! Each month, there was something new growing. Every Saturday, my mother would wake me up at 6:00am and we would go to the market. She said that the earlier you go, you would get the fresh produce from the country people that came to the market to sell. Every Saturday evening, my mother cooked soup with meat and ground food.

Sunday was time for church, but before we could do anything, me and my sisters had to carry buckets of water to use in the house. We had to fill the containers, but they lasted all week. The water was always refreshing. It was used for cooking and bathing. My family couldn't afford a water heater. Sunday evenings, my mother would always teach me how to clean and cook. When cleaning the floor, I had to get on my knees, use two hands, and use a dry coconut as a brush to shine the floor. Sunday was the

best and most special day of the week. My mother taught me how to cook rice and peas with coconut milk. It is a must, but with any type of meat and vegetables. This dish would be served with freshly made drinks. Also, I can remember if I was sick, my mother and father never took me to the hospital. There was always a bush in the yard that could remedy cold, pain, and fever. It's very different in my country, but we were well loved and happy.

Melesia Grant is a GED student at Atlantic Technical College Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus. Her teacher is Ms. Donna M. Johnson.

Life in Sudan and Life in the United States

My name is Badria Kabor. I am 36 years old. My husband's name is Sharif. We have four children, and we are from the Sudan. The reason we came to the United States is because the Sudan has more problems. The government is killing the people. They take everything you have, so living there was not safe for us.

Right now we live in Largo, FL. But life in my home country differs from life in the U.S. because in Sudan we had our own home, camels, goats, and sheep. We were farmers and had our own farm. We never had electricity, so we don't have any bills for services to pay. We drink water from a well and we cook from wood fire and our light is from wood fire. Our transportation methods are donkeys and camels. People climb trees and the mountains. Also, in my home country children play outside and we never have thieves take children away. The children are always safe, so life in my home country is easier for me.

In the United States life is difficult for us because everything is different from my home country. Here everyone speaks English, and everything gets sent in the mail or your email address and transportation is by car or bus. If you don't have money, you can't go anywhere. There are so many things in the U.S. that I don't know.

Badria Kabor is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas' (LCUP) ESOL Program at St Catherine of Siena in Largo, Florida. Her tutor is Cassie Moreau.

Vietnam vs. USA

I come from a country in Southeast Asia, Vietnam. I came to America in the fall of September, 2023. When I arrived, the first thing I felt was the difference in the weather. My family lives in Florida with my grandparents, where the climate is warm, similar to Vietnam, but not as humid. I also had the opportunity to go to Virginia to experience the winter there. Virginia winter is very cold, a cold that I had never felt in Vietnam. Despite the freezing weather, I love the fresh cold air of the pine forest.

Another difference between Vietnam and the U.S is education. I study a lot and there is a lot of homework in Vietnam. My classes were from 7a.m to 5p.m and I studied a total of thirteen subjects a week. English is a mandatory language to learn at school, but to learn English well, you have to spend a lot of money to study with native teachers at special language centers. In America, there is a lot less studying and I'm not used to that. You can choose your favorite subjects in the US and don't have to study them all like in Vietnam, but I really like the education system in America.

The food is also completely different. In Vietnam, rice is an indispensable dish in every meal, eaten three times a day and served with soup. There are also great dishes like pho, beef rice noodles, crab and tomato vermicelli soup, glass noodles, etc. And one dish that is always on the dining table is fish sauce. In America, people often eat fast food with a lot of cheese and little vegetables. I don't like that because it makes me gain weight. And there are not many types of vegetables like in Vietnam.

Finally, January 1st is the start of the new year in the US, but in Vietnam, the new year actually takes place on January 1st of the lunar calendar. In 2024, the lunar New Year falls on February 10th . The indispensable cake is glutinous rice cake called Banh Chung. Inside is green beans and pork with a little pepper. Outside is sticky rice and wrapped with banana leaves.

Transportation is also different. In Vietnam, the main transportation is motorbikes, but in the US most use cars and public transportation buses. Traffic lights, in addition to the three colors red, yellow, and green, also have arrows pointing left or right, while in Vietnam there are no such arrows. In America, you rare-

ly hear car horns, but in Vietnam, the streets are always bustling with car horns. Pedestrians have priority in the US but not in Vietnam. My life has changed a lot since coming to America!

Anonymous

Life is Very Different Here

Life in my country home is different from the U.S. The social structure is very different.

First, the education system in Haiti, my home country, is not the same from the U.S. The grades and levels have different names. In Haiti, we learn French, Creole and some Spanish and English. The U.S. has different names for schools and levels.

Second, the economic policy in my home country is not balanced. The U.S. has a more balanced economic system. In the U.S., each State has some control of its own economy and it is not just controlled by the Federal government.

Third, the opportunity to work in my home country is not good. The U.S. has a lot of opportunities to work, to learn and to make my life better.

Finally, the environment in Haiti is dangerous and the government is not in control. The U.S. government has more control and that makes it a safer environment.

The cultures in my home country and the U.S. are very different. I am taking advantage of all of the opportunities I have in the U.S.

Jean Severe is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Jean's teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Living in the US Compared to Other Countries

I was born in Tuscany in a wonderful region of Italy. When I was 10, my parents decided to emigrate to Switzerland. I then grew up there, did all my studies, and completed my entire career until I retired at the age of 65.

In 2019, my wife and I made a major decision to settle permanently in Florida, due to the fact that she had already lived there for more than 20 years. We wanted to buy a house, to find a job for her again, and to build a new adventure.

For me, everything was new, and even though it had been a dream of mine since I was a child to live in the United States, the changes were numerous, some of them surprising.

Firstly, the vastness of the space, compared to little Switzerland, is colossal. Although I had learned a little English at school, I was far from being able to express myself and understand the language easily.

Then, what surprised me most of all was how easy it was to learn here. Everything is done so that people can integrate, learn, evolve in general, and become autonomous.

On the other hand, the main difference with Switzerland is the way foreigners, whatever their origin or language, are given access to a job to earn a living. It's truly astonishing! There's no such facility in Switzerland. On the contrary, we take a rather strange look at someone who has just arrived and is trying to integrate.

The other incredible aspect is the difference in living standards. To give just a few examples: gasoline costs \$12 a gallon and a 3-bedroom apartment to rent costs an average of over \$3,000 a month. It's true that salaries are higher in Switzerland, but they're just adapted to the standard of living without offering any advantages over the US.

I've also noticed that it's easier to make contact with strangers and strike up a conversation on the street in the US. As a general rule, people in Florida are more communicative. You can very quickly talk about money, career, or something more intimate, whereas in Switzerland, talking about such things is voyeuristic and not done.

Even at 70 years old, I do not regret for a second deciding to retire in Florida where I have found a magnificent school for adults and progressed at my own pace with an exceptional teach-

Pathways

er and school friends, who have become like family.

In conclusion, in Florida people in general are welcoming, friendly, and communicate more easily than in Switzerland. I also have to say that the climate is so pleasant that it more than makes up for Switzerland's magnificent mountainous landscapes.

Arcangelo Ubaldi is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School in Palm Beach Country, Florida. His teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

Someone I Admire

Forever in My Heart

I don't have idols, but there are real people with whom I personally know whose actions I admire. One of these people is Margarita Yakimova. I met this wise woman when I was 24 years old (now I am 47 years old). Yakimova was 59 years old. The age difference didn't bother us at all, we became best friends. I admired her life position. She was always joyful, friendly, and very smart. Her life was full of various difficult situations, but she never had swollen hands. She never gave up. When she got married for the second time, her husband had four children of different ages. Their own mother died, but the children were all old enough to understand and remember their mother, and at the same time they were so little. Ms. Yakimova found an approach to every little new member of the family, warmed everyone with her warmth, and generously gave everyone her love. She became their mom forever.

The kind, loving heart of an independent woman was revealed to me. Margarita Borisovna shared moments from her life, her family. Family has always come first. No matter what difficulties arose. I never heard words of pity or condemnation, but only a deep understanding of the other. There were many conversations in a small kitchen, always with delicious tea and treats from the soul. We talked for hours that had to do with youth, tourism, conquering mountains, traveling to India and many other such simple but interesting and important life topics. I saw and felt kindness and generosity in attention, a deeper participation, and understanding of life. She was a friend, teacher, and mentor for me and helped me believe in myself. My dear Margarita Borisovna passed away two years ago, but she is forever in my heart.

Veronika Akhmetgareeva is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

An Admirable Woman - Michelle Obama

One of the people I admire the most is Mrs. Michelle Obama because of her hard work and concern for poverty, education,

nutrition, physical activity, and healthy eating. In her position as First Lady, she was a powerful supporter of the communities and a role model for women in America.

Mrs. Obama felt that her true calling was working with people to serve their communities and their neighbors. She served as assistant commissioner of planning and development in the city of Chicago. Mrs. Obama joined the University of Chicago as associate dean of student services with the vision of bringing the campus and the community together. She also developed the first community program and under her leadership as vice president of Chicago Medical Center, which helped volunteerism skyrocket.

Mrs. Obama was the first African American First Lady of the United States. She continued her efforts to support and inspire young people during her years as First Lady and became a role model for women. She looked forward to continuing her work on the issues close to her heart, such as supporting military families, helping children lead healthier lives, higher education, and international adolescent girls' education.

Today, Mrs. Obama continues giving messages of encouragement to people and followers. She published a book entitled *The Light We Carry* with topics on how to build enduring and honest relationships, discovering strength and community inside today's differences, and about tools to use when you feel doubts or helplessness.

Through her work and effort to bring awareness of main topics that impact society, Mrs. Obama was able to encourage people to look for ways to change their lives, pursue their dreams, and improve. For those reasons, I consider Mrs. Michelle Obama a remarkable and admired person.

Haydee Alfaro is an advanced ESOL student at Orange Technical College., East Campus, in Winter Park. His teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Someone I Admire

Among all the people living in the world, if I didn't talk about this person, I would be most unfortunate. I want to explain what this person represents to me. It's my godfather, Jean Charlemagne Ernest.

I remember my mother telling me from the time I was born that my godfather became responsible for me. After I left the baby stage, I was two years old when my godfather enrolled me in kindergarten. After that, I went through five years of primary school until I finished classical studies and entered the university. Then, I graduated in 2022 with a concentration in Pharmacy.

Everything that a caregiver should give to her child, I got from my godfather. It's my godfather who gave me money to buy food and to dress me. In addition to giving me an education, he taught me how to live in society. Then he managed to get me into the United States through the government, and so far, he's still helping me even though I am employed.

So, if I were to talk about my godfather, Jean Charlemagne Ernest, I wouldn't have enough words to explain everything he has done for me or enough words to thank him either. He is more than a godfather, whom I love very much, and I don't see who can replace him.

Daphney Bertrand is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Ivette Waller.

The Echo of Love

Unconditional love and guidance. There is no other way I can describe my mother, who I admire so deeply from the bottom of my heart.

She's always been there for me and supports me in everything in my life. And her admiration is an extraordinary force and an unending wellspring of warmth that transcends boundaries and defies definition. It's a selfless, unwavering devotion that knows no limits, encompassing boundless care, compassion, and an innate desire to nurture and protect.

It's a love that sacrifices without hesitation, that embraces both joy and pain, guiding and comforting through life's highs and lows. A mother's love is a profound, irreplaceable essence that shapes, sustains, and forever echoes in the lives of her children, and forever echoes in my life.

Taisha Ciprius is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

The Characteristics I Admire

I am a twenty-four-year-old woman who moved to the United States and am making a lot of new friends. I am wise, kind, intelligent and a hard-working person. I like these characteristics in myself.

Whenever I meet someone who has these qualities about them, I am enthusiastic to meet them. After becoming friends, I feel as though I am at home. I can say that this is a person who is on my side. I feel very good and automatically this is a person I appreciate.

I admire people who care for me, for my health and who are always there for me. I admire them for being brave and working hard. I appreciate when they encourage me the focus on my school and help me to practice my English more. I admire them for the wisdom they share with me. I am thankful when they help me to calm down when I am angry. I admire people who always respect me.

Orphelia Alan Dodor is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Orphelia's teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

My Guardian Angel

Hi there, I'm Sherry. I set out on my journey, about three years ago, at Brevard Literacy for Adults (LAB). However, I'm not here to boast about myself. I'm here to discuss this incredibly wonderful individual, my teacher. Well, let me share a little about her.

I can remember during the first day of class. She made sure I understood that I was the focus of this life-changing journey. My teacher even went as far as to inform me, in the event that we weren't a good fit, I could switch instructors. She also informed me, if I felt uneasy in telling her, I could always call the office to let them know about a change for a new teacher. This gave me a sense of calm and a relaxing feeling. I couldn't help but to pon-

der, does she really think I'm important? After hearing what my teacher had to say I'm still thinking about everything she went over with me.

My teacher did not come here to play! Like if I don't understand a lesson, she always manages to come up with an effective way to teach me a new or difficult way; or she repeats it again for me. Also, you can't forget about her step-by-step instructions. I mention this because I recall another incident in class when there was a lesson plan I wasn't getting. When she explained it to me, it felt like it went over my head. I'm like, "What's going on here?", (to myself). That day I felt like I'd taken on too much. This made me begin thinking negatively and doubting myself. I was considering dropping out of the program, but my teacher did one wonderful thing. We spoke at the end of each session and she understood that this was a difficult lesson. She explained what we would do in our next session to assist me better. My wonderful teacher is continually seeking new ways to teach me or contacting other teachers to help me. She goes out of her way to get me to the next step toward achieving my goals. She constantly goes the extra mile for me. She always embraces me with encouraging words. Sometimes I think she works harder than I do to accomplish my goals I have set.

The key is that she still believes in me. This is what I need to keep moving towards my goals. I'm truly grateful to have my teacher, Mrs. Kathleen Dyer, in my life. Oh, and by the way, I wouldn't change my teacher for another one in the world. I consider her not just my teacher but also my friend and, of course, my Guardian Angel.

Sherry Flowers is an Adult Learner at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Her Teacher is Kathleen Dyer.

To Ivan

My dad passed away on May 20th, 2023. My first heartbreak was not supposed to be him, even though we only share a last name more than anything else. He never understood me, but I think nobody understood him. I am still not sure if he took his own life, but I know that it was his first time living, too.

Now that he is gone, I understand his pain when he was alive. He was living for his family and tried to make everything be worthy. He always tried to be perfect, which never gave me the idea that he suffered from depression.

I always had the idea to move to another country. I wasn't sure if I wanted to make my life in Nicaragua because of the corruption, but I was sure that I wanted to live with my dad so bad. Since I was a kid, I thought that people in America were raised differently. The only things I knew about them were through movies, but now, since I arrived here without my dad, I didn't know how to feel or what to expect.

It is difficult to know when we hit bottom, as difficult as stopping to believe in fairytales in childhood. There are many words that are drowning in the blood of my heart, and I don't know if they have their own guide to get out of there. My father always kept a lot of love in his heart, love that not even all the money in the world could match.

My dad was acutely aware he was so loved, and when he tried to let us feel the same love, it felt the same to each of us. He was always looking for ways to let us know that we were fully loved. And although he slept very early, he didn't know how to ask life to leave him one more moment with his loved ones. And even though he will no longer return to this earth in this instant, I will find him in every dance and laugh. Specifically, in "Mis ojos lloran por ti."

I'm still thinking of stopping time when he called me the last time. Feeling a great emptiness is inevitable. My pain is comforted sometimes by the fact that he no longer feels pain, but since May and forever, he has been the most present absence in my life and will always be the person I admire the most. He was always a brave human, and even in his last minutes of life, he gave the chance that he never had to other people, an organ donor with a photo on the wall of a hospital.

Enyis Garcia is a student from Nicaragua at Miami Dade College-Kendall. Her professor is Ms. Carmen Whu.

My Brother's Legacy

Someone I admire is my brother. He was always a tough person, a person with many challenges within himself and the world. Since he was a child, he was my family's protector. He was always someone you could rely on; someone you could turn to in your lowest moments. If you needed an ear to vent, a helping hand, or someone to teach you the fundamentals in life, he was the right person.

I remember at the age of 17, he left school to help my mother with our financial situation. This was a life-changing event for him, as this meant he did not get the chance to graduate high school. He never once made us feel guilty for that. He made many sacrifices for my family, which is one of the many reasons I admire him greatly.

He was such a humble person with the biggest heart. For instance, one time we went to get dinner from a food truck, and we happened to see an elderly gentleman struggling to put his flowerpots away in his car. My brother did not hesitate to get out of his car to help.

Another thing I admire about my brother is he was a great father. With the mother of his child not being present, he was forced to take full responsibility of his son, from two months old to a year old, on his own while trying to manage providing financially for all of us. He made no excuses, making sure to be there for his child. I admire that so much about him because I know how hard that must have been for him - as a new parent, learning the parent life as he tried to maintain other things. I would see his eyes with dark circles and could tell he was barely getting enough sleep. It makes me laugh when I remember how he brought his son everywhere he went.

Before he passed away, I remember him always telling my family life is short and we should treat ourselves whenever we can. He would always influence us to go have nice dinners with him and I would brush it off at the moment, not knowing I would regret not doing so.

What I am trying to say is that even with him not making the most money in the world, he would still find a way to treat him-

self because he believed that this is what life is about. Now, I do not hesitate to buy myself the things I want because life is short, and you do not know when it will be your last breath. This has shifted the way I view life in a positive way. My brother taught me to be resilient and much more. My admiration for him will live on.

Joseline Garcia is an adult learner in Miami Dade College's GED Prep online program. Her instructor is Karin Ann Miller.

The Person I Admire: My Grandfather

When they told me that I had to pick a topic to share with others I didn't hesitate to choose the person I admired, my grandfather. He's the person who will always carry my heart until the day I die and who I will meet with wherever he is.

Throughout my life, I was always the grandson who accompanied him everywhere. I only remember getting upset with him once because he didn't defend me from a problem. Of course, I was 13 years old, and he was right, but I didn't know that. I was upset with my grandfather because it hurt me a lot. I didn't greet him with a kiss and a hug when he came home from work. Eventually everything was normal again.

I will never forget the day his heart stopped beating. I have it in my memory every day of my life. I was with him in the hospital in January 2015. I was 16 years old, and my aunts had gone to buy medicine, so I was left alone. The doctor asked about my grandfather's relatives, and I approached to find out what she needed. Unfortunately, she gave me the news that my grandfather had just died. I felt like at 16 years old my world was collapsing. I went to see him, and he was lying there cold on a bed with his eyes closed. I approached him, grabbed his hand, hugged him and gave him the last kiss. From that moment on, there has been no day that I do not think of him with a smile remembering all the moments at his side.

If you ask why I admire him, for me it is easy and simple to write. I admire him because of his big heart, and for being a simple, humble person. He was loved by many and hated by no one. He was not envious of others and did not wish harm on anyone.

That was what I always admired about him. He lived his life with the people and things he liked.

With love and dedication to Luis Justiniano.

Marco Justiniano was born in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and is taking advanced ESOL classes at Ronald Reagan Adult Education Center. Marco's teacher is Artentry Jackson.

Someone I Admire

Someone I admire is my mother because she is the most caring person in my life. She is my first foremost and closest friend. I love her over and above everyone. My mother cares for me a lot and dedicates a lot of her time in helping me out throughout the day. I love you so much my mother.

Rose Alexandria Liberal is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Admiration For My Family

God is the creator of the world. He created all people with the capacity to admire. Some people have admiration for things, for animals, others for a particular person. I want to talk about special people I admire.

When I was a child, I had admiration for my mother because she loved her children. She was a good mother, a caring mother, a counselor...so on so. Unfortunately, she died in June 2012.

When I got married, I have my nuclear family, that's to say my wife, Andre Lafleur Mariane, my three kids, Andre Lordson, Andre Loudjina and Andre Max Bryan.

I admire Lordson, because he is my first kid and my first son. He is my friend. He always wants to help me with my domestic work even though he is a child. He is intelligent at school. He always gets the best results. He would like to become an engineer in construction.

Loudjina is my second child. She is my only daughter. She

looks like my mom. She shares some physical and genetic traits with me. She likes to cook food for me. She is very smart. At school she always gets excellent grades. She has great dreams for a child. She would like to become a doctor to take care of the ill.

For Max Bryan, my last child, my second boy, he is always ready to play with me, he makes me laugh when we play. He likes to stay with me and walk with me. When he sleeps, he comes to me. I take him and he sleeps in my arms.

Talking about my wife, I don't have enough words to explain my love for her. She has a special place in my heart. Since we got married, we have never separated except when I traveled to the United States for a month. When I came back, we were together. My wife is a courteous and courageous woman. There are not enough good adjectives to describe her. For me, she is more than a spouse, but a best friend, a mother. When I was in Haiti, we worked, went to church, and went to the supermarket together.

In conclusion, I wouldn't miss my family for a day. I never thought about separation from my family. Because it is very dear to me. Unfortunately, the socio-political situation and kidnapping in Haiti forced me to leave it for an indefinite period to immigrate to the USA. For this reason, I am here in the flesh and my spirit is with my family in Haiti. It was a pleasure for me to take my children to school, pick them up and help them with their homework. Now I am so far from them. Alas!

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

A Pillar of Joy and Strength

We value and admire some people, such as parents, teachers, friends, professors, and movie stars, who influence our lives for their special characteristics. In my case, my mom is the person who influences my life a lot. She is the person I admire most. In every aspect of my life, she played an important role, not only as a mother but also as a good friend and coach.

As a mother, I have admired her kindness, unconditional love, and patience. She did teach her children how to love God and

gave us good examples. She has supported us in whatever we are involved in. She kindly and patiently cares for her family and never upsets them about mistakes.

She was adorable in her ways because she knew how to be firm yet gentle. She would encourage us to be studious in our studies and help us when we needed her the most. Mealtimes are good times for character training; she would always teach us to serve siblings before we served ourselves. My mother is the most significant person in my life today.

She remains a pillar of joy and strength for us all when Father is out providing for the family. I am what I am now because of the sacrificial love of my mother for all of us.

Roselande Monfiston is from Haiti, married with two children, and moved to the USA in 2007. She is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County, and her teacher is Jim Wheeler.

My Little Surprise

My little one, David, is the fifth son in my family, and he was a big surprise to us. No one expected it, but we had a new baby boy.

In 2011, he started his Pre-Kindergarten at the age of 3, and he was crying for a couple months. Then he adapted to the school. His teacher was very proud of him because he was smart, talented, and good at dancing. He loved dancing to Michael Jackson's songs. The teacher gifted him a sparkling glove, like Michael used to dance with when doing the Billie Jean song. David was over the moon.

His kindergarten teacher nominated him for the gifted program, and he studied in this program from elementary to middle school.

He was five years old when he created a story about his origins. David told his friends that he was born in Africa, and he came to live with our family in a canoe. Someone told him we had been sad because we hadn't had a little baby. Then he was born. His friend's mom asked me about David being adopted,

so I told her that David made up the story. During elementary school, he took piano, math, and reading classes after school.

From 2019 to 2022, he went to Thurgood Marshall Middle School. He chose music course as his elective, and he played the trombone for three years. In 2020, the pandemic started, and it was extremely difficult for him to take classes online when he was in sixth grade. In seventh grade, he got back and started taking classes in person.

Now, he is going to Saint Petersburg High School, and he is studying in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. After school, he works at Kumon Academy three days a week teaching math and reading. On his guitar, he regularly plays his favorite songs from rock bands like Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, Queen, and Japanese bands. He promised me that one day when he is famous, we will be living in Los Angeles.

Blanca Olano is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Blanca's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In my opinion, some people are admirable when they do something that could be difficult for me to do and when the result is for the well-being of society.

In this sense, someone I admire was a leader of civil rights in the world, Martin Luther King, Jr. He not only represents the fight for equal rights for African Americans but also represents all immigrants who live in this country of opportunity. He made the world aware of the need to change the rules of the game. Unfortunately, he was murdered but his legacy continues throughout time because of his fight for justice without the use of weapons and only based on human reason, which always triumphs.

If nature itself makes us equal before God, why do men want to change their nature by establishing rules for the people according to their origin, skin color, religion, and beliefs? After this great leader raised his voice, the situation of discrimination in the United States changed, but we need more changes and for all minorities to be inclusive.

Elio Saravia is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why I Admire Messi

Lionel Messi wasn't just a name on a jersey, a statistic plastered on a screen. He was a melody woven with laces and leather, a symphony composed on the emerald stage of the football pitch. To me, he wasn't just someone I admired; he was an artist, a magician, a maestro who painted emotions with every touch of the ball.

My admiration for Messi wasn't rooted in trophies or titles, though his collection was a glittering testament to his brilliance. It stemmed from something deeper, something intangible - the poetry he crafted with each step, the way he bent time and space with a flick of his ankle.

My eyes were first drawn to him when I was a child, mesmerized by the way he glided past defenders, a blur of blue and white leaving bewildered shadows in his wake. The ball seemed an extension of his being, whispering secrets to his feet, responding to his thoughts with impossible precision.

He wasn't just technically gifted; he was a storyteller. With a nutmeg, he'd weave a tale of audacious skill, with a chip over the keeper, he'd etch a moment of sublime audacity. Every goal was a brushstroke on his canvas, every dribble a verse in his epic poem.

But Messi wasn't just about individual brilliance. He was a conductor, orchestrating the movements of his teammates, his vision drawing them into the melody of his game. A pass, deft and disguised, would ignite a dormant teammate, turning them into co-composers in his grand symphony.

His humility resonated with me too. Despite his stratospheric achievements, he remained grounded, a shy smile gracing his lips instead of a boastful celebration. He was a champion who celebrated not just his own victory, but the joy of the game, the beauty of the collective effort.

As I grew older, my admiration evolved. Messi became more

than just a sports hero; he became a symbol of perseverance. His early struggles, his battle with growth hormone deficiency, painted a portrait of resilience, a testament to the power of unwavering passion. He taught me that dreams, no matter how audacious, could be chased with grit and a never-say-die spirit.

Today, even as his playing days might be nearing their end, my admiration for Messi remains undimmed. He redefined the beautiful game, reminding us that football wasn't just about goals and tackles; it was about artistry, about the symphony of skill and spirit that could leave hearts pounding and imaginations soaring.

Joshua Solis is a student of Lisa Wroble at Lorenzo Walker Technical college. His goal is to get his GED, graduate, and play soccer.

Personal Stories

I Don't Ever Want to Stop Learning

My name is April, I'm 47 years old, going on 48. I was born on April 10, 1976, with cerebral palsy, which gave me physical and learning disabilities. My parents were told by the doctors and therapists that I would most likely never walk or talk.

Through many surgeries on my brain, and my leg, and a lot of determination, physical therapy, and so much love from my family and friends, I do walk and talk. I don't back down from a challenge.

My very favorite thing in the whole world is Everything Disney- going to Disney World, Disney movies, and collecting Disney treasures and Disney books.

My most recent challenge has been learning to read. I heard about the L.E.A.D. program and decided to try it. I went to the main library in downtown Miami with my mom and we filled out an application for a reading teacher.

That's how I met Beverly. I like her a lot. She is very patient and never gives up on me. Beverly taught me how to read and write so I can start reading my Disney books and one day write stories and essays, just like the one I'm writing right now.

I still have a lot to learn and I never want to stop learning. I hope I can continue to learn with Beverly for many years to come.

April Alesi is an adult learner in the Project LEAD Program. Her tutor is Beverly Jones.

To My Father Who Passed Away.....

On March. 11. 2009, 14 years ago, I lost my father. it was a very sad and shocking day for me, my mother, and my brothers. Even now, at this moment it feels the same....

Loss is a painful thing... How can I explain the loss of my father?

My relationship with my father was not just a father and daughter. He was a friend. I was counting the gray hairs on his head and kissed his hands which were a light guiding the darkness of my night.

My father was an endless sky and an uncontrollable sea.

I was envious of his great love for me. I will never forget how many times he carried me in his arms and carried my pains whenever I complained to him and burdened him with them so that he could relieve me of what I was in.

I didn't forget the smell of his perfume on my clothes whenever I hugged him.

Despite my old age, I cry longing for him.

Losing your father means that you lost the wall on which you were leaning.

My beloved father, what you taught me and instilled in me is not wasted, and I will remain your daughter whom you are proud of, and I will not disappoint.

Oh, God, do not deprive my father of paradise, for he has not deprived me of anything in this world.

My word to you is I LOVE YOU.....

Nancy Alshatnawi is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

How Many Turns Does Life Take?

For me life has taken four outstanding turns, apart from my many smaller turns. I got married when I was 20 years old and a year later, I had my son. When he was one and half years old, my husband went to the United States, left me alone and that is where my first round ended.

My second round: I came to the United States after my husband had been here for 8 years. My son is now 9 years old and we started a new life. But after a year I saw that this was not what I had dreamed of. Everything was so difficult that my child took my suitcase and I went back to Colombia. End of my second round.

My third round: began when my son was 18 years old and came to the United States on vacation. I came after he did. I felt it was something more definitive. In 2015 my third round ended because I had to go back to Colombia to take care of two older sisters who got sick, and I took care of them until they died.

My fourth round: at the beginning of 2023 I returned to the United States to begin my fourth round and perhaps my last because I am going to dedicate myself to enjoying this country like I enjoy mine. In this 4th round despite my many years here in America, I found the Library in Largo, where I am going to study English. It has brought me happiness to work with such kind teachers. This is the summary of my life.

Myriam Alzate is from Colombia and is an ESOL student at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler & Mildred Pioli.

A Different Perspective

Hello everyone, my name is Tanya. I would like to share with you my thoughts about life. I think every person is unique, and their life experiences are also unique and interesting.

I lived in the beautiful city of Kyiv, Ukraine. This city is over 1500 years old. It has an ancient, interesting, unique, and rich history. I grew up and graduated from school there. I then went to university and had a job that I loved. My family and friends still live in Kyiv. In our free time, we regularly visited museums, botanical gardens, a zoo, or simply relaxed in nature. We also attended concerts, the theatre and the circus. One of my favorite places remains the Kyiv-Pecherska Lavra (Kyiv Monastery of the Caves) and St Sophia's Cathedral. I had a great time visiting them.

I, like many people, know that in life you need to appreciate every precious moment and love and care for your family, city and country. I think most of us know about it, and some of us even contemplate it deeply. But all this gained a much deeper meaning for me when the war began in Ukraine. That is when I realized this information to the fullest.

I saw destroyed buildings, architectural monuments, and whole towns turned into rubble. The loss of life was immense. I felt severe mental pain, and I cried a lot. At the beginning of the war, I was in Kyiv. I witnessed with my own eyes the horrors of the war. That made me rethink my understanding of the value of life. Like many people in my country, I realized the value of even the smallest thing, everything beautiful that surrounded me, and everything that was dear to me. How priceless it is to have your own spiritual corner on planet Earth!

At this time, my life is good. I have the opportunity to live in the USA and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn the American language in its country of origin. My wish is to integrate into the American society and to be useful. Still deep in my heart, I believe that someday I will be able to return home. From the bottom of my heart, I wish for all people to love life, to appreciate every moment, to cherish it, and take nothing for granted.

Tetiana Botvyna is an ESOL student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Joie Ritger.

My Life

I let you threaten bad feelings.

I wish I never felt.

He decided breaking me down was so much fun for him.

The unexpected happened to me.

I was so scared and kept asking myself questions, “Why did this happen to us?”

He crushed the only happiness I had.

They tried to say I was the suspect, but in reality I was the victim.

I neglected the one thing they needed from me and that was to protect them.

Through the pain and denials I became so worried about being stuck behind these walls.

This is a test for me to learn how to stop shutting people out.

I need to embrace my fears because one day I will be free.

The unthinkable will happen, and I will finally be home.

This is not the end of my story.

No more difficult frustrations and issues of feeling less of a mother.

I always cherish the little things and enjoy the time I had with them.

I'm done falling apart.

I have become better and different- just for them.

I love you baby girls!

Michelle Cannimore is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Sherri Jackson.

It's More Than A Dream

We all have big or small dreams, but there is nothing more beautiful than when those dreams come true. My dream had always been to move to the USA, so when my family and I traveled to Florida in 2017 for the first time, I was very excited. To this day, I remember it as if it had been yesterday.

The first thing that impressed me was the large number of

lakes I saw from the plane. Then, when we were traveling along Florida's large roads, I was amazed at the beautiful beaches of the Gulf and the Atlantic- beauty like no other! The large cities with their tall buildings were also so impressive. That first trip expanded my dream of what moving to Florida could hold for me.

In 2019, news began to spread within my family about an approved residency request that my father's sister (my aunt) made for us 20 years ago when I was just a baby. That determination opened up a great opportunity for my wish to come true. Unfortunately, in 2020, we had terrible family news, and it was not about the growing pandemic. My paternal grandfather was living in Florida and was in very poor health due to an illness that had tormented him for a long time. Now his health was declining rapidly, so we had a travel emergency. Unfortunately, he passed away two days after we arrived in Florida. During our grieving, the pandemic began to forcefully hit the world's population, causing many countries to close their borders, among which was my country, Peru.

I didn't know whether to be sad or happy about that moment in my life. Many people died due to the pandemic, but Peru's border closure was an important factor in my Florida residency dream becoming a reality. We were "stuck" in Florida while attending to all the procedures corresponding to the request for residency. Thankfully by the end of 2021, we had our residency interview and we passed.

Today I live in Highlands County, Florida, far from the big cities. I am in love with the wonders of nature in this part of the state. I know that I still have a lot to learn and dreams and goals to fulfill. But there is nothing better than enjoying the anticipation of what experiences the path ahead of me holds. I just hope the path to my next goal is not too long.

Javier A. Capacyachi is a student at South Florida State College where he is enrolled in both GED and ESOL classes. His teacher is Denise Miriani.

Doors and Windows

When I was nine years old, my eldest sister gave me a birthday present: it was a book. Excitedly, I opened the package and held the book in my hands. I thought it was too big for me, but it wasn't. Actually, it had only 120 pages, but for me, at that age, it was the largest book I had ever been encouraged to read. Reading in those days was challenging for me; however, I have been curious since I was a child, so I started reading.

The story was beautiful and sad at the same time. The main character was an old man living in a very miserable house made by himself with wood and plastic, working as a recycler, and with only the company of a dog, a cat, and a horse. They were really poor, alone, and unprotected.

One event that changed the course of the story was that the man became sick. The animals had suffered their entire lives, but when they first found each other, things were different. Love, care, and company changed their lives. With the man too sick and disabled to recycle for a living, they suffered hunger and felt devastated.

That story made me feel a deep and intense compassion for human beings and animals in those circumstances. I cried thinking that life for some beings is extremely hard. Then I realized some books take stories from real experiences humans go through.

When I finished the book, which I read in a couple of days without blinking, many things changed inside me.

The first one was that I discovered the power of stories, and in consequence my love for books and literature started growing. Books are doors and windows to enter into others' lives, to see things with a different perspective, and to open our senses to a new sensibility. Soon my love for reading became an interest for writing because I also wanted to create my own stories.

The second thing that changed for me was the way I perceived animals. I felt so connected to them in this story that I began to think about their being, in their feelings, and their thoughts. Perhaps since then I feel that human beings are indebted to rec-

ognize all animals' rights and needs.

Many years after that first book I became a writer. I write to tell stories that maybe open minds and hearts, stories that give voice to those who speak low, stories where animals have a leading role and interact in balance with humans. I think that stories we read in our childhood can change the way we understand the world where we live, and trying to make that change is something that pushes me to write. Today, I say thanks to my sister again for letting me open many windows and doors.

Adriana Carreno is Colombian. She is a student of ESOL at Miami Dade College-Kendall, with Ms. Carmen Whu.

The Other Side of My Life

This is my personal history about how I got to Naples Florida. It all started when I lived in Tijuana. It was very dangerous. There was a lot of drug trafficking and a lot of crime. My uncle on my dad's side told us he would give us support to enter the United States. We liked the idea, and that same day we decided what we were going to do.

The trip began. We bought flights to Monterrey, Mexico, since this is where we were going to cross. We arrived in Monterrey and then we moved to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. No one knew that this is where we were going to live the worst days of our lives. When we arrived in Nuevo Laredo, we took refuge in a house with more than 50 people. We spent more than 2 days in that place; we had to wait our turn.

The day passed and our hopes of crossing became less and less. Suddenly, in front of us, they started crossing very fast and the time came when it was our turn. But there was a problem. A man got into a fight with an immigration officer, and they turned around. We returned. Our hope was already lost. We stayed 3 more days just in case the time came to cross. We crossed and they gave us political asylum. Thanks to our uncles, we are here. This is my story.

Oscar Casbis is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Internal ESOL Process

As an English student, I have had quite an interesting life process from my own point of view, that is, from within.

I have to say, when I found out by chance that the Jacksonville Public Library had a free online English course available on a flexible schedule that I could access regardless of who I was or where I came from, it was fantastic.

Upon my arrival in Jacksonville at the end of January 2021 from Bogotá, Colombia, my birthplace and residence for so many years, I thought that my knowledge of English was sufficient. I had managed a business with American and Canadian people and companies for a long time without difficulties. But when I faced the reality of day-to-day life here in the United States, culturally and socially, things overwhelmed me! I had to progress from understanding and making myself understood to truly living and relating.

I made the decision to enroll in the Jacksonville Public Library's ESOL program in April 2022. My first big challenge was the qualifying exam. Happily, I placed into Level 4, but my bravest moment was facing the other students. It was a little intimidating to think about what it would be like in front of my peers. Fortunately, I'm naturally a little extroverted, but the warmth and constant support of our teacher, Naomi, made me overcome whatever obstacles I imagined. I found a group of wonderful people from different countries, varied cultures, and different challenges who have become my companions. I feel great closeness and affection for them all.

After many classes, constant exercises, and many exams, I received the motivating news I had been promoted to level 5 and here I am! Today, although I still have a long way to go to become Shakespeare, I can say that I feel quite satisfied. I have learned that English is more than a language to communicate. I now understand there is a way of saying things that depends not only on vocabulary, but also on my ability to effectively express thoughts and opinions and to establish relationships. Learning English has helped me integrate into a new society and culture whose doors have been generously opened to me.

Today I can only say, “Thank you very much!!”

Fabio Chaparro is a student at Jacksonville Public Library Center for Adult Learning. His teacher is Naomi Chase.

The Journey to Adulthood

Would you like to hear about my journey to adulthood? I was born and raised in the small town of Brownton, Minnesota. I have five siblings: four sisters and one brother. Two of them finished high school and went to college. Three of us did not, due to situations going on with our parents.

My parents argued about their marriage and who should take custody of me and my siblings. It went downhill from there. My brother and my third sister never got a formal high school education. My parents never taught us anything that would prepare us for the outside world. Unfortunately, I never knew much about my own mother and what she was like since she worked seven jobs a week to provide for her kids. My dad never really acted like a father to us. He neglected me and my brother. By the time I turned 7 and my brother turned 13, he tried his best to be a big brother by teaching me to read, do math, and cook so I could take care of myself in case I got left alone. I always remember how I just watched TV and tried to use a chair to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches so I didn’t starve for the whole day. Now you may understand my journey to adulthood. The story just repeats itself.

I thought my journey to adulthood was about to get easier; however, when I turned nineteen, that was when it got worse. I was grounded for stuff that I didn’t do. I wasn’t allowed to have a phone or a laptop, as my parents feared losing control of me and the risk of me moving out to get help.

Now that I am 22, I’m taking therapy, slowly talking to people, and studying for my GED while finding resources to help me find a job. I’m a young adult currently dating the love of my life who works with the financial aid office at Tallahassee Community College. I currently do dog boarding as a full-time job.

I’m telling my story to help those who are struggling with get-

ting a job or struggling with classes or life. Don't let that take you down; keep moving forward. Find the right support from people you meet on your journey and ask for help; don't be afraid. Let them help you find the right help if you are having a difficult relationship with a boyfriend, girlfriend, sibling, or parent. Try to talk about how you are feeling about your past and your current situation. Please pass on your story for advice so that it can be used to help the next person.

Katerina Dean is a student at Tallahassee Community College. Her teacher is Brenda Johnson.

Never Give Up

I want to say to you that it is never too late to start something new. When I was 70 years old, I started doing yoga. I took yoga instructor courses and began teaching yoga to older people.

Now I am 75 years old and I have been studying English since last year. This is completely a new language for me. I previously studied German at school at the university which, by the way, I conveniently forgot because I did not practice it.

I was lucky that I began learning English at an adult school at Largo Library with professional teachers who were able to motivate and interest me. I won't say that at this age it's easy to learn something new, but I don't give up. I try hard to improve my English.

I moved to the United States from Russia to the wonderful state of Florida and I want to live here interestingly and happily. I'd like to communicate freely with people in the United States as in my native language. I need to work a lot to achieve this. "Never give up!" I tell myself.

Alevtina Derevianko is from Russia and an ESOL student at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler and Mildred Pioli.

Does Anyone Really Know What Tomorrow Will Bring?

My name is Amond Desir. I am from in Nippes, one of the ten departments of southern Haiti. There I studied Mechanical Engineering for 3 years from 2005 to 2008 at Diesel Institute of Haiti and law for 4 years at (EDSEG) Ecole des Droits et des Sciences Economiques des Gonaives in my country and I had obtained additional certifications in various skills. I strived to prepare myself to build a good life in my sweet home country without ever thinking to take a new step into a foreign country because I achieved my goals and established a peaceful life for myself. I went on to open my home business (Amoncito Auto Parts and Garage) in April 2021. In addition I became a Junior Jural Consoler of congress. I was proud of myself, and it felt good to accomplish this level of achievement.

Unfortunately, I did not know that I would have to leave my country and restart a new life in a foreign land, where I do not know yet what would happen to me. All this happening in my life because a politician and his team planned to destroy everything I built. They were out to do everything to take my life, they hated me for my political ideology, they were trying to kidnap and kill me because I told my people in a meeting this man was corrupted and he worked for the Ariel Henry government, and he is a full of power member from SDP.

After having suffered and survived several attacks, I had to leave my country to save my life. Traveling to the US saved my life, and I currently attend a program, where they are helping me to improve my English skills. English is my primary goal and the key to unlocking all the doors. My principal goal is to have the guidance to potentially receive help and access to a technical school or other educational establishments. That will be the utmost achievement that can happen in my life at this moment.

Here is the unexpected reality that...no one really knows how your life will be in the next few minutes or what will happen tomorrow.

Amond Desir was born in Miragoane Haiti. He is currently attending the High Intermediate ESOL program with Ms. Fayne Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe in Florida and plans to continue studying in the field of transportation.

Days I Will Never Forget

Six months ago, my mother passed away, and my journey back to Vietnam was full of mishaps. At midnight, as I was getting ready for bed, my phone rang. My younger brother told me that my mother had just died! I asked my daughters to buy plane tickets so that I could return to Vietnam as quickly as possible. Fortunately, I got tickets with a short fly time; my itinerary was Tampa- Atlanta- Seoul- Cam Ranh, Vietnam.

Three hours later, I went to the airport and took the first flight to Atlanta. When I arrived there, I was informed that my connecting flight was delayed for two hours, even though the plane was parked at the gate. After 13 hours, when I arrived at the Seoul airport in South Korea, my next flight had already departed. Therefore, I had to get another flight that I could take home to see my mother for one last time. With all my efforts and help from my family, I got the last ticket to Vietnam on the same day. I was the last passenger on board. However, while our plane was taxiing to the runway for takeoff, it suddenly began to rain heavily; it became very windy. The plane could not take off and had to return. More than one hour passed; it was still pouring rain. The sky looked as if it would collapse. I thought that I would not be able to get home in time. Luckily, 15 minutes later, it stopped raining, and the plane could take off. Since I was tired, I fell asleep. The captain's announcement woke me up, "Due to the storm at the Cam Ranh airport, we cannot land and have to fly to Tan Son Nhat." Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh city is more than five hours away from my hometown. At that time, I was extremely disappointed and I wondered what would happen next. When I arrived, I realized that all my luggage was lost. However, I didn't have the time to deal with that; I had to leave immediately.

Fortunately, I arrived home before my mother was taken to her final resting place.

My mother's funeral was solemn but sincere. Although it was not crowded, it seemed like all my friends and family came to say goodbye to my mother. My mother lay in the coffin wearing her favorite traditional Ao dai. She looked peaceful. She would be pleased to see her eldest son returned in time to be by her side in her last moments. Standing next to my mother, I remembered

her words: “You must be a kind person; you have to work hard. Even though you encounter difficulties along the way, you should try your best and persevere. You will be rewarded!”

*Huan Bo Dinh is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center.
Huan Bo’s teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

Who Am I?

You might be expecting me to analyze my personality, but you are kind of wrong. I genuinely don’t know yet who I am. Hello, my name is Elisa, I am 20 years old. Let me note that I started writing this essay on December 12th, 2023, at 6pm.

Now that you know my name, let me give you some more basic information about myself. It is my 5th month living here in the United States, specifically in Clearwater, Florida. I was originally born and raised in Athens, Greece, but my parents were born in Albania. Even though I was raised in Greece, I also had the experience of living one year in Vittorio Veneto, Italy, in 2019 but then I returned to Greece. You could say that I am multilingual.

You might be asking why I name my essay “Who I Am.” Well, indeed it is a question I have been trying to figure out for a long period. However, my point is also to make the reader wonder why is it so important to know yourself, or why am I delusional trying to find an answer to something that might be irrelevant? You see, we live in a society, where it is quite common to find similar personalities. I do admire those who just fit into society’s standards and choose to avoid knowing themselves, because really who wants to be panicked about themselves? Just live your life, you only live once, right? Guess what... I DISAGREE! Do you like the idea of being the same person with 100 more or being an individual and being accepted for who you are?

I don’t know yet who I am. I do know what I want to achieve in my life, and I know what I like and dislike. Though, those data about myself aren’t enough to conclude who I am. I remember I asked my friends if they were concerned about themselves. They replied that they don’t know, but they don’t find any reason to also be in a crisis state about it. Here’s the thing though, at the end of the day, who do you have by your side? Your friend? Your

lover? No one. Just yourself and only. Who makes decisions for the future? Yourself.

It is one of my main goals, to know myself and improve where I think it is necessary, but why? Well, it is simple. I want in at least 10 years, (supposing in my thirties), to be someone unique, independent, and succeed in all my plans. To do this, I have to figure out my strengths and my weaknesses, otherwise, how am I supposed to improve? Do you think I am paranoid by reading this, or does it make you want to have a deep thinking for your personality too?

Elisa Dule is a student at “STAR Program” - Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Getting to Know Snow in the Tropics: My Trip to Mérida

When we hear about tropical countries we imagine heat, sun, beach, sand, and high temperatures, but what would you think if I told you about a place where there is snow in the tropics? Join me on this wonderful journey and you will learn more about this incredible experience.

Hello, my name is Shlaydys Edmond. I am from Venezuela, a tropical country. My journey toward knowing snow began when I travelled from Caracas to the state of Mérida, which is located in the Andes Mountain range in the southwest region of the country. Greeting me with a beautiful landscape of moors, the first stop was at the glacial lagoon called Mucubají.

Mucubají’s surface is covered with fine fog, and its cold waters are home to different types of fish, among which trout stands out because it is preferred by the locals and visiting fishermen. Despite the prevailing cold and icy winds here, I did not reach my main objective yet, which is to see the snow.

Continuing with the tour, I headed toward the second stop: Pico el Águila, better known as the “Collado del Condor,” which is at a height of 4,118 meters above sea level. In Pico el Águila, I found a monument represented by an Andean Condor.

In addition to the peculiar landscape of the Páramo, the fraile-

jones stood out. Frailejones are the typical flora found at these heights. Despite the environment with low temperatures and thick fog, I did not achieve my main objective of getting to know the snow in Pico el Águila.

The last stop, but no less important, was the Mérida cable car called Mucubají. This transportation system, being the highest in the world, is made up of four sections or stations. I began my ascent starting from the first station called Barinitas. Arriving in this first section to the station La Montaña, located 2,436 meters above sea level, I continued the ascent to the next section. The height of the next section, station La Aguada, is 3,452 meters above sea level.

Next is the station Loma Redonda at 4,045 meters above sea level, from which I could begin to visualize how the top of the mountain was covered with a thin whitish layer.

Finally, I arrived at the last station Pico Espejo which is 4,765 meters above sea level. There, I was welcomed by a majestic white landscape covered in snow, whose winds and temperature did not prevent me from feeling the snow in my hands and thus making a snowman for the first time. I know I wouldn't win a snowman contest, but I have the satisfaction of having fulfilled my goal of getting to know snow.

In conclusion, I thank God for having allowed me to discover part of his wonderful work, and I invite you to explore unusual places in unusual locations. I assure you that the experience will be of great satisfaction and joy for you. Blessing

Shlaydys Edmond is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Childhood Dream

On September 2, 2021 – I remember like it was yesterday – intruders came into my home. They took everyone who had valuable jewelry and money; they asked us all to stay flat on the ground and not make any noise. I was very scared. Then these same intruders reappeared on September 25 of the same year. The shocking part of this terrifying event was the fact that the

intruders were family members disguised as police officers, they concealed their faces to hide their actual identity. After the second time, my father recognized one of their voices. This finding was difficult to comprehend.

Fortunately, the police appeared within minutes during the second intrusion and noted that we had gone through other ordeals which never stopped. When all this circus was over after 5 days, I told myself that I had to become a police officer to be able to protect my family and put in prison everyone who had wronged us. Quite a few years later, I was able to understand that the one who could condemn them with a sentence would be a judge, and this realization is where the idea of becoming a judge came to me.

So, after my classical studies at the Saint Francois d'Assise College in 2016, I continued my university studies at the National Diplomatic and Consular Academy where I received a degree in Law. The next step would be to take the EMA exam which would finally allow me to achieve my childhood dream of becoming a Judge.

Life decided differently. After 22 years of relatable struggles, on May 1, 2023, I had to flee my country to immigrate to the United States, leaving behind all those who were dear to me - my family and my friends. A difficult experience for me because at the times I had come to US on vacation those days were fun. Now, living in the United States everything has changed, the fun disappeared.

In the moment I am writing this text I feel very lost, life is a surprise. You do not know why or what will happen tomorrow, and I ask myself every day WHY this changed? But only one thing is certain if this country is indeed a country of opportunity, then I will wait for my fixed goals of becoming a Judge.

Marie Fillette Guerlie Edouard was born in Haiti, where she studied criminal law. She currently studies English with Ms. Fayne Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe in the High Intermediate Level while working towards her dream of working in criminal logistics.

Language Now and in the Future

I am thankful to my ESOL instructor, Naomi Chase, and the Jacksonville Public Library where she facilitates online ESOL classes. More important to me have been the Conversation Essentials discussions she regularly leads where we explore different issues including science, society, and art. These really inspire me.

In 2020, before I had the opportunity to join ESOL classes in Jacksonville, Florida in 2022, I took part in a book and movie club at the Cleveland Public Library in Ohio. I attended this program every month for about 6 months. I understood then that I wasn't able to properly explain my views to the other members who were mostly native English speakers. That was a frustrating time because I was willing to participate in film and book analyses, but I could not express my personal feelings in English to the other group members. So, I got motivated to learn and practice English more than ever before. Unfortunately, self-teaching did not work effectively.

Since 2022, I have been taking part in ESOL classes in Jacksonville, Florida. I am very pleased to have had this chance to participate in reading, speaking, and grammar practice. We review newly published articles and books every Friday, and these sessions are very pleasant for me as well.

We know that language is changing from technological influences like AI and from disuse and extinction. But I personally believe that the mother tongue usually expresses the heart's emotional thoughts. For living in the modern world, English has become humanity's common language, so we all need to know it. Digital language will be increasingly critical to communication in the future.

I am grateful for ESOL classes where learners from different cultures and societies gather, connect, and talk together and exchange ideas and experiences.

Masoumeh Fallahian is a retired Obstetrician who practiced in Iran for over 30 years. She is an ESOL student at the Jacksonville Public Library's Center for Adult Learning Virtual ESOL Classes. When her daughters decided to study abroad, she came to the United States

too. She has spent time in Houston Texas, Cleveland, Ohio, and most recently, in Jacksonville, Florida. She completed Level 4 ESOL and is currently enrolled in Level 5 of the Jacksonville Public Library's Center for Adult Learning Virtual ESOL classes.

Brazilian Folklore

Brazilian Folklore is the set of cultural expressions which encompass aspects of national identity. It is composed of myths, legends, and dances. I, like a good Brazilian, love all of this. But I'm just going to write about one legend: Saci Pierre.

Saci Pierre is a one-legged black man who smokes a pipe and wears a magical red cap that enables him to disappear and reappear wherever he wishes (usually in the middle of a small whirlpool). Considered an annoying prankster in most parts of Brazil, and a potentially dangerous and malicious creature in others, he grants wishes to anyone who manages to trap him or steal his magic cap.

In addition to having only one leg, Saci has a hole in both palms of his hands. A favorite pastime of Saci is passing a lit match through these holes. Legend says that a person can trap a Saci inside a bottle when he is inside the whirlpool. My cousins and I spent our childhood trying to imprison Saci, but we never succeeded. It was so much fun to chase the little whirlpool.

Tania Faria is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

Bubble

My home is a bubble. This is where I'm safe, smart, out-going, loved, and loving. In here is where the person I imagine lives. Without my bubble, I would cease to live. I would just blow away like dust.

My name is Mary. All through school I was an A student. I got the best of everything that I needed to succeed. I went on to college and became a journalist. You can see me on News4Jax Channel 432 at 6 pm or 10 pm. I report on all the very important stories. This is a made-up life in the bubble. Outside my bubble

life, I have to think, “what face do I have to wear for this moment?” I become the real Mary, with the need for different faces to fit into the world.

In the real world, I’m scared, lonely, unwanted and unhappy. No one knows this because my faces are just masks. I can fit in just about anywhere. If I am unsure about anything, I stay quiet. I become a piece of furniture. In my whole life I have let about five people on the planet see or hear me.

I started very young hiding and wearing different faces to protect myself from others. I had to hide my secret - it’s just one - I can’t read. I’d feel less than a person if you knew my secret. I have tried to get help with my reading problems but it never worked. I just go back to my hiding place - in my bubble - where I am a doctor, lawyer, politician or bank president. It goes on and on.

In the present day I am walking out of my bubble into the real world with less faces to hide behind. I used to say I can’t read - but now I can say I can’t read well. I’m accepting myself, just the way I am. No more, no less. I can’t give up my bubble yet. But that day is coming. I can feel it. I am reading and writing. I can really smile and it’s not just one of my faces.

Now that I am half in the world and half in the bubble, I can see what I want to do next in my real world. I think I’ll write short stories.

Mary Floyd is a student of Learn To Read St. Johns County. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

Bundle of Joy

I was in the car.

Brandon was in the driver’s seat.

Brandon was getting out of the car to get my bags.

I was getting out of the car.

“Brandon, are you ready for Tianna?”

I asked my husband by the car.

I, who was in the hospital bed when I was about to give birth, said the baby is pushing against my stomach, and I am tired like I haven't slept for days.

Brandon who was in the delivery room said she is about to come out.

The baby is here already, the baby is beautiful, the baby is a girl.

I cry and feel excitement.

I am bringing the baby home.

Brandon is in the driver's seat.

The baby is now in the car seat with me beside her rushing home with excitement.

Feeling pain. It doesn't matter now.

My bundle of joy is finally here with me.

Latoya Forrester, originally from Jamaica, now residing in South Florida, has been attending ongoing tutoring lessons through Project L.E.A.D. with her tutor Nancy de Arrigunaga. Her poem, “Bundle of Joy”, inspired by the birth of her daughter, is a product of her study of “Twister Hits Houston” from Sandra Cisneros’ poetry collection.

My Goals and Ambitions

My ambition in life is to constantly challenge myself to learn and grow both professionally and personally. In my career, I strive to achieve a leadership role in my field where I can use my skills and experience to make a meaningful impact on the organization and the people around me.

What goals do I have in life? I guess you could say I really know what my goals are, which is one of the reasons why I'm in

school now writing this essay to you so you can understand what my life is like. My main goal is to be a professional boxer. Boxing speaks to me like a third language. The movements and steps you take to get the right punch is what I strive for in life, the life I want; but for now, is the life I need to be the greatest. My goal is to be a successful millionaire, pretty cliché for a professional boxer in school, right?

Diego Francisco is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Best Country and The Best Man

I came from Russia to America in 2017 and my only intention was to see how people live here, what they are like, and what they are interested in. I was very surprised to see how cheerful and kind they are. They respect other people's space and opinion.

I understood what freedom means. In my country one cannot express one's opinion about the government. The social level is very low, and people earn little and, therefore, they are angry. It is very cold in Russia, and I really liked the eternal summer in Florida.

I returned home and decided that I want to return to America and in the future to get my children here.

I came back to America for the second time in November 2019. Then there was a COVID 19 quarantine, and I had to stay, so I started studying English. My friend downloaded the Tinder dating site to my phone so that I could practice the language and communicate online. I met a man who is from England and has lived in Key West for 27 years. He has been in the restaurant business. His cooking is very tasty! He has three children and is a wonderful father. We fell in love and on Valentine's Day, he proposed to me to marry him. We had a wedding in August 2022. We have been together for three years, and I am very happy. My dream has come true. I live in the best country and am married to the best man in the world.

I am in the process of applying for a green card. He sent all

the documents to bring my three children from Russia. I want a better future for my children, the best education, and freedom of choice. My daughter, Adeline, graduated from college. She is an artist and a designer. She paints the landscapes of Florida. My son, Arthur, wants to be an architect. My youngest son, Radmir, wants to be a programmer. They want to see the ocean. They love to swim and fish. I know that they will really like America. And I will do everything to make them happy.

Giuzel Galina is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Never Give Up

I would like to say how my life was back in Afghanistan, how when the Taliban came, everything changed, and then leaving Afghanistan. August 18, 2021 - this is the date when my life changed. My father got an email from the American people he worked with, telling him to leave. My father said we had to get out because this was our only opportunity. He didn't give up.

When we got to the airplane in the airport, it was horrible. Everyone was running and there was shooting and bombing. They were setting off tear gas. People were still trying to get inside the airport. They didn't care what happened - they just wanted to get out of the country.

We were in the airport for two days. We didn't have any food, just military rations. There was no bathroom, no showers. It was in the news that the Afghan people were sitting on the wings.

When the plane took off, they fell off. We got separated from each other in my family. My two brothers and I were with my father, and my four sisters and a brother were with my mother. We were crying - traumatized.

My first experience going on an airplane was really confusing because we were changing time zones and countries, so it was hard to know when to pray. I tried to follow an app on my brother's phone. We flew to Qatar, then Bahrain, then Washington DC, and finally New Jersey. We were in a camp for six months. In the camp there were Afghan people. We could eat and play, and we

had English classes.

Language - we couldn't talk to people. People were different. We were from a different culture because we were Muslim from Afghanistan. How people dressed - when I saw people in shorts, it was a shock. Food! Not a very good taste. It was my first time seeing snow in New Jersey. That was fun. We were in a camp there for six months. The time changed. We left in the morning and arrived, and it was still morning.

Getting to Florida it was so hot! I am used to hot weather, but it was different. With time passing I was getting familiar with things. Now I am going to school, and I had to learn that everybody sits together. Students were disrespectful to teachers. At first, I didn't like any of them. I hated it because some students were so rude.

Now, I am studying hard. I also have goals for my future. My goal is to become a doctor. I have also learned a lot of English. Another goal is to be fluent in English. I want to be together with my whole family.

Ardna Hamkar is an ESOL student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas's program at St Catherine of Siena in Largo, Florida. Her teacher is Donna Curtis.

Starting Over

There are moments in life when you wonder, "How did I get here?" You live your life day to day, and you train for one plan. Finally, one day is the same as the next and you think it is normal because you feel good. When humans feel secure and comfortable, they don't want to break out of monotony, but what happens if someday you wake up and must start over? It scares you. You feel that all is finished, and you feel like things are falling apart. But you ask yourself, "What do I do now?"

I know that everyone has been in a similar situation. For example, when you fall in love with someone and then lose the relationship, when you are fired from your work, or when you move to a new country. In every situation, we are thinking about how we can start over, but the problem is not the situation, it's

the attitude and how you face it.

In my case, I never thought that I would experience such a complicated situation and I would make an important decision for my life and my children. I felt confused when my husband told me, “We need to move to the United States.”

I was raised in a small family in a beautiful city, Bucaramanga, Colombia. I studied medicine at the university because I love to help others. My career was a difficult experience because I became a mother. I studied every day, including weekends, but my son was the motivation to keep my goals. I studied specialization and worked for about 15 years in hospitals and my private office. Also, I got married and I felt I had the best life.

I thought that I had overcome all obstacles, but in 2020 I had to move to the United States of America. One day I opened my eyes, I was far away from my perfect life, and I started over again. Experiencing a difficult situation is an inevitable part of life, but it brings out strengths and abilities that you never knew. You should focus on your objectives and always fight for your dreams. You don't have to fear. Starting over is better than if you don't try.

You can do it.

Nelly Herrera is a student at Santa Fe College. Her teacher's name is Karen Shaddeau.

The Adversities of My Life

At every moment of our existence, life gives us an endless list of tests and opportunities that may or may not favor us in a positive way. Even if at that moment we think in a way that is not full of optimism or our mind makes us believe that there is no way out, we must remember that every morning a new dawn happens, and every day is a new beginning for all of us.

Like everyone in life, I also participated in the hands of destiny, which placed in my path one of what I consider my greatest challenge. I was fifteen years old when one night I got up from my bed and began to feel that life had lost its color - a little flower

in winter. I cried in my mother's lap heartbroken for something that she didn't even know where it came from. I lost my essence, my smile and even became something that I wasn't. For a while I wondered what was happening to me? But the answers never came completely, so I decided to seek professional help. The doctor said that I had depression. At first, I didn't fully understand it. Then I realized that this was the illness that had plagued my life.

For a few months, I went through a real ordeal after my emotions became bitter and negative. My life took a real change, and I felt that everything was lost. Then, something illuminated my path and began to take me out of that dark place in which I found myself. The hands of my parents, friends, and family helped me a lot to recover as the smiling and dreamy person that I was.

Life is full of adversity and sometimes destiny can play against us. But what really matters is that I manage to move forward and get back on my feet. Facing life may have its moments in which we want to give up, but we must face it and continue because the adversities that life sometimes places at our doors can help us become stronger along the path of our stay in the earthly world. It's a new day for everyone and it's another opportunity.

Keilin Ibanez is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Hobby is Baking Bread

When I realized that this time I was really in trouble, it was already too late... It's funny to you? Here, everything is serious, and now I'm learning to bake bread. This is my hobby - baking. As with any hobby, there are different stages of immersion in the passion for bread.

At the very beginning, you bake bread without kneading, with ease and excitement, and receive applause. Then you begin kneading further - steeper, the first loaf is a gray brick and the rye is weak. You then move carefully and by touch. You study the theory, follow the recipe exactly, try to understand the process.

Then you move on to practice and realize that this is an expen-

sive hobby. If in the beginning a cauldron with a lid was enough for happiness, now, in order to realize your baking potential, you will have to fork out the cash. One morning you will wake up with the thought that you cannot continue to live without accurate scales, and you urgently need a stone in the oven, as well as a thermometer, and also a silicone spatula with a mat and parchment paper. Baker's requests are growing by leaps and bounds, and now molds, scrapers, malt, rye flour, cumin, coriander and sesame are on the wanted list.

Just a year ago, if someone had told me about my hobby, I would have taken it for delirium or a bad dream. But everything has changed. Now evenings and weekends are spent in front of the oven. Stone, maximum heat (of the oven and passion), steam, and climax - hurray, the cuts have opened!

Furthermore, you are armed and one might even say dangerous, not only for the family budget, but also for the health of friends and relatives. They are forced to try all these baked goods and pretend that they are edible. Their forced compliments get stuck in your throat, along with your bread.

Bogged down in flour and dough, fussing around the oven with a sprinkler and a basin, having lost sleep and appetite, you stubbornly continue to bake... And one day, you will have fluffy and tasty bread- just like real bread, fragrant and shiny.

Renata Kabaloeva is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Denise Reardon.

Five Years

My story begins when I moved in with my daughter. My grandchildren had started school and I had to help. This is how the circumstances developed in the family. My husband and I decided to leave Latvia. I had to close my business there. It was sad to leave the "Flower Shop" and my friends. I adapted quickly and easily here. I had to change my driver's license and pass the exam. I went to the library to study English. It's hard for me, but I've learned a lot. The teachers explain everything very clearly and I am becoming more confident. We have competent and culturally attentive teachers.

I like Florida because there are a lot of theaters, good concerts, many fun and interesting places to visit, many sports events that the children enjoy and it's good that all the holidays are celebrated. The people here are friendly and hospitable. English is necessary for me to know so that I can enjoy these experiences with my family.

Natalija Kasirkina is from Latvia and an ESOL student at Largo Library. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler and Mildred Pioli.

The Way to Success With ESOL

Before immigrating to the United States, I used English mostly for communication with my colleagues through emails and having general conversations during vacations with other tourists. I thought that my English was at an appropriate level, however, when I came here, I realized that my skills needed improvement.

I started a new job here in Jacksonville around two years ago. When I discussed anything related to my profession, I knew the specifics and that made me more comfortable. What makes me uncomfortable is still not being able to communicate effectively on a phone conversation, during my doctors' appointments, or when talking to my colleagues about our daily routines. The faster people speak around me the less confidence I have. I assure myself every day that this is temporary and I just need more time.

Last summer, I decided to take the exam for the International Anti-Money Laundering Certification that would be beneficial for my career. It would make me a more qualified specialist in my professional area and could give me a new opportunity in the future. Unfortunately, I failed, as my English was not comprehensive enough for this. I finally understood that to be more confident in my life, I needed to improve my English. It didn't matter if it was for professional advancement or for changing my driver's license, for buying food in a store or for placing an order in a restaurant. I needed to speak English fluently!

I have been attending online ESOL classes offered by the

Jacksonville Public Library. It hasn't been so easy for me as an adult to return to being a student. But, my teacher and my classmates are very friendly and open. My teacher has told me that, while you are learning, even incorrect answers can be instructive. Sharing my learning experiences with classmates who, like me, are adult immigrants with goals of fluency, has been very helpful. One day, I just stopped being shy.

Our ESOL instructor has given us a lot of advice on how to use the Jacksonville Public Library's onsite and online resources. We practice grammar and improve our vocabulary through varied exercises and modalities. We are inspired by our teacher and by one another every day. I believe that together, my ESOL classes through the Jax Library and my hard work will help me to achieve my goal of fluency.

Oxana Kolbasina is a student at Jacksonville Public Library Center for Adult Learning. Her teacher is Naomi Chase.

Cracker

It was a typical day at home. I was cooking dinner for my family. At that moment, my son who was two years old, came to the kitchen and took a cracker. When he went back to the bedroom, he started jumping on my bed with the cracker inside his mouth. I didn't see it. After three minutes, he ran out crying with his sister following him.

What happened really?

When he was jumping on my bed he choked on the cracker, and then he began to cough because he was choking. My daughter picked her brother up, and started hitting him on the back. His skin turned white and there was fear in his eyes.

My son screamed, "She is trying to kill meee!" "She saved your life!" I explained.

I hugged my kids, and thanked my seven-year-old daughter, the little girl who was able to provide first aid and save her brother.

*Regina Kolieva is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center.
Regina's teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

Do You Know What's Great About Hitting Rock Bottom?

In September 2018, my brother had been diagnosed with cancer. At that moment my eyes blurred, and the only thing I wanted was to hug him and never let go. Those were critical months, and little by little I was falling into an abyss, into a hole where I couldn't get out. My brother was getting worse and little by little I was getting worse too.

After a long time, the disease was destroying him. The day of my birthday arrived, and I asked to visit him. I spent the night filling myself with strength to be able to smile at him and tell him that everything was going to be fine without my voice failing. When that day arrived in that room where he was, it was like a blow to reality. There he was, lying down, his body so skinny, his eyes sharp, his little hands full of bruises from so much medicine and chemo put in his veins. I went up to him and kissed his forehead, and immediately he smiled at me and only asked that this instant pass more slowly, that smile that heals wounds, a smile so sincere and pure. He took me very tightly by the hand and told me, never let go of my hand sister, stay here forever. No matter how strong I was, I thought I could not stand, and my eyes filled with tears. At that moment I felt such a strong emptiness.

I felt empty. He couldn't take it anymore and a few days later he passed away. This was where I really showed how I was. My parents looked so bad, and me? Without knowing what to do to make him feel better, there is no worse way than not knowing where to run, nor is there a worse sigh than looking at yourself, and you have to do what you must out of necessity. Even if you don't want to say goodbye, it still goes. No one teaches you to be strong, but they force you. No one ever teaches you the steps in a world that forces you every day to be able to get up and keep going.

The good thing about bottoming out is that the only option you have left is to go up. My brother's last smile, helped me to keep going, to want to feel better, to live for me and live for him. My nights were getting better, knowing that I had a little star

in the sky watching over me and comforting me. To all people I would like to say that all storms pass, and the sun always comes out again.

Erely Jesabel Lorenzo Pedraza is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Looking For a Better Future for My Children & Grandchildren

On June 13, 1994, my son, Edgar, at the age of eighteen, arrived in the United States in the city of Naples. That same year, on December 28, he decided to get married at the age of nineteen. For the next five years he worked very hard in different types of work. He had been an aeronautical mechanic in Caracas, Venezuela, where he studied and completed his degree. His degree was not valid in the United States. His challenge was to earn that same title here but his home responsibilities did not allow it.

On June 22, 2001, a beautiful girl gladdened our hearts, my dear granddaughter. Valerie is today an excellent University student with high grades. Since then, I have visited this county 18 times with tourist visas as an Italian citizen.

Having achieved his goals, including being an American, makes me a very proud mother and grandmother. In 2020, I became a U.S. resident citizen, thanking God for the union of my two children, Edgar and Jessica and my two beautiful granddaughters Valerie and Avril Arabella.

The story of these moments will remain in my memory today and always.

Agnes Lotito is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

An Unforgettable Experience

Today I am going to tell you my journey of coming to the United States. We left Cuba on September 20th for Nicaragua and our journey ended there. We were in Nicaragua for 4 days because

the weather was bad, and we couldn't continue yet. On September 25th we left for Honduras and for two hours on horseback crossing rivers and rivers until we reached Honduras.

If you think that was a lot, that was just the beginning. From there, they put us in a car heading to the houses where we were going to stay for a few days. On Monday, we left for Guatemala arriving the next day in the afternoon. The next day we left for Mexico all day on the road. Arriving at the Mexican border, they took us on a boat to Mexico. When we were in Mexico the next day, we left straight for the United States border. Arriving at the border two days later, the next morning we surrendered to the border patrol. And finally, the American dream came true.

Bryan Lugo Perez is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Path to Lifelong Learning

English is the third most widely spoken language in the world. It's used in trade, diplomacy, and as a medium of education. My journey with English began in my early childhood when I was enrolled in an English Medium School in my native country, India. Although I tried to converse with the teachers in English at school, my preferred language for good, heartfelt conversation was undoubtedly my mother tongue, Telugu.

Growing up, I knew that being fluent in English fetched fantastic opportunities to academically advance. I still remember the faculty imposing a penalty for not speaking in English. If only we students had understood its importance, then we would have seized that opportunity to better ourselves sooner. But, "better late than never", as the popular saying goes.

In 2010, I finished my bachelor's degree in Dentistry in India and began exploring master's programs in English speaking countries. My husband's work relocated him to the United States in 2015 and we moved to Portland, Oregon. Soon after, we moved to Jacksonville, Florida. I joined Toastmasters, a public speaking training program in 2018, where I learned the strong connection between listening and speaking.

In 2023, I enrolled in ESOL classes offered by the regional public library. These helped me improve my reading, writing, listening, and speaking. I was encouraged by my zealous classmates who were also working towards our shared goal of augmenting our English language skills.

It wasn't easy to realign and pursue my career in the USA. As a healthcare professional, I needed exceptional communication and social skills. Every day before I set out to my workplace, I'd imagine what I would go through to effectively communicate and my heart would sink. One day, it suddenly clicked that I could trick my brain into believing that I was a self-confident, extroverted and proactive person. As a result, my fears of criticism and rejection plummeted as I began my current job. I was astonished and inspired to know that one of my colleagues who was also an immigrant took an acting class to acclimatize to and be more confident in the work environment.

Now, I read complex English texts with ease, and I enjoy reading storybooks to my children. If I find a new word, I add it to my vocabulary by using it when I can. I can consciously think in English rather than my native language to reduce the time I take to respond during a conversation. A lawyer recently observed that I speak clearly and fluently, and I took this as a rare compliment. Effective communication skills have paved the way to a more expressive, eloquent and self-confident "me." The only true limitations are the ones I place on myself.

Anonymous

Fenix

I believe that to judge or to get to know a person, you have to look into their past. This is the reason why my way of thinking has changed since many years ago. In Cuba, I was a university student looking for a job, but it did not go easy on me. I didn't understand how I could find a job and there were very few opportunities. At that precise moment, my mind changed. I decided to take a different approach, and it was to emigrate. Even though a little bit of time later I found a job in Cuba, my decision had already been made.

It was then when my worries were different. I was in a long-term relationship with my girlfriend, my mother and my grandmother were elderly and they each had a good job. When the right time came to follow my dream, six years after I had made my decision to leave my country and my loved ones behind, I realized my last few weeks would be very difficult due to the fact that I knew I wouldn't see my family for years. Such is life and it is difficult. We don't know how important family and friends are to us until we separate from each other.

Well, I have now been living in this city, Miami, for 7 months and it's been exciting. Here opportunities are around the corner, at my hand, in my mind. Of course, we can achieve our goals with much sacrifice. I will be whatever I want. Now I only focus on a project, an idea or a plan. I am free to choose whatever and wherever I want to study and even in other states. I can travel and get to know other cultures. Those have always been my expectations, and I believe they may all become true. That is why I am happy with the decisions I have made. We make the change.

Daniel A. Mata Barrios is a graduate in Accounting and Finance and a Cuban native. He is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus and his teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

Road to USA

Since I was born, I have heard that the USA is a big and good country to live in; a country that offers a lot of opportunities in life. That is why when someone has nothing to do for a living, has nowhere to go, they try to come to the USA.

In my twenties, I realized that many people come from all over the world to migrate to the USA. Some of them have political issues in their country, some are running away from war, some from hunger, and some for lack of opportunities.

The majority of Haitians migrate to the United States because of all the conditions pre-cited. Some were already out of Haiti, most in Chile and Brazil. From there, the entire trajectory was very difficult, dangerous and risky, especially when they tried to cross from Colombia to Panama.

What their eyes saw on that road, they didn't even have mouth to talk about. In some cases, teenagers and adults were raped, robbed, even killed by gun men. Some died because of hunger or health issues. Many lost their way in Darien. I have heard that the citizens of Costa Rica and Nicaragua are very lovely. Some Haitians had hard times in Guatemala. On the road to the US, everything was more expensive than usual.

The last stop before they getting to the USA was Mexico. Some Mexicans were very nice and respectful to these people, but some landlords did not have any respect for them. Worst of all, some were kidnapped in Mexico.

In conclusion, a few Haitians had to wait at the border until the authorities gave permission to step into the USA. Unfortunately, some refused to wait for Control Border Patrol (CBP) permission. Instead, they tried to cross by themselves and got deported. The stories I have heard about the road to the United States make the journey sound very difficult. But it's worth the risk because we all know how the conditions are in Haiti.

Nesly Mathurin is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. His teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

Do You Believe in Ghosts?

My family has had many experiences with spirits, and I want to share my own experience with you. When I was six or seven years old, my family lived close to a cemetery. Sometimes things disappeared or fell on the floor. One night I woke up and saw a big shadow in the hallway. He seemed to be looking at me. I thought it was my dad, so I called out to him three times, but I didn't have any answer. The next day I asked my dad if he had woken up and walked in the house last night, and he said no. This really confused me.

Many years later we had moved to other houses, but the situation didn't change, and it became more intense with time. I saw strange things, and physical things actually happened. My mother sometimes woke up with marks on her neck, back, legs or arms, and I had them on my back or arms. My last incident was hearing how somebody scratched my window. At that time, we

were living on the second floor, so no real person could scratch the window. The spirits or ghosts are not friendly, and they want to see your fear.

Carmelin Mendez Arias is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Life Without Limits

I explored new horizons, challenging imposed expectations and breaking chains that imprisoned me. Every step into the unknown fueled the inner fire in me. On my journey, I faced inner demons, discovering that true peace does not lie behind imaginary lines, but in authenticity. I met like-minded souls, forging unbreakable bonds that propelled us to bravely overcome obstacles. Life without limits is not perfection, but authenticity and plenitude.

On this journey, I met others who, like me, rejected imaginary heavens for an authentic and vibrant reality. My story, marked by challenges since childhood, is a search for redemption and resistance. A childhood full of abuse and betrayal taught me resilience. I faced the world alone at 12, carrying inappropriate responsibilities. Anxiety, insomnia and depression, my uncomfortable companions, fueled my exploration of authenticity and inner healing. I live with parents who were disappointed and stressed by sharing my home with a former partner.

My story is a fight for redemption, where each wound becomes strength and each obstacle an opportunity to discover the essence of freedom and self-love. I invite you to join me on this journey, where scars tell of strength, and every challenge is an opportunity to find the true essence of freedom and self-love. As we unravel the mysteries of this quest, we discover that life without limits is a path that is built with each bold choice and each inner revelation.

Erika Milanés is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Professional Dream

I was born in Venezuela. By the time I graduated from high school in 1998, I knew that I wanted to study something related to medicine because I like to help people. I started looking for universities that had a dental degree and were close to the city where I lived. Antonio Nariño University in Cúcuta, Colombia was the best option, so I applied to study dentistry there. I studied there for two years, but the university had to close for a while. In order not to waste time, I transferred to the Colombian Dental College, another university in Bogotá, Colombia. I studied there for three and a half years, graduating as a dentist in Colombia in 2004.

When I returned to my native country, I found another challenge; I had to revalidate my degree to be able to practice in Venezuela and have my own office. Meanwhile, I started working at a friend's clinic as a dentist, and for a while, I forgot about my dream of having my own office. One day, my mom said, "Don't you think it's time for you to study to get your dental degree?" So I went on to obtain my degree revalidation at Los Andes University in Mérida, Venezuela. Graduating there made me even more proud of myself than when I had graduated from dentistry for the first time.

After that, I started studying for my postgraduate degree in orthodontics in Mexico; it lasted two and a half years. When I finished my degree, I thought, I don't have to study anymore! However, in Venezuela, the political, economic, and social situation was getting worse, and my family's life began to be in danger, so we decided to emigrate to the United States to live safely and start studying again to practice as a dentist here. Since my arrival five years ago, I first worked as a dental assistant for two years; next, I studied to obtain my dental hygienist's license. I am currently practicing in that professional role.

Next, I spent months studying non-stop to take the first exam to be a dentist. On the day of the exam, I felt very nervous, but I did my best. The very next day, I received an envelope with the test results. I was afraid to open it -- I didn't believe I had passed the exam -- but when I finally did, I found that I had passed! I was so excited that I began to run, laugh, jump, scream, and thank God and my mother, who is in heaven. Then I started cry-

ing with happiness.

Meanwhile, I have been preparing for two years with my literacy tutor, who has very patiently helped me improve my English. My next step will be to take the TOEFL exam, so I can apply to a university. Once accepted, I will study for two more years to complete my dental degree in the United States. I still feel nervous about taking more exams, but I continue working on my English every day to achieve my goal of speaking it fluently and fulfilling my professional dream.

Linda Miranda, trained as a dentist in Venezuela and is an ESOL student at READ Lakeland. Her tutor is Neal Steiger.

Helping People

My name is JEAN, I'm from Haiti and I'm 40. I moved to the USA on March 16, 2023. I will tell you my history. I come from a small town in HAITI, I am the eldest in my family. I spent my entire childhood in JACMEL, a very hospitable city. In 2018, I entered PORT-AU-PRINCE to find my wife and my darling daughter. From there, we experienced the worst, shootings, deaths, kidnapping. The day we received our approval, it was GOD himself on earth. Today I am finally here to tell you my famous story and also to give you this testimony.

As soon as I arrived in U.S. everything changed. God changed my life. Things became new to me. I met new friends, I went to a new school, and my job is great. So, I became comfortable. My dreams are to be a good entrepreneur in the U.S. Give people work, so they can survive and so can their family, because it's hard in America not to find something to survive. My dreams came from this article.

There are two different ways of measuring poverty: absolutely (by defining an income threshold necessary to satisfy basic needs) or relatively (by setting a threshold in proportion to the median income). For example, 50% the United States (as well as Canada) uses an absolute threshold, which makes comparisons difficult with most other rich countries, which use a relative threshold.

The United State Census Bureau publishes poverty thresholds based on variety of criteria: for example, national poverty estimates categorized by housing type, ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics and socio-economic data. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) publishes its thresholds for an administrative purpose, such as to determine whether an individual or family is eligible to receive public assistance from a federal program.

Since the 1960s, the United States government has defined poverty in absolute terms. The absolute poverty line corresponds to the threshold below which people “lack the resources to satisfy the basic needs for a decent life and do not have enough income to feed themselves sufficiently and have housing and clothing enabling them to remain in good health.”

After reading and learning about poverty, I came to understand it. Learning about poverty has inspired me to work hard to help people who are in poverty as much as I possibly can.

Jean Momplaisir is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Photographs Tell Stories

During several years after I migrated to the U.S., I was able to adapt to many things but there was one thing I still missed: the family photograph albums. Anniversaries, birthdays, and special dates made me want to look at our photographs again. I thought that I would forget important details like when I tried to remember images of my old times.

The activity of creating albums is very interesting because you can select the photos, do scrapbooking, write notes, organize the events by dates, and then look at them anytime. You can remember when the children were growing up, when they went to school, when they were riding bikes, enjoying family vacation, doing different daily activities with friends and with pets, etc. It’s like the saying, “To remember, is to live.”

It is important to take into account that when we see photographs, emotions accompany the moment and that memories

unite generations and bring the past into our present.

A week ago, my daughter gave me a wonderful surprise. She managed the shipment of all our albums in two boxes from our country. When the boxes arrived at home, she told me, "Please Mommy, help me to open these boxes." When I looked at what was inside, I didn't believe it. My heart and mind were very happy and my daughter and I celebrated with long hugs.

Later that day, as a family, we sat together and enjoyed looking at them. Now, I can tell how much gratitude I feel to have them with me. This reunion with our photo albums may seem a little vain, but it was very exciting because we connected with the past, achievements, the path traveled and shared together, and our identity.

As we are currently building a new stage in our lives, we are creating new memories that are being told in photographs in the future.

Mayrena Mora is an Adult Literacy League student at Celebration Library. Her teacher's name is Barbara Huddleston.

The Story of My Life

I spent the first half of my life in the city of Nikolaev, Ukraine. Then, my first foreign trip to Italy came. My daughter invited me to spend a long weekend on Lake Como. Since then, significant changes have occurred in my life.

Over the past five years, I've visited ten countries, married an American in Turkey, and moved to the USA. I met my husband online. After a month of active correspondence, he invited me to meet in the Philippines, where he planned a vacation. The Philippines' sea lagoons are paradise on Earth. There, for the first time, I saw the beauty of the underwater world while snorkeling. The world was quarantined two weeks after I returned home, and my future husband and I began planning our wedding. He bought a ticket to Ukraine, but the quarantine remained in 2020.

The first country to open its doors to tourists was Turkey. My future husband decided we would get married in Istanbul. He

flew there from Miami, and I from Odessa. We had 12 days. Turkey has its own rules for marriage, which we did not know, and we also did not know the Turkish language; people in Istanbul did not know English or Russian. But we were enthusiastic like children and fate favored us. I have a very warm impression of Turkish people.

We needed to obtain documents from the Ukrainian and American embassies for a medical examination. Everyone wanted to get married in Turkey. It was necessary to find a translator. The biggest surprise was that one of the most significant Muslim holidays took place in Turkey, and there was a long weekend of four and a half days. This news surprised us, but we had no choice and had to wait. I understood that we would not have time to do everything before departure.

But my husband showed a miracle of communication. To relieve stress, we went on a tour of the Bosphorus. While I was admiring the beautiful views, my husband was connecting with our hotel manager, found an English to Turkish translator, explained our situation, and drew up an action plan. The translator was inspired by our love story, said he did everything and that we could get married in his favorite city.

Indeed, in the last hours before the marriage office closed for the long weekend, we submitted all the documents and bought rings. And on the first day after the weekend, I married my wonderful husband in a tuxedo he brought with him and I in a beautiful long dress. The following day, we flew to our own country. My husband immediately gave me the documents to apply for a spousal visa, and after nine months, it was ready. He flew to Ukraine for me. It was funny when he called his friends in Miami and joyfully shouted: "I brought her!"

Svitlana Owens is a Ukrainian-born programmer of automatic production control systems. She attends ESOL classes at The Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Iliyana Vassileva.

My Most Cherished Wish

Do not be afraid to dream; dreams have a wonderful ability to come true. I had long dreamed of visiting the USA. I wanted to

see this faraway beautiful country. When I was a teenager, I read many works of famous American writers. My favorite authors are Mark Twain, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, O. Henry, Edgar Allan Poe, Ray Bradbury, and Stephen King. These authors' characters introduced me to the life of people in America at different times and gave me a dream to travel to America. On New Year's Eve 2021, I wished that this dream would come true.

On February 24, 2022, the aggressor country Russia began launching missile strikes on peaceful Ukraine without declaring war. My city Sumy was occupied by enemy troops. All exits from the city were closed by Russian checkpoints. The Russian military began marauding actions; they robbed and killed the civilian population. The enemy destroyed entire villages and towns of the area. Okhtyrka, Trostyanets, Krasnopillya, Bilopillya were the first to suffer enemy airstrikes. Russian planes dropped bombs on residential buildings of peaceful residents.

Dozens of people died; innocent children and whole families were killed. The Russian military began shooting and torturing the population. Black depression and sadness enveloped the city. Some people tried leaving the occupied city, but the Russian military was ruthless. They spared no one. They killed children, teenagers, and old people. I was very worried about my relatives, children, and students. I teach construction engineering at the Sumy Construction College.

At that time, early in the morning, I was trying to call my students. I asked where they were and if they needed help, but I didn't know how to help them. Some students did not respond. We could not move around the city. My student Vlad was driving to the city with his girlfriend. Russian soldiers shot at his car from a tank. The girl died. She was 19 years old. Doctors saved Vlad's life.

Alarms sounded in the city day and night. My family and friends were constantly in bomb shelters. In March, the Humanitarian Mission organized a "Green Corridor" for foreign students. People were afraid to leave the city because the Russian military opened fire even on buses with people from the humanitarian mission. My daughter and I risked our lives getting out of the occupied city. It was a life-threatening journey, under the fire of rockets and shells that flew into my native land from Russia.

Today we are safe. I thank God and the American government for the temporary protection provided. On New Year's Eve, I made a wish again. God save Ukraine! Bless my Motherland for victory over the enemy. God grant peace and goodness to the Ukrainian people! I believe that this wish will come true.

Iryna Prydatko is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Our Life in Key West

Living in the USA is an experience we have always dreamed of having today, more for our children than for ourselves. My husband is in the military and his work brought us here. It also gave us the gift of living in Key West that we love. Key West is a wonderful place to live.

Our family loves living near the sea in our country. Every year we travel to the coast for holidays, and today we live on the coast. Living outside our country brings us many challenges, the biggest of which is language. For a long time, we prepared to be here, and we thought we were prepared, but things are very different in real life. The difficulty in communicating and solving problems left me very discouraged when we arrived. We looked for a place to study and take advantage of this period here to improve our English, which is a goal for me and my family.

Our children, Pedro age 14 and Lucca age two and a half, suffered a lot when they arrived here. Everything was new and many things they loved were left behind. This shows us that even though we are living one of our biggest dreams, not everything is rosy. Challenges exist to overcome, and that is what we are doing, living, and overcoming. Over time, they are adapting and getting involved with their new activities.

We make many dear friends from different parts of the world. Living with so many different cultures has been a great learning experience for us and a great joy, too.

Living in Key West has been a completely different experience than what we imagined when we found out we would live in the USA. I find it really fun how people here enjoy life, making everything a party with necklaces and sweets. We have been

traveling around the USA and no city is as lively as Key West. In 18 months, we will return to our country. In our luggage we will take the most beautiful memories and a lot of gratitude in our hearts for the two years in this beautiful place blessed by God.

Graciana Quiroga is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Worth of Waiting

A few years ago, I began to wonder what it would feel like to move to another country, who I would miss and how hard it would be to get a job. These kinds of questions came to me, as I longed to get an answer to them and to live each of them for myself being aware of the changes I would face.

In 2022, I had everything ready to go to live in Spain, but I was not sure about the university and the major I had chosen, so I decided to wait and look for options. Consequently, I decided to focus on other things and improve them to rethink my plans and future. In the midst of that focus, during 2023 situations began to occur that put me and my family at risk due to my dad's job; therefore, anguish and worry appeared to live with us until our last day in Colombia.

Despite the worry I felt and the fear, I met incredible people in my last days in Colombia. When I thought I would only miss my maternal grandmother when I left, a person appeared. At first, I did not like him; however, when I got to know him better, I was fascinated with his sweetness and intelligence, and quickly Alejandro became another person I would miss when I left the country. As my days with him went by and the countdown to leave my beloved country shortened, the nostalgia I felt at the thought of being far away from the person who appeared out of nowhere and took such an important place in my life became stronger.

And going through the nostalgia for Ale and my grandmother, I also began to think about my work here in the U.S, which led me to a very strong reality checklist. I have done things I knew I had to do when I came here, but to carry them out feels very different, the body, mind and emotions go to the floor, that's when frustration comes and begins to take hope slowly, but even in the

midst of despair, a light that renews my strength always appears; it makes me go ahead and think that the effort will be worth it.

And with all the above, I found the answer to the last question. Having left my country, I feel that I have left fears and apprehensions, that nothing is as it is perceived from the outside, although I have felt fear and frustration, I feel that I am full of expectations and willing to move forward. I am aware of the passing situations and the steps that will take me to the point I want to get to. I feel grateful to this country that opened its doors to me and has filled me with hope to move forward.

Jireh Andrea Ramirez Jaimés is from Bogota, Colombia. She is an ESOL student at MDC-Kendall. Her teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

The Dream

When I was fifteen years old, my dream was to become a polyglot. I completed two courses in English and French. My desire to learn more languages grew when I started to travel abroad in my twenties. I learned German, but my goal was to speak fluent English.

In 2019, I worked for Deutsche Bank. I was transferred to Jacksonville, Florida to work with a Brazilian team. I spoke only Portuguese at work and at home. I consulted neighbors and parents on playgrounds for recommendations of daycare for my daughters. These conversations were struggles. Eventually, I didn't recognize myself; I had become a person who prayed that nobody would talk to her in the cafeteria at work.

I started ESOL classes at the Jacksonville Public Library in 2022. I gained vocabulary and grammar mastery. What I enjoyed the most were Conversation Groups. In a natural and engaging way, we discussed topics of relevance and importance to me and to the other non-native English speakers. I felt less fearful of making mistakes there. This was exactly what I hoped to experience with native English speakers.

In August of 2022, I applied for a new position on an American team with Deutsche Bank. I got it, and it has challenged me, but after 18 months, I'm now leading calls, projects, training, and

meetings with senior executives. ESOL classes and working in an English speaking environment have doubled my English proficiency in a short time.

ESOL classes have been vital for my personal life, too. My husband started classes at the library at Level 1. His frustration grew every time he needed me to complete a task, like buying a car, handling documents, searching for schools, and getting drivers licenses. He needed a job, but interviews were difficult, especially since they were mostly on the phone. He wanted to go back to Brazil. In our country he was someone. Here, he was nobody. Through hard work and lots of encouragement, today he is in Level 4 ESOL at the library. He got a job and is now able to join calls with people from all over the world. I'm super proud of him. My mother is an ESOL student in the library's program, too. At age 63, her passion for learning is impressive.

I still attend library online ESOL classes because I learn something new in each one, especially cultural things that help me help my children. When they learned about Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Jr at school, I could offer information that I had gathered from discussions in my ESOL classes. We talk a lot about diversity and my children find it interesting, too.

I was recently offered an opportunity to return to Brazil. The decision not to move back was immediate. I value my English learning so much, professionally and socially. Learning English has made my whole family more confident. We can negotiate, make friends, and most importantly, we feel a sense of belonging here. English language proficiency made that possible.

Talita Rio came to Jacksonville, Florida in 2019 as an employee of Deutsche Bank to work with their Brazilian team. She and her family have been enrolled in the Jacksonville Public Library's online ESOL program and have participated in its Conversation Essentials group sessions. Talita completed Level 4 ESOL and is currently enrolled in Level 5, the library's highest level.

Never Say Never

I come from a simple and hardworking family. I am the middle daughter of four siblings. I am totally different from my older sisters. They were always good students. When I was young, I didn't like studying. I think that I was an immature and very stubborn little woman. When I went to the university everything in my behavior began to change. I used to be hyperactive, distracted, and absent-minded, but from then on I became a disciplined and responsible woman. I got good grades. I had the experience of participating twice in the Work and Travel USA Program for students which allowed me to meet other people from different places and their cultures.

In my country, I had a very planned life. I had a good job. I am still part of a running club, and I made a lot of friends. All my life I had few love relationships, though, I love being alone and doing whatever I want. I thought married people were boring and having kids was a bad idea.

Surprise! Now I'm married, living in an amazing city with my husband, jobless, and far away from my dear family. How come my life changed so much in only one year? Maybe it is my destiny. I feel happy to be here briefly in America for many reasons. It is a good opportunity for me to keep learning and keep running so that I can participate in many marathons. Also, I meet great people, able to develop social skills, boost my English skills, and build a family. I find that this is a great project and I hope it will be a successful short life in this beautiful country.

Alfonsina Riquelme is an ESOL student at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Beginning of a Dream

My life, your life, and the life of every single person are like a movie. Sometimes there are nice moments, sometimes sad ones. However, you always need to believe in yourself and trust your instincts.

More than half of my life has been spent as an emigrant, changing cities and countries. My mother took the first step, and

we left behind our small town in Cuba when I was still a little girl. My family split up as my father took another path. My sisters and I grew up under the strict and loving gaze of our grandmother. Our goals were to study to achieve a university diploma. Those were beautiful times.

When I finished the university, I asked myself, “Now what? What do I want for my life?” I needed new goals. I tried to pursue them, but unfortunately, in my country, that was not possible. After many long nights thinking it over, I arrived at a decision. It was not an easy one because I had to think not only of myself but also of the future of my little daughter. My only choice was to emigrate. And so, we did. We not only changed cities but also countries; we started again in a distant place in the southern hemisphere, far away from my family.

I am an optimistic person, so neither the cultural change, the cold, nor the distance traveled mattered; I had to go forward. I studied and worked as an engineer in Chile for 29 years. In Chile, I had very pleasant days but also others filled with sad news, like the death of my grandmother in Cuba. Nevertheless, I achieved my goals. I grew professionally and had challenging tasks and assignments. I built a beautiful family and have three brave children.

Once more, however, I felt the need for changes. I asked myself, “Now what? What are my new projects and goals?” I needed new challenges and horizons for me and my family. I wanted that my children would have better opportunities to develop and be able to have their own dreams.

And so, here I am once again in a new country, a new city, and this time learning a new language, following my dreams that I am certain I will fulfill.

Cecilia Rivas Tornes, a student from Bayamo, Cuba, is enrolled in the Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program at Miami Dade College’s Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert K. Kelso.

Critical Situation

In 2022, my family went to Ukraine because of medical issues. Unfortunately, during that year in February, the war began in Ukraine.

My wife did not have much experience driving a car. The morning was the worst in her life at the time. Helicopters were flying, rockets were blowing up, and kids were hysterical because everyone knew they could die. The children asked their mom, “How can we get away if you have no driving experience? My wife answered, “I have to save us and I can do it!”

The road was congested. There was a lot of traffic and explosions, but they were a team. The route was 510 miles long. It took more than 28 hours and they did not sleep a minute.

I am proud of my two daughters and my wife because they did not lose their minds during this critical situation. At that moment they were a team and managed themselves very well.

Oleg Shcherban is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Letter to Baby

Hello, baby. Well, I wasn’t expecting you. I have a few words and a lot to say, but I generally keep it to myself. I have a secret, and it is that I often write in imaginary letters to imaginary people. Rarely have I written physically, but I think this is important and I should stop keeping everything that I think and feel to myself.

Don’t think that because I didn’t expect you, I don’t love you. It’s just that I have already come to terms with the idea of not having grandchildren and the truth is that I thought it was better this way. Not because I didn’t love them, at the end of the day the responsibility will not be mine, but this world is so... I don’t know what adjective to use... disconnected from the values of life. I felt relief at not having to deal with the empty world in the formation of a human being. That terrified me, so I decided to feel relief with the possibility that I would never have grandchildren.

Life always surprises. You are on your way, and I already love you. I only think about how I can do it well, how I can protect you in this corrupting world, and how I can transmit to you everything beautiful and truly valuable in life. I have always thought that the best way to teach is by example. It will be up to me to keep smiling so that you learn to laugh and keep loving, learn to love to continue expecting and valuing others, and earn empathy towards others. I will learn to communicate better so that you learn to give your opinions without fear but with respect. I will continue dreaming and working to achieve them so that you learn to dream and achieve your goals no matter how old you are.

I will continue enjoying the sunsets, the full moon, starry skies, the songs of the birds, the sound of the sea, the warm sand on my feet, and the breeze when it caresses my face, Thus, you will learn about the greatness of simplicity. I will take you with me on the paddle to collect shells and watch the sunset, and there will be moments that we will both keep forever in our memories. When I'm no longer in this world you will find me in all those things because I will always be there for you.

PS: That baby now has a name, Luna and we are already living adventures together.

Rosalinda Leonor Sosa Lozano, was born on August 22, 1971 in Caracas, Venezuela. She earned her degree in Hotel Business Administration from Simon Bolivar University and studied Fashion Design at the Massett Fashion Institute. Since 2016, she has lived in Orlando, Florida. Her hobbies are paddleboarding and writing for herself, reflecting her love for outdoor activities and storytelling.

She has two amazing daughters and one granddaughter who served as inspiration for this heartfelt letter. She enjoys all art expressions and forms. She is actively engaged in her career, contributing her skills and talents to the enchanting World of Disney.

Worth the Struggle

When I had my first child, I was in shock to see I had a “mini me” for the first time. I prayed my next one was a boy and I got my one special boy. I was happy after I had two kids, a girl and a boy. And then I had another girl.

I needed to go to work. It was hard for me because I didn't own a vehicle, nor did I have a babysitter. When I first moved to Florida, my husband was still in Haiti, so it was only me and my younger sister.

When I didn't have anybody to watch my kids, I would put them on my sister's bed, so she had no choice but to watch them. 20 years later, I realized it was worth the struggle. My kids put a smile on my face.

Miglese St. Fort is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach.

The World's Creation

The world's creation was made for humans. Nobody can find the true words to explain this wonderful situation. No one can compare it yet. (That seems to be important to us.) First God knew and saw the world is the best for humanity.

Then because of the serious imagination of many men and women, the world has become truly better. They created something to give value to nature. They thought of inventing the boat, the airplane, the car, computers and more. An aircraft, for example, mimics the natural bird. What a magnificent feat! We can go everywhere to visit the countries in the world and to travel easily. The boat can also go to other countries. Because of that, life becomes beautiful and better. We have the workers who help us to find food that and the women need to eat.

We can't forget school. Without it, we would have no education. Without the church, we would have no information of God. And without society's work, we would not have jobs. Often life is dark. When there are problems, certain countries meet in war. Some people lose their lives and it is terrible.

It is necessary to imagine because there are many things that we need to make life in this world beneficial.

Estulien St. Hilaire is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Choosing to be Happy

What is happiness for you? Someone asked me once. A question I never asked myself. I try reflecting a little bit before answering and I remembered that there is a quote about happiness that I like and it says: “If you want to be happy, be happy now.”

I realized long ago that this quote is so true. You can choose to be happy every time as you can choose to smile. Despite any hard situation you may find yourself in, it is in you to choose to be happy. Life is so hard at times, and in a moment of distress everything seems dark and with no way out. However, at the end of the day, you start to see things for what they really are. Everything changes and you realize everything is going to be just fine. It is all about choosing to be happy. That problem you had last year, now seems so far and not a problem at all. It is all solved now, and your perspective has changed. So, it just needs time to heal, solve, or a little smile.

When you decide to be happy it's just like wearing beautiful new clothing. You go out and everyone notices and compliments you. I decided to wear a smile then! I noticed how most of the people would smile back at you. I am not saying is easy, it is the most difficult thing to do. Not every day is a “smiling kind of day.” Happiness is not something you can find unless it is something you decide you want in your life. It is amazing how the simplest things can make you smile every day, like a kid's laughter, so pure and innocent. I feel so happy when I see a dog walking in the park with its owner. When you are just wandering around and find a beautiful garden, a sunrise in the ocean, or hearing the voice of your loved ones even though they may be far away from you. Listening to cool songs that bring great memories or make you dance silly. Happiness is everywhere.

I try to enjoy every moment of my life. I say try because I think it is not easy to be happy all the time. We are just humans not machines, but again is a choice we are given. It is all around us in the little pleasures of life, in the simple things in life, in your accomplishments, your private life, and of course your dear ones. These make life worthwhile. Life has a bigger purpose than oneself and we are just a simple component who can contribute to the happiness of others too.

So, to answer this question I simply said: “Happiness is my choice.”

Ms. Thelusma is an ESOL student from Miami Dade College. Her professor is Regla Requena. She is also enrolled in the CNA program and works part time.

St. Augustine Castle, a True Story

Last December, my wife and I went to Jacksonville for a wedding. After the festivities, we were coming back to Tampa and decided to make a stop in St. Augustine to visit the castle and stay in a hotel for the night. A castle in Florida is unusual, and this one did not look like any other construction you can see in the southeastern United States. It was a kind of Spanish castle, low and surrounded by angular towers.

We easily parked our car. The lot was empty. It was not completely dark yet. There was nobody but us at the entrance. It was not a tourist month we thought, the chilly wind did not bring visitors. Inside the walls, everything seemed dark. We were surprised by an old man, a Florida native. He was small and skinny with tanned skin. “Have you heard the voices?” he asked. We wanted to say no. He did not wait for our answer and asked us to come with him. “When it’s windy, you can hear the voices. Stand in the center of the dungeon, right here, and wait a little bit.” The old man didn’t seem dangerous, but we were impressed and scared to death. We were waiting for a while when I felt a pinch on my arm. “Are we going to wait a long time?” my wife, Carole, asked me quietly. “As long as it takes to be able to pretend to hear something.”

Just two seconds later, the wind rose. A strong wind rushed into the open enclosure. A loud whistle was heard. We both looked at each other, petrified. It sounds like a plaintive voice of a baby, like the cry of the whippoorwill. The cry became a crowd of voices. It was enough for us, and we told the old man that we were completely sure that it was voices. “Did you hear, it was spoken in a foreign language! Do you know that it was the cry of the Huguenots? Four hundred of them, were killed just where you are. The voice we hear is their walling before death,” said the old man. We did not want to discuss it.

I said, “Thank you for the information! We really appreciate your explanation and the time we have spent together.” One minute later we were in our car, driving to the hotel bedroom. At dinner, we were comfortable.

“Did you hear something?”

“Not really.”

“We can find a rational explanation.”

“Of course, we can!”

The next morning, before leaving St. Augustine, we went through the castle parking lot. It was full of buses around us. It was crowded. We ask a policeman why there was nobody at the castle the previous day. He answered, “Yesterday, it was closed!”

Didier Touchet is a 60-year-old French immigrant who moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, in early 2023. He is a student of Jeffrey Kallan at the Clearwater Adult Education Center.

A Family Trip

Last year, me and my family did a European trip. We visited my family in Italy for my parents’ party. I met some cousins and uncles that I had not seen for more than 20 years and it was such a special meeting, it was unforgettable.

Afterwards, we stayed in Paris for 3 days. We visited some tourist places like the Eiffel Tower, the Seine River, Notre Dame, La Fayette, and the Sacred Heart Church. We tried the delicious crepes and croissant next to the Eiffel Tower. The last night of our trip to Paris. We went to a restaurant, but there were protesters in the city. Thank God we were able to hide in a restaurant for safety.

The next day, our destination was London, a city known for its global economic importance. While we were taking the train from the airport to the City Center, we saw the beautiful and extensive green hills with the sunset. The city received us with good vibes, we looked at the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, The Tate Modern, The Tower Bridge, and Piccadilly’s Circus. When I saw the London Train Station, it seemed like it was the Harry Potter movie.

I think each of us had a beautiful and unforgettable trip. After a few days we returned home sad, but with the feeling that we will make many more trips like this again.

Edson Trujillo Valencia is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. His teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

What Never Was

It all started that day in the summer. I was walking hurriedly through the hallways of my new school, trying not to be late for my first class. Suddenly my gaze met his. Before arriving in the United States, I had to leave very important people in my life, including the person I loved. For me, it was a very drastic change, but as time went by, I understood that if he really was the right person, it could have worked, however, our story ended the day I left. Devastated, I decided to forget what had happened and focus on everything new that I would have to face. Later, sitting in the dining room, I remembered what happened that morning, how my gaze met beautiful brown eyes, though I was unable to remember the subject's face. I then forgot what happened and continued with my day.

As the weeks went by, I began to adapt better to my new life and made new friends. I felt that everything was going well, when suddenly, for the second time walking in the hallways, my gaze met those brown eyes again. This time I paid attention to that subject. I could notice how his features complemented each other giving way to a harmonious face. Leaving the library, I remembered that my notes were left on the table where I was studying, I quickly turned around and ran straight to where I was, however, my notes were no longer where I left them. In a hurry I ran to the librarian and desperately asked her about my notes. Without an answer and with my head down, I left the library and headed to my next class. When I got to class, the doors were closed, and the teacher did not accept excuses when entering his class late. The teacher decided to send me to detention.

This place of boredom and punishment became for me an unexpected place to find that guy with brown eyes. At the end of the day, the director let us out of detention. The bonds that flour-

Pathways

ished in the classroom slowly faded in the midst of my daily life and the academic responsibilities I had. Maybe it was the right person, but the circumstance we were in weren't

Emily Vera is a student at Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Favorite Day

My Favorite Day is Sunday

My favorite day is Sunday. It is the last day of the week. I like Sunday because Sunday is the day of Jesus. It is a day to God. After I finish my work week, I give thanks to God for the week He gave me.

In my country, every business respects Sunday and they are closed on the weekend. When I worked in Haiti, I worked Monday to Friday. Now in the US, I work on the weekend.

When I was looking for a job in the US, they asked “Do you work on weekends and holidays?” I said no. They didn’t give me the job. I didn’t have any choice. I had to work on the weekend.

I have a dream. My dream is to start a business. When I start my business, I will be open Monday to Friday, and I will be closed Saturday and Sunday.

In conclusion, Sunday is an important day for me because it is the day to pray God.

Marie Maud Ambroise is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Surprise Cruise Through the Panama Canal

I had heard about the Panama Canal for years and was always curious about it. I wondered, how do ships get through that narrow space? I never thought I’d find out, or sail through it! But I did, and it was a surprise!

In March 2023, my wife Marva and I planned a Caribbean cruise. We had been on many cruises, so were expecting to disembark at ports in Aruba, Curacao, Bonaire, Costa Rica and Panama. But we didn’t know the cruise ship would actually sail through the Panama Canal.

One morning we were in our cabin, expecting another day at

sea, when the Captain announced we were about to begin the journey through the Panama Canal. We were surprised! We left our cabin and went on deck, excited to see what was ahead of us.

The first thing we saw was an oil tanker that was coming from the opposite side – the Pacific Ocean. Because the Captain described what was going on, I learned so much about how the Panama Canal works. He told us about the lower chamber and upper chamber, which are the two lanes that go through the Canal. The upper chamber is for ships traveling from the north, or from the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean. The lower chamber is for ships traveling from the south -- from the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean Sea.

The lower chamber was full of water so that a sailboat that was ahead of us could sail through. Then they “dumped” that water back to the Caribbean Sea, and filled the upper chamber high enough so we could sail through. When one chamber is full, the other is empty. The Captain said the sailboat had to pay a \$2,500 toll.

When the gates opened and our ship entered the Canal, four trains hooked cables to our ship – two on each side, front and back -- to guide our ship through the Canal. But first, we had to pay the toll. I hoped to find out how much they charged our Norwegian Cruise Line ship, but the Captain never announced that.

Then the trains were unhooked from the ship and we sailed through the Canal to the Pacific Ocean. The water was dumped back to the Caribbean Sea, and the upper chamber was filled back again with water. A tugboat guided us back to the Caribbean Sea.

I remember this experience like it happened yesterday, and I would do it again! It turned out to be my favorite day because I never thought I’d sail through the Panama Canal. What a surprise!

Rodney Brown attends G.E.D. class, which is offered through his employer, the City of West Palm Beach, in conjunction with the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County. His instructor is Gerri Malcolm.

My Life's Best Moments

I have had many favorite moments, but the best of my entire life were the days when I gave birth to each of my daughters Andrea, Paola, and Daniela. I am the mother of three girls and each of them is the light of my life, just like my mother, my siblings, and my grandsons Aaron, Bruno, and Clemente.

With a lot of effort, I got ahead with my three daughters. I studied and worked at the same time. This was not an impediment to graduating with my education degree. Working with children has always been my greatest desire since I was young. I got married when I was 23 years old. Shortly after that I had my daughters, and we created a beautiful family. For me, the family is very important, because through it we learn to love our neighbors, to collaborate with each other, to respect each other, to move forward with love and strength.

My other favorite days were receiving musical education after school. I thank God and my dad, Jose Emiliano – who may rest in peace – for dedicating every day to accompanying me and my sisters to music school. Through musical studies, I was able to socialize and meet many people throughout my life. Studying and learning to read musical scores and playing various musical instruments such as the piano, violin and others helped me acquire skills to perform in my job and even earn income to pay for my professional education.

Finally, another one of my best moments is the one I am currently experiencing in this country. I thank God, the United States of America, this school (Clearview Adult Education Center) and especially all my teachers (Inguna, Jeff, Silvia, and Lucy) for giving me the opportunity to learn English, which is such an important and necessary language for immigrants who come to this country.

Isbelia Fuentes is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Isbelia's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Favorite Day

My favorite day is when my friend Frankie surprised me for my birthday at the Karibe Hotel. With my auntie's help, they made me cry with happiness. This day was special for me, I will never forget it. It was a big surprise that we danced together.

On this day my other friend asked my sister to marry him, so it was perfect. Everybody was glad! I was touched by the surprise and for my sister's engagement.

The same day there was another surprise for me. He took me in a helicopter! I was so excited but afraid at the same time.

The view was so beautiful I felt like a bird. This was when I noticed that my friend likes to make me smile. When someone makes a special day for you that's important, and it shows how much they care.

Lourdjina Giordani is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Ivette Waller.

Reunited With Family

In the life of each individual, there is a date, a day or a moment forever engraved in their hearts. For my part, it was only years ago that I understood the meaning of this sentence.

I was born in the Turks and Caicos Island and shortly after my father had to return to the United States with my big brother. Then it was my mother's turn to leave me with my grandmother. I was still just a child. Years later, they had me sent to Haiti where I spent my childhood, my adolescence and where I began my adult stage. I remember seeing mom for the first time in 2016 while she was visiting Haiti. She had already had my little brother for a long time. She stayed in Haiti for one month before returning to the United States.

After all these moments God created May 8, 2023, which is when I experienced the most beautiful day of my life. An unforgettable date and a moment of pure happiness because I got to meet my family for the first time in my life. My dad, my mom

and my two brothers were there to welcome me after 22 years of living apart. We finally got to be reunited as a real family.

On that date there was my mother, my father and my brothers. We experienced this moment with enthusiasm. In my life, this is the moment that will forever be engraved in my heart.

Jennifer Jean is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

The Gift of Life

My favorite day is the happiest day of my life. It's the day I gave birth to my first child. I was suffering from some health problems during pregnancy, and the doctor advised me to rest completely and remain lying on my back in the hospital during the last three months.

My husband supported and helped me. He visited every day and brought me favorite foods and medicine. On the day of delivery, the doctors told me that things went well, and my health condition was stable. I had a beautiful healthy boy. At that moment I felt great comfort and great motherly feelings and prayed to God. I named my son Selwan.

More than 37 years have passed since that event, but every birthday of my son Selwan I remember the events of that happy day. Now my son is a doctor and has a family with two children and lives in England. I always visit my son and grandchildren.

Aedoon Khudhur was born in Iraq and is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. She and her husband participate in the Conversation Club and have an individual tutor. They have four sons.

My Favorite Day - Christmas

My favorite day is Christmas. It commemorates the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It is celebrated on December 25th. Christmas Eve is celebrated on the night of December 24th, the eve of Christmas Day. These are my favorite holidays since I was a kid. My family always gets together in two days. We make a lot of food, dance, and pray. When my cousins and I were children we

loved this celebration because we received gifts from Santa Claus.

We were waiting for Santa Claus to arrive at midnight on the 25th with our gifts. My uncle dressed in Santa's clothes but we didn't know he was our uncle. I also like to put up the Christmas tree in November. We always decorated the Christmas tree with balls and lights. One day when I was six years old I discovered that Santa Claus did not exist. I saw my uncle when I placed the fantasy. I felt very sad but then my mother explained the truth to me. Nowadays children stop believing in Santa Claus sooner than before maybe because they are more awake than we were.

Angel Montano is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

My Everyday Favorite Day

My favorite day is not a very special one, but any day I can repeat over and over again. My point of view about this topic is not necessary for a special date or a special event. I want to tell you what a favorite day means in my life. Every day I decide it will be my favorite day, that is my attitude.

It is the feeling, it is the place, it is the kind of people that I want around me, it is the rhythm of my day. Probably right now we are rushing in our lives, we do not have enough time, but why? We are overthinking about what we need to do, what we need to buy, and many other things; but the most curious thing is maybe we do not know why we have this fast pace of life.

Our lives need order, I am sure about that. Our lives need future projects, but it is important to remember it is not a list to do and a race against time. Personally, my favorite day can have different favorite beginnings. For example, it can start with a cup of coffee, reading a book, feeling good after sleeping well, waking up with the sound of birds around me, etc. All of these things help us understand the appreciation for and the meaning of a favorite day, the importance of realizing the value of what the most simple activities represent in our everyday life. Smell the roses.

In English we can use the phrase "my cup of tea" to define something that you like or when you can do activities that make

you feel good. This is the other important element when we talk about my favorite day. For example, if you enjoy your job, you will probably feel better than if you don't like it. That is why it is important to try a different option, we need to have an open mind. We should meet new people and, even better, visit other countries, because the most valuable experience in our favorite day, and mainly in our lives, is diversity. In diversity, there is wealth and knowledge.

And the bad days? Well, we tend to believe that we learn only when we win or when we have a good day. However, we need to understand that bad ones are important for our growth, too. Likewise, when we realize that learning comes from falls, we stop having bad days and we also understand that those falls have a lot of teachings.

Therefore, I believe that any day is important in my life because it is not related or dependent on external situations, but related to my attitude and the appreciation of each element that surrounds me. Consequently, when we look back, we will see we have had many favorite days.

Fernando Morales is a Nicaraguan agronomer, traveler, chef, and student at Miami Cade College-Kendall. His teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

Every Day with My Son

My favorite day of the year is not marked by grand celebrations or extravagant gestures. Instead, it is a simple day filled with the warmth of love and the joy of motherhood.

It's my son's birthday. My heart swells with pride and gratitude for the blessing of having him in my life. From the moment he came into this world, he has brought endless joy, laughter, and love into our home. But perhaps my favorite part of the day comes in the quiet moments. In those precious moments, time seems to stand still as I marvel at the miracle of his existence and the depth of my love for him. As he drifts off to sleep, his breathing steady and peaceful, I tuck him in with a gentle kiss on the forehead, whispering words of love and gratitude into the darkness.

Though another year has passed, my love for him only grows stronger with each passing day. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the privilege of being his mother. For me, my son's birthday is not just a celebration of another year gone by, but a reminder of his profound impact on my life. He is my greatest teacher, my constant source of inspiration, and my deepest love. I know that I am truly blessed to have him as my son. For him, every day is my favorite day, a precious gift to be cherished and treasured for all eternity.

Diamelbis Nunez is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Big Surprise

As usual my day starts at 7:00 a.m., I get out of bed and my mom had a big surprise for me, I won't tell you yet, it will be a secret, she told me. My day begins when the first ray of light comes through my window. Seconds later I prepare my breakfast, my mother has breakfast with me, and I see that she has a big smile on her face, something that caused me uneasiness.

My mom tells me that you must go shopping, but I didn't know why. We bought things we already had at home, something that I found strange. We did all the shopping and when we got home, we took down everything we had bought, she looked at me very seriously and told me to pack a suitcase, I was worried when I saw her face so serious, then she told me smiling, we will travel to Cuba. How happy I was when I heard my mother's words. She told me that we would give a surprise to my dad and grandparents since they didn't know we were going. It was already midnight, and we still hadn't finished packing.

The flight was at 9:30 a.m. the next day, we had to get up early as we had to check in 3 hours before the departure of our flight. It was time to board the plane and my mother was very nervous because she is afraid of heights, 45 minutes later we arrived on Cuban soil. Outside the airport a taxi was waiting for us that would take us to our destination. When we got to our house, my father and grandparents were so excited that they cried with joy. My father was sick, he had covid-19 and almost fainted from the emotion. We had to give him alcohol to smell since he was very

devilish from covid.

That was the happiest day of my life, since I hadn't seen my family for a year. We cried together, we hugged each other so tight that I couldn't breathe, but we needed that hug. The next day we made a trip to a beach called Varadero where we stayed for a week, between laughs and laughter the day had come, we would have to return to the United States. Little by little our Happiness was fading, we would have to leave our family again.

Erika Pelaez is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

A Sunset for Friends

Imagine the perfect day. It's a summer day, there is soft golden sand, refreshing crystal clear water reflects the sun's rays, and friendly laughter with my best buds. That's how my favorite day started at the beach in Cuba with my closest friends. My friend Daniel, yes he has the same name as me, and my other friend Fabio, are my best friends from Cuba. It was a day when everything was perfect, from the spontaneous football matches to the shared stories under a fiery sunset sky.

Our day began with me and my friends going to the beach at 7:00 in the morning. The golden sand was warm under our feet, but the water was a little cold, though very peacefully quiet. We played football a lot and between matches we raced to the water. In the afternoon, surrounded by my friends, the beach became an oasis of happiness. We shared stories and we laughed non-stop. Each laugh, each shared glance, strengthened our friendship, turning simple moments into treasures that will be forever memories to make each of us smile when we think of this perfect day.

It wasn't just the setting or activities, but the feeling of connection and freedom with my friends that made this day my favorite. It's a reminder that sometimes, the simplest days can hold the most extraordinary moments.

Daniel Rosales is a Cuban ESOL student attending Suncoast Technical College. His teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

Sunday

My favorite day is Sunday because it's a holiday for me. On Sunday, I like to wake up a bit late and will have my breakfast with my parents and younger brother. Then I will play a game with my father inside our house. Sometimes, he helps me in doing some interesting activities. By this time, my mother will cook my favorite dishes for me which I enjoy a lot.

After lunch, I will take a short nap with my family. After a story from my mother in the evening, I will watch some movies or my favorite cartoon. In the evening, my father will take us to a park nearby or a beach or sometimes we visit our nearby temple. I love to play with my brother in the park and at the beaches. We will go to the market and buy vegetables and other items. I will have my dinner and go to bed early so that I can go to school the next day on time. I will get more refreshed and energetic in my studies after every Sunday. Sunday will always be my favorite day.

Verline Ulysse is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Julie Iskenderian.

Original Poetry

You Can't Break My Heart Because It's Already Broken

You can't break my heart because it's already broken.
I know you have been behaving badly in our relationship.
I know you have been cheating on me for months.
I also know that you call her, "my favorite person in the world"
As you used to call me every day.

No need to apologize because the truth is
You can't break my heart because it's already broken.

Don't worry,
I am a strong woman.
I have survived unimaginable things that
I wouldn't wish on any human being on earth.

Believe me,
Your infidelity and your lies
Are only small pieces of the puzzle.

Let me tell you a little secret.
In my head there's a war going on
Every time reality reminds me
That I am powerless in the face of humanity
And its tragedies.

I didn't grow up like "Alice in Wonderland."
I grew up in a place where we live the true definition of lies –
Corruption, insecurity, inequality, and abuse.

An impoverished place
Where a category of people is ready to erase an entire popula-
tion.
Ready to ruin the future of an entire generation
To achieve their own egotistical goals.

I grew up seeing children and women abused and raped.
Fathers irresponsible
Men and women forced to abandon their homes because of
gang warfare.

Students killed.

I grew up in a place where
Even if you meticulously follow society's codes
You're more likely to fail than to succeed.
When I say you can't break my heart, believe me.

I know you're going to ask me
how such an optimistic, cheerful woman
can think of such atrocities,
But that's my reality.

How can I not focus on her
When there are mistakes that pursue me every single day of
my life
Even on the other side of the world.

So, you can't break my heart because it's already broken.
Even though my heart is broken
I know that I am this flame
In the midst of darkness.

Even if there's rain, hurricanes, tornados, or sunshine
I will always look for happiness without you.
For me, our relationship was a museum in which I was the
masterpiece.

Don't worry
Even if you break my heart,
I'll fix it a second time.

*Bethaida Bernadel was born in Haiti where she studied Communi-
cation and Public Relations and worked for two years as a journalist.
In 2023, she left her country to come to the United States. She is cur-
rently attending ESOL classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Tech-
nical College. Her dream is to achieve a doctorate in communications
and become a famous poet.*

Alone

On the bench of loneliness
a bird rests,

Screaming...
Near the graceful girl
Screaming she said...
Melancholy is reflected in your eyes,
The girl asserted, I am a bright watchman,
Totally alone
Keeping your flame burning,
Yearning for the moon to shines.
On the bench of despair
The bird sang.

Marckens Chervil is a student in the Collier County Adult Education program. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

We Grow

We grow.
Nature blooms, we grow.
Birds sing, and we grow.
Water flows, we grow.
Summer calls, we grow
The sun shines, and we grow.
Night falls, we grow.
While the trees watch, we grow.
With the ocean's embrace, we grow.
With every breath, there is a prayer, we breathe.

Tyre' Church is a student at Family Support Services Network. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

In Memory's Embrace

My favorite place is my childhood home, a beautiful house located between the city and the countryside, in a fairly modest neighborhood. Filled with trees and a view of the large buildings of the city, this house breathes love and a feeling of nostalgia. Every part of the house leaves me with good or bad memories, but I experienced the best moments of life in this house.

Entering through the handcrafted wooden door, I am greeted by the scent of freshly barbecued chicken, a testament to my aunt's love and nurturing. The smell wafts through the air,

instantly transporting me back to my carefree childhood days. The creaky staircase, worn with time, echoes the laughter and footsteps of bygone times.

As I walk into my old room, memories unfold before my eyes. The walls are adorned with my colorful artwork. The shelves are lined with beloved storybooks, and the familiar view of a tree outside my window all bring a sense of comfort and familiarity. The room is a sanctuary where my dreams are nourished, my creativity flourished, and self-discovery was nurtured.

The lush garden that surrounds my childhood home is a testament to my father's green thumb. The melodious chirping of birds among the trees, and the gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze all create an orchestra of natural serenity. As Robert B. Laughlin said, "my childhood home backed onto wheat and cotton fields." This oasis is where I spent countless hours exploring, reading and finding solace in the midst of nature's embrace.

Jean Lorine Dadeline is from Haïti. She is a GED student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

All Because

I can hear, what you see.

I can see, what you smell.

I can smell, what you taste.

I can taste, what you think.

I can think, what you touch.

I can touch, what you hear.

All because we are one.

And I love you, my dear.

Deborah L. Mckissick is a student at Family Support Services, Inc. Her teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

I Know

Some people say, “Beauty is only skin deep.”

Some people say, “GOD created beauty in all his creations.”

I know beauty is beautiful, from the inside of you to the outside of you.

I believe in creation, but I do know that evolution occurs with time and space.

One and one equates to three.

Creation + time = evolution.

Creation is woke only a moment in time.

Remember this, “Woke is the past tense of Wake.”

So please wake up.

The woke can't lead or follow, period.

They're just stagnate.

Woke gets out of the way for the waken.

I'm a wake, you're awake, we all are awake.

Because creation was the woke, for the wake to live and learn.

I know because we are living the awakening.

We who are awake will see and experience the beauty in all people and things, past and present.

Because we all are awake.

Larry Mckissick is a student at Family Support Services, Inc. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

My Beautiful Land (Bolivia)

My beautiful land it is
The heart of South America
Has different weather
It's cold in the occident,
It's tempered by the valleys
It's hot by the oriente.

My beautiful land it is geographically
Divided into 9 states: Pando, Beni,
Santa Cruz, La Paz, Cochabamba,
Oruro, Potosí, Sucre, Tarija.

My beautiful land has 3 colors
On its flag: The color red represents the blood
Shed by those who defended the country.
The color yellow represents natural wealth.
The color green represents the vegetable richness.

My beautiful land has
36 native languages
Some are: Aymara, Quechua,
Guarani, Tacana, Baure, Trinitario
Mosetenas, Movima...

My beautiful land is very diverse in flora and fauna
Has mammals, fish, birds, amphibians,
Reptiles and thousands of plant species.

My beautiful land has delicious food,
In Pando you can eat Sudau de Pescau.
In Beni you can eat Majadito de charque
In La Paz you can eat Sojta.
In Cochabamba you can eat Tranca pecho.
In Oruro you can eat Charquekan.
In Potosi you can eat Cazuela.
In Sucre you can eat Mondongo.
In Tarija you can eat Saice.

My beautiful land has
Different dances and typical clothes
For each state. Also each state has

Its own flag that represents them.

My beautiful land has a spectacular parade
On its independence day.
In every city they do something special,
Band parades by school, Military school,
Business people, Social organizations,
And fireworks.

My beautiful land of pure air,
Where you go out for a walk in the
Afternoons in its squares,
Talk with friends and at night
Have a coffee cortadito in Santa Cruz.

My beautiful land is a place where
I would return a thousand times.

Noira Mosqueira is a student at the School District of Palm Beach County, Department of Adult Education. Her teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

A Lys for Lise

Roses, often recognized as queens of flowers
but, on the feet of the queen of my heart I will set down a
“LYS”
not just a flower with beautiful and largest petals
but a flower that made war, increased in royal’s family armory
A flower that made history...
Not just simply a beautiful flower that is spreading good scent
But a flower with a powerful perfume which makes you feel
comfortable.

More than a flower, a muse that has inspired poetry since
ancient times in the bible.

A flower showing proudly the multiple aspects of her person-
ality with the diversity of color showing up in one petal.

A sunny flower that can also survive even the white winter.

A flower not fragile at all

A flower standing like a rock, my rock...

A flower that’s symbolism you Lise

I do not want to set down two, three or more of them but just

one, only one in fact when gently you will pick it up you will sparkle by all my admiration and Love

A Lys for Lise, my mom that I love infinitely.

Colonia V. Pierre is from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where she worked as an administrative assistant and fleet manager until coming to the US in 2023. She attends the ESOL Advanced class With Mrs. Fayne Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe campus.

I Appreciate

I appreciate all the paths I've traveled, to get here and to you.
I appreciate that understanding life is today, and that one owns nothing, only the moments lived, especially you.
I appreciate having a family, and that you're in it.
I appreciate all the blessings I have, because everything I have is a blessing,
especially you.
I appreciate being able to look at life differently,
because now I know life is beautiful, because of you.
I appreciate the sunrise, the sunset, which are more special when you're there.
I appreciate knowing that it's not about what you have, but who you have, and I have you.
I appreciate God for hearing my prayers and sending angels into my life, among them, you.
Forever, I appreciate your essence with your presence.

Maria Pulido Parra comes to us from Venezuela. She is presently attending Largo Library ESOL classes. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler, and Mildred Pioli.

Knowledge of Yourself

My love, are you there?
Don't you feel exhausted?
You love too much,
you love too hard.

My Love, are you okay?
Don't you feel dizzy?

You've been so high flying in the sky,
I saw you falling too many times.

My Love, how you feeling?
Don't you feel pain?
They've hurt you and torn you apart,
they have broken this heart into so many pieces;
Sometimes I saw you bleeding
when they broke your feelings.

But my Love, even though all this has happened to you;
I see you strong
and you still complete,
cause you are real,
and you are MINE,
You belong to ME
my Love, you will never end
and you will never die.

My beautiful Love,
my lovely butterfly,
I do know you
and I feel you,
Deep inside of me,
Your wings are shaking me,
thank you for letting me be,
thank you for letting me feel.
I promise you I will take care of myself
to take care of you.

Katherine Rios is an ESOL student with Hugo Moraga at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus. She dreams of continuing to study very hard to continue writing and entering law school.

I Am

I Am
Beauty that meets the eye
The cloud that's in the sky; peaceful
As I float by

I Am

Pathways

The rain that fills the flowers
Watch me blossom as I grow;
Bloom until I can't any more

I Am
The storm in the rain
I CLASH! I ROAR!
I can wash away your pain

I Am
The sun, a big ball of flame
I have no doubt that I am not
But I'm the brightest thing in the universe
You are not!

I am the unstoppable
I am the impossible
I am life
I am joy
And most of all, I am Hope!

Bobby Williams is a GED student at West Technical Education Center. His teacher is Mrs. Joykeria McDonald, GED/ABE Instructor.

What the American Dream Means to Me

Yes, You Can

For any foreigner, the American dream is something that must be experienced before leaving this world. The United States is one of the most beautiful and largest countries in the world, with magnificent landscapes, home to all races and cultures.

At first, the American dream was something extraordinary for me. I thought everything was easy. One could become rich in a few years. I also thought that finding a job was simple. But the reality is a little different from the dream. You must come to the United States and live there to really understand.

Today, the American dream for me is to be determined, courageous and resilient. You must study, work hard and never give up. The United States is a country that offers multiple opportunities to those who know how to take advantage of them. Saving money and starting your own business is the best way to achieve financial success and enjoy some economic freedom.

At the beginning it is very difficult to adapt; the language is a major obstacle for those who do not speak English. Life is very expensive in some cities and the unemployment rate is increasing day by day. But anyone who wants to succeed can achieve it because America is the land of opportunity.

Marie Nadia Auguste is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Neither Gods Nor Paradise

When I was a teenager, and television had only just colonized a good part of the globe, I watched American series and movies carefully. In them I saw a very different world from the one around me. It had more class, more luxury, and a certain air of superiority that, more than being real, was a meaning acquired by social speculation in my environment.

When I went to university, I met new people who had the

experience of traveling or had relatives who had traveled to the United States. It seemed they were more interesting than others. Was this because they were a novelty or that they were living a privileged experience that for the majority in my country was impossible?

I learned the term American Dream in a film class. I heard it from a teacher I greatly admired who had a revolutionary and critical air on sociocultural issues. At the end of the semester, I understood that I suffered from a phobia of Americans. This made me very curious. I realized that I associated the term “American Dream” with preconceived ideas of having more study opportunities and a better lifestyle. Perhaps this was due to my family environment where the most important thing was studying, though not in relationship to making money.

Over the years I met people from abroad, including my ex-husband, a former soldier and musician. They gave me tools to understand that we do not continue to be colonized by Gods nor by superior beings, only and simply similar humans with contexts, lifestyles, and different opportunities.

Five years ago, I got the best job I ever had in Colombia, my native country. I was hired to teach in a bilingual school where half of the staff were natives and the other half foreigners. This provided me with the opportunity to experience and contrast social and cultural differences, such as the way of relating emotionally, job performance, attention to details, and management of competitiveness, among others. In the beginning, tiny details could generate some pride in me. When I lived in another world, the United States, I understood that these were misunderstandings. In a world with multiple opportunities, where there is an excess of accessibility to material things and where you even have peace of mind to walk in the street, following some rules and adapting to a comfort zone doesn't sound as bad or as mediocre as it at first seemed to me.

In conclusion, there are people who do not associate America with paradise or a dream with money, nor emigrate to have more. We only understand that it is a term used by many to express their longing to find opportunities.

Martha Castrillon is a student at Adult Literacy League. Her teacher is Robin Schoen.

What is the American Dream?

The American dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born, can attain their own version of success.

So, what does it mean to me? For me it means if you were born poor or homeless, you still have the belief you can succeed in your life. To do it you have to work for it because you can't just sit at home and think you'll become rich. You must work hard for that. Go to school, study, etc. I know you're asking yourself, how am I going to do that? The answer is that this country offers many opportunities to realize your dream. I'm not from a rich family, but since I got to the United States, my life has changed. Everything has changed. I got a job, and I'm making money. I have a goal to buy a car. I feel like my dreams are coming true. That is so cool. I still have many opportunities that I haven't enjoyed yet, but I still have the belief that I will achieve my dreams.

In conclusion, The American dream maintains a core set of beliefs, the right to certain freedoms that enable every individual to pursue a life of success and happiness.

Carl Marvens Dorisca is from Haiti. He is currently a student at Lorenzo Technical College trying to get his GED and eventually become a real estate agent. His teacher is Lisa Wroble.

Lucky to Be in the USA

My name is Telisma Lyvenshly. I am from Haiti, and I just turned twenty-one last week. Now, I live in the United States.

What does the American dream mean to me? We all have dreams. Mine stopped at the age of eighteen when I finished high school and received my diploma. Before, I was anxious about what I wanted to do, I wanted to be an architect, go to a university and study architectural science. Are you wondering what's going on?

Haiti is a country (for those who do not know) that is political-ly unstable and has security issues. We are not immune. I did not have the opportunity to go to university to pursue my education and as a result I lost two years of academic knowledge when in

fact I could have advanced my goals.

To me, the American dream means access to fundamental freedom and social advancement. It is here in America, a land of freedom, where if you want it and you work hard enough you can achieve your goals and even more. It has social status and even the opportunity to become an American citizen. I really think that here I can set my goals and accomplish them. I need to be patient and steadfast.

The most important part of the culture is to be able to speak the English language. One needs to speak it to be understood and to integrate. All things are possible with a little luck and a lot of effort, I believe I will achieve my goals.

Telisma Iyvenshly is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Telisma's teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Tania's American Dream

I was born in Bangladesh and spent the first 28 years in Dhaka and Tangail. Growing up, I dreamed of coming to the United States of America, pursuing my academic goals, and raising a family in a secure, nurturing, and education-focused environment. Despite my parents' limited income, they provided me with everything I needed. As an only child, education represented the gateway to my dreams and all possibilities.

I got married in 2007 after completing my bachelor's degree, and in 2010 my eldest daughter was born. Following this joyous moment, my husband and I moved to the United States to pursue our long-sought aspirations. We relocated to Miami, Florida, in 2012 for his doctoral degree and to chase our American dreams.

Initially, we faced many difficult challenges as we did not have a car and had to stay with unwelcoming people for a month. Later, we rented a place with other students to manage our tight budget. Living on my husband's scholarship money to support a family of three became challenging due to Miami's high cost of living. There were months when affording decent meals was a constant struggle, leading us to rely heavily on credit cards; therefore, accumulating significant debt. In 2017, my husband's

scholarship funding was cancelled, and he had yet to complete his studies so that he could graduate. During the same period, our youngest daughter was born, and sadly my father passed away. Financial constraints prevented me from traveling to Bangladesh to bid farewell to my father. From 2018 to 2021, we survived on the monthly \$960.00 dollars, which my husband was able to earn from a part-time university job. We moved to a living room, renting out two rooms to manage living costs.

The pandemic in 2019 exacerbated our challenges, with my eldest daughter attending online school while sitting on the stairs and my husband working from the car. Despite the hardships, we were able to count on friends and family from whom we borrowed money to cover my husband's tuition so that we could eventually fulfill our American dream.

Fortunately, after more than ten years of struggle, my husband graduated in 2022 and began working as a university researcher. While our life has improved, we still cannot afford luxuries. Nonetheless, we find joy in our children receiving quality education. I am now contemplating my career and higher education. The tough times linger, but they have made me resilient and more determined to achieve my American dream.

Tania Mamun is a proud mother and wife who attends classes at Miami Dade College-Kendall. Her teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

The American Dream is Real

The American dream is real, coming from another country and being able to achieve things that were and are impossible in your country. You arrive in a country where if you put mind to it, you can achieve it. It is the dream for many of us who come to this country in search of a better life.

Adriano Moreno is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

Dream, Grow, Fly

For those who grow up amid shortages, i.e., few toys, candies, parks and with their wings tied, the American dream becomes

the accumulation of all those dreams that were born in childhood and grew over time. You grow up dreaming of flying, swimming, or walking “outside.” You do not know what that represents but you know that your dreams are there, outside that fish tank that you know as the world.

For my five-year-old self, the American dream was Disney. I dreamed of seeing the princesses, being able to talk to them and tell them how they inspired me or walking with Dora and Boots on a new expedition. At age ten, international television arrived, and I dreamed of having roller skates, being able to go to a dance floor on roller skates and then do my homework with my friends in a different environment or put on makeup like the American protagonists of those series that I watched repeatedly. At age 15, the internet, social networks, and photos arrived, and in my socialist world the access to that development was always interrupted; my American dream had already accumulated a decade of desires. At age 18, you just want to understand why your fish tank still does not break and give you the freedoms you deserve and that only your American dream promises. You have spent a long time among ideologies that do not let you fly.

In the small light and in the imposed silence, your American dream drives you, it becomes courage and sacrifice, and you go out in search of it. And today, when I finally have in front of me the free world of 50 stars, I jump for joy and conclude that my American dream is precisely the real opportunity to spread my wings and fulfill the expectations of that 5-year-old girl to go meet princesses while falling in love with the English of her favorite movies. The American dream for me is the joy of smiling fully, learning to know myself, the constant challenge of starting over. For me, the American dream is to be able to have a profession and work with pride and freedom, to be able to give my future children everything that my parents dreamed of giving me, to be able to give my parents the best last years of their lives by fulfilling all that they also owe themselves, to their inner children, and above all the American dream for me is about fulfilling my dreams as well as my life.

Maria Paz is a student from San Luis, Santiago de Cuba who studies in the Adult ESOL Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her professor is Robert K. Kelso.

Freedom of Choice

The American Dream can be seen as the result of individual merit and sacrifice rather than chance. The American Dream promotes the belief in freedom of choice. As a romantic ideal, it gives hope to those who struggle not only with adversity, but with prejudice and exclusion daily. America is a land of limitless opportunity as individuals can achieve whatever their own merit allows.

The American Dream played a significant role in building this nation. Unlike other countries, many people come to America to find opportunities and achieve independence. For them, America is a promised land, a new world where everyone can dream and live their dream.

This notion reflects the ideas, values, and aspirations of the American people. No matter your conviction, your place of birth, or the class in which you were born, you can achieve success because social advancement is possible for everyone.

Djephly Pierre was born in Haiti and is a student at the Advanced ESOL program at Atlantic Technical Center, Ashe Campus. His teacher is Fayne Johnson.

It's Important to Have Dreams and Goals

Recently, I read this statement on a friend's page, "Intelligence without ambition is like a bird without wings". During a brief reflection on that statement, two words came to my mind, "Dream and Goal", which I will discuss in my essay. My main objective is to help you understand the reason it is important for everyone to have a purpose, a goal in life, especially in the USA, based on the theme: "What the American Dream Means to Me."

We all agree on the three fundamental needs of man: to be fed, clothed, and sheltered. At a very young age, I gave myself the mission of satisfying the first fundamental need of man, namely: to feed.

My passion for cooking, particularly Haitian food, makes me a born representative wherever I go, spreading our culture through

my culinary knowledge and experiences. In order to accomplish that, my American dream involves translating my cookbook, “Les secrets de la cuisine Haïtienne” to English and Spanish. My goal is to spread the secrets of our cuisine to all households by filling thousands of shelves with copies. Initially focusing on Florida with mobile restaurants, I plan to prepare and serve good meals there, then expand to franchise opportunities in other states.

However, this beautiful dream can either remain in my imagination or be true depending on my daily choices. I can either sleep and continue dreaming, or get up every morning to improve my English, work diligently, and save for investments. Currently, I am studying to get a bachelor’s degree and seeking information and guidance from people and institutions dedicated to this field. Staying honest, positive, overcoming obstacles, maintaining focus on my goal, and never giving up are all essential elements in this journey, and with the help of the Almighty, I believe I can achieve it.

If one day, I had to choose between having money and a goal or objective, I would choose a goal because a goal, an invention, or an inspiration can generate money, but money doesn’t inspire. America offers the structure and financial opportunities that can turn my dreams into reality. Today I invite you to decide on a goal, a dream. Because if you can dream it, you can do it.

Darlyne Pierre-Louis is an ESOL student at Palm Central Community High School. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

What The American Dream Means To Me

The American Dream holds different meanings for different people, but to me, it embodies the promise of opportunity, success, and personal fulfillment. The pursuit of happiness and the ability to overcome adversity are integral to this dream. Additionally, it represents the idea that hard work and determination can lead to prosperity. These principles have been ingrained in the fabric of American society and have inspired countless individuals to strive for a better future. In this essay, I will delve into the significance of the American Dream in my life and how it has shaped my aspirations and endeavors.

In delving into the development of the American Dream, it's important to acknowledge its historical context. For centuries, the United States has been viewed as a land of promise, attracting immigrants and hopeful citizens with the prospect of creating a better life. The narrative of the American Dream has evolved alongside the nation's history, reflecting social, economic, and cultural changes. From the pioneers seeking new horizons to contemporary individuals pursuing education and career advancement, the concept of the American Dream has always been synonymous with ambition and progress.

Moreover, the American Dream extends beyond material success; it encompasses the pursuit of individual liberty, equality, and self-determination form the cornerstone of this vision. As society continues to evolve, the American Dream has aspirations, including the desire for social justice, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment. This evolving values of a modern, diverse American.

In conclusion, the American Dream encapsulates the enduring belief in self-improvement and the relentless pursuit of one's aspirations. It symbolizes the collective yearning for a better future and the commitment to realizing individual potential. As I reflect on its meaning in my own life, I am reminded of the boundless opportunities that this nation offers and the responsibility to contribute positively to its legacy. The American Dream is not merely a concept; its is a driving force that propels individuals to push beyond limitations and carve their paths toward fulfillment and prosperity.

Marly Reseau is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The American dream is something that I have always dreamed of until I can achieve it. I have only been in this great country for a year, and I have achieved many things that were impossible to achieve while in Cuba, such as being able to travel and see new places. The American dream gives you opportunities. You create goals and those goals are achieved in this wonderful country.

Amanda Ricardo is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

I Am Living the American Dream

My name is Zulma, I am a Largo Library ESOL student. At the age of 21, I was presented with the opportunity to travel to the United States and go to New York. At that time there was no talk of the American dream, at least I hadn't heard of it. Out of curiosity I dared to travel by myself. I didn't know how dangerous it could be for me. At that time, I wanted to work as a seamstress, it is what I was passionate about. That profession was abundant and my curiosity of New York and studying there was important. I did not feel I was in any danger. I had many people that loved me and protected me and gave me the best advice. These were people of all different nationalities. Of course, my idea was to return to Argentina because of how much I missed my friends and family. But my life took a twist. I fell in love with a person of a different nationality. We got married in 1972 after dating for 6 months.

Together we started working to get ahead. Like every couple we managed to achieve our American dream with three children that graduated from College. They got married and each has a wonderful family. I have four grandsons. For me that is truly an American dream without a doubt. The time had come to fulfill my own obligations. I have tried to study English on many occasions. This is the time to continue dreaming to learn English. The reason for not speaking English well in all these years was because I wanted my children to learn and speak Spanish so that they would be able to communicate with their relatives. That was an important achievement for me. At this stage of my life I must thank all my teachers Mrs. Mildred, Mrs. Naki, and Mrs. Jodi from the ESOL school for the many wonderful moments that I have experienced. I must also thank all the people who believed in my dream coming true. Thanks to everyone, and to the United States.

Zulma Rojas is from Argentina. She is now living in Clearwater, Florida and is attending Largo Library ESOL classes. Her teachers are Elaine Angelou, Jodi Durante Ziegler and Mildred Pioli.

A Small Reflection from J. Dewey: The American Dream and Adult Education

For many years, I have heard from different contexts about the famous and world-known phrase of the “American Dream.” I lived in several countries in Latin America and Europe before arriving in the United States, having as a reference that concept that outlines an ideology of thought about freedom and citizen rights in the country that has freedom as its fundamental reference. Beyond that, given the closeness with family and friends, I understood that the “American Dream” is a personal construction that begins with the desire for a better life, which requires work, effort, and permanent development to achieve.

The hope of the average citizen, when he arrives in the United States, is to achieve material wealth and security of life that do not exist in our home countries. This dream has the rule of law as its reference framework, an aspect that represents the difference in achieving what could not be done before. Being clear about this aspect, it is important to say that a fundamental premise for building the great American dream is to culturally integrate into this great nation.

Among the infinity of cultural aspects that imply integration into North American culture, with its variations, derivations, and regional singularities, is the need to use the language. Learning English is essential to being able to enhance the construction of the “American Dream” and to be able to achieve the goals, purposes, and life objectives that we define around that personal or family project.

As an adult, who has had experience in adult training, being a professor at a Latin American university, and with experience in various latitudes of South America and Europe, the English as a Second Language (ESOL) adult training program at Miami Dade College (MDC) represents an initial door to building the “American Dream” with the understanding that it is a way that socially supports immigrant communities to insert themselves in all forms into the country’s fabric, giving us opportunities to achieve certain language skills in an accessible way from an economic, social and cultural perspective, at the same time that it strengthens the great national project represented in the “American Dream.”

John Dewey (1938) was right when he defended the importance of education for democracy and the development of the United States, pointing out: “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

This pedagogical-philosophical premise is essential in MDC’s Adult Education program in the understanding that it is important to train students in language skills through “significant learning experiences” where teachers guide us to achieve fulfillment as free citizens who live in a democracy, who can dream and achieve the construction of a full, quality life, contributing to individual development and enhancing the permanent constitution of the United States as a nation.

Martin Suarez is a Venezuelan lover of reading and writing - both personally and professionally in both hard copy and digital formats. He is a corporate trainer with a European license in employment training and postgraduate studies in pedagogy as well as a content creator in education with experience in university level teaching. Martin is an Adult education student in the online ESOL program of Miami Dade College.

Our Hope for a Better Place

In Nicaragua, I worked in the family business for many years. I studied law and I worked as a judge for 25 years. In the beginning, my job was remarkably interesting, and I felt comfortable, but everything changed in the last few years. As a result, I decided to move to the United States with my daughter to look for a better future for us both.

Once we were here in the United States - although it has not been easy - our lives changed for the better. We love living in this country because we have so many more opportunities to improve our future.

I have many goals because I am an ambitious woman. One of my first goals is to learn English very well. Why? Well, if I learn English very well, I will have more job opportunities and I am sure I will find an excellent job. Once I have my dream job, I will save enough money to buy my dream house where my daughter and I will live and enjoy the benefits of living in this beautiful country.

Maria Concepcion Ugarte Barillas is a student from Nicaragua and enrolled in the ESOL Program at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert K. Kelso.

The American Dream for Me

The American dream is a dream that comes true, which includes freedom, stability, and a good life. You can achieve the American dream if you want to.

When we arrived in this country, we were dazzled by its greatness, comfort, and ease of acquiring things. But it's not just about arriving and thinking that everything comes true, like in your dreams. It's not just about looking for a job, and that's it. Not only do you have to put in all the effort, hard work, and sacrifice, but you also need to always focus on your goals all the time and stay within your path to achieve those goals. It is essential to focus.

We need to educate ourselves, work, and fight, and then look for a goal that we want so much to achieve. We want a good, healthy, and comfortable life, and provide stability for our family. Many times, in my country, having a good, healthy, and comfortable life is not possible.

Enjoying life and providing for my family is the American dream for me. It's not easy, but it can be achieved.

Maria Zarur is an advanced ESOL student at OTC East Campus, Orlando, FL. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Original Fiction

Mufasa

The sound was just too loud. I could hardly stand it. The lack of light and intense smell of sewage did not help, either. What was I doing there?

Everything started two months ago. I will never forgive my mom for leaving me behind. They left for work every day, but usually they came back by sunset. That day was different. My mom was picked up by a large van and took a huge bag with her. I always looked at her when she left... That day she kind of looked back at the house with a sad face... At sunset nobody came back. That night was very long, but I was just too tired and finally fell asleep.

The next day was even worse. I couldn't find anybody. Where were my siblings? And then I heard strange voices in the living room. I looked down from the stairway and couldn't believe what my eyes saw... Squatters in our home! I had to decide what to do, and fast. So, I hid. The attic was the perfect spot.

That night, when I didn't hear any noise, I went to the kitchen to look for food. Fortunately, there was always something left behind. The squatters were really stupid. It kind of appeared that they left the food behind on purpose, and I also knew they were always looking for me. They obviously wanted to expel me and have the house for themselves.

This became almost a routine for the next two months. During the day, I hid and kept silent in the attic. At night, I made my raids to our kitchen to get some food and try to find out what was going on. Time passed and I was getting more and more depressed. Perhaps they just forgot about me. But my mom, too? No, that couldn't be true.

On one of those night raids, I found a pleasant surprise. On the kitchen isle there was a yummy filet tartar. We used to eat it only on very special occasions. It wasn't as good as the ones my mom prepared for me, and it did have a funny smell, but I was so hungry. I started to feel tired and with an unstoppable desire

to sleep... When I woke up, I was trapped in some sort of a cage. Everything was shaking like an earthquake.

The noise finally went away. It was still dark, but I could breathe fresh air. That was really relieving. I still couldn't figure out what was going on. I felt so dizzy... and suddenly, like by miracle, I heard her voice. Her unmistakable voice. My mom was there somewhere!!! There was finally light and my mom opened the gate and took me out of the cage. She hugged me and I purred with satisfaction. My mom and I were finally reunited.

Ramiro is a journalist and ESOL student at Miami-Dade College, Kendall Campus and is taught by Carmen Whu. He is from Santiago Chile and a father of 3.

A Dog Is a Man's Best Friend

A couple of years after begging for a larger dog than the 4-pound Chihuahuas I have always grown up around, my uncle was visiting one day and asked me if I wanted a dog. I quickly changed views while looking over to my mom for approval, and with her head nodding yes, I got my answer. My uncle told me to get into the car because we had to go pick her up and me still not knowing what I was walking into. After a very long car ride, we got there. We walked into this random man's house. The long-haired man told me that his neighbors had left their husky chained up inside their house after moving out. He then handed me a dog wrapped in a blanket that was shaky, skinny to the bone, no lighter than 10 pounds, a blue-eyed dog.

After that, the car ride was kind of a blur because of how surprised I was by her condition. It was the roughest four months of my life trying to get her to be able to eat and drink water without being scared of me. Then taking another full year to be even able to get her to come towards me on her own. I am not going to lie, I have always felt lonely even with her there, always feeling like I was missing something.

After the two-year mark on a random Saturday while I was just watching a movie, she walked towards me without me noticing it and plopped onto my lap and just laid on me with her head on my chest. I am not an emotional guy, but for the first time in

months I broke down and cried for hours. She still was laying by my side, even giving me a couple kisses. From that day on and going forward, I never felt alone again. I never felt the missing connection that I had been searching for. All it took was this now almost 40-pound dog to be by my side. She is and will always be my true best friend because not only did I rescue her on that day, but because she rescued me by the end.

Alex Martell is a GED student at Suncoast Technical College in Sarasota, Florida. His teacher is Ricardo Bellón.

Why Voting Is Important to Me?

Why Voting is Important to Me

Voting is the first and simplest mode of action in democracy. Using your right to vote represents a way of exercising your citizenship.

Voting is a right, it is a citizen act which allows you to choose your representatives during an election. Within a democracy, this fundamental right which gives me the right to choose my representative, the one in whom I have a little confidence to represent me in the elections.

When I vote I give my representative the power to exercise what I myself cannot do. For example vote for laws for the smooth running of the country, for better living conditions, to strengthen social security and to better sell the country on a global scale.

Samuel E. Charles is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Strategist

I have yet to gain experience with voting. I have not had the chance to vote. My reason for voting is to see changes in my community. Given the opportunity to vote, I would like to see changes and the impacts in my community.

My interests lie in making changes to the environment as it relates to agriculture (food) and public safety. Even though I am familiar with the potential candidates, I would vote Republican.

My way of thinking about voting is a “strategist voter.” I will use my way, my ability to understand the significance of events without being influenced by current opinions, changing attitudes, or prejudices. Also, my ability to make decisions quickly and take action without being deterred by a perceived danger makes me a strategist voter.

TeMauri Church is a student at Family Support Services Network, Inc. Temauri’s teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

If You Care, Vote!

As a US citizen, one of the social obligations in our lives is voting. That is casting a vote for an election of a new president, or politician, amendments to a bill, and so on. I consider voting as one of the most important actions in a civilized society. By casting a vote, everyone can express their will and position.

For me, as a modern woman, freedom of expression of my thoughts is vital because my ancestors lived in a patriarchal society, where women had minimal rights with maximum responsibilities. I support traditional values, but I want to speak in general about a society where everyone has a voice. And every time people don't believe in voting or say that they do not care about what is happening around them, or it is not their sphere, I am indignant. I don't agree with it.

Everyone's voice is a brick in building a bright future for every person and citizen. If society is indifferent to the environment, and to its future, what will it give to the younger generation? It will bring a world where chaos reigns. We must remember that when voting for the guarantor of the security of society, for each citizen individually, and for this or that law, we must understand how it will affect us. Of course, society is always divided into those who agree and disagree. This is precisely why elections are good. A conscious society will always make the most correct choice.

Even during the times of the Roman Empire, voting was popular. So, why should our modern, highly intelligent society refuse to vote? Every time I go to vote and sign the ballot, I am happy to be part of that I "have" a voice and that my choices will be part of the future. Through choice, we can have our continuation in the future. I hope this future generation will be grateful to the current one. This is why voting is so important to me. If we vote, we care about our lives and our future.

Akmara Galimzhanova is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Being a Good Citizen

Being part of a society provides many different values and benefits. It gives us a feeling of love and belonging. Our vote voice is important. When we vote we task elected representatives to govern the important issues pertaining to biological needs, safety needs, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Voting is important because without it, citizens will not be able to choose the people who run their government. It gives us a feeling of responsibility and recognition. If we do not vote, we are failing to execute and carry out our civic commitment and responsibility.

Throughout history different groups were prevented from taking part in the voting process, especially women, black Africans, different races, and immigrants, who could not vote until they got their citizenship. Still most countries do not have real voting because most presidents stay running their government for many years or until they die. Unfortunately, their sons will then be in charge. Voting is considered important because it is our responsibility to elect people who are right to represent us in the government.

As good citizens we have responsibilities, duties, and obligations to obey the laws. Everyone must follow the rule of law, and nobody is above the law. It is our responsibility to pay taxes and be fully involved in serving and improving our society and community. In order to help ourselves and help others, we need to practice what we preach and set good examples and good standards such as being honest and trustworthy, respecting the rights and properties of others, and volunteering by being active and providing free advice and assistance.

Voting is important because it will secure peace, prevent aggression and dictators, expand markets, improve economic development, and improve the global environment.

Ibrahim Hamedallah participates in the Conversation Club with Literacy Services of Indian River County and has an individual tutor. He recently became a U. S. Citizen.

Get Out and Vote

Voting is very important for me because it helps me decide what is best for me and my community with liberty. I am originally from Burma, also known as Myanmar. I voted twice in my native city, Mandalay, in 2011 and 2015.

Myanmar declared independence from British colonial rule on January 4, 1948, after a long fight championed by General Aung San, the later father of Aung San Suu Kyi. After Myanmar's independence, General Aung San was killed by the Myanmar military who took over the government and declared democracy. The country's history was checkered by unrest and conflict. In 1962, General Nay Win took over and declared the government to Socialism, under a military dictator. The people did not like socialism, so they launched a coup in 1988. In 2011 and 2015 I voted. I came to America in 2018. In 2021 the military cracked down on protests. People lost hope and faith in the political system. They no longer believed in political parties because they thought it was kind of a fraud.

Voting gives us the potential to understand and cooperate with everyone even if they have different ideologies. This is one reason why voting is important to me. Everyone must vote because if you do not vote, the result may not be what you were hoping for, because every vote counts and that is how change occurs.

The word "privilege" is very important. It is not only the right of US citizens to vote, but it is also a privilege. It is a privilege because, first, not everybody can vote but only citizens of the United States can vote. Second, it is a privilege because US elections are a prime example of a fair, honest, and transparent election process. As with any process, if we do not participate in it, then the process becomes unnecessary, corrupted, or misused. My vote is my voice, my life, and my future democracy.

In the "LADY" documentary movie, Aung San Suu Kyi wrote down something on a piece of paper. When she finished, she looked up and saw that her soldier guard had seen her writing. When he looked away, she approached him and showed him what she had written. It said, "You may not think about politics, but politics thinks about you." My father told me the same words before he died. Something for all of us to think about.

Winn Winn Htun is an ESOL student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Voting: The Duty of Every Citizen

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference...” And this right is inalienable.

After years of several people being relegated to a position where the right to choose and to express their opinion was denied to them, today, every citizen has the opportunity to make their opinion heard thanks to the right to vote. But many people neglect this right, which is also a duty. And yet, voting is an important activity that no one should neglect. In the following lines, I will explain why, in my opinion, voting is important.

First, voting is a responsibility. It is the duty of a citizen to participate in the adoption of political decisions that will have an impact on his life and that of his fellow citizens. Voting allows the voter to choose the leader who inspires confidence in them and who has a policy that appeals to them.

Next, voting also allows you to express your choice and not give others the opportunity to choose for you. It is a way of perpetuating democracy and “power to the people”. If the people are offered power on a platter and refuse to seize it, it leaves others with power that rightfully belonged to them. Then, what is the point of having a democracy?

Finally, the right to vote not only boils down to the legitimate right to choose one’s leaders, but sometimes includes the right to choose certain laws and principles that will govern the lives of citizens. I consider that it is completely required for each citizen to make their opinion heard through voting to facilitate leaders in making good decisions.

Democracy is the result of hard work, however, today still, many people refuse to vote. Some claim that their vote will not be taken into account in any case while others emphasize that they are not convinced by any candidate. If this last excuse were true,

we should not forget that the blank vote exists. As for the first excuse, if there is reason to say it, it is because there is no point in talking about democracy and, therefore, the people in question have their work cut out for them.

Bergie Depta Christie Leger is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

Why Voting Is Important To Me

Voting is important to me because rights are legal or moral entitlements that individuals possess. They are the privileges or freedoms that people have, which are protected by law rights to ensure that individuals are treated fairly and can live their lives freely and without discrimination.

An example of individual rights is the right to freedom of speech. This means that individuals have the right to express their thoughts, opinions, and ideas without fear of censorship or punishment. It allows people to speak up, share their perspectives, and participate in public discourse. Voting is important for several reasons. First, it is a fundamental right and a way for individuals to have a say in the decision-making processes of their country or community. By voting, people can help shape the future and influence the policies and laws that affect their lives. Additionally, voting is a way to ensure representation and inclusivity. It allows citizens to elect officials who they believe will best represent their interests and values. Through voting, individuals have the power to choose leaders who will work towards the betterment of society.

Furthermore, voting promotes accountability when citizens participate in elections. They hold their elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions. This helps maintain a system of checks and balances and prevents the abuse of power. Voting is a right that everyone has as long as you are old enough to vote. According to the law, you have the capacity to have an electoral card to vote in the election, it is always good as a citizen to vote, and to choose our agreement.

In conclusion, rights are important because they protect individual's freedoms and ensure fair treatment. Voting is important

because it allows individuals to exercise their rights, have a voice in decision-making, promote representation, and hold leaders.

Lovely Louidor is a student at Collier County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito Rivas.

The Power of a Citizen

The majority of democratic countries have stipulated voting as a constitutional right. That right is, in my opinion, the simplest way to choose our representatives, for all positions that the authorities require to be elected by vote. When I vote, I not only choose an authority, I also indirectly participate in the decision-making process of the country, my state, and my county. Another great importance of voting is that it allows the alternation of authorities in power or positions of popular representation. This alternation is a fundamental principle and constitutes the essence of democracy. In other words, it prevents the continuity of the same people in positions of popular representation. That is what is called the power of the vote, it means, on the one hand to elect, but on the other, to dismiss. Fundamentally, exercising the right to vote implies a citizen duty, with my country and with society.

It is very likely that for the presidential elections this November 2024, I will be able to vote in the USA for the first time. Voting is important for me, because I will be able to help direct federal money to the State of Florida and thereby decide how to use my taxes and improve health services.

Today voting is undertaken and accepted as a legal right, but it is definitively a human right, too. It is very important because voting is an elemental political right. If voting is eliminated or restricted, not only a right is violated, but also the human rights of the person are also affected. If this happened for any reason, democracy would not exist, and a dictatorship would be established. Nowadays very few countries do not use voting to elect their representatives and these countries are considered non-democratic countries.

According to the United States Constitution, voting is a right and a privilege. Although many constitutional amendments have

been passed since the first election, none requires American citizens to vote. In the United States, nobody is required by law to vote in presidential, state, or local elections. You can vote in USA elections if you are a US citizen and if you are 18 years old or will be 18 years old on Election Day. Non-citizens, including permanent residents with a green card cannot vote in the United States.

I recommend that every citizen exercise their right to vote, it is a way to express themselves and give their opinion. Voting is important for me because it constitutes a valuable instrument to elect and represent the power of the people in each country. Voting avoids the continuation of authority of the same individual which has frequently been the terminus of democratic governments.

Carlos Murga was born in Venezuela where he was a lawyer by profession. He participates in the Conversation Club with Literacy Services of Indian River County and also has an individual tutor. His teacher is Michael Godown.

Why Voting is Important to Me

Vote! Vote! Vote! Yes, that's what everyone wants you to do nowadays. Why? Well, voting is super important now more than ever! As an immigrant, voting is really important for me and my family. It was definitely a challenging experience coming to the United States. I came to the U.S. on July 21st, 2006 by boat pregnant with my second child and during the whole time, I was just thinking about how my life could be better once I arrived in America. Such a wonderful and surreal moment for me.

My second child is almost 18 and I encourage her to vote as soon as she turns of age. She thinks it's funny when I tell her, my daughter is a U.S. citizen and doesn't realize the privilege she has every day. I wanted to come to America not for me but for my kids and to give them a better life than mine ever was.

In addition, voting is a very crucial thing to do and everybody should if eligible of course. Voting as someone who was not born in the U.S. is such a huge thing for me and other immigrants. Voting can open new opportunities for you, especially voting for someone you think has the power to change people like you.

When voting you try to look at what that person has done for the world or done for people like you. People that tend to share the same characteristics that you have, you try to look for them and that's okay. You look for the reason why they want to do this and then you vote.

Voting was not always a right to everyone equally, so voting when eligible is important. Don't vote because you have to, vote because you feel like it's truly good. Vote for you and only you. Without voting, citizens would not be able to choose the people who will run their government. Those who don't carry out voting when they can are failing to carry out a civic responsibility.

As a black Haitian American woman, voting wasn't always a right to me and many others. According to the Library of Congress, "Many African Americans who attempted to vote were also threatened physically or feared losing their jobs. One of the major goals of the Civil Rights Movement was to register voters across the South in order for African Americans to gain political power." This indicates that people of color who tried to vote were harassed and beaten, and the civil rights movement has resolved this issue in so many years ever since 1954.

To conclude, on why I believe voting is important, having the ability to change so many wrong things in America, with just one step is so crazy to me! Like yes, I have that ability and so do you - just vote. Why wouldn't you want things to be better in a country you currently reside in? Exactly! It's just a fact that voting rights are human rights. Remember this year is an election year, save the date. Having even just a little power such as voting means the world to me and other immigrants. Barack Obama once said, "There's no such thing as a vote that doesn't matter."

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

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