

A person stands on a beach at sunset, their arms outstretched in a gesture of freedom or inspiration. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow across the sky and reflecting in the shallow water. The person's silhouette is reflected in the water below. The overall mood is serene and uplifting.

# LIVE INSPIRED

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

# Live Inspired

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

## Adult Education Is A Precious Gift

I had never heard the term “adult education” before moving to the United States. I just thought it was an English learning center for adults. You pay for what you learn. That is all. But after a few months at Clearview Adult Education Center (CVAEC), I realized that I was wrong. It is more than a class. It’s a small family with many members you have never met before.

After a month of arriving in America, I registered for an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class at CVAEC. The first reason I chose this class was the low price. Only \$45 for 6 months. I cannot imagine how they can maintain the classes with this tuition. Furthermore, they have 4-5 classes/week. It is really amazing. In my country, a developing country, you can spend at least \$30 a month with only 2 classes per week if you want to study English with native speakers. Some centers can even cost \$200 a month.

The quality and environment of the school are the most important things that make me feel love for this school. Teachers are always kind to us. I think they try their best to understand every student in the class because we are English learners with many different accents. They share their knowledge about life and the history of this country—America. It really means so much to me and other immigrants because we have limited information about the country where we live right now. Moreover, I have classmates from many different countries. I have a new “grandmother” from Poland. I really respect her when she can arrange her job and come to class at her age. I also have a “father” from Thailand. And the aunts, uncle, brothers and sisters are from Peru, Columbia, Venezuela, and Brazil.

I have learned about new countries and cultures from them. They have also shared a lot of knowledge and real experiences from the time when they came to America. They are always willing to give valuable advice when I am concerned about something. It’s really hard to find this kind of honest advice from other people who are not my relatives. I especially admire the

way every teacher and employee at the center treats students. They do not care who you are, how old you are, or where you are from. They always respect every person and encourage you in your learning path.

In my opinion, adult education is really a perfect place to start for adult immigrants. You will receive more than a normal class, I promise.

*Son Le is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Son's teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

## **My English Studies**

I am writing about one of my experiences when I arrived in the United States. I was nervous and excited for the opportunity we have to live in this great country. This moment for my family and me changed our lives for better. I knew the first objective would be to learn English—that was needed to communicate in an effective form with other people and so I can find a better job. A few years ago, I had studied English in my country but did not finish the course, although I had the time to do it. A couple of days after starting the job, I started looking for information about an English class near my house. I found the East Area Adult School.

I went to the school and discovered really helpful information about how I can enroll in the ESOL program. The attention was excellent and the workers in the school were kind and amicable.

Since I'm studying in this program, it has not been easy for me to learn English because I don't have enough time to read and practice. Nevertheless, I know that when you want something, you just have to be constant and keep going until you achieve the goal. In the East Area Adult School, I have had some excellent teachers who have dedicated their time to teach me.

Thanks to the school, teachers and the ESOL program, I have improved my knowledge and vocabulary and my goal of learning English is closer.

*Edwin Rivas is a student taught by Lori Cabrera at the East Area Adult School in Polk County.*

## **My Experience in Adult Learning**

I did not suspect that I would not only attend school at 62 but also enjoy it. In Poland, I was a teacher for many years myself. I came to the USA for the first time in 1996 for the holidays to visit my mom, and I only knew a few words in English. I realized then how important and useful it is to know English. I had to communicate with doctors in the hospital when my mom had an operation.

I came again in 2016, this time planning to stay for longer. I needed to start learning English as soon as possible. At first, I was studying alone, by watching TV and online. After a year, my mom, who used to go to English school herself, suggested that I attend proper lessons to improve my English. This is how the adventure began. I was worried and afraid whether I'll be able to handle the lessons as there was no one who spoke Polish, and I always thought that English was a hard language to learn. I remember the first lesson and how friendly and welcoming the teacher was; how he tried really hard to make me feel "at home", assisting with the material and practice exercises.

And this continues to this day. The teachers are always trying their best so the students understand, so that they would learn better. They're also creating a friendly atmosphere. The teachers use innovative methods, chose interesting study books and materials and they are always prepared for the lessons. Over time I have had a few different teachers, some of them, such as Inguna and Silvia have become my friends until this day. All the teachers, such as Jacob, Adriana, shared their life stories with the students, teaching us not just English, but also about life in the USA itself – the customs, the traditions, the culture. I'd have never known that much about the USA if it wasn't for my English school. Because of my teachers' efforts, I was given a chance to understand the English language, be able to read in English, whether it's a newspaper or a book, be able to write in a language that seemed like such "black magic" to me only few years ago.

The school also gave me a chance to meet people from all over the world – all different and “colorful” both physically and personality-wise. Whenever we talk, I feel like I’m on a journey to a different country. Together with my fellow students we have thrown quite a few “get togethers”/parties, where each of us “presented” our own culture by bringing traditional dishes for everyone to try. We played music from different countries, played games. I’ve met many people who I can proudly call my friends to this day. These friendships have made my life richer, opened my eyes and gave me an insight into a wider world, to understand it better. I believe that when you study as an adult you, you make a conscious effort to absorb as much as possible, not just the curriculum, but also everything else that you experience in school. The school is paid for by the American government, which means is accessible for all. I truly do love my school, and I say this anyone I talk to.

*Urszula Brzeska Boguszezewska is a student taught by Inguna Ozols at the Clearview Adult Education Center.*

## **First Steps**

I want to tell you about my experience in adult education. I got to meet amazing people at the East Area Adult School. When I talk with them, they give me good advice and give me good instruction. I have an excellent teacher. Mr. Barnie teaches very well and explains words in a clear way I can understand. I feel that before I didn’t know how to speak the language and now thanks to adult education and my teacher, I can understand and speak English well. I have a desire to speak the language better and I will work hard for that.

I lived with my family in Haiti. My favorite subjects at school were math and accounting as they were easy for me to do. I studied accounting and computer science at university. Unfortunately, I didn’t find a job in the Administration Science field.

I came to the USA to improve my education. My cousin told me and my sister about East Area Adult School and we accompanied her to school. I like this school because it has good teachers and I have had a good experience here. I’d like to continue with

my studies and do a master's degree so that I can work as a computer scientist or an accountant.

In conclusion, I want to go to college and I need a GED to do so. My first step is to graduate from Mr. Barnie's class and to pass the ESOL test.

*Herline Corrolien is an ESOL student in Mr. Barnie's class at the East Area Adult School in Auburndale, Florida. She wants to go to university in the USA to continue studying accounting and to study professional ethics and communication.*

### **Adult Education is a Wonderful Experience**

My experience in Adult Education has been very good. I feel like a baby who has started to walk and using new toys to play with. The skills that I have learned are better than toys, they are the tools to build my future. Even when I was exposed to English for many years, I was unable to put together the vocabulary needed to be successful.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I tried to register for ESOL classes but it was complicated with the need for technology. A coworker told me that the classes went back face to face, and I was delighted. I decided to register, it was my best decision!

When I attend class, I get excited with everything new I learn. Now I can understand and participate in meaningful conversations. Also, I can read and write numbers. I am writing this essay! Now, when I try to speak English at work, I can see new and bigger opportunities. I have been in class for two months! Everything that I hear is making sense, and I feel that I am ready to move forward.

With this experience of learning English, I can open new doors of opportunities in this country. Studying is the best way to make our dreams a reality.

*Serafin Vazquez is a student taught by Larid Lopez at South Florida State College.*

## **My Experience in Adult Education**

The year of 2020 was difficult for all of the people from around the world, but it's also a chance for some people to rebuild confidence to chase their dreams or get their goals. For me it was an urgent time to begin Adult Education in learning and improving my English as I had planned at the end of the year 2019.

As an adult student, I knew that both negative and positive educational experiences exist. The most challenges are time management and self-discipline, because an adult student is beyond supervision of parents and teachers. By contrast, I had the responsibility to manage my time to have classes, to do assignments, and to balance the other things in my daily life. Besides, I have clear goals to study, so that I could build knowledge structure quickly, then persist in learning details. Fortunately, I met three teachers with divers methods of teaching in classroom and online.

At beginning of the year, I met Mr. Howard in the classroom at a local school in adult education program; he is more focused on teaching pronunciation and daily expression. Precisely, my goal is to speak English like a native speaker. After practicing a lot, I found that my pronunciation was improving gradually, and my listening was getting better together. Everything was good for learning in the classroom, except I had to spend time driving to school.

However, beyond human's expectation the coronavirus pandemic outbroke, I had to switch classroom learning to virtual study with Ms. Strohmayr and Mr. Desir in March. Compared with the classroom learning in school, from my point of view, studying online is more flexible, saved the time on the way. So, there's more time to do homework and review the knowledge that I'd learned. Furthermore, I could see, some of my classmates were able to learn English during work break; some of them were having English class, meanwhile, they were taking care of their family.

Ms. Strohmayr is such a best teacher, in her classes, she always helps students build confidence, and encourages students to talk with each other frequently. Simultaneously, she provided

many readings and learning materials for students to practice in and out of classes. After a while, I felt more confidence for speaking English, and my oral English was more fluent than before. Additionally, I learned more American culture in her classes, which helped me build good background knowledge for studying English further.

At the same time, My English grammar was consolidated in Mr. Desir's classes with many exercises which he prepared for students.

All in all, that was a pleasant and cherish experience in my life. And I quite appreciate my teachers and the opportunity of the adult education program. I sincerely want to tell adult students, "You're never too old to learn."

*Longfeng Yang is a student taught by Whitney Strohmayer in the Collier Adult Education program.*

## **The Long Road**

I remember flying to Miami and thinking about everything I left behind – my mother, my veterinary practice, friends, everything I knew and felt safe with... maybe it was a panic attack but when I looked at my daughter, I knew why I was doing it – for myself and her. My husband drove to Miami to pick us up and I am sure he was already at the airport. Everyone on the plane got a bit excited when the pilot announced the weather, but I had no idea what they were saying! Another panic attack... I didn't know the language; I couldn't put one sentence together... Vicky was pretty fluent already, but me? After Christmas we all made a decision that we need to go back to school. Back to school?! We looked at what's out there and signed up for English classes. Thankfully I had my daughter with me, so it was a bit less scary now. Being in the classroom with other students who all came from different countries made me feel much better. As the days and weeks passed, I made friends in the classroom, I spoke English, well, I attempted to speak, and even if it was difficult, I wanted to go back the next day. The teacher was very understanding, and we all had fun learning.

Sometime later Vicky decided that she needs to go and work on her High school diploma and went to a different school, but I didn't panic not having her with me in the classroom. The progress was slow but a progress none the less. When there was an opening at Vicky's school I quickly signed up and here we were again – mother and daughter going to school.

Here, at Clearview, things were a little different and expectations were higher but so were mine, of myself of course. Again, wonderful staff and support.

I knew there is a long road ahead of me but the feeling of being accepted and knowing the teachers care and want me to succeed is just awesome. So this is my thank you to all of them: thank you for being there for me and every other student who left something behind and is here to build something new.

P.S. My special thanks go to Mark Nickless, Cathleen Clark, and Inguna Ozols.

*Adrianna Dambek Machel is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

## **Learning with LCUP During COVID**

I arrived in the United States in July 2014, but a couple things kept me from interacting with others, even my neighbors. My shyness and lack of confidence in my English discouraged me from speaking to Americans.

Due to COVID-19, I chose to self-quarantine, which limited my social life in Florida. I avoided going to the malls, the shopping centers, the grocery stores, and the library. However, I wanted to keep improving my verbal and written skills. Therefore, I participated in the conversation meetings offered through LCUP online, almost daily, which helped me to create virtual relationships with emigrants who are also learning English.

These afternoon classes have been moderated by American volunteers who, by their huge patience, understanding and different professional life experiences, have invested all their knowledge in teaching us the English language in order to make

it easy for us, the emigrants, to become accustomed to the American society. In addition, no words could describe our gratitude toward our instructors' efforts, creating an interesting and fun virtual gathering in order to achieve the different skills of understanding, speaking and writing like an American.

In conclusion, as a new U.S. citizen, working hard on my English language in these classes helped me to feel at home, especially during these pandemic days when traveling becomes more difficult.

*Maha El-Daif Frangie is a student taught by Geoffrey Boberg and Brandie Cox at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. She is originally from Lebanon, has a degree in French Literature, and speaks French, Arabic, and now English.*

### **Hope is Life!**

It is better to be alive and regain a little place underneath the sun than to own the whole world and die before even getting a taste of it. My family came to the United States one year ago following a serious security problem which we faced in our country. We decided to run away to save our lives.

The challenge was hard for my husband and me because we had reached a good standing lifestyle in our home country. We left all that behind us without knowing what was going to happen.

In a short time, we found a cousin who offered us her unconditional support for our accommodation and our children's schooling. We are thankful to her whole family for this blessed action. However, we considered her help as a first step in a long adventure which includes the learning of the English language.

Fortunately, my husband learned via the internet about the Adult Education Center (AEC) and enrolled immediately. He was amazed by the staff and the learning quality. He urged me to register at this school, which I did months ago. This place is definitively the foundation of my adventure in the U.S.!

At the AEC, staff and teachers are well prepared, and the courses are personalized as well as based on students' specific weaknesses. Teachers use interactive and innovative ways to create a fun teaching atmosphere in their classroom. They are organized and responsible, so they fill their schedule with many methodical and valuable lessons, more than you and I could imagine! Subsequently, they lead us through many amazing resources to practice what we have learnt. Students wouldn't like to miss a class, for every second is full of rich learning. My teacher even manages online resources with topics we are studying to ensure that we catch everything. She keeps our eyes on news and actualities which feeds our lexis and increases our thinking skill. My husband thinks the same thing about the AEC and about his teacher too.

Indeed, adults could feel lost when they move to a new country. It is more difficult for them to learn a new language, understand the new culture, deal with a new lifestyle and anything they naturally do not master. The Adult Education Center offers a formal and effective education frame to lead an immigrant who just arrived in this country. In other words, they can discover the basics of American life, such as the language, traditions and culture, educational system, and employment.

My attendance at the Adult Education Center helps me to feel that I have found what I exactly expected to achieve the American dream.

*Junie Phanord is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Learning English**

It is important that people know other languages; in my case it would be English, and I know how indispensable it is in the early stage of our lives. Studying and learning any language other than the native one stimulates the brain's creativity and mental ability. It also helps us be more immersed in other cultures and understand more things.

My life changed when I first settled in this country, and I now understand the need to have learned the language before coming here. I came to this country because my American husband, who was working in my country, had to return. So for the family, we made the decision to return together.

More knowledge of the language would have helped me be able to participate more in everything related to my daughter's education. If I already possessed the ability to speak, understand and write the language correctly, it would help me more quickly. I would have higher education and therefore multiple job opportunities and better interaction with other people. It would have made my life a lot easier than it was when I first came here.

When people are older it is more difficult to learn something new because we are slower to learn due to fatigue and other reasons; we feel frustrated and bored. This is why I believe that we must encourage our children to learn a second language, and other things will bring them great experiences and advantages in their lives later.

*Luz Chica is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Never Stop Learning!**

When you think of learning, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? I think of studies! Not only through them can we learn, but each person is born with different traits, so for each trait there are different styles. There are seven learning styles: Aural, Verbal, Physical, Logical, Social, and Solitary.

While it is true that we receive information in different ways, to learn every day, I believe that we must maintain an important virtue such as humility. This allows us to understand that we do not know everything, that there are several points of view about the same subject and that we can learn from anyone regardless of their profession, age, race, etc.

I think that people who like to learn never stop dreaming. There is always something new and different. What would you

like to learn someday--dancing, singing, cooking, studying? What are you waiting for? Go do it!

*Yohani Leal Bolivar is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **Better Late Than Never**

My experience in adult education is learning English. In my country, there are many English classes. When I was a little girl, I didn't give much importance to studying. I just came to play with my friends in the class. I hadn't a brain for class. Now I like to participate in school activities. Let me share something.

I remember when I prepared to come to the United States. I didn't speak any English. When I arrived to the Miami International Airport, I needed to use the bathroom. I asked someone where it was but she didn't understand me because I spoke Creole. I saw another Haitian person and she showed me where it was.

Then when my husband came to pick me up, I explained the problem. He told me, you should go to school to learn. He gave me the books to read, a CD to listen to English. I decided to go to school. I asked my friend, "I need to go to school, where can I go?" She told me, "Come to Village Readers. It has many teachers who teach good."

I went to Village Readers, I learned a lot of English. After two years, I stopped to go, because I was pregnant, I got a baby girl. I stayed home to take care of my baby. After two years, I came back to go to school.

At the school, the teacher invited specialists of different branches to make presentations about health care, family education, sports, social security, and taxes. My teacher was very patient with our classes. She was really, really good; she explained very good. I read vocabulary, conversation, and grammar. Now I understand much better everywhere, when people talk.

In conclusion: My experience in adult education is wonderful, great. I found the perfect school to learn English at Village Readers.

*Marie M. Ambroise is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **No Regrets**

The topic I chose to write about is my experience in adult education. I go to Village Readers to learn English. That has been a lovely journey for me.

Firstly, I understand a lot more. I learned so much from my program: how to better communicate with people, and how to do different things as a class. The opportunity to get to go to Village Readers is amazing. I love it so much.

Secondly, I am more confident. Adult education for me dramatically changed a lot over the years. I can truly say that my teacher, Ms. Siena, has seen a lot of improvement in me. It makes me inspired. I don't get discouraged like I used to. Ms. Siena and my peers honestly make me happier for the effort I put into this program.

Thirdly, it gives me more experience. I have been a Village Reader for quite some time now, and I can definitely say that this program is really helpful. I started a few years ago and I don't regret it. This program not only teaches me about educational things but also things about life, which is such a great thing for a lot of people who are struggling through these hard times.

To summarize, English class made me understand more, feel confident, and introduced me to new experiences. Adult education has been really helpful and useful. It has provided many benefits in my life.

*Rosita Vancol is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **I Was Mute, But Now I Speak!**

My name is Zamira, I'm from Uzbekistan and I have lived in Orlando, Florida for the last three years and also, I'm a student in the ESOL classes for the last 2.5 years.

I appreciate everyone who has organized and doing their best for us – for the students who need to learn English from ESOL classes. I'm one of them. When I came to my first class it was as if I was deaf and mute... Even though I had enough base vocabulary at the time (or so I thought), I couldn't use it and my ESOL teacher and classmates helped me. Step by step, little by little I began to talk and introduce myself to my classmates and I made a lot of friends from different countries. At the same time we were learning English and learning about other countries. It's very interesting, everything we are doing in ESOL classes, and it motivates us. We like, we want and we need ESOL classes more and more! Also, during these quarantine days, we continue our ESOL classes online to keep us learning while safe at home.

My regards to the organization and everyone who has helped continue this service for the community.

*Zamira Saitmuradova is a student taught by Keyla Abreu at Union Park Neighborhood Center for Families.*

## **Learning Like a Baby**

When I was 35 years old, I never thought I would need to take all my knowledge, thoughts, and prejudices and put them in my pocket to start from zero to learn a new language, in this case English. Many people think that by living in another country you will learn the new native language automatically, but I can say that you just learn it if you are dedicated to doing it.

Thanks to YouTube, Google Translator, free English apps, and also all the teachers I have worked with, today, I can speak the language, and I have started to study grammar and write. The path to learning a new language isn't easy if you want to express your own ideas, opinions and feelings, but it isn't impossible when we open our minds.

My mind turned when I understood that all we need to do to learn a new language is to be humble and accept the fact that all people who cross our way can be our teachers. When I put myself in this position, I started soaking up all the information I was receiving, and in less than one year, I was able to speak English.

For now, I continue studying English, and I will continue for a long time because of my goals. “Think like a baby” was the biggest insight that helped me to get by and learn English. Now I’m confident about living in the USA.

*Priscylla Silva is student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

## **A Turning Point In My Life**

### **Becoming Parents**

What is the perfect age to be parents? Sophia met her husband Martin when she was seventeen years old, and they dated for seven years. In 2012, Martin asked her to marry him and Sophia answered, “Yes!” They decided to wait to have babies because they didn’t feel ready to be parents. But their families have other customs from their country, Mexico. Almost all people from Mexico, when they get married, the first thing they do is have children, regardless of whether they have true love, home, work, etc.

Sophia and Martin’s families pressured them to have children—more Martin’s family. They felt uncomfortable with their comments, but Martin took no interest in those comments because they knew the real reason why they were waiting to have children. But Sophia was angry when the people said bad comments about her like, “He is going to leave her because she cannot have children!” When she heard that she felt so bad and scared because she never tried to get pregnant. Sophia thought silently, “Maybe it’s true what people say. Will I not be able to be a mother? Is my husband going to leave me?” But Sophia tried not to get those negative thoughts. Shortly after, Sophia and Martin talked about that topic and she said: “I feel ready to be a mother,” and Martin said, “okay, my love.”

The next month, she got pregnant. After six years of marriage, they did not have any problem getting pregnant. She said thank you to God, because she could be a mother. Now they have a beautiful son and the people who spoke ill of their lives now call them to congratulate them.

Being parents: it’s the best stage of life but only when you decide you feel ready.

*Ana Partida is a student of Lori Cabrera at East Area Adult School.*

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

The story started when I was around 17 to 19 years old. At that time, a turning point in my life was when I got a job as a server in a restaurant and contacted with life outside of home. At that moment, our life and the financial situation at home was difficult for me, and I was not able to continue school. That's why I wanted to go to work to help my parents as well as take care of myself. When I started to go to work, it was complicated, and I was shy with my classmates about the job that I did. But when I had worked for a while, I didn't feel the complexity anymore, I felt like I understood more about life and knew more about the personality of each human being. People are different.

And on the other hand, I felt proud of myself because I made money for myself and I tried to work hard every day to get it. It was just a small job to get some money, but I felt more confident about myself because I knew how to communicate with people, and it improved my communication skills also.

It was both things for me at the same time - a small challenge and an enjoyable experience in my life. I was proud of myself that I could help my family and myself also, as much as I could at that difficult time. Although the money I received was not too much to improve some big things, I was very excited and proud when I compared it with the friends around me. But in short, for me, learning is always the most important thing in every human life. I will keep trying to learn as much as I can so that my life is more successful in the future and I can repay my parents who raised me to be a good person and have a good personality. This is truly something inside me that I still have.

*Van Chau is a student at the Clearview Adult Education Center and is taught by Inguna Ozols.*

## **Recovery Set Me Free**

Wilding out on the street can happen to either you or me,  
But a turning point in my life is when I had my little baby.

Seeing her for the first time took me by surprise,  
She was beautiful, it felt like I was hypnotized.

She came, then the drugs right after,  
People in my face, pointing fingers with laughter.

Can I ever go back and recover from my wicked ways?  
My God brought me to recovery in one hundred and thirty days.

*Raquel Marra is a student of the East Area Adult School Corrections GED Program. Raquel's teacher is Cheryl Watford.*

## **Living with a Learning Disability**

I would like to tell you a little about my story living with a learning disability and thinking that I was unhelpful. Luckily, I had a loving and supportive family, I never spoke of my learning disability to anybody. When I was younger my parents would try to talk to me about problems in school, but I would think of ways to escape the talk by faking sickness or just leaving the room. I did the same in school when I had to read out loud or do test taking. The thought of someone finding out about my learning disability would be unbearable.

My family helped me out by filling out job applications. I would keep low paying jobs for long periods of time, they didn't give raises or have health benefits. I searched for jobs that had extra hours and worked twice as hard to earn a living. I would always stay under the radar so my disability couldn't be noticed.

Currently I've been at my job for twenty years and thought my job cared like my family did. I got sick and was out of work for months. During that time my job frequently checked on me. After a period of time, I returned to work. It was time for my self-evaluation. When my boss asked me to complete it the same day, I got nervous. In the past, I would take the evaluation home and my family would help me complete it. I had just opened up to my family about my disability and I was ready for a change, so I opened up about my disability to my boss and we did my evaluation together. We talked about learning programs and I felt relieved opening up. Some time went by, but I didn't see my raise, so I reached out to my boss and she called me into the office to inform me that I didn't get a raise because of my poor paperwork. I started thinking that I shouldn't have opened up—

this is what I was hiding from. I was so embarrassed. I told my mother I wanted to get help now.

Shortly after this, I was listening to the radio and they talked about a program called Literacy for Adults in Brevard. I told my sister, and she found a number for me to call. Still embarrassed, I didn't make the call and went back to my old habit of trying to escape. I finally made the call I went from being nervous and scared to hoping that I could be helped. Meeting with the staff for the first time was very scary but this would be the best thing I did for myself. When I met my teacher, I realize she wanted the best for me, and she cared. When you have a teacher that cares you feel it and you start to believe in yourself. I did this program to catch up in life, now I can say I do all my reading and test taking myself and now I live to learn for fun.

*Sherry Flowers is a student at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Sherry's teacher is Kathleen Dyer.*

## **Life as a Teacher**

Even as a little girl I had fun "at school" teaching my younger siblings and my cousins. Sometimes I had to bribe them with something to keep them playing with me when they had had enough. When I finished high school, I studied pedagogy at university. After five years of study and receiving a master's degree, I managed to find a job at a school. It was a tiny school in the countryside near my city.

I started teaching in kindergarten, where there were only eleven children, so not many students. September 1, the beginning of the school year, I met my first students... "Oh, I don't know what he is saying to me! I don't understand him!" One of the students had a huge speech defect and, as it turned out later, developmental problems. For several weeks, children who knew him translated from his language into ours--mine. It was sometimes funny, but also it made it difficult to conduct classes. I often thought that it would be impossible to teach and that I was not suitable to be a teacher.

Now, this boy, Artur, is an adult man and he already has a family. I am happy that I contributed to him becoming the

human being he is now. The work of a teacher is a challenge, but also a thankful and noble profession.

*Iwona Szumski is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. She is from Poland and has been living in the U.S. for 20 years. Iwona's teacher is Robin Pitchford.*

## **My Older Brother**

Sometimes life can be hard. It was December 1, 2020 at 5:40 when I got the worst news of the year. Franklin, my older brother, was murdered in Guatemala. The sadness invaded my heart and tears started to fall from my eyes. It was something unexpected and heartbreaking for all my family.

We are 7 siblings—4 sisters and 3 brothers. My mom had to leave Guatemala and come to U.S for about 10 years to give us a better life. My brothers and I had to stay with our uncle, and my sisters had to stay with our grandmother. Living with our uncle is where we learned all kind of things, especially farming that was my uncle's source of living in those years. Even though we were living with our uncle, Franklin always took care of each one of us, as the older brother does.

Our stories in the farm were fun and unforgettable. Milking cows was one of the funniest things ever, since we did it by hand and sometimes, purposely shot milk at the other person's face. It was that kind of fight that ended in a big laugh.

I have been living in the United States for about six years. Two years after I came to the U.S., my uncle died from diabetes. My brother cheered me up and didn't leave me alone during that time. He knew what our uncle meant to us.

Franklin died at the age of thirty-one years old. He was a brave man that always showed enthusiasm for living in spite of the adversities. His leadership was not only reflected in the family, but in the entire village as well. As an older brother he always was the head of the family. As teacher he always taught his students to reach their goals without putting anybody else down. He was in his first years of studying law at the university. His goal was to be a lawyer and look for justice for those that can't have it. His

murder caused a big impact not just in the family itself, but to every single person in the village that recognized him as a model person to follow.

Sometimes we say that something happens for a reason, but sadly we don't know any reason why this evil act reached our family. His death left us with an open wound that only time will heal, and questions with no answers. We are really going to miss him, and we now have to learn to live without him. Whoever did this cowardly act put an end to his life, but his legacy, essence, trajectory, and memories will keep alive in us forever and ever.

I admire him not only because he is my brother, but because he was a true hero for the entire village.

*Randy Guillen is a student of Sherry Emigh at the Manatee Literacy Council.*

### **Saturday, February 2, 2002**

I had just moved into my aunt's house four hours away from home and had already started nursing school. Like every other Saturday night, we went to church. Back then there were no cell phones. The church phone rang, and a young girl came to me and said that there was a guy who needed to talk to me. To my surprise, it was my dad who then lived in United States.

I can still hear his voice when he said without a warning, "Your mom was in an accident and she died!" At that point, I knew this was a turning point for my life. It was a cold night, but this was a different kind of cold—this was in my heart. I had to go back home and face my younger siblings and help them go through the greatest loss of our life.

So, we all moved to the United States with my dad, and I have been taking care of my younger brothers and sister since then. We are all grown now, and we love each other. Sometimes we fight, but the death of my mom brought us together.

From the loss of my mother bloomed the most incredible love between all us siblings. Life took away one love and give me four more instead.

*Jheymy Morales is student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College GED program in Naples, FL. Jheymy's teacher is Khris Betten.*

## **God Heals What Medicine Does Not**

I, LeBroxton, am a patient of God and doctors. Healthwise, we may think and feel that we are okay, but the body has a mind of its own. Without any warning, we can become ill and not really know what caused the problem. In need of answers and treatment, we put our trust into doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals. We depend upon their care, knowledge, and skills to piece together what it is that our body is experiencing and develop a personalized treatment plan.

Here is an account of my medical journey. On Monday, June 18, 2018, I walked into a doctor's office ready to start the process of an initial visit. After I got called into the examination room, the nurse took my vital signs. Shortly after, the doctor walked in to see me. We introduced ourselves and began to have a conversation. He asked me about all my past medical history as well as my family health history.

As I explained my medical history, I told him about the lower back surgery I had in September 1997, my high blood pressure, and other bits and pieces of my personal health history. The doctor asked me about the pain level that I experience in my lower back, and I explained that I rarely have any pain.

The doctor then offered me a shot for my lower back pain. I replied that I am not sure about that, Doc, because my pain is not that high, and I do not like injections. I told him that I would think about it, and I would decide by the end of the visit. Well, lo and behold, I decided to take the shot. A nurse came in and poked the injection into my left butt cheek. The medication burned like fire and extreme pain shot through the top of my left leg to my foot. I had never experienced such pain!

The next day I came back for bloodwork, and I told the nurse that my leg felt funny from the injection. I was reassured it was just the medication. By Thursday morning I got out of bed and hit the floor. My left leg was non-responsive. I now cannot walk

without crutches. It was the beginning of a decision I regret every waking, or let's say, every walking day!

Doctors could no longer help me. I knew I had to heal mentally. My healing came from God. He healed me by helping me find faith to deal with my situation. They say that faith helps you heal, and faith is where I place my trust. God will always be my daily medicine.

*LeBroxton Bryant is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center. LeBroxton's teacher is Holly Heintz.*

### **Keeping the Faith**

It has been a long journey, but I give it all to God! Back in 2014, I watched my youngest child, Tazariouis Lane, Sr., walk down the graduation aisle at the Thunder Dome for Lakewood High School. It was one of the proudest moments of my life. My son made it, YESSS!!

Tazariouis had big dreams of becoming a truck driver. He wanted to own his own business, to invest in properties, and to be the best father ever! We planned on taking the Commercial Driver's License Class together. Tazariouis became a father on November 21, 2014 to a precious little boy named Junior. As time went by, I watched my son become a good role model for Junior and his nephews.

Then, on March 12, 2016 it all came crashing down. My, my, my, MY SON WAS GONE! My son was a victim of a car accident! "Why my son?" I questioned God. Although I knew not to question God as a human being in the flesh, it was the only thing I could do! So, I asked, "Why not take me?" My baby (son) was a very good person and never once gave me a problem. I mean he was the true definition of a respectful, loving, and caring person. He was all the things that God wants us to be. My heart bled so badly.

So, I prayed and asked God to give me peace with my heart-sickness. I told my son at his funeral that I was going to "get it right" and that everything we planned would come to fruition. I vowed to be a better mother, grandmother, and human being.

Well, I signed back up for adult education classes for the sixth time to achieve my diploma. I was still grieving over my son when my baby brother was diagnosed with cancer with only 120 days left of his dear life. He made it eighty-nine days, and boy I was an emotional mess! But God took care of my mess and “sat me down”--373 days in jail. Yes, sometimes we get worse before we can heal.

God filled me with His peace and love; His favor turned my mess, and He blessed me abundantly. Oh, what a God that can take this broken vessel and fix a tormented soul. God carries me even when I do not have the strength to do so myself.

I have prayed for better days, and my life is better even though my son is with God. My heart has opened, and I am grateful for the lessons and blessings that I receive. Everything is part of God’s plan, because if it was not, I would be the same broken person. Now, I know I can, I CAN, I CAN! One of my pledges is to achieve my diploma. Praise God!

*Tameco Ingram is a student of Holly Heintz at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center.*

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

My body suddenly started feeling weird. At the hospital I was immediately admitted to the ER. The doctor couldn’t diagnose the cause, he simply ordered rest, and gave me six months to live. A year passed. I incredibly survived this tragedy in my life, thanks to the care of many others. Gradually, I obtained strength even though my daily activities were challenging.

One day I asked myself, “Why am I still here?” I had thought that my calling was near. That same day, I wriggled out of bed dropping my feet to the floor. I wobbled to the kitchen door. After a while I was able to sit and enjoy a healthy lunch. Then, I got a hunch. I determined my life wasn’t spared for me but to help others. I could see I had reached the turning point of my life.

I’ve got to live! What did I have to give? I was a product of my environment. The quality of my schoolbooks was extremely inadequate. I spoke slang. I was terrible. My friends laughed at

me. As time went on, a friend encouraged me. I enrolled in an adult literacy center around the corner. I improved my reading and writing skills.

There were times I wanted to quit. But I thought how bad I wanted it. I sacrificed my personal life and toiled long nights until my assignment was right. I stayed off Facebook; kept my head in a book. It wasn't easy but I reached my goal.

Then, there I was, giving presentations, speaking fluently about how important education had been to me. If I could touch one person and they got peace of mind through my story and saw that they could be helped as I was, I'd have reached my goal, and proved that my decision was right. In fact, there were some that gave me thanks.

I think of myself like the characters in the movie "Wizard of Oz." I was reminded that I needed courage, a brain, and a heart. The literacy center strengthened all three in me. I hope my story has touched you and maybe you are asking yourself what you have to give.

*Gail Hartfield is a student at DePorres Place Adult Literacy Center. Her teacher is Clare Wilson.*

## **Paying it Forward**

My life changed in a way that I did not expect 12 years ago when I arrived in this country. I arrived with many fears of the unknown, but with a feeling in my heart to seek God. I did not understand that feeling very much in the beginning because I thought I already knew Him. However, it was a feeling in my heart that was very deep, and I knew that everything was going to be just fine.

As it happened, in the first month of my living here, while I was wanting to return to my country, a lady invited me to a prayer group. On Sunday, she invited me to her church, and there I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior. At that specific moment, my life changed completely. Twelve years have already passed, and I have learned to live by faith.

I now understand that it's fine when I am weak because I am with God, and He makes me strong. One thing, out of the many things that God has given me is a life purpose. My church has leadership opportunities; that is, we take classes that teach us to help other women know Jesus and establish a relationship with Him. Many people arrive with so many problems, and as the group leader, I help them get up to take that necessary step, in the same way that someone did with me.

We study the word of God, we pray, and this helps us all to live life understanding that we are not alone, that although there are problems, God is always with us. With Him, nothing is impossible to achieve.

*Paulina Soria is a student at Miami Dade College ESOL Program - North Campus. Her teacher is Jackie Jackson.*

### **My Journey to Be Reunited with My Mother**

My name is Jacqueline, I am a Cameroonian from Africa and am 19 years old. Throughout my childhood, I mostly grew up with my mothers' family members because she had to move to the USA. From my young age, I mostly knew who she was through pictures and phone calls. Being little and not having my mother around me made me see my aunties as my mothers.

By 2010, when I was 9 years old, I finally got the opportunity to travel and meet my mom after 8 years of separation. I traveled alone by plane for the first time. It was scary but I arrived safely and was so excited to meet with my mom at the airport in Atlanta. We hugged, kissed each other, laughed and told each other how lovely we look that day. Then we took the road for Tuscaloosa, Alabama where she stayed with her husband and my little sister.

Years went on and everything was great. School was awesome and I had excellent grades, A's honor rolls, and only a couple of bad behaviors. But one day in 2010, everything changed. My mom got divorced and we had to move to Mobile, Alabama. Months after, just when I turned 12 years I misbehaved and really did something bad which I did not know would send me back

to Africa. It was difficult and devastating having to move back to Africa 3 years later.

Living away from my mother was hard. I was not feeling loved by anyone surrounding me. I saw myself as a mistake in life going from house to house. The only thing that kept me going forward was my mentality of how strong and ambitious I was to what I really wanted in life. After 7 years, my life was finally going to get back on track.

I came back to the United States in 2020. I was really relieved to re-unite with my mother and sisters. To me, it was like dreams coming true again. Being with my mother makes me be safe and gives me more courage to push myself for a better future. I will always be there for her as she has always been there for me.

*Jacqueline is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. She is 20 years old and is from Africa. She is studying English and working towards her GED. Her teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

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

It has been thirty-one years in my time, and I am still not happy. I feel like some of the choices and things I have done have never exactly worked out right--or not at all. I am angry and ashamed of myself, and I have had enough!

I feel like I am running out of patience and time. There was a time when I had some good times, which took me away from all the drama and other things in my life that would get to me. I even tried to hold onto high hopes that one day I would pass my GED or be able to move out from living in a hotel. I also thought this, but boy I was wrong. Now, I feel embarrassed and driven into such pity and disappointment in myself.

However, now this is the time I am under and I'm over it. I have never been so tired, and I've just had it with the way things have been with me. My father and all the things in general with the new age. I still can't let that hold me down. I have made up my mind, and I am going for it all. This is all I dream about; this is all I fantasize about. I am going for it and taking my life back!

*Tiara Brown is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center. Tiara's teacher is Holly Heintz.*

## **Unrealistically Real**

I've always been an indecisive person, something that has always chased me down. I just let life pass. She made the decisions that I refused to make because I was scared of failure, but things are different now. I know everyone is sick of hearing that 2020 has taught us many things -- not because it isn't true, but because people were used to things the way they were even if they didn't like them. Me too!

Last year I was in the middle of my senior year. I've always dreamed about it. I had so many plans, and I was making them come true. Everything in that year started like I imagined. In January, I had decided what I wanted to study in college. I remember having conversations with my best friend because we were planning to go to the same college, and those conversations always included us living that experience together. I spent February planning as well, without knowing that in March things were going to change drastically. We had our last activity as seniors on March 9th, and then the corona came.

I used to live in my own world until that time. When my parents told me that I couldn't go to college because we didn't have enough money, and I had to stop thinking about myself, I saw the reality that was happening in front of my eyes. They don't know it, but I spent days crying and also thinking. When I had to come out of my world, I realized that everything that I thought I wanted was nothing more than a cover. I had decided on a career that wasn't based on what I love, so I found the courage to change. Something so sad for me was not being able to go to college at the time that I wanted to. This ended up helping me discover what I want to do with my life.

Months later, my parents decided to move to the USA because they wanted a better life for us. Things were not easy, and they are far from being easy even now, but I had to make the decision whether I wanted to stay in the Dominican Republic or go with them to the USA. After months of thinking, I finally know what I want: to study in my home country and fight for a life that I

know is not going to be easy, but if I put effort in it, it's going to be fruitful. This is my reality now, and this has taught me that even when you think you have everything under control, life has another thing prepared for you, and I have chosen to learn from it.

*Ashley Reynoso is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's CCR class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **1% of Possibilities; 100% of Determination**

Determination is the fuel that has allowed me to go forward, reach goals that I thought I couldn't, and make me rise even in adversity and difficulties I have had around me. Many young people that have no knowledge, no experience, no goals, no discipline are collecting ideal ingredients to waste their lives. That's a shame because even in countries just like the country I came from, people can find a way to get ahead. Yes, it's very hard, but determination can help to reach any goal.

In November 2008, my family was waiting for me at the gate of the El Dorado Airport, where I was landing after an eleven-hour flight from Spain. I was returning to my country after three years living in that country, where I was living alone, with no friends, no relatives and -- the most difficult -- no God. Something that I remember of those times is that, as always in my life, I used to work very hard, but I couldn't see any result. I never was concerned about saving money, studying or doing something that would help me to improve my lifestyle. As a result, I came back to Colombia with no positive experiences. There I was, a young guy working at the supermarket warehouse and earning five dollars each day.

Finally, I learned the lesson. I had to study and look for a profession. But how? I had no money, and I had finished high school eight years before, and to make it worse, I was not a good student. One day someone left a syllabus inside my bag. I don't know how, but there it was, written by hand on the back, "The hardest is to take the first step." I knew what I had to do. After a couple of calls to the bank to get a loan, I finally decided to start. I was recognized three consecutive semesters as the best student, and for that reason the university supported me by paying the

cost of each semester. I couldn't believe it, but after six months I was actually talking differently, and that motivated me more and more.

Today I have a degree and a postgraduate course. I feel really proud of that. Now because of different situations, I am here, starting over, being born new once again and feeling the same determination I had when I returned from Spain. So if what I got then was great, I can't imagine what's coming. I will speak English this year, and I will continue my education. Then I hope to find a technical career. And if I feel tired, I will take a "pill" of determination.

*Frank Rodriguez Pardo is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Breaking Point**

When I think about a breaking point in my life, there is only one thing that comes to mind. And no, it's not bad but it's also not good.

The breaking point of my life was the desire to get back on track and finish school. Not finishing school was probably one of my worst decisions and something I will always be ashamed of. "What started that breaking point?" you may ask. Well, it probably was looking around seeing friends and family graduating, but not me. And it was the experience of looking for a job. Nowadays you need a diploma or GED for just about everything. At that point I already knew it was time for a change, for me to become a better me and a more successful me at that.

The first thing I remember was texting my god-sister; she had just recently received her GED and I wanted to know the process she went through to accomplish that. I was nervous, I'm not going to lie, but I remember her giving me a stern talking-to. She didn't sugar-coat anything to make it seem like it was going to be the easiest thing in the world. She gave it to me straight and I thank her for that. After the talk with family about going back to school I was thrilled and nervous at the same time. I was ready

to grow from my past mistakes. The first thing I did was sign up online and pay my fees.

When the time for school came, I was ready. I prepared myself days before school started, getting all types of supplies I probably didn't even need to buy. Mind you, during this time we were—and still are—in a pandemic which made things a little harder. Being at home doing online classes, you aren't really focusing. You have thousands of things distracting you from what's important, not to mention sitting in front of a computer for hours. I know it'll be worth it in the end. I feel that choosing to go back to school was a great decision for me.

I just want to succeed and do better with my life and become the person my siblings look up to. I'm going to make it my mission to do that no matter how many helpless moments I've had. I'm not done succeeding and might have a long way to go. I'm glad I figured out what I want to do and who I want to be. So, this was my breaking point in my life. Thank you for taking the time out to read about my journey.

*Kiana L. Walker is a student of Zanovia Manderville at West Technical Education Center.*

## **My First Car**

Having a car facilitates a feeling of freedom and access to do some activities.

When I got my first car, I was very happy because it was very difficult when I first came to the U.S. It wasn't easy for me to go to work. Every morning someone had to pick me up very early and come back to my house very late because the driver and I, we didn't have the same clock out.

Now I have my own car and that makes my life easier for everything I want to do. It facilitated me to get a better job, go to school to learn English, and to go to church.

In conclusion, having a car was a big turning point in my life. Now I feel more free and I can do more in a day.

*Fonfil Cadeau is a student at Village Readers Family Education Program. His teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **17 Months**

Seventeen months ago, I made the big decision to take English classes. It was one of the best decisions that I have ever made. I call it a turning point in my life.

Before I took English classes, I was so dependent. Everywhere I went, I needed someone with me to translate each thing that I wanted to say. Since I have taken English classes everything has changed.

In the past it was difficult for me to help my children with their homework, but now it is easier for me to help them and to communicate with them in English.

Seventeen months ago at work, I had some problems understanding and answering correctly. Most of the times I answered by saying “yes” or “no.” Since I have gone to school, I became another person. Now I can communicate with my boss and my co-workers more easily than before.

Taking English classes has been one of the most important changes that happened to me. And I bless the day when this change happened to me because I am free to communicate without someone translating for me.

*Marie C. Romain is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. She is a mother of 3 handsome and amazing boys. She loves all positive things like dancing and reading a good book. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **Buried Alive**

I thought my life was over. As I looked around, all I saw was chains, handcuffs, tacky orange and red jumpsuits, and caged doors. A turning point in my life began with my incarceration. After being arrested and placed in county jail, I experienced a world of struggles. I was separated from everyone and everything

I cared about. I was broken down, and had to build myself back up. Never in a million years did I think I would be in a situation like this, dealing with the circumstances of being incarcerated.

The world of struggles I experienced while incarcerated were this:

Firstly, most county jails and state prisons are just filthy. Where I was housed was no exception. On top of that, the living arrangements required me to eat, sleep, and shower with up to 75 women on a daily basis. The food that is provided comes in small portions and is completely tasteless. The staff and the guards treated me with little to no respect. I went from being free to being secluded in a box like a caged animal.

Secondly, I was separated from everyone and everything I cared about. I had to have my loved ones visit with me through a thick glass for the first two years of my incarceration. The visits were only 30 minutes long and I could not touch my family. Everything I had worked hard for at home, I then lost because I could not maintain anything from jail. Being away from my family and losing everything I cared for had started to take a toll on me.

Thirdly, I was broken down. I had to build myself back up. I was deeply depressed and wanted to give up most days. I had recognized my wrong decision, and I vowed to make sure I would find ways to make the rest of my incarceration as positive as possible. I did daily devotionals, volunteer work, studied case laws, and received as many certifications as I could. I had a new mindset, and I am now determined not to let my incarceration define me. Jails and prisons are not a good place to find yourself. However, being incarcerated has taught me never to give up, and also how to turn a negative situation into a positive one. I know that I have a second chance at freedom, and one day I will be emancipated.

*Priscilla Williams is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Ms. Phillips.*

## **The Vacation That Changed My Life**

I grew up in the city of Caracas in the capital of my country, Venezuela. Though I am from a family with low resources and economic difficulties, we have firm moral values and strong conviction that hard work and education is the way for improvement and success.

Through a lot of sacrifice, I graduated with a degree in administration at the age of 26. I never thought of immigrating to another country since I had a profession and a stable job. But in 2014 the situation in my country changed radically due to mismanagement by the rulers, and it affected my work environment and my finances. My life was no longer the same. There were many deficiencies and difficulties in acquiring basic and essential goods and services. Also, the unemployment rate increased and crime made it impossible to have a decent life. So, I made the tough decision to leave my son, my family and my country to look for a better life. I arrived in the United States in 2015 for a temporary vacation and ended up living in the state of New Jersey.

I got a job at a restaurant in order to financially support my family and there my life took a turn. I began to notice the differences in the life that awaited me. There are more opportunities and advantages that I could have in America. I started the legal process for political asylum. My life began to take shape. I adapted to the lifestyle and the system of this country that opens doors for a better future.

In 2017, I met my beloved husband and we got married. This changed my legal process and I was able to become a permanent US resident. My husband applied for my son to be accepted as a resident of this country in 2019 and he currently lives happily with us.

This year my goal is to apply for United States citizenship and then be able to do the petition process for my parents. It will give them the opportunity to know this wonderful country where dreams do come true with hard work, patience and perseverance.

*Yohana Figuera attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. She is happy to live here and is preparing herself for a career in America. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Immigrant Story**

Once upon a time there was a land full of joy, prosperity, festivals, and friendly people. There were also people with defects, but in this way they formed a great nation. They called it Little Venice—a country rich in natural and mineral resources with various tourist attractions, cattle raising, flora and fauna—its name is VENEZUELA. It is a melting pot that fundamentally integrates three different families, the indigenous, the African and the Spanish. Venezuela is located on the north coast of South America; to the north is the Caribbean Sea, to the south Brazil, to the east Guyana and to the west Colombia.

History has taken a 360-degree turn, transforming our beloved Venezuela into a country in ruins, devastated by the political, economic and social crises created by the ambition for power by the rulers. It is marked by a strong hyperinflation, increases in poverty, reappearance of diseases previously eradicated, increased mortality, famine, unemployment. All of this has resulted in a massive emigration of its population. According to economists interviewed by The New York Times, the situation is the worst economic crisis in the history of Venezuela and the worst since the middle of the 20th century. This migratory crisis is classified as the largest in the history of the Western Hemisphere in the last 50 years! This information is provided by the Organization of American States (OAS), and the spokesperson for the United Nations refugee agency.

Faced with this situation, my family and I migrated from Venezuela to this great nation called the United States in July 2018. This is a country that has opened doors for us and together with the help and blessing of our great God, creator of heaven and earth, we have been able to restart our lives. It is challenging because we have a new lifestyle, a new culture, and are learning new behaviors. The diet, work, climate, and language are all different. It has not been easy to study and to be able to speak, understand and write English; but it has not been impossible. Thanks to Flagler Technical College we are able to learn a new

language. FTC has their doors open so that anyone who wants to study and learn this universal language can. I am learning English with confidence in this prestigious study house.

Being a foreigner makes you change your attitude, adapt yourself and to live with the rhythm of the country that extends its hand. It is a privilege and a great blessing for me to be living here in the United States of America. I enjoy living a healthy life, and I comply with the rules and laws. I have a suitcase full of goals and dreams. I am learning to live as an immigrant overcoming challenges and achieving goals.

*Herlandy Alfredo Cuevas is a student in the ESOL program at Flagler Technical College. Herlandy's teacher is Paul Delisle.*

### **New Life, New Purposes**

I'm originally from Cancun, Mexico, a beautiful place in the Caribbean with amazing landscapes. My story begins when I started a relationship with Julio who is now my husband. In the past we were good friends, and one day he told me he was going to move to the USA for a better quality of life. We had a long-distance relationship. He came to Cancun or I visited him in Florida. We met in many places and we enjoyed the fleeting time we had. We decided to be together all the time, so in January 2020 I moved to Clearwater, Florida to join Julio. On June 17 we got married.

Now that Julio and I were together, I wanted to achieve my personal goals: to improve my English and to get a job or start my own business. I did not have permission from USCIS to work in the U.S., so Julio and I decided to start an online business selling a bamboo air purifier. The name of our business is Green Cay, and we sell the product on Amazon. We advertise on Instagram and Facebook so I am learning how we can use social media.

Since I wanted to improve my English, one of the first things I did was to look for some English centers. I started classes at the Adult Education Center and the Hispanic Outreach Center in Clearwater. For about two months, I enjoyed taking classes with other students. We never imagined that our plans would change suddenly when the pandemic started. All centers that I attended

were closed. I kept in contact with my friend, Mary, at the Hispanic Outreach Center. One day she told me about online English classes, and she sent me a link. I researched the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas webpage and I enrolled in several classes right away. I met my teachers Geoffrey, Brandie, Kate, and Eileen. I appreciate them and every person who helped me improve my English. They have helped me to adapt to my new life, and to feel more secure when I am speaking English.

In just one year, despite the pandemic, I have improved my English, started an online business, and gotten married! I am so excited that I am achieving my goals. This year has been a great challenge, but in life there are always difficult situations. Only you can find ways to overcome obstacles and go as far as you want to go. This year has been an awesome turning point in my life. Viva la vida!

*Virginia Sosa is currently a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas County, where her teacher is Eileen O'Sullivan-Smith.*

## **My Life in the United States**

I arrived in this country in 2005, my job prospects were very limited because of my language skills. There were times when I had difficulties in finding work because I couldn't speak English and my clients couldn't speak Spanish.

The ESOL program changed my life because now I have the tools to achieve my goals and ambitions. I have always lived in Florida - specifically near Miami - because I could find clients that spoke Spanish, so it was easy to find work. However, my dream is to be fluent in English so that I can work with clients in Florida or any other place in the United States in English.

I started taking ESOL classes in August 2020. My experience in Adult Education has been amazing because I didn't only learn how to speak English, I've also learned many things about American history and culture. I've learned to love the English language and I know that when I complete this program, I will continue to study and learn. I plan to never stop studying. I will continue to practice my listening, speaking, reading and writing. I know

I have no excuse, because I've had a solid foundation with my teacher at South Florida State College.

*Leonardo Lares is a student in the Advanced ESOL class at South Florida State College. His teacher is Melanie Proteau Blake.*

## **The Man I Am Today**

Well, where does this story begin? My best guess would be when I realized that the only person keeping me from achieving my goals was myself. Until recently, I was always someone who could easily put something aside or move on to the next option when things became too difficult for me. It took many years and countless mistakes before I could recognize the lack of self-guidance and the need I had for outside validation for me to feel like I was accomplishing anything. For me, the one thing that changed my outlook on everything was realizing that I could turn my job into a career, and this is how I did it.

Starting as a high school dropout, it was easy to fall into the wrong crowd and get swept up in a temporary lifestyle of the party scene. Being seventeen at the time, I really didn't pay attention to the fact that I was wasting valuable time during the most crucial point of my life. Nothing that I did during those years was beneficial to my life; from the people I was surrounding myself with to the sticky situations we got ourselves into. I moved away from the area I was living in at eighteen years old and started my first full time job working as a dishwasher. I quickly realized that the more I applied myself the more I was advancing.

Throughout the next couple of years and multiple jobs I kept the mentality that "If I am going to do a job, I am going to do it to the best of my ability." From the food industry to customer service I pushed myself to be a valuable team member as well as employee. However, out of all of the jobs I've worked I only looked for two things: a set schedule and room to grow within the company. Unfortunately, I was unable to find this in any employment path I chose until I started working in the marine industry as a dockhand.

Even though I already knew someone working at the marina, there was nothing that could calm the nerves of starting a job

in an industry that I knew nothing about. However, I put my best foot forward and got to work learning everything I could to become a vital asset to the company. I quickly gained recognition from management after the first year with the company, and decided I wanted to turn my job into a career. Eventually, I was offered the Dockmaster position.

As I reflect on my life as a former high school drop-out, I appreciate the challenges that I've overcome -- from losing friends to being involved in unpleasant situations -- as these challenges have helped me turn into the man that I am today.

*Michael McCauley is a student in the Palm Beach Gardens GED Program. His teacher is Krystal Starling.*

# The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

## The Best Advice I Ever Received

When I finished my university degree in El Salvador, I went to UNAM, Mexico, to study a Postgraduate Course where I received a Doctor of Foundations degree. Dr. Moreno Pecero, Director of the Faculty of Continuing Education, at The Palacio de Minería, in the Historic Center of the city was my mentor and he gave me the best advice I ever received.

Dr. Moreno Pecero's advice still rings in my ears. He told me that every great work needs three fundamental ingredients. The first ingredient is a deep passion, the second a constant reflection, and the third a firm will. He said, "If you want to be a good engineer, which is great work, you have to use those three important ingredients". The year was 1992, and since then, I have tried to apply that recipe to everything I do.

I believe if you use this recipe, you will be happy in your job. If you put passion and love in every little thing you do, it won't feel like work. I hope the advice that I received from Dr. Pecero helps you, as it has helped me.

*Leonardo Garcia is an ESOL student taught by Sandra Gladney. He is originally from El Salvador and lives in Greenacres, Florida with his wife and three daughters.*

## A Bit of Advice

These are the pieces of advice I have found to be most relevant in my life:

Never be ashamed of your weaknesses, and always be brave enough to speak what's on your mind.

Do not be judgmental about yourself or others, and never criticize other people's circumstances or situations.

Pay attention to people's character—make sure you recognize

the faults that you possess before you try to recognize the faults of someone else.

Always accomplish what you set out to do, and never give up on yourself or anything you do in life.

*Nicole Brewington is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Ms. Phillips.*

### **The Most Valuable Reward of My Life**

As a child, I noticed that bearing well and being a bright child led me to be rewarded wherever I was at school or family gatherings. As a result, I always pushed myself, thinking of what I was going to receive. Growing up, I kept applying this strategy throughout my school stage, getting diplomas and medals every school year. When I got my high school degree with honors at the closing of the last school year, I was not as joyful as everyone expected, perhaps because I had already known what was coming next. I felt blue somehow- staring at that rectangular beige synthetic parchment paper- I realized I overrated the aim of my effort. Being rewarded did not fill me up nor make me proud of myself. So, I began overwhelming myself with the question: Why do I do what is right?

This question haunted my mind for a long time, and I couldn't find the answer to it. One day while I was watching my programming class on YouTube, my mom popped out of nowhere and handed me a brochure of an invention fair to help firefighters. She knew my passion for programming and designing and suggested I participate in it. I doubted since it didn't give me credits for university, so my mom looked me straight in the eye and said: "Good actions with a sincere and unselfish purpose are those that bring the most valuable rewards in life". She left the room, leaving me with even more doubts than I already had. Anyway, I still had a few months of vacation, so I enrolled. I began doing an in-depth investigation of firefighter needs to develop my prototype's central idea. I found an interesting challenge that they face in work: Heat stress. Accordingly, I started programming the Arduino code, designing in Inventor 2019, and began gathering the temperature sensor, wires, the Arduino nano, etc.

All in all, I managed to finish and make it functional, and then it was time to begin the testing process. Fortunately, I met Mr. Etzel, a firefighter of unit four of Metropolitan Lima, and he was willing to help me. As he was wearing my prototype, the measurements seemed quite weird due to his body temperature reaching a perilous limit fifteen times in a shift. I warned him about what I discovered. He went to the doctor and found he was already beginning to develop a severe medical condition called Rhabdomyolysis; he started his treatment right away. After a month, Mr. Etzel recovered and could go back to his daily life. I finally understood what my mom said. I no longer seek extrinsic rewards when I do good deeds or do well in my studies. What matters is that I love what I do so and can make a better world by helping people as I did for Mr. Etzel.

*Marco Pena is Peruvian and a recent student of ESOL program at Miami Dade College, where he was taught by Ileana Perez. He has lived in Miami for 6 months.*

## **My Bravest Moment**

### **My Bravest Moment**

The bravest moment in my life was when my mom decided to leave to go to the USA and leave us in Mexico. I was 11 years old. I remember coming home from school and finding two of my little sisters sitting on the bed holding a note for me that said, "I have to leave. Take care of your siblings." I was so scared. I ran trying to find her, but it was too late. Then, I realized that I was the mom of my 2 brothers and 4 sisters. Their ages were 9, 7, 6, 5, 3, and 1. That's one of my bravest moments. I look back and I don't know how I did it. Life in Mexico is different, especially if you're a girl. No one wants to give you a job and if you get a job, they don't pay right. I went through a lot, but I don't regret anything. All my siblings are good people and have a good life.

My other bravest moment was when I got pregnant with my first child. I was only 15 years old. I was so scared. I got pregnant when I decided to come to the USA. A man sexually assaulted me. I didn't know that I was pregnant until I was like 3 months. My mom decided that it was not a good idea to have a baby because I was too young. She decided that I was going to get an abortion. I was so scared, especially because I was on my own. Then, I remember thinking that if I took care of 6 kids when I was 11 years old, I could protect my baby inside of me. I worked hard for her.

Sadly, my stepfather sexually assaulted me, and I got pregnant again. My mother was in Mexico because my grandmother passed away. After a few months, she returned and her husband told her that I was out of the house all the time and that's why I got pregnant. My mother believed him. It's sad when your own mother doesn't believe you. I was devastated. The days went on and I worked to pay the bills and save money until the baby was born. However, he passed away because of the physical abuse during the pregnancy. After living in a foster home, I decided to leave for a different state with my baby girl. I chose to leave to start a new life.

After 21 years, I now have time for myself and I decided to go for my dreams. I'm taking an ESOL class and thanks to my teacher Ms. Lilibeth Castro, my husband, and my kids, I have completed my ESOL program. The bravest moments are when you decide to not give up and let the bad moments make you strong.

– *Anonymous author*

### **My Bravest Moment**

My bravest moment was when I decided to move from my country Puerto Rico to the State of Florida. My son of ten and my daughter of six were my companions. In my personal situation that I had at that moment, there was nothing that could stop my decision. Only my friends gave me help and shelter. I decided to come to Florida because my daughter had a health problem. Day after day, I was knocking on doors looking for help. I never listened to a “no”; I saw God in everything. It was a process of adaptation, hard in many areas. I started studying the language and was accepted in groups. I adapted myself to the weather, customs and other things.

I registered at Dixie Adult School to learn English. I only studied for three months because I was offered a job at a school, and I accepted it. It was totally different from my previous one because I have a degree in Education, and this job was working a cafeteria. In this moment, my daughter was going through a surgery and therapy until we completed everything with excellent progress.

I was thinking about returning to my country, but I decided stay and live in Florida. We got used to the lifestyle. Today, I have my own home and transportation. Having worked in the cafeteria for two years, I was offered a job as a teacher in a private school. I decided to give myself a chance and give up the cafeteria.

I completed my teacher job. Then, I decided to go back to Clearview Adult Center to continue learning English. I recognized the need to do it, and I'm here again.

*Gisela Rodriguez Matos is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

### **I Asked Myself, “What is a Logical Life?”**

My name is Phanit. I was born in Cambodia. I have eight siblings, and I am the seventh of all of them. I was born in a poor family, and my dad passed away when I was seven years old. My mom took care of us, alone. I couldn't help her because I was still the youngest and didn't know how to help, but I had many questions and many problems around me. Usually, we cooked some food to sell on the street and sometimes during festival celebrations to earn money.

Let's talk about me. In my family we had many problems because everyone had little money and education. I received complaints and tried to work hard to support my family. In my memories, I have many interesting stories such as - I had lost my father; we were a poor family; and we didn't have enough clothes to wear. I would take food from the floor to eat, and I had no friends, no independence, and no confidence. All of these problems made me want to drop out of school many times, but my mom reminded me all the time and kept saying, “If you want to change your life, don't stay away from school.” I kept doing whatever she said.

When I was 20 years old, I started finding many answers and many logical responses to my childhood questions. I understood more about my life and got ideas on what to do later on in the future. Now I am determined to reach my goals and take care of my mom in return. I want to hold our present happiness in my family.

*Phanit Phoeung is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Phanit's teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

### **Bravest Moment in My Life**

What is the bravest moment in your life? One day, I made the decision to come to the United States. I was afraid of what might happen at that moment when I reached the new country that I

faced. I was afraid of what could happen at that time. The main reason I made this difficult decision was because in Mexico, I could no longer study. The reason was because I did not have Mexican nationality. In Mexico, as in other countries, this type of document is very important. I firmly told my mom that I wanted to finish my high school and that to do so I had to be in the country where I had my citizenship. At the time, I had no idea what I was going to face. Later that day, I packed all my personal belongings to come to a new country, a new life.

When the day came to depart for the United States, I knew that the time to say goodbye to my mom and sister had arrived. After this unfortunate farewell, I was very happy because I was going to fulfill one of my dreams. When I arrived, my uncle enrolled me in school, and I was very happy! The next day, I went to school and a lady showed me the school as well as what my classes were going to be. At first, I thought it would be a lot of fun to go to a school in a new country. On the other hand, the next day, I did not know where my classes were and many students from the school did not help me. After having been in school for several weeks, I felt very sad because I did not understand the language and I was doing very badly in my grades. I was also suffering a lot of depression because I missed my family and wanted to go home. I also missed my friends. After I had been in school several weeks, I did not have friends and I did not have much confidence with my uncles and my aunt. It was difficult to express to them how I felt, how I was doing in school, etc. There was a time when I always cried when I came home. The only thing I wanted at that moment was for school to finish. Also, I no longer wanted to go to school, but I was afraid of what my uncles would say. From the bottom of my heart, I did not want to leave because I wanted to finish high school.

In the end, I decided that I didn't have to be sad or feel bad about whether or not someone at school was helping me. The reason I came to this country was to finish school and take advantage of the opportunity that life was giving me to achieve what I wanted. The result of everything that had happened during the first few months in school was that my senior year at high school was one of the most enjoyable years for me. During this year, one of the things that I felt was worth it was having passed my state exam. All the effort I put in was worth it. That is why without a doubt this experience is one of the most difficult

things that I have been through during the 19 years of life that I have.

*Ms. Joanna Lozada is a student at the Family Service Center. Her teacher is Mrs. Dawn Randolph.*

### **To Be Brave**

My bravest moment was when I was in the hospital fighting for my life. At that time, I clung to life with all my strength. I was alone and scared but did not give up. It was on September 9, 2016, when after some medical tests, the doctors gave me the news. I had uterus cancer! At that moment, I decided that I had to fight the odds. I could not die, not yet! I thought of my daughter, so young without a mother. I did not want her to grow up without a mother. I prayed to God for strength.

The treatment was very difficult with chemotherapy sessions and constant checkups. It lasted two years. During that time, the image of my three-year old daughter kept me fighting. I had faith that there was going to be an end to the illness and that I was going to be able to raise my daughter.

I learned that we can plan our life but everything can change in a moment. What we need to keep in mind is that if there is faith and enough reason to live, the courage and strength will be there. With courage, victory is possible!

I have no doubt that my bravest moment was on September 9, 2016, when I faced cancer and decided to fight and beat it. Today, my daughter is eight years old, and I am alive and, so far, cancer free. I believe in God and know that He was by my side during the process. Do not doubt that He will be by your side too when you are in need.

*Sarai Ramirez is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.*

## **I Got It!**

I was 27 years old, living in Russia and married with one child. I was afraid to drive, and I was afraid to think about driving. I didn't understand how people could drive, watch in the car's mirrors and look at the road at the same time. I couldn't judge the car size and worried about crashing. We bought our first car, and I got an interest in driving. Something was changing in my brain, and I wanted to try driving. I asked my husband to teach me. He was happy to help me. We went to a small village because the roads are not busy there.

We arrived in the village and my husband invited me to get behind the wheel. I remember this moment – I felt nervous and my arms and legs shook. I got into the car and tried to accelerate. I really liked it. I felt scared but happy too. My husband helped me understand what to do step by step. It wasn't as scary as I thought. Then, I enrolled in a driving school. In Russia, what you first need to do, if you want to drive a car, is to study at an auto school. When you graduate from auto school, you receive a certificate. Then you need to pass an exam at the police department. After an exam, you get a driving license.

I understand one thing – when you can drive, you have more options and you feel free.

*Iuliia Sviridova is a student taught by Robin Pitchford at Clearwater Adult Education Center. She is from Russia and has lived in the United States for two years.*

## **A Loveless Moment in Time**

The million-dollar question: If I die, will everything improve, and will it be easier for everyone? It all started when I was 13 years old. Well, I was a daddy's girl. I loved him. I looked at him as a hero, and he named me his blue princess. But everything fell apart when, in an argument, my father hit my mother. My heart broke at that moment. It unleashed a fury inside me, but I never did anything about it until I was 15 years old. Maybe I was sick of hearing the screams and cries.

It was when I heard the blows. My immediate reaction was to run and see that my mother was crying on the ground. I had never felt that emptiness and contempt for my father until then. He wanted to hug me that day, perhaps so I would not be scared, but I pulled away. Instead, my rage accumulated for more than 2 years. This anger made me hit him. Do I regret it? Obviously!

But I regret not having reacted before and doing something for my mother immediately. That day I helped my sisters get dressed and go to my grandmother's house. My dad reacted and beat me until I was unconscious. At that point, I only wanted to save my sisters and my mother. I spoke to the police as soon as I woke up, and my father threatened me. This man I loved the most, the man who showed me how to grow up. He was filled with hatred just like my heart. Three times I have tried to commit suicide, but I did not have enough courage because I understand the pain that I would give to my family. I was wondering if this would have a happy ending. Maybe yes, or maybe no!

I only know that now that I am still here, far from danger, depression and the pain. I feel like I do not have a father who loves me. It is with tears in my eyes, I think my bravest moment was to stay alive and protect my family!

*Mariajose is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples FL. She is 17 years old and is from Mexico. She is studying English, attending a health bridge class and working toward her GED. Her teachers are Ms. Khris, Ms. Lin and Mr. Caraza.*

## **Changes in My Life**

When I arrived in the U.S.A., I was very excited, nervous, happy and scared because I knew how to start. The goals I have are to learn a second language, earn my GED, and get a job. Now I am very happy because I learned more English, and it is easier to understand now.

This was a big change in my life but now I am working hard to follow my dreams of being a nurse and other things. One of my bravest moments was one year ago when I arrived in the U.S.A. I never imagined living here because in Mexico, I was very happy,

but my mom came here. It was a difficult moment for my brother and me.

We always found ways to keep positive and be strong. I learned many things including to “never stop, no matter how hard it is.” Sometimes, it was so difficult, but my mind always told me, “Fatima you can do this.” I just know a moment will come later that is full of happiness.

I waited a long time to see my mom and be together.

*Fatima is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. She is 17 years old and is from Mexico. She is studying English, attending health bridge class, and working towards her GED. His teachers are Ms. Khris, Mr. Caraza and Ms. Lin.*

### **One Mile at a Time**

Some people go fast to complete their plans. Some people do things automatically and forget themselves, family, and friends to just stay focused on their goals. But sometimes “Life” makes us stop and changes all things. That’s what happened to my two brothers. In 2012 and 2019, both of them had a terrible motorcycle accidents. Let me tell you the story.

In 2012, my older brother was riding 50 miles per hour with his girlfriend and crashed into a street light pole. My mom wasn’t in the city, so I had to support all the things for the accident. I had to look for a hospital, find an ambulance, support my younger brother, call my parents, and forget all that I was feeling in that moment. I was thinking, I don’t care; I have to solve everything. For two months, I went to the hospital every day of the week. Finally, my older brother survived and returned to the house. After that, he changed his lifestyle step by step, and “Life” gave us a break.

Seven years later my younger brother had a motorcycle accident too. He crashed at 50 miles per hour with a pedestrian. He survived, but the other man, unfortunately, died. It was so difficult for everyone. After the accident, my younger brother lost his job, lost his girlfriend, and started a legal process that

demonstrated he was not guilty. After this, he started to change his life step by step too.

Sometimes “Life” tells you, “Hey you are lost. You have to stop. You have to take one mile at a time.” Those are my bravest moments, and, like my brothers, I learned too that it’s correct to feel free to cry, be tired, worried, and say wait a minute, I need a rest and then start again. That’s what my brothers and I learned “one mile at a time.”

*Andres Barrios is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **Thank You God for a Second Chance at Life**

On February 21 of 2013, when I was Captain in the Colombian Army, I was injured while I flew a Black Hawk helicopter with special forces over the jungle at night.

Nowadays, I remember that special moment of heroism where I was a leader in the mission with seven Black Hawk helicopters to capture an enemy leader. The Military Forces Commander got me the leadership position for that mission because of my experience as a military pilot.

I always entrust my soldiers and my helicopters to God before going out to fly. I took off from the military base commanding seven aircraft over the dark jungle, and without the moon’s light, we were able to see two miles ahead. Throughout the flight, I heard noises as if the enemy was shooting at me. Already in the landing area and leaving my soldiers on the ground, I took off to hover ten feet above ground. All of a sudden, I felt a hard explosion that made the helicopter land immediately by the effect of the explosive sling. All at once, I felt my legs were warm, and I thought that I was injured. Seconds before I’d lost all communications, I quickly communicated, “MAY-DAY, MAY-DAY, MAY-DAY,” which means EMERGENCY in aeronautical phraseology. Then there was a second explosion that caused fire inside the aircraft, and I decided to take off to a safe area to the South.

My crew told me to try to land as fast as possible because they thought the helicopter could explode, so I decided to land immediately. When I turned off the engines in the smoke, the crew helped me out of the cabin. We ran fast, and we heard a strong explosion that covered the entire helicopter with fire. We all screamed, “Thank you God for a second chance at life.”

Finally, I didn’t feel my legs, and I was losing a lot of blood. It was in those moments that my life began to pass through my mind and images formed, but one was constantly repeated: my daughter, Maia, sleeping in her bed. The reason was because the last time I left home, I forgot to give her a kiss on her forehead as usual.

I begged God that I could get back home and could say to my sweet daughter, “Bye.” I was hospitalized for 15 days, and when I saw Maia I hugged her and asked her to forgive me.

Nowadays, when I leave home, I ask God to always allow me to return.

*Jaime Vargas is a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the Colombian National Army, pilot instructor of Black Hawk helicopters, and a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **The Loss of My Mother**

Have you ever experienced the loss of a close relative, like your mother or your father? I have had bad experiences, and I was very young. I’d like to share this terrible, real story with you. Today, I can talk about this stressful situation.

It was in 1986, in an area in the countryside where my mother gave birth to my last little sister. A few days later, my mother suffered from a crisis called postpartum eclampsia, in which her blood pressure became high. She was swollen and sometimes unconscious. The doctors asked my grandmother to take care of the baby (my little sister) while they held my mother in the hospital. Some days after, my mother’s health worsened. She had renal failure, anemia, and eye problems. The doctors prescribed dialysis. It is very expensive in my country and for lack of money,

it was not done. My mother was getting worse and worse every day. She went into respiratory distress. No longer able to meet the requirements of the doctors, my grandmother abandoned my mother in the hospital and went home with us.

When my grandmother decided to go see her daughter, she received terrible news. My mother had died. It was really sad to endure. I did not have the chance to see her face. I did not even attend her funeral. No one can tell us exactly what she looked like, not even a picture of her. That is the reason I consider this passage as a brave moment. Every time a person describes her mother or a member of her family, I feel sad and brave at the same time.

Living with this scar all my youth was hard to bear. Every time I tell someone that “I did not know what she looked like,” that person is always surprised, and it is true. Finally, I am feeling better. I feel well since I had the chance to share my pain and sad moment of my childhood.

*Louisemanie Belizaire is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Bravest Moment**

My name is Ana Rosa Cardenas, I am 40 years old, and I am from Mexico. I have three girls, I am amused. My bravest moment ... It is difficult to speak of a single moment of courage that I have had in my life because there have been several. For now, I will only share one.

Five years ago, I decided to come to the USA with my three daughters. I was having some personal problems and had the opportunity to come. I arrived with nothing, just a suitcase and my three daughters, but with the great hope that everything would be different here. When I had my first daughter, I thought that her life would be different, that she would grow up in a healthy home where there would be respect and gender equality, but it did not happen like that. Her father was going through a serious problem of alcoholism. I understood that I was the only one responsible for their lives being different and here I am, now, after

these years, living for them, doing my part every day to be a good woman and mother.

Here, I have seen the hand of God. I always tell my acquaintances that God lives here because of all the wonders that he has done in my life since I have been in this country. It has not been an easy road, adapting to the different system, the language, etc. However, I still believe that it is a great country full of opportunities for people who take responsibility for changing their lives.

I want to end this by thanking God for being with me at all times; my teacher Ms. Pamela for being an example of discipline, strength, joy, and commitment; to my colleagues; and to this great country that gives us the great opportunity to be part of this school system. Thank you!

*Ana Rosa Cardenas is a Level 4 ESOL Student at Wellington Community High School in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.*

## **Riding a Motorcycle**

My name is Zu Zue. I'm from Myanmar. I'm going to tell you a story about an experience I had that made me so brave. I wanted to learn to ride a motorcycle when I was twelve. I told my aunt, Winn, about it. She didn't allow me to ride because I was too young. When I turned 15, my aunty started to teach me how to drive a motorcycle. I was so excited and nervous at the same time because it was my first experience riding. Every night, my aunt and I rode along the moat. The moat was two kilometers away from our house.

After two weeks, I could ride the motorcycle by myself, and my aunt let me ride alone without her help. Unfortunately, an accident happened in front of me. The motorcycle in front of me was hit by a car at a traffic light. That incident scared me, and I didn't want to ride the motorcycle anymore. But my aunt encouraged me to keep riding. So, I didn't give up. I rode along the road with her for three weeks. Finally, I could ride carefully. Sadly, I had an accident when I was 16 because the motorcycle brakes crashed. I fell on the ground and I had a wound on my elbow. At the time, I

was a matriculation student, and my family wouldn't let me ride the motorcycle until I finished my exam.

I learned a big lesson: no matter how strong our determination, sometimes we get frustrated and want to give up, whether at work or training for a big race. Our greatest weakness is giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

*Zu Zue Ko is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. She attends the virtual English class. Her goal is to study in an American university soon. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Sickness in Motion**

About 8 years ago, we were told that my father had to undergo emergency heart surgery because he had a blocked aortic artery and could have a sudden death. At that time, he lived here in the USA, and my whole family lived in Costa Rica. Only my younger sister and I had a visa. She and I came to be with him for the surgery, and we spent a month and a half taking care of him on his recovery. My sister, Gloriana, had to pause her studies at the university. And I had to leave my two children with my mother and my other sister. It was very difficult to separate from them for so long, but I did it out of love for my father. I owed him for everything he had done for me.

When my dad got better, I had to go back with my family. It broke my heart to leave him. But it gave me peace to know that he was going to be fine. I thanked God that he allowed me to be with him when I needed him most and for always taking care of my children while I was not with them.

*Maria Arrieta Barquero is a student at West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.*

### **We Are All Brave**

My bravest moment was when I decided to make the decision to open new doors to gain more knowledge to better my life. I am 31 years old, a Cuban immigrant searching for a better future

for me and my family. Hoping to fulfill my American dream as a person, as a mother, and as a woman. Something very frustrating and sad was coming to this country and not knowing its language because Spanish is my first language. This has been a barrier that I made for myself. I was afraid to learn, thinking I would say something wrong or inappropriate. I wasn't brave enough to get over my fears in order to start building up the life that I want to live in this place where there are unlimited opportunities to grow in every sense.

I've gone through many events in my life due to not being able to understand when people approached me to start a conversation. One thing that is difficult is when I've looked for jobs because speaking English is the first prerequisite the employer looks for. Also, when I've volunteered in my kids' school and tried to follow along in the conversation, I cannot, because I never understood what their teachers were saying. Furthermore, when my kids have homework, I just can't help them because I still do not understand how to comprehend the language. For my children, I feel I am not being the role model they want to look up to, to grow and become independent people.

Today, that fear is no longer here for me. I was finally able to go beyond it. Today, I am a different person. I am brave, I have strength, I have goals, and I want to learn. I trust myself. There is nothing stopping me from accomplishing my goals and dreams. I've had help as well. Just like the most precious treasures in the world, I have two friends that have given me all their willingness and help whenever I needed. They are always encouraging me to do better every day, telling me how worthy I am, and that I can do whatever I desire because I am brave enough. I cannot finish this essay without remarking that without my children and my friends, I am nothing. Thanks to them, I am brave. I am not afraid anymore because I know they're by my side. I want to go to college and start studying criminality so I can serve this country and be useful to fight against crime, and search always for the truth to make this country a safer place.

Hopefully someone can read what I've written for you, the audience, because I know many people have felt or lived through a situation very similar to mine since as immigrants, we go through harsh times. All I can say from my experience is to be brave! Wake up, go out and fight, find friends or other support,

fight for your children's future, for your family, and never stop dreaming. Dreams are such a beautiful thing, a perfect reality, but when we wake up, they're gone. This doesn't mean we can't go chase them and achieve them, but we must work for it. Let's teach the upcoming generations that even though we are in an unknown country, leaving behind everything we once had, it's time for us to take control over our lives and make them better. Let's all have our moment of bravery and courage, and let's grow.

*Irina Molina Feijoo is an ESOL student. Her teacher is Mr. Gary Habib.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

### **Journey To My Future**

A few years ago, I never thought I would be where I am today. I come from a family with a history of addiction, which made my childhood traumatic. My life was broken apart when my parents separated, and that caused me to be homeless when I was 15. I was forced to grow up faster than other kids.

There is more to the story of my past, but I would like to stay on the subject of the present and my future. One accomplishment that I am very proud of is that I have never given up. No matter the amount of times I've fallen, I start all over again. I have always believed in myself when others did not, which has made me the strong woman I am today. I will always push forward for a better future for myself and my family.

After having two beautiful kids, a loving partner, a small circle of great friends, and a stable home, I was finally able to focus on myself and get my GED. I believe that this is the first step to better my future, and I want to thank everyone who has helped me reach this point of my life.

I want to thank my GED teachers, Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Paul for putting their time and effort into educating students who want to succeed like myself. I would also like to point out Mrs. Paul's compassion in teaching. She is an outstanding educator. She is humble, empathetic and inspirational towards our goals. She made coming to school easier. I look forward to furthering my education and am excited for the future. Even though I have overcome many obstacles in my life, the journey has not been easy. I struggle with anxiety, depression and PTSD but I have learned to cope with it. I want to be proof that no matter where you come from, what kind of past you've had, or if you suffer from any mental illnesses, you can achieve your goals. I would like to share my favorite quote: You can't go back to change the beginning, but you can start where you are to change the ending.

*Zena Sevenski is a student with Lee County School District. Her teachers are Tia Paul and Andrea Scott.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

In July 2019, our family arrived in the US.

Although I have studied and traveled to some developed countries in the world such as Belgium, France, Netherlands, and Japan, I still had many difficulties when starting my new life in the US, like culture and language. I studied French in high school, and only two years of English in Vietnam.

I came to America with the goal that my children would have a better education, and I could hear and speak American English fluently. When my children graduate from college, I plan to return to Vietnam and complete the dream I had when I was a student.

As you know, in my country, Vietnam, most of the people living in rural areas lack a lot of facilities, especially in the mountain areas. Even though school is free, some children cannot go to school because their parents want them to help with field-work. Some parents do not allow their children to go to school because they think it is unnecessary. Some children get married before the age of 18, so their lives can't improve. And I think only knowledge can help them have a better life. Five years ago, I went to Konhra Chot (Bana ethnic group in Kontum), a mountainous region of Vietnam, and I wanted to help them. I have established a small library with many kinds of books—stories, science for children. I donated notebooks and pens to good students or excellent students. Every summer, I have a party for 350 children, and at the party, they can sing and dance. I give scholarships to a few poor students. I am really happy that all members of my family support this work, and now I have more friends to help me.

Now, every year, my family and my friends look forward to the summer so we can meet all the children in Konhra Chot.

I hope in the future I can help more children in other rural areas.

I know I will still face many difficulties with life in America and helping poor children, but my family's motto is: Life is a game, and difficulties are challenges. I believe that my husband, my children and I will overcome these challenges.

*Thao Tran is a student taught by Inguna Ozols at Clearview Adult Education Center.*

## **Shut Up**

I wanted to tell you about my goals and ambitions, but instead I'm going to say why I don't feel comfortable sharing them with you.

It's something very personal, and I worry about what people are going to think about me after getting to know my goals and ambitions. Are they going to cheer for me or root against me? Perhaps people look at the idea and think, "Oh, it's never going to happen!" or "Hm, how ambitious!" or "No way, he's just saying that because he wants to look \_\_\_\_\_," or whatever you're thinking right now. Anyway, I just don't think that it is something that people should go out there telling other people. Actually, it should be like one of those questions that people have, but they never ask because it's impolite, like asking a woman if she is pregnant. Come on, dude, you should never do that.

The main reason that I don't tell people what my goals are is because of something that I believe in. My grandmother somehow made me believe that once you tell somebody what your plans are, they start to seem harder. There is one TV show on Netflix, called Lucifer, that illustrates a part of what she means. In that TV show, Lucifer is on earth among normal people, and what happens is that Lucifer asks people what they desire, and most people answer him without shame what they do want deep inside, no matter how embarrassing or ambitious it seems. My grandmother used to say that once you speak out loud what you aspire to, the devil hears you. Then, if it's something good, he'll try make your objective look impossible. Somehow it got stuck in my brain, so I just try to keep it to myself.

It's already hard to get what we want in life; we don't need someone going against us trying to ruin our plans. To conclude, I want to share one of my goals with you—be happy! It's simple and very generic. What makes it so special for me is that it's something that everybody is looking for, something that varies among people because everybody sees it differently, and it's something that is achievable most of the time.

*Lucas de Mello is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

### **My Goal to Learn English**

In my country, Colombia, six years ago, the mother of my grandson's best friend was dean of languages at a prestigious university. Sometimes I helped with the care of her son. Then one day she told me, "Juan will not be coming to your house because he is going to start English classes at the university." I asked if my grandson could do it too, and she told me, "Of course your grandson and you can study." So, I would go twice a week with my grandson to learn English. Starting my classes, I told the teacher that it was going to be difficult because "an old parrot does not learn to speak." When I finished the first semester I had to speak in the auditorium and my words were, "Thank you—this old parrot learned English."

When I arrived in the United States, I looked for where I could continue learning and I started taking English classes for adults. These classes increasingly help me with my reading, writing and pronunciation. Regardless of how old we are, we can learn every day and achieve our goals. It is interest and motivation that drives us to continue. It is the desire to be better every day in everything we do that makes the difference.

*Carmen Rosero Ferreira is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayr.*

### **Step by Step**

The first goal I have is to finish ESOL at the beginning of the year 2021 successfully. Because of these classes, I have much more knowledge of the English language. I will start working on my GED within the same year. By 2022, my goal will be to enter a college or university to study Pediatrics, since I like to be around children and thus be able to help them.

When I obtain my university studies, I will have the option of practicing the profession of Pediatrics either in a hospital or a clinic. The income obtained from my profession will allow me to

start my own child care business and apply my knowledge in this area.

Besides my professional goals, I also have some personal goals. My goal would be to have a family with only two children. I would like to have a large house in Cape Coral that is beautiful and spacious, allowing me to receive my family from Colombia. I want to have many pets in the house that serve as a distraction when I get home from work, because I am going to have the kind of career where I can travel the world.

*Valerye Sanchez is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Ms. Jackie Jackson.*

## **Goals and Ambitions Give My Life Meaning**

“Life without goals is like a race with no finish line; you’re just running to nowhere.”

A goal is an idea of the future, a plan and a commit to achieve, similar to a purpose or aim.

Growing up in an underdeveloped country is not an easy task. When you are always hoping for the best to come or some change to happen, but still nothing comes. Days spent there were difficult. Like any youngster having finished their studies, none of us could count on continuing our professional studies because there were rarely universities and colleges to attend, and they demanded an exaggerated sum of money that even my fingers are unable to count. So for that reason, we could only count on our parents and their decisions to look either for a way to study in another country or to stop studying and seek to earn a living with the little that we have, like our parents do. But my moments of discouragement really did not stop me from thinking big, and with faith and hope sometimes things go the way you want them to go.

Anthony Anderson says, “Be ready for when your time comes, you will have that window of opportunity, so seize the moment and capitalize on it.” My arrival in the U.S. is for me that window of opportunity that cannot be given twice, and I’m ready to take full advantage of it.

My main goal is to be successful. Nowadays for some people, being successful is either being wealthy or famous. For me, it's not necessarily that. Being successful is obtaining something intended or desired which enables me to see my dreams come true, have everything that I ever wanted, and be able to continue living without any regrets.

My goals that I consider important are to learn a new language, study abroad to experience other cultures and get outside of my bubble and my comfort zone while in college. Also it could help me find the connections and networks that might help with my future. I want to complete my degree in IT or Computer Science in two years and build strong connections in a mentorship program that will probably help build my social network. I'd like to attain a position in a company such as Apple, Samsung, Cisco, or Intel. Finally, getting an internship in my desired field not only helps me to network with people around me, but it is also a perfect way to get my foot in the door of the companies I dream of working for someday.

*Steph Lucmanyame Guillaume (Mimi) is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **Free At Last**

My name is Maclerf Fabien. I am 16 years old. I'm from Haiti. My primary goals in life are to make my parents proud of me and make my dream of becoming a doctor come true. I've dreamt of becoming a doctor since the Haiti earthquake in 2010. At that time I was only 9 years old. I have seen horrible things that I thought could only happen in horror movies. Many people died in front of me and I couldn't do anything to help them. Since then, I dreamed of becoming a doctor to help my people. Because of the insecurity in my country, I did not manage to finish the last year of high school and to receive my diploma. I am now in the United States to complete it. My English level is too low. I did not score high enough in the placement test. Therefore, I am learning English at the adult education program to acquire English skills and then be eligible to enroll in the GED program.

My second goal is to make the most of my youth. I did not have the chance to enjoy it in my native country because it was unsafe for kids to be outside of their house playing with other kids. Because of the insecurity, my parents wouldn't let me go out. I was homeschooled. Now that I am in the United States I finally feel free. I go out when I want but I can't come back when I want. When I'm hungry I don't have to go and make food by myself. When I get tired of watching Netflix or TV I can go out for a walk.

I am grateful to my family who permitted me to come to America. I get the taste of freedom to be a youth like a normal kid should. I am also thankful to my English teacher at the adult education program who continues motivate and educate me in preparation for a better life in this promised land. I am very hopeful that I will reach my goal and realize my dream to be Dr. Maclerf, one day.

*Maclerf Fabien is a student at Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. He attends class regularly and is ready for a bright future in America. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Each Achievement Elevates My Self-Esteem**

My life has been amazing and varied. As a child, I had many hobbies. I have never been bored. If something is unexciting to me, I would look for something else to do.

After graduation, I studied at a medical university, continued to play sports, did drawings, and attended scientific conferences. It was always stimulating for me to learn something new. It was fun to keep up with the times and set new goals. After I acquired a job as a family doctor, I decided to major specifically in the area of allergist. Then I took on a career in this profession. After several years of work, I was intrigued with aesthetic cosmetology. This was not very easy as it consumed a lot of time. Moreover, it was also expensive and risky because I found it difficult to juggle two jobs. Training lasted six months. Immediately after that, I received new patients. I was pleased and relieved because one more task has been completed.

Many years ago, a European Pharmaceutical Company offered me a counter in clinical research, and I had to increase and update my knowledge in this field again. And recently, my life changed. I had to move to America after 17 years working as a doctor in my country. I have no permit to work here with my medical credentials, but I am creating an action plan to pursue my career in the medical field. I am currently improving my English and am looking for a medical college for further studies.

Setting goals for myself and following my strategic plans to succeed is something I enjoy to do. The achievement of each goal elevates my self-esteem. I am so happy with the result and am very grateful for the blessings I received.

*Hanna Moroz is attending the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She is very organized and systematic. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **One Step At A Time**

When I was little, my goal was to become a nurse. Every time I talked to my parents, I repeated that to them. While in school, I became pregnant and got married. Fortunately, I managed to graduate high school in Haiti. I studied medical technology because I wanted to help people in any community in my country, Haiti. My country is very poor. The people don't have means to pay for medical help. My job was to check their blood pressure.

I also studied to be a secretary. My country cannot afford to pay us well, so, I decided to come to the United States. I still have this ambition to become a nurse one day. Meanwhile, I work long hours and I don't have enough time but I make sure to go to adult education classes to study English. All of us face the same difficult situation due to COVID-19. I cannot go to school in person, but I attend the virtual class. My teacher is a good person. She goes out of her way to teach us online through Google Meet. I try to study hard and do my homework to get closer to my goal.

I have been in the United States for 12 years. It is not easy living here, but I admit that it is better than being in Haiti. There are many opportunities for everyone. I believe the day will come

when I would be fully equipped to fulfill my aspiration to become a nurse.

*Marjorie Tunice attends the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West to study English. She is very persistent and perseveres through it all. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **A Quest Towards Obtaining a High School Diploma**

Who would have thought that I would be back in school at the ripe age of 70? Way back around 1968, in the 12th grade, I got kicked out of Ms. Thomas's class because of my usual bad behavior. The day she kicked me out of class she said, "If you return to my class, I will throw the entire school building at you!"

Well, passing her class was a requirement for graduation. Thus, I was not able to graduate with the class of 1968. Of course, my mom was upset and disappointed that I had gone through 12 years of school without graduating, and more importantly, not receiving a high school diploma.

I said within myself that I would one day go back to school to earn my high school diploma. However, I also decided that I would have to get a good job to compensate for this situation.

Through the years, I was blessed to get well-paying jobs, so I did not make it back to school. However, the desire to get a high school diploma remained in my heart.

Today, I am pleased to say that I am on my way to achieving my goal of receiving my high school diploma. How I wish my mom were here to see this, but I know she will be looking down on me on that special day and smiling from heaven.

*Robert Lee Brooks, Sr. is a student at Flagler Technical College. His teachers are Lance Baxter, Mariann Mahnke and Regina Winbush.*

## **Is Your Work Your Passion?**

Do you think about your goals? What is your goal in life? I think that everyone comes to life with different goals, for example to help people or to take care of their children.

My way was really hard to find. I studied different careers to recognize what I love to do. I began with a veterinary career, but it didn't work out. Then, I did two years on the road to a nutrition career that I loved, but I didn't have enough time.

The next year, I started my physical education career, and when I began to work at a school as a physical education teacher (and other places as a CrossFit coach, personal trainer, and swim teacher) my mind changed 100%. I said, I couldn't believe how fast the hours were running and how I enjoyed my work because I learned every day from my students.

I'm the kind of person that has a lot of patience and wants to learn something different every day. I'm a faithful believer that every person that you cross in your life makes you learn a lesson. For that reason, my job makes me feel that my heart is full. After experiencing a lot of things I can say: find a job that doesn't feel like you are working and make money at the same time.

*Daiana Catabbi is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Favorite Place**

### **My Favorite Place**

Do you have a place where you feel very relaxed? For me, I feel very relaxed on the beach.

I wake up, have breakfast, shower, wear my bikini, and hear the sound of the sea. I feel very good, because I see the beautiful landscape and feel very relaxed.

Afterwards, I walk on the beach for a long time. I also like to see people on the beach and kids having fun. I like to see the calm of the sea and its foamy waves that look like champagne.

Finally, I swim in the sea and feel very relaxed. I thank God for giving us the sea, which is so beautiful. Returning home happy and energized, I have good memories of the beach. When I was a kid, I traveled a month on the beach. It was a magical moment for me.

Brazil has wonderful beaches. I love the sea and the beautiful memories of my childhood.

*Ana Claudia Araujo is a student attending the Family Service Center in Arcadia, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Dawn Randolph.*

## **Orlando**

There is no Heaven on Earth, but there is Orlando – a slice of Heaven!

This is the story of my acquaintance with Orlando, which happened several years ago. I will tell you how I gradually got to know this beautiful city.

The first thing I saw when I arrived in Orlando was the airport. I have never seen such a beautiful, comfortable and pleasant airport with its own four small trains. And this is great because everyone immediately understands that they must have

come to a wonderful place. Residents of the city know that it is named after Colonel Michael Norman Wright McCoy.

When you go outside the terminal and breathe in the Orlando air, you are amazed at its purity and the freshness of nature, trees, and herbs. There is a lot of greenery and purest oxygen flows into the air and affectionate sunbeams touch you gently. Everything around is green and blooming, and among the greenery ibises, cranes and herons are walking, squirrels are jumping, and in some places, alligators are crawling.

But where the alligators are, there is usually a fence, although that does not mean you should be careless. It wasn't always heaven here. There was a swampy area without roads, but with alligators and mosquitoes. What was formerly in Florida can be understood from the fact that all Central and Eastern Florida was called Mosquito County. The labor of hard-working people has transformed this area into a beautiful country, akin to a paradise.

Besides the fresh and wonderful air of Orlando, you will notice something else. You will notice that the locals are very welcoming and friendly. Don't be surprised if the strangers you meet wish you a good day or smile. It is accepted here.

Residents of the city know that the name Orlando, according to a legend, was given to honor a soldier named Orlando Reeves who died here. The name Orlando is considered as an amulet. Maybe therefore hurricanes bypass the city of Orlando.

The parking lots in Orlando look more like airfields. If you drive further from downtown, you will see huge parking areas literally everywhere. Even the smallest stores, where five customers cannot squeeze into, have an excellent parking lot for a dozen cars.

Everything is in harmony with the tropics, but people from the north say that there are hurricanes. Even though Florida gets the most hurricanes, Orlando is typically safe because hurricanes almost always come from the east or the west. So, our Orlando is not a comfortable place for hurricanes.

And this beautiful city just suits me! I realized this when I got to know the city. I hope you will agree with me when you get to

know Orlando better. If you live here, then you understand that you are very lucky to be an Orlandoan.

*Igor Avrutskiy is a student at the Adult Literacy League and is taught by Paola S. and Colin N.*

## **A Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago**

Can you imagine a 500-mile path being a favorite place for somebody? I know it sounds unusual but, for me, it is. This path is called Camino de Santiago; it is, actually, a pilgrimage path that starts in St Jean Pier du Port in France, and ends in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. You can take this path by walking or riding a bike. I chose to walk on this incredible path twice in my life, and each time I was surprised by how beautiful it is. I walked between 10 and 20 miles daily, but each mile is a delight in everything it offers.

As a pilgrim, one travels with only a backpack filled with what is needed for the journey. If the backpack is too light, it is possible to not have enough necessities. If it is too heavy, it is possible to carry unnecessary items. So, the first thing that must be considered is what to carry in the backpack. That is the moment when any pilgrim must consider what is important and what is not, and suddenly, on this road, you can discover how easy is to be happy having only a few things with you. Here, on the Camino, what is needed is only a few items of clothing, and other essential things such as medicine, socks, flashlight, etc. The second important thing is what shoes/boots to wear. If the sole is too thin, the pilgrim will feel the rocks from the path or will develop blisters on the feet.

The path goes through mountains, cities, and villages, and to travel this path can be a life-changing experience. For instance, the first 5 miles are very easy, (within the starting city called St Jean Pier du Port), where you can see many pilgrims; everybody is friendly and greets you, and you feel compelled to respond. Once you leave the city, the road starts to ascend - smooth at the beginning, but then the road becomes very steep, but luckily, not for a long distance, only 3 or 4 miles. After that the path is, let's say, normal for a mountain trail. But the scenery - is astonishing: hills, forests, valleys, shepherds, flocks of sheep, etc. Also, along

the path you will find beautiful places, beautiful people, interesting traditions, and many other experiences.

For instance, we met a 77-year-old gentleman, from Luxembourg, who walked wearing sandals(!), and the sandals were sewn with wires(!!) to be more resistant. Another gentleman, from Switzerland, came walking from his country, so, at the moment we met him, he had already travelled 2,400 miles walking!

The truth is that you cannot understand the feeling of being a pilgrim until you take the journey! For this reason, I think it is a wonderful experience, that can be done once in a lifetime.

*Alina Danet is a student of Melissa Klaver at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. She is originally from Transylvania, Romania and moved to Florida with her family.*

### **My Mind in One Place**

When I was a child, in my country, Venezuela, I remember that going to the beach was like a ritual. We met among family and friends. We had to get out of bed very early, fix our bags and clothes. My mother cooked rice with chicken the day before the trip. We rented a bus with a capacity for 40 people, and sometimes we were more than 40 people.

The best beaches were approximately four or five hours from my house, and once I got on the bus at 3 am, I could not sleep anymore. During the trip we made jokes and sang, it was all a fuss; we had a lot of fun. On the way, when we were about to arrive, you could see the immensity of the sea; it was the best feeling I could feel. We did not go very often, but getting in contact with the sand, that strong breeze, the sound of the waves, seeing the seagulls flying, the smell of the sea and getting closer to the rocks to see the fish swim made me feel that I was in the most pleasant place that could exist. Being there gave an indescribable feeling of freedom. It is the perfect combination of many natural elements.

Today, living here in Florida, I am surrounded by very good beaches, and I love taking my children to have that same contact with the sea, the breeze and the sand that I liked so much as a

child. Doing this with my children makes me travel many years back in time and remember how joyous my childhood visits to the beach were.

Just like me, my kids love going to the beach, making sand shapes, playing with Frisbees, balls and rackets, swimming, and watching the fish swim from the shore. This makes me believe that they feel the same as I did when I went to the beach as a child.

These are the moments that I have treasured in my childhood memories. I cannot assure that my children will have the same feeling that I did when I went to the beach as a child since we are in another country far from many relatives. The trip is not so long, and we do not meet many people, but I make them enjoy and respect the sea, its immensity, and the beauties of nature.

*Francisco Rodriguez Gimenez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Mom's or Dad's Place**

Whenever I point out I have divorced parents, I always hear, "It's common nowadays," or "Everyone has divorced parents." Just because it's common, doesn't mean it's easy. Since I was a baby, I have always lived with my mom. I guess that the "normal option" is for kids to live with their mothers, but now that I'm a teenager, I have been given the option to decide with which parent I want to live.

At my mom's house, I have a beautiful big bed with comfortable sheets. I have colors, paint, and paper in case I need some for a school project or just to make crafts. My mom has always bought the best snacks to eat. My friends would always go into my pantry to see what there was to eat. I love to watch movies at the end of the night with my mom and talk about life. But—yes there's a but—I share my room with my brother. I have many more responsibilities and chores to do, and the rules of the house are very strict.

At my dad's house, I can do fun activities. With him we just decide to go on an adventure whenever we feel like it. We go kayaking, go on walks, go to the park or eat out. My dad's house has the coolest and most comfortable sofa. Of course, I picked it out. With my dad, I always have someone to play board games with, and he is more flexible with rules at the house. But--and yet another but--I have a small bed, and my room doesn't feel like home. I don't have materials to craft and can't just go to the kitchen and grab a snack.

So I think if I had to choose who I want to live with, the answer would be pretty simple, and that is that I don't want to live with either of them. I have come to the conclusion that I want to live on my own because I want to be independent and pay for my own bills, get my own couch, buy my own snacks, and invite friends and family to host. But for now, I'll just go back and forth between my mom's and dad's house.

*Sofia Paredes is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **I Wish I Were In Paris Again**

My favorite place is Paris. I visited Paris in 2011. I went there with my friend from college as a gift from myself. I have always wanted to go to Europe and that was the perfect place to start. It was truly amazing. I went to the iconic Eiffel Tower at sunrise, sunset, and saw how it glowed at night. Personally, it is the most romantic place I have ever been. I also went to the gardens of Luxemburgo to enjoy the beautiful flowers, trees, and animals wandering in this beautiful park. I saw horse riding and kids running around having fun. It is a perfect place to read a book, drink coffee or just listen to music while admiring the views.

I can share a lot of places that I have visited but every inch of Paris is beautiful. You can walk on a sunny day in Paris, see the local fruits and vegetable markets on the streets, the little corner shops, the flowers, and the amazing architecture. Even on rainy days, Paris is still beautiful with hot cocoa and an umbrella. I felt like I was in the movies. Let's not forget the amazing food that they have. I could eat a whole basket of croissant and macarons.

Also, it has an amazing nightlife where you can party and have fun. It was wonderful to experience new cultures, observing people and their different ways of thinking.

On the contrary, the only thing that was not that enjoyable was the messy metro rides with a bunch of people, trying to see the Mona Lisa in the Museum of Louvre with thousands of people in front of you, trying to take photos and people pushing each other. Nevertheless, this is an experience that I will never forget. On the last day, I put my lock on the bridge of love promising the city that I will come back as soon as I can.

*Angelica Gonzalez is studying English at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Favorite Island**

My favorite place to visit is the island of Saint Thomas in the Caribbean.

The reason why this is my favorite place is for its beaches, its beautiful transparent waters, and its beautiful nature. The island is located in the Caribbean Sea. It is the main island of the Virgin Islands in the territory of the United States. It is a paradise because you can enjoy the most beautiful corals in the world, the diversity of fish, which you enjoy seeing when you swim in its beautiful beaches.

Known as the most visited port in the Caribbean, it offers refined gastronomy, exciting nightlife, duty-free shopping, and much more. In this beautiful island, you can enjoy the beaches, like Magens Bay and Honeymoon Beach, which have sapphire blue waters and white sand that make you feel like you are in paradise. You can find perfect beaches for fishing, practicing water activities, and relaxation among nature.

Its people are cool and very friendly. In its waters, you can find a variety of colorful fish and enjoy the friendly iguanas that walk on the sand. You can also enjoy a delicious authentic island food, such as fried fish. The climate on the island of Saint Thomas is perfect. It is hot but without humidity because the ocean breeze refreshes all its surroundings.

When I traveled to the island, I did it in the company of my husband. We celebrated our first wedding anniversary. We spent five days enjoying this wonderful island. I hope to return to Saint Thomas to live there so that my husband can enjoy his retirement.

*Judith Cardenas is a student at Orange Technical College - Winter Park Campus in the ESOL class. Her teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.*

### **Still on the Court**

When I was a nine-year-old girl living in Serbia my parents enrolled me on a basketball team. The name of the team was “STAR” and there were 15 girls on the team. Our team was led by a coach whose name was Tanja. She was a middle-aged, very strict a coach, but for us she was the best coach.

Every weekday night our basketball team had two hours of very hard training, but on the weekends, it was very special because we did something different. We had to exercise in both the morning and the evening. In the morning, very early, at six o’ clock we had fast running and in the evening, we had a game between ourselves or between us and another team. It was very difficult, but it always paid off because in the end, we always had good results and many gold medals and cups.

These were very exciting and beautiful years in my life. My thoughts are still on the court, although many years have passed. Today I can give my children advice about how participating in sports is healthy and a good way to have close friendships.

*Jelena Jovanovic is from Serbia. She is a student at the Oldsmar campus of Clearwater Adult Education Center. She has lived in the United States for a year and a half.*

### **Peacefulness in the Middle of Chaos**

My favorite place is located in the middle of New York, and it is Central Park. I’m sure everyone knows this place because it has been seen in the movies more than once.

The first time I went to this place was more than 10 years ago, and I fell in love at first sight of it. When I lived in New York, I went there almost every weekend. I always had a good time. Unfortunately, now I am living in Miami, and can't go to the park as many times as before. However, when I am visiting NYC, I go to Central Park.

Central Park is a calm and peaceful place in the middle of a very chaotic city. When you go deep into the park, it is very quiet, and only you can hear the sound of nature. Birds sing, and leaves rustle. It's a beautiful place all year round. I like to walk there for hours and climb on the rocks, where there are open and spectacular views of the city's skyscrapers. Also, the park has a beautiful pond with ducks and turtles, and people usually feed them.

It's an amazing place to have a picnic with family and friends. The park has a special field for a picnic. It is a huge green field with little benches. People can sit down and have their own food. Unfortunately, barbecuing is not allowed. Also, there is much space to play with a ball or do different games or activities. I love this place the most because you find something new about Central Park anytime you go there. I wish I could go there more often.

*Aleksandra Saraidarov is a student in the ESOL Program at Miami Dade College - North Campus. Her teacher is Ms. Jackie Jackson.*

## **The Tennessee in Me**

I love going to my uncle's house in Tennessee. The reason I love going to my uncles' homes is because there are a lot of cool things about Tennessee. One of the things I like about it is that there are a lot of trails that my family has made. My family and I take our ATVs and dirt bikes out and we ride for hours from sunup to sundown. It is my favorite thing to do while I am at my uncles'.

I love going through the woods fast and being the one ahead of everybody. I love the jumps in the hills. I also like being the only one to be brave enough to go through some dangerous trails and the reason why they are so dangerous is because they are steep and have a lot of roots. To be honest, I have an advantage

because I am on a dirt bike which drives easier but is much more dangerous.

Another thing that I like about Tennessee is that I have a lot of family and friends that are cool, and we have fun. The main reason why I like being around my family is because we are very similar, the way we like the same music and like the same kind of cars and they make me feel happy and welcome. Another thing is that my uncle knows a lot of our family's recipes and they taste amazing. One of the things they make is chip salsa with homegrown ingredients and the salsa is amazing. I also love going through the hills in the car with jeeps and muscle cars it is fun, and I enjoy going fast past the trees and going up the hills while listening to the motor rev. Another thing I like is the music like Metallica, and country music. Another thing that is awesome is the burnouts and drag racing. It's fun having the fastest car and beating other people. It helps that the car has a small block 350 with 700 Horsepower. I also like going to the walk trails in the woods with my dad because he is good at reading the tracks of animals and telling us what kind of animal and when it was there. And it's a good exercise.

*Blake is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 17 and is in GED classes with Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

## **Grandma's House**

My favorite place has always been Grandma's house. I have three reasons why Grandma's house is my favorite place. I am going to tell you about the place where I spent many summers, my family gatherings, and enjoyed celebrating holidays.

First of all, my grandma's house has and always will have a very special place in my heart. I spent many summers at my grandma's house when I was little. I used to love to relax there. I ate lots of organic food, fresh eggs, and mangos. We also went swimming. Her house seemed to have something special about it, that kept it apart from all the rest.

Secondly, my grandma's house is a place of family gatherings. On holidays it is always full of laughter and cheers. Aunt Venise can be heard from miles around with her deep signature laugh.

My cousins, my sisters, and I all loved to laugh too but Uncle Mark was more serious. Everyone except Uncle Mark used to sit down at the holidays dinners and make jokes about one another all telling the newest joke they heard.

Last of all, my grandma's house is special because it is my way to remember her now. My grandmother died 12 years ago. I was very, very sad. It was painful to lose her and I screamed at the walls. Now, when I feel emotions at their highest and my mind goes numb, it comforts me to be in her house. If we ever lost this house, I would miss the memories that we shared inside.

In a nutshell, I love my grandma's house because I enjoyed having many summers and family gatherings there. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THAT!

*Yolande Jean Joseph is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

### **What I Like About America**

America is a great country. I have always wanted to be there ever since I was a kid. I dreamt about it. Most people in my country wanted to go there because they wanted to live a better life, to be free, and have opportunities.

Since I got here, I can tell that my life has completely changed. It is not the same culture or vibe. I used to be in a country where everyone had the same life. Now I can tell that in America everyone is living their life, in their world, and everyone is busy. That is what I like about America.

Another thing that is great in America is the food. Chicken thunder is one of my favorites, it is cheap and tastes good. I also really like the fast food here in America. It is delicious and quick. I eat Wendy's only once a week, because I do not want to gain weight.

*Alen is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples FL. He is enrolled in GED classes and studies with Mr. Caraza and Ms. Khris.*

## **Ylvenie's Time in Haiti**

My name is Ylvenie Sylvain. My favorite place to visit is Haiti. Haiti is my favorite place to visit because I get to spend time with family members, and I get to enjoy myself. When my family and I spend time together, we go to the beach, swim and have picnics. It is important to me that I spend time with my family because I do not get to see them often. Sometimes when my family and I get together, we spend time cooking all my favorite foods.

When I'm alone, I like to go shopping to buy things for me and my kids that I may like. I also like to take long walks on the island to see all the beautiful places and things. I do not get to visit Haiti as much as I would like to because of my job. I only visit when my job gives me vacation time, which is only once a year.

*Ylvenie Sylvain is a student taught by Carolyn Vickers at West Technical Education Center.*

## **A Famous Warship**

My family and I visited the USS Yorktown (CVS-10), a U.S. Navy anti-submarine aircraft carrier located in Charleston, South Carolina. USS Yorktown (CV/CVA/CVS-10) is one of 24 Essex-class aircraft carriers built during World War II for the United States Navy. She was named after the Battle of Yorktown of the American Revolutionary War and is the fourth U.S. Navy ship to bear the name. We saw many Boy Scouts from different states. There were over 100 Boy Scouts there. We said hello and shook hands with them. We stayed there for three days and two nights, and only Boy Scouts of America and Vietnamese were permitted to stay overnight on the aircraft. The men stayed in the Noncommissioned Officers' (NCO) rooms, and the ladies stayed in the Officers' rooms under the flight deck.

Every morning, all the Boy Scouts performed a flag ceremony before breakfast. All of us wore Class A uniforms, which is the official dress for Boy Scouts and Senior Scouts and said the Pledge of Allegiance of the United States. I have been a Boy Scout for 43 years and have enjoyed every minute of it.

We also visited Fort Sumter, which is a fortress on a small island. There were a lot of canons that were 8 inches thick, capable of firing bullets at 800 yards, and weighed 200 pounds. The canons had been used to protect the island.

We also visited the Church of Christ Our King in Savannah, Georgia. Then we had lunch at the Pirate Restaurant. We visited the Angel Oak tree, which is 500 years old. When we returned to our car, we found a note on our car that said, "Sir, we welcome you to our city. This is a 'No Parking' area. You will enjoy your stay here if you pay attention to our street signs." Thank goodness that this note was only a reminder. If you receive a note like this, you must obey it.

Charleston, South Carolina and Savanna Georgia, are nice places to take your family. We were happy to have taken pictures of our trip near old cannons that were used to attack enemy aircraft.

*Xuan Nguyen is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College - Winter Park Campus. His teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.*

## **Freedom on the Field**

Everyone has a favorite place they go to. They can unwind, relax, have a great time, make memories, and just plain have fun. That place can be any number of places such as bowling, the library, skating, camping, family's home, hometown. Some would even say that their favorite place is their own space but if you ask me, I will say my favorite place is a soccer field. I would like to tell you a few things about what I do before I play soccer. First, one day before I am going to play, I find all my stuff that I need like my shoes, shorts, socks, t-shirts, and the ball of course, and put them in my backpack.

I love to feel the emotion I feel before a game. The thrill of competition. When I am in the place where I will play, I am really excited and a little bit nervous. I am sweating in my soccer clothes. My team has to wear the same color of clothes, and the other team too. When the game starts, I forget everything, I just focus and enjoy. Finally, when the game is over, sometimes we win or lose but it is the same for me. Because I always give the

best of me. I just enjoy all the games. This is life, sometimes you will win, or you will lose. This is a little secret. However, the best thing is to learn to win and lose and be okay.

*Davis is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 18 years old and is from Guatemala. He is studying and working towards his GED. His teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

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

### **My Life**

My name is Farah Dahmani. I am from a beautiful country named Morocco located in south of Europe and north of Africa. We have two seas—the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Also, we have nice weather—it means four seasons. Rabat is the capital, and our king is Mohamed the Sixth.

My life was usual. I am the mother of two children - my lovely daughter Basma who lives and studies in Paris and adorable son Wassim who lives and studies in Morocco. Now, I am in the United States. I never thought I would change my whole life and come to live here. I remember one day I asked my friend, who is a painter, to draw the Statue of Liberty in my balcony. It was a nice drawing.

I was married for almost 20 years to a famous neurosurgeon professor. We had a beautiful house in a nice neighborhood, new cars and a housekeeper. Also, I have my own business. I have been the owner of a childcare center since 2009. Seemingly, I had an ideal life, but unfortunately, I was not happy. I am the kind of woman who likes adventure. Also, my husband was all the time busy with his patients or operating. Afterwards he was tired, and he didn't give me any attention and also didn't care about our children. I was doing everything - schooling for them and after school activities. I was thinking all the time about a divorce, but it wasn't easy. My daughter was in high school. After she graduated, she went to study in Paris. At this time, I got my divorce, so I was finally free.

After that I was sure that I would travel all over the world since I was free. But soon after, at my sister's wedding, I met my new husband who was on vacation in Morocco. We fell in love, and he suggested that I come to Florida for a vacation. I never thought that Florida was so far from Morocco - two planes and 13 hours flying. I was very tired; he was in the Tampa Airport waiting for me. He was happy to see me, and I was also happy.

We got married in Saint Petersburg on January 5, 2016. I began a new adventure. I got a new driver's license. I have to do everything by myself—chores, cooking, and grocery shopping. It was not easy in the beginning because I was doing things I never did before in my previous life. I think I prefer my life now. It is amazing and not boring. I love the United States, especially Florida.

*Farah Dahmani is a student at Clearwater Adult Education. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

### **Insights on Life in Brazil**

I was born in a middle-class family in the city of Recife which is in the Brazilian State of Pernambuco. Recife is situated on the Northeast Coast of Brazil with a population over 4 million. There are three climate zones in Pernambuco. Along the coast is the littoral with good rainfall. Then comes the agreste with less rain but enough for small scale farming and then the semi desert sertão. This is an empty region as most folks moved to the cities after bad droughts.

I attended a state school and later the federal university, all for free. In general, the students were very appreciative of the teachers and staff. The only problem was when the federal government stopped payments for the teachers causing suspension of classes for almost the whole semester. This did not happen very often. Looking back, I believe that was a political issue. The federal universities in Recife are very good and well equipped. The teachers are paid okay but not great.

Before the 1990s, life in Recife was very pleasant, but not at the present time because of the droughts. People from the interior migrated to the big cities, creating social and economic problems. Self-built houses resulted in densely packed neighborhoods. The favelas often butt up against established neighborhoods. This has created some problems with crime.

My stepfather was a state police officer, and we had a good health care plan for the family. After graduation I went to live in Rio de Janeiro with my sister. I used our national health service. It provides good health care including maternity, medicines,

emergency, and even transplants. Unfortunately, there is a long waiting list for certain services.

There is a very good railroad system. I have taken the one-hour trip from Recife to Cabo, which is very pleasant. You can see the neighborhood houses and the skyscrapers of Boa Viagem Beach. You pass several different habitats, people riding horses, soccer fields with children playing, and small country homes. Cabo City has arts and craft supplies that I like. I drive north along a good freeway to João Pessoa where I visit friends. The inner cities are a traffic mess!

I also like to visit the hand craft market in the Rua do Bom Jesus in the historical section of Recife near the port. In the 1990s the area was renovated, and now people come to see the beautiful French architecture. There are museums, street bars, music shows, and folk dances.

It is very pleasant to spend the day on Boa Viagem Beach. A beautiful palm-lined boulevard runs along the beach for miles. The best beaches for swimming are far from the city and we had to drive or take the bus. It seems to me that everyone, rich and poor, goes to the beach on the weekend.

*Wilma Simons is a student of the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library literacy program. Her teacher is Carolyn Turner.*

## **My New Homeland**

Two years ago, I came here to visit my daughter and to help her take care of her son, my grandson. Because of conditions in my home country, I had to change my travel purpose. When I left my homeland, I never imagined that my life could change without me realizing it.

My country, Venezuela, is different compared to this country. My country has an official language, which is Spanish. This country does not have an official language even though the main language is English. At first, I felt confused with the language but as time went by, I was learning. It is very important to speak English because it is necessary to communicate with everyone and it allows me to have access to different job opportunities.

My country has many different geographic places. For example, my country has beautiful beaches with several trees and white fine sand. In addition, my country has a desert and old mountain called “Macizo Guayanes” which is from the Quaternary Era. Likewise, my country has the Amazonia and the Andes Mountain with snow every year. While the U.S. has many beaches, they are different from the ones in my country because most U.S. beaches have big waves, and some beaches have sharks. The U.S. also has large arid areas and some mountainous areas.

In addition, Venezuela has a mix of races: American native, European and African people form my country. In this country, there has been a lot of immigration, but they do not mix.

Before I came to the U.S., I had a complete life in my country: family, friends, and plans. But I did not know what fate awaited me. I could not go back to my country because my American visa had expired in June 2019.

So, I said to myself, “What do I do now?” I had many doubts. I did not know what to do. I missed my country but if I left, maybe I would never see my beloved daughter again due to the changing socio-political situation.

I had several options. I just had to decide which one to take. So, I changed my thoughts in respect to living in the U. S. because I enjoy the American people. They are very friendly and polite. I like them.

Finally, in this country I have many opportunities for learning English very well. Also, I can work in anything related to my profession.

Now, this country is my country.

*Ingrid Yopez is from Venezuela and studies English at Clearwater Adult Education Center. She has been in the U. S. for about two years.*

## **Stretched Between Countries**

“Not how long, but how well you have lived is the main thing.”  
- Seneca

It was September 2017. I had just arrived in Tampa from Italy. The day after my arrival I was walking in my new neighborhood, and I was curious to see what was waiting for me out there. “Good morning! Hello,” said the people that I saw on the street. “Are they saying hello to me or someone they know behind me,” I wondered. No, they were really saying hello to me. I thought this was strange, but pleasant. When I would walk in Italy, only the people who knew me very well greeted me.

Even more shocking was the discovery that in the U.S. people wait in line in a quiet and orderly way, which is something that in Italy never happens. There is always someone who tries to cut in the line, and this is stressful. I had to stay all the time to check that no one takes my place.

In my opinion, the best part of this country is when someone needs help. For example, if you call the police or the ambulance they will arrive in a few minutes. The firefighters also give you the first aid! In Italy I did not feel as safe as here. There are not enough police or first aid crews, therefore, they are less efficient.

In conclusion, today I feel like a different person. I can say that I live in the sunshine state, I swim in the ocean, and I breathe the wild air.

*Patrizia Carraro is from Italy and studies English at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Patrizia's teacher is Robin Pitchford.*

## **How Life Here is Different from My Home Country**

When you come from one country to another and live for some time, you will find differences between them, and there are some of them that I want to share. Some of them are good, some of them are not and some of them are just different.

**Interpersonal Interactions:** The first difference you notice here is that people smile more. When people greet each other, they do this with a smile which helps increase your mood and make you a little bit happier. Second, people here are more polite. They rarely express with body language that you have to hurry. A person will wait or ask you in a kind way to hurry up. It's noticeable

when driving. If you don't move within a second or two of a green light, you either hear nothing or you hear a short beep from the car behind you; in my country you can hear long beeping after milliseconds when a green light comes on.

**Advertising:** It was unexpected to hear names of direct competitors in a tv commercial. In my country you hear "other" or "regular" during advertisements of products which need to be compared. The difference is even more noticeable in political commercials. You can really see that politics is a "dirty" business.

**Children's safety:** There are crossing guards near crossroads in the school zones who watch for students' safety. This is good to protect children, but I noticed that children are more careless about their safety. All this creates a false sense of security. When I was a child, I was taught to look at both sides when I crossed a road, even when I crossed the road on a greenlight and I still do this. I look left and right at least two or three times when crossing a road. It has to be memorized from childhood because the road is a dangerous place and pedestrians have to be on alert. Cars do not stop immediately due to high speed and heavy weight; malfunction; or a driver could be impaired. So, your safety is in your own hands.

**Honesty:** My wife and I were on a vacation in Helen, Georgia. We were hiking in the mountains. There were paid parking lots near trails, but there was no parking attendant to collect parking fees. We had to put money in an envelope and drop it into a special box. Another example is self-checkout in big stores.

Despite the differences, each country has its own positive things and should work on strengthening them and eliminating the negative.

*Eugene Lazarchuk was born in Sevastopol in the former USSR, now Ukraine, and has lived in Clearwater, FL since January 2016. He is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas and is taught by Geoffrey Boberg and Brandie Cox.*

## **Brazil: A Cultural Melting Pot**

Brazilian culture, as well as the ethnic background of the Brazilian people, is vast and diverse. Our cultural habits received elements and influences from indigenous peoples, Africans, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians and Japanese, among others, due to colonization, immigration, and the people who already lived here.

Popular elements of Brazilian culture are music, literature, cuisine, and traditional national festivals, such as Carnival, one of the main Brazilian cultural events. With the arrival of the Portuguese and the beginning of colonization, European culture was introduced.

Religion, as a cultural element, was also changed by the Brazilian melting pot, forming what we call the plural religious conception. Brazilian customs are varied. When dealing with moral terms, our influence is based mainly on Judeo-Christian morality.

Thinking in culinary terms, we have typical dishes and ingredients that come from indigenous culture. Currently, there are indigenous meetings in Brazil, in which our native culture is promoted through exhibitions of dance, music, clothing, etc. Today we consume typical indigenous dishes, in addition to incorporating Tupi-Guarani words into our vocabulary. Africans brought their religious practices to Brazil. They also brought typical dishes from their regions.

Brazilian culture was formed by many influences beyond its roots. These differences present within our territory and the combination of several peoples contributed strongly to the plural formation of our culture.

*Rubens Moraes a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas and is taught by Geoffrey Boberg and Brandie Cox. He has a degree in biology and is starting a business here in the United States. Rubens lives in Clearwater with his wife. They have been in the U.S. since 2019.*

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

Ten months ago, I arrived in this great country of the U.S. and my life has changed completely. I have found that living here in the United States is completely different than living in my home country of Cuba. There are cultural differences, but the largest difference for me is the language. Being away from my family has been a great challenge for me besides the challenges and demands of living in a large and highly developed city. When I lived in Cuba, I used to live in a small town that was very underdeveloped. Since I have lived in the U.S. I have enjoyed living in large cities like Las Vegas, Miami, and West Palm Beach.

In my small town in Cuba, I could go bicycle riding or even walk almost everywhere, but here in the U.S. I had to learn to drive a car because it is a necessity to get around. In Cuba I studied a little English at the university but very superficially. Now I am taking classes in a school for adults because it is very important to learn to be able to communicate to get work. The most difficult thing for me is being away from the people I love. I spend birthdays and Christmas only with my husband's company. I miss my mother and my grandmother's soup when I am sick. I also miss the neighbors' greetings. In Cuba, I knew everyone in the neighborhood and even exchange food, but here I still don't know who my next-door neighbors are, and when they see me, I feel that they tend to ignore me by not even looking directly at me.

Even though my life in the U.S. differs in many ways from my home country and even though I have faced many challenges, I have met many wonderful people who have helped me and who I now consider to be part of my family although we do not share the same blood.

*Yenisey González Rodríguez was born in the city of Las Tunas in Cuba. She is a dental hygienist, and her goal is to learn English in order to study and carry out her profession again. Her teacher is Sandra Gladney.*

## **So Near but So Far**

My name is Dayadna; I am 18 years old. I came to the United States one month ago and learned things here are very different than in Cuba.

I love different kinds of food and here I can try foods from different parts of the world. But I really miss Cuban food because Cuba has some special flavors. The big problem is that though I can find similar food in this country, it is not exactly equal. For example, the corn that is very popular in Cuban food is savory, it is sweet in this country, totally different.

In the USA, the water is ugly because it is dirty. Also, the Cuban water at the beaches is like a mirror and is more beautiful because everything is blue.

The economy is unlike my island. In Cuba there is poverty even though education and medicine are free. In contrast, in the USA these things are very expensive.

The people are different too, in the appearance and character. Cubans are talkative and very friendly. American can be cold and serious.

The unique thing that is the same I think is the weather. Both are warm and sunny.

In conclusion, I miss my country so much, but this is the place of opportunities. Here I can have a future that is impossible on my island.

*Dayadna is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. She is 18 years old and is from Cuba. She is studying English. Her teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

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

My name is Luca; I am 16 years old. I came from Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Today I will talk about the differences between my country and the U.S.

**Foods:** The foods in the USA are very different than in Bolivia. There is much more variety, they are also very spicy but in the United States I like junk food more because there is more variety. I like neither more than the other. I like both.

**Schools:** There are many differences in the schools. In the U.S., I think they are much kinder. They help you a lot, the level is high, but I think that in Bolivia, it is a little more complicated. In the U.S., it is different because for subjects you change rooms and classmates and in Bolivia you do not. In my opinion, it is better in the U.S. because it helps you to socialize with more people.

**People:** There are no differences, they are both very kind.

**City:** The only difference is that in the U.S. it is cleaner and much bigger.

*Luca Sorich is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL and is 16 years old. Luca is studying English and working towards a GED with Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

## **Whole Life Changed**

There are many differences between my country and the U.S.A. My native country is Albania which is about 90% different compared with the U.S.A. Albania is a small country in East Europe with small streets, buildings and stores. You don't need a car to go around the city because everything is nearby. It has a lot of small stores in the street. Albania is small but has a lot of mountains, hills, rivers, lakes and an amazing sea. People walk a lot and it is noisy when you stay outside because there are a lot of people and cars in the street. The education system is good but not as modern as the U.S.A. The lifestyle is different. I have my friends and cousins in Albania. I hung out with my friends every day when I was there. Food is one of the biggest differences. In my country, it tastes and smells different than here, and I need a little bit of time to accept the fact that I am going to eat different food. To be honest, I like the food here now. My country does not have a good economy and features. I hope one day things are going to change.

The U.S.A is one of the most famous and biggest countries in the world. Streets, houses and food are all big. A lot of things are far, and you need a car, and I think that people don't walk too much. America has a lot of beautiful places, but you need to go by airplane to see them because, like I said before, a lot of things are far away. I made friends here, but it is not the same as friendship in Albania. The education system is very good, and the economy is great.

Albania and the USA are democratic countries and they both have very friendly people.

*Filip is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 19 years old and is from Albania. He is working towards his GED. His teacher is Ms. Linn and Ms. Khris.*

### **How Life in Haiti Differs from Life in the U.S.**

Life in Haiti is very different from life in the U.S. It differs in so many ways like school, holidays, and culture. You have to pay to go to school. You don't pay \$200 or \$300. You pay a lot of money if you want to go to a good school. You have to buy your own books. Kids buy or bring their own food or they won't eat for the day. Each school has its own uniform, and girls can't wear braids. And grades are different. They use numbers, and ten is the highest. Also, students don't have a different teacher for class. The teacher comes to the students' classroom. Students don't have buses that take them to the school. Their parents take public transportation, bus, or a motorcycle to take them to school or some parents use their own car. Students have to memorize their homework, like social studies and science, because they are going to have to stand in front of the class to recite the lesson.

In Haiti, we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Halloween and some others. We celebrate New Year's Day because it's also our Independence Day, and Carnival, Flag day, and the anniversary of the Battle of Vertieres. People of Haiti also celebrate the landing of Christopher Columbus on Hispaniola island.

Haitians have a different kind of music, dance, food, house, and language. We don't pay bills or taxes. The government

doesn't help that much. Some people plant food every season so they can eat and sell to others. While in America most people are able to quickly prepare a meal using a microwave or conventional oven, Haitians must first gather coal or firewood in order to even begin to cook. Homelife for the rural Haitian is vastly different than it is in America.

In Haiti, families live in extended groups with multiple generations under one roof. Not all young Haitian children go to school as they mostly do in America. The different lifestyle, food, holidays, and school system make life in Haiti different from life in the U.S.

*Junie Orelus is a student at West Technical Education Center and is taught by Ms. Zanovia Manderville.*

### **America, My New Home**

I am from Myanmar. I have been in America for two years in August 2021. I like my home in Key West, and I love my husband and my son, Owise. I am very proud of my son because he is smart and very talented. He loves soccer, and I go to the soccer games and root for him. His first year at soccer was fun, but now he is getting better. He plays the piano, and he has a hoverboard and is learning to get around on his board. We walk to Dairy Queen from our home, and Owise will ride on his hoverboard. All of these things are different for me because in my country there is no Dairy Queen and the roads are too rough to ride a hoverboard. There are a lot of dirt streets in Mandalay, my hometown. A lot of people in Myanmar ride motorbikes but in America many people have cars. I do have a bicycle here in Key West and I ride that to school sometimes. Bicycles are fun to ride in Key West.

I am lucky that my son is getting a good education in America. He is attending preschool at Wee Care Center in Key West. He goes to school for 9 hours a day and he is learning so much. He knows all the continents and he learns a different letter of the alphabet each week. This week his letter is "P" and his favorite word that starts with P is his first name, Phone MyatThaw.

In Myanmar, the government is very unstable and it is dangerous for the inhabitants. There is so much fighting going on

between the government military and different villages in my country. Gold, jade and rubies are plentiful in the village. So, the government wants to take the things from the people. So they fight a lot.

In America it is very peaceful and I like that. Though I love America, I miss my friends in Myanmar. I talk to my family often. I use Facetime mostly to talk to my mom and my sister and my niece. I am very happy here. God Bless America!

*Winn Winn Htun attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She loves America. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the USA**

My country, Peru, is very different from the United States. I have lived in Florida for 38 years and in that time, I have learned many things about the U.S.

First of all, education in my country is limited, we don't have the same opportunities as we do here. If you want to go to University here, you can get student loans from the government. I have recently gone back to school and I am studying English at South Florida State College. It has been very exciting to study again. In my class, we study many topics. Right now, we are studying insurance. In Peru, when you get in a car accident, you don't have the benefits you have here with insurance companies. In the United States, no matter what policy you have, they usually pay something. It all depends on the coverage you have with your insurance company.

I am almost at the age of retirement now. In my country, when you reach retirement age, sometimes you don't get the amount of retirement benefits you were promised but you are not allowed to work anymore. In this country, you can continue to work after you retire, I enjoy working so I am grateful for this.

The thing I miss the most from my country is the food. It is so good because it is organic and very fresh. This is the best part of living in Peru. The hospitality is also wonderful, and we give

tourists a very warm welcome. The food in the USA is also very good. If you want to eat organic food, you can buy it. When tourists come to the USA, they are welcomed too as in my country. I have felt very welcomed by the people I have met in this country.

*Isabel Linan is a student in the Advanced ESOL class taught by Melanie Proteau Blake at South Florida State College.*

### **How My Life Changed When I Came to the United States**

I am from Thailand. In 2016, I came to the United States. I was so excited because it was a different culture; there was new food, new people to meet and a new language to learn.

The first thing I did was look for a Thai restaurant and Asian market. The food products were very expensive, but it was important that I still had a connection to my culture. So many things are different here. For example, in the first month, I learned how to drive on the right-hand side of the road. I drove from Washington state to Florida; it took eight days, I was very excited. My husband then took me to visit all his friends and family. We went to Iowa, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. When we met them, they gave me hugs. I got nervous because in Thai culture we pay respect to older people by bowing down to them, not by hugging.

I've gotten to travel extensively with my husband. In 2016, we went to North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida. In 2017, we went to Georgia, the Carolinas again and more parts of Florida. Before the pandemic hit, we got to travel to Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Ohio and Montana. In all these travels, we saw beautiful natural landscapes like the Grand Canyon, Yellow Stone National Park, the Red Woods, Hollywood and Arches National Park. I was excited and enjoyed it all. It was like a dream. I also got to learn so much about this beautiful country.

I learn new things about American culture every day. Now I am learning English at South Florida State College. I am really enjoying my class; it helps me understand people and have conversations with them more easily. I have now lived here for five

years. Although everything is different from my home country, I am adapting. My new life is getting better. I am happy to live with my family here in the United States.

*Chalairat Phillips is an Advanced ESOL student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Ms. Blake.*

## **Haiti vs. United States**

After twenty years in the United States, I will never forget the good, the bad, or the uncertainties of my home country, Haiti. I spent my entire childhood there, but I wanted more for my family and myself so I migrated to the United States. It took a while for me to adjust to the vast changes here in America, which is a lot different from the time I spent in Haiti. On the island, it is slow paced and more relaxed. The worries of everyday life were very simple and basic, such as having enough to eat or being able to afford sending your children to school.

The government being unable to establish a proper system of governance has exacerbated the overall situation. Unlike the United States, my home country does not have property taxes, sales taxes, incomes taxes, or any other form of revenue systems among the population that is needed in furthering a proper economic benefit for all.

Back then, most people assumed that coming to the United States was the only way for a better life. Many people felt that way due to the political and economic situation in Haiti. The politicians were not doing what they promised to the public. The police were nowhere to be found, and it was hard to find a job. Some of us that did have jobs were afraid of being killed or kidnaped. Parents were afraid to send their children to school, or even let them play outside.

That is not to say that we are a poor country. At one point, Haiti was a major leader in the production of coffee, rum, cotton, tobacco, and sugar. It was also the first black independent country. We have some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, our food is amazing, and the people are generous to strangers. We are a people rich in natural resources but plagued with mismanagement in all levels of government. Most Haitians still dream of

being able to go back home. If asked what the biggest challenge to them going back is, most would tell you “Security.”

The one singular aspect of American life that is most cherished and envied by Haitians immigrants is the concept that all are equal under the law. Money and power does not justify preferential treatment in communal life.

*Fabiola Chavre is a student at Palm Beach Gardens GED Program. Her teacher is Krystal Starling.*

### **My Life Between Two Countries**

My name is Ana Ochoa. I am 49 years old. This is a comparison between my life in Venezuela and my life in the United States of America. I lived in Venezuela for 47 years, and I have been living in the U.S. for three years. In all this time, I am certain that both countries are beautiful. There are a lot of differences. Here are some examples.

In Venezuela, there are two seasons, rainy and drought. In both, the sun is felt almost 365 days of the year, so I went to the beach frequently. In the U.S., there are four seasons, and there are big differences. I enjoy that. I love the four seasons, but I cannot go to the beach frequently because the days are cool in the winter and spring.

The daily routine of meals is a big difference, and I have not been able to adapt. In Venezuela, I had an employee in my house who cooked and cleaned the house for me. I had time to go back home to have lunch with my children. Here in the U.S., I take care of my house and everything that implies having a home. I am a homemaker. In my country, I was an architect, and I had my own company. Here, I am an employee. I am an Uber driver, and I work in a store. My new jobs have been new experiences for me. I have enjoyed them, and I have learned a lot from them. There are other differences. Venezuelan people are friendly, familiar, so kind, and happy. I am like that too with my family and friends. American people are polite - all people say please, thank you, and they apologize if they bother someone. They are also honest and follow the rules, but I think they are less effective

in communicating. But I am so alone here. I can't hug children or anyone (even before the pandemic).

The economy of Venezuela currently is one of the poorest in the world. People do not have money. There are two Venezuelans: poor and rich. Construction came to standstill, there was no work for architects. The United States has the strongest economy in the world. The U.S. is a great country; it offers many opportunities to develop our lives. It is the country where many people want to be. Even having different jobs that I know how to do, I can work and have new life projects.

I could describe many aspects of each country. I have been here for a short time, but I feel that I respect and love this country as my own. Venezuela will always be in my heart and mind. I do not know if I will be able to return. I hope to meet with my brothers, my family, and friends again. Due to the difficult crisis that Venezuela is going through, many people have gone to other countries and have left everything they had. God bless Venezuela and the United States.

*Ana Ochoa is a student at Orange Technical College, Winter Park Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

## Someone I Admire

### The Sky's the Limit

When talking about someone to admire, one usually thinks about Hollywood stars or professional athletes, but they are not necessarily who I would choose. The person I admire is much closer to me, and I have had the opportunity to witness my daughter's growth throughout all these years.

My family came to the United States when my daughter was twelve years old. She started eighth grade knowing the little English that she studied in Vietnam. I still remember she was quite excited on the first day of school, but after a few days, I could sense that she was struggling academically and socially. It was easy to understand why because everything was different: a new education system and a new environment. Because she was not fluent in English, she finished eighth grade with just a fair grade point average (GPA).

Then, the next school year came, and she was a high school student. She studied harder to receive a higher GPA because her goal was to become the valedictorian. After four years of high school, she achieved that goal. She was the valedictorian of Dixie Hollins High School with the honor to represent all students to read the graduation speech. At that time, she also got invited to be a member of Mensa, a gifted organization. In 2015, she chose to major in Biology at the University of Florida, and after three years of diligent study, she graduated with a bachelor's degree with honors. Shortly after, she received a master's degree from the University of South Florida; she was twenty-one years old.

Step by step, she has been working so her dream to become a doctor can come true. With her strength and independence, I believe that she can accomplish that.

*Hong Tonthat is a student of the Clearview Adult Education Center and is taught by Inguna Ozols.*

## **My Hero**

My mom, Cira Galicia, is the person who I admire. She cared for five kids by herself and has always been an independent and honest woman. She worked very hard at an early age to give us the best that she could within her means.

I don't have many memories from when I was a child, but when my mom told me about her life, I felt more love for her because she was able to move us forward. My mom's life has been very difficult; unfortunately, she had many problems with my father, but I think her priority was her children. It was always her wish that we would meet a good man, and fortunately that happened! She always tells us, "Thank God" that her wishes have come true! She tells us that is the greatest reward she can have, with 11 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

Now she is retired but is always busy doing things like caring for her garden that has fruit and many flowers, and her dogs and birds. She also goes once a week to exercise with a group of senior citizens—she is a very active person.

For all of these reasons, I admire my mom—my hero.

*Ruth Hernandez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. She misses her mother in Mexico. Her teachers are Melissa Klaver and Robert Baum.*

## **How My Friend Found Her Father**

The story that I tell is a case of real life and occurred to my friend who always wanted to know who her father was. This story is true, but the names of the characters have been changed to protect their privacy.

Occasionally we think that there are things that are impossible to do, but sometimes life gives surprises. Mia grew up without knowing her father. She only knew his name and the place where she was born and where her parents met. She always lived with her mother, but her mother never wanted to speak about her father.

When she was 30 years old, she worked in a government ministry and she had to travel to inspect a building that the government was constructing. She planned to visit the Leticia Amazonia Region and coordinate the plan with a coworker named Carlos. This coworker knew this region was where her father might live. My friend was confident that she could find her father because Leticia is a small community, and everyone knows one another. She asked Carlos if he knew someone named Pedro Moreno, because Pedro Moreno had worked in Leticia for a long time. Carlos told her that he knew a person with the same name.

When Mia arrived in Leticia with her coworkers, Carlos met them and announced that she had a date to meet Pedro Moreno a 12:00 noon that same day. Mia was surprised because she thought Carlos had forgotten about Pedro Moreno.

When the time came for the appointment, her father did not come, and Mia was sad. Carlos asked another coworker, Maria, if she knew a Pedro Moreno, and she answered that he was her uncle and he lived in the town near the church. Maria guided them to Pedro's house, and they met with him.

Mia was nervous and anxious. When Mia met alone with her father, she asked if he knew a Rosario Aldana. Her father answered, "Yes, I know her." Mia told Pedro that Rosario is her mother so she must be his daughter. Her father was surprised, and he went pale and started to cry. He was shocked. After her father could again speak, he told her that he looked for them for a long time, but he could not find them. Pedro opened his wallet and showed Mia the photo of her when she was one year old. Mia recognized the photo because her mother had the same photo in a family album. He explained why he separated from her mother.

This moment was very special to both and Mia was happy that she found her father. Then Pedro yelled and said, "She is my daughter! She is my lost daughter!" He ran out on the patio and he continued to yell, "She is my lost daughter!" The whole family celebrated the good news.

Mia continued her travel, but she took time off to visit her father for a short time. She continues the relationship with her father to this day.

*Ana Claudia Orjuela is a student at the Oldsmar campus of Clearwater Adult Education Center. She is from Colombia and has lived in the United States for almost three years. Her teacher is Robin Pitchford.*

### **The Most Important Person in My World**

The person I admire the most is my mom because she is kind, loveable, strong, and patient. Another reason is if it was not for her, I would not be here today; she was the one who gave me life. When I was ill, I can remember many sleepless nights she had spent to look after me. She is a responsible person; despite her hard time, I have never seen her ignoring her responsibilities. She is always there for me, and never turns her back on me.

My mom is a strong and patient woman, she has always been there to build up my confidence, my character, and moreover she taught me how communication skills are important in life. She taught me when faced with a bad situation how to turn it around and find something positive. She taught me to be a strong, confident female. I learned how to conduct myself confidently in difficult situations.

I respect and appreciate my mom, she worked hard to raise me by herself. Being a single parent, my mother made many sacrifices for me. She guided me in the right direction from the day I was born. For instance, when it came to my education, she was very supportive and made sure I had nothing to worry about so I could focus on schoolwork. In Haiti, there are many universities to choose from, but my mom made certain I attended one of the best. For this, I am very grateful.

Although she is currently residing in Haiti, her persistence, devotion, dedication, and the way she conducts herself is still an inspiration for me. Furthermore, even though I consider my mom to be an ordinary woman, she is my hero, and my love for her is unconditional. I treasure my mom as she is the most loving person I could possibly ever have in my life; she is my world.

*Marie Michele Moisset is an Advanced level ESOL student at Atlantic Technical College - Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus. Her teacher is Ms. Fayne Johnson. She came from Haiti on October 3, 2019. Her eleven-year-old daughter lives in Haiti with her mom and her sister.*

## Song of My Mother

My mom is from the city of Delmas in Haiti. She is a beautiful and clever woman. When my Father passed away, she gave up her full-time job to open a business in our house with the money she saved from the piggy bank. Her family and friends thought that was too risky and insane. They said to my mom, “Your husband just died and left you four kids to take care of, and now you quit your job. That was a bad idea.” But my mom always believed in her goal. For her, that was her best shot because her job didn’t pay enough to survive with four children; her best plan was to open a corner store.

The store hours were from 6 AM to 9 PM every day except Sunday. My mom is a religious woman; she always started the day with prayer and worshipping to God.

My Mom did not finish high school and she never went to college to study business. She has a talent for business. She believes in hard work, and she’s very good in mathematics and knows how to sell and interacting with clients.

With determination, the corner store became a substantial grocery store. She became a successful businesswoman and had the biggest grocery store in the district. According to my mom there are five characteristics that you need to have in your life in order to achieve success:

1. Believe in God.
2. Believe in yourself.
3. Don’t be scared to take risks when necessary.
4. Discipline and talent go together, but discipline is the key.
5. Work hard as well.

This honest woman teaches me to never give up in your dream—don’t be afraid of failure. That means failure is okay—it is part of life. When you fall, you rise, and you try again and again. My mom is amazing; she’s the person I admire most in this world.

*Marie Courtois is a student of the Boynton Beach Adult Education program. Her teacher is Jason Tam.*

## My Mimi

Each one of us has someone we admire. It may be a movie star or a basketball player. But the person that I most admire is my grandma. The reason that I most admire her is that she is one of the toughest people I know.

When she was a teenager, she had three kids and had to drop out of high school to take care of them. Then, after a few years she had to raise them all by herself. Her husband was a bad influence on them, therefore; she had to support all three of them. This meant, she had to pick up multiple jobs. The ones I remember was when she worked in a hospital in downtown Jacksonville and playing the piano in church. I don't really remember the other ones, but there were definitely a lot more. One thing I know about my grandma, is that she is capable of anything. She is still working while going through chemotherapy, but she's still kicking it. She never wants us to have sympathy on her because that's one thing she hates, we still clarify our love for her. Even in my grandma's age and condition, she still works her hardest every day. She is one of the hardest working people I know and one of the funniest. Me and my grandma have a close relationship because I like to stay in Jacksonville a lot, and when I am there, I like to help her out. The reason that she is still working isn't because that she likes to work, but that she needs the money. She has never been a wealthy person and has never wanted to be, but she always works constantly and never complains. That's why when I go over and notice a problem, I just fix it without hesitation because she doesn't like to ask for help.

After all, she is one of the people that I would like to mold my life after. She has been the most important person in my life, and I can certainly say that I admire her. Whenever I'm down, she made it her mission and her goal to make me feel better. To me, that's amazing. Not only because she made me feel better, but she made it her mission to do so. She cares that much. Even today, while she is going through cancer treatment, she still has a positive attitude and is still pushing through. I don't get to see her much anymore because of my work, but I try to call her at least once a day to check up on her and see how she is doing. So, my Mimi is the person who I admire the most in my life. Can you think of who you admire the most?

*Andrew Underhill is a student in the Tallahassee Community College (TCC) Main Campus GED Prep Program. Ms. Brenda G. Johnson is his GED teacher.*

### **A Mom's Advice**

The best advice I have ever gotten in my life was from my mother when I myself became one. Throughout my whole pregnancy the father of my child's family was always telling me what I should do to raise her. They never asked me what I thought about how I wanted to raise my daughter.

The day I gave birth in the hospital on August 25, 2020, my mother told me to be brave, and to do what I think is right as a mother. To make my own choices as a parent. To ignore what his family had to say to me and how I would raise my daughter. She said I was the one who went through the hardships, and made my brave decision to keep my baby, while his family was telling me to abort her and live a better life and that they would get me therapy after aborting. And now that she was born, they had told me how I was going to raise her was wrong. But my mother said I made the decision to keep her, so I am the one to raise her the way I want.

The last thing she said was to not listen to any of them and put my head up and stand my ground as a mother and to speak my mind to them, and for those who did not accept it to remove them from my life.

*Dayane is 17 years old and studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, Naples FL. She is attending GED classes with Ms. Betten and Mr. Caraza.*

### **My Heroes Are Gone but Never Forgotten**

Two incredible human beings have blessed my life. My mother, Margarita, had uncountable virtues, like the petals of the Margarita flower that she was named after. She was born and raised on a country farm. She never graduated high school, but she gained her wisdom and developed her virtues by growing up in that environment.

There were no hospitals near the farm, so when a neighbor was about to go into labor, my mother was called to assist with the birth. She never accepted money for her help, but she was honored by being the God-mother to at least a dozen of those babies.

My mom moved to Bogota, Colombia, where she got married. She and my dad had a loving marriage and had six children. She continued her kindness by giving and serving others. For instance, when our neighbors didn't have enough food or money to buy it, mom was generous and shared whatever we had at home. When relatives moved to Bogota, she was ready to help them find a place to live and help them find a job.

My mother always stayed calm and her heart was full of peace and love. It was her way to listen to other points of view and learn from those that she respected, even though she might disagree with them.

After high school, I took a secretarial course at a government technical institution called SENA. I was lucky and got a job to work there as a secretary. I got married and had a beautiful baby boy named Edwin. Unfortunately, my marriage didn't last.

As a single mom with a full time job and a new baby, and going to college at night, my life was filled with stress. However, my "supermom" came to my rescue. She helped raise Edwin and taught him to respect others, be honest, and always try to do his best. He was good in school and loved to play soccer with his friends. At the age of ten he attended soccer camp to improve his skills. On the high school soccer team, he played goalie. He was great at it, and mom and I loved to go to his games. He made us proud.

Needless to say, Edwin and his grandmother were best friends. Unfortunately, Margarita died of a heart attack when Edwin was 15 years old. Two year later, Edwin died of a heart attack while playing his favorite sport.

I believe that my mother's attributes of kindness, generosity, patience and respect for others was her legacy that she passed to my son and to those who knew her. I'll always have enormous gratitude and wonderful memories of my two heroes.

*Mabel Stierwalt is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's CCR class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **My Mother is Irreplaceable**

My mother is the most important person. She protects me from all the problems. My mother teaches me how to respect elders. She keeps me in place and safe. My mom is my best friend.

She's very hard-working. She cleans the house, buys me clothes and washes them. She makes sure I have food to eat. She gets up early every day to work and give me everything I need. Even when she is off, she still wakes up early to prepare breakfast and get me ready for school. My mother is irreplaceable.

My mom is an amazing parent. Even through hard times, she always does her best. She has persistence.

*Marie Ginette Sainvilus is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

### **The World's Greatest Mother**

Theresa Brooks Sullivan, born January 29, 1949, to Mr. and Mrs. Herbert and Josephine Brooks. Mother of three, she raised a set of twins- Stacy and Tracy Sullivan, and a son, Eugene Sullivan. Theresa was a hardworking, well respected, and loving single mother. She had help from family, but she appreciated the assistance. It never stopped her drive. Theresa read her bible nightly and made sure we attended church every Sunday, even if she had to work. I can't remember her ever complaining. All she said was "I have faith God has my family."

Working endless hours at Red Lobster for 30 years, she made sure her kids had food, clothes, and the best education. I remember waiting up late just to see her face and get a kiss goodnight. I needed the confirmation that she was okay and made it home safely. Although she worked endless hours, she still had us up and ready for school every morning. We always left with a full belly. We argued, fought, and skipped school, but my mother kept a smile on her face and a belt in her hand (if needed.)

Honestly, her punishments made me into the woman I am today, regardless of my current circumstances.

There wasn't a time I couldn't talk to my mom about any issue. She always had a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. I remember rushing home to show her a report card that I was proud of, and she would look at it and start crying. She was so pleased with my excellent work. She worked so much she couldn't attend many school functions, but she made sure another loving family member was there to embrace us and show their pride. I'll never forget the look on my mother's face when I told her I wanted to drop out of high school. I was a senior.irate and sad, all she would say was "Get out! If you don't want an education under my roof you will have nowhere to stay." I thought I had the world wrapped around my finger. I thought I had all the sense at 16 years old. I left my mom's house not knowing that trouble waited ahead, because I wanted to grow up before my time. If only I had listened and turned around. I would've had my diploma. I wouldn't be in prison.

Her words play in my mind every day. The love, wisdom, and dedication she showed is something unforgettable. My mother remains the definition of admirable. She's who I admire most in the world because she worked, prayed, cooked, cleaned, taught, and spanked. She made a great life for us and for that I am grateful. I lost my mom a year ago, a day after Thanksgiving; her favorite holiday. Thanksgiving will never be the same again.

*Tracy Sullivan is enrolled in the ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Ms. Phillips. She enjoys reading, writing, and listening to music.*

### **Super-Duper Mom**

There are a lot of people in my life who are worth being admired. I admire a lot of people but the person I admire the most is my mother. She is the most important person in my life. There is no reason for me to live without her by my side. She is very important to me because she has many good qualities that I have to learn from her. She is a good example to me and I love her for many more reasons. My mom is 72 years old now, and her manners and soul are like a talented young woman.

She was a government civil engineer for many years. She built bridges, houses, and railway roads. She is retired now but she is still building the mosques. Some mosques are so far from my town. So I always drive her there.

I admire my mother because she is very intelligent, ambitious, and she has many goals in her life. She takes good care of everybody. She is a wonderful mother, very patient, sensitive, and open-hearted. Because she is so patient and open-hearted, whenever people have trouble they always come to her for help. She is a great and fun person to be around with because she has a great sense of humor for everybody.

My mother has many talents that I don't have, but I have two talents such as teaching and loving kids. She is a very good adviser, a good model. Generally, my mom is warm and friendly. She is very patient and careful in everything. She always kind and generously opens her heart to listen to everyone and helps them to solve their problems. She always encourages me and makes me happy.

*Phyu Chaw Chaw Htun is from Myanmar. She is studying English at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She does the virtual class together with her niece. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **My Best Friend Forever**

Everyone in this world admires someone for different reasons. It can be the person's personality, how nice the person is, or it could be their appearance.

The person who I admire is my best friend. Her name is Fatima Zara. She is an outstanding person, and she lives in Germany with her husband and two beautiful boys. She is a French teacher in Germany and is a very successful woman. She went there as a Moroccan immigrant, and improved herself by working very hard to achieve her goals. To me, she is a good example, a motivator who started from the bottom and faced many difficulties to become successful.

I have known her since I was a kid. We lived together in the same neighborhood for more than 20 years. We went to the same school. Even though she moved to another country, we still respect, care, and help each other. She is a person you can count on.

I really admire her as a friend, sister, and good listener. I am proud to have someone like her in my life, and I wish that we could stay together forever.

*Khadija Fadel is from Morocco. She is a student at Orange Technical College – Winter Park Campus in the ECCR program. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

### **Love and Admiration—It is a Mystery**

Sometimes you will have some emotional feeling that you do not understand quite yet. Are you going to question yourself about what you are feeling? It is always hard to find the answer to this question because many people are miserable because they can't answer this question. They were confusing admiration with love. Life is like that. There will come a time in your life where you are going to talk with yourself to find out if you are in love or have admiration.

Five years ago, when I was in 7th grade, I admired someone. We were in the same school. She was one of my motivations to go to school. Every morning, I was excited to see her smile. She was tall with brown eyes, polite, smart, and nice with everyone. She had all the qualities to attract everyone. I was one of her secret admirers. On May 26th, she came to me and asked for my number. She told me she would like to see me and would like to start a friendship, but the problem is she had to move to the U.S. on May 28th. I was happy because it was our first conversation, but also sad because she had to leave.

It was a good experience to have admiration of someone secretly, but now I am living in the U.S. My question for the future is, "Are we going to connect again?" It is a mystery. It is always good to share love with everyone to reduce hatred in the world.

*Rickell Pierre is a student in the ESOL program at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Ms. Khris Betten.*

## **Live the Life That Your Heart is Guiding You**

I as a human being who is constantly changing, accumulating, and learning from old experiences, have learned to live with passion and emotion to the extent I can under my circumstances. My emotional or spiritual inspiration helps me to understand my place in this world. It comes from many sources, such as: my inner peace, art, people, or nature.

Art inspires me in almost all its representations. I like painting because the color palette is not only black and white, but there are also many shades in the middle. I like the poetry of Benedetti, Borges, Jaime Sabines, and the stories of Gabriel García Márquez; I feel excited by the little prince and his wisdom as a child.

I am also inspired by people. Sometimes people who inspire me are recognized for their scientific achievements or public character, but most of the time they are anonymous people. These are people who struggle daily and are simple and joyful. They are humble and grateful, and those who meditate internally who value their fellowmen. I am inspired by the questions kids ask with their innocent logic. I am inspired by my ancestors because it is my origin and my current friends and those who have already gone for the wonderful gift of friendship, they all gave me.

Nature inspires me, I love to greet the sun and with my closed eyes feel its warmth and energy. I love cool mornings accompanied by the singing of birds, the steam emanating from the earth and the sound of trees when the wind moves them. I am inspired by the amazing and generous ocean and the moon that makes me feel so small.

All these things inspire me to think, analyze, create, and meditate. Thinking is a great virtue; it is a gift that we must exercise with gratitude and responsibility. We are different from other creatures with which we share the planet because of the quality of our thinking. Never stop thinking; think about you, about the

life you have, the life you want to have and the people you love, and then act accordingly.

*Rebecca Naes is a student at Flagler Technical College in Palm Coast, Florida. She is taught Donna Graham.*

### **Julia Childs, My Inspiration**

In my life, there have been many people who have inspired me. It is difficult to speak of just one person who I can say has been at the top of an “inspirational person list.”

Julia Childs has had an influence in my life. I loved watching her weekly shows. I have become quite a cook myself, just without the fanfare as Julia. I learned how she struggled as she moved her way through her career.

Most people only knew Julia Childs as a French Chef, but she was so much more. She stood over six feet tall, which prevented her from joining the military. However, she still served her country by being a spy in an organization like the CIA. It was called “The Office of Strategic Services.”

She was a cancer survivor which she did not speak about publicly. Julia overcame many obstacles and accomplished many firsts in her life. She started her culinary career late in life. She is mainly known as a chef. Julia has inspired me, as I continue to grow myself.

It is hard to say who has been the major inspiration in my life. I could possibly say everyone I have let into my life has inspired me to some degree. The people I meet even today provide inspiration, those I see in the news, those I speak with daily, and even the occasional stranger I strike up a conversation with while out shopping.

*Amber Miller is a student at Flagler Technical College in Palm Coast, Florida. Her teachers are Gloria Sward and Regina Winbush.*

## Love of Family

Everything in life you need to admire people, animals and nature, I am choosing to admire my lovely cousin.

During my life I've never seen one member of my family think about me like she has. She is from Haiti. When she was twenty-five years old, I was a little child. I am talking about the cousin of my mother Rosette Romulus. She came to United States in 1980. She has a good heart. She supports the family on everything we do. In 2014 she came to see our family in Haiti. I explained to her a true story about us. After one week, she thought about the story and she called me back telling me: "my little cousin everything you told me is the truth the story I would like to keep everything in my mind. I will never forget that, to this day I would like to tell you, I will help you come to visit United States the big country where I live." She was talking while I remained silent and listened, so I would understand every word she said. It made me so happy.

Admiration is important for everyone, I want to continue to respect, love my family and to admire people who live around me. My cousin you are in my mind and you are in my heart and you are in my spirit; I hope God continues to bless you, to bless your kids, and your grandchildren.

*Jocelyn Romulus is a student at West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, Florida. She is taught by Carolyn Vickers.*

## Tired of the Laws

The person who I admire is Rosa Parks. This woman, in 1955, was riding a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She was a Black woman and was not allowed to sit in the front seat. According to the laws during that time, Black people had to sit in the last two rows of the bus.

On that day, Ms. Parks said to herself that this was enough and sat on one of the front seats. The driver and other passengers told her to move to the back of the bus, but she refused. The bus stopped and waited for her to move. This brave woman stayed in her seat. Finally, the police arrived and took her to jail.

This incident does not seem to be a great deal, but all the news spoke about what she had done. After that day, the country saw that we are all equal, and nobody is better than any other human being. God bless Rosa Parks. I love you.

*Hans Hahn is a student at Orange Technical College – Winter Park Campus in AECCR. He is from Venezuela, and his teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.*

## Personal Stories

### Blessing

Every morning, Julito goes to his neighbor's house. The boy who began to walk and say his first words would run and stick his little face to the mesh of the front door, and at the same time with his little finger, he pierced the mesh and said, "Hi, Kenneth, are you okay?" From inside, he heard the answer, "Yes, I'm okay!"

Kenneth, who sat in his armchair waiting for a liver transplant, did not reflect joy on his face, but this question, when he heard it three times a day, day after day, was like food to his soul and body.

There was born a friendship- a family bond. Today Kenneth shares stories about when he played football and was a quarterback, and his favorite team was the Miami Dolphins. Now, Julito is also a Dolphins fan and they attend Julito's soccer games together, and he still asks: "Kenneth Tucker, are you okay?" and his friend responds, "Yes, I'm okay!"

"If the union of love and care were deleted from the face of the earth, no city, home or even crop would survive." - Cicero

*Irma Grand is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### Mexican to the Battle Cry

The title refers to the national anthem of my country. I have always felt a certain suspicion towards nationalist people. However, being so far from my country in a harsh way makes me feel more love for my culture and it also identifies me a bit in my stay here. It has been a long road to learn a language; I honestly thought it would be easier for me, but it is not. I came to America to learn English, not to get a job. Then I fell in love and decided to stay a little longer.

It is a challenge to get to a country where I do not know the language and also where there are many foreigners from all over the world. I face not only the culture of the country I am in, but also that of all these people: different words, different phrasal verbs, different accents, and I can't help adding COVID-19 and masks on all the time. I don't hear enough, nor can I see the movements of the mouth, which is something that they always advise everyone. And the truth is, I can't help saying that there are people who are very cruel to foreigners knowing that they are not fluent in the language.

I am not fluent in English and my accent is very obvious. Even so, I do not lose hope that one day I will gain fluency and I am pleased that my English has improved a little bit. I feel motivated because I have an English class to attend and get help from. I am exhausted from work and so going to school is tiring for me.

Hopefully, I will be reading this after a while. When I do, I look forward to recite it without thinking so much about the words or pronunciation. I hope to smile when this happens, and that life allows me to stay here a little longer to improve my English. Something that we have to recognize is that COVID-19 has taught us that the plans you make can change at any time.

*Arianna Ortega Velazquez has moved around the United States and in each state, she makes time to learn English. Currently, she is attending Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Rafting**

In my country, people say that life starts after forty years old. I believe that situation is true because my daughters were grown up, finished university and got married. Now, it is my time for fun and to have a new experience.

Before I went to Brazil, I was looking for something interesting to do with my nieces. The challenge is hard because they are different ages and have different tastes, but I tried. I have a big problem- my oldest niece is very heavy, and she doesn't have energy for walking all day and another niece has energy for three people. I wanted something outdoors and different than normal

activities like parks, malls and going out to eat. It was important to be near my house in São Paulo – Brazil. I needed some tour that was possible to take the girls in the morning and go back in the night.

After my search I found the rafting, but I was afraid because I do not know how to swim, but I saw that people use a life jacket, helmet, have an instructor on the boat and another boat with a lifeguard. I concluded that it was safe, but I could not bring my niece the first time.

I had to convince my friends to go together with me the first time. However, it was not easy to convince my friends that rafting this time was not dangerous because the river was running low on water. The danger is the rocks in the river. Another question is that my friends did not know how to swim like me.

When my friends saw the river, they started the complaints and I told them that now I cannot regret it, because we paid for the tour, traveled two hours the car and besides, I see families together with kids.

After the experience, my friends said: “What’s next?” I put the desire of adventure in them. After telling my husband about the adventure he wanted to try it, so I went again with my husband.

My best friends who were the most afraid now are preparing the next adventure: Lori Cabrera she wants to fly in a balloon!

Now I am afraid, but I am still searching for the new adventures.

*Graziela Belaz Khreis is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

## **Something Positive I Learned During the Pandemic**

Life is what happens to us when we have another plan.

Imagine a man who throws an arrow with his eyes shut... Do you think he will shoot his target?

Imagine a woman who can't make up her mind over what she wants to be in life... A ballet dancer or an architect?

Imagine a boy who doesn't want to fight for his dreams... Do you think this attitude will help him to reach them?

Even though we must plan in advance to succeed in life, this is not meant to be a torture or a stressful deed. Life is a journey to be enjoyed with the ups and downs; the sooner we learn it, the better. Humankind has the capacity of choice and the virtue of resilience when facing misfortune.

I remember one afternoon returning from my folklore class my father asked me, "Stand up and try to touch the ceiling." So I tried, then he urged me to make my best and I did it, but he wanted me to keep doing it. Then he told me, "In life you must do all your best in everything you do to succeed, and no matter how many times you fall in the end, but the times you stand up and try again, never give up any dream."

This advice from my father has helped me to see life through different sides of a prism and to react in the most positive way I can find with the confidence that "water always reaches its level" and "there is not a burden that endures 100 years, neither body that can resist it." I have learned to cooperate with the ineluctable and to struggle with fate when there wasn't another choice.

COVID-19. "Pandemic". A big name. A big burden. A big challenge.

Have you ever been at a party where people are watching their cell phone? What about the new generation that cannot communicate without one? Families lost in their cell phones? People didn't look at each other anymore. It has been a necessity to make laws to prevent the use of this magical device when driving. Everybody has at least one. I have two—one from El Salvador and another for using here in the U.S.

One positive thing that I can count on in favor of COVID-19, is that thanks to the quarantine, we were tired of the cell phones, so we lifted our faces and found our relatives! At last! We have shared time, meals, movies, good jokes sometimes, and not so good too, but families have improved their relationship thanks to

the enemy COVID-19. But what happened with the ones that are far away from us now that we are missing them and are not able to hug them... Guess what? Cell phones at the rescue!

Another positive thing that I can say on the behalf of Mr. COVID is that thanks to him.... The whole humankind has shared sadness and kindness, gratitude, sorrow, expectation, patience, grief; there have been heroes in every country struggling to help those in need even at the cost of their own life, no matter its condition, from the humblest to the powerful. We have chosen to be resilient and that is a great decision!

*Nuria Perez is an ESOL student in the adult education program at Olympic Heights Community High School in Boca Raton. Her teacher is Vivian Mydlarz.*

### **Tourism is Not Migration**

Since I was a teenager, I used to come to Miami with my family on vacations. We used to spend some days enjoying the beaches, shopping at the malls, and driving around the city. We would talk, then and admire at how organized and beautiful everything looked. Being a tourist, contrary to a migrant, carries that exceptional feeling of being on a holiday, enjoyment, and nourishment. Time passed by, and one day I was in my thirties already. I was running my own business in Venezuela, just thinking I would spend the rest of my life there. And of course, I would continue to visit the United States only for vacations.

Then everything changed. The economy in my country turned into a huge crisis and my business started to suffer. It did not matter how hard I tried to grow every month; the value of money disappeared due to inflation. After 6 months fighting to survive, I did the math and noticed that there was not much time until the crisis knocked on my door. So, I decided to close my business.

In 2015 I traveled to Miami again, but this time there was no list of places to visit. Instead, there was a list of colleges, universities, lawyers, CPAs, and close friends who I had to visit to look for orientation. Pretty soon something remarkable happened, every time I asked someone, I found out these people were also immigrants and had stories loaded with courage and sacrifice. Many people come here seeking refuge from countries like mine

that have been destroyed because a minority kidnapped the power of the nation and destroyed the life of a whole population. I heard stories about families broken apart, people that were killed because they simply think in a different way and people who crossed the desert or sea just with a dream of a better future for them and their loved ones. At that moment, I realized how fortunate I was because of how different these stories were to mine. I was not directly marked by violence or loss of lives. However, I also noticed that this country represents a land of hope for many people in different parts of the world. It has been 5 years since I arrived to this country and decided that this was going to be my new home.

I'm no longer a tourist, I have become part of this city. Now my own story forms part of the millions of stories of immigrants that have come to this great country. It has not been an easy path, but every day I feel a little less immigrant and hopefully soon I will call myself an American.

*Jencarlos Scanga is an ABE student. His teacher is Regla Requena.*

## **Water Bottle**

Women, when we become mothers, are always improvising to solve any need or situation that may arise with our children.

One of those needs happened when my two-year-old son was potty training. I remember we were traveling to a hotel and my son called to me, "Mom, pee." At this moment, the bathroom was occupied by my oldest daughter.

My son again tells me, "Mommy, pee pee! I can't stand pee anymore." I saw a bottle of mineral water with some water in it and I helped him urinate in that bottle. I put the bottle near the bathroom to remind me what was in it. At that moment, my daughter finished using the bathroom. While I was waiting for my daughter to come out of the bathroom, I thought he emptied the bottle in the sink and threw the bottle away.

I was preparing the clothes that the whole family were going to wear when I suddenly heard my daughter say, "Mom, this water tastes bad, it's not good."

She was drinking her brother's urine.

*Edualbis Sulbaran is a student at Community Coordinated Care for Children in Orlando, FL. Her teacher is Teege Braune.*

### **My Pleased Life**

I am from Thailand, Chainet province. At age 21, I went to work at the hospital as an X-ray technician for 5 years. After I got married, my husband and I moved to Chiangmai with his family and we had one daughter. While in Chiangmai, I opened a restaurant and shop. At the restaurant, we cooked Thai food and such. Chiangmai is a tourist town, and has a lot of Americans living there. They like to eat late because our temperatures during the day are extreme.

After I was divorced and alone, my daughter sponsored me to come to America. They were living in Philadelphia, finishing school. While there, I worked as a chef at a Thai restaurant and helped them with things around the house, then helped with the family addition, and we had a great time. After they were done with school, we moved to Gainesville, where my son in law worked on his Ph.D., and Nui was a mom and I helped them with kids and expenses. While there I worked as a Chef again at Bangkok Square and stayed there until my son-in-law finished school and when they decided to move to Jacksonville, I moved to Lakeland with my boyfriend at that time.

After I moved to Lakeland, I have been keeping busy by taking care of the house, decorating the house for Christmas, planting herbs and keeping a garden in the backyard. My husband and I make fun of each other: a Buddhist and a Jewish person decorating for Christmas. Yes, we also started celebrating Hanukkah since it is that time of year for my husband. I enjoy living in Lakeland. I don't work, except taking care of the house, learning English from a great teacher, learning to drive, and getting used to a new lifestyle and events. Since the pandemic came to visit, we haven't traveled, but we did about three or more times a year before, cruising or going somewhere. I do hope it will be over soon so we can go back to our lifestyle.

Well, that is a quick short version of my happy and pleased life.

*Kanakkorn "Pia" Uamtorn is a student attending the East Area Adult School and is taught by Lori Cabrera.*

### **Poppin' Pete and the Sunset Lounge**

Well, I remember a time in my life when I danced in talent shows. The competition was tough. There were singers, dancers, and comedians and all of them were good. The Sunset Lounge was the place to be on Saturday night. That was the night they had the Talent Show. The host of the show was Chico the Virgo. Chico had decided to have a six-week competition. If you wanted to enter the Grand Finals Competition you would have to win one of the six weekly talent shows. Once Chico had six winners, the Grand Finals could begin.

I had the right clothes, but not the right shoes to dance in. One day, my grandfather called me into his room. "Have a seat" he said. He opened his top drawer and said, "Pick out a bow tie you like and pick out a shirt you like." My grandfather gave me a pair of his best dress shoes and told me. "These are the type shoes you dance in." He just looked at me and smiled. My grandfather had seen me in a talent show, Wow, and did not tell me.

Well, on this night it was the Grand Finals, the biggest show of the year. There were four singers, one comedian, and one dancer. You want to talk about pressure! I felt more pressure than ever. Yes, I knew who the competition were. That was why I felt so much pressure,

Picture a young man, nervously pacing back and forth, listening to the crowd roar for the competition. Dressed in a black suit, white, long sleeve shirt, black bow tie, white gloves, soft leather low heeled wooden- bottomed Stacy Adams shoes, black hat, and black shades. As I put on my white gloves, I looked in the mirror and took a deep breath. And there was no more pressure. It was just—show time!

The six finalists were the best of the best in Palm Beach County. All of us were good but there was one young lady whose stage

name was Black Gypsy. She could sing Gladys Knight songs like no one else. She even sang acappella. But that night, she surprised me. She said to me, "You know, Pete, you're the only one who makes me nervous." I looked at Gypsy and laughed. "I make you nervous?" Gypsy said, "No. What I am saying is that you bring out the best in me and I want to see your best tonight. So, come on. Let's go put on a show for them."

What happened next? Yes, I won first place and I was on the front page of the Photo Journal News as the "First Place Winner of the Sunset Lounge Competition."

Who am I? I'm Poppin' Pete of the Sunset Lounge.

*David Burney began attending sessions at DePorres Place in May of 2018. David had completed ninth grade as a teenager and wished to finish his education. His work at DePorres is helping him move forward with his goal of pursuing a GED. David's other interests & hobbies include being helpful to other people in any way that he can, gardening, and fixing things.*

## **The Canoe**

My family's first canoe trip will always be one to remember. There are four of us in our family: myself, my husband, our son, and my little brother. We have always been adventurous campers. We usually hike into the woods, stay a day or two, and hike out. This past year we were seeking to change things up. My husband was told about a ten-mile, three-day canoe trip. You rent a canoe, paddle down the Peace River, and camp along the sides. We were excited to book the trip. With our car loaded with all our equipment, we headed to the camp where you rent canoes. From the camp, you are bused to the boat ramp that is your starting point. When we arrived at the boat ramp, our family had rented two canoes. One for my husband and son. And the other for my brother and me. We separated and loaded our gear into each canoe. We were given life jackets, but the only one to wear one was my son. He was only seven, and the rest of us were over eighteen and experienced swimmers. The day was cold and overcast as we launched our canoe into the black water of the river. The water was calm, and a slight current carried us along.

We eventually came to the part of the river where it winded around like a snake. My brother was at the front of the canoe that he shared with me. I caught him staring up at the trees as he slowly fell back into the river. I thought he was playing a joke on me at first. I yelled his name, but there was no movement, nor bubbles. I suddenly felt something was wrong as I stood upon the boat. All I saw was the bottom of his boots just touching the surface of the water from underneath. My heart started pounding as I jumped overboard feet first. I don't know how, but I was able to find his body underneath the water. I realized he was having a seizure. He had only one once before, a few months ago. I quickly pulled him to the bank. The bank was a vertical drop, and I didn't have the strength to left him to the top. So I had to wait for him to come out of it or help to arrive. His seizure was 5-6 minutes long. That seemed the longest moment of my life. He finally came out of it. A fellow camper was able to help us get him to a hospital. He has been diagnosed with epilepsy, but we don't let it keep us from enjoying camping. We take extra precautions now, and everyone wears a life jacket, whether they are an excellent swimmer or not.

*Wanda Grant is a student in the adult education program at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Alexander Aguilar.*

## **Growing Up with a Disability**

My name is J'Dail, and I was born with a disability and three of my other siblings have the same disability. I was adopted when I was about 5-6 years old by my grandmother along with my other four siblings. I learned later that the disability was inherited from my birth mom and dad.

When I first realized that I was different from other kids, I had to be in about the fourth grade. I remembered that I couldn't see from a distance or see small print. When I was in elementary school, I used to get picked on by other children, but not as much as I got picked on at home from my family. Middle school was the worst; things happened to me at home, and I was getting bullied from the time I woke up to the time I went to sleep. There were many days I wanted to commit suicide. I remember high school being okay. But one funny thing I remember is after coming in from lunch break, this teacher thought I was high on

drugs. He sent me to the principal's office, and because he sent me home, things there was not getting any better.

I decided to go back to school to get my GED so I can prove to my family and other people who said I can't do it. Unfortunately, I have two nieces who have the same eye disease as me. By getting my GED, I want to let them know that it's ok that you are different from the world. I know for me, the one thing that I've learned is that I have to live my life and not live for other people. For a long time, I didn't think about anybody but other people and what they thought of me, so now it's time for me to take care of me. When I was younger, my family use my disability against me and now that I'm grown, I'm not allowing anybody to do that anymore.

Considering all, I'm motivated, dedicated and committed to achieving this goal: "Ain't no stopping me now!" My goal is to complete one subject area this semester, crossing one hurdle at a time. Perseverance is a must – that's my story. What's yours?

*J'Dail Flemming is a student at Tallahassee Community College enrolled in the GED Prep Program. Her teacher is Ms. Brenda G. Johnson.*

### **Something Positive I Learned During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

I believe less is more! That's something positive I learned during the pandemic. Live simple without a lot of things and without spending a lot of money. An example of my experience is that I saved money during the pandemic because I didn't have to spend my money on clothes, shoes, or even eating in restaurants. This pandemic has taught me to live with less.

This pandemic has made me realize that I have a lot of things that I don't even need or use. During this pandemic, I changed my view of using different household products like plastic store bags, zip lock bags, sponges that I use to do dishes, soap in plastic bottles, etc. I have changed these things for reusable bags, bamboo sponges, bar soaps, etc. I can use these household products repeatedly and I do not have to spend my money on

these items anymore, and by making these changes I am making a positive contribution to saving our planet.

In conclusion, I know this pandemic has caused a lot of financial and personal problems, sickness, and deaths. For this reason, I am sharing with you the positive thing that has happened to me. The Coronavirus pandemic has caused me to make personal changes in the way I was using everyday household products and because of these changes, I am now saving a lot of money.

*Lilliam Cotto is an ESOL student taught by Sandra Gladney. She is originally from Puerto Rico and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration.*

## **Grit and Determination**

Growing up life has always been tough for me. I was born in Chicago, Illinois and lived with my mom and dad up until I was eight months old. My father was Haitian and Dominican while my mother was just Haitian. At 8 months, my mom made the choice to leave me with my dad and move to Florida. I did not receive a phone call or message from her up until I was 5 years old when my father became incarcerated, meaning I had to come stay with her.

My dad was released from prison early on good behavior, so I was able to move back to Chicago with him before my seventh birthday. At the age of nine only two days after Christmas, on December 27th at around 10:00 am, there was a loud, obnoxious ruckus at the door. I remember hearing deep voices and the sound of the security system in our house blaring through the whole house. I will never forget running into my dad's arms begging him not to go downstairs. Despite my pleading he grabbed his gun and went downstairs, not before giving me the biggest hug and kiss like he was saying goodbye. Little did I know that was going to be our last hug and kiss. I followed him and got to the top of the stairs where I could see everything. Then there was a loud sound followed by sudden ringing in my ears. I heard this horrifying scream which was followed by the realization that it was coming from me. My little feet ran downstairs to my dad's lifeless body on the ground where he lay in his own pool of blood. Men quickly exited my home while I lay with my best friend.

I moved to Florida soon after with my mother. I never spoke or ate, I just stared at walls all day. I got put into therapy soon after because I had uncontrollable anger. I would get so angry until I dissociated. Once I would come to, I would not remember anything I just did. I did this for years, but it got better with treatment. Soon my relationship with my estranged mother got better too due to therapy, helping me speak to her about my horrifying dreams.

My mother had a best friend who had about five boys. One of them happened to become my best friend and he completely changed my life beyond words. Soon we started dating once I turned fourteen and as the years went by, I happened to get pregnant with our first child who we are now expecting. It has not been easy and there has not been a lot of support, but we are pushing forward. With all that I endured growing up, I just hope I can give my child a better life and teach him or her about grit and determination.

– *Anonymous author*

## **The Magic of Traveling**

“Those who don’t travel or read, who don’t dream, who don’t trust, who don’t try, die slowly.” Pablo Neruda.

Like many of us, I was always interested in discovering the true meaning of life looking for answers, but while I was growing up, I realized that life could have different interpretations and each one chooses their best answer according to their own life experiences. For these reasons, I think having the opportunity to travel is the best gift we can give ourselves to learn more about the beauty of living.

I remember the first distant trip I made when I was 23 years old. I decided to apply for a scholarship about an international leadership training program, and I had the opportunity to get to know the United States of America. I had never thought of traveling so far from home, but fortunately all things were very easy for me to travel. I arrived in Washington, DC where I felt very excited to know the capital of this beautiful country. Even with

the snow and cold (I had never felt that cold before,) this was one of the most amazing experiences I had until then.

I was able to visit the Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the White House, the National Museum of Natural History, among other various places, each one more wonderful than the last. I was amazed to visit all those places.

After this trip, I started to see life from another angle. When I arrived in my country, I was very excited about all the things that I had seen, and new ideas started to come to my mind. For example, I had already had an idea for a business venture. With the new knowledge based on the experience of knowing this wonderful country and all the advice I learned in the leadership training I attended, I was able to generate new ideas, and that is how I forced myself to create an innovative product. It was a motivating experience in my life.

Later I traveled again, acquiring more knowledge, and this experience taught me that many times we are like a fish in a lake, without realizing that there is an ocean outside.

Traveling and getting to know new places and cultures is an experience that opens the doors to wisdom. Traveling is the best way to have a personal approach to the differences and contrasts that exist in the world. To travel is like reading a book, where each page is a new and unexpected adventure for us.

*Carla Pinto Palma is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **A Day in Africa**

Since I was a child, my dream was to be a pilot. I decided to start my training to become an ATP (airline transport pilot). In Italy, to do this would have been very expensive. To support my training, I decided in 1981 to come to Florida for a more affordable cost of flight training for my financial budget. After a big sacrifice despite my poor English, I reached my goal. I was so happy, you can't imagine. My dream came true.

After that I found an American company leasing aircraft which gave me the chance to ferry and fly an old DC3 Dakota from Opa Locka Florida, to Nairobi, Kenya, and I did. The contract was only to deliver the aircraft, but a request from Skyways Kenya to fly the airplane for them, was a big opportunity for me to stay in Africa and fly. The company had contracts with the U.N., UNICEF, the Red Cross, and religious missions for humanitarian aid. The job was so dangerous because of the war in South Sudan, Zaire and Somalia. I was feeling well and happy to give aid to the poor people in the remote villages.

One terrible day, I flew to a village in Nuba Mountain. After they unloaded the airplane, the chieftain asked me to transport some wounded people to the Red Cross Hospital in Lokichoggio, Kenya. I agreed, but when I boarded the airplane, the inside was stinking so badly, I couldn't breathe, and I started to lose consciousness. Then I jumped out of the airplane, and I ordered them to unload the wounded people. The gangrene had invaded the inside of the airplane without possibility of breathing. That day was a decision that made me feel bad for a long, long time.

*Giuseppe Masuzzo Castagna is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **All About Veronica**

When I was 14 years old my mom passed away, which was the most devastating thing I have ever experienced in my life. I was a teenager that loved my mom passionately. I was in the 9th grade at the time of her passing, which discouraged me from finishing school or even living. Due to my mom's death, I began searching for love in people and places that could not fill a void in my heart. I tried to fit in with the wrong crowd of people. I went against my standards of living. I became a rebellious teenager that wanted attention. I began smoking, drinking, and became sexually active. My life started to go downhill. Little to my knowledge, I made things worse.

I became a young mother at the age of fifteen, and eleven months later I had my second child. I had no clue of what it was like to raise kids; my last child came five years afterward. By then

I was a single mother still trying to figure life out. I have had many ups and downs, but most of the time I was struggling to raise my family. There were times I really wanted to give up on life, but I had three little ones depending on me. I continued to push through my problems. My kids are truly my daily motivation.

I continued to push my kids while they were in school, never giving up on their dreams and goals no matter the circumstances. While pushing them to graduate, I became inspired to go back to school. Receiving my high school diploma is my lifetime goal. I began to crave the feeling of holding my diploma and then it hit me, faith without work is dead. I thank God for allowing me to see all three of my children graduate. After high school, two of my kids pursued college while one of them started a family. This was a dream come true.

That leads me to where I am today, I gave my life to Christ to become a better individual. I do not have a desire to drink nor smoke or become sexually active. I went back to school, attempting to pick up where I left off. I have come to know failure and giving up is not an option. You must keep moving on, no matter how tired you become. Keep on climbing! There is something great when you cross the finish line, and I am determined to cross this line.

*Veronica Best is a student at the West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Zanovia Manderville.*

## **My Personal Story**

My name is Sara Jean Carter. I was raised by both of my parents in Illinois. I have two brothers and one sister. I had a decent childhood, until I turned eleven. I began acting out and thinking I was grown. I didn't want to go to school, so I began skipping school to go smoke weed and cigarettes. I ended up in Juvenile for truancy. I got into Alternative School.

I couldn't get along with other females, so I ended up going to a school called Esmen. I was fourteen, and my parents wanted me to straighten up. I went to stay with my sister, I was introduced to sex, and I got pregnant. The guy I was with was an older

man, who was a gang member. I was accused of cheating on him with his cousin, who was also a Vice Lord.

I never cheated on him, but he left one day and came back to find his cousin's truck parked in the driveway. His cousin's mother lived across the street from where his house was. He automatically assumed that I was cheating. I knew I was going to get hurt. I was eight and a half months pregnant. I was fifteen years old, scared, and couldn't go to my sister's because he would come looking for me.

I asked my sister to get me a hotel room, thinking this would provide me some safety, but I also didn't know that he had people stalking me and they had followed my sister and I to the hotel. She got me a room and I stayed there by myself. I remember getting hungry and going out the room. I had a blindside at the staircase, so when I got downstairs, all I remember is him grabbing me and beating me. I was balled up on the floor begging him to stop.

I remember him kicking me four more times in the face, and then I woke up in the hospital two months later. While I was in a coma, I lost my baby and he kicked all my teeth out. Two days later my mom passed away. I didn't get to tell either one goodbye or go to the funerals. I know I will never forget that experience. I know that I have changed my way of thinking because I wanted him killed but now I know he will have to face God.

I have two beautiful kids. I turned to drugs and ended up in a prison six times. It took me coming to the Department of Corrections in Florida to realize life is short. I am tired of coming back and forth to prison. I have kids, grandchildren, brothers, and my sister looking up to me. I have to move forward from here on out.

*Sara Carter is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida. She is the mother of two. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

## **My Personal Story**

I gave birth to a beautiful little baby girl in 1992. Her name is Stephanie. Unfortunately, I wasn't around to watch her grow. My mother had the chance to experience her first steps. When she hurt herself, my mom was there to treat her bumps, bruises, and boo-boos. As you can see, my mother was a mother to my child.

I was young and I thought I knew everything. No one could tell me different. It was my life, and I was living it. I was living by my bad choices, in and out of prison, never finding the same time to spare for my daughter. As she grew, her anger and disappointment in me grew. I had less and less time for anyone except myself. It was all about me and what I thought was right for me. Through all of this Stephanie's attitude changed. I told myself initially, I didn't know why, but deep down I knew. One day Stephanie cursed me out like a dog. I still couldn't believe my daughter was talking to me like that. That anger was so raw. I didn't think I deserved such disrespect. Those feelings that she let out had been growing for years. Her struggle with the thought of being forgotten, thinking that something was wrong with her, why her mother didn't want her. Through the yelling and screaming I just thought, as a mother I had fallen short. It wasn't so much of what I did, but what I didn't do; my daughter needed me. She needed my time and that is where I neglected her. Stephanie finally exploded and released her emotions to me in a storm.

As time passed, I explained how I had been doing better, trying to change my ways, not going to places I used to hang out at. I began to take advice from the older people in my neighborhood. I was really learning about myself now and learning to make better decisions, making more time for my family and for my daughter. Stephanie didn't believe me. She had to see it for herself; and she saw it. Not long after that we sat down and had a conversation where we cried, and I promised to be a better mother and person.

Now we can't be separated. We are best friends. I've been through so much with my daughter. Her being with my mom has made her a strong woman.

*Vanessa Williams is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional*

*Facility in Quincy, Florida. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education class.*

## **Life Lessons**

I grew up in a poor family. My parents never really had much, but the bills were always paid. I have two brothers and an older sister. We were raised in Tampa, Florida, by both parents, but sometimes my grandparents or my aunt took care of us.

Life was not easy in our house. My dad was abusive alcoholic! When he was drunk, he would hit my siblings and myself. After hitting us, he would begin hitting my mother. She would wait for him to pass out drunk, then load all four of us kids into the car and make “the great escape.” We would go to my grandparent’s house or to my aunt’s house, but after a couple days, my dad would beg my mom to come back. He always promised that he would “quit drinking” or that “things will be different,” but things never did change. Instead, the beatings became worse.

As the years progressed, my parents split up many times. My mother would end up back with my father saying, “I love him.” I never understood why anyone would stay through the abuse, and make their children suffer too. I always thought that my mother loved her children more than her husband, but I was wrong. As a result, my mother endured being abused for many years. As teenager I grew tired of the abuse, whatever form. I wouldn’t let either of my parents touch me, and I ran from verbal abuse. I wouldn’t even let them hug me. I was never sure if the hug was just a ploy, some way to get me in their grip so they could hit me.

Growing up in a violent home taught me not to trust and caused fear of love. As an adult, when I would be in relationships, I never knew how to express myself. I felt like the words, “I love you,” meant I was going to be hit or disrespected. In return, it made learning how to love and accepting love my hardest lessons. Later, I found myself with a great man. He showed me I was loved and cherished. We didn’t always see eye to eye because of my past and its scars, but he never gave up on me. Indeed, he gave me a great life. We had two beautiful children that together we taught how to love without violence.

I wish I hadn't learned that loving someone has the ability to hurt just as much as a physical beating. Loving someone can be devastating. I learned that the people you love the most can die. The effect that has on a person varies depending on their ability to cope with grief. I wasn't ready for that particular life lesson. I've since learned how to live through these lessons and I'm a stronger person because of it.

*Mary Roberts is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is in the ABE III Class taught by Ms. Phillips. She grew up in Tampa, FL, and has two children.*

### **Looking for a Better Life**

My name is Chantal Reyes Lira. I am 27 years old, and I am from Nicaragua. Like some of the foreigners who are residing in the United States, I have a similar reason why I left my country. Who could be happy and safe if the country has economic and political problems? Certainly, no one. That is the reason why I came to stay in America to reunite with my mom, sister, uncle, and aunt who came here before me.

In a way, I am very blessed because I am now in a better place, though I have other challenges. But I'm sure that they will all be resolved in the long run, especially now that America has a new president. He is definitely a man who cares about the people in this country, including the immigrants. I am very hopeful and trust that he will find a way to help us.

Because I am new in America, I do not know anything about this city that I am living in now, Key West. I learned to take the bus, look for work, and do many things that I would never think of doing. In fact, all those moments helped me to grow up and get stronger as an independent person.

I studied odontology in my country, and I have a lot of dreams that I would like to do in the future. My first goal is to learn English. By the way, I am improving a lot. My second goal is to take the dental assistant test and I did it. Also, I already got my license. I want to be an odontologist here and I want to help all of my family in Nicaragua too. Apparently, I have more English, work, and social skills. I got to know many amazing people. This

would never have happened if I did not take the chance to come to the United States. I am so grateful for that. Thanks be to God and the USA for this wonderful opportunity.

*Chantal Reyes Lira attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She is working very hard working to reach her goal in America. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Bewitched by Key West**

I have been traveling to the U.S. for many years once per year for my vacation, but I never heard about Key West, Florida. I came here because an old friend from my beautiful country, the Dominican Republic, invited me. I came without any expectations. I only brought with me a small suitcase. My heart was broken because of my divorce and I wanted to escape from curious friends who wanted to ask about it.

Immediately after I arrived in Key West, my friend took me to walk around the city. Right away I noticed the local people had friendly smiles. The most impressive was that everybody said hello to me without even knowing me. I rode a bike freely like a little girl. That day the weather was perfect like my town in my country. I was very happy and relaxed.

I also found a church, Paz y Amor. I felt welcomed there. While the days passed by, I fell more and more in love with this island. I did not have time to think about my problems. My family was very happy for me, too. I sent them photos and videos of the old houses, museums, and parades like Fantasyfest. That festival was very surprising for me.

The day that I had to leave finally approached. Everything in my life started to change and I did not want to go back for that reason. I could not sleep at night because if I had decided to stay, I would not be able to see my family for many years. I got down on my knees and prayed to God to help me make the best decision. Two days later, I decided to call my family and talk to them about what I decided to do for myself. To my surprise, they wanted the same thing, too. They were happy and supported me. My mother was both happy and sad at the same time, but she knew that was the best for me.

Now, I have almost two years of residency in this lovely place. I work very hard for my future. I met wonderful people who I love, like my mother-in-law, my husband, his daughters. Yes, I said my husband. I got remarried, and very soon I will be with my family again.

*Rosa Rodriguez attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. America is now her new home. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Coming Out of the Shadows**

I want to give thanks to God for giving me the opportunity to live in this great country. My time here changed my life. I came here at 24 years old with enthusiasm and determination. I started going to school to learn English every single day during my first year here. Sometimes I was hungry because I was in school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. and never took a break from my studies.

I learned a lot, but I had to leave because I had to work. I got to experience a lot, but my English only improved a little bit. I also had children and we had big problems with their school. Sometimes I felt powerless; I could not understand their homework or the teacher. This made me decide to start school again! In addition to improving my English, it is also my goal to get my GED so I can get an associate's degree and get a better job.

I do not want to live in the shadows, always trying to find somebody to translate for me. I want to belong to this country and improve myself, and the only way to do this is by speaking and understanding the language.

*Emma Morales Marin is a student in Mrs. Melanie Blake's Advanced ESOL Class at South Florida State College.*

### **A Day in the Life of My Creek People**

In the small camper on the tribal grounds, the frosted, cold air lingers, and dew drops begin to fall like rain from the roof. The sun starts to peek though the pine trees on an open field where

love, happiness, family, and traditions lie. Songbirds are awakened to the sound of light drumming coming from the center of the grounds where my people gather.

The smell of a fresh cup of coffee hits my nose, as I crawl out from beneath the warm covers of my bed. I start to put myself together with my regalia, boots, and beads, then I begin braiding my long, strawberry-blond hair. I walk into a place where I know my ancestors will be. Blessing time has approached, and I hear, "It is now time for the amazing grand entry." Moving forward to our gate keeper and the warriors that protect us all, I know it is time to keep the ways of our traditions.

As I am being smudged from head to toe, I am also thanking the Great Spirit for all of His blessings. The announcer soon calls for fancy shawl dancers. Thinking out loud, I say, "This is my dance, my time to pray, to show who I am, a majestic butterfly who is born to shine." With all the prying eyes, I hear a tiny voice in my head that states, "You are not worthy enough." I struggle to silence that voice.

Locking my eyes on a nearby warrior, I know I am not alone. As the dance begins, he keeps me focused on what is important. I feel the sound of the drums running deep through my veins, as it is also pounding through my heart. As I begin to float like a gorgeous butterfly, gliding with the air, my prayers scream like the wind within myself. The day is still young, yet it is time to rest my wings. Night fall is coming fast, while I am dreaming of my next day.

As the stars approach, the real pow-wow begins! Our elders tell us stories of our traditional ways while many of us laugh, sing and dance to the beat of our drums. When the moon is highest in the sky, we all find the right time to share our love for our people and our nation, then we say, "Good night!"

*April Milstead is a student in the Adult Basic Education Program at Pensacola State College. Her teacher is Linda Lewandowski.*

## A Very Special Holiday Tradition

Samanak is a very ancient tradition that people from Afghanistan, Iran and other countries celebrate every Persian New Year. The History of Samanak has its roots in the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian religion going back to the sixth century B.C.

Samanak is a very tasty dessert when it is cooked. And when it's fresh and green, it makes the New Year's table more beautiful. A person or a group of people celebrate Samanak when they want their wishes to come true in the upcoming New Year.

Samanak is a special tradition with a very special recipe which is different in certain ways: First, it should be cooked only at night from evening until morning, because it needs more time to be cooked well at a low-degree heat; Second, there should be a party while cooking the Samanak, with singing, storytelling, and reading fortune teller books.

Sprouting wheatgrass is an important ingredient of the Samanak. People grow the wheatgrass five to seven days before the party. After cutting the wheatgrass in slices, add some water and blend it and mix it with some flour to make paste out of the ingredients. Then start cooking it in a big pot on the fire outside in a beautiful garden, where the party begins.

Each group takes a turn to stir the Samanak, while the others are singing and entertaining the party. It's important that the stirring is not interrupted. Even a bit of neglect can change the taste of this very delicate recipe. Some people believe that the taste of Samanak is related to the pureness of the person's heart who held the Samanak party.

The philosophy of Samanak is related to the beauty of the nature in this specific time of the year. Like the other traditions, Samanak tells us stories about commitment, honesty, and being appreciated once our dreams come true. Every year is a new start, and every new start is beautiful with a new hope and a new dream.

*Nastaran Masood is a student in the literacy program at LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library. Her teacher is Madelyn Skene.*

## Dancing Saved My Life

My name is Diadié Bathily (JAH-jay-bah-chee-LEE). I was born in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa. I have danced my way from cities and villages in Africa to the United States. But my life has not always been filled with dance and joy.

As a young child, my father took me to Mali to live in a village with my uncle. The result was a difficult childhood. I did household chores and worked on the family farm while the other children went to school. I would enjoy getting away and playing in the mountains with the baboons.

Early on, I developed a love for dance. However, I was severely punished by my uncle. My family belonged to the occupational status group called "hòron." With a very old tradition, they are extremely reserved and my dancing violated their morality code. For me, dancing provided physical and mental benefits and reduced my depression and anxiety. I danced at weddings and holiday festivals. Wherever drums were playing, I was there.

One day, my family came for a visit. For the first time, I met my parents and my siblings, whom my uncle never told me about. When it was time for the family to return to Côte d'Ivoire, my older brother, Daouda, who loved me as his newfound brother, hid me in the back of the family's truck.

During the journey, I became frightened and began to cry. My father told the driver to stop and got out to discover he was aiding a "fugitive." Fortunately, we had traveled too far to return. I was going to Côte d'Ivoire, where more surprises awaited. Sadly, my father left me with his second wife. She lived in the city and spoke French, Soninké, and Bambara. She made her children eat with a knife and fork. I, like other villagers, ate with my hands. I was repeatedly punished for my table manners. Unable to fit in, my father sent me to live with my mother in Yamoussoukro. With a connection to family, my foundation was strengthened.

In retrospect, I realize that all things, good and bad, can come together for the better. While frequently displaced, I was exposed to various dance styles in West Africa, expanding my training. I acted and danced in local theater troupes, and later organized and choreographed my own shows with local dancers.

Word of my skills as a dancer spread. I began teaching courses locally which connected me with a student, who referred me to teach African dance workshops in Montbeliard, France. A few years later, someone I met there invited me to come to the United States to contribute to a curriculum about African dance for K-12 students at the University of Missouri in St. Louis. The rest is history.

*Diadié Bathily is a student at ACE of Leon. His instructor is Joanne Clark, her Intern is Alexander Rojas.*

## **My Best Dog**

I had a special dog, and his name was Ramon. He was a Shar Pei, and he was given to me as a Christmas gift from my friend at work. Ramon was my best friend because he was always with me. The first time with my dog was on December 24, 2002. He was a little puppy and so adorable. Ramon was born in December 2002 and died in June 2014.

Every day Ramon waited for me at home behind the door. In 2003, I got married, so Ramon was my little baby. He had a special plate, bed, clothes, and a leash.

In 2009, my first daughter was born, so Ramon was very jealous and felt bad. He didn't want to eat or take a walk with me. Finally, every morning Ramon began to take care of my daughter. When she cried, Ramon always barked and told me what happened.

Every weekend we used to go the park and play fetch. Ramon was growing up so fast. Every moment was very, very special to my family and me. We spent wonderful times with him. The time passed quickly, so in 2011, he started to get weak and old. He started running very slow.

In 2014, I went on vacation for 25 days. During that time, my dog missed me a lot. He got sick and my sister called me. Ramon was very sick, and he needed a doctor.

My vacation was almost over, and I just wanted to get back to see Ramon, but I could not. I FaceTimed him and told him to

wait for me. When I arrived in my country, my sister was at the airport waiting for me. I saw her face, and I knew that something bad had happened. She gave me a hug, and we started crying. Ramon had passed away. Ramon lived with us for 13 years. To this day, I still miss him.

*Maria Almeida is from Ecuador. She is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College - Winter Park Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

### **A Little Personal History**

Between the hills and mountains, a baby girl with brown eyes, long hair, and a dark complexion was born and grew up in the middle of banana plantations. I was that baby girl. When I was 7 years old, my parents brought me to live in the city, and I had to work after school and on weekends to help my parents financially.

My parent's house was located four blocks from the train station. Every morning, my mom cooked food. Then she sent me to sell the food at the train station. When the train stopped at the station, I had to walk through five or six rail cars in twenty minutes selling food. Sometimes the people on the train did not listen because of the noise. In order to get the people's attention, I yelled, "I bring baleadas (hot shots) for 10 cents and macheteada with coffee for 50 cents!" These are special foods in my country. I was just a little girl with many dreams. One of those dreams was to become a nurse or teacher instead of becoming a seamstress.

One day, I heard people say that living in the United States was very, very nice. It was so pretty that you can walk, and your shoes never get dirty. After hearing that, I thought maybe in the U.S. there are no cockroaches, lice, or mosquitos. During recess at school, I spent my time reading romance newspapers. When I looked at the tall, big buildings in the newspaper, I was even more excited about living in the United States. I held my hopes in my dream.

I was almost 16 years old when my mother died, and I told my dad I had to go to work because what he earned was not enough. I got a job as a domestic worker.

My dad gave me some great news that made me proud of him. He said that the banana company had given him a visa to travel and visit the U.S. because he was the best employee for many years. The visa was valid for 5 years. I said to myself in my heart and mind that I will live in the U.S. with my dad. I had hope that when I arrived, my dad would help me. I started talking to my Heavenly Father so that my dream would come true.

When I finally arrived in the U.S., I could see the difference between an undeveloped country and underdeveloped country. Now that I am an adult living in the U.S., I am waiting for Jehovah God to fulfill my other dreams and goals in life. I am in love and grateful for this beautiful country.

*Carmen Lopez is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College - Winter Park Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

### **The Best Cigarette**

I remember the day when a little girl of 4 or 5 years old was attracted to cigarette smoke and decided to start smoking. At the first puff, she was strangled and threw the cigarette down onto the field. She didn't want to start smoking again and didn't understand why people were so addicted. She had nothing but disgust for smoking and never tried to repeat the experience.

Many people smoke. It is estimated that there are 1.1 billion of them doing so. The consumption of tobacco can lead to various diseases. You can experience several harmful effects. Smoking is the origin of many diseases such as cardiovascular disease and many types of cancer. It is estimated that 30% of deaths due to cancer are unfortunately due to tobacco. The smoker is at risk of respiratory diseases such as pneumonia. For women, smoking addiction can lead to problems with babies during pregnancy.

The little girl who gave up smoking was none other than me. You will agree with me why I luckily gave up on the spot before I started. It is because smoking is a vice. Smoking is dangerous for your health. If it wasn't the case, the commercial should not mention, "If you are not of legal age, you should not use it." Now, you would like to know what the best cigarette is. "Eh, bien!" The one that you do not smoke!

*Sabine Sampin is an ESOL student at the East Area Adult School in Auburndale, Florida. Sabine was a lawyer in Haiti and would like to do a Master's in Human Rights or Criminal Justice.*

## **Parts of My Life**

My name is Landa Jean-Baptiste. I am from Haiti. I am the only child in my family. My parents have been separated since my childhood. I always wanted to have a brother or sister, but life didn't give me that opportunity. My mother was father and mother at the same time. I saw her working very hard to offer me a decent life. My biggest goal was not to fail her, so in school, I tried to be the best student in my classes. When I finished high school, without great resources, she sent me to study outside the country since at this time there was a lot of violence in the capital of my country. As her only daughter, she wanted me to be in a safe place.

Even though my dream was always to study medicine, I had to accept my reality and study another career that was less expensive. I graduated from university with honors and my mother was present, at the time of delivery of the certificate. Seeing her face of satisfaction was my best gift, and this day was the happiest of my life until I had my son.

I can't finish this essay without talking about this little person who changed my life completely. A few months after my graduation, I returned to my country and started my first real employment. That is how I met my ex-husband. At the beginning, we had a nice relationship and two years later, we had a son. His name is Bryan, he is 6 years old and is already a little man. He bathes and dresses himself.

He and my mother are all I have, for now life separates us. Actually we don't know for how long. My mother stayed in Haiti while my son and I are living in this country. I have faith that someday, not too far away, we'll be together again as it should be.

*Landa Jean-Baptiste is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Waiting Hard**

I am Homa from Iran. People in the USA confuse Iran with Iraq. Iranian people are Persian and their language is Farsi. Iran has a 5,000-year ancient history and it was the first country that was writing human rights statements on a stone tablet. I, with my daughters, have been in the USA for 11 months. We are glad, but we are a little sad.

Eighteen years ago, my brother applied for my immigration because I love the USA and my family was there. I waited a long time. I got the visa last year, then I came with my daughter but without my husband. The immigration office told us he had to wait six months because of administrative rules. But now a long time has passed, and we are very saddened by this separation.

It is hard for me as a mother and as a wife. I have great responsibility. My goal is to improve my English to be able to get the same position in my last country as a university professor and a researcher in anthropology because I love it and it is useful for my new country.

I hope the waiting here will be finished soon so that we can make good memories in this beautiful country, which is the cradle of democracy and freedom.

*Homa Haji Alimohammadi is a Level 4 ESOL student at Wellington Community High School. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.*

## **I Was Happy, But I Didn't Know It**

In the summer in Veranillo, the sun was our alarm clock. My mom got up very early and my older brothers did, too. She had to go to work, so she assigned each of us the household chores, such as sweeping the house, cooking, sweeping the yard, washing dishes and other chores like, washing clothes and also taking care of the younger children. I was one of them- the only girl of four older brothers.

My brothers George and Daniel prepared a game plan to spend the day. It was summer, we were on vacation from school

and we lived in an urban area, with a house that had many trees behind, such as mangoes, coconut, papayas, guanabanas, and bananas. You image that: all day we played marbles, climbed trees like monkeys, cooked plantains with sugar, played with cans and pebbles, because we were a poor family, my mom did not have money to buy toys, but we thought only that we wanted to play.

When my brothers supposed that it was three o' clock (my mom always came at home at 4 pm) we would run quickly to do chores. However, we were like a mutual work organization. "You sweep the floor," shouted one of my brothers and the others washing dishes etc.. That was funny and scary at the same time, also my mother had worked hard all day, so we didn't want her to be upset about anything.

One day my Mom left early from work and my brothers and I played in the yard. Oh my God. What happened? That day my mom was happy because the boss increased her salary, so she did not nothing. She had bought food for her children, treats to celebrate her promotion to the new job.

The little things in life are not always money or fortune. There are very simple things in life that make you happy. My mom never gave us luxuries or expensive toys, because she was a woman who worked very hard for basic things at home. But we were happy with a can, with stones and climbing trees. But we also learned about the ability to work as a team and to love and respect our mom.

*Aida Quiros is an ESOL student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### **"Happiness" 2020**

December, the last month of the year 2020—everybody is sad and dissatisfied because they can't get on with their lives.

The main and big obstacle was the pandemic and even until now, it isn't finished. Here with my family, we couldn't get out in order to study English, work, or travel for one year.

But otherwise, my daughter, Vicky, studied and graduated on December 5th from Stetson University College of Law; her specialty, LIM, Master International Law Class of 2020. She took advantage of studying and working, and now she can have more possibilities in her life. I am very proud of my daughter—never mind I was closed all year.

These are the great things that our God gives us always. Thanks to my God.

*Fany Sanchez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Robert Baum.*

## **Personal Story**

When I came to America two years ago, everything was new and difficult for me. I was very alone and helpless. I missed my country and my family all the time. I came here to have a better life. I live with my husband and daughter in Florida.

My husband is working in a grocery store. Every evening he has a busy time. I have no work, so I helped my husband during the evening time. One day, an old woman came to our store. She asked me something, but I couldn't understand her speaking. I asked to her two times. That's why she criticized me. It was really hurtful to me! In this moment, I decided to learn English.

I would like to share another hurtful story. Please listen to me. One year ago, I went to driving school to get driving lessons. But sorry to say, that they didn't give me lessons. Again, I felt too much hurt! I decided I will learn driving. Now, I can do it. I'm good at driving. I have given driving lessons to my daughter myself. My daughter got her driving license one month ago. "Where there is a will, there is a way."

One month ago, I went to East Area Adult School to learn English. I took an ESOL course. Now I am learning something every day. I am going to start working hard to learn to speak English. I am always determined that I'll be able to learn English. It is difficult but I'll achieve it. I am eager to learn. My Adult school experience is really good. They are very helpful. I am proud of my teacher, Lori Cabrera. She is very polite and helpful. Her learn-

ing style is really nice. I enjoy my class. Every day, I wait for my class. I would like to start a certificate course as soon as possible. In the future, I would like to be a Nurse. I want to help people.

It is really true that: “No English, no good job. No job, no money. No money, no honey”?

English is an international language. Everywhere needs English. It’s not possible to get a good job without English. So everybody needs to learn English. Don’t be late like me. Please go ahead as soon as possible. I believe that “Industry is the key to success.”

*Rokhsana Yeasmin is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### **My Three Languages**

I am now learning my third language. I grew up in the Guatemala state of Huehuetenango, where my family and most of the people in my small village spoke both Spanish and Mam.

When I came to the United States at the age of sixteen, I did not hear the Mam language spoken anymore like where I grew up. I only spoke it when I talked with my family members in Guatemala on the telephone.

*Cristobal C. is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 18 years old and is from Guatemala he is studying English and working towards his GED. His teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

### **My Personal Story**

My name is Saima Ans. I am Ahmadi Muslim and I am from Pakistan. I live in the USA now. I am 27 years old, married and I have two kids. I also have three sisters and two brothers. My two sisters and one of my brothers live in Thailand, my other brother lives in Australia.

My mom and dad have both passed away. My dad passed in 2009 and my mom passed in 2017. My mom and dad were very caring and loving parents, I really miss them a lot. I traveled to Thailand in 2014. Thailand is a very beautiful country, with yum-my food and beautiful shopping malls. I enjoyed my time I spent in Thailand a lot. My son was also born in Thailand in 2017.

I came to the USA in 2018 and I am so happy I did. My daughter was born in the USA in 2019. I am now attending Adult Education classes because I really want to learn to speak good English. I hope you enjoyed reading my personal life story.

*Saima Ans is a student in the ESOL program at Palm Beach County Schools. Saima's teacher is Sandra Gladney.*

### **Have I Been Discriminated Against or Was it a Coincidence?**

I have always heard that America opens the door for anybody to come and pursue a better life, but that was not easy for me.

In September 2013, I met my Prince Charming and we got engaged. I was very happy and everything was good. We got married in December 2015 and because my husband lives in America, I had to leave my native country, Morocco and come to the U.S to live with him. So, we started the immigration process in March 2016 by filling out the application; we did everything by the book and the waiting time began.

During this time, we were planning our new life together and talking about our goals. The time passed and everything was smooth and easy.

In October 2017, I finally got an email from the consulate telling me that I had an interview in November. I will never forget how much me and my husband were happy. We were pretty sure that they were going to approve my visa, so that's why my husband started looking for a plane ticket and I started packing my luggage.

At the day of the interview, I woke up early and traveled to a city called Casablanca, where the U.S. consulate is located, with

all documents that I had to bring with me without knowing that it was going to be the end of our dream and the beginning of a miserable story.

When I arrived at the consulate, a woman asked me to give her the papers, then I sat in the waiting room until they called me. The consulate officer asked me a few questions and said, “Your visa is approved, but you have to fill out another form and we are going to call you within sixty days.” I didn’t know what he was talking about. After doing some research, I realized that it is an “extreme vetting” program the administration of Donald Trump came up with. It is a new form to complete requesting additional information about the applicant’s background to more rigorously evaluate them for terrorism. I was very disappointed, and I kept asking myself the same question: Why me? Maybe because I am wearing the headscarf?

We waited two months and after that my husband called the consulate because they hadn’t contacted us. They told him you have to wait six months, then the six months became one year, then two years. It was a hard period for us. I had been held all this time without knowing the reason. We tried everything we could, we emailed and called the consulate several times, we contacted the USCIS then the congressman and senator, but nobody could help us.

One day, when I was reading a forum, I found out that we had to sue the USCIS and the consulate to get my visa. So we hired a lawyer, and of course we had to spend a lot of money to do that. Magically, I got my visa within three weeks and the nightmare ended.

A discrimination or a coincidence, either way, the more important thing is I got my visa and I am happy with my husband and my baby girl.

*Sanae El Hajjaj is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

## **Life Outside Your Country: My Personal Story**

As a human you have a life, and on one hand, it has some good moments and some bad moments. I am going to explain my personal story, and my own experience when I moved to the USA. Could you believe it? It's unbelievable, but true.

In 2011, I moved from Haiti to the United States with my three children and left my husband in Haiti with a six-year-old. My father applied for me ever since my young age, and then when the immigration called me, I was married and the mother of four children. My husband and I planned that I could come to the USA with three kids by myself, but he stayed over there. I can tell you how hard it was to leave your love and your child. Finally, I gave myself the courage and came in. Thank God I have a good sister, she's very helpful to me. She's the one who sent me to school. She did a lot for me, but I was never satisfied. You know why? Because I don't have a job. To find a job, you need to speak or understand English. In my country, I used to be a teacher with seventeen years of experience. Imagine how frustrating it is because of the language? I went to adult school to learn English, but my goal was to have a job and have all my family together one day. About one year ago, I started to work and keep going to school. After one year and a half, I took my CNA license and changed my job while still learning English and taking my citizenship class. Then I became a U.S. citizen. I have a chance for my husband and other son to come in too. For that reason, my life changed. It's not done yet; I am still working on my goal to speak and understand English and have what I am waiting for.

Definitely, leaving your country to another country is very hard, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Especially when you can't speak or understand the language. It's very frustrating. But as an adult student don't be discouraged, don't give up, be optimistic. For me I'm still learning English because my goal is not achieved it yet. It's a great experience for me, learning another language and other culture. Now, I am glad to live in the USA because I am working and trying to achieve my goal. If you just come, maybe you will have the same experience as me, and you can have a better life one day.

*Guerda M. Salomon is a student in the Collier Adult Education program and is taught by Whitney Strohmayer.*

## **My Autobiography**

Do you want to know a little about Kelly?

Kelly is a young 40-year-old Venezuelan, outgoing, professional, a businesswoman in her native country, and married to Mr. Giovanni, a Dutch-Puerto Rican national and a worker in the hotel industry.

One day, Kelly was in a financial institution doing banking errands here in the United States, where she met her current husband. He asked her for a conversation because of the work uniform she had on. Since then, they became very good, faithful, unconditional friends, said yes to marriage, and from that moment on, Kelly did not return to her native country because love surprised her in the best way. Now, they are currently married for more than two years, enjoying their new home and waiting for the great blessing of God for the family to grow.

They hope to go on vacation to Venezuela soon so that her husband will discover the beauties of that country.

*Kelly Aramacuto is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

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

Many times in our lives, we face many challenges like a multi-lane junction or a dilemma, therefore we don't know exactly what is the best direction, what we need to do, where we should go, or who we should speak to. We never know what things are going to happen until the event.

My journey has been started in the USA by a 15-day vacation. It was the longest day that I ever knew, ever imagine. It was a hard reality when I had to attempt the respiratory resuscitation followed by a difficult intubation of my second daughter. And, after passing one entire month in critical care, I finally realized that I had to make a big decision in my life because her situation was life threatening and required a lot of things and advanced care...

The denial faced with this situation would never believe that my life has changed forever. Anger at this situation. Oh, no words to express my feelings as a mother; disappointed, hopelessness, loneliness. Despite my emotions, deception and struggles I had to confront the situation, deal with the reality and fight with my fears.

Bargaining with different choices. During the hospitalization, I thought a lot about many possibilities, I turned around to go back to work and take care of my family, I couldn't because my daughter needed more than I thought. The only choice I had was to stay to take care of her and forget everything. I had to assist her and respect my engagement as a mother. My biggest disappointments that I had to give up everything: my house, my stuff my property, and my husband. I left my job without hand-off, I declined my responsibilities as a Nurse Leader, gave up other opportunities that came on my pathway, and started a new life completely different than before.

Acceptance. I don't let the situation disorient me or trick me. I stay focused on my goal and redefine my new goal, my new aim. I learned a lot of new things and new lessons in my life, do not get attached to anything. Every day I have tried to adjust to the real reality and try to reach new opportunities. I started my English adult class; this help me rejoin my strength and continue my education as a nurse.

I can say taking care of my daughter is the best choice, in the future I will have a new job, new position, new opportunities, new position, but a dead infant would not come back. The worst thing is the loss of a loved person in your life. We can't have a life two times. Fight aggressively, don't fail, don't stay alone in your situation. Try to create or find opportunities, and the best thing you can offer yourself is your smile, motivation, courage to move forward despite the storm.

Stay positive in order to transmit positive waves to others and especially those who are suffering. What goes around comes around!

*Nesrin Emiroğlu is a student in the Boynton Beach Adult Education program and is taught by Jason Tam.*

## My 16th Birthday

Last year on July 22 was the Celebration of my birthday. The celebration was in Mexico at my Mom's house. We lived with my mother's family. Also, with my father's and close friends who accompanied me to my birthday because it was a special day for me to celebrate my birthday with my loved ones.

At the party we ate chicken tamales and chocolate cake. We drank soda and water. My family and I listened to music and talked. It was my special day.

*Geraldo is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. She is 17 years old and is from the USA. She is studying English and working towards her GED. Her teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

## My Life Story

I remember June 2012. When I was taking a bath, I had an accident and then my ligaments were broken on my side. I couldn't do anything by myself. It was terrible for me. It was on a Monday afternoon when I felt very, very bad, and my cousin told me to let them call the emergency line for me. I said no to my cousin but still had a lot of pain. The day my cousin called an ambulance, I was working. When the emergency team arrived, I was unable to breathe because the pain was too hard for me. I couldn't stand the ambulance running with me screaming. When I got to the hospital, the doctors did an x-ray on me and then they said I had a terrible accident all over my body. After, they gave a short anesthesia to soothe the pain and I laid down but I couldn't move my body. I felt my heart break. I never guessed it, I said, "Oh my God, I need you, don't leave me alone and help me please." I said, "Jesus, I know you love me, and I love you too, don't let me die, please Jesus. I'll tell everyone how wonderful you are I'll make praise everywhere I go to say how good you are in my life."

They sent me to another hospital for therapy. When I got to the hospital, I still couldn't move by myself, and then the doctor looked at me. He was crying and then he said, "Look at a beautiful young woman who will end up in a wheelchair." I looked at the sky and then I said "Lord, I believe in you. You are God and I believe you will not deny me. You will put me on my feet again."

I spent six months where I couldn't sit, I couldn't walk, and I couldn't do anything by myself, but I believed in God, that He was doing something special in my life. Then I was engaged to my husband and I told him, "You will leave me," and he asked me, "Why, my darling?" I told him, "Because you do not want to be married to a disabled person." He said, "No, my heart. Never, ever. I will not leave you alone. You are my everything, so I will always be there for you." He told the truth because he was there for me and helped me every day. Sometimes he slept with me so he could help me. I still kept going to my therapy every day, and then I kept drinking my medicine, and God made me walk again but all God could do, glory to God forever. God is good all the time; all the time, God is good. This story is my true life story.

*Gerline Eugene is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### **Lunch Lady: A Personal Story**

Although in the stories we are usually described as bitter, old fat ladies without any education, in most instances, that is not the case. Many of us indeed come from other countries and we do not know the English language very well if at all, but a lot of us are educated.

The hours we work allow us to focus on our homes even though the salary from working in the lunchrooms doesn't pay enough for us to make a good living. We have the great pleasure of feeding the children their breakfast and lunch.

We serve and prepare the meals according to the guidelines and requirements that hot and cold food requires. We always check the temperatures to be sure they are correct. We make sure the children have a balanced diet. We offer vegetables, fruit, and milk with all the meals.

The children don't know my name; they only know me as the lunch lady. I need to do my job well because if the children are well-nourished, they will be able to concentrate better on their studies. As the lunch lady, I am contributing to the growth and development of the children of this country.

*Aminta Oms is a student in the ESOL program at Palm Beach County Schools. Aminta's teacher is Sandra Gladney.*

### **Personal Story**

I got married in Colombia and I had two children. My marriage was not okay. One day, I argued with my husband and he said he was going to leave. I told him I would help him pack. I had a good job with Avianca Airlines. For this reason, I was not worried about it. I went to live in another apartment, and I transferred to another position in Avianca with a better salary, mainly because I did not want to see him again. Unfortunately, one day, he saw me and he found out where I was working. That day at the end of my shift, he was waiting for me. He told me that he wanted to get back together. I said, "No way, Jose." He said since I refused him, he was going to take the children and I would never see them again.

I was sure that he would do it. I called my sister who was living in Miami and we planned on sending the children to Miami with my mother. The plan was to go through Mexico. Within three months, I myself arrived in Miami. I wanted to work with people who only spoke English, thinking this would help me learn English. My first job was to sell door-to-door cleaning products. During this venture, I met a lady who had a sister who owned a hotel. I soon started working at the hotel for seven days a week. Soon I found another job during the evening cleaning in a medical building. I worked for 12 hours a day. One day, my boss in the medical building locked up for the day forgetting about me and I was unable to get my purse. I ended up walking home believing that I would be home at 6 a.m. because I lived very far. On my way home, I saw a couple. I walked up to them to see if they could help me. I explained what had happened and they gave me money for the bus. Learning English was harder than I thought, but I was on my way. After living in Miami, President Reagan declared that people who had arrived before 1982 were able to apply for residency. I applied and at the end of three more years, I became a citizen.

*Elsa Martinez is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

## **My Personal Story**

I never imagined coming to the United States, my story is very long but I will shorten it. My grandmother told me to go to Mexico, to meet my family. The plan was a trip.

It took me a week to get to Mexico. I went many places in Mexico, with friends and family. We made the decision to come to the United States.

Traveling from Mexico City, we went to the city of Tijuana and asked for asylum and waited 5 months. We stayed with an aunt and they accepted us asylum after waiting,

We went into a kind of prison; we were separated, and I did not go near my grandmother for 3 days. The place was cold with no windows, day and night light, after a week a police officer let me talk to my grandmother. She was deported and I stayed.

I stayed in a shelter for two months. Waiting for someone to receive me in the USA, an aunt received me, and here I am in the USA I learned many things. I will be in the USA for two years.

At present I only study and work, I am studying English, not having anyone is difficult. I miss my grandmother, my family and my country, but I know that one day I will return. I love education and one day I want to be a professional.

I love the USA. It is an incredible country, the people and everything is great! I do not regret being here, I thank God for guiding and taking care of my Way. I learned to earn everything with my own work and thanks to Lorenzo Walker I have learned English step by step. And as a dear teacher says: "Echale pa' lante!!!" - Mister Caraza

*Bradley is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 18 years old and he is from Guatemala. He is studying English. His teachers are Ms. Khris, and Mr. Caraza.*

## My Personal Story

This is my very own personal story. My name is Carol Miranda. I was born on an island of beautiful beaches, the Island of Puerto Rico. As a girl, I danced in front of the television and pretended to be Madonna. I always dreamed of becoming a choreographer for a great artist. I am the eldest daughter of three girls from a home where our mother was our core strength.

I always surrounded myself with art in some way, although I could never study it completely because of our economy. But deep within myself, I was living the dream of a dance choreographer. At the young age of thirteen, God gave me the ability to learn the art of dance and I thought one day I will get a great opportunity to be a dance choreographer teacher for children. I would then be able to sow the seed and make it possible for them to fulfill their dreams as I had done.

On a vacation trip to Disney Springs, Florida, I told my husband that at some point I wanted to bring my choreography to Disney. But quickly realizing I did not know the English language my heart was broken. God works in mysterious ways, my first job in Florida was to teach dance classes to young children. It was so funny to watch me teach the classes because the only English I knew was how to count.

In my humble conclusion, I am now enrolled in an Adult Education program and taking English classes and teaching dance classes. I have learned to appreciate the gift I was given from God. I am also learning how to speak English and I am so happy that I am no longer just counting from one to eight.

*Carol Miranda is a student in the ESOL program at Palm Beach County Schools. Her teacher is Sandra Gladney.*

## Personal Story

I woke up one good morning as I usually do every morning. I was preparing to do all of my morning duties along with my family, which consisted of my sister, brother, mother, and niece all living together in the same house. On this day my mother wasn't home, so it was only my siblings and my niece that were

left in the house. After doing all of my morning duties, I was off to school.

After a long day of school, it was time for the students to head home. As some of the students were getting ready to leave, we heard a noise and the ground started to shake. When I turned back to look at the school behind me, I saw the school flat on the ground in pieces along with all the remaining students that were left inside. But it wasn't until I started to walk home that I saw something very terrible. The sight of people crying because they were hurt or that they lost a family member really hurt my heart.

When I started to arrive at my house, I wasn't able to go home because of all the fallen buildings that blocked the way and made it impossible for me to get through. I wasn't able to go home that day, so I had to go and sleep somewhere else for the night. It wasn't until three days after I got a phone call saying that they had found my brother, sister, and niece. When I arrived home, they handed me a big bed sheet with their bodies wrapped inside. The only thing that I had as a souvenir of my family was the thought in my mind about the morning before it all happened remembering everything that we talked about. I never thought that that morning was going to be the last time I would ever see their faces or even get the chance to talk to them.

When you have a family, a child, or a husband that you love dearly, try to let them know how much you love them every day that you can. So that if you are departed from that person, you won't feel an emptiness or a longing to tell them something that you wish you could have told them, for this is very important.

*Alice Edouard is a student at East Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### **My First and Lasting Story**

When I was sixteen years old, I fell in love with a great and funny guy. I remember the first letter he sent to me to explain his feelings began with this phrase: "MAY 2: VERY IMPORTANT DAY IN MY LIFE." It was the date of his birthday.

In our country life was very difficult. We had to go to school by foot, and the walk was about one hour. My school was in the

North and his school in the South. Every morning he came to get me, and we walked together holding hands for 30 minutes. Then he returned to go to his school, and we did the same in the afternoon. It was a very great time for us.

When we finished school, life became more difficult in our country, and he made the big decision to immigrate to the USA. We had a long distance relationship, but at this time communication was very difficult. There was no internet, no telephone, and letters took many days. To make the story short, I got married in my country and had three children. He got married and had two boys.

After many years, my brother got married in the USA. I came with my children, and guess who was there? He was. We were very happy and spent a lot of time speaking. After several years, I divorced and stayed in my country with my children. He also got divorced, but we stayed friends.

Ten years ago after a disaster in my country, all my children immigrated to the USA, and I was alone in my country. I made the decision to join my family in March 2020. Now I'm living in Florida. We speak a lot about everything, but never about us.

One day in July, I think, he found his courage and said to me, "Andree, do you remember that you are my first love?" I said, "Yes, you know, you are my first love too." It was the beginning of a new story. We saw that in the heart of each other, this first love has a place that no other person can remove.

We think every time there is a wall between us. First, his migration to the USA. Second, I had three children to take care of. The last thing is that after retiring from my job, I'm living in Florida, and he is living in New Jersey. What I want you to know is that I am 63 years old, and he is 67 years old, and we feel in love like when we were young. Our hope now is to get together for the rest of our lives.

*Marie Andree Baril is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's CCR class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## Late at the Airport

Sometimes when we think about our past, we remember the best moments we enjoyed, the best moments we lost, and also the stupid things we did. Here is a stupid thing I did that I would like to share with you.

It was a day I had a plan to make a trip to the United States of America. I had bought my round-trip ticket on time and at an economic price. So, as everybody knows, the travel company's rule is the travelers should be on time at the airport, like two hours ahead of time at least, just to have enough time for the check-in process. That day I arrived a little bit late. I mean just one hour before the departure time. I went to the airport late that day, because, in my travel experience, when I arrived early, I had to wait for the airplane one hour and a half after check-in—it was a loss of time.

Now, let's wonder what happened to me after I arrived a little bit late. When I looked around me the line was empty because everybody had already left. I approached the company representative to explain my situation. She said to me, "I'm so sorry for you. You just lost your trip." I said "What! Dammit! Are you kidding me ma'am?" She said, "No sir, I'm serious." She kept telling me that the only opportunity the company offered was to pay a \$50 fee to change my travel schedule for another one in the next departure six hours later, but that flight had to do a thirty-minute layover in Puerto Rico.

In conclusion, I had tried to not spend time at the airport. As a consequence, I spent more time and more money. When I take time to remember what happened to me at the airport that makes me so sad and happy at the same time, because I learned a good lesson. Whatever mistake someone does has its consequences. I hope that will never happen to me again and neither to you.

*Wideno Joseph is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. His teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## My Personal Story

When I was 9 or 10, my grandpa died. This is where my life began to go downhill. I started using cough and cold medicines to trip on. I started skipping school and acting out. My mother was an addict and when I had my 13th birthday, the police came and kicked our doors in and took me to DCF. My siblings had friends that their families came and got them, but I was left in the system.

When I was 15, my dad came and worked his case plan to get me back. After he got me back, we moved to St. Petersburg and moved into his house with his boyfriend. While in St. Petersburg, I met a girl that introduced me to pills. I fell in love with Xanax, so much that I would swallow or snort them. I know now that she was never my real friend. All she encouraged me to do was drugs.

I landed back into foster care and met another girl. I got a job and worked my way into an apartment and my own car. I started seeing Anthony, my daughter's father, and it didn't take long for the relationship to become bad. I lost my daughter to his mother because I kept getting high.

I got pregnant with my second daughter and thought my life would change, but it didn't, and I lost my second daughter to the system I grew up in. I continued using drugs and hanging out with bad influences. That is what landed me into prison. I have been down for almost four years now and have been clean. I'm ready to go home, be a great mother, be with my girlfriend, and be happy with life!

*Christina Sullivan is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida. She is the mother of two daughters. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II Class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

## An Expensive Manicure

My Nissan Maxima was in an accident in 2013. When it got in an accident, I wasn't driving it that day. Instead, it was being driven by my daughter. Before she asked me to borrow my car, she kissed me on the cheek. I asked her, "Why did you kiss me?"

Immediately she asked me, “Mom, can I borrow your car?” I replied, “Sure, where are you going?” She said, “We’re just going to go do our nails.” I said okay and I told her not to stay out too long because I needed to buy something to eat. Before they left to do their nails, they told me, “We’re going to the library first.” I reminded them I was hungry and they both said, “Okayyy mom,” while walking away laughing.

They left at 5 p.m. and I sat down on the sofa to watch some TV. At 9 o’clock, I called them to let both of them know that I’m going to sleep and they told me were coming soon so I sat down to wait. I kept watching TV, but a little after 9:30, I heard a voice talk to me saying stop the movie. I looked around and didn’t see anyone talking to me and then I hear the voice talk to me a second and a third time. The voice was yelling the third time in my head so I obeyed and I got up to turn off the TV. I began praying for half an hour inside the house and the voice kept telling me, “Pray because your daughters are going to be in an accident.” I heard the voice told me, “Go to their room, put your knees down in front of their beds and pray for them.”

They said they didn’t see the truck because it had no lights, plus it was raining in the road and it hit them when they turned right. I asked them where it happened, and they said by where they went to do their nails. My car was broken by the truck. They charged me \$967 to get my car back from the tow yard because the insurance company didn’t want to pay. The place where I’m living now doesn’t want my broken car staying there so I was thinking about which friends I could ask to leave my car at their house until I had the money to fix it. Fortunately, I found space to let my car stay for one year.

In conclusion, it was an expensive manicure.

*Clermelie Jean is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **The USA is My Childhood Dream**

My name is Farangiz. I’m from Uzbekistan, but now I live in Key West, Florida. In 2003 when I was six years old, my parents came to the USA without my brother and me. I cried every

day because they left without us. So I always dreamed of getting there, but it didn't work because, as you know, it is very difficult to come to America. After that when I turned 10, my parents came back to our country. They left America because of me and my brother. And I'm so happy that my parents have returned. But my parents' dream is to come here again. We have a tradition called, "REMEMBER YOUR FAMILY."

I have a younger sister who was born in Key West, Florida in 2007. Her name is FloridaBonu. Now she is 14 years old. She was given this name in honor of Florida because my parents used to live in Key West for 3 years. My parents always wanted my sister to grow in America. They love being in the U.S. very much. For that reason, I am now here where my parents used to live.

Why do I like America? Well, my husband lives in the U.S. He came to the USA in 2009, with his family. They won the green card and came to Key West, Florida. In 2015 with our traditions, they came to our house to match their son with me. After that we had a wedding on September 26, 2015. My husband came back and submitted my documents for family reunification. On July 4th, 2018, we had a new member of the family. Our son was born and we named him Afruz. In 2019 in March I got a visa and came to America with my husband and son. My kids were born here, too. As you can see I am now in Key West, Florida where my parents once lived. We have two children at the moment.

I plan to visit all the states of America with my family in the future. I want to work in a bank. At the moment I am studying English. Then I plan to go to college. I love America because the people are nice, welcoming, and friendly. There are more jobs and higher learning opportunities here. I feel absolutely free in the U.S. Americans teach their kids to build their own destiny. Starting from a very young age, special emphasis is placed on the children's upbringing and education. I agree with this principle, and I want my children to become worthy individuals in this country.

*Farangiz Kobilova is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Get Fit Outside in the Park!**

I am going to share a personal story with you. Once upon a time, I used to live in one of the Caribbean islands. It happened many years ago, but even until now I still remember the moments and great time I experienced in the country. I lived there for about five years and got to know a lot of local people and learned about their culture, food, music and their everyday style of living.

The story goes like this: I was a little bit overweight but couldn't join the local gym because my savings were running low, and I had to spend it wisely. So I decided to exercise at the nearest park to my home. As time passed, I made some good local new friends. One day, a lady asked me why I didn't teach other people what I was doing. I answered: "Well maybe you are right."

I thought that was a good idea from these people to provide some feedback, but in order for me to do that I would need some help because I couldn't do it by myself. I mentioned it to my neighbor in my community, and she passed it on to one of the chief members in the city along with a letter proving that there was a need for an exercise routine program out at the park. Guess what? We received the approval from the mayor's office.

Now let the fun begin! We used to meet Monday through Friday for one hour. Everyone was able to bring their water, towel and a floor mat. At the end of the session people were catching up with one another. Also we used to celebrate special holidays, birthdays, and potluck lunches together like a big family.

*Angie Serra is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Life in CONUS and Abroad**

My name is Homero and I want to share with you some experiences of my life in CONUS (the Contiguous United States) and abroad.

My first trip to the USA was in 1972. I was a captain of the Colombian army and came to attend the Special Forces officer course at JFK Special Warfare Center and School in Fort Bragg, NC. At the end of the training, I went back to my country with the “silver wings” upon the chest and proud to be a U.S. Army Green Beret.

In 1983, I participated as member of the Colombian Battalion No. 3 in the MFO Multinational Force and Observers, Peace Keeping Force to enforce the Camp David Peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, backed by President Carter in the Sinai.

In 1985 during a special operation, working shoulder to shoulder with the FBI and US Legat Embassy in Bogota, we were able to free four Missionaries of New Tribes of Colombia that were kidnapped by the narco terrorist organization FARC. I was invited in 1986 by the U.S. government to attend a course in the FBI National Academy in Quantico.

After graduation, we organized the Latin America-Caribbean Chapter of the Associates of the FBINAA. Since that time, I had come to the U.S. at least once a year to attend different retraining with The FBINAA and IACP.

In 2013, we were forced to leave our country for security reasons, and since that time we have lived in Orlando. It is difficult to start a new life, but we have been received with love and we have also had the opportunity to join Union Park Community Center for Families, where we study English and share experiences with extraordinary people of many countries worldwide, improving our English proficiency. This has helped us a lot in our daily life, and with our classmates we have really developed not only a friendship, but a brotherhood and have become a family.

*Homero Rodriguez is a student from the Union Park Neighborhood Center for Families. His teacher is Keyla Abreu.*

## **My Favorite Day**

### **Tet - Vietnamese's New Year Holiday**

I'm Chuong. I'm originally from Vietnam. I have great love for Vietnam so I will share one of my favorite days in Vietnam's culture. Tet holiday - Vietnamese Lunar New Year, or simply Tet Vietnam, is the most significant festival in Vietnam. As a result of being calculated by the lunar calendar, Tet festival often occurs at the end of January, which is later than New Year's Day. Tet holiday 2021 is on February 12th, 2021. Tet Vietnam is celebrated to welcome the Lunar New Year and summarize what they did in the old one. It is a moment for family and friends gather together to celebrate New Year.

The time that I could experience Tet the most is when I went to another city to study in college. Every day, I waited for the time to go home to my family and help them to do the housework for Tet. I always remember the feeling when I went home after a long time studying far from home and my parents' emotion when they see me. That's the best moment in my life.

After I arrived home, there were a lot of work waiting for me to finish for Tet's preparation. I have to do house cleaning, re-decorate the interior to make a new look for the house, etc. After finishing the cleaning work, my dad and I went to the flower shop to buy some peach blossom and apricot blossom trees because it is a symbol of Tet holiday. On the last day of the old year, all the family will congregate to enjoy the last meal of the year. Then they will go downtown to watch fireworks.

In the Vietnamese culture, to celebrate Tet also means to eat. My weight always increases extremely after Tet because there are so many delicious foods and I can't resist them. Our traditional food for Tet holiday is Chung cake - square sticky rice cake. Tet can't be Tet if we don't have Chung cake.

Lunar New Year in Vietnam traditionally lasts for three days. I often stay at home to welcome guests to my house or go to my relatives and neighbors' houses. Besides, my family often go

to pagodas to donate money and ask for letters. We believe that we will receive plenty of fortune.

If you are a Vietnamese, no matter where you are, Tet is always the most important holiday. Vietnamese community in California and Texas celebrate Tet every year even though they are not in Vietnam. Furthermore, I believe that all the Vietnamese people want to be in Vietnam to celebrate Tet than in other countries.

*Chuong Dinh Le is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. He is looking forward to pursue studies in fashion. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **A Little OOPS into a Big YAY**

Everyone has an adventure story to tell. If not, they will have one day. One of mine was in Brazil with my family. We had a great time. I was in the countryside not far from my city, and it was an unusually rainy day. The road was wet and slippery, water all around, especially in the flat parts and holes.

It was a beautiful but rainy afternoon; my family was at home, watching TV with our blankets. After a while, my husband decided to go to my sister's house, so he talked to me. I said that I was fine and that we could go.

We took the car, and he was driving. It was not a long drive, but when we were 1 km away from my sister's house, the car slipped in the mud, drove off the road, stopped, and got stuck in the muddy clay. We had to get out of the car, and it was still raining and very cold. We had to walk to my sister's house. On our way, my kids fell in the mud many times; we laughed a lot; we had a great but cold experience.

When we got to her house, my sister was very happy; she said it was a great surprise. She made dinner for us. We spent the night at her house, and we went home the night of the next day when had stopped raining. This was my adventure, and my favorite day!

*Geralda Da Silva is a student taught by Inguna Ozols at the Clearview Adult Education Center.*

### **My Perfect Weekend**

My favorite days are the weekend because almost every important person to me has a day off work. I try to make every moment special during the weekend because I think life is about that, moments and memories. I start the day with a great breakfast too early before going to the gym with my younger brother, and after the gym we hurry to get home to spend extra time with our baby brother. In the afternoon, I hope to call my friends, and we propose to do something whether it's playing soccer, going to the beach, or going to the mall. In summary, we seek to enjoy the weekend.

These are my favorite days.

*Jen is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is 18 years old and is from Bolivia. He is studying English. His teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Carranza.*

### **My Favorite Day is Sunday**

My favorite day is Sunday because it's my best day of the week.

On Sunday, I like to wake up a little early and I take care of my daughters and myself. We eat breakfast together and we go to church.

On Sunday, I have time to do my favorite activities. I cook nice food for my family. After lunch, I read stories and relax. Sometimes we go to the park. On Sunday we have lunch and dinner on time and go to bed on time.

In conclusion, I like Sunday because I feel more refreshed and energetic. That's right, Sunday will always be my favorite day.

*Miglène Michel is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **My Son was Born**

I bet everybody has a favorite day. For me, my favorite day is the day that my son was born. It was on March 2, 2007. It was at 2:00 p.m. I was already in the hospital one week before my son arrived. It was typical in Russia that pregnant women stay in the hospital for that long in preparation for the coming of the baby. I was fine, not sick at all. I took my vitamins, had normal meals like I do every day.

I had no complication nor do I felt uncomfortable because I had a cesarean. My baby was perfect. He just cried a little bit. I was very blessed because I had a healthy baby. It was a very amazing experience to have a baby taken out of me. I was very thrilled to see my baby when the nurse put him in my arms. He was sleeping and had his first meal from me.

Can you imagine what it is like to give birth to a child? If you are a man, you wouldn't have a clue. If you are a woman, you would. Each of us have different experiences. But the most important thing is that the baby and the mother are all right. I wouldn't want to imagine anything bad. I'm very grateful that I had an easy time when my baby was born.

Now, my son is 13 years old. He is in middle school. He loves sports and reading. Every child should have a good upbringing and values. I have been caring for him all of my life and will continue to do so until he graduates. Well, that was my favorite day. What is yours?

*Marina Kartavenko has been in America for one year. She's attending the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **The Day My Life Changed for The Better!**

The day I found out I was going to be a dad, I was scared because my life wasn't going as well as it should. Back then I was only involved in my world. I didn't want to be a dad at that moment. But I felt you and started loving you from that moment. I knew you were going to change my life forever. Now I have to

take care of you and teach you how to take care of yourself. I have to show you how to walk and talk.

When I found out that you were a girl, my heart became huge. I am a king and you are my one and only princess in my life. You became the first and only woman who won everything from me just by seeing your little smile. I carried you in my arms and you have filled me with one peace that I have never felt before. You became my little angel that I must protect and give my all to.

Knowing that from the day you were born until today, five years have passed. Being by your side making you happy, seeing you grow every second, minute, hour, day, and years fills my heart with joy and sadness at the same time. Because you are growing up, you are learning more each day. But knowing that even though you are growing up every day, you are get bigger. You will always be my little girl, my little angel and my princess for a lifetime. The day my precious little princess made me the king of her world! I WILL LOVE YOU FOR LIFE.

*Andres Duran is a student taught by Carolyn Vickers in the Palm Beach Migrant Education Program.*

## **My Twentieth Wedding Anniversary**

Edline and I were married on August 28th, 2000. Since then, we have never had a wedding celebration as interesting as the celebration that we've had last year. We didn't have a great party, but the whole family, including our grandparents was there. We were able to take stock of our married life, review the ups and downs, reset the goals and thank God for the privilege.

In the previous celebrations, it was always difficult for my children and my grandparents to be present. When it was not a voluntary absence, it was an involuntary absence due to the bad weather and other annoyances. Our eldest son was in Georgia attending High School during the last 4 years.

We didn't live in the United States. We lived in Haiti. The political situation in our country was too bad. We could not celebrate. We arrived in the United States in July 2019.

Although we know Coronavirus, this pandemic has given us the privilege of being with our family members most of the time. It is this very reason that we had a special celebration for our twenty years of marriage.

We don't know how many anniversaries we still have to celebrate. But what we know, the celebration of our twentieth was very special to us.

May the name of the Lord be blessed!

*Joseph Charles is a student taught by Carolyn Vickers at West Technical Education Center.*

## Original Poetry

### Earth

Bless the mornings,  
Bless the nights,  
Brightening colors shine,  
The endless forest waits,  
The wild animal lessons,  
Will lift up your spirit,  
The full moon will shake you,  
Shake the ground under your feet,  
The strong winds  
Will sway away,  
The dirt,  
The impurities,  
A strong message of love  
Will be heard  
With a pure heart,  
With pure joy,  
Earth Rejoice.

*Carol Arrieta is a student in the ESOL program at Cooper Memorial Library. Her teacher is Wanda Klaas.*

### I'll Rise

You may write me down in history  
with your bitter twisted lies.  
You may tread me in the very dirt,  
but still like dust, I'll rise.

You may shoot me with your words.  
You may cut me with your eyes.  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
but still, like air, I'll rise.

I'll know one day; I'll achieve my diploma.  
In my heart, I'll believe in that.  
I'll rise above it all!

*Teresa Campbell-Hill is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center. Her teacher is Holly Heintz.*

### **Behind the Glass**

You pick a girl out of a crowd, any girl.  
She looks strong, confident.  
She must have had it easy, right?  
Did you ask yourself, “What could be behind that girl of glass?”

She must’ve only seen the delicate sights that life has to offer,  
Oh, those glass eyes.  
The most disconcerting images came from scary movies past  
bedtime, right?  
Certainly her eyes have never seen further than the sunshine.  
What’s behind those glass eyes, my dear, holds a contrasting  
truth.

She must’ve felt only the most gentle touch,  
Oh, that glass skin.  
The most memorable feeling of touch must be the comfort of a  
childhood blanket, right?  
Of course that body couldn’t have been mistreated.  
What’s underneath that glass skin, my dear, holds a contrasting  
truth.

She must’ve only heard the desired voice,  
Oh, those glass ears.  
The things she’s heard, the phrases that have been said to her;  
They were all pleasing to hear, right?  
She most definitely could not have experienced verbal abuse.  
What’s underneath those glass ears, my dear, holds a contrasting  
truth.

The girl you pick out of that crowd may seem like her glass has  
never been shattered.  
Unbeknownst to the world,  
She is who put the pieces of shattered glass back together.  
All it takes is a look behind that glass,  
To see exactly what made her so strong.

*Sophie is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. She has always lived in the USA, but recently moved from Minnesota to Florida with intentions of starting a new chapter in her life. She is 18 years old. She is working towards her GED. Her teachers are Ms. Khris and Mr. Caraza.*

### **Lover, Lover**

Lover, where are you?  
I've been searching for you for years.  
I'm afraid to admit I've never been loved.  
Sometimes I feel as though I am left out trying to find a way inside where the cool people hang – then you grab my hand.  
Often I am captivated by those who hold hands, kiss in public, and love to slow dance.  
I am stuck wondering, “Where’s my man?”  
How is it that I actually found the only man for me?  
“Alone” is my name since alone I have been since this tragedy.  
I can’t seem to fathom why the lover I have dreamed of, so many nights is not in my sight.  
Deceived as I wake from a dream; it’s all a façade – dang.  
I feel your passionate caress, but open my eyes and realize it is only the comfort of my skin that I am in; it keeps me warm on these cold ‘cinder block’ nights.  
Again here I am searching for someone I can reach. My hands are still lifting to get a peek at this mystery man who keeps tossing and turning through the night. This isn’t right.  
I was completely knocked down off my horse. “Jack in the Box” release me from my trap door. My body is sore from yearning for him so much.  
What am I to do? I feel like a fool never knowing his touch but needing it so much.  
Ray, I never thought I’d love you so much!

*Sonya Cisrow is a student with the ABE II program at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Mrs. Myra Williams.*

### **New Hope**

When I came to Jesus I had lost all my hope  
Because I just knew- nobody could save me from dope  
But one day I fell at Jesus’ feet

and I cried with shame- for my life was a failure;  
and I was to blame.

A hopeless case from all the drugs I had used  
Like a slave I became;  
chained, beaten, and abused.

Only you, dear Jesus, can answer my prayer  
because the pain in my life I can no longer bear.  
Please forgive me—for the things I have done  
and those that I've hurt; each and every one.  
Unless I'm forgiven my life now is dead  
“Have mercy on me, Jesus!” is the prayer that I said.

Look! I feel a thousand tons falling off of me--  
It was the love of God that came in and set me free.  
My life to him I will forever give  
because he has given me new hope to live.

*Laverne McDuffie is a student in the ABE III program at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Ms. Phillips.*

### **Yin & Yang**

I used to cook for my family delicious meals for dinner,  
But now I don't so now we are all looking thinner.

I always go to work five days a week,  
But I never have time for homework to complete.

I once was married to an older man,  
But now I remarried and a new life began.

If I could I want to not have to work so much,  
I would like to be home, cook, garden and such.

I never travel around the world,  
But I might if I have money and pearl.

I can't think why people fight a lot,  
But I can try and set an example to be not.

Live Inspired

I won't be able to be with my friends as I like,  
But I might visit them every now and then with my bike.

I used to walk around and talk freely,  
But now I am restricted to my home completely.

*Julienne Josaphat is attending the English Class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Swimming in Unknown Water**

We feel brave because we took the first step,  
We transform our backbone in a shell to stay strong,  
But we are the most delicate and fragile ones along.

We are alone still when we found a group to which belong,  
We are attractive and different because of where we come from,  
Yet we do our best effort to fit in spite of our differences.

They look at us wondering why we are here,  
How our reality could have been to risk unknown waves,  
Still, few understand our answers and craves.

To change the atmosphere requires us to adapt ourselves,  
We open our eyes and our minds to accept the styles of streams,  
Low, clam, high, furious tides in our sight, we grow up with less fear.

Anyway, if we study the rules we trip over,  
Everybody is ready to remind us our origins,  
We'll learn to ascertain ourselves by all means.

How brave we feel now because we know different water,  
We succeed by altering our weakness with our charm,  
We are victorious and available to whatever the current may be.

*Brenda Re attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She wants to be an upscale bridal gown designer and businesswoman. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Country vs. USA**

I'm from Medellin, Colombia,  
United States, now I'm here.  
My country has security problem,  
But my stay in America is awesome.

People are the same in my country,  
Not In U.S. there is many variety.  
Different food, languages, cultures,  
Beautiful strong infrastructures.

Most of all what I'm really looking for,  
Children and adult with smiles,  
It makes me feel happy and soar,  
Welcome from thousands of miles.

*Johnny Ceballos attends the English class at the Monroe County  
Adult Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **That Glare in Your Look**

That glare in your look  
Produces in me sensations  
That I can't control  
The sweet melodies you produce  
When they speak, they are pure poetry worthy of declaiming.

Sweet phrase of love that is to pronounce your name  
Beautiful composition of the heart,  
Being with you fills me with air  
And the wonder of your smile which makes me fall in love.

The delicious fragrance of your skin, elixir that fills my being,  
The one that intoxicates me with a single fragment  
That I can even address a beautiful feeling.

My guilty pleasure that makes my skin crawl,  
Since with a few frictions you have me at your mercy,  
I burn in the endless flames of unbridled passion  
Since only you can cause a fire in my soul.

Live Inspired

Offering you a thousand and one gifts is what I want, to honor you  
Every day is my greatest wish, I know it sounds crazy  
On my part and even obsessive but it is how you make me  
Lack nothing but the air that I breathe.

*Ximena Vargas is a student at East Area Adult School in Polk County.  
Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.*

### **That You Can Love Me**

Everybody wants you to be their girlfriend  
In the neighborhood, you are serenaded  
Everyone who sees you immediately falls in love  
You are very beautiful, that is why you kill me.

Again with the silence of the night  
With my guitar I am in front of your window  
With the fear that you will reproach me  
But hoping that even if you thank.

That I am going to dream  
To that world that forced me to invent  
Where imaginatively, you and I  
We have love.

Where I can kiss you  
Where those lips that only inspire passion  
That is just where your heart  
Sighs for this man

How I wish this was true  
How I want you to say yes  
How I wish you can love me  
And that I am the only thing for you.

How I would like to reflect in your eyes  
The feeling that burns me inside  
How I wish I did not feel alone  
And that you are the owner of my moments

Now I am leaving without a hope  
But tomorrow the new day will come

If I am the one who turns you on  
so, don't make my wounds increase.

How I wish you can love me...

*Nelson Riano is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

# What the American Dream Means to Me

## My American Dream

The American Dream to me is a real chance to accomplish what you are willing to work for. It is an opportunity to reach a better life for one and one's family. It includes the opportunity to get an education, to get a job and improve my skills. Most important it is that by my example others can be inspired and understand that with determination and hard work dreams are not just dreams in this country.

In this country, everyone has the opportunity to go to school, regardless of their ability to pay. Education is free for all children. This is not the case in other countries where only children whose parents can afford it get an education. Education is the key to be self-sufficient and here it is available to all. Being self-sufficient is the first step to success.

In this country, if one is willing to work, it is not hard to find a job. Once working there are opportunities to improve your skills and learn other task, with hard work a possibility of a promotion is there. That is a dream not possible in some other countries.

Who does not have dreams? I had the opportunity to come to this Country and live the American Dream. My children are in school. I have a job and am learning English. I am thankful to all those that helped me along the way. Their patience and willingness to guide me to reach my potential, encourages me every day.

I am accomplishing all the things that I was dreaming of on my way to this country. I am living the American Dream!

*Baudelia Zepeda is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.*

## **A New Way of Living in the USA**

Since the ancient days, the population around the world is in constant movement. Individuals, small groups and large groups started as nomads moving in their own and other territories. Different cultures migrated to America, a multicultural country with different flavors and taste.

Some of us have our own immigrant history. My history is something like others who decided to come to US, the most powerful country of the world. A country with advanced technology and science, a leading economy, a high level of education, and its principles of freedom, respect, and a vast opportunity to grow. Education was one of my parent's priorities. I got a scholarship and came to USA to get a Specialization in Management. That was my best opportunity to get familiarized with the American culture.

When my family, we moved to USA at the end of year 2019. We started creating the foundations to live in USA. We received by mail a magazine from Palm Beach County advertising the learning courses for the community including English Courses, so we register at Olympic Heights Community High School. This is a fantastic program for helping people to accomplish their studies, especially for newcomers and for people that came some years before. We met our teachers and classmates from several countries around the world. Most of them had the same ambition to succeed in USA and have a good way of living in working, studying, motivating their families and friends to take advantage of the values of freedom and principles of democracy with a strong respect for its constitution.

Unexpectedly, there appeared the deadly COVID-19 and the pandemic rapidly spread to all the USA. This situation dramatically put us in a different perspective; people became more dependent on online interactions with businesses using a wide range of networks. Curfews, pickups, home deliveries, Amazon, FedEx etc. are the words used most frequently. Because of the pandemic, the USA closed some businesses and many public services. Millions of people lost their jobs, while scientists were working against time to find the cure to fight COVID-19, and in a short time appeared the vaccine.

The near future is uncertain as we learned how to adapt to live in USA, we have alternatives including going to school online. The school is giving us the necessary support with the online classes, teachers are doing their best by not only teaching the English language, but giving us some important subjects related to managing a better life in USA.

Living in US demands courage, imagination, skills, and education development. Those are the keys to opening opportunities. Also respect the multicultural society, its values and characteristics. With that background, it is possible to succeed and have a new life in the USA.

*Milton Munoz is an ESOL student from Olympic Heights Community High School. Milton's teacher is Vivian Mydlarz.*

### **What the American Dream Means to Me**

Who didn't ever dream of knowing America? I have met a lot of people who would like to come and live in the U.S. For much of the people living on Uncle Sam's land, it means to accomplish the dream of having a good job, material goods, and respect. For me, living in the U.S. represents being free. I really love this word. To be free is more than only having money. It's also respect for others and things in general. Living here, as a dream means to have freedom to do things that I was born to do in my whole life.

I believe that everyone has a purpose given by their Creator. I am not talking about religion, just expressing my thoughts and beliefs. I respect you if you do not agree with my argument. Throughout my whole life I have felt discouraged to accomplish simple things such as learning a new language and traveling to another country. However, everything changed when I decided to come and live in the U.S. It was the most important decision of my life, until today. Because I made that decision, my mindset has been transformed day by day. I found a new world in front of me, new possibilities, new people, and new ideas. Now I know that everything is possible.

I never could imagine that a normal boy from Brazil could write or speak English one day, but it is real! I am proof of that. I

know that I will have new challenges in front of me, but I will win all or at least most of them. I do not need to win all my fights, but learning from each of them is essential to having a creative and free mind. As with everything in life, there's a beginning, middle and end. It is only the beginning of my journey as a free man. It means not only being free physically, but free mentally speaking. Currently, I am really happy and thankful for all of hard things which life has given me. Without them it would not be feasible to be who I am today. I would like to finish this text expressing my gratitude to the American people, the U.S., and my Creator for undoubtedly being part of my Freedom.

*Hiran Siqueira DaSilva is an ESOL student. His teacher is Lilibeth Castro.*

### **Be Safe, Be Strong**

Being born and living in a place throughout life can lead us to believe that the functioning of that society is natural, and we easily forget that it is a specific cultural construct of that place. When we travel, we have the opportunity to visit new places, and generally we are open to observe new cultures. We are more attentive to aspects that differ from our habitual place. It is an exercise in paying attention to architecture, flavors, smells, the people on the streets, the spoken language. We admire what is unusual and compare it to the way we live. In this process, we can even acquire a new perspective different from where we came from. In this sense, living in another country and observing this new culture in its different aspects have been a great adventure for me. Before arriving, I thought about what it would be like to experience the "American Dream". Until then, it was just an abstraction for me.

As a journalist, one of the first things that caught my attention was a segment of the ABC News, aired daily at 06:30 PM, called American Strong, that gives good examples of Americans in diverse situations. When the pandemic arrived, they started to show the challenge in dealing with COVID-19, and every day the news always ends with the motto: "Be Safe, Be Strong." Soon I realized there was an incentive to value good initiatives and increase people's positivity, elements that I didn't find in the culture where I come from. The spirit of self-worth and self-esteem

are important values in building a successful and powerful nation like America.

In my experience at the Adult Education Center, we have learned through inspiring lessons to think about building our future. We watch videos from Ted Talk about Growth Mindset, study biographies of inspiring people such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., count on the support of the Career Center for preparing us for the job market, and we think and talk about short and long-term goals and ambitions. The ability to inspire and excite yourself and others to face life's challenges is a present value in the minds and hearts of people in this country, especially immigrants who seek to get ahead in life by being financially and emotionally stable. A sentence from the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, has been with me for many years. "Walker, there is no path. A path is made when walking." While I walk, I observe people, learn about American culture and the way this society works. More and more, I learn about myself cultivating my own dreams and pushing my limits.

*Isabel Guimarães is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **What the American Dream Means to Me**

I came to the USA in search of the American dream. This country has allowed me to continue my studies. I started taking adult education classes so that I could learn English because it is very important to be able to speak and understand the English language in the USA.

I believe that The Project Transition program is the best program to learn English. This program has given me the opportunity to practice while I learn the beautiful language of English. My first goal when I came to this country was to become a teacher. The Project Transition program has made this beautiful experience happen for me.

I feel very happy that I can teach the children and be part of their education. To continue studying to achieve many things in this beautiful country is what the American dream means to me.

Thank you, America, and Thank you to my beautiful teachers as I continue to achieve the American Dream.

*Mayelin Lorenzo Fernandez is a student in the ESOL program at Palm Beach County Schools. Mayelin's teacher is Sandra Gladney.*

# Why Voting is Important to Me

## Voting is Power

“Democracy is not just the right to vote, it is the right to live in dignity.” - Naomi Klein

In the majority of countries, democratic countries, the right to vote is established in the main law, which is the national constitution. Through the vote, we can elect the candidates for the most important positions inside the political structure of any country, like the President, the Representatives of the Congress, Mayors and the Governors of the states. By voting, we can choose our representatives in other instances, civic organizations like non-governmental organizations (NGO), professional colleges or other communities.

The election can be direct by the popular vote, or indirect through the votes assigned according the population. Also, the vote can be mandatory or just a responsibility, depending of the system that each country has.

Voting is a privilege that we have because we can take the reins of our district, county or country. Through the vote, we have the right to ask to repair the streets, parks, avenues, the right to demand services of quality, like the collection of garbage or to create a credible and solid electoral system, or even more importantly, require an education system for all. Through the Representatives that you elect by the vote, your voice can be heard in the higher instances.

Voting is especially important to me because I am from Venezuela, where we've had a communist system for 22 years ago, where the vote doesn't matter because the elections are always done for the own government and the results are doubtful. When the people elect a candidate, usually that person is sent to jail because he/she is accused of a fake crime. This makes people not want to vote any more. People lose the hope and faith in the political system. They no longer believe in political parties because they think that all of them are combined with the government or because they feel all is a fraud.

Notwithstanding, I think that we, always, in every opportunity we have, must vote! In every election, we have the opportunity to change the authorities or officials who didn't comply with their promises. Voting is not only a right, also is an obligation for our country, for the future of our kids. It is the only way we have to change all those that we don't like or those things we disagree with.

Voting is very important to me because I believe in the political system like the only way to keep the democracy. Your vote can make the difference! Voting is important because we have in our hands the power to decide the destiny of our country.

“Voting is the foundation stone of political action.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Zoraya Zerpa is an ESOL student in the Collier Adult Education Program and her teacher is Whitney Strohmayr.*

### **My Voice as a Free Woman**

“The right to vote is a privilege often taken lightly with sometimes disastrous consequences” - Marc Cloutier

As a citizen, voting is a right and a duty. Voting is a formal indication of a choice between two or more candidates. This is my voice of change!

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights became the turning point in the life of all human beings. This was the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Moreover, it declared that human rights were universal and should be enjoyed by all people, no matter who or where they lived. Subsequently, this right was not granted to everyone.

It took years of struggle, and sacrifice, for countries like France, and Finland to grant this right to women. Additionally, in 1807, in the United States this right was withdrawn in New Jersey and Massachusetts, then in August 1920 allowed in all states.

Olympe de Gouges, a French activist and feminist, issued a statement denouncing, “A woman has the right to go up on the scaffold, she must also have the right to go up to the platform “. She had made a strong point. It took almost a hundred years for women to win that right. It’s really important to have a voice.

It is extremely important for me to be able to vote for many reasons:

This right has been granted for women at the cost of many struggles and female leaders ready to sacrifice themselves so their voice in society had value. Therefore, it is very important for me to be able to fully take advantage of all the rights and duties of my society on an equal basis with man. Conscious of this sacrifice, I must vote.

As a woman, and a citizen, voting is important for me because it is a way to make my voice heard. I choose my representative based on my interests and those of my country.

I choose the person who will reflect my personality and my ideologies, can ensure the well-being of my community and make life easy for everyone.

Voting is also the way I participate in the political life in my country, memorializing the strength of those women who paved the way for others and myself. Deciding not to vote is not a choice for me, as this would silence my voice and allow someone else to choose a potential leader, who might not reflect the well-being of my society.

To share my whole point of view with you, voting for me is to choose my way of life. It is to continue to see my neighborhood evolve every day. It is to remind myself that I am an emancipated woman, free and equal to the man in rights and duties.

*Gaetane Charlotin-Jeanlouis is the eldest child of a family of three. She had an atypical career attending law school, although prefers medicine. She opened her own company, Kouzinayiti artisanal products, studied political science and emigrated to the United States. She is studying English in Advanced ESOL at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus with Ms. F. Johnson and will continue to pursue her nursing certification and her Jurisprudence Doctorate.*

## I Will Vote

Going to vote is a civic responsibility. To me, it is having the pleasure to express my ideas about the future of my country and choosing my leaders as I desire. However, the law establishes how we must proceed with all changes according to the country's constitution.

First, at the eligible age of 18, it is very exciting to have the privilege to express the politics of my country, which is a constitutional law. There are two systems of politics: democratic, republican. The mother law indicates or defines how to change the governors. I think voting is important because through that popular expression, I can express my ideas freely by choosing a great person like the president, parliament and other representatives that have terrific projects or programs for the development of the nation. Voting is essential for me to change people's condition of life by receiving education, health, and justice.

Voting is also a capital for economic prosperity by creating jobs, having a national production (agriculture), exploring the natural resource: seas, beaches, great landscape. Also, building hotels and beautiful places that can attract the tourists and help the economy.

The most important thing to me about voting is the security. Protection for the different places and communities, especially of the country against all enemies externally. Another factor is construction by building the infrastructures: roads systems, construction of big buildings, social housing for people in need. Voting is vital for the protection of the environment. Taking the pleasure to admire nature is a joy. Also, to smell flowers is great and listening to songs of certain birds in the forest. Therefore, it is imperative not to destroy the trees by protecting the park, forest and cleaning the streets against all microbes by having a good garbage system to ensure a clean environment. So, these are the reasons why voting is important to me. What about you?

*Kencie Marsielle is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center in Key West. She is studying English to become a nurse. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

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