

HEAR ME



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

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A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and those of Florida's Adult and Family Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based organizations with their training and 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, literacy, ESOL and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing, reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. The editorial committee chose to minimize editing of submissions and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or other affiliated organizations.

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

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My Favorite Day

My Favorite Day is Saturday

Saturday is a very special and different from the other days of the week for me. It is a day that is dedicated to God and family.

Every Saturday morning, we get dressed up in our nicest clothes and go to church. We pray, sing, have biblical classes for children and adults, and hear the preaching. Finally we have a lunch for the whole congregation. In the afternoon, we visit the sick and return. I like this service because it is different from the morning because it is more interactive and fun. We do bible games, games for children, and pray for the new week will begin.

At night my husband invites us to a restaurant for dinner out of town. We spent some quality with family. I love hearing my children talk about their things, feelings, problems, goals, etc. As parents we can support them economically and morally, while we also have a fun time together. I love the Saturday because we forget work, school and daily routine, enjoy family time and be in communion with God.

Florinda Argueta is a student at iTECH. Her teacher is Ms. Katie. She enjoys her family and her life.

Best Day Ever

Giving birth to my daughter is my best day ever. Though the pain of it was horrible, I'll never forget it, seeing her little face, becoming a first time mom, and a fresh start to the future is what makes it even more special.

Her face is everything. Seeing the face of your own creation, someone that you carried, felt every movement, watched grow from a bump to the size of a watermelon inside of your belly, and that little person that kept you hungry even though you just ate 20 minutes ago. You see the face and think to yourself, "Wow! You're finally here."

Becoming a mom, especially a first time mom, was an awesome experience for me. The thought of it is very scary. What to do first, am I doing it right, what schools to send my child to, and the scariness of my child being sick with a fever. These fears shot through the roof. All were the things that I went through as a first time mom. With no prior experience but a good support team on my side, I have successfully been raising my daughter for the last 2 years.

My daughter's future is important. Once you have a baby all plans change. It's no longer just your future that you are planning for. I can certainly say that my daughter has changed my life around for the better. I am now in school heading towards a better future. Kids really are an inspiration.

So in conclusion my most painful day was my best day. Seeing her face, becoming a first time mom, and a new future is what makes it so special. Having my daughter was the BEST!!!

Precious Coley is enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

China's Mid-Autumn Festival

China has a very special holiday called "The Mid-Autumn Festival." It's also known by another name "Moon Festival." In olden days, people counted the date by seeing the shape of the moon. Every month on the 15th, the moon is a full moon. The full moon symbolizes completeness and unity. On the 15th of the eighth month in China's calendar, this is also a harvest day. The family gathers together by sharing mooncakes and other different delicious foods. It's a popular tradition of eating moon cakes on this occasion.

A Mooncake is a round cake with some different kinds of fillings. The fillings sort by tastes and ingredients. There are sweet, salty, sweet and salty, and spicy tastes; there are also lotus seeds, five nuts, red beans, rose, sesame seeds, ham, salty yolk, and now we even have ice cream fillings. Mooncakes are normally round cakes 10 centimeters in diameter and three centimeters high. My favorite mooncake is Haagen Das ice cream filled mooncake.

The main reason people celebrate the Moon Festival is the family reunion. Before the festival, people buy moon cakes as a gift for their parents, relatives and good friends. Until now, this tradition still goes on, but it also has been a kind of waste food. Not so many people like to eat this very rich and sweet mooncake anymore. They eat more healthy ones, such as, fruits, yogurt, and ice cream filled mooncakes instead of the old traditional ones.

In my mind, I still remember when I was 5 years old that my parents took my siblings and me to visit my grandparents on Moon Festival. My grandma and my aunts cooked the whole round table of delicious foods; however, at that time we barely ate shrimp, fish, chicken, and pork as a dinner at home. That was the only night I could eat all of them for dinner. After dinner, family members were all moved outside and seated in an area where we all could see the blue moon rise. The best part was my grandpa cut the round mooncakes into pieces and gave them to each of us. This signifies family reunion with the harvest season. We ate mooncake with fruits and hot tea. All the kids liked the mythical moon stories which grandpa told us. We worshiped the moon by singing, talking, and laughing.

In 2006, the Chinese government named this festival the Intangible Cultural Heritage. It became a public holiday in 2008. Today, families, relatives and friends gather together on the Mid-Autumn Festival, and they celebrate it the way they like.

Yanhong Gou a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Christmas Every Day of the Year

By the time I was seven, I heard how Christmas was celebrated on December 25th, once a year. The thought of Christmas is exciting, fun, happy, and filled with lots of love. My family with the help and strength from God, make everything possible. Together, they make it a special and fantastic day. We put up our tree and decorate it. We put colorful lights on the house and it is beautiful. Some nights, we would stay up not wanting to miss anything. We would get new outfits, shoes, and hair styles. At a young age, that is what is important to kids. I remember all the kids in the neighborhood playing and riding bikes.

As I grew older, I always waited and looked forward to Christmas. This one year, I had really found love with my family and friends while everyone was playing and enjoying Christmas. The music was right and the food smelled done and delicious.

I knew this was a wonderful day to always remember. Everyone was enjoying themselves and there was not one argument. That was Christmas in our home.

Now, I'm so much older. I enjoy life and every day, I am happy. I try to be pleasant to my husband, family, friends, and neighbors. I can celebrate Christmas anytime, and every day if I wanted to. I pray families all over the world should remember the first Christmas. Enjoying Christmas in our home fills me with joy.

Tiffany Hutchins is a student at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Campus.

Favorite Seasons

My favorite seasons are summer and winter. I love these two seasons. During summer, I have a blast with my kids on different vacations. In the winter, we enjoy visiting my hometown in Georgia for Christmas.

Last summer, the kids and I enjoyed a nice vacation to the Nickelodeon suites. There were many play areas and spaces with huge individual pools full of nickelodeon fun events just like the T.V. show. We had breakfast, brunch, and dinner with all the wonderful cartoon characters. My kids loved all of the cartoon characters, especially my 4 year old son, Anthony. They had a blast.

During the winter, we took a trip to my hometown for Christmas; it is in Douglasville Georgia. It's a small town, very beautiful during the winter and the atmosphere is breathtaking. Although it only gets 4 Inches of snow, we were still able to make snow men and snow angels.

My winter was not completed until we sat under the huge 1200 feet tree in the downtown area and had a home cooked, fresh hot meal.

This is why I enjoy summer and winter because it is a great experience for the children, and visiting my hometown, was a great experience for me.

Marquitta Isaac knows that in May she will march across the stage for her GED Diploma. She is a GED student at Dunbar Community School; Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

Always Looking Forward to Sunday

My name is Milan Kozak. I am from Czech Republic. I am new in Key West and in this class. My favorite day is Sunday. On this day I like to spend time on the beach, swim, and ride my motorcycle. I also like visit the historic houses in Key West. In the evening, I enjoy eating at the restaurants and strolling on Duval Street. I wish every day is Sunday.

Milan Kozak attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Tapati Festival

Easter Island is a beautiful place situated 3,600 kilometers from continental Chile. It's known for its Moai, which are giant stone statues, but it is also a land of traditions and rituals. One of them is known as Tapati festival, which takes place during the first 15 days of February. During these days, there are various events between the natives and tourists who recreate and perform ancestral indigenous sports.

The first event is called Rapa Nui Tau'a, which is similar to a triathlon competition, in which participants must run with a stick on their shoulders carrying bunches of bananas. Then they must use a boat made of cattails or Vaka Tuai to cross the sea and must swim with a float a distance of 1,500 meters.

Then comes the body painting contest called Takona. Competitors must use natural pigment to create the paintings and then must describe the meaning of the painting to the community. The use of bright colors such as yellow, red, brown, green, and white are typical of the island.

There is also a musical event called Koro Haka Opo, in which the teams alternate to interpret traditional songs without repeating or making mistakes in the lyrics.

The next event is called Riu. It's a competition in which the leaders of each group tell epic stories and legends of the Rapa Nui people. The best known are the stories of the Moai Kava Kava or Tu'u Ko Ihu, considered as a kind of demon that protected people from evil spirits. The other story is about the Bird Man or Tangata Manu, which was the title given to the winner of a contest in which the natives must find the eggs of a bird called Sooty Tern or Tara Manu.

Finally, people must choose the queen of the festival based on the amount of fish caught by each group. This gives an end to a festival that seeks to attract people from around the world. Although globalization is good in many aspects, many cultures have been affected as they lose their identity and customs. It is valuable to see how some cultures, such as Rapa Nui, try to preserve their traditions and remember their ancestors.

Miguel Leon is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Tabaski in Ivory Coast

Tabaski or Aid-El kebir is a Muslim feast. Tabaski is a national holiday in my country, Ivory Coast. It's also called "The Feast of the Sacrifice." Why? It commemorates Abraham's willingness to follow God's order to sacrifice his beloved son Ismail who, when saved from the knife, was replaced on the altar with a ram. Tabaski is a little like Thanksgiving.

Every year, Muslims around the world sacrifice an animal in remembrance. This year, Muslims have celebrated this feast on the fourth of October in my country. Come with me to share this celebration.

On the eve of Tabaski, Muslim families buy sheep. Early in the morning, the sounds of bleating sheep awake everybody. In reality, nobody sleeps.

About 9 o'clock, dressed up in the traditional clothes called "boubous", men, women and children go to the mosque to pray. That looks like a parade. After the prayer, about thirty minutes, the Imam, the Muslim religious leader, undertakes to make the ritual sacrifice. He cut the throat of a sheep. By this way, he invites every Muslim to do likewise.

Once at home, men and boys sacrifice their sheep. The meat from the sacrificed animal is preferred to be divided into three parts. The family retains one third of the share; another third is given to relatives, friends and neighbors, and the remaining third is given to the poor or needy.

In my village, in addition to sharing meat, Muslim women cook and share the meals. About 2 p.m., you see teenagers everywhere carrying the meals and distributing them. On this day, the non-Muslims don't need to cook. Every year, in my family, we receive at least ten different meals from our Muslim friends and neighbors.

Many Muslims also take this opportunity to invite their non-Muslim friends, co-workers, and classmates. Everyone, rich or poor, eats well for at least one day in Tabaski. I love Tabaski because on this day, people tolerate each other. We become one people. We would be in a wonderful world if everybody considered every day as Tabaski.

Rita Mbo is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Favorite Day

My favorite day is Sunday. I have three exceptional reasons why. These three reasons are waking up to birds chirping, hearing the gospel in the living room, and being able to have one last day to relax.

When I think about everyone's favorite day, the first two days that come to my mind are either Friday or Saturday. Yet, it seems like I am the odd one out here; I just admire the exciting yet calm Sunday. This is what I have to say about the day of Sunday and how I feel about it.

To begin with, as I awake from a long and tiring Saturday, I do not awake to a loud and annoying alarm clock; instead, I let the birds awake me. When birds awake me, there is a feeling of calm and happiness because I suddenly know that the sun is out; also, when they wake me up, I feel that they want me to come and enjoy the sun as well. As I listen to the graceful sounds of the birds chirping a slight, a noticeable grin comes across my face. I know it is a Sunday because I only tend to notice the early birds chirping on that particular morning. It has gotten to a point in time where I no longer check the calendar to see what day it is; instead, I am awakened from a deep slumber and simply listen for the chirping of the birds.

Waking up to the loud yet somehow so subtle preaching and music of gospel on a Sunday morning is wonderful. My mother always plays gospel music every Sunday in the living room. Therefore, when I wake up and walk into the living room, I can just look around and see everyone smiling and sitting on the couch, listening to what the preacher has to say or even dancing to the music. When I hear the gospel music, I know it is a Sunday and basically, there are no worries for the moment because everyone is in a quite soothing stage at that point in life.

Sunday says to me that “we will meet again my friend” when I think about what it says, I get a knowing feeling that there is no need to worry because the cycle will not disappear but instead repeat exactly like day and nights. Sunday is not a day to be disliked but instead a favorite not just by me or everyone but at least a good majority.

In my opinion, Sunday should be everyone’s favorite day being that it is the last day to relax. As our gruesome or happiness filled weekend breaks come to a speedy conclusion Sunday is there to comfort us and let us know everything is okay.

Jacari Pearsey is a GED student at Dunbar Community School. He is in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley’s Class. His intention is to get a GED diploma and enroll in a college in Fort Myers.

Love is in the Air

In my country, Guatemala, February is called Month of Love and Friendship. It is celebrated in many ways with love, joy, and friendship. This date really does make the population go round! We have the opportunity to share on this special day with everyone that touches our lives. Many people show appreciation for who they love like their family and friends. They would like to share with special touches, such as beautiful decorations, flowers, loving messages on a greeting card, sweetheart chocolates, or any other special gift that you would like to give or even invite them to special dinner. This date happens every year on February the 14, so even though everyday can be romantic for everyone, this is the most romantic day of the year. I really love this date because my husband takes me for dinner. He buys me special romantic roses, and a special gift.

Of course in this country most people celebrate Valentine's Day and people make it so special and unique by inviting the love of their life such as their wives, or girlfriends for a romantic dinner. Others may choose this date to get married or ask to their girlfriend to get engaged. It could be a special occasion, when Cupid comes into our life. On this day love is in the air! Love and friendship is important in our lives. We can live happy and peaceful with our families and friends. In this century that we are living we almost don't believe in love anymore. Do you know why? Because in this time we are trying to make everything untouchable or unfeeling, such as the picture on the Internet instead of real flowers.

At this moment we are losing our ancestors traditions. They loved to write a great romantic letters to their love or send them fresh roses. They always had a special touch and feelings. On the other hand, it was a little more difficult for them. However, from my point of view, we are living in a world where the social media does everything for us. It's as easy as finding a great picture of flowers and great message and sending it.

Olga Vasquez is a student in the Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

Sunday

My favorite day is Sunday. This is my favorite day because I am usually off from work and can take the time to relax. Another reason that Sunday is my favorite day is because my daughter, dad, and I meet up for breakfast at Cracker Barrel. The final reason my favorite day is Sunday is because during football season, my family has lots of fun gatherings and the sports bars are full of interesting people.

Sundays are mostly relaxing for me. It's time off for me from work and aggravation. I work a lot during the week and some weekends, plus I go to school four nights out of the week. It's hard but I do my best to deal with it. When I'm off, I try to enjoy doing anything other than thinking about work. I get up first thing in the morning and thank the most high for letting me see another day. That's the most important part of it.

Then my daughter and I meet up with my dad for breakfast. She loves going out to eat. Her favorite place is Cracker Barrel. She's a greedy little something. After breakfast, I take her to her mother for the day. By the way, I'm a single parent of my daughter. I've been taking care of her since she was a year old and she is eleven now. During the time she's with her mom, I go hang out with the fellas or by myself. Now the fun begins. I call up a couple friends to see what they have going on.

Football season is the best time of the year. People always have gatherings for the games. I enjoy those gatherings. Sports bars are pretty cool as well. I get the chance to have drinks, laugh and meet nice people or even see people that can't control their alcohol and do crazy weird things. When I'm at my family gatherings I feel at home I'm more relaxed and safe. There is too much crazy violence going on these days. It makes me not want to go out in public. My family and I have great times when we get together. We laugh, crack jokes, and make crazy bets without money on the games.

In conclusion, Sunday is definitely my favorite day. They are relaxing, and full of fun times with family and friends. I get to rest from work, hang with my daughter and dad, and go to family gatherings. I can't wait to see what happens next Sunday!

Brandon Walker enjoys relaxing and listening to jazz music and his goal is to complete his GED in 2015.

A Family that Prays Together

Every Sunday, my family always plans something to do. We finally decided that every Sunday we will get together and go to my great grandmother's house. Every there laughs, smiles, cooks, and sometimes fights. At the end of the day, we make up, hug, and show love to one another.

The older people visit on the one side of the house, the younger people stay on the other side. It is like the best day of the week is Sunday. I know I will see my family, pray together, and stay together. Some people don't have any family, so having one means a lot to me. We can always celebrate in unity. So many people that are depressed, sad, and unhappy were welcome on Sundays. My family always opened our home to them.

My aunties and my great grandmother used to get together to cook the best meals. They would cook so much that you could leave with left overs. That house left so many memories. My great granddad was the best ever. He passed away and my grandmother moved out of the house. Every time I pass the house, it brings back old times. I just smile and think about it. Sundays can bring such joy!

Gregory Williams is a student at Atlantic Technical College - Arthur Ashe Campus.

My Experience in Adult Education

Getting My GED

School should be a place of fun and logic. Northtech Vocational School does everything in their power to make this possible. From open classroom conversations and heartfelt lectures to occasional holiday parties, it can be said that Northtech has succeeded. The components put in place to make this goal a reality are the wonderful staff, the straight forward education, and the fact that just attending the school is a great opportunity.

To begin with, Northtech Vocational School is an excellent facility due to its wonderful staff. On the Northtech campus students are surrounded by smiling, compelling faces and behind those faces are masters of their trade ready to take you to the next level of education. The educators always find a way to make the classroom or workshop a place of excitement with open classroom discussions, experiments, and funny subject related antics. The staff is truly the heart of the school.

Secondly, the pick for best adult education school in Florida is Northtech Vocational School because of their system of straight forward education. When you first enter the school you are required to take a T.A.B.E readiness test to see where you need improvement. After the results have been reviewed, your teacher will find your weakest points and focus on them to improve your skills as a student. Then, after studying, the student gets tested again to show their development. The staff will do everything in their power to make sure everything is understood before moving on to the next subject. Doing so brings interest out of the students.

Lastly, my experience at Northtech Vocational School was great due to the fact that it was an outstanding opportunity. Northtech offers a seven month program for both G.E.D and several different trades [HVAC, Welding, Carpentry, Plumbing, Electrical], and all this is covered for \$90. There is nowhere else that offers a deal as extravagant as this, so much so I withdrew from my original school just to attend this establishment. Beyond the financial aspects of the proposal, the school has hands on teachers that are dedicated to make every face into a graduation letter.

To conclude, Northtech Vocational School is different from any other Adult Education Center for many reasons. Their wonderful staff keeps the students upbeat and ready to learn, their straight forward education gives everyone a chance to learn, and attending the school is a great chance to get something going for anybody.

Ronaldo Augustin signed up with the school because he was behind in the regular school system, and believed that this school would be the only thing that can get him on track.

My Road to Communicating Like a Native Speaker

My name is Prasad Damoder. I am Indian. India is the third largest country in Asia after Russia and China. It is the world's biggest democracy, as it has 1.2 billion people. It is the world's second biggest in terms of population, after China.

I moved to the US about three years ago. In fact, I got an opportunity to get transferred from India, since I work for a global consultancy company. I had moved while I was on the job, and hence getting a job here was not a problem, which in my opinion is the biggest challenge for an immigrant. I feel extremely lucky to be here and I thank God for that. The US is the world's best country in all aspects. We have the world's best democracy, freedom to lead a good life and the strongest armed forces to defend us.

If I go on writing about the US, it would turn into a book. Let me shift back to the discussion of my experience in the Hillsborough County library. I have a Masters in Computer Applications and read, write and speak English. However, my personal requirement is that I should communicate in English as a native speaker does. I should form phrases as they do. Any native speaker should not have any problem understanding my words. With this in my mind, I contacted the library last year and started my coaching in October 2014 with a fellow student.

Heather Farrell is our tutor. She is very nice, helpful and has sound knowledge in even small nuances of the English language. From day one, she listened very patiently to all our requirements and discussed with us in detail about our problem areas.

She noted them down and made a perfect plan for us. For the next class, she formulated our lessons well, prepared action items and other activities including homework.

It's been around four months and we definitely see some improvement. We both know that we need to go further. We are fortunate enough to have her as our teacher. I cannot explain in words how patient, organized and enjoyable her manner has been in coaching us. We definitely do not want to lose her.

Prasad Damoder is a Hillsborough Literacy Council student taught by Heather Farrell in the ESL program at the Town and Country Library. He has a Master's degree from India and has worked in the U.S. for three years.

No English, No Job

My name is Jean Giodarny Desire. I am from Haiti. I came to United States in 1999. I have been attending the adult English class for seven months. I know that English is very important for me to get a good job, so I try my best to go to class as regularly as possible. Taking any classes as an adult is not easy because I have other responsibilities. Many times I failed to go to class. But my teacher never gives up on me. I am very thankful for her.

Jean Giodarny Desire attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Motivator, My Teacher

My name is Rachele Desroches. I am from Haiti. I enrolled in adult English class on December 8, 2014. I had no ideas what to expect from this class. Surprising, I was happy on my first day of class. The first impression I got from this class made me strong. The teacher is strict, good, and encouraging. Her teaching style is very interesting to me. I like the English programs on the computer. They make me speak while I am using the program. I can listen to the lesson and record my speech. Then it will show me my scores. Going back to my teacher again, she makes us to be active listeners and active students. She really wants us to speak good English.

My teacher wants the students to attend class every day if that is possible. Sometimes, I feel very tired and want to relax at home, but I will always think about what my teacher says and this motivates me to come to class.

I must say that I feel better about myself now. I am more confident, feel more hopeful, and have the courage to go forward. For all these things, I am grateful to my teacher.

Rachelle Desroches attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Story

It is a real pleasure for me to share with you a part of my life. First, I have to tell you, I am Canadian and I am 67 years old. During my childhood, I lived in small French town near Quebec City.

My family consists of my two parents and three daughters. I have an older sister and a twin sister. My father was a teacher and a principal. He was strict and fair with us but he had an open mind. He encouraged us to study.

My primary and secondary studies took place in La Malbaie, a small town along the St. Lawrence River. After I went to study in Quebec City because I wanted to teach home economics.

When I was 22 years old I got married and my husband and I had two daughters. We lived in the city of Quebec. I kept working. I had lots of energy and I could, with the help of my husband, continue my professional life. In Canada most women work outside the home.

A few years later all the family moved to Montreal. I was 40 years old. I still live in this city. I continued to work in a high school that received many immigrants. For me it was a window on the world. I realised how learning English would be so important. I took several courses but unfortunately I have abandoned this project to return to school for a bachelor's and a master's degree.

After a busy professional life I took my retirement from teaching. My daughters were married and my husband was still working. So I decided to pursue a second career. Since I have a background in food and that this topic is close to my heart, I decided to go to work for the Weight Watcher Company. I acted as leader with people who wanted to lose weight. I mostly worked at Radio-Canada. This job lasted eleven wonderful years. I loved this second career. It was an extension of my teaching life. As the years pass quickly, my husband and I were very tired of the bad winters of Quebec so we decided to buy a condo in Florida. The climate of Florida to enjoy the sun and we can play golf as many times as we want.

The most important thing for me is that it is a chance to learn and improve English. It was a dream for me. Finally because of the facilities that the city of Weston offers to the new residents to attend classes I am confident of success. Because I live in an English environment I have the chance to listen and to speak this important language. Finally, as teacher myself, I must add that the teachers are extraordinary. It is a pleasure for me to go to my classes and learn. In short, I will realize my dream of learning English. It's never too late.

Françoise Dubé is an ESOL student. Her tutor is Lou Marett.

An Experience to Share

There are several programs in Palm Beach County that give people the opportunity to learn English. The Adult Education and Literacy Program provided through the Palm Beach County Library is one of those programs. The library provides the books for students and tutors. The tutors are volunteers and they give their time to people of all ages and from all over the world who come to this country and want to learn English. They also help in preparing students to pursue a career.

I would like to share my experience with people who are thinking that English is hard to learn. It is hard, but it's more frustrating when someone speaks to you and you do not understand. I recommend this program to those who are not able to go to the doctor because they are afraid to talk. Do not be afraid.

It is wonderful when we are able to make a phone call without asking for someone who speaks our language.

I was in this program a long time ago. I was so excited because I wanted to learn English. I finished the first book but for some reason I quit. I do not remember why, but I think it was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made in my life. The program is excellent. The tutors are the best. They spend their time working on grammar, pronunciation, reading and writing. The first time I took the classes I had Charlotte Luinetti as a tutor. Charlotte was already my friend and she volunteered to become my tutor. She considers me as part of her family.

In 2014, I wanted to start taking classes again because I realized that I needed to learn more. Now I have a tutor who is great. She is always pushing me to learn new and difficult things. She is excellent. I am very happy to have Karen Thomson as a tutor.

One of the best things that has happened in my life is to have wonderful people who are willing to try their best in every single class I take. Thanks to those who are able to volunteer as a tutor and give their time to help others to have a better future.

Irma Garcia is from Guatemala. She is a student in Susan Mitchell's Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.

Courage, Class, Confidence

My name is Siliana Joseph. I am from Haiti. I attend the adult English class because I need to learn English. My teacher never seems to be tired of teaching. She gives me the courage to come to class. Even though I feel tired, I still come to class because I know that if I go to class I will learn something.

This class makes me strong in my thinking about myself, my family, and my job, and my future. This is the best place for me to grow intellectually and individually. I want to be the example for my kids so that they will come to class to get their high school equivalent diploma. I hope that will happen soon.

Siliana Joseph attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Open Your Mouth and Speak English

My name is Wilken Juste. I am from Haiti. I am new in the adult education class. I am learning English. This class helps me to improve my speech, writing, and reading. I like the method my teacher uses to teach English. She teaches proper, standard, academic English. She talks at a moderate speed, but loudly and clearly. She pushes us to speak more in the class. She wants us to be an active listener. She said, "If you want to be able to speak English, you must open your mouth and speak. Here you learn, make mistakes. But when you leave, you must try to speak proper English".

My plan is be able to speak, write, and understand English first. Then I want to take the high school equivalency test. After that I want to study medicine to become a doctor. My dream is to work in a hospital where I can help cure people with health problems.

To everybody else, I would like to say that education is the key to a successful life. Do your part and do it well.

Wilken Juste attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Experience in Adult Education

I am originally from Mexico, and my native language is Spanish. I have been married for 32 years and have four children. When I arrived in Arcadia in 1996, I didn't speak any English.

It was so hard for me, but on my way to enroll my children for school, I met people in the Title I program. They told me about the Family Service Center for adult students. I enrolled myself in class. Now I'm here. I am not perfect, but I take care of myself and my family.

Also, I motivated many from the Hispanic community to attend school to learn English. I feel happy because now many are at school learning English and are improving their lives. I really don't have time too much time for myself, but I try to do my best. My family always comes first. My goal is to get my GED.

I work with other people to get the best service for all in my community. I am happy to be part of the community here in Arcadia, Florida.

Ana Magana is enrolled as a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. Her literacy tutor is Anson Raymond, and her teacher is Dr. Michael McCoy.

Why Am I In This Class?

My name is Maricela Martinez. I am from Cuba. I came to the United States of America two years ago. I knew that I would have difficulty because this country requires me to know English. So, my greatest difficulty and challenge is learning English as a second language.

I attended the English class in July 2014. At first I felt frustrated. When the teacher spoke I could not understand what she said. Slowly, I began to pick up words, retain the meaning and pronunciation. I am thankful for this class. The computer programs (English Discoveries and Burlington English), lessons from the teacher, and support from many students are wonderful. Obviously, I have seen my progress. Now when my teacher speaks I understand what she says. Also I am able to respond to the questions when someone ask me. I realize that I made a good decision to enroll in this class.

It motivates me to see how committed my teacher is to help me learn. She is concerned about our regular attendance. She does not abandon her insistence on making us understand the importance of learning. Although it is not easy to learn a second language, we can achieve it by working hard.

Every day I strive to attend the class. Each word I understand or say is a cause for joy and this makes me come back the next day to school no matter how tired I am after I return from work.

Learning to read, write, speak, and understand English is my goal, just so I can have a better job and feel more comfortable in this wonderful country that offers many opportunities.

Maricela Martinez attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Nothing is Enough to Stop My Dream

I decided to learn English, because definitely I understood how important it is to introduce myself in the society, have communication with the other people, and have better opportunities in my daily life.

Years ago, I had an experience at my son's school. I had an appointment with his teacher, but she did not speak Spanish, and I didn't understand English. The translator was not available this day so, my son Jorge tried to translate. He got frustrated and started to cry. I felt so bad; that experience changed my life.

I made the decision to come to school and learn English. I didn't care if people told me I can't, that English is too hard to learn, or that I am too old for school. I have three children so it is too difficult for to me to attend to school, but not impossible. I had to change my routines: wake up earlier and clean my house at night.

At the beginning it was very hard for me. I have to ride my bike 30 minutes to school every day, even when the weather is too hot. I wanted to quit, but when I saw my improvement at school, my thoughts changed. Now, I believe in myself that I can, if I study hard and focus on what I want. Also, my teacher encourages me every day. She always reminds me: don't decide you can't before you discover that you can.

In fact, I am so proud of myself. I started in a low level, but with every test that I have taken, I have seen my progress. Now I can prove to others that I can do it because I believe in myself. It doesn't matter how many times I get wet when it is raining. The rain will not drown my dream. Nor will the fire of the hot .

The cold will not even freeze my dream. The weather will not stop me in my tracks. In fact these obstacles motivate me even more. It was the best decision I ever made.

Lusvi J Perez Gonzalez is an English student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her tutor is Katie Mominee.

One Purpose: Success

My name is Carlos Pino. I am from Cuba. I came to the United States of America two years ago on February 9, 2013. I began to work immediately because, in this great country, nothing is free. In order to improve my life I need a good job. But in order to get a good job, I need to know how to speak English well. So, I enrolled in the adult English class seven months ago. The cost is reasonable for six months. The program is very interesting because, besides having a teacher, there are other learning tools available for all students. Burlington English and English Discoveries are very important online software to help us. I am glad about that.

The classroom is made up of students from many different countries: Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba, Uzbekistan, Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Ukraine, Colombia, and Guatemala. Some students are beginners, while others are here to improve their English. Jobwise, some students work as housekeepers in hotels; cashiers, baggers, janitors at supermarkets; and cooks at restaurants. Everybody in the class has the same reason why they are in this class – for a better future.

I am happy with my teacher and my classmates. We are like one world, one family, and one life focusing on one purpose: success.

Carlos Pino attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

I was born in Georgetown, Guyana, as a child I always knew I wanted to be a nurse. My father fell ill at the age of thirty and passed away at thirty – two. I was determined to move to the United States to live with my mother. I got the opportunity at the age of nine to move to the USA. My mother was a nurse and I would often go to work with her. My mother always would explain what she was doing for her patient and loved my constant questions. However, I got the chance in high school to take a nursing assistant program. I was very excited. When I finished nursing school, I could not wait to start my exciting career. I did not graduate from high school; I thought I was doing great and I was working at a job that I loved. Most of all I loved being around my patients.

I got married at the age of twenty- five and had my first son. I had to stop working due to being diagnosed with a brain tumor (Pseudo Tumor Cerebral). My husband and I decided to move to the State of Florida. I was a stay at home mom for years. I often wanted to go back to work as a nurse, but it was not that simple. I started doing some research and learned I had to have a high school diploma or a GED. I found myself calling the Lee County Adult Education. I was very hesitant. I did not know how it would be for me at my age thirty-five to go back to school. I was terrified of how I could do this. Despite my fear, I wanted to set an example for my son and myself so I signed myself up at the Lee County Adult Education.

I was scared on the first day. After being in the classroom I realized I can do this and I was not the oldest nor the youngest. Since I took that step I now feel so confident in my ability to get back to the career that I loved so much. Being in the classroom and having a great teacher and classmates made a big difference. I could ask questions without feeling insecure. I have realized it's never too late to follow your dreams. Believe me when I say it is worth it all the way for me. Do not hesitate because there is so much opportunity and great career out in the world for everyone. I thank for your time and interest in my story.

Debbie Ricciardi is a Lee County Adult Education student.

Steadfast and Hopeful

My name is Christania Sylla. I am from Haiti. Two months after I arrive in the United States of America, my friend advised me to register in the adult English class because she said that I needed help with it very badly. I agreed and I did it.

My first day in class was great. Do you know why? It was because of my teacher. She was my main focus. I wanted to know what she could provide to help me with the language. So I listened to her and followed her directions. She taught me certain things that I do not think that someone else would. The class also had computers where students would use two main programs to study English at their own pace. For a very reasonable price and six months per term, I cannot complain. If you do the math, it is about 50 cents per day. Where in the world can you find such a place? I don't know any, do you? Oh, one last thing, I can write this essay because I learned how to write in this class.

So, if you have friends or know anyone who needs help with English, please, please tell them to look for a class. It is very important.

Christania Sylla attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Steadfast

My name is Darline Tertulien. I am from Haiti. I left my country on October 17, 2012 to come to United States of America. When I got here, I felt lost. Do you want to know why? It is because I did not know how to speak in English. My brother's friend was very kind to help me enroll in the English class. I was so sad because I was not able to register in the high school. The reason was that I was already 18 years old.

My first day in the adult English class was interesting. I saw many people in the class that were from different countries. Some students can speak some English, some cannot. They were just like me. I was nervous, but my teacher was very nice even though she was strict. She did not speak fast. So I was able to understand what she said.

Her style of teaching helped me to learn English in a good way. I learned many things in this class. Among other things, I still need help with pronunciation. Believe or not, I am still in this class. Now, I can speak English better. I am also working at Publix as a cashier. Yippee!

Darline Tertulien attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Learning English

I never thought that learning English would be so difficult, but at the same time interesting and entertaining. When I came to the United States of America, I knew that it would be an important step in my life. At the beginning, everything was new for me; I had to learn a lot of different things, but the most difficult issue I encountered was the language.

I am Cuban, and a Spanish speaker, but in my country I took English classes at school. The professors taught me a few English words, some basic vocabulary. However, as a young teen I did not pay too much attention to the classes because I did not know that English would be so important in my life. I thought I knew a little bit of English, but when I arrived in the US, I was totally confused. Every time someone spoke to me in English, I panicked. Even if it was a simple “Hello,” or even when I knew the words that they spoke, my brain did not function. I could hear, but I did not really understand anything. At that moment, I realized I needed to take English classes. That is why I entered the Adult Education English Program at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology with the objective of improving my knowledge and become proficient in English.

When I enrolled in the program everything was confusing. I had to learn new words every day and read a lot of books. At the beginning, I was a little scared, but today I feel comfortable. I really enjoy learning English, most of all, the grammar. Even when I have to deal with verb tenses, new punctuation rules, and those crazy prepositions (that I hope to master someday), I still like English grammar.

Furthermore, learning English is also interesting and entertaining for me, and I use everything that is around me to learn new vocabulary. For instance, in my free time I read books, magazines, newspapers or even the advertisements to learn new words. I also listen to music, because although music helps me to relax, there are melodic songs with beautiful lyrics from which I can learn new words. Another way to learn English is by watching TV because it helps me with my English pronunciation, and I also improve my knowledge because I watch a lot of educational programs. Even in a regular conversation and texting with my friends, I learn English.

Today, I am very proud of what I have learned because I am able to read, speak, and understand English well. I am certain that in a few years, with effort and determination, I will become totally proficient in English and be able to fulfill my goal and become a medical administrative assistant. Yes I can, we all can, learn English with perseverance.

Katia Torres is a student at the Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology in the ESOL program through Adult Community Education. Her instructor is Mrs. G. Somoza.

Original Poetry

Answers

The snow has something similar to my heart
even though they may seem apart.
It's cold, filling my soul with sadness
leaving me completely in total darkness.
As memories run through my mind
I can only help myself and cry.
As I walk myself lonely in this dark snowy night.
As I look up at the stars and I close my eyes
I whisper to myself "don't worry, don't suffer let it end
tonight"
but I realize that in order for something to end
you must know why was it meant.
Only then you'll figure out the answer that laid within the
very end.

*Alejandro Adame is a GED student at Miami Dade College, Kendall
Campus. His instructor is Serena Lurie.*

Through It All

Friends come and go
Life flies by, right before your eyes
You can lose the one's you love
Yet, through it all, you still love your life.

People leave you to fight alone
You put on a fake smile to hide all your pain
Yet someone still knows you're hurt.

Through it all, you still put on a front to satisfy those around
you
Through it all, you wouldn't change a thing,
Through it all, you trade your life for fame.

You build a wall to try to keep from getting hurt
You lock up your heart and throw away the key
To see who cares enough to look for it.

Through it all, there are not many people that get you to
open up
Yet still love it all.

Struggles meet you in the face to watch you slip away,
Yet through it all, you wouldn't change a thing.
Through it all you wouldn't trade your life for fame.

Brandon A. Adams grew up in Florida. He is a father of two boys I love to write, draw, do tattoos and play sports.

The Way of Learning

You can learn anything if you want to
You just have to want to learn it
Now I believe that the only way you **cannot** learn anything
is
You have to be sick or not want to try

Rakeem Bailem is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His dream is be a music producer. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Realize

You look at me as if I'm the only one around
You make me feel important and never let me down
You've showed me how to live, smile, and hope again
You showed me what it is worth to love someone
Each and every day for the rest of my life
So my heart goes out to you for everything you've done
So now, I hope you realize just how much I love you.

Denise Bozarth is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

Admired by Thousands

Basket full of open doors,
Spitting image of asexual roses,
Washing away the sins kept in prayer,
Enjoying paradise,
Returning to the beauty that you've always been,
Supper time in the midnight hour,
Not a right time to say I've seen ignorance at its coldest,
Like the saying that all humans have layers,
Unless bruised knees are kept in ice,
Don't worry about the less passionate just look within,
Last minute discussions more like hang-ups,
All I want is cooperation from people that believe,
Forgetting where my soul went,
Then creates having lost ones self-respect,
But the emotions set to overcrowd and

.....Perfect lack of stamina,
You want signs, but its messages that you receive,
Sitting in a room with four walls and the hours that you
spent,
The only time you really have to accept and recollect,
To be admired by thousands.

Arcassin Burnham is student at Flagler Technical Institute.

Life Isn't Hard

Life isn't hard
It's what you make it
Your dreams are real and in due time they all come true
Even though you may cry along the way 'cause some things you
just don't understand
But life isn't hard
It's very simple
People make it complicated with all their unwanted rules and
unloyal decisions
They always tell you
You can't and you'll never be
It's what you make it
See

Speak it into existence that you're okay
And you're gonna make it
When you're sad notice you become sick and weak
But when you're happy you can do anything you put your mind to
You may have worries but you don't let 'em control you
Speak love into existence and you'll get it in return
Your life is truly yours whether it's a lesson or a blessing
Only you can live it

You live and you learn
I never said it was easy--- it's what you make it

Tyshay Campbell is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Love

The love I have for you,
No one can take its place
But my love is just like a
Waterfall that never stops.

Why does love hurt?
Because it was never love.
Love is like a rose
And your hair is like the wind.

And your eyes are like the
Sun that brightens up my
Day and without your
Smile there would be no brighter day.

Daniel Colston is from Nassau, The Bahamas. He attends Tomlinson Adult Learning Center to get his GED and to study to be an electrician.

Your Worth

Your worth is more valuable than the finest rubies in the world. You are much more than you see in the mirror. There is something more inside of you that others may not see. When you allow your worth to birth, there is no one on earth that will be able to invalidate your worth.

Your Worth is Beautiful
Your Worth is Elegant
Your Worth is Joyous
Your Worth is Unique
Your Worth is Peace
Your Worth is True
Your Worth is Lovely
Your Worth is Wonderful
Your Worth is Priceless
Your Worth is...
YOU!!

Remember that your worth inside of you is more than just skin deep. Your worth is the very element that gives your name. Never allow anyone to tell you that you are not worth anything.

Your worth is more than just the image you see in the mirror! This is what I think of when I think of you, your worth is far more than I can describe. The worthiness that you possess inside of you. Over and over you show these attributes daily. I had to take time out to tell you how you captivate my mind. Your worth to me more than you could ever imagine.

Jennifer Daniels is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

Embracing Life

My favorite day is every day.
I sit and think about the things I have,
Instead of the things I don't in every way.
Every day is a blessing to me.
And if I didn't get blessed with my child,
I wondered, "Where would I be?"

That's why my favorite day is every day.
And I love it with all my heart, in every way.

Admiring my determination for success along the way
Giving up is not an option, I'm here to stay.
I have the potential to make it.
That's why my favorite day is every day.

Laquandra Denson is a young devoted mother of one. Her philosophy is "With dedication you will conquer all the hurdles in life." She is studying at the Fort Myers Institute of Technology under the Lee County Schools ACE program, and her teacher is Darlene Carrillo.

Yourself First

Be present.
Be kind.
Believe in your dreams.
Believe in yourself.
Let go what and who no longer serves you.
Hold on to those who
Respect and appreciate you.
Appreciate yourself.

Love fiercely.
Love fearlessly.
Love yourself.

Monique S. De Oliveira is GED student at CareerSource Southwest Florida. Her teacher is Susan Chastain.

Brazen

This skin I live in...
Lightly salted,
Uniquely exalted,
Creamy, caramel completed
Divinely protected,
Misery neglected
Inquisitively dissected-mitigated
A compound mixture of nations

Black, White, Indian, Jamaican, even Haitian
A strong spirit planted in the depths of the Motherland
Don't mistake it
Cultivated and nurtured through the Slave Trade
Uniquely crafted and created
Watered in the Trail of Tears and rain dances
Cumulatively and beautifully painted
By the blood shed from my Caucasian ancestor's hatred.
Who am I? Where am I from?
31 years I've contemplated and waited
And waited...
and waited...
Raised and navigated around a world of half truths and
whole lies
An entire different breed of the female race
I fight while in flight
A prodigy of my mother, cousins, aunts and grandmothers
Who fought for my rights, their reflections of intentions,
intuitions
Profound ways of inventiveness
By the blood that runs through my veins
I've gained
Vision while feeling judged, prohibited, enslaved
Embraced
Strength when underestimated in pain and afraid
Educated
Not only through text books, but through life's experiences and
my ancestor's ways
I can go on and on for days
But it is the understanding and acceptance
of where I can from that grants me my grace
The same grace that allows me to hold my head up high and
assume my place
upon the highest pedestal
Where my quintessential characteristics protect it alone
Deemed a physical code

For my ancestral compound mixture of nations
Black, White, Indian, Jamaican
Yes, even Haitian
Internationally made bold and shameless
This skin I live in –
Brazen.

*April Ellison is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at
Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.*

Take it How You Want to

Some people are just desperate for friends
Well, I'm not!
I love being alone
I wasn't born with anybody!
I'll die by myself

I'm the only child
The first born in my family
Which means,
The way I was raised,
I never had anybody to play with,
When I needed to
I'm 18 now, friends are not as important in my life

People are just your friends, for a reason
Just your best friend, to know your business
That's their way to talk about you to other people
I sit back and observe things,
When new faces come around me,
I back up
Because, I know,
Girls talk,
Boys run their mouths like water
That's why my vibe is never friendly.

Christelle Fertil is an ABE student.

LEARNING: A Literacy Acrostic

Love for
Education
Any time, any place
Runs more toward a
Normally demanding
Imagination, and
Never allows you to
Give yourself less.

Mrs. Fontànez is the mother of Sebastian and Maia. She is a student in Plant City's Bruton Memorial Library ESOL class, part of the Hillsborough Literacy Council program. Her teacher is Lark Underwood.

The Experience

When we arrive, we are wearing steel bracelets.
And from now on the jewelry we wear will be tasteless.
We are then booked and have no way of knowing
How much time that we'll face or where we are going.

They house us together with junkies and cons,
girls of all races, some brunettes and some blondes.
We're a spectrum of colors from the dark to the light,
with each our own views of what's wrong and what's right.
We all have our fears and shed tears of grief,
from the girl with no record, to the veteran thief.
And we learn to find joy in the smallest of things,
for this experience has shed light on the gifts that God brings.
There is nothing but time to reflect on our life
and the painful reality cuts like a knife.
Everyone breaks down in one way or another
but I now know not to judge a book by its cover.
There have been times we were angry or maybe just scared
but we've learned to grow stronger through wisdom we've shared.

Our loved ones have forgotten or don't have the time
 It is how they say, "out of sight out of mind."
 But we find strength in each other as all sisters should,
 because we're all a bit lost and misunderstood.

Angela Gechoff is a GED student who has passed all sections of the test with honors. She is a single mom who is a talented artist who plans on attending college.

A Mother's Darkness

Rape, violence, shooting dope
 If I only knew there was hope
 Drug busts, lying in the dust
 Cold and alone was a must
 Weed, pills, cocaine, meth
 Anymore would cause a death
 This is what my life once used to be
 Now that I'm locked up and it has set me free
 I only wish to be the true me
 That's a work in progress which you'll see
 In a little while it'll all be over
 Because I know where I went wrong now that I'm sober
 Since I've lost a year with my daughter due to my crazy
 past
 I'll have the rest of my life to make it a memory to last
 As I look back at all that was lost
 My future is in His hands at all cost
 Will she forgive and trust the mother I am now
 I'll never steer from the light again, this is my vow
 Because she's the heart that makes it beat
 I'll pray to the lord and take a seat
 For him to place us together to bind
 As he guides us through these hard times
 So one day she'll spread her wings and set out to see
 The promise that was made was meant to be.

Kristine Guetschoff is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Russell Johnson.

The Bad Times

Been called names and tortured with words,
Spirit broken cursing all you heard...
House shaking like a volcano erupting,
I said nothing when I was told to say something...
Constant yelling and beatings making me dizzy
Felt like giving up, felt like quitting...
But who am I kidding?
I couldn't take my own life
Even all the time that I thought twice,
Even all the times when you screamed I'm a dyke
And even all the times when you were right...
Said I wouldn't amount to nothing, if I stayed in the streets
Said street life and education didn't meet...
Did I listen, no cause I was too persistent
Persistent with finding love in the streets cause
I had none at home
Trapped in a darkened cage I sat alone...
No one but my mind to accompany me,
So to Lala land is where I flee.

*Amber Hunter is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at
Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.*

The Signs in All We Cherish in Life

A unique butterfly so still and afraid to fly
A bright dragonfly not willing to die
While, listening to a heartfelt song
On this day, you were gone
In the rain looking to the sky with the question of why
I saw a heart shape cloud and began to cry
For as long as we cry and time flies by
We cannot live with regret
It is time to share those memories kept
We teach to focus on what is ahead
Not with thoughts of what has left unsaid
You will look back on this day and smile
This of course is going to take a while
The road to follow is the sign of trust

To continue will always be a must
Moving forward does not mean you forgot
Moments and memories will come to thought
Keep your head held high, as we never said good-bye

Brandy Krogg is a student in Lee County Adult Education.

Dear Mother America

I'm your disregarded daughter. The girl you labeled 'OUT OF ORDER'. My achievements unappreciated, sweet mother I made it. Endeavor to be remembered. I am a member birthed on a frosty day in gray December.

Will you mend the pieces of my broken heart? How will you do it, where will you start? Don't be offended, I love you – I DO. Can your love for me ever be true? Changes you've made over the years have yet to comfort my fears or tears. Penetrated deep within, your resentment at the color of my skin.

Education you never denied offered few lessons on African pride. Teenage years I stayed out of trouble for a high-school diploma I had to work double. Graduated, went on to college. Power can't come without knowledge. Accepted to schools I couldn't afford. Penn State and Hampton wouldn't pay room and board. I came up with Plan B, a two year college with an Associate's degree.

Persisted because I knew what it proved, told myself I had nothing to lose. Proud to hang a degree on the wall. Fell in love, had a baby by Fall. Bright, bubbly, chubby little girl. Best gift received in the entire world. Her father was gone by birthday 2. He wasn't a citizen, but he was your son.

Locked him in a cell where he couldn't run. With words of encouragement, support from my mom. I pursued education, child under my arm. Went to Uncle Sam asking for help, but he don't help those who help themselves. No approval on loans or rent checks for homes. I wanted that baby, I'd have to be grown.

Ultimately pressures you insisted to impart did an outstanding job breaking family apart. Single mother, not dearly departed, but I didn't die from a broken heart. Bypassed deterrents, stuck to the plan; found myself another man. Nine months swollen, bachelor's degree in hand. Diligently pursued American dreams, even if advertising wasn't all it seemed.

Secured role, corporate position; which failed to project my vision. Paid least, worked most, flashed fake smiles at company toasts. Another baby, another year, another career. Many mornings awoke to the fear of when or where city marshal would appear. Baby-daddy two, he's gone, too. Prison out of state you thought that would do. Vulnerable, up on the shelf. Here comes the devil, very man himself. Disguised as a sweet guy to offer me help. Took a trip down the highway to hell to end up in a prison cell. Pronounced guilty no need for trial, sentenced for trusting gorgeous skin and smile.

Will you ever accept me, protect me, respect me? Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Banners of freedom make it worthwhile. Liberty and happiness are mine for the chase. I'm HERE, I'm YOURS and I won't be erased.

Michelle Lewis is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

Lady of a Dream

Woman I see by the shimmering pool
Doeth my eyes deceive a most desperate fool?
For by my dreams do you exist?
But here you stand amongst the mist
In the mist of a waterfall so grand
How can it be here you stand?
For only in my mind is it you linger
Not even awakened by the most angelic singer
Exceeding beauty this has to be
What marvel hath awakened thee?
Skin bathed by the light of the moon
Never seeing the bright of noon
Hair bleached blonde by the kiss of snow

My soul pleading that you don't have to go
Lips as luscious as rubies so fire red
One kiss could possibly awaken the dead
Eyes shining bright as stars in the night
My heart leaping with all its might
I reach out awaiting your touch
Praying I haven't imagined too much
Suddenly, I feel you take my hand
As I welcome you to this new found land

I ask when you must leave
You smile and say "Never. I am yours until the end of time, always
and forever".

J.J. Manord is a Martin County Adult Education Student.

This Woman

There's this woman I've known since I was small.
She cooked and cleaned and did it all.
Out in the backyard she'd push me on the swing,
and when we rode in the car we'd sing and sing.
When I came home from school, my homework we would
do.
She even taught me how to tie my shoe.
In the kitchen is where she loved to be;
Cooking for her family.
When I got older, she was still there.
This woman, all she did was care.
When I had my babies, she was by my side;
no matter where life took me, she was along for the ride.
Until one fall morning this woman died,
and as for me, I cried and cried.
What this woman was to me, no one else could ever be.
I was blessed with the honor to know this lady.
To have come into this world being her baby.
She was the best woman ever; she was my mother.
In loving memory of Vickie

*Brittany Mims is a student in Aides Cooney & Mullen ABE III course at
Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.*

A Child No More

A memorable morning, indeed it was
The entire hospital was filled with ah's
There he was, as pure as snow
The cutest baby you'll ever know

Even in infancy, people smiled brilliantly
All staring at his innocence and fragility

The baby grew and grew, until he was seven
Then he learned his life's greatest lesson

His dad came home, and out of the blue:
"Dad, will I ever be as smart as you?"
Pulling off shoe by shoe, the dad said:
"Wait until you are older instead"

The boy groaned, his eyes rolled
Refusing the answer that was told
A teenager now, adulthood was near
The answer to his question is becoming clear

"I must be getting smarter with age", he thought
Knowledge through experience is what life taught
Grown up, he has learned so much than ever before
The child that was is now no more

Abdel is a 17 year old student of Mrs. Rhonda Currier at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. He hopes to earn his GED® diploma with honors and go to college.

Who Are We?

Who am I? Who are you?
Does the inner voice inside your head ring true?
Do you truly know the person you claim to be?
How deep down inside yourself do you really see?
Are you trapped & bonded to this earthly shell, that's super
vulnerable and delicate as hell?
Are you content in this life with the things you have done?
Or do your regrets weigh you down like a ton?

Thinking this deep can be a bit weird and strange, but if you're up
for the challenge, I know you can change.
Your conscience and soul are the keys to the door.
So don't be afraid to look around and explore.
I'm currently on a self-journey to see what I can see, cause now I
see who I truly am and what I want to be.

Kayla Lashay O'Kelley is a student in Ms. McCall's Transition course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida. She was born and raised in Moultrie, GA.

LEARNING: A Literacy Acrostic

Learning more vocabulary makes
English easier
And understanding better when I need it
Romance is my love for words.
Nature understands quickly how
Intuition leads to knowledge
Never stopped by
Geographic boundaries!

Melba Oquendo is a two year student with tutor Lark Underwood at Bruton Memorial Library, part of the Hillsborough Literacy Council's ESOL program in Plant City.

A Friend

A friend is someone who knows when you are down
Who makes you feel happy when they are around.
They smile, that especially warm smile, which is always up to par
But stop and think for a while on how lucky you are
To have such a person around to share your grief and your strife.
I don't mean to be hasty or brief, but Eleanor I am glad you are my
friend in this life
Just this last word will I write, for the bird is singing good night
I dearly thank God above for a friend like you whom I love.

Jim Parks enjoys writing poetry. He is a student in the Florida State College at Jacksonville for Living Program. His instructor is Mercedes Robinson.

Symbolize

At first I was a caterpillar slowly going nowhere awaiting a change. My change.
Not knowing when or how; living in a state of confusion barely going on.
One day it happened, the end, to the beginning to the middle and back to the beginning.
My chrysalis, a chrysalis of bondage.
Here I lay dormant. Learning about me and living a new life.
Soon I will open my wings, me this beautiful butterfly set free.
Warm sun shining upon me, bright flowers before me.
While waking up to the smell of freedom's early morning dew.
With nothing but air, opportunity, dream and goals. I'm reaching beyond the stars.
When people of this world pass me by,
They will stop to watch in awe, not remembering who I used to be.
For the colors of my soul shine bright, they cannot fail to see.
Some will try to capture me into their captivity.
No matter how they may try, this beautiful butterfly will forever soar high.
Someplace they do not choose to go.
Oh yes, that's me, that's what this is;
That butterfly is me.
Surrounded by green pastures, blue skies and several other butterflies floating alongside.
God says we're put on earth for a time unknown,
so I ask myself what would my legacy be if my time were up now?

Ashley Penniman is a student in Ms. Williams' Creative Writing course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

True Peace of Mind

What is true peace of mind? Peace is something natural; it is not something coming from anything under the sun.

That means a big bank account, a nice car, a nice house—all these things cannot give peace. Because all of a sudden, you may lose these things. But real peace is still in your mind, so it is natural. It is possible to see somebody who has not a great economic possibility, but he/she is feeling peaceful and joyful because his/her peace is natural.

Clearly, nothing can destroy that peace; it is something deeper and greater than anything else under the sun.

Vilner Pierre is from Haiti. He wishes to obtain his GED and to become a medical coder. He is a Literacy Council of St. Petersburg student and his tutor is Nancy.

ENGLISH: A Literacy Acrostic

English is a language that I like a lot.
Nothing in life is easy, so
Gaining practice every day makes
Learning fantastic!
In everyday practice
School helps us a lot, and
Home is my second school.

Mrs. Ramirez is a student in the Hillsborough Literacy Council's ESOL program at Bruton Memorial Library in Plant City. Her tutor is Lark Underwood.

The Meaning of Love

You may not know it
Maybe you wouldn't understand it
Perhaps not even believe it
It might not seem like it
It might surprise you
Maybe you never noticed
And even maybe you might not care
But I always carry in my heart

And although I still have not told you
My feelings for you are so strong
That to say I love you
Simply seems so little.

Karen Rodriguez is a GED student at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus. She began her studies last month. Her instructor is Carlos Villeta.

Depression is Illness

Depression is an illness
Quite drab
I'll foot the bill
My health will pay the tab

This dark cloud
Just follows me around
So much that it's like
I'm wearing a shroud

The inside of my body
Is dying at my soul
It's been a long time
Since I've felt whole

Depression is a sad mood
That can linger for years
It can affect people differently
With me-it brings many tears

At these times, I like being alone
I won't answer the telephone
Or answer my door
Don't want to do anything anymore

When the depression does cease
What a welcome relief and what a gift
To finally have this darkness lift
Sweet peace! Sweet peace!

Kenneth Dwight Sauls is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School.

Faith

To ask oneself “do I have faith?” is in fact admitting
he, you, me has none at all.

Faith cannot be sold or bought, it can be accepted or denied.

Sense of faith can bring promise of salvation.

A sense of faith may also be one of will.

Either you will have it or you won't.

Faith will take you to places you would never imagine you could
have gone, just as surely as lack of it will do the same exact thing.

Read between the lines and as they say, keep the faith.

*Cordy Walton is Martin County Library Adult Education Student, His
teacher is Donna Musso.*

How Life in My Country Differs from the U.S.

True Wealth

My name is Sandra Aguilar. I am from Nicaragua. I came to the United States of America five years ago. During that time, I lived three years in Illinois and two in Florida. Both have been a spectacular experience. The United States catches my attention because it is a country with so many natural resources and with such beauty. However, people cannot enjoy everything that this country has to offer, and that is the difference between the United States and my country, Nicaragua.

The United States differs from Nicaragua in many ways. Life in my country is relaxing and very quiet and peaceful. However, life here in the U.S.A is stressful, noisy, and fast. Nicaragua is a very poor county, but people are happy. No one worries about bills, rent, or gas for their cars. This is a constant worry for the people of the United States. They are under stress all the time. They are always thinking what they can do to make more money and pay all their debts. No one has time to observe the stars or the full moon on the beach. Their thoughts are always on making more and more money.

Family time between the two countries is different, too. In Nicaragua, the family spends dinner time together every day, and after dinner they watch the same television show because there is only one television. This is a good feeling for us because it is cozy, and we enjoy the family unit. In the United States, on the other hand, each family member spends time with his/her iPad, cell phone, or computer, and this time is spent in their own rooms. Despite all the comforts, the American family does not spend quality time together. America is full of wealth. However, what is gained? Nothing is helpful in living in a country so rich in all aspects if the people are not able to enjoy everything that the county has to offer. Nicaragua is rich in family unity and togetherness. That is true wealth.

Sandra Aguilar is an ESOL student working with her tutor Dr. Phyllis Chandler

Life in Guatemala VS Life in the U.S.

Depending upon where the people live, the way of life in Guatemala can differ a lot from life in the United States. In my country, Guatemala, the urban population and rural population have different opportunities in life. The urban population has more access to electricity and education. Most rural dwellings have serious structural defects. Here are some other differences between life in Guatemala and life in the United States.

In the U.S., families often consist of a mother and father with an average of 1-3 children. The average number of children per family in Guatemala is 2-6 children. In the U.S., it is very common in families for both parents to work full time, and they are at work while the children are in school or daycare. In Guatemala, in most families just the father works and the mother takes care of the children. The percent of divorce in the U.S. is higher compared with Guatemala.

Access to education is difficult in Guatemala. Many children have to leave school because they have to work. Here in the U.S. we don't see that. To go to college is difficult, too, because less opportunities exist, unlike here in the U.S. The school term starts in January and finishes in October. School hours are generally the same in all of the country: from 7:30 am to 12 pm. However, there is no daycare or childcare. Most of the people in Guatemala have a place to live. When the houses are in very bad condition, people don't have to pay rent. Many people here in the U.S. have to rent a house, or an apartment, and of course the houses are in good condition.

The official language in Guatemala is Spanish, but many other languages exist, and many people don't speak Spanish. In the U.S., the official language is English. In the U.S. it is inappropriate to show up at a house if you don't call beforehand. In Guatemala, you just knock on the doors, and you are not going to have any problems. Even in the urban population where it is dangerous, it is normal to see people walking in the streets all the time, and all the neighbors know and help each other. Here in the U.S. it is not easy to see that.

In the U.S., if you have any problems, just call 911 and an ambulance and/or the police will show up quickly. In Guatemala, in many small towns there is no police force, so the people have to solve their own problems, even when bad crimes exist.

Manuel Cardenas is from Guatemala. He is a learner in Susan Mitchell's Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School. He wants to pursue a career in Environmental Engineering.

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

My country is very, very different from the United States. People usually say that “different is a good thing!” In this case, it isn't. There are things people take for granted here in the United States that you wouldn't be able to do in other countries, especially if you come from a dictator country, where freedom isn't a privilege. You'll know how important freedom is needed.

Being born in a dictatorship country, I was lucky enough to get out from there before I even knew what was going on. Imagine not being able to speak your mind against the government or “The People” and say anything negative about them, and if you did talk bad about the Castros, just hope no one finds out that you did. If someone in the higher power hears you, just hope they don't find you. Just in case you want to know what would happen if they find you, just hope you get a good lawyer! Too bad there won't be one on your side defending you. They'll just throw you in jail for speaking your mind, oh, and you might not know when you're getting out. They don't know either. You could just live there for the rest of your life.

Do you want to be a doctor where I come from? Well, that won't help you survive here in the United States. It's said that a doctor in Cuba and a person working in McDonald's here in the United States make about the same amount of money.

Do you have plans on visiting Cuba? Go ahead, I hope you have fun supporting a communist country that doesn't care about its people and lacks basic human rights! Just stay there for a few months living like the Cuban people do, not in a classic hotel that's just there for the guests. You'll find how hard it is to find food, water, etc.

If you're reading this, I really hope you have fun in Cuba! I wish you the best supporting a communist government that doesn't care about their people.

I hope you don't mind using electricity for hours, well, that's what goes on at night. Almost every night power goes out, sometimes for an hour, sometimes for two hours, and sometimes you don't really know when it's going to come back. Just hope you've some candles around, because it gets so dark, you might not see where you're going.

Have you ever wanted to have a business in Cuba? That's nice! I wish you the best! Just don't visit the real parts of Cuba, like the houses falling apart, the roof collapsing, etc. That's not the worst part. You probably know about hurricane season, right? You know how Cuba usually gets hit by them? Well, Cubans don't get any help from their government, you just have to re-build with pieces left on the floor that aren't damaged and just put them back where they were. You think that's new? Nope, it has been going on for years.

While the people of Cuba are suffering, the Castros are doing very well. After all, it's like they're new at this. Just about 50+ years in power.

Randy Diaz is a Lee County Adult Education student.

Step By Step

It is said that variety is the spice of life; for me, this is true. Leaving Jamaica and coming to the United States has been interesting and has changed me in many ways. The three things that have affected me the most are the culture, the food and life in general.

From a cultural stand point, the common aspects between both countries are there melting pot of rich history with multiple nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. However, in America, I see the segregation throughout the masses; people are still classified as Black, White Hispanic, etc.

In Jamaica, there is a combination of the latter; “I am Jamaican” is used to give emphasis to everyone. I have come to admire the American constitution that reflects and protects the rights of the individuals of the nation and gives everyone a voice no matter how small it may be.

Americans may not be as friendly as what I’m use to back home; the human interactions may not be as strong due to the faster life style but it is still good to be out learning new things and seeing new places.

This new life style has its moments where it is fun and exciting but it’s hard to make time for one’s self, even taking care of one’s health becomes a challenge. Consuming fast food is a way of life for most people living in America. There are thousands of fast food chains whereas back home there weren’t a lot.

Jamaicans tend to live off the land and prepare meals from scratch, not that we don’t indulge in the Kentucky fried Chickens and the Burger Kings from time to time. This new world of processed, canned, ready to eat, pre seasoned, precooked food is both strange, yet remarkable and innovative; it has helped to limit the time spent on meal preparation.

However, not all options are as health as we would like them to be. I do enjoy the fact that food is a bit more affordable as exported items from the U.S to Jamaica cost way more back home than in the states for sure.

The changes in the culture have given me a fresh outlook on life. It proves that everywhere in the world has its ups and downs. Growing up in Jamaica was hard and opportunity was limited, especially for a “country girl” like me.

Here I am, 3 months later, trying to take another step towards my “Jaamerican” dreams of becoming a nurse. I am enrolled in GED courses at the Dunbar Community School, I know the road will be rough but with a willing heart any dream can be accomplished.

Remember, “the heights of great men rich and kept were not attained by sudden flight, meanwhile there companion slept there were upward toiling through the night”.

Tasheika Ferguson is a GED student in Ms. Hicks-Wiley’s class at Dunbar Community School. She will have her GED Diploma by May 2015.

Life in My Home Country vs. Life in the United States

Coming to the United States from Colombia was a challenge to me not only because of the language but also because of the new customs. After having lived in the US for two years, I am able to share my observations according to my experiences.

Although this country is a mix of cultures, I would like to highlight that Americans are generally very friendly, but at first I felt a little lonely—not necessarily because I am a foreign national. Perhaps I thought all the people around me were too individualistic and had very busy and self-sufficient lives. I was wrong: I needed to get used to my new environment. After I met some of the people in my neighborhood, my point of view changed. I learned that my neighbors were generous people whose customs differed from mine.

My next experience in the US is that most Americans are polite, punctual, and disciplined. I think these are very fascinating qualities that can be observed in such situations as driving, crossing the street, shopping, or making appointments. These customs are not as widespread among Colombians.

On the other hand, in the US, the purchasing power is a lot higher than in Colombia. It is easy to buy anything and sometimes things are not valued. In Colombia, many people who work very hard barely make a living and they never have a lot of amenities like here. In fact, it is easier to be poor in America.

To summarize, living in different countries makes people appreciate the good things in life wherever they are found after adapting to other customs. It is the only way to get the most out of living in a new country.

Lina Hernandez is an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, Florida.

Different From My Country

In my country life is more difficult, but the laws are less complicated. Here there are a lot of laws that I never thought existed. In the U.S., it's a law to keep your city clean, but in my country nobody worries about that. Also, when I was young, if you didn't go to school, it would be O.K., but here in the US, it's a law that kids must go to school.

In my country, people have no respect for property. The people in my country throw things out of the window of their cars. They don't care about anything. They throw garbage on the roads. In my town, laws are beginning to change because they now have garbage trucks picking up the garbage. Now my town looks different. It looks pretty and clean. In the past, children didn't go to school if they didn't want to. There were no laws telling them to attend. Now things are different. Schools provide uniforms, books, shoes, writing materials and lunches. Now children attend schools, and their parents are happy that their children are provided with these things.

It was difficult to adjust to life in America because the laws were different. I am happy with the laws here in this country, and I am happy that the laws are starting to change in El Salvador. Both countries are full of beauty, yet at the same time, they're also different.

Estella Lopez is a student at Piper Community School in Florida. Her teacher is Debbie Gitlan, and Debbie loves having Estella in her class.

Differences Between Colombia and United States

My name is Juan Mamian and I'm from Colombia. I am 17 years old. I have been in the United States for one month. It's my first time here but in this short time, I have found many differences about the lifestyle between these two countries.

First of all, I am fascinated with the organization of United States. Your spacious and tidy streets make finding locations easy. Also, the GPS is more accurate. In Colombia it is not the same. If you don't know the direction of the place you are trying to locate, then you are likely lost because the streets are very confusing.

On the other hand, the opportunities to work and to study in Colombia are limited for the money that you have. Here is easier to succeed. The food is also different, here it is common to buy frozen food or eat junk food, but in Colombia the taste of the food is more rewarding and healthy, because the fruits and vegetables are fresh.

In conclusion, I like the culture of this country and I hope to continue learning the customs in the time I have left.

Juan Mamian is from Columbia, he is student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Costa Rica

I am from Costa Rica. It is small in size but we have cities, beautiful beaches (as Isla del Coco) and places visited daily by people from all over the world. We are known for the beauty of our landscape and warmth of our people.

Costa Rica does not have an army. It was abolished on December 1st in 1948. The government sought to devote efforts to the field of education and that is why we have a low level of illiteracy in comparison with other countries. We have one of the most established democracies in Latin America. We are ranked 5th place in environmental performance worldwide. Costa Rica is the first country in the Americas to ban the hunting of animals for sport. We have 32 national parks, 51 wildlife refuges, 13 forest reserves and 8 biological reserves.

Its natural beauty, tranquility and warmth of its people make Costa Rica a top tourist destination. Costa Rica exports a variety of fruits, among the most prominent are pineapples and bananas. The main markets are USA and Europe. Traditional breakfast is "Gallo pinto" which is rice, beans, eggs, bananas and cheese. It is sometimes served with bread or tortillas.

The name given to the typical lunch is "Married", which includes meat, poultry, fish, chopped vegetables and salad.

Costa Rica has a tropical climate, ecological diversity, beaches, volcanoes and rainforests. When you visit, you can practice different sports such as whitewater rafting, football, bird and butterfly watching, dancing and rock climbing.

Lucia Martinez is an ESOL student at Aparicio-Levy Technical College in Ms. Smith's class. She has a Master of Science Degree in Curriculum and a beautiful daughter.

Coming to America

I am from Haiti and I came to the United States one year ago. Haiti is one of the countries that is close to the Dominican Republic. I came to the U.S in November 2013 with my children. On this date, they were eleven months old; they are twins, a boy and a girl. Now they are two years old. Monday through Friday they attend pre-school. Sundays are our days to attend church.

I am very happy, I thank and bless God every moment for them, because they mean more to me than life itself.

When I first arrived in the United States I didn't want to stay here. I remembered my life back in Haiti with my husband. My home in Haiti meant a lot to me and it was difficult for me to leave it. My husband has the responsibility of sending money every months for us. He is allowed to come visit every six months.

On January 2014, I enrolled at Dunbar Community School to learn English. In July, six months later, I registered into the Certified Nursing Assistance Program (CAN) now I'm working as a CNA.

Finally, I realized how much I like living in the United States. I want to stay for a long period of time. This will allow me to complete my English class, because I would like speak English very well. With that being said, I will be able to help my children with their homework. As for me, after completing my English class I want to become a Registered Nurse in the future.

Obas Nerlande is from Haiti, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Belize

Life in my home country of Belize differs from life in the U.S. in many ways. Government, education, work, and healthcare are four main ways that life is different when comparing the two countries.

In Belize, the government is corrupt. The government keeps the money from taxes and uses it for its convenience. The streets are very bad. Also, the schools are not very good. In some classrooms there are 30 to 32 students with only one teacher. Work is unsteady and inconsistent for many people.

In regard to healthcare, visits with doctors are free and sometimes the medicine is free in the hospital. Service is provided whether you have money or not. If you have money you pay for the service, but if not, you still get service. However, the quality of the service is less.

In America, the taxes collected go to build roads, hospitals, schools, parks, libraries, and sport centers. The classrooms seem better, as the class sizes are smaller. There is more steady work for people and the churches and other groups help people that need it. Doctor visits and medicine are more expensive in America, but the quality is better.

Life in Belize and the U.S. differ in government, education, work, and healthcare. While I miss my home country, everything in America is much better.

Julieta Rojas is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida. Her teacher is Aimee Holzer.

My Two Countries

My name is Tatiana Saavedra and I am from Columbia. I arrived in the United States one year and three months ago. In my country of Columbia, located in South America, the people are happy and funny. They go to work every day from morning until night and the children go to school every day. After that, they come home to rest. On the weekends, everyone spends time with their families and enjoy their favorite activities.

The topography of the land is extraordinary! There are many different places to visit and to know, such as Armenia where the coffee is grown and Cartagena which is a historic city to enjoy.

The United States is a big country where the people are special. It is not easy to be here because the culture is very different. Here, when I walk near my home, I see persons of different cultures, such as Latino, Asian, Brazilian and Argentinean. I would like to go to New York because I've heard it is magical. I would like to see the Statue of Liberty. Right now, I live in Lakeland, Florida. It's a quiet place located between Tampa and Orlando. My whole family is happy to live here.

Tatiana Saavedra is an ESOL learner in the READ Lakeland, Inc. adult literacy program in Lakeland, FL. She is from Columbia and her tutor is Irma Dietert.

Mexico City

I am from Mexico City and I moved to the U.S. four months ago. I am trying to change some aspects of my life in order to fit in the American culture more specifically in Fort Myers. Life in the U. S. differs from life in Mexico City, in many aspects, for example; language, traffic laws, some behaviors –such as the way American people greet each other, the way they get the bill in a restaurant, etc. Even the weather and places to meet people are different.

The biggest difference between Mexico City and Florida is language. Even though I am improving my English every day, I think I am fluent, however some ideas or feelings remain ambiguous to communicate or sometimes I'm afraid to say them because the grammar or the pronunciation may not be the correct ones. I think language is the most important thing that I have to get used to, because sometimes it happens that I go to a store and unconsciously start talking in Spanish to the cashier.

Traffic laws are also very different because in Mexico we are used to ignore them because punishments are very insignificant, while in the U.S. I can't imagine myself passing a red light. In Mexico the only thing that kept me away from speed were the every day's traffic jams, but if I ever saw Viaducto (a very popular and important avenue in Mexico, that connects south to north) empty, I would go to 140 km/h and nothing would happen, but here I can't picture myself going over 65 miles per hour in Palm Beach Boulevard.

Some behaviors are also different, for example, in Mexico when you say 'hi' or 'bye' to someone you must give that someone a kiss in the cheek (men only kiss women; women kiss both, men and women) even if it's the very first time you meet each other, while here instead hand shaking is enough. In a restaurant, in Mexico waitress will not give you the bill until you ask for it, here the bill arrives without you asking for it, at the beginning I found it rude (and most Mexicans may agree with me) because I thought they were asking me to leave, but then after telling my concerns to my uncle who was born and raised in Florida, I realized that it is just the way it is in the U.S.

Weather in Mexico is colder than the Floridian weather. The closest beach to the city is Acapulco, which is four hours away, so it is unusual going and having fun at the beach very often. In Florida I have the Fort Myers Beach and we can go whenever we want.

In conclusion, life in Mexico City differs from life in Fort Myers, but those are differences that I am willing to accept and won't be impossible to adopt. As I continue improving my English my social life will be easier.

As I continue respecting traffic laws, I will get used to them and it won't be hard to obey them and as I continue meeting people I will learn how to behave among the American people.

Saul Santoyo is enrolled to get his GED at Dunbar Community School. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is his teacher for Reading and Language Arts.

Between Two Countries

I came from The Dominican Republic, the perfect paradise for vacationers, surrounded by blue water, beautiful sand and welcoming people, who are ready to make your vacation a dream come true. There are many differences between my home country and the United States. I listed below some of the differences that made an impression on me after living in America for several years.

In The United States people invite their friends to their home if they want them to visit or have them over for dinner. In the Dominican Republic, your friends tend to invite themselves to your home anytime without notice. Another difference I noticed was that in America if you have an accident you call the police to fill out an accident report. In the Dominican Republic, you don't bother to call them since they will never come on time and when they show up they will expect money from you. American people usually drive very carefully and have insurance in case they get into an accident, but the Dominican people drive crazy and very few people have or can afford car insurance.

With respect to household needs in United States, if you have a plumbing problem you call the plumber to help you fix the problem. This is unlike my country where you will call your next door neighbors and ask for their help to fix the plumbing problem together.

In regards to meals, people who live in America have their main meal in the evening which is very different than in the Dominican Republic. In the Dominican Republic, our tradition is to be at the table at 12:00 noon to have a family lunch.

In the way of technology, there are many differences between the two countries. In America you are surrounded by the newest technologies and conveniences. Unfortunately, in the Dominican Republic these same conveniences may not exist or are more expensive which limits the amount of people who can experience them.

Lastly, in the United States, the school systems have many more resources to teach the children of all ages. In the Dominican Republic, the same resource are extremely limited or nonexistent and restricts the teaching that can be done by the schools.

In closing, there are many differences between the two countries, I love my home country, but my heart is now here in America, the country that grants me new opportunities every day.

Liga Elena Snyder is a Lee County Adult Education student.

Life in the United States

Life in Haiti, my home country, differs from life in the U.S. The big differences for me are housework, family time and employment. When I go back to my home country, I don't have to worry about housework, time with family, and employment.

Housework wasn't one of my chores. When I was in my home country, my dad hired two maids. The maids were paid a salary. One did not need to have a lot of money to hire a maid to do the housework and take care of the family. But life in the U.S. is really different; it is so hard to hire a maid. One needs to make a lot of money to have a live-in maid to do housework and take care of the family.

In my home country, everyone works in the morning and has the same schedule unless they are working as a security guard, working at the airport, working at the police department or working at night. Most of the jobs are not open on weekends which means everyone has the same day off, with vacation being the exception. You can request vacation days at a different time. This allows for time with family and friends.

In the U.S, most of the places are never closed. Most people have different work schedules (different shifts) which does not give family much time. In order to have time with family, you must either work for a private company, be self- employed or employed by the State. In my opinion, people in the United States really don't have time for each other unless they work out their schedule.

In my home country of Haiti, one can open his or her own business with less regulations; however, it is always harder to find a job. The U.S has more regulations for opening and owning your own business, but it is easier to find a job.

If my home country gave us opportunities like jobs, schools, hospitals, recreational places, etc., I believe that many of us living in the United States would return home. I have been in the United States thirteen years; life for me is still not manageable. Maybe, one day, I will adjust to life in the United States and not miss my country, Haiti. I love Haiti!

Jeanne Tamas is enrolled in GED at Dunbar Community School. She is from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Her teacher is Mrs. Hicks-Wiley. She is a beautician who hopes to become a nurse.

Having Challenges is a Good Thing in Education

“Believe you can, and you're halfway there.” Theodore Roosevelt's thought reveals the American mentality. The “Yes, We Can” slogan used by the Barack Obama presidential campaign, 2008, shows another aspect of American way of thinking. Having challenges is really a motivating lifestyle, especially in education. In my country, France, it is different: people have the habit of considering what is left to do rather than what has been accomplished. In education, such a difference may have considerable consequences.

Educators, parents and teachers have an important mission in their life, which is to raise or educate children in order to help them to become responsible adults. Many times, the way they accomplish their mission defines how the children feel in the future. At the beginning, reading and writing are the first steps in learning.

The instructor's attitude will condition students' learning perception. For example, if they are supported in their learning, they will feel more confident and their desire to learn will increase.

Sometimes, children have difficulties achieving what they have to do in their learning. They may also be confronted with some learning disabilities. In this case, the instructor's attitude is crucial for them. Encouraging students' efforts, recognizing their progress, and supporting their studies are beneficial for their learning perception.

Growing up in such an environment permits them to believe in their capabilities even if they are confronted with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. American school walls are covered with positive messages, which motivate the children as positive self-talk. The first step in feeling confident for students is to keep a positive attitude which will permit them to stick it out.

Frequently, in France, people are inclined to judge what is not done well. At school or at home, it is frequent to focus on mistakes, not successes; it is common to consider daily problems as huge difficulties. This attitude impedes self-achievement and is not helpful for children. How many times can a student read on his school report "Can do better! Not enough work!" Such words don't motivate students to invest in themselves nor in their schoolwork. Most of the low or average students feel discouraged especially if they have made some progress or have worked hard during the previous period. The repetition of such feedback may have terrible consequences on their self-esteem, and they quickly consider that better school results are out of reach.

To conclude, encouragement, motivation and positive thinking are essential in education as well as in any other area. Never forget how important it is to see the glass half full rather than half empty. It is always much better to face challenges than to face difficulties in life. It would be great if the challenging "Yes, We Can" could be more prevalent in the French way of thinking.

Agnes Tourrand-Serre is from France. She studies ESOL at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

Living as a Foreigner

Why do people choose to leave their country? The reasons are many and varied, each one important enough for someone to decide to leave and be an alien the rest of his life. Some seek new opportunities for education or work, some follow love, some look for adventure, others in search of a new life. I decided to be a foreigner because I felt that in my country it was no longer possible to really live a life. I realized that I would rather live as a foreigner than to live in fear, anger, helplessness and hopelessness, which is the same as not living.

Part of the strength that I need to keep positive and optimistic is to remember what I left behind in Venezuela, things that I do not find here. Here I do not find empty shelves. Here people don't stand in line for hours to buy food or products for personal hygiene. Here people are not marked with a number noting their place in line. Here the government does not determine how much each person can eat or spend a month. There is no blackout light for 14 or more hours, almost every day. Life is not worth the price of a cell phone, a watch or a pair of shoes. People do not die from a mosquito bite. Police do not shoot people, and people are not brought to prison for protesting or thinking differently from the government. Here no one calls me oligarch, fascist, terrorist or pitiyankee*.

Here I can live in a house without bars on doors and windows. There are many parks where I can enjoy the outdoors and there are many cultural and recreational activities. Here people on the street smile and are kind. I can walk my dogs, even if it's 9pm, because there is no danger of them being stolen or kidnapped. Here I can study and work on whatever I want. There are endless opportunities to study and unimagined jobs. Here working hard and honestly I can live well and I can enjoy the fruits of my effort without fear.

**Pitiyankee is a pejorative term invented by Dictator Hugo Chavez, used to insult and attack people who oppose his regime.*

Little time has passed, I cannot say it has been difficult or easy, but things that I can do here are so many. Every day my country deteriorates further, so despite how hard it can be to be an alien, hope remains, and I have life.

Bertha Uzcanza Fox is a student in the Academic Skills program at Piper Community School. She recently acquired an internship at an animal hospital with the intention of earning a certificate as a veterinary assistant.

My Different Life

My home country is China, but I have been living in America for several years with my daughter and my husband. My life in China was very different from my life in America.

The first difference is my surroundings. In China, I lived in Beijing. That is the capital of China. Beijing is a massive city. There are many people, lots of traffic, and very high buildings everywhere. In America, I live in Jupiter, Florida. This is a very clean and quiet city. I can go to the beach every day if I like.

The second difference is my job. In China, I was a good salesperson in a company. I made my customers believe in my products. I also made them trust me through our communication. I was very satisfied with my ability. When my customers accepted my advice to make a contract with me, I really liked my job. In America, I'm very afraid to talk with people. Sometimes I'm frustrated because of my English. I can only take a job that doesn't involve the advanced skill of English. Now I'm doing inventory. I like the job, too. The third difference is culture. I have a big family in China. Most of my family members live in the same city, so family members are very close to each other. All of our family members gather together on the different festivals. We celebrate by eating special foods, such as dumplings on Chinese New Year. My grandma makes special steam bread with red dates for every New Year. It looks like a beautiful peacock's tail and it is called a "Huagao". The meaning of this word in Chinese is "Life improves." Even though some people live in different cities, they will travel back to their hometown to be with their families.

I never go back to China to celebrate the New Year with my family because we don't have a holiday break for Chinese New Year. In America, although I don't have any family, I do have several very close friends, and on some of the traditional festivals, we have parties together. We made some dumplings and a lot of delicious Chinese food, but nobody can make "Huagao" like my grandma does! My life is different in America and China. I like some parts of my life in China; I also like some parts of my life in the USA.

Yan Wang is from China. She is a learner in the Adult ESOL Program at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

An Encounter that Changed My Life

Daring to Dare

In April 2009, I started working as a nurse for a private clinic in Brazil. On my first day, I was approached by this gringo that gently asked me to measure his blood pressure. Something about him got my attention because he looked into my eyes and I saw a glow that felt as if he could read my innermost thoughts. This might sound intimidating, but the weirdest thing about this was that I was not afraid.

I had been working for this company for just two weeks, and since that day this gringo would visit the clinic every day to measure his blood pressure. The only explanation I could give and that made sense was that he came to the clinic just to see me. I suspected this because his blood pressure was always normal, which did not justify him to come every single day. After my fourth day at work, I had my first day off. While relaxing at home, I received a phone call from a co-worker telling me that the gringo was there and wanted my phone number.

My first thought was that it was crazy idea since I didn't know him well, but in second thoughts, my inner self was telling him to give myself the opportunity to find out what this man wanted from me. With this in mind, I agreed. Within an hour, my phone was ringing and it was him! My heart was beating fast! My adrenaline was high and I felt nervous and excited but it felt good. He invited me on a date. Although I did not speak any English and he did not speak any Portuguese, I dared to agree. We had an encounter that turned out to be funny because we both had to take a dictionary so we could communicate with each other.

Two years and three months have passed, and in a simple ceremony, we got married. The adventure of daring to dare had fruits. However, the idea of leaving Brazil to live in the United States never crossed my mind until the day came.

I was reluctant to the move but then again, I remembered that new ventures are only successful when we are daring to dare. Today, I can tell you that this encounter DID change my life! I met the love of my life, my gringo, Tim Abele, a person who spares no effort in making me happy.

Luciana Dantas-Abele was born and raised in Brazil. She enrolled at East Area Adult School's ESOL program with Madeline. She wants to enroll at Polk State College to become a certified nurse in the United States.

Life is like a Light

I came to the library not knowing I would learn to read. But life had a big plan for me. I'm a mother of 6 kids and I have been put down by so many people in my life and in my family. But I kept going, since I have dreams.

When I moved here to Pompano Beach, Florida from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, I never knew that I would find a library full of life. Here you can live and people don't judge me for who I am. I guess you can say this library is home, and they say that home is where the heart is. I can talk to people here when I'm feeling down and go back home feeling proud.

This library has changed my life. I get to have the dream that I always wanted to have come true, learning to read and write when I started the literacy classes here at the library. I call this library miracle on 9th Court in Pompano Beach, Florida. You can come here, live life, feel that you're going somewhere, and not worry about being pushed down.

See, we all have something we want and that we want to do. We just don't know where to go to get that love. Go to the library on 9th Court. They call it the Jan Moran Collier City Learning Library. You will be glad you did.

Don't let people say you can't. Everybody can if you put your mind to it. I did coming here. Who would have known that moving out here I would find this library and that it would save me today.

I'm blessed to say I feel free. This is just the beginning of a brand new life for me. One door closed and now the next one opened.

Marline Defrand is currently a student in the Adult Literacy Class at the Jan Moran Collier City Learning Library in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Heather Roth.

My Experience with a Tornado

Yesterday I had a strange experience. It started to rain hard. I was sending a message when the lights went out. I got out of the room and went into the living room. Immediately, I saw dark clouds. I heard a very strange noise. I could see outside the window and saw a tornado similar to a gigantic, black mushroom.

The two chairs in the front yard and another chair in the back yard went flying around the house. The glass door made a loud noise and started shaking. Everything was flying around the playground, including the garbage, the fence, and the plants hit the windows.

I was very scared because the house was new. I didn't know how secure it was and I was alone. I didn't prepare for that. I closed my eyes and I prayed to God. I felt the power of nature and the love of God.

I hugged myself and then I felt peace. The tornado moved and disappeared onto the lake close to the house. This is a true and strange experience.

Cumanda de Ohagon is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes and East Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

A Journey of Friendship and Love

It's been 12 years since I first met my husband. In July, 2003, that encounter completely changed my whole life. I was just a 13-year-old Hungarian girl when I first met Mark who was a 14-year-old American boy (who had a Hungarian family background) during my family summer vacation in Bogács, Hungary. I still clearly remember the moment when I first caught sight of him. Just like children always do, we quickly became friends, and spent the summer playing different sports and games at the Hotel's wellness facilities.

Maybe fate controlled our lives after this encounter, but for years without any harmonizing, we always spent our 1-week vacation together. Nevertheless, when I was 16 years old something changed. From our friendship, an honest, young loving relationship started to form. From this moment our lives completely changed. We knew that the distance between us would be challenging, but we believed that our strong love would fight all of tribulations. Shakespeare once wrote, "The course of true love never did run smooth." I can relate to this quote. Our love story was also full of barriers, crying nights because we missed each other, and the undetermined waiting time.

On the other hand the distance made our relationship much stronger. We were more focused on our future than before. I started to learn English because my actual vocabulary at that age only stood from 5 words: "Yes, No, and I love you." We always gave each other a shoulder to lean on. He was there when I needed it and I was there for him too. We helped each other to stay focused on important things, like education and family. We were each other's soul mates from the beginning of our relationship. We imagined our dream life together and then slowly started to work on achieving our goals.

After 7 years of constant visitations, we finally decided we could not leave each other again. During my most recent summer trip to see him, I decided not to return to my beloved country, my family, and my friends because there was something much more important. On July 21, 2014, which was the most beautiful day in my life, we started our lives as husband and wife.

Although there were a lot of bumps in the road along with time that could not be rushed, it was worth the fight and the endurance. And I couldn't be any happier in my life.

Andrea Grebely is a student in the Academic Skills Program at the Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology-Adult Education division, Naples, FL. Her instructor is Graciela Somoza.

A Book That Has Changed My Life

Seven years ago, despite my education, my knowledge and skills, I kept accumulating disappointments. My life seemed like a failure.

I was crying very often and each new day for me was becoming a burden. I even came to ask myself what I was doing on earth so I felt the uselessness of my existence. Fortunately, I had enough faith to not just let go and I decided to ask God for his help and grace to meet a guide that would make me understand the meaning of my life. I was looking for a real and permanent peace.

So I wrote a simple prayer and every day I was reading my request, hoping with more or less conviction a positive result. Why do I persevere despite so little conviction? I figured I had nothing to lose but everything to gain if it could succeed. The result was not long in coming. Less than a month later I met the desire guide. Unknowingly, I had my discovery program.

With the help of this book written by Michele Morgan, I consciously program a lot of things: I kept thinking positively, I procured several material objects that I did not have the means to obtain, I got many spiritual graces, etc., and my life took a different meaning.

I shared this experience with several friends who also have achieved impressive of results. You also can have incredible results. Your subconscious belongs only to you, help yourself now and be happy!

Richardson Jean is a student at Atlantic Technical College - Arthur Ashe Campus.

An Encounter that Changed My Life

A few years back I was sitting in a park watching people dog walk and then in a sudden swoosh as fast as lightening, a crazy squirrel darted by me. The size of the thing was enormous or so I thought it was. Turns out the little guy was holding a can of Red Bull. Normally, I tend to ignore small animals but this was one of the most amazing things I have ever come across in my crazy life. I tried not to make eye contact with him but it was too late he knew he'd gotten my attention. Before I could look away he was already throwing the empty can at my head.

I jumped up in a rush ready for battle, only to realize what I was about to embark upon. Thinking to myself did that just happen or am I dreaming? Before I could finish my thought, he was eye level with me on a tree branch trying to slap my face. I ducked and smacked the tree branch with such force that it knocked him from the tree, but he landed on his feet. I took off as fast as I could run in the direction of my car. The red bull infused squirrel was insanely fast. I got to my car seconds before him, frightened beyond my belief. Then he looked me in the windows of my soul, aka my eyes, and said, "If I catch you in my park again I'll finish the job!!!"

Upon returning home, still shaky from the event in the park, I sat in the car for a few moments. As I got closer to the front door, I noticed the empty can of red bull with the squirrel's paw prints on it sitting on my door step! I opened the door and called for my dog, who's a Yorkshire terrier.

His name is Puppy. I told him about my assault that just took place and he said, "get the leash we're going back to the park dad! I got this." As we pulled up to the park, Puppy jumped out of the window before I could find a space to park. He scanned the layout for the assailant. Once he found the squirrel, he chased him into a giant bush. All I could hear was growling and Kung Fu sounds.

As soon as it began it was over. Puppy ran back to the car. When I got in, he said to me, "You must be crazy having me out here fighting squirrels on red bull. Ain't nobody got time for that!" Now every time I see a squirrel or Red Bull I cry.

Michael Kohl is a Lee County Adult Education student.

An Experience That Changed My Life

I have been living in the United States for one year and one month, and I am glad I came to a country where I am going to have a better future.

I arrived on July 16th and my life changed that day. Sometimes we have to face hard decisions and make radical changes to move forward in life, but these are the things that make us stronger. When I left the plane, I found this new world, and it was wonderful. At the beginning, it was very hard for me and my family because my father and my brother still live in Cuba. Also, I missed my friends and the university lifestyle. As is typical, we do not appreciate what we have until it is gone.

I have dealt with two of the most pressing obstacles to living in America. The most difficult thing to adjust to has been the English language. People did not understand me as well back then as they do now. My English is getting better every day, however, which is empowering me more and more. Another shocking thing was learning how to drive. I had never driven before, and I was so scared just thinking about it. The good thing now is that I already have my driver's license and my own car—not to mention my own car payments!

I have come to realize that the most important thing in life is not the result; it is the process by which a person gets there. After coming to America, I started to appreciate the time I spend with my family, and I have learned that they are the most essential part of my new life.

Elizabeth Moreno is an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, Florida.

My Son

Today, I would like to talk about an encounter that changed my life for the better. March of 2014, I found out I was pregnant with my first child. I knew from that moment that my whole life was about to change, and I would have to put his or her needs and wants above my own. It was now time for me to stop living life the way I was living, grow up, and start preparing and working on making a good life for my child and myself.

When I say I had to stop living life the way I was, I mean that I had to stop running the roads all of the time. I had a bad addiction to drugs before I found out I was carrying a little blessing from God. Immediately, I had to stop and make a lot of changes. I had to do what was right by my child and to make sure I gave birth to a healthy baby.

It was then time for me to grow up and stop acting like a child. I could not raise a child if I continued down the road I was on. All of the late nights or not coming home at all had to come to a stop, and that they did. I chose to drop all of my friends because I knew they would only bring me down and they no longer fit into my life plans. All of a sudden, having friends and going out meant nothing to me, all I cared about was the sweet baby growing inside of me.

Now, almost a year since I first found out I was an expectant mother, I have my precious baby boy in my life, and goodness, he is perfect. I am now going back to school to get my GED® diploma. I know without an education, I will never be able to provide for my son the way I need and want to. After I get my GED® diploma, I plan to go to college for psychology. I believe with a degree in psychology, I will be able to provide my son with everything he needs and we will never have to hurt for anything.

I can honestly say my son is the reason I am the person I am today. He has made me a better person and opened my eyes to a brighter world and future. It was not easy making the life changes I had to make, but I can definitely say it was all worth it. Even though I know raising my son isn't going to be easy, I wouldn't change any of it for the world.

Tiffany Musgrave is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Beth King.

Changing My Life

I was a sophomore in high school, and life was going well. Then an encounter changed my life! When I was a sophomore my daughter was born, and I was only seventeen. I ended up dropping out of school and became a stay at home mom who was struggling.

Then my second daughter was born and I was struggling even more. When my second daughter turned a certain age, I decided to go back to school. The reason I decided to go back to school is because I have a great family to help and support me, and my babies are still little.

I have a wonderful teacher to help me along the way as well. Now I can move up in life from where I am and have a better life. The truth is I would not change it for the world; I am a proud momma of two beautiful little girls. By finishing my education I can make a better life for my girls and me.

Brianna Pollard is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

How I Met My Soulmate

I have a friend who advised me to sign up on a web page where people can find friends or love. I didn't have a boyfriend at that time and I had some bad experiences before with guys. She told me she had met a nice person on a web page and maybe I could find someone, too.

I went home and I mentioned it to my sister. She thought it was interesting and put my information and my picture on the web page. After some time I got an email message saying I had the most beautiful smile and that I must be a very happy girl. I thought it was cute, and I replied saying "thank you." I continued getting more messages from the same person. He was looking for somebody to teach him Spanish. I didn't pay a lot of attention right away because sometimes it can be dangerous online. Some people have bad intentions on the internet.

One of the last messages he sent me said he was traveling to my country and would like to practice Spanish with me and would pay me for my time practicing with him. He said he didn't have any intentions other than learning Spanish. I made the decision to meet him. When I met him I felt very confident, and it was a very interesting encounter because I didn't speak any English and he only knew some words in Spanish.

Since that day, my entire world changed because he became my companion, my best friend, my husband and the love of my life. He came into my life and brought me happiness and peace. My life was a little difficult before I met him and was full of worries, boredom and disappointments, but now all of that is in the past.

Every day he says nice things to me and treats me like a princess. Because of meeting him I have been able to travel, meet new people, and help my family. We got married two years after we met and have been happily married now for another two and a half years.

My friend also married the guy she met on the internet and she now lives in Australia. She is very happy, too. Thanks to my friend and my sister, I met my soul mate.

Diana Milena Castro Tobon is from Colombia. She is studying English in Susan Mitchell's Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.

A Turning Point in My Life

Thrust into the Big Apple at 15

The gorgeous city of Medellin, Columbia, was my birthplace, and where I completed elementary and middle school. Many parents in Columbia often feel that their daughters do not need higher education, since most girls marry young and have children. With that reasoning, at age fifteen, my mother sent me to live with Aunt Lillian in Brooklyn, N.Y. My aunt found a job for me right away, and I made many new friends in the city that never sleeps. Nonetheless, I felt lonely. Therefore, when my brother came to live in New York City, I went to stay with him. Soon after, I met a nice man, got married and we moved to Puerto Rico.

Three important events happened in Puerto Rico: I got my GED, had my first daughter and I received my Green Card. Freedom at last to leave and reenter the USA! Finally, we were able to visit my family in Columbia. I spent quality time with my mother, relatives and friends. Six months later, we returned to Puerto Rico. During one of our several trips to visit my brother in Bridgeton, New Jersey, my son was born.

Returning to Puerto Rico was an easy choice; we loved the warm weather and friendly people. Our second daughter was born there. A few years later, I divorced my husband and moved to Miami, Florida.

Longing to be closer to family, we relocated to Anaheim, California, where my sister lived. We stayed there for five years, and visiting Walt Disney Park was our favorite pass time. I learned much about Mexican culture, living not far from Santa Ana, also called "Mexico City." Mexicans, in general, are hard-working people. I love their music, arts, dances and food. Living in California was almost perfect, until I experienced an earthquake. That was enough for me! I moved to Broward County, Florida by myself. My children soon followed. I remarried again, and worked many years at Publix Supermarket. At last, we settled down in Ocala, Florida, to have a quieter life. My daughter, a sister, and their families live here as well. I now work as a chief cook at a school in the Marion Oaks, subdivision of Ocala.

The real turning point of my life was coming to the USA. This was a dramatic change from the traditional course of events in my native country. This country broadened my horizons for me and all my children. We were blessed with being exposed to a different culture, way of life, education, and working opportunities at every place I set my feet. “Thank you” to the USA, for all these downstream experiences as a result of coming here at an early age.

Gloria Arias is a student of the ESOL program at Marion County Literacy Council in Ocala, Florida. Her teacher is Midori Storms.

He Brought Out the Best in Me

My name is Bivaiana Campillo. I am from Colombia. I think my life took a change from the day I made the decision to get married. That meant I had to leave my family, my friends, my country, and of course my dog. The decision was the best thing I have done so far. This change made me realize the value of many things that were not so important to me before. I came to know a very different culture than my own. On my journey, I have come across many wonderful people. They are angels to me. The person who has helped with the change is also the one who has brought out the best in me. He only knows to give me love and support. That person is my husband.

I want to share this with you: Family is not always blood. Families are the people who accept us as we are. They are those who would do things to see us smile, and are those who love us no matter where we come from.

Finally, I want to leave this with you: Learn and respect every person who crosses your life. Every one of them is a blessing for you.

Biviana Campillo attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

A Big Change in My Life

I have been out of prison three months and I can see the changes I have made; however, there are three things I need to do for me to feel or be successful. I need to get my GED, hold on to the job I now have and be a better father to my children.

My biggest challenge is to get a GED diploma. While I was in prison, I started my GED but I didn't get time to finish. I left my main camp and went to work release to better myself so I could get out of prison to find a job. I really want to get my GED; it plays a big part in my life. I want to show my children that nothing is too hard in life if you just put your mind to it and work hard at it.

I got out of prison to make a big change. To get on the right track, I am back in school to get my GED. I also got a job when I got released from prison. The job allows me to take care of my children. The job plays a really big part in the big change in my life.

Another turning point for me was that I can spend more time with my children and be a better father to them. When we do spend time together, we have the best time of our lives. We go to the park, play on the slides, swings, and the merry go round. The kids have a blast when all of us get together like that. We're like one big happy family when we get together.

All of these things are big changes in my life: getting out of prison, my kids and I spending time together, and last but not least, getting my GED.

Dessie Crawford is working very hard in his GED classes at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

A Turning Point in My Life

One of the most important events that had happened in my life was to leave my country and seek a better way of life in the United States. At the beginning, it was hard for me to have the idea of leaving everything, family, friends, house, and begin a new life in an unknown place.

One of the reasons my family and I made this decision was the educational opportunities for our children. They were able to attend a better university with excellent career opportunities. As a result of their education, they were able to find good jobs that pay well and offer financial stability.

Another reason we came to the United States from the Dominican Republic was to find a more peaceful environment. In the city where we live, there is less traffic and noise pollution. People are more educated and tolerant with each other. Knowing people of different cultures and countries has been a wonderful experience in my life.

Better educational opportunities for our children, a more peaceful living environment, and being around people of different cultures are the reasons why I came to the United States. The decision to leave my country has been a turning point that has greatly impacted my life.

Carmen Duluc is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida. Her teacher is Aimee Holzer.

A Wonderful Journey

When I arrived in Naples on September 1st, 2014, I knew that this would change my life style. I was moving to start a new life, in a new city and a new country and the biggest change of all was having a fiancé. At the beginning it was a great experience. For almost 9 years, I had lived with my mom at her place in Caracas in the apartment where I had grown up since childhood. I had grown used to the same knickknacks, the same furniture, same kitchen style, even the same neighbors for many, many years.

All of a sudden, I was living with Hector in a new home, completely different from what I had been used to with my mother in Venezuela. Now my fiancé and I had our own place, our things, our home, our accessories and style of doing things together. This has been an incredible change for me one that I felt a little scared to face, navigate the challenges ahead of me, but a change that I was determined to overcome and succeed at.

It's been a few months now since I made that important change in my life, a change that had me concerned at times, but looking forward to overcome along with my fiancé. A couple of months after I moved to Naples my fiancé and I decided to get married. That was certainly another major challenge for me, I'm sure that it was also for him. We decided to get married on November 14th, on that day something funny happened, we forgot our marriage license at home. I remember he started to ask me about all the documents that we needed for the ceremony, like my passport, our driver's licenses, and my ID from my country while we were still at home; but he never asked for our marriage license.

When we arrived at the Courthouse parking lot, I remembered the marriage license. I said to him, "Baby, I forgot the marriage license." He thought it was a joke and I repeated, "No, it is the truth I left it at the house". Our scheduled wedding ceremony was for 3pm and we arrived at the Courthouse at 3:10pm, we were late but we got lucky because at the Courthouse we were able to obtain a duplicate and finally we got married. I think at most ceremonies or celebrations something funny or unusual happens.

Now, I'm trying to improve my English. I have been attending the Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology, taking ELCATE classes every day.

I'm studying hard at this time because when I improve my writing, reading, understanding and speaking like on American, this will certainly help me reach my goals, one of which is to get a good job in the financial sector.

Monica Hernandez is a student at LWIT in the level 7 Academic Skills program. She is from Venezuela and plans on furthering her education with the goal of obtaining a position in banking.

My Big Accomplishments

My turning point started when I got a divorce in 1996. I had two amazing children, ages 13 and 12. My ex-husband was moving his new girlfriend into our home, and I had to move out.

I needed a place to stay and transportation, so I had to work. I stayed in my sister's garage until I had enough money for an apartment. I worked two jobs with hardly enough time to sleep, eat, and play with my children. After 9 months of working extra hours, I finally had my two bedroom apartment and a little black used car.

My children were proud of me, and at the same time, they were happy to have an apartment. I knew I needed to work harder and a lot of extra hours to be able to pay all the bills. I really didn't care as long as my children were getting their education, food and a safe place to sleep. I needed to be strong, optimistic, motivated, and persevering through all the tribulations of being a single parent. Along the way I learned to be a mother, father, nurse, maid, teacher, friend and cook. My children looked up to me as if I was their hero, and that kept me going stronger.

After struggling for 6 years with job after job, my body couldn't take it anymore. I ended up in the hospital. I lost a lot of weight and had migraine headaches. The doctor told me I needed a lot of rest, but I knew I couldn't afford to rest. My daughter was about to graduate, and as a reward she asked for a car. I couldn't disappoint her. Therefore, I gave my best to another 5 more years working from job to job because I knew my son would graduate the following year. After that I promised myself I would work only one job, like a normal person would. Then I would like to improve my education by going back to school.

After my children both graduated, they moved out and started to make their own lives. I was left alone, tired, and sick, but proud of my enormous accomplishments. Over the years I had forgotten how to date and to flirt. I was afraid that my heart would be broken again. I remember my sister telling me to give love another try, so my sister and her husband had a barbeque and invited all their friends over. Yes, I did meet someone—my brother-in-law's best friend. It was love at first sight. We got married and with God's blessing, we had a child.

I have had 3 years of marriage, and I haven't been working ever since. I decided to go back to school, and that's why you find me writing about this extraordinary turning point in my life.

Maribel Garcia is a GED student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Our Second Home

As the years pass, I strongly think that we are able to control our own destiny. I am convinced that we have a mission in life, but we can make good decisions to feel fulfilled. Sometimes we think fate is all, but I do believe that there is a difference between fate and destiny.

A few years ago, when I was living in Argentina, I had a great job, at least for me it was. I was a bank employee. Everything was fine until I was transferred to another branch. People were different there, and it was very difficult to adapt myself to such an uncomfortable workplace. I wasn't used to working in fierce competition between co-workers who were trying to reach the bank's goals. We share so many hours in our jobs that it's very important to feel happy; I think it's our second home. Moreover, I also think that as coworkers feel comfortable in their jobs, they work better and make the customers feel comfortable too.

One day, after resisting for five years and tired of being sad, I wondered what need I had to continue in that work environment. There was no salary that justified going through that situation. At that moment, I couldn't put up with that situation and I realized that a decision in time could change my life and improve my lifestyle.

For that reason, I called my boss to let him know that I was resigning that day. That was a great decision; it changed my life. There were so many simple things I couldn't do while working, and then they became very important to me as such as picking up my children at school, attending the meetings with the teacher, and other school events. My strong and continuous headaches also ended, and my mood changed. Now, I could share more time with my family, my friends and most importantly, never more would I have to share so many hours with unfriendly people.

Now, I firmly believe that the main goal in life is to try to be happy, enjoying simple things every day. I learned how important it is to do what we like, sharing time with people we love and getting away from people that are not kind with us. Making good decisions in our lives and being a good person will help us to achieve happiness.

Mariana Gil is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Moment My Life Changed Forever

The moment my life changed forever was because of two reasons; first, when I gave birth to my 3 sons, that was indeed one of the most life changing experiences for me. I loved them like I loved no one else on earth. They made my life whole. I, as a mother, showed me how to love and be supportive, but I always felt like there was still something missing. Also, being a single parent was hard raising 3 boys, but I continued doing what I needed to do to take care of them. Going to church and believing in God, I knew that one day everything would change.

In November of 2013, I met a friend at church named Antonio. He was very nice and boy, he was good looking. He was the pastor's son. Although he was much younger than I was, he really didn't act his age. As time went on, we began to get to know each other day by day. On February of 2014, we made our relationship official and he actually told me he loved me. From that day forward, my life changed one last time. Antonio makes me feel loved in everything he does and everything he says. He is, indeed, a great supporter for me and my boys.

He also helped me learn to manage my money in a way for me to do less spending and more saving. I realized that he was only teaching me responsibility. Antonio has taught me to trust, in spite of all the wrong in my life I have been through. He told me never let other people pay for what you've been through in the past because everyone is not the same. I was always told that one man's trash can be another man's treasure.

I can truly say that ever since Antonio and I have been together, I feel secure and now have peace in my home. My boys

love him and he's a great father figure to them even though he doesn't have kids of his own. We have differences, but what relationship doesn't?

We learned to not hold grudges and not to go to sleep mad at each other. Antonio and I move forward in life no matter what the situation may be. No relationship is perfect. We had to know that if both of us weren't willing, it would never work. I'm glad for the life changes I have encountered. Every moment is accounted for, and I wouldn't change anything. My life experiences made me out to be the person I am today. I would not trade the people in my life for anything. They are my existence. Moments are forever and my life is complete.

Sheena Green is a student at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Campus.

Never Give Up

My story starts in the first grade when I was diagnosed with a learning disability. Throughout the years I had to learn how to cope with my disability. I struggled to the point that I dropped out of high school during my senior year. I dropped out after being told that I could never apply myself long enough to finish. By the end of that year, I had my first child.

As a single parent, I decided it was time to go back and get my education. Once again I struggled, and once again I dropped out. Over ten years and three children later, while two of my children now struggle in school, I have the “self-motivation” I once lacked.

I am in the process of getting my GED® diploma. I want to show everyone that it's ok to struggle, but never to give up. I want my children to know of my past struggles and now see I'm not giving up. Fight, fight with all your might. You can do this; I can do this!

Robyn Griffin is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

How My Life Changed

On November 5th of 2004 I was playing softball with my company team. In the middle of the game, I took my turn as batter and I hit the ball to the middle of the field. The next batter also hit the ball and I ran for home. I slid to safety, broke my leg in two places and my life changed completely.

Before that game, I worked more than 12 hours per day. I ate whatever I found in front of me. I didn't have enough time to spend with my family and with my friends. So, in the middle of rehabilitation, I found a reason to change. In rehab, I saw many people who would never walk again, I saw people totally disabled. I thought to myself, yes I can do it..! I didn't lose any part of my body. I had to get better.

I needed to recover the movement of my leg and most importantly, I needed to recover my faith, I needed to get back to my life, and I needed to get my life back. The daily routine, overworking, traffic, and the political and economic situation had forced me to move away from the things that really made me feel happy. Sharing time with family, having fun with friends, doing activities that fill the soul had become less important and step by step I was becoming more and more unhappy.

So this experience that began badly, gave me a new reason for life, a new reason to keep me going. Now I see my life with more optimism. I take better care of myself. I do not worry so much about what other people think or do. Work is now in the background. Things that happen around me I find important, but do not let them change my life.

I try to go to the doctor twice a year and I eat better and healthier. I love to live my life fully, as God brought me into this world. Life is not perfect. Sometimes you can find rocks in the way. You may decide to go back, or to move forward. People might think life is so hard, but it is our life, and we are so lucky to be here.

Douglas Hernandez is a student in the Academic Skills class at Piper Community School. His teacher is Debbie Gitlan and she loves having him in class!

From Bad to Good

I lived in a small town in Massachusetts, where my story starts off. From when I was eight years old, I was bullied in and out of school for nine years. The bullying led me to hurt others, but before I was sent to juvenile detention, one of my friends taught me to control my anger.

When I was in elementary school, I was shoved inside and against lockers, and I was called a freak. I wondered “Why me?” “What did I do wrong?” and “Was it my fault?” I sat alone in class, at lunch, and on the bus. After a while I sat with others, but I was still getting bullied.

When I was in middle school, I got tired of getting bullied, so I fought back. I fought three of the bullies; I broke one’s arm, one’s leg, and one’s jaw. I felt powerful, but sick too. In addition, the beatings I got became worse.

I was bullied less in high school because one of my best friends helped me and backed me up. I couldn’t take getting beaten up and my friend left, so I dropped out of tenth grade and left Massachusetts for Florida.

On my way to Florida, I was thinking a lot about the past and turning my life around. I decided to change my life for the better, not for the worse. I left the place that hurt me and I didn’t look back. I chose to get my GED, go into the military, go to college, work with computers, and spend the rest of my life in the countryside.

Today, I am older and wiser; I’m getting my GED and looking forward to the next challenge. I fought my way through school. NOTHING can stop me.

Brian Jewell is a Literacy Council of St. Petersburg student working on his GED at the Northeast Community School. He has two tutors, Martha and Janet. He knows he will succeed!

The Biggest Loss I Have Ever Experienced

The biggest loss I have ever experienced was on the day of 02/05/11, four years ago, when I lost my five month old son. He was my world. I had to change my life for him. That's why I'm here today to talk about the good things about him. He was a sweet, intelligent little kid. He wouldn't harm anyone or anything at all. He would put a smile on your face, even when you were crying and feeling down. He was very young and innocent. He would love you like the ones who loved him.

Everything had been okay for the first five months. I was going to school for my son. I had gotten a call from his mom. She wanted him to come over, so he came. Long story short, my life was crushed because he had been hurt. I cried because he was a short of breath, so I called 911 and the ambulance came. It felt like someone stabbed me in the chest multiple times after I got a phone call from my big sister. She said my son was in the hospital with tubes in his mouth and a whole lot of cords on him. The worst part about it was that the mother of my son and her family called me 30 minutes later. They were crying and asking me if they could pull the cord on my son! I was broken in half. I didn't eat or sleep for what felt like a whole month after he passed.

Now I'm back in school working on getting my GED. What helps me is still thinking about the good times that I had with my boy. I will always have him in my heart.

Eric Johnson is a student at Atlantic Technical College- Arthur Ashe Campus.

A Story of Hope

Since I started the Adult Literacy Class, it has taught me a lot. I am grateful to be able to read and write now. Also, I am grateful that I was able to go to the bank and open an account all by myself. Now I can even do my own deposits.

Even when I travel, I am able to do my paperwork on my own. For all of these things I can now do on my own, I am so grateful to my teachers who take time out to help me, see the best in me, and believe in me.

I believe in myself too, and one day I will get my GED.

*Anonymous is a student at Jan Moran Collier City Learning Library-
Each One Teach One/Adult Literacy Class.*

Every Situation Has a Silver Lining

I believe it's true that every bad thing has a good side, or a silver lining. It was hard when I left my home in Jordan, especially when I left my parents. It is hard to leave the people you have lived with all your life. Our parents are the best people in the world. However, on the day you have to leave these lovely people and it's sad. I wanted to be responsible for myself and be independent, which was the good side. I began improving my self-esteem. I did everything in my power to be happy. Now, if someone tries to put me down it's bad. But the good thing is I am learning to stand up for myself. I will not listen to anyone who tries to hurt me.

When my first son left home for the first time, I had a bad feeling, but the good thing was that he wanted to be independent. He left the house. It was sad. The first time when he left, I felt so angry, but then I saw him improve himself. He got a job and now has a house. He can take care of himself. That makes me proud.

Every time when I stand up for myself, there is someone who tries to put me down. I see this from a person close to me in my family, but I'm not giving up. The good thing is that I will not listen to him, especially if I have the opportunity to go to school to learn English. I have decided to improve myself. These bad times will make me stronger and more determined.

I know that bad things have a good side because my own personal experience has taught me that every situation has a silver lining. Nevertheless, I love my parents and I wish good luck to my son. From this day on, I will not let anyone who puts me down keep me down. I will turn bad things to good things and become stronger for the experience.

Najat Kiwan is originally from Jordan. She is a student in the Literacy program at Cooper Memorial Library, Clermont, FL. She is married and is the mother of four children. Her tutor is Wanda Klaas.

My Turning Point

My name is Mary Lyles. I am a proud mother of four children and seven step-children. I worked cleaning houses. I took my children to church. As time passed, I had three children at home and raised them without a man in the house. Much to my sorrow, my oldest daughter passed away. After the others finished high school, they did well in life. My son entered the Navy, one daughter became a doctor/professor, and the other is a nurse. How happy can a mother be?

I have volunteered in hospitals and nursing homes and am currently serving as a volunteer with the Chaplain Care Ministry. People saw something in me and thought I could become a good teacher, but I did not have the education. I began to think about getting my GED. This became my goal for the next chapter in my life.

One day while walking, my spirit spoke to me, "It is time to start on your goal." I obeyed the spirit. It took a long time to get started, but I entered a program and am working on my GED. It is going to be hard work and dedication, but so has been my life up to this point. I know that my family and friends will be very proud of me when I reach my goal. I thank God for the things He gave me to keep going.

Mary Lyles is a Literacy Council of St. Petersburg student at Lakewood Community School. Mary is present twice a week, working very hard on her goal with her tutors, Jim and Dedra.

My Dream Will Come True, Someday

My name is Rocael Marroquin. I am from Guatemala. Ever since I started school at the age of six, I was fascinated with learning. I obtained my basic education in my country. After I graduated high school, I felt that I needed to go to United States to pursue my interest in nanotechnology. This is because the technology in Guatemala is very poor. I will not reach my goal if I stay here.

The year 2011 changed my life. I arrived in America with excitement and high expectations. Getting a job was not difficult, especially where I did not have to communicate as much in English. I took the job as a construction worker, then as a cook. To me, I needed to earn a living. These jobs were only temporary but I could at least start saving some money.

My dream is to go to college and study nano-technology. Do you know what nanotechnology is? If you go find out what it is, you will be interested in it like I am.

This is my plan. I want to invent a program or instrument to diagnose people with different kinds of illness. The purpose is to help humanity to become healthier and live a better life. My invention will not be as costly as the current technology we have now in the medical field. I want people to be able to pay a low cost when they use my invention. It might sound superficial but I am very sure it could be done. As a result, we will have a generation of people who are happy, healthy, and living a long splendid life.

Rocael Marroquin attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Just Another Way of Life

My life is full of turning points. When I chose this topic, about my decision to stay in the U.S., I realized how many other turning points happened in my life. This is, by far, the most significant, because of this turning point, a lot of things have changed completely in my life. At other times, the changes that have taken place due to other turning points were not as big.

For example, once I decided, at the age of twenty, to move in with my boyfriend (unlike in the U.S., that is something very uncommon in my country, Brazil) and leave college for a while. Another time I decided to go back to college, leaving my boyfriend. Those are two examples among many other moments.

This time the change is more drastic. It wasn't a boyfriend, job or college change. This is a completely different way of life! In my country, I had a good job. I lived alone in a two-bedroom apartment (but on weekends it was always full of friends), and I had considerable stability.

Then I realized that stability was no longer working for me; I needed something new in my life so I quit my job, which was very stressful at the time. After four months of trying to find out what to do with my life, my sister invited me to come visit her family. She suggested that I stay and study to improve my English, because I had nothing holding me back in Brazil. I am single, have no children, and I had not received a good job offer yet.

Now, this turning point is definitely the most important ever! My job is not the same, my home is not the same, and I'm on a different continent, speaking another language! Looks like being out of my comfort zone is my thing!

Ana Nobili is a learner in the Jupiter High School Adult ESOL Program. She is from Brazil. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

A Difficult Decision

My name is Dinora Orellana, and I will tell most of my life in this story. I came from El Salvador about eleven years ago, leaving my children, family and friends. It was very sad for me, but I had to because otherwise my children would have suffered from the shortages.

Then I had to make a decision which was not easy. I think it was the hardest decision of my life, having to leave my children with my mom. They were so small and helpless. Now, my kids are teenagers.

They study and I feel fulfilled because they are grown, but I missed the best part of their lives. Now, my goal is to learn English and get a better job.

Dinora Orellana is an ESOL student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, FL. She is a diligent student in Vicki McDonald's Levels 4 and 5 class.

The Death of My Father

The day my father died, my life changed forever. Everything before then was simple for me. My responsibilities consisted of going to school, and doing my chores around the house. My responsibilities changed after his death. I was now responsible for myself; I had to grow up instantly. I came to the conclusion that I had to move to the United States. I am going to tell you about my life in Guatemala, what made me decide to come to the USA, and my life now in the United States of America.

My life in Guatemala was simple, but great. I am the second youngest child of five. Many say I was my parent's favorite child. My father always made sure I had everything, but that I would have it all through hard work. My father would say "if you want to be important in life, you need to educate yourself." With my father's encouragement, I went to the university and studied tourism.

My father died my senior year of college, which devastated me. My priorities changed. I was now the man of the house, since my older brothers were now married and had their own families.

I became responsible for the wellbeing of my mother and younger sister. I had a job in Guatemala working at a travel agency, but I didn't make enough money to support my family. My brother was already living in the United States at the time, and he advised me to come here. When I finally came to the United States, I found out how different life was here. Not knowing the language made it more difficult. I spoke very little English, but I found a good job. When I started making money, I began to send some of it to my mother back home. With time, I started to assimilate to the life here in the USA. I realized that in America, you can make enough money to send home and still afford to live here.

At my job, I was promoted to shipping foreman, but not speaking English well made it difficult to communicate with others. I decided to go to school to improve my English. My father said “education is important, when trying to be a better you.”

My father’s death was the turning point in my life. I thank my father for always giving me the opportunity to learn from him. I continue to live in the USA and enjoy life, while contributing to my family. I am studying English, so I may better communicate at work, and allow me to move further in my career. The United States is a great country with many opportunities; you just have to work at it. I know my dad would be proud with what I have accomplished.

Jose Ramos is an ELL student at iTECH in Immokalee, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

Five Heartbeats Were My Reason for Change

After having my fifth child, I sat down and wondered what’s next? Everything I had was lost including my pride, self-confidence, and dignity. When I looked at my children, I came to the conclusion that failure was not an option. I was 18 when I had my first child. I named him Roshod. At the age of 19, I had my daughter and named her Nickali. Then came three more boys: Nicholas, Nickayden, and Nickeli. At the time, we were living in Georgia, but my mother lived here in Florida.

I decided to relocate to be closer to my mother and start a new beginning for myself and my family. I knew I wanted to get my life back together. When we arrived in Florida, my mother didn’t have room in her home for us. I knew I had to better myself in order to show my children what it’s like to be successful and what it takes to reach success. In the beginning, things were not easy. My children and I went to the Salvation Army to stay. We lived there for a few months. I realized a lot from that experience. I had an advocate and together we sat down and discussed my short and long term goals. A few of my goals were to be stable, find a place to call home, and earn my G.E.D. After going over my goals, my advocate brought to my attention a flyer that read “ YouthBuild Program-Earn While You Learn...Ages 16-24.”

I thought to myself, this is perfect for me. I called the number on the flyer and things were moving in my favor. I was informed about the program and everything it had to offer.

I learned I had become a student August 19, 2014. I cried when I heard I officially made it into the program. In all reality, I felt like I beat the odds of going through life and being told I wouldn't amount to anything. I was told by having the amount of kids at such a young age, I wouldn't have time to pursue a career. Making the program was the first step and confirmation that the negative words spoken to me were not true. I knew then I was capable of doing anything in life as long as I kept the inner motivation and strong determination.

I am currently enrolled in YouthBuild and getting ready to graduate soon. My teachers, Ms. Kim and Ms. Shelley have shown me so much and taught me things I thought I could never focus on or learn before. Being on the road to earning my G.E.D. gives me a sense of accomplishment. To know that I am stable, in school, and that my kids are in school learning as well, are God's greatest gifts to me!

Reshudia Ricks is a single mother of five who is currently attending the YouthBuild program working towards earning her GED. She works extremely hard on every subject of study and plans to enroll in college soon.

A Courageous Decision

A turning point in my life was when I moved from Colombia to the U.S. with my daughter because it was a new experience for her and for me. We decided to move here because my mother and my eight brothers and sisters had been living in New York for a long time. At first it was difficult for me to understand the system, and I got nervous to have to take the train when I was looking for a job. I had thought that I would be spending more time with all of them, but it did not out that way. They had to work hard to maintain their own families, and they were married and had their own children. I tried to find a job, but it was not easy for me because the language barrier was the first obstacle.

As soon as I could, I searched for a school to learn English. My daughter, Yenny, was seventeen years old, and she found a high school where she got her high school diploma and at the same time learned English. She graduated with honors and right away she enrolled in Business Administration in college. She got a scholarship for her excellent grades, and she didn't have to pay anything for her education. She continued with her studies, and graduated with a master's degree in business.

Right now she works for a construction company in the Big Apple in Times Square, New York. My son finished his electrical engineering bachelor degree in Bogota, and the following week he moved with us to the U.S. and he enrolled in a New York College to study for his Master's degree in electric engineering. Now and he is working for the Cannon Company in Long Island, New York. Now they have their own families, and I have a grandchild from my son. I want to speak English fluently, because I have an investment company with my husband, and it is very important to communicate with all my tenants in their main language because most all of them speak English only.

I am very pleased with my teacher, because I am improving my English. And she makes me more confident when I speak. I am very proud of myself to have had the courage to move to U.S. because I was living pretty well in Colombia, but thinking of my kids' future, I thank God for the best decision for all of us.

Ruby Turner is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Best Decision

I would like to tell you a little bit of my story in this country. How a Colombian lawyer could leave her country, her profession, her family and friends to come to the U.S.?

Well, I'll start by telling you about my life before making such a decision. Many years ago I decided to study law in Manizales, Colombia. It was not an easy time because when I arrived to this city, I did not know anybody; I did not have friends, and I missed my family very much; especially my mom. The good news is that in this process I met many people that I will never forget.

At the end of my college career, I started to work as a lawyer in a big state company in the same city. After one year, during my trip to another city, I met somebody who is now my husband. On the day we met, I could never imagine that this meeting could change my life completely because I never even planned before to come to the U.S. on vacation. We talked for three months as friends, and he decided to take a vacation in Colombia again, and it was at that moment when we decide to have a formal relationship, but from a long distance. We talked every night on Skype, and he traveled to Colombia to see me almost every three months.

After two years, my company work was finished, and then I decided to come to this country for the first time for vacation. On my arrival in this country, I was surprised by the order, security, cleanliness, highways, bridges, organization, landscape, and of course the kindness of the American people. It was how I completely fell in love with him and Florida. And that's when I began to consider making a big decision.

When I returned to Colombia, I was still hesitant to make such a decision. I was determined to start looking for work, but I faced the lack of opportunities, and low wages. So in October of the same year, I decided to come to the US again for Christmas. I was thinking about going back in January to continue my job search, but to my surprise, in November my boyfriend proposed to me, and I accepted. It was the decision that changed my life. I am now happily married; I have God in my heart. I have a good quality of life, full of peace and joy. I am learning a new language, and I have a new job.

Now, I live in a developed country, full of opportunities for those who have determination and courage. Everything has been a great challenge and has not been easy, but I feel that was the best decision I could make.

Carolina Vallejo is a student in the Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

Neither Here nor There

My story begins fifteen years ago on January 28, 2000. I remember this very sadly because I think that so much time will pass without seeing my family, and so many hard times passed for me to reach this country. Everything was different – the language, the food, and the beliefs if these countrymen were very beyond that of my country. But now I am happy because this country has given me six years in California (with new friends and one of my favorite places, Lake Tahoe) and where I was given the opportunity to work as a burn nurse. Most importantly, I met my partner, Victor.

After meeting in California, we came to Florida for better jobs. We've been here for nine years and we now have two beautiful children, Jorge, 5 and Nathan, 2. The children are already in school, and as I want a better future for myself, I'm attending Dunbar Community School to learn to speak, to write and to read English. When my English is good enough, I want to work as a nurse in a hospital.

Alma Delia Vazquez Espinoza is in a Levels 4 and 5 class, taught by Vicki McDonald, at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, FL.

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life was the day that my husband left our country to come to the United States. We had never been separated from each other, and we did not know how long it would be until we would be together again. From that day on, my life changed completely. Although I was in my country with my children, I felt a great emptiness, and I was very afraid. There was a great sadness in my heart to see my children as they suffered from their father's absence. I was a woman with a good job, a beautiful family, but I depended emotionally on my husband. I felt I couldn't face daily life without him by my side. I knew it would be very difficult, and I knew it would be long. My husband and my children had residency to live in the United States, but I did not.

The following year, my children visited the United States, and then my son, who at the time was 14, told us he wanted to stay with his father.

That was another hard and important change in my life. It took us seven years, during which they visited Colombia every six months, and my daughter, who at the time was 8, visited his father and brother at the end of every year. During this time, I couldn't visit the United States. After seven long years of waiting, I finally got my residency, and we met here in this country.

It was a sad experience, but it served me to learn that we should not emotionally depend on someone else. We should be able to fight, to achieve our goals, and to go on in life by ourselves if necessary. Everything in life is fragile; an event can completely change your life.

Doris Villa has been a student at Miami Dade College for 5 semesters; she is married and has two children. Her professor is Zuly Rosello.

My Turning Point

My turning point was in the year 2014. I was 24 with no job experience. I was stuck working fast food, and I got tired of waking up going to the same boring job every day making just enough to get by. I wanted more for me and my family, so I stopped smoking weed and decided I was going to get myself on track to try to get a better job to support my family. I enrolled in a couple of GED® preparation classes to help me get on track. I didn't think I could do it because I had been out of school for 7 years, but when I went to class, little by little, it started coming back to me, and I started to remember how to do math.

When I passed the math part of the TABE, I was proud of myself. I moved on to another class, reading, and it took me a while to catch back on, but I got it. I passed that part on the second try. Now I am studying to take the real GED® test. I know now I can pass it. It's just the writing part that scares me because I hate writing essays. On the other hand, I quit my fast food job and got a job detailing cars, making more money and working more hours. When I get my GED® diploma, I plan on learning a trade so I can know how to fix stuff so my family doesn't have to call somebody when something needs fixing.

Jarrett Warnsley is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Beth King.

My First Semester at the University

In March of 2014, I began my first semester at the university in Ecuador. I didn't know what was going to happen because the university is different from high school. I went there without a philosophy, hoping to find one.

The first days at the university were normal. I met some guys and I got to know my teachers. Everything was normal, but I hate normal things. The first two weeks were the same, class after class of stupid things. But then I met Alvaro, he had the key to the door that I was looking for.

Alvaro was the one person who I felt free and comfortable talking with. He had the same unusual ideas that I have. We used to do a lot of different things like practice Aikido, watch some crazy movies, play different kind of games that we invented, read the same books and we learned juggling at the same time.

We used to talk about the universe and its nebulas and stars. We talked about the different dimensions and the different kind of creatures that would live there. We discussed music and its influence in our lives. We shared our views on society and its mind control, and spirituality and the real purpose of life.

One day he gave me a book called "Intelligence: the creative response to the present". The book talked about conscience, spirit and meditation. Most importantly, the book showed me that in life you don't need a philosophy because existence doesn't have one; your only purpose in life is to exist in the present and know yourself so that you could live in peace with yourself and the universe.

Now, I don't have a philosophy and it's ok, I don't need one, but now, I have a course. Now I know what I want to do and what I want to be in my life. The answer is not in a diploma or in a job or in a wallet. The answer is in my soul. I want to be free.

Armando Yanez is a student in the Academic Skills class at Piper Community School in Florida. He has many interests, and loves to express his ideas and share his visions with the class.

Why Voting is Important to Me

The Importance of Voting

Voting is important to me. Before 1788, there was no such thing as voting. That year became the first year that the United States had ever held an election. The first presidential election was held from Monday, December 15, 1778 until Saturday, January 10, 1779. During the first election there was only sixty-nine electors allowed to vote under the system that was in place, making George Washington the first president of the United States. The US Constitution originally did not define who was eligible to vote. Most states only allowed Caucasian males who owned property or had taxable income to vote.

Women were not allowed to vote because most were homemakers and could not meet the requirements by state law in order to vote. On October 30, 1856, Lydia Taft was the first woman to ever vote in a New England open town meeting. In 1848, the woman's suffrage movement actively began. For the next 50 years, many women leaders such as Susan B. Anthony worked very hard to educate the public about women's suffrage. By the 1920's Congress voted for Women's Equal Rights.

The African-American civil rights movement began in 1954. Over the next fourteen years many nonviolent protest and marches were held all over the country. Some of these protests were led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Sometimes these protests did turn violent. During a peaceful night march in Selma, Alabama, the state troopers attacked the protesters. A 26 year old protester by the name of Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot and killed by James Bonard Fowler, a state trooper. In 1965, the Voters Right Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

These are just some accounts of what some Americans went through just to have the right to vote, and many of those people died fighting for that right. Over the last sixty-two years only 60% turned out for the presidential election voting and about 40% during the midterms.

The year 2008 was a record for voter turnout. Over 131 million people voted making Barack Obama the first African-American president of the United States of America. This is a true indication that every vote counts.

Joe Lanier is a student who participates in the tutoring services provided by READ Lakeland. His tutor is Ruqayyah C. Nicholas and they both live in Lakeland, Florida. Joe went back to school so he can complete his GED.

Voting for the First Time

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

It was a Saturday morning and my husband and I had decided to go down to vote together. It was so exciting because it was my first time. On the way down to the election office, I was so nervous. Once we arrived, I saw the long line. It looked as if everyone was trying to vote. When it came my turn, I showed them my license and they gave me my voting ballot. I went to a booth and voted. After I got through, I was so happy and proud.

What really made me want to vote was watching the news. The person I voted for was talking about change. I was happy to hear positive things about how the world could be if he were elected president. I really felt like he cared about what was going on. I feel like if you can vote, you should. It is an honor; not everyone can vote. However, if you are eligible, please do so. Every vote counts and your vote can make a difference. Voting is a way of making a difference and that matters a lot. Now you know my three reasons for why I voted. It was my first time, it was the right person I wanted to vote for, and it was an honor to vote.

Kyong McChesney is an ESOL student in the Adult Education Program at Northwest Florida State College. Her instructor is Diane Dunn. She enjoys coming to school and learning more English.

Voting is Important

It is important to me to elect a person I think can do the best job. It's very good to choose our representatives because we can know about their lives then choose the best. With our vote we can change the history of the nation for better or worse. When the people choose well, our country, state and city will grow, but when we choose badly, all the people suffer.

I would like to vote here in the U.S.A, but I am not an American citizen yet. Maybe I will vote for president next time because I only have to wait a year more to get my citizenship.

Maria Taylor is from Brazil. She is a learner in the Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Someone or Something I Admire

Basketball

Since my childhood, I have always enjoyed the game of basketball. Basketball is a sport played by two teams of five players each in a rectangular court. The objective is shooting a ball through hoop mounted to a backboard at each end. The game is so interesting and passionate; it is one of the thing I do mostly in my free time. I love the game; I fell in love with it when I first stepped on the court. Basketball is one of the world's most viewed and widely popular sports.

I've been watching and playing basketball; I'm not all that good but with practice. I'm getting better every single day. When I was in Haiti, in my neighborhood, my friends and I made a basketball goal with metal hangers. We couldn't find any court closer to play in so we had to made our own. I have been playing a lot and improving my skills nonstop. When I got to high school, I made the basketball team and after two years, I became the captain.

I got two trophies, one for the championship and one for vice champion. It was a long journey. Here in United States of America where I spent my last years at Oakleaf High School, I didn't made the team. They found me too short and I wasn't that good enough; however, I Keep watching the NBA which is the National Basketball Association.

My favorite team in the league is the Lakers; I'm a huge Lakers' fan. My favorite player is Kobe Bryant. The American Basketball has a long an awesome story. It is the biggest association of basketball in the world. With this league, people can discover the beauty of the game.

My basketball journey is one of the best activities that provides great time in my life. It gives me a new view about working hard and what skills I need to face life. According to me, basketball is one of the greatest sport in the world!

Godounov Alusma is from Haiti. He is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

Someone I Admire

Many people pass through our lives and offer us various experiences: both positive and negative. I have met some amazing people in my life and they have always helped me and loved me. One of these people is my godfather, Manuel Robles Villamarin, who is one of the best men in the world. He is honest, confident, and helpful. When he smiles, he gives hope to children and adults. He always has a comment for making the day brighter. When I am with him, I feel comfortable. Many people think he is eccentric because he is full energy, and he is always on the go.

My father came to the United States in 2010 while my mother, grandmother, sister, and I stayed in Cuba. At the time, I had stopped going to church because I did not like my Youth Group's teacher. One day in September of 2010, Manuel told me: "I am going to be the teacher this year, so you should return." This was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

When I chose him as my godfather, everybody asked me "why" I did so because they said that he and I were opposites. However, they were misinformed. Manuel taught me to fight for my dreams, and he lit the fire of my faith. We eventually became best friends, and he is like an older brother to me. I give thanks to God daily for putting Manuel in my life. I have always admired him, and I am very proud of my decision.

Laura Cadenas-Sainz is a student at Brewster Technical College.

My Mom is Someone I Admire

The road getting here today has been a long and bumpy one. School is sort of a progressive escape for me now. I get plenty of support at school from my teachers and especially from my mom. I also push myself more. I do this because I have a five year old daughter, an 11 year old sister my mother cares for, and I just became pregnant. My family needs me to be responsible and I won't let them down.

My mother has always been an inspiration for me. I admire my mother for being so strong and independent! She came to America from Puerto Rico and spoke no English, but she was still able to graduate from high school. If she can do it, so can I!

I am currently 21 and I want an overall change. The longer I take, the harder it becomes for me to reach my goal. I plan on earning my G.E.D before my baby boy is born in May of this year. I also plan to start college for Business Administration. Someday I hope to start a pest control company. Getting my business running will be a very proud day for me. I look forward to my future and providing for my family.

Rachel Coleman-Cruz has made a giant turnaround to get her life on track and the direction she wants it to go. We are very proud of her. Rachel attends Clearwater Family Literacy /GED Program.

A Strong Independent Mom

My mom is the person I admire. She is very special. There are many things I admire in my mom. The three reasons why I admire my mom are she shows me right from wrong, she cares for four kids by herself, and she is very strong and an independent woman.

My mom showed me right from wrong when nobody else did. When I got into trouble at school or anywhere else, she would sit down and have a conversation with me. The conversation would be about how being bad is not good and that I need to choose the right path. She would also tell me not to steal, kill, or go to jail. She always end the conversation by saying, “do the right thing.”

My mom is a single parent. She raised and provided for three boys and one girl by herself. My siblings and I always got what we wanted. We have never not had what we need. My mom always supplied us with shoes, clothes, food, and a roof over our head.

Mom is a very strong and independent woman. Even when things are going bad or not as planned, she would always keep her head up and not let things bring her down. My mom is also an independent woman. My father is not always around; however, my mom still manages to prepare meals, show us love, and keep a roof over our heads without a problem by herself.

In conclusion, my mom is the only person who I admire the most because she showed me what's right from wrong when nobody would, she managed to take care of three boys and one girl by herself, and she is also a very strong and independent woman.

Laquan Covington is a student at Dunbar Community School. My teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley. She hopes to have her GED by May of 2015.

My Everything

I admire someone who is lovely, honest, funny and caring. That person is one of the most important people in my life. I am talking about my grandma, Ms. Ana. She is the mother of seven children and has twenty grandchildren. She is also the wife of a wonderful man (my grandfather, of course)! And with all the demands and responsibility that come with having twenty grandchildren, she still is kind to everyone.

My grandmother is one of the most valuable people in my life. She is someone I am proud of the great person she is, and I thank God for allowing me to have her. I admire her because she is an enterprising woman, a fighter who has managed to get ahead through her own efforts, and who all her life confronted her barriers. She gave up everything for her children and has managed to overcome difficulties and trials while continuing to fight for what she wanted.

From an early age I felt a special connection to her. When I am with her I'm like an open book. She has always known how to listen, and that is something I admire very much. She has given me helpful advice, but without forcing it, and even though she thought a path was right, she always gave me the option to choose for myself. My grandmother is my refuge, my lifeboat, my armored car shelter, and especially my support.

With her I learned to dream; I learned the art of making decisions and accepting the consequences. And, most importantly, I learned to challenge myself to aspire to great things in life.

I admire her because she is a person who is full of life, a person who gives love and who does good things without judging anyone. I also want to say that I admire her for all her many beautiful virtues.

Even though she is not with me right now because she lives in Dominican Republic, she always will be there for me when I need her. That's why I admire and love her with all my heart.

Michel Diaz is eighteen years old and is from Dominican Republic. She is a learner in the Adult ESOL Program at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

The Best Guests

If you could have dinner with anybody in the world, who would you choose? Just imagine: it could be a world-famous person or, maybe, a fictional creature or person that passed away centuries ago! It is a difficult choice, isn't it? Who comes to your mind above all? Probably, first of all, these are famous names: movie stars, significant politicians or, maybe, sports champions! It would be a really exciting opportunity to have dinner with Christopher Columbus, for example, and find out details about his exceptional traveling and discoveries. Or, maybe, you want to ask Adolf Hitler if he would start the war knowing about his huge failure. There are so many questions and dark spots in the world's history!

However, why do you think that all these people supposed to tell you the greatest secrets of the world? On the other hand, what do you have in common with these people? Do they know you; do they care for you? What do they mean to you? And who are really the most important ones in your life? My answer is this: the most welcomed guests at my dinner are my parents and my husband, the vital people in my life!

My parents are in Ukraine now. I have been in the U.S. for nine months, so I have not seen them for a while. I miss them very much, and more importantly, I worry about them because of well-known political tension in Ukraine now. The other important person in my life is my husband. Joseph is an American, and I left my country for him.

Of course, we have had a lot of dinners together. Every day! However, my parents and Joseph would be happy to spend time together again. They get along very well regardless of the language and culture barriers. My husband likes my parents because they are sincere, hospitable, and hard-working. My parents love my husband because he takes good care of their daughter and makes her happy. Indeed, it would be the best company for me, the company of my three most beloved people. Oh, no! It would be company three plus! Who is this plus? It is my little dog, Lucky. She is so loved by all of us.

As a matter of fact, when I first started thinking about guests for my dream dinner, many famous people appeared in my imagination. I pictured a real adventure! However, after thinking for a while, I understood who I want to invite to my dinner party and why. Not one of the celebrities nor another famous hero can be a more important and, consequently, a more desired guest for me. Only time with people that you know and love, and that love and care for you can bring you real happiness!

Oksana Falsia is a student in the Academic Skills class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Can You Talk Like Him?

My name is Roberto Gabriel. I am from Guatemala. I would like to share with you about someone I admire. He is Craig Setzer. He joined CBS Channel 4 on January 2000 as an executive producer and on-air meteorologist. One of the reasons why I admire him is because he speaks proper English on TV. Though he speaks very fast, it is without filler words. As my English teacher always says, “To be an excellent speaker, you need to think first, then speak clearly, loudly, and try to avoid filler words.”

After watching this man for many months and following closely to my teacher’s instruction, I practice speaking in English in my workplace. To my surprise, my coworkers noticed the difference.

My teacher complemented me on my improvement. She uses me as her role model for the class. She made me talk to the class about my progress. This makes me very happy. I am not at the fluent level yet, but I am getting there.

Roberto Gabriel attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Auntie Jeannette

To admire someone is to love and respect the person. Well, I have someone I admire and love so much; her name is Jeanette. She is my Auntie, she is like a mother to me. I have three reasons why I admire her the way I do. She has been there for me when nobody else was. She made me the young lady I am today. And, throughout my whole 19 years of living, she has always made sure I had food, clothes, and somewhere to lay my head.

I admire my Auntie so much; she has been there for me when nobody else was. I don't want to get too detailed about the situation because it's kind of personal. However, to make a long story short, I could've been left without anything; she came to the rescue like a superwoman. She didn't have to go out her way to do what she did; I'm just her niece not her child.

She did it out of love and I appreciate her for that. Lord knows where I could've been in life right about now if I didn't have my auntie to keep me on track.

My Auntie has made me the young lady I am today. My Auntie taught me everything I know. As far as style, hygiene, education, and life, my Auntie has my back. I feel like I can talk to my Auntie about any and everything and she won't tell a soul. She keeps it straight up; she doesn't sugar coat anything. If she feels that I am wrong, she is going to tell me.

My Auntie would spend her last on me if she had to; sometimes, it gets to that point. Nevertheless, she doesn't complain. She makes sure I have food, clothes and shelter. Yes, she makes sure I have clothes and all of the extras. She does more than I ever dream of having. I have never been homeless because auntie was and is always there.

I have explained to you someone I admire and gave you three reasons. I love my Auntie and I cannot imagine life without her. She and my grandma were my life savers. Grandma is not here anymore; she is in a better place. All I have is my Auntie. I look at her like a mother not an auntie. I would go to her for advice or anything before I stop to ask anyone else. She bends over backwards for me and I love her for that. The day when I start making millions, she is going to be the first and only person I will spoil to death because she deserves every dime.

Jakeeria Hagins is enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. She works part-time and wants her GED Diploma by May so she can enroll in college in the Fall. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

The Person Whom I Admire

In all my (not so long) life, I've appreciated so many people for example my whole family. I appreciate my mom because of all the efforts she made, my dad because of his reliability and honesty, my sister because of her helpfulness, and my grandparents because of their caring nature, my best friend, and other close friends. I've always been grateful to God for the people who surround me.

Now, I'd like to give extra thanks for my boyfriend. I really feel that I've found my other half. Our relationship is quite unique for a number of reasons. First is the "generational gap" between us (He's "only" 32 years older than I am). It's very interesting but the big age difference doesn't cause any problems. Personally, I really enjoy when I see people looking at us with very strange faces. It's so funny. Another reason that our relationship is unique is the way we think. The same thing makes us happy and that is the other's happiness. We do many things just for the other's pleasure. For example, if somebody had told me a year ago that I'd be spending my afternoons cooking for my boyfriend, I'd have laughed loudly in his/her face, but now, with a big smile on my face, I cook. We see things from the same point of view, and we tend to think the same. One of us says something and the other answers, "I wanted to say exactly the same thing." It's happened a million times.

I honor my loved one very much for his honesty, reliability and humor. I can tell him everything, and we can discuss anything that comes up. He is very humorous; he can always make me smile, no matter what my mood is. There's nobody else who knows me as much as he does, irrespective of the newness of our relationship (we've been going out with each other for four months). Sometimes he knows me better than I do. Besides his verbosity and attentiveness, I really admire my boyfriend because he treated me as an adult woman from the first moment. First, it was a little bit extraordinary for me because my mother still treats me as a child, and that will never change. When there's an argument between my mom and me, I always get the statement "You're the child, and when you're 50 years old, you will still be". My boyfriend and I are equals. That means we do things for each other. As I mentioned above, the other's happiness is our happiness.

All in all, I admire my boyfriend because of who he is. I love every piece of him and love to feel he has the same viewpoint as I do. I really couldn't wish for a better companion.

Hedi Horvath is an 18 years old student at Dave Thomas ESOL program in Pompano Beach. Her excellent teacher is Nancy Gardner.

My Grandmother

The person I admire the most is my grandmother. Her name is Paula and she lives in my home country of Honduras. There are three reasons why I admire my grandmother. My first reason is that my grandmother always have taken good care of me. My second reason is she was there when I needed her the most. My third reason is that she is an important person to me and the person who I most admire.

I admire my grandmother because despite everything she is a fighter and someone who is strong, in spite of the things that happened in life. She was there with me no matter what, she was by my side without leaving me alone and she gave me her help with unconditional love. She is the most wonderful person that I have known in my life. She taught me the importance of God and taught me a lot about the Bible.

Also, I learned everything about life with her and I spent much time with her. Whenever, I went to her house, I had a great time. For all these reasons, I love my grandmother, Paula, you are always in my heart. The most important of all these things about my grandmother is her example to me. My best moments is seeing her in all of the pictures with me. She motivates me to be a better person and take responsibility for who I am in this moment. She is my inspiration to do good things that can help me and others in the future.

Daysie Lopez is from Honduras, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

A Real Hero

My greatest admiration is for someone who can do great things for me. He is better than Superman, he is more powerful than Batman, more skilled than Spider-Man and much greater than the Avengers. Do you want to know who he is? Let me tell you a little more about this person who I admire.

Have you noticed the devotion we usually have for certain characters from history or from today as well? We're fascinated by certain politicians, military people, artists, athletes and preachers. We often admire them since childhood, and still do even when we grow up. We also admire some relatives, friends or teachers. We all need heroes; they give us hope that all is not lost. They can inspire us to be better, to rise above mediocrity and human miseries. When I was five years old I started to admire cartoon characters because of the things they did. They were magicians; they did incredible stunts that I wanted to do when I grew up. When I was a child I didn't understand that they were just cartoons. It was at the age of eleven when I knew a new person, a hero like no other.

This new character is different; he has something special, and I got to know the story of his life from his childhood to the day that he died. He left me great lessons and they still help me in my life. From this character that I admire, everyone can learn how to obtain good behavior and a healthy life, how to have success in your life, and how to have great happiness.

Someone powerful, the creator of the heavens and earth, must be the only person who is truly divine, noble, pure, perfect and holy in the whole universe. The person that I admire is Jesus of Nazareth, the man that came to die for you and for me. Jesus is infinite love and kindness. He had an impeccable and heroic life. He is a model for all who choose to follow him.

If you have great aspirations, ethics, elevated ideals and morals, the greatest hero that history has ever known offers himself as your friend and companion. You should get to know him, understand him and imitate him and follow him. You would see how you will get the greatest satisfaction, of goodness and kindness, in your life. I believe that I will never stop admiring Jesus. He is my hero. He changed my life and I have no words to describe such happiness.

Kenet Darwin Raymundo Lucas was born in Guatemala. He is currently living in Jupiter and is a student in the Jupiter Community High School ESOL Program. His teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Discovering Will Smith's Concepts of Life

I was listening to a video on YouTube, and I heard a voice say, "The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is I am not afraid to die on a treadmill. You might have more talent than me. You might be smarter than me, but if we get on a treadmill together there are two things. You are getting off first, or I am going to die. It's really that simple. I just believe that I can create whatever I want to create." That voice was Will Smith's. This is something that really impressed me, and since that time I've become obsessed about Will Smith's outlook on life.

Willard Carroll Smith Jr. is mostly known by his famous name Will Smith. Will was born in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S. He is an American actor, producer and rapper. He has enjoyed success in television, film and music.

One of his most successful movies is "Ali", which is one of my favorites. I don't know Will personally, but I first saw him in the movie Men in Black. I am becoming more familiar with him by watching his movies and his documentaries. Will is like a role model for me.

I am really glad that I discovered such an amazing person and because he has helped me find greatness within myself. Will inspires me because he is a very funny, smart, amazing person, and most importantly because of his concepts of life. We have some common points. For me, everything he says makes sense. He says for example, “Whatever it is you love doing, you’ve got to dedicate it to your life. I want to represent an idea. I want to represent possibility. I want to represent the idea that you really can make what you want.” That’s why the way he has been successful all his life is by doing things he loves. Will truly believes that if you really want something, you can have it, and I love that idea.

So often in life we think that we have no power to work harder, to expand our intelligence. Until one day we find ourselves in a situation where we really have got to make the difference, and we just do it. Beyond Wills’ great concepts, he shows us that we can really do whatever we want to do.

We just have to work harder than before, sleep less than before, and think smarter than ever. People like Will are worth discovering. It is just so easy for him to enter your mind and help you to see the greatness within you.

Colimon Michel is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Someone I Admire

In life every person has someone they love and appreciate. For me that person is my beautiful mother. I have many reasons for that. One reason I admire my mother is because she cares about me so much. When I was little she protected me every single day. One day when I was a little girl, my mother did everything to keep me safe and protect me from the illness. I was sick with the flu and fever but my mother didn’t have a car to take me to the hospital. She did her very best to make me feel well.

Sometimes when we go out people ask if we are a twins because we look so much alike. We love each other and show it by giving affection to each other. She always shows me that when she was able she would provide and give me everything I needed. Another thing I needed from my mother was good advice to guide me through life. My father was never in my life and my mother was the only one who took care of me. My mother is a very good, loving, and sensitive person. She still provides me with encouraging word. Even though my mother didn't have any formal education, she is a very intelligent woman.

It's really nice to have a mother like her. My mother inspires me to continue with my education. She is an important person in my life that is why she deserves admiration. I truly love my mother.

Gerbie Milord is a student at the Technical Center in Immokalee. Her teacher is Kathie Mominee.

Today's Civil Rights Hero

One of today's Civil Rights Heroes is Rosa Parks. Well, Rosa Parks was a Civil Rights activist. Rosa Parks was born February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee Alabama. She was born Rosa Louise McCauley. She was taught to read by her mother at a young age. She attended a segregated one room school in Pine Level, Alabama. African Americans were forced to walk to the 1st through 6th grade schoolhouse while the city of Pine Level provided bus transportation, as well as, a new school building for white students.

In 1932 at age 19, Rosa met and married Raymond Parks, a barber and an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Later down the line, Rosa earned her high school degree in 1933. What Rosa Parks did for us was to stop segregation in public business, but mostly public transportation for not giving up her seat to a white man. She was arrested where later she was released on bail.

Although she had become a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks suffered hardship in the months following her arrest in Montgomery and the subsequent boycott.

She lost her job at the department store and her husband was fired after his boss forbid him from talking about his wife or their legal case. They were unable to find work, so they eventually left Montgomery's, along with Rosa's mother moved to Detroit, Michigan. There Rosa made a new life for herself. She found a job working as a secretary and a receptionist in the U.S Representative John Conyers' congressional office. She also served on the board of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

In 1987, with Rosa and her friend, Elaine Eason Steele, Rosa founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. The organization runs "Pathways to Freedom" bus tours, introducing young people the importance of the Civil Rights and Underground Railroad sites throughout the country. September 9, 1996, President Bill Clinton awarded Parks the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given by the United States Executive Branch.

The following year, she was awarded the congressional Gold Medal, the highest award given by the U.S legislative Branch. In 1999, Time Magazine named Rosa Parks on its list of "The 20 most influential people of the 20th century." She is one of today's civil rights heroes. On October 2005, at the age of 92, Rosa Parks quietly died in her apartment in Detroit, Michigan. She had been diagnosed the previous year with progressive dementia. Her death was marked by several memorial services. Rosa's body was placed between her husband and mother at Detroit's Woodlawn Cemetery, in the chapel's mausoleum. Shortly after her death, the chapel was renamed the Rosa L. Parks Freedom.

Chantel Moss is a student at Atlantic Technical College-Arthur Ashe Campus.

My Husband

I met my husband in this country 7 years and 7 months ago. He is the fifth and last child of a different father than the four previous siblings. He was born in Salvador. His family remains poor with a mother who worked to keep their 5 children. He had to migrate to the United States at seventeen years old, because of insecurity and poverty.

What I admire about my husband, even though I am twelve years older is his maturity. He sees life in its full context and accepts death as part of life. I learned a lot from him because he has a very noble and humble heart. But he is also strong and determined; for him nothing is impossible. Whenever there are problems, he provides confidence and keeps a positive outlook. He remains optimistic in all situations. He is also hard working and has a lot of creativity, resourcefulness with a wild imagination that can visualize all things. One of his qualities is that he has a good sense of humor and he's very funny. My husband makes me laugh a lot and that makes me very happy. I am very proud of him, my husband is my partner to walk the path of life together and continue to learn from all situations. He shows his love through sincerity. He is ambitious, a good friend, a good son and a wonderful husband. Thank you God.

Elizabeth Mozqueda Paredes is from Mexico, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Lest We Forget

Have the people of America forgotten what the horse has contributed to the building of our great country from its very beginning? When you hear the word “workhorse” you know immediately the term is referring to a horse or a power of some sort. It is time we honor this animal and give it a permanent place in our history. By permanent place, I mean a title similar to the one given to our national bird, the bald eagle. A suggestion may be the national American horse.

The horse carried minutemen into battle for the independence of America in the Revolutionary War with England and every war that America was involved in until World War II. They dragged logs from the forest to build homes, buildings, railroads, and bridges. We depended on the horse for all kinds of transportation such as: pulling stagecoaches, wagons, and carrying the mail. Known as the Pony Express, mail was carried across the country on horseback all the way from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco, California. This was done in just 21 days on one occasion. The horse plowed acres and acres of ground all over this country and made it so we could grow food and grains to feed the people of America.

This noble animal saved lives by pulling the old fire pumpers with top speed to fires. With all those many duties the horse had in the past, it gave us pleasures of all sorts, for example, horse racing of all types, rodeos, horse shows, polo, pleasure riding, and on and on. Now, I understand the mayor of New York City wants to ban horse carriages from the streets of New York. Not only will this take away some of this city's charm, but it also will cause a lot of people to lose their jobs and businesses to suffer. Farmers who grow grain will suffer, veterinarians will suffer, and the hostlers who keep the barns and clean the horses will suffer.

So we, the people of America, don't forget that without our horses there would be no America like we have today. So lest we forget, don't you people of America think the horse, who has been with us from the very beginning and has done so much for the people, deserves a national status position? Instead of the quote "how soon we forget", let us say "lest we forget".

Bill Payne is an 86-year-old GED student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My Daughter Shaina

I admire my daughter Shaina because she encourages me to be the best that I can. For example, she wants me to earn my GED and further my education. She always tells me, "Mommy you are a C.N.A. However, if you continue your education you could become a Registered Nurse. Mommy, when you are at school pay close attention, study very hard and you will succeed." Shaina, is a wonderful daughter. Always willing to help out with the chores around the house; whether if it's cooking, cleaning or doing the laundry. She is my pride and joy. I love her so much. Shaina is not only my daughter, she's also my best friend.

Yveta Pierre is from Haiti, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Parents

Hello my name is Jose Pineda Ramirez and now I will write about people that I admire, my parents. Their names are Ernesto and Espernaza. The people I admire are my parents because although they lived in poverty, they were able to create and give us what we needed to survive. In this world of different societies, I admire them because they were hard workers, were very honest, kind, and gave us a good example to follow.

When my brothers and I were kids, my parents were the ones who taught us to be good people and I appreciate and admire what they did for all of us. This is why I try to follow my parent's examples in life. I want to be able to give to them what they have given me and my brother.

Jose Pineda is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; his teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Brave Mom

When my mom told me about her life, I felt more love for her. My mom's life has been very difficult. I admire her because she has suffered a lot, she worked hard, and is a strong woman and excellent mom. My mom lived in a humble house in a small, beautiful town. At first she was happy living with her parents and siblings. She didn't finish middle school because she always helped her father in the field and did chores around the house. One day her life changed.

When she was six years old her mom died of poisoning. A few months later, her youngest brother died at six months old and then her younger sister at four. She was left alone with only her father and older sister. When my mom was fifteen years old, her father died of unknown causes. That caused her much pain and sadness. Now that she was alone, she had to work harder to survive. For example she did chores at her neighbor's house and washed clothes for others. She eventually moved to the city to work as a homemaker.

When she met my father, she left behind her sister, her job, and her lifestyle to live with him. Unfortunately, my mom had many problems with my father and her in-laws, because they always mistreated her.

When my siblings were born, they likewise struggled. I can't believe her mother-in-law denied food for my brothers when they were children. My grandparents never wanted us. During that time in her life, my mom sacrificed her freedom and happiness for us. As a result of her experiences, she became strong and independent woman, able to work, and sure to succeed despite the problems. Finally, my parents got married after I was born. For me, my mom is an excellent woman and mother because she fought for my brothers and me.

She knew how to manage her money so that we were never without. She never gave up. Despite everything that happened, she is not a spiteful woman. She is friendly and always taught me not to return evil for evil. I believe if you have your parents you have it all! I thank God because my parents are well. I try to visit them each year, if it's possible. I learned from my mom that I can do anything I set my mind to. She taught me to be strong like her despite problems. This is why I admire my mom and I love my parents.

Edith Rivera is a student at the Technical Center in Immokalee. Her teacher is Kathie Mominee.

A Sister's Life

Someone I admire would be my sister Cassandra. She's had to overcome a lot in her life beginning at a very young age. She became a mother at the age of 15 while still a child herself. She was raising her baby on her own as a single parent. Although she had the help of her family, our mother, brother, and myself, her child was ultimately her responsibility.

Cassandra is a very hard worker who strives to achieve all that she can and do her best at everything. She enrolled in the medical department at Keiser University where she specializes in the pediatric field to this day. Her goals in life are to better herself as a parent, and to become more of a family oriented person.

These things are more important to her than anything else. She now works as a home health aide until she can become a pediatrician. Life is guaranteed to come with pressure. There is no way to escape it entirely. Cassandra's childhood wasn't too bad, yet we all go through some uncontrollable things in this life.

As for Cassandra, the harder things got, the stronger she became. She grew through these experiences, and she persevered with a fierce determination. She faced it all for herself and for her child. The challenges made her a better mother and person; one more capable to face new challenges and raise her baby. Throughout the years, she grew into a wiser, brighter woman.

I've always said to her that we all have to go through the test to get to the testimony. She is a living example of that, and an inspiration to me. Although Cassandra is my younger sister, I look up to her. She is every man's dream. She is who every mother wants as a daughter. She is who every child wants as a parent. Most importantly, she is the best sister I could have ever asked for. She is my heroine. That is why I adore her.

Tamieka Robinson is a student in Aides Cooney & Mullen ABE II course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

Mom and Dad Are My Heroes

When my parents decided not to be together for many years, I was a child who did not understand their reasons. I knew my parents loved me very much. For this reason my mom and dad are the people that I admire most in the world. After they separated, I saw my mom crying, missing her husband. It was very sad because my dad never came back home and I thought: "How can I help or what can I do for my mom"? I felt uncomfortable with this situation and I decided to talk to my dad. He explained a lot things to me regarding the differences between him and my mom. The end result remained the same. My day never came home.

With the passing of time, my mom decided to travel to the United States and start a new life. She has become very strong in decision making. My mom learned to fight for her rights in a non-violent way.

During the nine years my mom was in the United States I missed her every day. Growing up as a young girl there were many times that I needed her to help me resolve many different situations. Nevertheless, I understood that my mom deserves a happy and new life. She married to a wonderful man, however he became ill with cancer and passed away two years ago.

My dad continued his life with other women; nonetheless he always took care of us. Years later my dad had a thrombosis which hospitalized him for 1 month. He required much assistance. My dad could not go to the bathroom, walk, eat or even talk for three months. My dad always had faith that with patience and hard work he would recover.

I admire both of my parents for achieving their dreams and pursuing their own happiness. They are my heroes. My parents taught me that no matter how difficult life gets to follow my heart as well as my dreams, then I am sure to reach my goal no matter the situation. My dad said if I continue to have faith in God my trials and tribulations in life would be less difficult. My parents always said: “Don’t forget your origin and the person who you are so you can be the best in what you choose.”

Paola Carolina Bernal Rodrigues is from Columbia, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

The Right Choice

I have always wanted to get my G.E.D to better my economic situation and to be a role model for my Kids. Also, there is another reason which is sort of crazy; my 5th grade teacher motivated me to be an optimist and a woman of perseverance in life. This has made me wanted to get my GED.

At this very moment, my economic situation is very complicated. I am living in a low income housing area where some people refer to as “the Hood” because rent is based on income. The money I receive is exactly enough to pay my housing bills. I do not have a car. I have to ask for rides, put gas in other people’s car or ride the bus.

Therefore, if I get my G.E.D. I will be able to change my economic situation. I will be able to get a better job, move to a better place and will not have to live pay check to pay check. I will also be able to buy my own car. Things will much better for my family and me.

In order for my kids to be happy, I believe they need to see me happy. My kids have been through so much at their age. I want them to see, even after making bad choices in my life, I was able to get my GED. It is important that they are proud of me and hold me as a model mommy. Once I get my GED, I can say, "I did it." My children will believe and they will achieve even more. I would love to be an example for them to know that they can do it even better and are able to learn from my mistakes.

I am persistent in getting my GED because of a special 5th grade teacher. My elementary teacher, Mr. Smith was very emotional when he talked about making the right chose. He told us that we choose our future. He was mad, sad and happy all at the same time. Mr. Smith believed in me and has helped me in making my decision to get my GED.

Getting my GED will definitely impact my life and my children's lives. I will change my economic status, be a role model for my children and persevere in life by getting my GED.

A stranger not even a family member showed us that there's great people in this world that make a difference in others live and I would have to say that Mr. Smith was a person that believed in destiny and I am grateful for that man and I would love for him to be in my graduation. Thank you Mr. Smith for your encouragement.

Veronica Rodriguez is a single mother enrolled in GED at Dunbar Community School. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher. She believes she will accomplish her goals.

My Hero

My hero is an example of determination and tenacity! This story is about the most humble and perseverant person I have ever known. His name is Gelacio; he is the third of 10 brothers and sisters of divorced parents. When he was twelve years old, he was forced to go to work to help support the family when his father, the sole provider of the house, left them and never came back.

He would sit with us for hours and tell us stories of how difficult his adolescence was. Due to the financial problems the family was encountering, he could not afford to live a normal childhood; he was forced to have the responsibilities of an adult when he was barely a small child.

Anybody could see through his eyes the suffering and life experiences already present at such a young age. With scarce job opportunities in Mexico, especially for a person so young, he immigrated to the United States in search of new opportunities. He was barely 14 years old and he came alone.

Many years passed before he was able to become a legal resident of the United States and able to return to Mexico to see his family again. Shortly after he arrived, he received the terrible news that his brother was killed in a car accident in Alabama, so he had to come back to bury his brother. The farewell between these two men was held privately – just them two - with pain, tears, and a terrible sense of loneliness permeating the moment.

Life continued its course. In Mexico, he got married and had three children: a boy and two girls. With such a growing family and the benefit of being an American resident, he returned to the United States to continue working. One day he received the news that his son had died. Therefore, he had to return quickly to Mexico. Confronting another pain, a deep one that seemed unbearable, took many years to learn to live with.

Eventually, he was able to bring his family to the United States to finally live together. After so much pain, he was relieved that he could have his family together again. Gelacio is an example of life, perseverance, determination, strength, and loyalty.

Experience has made him a good man, always willing to help others without expecting anything back. I feverishly love Gelacio; he will always be with me because he is my father. There are no words that can describe how much I love him and how proud I am of having him as my father. I am grateful for everything he has done for us. He's my inspiration to get a career and succeed in life. I won't fail you, papa; all your efforts will be worth it. My father, my hero.

Roci Ivet Sea is an extremely smart young lady and is currently in the ABE/GED program. She plans to become an ESOL teacher. Madeline Lopez-Ortiz, her teacher, states that she is an exemplary student in all aspects.

What the American Dream Means to You

My American Dream!

Every person in this world has a dream or a purpose to fulfill in his life, and we all try to work hard to realize our dreams. For some people their dream is to be successful in their career and become rich. Some people dream to become a celebrity or to be a powerful person. Some want only to have a huge family and to be the best parents they can be. These are just a few examples of dreams that people want to see come true. It's what we call here in America, "The American Dream"!

I also have a dream. Actually, I have two dreams. My first dream is to have my citizenship. I want to live the rest of my life in the United States for the lifestyle, the climate, the great opportunities and also the big cities. My second dream is to live in California. Since I was six years old, I have dreamed of living in California in the big city of Los Angeles. For me Los Angeles is like paradise, and it's why we call it the "City of Angels". So, living there would be my "American Dream". I know it can sound superficial, but the thing I love the most in this world is money. With money you can do everything you want! I want to live in luxury like many people do, and for that you need money. So, I have to work very hard and make a lot of money. I always put the bar very high in my life to achieve my goals.

A lot of people in my life said to me that I will never be able to do this or that. But, if it's just a dream, why do so many people have a luxury car, a nice mansion, and all that stuff. Maybe because it's not only a dream! I will do everything I can to succeed at school and in my life because it's not fun to live a life where you can't do things because it's too expensive. One day I will have my big mansion and a luxury car! I think that if you really want something in your life you just have to work really hard to achieve it. Whether to be rich, famous, powerful, to have a family, or just to succeed in whatever you want, you can do it! Dreams are made for dreamers, but they are also made to come true. This is why the American dream exists!

Mathieu Caron is a student at Piper Community School Adult ESOL.

My Perspective of the American Dream

My name is Israel Hernandez Madrigal. I came to the United States of America fifteen years ago. That sounds like a very long time ago, but in my case I feel like it was yesterday, and like many people who come to the United States of America, I am seeking the American Dream.

What I notice is this: each person interprets the American Dream in their own way. Some people think having a big nice house, a fancy car, a big screen TV, lots of electronics, and a very comfortable lifestyle is the American Dream.

My view is different. I am an immigrant who came from another country that I love and will never forget all the good things about it. However, to be honest, it does not have the same system of the United States of America. There are so many examples I can mention. Freedom of speech: you can express yourself without fear of punishment. Freedom of religion: you can have your own beliefs and no one will say you are wrong. Opportunity: if you work hard, you can get things you need, things you like and sometimes more. These are just a few examples of the many, many things you cannot dream to have in countries with dictators or greedy presidents who only care about themselves. These types of leaders abuse people, overpowering them with violence and in this way controlling everyone.

I cannot tell people who think that the American Dream consists of materialistic items are wrong because it is always nice to live comfortably.

On a daily basis I can see that family and I drive on safe roads, I can express myself, practice my religion, work and support my family and always search for better work opportunities. If I can do all these things without fear for my safety or even fear for my life, I am living the American Dream.

Israel Hernandez Madrigal is a student in Lee County Adult Schools.

Our American Dream

Unfortunately, the dream of millions of immigrants is to come to the United States and live the American Dream - the dream that everybody talks about in our native countries. I am one of them. I made that big step more than twenty years ago.

I come from Honduras - a tropical country in Central America bordered by the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Guatemala is to the west, El Salvador to the south, and Nicaragua to the south and east. In order to pay for my personal expenses, I started working when I was 16 years old. My father passed away when I was twelve and all my five sisters and two brothers had to go to work. When I was 17, I met Albert, the love of my life and person that became my husband in 1988. Both my husband and I wanted to provide our children with a better life, so we decided to immigrate to the United States and follow the so-called American Dream everybody had been talking about in Honduras. The lack of opportunities and a somber future gave us the strength to take such a decision.

We knew this would mean many sacrifices but it would be worth it at the end of the journey. With determination, my husband left for New Jersey in December, 1990 and I followed him in April, 1992. Like many young married couples, we wanted to have children, but we found out that I had fertility problems. Since we don't give easily to the obstacles imposed in our lives, we visited a doctor. On April 17, 1993, my husband and I were blessed with the arrival of what is now the most important person in our lives, our son Brian. Without giving up our pursuit of the American Dream, we worked in different jobs, but we were happy because we had the opportunity to succeed and provide our son with better living conditions. In 1996, we moved to Florida.

My husband is a truck driver and we knew that driving in the snow was dangerous. This is where we bought our first home. Now, Brian is 21 years old; he is in the Army Reserve, a college student, and works part time with Amazon. What else can I ask for? Koko is my 9-year old Pomeranian, who is the spoiled one in the family. Our American Dream doesn't stop here.

I'm still trying to grow up and become a better person every day. My new goals in life took me to enroll at our local adult school. I'm blessed to have an excellent teacher and wonderful classmates. I must say that I am one of many immigrants who had the opportunity to come to this great country to fulfill the American Dream. GOD BLESS AMERICA!

Nery Meiselbach is currently in the advanced ESOL level at East Area Adult School in Auburndale and in the process of getting her GED.

Making Your Dreams Come True

“I have a Dream” What do you think of when you hear those four words? I think of bravery, sacrifice and much more. The one thing that stands out the most is how one man had one dream that could change the world. Martin Luther King Jr's dream was that people all over, both black and white, could come together without being judged by the color of their skin, but instead by the content of their character.

Martin Luther King believed that one day we would come together as one. He believed in that so much that he was willing to sacrifice his life to make that dream come true. Knowing that people could rebel against him, Martin Luther King was still brave enough to go on that podium and deliver his speech.

Martin Luther King showed us all that if you believe in something enough, you can make it come true.

Gabby Miller is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

The Importance of the American Dreams

The American dream to me means having opportunity to achieve and to become a great citizen. I don't think I should be guaranteed anything other than opportunity. The leaders of America always creating jobs and give work for people who want it. That's really attract my mind and to achieve through a hard work in a society with few barriers.

The American dream means to become a citizen in this country. The government usually offers every single immigrants the possibilities to have a green card and become a citizen. That means you have the same rights as American citizens. When you have right to something that means you can become someone extremely special. Sometime the dream is identified with success in business or how working class immigrants seek to join the American way of life. Another example is the government provides us everything like, food and creates jobs because they care about every single detail in our life. Another illustrate freedom of mobility this means you can travel all over the world. When you become a citizen you have privileges to open your own business or homeowners a home or a land.

The government always cares about schools for their students they also give them a chance to attend college when they have received a high school diploma or GED diploma. Another reason is the government of America always focuses on the future of their student.

The American dream mean freedom for everyone and opportunity to achieve everything you wanted to do in the future no matter what life going to bring for you that's what the American dreams mean to me. Without education and jobs I'm pretty sure we will have a lot of barriers to attend our dreams.

Jeff Paul is a student at Immokalee Technical Center.

My Big American Dream

The American dream to me is big. When I was around 12 years old my goal was to come to the USA and be a citizen. Now, the American dream for me is also to get out of the dark side, and have no fear that one day I could be stopped by the police and be deported to my country.

My dream is to be one of those people who can walk in the light of the day without fear of anything. Why do I say this? Because being here is like being in a gold jail. In the daytime you leave to go to work and when you get home, you stay home for fear that something might happen to you.

We have a saying in Spanish: “No hay que estaren el lugar menos indicada en la hora menos indicada.” It means “Don’t be in the wrong place at the wrong time.” You do not want to be asking for favors from other people to do the legal stuff. You don’t want to hang your head in shame at the job for not having legal papers. I can’t travel to my country to see my loved ones, especially my mother and my grandmother.

Not seeing my mother is very hard because she has played two roles for me. She is my mother and my father. She filled the void in my heart that I had for my father. For me she is my first love, my hero; she is a survivor. I want to continue my struggle to become legal here and to give a good life to my mother. She already suffers with me.

Dany Sajbin Sosa is from Guatemala. He is a learner in Adult ESOL at Jupiter Community High School. His teacher is Susan Mitchell.

The American Dream

The American Dream for many people is to come to the U.S.A. to have a house, work, and drive a good car, because they cannot have it in their country. A lot of these people came for material stuff because it is difficult to get in their country.

My American Dream began the day I met a wonderful Cuban-American woman who is today, my wife of 30 years. We created a wonderful family and have two daughters who are college graduates. Today, I am a homeowner and own a business too.

In America, I saw for the first time an apple and many more things that I have never seen in my country of Cuba. I will never forget the emotion I felt when I saw for the first time in my life Santa Clause. For me, the American dream is not only about all the material stuff I can get, but it is much more. It is having the freedom of expression, religion, talking about whatever I want, and the power to protest the things I dislike. I am a free person, and all these things I cannot have in my home country of Cuba. For me, the American dream is to be a free person.

Fernando Su is a student at St. Joseph’s ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida. His teacher is Aimee Holzer.

My Life in the US

I have lived in America for many years. I was born in the country of Mexico. I was very young when I came to the Unites States of America. I am proud to live here because I have been offered many opportunities to have a better future for me and my family.

One of my dreams is to become a Citizen of the United States. By doing so, it is very important that I strive to obtain my GED and learn the American way. My first step was to pass my entrance exam by focusing and studying for my test without watching television, or listening to my favorite Spanish music. It became frustrating to me because I felt nervous about testing. However, due to my determination, willpower and consistency I passed my entrance exam for placement in level 6.

Upon completion of level 6, I will continue pursuing my GED. After I obtain my culinary licenses, my dream is to use my skills and talent to own and operate my very own up-scale restaurant.

Also, I want to give others the opportunity that has been given to me by providing on the job training for the underprivileged. These dreams are very real and important to me. I will not stop until I complete my American dream.

Ismael Villalobos is from Mexico, he is a student in ESOL Level 6 at the Dunbar Community School; his teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Life

My full name is Derek Edwin Watson. I was born in Pompano Beach, Florida. I have two older sisters and a nine year old dog. My favorite things to do are playing basketball and hanging out with friends and family.

Getting my GED is important to me because I am moving to South America this year for a while. Earning my GED now will help me not worry about getting it in the future. Also, when I come back from South America, I can go to college and start a career in business.

I am young to be out of high school but I am glad to have the opportunity to possibly finish in a month instead of finishing in a couple of years. Once I graduate and move to South America, I know I will start my adult life. Life will be harder and tougher for me in South America but I know I will be fine.

Derek Watson wants to get his GED now and not wait until he is older. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

My New Life in the USA

My name is Maria Wrzeszcz. I came to the USA from Poland and I have lived in Fort Myers for three years. I have a restaurant in Cape Coral called Belvedere Bistro. We sell European food. My husband is working for a corporation as a salesman.

I love Dunbar Community School because I have a chance to study English. We have an excellent teacher. Her name is Ms. Vicki McDonald. She has a lot of patience with us, and I am very thankful for her.

My goals at school are to improve my reading and writing of English. I like living in the USA because the people are from different countries and different cultures. This is very interesting to me. I admire people in the USA because they are very nice, calm and friendly. One of my favorite places in the USA is Key West. My husband and I travel there every year for Thanksgiving. We love to travel and visit new places, but my favorite day is Christmas because I can travel to see my family. Everyone is happy and close together.

Maria Wrzeszcz is a dedicated student in an ESOL Levels 4 and 5 class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myer, FL. She is also a savvy, motivated entrepreneur.

My Goals and Ambitions

Everything is Possible

As a way of teaching, I usually say to my son that “Everything is Possible.” Since people plan with common sense, attitude and effort, what they want is based on their goals and ambitions. “If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things,” Albert Einstein said. I try to follow this theory in my life.

My personal goals include a vision for personal things such as family, marriage, children, home, and some challenges of life; professional goals are related to the professional aspect of life, such as education, job, professional experience, and so on. In fact, a goal is a point that a person wants to reach, while ambition is the direction that will get the person there. I believe that the most important goals have already been achieved in my life, but I still have many to pursue and reach.

Several examples support this concept. Some of them are about my professional and personal goals and ambitions. I am very grateful to my parents because they gave me an excellent education and always showed me the right way to go, with good examples of life. Consequently, in my 20s I could realize my first dreams, such as graduating with two Bachelors’ degrees, buying my first house, getting married, and having a good job in Brazil.

However, one of my biggest goals and ambitions was also achieved right after that; it was to live in the U.S. After I got married, my husband and I had a chance to move from Brazil to Boca Raton, Florida. Having realized this goal, I continued to pursue another one: buying our house and planning to have my one and only child.

The process of setting goals helps me choose where I want to go in my life. By knowing precisely what I want to reach, I know where I have to concentrate my efforts. After my son was born, my next dream was to become a U.S. Citizen. It was my hard journey because as an immigrant there are many barriers in language, culture, lifestyle and education.

I had a huge challenge ahead! Through volunteer jobs in hospitals, schools and government, I could learn the English language better and know more about life and culture in the US. I also had an opportunity to work for the government because I volunteered there for many years. About 2 years ago my husband and I became U.S. Citizens, and it was one more accomplished goal and ambition.

Setting goals gives me continuing vision for the future and immediate motivation to continue to fulfill my dreams and always do my best for me and my family. The most important goal of my life is to see my son grow into a successful man. I want to live a happy life!

Ana Bellinetti Petz is a student in the Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

GED Stepping Stones

The GED has become my gateway to graduation. Our child, a diploma, and the feelings of wholeness are my driving motivations. Time passes you by. Spending the last 25 years working and not thinking about school has been fun, but not fulfilling. One day I told myself, “Education is what’s missing.”

Being a teacher to our son has given me a willingness to learn more. Our kids need family guidance now more than ever. Common Core education requires high school students to know Calculus and Statistics.

Never graduating from a school has always been one of my life’s letdowns. This is a chance to show our son it can be done, and mistakes can be fixed.

I have spent half my life screwing up, and now the other half fixing the problems. It is important that our son receives the best education to build that bridge for a better and more satisfying career after school.

Robert Bennett enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

I Will Give My Family a Comfortable Life

My name is Selvin Cardona Alvarez. I am from Guatemala. It was challenge to get here and I made it. One of my goals is to be fluent in English and find a good paying job. I need to be able to communicate with the people in this country in English. English is not an easy language to learn and I have no choice but to keep trying until I get it.

Another goal I have in mind is to open a bike shop. I want to be a fast bicyclist. I want to live partly in my country and partly in United States of America. I want to spend family time with my brothers, parents, and grandparents in Guatemala during the break. My ambition is to work hard, earn a lot of money to help my family. I want my parents and grandparents to live comfortably the rest of their lives.

Selvin Cardona Alvarez attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Jessica Cash and I am thirty years old. I haven't always thought very highly of myself. That recently changed, though. Today I know I can do anything. All have to do is try. I want to be the best mom I can be for my two children; my wonderful son Jordan who is eleven and my dear daughter Jazlyn who is two. I have some personal goals and ambitions to help continue to build my confidence and to be successful.

I will earn my High School Diploma. I plan to graduate with my GED before June of this year. Then I plan to enter PTEC College and earn my license as a Practical Nurse. My next step will be to go to St. Pete College to earn my Registered Nursing Degree. Completing nursing school will be a difficult journey. I will be able to secure a really good job. This will allow me to meet my number one goal, which is to provide for myself and my family.

I hope after Jordan and Jazlyn see how hard I worked, and how important education and staying focused on your goals are, that they will set and achieve their education and career goals. I want to help them succeed in school, as well as push and support them to reach their goals. They can become whatever they want, such as a doctor, astronaut, dancer, actor or a teacher. The sky is the limit! I'm reaching for the stars for my family and I will be there to support them all the way.

Jessica Cash is a fabulous role model in the classroom. Her children are blessed to have such a dedicated mother. Jessica attends Clearwater Family Literacy /GED Program.

My GED

One afternoon coming home from service, I sat down and decided to set goals for myself, not just for me, but for my kids as well. One of those goals were to get my G.E.D. I feel as though I can't move on in life without it. I figured in order to move on with other goals I have written down, my first priority is getting my G.E.D. I can see myself owning my own daycare business and maybe becoming a V.P.K or HEADSTART Teacher.

Getting my G.E.D means a lot to me. Even though I completed high school with a certificate of completion, it just wasn't enough. As my certificate of completion sits in my mom's family room, the kids walk by and look at it from time to time. As they grew older they realized my high school degree doesn't say diploma or G.E.D. They ask question and I explain to them the reason why. I always promised them before they graduate with their diploma that mommy will go back and work on getting it. I have to set good examples for them.

My G.E.D will take me to a higher level in life, with God's help that is. I see myself owning my own Childcare business, because I love children. I love to see them grow and learn new things every day. I don't want to just babysit kids. I want to teach them responsibility and most of all educate them as they grow from infants to little boys and girls.

While owning my own business, I also see myself going to college and receiving an AA Degree or Bachelor degree so I can become a V.P.K or HEADSTART teacher. I enjoy helping my children with their homework. We go over sight words, spelling words, math, and last but not lest we get down on those science projects. Which we enjoy doing the most! When I'm helping them with their work it keeps me up to date learning new things they are being taught and to see how excited and fun it is what they are learning.

Setting my goals, keeping a promise to my children, and accomplishing them is why it is so important for me to receive my G.E.D. I see a better future for me and my kids. I prayed about it and remain to keep God first. I will succeed in getting my G.E.D. One step at a time!

Danetria Dawson has big dreams. She works full-time and is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's GED class.

My Goals

The turning point in my life actually occurred not too long after I graduated from high school. I realized that I love music, I love making money and I'm very ambitious.

Music to me is more than just an audio recording of words being put into a song. It's all about the message that's conveyed within the harmony of the musician making the track. So, basically what I am saying is "music makes all the problems go away", it keeps me sane, sarcastically speaking.

Money is the root of all evil not the principal when it comes to me. But, it is a necessity that you need to survive out here in this cold as world. So, I learned anything worth having is worth working for at least it is to me, can't let nobody stop me from trying to get these Benjamin franklin dollars.

I feel like my fullest potential towards ambition hasn't even came to its greatest peak yet, but I'm so grateful that the man above blessed me with another day, yet along an opportunity to see how far I've come to seek out the rest of my journey for success and every other desire I have in mind of obtaining.

In conclusion, only thing I'm focused on as of right now is to continue to get this money, make music, and keep my high strong ambition attitude, because I know that's gone be the main reason I'll be finding my way on the top before this year is out.

Ronnie Dean is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Journey

My name is Gerard Dieujuste. I am 61 years old and I was born in Haiti. I came to the United States in search for a better life for my five children because I wanted them to have a good education. I arrived in the United States on September 16, 1983. I will never forget it. I moved in with my brother, who helped me to find a job. I worked hard and saved money to purchase a home, so that I could bring my family to the United States with me.

In 1995, the day finally came I was able to purchase my first home. In 2001, my wife joined me here in Miami along with my youngest son. Later, my entire family came to the United States. It was a dream come true. Today, all my children have a high school diploma and currently have stable employment. For 27 years, I worked for a mattress company. Unfortunately, my health began to fail me, so I was forced to retire in 2007. After sitting home and running out of things to do around the house, I thought it would be beneficial to begin ESOL Classes. I have always emphasized the importance of Education and a good future. I began my journey of learning to read and write at William H. Turner Technical Adult Education Center. My goal was to learn to read and write. In the past I didn't have the chance to go to school, but now I am excited to learn to read and write in English!

I began in ESOL level 1 with a kind and patient teacher. Ms. Saint-Hubert, she helped to create a good foundation as well as a positive learning experience.

After completing the first level and moving to level 2 with Ms. Cunningham, I became ill again. I had to stop attending classes for a couple of years. I went back to Turner Tech. as soon as I regained my strength. Within the next 2 years I moved from level 2 to 4. It was very hard, but I continued to focus on my initial goal of learning to effectively read and write in English. My teachers have been very helpful to me. They have all been patient with me through this journey of learning.

I am currently at ESOL level 4 and still striving toward success. Throughout my educational experience here at William H. Turner Tech, I recognize the milestones of my accomplishments. Just think, once I would watch television and couldn't understand anything, but wished that I could. Now I enjoy watching CNN and TBN daily. I no longer hesitate when I'm asked to sign a paper, because I can READ.

Gerard Dieujuste is a student at William H. Turner Technical Adult Education Center.

Life Without a Struggle

Growing up, my life wasn't easy. Both of my parents came from a small island called Haiti. My parents moved to America for a better life for us. Life still wasn't easy for us.

I watched my dad work two jobs all of his life, just to take care of his family and pay bills. While both of my parents struggled to pay their bills, I always told myself that am going to be something in life. I am going to make it - just watch. I think my goal in life is to wake up and never have to worry or stress myself out about another bill. Just watching my parents work two jobs and still stress themselves out about their bills, I just don't want that life.

I want to take my parents out of the projects (low-income housing) and I want to one day tell my parents they don't have to ever work another day in their lives, and that - I got them. Also my goals and ambition in life are to finish school, go to college, and get a career, not just a job. I want to major in "fashion" in college. I love fashion and I have had a passion for it ever since I was a little girl. When I was younger, I had tons of journals and I used to draw models.

I acted like I was fashion designer and I used to draw my clothes on the model like I had my own fashion line. I suck at drawing, but as career goes, I hope one day I can open my own store. Maybe I could also dress up a famous person or even have my clothing line in New York fashion week. Those are goals to strive for, right there!

Furthermore, I want to share something personal about myself. Even though my goals and ambitions in life are wanting a career job and getting my parents out of the projects, I want a partner by my side to grow old with, seeing our little kids running around the house and watching them grow older and teaching them that even though life is hard, to never give up on your goals in life. I know having a big nice house and my dream car are achievable, if I work hard for those goals. I know that am going to make it one day. The way my dreams, goals, and ambitions are set up, I am going to be something in life. I hope you can also fulfill your dreams and goals as well.

Amalia Ferdinand is a student at Miami Dade College.

My Goals and Ambitions

In developed countries, children are born with the possibility of reaching goals which would allow them to succeed in their lives. Yet, for those in poor countries, it is just the opposite. These children's goal is to leave their home countries and live in abroad so that they can establish some goals and follow their ambitions to succeed. Because of the situation of my country, Haiti, I always asked myself what my future would be if I did not leave the country to study in the United States and become useful in my family and especially in the Haitian society.

Although this is complicated, I am sure that I will realize my dream of becoming a great doctor of medicine and returning to my country and contribute to the health situation crisis in Haiti.

Arriving in United States, I was faced with delaying my goals. First of all, I felt the need to learn English to communicate with Americans, so I went to an English school to increase my level of writing and listening and to prepare myself for college.

Next, because of the weak economic situation of my parents, I worked and helped with the bills and bought myself necessary things. Despite unexpected obstacles, I was still ambitious and became even more motivated to work hard and pursue my goal.

While I try to balance my life between work and school, I will complete my ESOL class and get my GED diploma. Afterwards, I am going to work full time and try to make a lot of money as well as find financial aid to register in a university. When I get into the university, I will continue with my ambition to study medicine with much determination and sacrifice to pass my various courses and get my Bachelor's degree. I will start working as a professional and then return to my country to study the health situation and see how I can be useful. Returning to the United States, I will continue my studies and work to save money to return to Haiti to work and remain.

To succeed, I have to fight to the end. Obstacles may come along the way but with my will and determination I will not give up. I will continue to fight for my conviction. I will really enjoy returning home and cooperating with hospitals there to bring something new to help people with their lives. Like Martin Luther King said, "I have a dream."

Mendel Fleurismond is in Nancy Gardner's Advanced ESOL class at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach.

My Objectives and Ambitions

My life has to be useful in the world. According to my dream, I have to go to school, pay attention, study, and do my homework in the English class.

After ESOL, I will start a Master's in Theology to complete and increase my knowledge in religion. I want to concentrate on preaching the gospel because there are so many bad things in the world. I think I will be able to help others in this world.

In the end, my objective in life will come to true; I will be able to help people to give up the wrong way and live as God wants us to be.

Louinor Forestal is a student at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Campus in the ESOL program.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Lovely Garou and I come from Haiti. I have been in the U.S. since 1997. I like it here because I have a lots of opportunities for myself. I am a mother of four kids – one girl and three boys. When I first came to America, I didn't have any family support at that time. I was in Cape Coral High School as a student. But because of my situation, I quit school after six months. It was not my decision to quit going to school, but at that time, I didn't have a choice. I was working at housekeeping in the Sanibel Hotel.

Later I would go to school to become a CNA – Certified Nursing Assistant. Now, I am a student at Dunbar Community School, Level 5. I am very happy with my goals and ambitions. I need to get my GED to complete my nursing program to become an RN. Then I will have a better life with my family.

Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can, or whether you think you can't, you're right." And I think I can!

Lovely Garou is an inspiring student in Vicki McDonald's ESOL, Levels 4 and 5 class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My Future

Education is important in today's world. I know a G.E.D will better my future and help me achieve my goals. My goals are to help my kids in their academic, further my education and become a mechanic engineer.

My kids have homework such as math, science, social studies, and reading. Sometimes they ask me to help them with their homework. By getting my G.E.D, I will be able to help them with their homework and inspire them to continue with their education.

A G.E.D will make me more optimistic about moving forward and aiming high for more education. Once I get my G.E.D., I will enroll in other schools such as ITT or college. Also, having a G.E.D will get me into a career. ITT is a School I want to attend. To attend the ITT School, I would need a G.E.D. or a high school diploma. In ITT School I want to get my certificate for mechanic engineer. Mechanic engineering is career I have wanted to do and getting my G.E.D is the answer to my career.

Having a G.E.D will benefit me. The G.E.D will get me into my career, mechanic engineer. I've always been into mechanic work and I loved it. I know this career will be fun because it's something I like to do. This career will bring in a higher income and financially help me with my expenses.

Armando Jose works full time. He is enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is his teacher.

I Believe in Myself

My name is Nigina Ilkhomova. I am from Uzbekistan. My ambition in life has always kept changing all the time. I like to be a dancer, an artist, and a writer. I do not think that there is any man without ambition in life. Some want to rich, many hanker after name and fame and others crave for power, position, and social status in life. Honor and position do not last long. Fortune turns like a wheel.

I have a strong desire to be a doctor and serve humanity. To reach this goal I have to work hard. I do not speak perfect English. Therefore, I have to acquire this first. I enjoy my English class. Now, I know a lot more and am at a higher level. The next step is to get my high school equivalent diploma. Then I want to go to college. I believe that I can do this. I have confidence in myself.

Nigina Ilkhomova attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

A Dream Come True

My name is Ekaterina Ilina. I have always had big ambitions. When I was a child, I wanted to be an actress; when I was teenager, I wanted to be a doctor; when I became a student, I wanted to become a professional photographer. While we are growing up our ambitions change; we come up with our to-do list, our bucket list. In other words, our ambitions are our dreams and our success. It is what we want to become.

When I was 14 years old, I found my dad's old camera. I was curious what it was and how it worked. My dad taught me how to use it, and I started to take pictures of everything. I printed my first photos and I liked them so much, but I wanted to take better ones. I decided to be a professional photographer. So far, it has been my biggest ambition.

However, it was not easy! I made a big list of my goals. First, I came up with my biggest goals, like opening my own photo studio and getting a photography college degree. For the second step, I made a list of smaller goals, which were going to help me get closer to my first goals.

For instance, finishing online courses, working with different technology, and meeting other photographers to exchange experience. Also, of course, I had every day goals. I had to ask myself, "What am I going to do today to be closer to my dream?" "What do I want out of my life?" These questions bother many people. The most important step is to never give up. Believe, work hard, and your dreams will come true.

I finished Russian State University in 2006 and got a diploma with honors as a professional photographer. I think it was one of the biggest successes in my life. But guess what? My ambitions grew and I came up with a bigger goals list. I wanted to be better, I wanted to know more and visit different places. So, I moved to the USA in 2008. Now I'm a student of NWFSC and want to get an AS degree as a Digital Designer.

Ambitions and goals are very important parts of being successful. You can't become a doctor, pilot or photographer without ambitions. So work hard, learn more, don't be lazy, and your dreams will come true.

Ekaterina Ilina is from Omsk, Russia. She is an ESOL student in the Adult Education Program at Northwest Florida State College. Her ESOL instructor is Diane Dunn.

My Life's Objectives and Ambitions

I have a great dream. I always wanted to be a dentist and I know with God's help I will achieve it. I already finished my high school degree and I now I am going to ESOL classes. When I finish, I would like to go to college to achieve my dream. At college, I will need to be polite and focus on my studies. After that, I will need to get a good job and take care of my family. I will also like to take care or work with children with disabilities. I pray that I will meet a good man and get married.

Lisme Loudjy is a student at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Campus in the ESOL program.

My Future Plans

My name is Acheton Lucas, and I have a lot of dreams. My dreams are to be a pilot and a technician mechanic. I would also love to join the U.S. Army, and I also have some other interesting dreams, but now I have to grow up because now I know what I want to be. Now, I am going to school to get my GED, and after that I will go to Universal Technical Institute to be a mechanic because I am not going to be able to pay for pilot school. After that I would like to save money to go to school to be a pilot.

I want to be a pilot because since I was little I always dreamed of becoming a pilot. I would love to join the U.S. Army because that is one of the best ways I see I can help others. Even now it is not easy for me, but I will never give up on that dream.

Acheton Lucas is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Music and Barbershop

My goals right now are to get my GED, become a good barber and make good music. Music and barbering make me happy.

I am currently getting my GED so I can go to barbershop school. I will do all my work and do my best to excel in my classes. So far, my scores in my classes are high and I am doing all my work in my classes to make sure they stay high so I can graduate in May. I like doing all my work so I don't fall behind.

After I get my GED, I will enroll in a barbershop school in Ft. Myers; then, I will study there until I get my Barbershop Diploma. My plan is to continue doing my work and keeping my grades high while studying at the barbershop school. I like cutting hair because it's not boring to me; plus, I can make good money doing something I like. I have a few friends that are barbers; I've seen them cutting hair. They have given me a few tips on barbering which will help a lot. I also have a cousin that used to cut my hair and taught me a few things when I lived in Puerto Rico.

I have loved music with a passion ever since I heard one of my mom's Bachata CD's for the first time. To me, music is what relaxes me and calms me down when I'm having a rough day, week, or month. When I'm in a sad mood, I can listen to slow tempo songs and just relax to the sound of the beat; or, if I'm in a happy mood I can listen to something with a little more tempo like Reggaeton or Hip Hop.

I chose to make music as one of my main goals because music is something that everybody likes and listens to. I want people to hear my music all around the world. I want people to listen to my music and cheer up if they're in a bad mood or going through some hard times.

I am very happy with the goals I have chosen to pursue in life. I know to get my GED Diploma, to become a barber and to make music will take hard work, perseverance and determination; therefore, I am using all of these to reach my goals.

Keith Mackey is a very dedicated student. He will accomplish his goals. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

A New Life

My goal is to get my GED Diploma. My diploma will mean a lot to me because it will help me to get a better job, go to college, and improve my life.

First and foremost, to get my GED Diploma is to get a new life. A diploma will allowed me to get a better job. A better job will probably mean a higher salary. I will be more qualified to get a better position with a GED.

The good thing is I will be able to save more money for college and take care of my needs better. I can obtain all of this by getting my GED Diploma. In my opinion, I believe that by getting my GED Diploma, I can find a better job and a better position faster.

Going to college is a step forward in my education. It is where I can earn a degree in nursing. I know that I must study hard if I want a better future. To do so, I will need to have my GED diploma. Education is very important in today's world. Knowledge is power.

When I graduate from college, my life will change. I will get a car, have my own apartment and travel. This is why having a GED Diploma is very important to me. Every day I think about a better life. There are so many things I want from life. A GED Diploma will be the answer to a better life for me.

Stephanie Moi-Meme is preparing for her GED test by staying after school at least one day a week. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

My Life's Goals and Ambitions

My goal in America is to learn English well first and to have a good accent as a native English speaker. When I finish my ESOL classes, I will go to a college to continue studying my profession as Statistician or Logician, so I can get a good job to take care of my family. I also would like to buy a beautiful house and to help my kids to get a good place in society.

Later, I would like to continue with my education to get a Master's degree in Logistical Science. After my graduating, I will help people in need by working for an international organization.

Ernst Moise is a student at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Campus in the ESOL program.

Life is a Challenge

Life is a challenge; it is even more challenging not having a diploma. I want my GED. A GED will help me get in college and start a career in nursing. I would love to be a nurse.

My first goal is to get my GED. Without a GED, it is hard in life to do a lot of things, especially, most of the things that I want. After I Graduate from Dunbar Community School with a GED Diploma, I will fulfill a part of me. I want to feel and know that I have accomplished that goal.

Once I get my GED, college is the next step in reaching my goals and ambitions. As a child growing up, I often wondered what college would be like. When I enroll into college, I will be one step closer to pursuing my career. I am sure it is not going to be easy. However, it is my desire to work hard, have fun and be successful.

When I was a little girl, I was the one who reached out to help those who were hurt or sick. I've always had a passion for working with hurt and sick people. I feel good when I can bring release to others. A GED Diploma will allow me to begin a career in nursing. My last ambition is to get started in this career that I love.

In conclusion, I would like to get my GED, get into college, and get started in a career that I love, so once I've achieved my 3 goals I know I've conquered something important in my life.

Ashante Moore is very focused. She will get her GED Diploma in May. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher at Dunbar Community School.

A True Story

My dream is my fuel, and many of my dreams have already come true. I continue to pursue more goals and, if anybody tries to make me give them up, I'll do whatever it takes to achieve what I'm going for. One of my dreams has always been to get a good education and succeed even though my parents didn't have the same chance.

My parents are very simple people who didn't have a good education. For that reason, I wanted to get a degree in accounting, and I had the dedication to do what they could not. I'm a very ambitious person. I was born in a little city in southern Brazil where we didn't have much to do, so I dedicated myself to studying most of the time. In order to accomplish my goals, I had to go to work during the day and college at night. I would start my day at 7:00 am and finish at 10:00 pm, but I was happy and had no complaints because I was doing something that I loved to do, studying and working in my chosen field.

After 4 years of hard work, I got my degree in accounting, followed by a master's in planning and control. My next goal is to learn English fluently so that I can go on with my journey. I still want to go back to school for computer science and open my own business developing a more user-friendly accounting software.

To sum up, I have been very ambitious with my goals. It may be a long road, but a very exciting one at the same time. It's been challenging, but I'm a very persistent person and am looking forward to achieving my goals.

Denise Prade is an Academic ESOL student at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

How to Succeed

In this time, anyone who lives must have a goal to become something in the future. Without this you can't succeed; God has a plan for everyone but you have to make some effort. I want to be a successful person and an important leader in my community. Therefore, I must move forward in my career. I'm very excited about learning English. My goal is to improve my English, become a doctor, get a better job, and travel to different countries.

First, I will improve my English because I would like to speak like an American and I want to become a translator. I will never stop learning because I'm a lifelong learner! I will do my best to converse every day, listen to the radio and music, watch TV, and read books to progress. Also, I will be able to help my kids with their homework.

Second, I hope to go to the university to become a doctor as soon as possible. I will have to work very hard and focus on my studies, because I would like to work in pediatrics. I will continue to get my doctorate as a result and teach a nursing class. After, I will be able to work independently in the medical field.

Lastly, I would like to travel to different countries, specifically, France and New York. I hope to travel a lot to see many things and learn more about language, culture, and tradition. Also I will preach the gospel, help people, buy a house in my country, and live a marvelous life.

In conclusion, while I continue learning English, become a doctor, and travel to different countries, I will be cheerful with myself. Thanks to God for the opportunities he gave me to accomplish my goals. Then I hope to share my experiences with others people to inspire them to be something in the future.

Berline Prenelus, from Haiti, is a single daughter of six children. She's a student at Immokalee Technical Center in English class. Her teacher's name is Ms. Katie Mominee.

My Goals

My name is Araceli Romero, I'm married and I have three children. I came this country 15 years ago. The United States is a great country, full of opportunities. We must take advantage of these in order to succeed. Therefore, I decided my goals and ambitions. First I want to learn English, be an inspiration for my children, and finish a profession to have a better job.

To begin, I attend adult school to learn English. I have been studying for five month and I am excited. I need to learn English because when I go to the doctor I don't understand. In my children's school, I always need to wait for a translator. It is important to speak English because, I live here. The United States is my country too.

Second, I want to inspire my children. I want to be an example for them because I want them to finish a career so they have more opportunities. My oldest son, Alex is 13 years old. Sometimes he asks me why I did not consider a career and why I did not finished high school. I want him to take advantage of the free education and understand that a diploma is necessary to get a job. My youngest son Daniel is 6 years old and in first grade. He has problems learning. He needs my support to continue reading and doing his homework together. My second son is 11 years old his name is Antonio. He is smart and responsible. He inspires me to be best, I'm proud of him. I LOVE MY KIDS!

Finally, I want a better job. I need to make money to finance my children's education. I want a job that I like. I always work in the field and that work is physically hard. I always wanted to be a nurse because of my experiences at the hospital when my children were born. I know the importance of bilingual nurses to help patients feel confident.

In conclusion, I feel that I will be able to accomplish my goals. I believe that with constant effort, we can achieve everything! I will always continue to study. The life is a constant learning. I want to thank my husband for his support!

Araceli Romero is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee. She is from Mexico and is happy to learn English.

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to get my GED, go to college, and to raise my daughters. To accomplish these three goals, I will know and feel success.

I want to get my GED mainly to show my daughters that I didn't give up on education and that education is the key to success. Without a GED or high school diploma, I cannot get into college to further my education. A GED is part of my life plan to get to the next step in my life. The GED is the first step of a bigger plan for myself and for my family; this will raise the expectation for my family to get their high school diplomas

I need to go to college. College will allow me to make more money in life. My hope is to learn how to manage a business and to play college basketball. My reason for going to college, basically, is to make more money and to provide for my family. Going to college and playing basketball might be one of the hardest goals and ambitions that I have; but, I am willing to put in the extra work and the extra grind to make my goal and dream come true.

My daughters are the most important people in my life. Their happiness and their joy means the world to me. I am setting up goals and completing them to show my daughters that their father was not a quitter. Everything that I do is mostly for them. I am teaching them how to read, how to write and how to count. It is important that my daughters get a good education.

The GED is the first step of a bigger plan for myself and for my family. I am willing to put in the extra work and the extra grind to make my goals and dream come true. The thing that I realize that only I can stop me from being successful.

Terry Salters Jr. is enrolled in GED at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley. Everything he does is for his three daughters.

My Journey

Everyone has goals, and ambitions, but not everyone will achieve them. They are not something you just dream about, but you have to work toward them.

In my case, my goal is to get from where I am now, to where I want to be. I have been working as a Certified Nurse Assistant for at least ten years. It is not an easy job to do, but I enjoy it. To work in the medical field, you have to care about people around you, especially when they need your help. You cannot neglect them. It's like they are part of your family. For that reason, I have to step forward to get more knowledge in that field, and I will help more later on. That's right! My goal is to be a registered nurse (R.N) even if this is difficult to accomplish, I am not going to give up. To be an R.N., I have to speak good English. For instance, I have to improve my grammar and spelling. I'm not worried about that because God has put such a dedicated teacher in my way, and with her kindness, she will help me improve my skills.

Since I came to the U.S I have been working two jobs which is not good, and I am tired of doing that. I know one day my dear God is going to help me reach my goal. When you really want something, you fight for it. I'm doing the best I can of me to reach my goal.

Manise Sylvestre is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Dream Goals and Ambitions

My goal is to get to the Big Leagues. It is difficult to reach, but not impossible. My goal since I was 7 years old was to play baseball. When I was 14 years old, I wanted to be a professional baseball player. I had to work hard and I had many difficulties to arrive here, but I achieved one of my goals! I still want to play in the Big Leagues, and I will continue to work for that. I just need to work hard, with my mind prepared and always do what the coaches tell me.

I also want to speak perfect English. In my life I never studied English, and it was difficult to begin studying English without knowing anything. I was poor but I always had the hope of learning. I had the chance to come here and the Houston Astros gave me this opportunity. What matters to me is to fulfill my ambition with effort, dedication and work. So I take my English and I try to never miss a class and learn a new word every day.

I can always improve every day. I need, also, to have God in my heart to fill me with wisdom and great faith. I need to give my best and never give up in my life or in the game. It is clear to me that there are many obstacles and barriers, but none will make me stop working toward my goals.

Gabriel Valdez is a 19-year-old prospect from Bani, Dominican Republic. He is a right handed pitcher and an English language student within the Houston Astros organization.

Completing My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Marlene Vazquez, I am thirty five years old. I am from Chiapas, Mexico. I came to this country with many dreams and goals to accomplish. I am from a large family; I am the ninth out of eleven children. Chiapas is one of most beautiful states of Mexico with fences, lakes, and the jungle Condona that attracts a lot of tourists. I love my country although I want to fulfill my dreams. One of the obstacles that slowed me down was the language. I had to work and take care of my child, it was very hard for me. When my son started pre-school, I also decided to study. I know now how important it is to speak, read, and write the English language.

Thanks to God, I am happy and following my goals. I am a student at Dunbar Community School; I have an excellent teacher who is dedicated to all the students. Now, my goal is to finish ESOL and take the GED exam. This country is beautiful and full of opportunities for those who want to overcome their handicaps and accomplish their goals. If I were you, I wouldn't let this opportunity pass you by.

Marlene Vazquez is from Mexico, she is a student In ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Goals and Ambitions

Several times in life people who really appreciate you try to encourage you to do whatever you are dreaming about. They usually say, “Don’t give up and keep your eyes on the target”. Encouragement is often the tool you have been looking for to reach and make your goals and ambitions real.

I remember when I was a little boy I used to think that someday I was going to be a doctor just like my parents. I used to wear a little lab coat that my mom made for me and around my neck I had a stethoscope to complete the costume. I loved to get dressed like that because I felt like a doctor already. I also remember me telling my parents, “You know what, some day you will be so proud of me, because I am going to be as good a doctor as you are or even better”. Ever since then, that has been my biggest ambition and everything I’ve worked on, has had to do with making my dream come true.

Many years later, when I was twelve to be exact, I was taking a test to get into a medical school. I was so nervous because I had to compete with almost 2 000 people to get one of the scholarships they were offering. But even at that moment, the only thought that came to my mind was me telling my parents, “I’m going to do this.” After a while, we had the results and everything was wonderful and special because I had made it!!!

Being part of that medical program was the beginning of my dream coming true. There, I had the greatest experiences of my life. I learned so much about how the human body works as a perfect machine and how illnesses can affect humans and cause a lot of problems. Unfortunately, I couldn’t finish my career because I had to move to another country, but guess what? Even here my dreams and ambitions are the same, to make my parents proud of me and become a really good doctor. Nowadays, I am working on my English, as an essential step to reach my dream. That is why I’m telling you, having dreams, goals and ambitions is such an important part of life; because that makes you wake up every morning thinking, “What am I going to do next to get what I want” and “How can I do it.”

Rafael Ortega Verdecia has been a student at Miami Dade College for one semester. His professor is Zuly Rosello.

Personal Story

My History and My Hope

I was born and raised in a small village in Guatemala called La Esperanza (Hope). I was one of seven children. I went to school at the age of seven, learning to read and write, and at the same time, learning to speak Spanish because I grew up speaking a dialect. I had the illusion that I would finish elementary school and go to high school, but it was not possible. After I finished elementary school, by the age of fifteen I decided to come to this country to help my dad pay the bills and the mortgage on the house. Otherwise, we would lose the house.

It was not difficult to achieve my goal of coming to help my dad. Thank God I made it, and I'm very happy about that. When I got here it was not as easy as I thought. It was very hard for me to get a job at the age I was and the language was hard. Eventually, at the age of twenty-one, I started my own life and I got married.

But through all this I thank Jupiter High School for giving me the opportunity to learn English. This is my short history. This country has given me many things. Today I live with my wife and my two daughters and I will fulfill my dream of studying. I have something yet to give - something better for my family.

Eladio Ajucum is from Guatemala. He is a student in the Adult ESOL Program at Jupiter Community High School. His teacher is Susan Mitchell.

My Daughter and Me

My name is Louizette Almeus. I came to the United States in 1980. I raised three children in the USA on my own. It wasn't easy for me because I did not speak English well. In 1982, I took an English class so that I could speak better English. From 1989 to 1990, I went to school for cosmetology and in 1990, I went to school to become a Nursing Assistant. With both degrees, I was able to help my family.

I encouraged my children to go to school because without an education there is no future. Some listened, some didn't. My daughter did go to college, but she didn't know what she wanted to do and did not know how important education was. She worked a lot of jobs with \$8 an hour pay. One day, while she was in school at FAU, she decided to join the army. I was not happy with her decision.

After two years in the army, she got pregnant, and returned home with a beautiful baby girl. She got a job at Holiday Inn as a Customer Service Representative making \$8 per hour. I encouraged her to go back to school. She did go to school and became a Licensed Practical Nurse while I took care of the baby. I talked to her about continuing her education. She listened and went to school to become a Registered Nurse. Now she is a Registered Nurse and continuing her Bachelors in Nursing. This year, she will have her BSN and she still wants to continue for her Master's in Nursing. She wasted lot of time before she succeeded. She did not know how important education was, but now she knows and thanks me. I thank my precious Lord because He heard my cry for my daughter.

I know going to school is not easy, but you have to try. It's not too late to give yourself a second chance in life and you will be a hero like my daughter and me.

Louizette Almeus is a student at Parent Academy of St. Lucie County. Her teachers are Isabella Escalona and Joan Moore.

Dare to Change

My name is Omar Alvarez. I was born in 1971 in Cuba. After 35 struggling years there, I decided it was time for a better life somewhere else.

So, I moved to the United States of America in 2006. That was nine years ago. It was not an easy decision because I had to leave my two lovely daughters in Cuba.

One reason I moved to Key West was because I have family who lives here. The other reason was because I needed a better job that pays me more money.

This way I can support my two daughters in Cuba and give them a better life as well. My dream is to be an artist. My first job was with a construction company. I worked as a construction worker for five years. Then I got a job as a janitor at GCA Services Group. I worked for them for three years. I gained many skills and I know how to use the machines to clean the floor and walls very well.

One day, Mr. Mario, my manager, spoke with me about a new position. I went to the interview and then they offered me the new managerial position. Guess what? I am in training now. Do you want to know how I got this position? This is how. Among all the people they interviewed, I am the only one who can speak and understand English, besides my experience and skills. I am so grateful to all those people who have encouraged and helped me in my life. Without them I would not be where I am now.

Omar Alvarez attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

A Million Dollars

Take a second and ask yourself... "What would I do with ten million dollars?" I'll wait, but let me explain to you what I would do with that kind of money. Well, first I would buy about ten thousand Lotto 649 tickets to get myself some more money. Usually, from what I've seen, the jackpot is in the twenty millions. Having about twenty million more, would be a real help. In fact, maybe at some point, I could keep buying more. When I have ten million dollars, losing about twenty thousand doesn't seem so bad. I would love to spend my money wisely. In a way, you have to admit-it is kind of smart if you try to win a lottery for more money. (Okay, maybe it isn't). I usually don't support gambling, but when it comes to lotteries, you can win a big chunk of money!

In reality, I would buy myself a nice \$500,000 house to live in. This would be enough room to start a family and to get in the necessities of a home (I'm talking about furniture, appliances, and you can forget the electronics). I would prefer a house rather than an apartment. Apartments are not big enough to support a family, and when you fit a bunch of things in there, it won't work out.

If I want to throw parties (you'll see later), a small apartment just won't do. I wouldn't hire a maid because unlike any other regular person, I like to clean. I also expect to have a pool and a hot tub in the back yard. Those are absolute necessities for my house. In addition, I would be able to donate to charity. Giving away one million couldn't hurt, right? It's going towards the right cause, so I have no problem spending a good chunk of money on kids or people in general who need help.

Perhaps I could own a charity and create a fundraiser of my own at my mansion. I can have a party (with security so no one could steal anything). For everyone who pays a \$5.00 entry fee, I could go and give that to people who really need help getting an education, or those who can't afford medical care. The world isn't only about one person. It's about anyone and everyone. All of us should be able to lead a nice normal life. I encourage everyone to spare some money for charities. It is for the right reason, and you can honestly help someone a lot. This is what I would do with ten million dollars.

Kelvin Anderson is a student at Atlantic Technical College - Arthur Ashe Campus.

I Wonder Why?

We can write about many things – events, experiences, joys, sorrows – the list can be never ending but, have you ever asked yourself what is the most important thing in life? I have always wondered what people expect from life. As a former policeman in Puerto Rico, I have seen many lives pass through life and when asked what is their meaning of life, what have they done in life, what do they expect from life but, I find no answer to that. That is pitiful! When we were children, we wanted the last edition of the toys currently in the market, show them off to our friends and presume what we think is the greatest acquisition of the world... I wonder why... Then, life changes and when we became teenagers we wanted the trendiest fashion clothes and the newest electronic equipment and cell phones. As an adolescent, the biggest expectation was to be outstanding in the social network world. Then, I wonder why...

Adolescence passes and then adulthood welcomes us. We get married, we have family, and we think life will be different but then, the circle of life repeats itself. Always looking for the best, many people marry and it is not necessarily for love; the spouse becomes the well-earned trophy of a won dispute... I wonder why... It is proven.

The way we raise our children is a reflection of the way we were raised by our parents or guardians. Why do we want to have our neighbor's car? The house our cousin bought the other day? Why do people desire the spouse's best friend? Why do we behave like that? Human behavior – inexplicable. Then, I wonder why...

Most of the time, we tend to compare ourselves to others as part of the process of acceptance in the social world. Don't you think it is time for humanity to create a balance in life? We will always be interacting with different people with different financial background, ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Have you ever sat down and thought about the simple things life? How important is your health for you? Only when you are sick? How important a person can be in your life? Did you regret saying "I love you" to that person that left and then dies? It doesn't hurt until you lose it. Then, I wonder why...

The question is: When was the last time you were grateful for what you have and what you have accomplished instead of regretting what you don't have? Don't you think it is time to begin breaking the vicious cycle and teach our children the real values of life? It's in your hands...

Bernice Aponte was a police officer in Puerto Rico. Right now, she is in the advanced ESOL class at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, with Madeline Lopez-Ortiz.

A Childhood Never Forgotten!

If I could change one thing about my childhood, it would be the emotional, the physical, and the mental abuse, as well as the sexual abuse I endured. My parents died when I was five years old. Growing up without my parents and to be raised by my mother's mother, my grandmother was the most devastating situation for me.

As a child, I was not able to have a voice to scream out or speak up; these weren't options in our household. My grandmother was never home. She always had to work; but, in the meantime her boyfriend was the caretaker. You might as well say we saw him more then we saw her.

From the time we got out of school till the time we went to bed, he was in charge. He wasn't a nice guy, and sometimes, I think to myself maybe he took away what I could've been in life. As a woman, I am stronger and I can handle situations in a humble way because of what happened to me in my childhood.

There are many childhood memories I'd like to change. However, the emotional, the physical, and the mental, as well as the sexual abuse I endured would be the most devastating selections of my memories. These are the memories I would like to change. These memories have left a scar. Now, in my heart, I have built a huge wall to protect my children and to trust no man. I'm speaking from the heart and sharing my deepest thoughts. Everyone has a story; I'd just like to think this is a cycle of life.

Latravia Baker is enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

A New Beginning

The stage of growing up hit me when I was very young. My mom and dad split up the year of 2009 a few short weeks before Christmas. At the age of eleven I learned how to cook, wash dishes, do laundry, and take care of my two baby brothers and little sister.

Sometimes I feel I grew up sooner than I should have, but growing up also taught me to never depend on anyone other than myself. My mom and I grew closer to each other after everything. My dad and I slowly drifted apart.

He got remarried in 2012 with a women who had four kids. When he took me to meet his new family, his wife and I didn't click. I didn't care for her kids all that much either. Ever since then my dad and I haven't had much to do with each other.

At the end of 2014, I started Santa Rosa Adult School. My brother told my dad about it, and eventually I got a phone call from him for the first time in over 8 months. We talked about my schooling for just a few minutes and then ended the phone call. He didn't have much to say, as usual, but I was used to that.

When I started Santa Rosa, it taught me a lot and made me wake up a bit more. I'm now with the graduating class of 2015 at the age of 16. I work, go to school, and I'm starting college in mid-June. I've got goals I've yet to reach and dreams that are slowly coming to reality. The turning point in my life has taught me a lot, and has made me the strong, independent, young person I am today.

Haylee Beers is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

American Dream

First and foremost, I would like to inform you that I am very proud to be an American citizen.

With so much opportunity in this country, my opinion of the American dream is simple and to the point. Go to school, graduate and stay motivated to be whatever you want to be. Getting married and then raising a family in a big home is all part of the dream. Experience was the best way for me to learn about the road-blocks placed in plain view. Maybe someone out there can take a short cut and learn from me.

The important things in life to me are my children, a place of residence, and the ability to pay the bills. Your life can easily be overwhelming with the stressful pressures of everyday life when you don't have the education to land a job. Financial security is extremely important in order to support your family and a big factor for my success. Even with motivation from friends and family, the reality of me not having enough set in and pushed me to do more. I had to go back to school and earn my GED. I am a single black American mother and single mothers all across the globe will understand that this is a major setback for anyone trying to move their life forward.

Today I am in school and I plan to graduate by September of 2016. Today I know I am smart and I can do anything. I want my children to know this about themselves, also. I am very involved with my children regarding their education and the sports they are in. They make me proud and I want them to be proud of me.

In conclusion, you must believe you can achieve in life. Do the hard work and the truth will shine and success will be yours. There will always be ups and downs, short comings and complete failures but these will be lessons for your success as well. The American dream is a reachable for you and for me. I want Americans to be happy and realize all that they can be. I want this for me and my children. After all, this is the land of the free and this is My American Dream.

Ashley Bennett is a dedicated and motivated student at Clearwater Family Literacy/GED Program.

A Memorable Day

On my older brother's 12th birthday, nobody expected what would happen later that day. The day started off with me and my brother waking up to my mom's loud singing of the Happy Birthday song. Later we got ready to go to the skating alley for the birthday party. We arrived, and the place was packed. Later, we went in the room to see him blow out the candles, open gifts and sing the Birthday song; we both actually liked hearing it then. After the party, we went back home with a car packed full of kids. They were still pumped up from the party and the candy.

It was about 9:00 PM, and we thought it would be a good idea to go outside and play kick-the-ball. It was a little hard to see, but we had a light on the side of the house to help us. When it was my turn, I didn't notice the incoming stick coming right at me. It hit and punctured my eye and I blacked out. When I woke up I was instantly in a lot of pain, so I ran inside to see what had happened.

When I opened the door, I looked at my mom and my aunt. When they saw me, their faces turned from laughing and smiling to sad and scared. My mom rushed to me telling me it was going to be okay, but she knew it wouldn't be when she realized that my left eye had burst from the stick puncturing it.

My mom, step-dad, and I jumped into the car and sped to the hospital, leaving the others at the house wondering what was going to happen. We drove up to the nearest hospital. Doctors were all over me getting me ready to go to another hospital because their ER rooms were all filled up. They called Sacred Heart Hospital and had them send an ambulance. Once it arrived, they quickly loaded me up and we were off. I remember hearing my mom crying and a lady next to me telling me that I needed to stay awake! It just kept ringing in my head as I was dozing off. Soon enough, I did go to sleep and couldn't wake up.

The next thing I remember is waking up inside the hospital with a patch covering my eye. My family came in one by one to see if I was okay. I ended up spending half my 3rd grade year in that hospital. That was 9 years ago. Since then I've had to go through more surgeries than I can count. I've had that eye replaced with a prosthetic eye. Even though that awful tragedy will leave a scar on me for the rest of my life, over time I have healed and accepted what life has given me.

Zakary Bennett is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

Happy At Last

My name is Marie Tilus Brice. I am from Haiti. I am married and have two children. My children came to the United States of America in 2010 after the big earthquake. I did not dream of coming to United States at all, but I do this for the sake of my family. Life is not easy here. Sometime, I do not feel comfortable. One thing I like about United States is that the high school is free. In my country, we have to pay a lot of money to send our kids to school. I am very happy for my children that they are getting a good education here. Also, America offers many opportunities. So, I am happy to be here.

Marie Tilus Brice attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Centenarian

My name is Augustus H. Cox and I was born in Starke, FL on May 8, 1915, the third of five siblings. I graduated in 1930 as valedictorian from R.J.E. Grade School. I was baptized by Palm Grove Baptist Church. I was baptized in the Gulf of Mexico around the age of 12. In 1928, I united with the Bethel Baptist Church in Starke, Florida. I later relocated to Jacksonville, FL and I united with Zion Hope Missionary Church where I have always been active. I served as secretary of the Trustee Board for 19 years. In 1942 I was ordained deacon. I served as president of the B.Y.P.U. (Baptist Young People Union) later named B.T.U. (Baptist Training Union), taught Adult Women Sunday School and was supervisor of the church's kindergarten.

I began working at the Florida Hotel in Jacksonville in 1937 as a janitor. I remember seeing several movie stars, among them Marilyn Monroe, who stayed at the hotel and attended screenings at the Capitol Theatre next door. In 1956, I began working at the Western Auto supply store as an automobile mechanic and retired after 25 years.

I was active in other organizations such as the NAACP and served as president of the Longbranch Elementary School Advisory Council. Since 1943 I have been very active with the Prince Hall Freemasonry. I became a member of the Harmony Lodge #1 (Mason), served as secretary. Additionally, I served in the following positions: Worshipful Master; Past Grand Master of Florida; High Priest of King David #9 Royale ARCH Chapter; High Priest of Crescent Chapter #50; Past Grand High Priest of Florida; Thrice Illustrious Master of Council #1 of Royal Select Master; Past Grand Thrice and Illustrious Master; Eminent Commander of Joshua #55; Eminent Commander of Selected Master David #99 ; Past Grand Eminent Commander of the Commonwealth of Florida; Past Most Eminent Grand Master of Knight Templars of the United States of America; Worthy Joshua of J.C. Phillip Court of Heroines of Jericho; Commander in Chief of Tillman Valentine Consistory #22 and 4th Vice president of the Commander of the Rite. I progressed through degrees to become the Most Eminent Grand Master of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar. In 1970 I achieved “ 33rd degree Mason”, which is the highest level.

My involvement with the Masonic Order provided me the opportunities to travel from east to west and from north to south of nearly the whole United States of America and to the Bahamas attending meetings. I continue to stay actively involved in my church and my Learning for Living class at the Longbranch Senior Center. I feel that education is important because it gives one a better objective to life.

Mr. Augustus H. Cox enjoys sharing his many years of experiences-written and orally. He attends Florida State College at Jacksonville Learning for Living class at Longbranch Senior Center. His Instructor is Juanita Wyatt.

Step-by-Step

My name is Peterson Cypres and I'm from Haiti. I am 21 years old, single and live with my family. I have been in the US for one year and I'm also working. I like the U.S.A.

One of my favorite experiences is going to Dunbar Community School where I'm studying English. I'm so very happy to meet some friends from different countries. This is my third semester and I'm in love with it. It was a turning point in my life when I took my last class in my country, and I saw what I would be beginning in the U.S. It made my day to see that my friends were so excited for me.

My goal is to speak English very well and that's why I'm coming to school every day. When I speak better English, I will achieve my ambition to get a better job and buy a house here.

Sunday is my favorite day and my church is my favorite place. When I'm at church I give God all glory for my successes and for helping me stay motivated to work for my goals. After church on Sunday, I visit some friends so we can play soccer. This is a sunny day for me. I love it. Step-by-step, I'm going to make my life better like I want.

Peterson Cypres is a studious member of the ESOL Levels 4 and 5 class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, FL. His teacher is Vicki McDonald.

Fate of an Immigrant

Life is like a wheel; we know when we started rolling, but do not know the roads, time or destination that we are going.

This is a real story about my father, his life and his dreams. When he was 19 years old, he left his home in Spain in search of a better life, leaving his parents and siblings and not knowing if he would ever see them again. There was a bad situation in Spain during the twenties of the last century: famine, diseases and unemployment in rural Galicia. All those things forced his adventure. With a little suitcase on his back, and no money in his pocket, but with millions of dreams, he was hopeful to find a better future leaving everything without hesitation. Eventually, he arrived at the port of Vigo and looked for work on a boat regardless of its destination. He couldn't pay a bill and needed to find a way to travel. He left Spain on January 1st, 1928.

He worked on the boat for a long time and the places he traveled to were Venezuela, Brazil, and Cuba. He didn't know when he left where he would end up. On the boat he learned about life in those countries. But he finally left the boat in Cuba. He knew what he needed to do to find a room and a job, because in that place workers were needed. When he first arrived, he went to the Catholic Church to ask for help. They helped him.

He lived in the little room, and worked in a bakery and made money. He needed to pay for everything in that place: his room, food, laundry, etc. He couldn't save any money; and for that reason he decided to find a job in another place. He continued to work at bad jobs, and he slept in barracks to save money to begin his dreams.

For many years he traveled everywhere trying to find a better job and a better life. He never knew about his family. He died without seeing his dreams fulfilled - poor, no friends and without a memory to remember where he came from. I started the reverse way at 38 years old. I hope the wheel of life will take me to a different destination.

Jose Manuel David was born in Cuba of Spanish-Cuban descent. He is a learner in the Jupiter Community High School Adult ESOL Program. His teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Around the World in 12 Years

My name is Maria Belen Gravino Destin and I am from the Philippines. I lived in the Philippines until I was 21 years old. The Philippines is a very hot place. During the summer it can get to 99 degrees or higher every day. Even in the winter it is still very hot. When my husband visited there, he sweated a lot and even got sick from too much heat. I miss the Filipino food (mostly the seafood), the restaurants in the mall, and the way they cooked pizza. I miss my favorite restaurant named Jollibee.

Then I went to Japan on a tourist visa for 4 months to be with my cousin. Japan was a great country. The food there was very good. I love their ramen noodles and miso soup. The people are very friendly also and the place was clean and the stores were very close to my apartment. It was easy for me to buy food. I could either walk or bike to stores.

I met an American Air Force guy and married him four years later. After marriage, we moved to England. England was very different than Japan. For one thing, the food was in my opinion, not as good. I liked the UK because there was a lot of history like Scotland and Stonehenge. The trees were so green, the people I met are very nice, and the church was close to our house. The only thing I did not enjoy was the cold weather. The summer in England was still cold for me so I could not even enjoy wearing slippers. I did meet a lot of Filipinos and friends there though.

Then after four years we moved to Spain in May 2009 and lived there for four years. To live in different places is difficult for me and I had to adjust. Especially learning the languages and it is important to try to learn as much as possible. This makes it easier to go out or eat dinner so you can communicate with people of that country.

After Spain my family and I moved here to Florida. There are a lot of things to do in this country. For one thing, there are many kinds of food to eat. One of my favorite places is the Olive Garden. The weather here is also very nice and we enjoy the beaches. We are considering staying in this area to settle down. I feel lucky to have traveled to all of those places and have learned something about each place.

Of all the places we have been to, I believe the United States is the best. It is not just the food and beaches, but it is great to be in a country where you can succeed if you work hard enough.

Maria Belen Destin is an ESOL student in the Adult Education Program at Northwest Florida State College. Her teacher is Diane Dunn.

Climbing and Feeling the Top

Close your eyes; breathe in the natural air, feel it on your face and moving your hair; open your arms and tell the world you are one of the billions of people living on the earth. With sensations in your heart and flashbacks in your mind, forget all the bad memories and keep the good ones. Then, when you open your eyes, you notice a huge wall of rock and you feel the wind rushing up on you from the valley below. Welcome to La Mojarrá, a wonderful climbing place in La Mesa de los Santos, Colombia, where our rewarding experience begins.

It's 2 p.m. on a sunny day. We start our adventure walking ahead down a mountain path, descending and trying not to fall. It's a special place where weekend climbers live the adventure of climbing in the beautiful Chicamocha Valley, where you can appreciate the blue sky and the huge mountain of rock with houses far in the distance. Twenty minutes later we arrive at our route. We're climbing a 36 foot route called "Music for Chameleons." Now you are sweating and your nerves are growing because the adrenaline in your blood is running so fast. We prepare our equipment and get ready for a worthwhile experience. You are nervous, but I tell you "don't worry. Just focus on reaching the top. Don't forget to repeat to yourself, 'I can do it!'"

Now you are in front of the big wall and you start to feel the energy of the climb. Here we go! You begin to climb, hands catching the rock above and feet balancing the weight of your body and you repeat to yourself, "I can do it!" You keep climbing and you're doing well, but some minutes later you start to feel the pressure because you can't find good holdings. You are in a difficult part and can't find good rocks to catch onto and only one foot is in a perfect place.

Now your positive mind is broken. You look down and see how high you are, thinking you might fall and you ask yourself, “what if I was climbing without equipment? Would I like to die falling or would I concentrate all my body and mind to live?”

You are nervous, sweating and feeling confused. There are climbers watching you, and one of them shows you the way to the climax of the route. You are afraid and frozen. Following the steps of the professional climber, you start to move and finally you see the movements in the rock, but you have to jump and catch a little piece of rock with both hands. Something happens in your body and you feel the energy to jump and catch that piece of rock. Now your legs are in the air. You are almost at the top, and with all your strength, you push your body up and finally you find the footing to support your weight. You keep climbing and finally you are at the top.

You breathe and happiness comes on you. You can't stop saying to yourself, “I did it! I can't believe it.” At 36 feet, you keep breathing and revitalizing yourself, appreciating the peaceful place with its magnificent landscape. As good as you feel now, I felt the same on the same climb, an experience that changed my life. Climbing is as real as life gets with all the challenges and goals we want to achieve. Never give up; keep working and you will finally be satisfied with life.

Stephania Duran is thankful for all the knowledge she has learned with her teacher, Nancy Gardner.

My Family

There are 4 members in my small, but beautiful family. First, there is my husband William. We have been together for 12 long years. Also there are two kids in my life. Each one is very special to me. First is my son William, who is 9 years old and my little daughter, Ashley who is 4.

My husband is very special to me because we work together as a team and we have a special connection with each other. We help and motivate each other to always do our best.

Especially in those moments when you feel down, it is good to know that you have a strong person next to you to help you carry on the heavy load of life. We are not just husband and wife; we are the better half of each other.

Now my son, William is in 3rd grade and his favorite class is math. He also likes to play video games and go swimming. He is full of energy and always tries his best at everything he does. This little guy always amazes me. I remember when he started school and he did not know the sound of the alphabet or how to read words, like most of the kids in his class. Two weeks after school started he learned the sounds and he was reading. I remember him wanting to achieve his goals, and for me that was a life lesson, to never give up without trying. My son is very special to me for so many reason. He is my first born. He also gives me the courage and motivation to keep working on my goals in life.

My little girl Ashley, is 4 years old. She is getting ready to go to head-start and she is very excited about it. She likes to watch the movie FROZEN and pretend that she is a princess. But not just a princess, she likes to pretend she is a princess with super powers. My little princess is one that knows karate and has magical powers. I guess you can say that my little princess is one a kind. Also she likes to play tea party and most of the time she is the doctor in the house. This little girl has been an inspiration to me because she is a very pleasant little girl.

In conclusion, each member of my family is special in their own way. My husband is my partner in life and the one person that I can count on for anything. Like they say, for good times and bad times we always have each other, no matter what. My son and my daughter are the best thing that ever happened to me. They give me courage and inspiration to keep pursuing my goals in life. My kids also gave me the opportunity to become a mother. At first, it was scary and something new for me. But once I held them in my arms, I felt proud and blessed to have been given the chance of a life time, to be a mother.

Francisca Espinoza is from Nicaragua, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

The Beauty of Art

“A picture is a poem without words.” With these words, Horace, a famous Italian poet, described art many years before Christ, and it is exactly how I feel about art. When I think about art, many images come to my mind: paintings, photos, sculptures, music, landscapes, books, etc. Art is just as big as human creativity, and it speaks as loud as a silent image.

Since the beginning of life, human beings have expressed their emotions, thoughts and dreams through art. In some sense, creating something is like life itself. It begins from something invisible, then, with love, effort, enthusiasm and patience, the artist perfects his work to be enjoyed by himself and everyone around it.

Many people have considered art like something surreal and mystical almost unreachable, but these days this concept is changing. Many cultural movements are making art accessible for everyone. You can not only find art in a museum. Art is in constant motion. It’s important to be awake and find it everywhere.

The challenge is then, find the beauty of art because there it is all around you. You have to open your eyes and heart to the colors, the sounds, the shapes, the textures, and the letters, even to the untold and unmade details.

Every time you contemplate a piece of art, you discover a unique meaning. It talks to you in many ways, and everyone will see and feel it in his own way. It’s in this moment when something that has been made by someone else becomes so personal, and suddenly you have discovered the beauty of art.

Adriana Fajardo Herrera is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Fighting Demons

Everyone fights a demon of some sort in their life. It takes a very strong person to be honest with themselves and face their demons. Changing habits is hard and takes a lot of will power and courage. I know of one such person.

A childhood friend was an addict most of his life. He left his wife for over six years alone to raise their two children. He didn't care about anything or anyone. He allowed his demon to control his life. It wasn't him making all the bad decisions; it was his demon, the addiction. But he was allowing it.

Today, he is clean and sober. He took back control of his life. Every day is a challenge for him, and his strong will power wins every time. I admire his current will to persevere through life. I see how he is aware of his feelings and emotions and is willing to confront them as well. His strength, determination and will power is winning the fight, and I am his biggest cheerleader.

Stephanie Fattaruso is studying for the high school equivalency test at the Fort Myers Institute of Technology under the Lee County Schools ACE program, and her teacher is Darlene Carrillo.

We Are Overcomers

My name is Elvira Flores. I am from Bolivia. The reason why I had to come to America is because of my two son's health conditions. They had asthma and the doctors in my country said that they could not do anything to help. So, we had to relocate to another country. It was a nightmare to leave my family and sell my beauty salon. By and by, we settled down in our new home. Life got a little easier when my children got to go to school. I found a job at a hotel and a place to live with my three children. Then I got my cosmetology license and started another job. Thirteen years later, my oldest son graduated from a university and was accepted to work at a bank, while my second son works as an electrical engineer.

Now, I have only one child left, my 16 year old daughter. I am proud of all my children. We experienced the difficulties together. Now we are enjoying the fruit of our hard work.

Elvira Flores attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Lifelong Learning

My name is Udo Johannes Fulland and this is my story. I am 62 years old, and I was born in Germany. I have had from the beginning to now, a hard and struggling life. I was 12 years old with 4 sisters when I found my father dead. After this accident my mother gave me some important advice. She said, “You can learn a job as a worker with no higher education.” I needed to earn money for my family, so when I was 14 years old I began my career as a printer. When I was 17 years old I finished learning this job. For 10 years I worked as a printer alternating shifts in morning, afternoon, and nights. After that time, I went to a management school by studying at night and on weekends for 5 years and graduated in printing. Then my career went up from just a worker to higher jobs, and I finished after 40 years. I became a CEO with more than 100 workers in a printing company. This job was hard, and I had responsibility for all those people and their families. During this time I was a trainer for professional development and training of employees in the printing industry.

Twenty years later, I began a turning point in my life. I was in Florida for skydiving and fell in love with this country. Now, I am learning English at the Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers and hope to complete the GED exam. The best thing for everyone is lifelong learning. It is never too late for learning!

Udo Johannes Fulland is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My Story

Travel is a word that people in my country do not hear frequently. That issue, together with many others, makes the population eager for opportunities. I have always dreamed of coming to the United States and living in this country. Finally, after a long wait, I am here, hoping my dreams and expectations will come true.

My whole life changed when I arrived to the U.S in November 2013. I have been in this country for just over a year, and I have done things that I had never thought I was going to do. In the area of education, I started taking English classes, getting a level three on my first test. I studied hard every day, and when the months passed, I moved to level five and then level six.

Once I completed level six, I felt confident enough to start taking GED classes. These classes have been somewhat difficult for me because some of the assignments were new. The official GED test has four sections, and in a period of five months I have already passed three tests. Therefore, I think that if I keep working hard, I will be done soon.

Another accomplishment that I did in this period of time was to learn how to drive, something that everyone does, but that I had never thought of. In addition, I recently got my first job in a clothing store. That was something important for me because I am starting to take more responsibilities. Since I began working on my education, I have been thinking about becoming a pharmacy technician. That plan can be at the beginning, but maybe in the future I will decide to go to college.

My life has always been changing, but I never thought I was going to have a change like this one. The U.S. is a country that changes the life of many people, and I am not the exception. I welcome changes in my life if they are good, and this country has definitely brought me “changes.” Happiness and better opportunities are what many people want. Moving to the U.S. was hard because I had to leave my family, friends, and reminders of my native country.

I do not regret coming to this country. All the opposite! I am very grateful with my life and all the opportunities that are given to me. This is my story in just over a year in the United States; perhaps it may sound familiar to other people from my country that came to the U.S. for a better life.

Carlos Garcia is a GED student at the Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. His teacher is Valerie Guillaume.

The Most Difficult Job

My name is Cristina Garcia, I am 30 years old. I got married at the age of 15. Things started to go wrong and I decided to get a divorce when I was 29 years old. That's when I started the most difficult job I've ever had - being mother and father to my two awesome kids. I have to admit that it has not been easy. My family is not here and I don't have many friends, so I'm alone on this journey. Some days I want to give up and leave it all behind me, but I can't because my kids need me. It is really incredible how having kids can change a woman's life.

At night my children and I take a little walk around the neighborhood; we talk about their day at school and they ask me about mine at work. My son is always joking and teasing with us; he's so funny. On my days off we have a movie night. We make some popcorn and bring our pillows and blankets to the living room in front of the television and then the fun begins. Sometimes my daughter falls asleep in the middle of the movie. I really enjoy the time that I can spend with them, and I just can't imagine my life without them. I love my kids with all my heart and I love them just the way they are.

Life is not easy and there is not a book to tell you how to live it. Being a single mother has made me a stronger and more responsible woman. I've learned a lot from this experience and I would not change it for anything. I'm trying my best every day to be a better person and a better mother for my children.

Cristina Garcia is a student at Parent Academy in Fort Pierce, Florida. Her teachers are Joan Moore and Isabella Escalona.

My Personal Story

I was born in Monterrey, Mexico on March 26, 1975. I am the second of four siblings. My father was a craftsman by profession. My mother was a housewife. We lived very modestly. When we were little and went to the elementary school, my mother took us lunch every day at recess. We used to run to the door; she was there waiting for us with flour taquitos and hot chocolate, depending on the weather. Sometimes she took us enchiladas and lemonade. That was delicious!

Every day after school we went straight home, my mom was there always happy and had food ready for us. In the afternoon, we used to go for walks with her and gathered firewood or soil for her plants. Sometimes we went to a nearby farm to buy fresh cow's or goat's milk. We loved it! There was also a river close to our house, and we could walk to it. Sometimes she washed our clothes in the river, and we helped. Fun was always after doing homework. Near my house there was also a soccer field where my dad played in the afternoon. We all went to watch him. My childhood was very healthy and fun. It's full of beautiful memories together with my parents and siblings.

Today I live in Miami, in the USA. I have three beautiful children and a husband who has a great sense of humor. He is always kidding me, saying he took the place of my father, because he feeds me and protects me. My brothers are now adults, also with their own families. My mom lives in the same place that I grew up. She remains funny and charming, my father is not that big and strong and man who used to tuck me in bed. He has become a sweet and tender, thin grandfather, but he keeps that smile that I saw when I was a little girl. I can definitely say that my life is excellent and very blessed.

Yolanda Gaytan is currently a student at Miami Dade College for three semesters; she has a husband and three children. Her professor is ZulyRosello.

My Life

Hello my name is Dominga Hernandez. I was born in Mexico in the State of Oaxaca. My mom lives in Oaxaca with one of my sisters. My father died when I was fifteen years old. I have six siblings and I came to the United State to work at fifteen years old to help my family.

I left my country when I was very young because our economic situation was very difficult at that time. My mother, at that time had too many problems. The death of my father, along with economic necessity forced me to come work here in the United States. My siblings stayed in Mexico with my mother. I was alone in a country where I did not know anyone. Everything was different especially the language.

When I arrived in the United States my first job here was in the fields collecting different kinds of fruit. This work was very hard for me because I had to work no matter what the climate was at that time. For three years I worked in the fields picking fruits and vegetables. As for women it is very hard work. But thank God I was able to get ahead.

Fortunately, I met a good man who is now my husband. We have been married for eleven years. We are a nice family of five and we have three children, two girls and a boy. Together we work hard for our children to have a better future.

In Mexico I had many needs, and I decided to take a dangerous road to come to the United State. Thank God I am doing well and I have a beautiful family. Now, I attend Dunbar Community School to improve my English. Once I complete level six I will earn my GED. In the future, I hope to have a better job to support my family. “United States of America”, thank you for the opportunities you have given me and my family. Our lives are slowly changing for the good; although the struggle continues.

Dominga Hernandez is from Mexico, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Let Me Tell You about Chris

Once lived a boy named Chris. As a child, Chris parents always wanted nothing but the best for him. They were very well determined to make Chris out of a successful young man. Mrs. Paula, working at a hospital, who is known as Chris mother, had seen and knew all the damages that drugs and alcohol could do to a person's life. Mrs. Paula never wanted Chris to go down the path of destruction caused by using drugs and alcohol.

Chris was a very smart young man when it came to school. He had the top honors in freshman, sophomore, and junior years. He was also known as being very talented, athletic, and known as the most valuable player in the whole school.

After a party one night, Chris never knew that his life was going to change so drastically. Many of the other boys at Chris's school were very jealous of him. Chris was a very handsome young man, and all the girls at his school wished that they could be his girlfriend.

While at the party, Chris was peer pressured into having a drink, which was spiked with a molly; known as a date rape drug. He drank the first cup and was fascinated from the instant high that it gave him. He then began to drink cup after cup. Becoming drunk and hallucinating, the poor child didn't even recognize his own name.

Given a ride home that night, by one of his former classmates; they rang the doorbell, and left Chris lying on his mothers' front porch. Mrs. Paula opened the door and found her son lying in his vomit. Embarrassed by her son's actions, Mrs. Paula refused to call the paramedics. She checked his pulse, then helped him into the house.

Chris then began to start skipping school when his mother would go to work. All he wanted to do was pop mollies and drink alcohol. This was something that Mrs. Paula never wanted to happen to her son.

With failing grades and dropping out of high school, Mrs. Paula kicked Chris out of her house. With no place to go and no one to turn to, Chris's new home is now living under a bridge. His job is holding up a sign that says "will work for food."

The kids today are our future, so if you don't want to end up like Chris; homeless and on drugs, don't use drugs and alcohol. Don't be a fool, stay in school. Everyone deserves an education. Without an education, you will not make it very far in life.

Cleo Higgins is a student in Mr. Scott's GED course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

My Friend Quessa

My name is Romaine Johnson. I was born in Miami FL on October 12, 1993 and now live in Fort Myers, Florida. My family is from Portland, Jamaica. I am a 20 year old female who is a mother first and a hard worker second.

My family and I moved From Miami to Lehigh Acres FL eight years ago. The move for my family and I was a big change for us. I still travel to Miami to visit my family and friends. I love Miami and went back every chance I got. I had a very close friend that I meet in the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah Witness when I was about five, her name was Jac'quessa English. Quessa Passed Away October 17, 2007. I will never forget that day, it's when my best friend, a big sister, and my role model died. After her death, I stopped visiting Miami so often. Now I visit Miami every other month.

At fifteen, I got pregnant with my first child. I had my daughter at sixteen years old. Today, I have three children, Ca'marri (4), Coroy Jr (3), and Casi (1). I was young having them and I love all my children dearly. Now it's time for me to change my life around to better for us. I am a single parent and I'm taking care of my children alone.

I am a full time worker. My job title is a Certified Nurse Assisting. I'm employed with Bright Star Care, a home care agency. My job duty is going into different client homes providing them personal care, light housekeeping, etc.

I love working in the medical field and helping the elderly. Today, I am twenty years old and a single mother. Working a full time job with three children, I realized it was time for me to go back to school and get my GED. It wasn't a bad decisions for me to do it has been one of the best I made and years. Therefore I can better my life for me and my children and go to college when I receive my GED. I'm already in the medical field, so I want to join the nursing field and become a RN. I want to become a homeowner and just have a better life for me and my family.

Ms. Hicks-Wiley was Romaine Johnson's teacher at Dunbar Community School.

Getting my GED

My name is Catherine, and I am a single parent. Over the years of struggling with raising eight children, putting them through school, and entering college, I had many starts and stops for myself. Now that my children are all grown up I would like to finish what I started for myself. I don't have the education I need to make the income to pay all my bills, so I have gone back to school to increase my education. I am pursuing my education, and with faith in my creator, I know I can achieve it. Happy times are ahead—getting my GED and then going on to college. When I earn my bachelor's degree in science, I will be a happy person, a qualified person, and a proud mother. I'm very happy that the education I need is available and there are people that care that no one is left behind. I am going to take advantage of something good.

Catherine Jones is a student a Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Chinese Red and White

If you ask me, “What colors are symbolic in your country?” I will say a simple answer. Red shouts “hong” and means good things; white shouts “bai” and means bad things.

Red symbolizes good fortune and happiness. It is found everywhere during Chinese New Year and other holidays and family gatherings, such as a wedding days. It also symbolizes success, such as a singer who is very popular; we say he is red. It also symbolizes beautiful women.

Red is strictly forbidden at funerals as it is traditionally a symbolic a color of happiness. However, as the names of the dead were previously written in red, it may be considered offensive to use red ink for Chinese names in contexts other than official seals.

White symbolizes death and is used predominantly in funerals in Chinese culture. Ancient Chinese people wore white clothes and hats only when they mourned for the dead. It also symbolizes failure, stupidity, no benefits available, such as failure in war. The military always uses a white flag to surrender. It also symbolizes shallow knowledge, lack of exercise, not deep experience.

Now, in China red still symbolizes happiness, white symbolizes mourning, but also they intermingle with Western culture. Sometimes red symbolizes the blood, such as red revolution, and white can symbolize brightness, purity, and fulfillment.

Chang Li is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

From Colombia to USA: My New Life

My new life started when I came to the USA with my daughters, Ma Paula and Valeria. Now 16 and 20-years old, my daughters' adaptation to this American system and culture has been easier and more comfortable than for me. Despite taking many English courses in Colombia and spending a lot of money, when I came to the USA, I felt frustrated, because I couldn't communicate with other people. I needed to live deeply in my new home in Palm Harbor, FL and in this new society. Then I found the Palm Harbor Library where they offered me the opportunity to "Learn English as a second language with individualized teaching, one tutor for each student". I applied to the literacy program and a sweet lady named Tania found a tutor just for me.

Since then, I have seen improvements in my life, in my work, in my daily routine, in any place and in any moment. Now I feel comfortable going alone wherever I go, because I can communicate with others and others can understand me! For one of my classes, my tutor, Bernadette, and I went to the thrift store. Karlina, a woman who has known me since I moved here and who also owns the thrift store, noticed that I can speak English now! Having better fluency and literacy in English has been key to having more meaningful conversations with English-speaking friends and strangers.

The literacy program has also improved my life, because now I enjoy reading articles, newspapers, and magazines. I can watch TV shows, movies, and the news and understand the stories. By learning English, I already have better access to a great wealth of entertainment and knowledge and will be able to have a greater cultural understanding.

Learning English has also opened doors for my family. Recently, I helped my daughter apply for a volunteer position at the hospital. Valeria hopes to work with patients with Down Syndrome one day. Because Valeria is only 16-years old and a minor, she needed me to accompany her to the volunteer information session and give parental permission. After learning how important this volunteer experience will be towards her career goals, of course I gave her permission to volunteer.

This experience has taught me that by learning English, I have helped open up opportunities for both me and my daughters.

Learning English has been challenging and time consuming, but I am more motivated than ever to improve my English. I will be an ESL student for the rest of my life, and that's okay. The English language is like a window to our world. Literacy has been the key to socially, culturally, and educationally life-changing opportunities for me, and I thank God every day for my new life.

Diana Lopez is a student with the Palm Harbor Literacy Council.

Literacy; the Key to My Journey

In 2001 my family and I moved to Florida leaving behind political problems in my country, Colombia, we needed to start a new life. In the beginning my husband and I had jobs where not knowing the language was not a problem. These were not quality jobs, the salaries weren't good, and they were very hard jobs. At that moment I felt like an illiterate person, even though I went to college in my country. I wasn't able to speak, read or write in English. How would we get better jobs or help our children in school? It was then we realized that if we wanted to get better job opportunities and improve our family's lifestyle we needed to learn English as soon as possible. Literacy would be the key to our success!

In 2002 I heard about the literacy program at the library. When I came I learned about the program, I filled the application out, and one month later I was contacted by Tania, she interviewed me and explained to me about the program. Soon she had a tutor for me. First, I had George, a very sweet man who with books and cassettes helped me to learn the basics of English. I started with the alphabet, reading and writing small sentences. At that time I was pregnant and it was hard for me to understand the papers from the doctor, so he helped me with the information about my baby and I. After my baby girl was born, I had to stop my classes because my family needed me.

After 4 years, I came back to the program to improve my language skills. My second tutor was a lady named Teresa. She was from Cuba and thanks to the program she learned English, so she wanted to give something back, by helping others with the language. At that time my English was getting better. I was able to read and write at a more advanced level. She helped me a lot with pronunciation. It's still the most difficult part for me.

Then I got a job; however, between my family and work there was little time to study so I had to stop again. Then, in March of 2014 I decided to return to the program because my children were older and I had more time for myself. I had a better job, and I wanted speak, read, and have even better opportunities. Now, I have Eddie as my tutor, he is a very nice and funny guy. His mother was a tutor also, so in her memory he decided to do something to help someone like me. I know my English has improved but to learn a language takes a lot of time and practice and he is helping me with the writing and pronunciation using The Voyager Guide books.

Today, I want to take this opportunity to say thanks to the library, to the wonderful people that make this possible and for developing this program because literacy is indeed the key, the key to being successful. Now I feel more confident, I can read the information that the school sends me home, go to a doctor's appointment or have a job interview. Literacy makes a difference in everybody's life and also makes a difference in this beautiful country that is the home of so many people from around the world. Thanks to everyone, you are so appreciated. You really are making a difference in many people lives, and I hope to give back what you have given me in the future.

Saida Loaiza-Ramirez is a student with Palm Harbor Literacy Council.

Life

Growing up as child, life seemed to be so easy. I mean, I had everything figured out. I knew exactly who and what I wanted to be when I grew up. I had dreams of getting married before having kids, with a nice house, fancy car, and a job as a nurse taking care of people. But with the choices and decisions I made, that didn't happen. My name is Veronica. I was raised in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I was always an A honor roll student that loved school. At the age of fourteen, my mom sent me to an alternative school called Leadership Academy, so I can work at a faster pace for my diploma. I had to start school late because of my birthday. I actually liked the school at the time, and it was fun. I mean when you're going to an alternative school, you're considered an adult (going to school with students as old as 22 even though I was considered to still be in the 8th grade. I met one of my best friends there. Her name is Amber. We were like Bonnie and Clyde. We started skipping school, partying, not going home when told, basically doing whatever we wanted and when we wanted to.

At the age of fifteen, I met a boy named Dwayne. My, oh my, was he fine! The complexion of his skin was dark brown and he had the body of LL Cool J. He had a nice brush cut, with golds in his mouth, with all the nice jewelry, and Jordan written all over his swag including his shoes. At the time when I met him, you couldn't tell me anything. I thought I was grown. And one night of pleasure between him and I, caused a whole lot of pain. I ended up pregnant and he ended up running off. I was blessed with a handsome baby boy who I also named Dwayne. He was the tiniest, cutest little thing I had ever seen. He came out weighing six pounds and seven ounces. I had to drop out of school to raise him. I had no financial support, so I turned to the streets. In my mind, my son didn't ask to be here so, by all means necessary, I was going to make sure I provided for us. There went all of my hopes and dreams. After a while of being a single mother, I met the love of my life, Ryan. He was my prince charming. He loved me and my son as his own. He got me out of the streets and back in school. Life has its ups and downs but it's really up to you to decide who and where you want to be. But no matter where life takes you, it's never too late to make a change for the better.

Eunequa Lumsdonis a student at Atlantic Technical College-Arthur Ashe Campus.

Second Chance

AIDS is not a death sentence, not today, not anymore. With today's medication, one can live for years. When I was told I had AIDS, I just knew that my life was over. I did crazy things. I took all kinds of chances with my life. I have a friend that told me that he believes in me, but I did not believe in myself. I never told the truth to any one because I did not want to be mistreated by others and because of my drug use, I did not want to become an outcast. At times, I smoked crack for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and stayed up for days. A part of me wanted to die, but God has something else in store for me: a second chance.

Coming to prison saved my life and also made me see that here was life in me. I know that AIDS is just a name not a face; I have a life ahead of me. If you look at me today, I look like anyone else. I tell my story to so many others. There is no more hiding or shame, no more telling people that I have cancer because of the hair loss, the weight loss, or why the color of my skin looked ash gray. I am taking my second chance at life. God has been good to me. I am now a new person inside and outside. Life is not for the taking, but for the living.

Linda Lynch is a student in Ms. McCall's SISTA course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

My Story

The history of India begins as far back as 75,000 years ago. In India there are several languages. We have 122 major languages and 1599 others. The Constitution of India does not give any language the status of national language. The official languages of the Republic of India are Hindi and English. The culture of India includes languages, religions; family structure and marriage, architecture, cuisine, arts, and clothing. These are all very different compared to the USA.

I was born into a small village in the Indian world. I will share with you my experience in India. In my village, I'm the only lady that has post graduate education with a Masters of Computer Applications. My parents are illiterate.

They were very young when they married, and I was born after one and a half years into their married life. My parents sacrificed their lives to make my life better. I have two brothers and my grandmother. She is the heart of my family and my role model. We are all very affectionate.

In India life is very different compared to the USA. We eat fresh food every day. We don't know about food labels nor the calories, fat, and sodium contained in food. We cook food from scratch. Here, everything is ready made. Life is easy here.

I got married on November 30, 2011 in India, and came here on a dependent visa on December 17, 2011. Due to my visa, I'm not able to work. I don't know how to drive, so my husband helps. I tried to get volunteer work in my field, but I didn't succeed, so I decided to improve my communication skills, as well as American English slang, by searching online English learning websites. I found an adult English class at the Town and Country library, so I called the librarian, and I made a reservation to take the class. The process to get a tutor took six months. During that time, I went to other adult English classes at the library. I attended those classes for a few weeks and loved all the tutors in that class. My favorite one was Terri.

Then after, I got a call from the library, and they arranged a tutor for me. Her name is Heather, and she is very friendly and patient. When I make mistakes with pronunciation, she corrects me until I can get the right pronunciation. I like her teaching skills very much. By following her teaching, I get a lot of confidence. This is very helpful for my career. Thank you very much to all my well-wishers.

Ramadevi Maram is in the Hillsborough Literacy Council ESL program, instructed by Heather Farrell, at the Town and Country Library. She holds a Masters in Computer Applications from India.

It Happened To Me

Growing up for me wasn't easy. I had to learn everything the hard way. Starting as a little girl, being sexually, physically, emotionally, and mentally abused by the ones I trusted and loved the most: my family. I had to learn right from wrong all on my

own. I didn't know the definition of a normal life because I was too young to understand anything that was happening to me.

It all began when my mother became mentally unstable from walking in on my father cheating on her. My mother tried to kill me with a knife, and my father walked in and stopped her. My father went to court and got a restraining order on her. She was no longer in my life for that point in time.

My father began to be on all kinds of drugs. His main choice was crack cocaine. My father married the woman he cheated on my mother with. She became my step mom. My step mom was also messed up with drugs. She had three kids of her own. They were so messed up on drugs that they didn't feed me, shower me, provide for me, or even take care of me at all. I had to beg on the streets for a living. I ran the streets.

Then my father got locked up because he had crack cocaine in his possession. So then I was left with my grandma. After that my father had no choice but to give his rights of custody up to my mother. So the judge gave custody back to my mother. I eventually got in trouble in school, mainly for fighting. My mother started abusing me. She always called the cops when I got angry. I started catching charges since age 11.

I've been in the system for over 6 years. I've been to two different programs. My mother isn't even in my life any more. My father has straightened his life out. My father is sober and has custody of me now.

Since I've been actually realizing that I don't want to live like that anymore, I have been enrolled in a GED® schooling program at Santa Rosa Adult School. I have completed several things on my probation, I'm searching for a job, and life has been much better for me. I should officially be out of the system in March. I only have two months left. I have set goals for my future now. I want to become a professional chef. I have things in my life I've accomplished. I feel like the things I've been through have shaped who I am today, but the things I've been through don't make me.

Jessica R. Miller is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

My Life, Through God's Guidance

I was born in West Africa, Nigeria. I lost my father when I was four years old. After my father's death, my mother couldn't take care of me and my four siblings, so she sent us to live with different relatives. I managed to complete elementary school. I couldn't speak, write or read the English language. After elementary school, I moved in with my uncle, who promised he would let me continue my education in the city. But I did not go to school; instead, he brought me to his girlfriend's house where I stayed and worked like a slave. I was eleven years old doing the work of an adult. I had no time to play. She beat me and gave me spoiled food.

One day she told me to leave her house and that I could no longer live with her. I was full of joy. Now I could go back home to my mother. But my uncle had another plan. He took me to his house and handed me over to his second wife. It was like going from the frying pan to the fire. She starved me and sometimes I would not eat for three days. One morning, I told my uncle that on Christmas I was going to visit my mother. To my surprise he said okay without being angry with me.

But I did not go to my mom; instead, I returned to the aunt I used to live with, hoping for a change. She provided for my basic needs. However, she did not prepare me for life. Her promise to send me to school or to learn a skillful trade was not fulfilled. One day I dreamt that I saw somebody who asked me to marry him. I dreamt the same dream several times. I believe God was leading me somewhere. But where? I kept praying.

I left my aunt and went back home to my mom and siblings. Even though I was happy to be back home, I did not know what was next for my life. Without money, it was difficult to survive. It was a difficult situation, but I never lost hope. I started selling bread to survive. One day, in my dream a man told me to stop selling bread. It was a difficult decision. I did not want to quit selling, but after that dream nobody was buying my bread.

So, following that encounter, being prompted in my dream, I fasted three days and prayed. Years later, true to my dreams, I got married to my husband who came from America.

I came to America not knowing how to speak English. I enrolled in ESOL and then in Adult Basic Education. Presently, I am in the GED program. My goal is to go to college.

Kehinde Olagbiyan is a wife and mother of two children, is enrolled in GED classes at Seminole State College of Florida. Her teacher is Cynthia Godby.

A Special Passenger

Life is like a train trip, with lots of stops, with changes on the way and sometimes even with accidents! When our life starts, it is like a train ride. We board a train, and we meet our parents, and believe that they are always traveling next to us. Later in some stops they get off leaving us alone on the trip as other important people get in, like our sisters and brothers, children, friends and the love of our life. Some of them get off leaving a permanent vacuum in us, just as they merit our consideration. Others leave unnoticed; we don't realize their chairs are empty. Our train trip has many surprises, some joys, some sadness; some people are waiting and others say goodbye. I think it is important to have a very good relationship with all the passengers on your trip and offer them the best of us.

I would have like to invite some of the passengers who got off of the train, for instance my grandparents, for a nice dinner. However, I have some special memories of a special person who I would like to share a nice dinner with. Let me talk about that special person. I started my fourth level of English at the AEC, in 2005. My teacher taught me how to prepare a resume, but approximately two months later I moved to New Jersey, and I wanted to work there, but my English was very poor; the only thing I had was my resume. One day I was called for an interview, for a filing position at the office, and the supervisor saw my resume and decided to hire me and offer me the opportunity because I had a lot of experience.

Later, he promoted me to a bookkeeping position, but I had problems because I didn't understand when he wanted some of the account's reports. It was as if God took an angel and put it in the office to help me.

His name was Eddie. He was from Poland, and he didn't understand Spanish, but he helped me a lot explaining once or twice what I needed to learn with patience. He was always next to me when I needed help. Two months later my boss raised my salary and expressed how happy he was with my job. One year later, Eddie had health problems and went to the hospital. He never returned back to work because a few weeks later he died. I couldn't visit him, because he lived in New York.

I worked for the company six years more, until I returned to West Palm Beach again. Believe it or not he was like an angel to me. How I would have liked to share a nice dinner with him to show my appreciation.

We do not know in which train station we are getting off. That's the reason we have to live in the best way, thankful, loving, forgiving, and giving our best to others, so when our turn comes to leave our seat empty, we leave good memories to those who continue traveling on the train.

Omaira Parrales is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Childhood

If I could change one thing about my childhood, it would be that my mother would have never been a drug addict. Due to the fact that she was a drug addict, it made it very hard for me to get an education, to succeed in life, and most importantly to have shelter.

During my entire life, I was taken in and out of school districts because of my attendance. I would miss over 100 days of school each year. With missing school so much, I was held back in the first grade. When I was in 8th grade, I was taken away from my mother; my sister received custody of me. When I approached my first year of tenth grade, the school found out I was using a false address; they transferred me over to Elizabeth High School where I then needed a hepatitis B shot, which I never got.

Because I never got the shot, I was dropped from the high school automatically. Once I was dropped from the high school, I took my GED test and passed; I immediately registered for college, but they needed my mother's W2 form. Since drugs were always her main priority, she refused to give me the W2 because she is a type of person who doesn't like to see her children succeed in life.

While my mother was always so busy getting high, my sisters and I needed to make sure we always had shelter. We went from living in an apartment building without any electric or heat to living in a hotel. We moved place after place with no stability.

In conclusion, I am so glad with the person that I have become considering all of the difficulties I have gone through. As a mother myself, it has all been a learning experience that I will never let my daughter go through. Drugs will ruin a person, a family, education, and a home.

Ashley Patella has her GED; however, she needs a high score on her TABE to get in college. Mrs. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

Caution Handle with Care

We must take care in what we say and do to our kids. Some teachers don't understand that what they do or say can make kids think that they are dumb. As a young boy, school did not come easy for me. But for my three older brothers it was so easy. Being the last of five, all my teachers thought that school should come easy to me.

Things got so bad that I would play like I was sleeping to get out of reading time. Being six or seven it was the only way to get out of it. When I was around twelve, I was better at reading but still I did not understand what I was reading. I was still uneasy. I loved football, watching or playing. But to play I had to keep up with my studies. I don't know how I did it but I did. I was good at football, so some teachers let me pass even if I did not do well. Being one of the best on the team, they all looked up to me to tell them what to do. "Look for the run on this play or a pass on that play." Things were looking up.

I had found what I could do with my life. One day out of the blue came a popping. It was my leg. All I had hoped for was gone.

After about two or three years of getting in and out of trouble and being a bad boy, I looked in to the Marine Corps. In the corps, they showed me how to cook. After being a cook for some time, my time was up. I got lucky, I got a job as a cook.

I guess what I am saying is if I did not have it so hard at the start, it would not have been so difficult. I wonder what I could have been if I was not behind all the time. Don't make our kids think they are dumb or the last to understand.

Willie Price is a learner in the Alachua County Library Adult Literacy Program. His tutor is Janice Ladd.

A Road Trip

Last summer vacation, my family and I traveled to Kansas. It was a wonderful experience. During the trip, we made different stops at different locations. But one of the locations impacted me the most, Battleship Memorial Park in Mobile, Alabama. During the stop, we went inside the Battleship to explore and learn. Once inside, we saw the machines that were used to drive and maintain the Battleship. In addition, we saw the weapons used to protect the Battleship. Besides the weapons and the machinery to run and maintain the ship, we also saw all the rooms where the crewmen of the ship stayed. The rooms had the proper equipment for the survival of the crewmen. Another thing that I enjoyed seeing was the vast crops of corn and wheat rows. This was an experience that I enjoyed and one that I will never forget.

Abigail Quiroz is a student at Aparicio-Levy Technical College in Ms. Smith's ESOL class. Abigail is from Mexico and now lives in the Tampa area with her family.

A Personal Story

Every day when my wife and I come to Gary Adult High School to study English, we pass by two cemeteries. One is a Spanish Cemetery, a gated but small one for Austrian immigrants from Spain. The other cemetery is a big and open, private cemetery. When we are driving along the street, in front of this big cemetery, my mind goes back to a personal experience that happened in Caracas, Venezuela in the 1980s.

My brother-in-law, CJ, who lives in Venezuela, decided to move their relatives' dead bodies from an old cemetery of Caracas, to a new one, after 30 years of being buried. He never thought that it would be as if he was seeing them the way they were alive. CJ's relatives were his father, his grandparents and his uncle, who emigrated from Spain to Venezuela during the Spanish Civil War. His father was a lawyer and his grandfather and uncle were doctors.

All of them were from Spain. They died when CJ was only five years old, and consequently, he had never remembered their relatives alive.

After a legal procedure, he proceeded to move their bodies. First, the cemetery workers opened the coffins. Three bodies--his father, uncle, and his grandmother--were in perfect condition, even though they had been buried for so long. His father and his uncle had their eyes opened. Their eyes were blue. One of his uncle's shoes was broken. However, his grandfather's body was decayed and only bones were found. So, in his 30s, CJ could see his father and relatives for the first time.

Now, when I pass along the big cemetery every day, I wonder how many people buried here are in that same condition like my brother-in-law's relatives, buried in Caracas.

Jacobo Reyes Romiro is an ESOL student at Gary adult High School. His teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

My Life Experiences

My name is Alejandro Rivas. I had an accident last year in February and it's been hard, but I'm trying to get ahead and continue with my life. I plan to recover and continue my work as before the accident. I want to learn from my difficult experience, have a different life view, and move forward with my goals.

It is hard because I can't lift heavy stuff or go up high. I hope that over time I can become the person I was before the accident. My best experience since the accident has been to return to school to learn English and be able to make myself understand more people.

The best part that changed in my life is that now I'm enjoying my family and friends. I did not do this before; it fills me with satisfaction now. I have time to be with them and travel to see many places. I enjoy every moment with them because the children grow up quickly.

I have many goals I would like to accomplish in my life. I want to support my children so they can continue their studies and fulfill their goals to succeed in life. Also, I want to buy my first house so my family may be stable. Next, I want to learn to drive truck and be able to drive from state to state. I would like to drive in the mountains as soon as I can return to work.

Lastly, I learned how to appreciate my family and trying to spend more time with them and not devote any more of my work because they need me as I need them.

Alejandro Rivas is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

I Am Not Fearful Anymore

My name is Yesica Rivera. I am from Mexico. I have been here for nine years. I have been learning in different schools and in many different states but I left because I fear that I would not understand anything. When I got home, I was frustrated. Then I told myself that if I never do something to break this fear, I will not ever reach my goal and master the English language.

I am thankful to my family, especially my husband, who always gives me unconditional support in my education. This is the reason why I decided to return to class. On my first day, I thought it would be difficult but it was not because the teacher made all of us feel at ease. She built the confidence that we will all succeed if we are focused, hardworking, and do our part well.

I want to tell my classmates never to give up. We all have the ability to learn. With the help of great teachers and full support from our love ones, we can do it. Looking back, I could see many things that I have not performed. Now, I am moving forward and will not look back again.

Yesica Rivera attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Who Are We?

At various times since we were children we had many questions: who are we? Why were we born into this world? Even though a lot of time has passed since our births, many of us could not find answers to our questions. Some people have decided not to investigate, and they have let their lives drag by without goals and dreams. I am different.

I am a seeker of who I am, my potentials and what I came to do in this great life. I am sure that would not be easy; no one said it would be. But I have my hopes and my aspirations. I will find answers to my questions. I will start by looking inside of me and recognizing who I am. In this way, when I have gotten to know who I truly am, then I can understand and accept those around me. I will analyze my every step and proceed with caution.

I will think before I speak or act, so that I will not be reckless with my words and hurt others. If I do hurt them, I will ask for forgiveness and love. I will practice this all the time in my life. I will reject hatred and bitterness and cling to a pure and clean heart. When time has passed, I expect to have accomplished my goals; live a full and happy life, and surround myself with people who love me.

I would have found the answers to my questions. I would have had the pleasure to have met and known all the people that I care about. I would have realized the best of me in all of my days. I would have given lots of love to everyone and made this world a better place.

Laritza Rodriguez Moya is an ESOL student. Her tutor is Dr. Phyllis Chandler.

My Journey

I am an only child. I started learning classical ballet and violin when I was three years old. I thought about using my artistic talent for my future because I enjoyed being creative. When I was fifteen, I knew I wanted to dance for the Takarazuka Revue Company, which is a very famous musical company in Japan. I studied and practiced harder than ever before by dancing, singing, and acting for two years. When I was seventeen, there was a huge earthquake called the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which happened on January 17, 1995. My house and family were OK, but I lost a few classmates. I was shocked, and my hometown was in chaos. After the earthquake, I knew others had lost their lives and I wanted to make my future positive, so I enrolled in Takarazuka.

Takarazuka, which has five troops each with over 80 actresses, is an all-female musical company. This company is so busy and has two big main theaters in Hyogo and Tokyo. In addition, the company tours in Japan and in other countries. Sometimes, I didn't have enough time to rest my body. However, I learned that effort is more important. Also, I formed a bond of friendship with other dancers from Takarazuka which was like a second home to me for many years.

When I was in Takarazuka, I had some opportunities for travel, one of which was to Bali Island, Indonesia. During the travel, I met my future husband, who was a chef in America and happened to be my best friend's friend. Four years later we got married, and I came to America in 2006. Living in America, the language was harder than I thought, and I regret that I didn't learn English before. Eventually, I had the courage to knock on the door of an ESOL department and enroll in classes.

I have been in GED classes for over three years. When I started, I couldn't follow the class very well, but now I can follow. I passed the Math Reasoning and Science GED tests last year, and now I'm focusing on Social Studies and Reasoning through Language Arts. During the past three years, I've thought deeply about my future. I'm thankful for my excellent teachers because I now have confidence to reach my goal. My next step is to go to college to become a Nutritionist or Dietitian.

In Japan, I'd never thought deeply about my life and what I wanted to do. When I came to America, I began to think about what I could do with my future. I realized that I needed to study English so that I can speak well, write well, achieve my goal, and enjoy my life in America.

Urara Sakurada is enrolled in GED classes at Seminole State College, and her teacher is Cynthia Godby.

My Personal Story

My name is Leocadia Saldana- Angel. I am a student at Dunbar Community School in the District of Lee County. I am studying to get my GED. I want my GED because I want to succeed, get a higher education and be a role model for my daughter, Jailyln.

When I was fifteen years old, my family decided to immigrate to the United States. At the beginning of November, we arrived in the United States. They enrolled me in a school because I was too young to work.

I remember my first day of School as if it was yesterday. Because of the language barrier, it was very difficult for me to ask any question or to ask for help. I didn't understand a single word of English. For these reasons, I started to pay attention to the teacher and started learning English. As result, I received a certificate of accomplishment from Hardee Senior High School in 2010.

By June of 2010, I got married to Raul who I met in my sophomore year of high school. After a year of being together as spouses, we were able to buy our own house.

Later, we made the decision to have a child, our precious girl, born on November 07 2012. After watching a T.V. program on Child Care, I decided to work with young children. Each time I applied for a position in Child Care, I was asked about my education. I could not say, I finished high school because I didn't have a diploma. I realized that I need my GED. So today I'm working hard to get my G.E.D.

A GED Diploma will allow me to have a career in Child Care, give me a better life, be a role model for my daughter, and give my daughter a better future.

Leocadia Saldana is stay-at-home mother with a beautiful daughter and a wonderful husband. I am enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. My teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

Finding Happiness in True Love

I never was so nervous by a phone call; a week of suspense. We wondered how we would care for this new member coming to the family, but once again we waited an extra day for her homecoming. My brother was so anxious for her arrival, and bought all the things a baby needs for the first days. My brother's girlfriend called us constantly, but not with the good news we wanted to hear, the day we would meet the baby.

The next morning everything went smoothly; I was in my room and a shrill cry woke me up. I hurriedly ran through the house until I found my brother. He brought "Perlita" in his arms, wrapped in her baby blanket. Immediately the first thing I saw were those blue eyes that looked at me so tenderly, as if I knew her a lifetime.

Perlita was the most beautiful puppy, and she taught me a lesson about true love, because I never loved anyone like that. My first day with the puppy was the most beautiful experience in caring for a small life. I was nervous and I didn't know what to do if it cried. I gave her food according to the schedule that my brother left me. She was very naughty and played a moment and then slept for a long time.

We love without knowing. We adopted her and filled her with lots of love, and unintentionally Perlita became a member of the family. In return the puppy gave us her love. She recognizes each of us and amid growth we have gone through several scares.

She fills our days with happiness and new stories, but, I must confess, that it was our worst day of life when we thought she was going to die. Her vitality had declined, she didn't eat, and complained of pain all day. She just wanted to sleep and do nothing. We were so worried, we decided to take her to the veterinary. After a few days, she didn't improve. We were concerned, so we decided to try the veterinarian one more time and this time the answer was positive. Perlita had a broken tooth and this was the cause of her pain.

Perlita now is eight months old, and is always was happy and running everywhere, expressing the love and joy she feels living with us. I believe that this is a true love; Perlita became our happiness and our best friend for life. She trusts us and gives us all her love without expecting anything in return. Since that day we realize that once you love your pet, you will have everything you need to be happy.

Cynthia Garcia Salomon is an ESOL student in the Adult Education Program at Northwest Florida State College. Her instructor is Diane Dunn.

Unforgettable Day

September 10, 2013 was a day I could never forget. I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Bennett. At seventeen, I would have never thought I would have a baby and so many responsibilities. It's hard being a mom at such a young age. Waking up multiple times a night, having to go to work the next morning and still having school gets really stressful. Sometimes, I look back and wish I could have gone out and had fun with friends whenever I wanted, but that's something I had to give up. Bennett didn't stop or ruin my life at all; he started my life. Since I had him I've enrolled in GED® classes, got a job at Hardee's and I've been looking into enlisting in the Navy. I know that without him, I wouldn't have been able to do any of it. I look at him every morning and remind myself that everything I do is for him.

He deserves the world and much more, and that's all I'm trying to give him. I gave up a lot of things, but got so much more in return. I wouldn't change it for anything in the world. I love my son and would do it all over again for him.

Alexia Slack is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Beth King.

My Road to Resilience

One day my mom went to work and an immigration officer asked her for her work permit. She didn't have one and got arrested. She was illegal. The officer told my mom that she was getting deported. I was six years old.

My mom had four children and I was the only girl. My oldest brother was 7 years old, one was 5 and the baby was 4. I was very sad, we were born in this country. I remember when we got in the airplane. My mom got sick and when we arrived in Haiti she got worse. Four years later she died. We were left alone.

Our father didn't care for us because he had another woman and kids. But we thank God our grandmother was alive. By the time our father thought about us, he got sick and passed away. We were orphans.

I was 10 years old when my mother died and 16 when my father died. Life was hard for us. Our grandmother worked on a farm to take care of us. When I was 19 years old my grandmother got sick and died. Life became harder for us. We couldn't go to school because we couldn't afford it. Two years later my younger brother got sick and died.

When I turned 20, my brothers and I decided to catch a boat and go back to our country. Six years after we arrived we got our documents. They gave us permanent residence because we could not prove that we were born there. I could travel and work but that was not enough. I wanted to get an education. I had two children and decided to move to the United States. The United States is different than my country. There are more opportunities to get a good education. Public education is better. I am looking forward to a better life.

I know it's never too late to be somebody once you put your mind to it. Now, my kids and I go to school every day. I am working on improving my English and then transferring to a GED program. After that I want to enroll in the License Practical Nurse program to become a nurse. I pray to God that together we will achieve the American Dream.

Angela St. Mile is a single mother of two children. She is a student at Atlantic Technical College in Broward County, Florida. She is in Mrs. Urena's ESOL class.

Stages of My Life

My name is Maria Lucia Tanis. I am thirty two years old, married, and Venezuelan- Haitian. Although I was born in Venezuela, both of my parents are Haitians. My life started changing since I was small. I now understand why everything happened and I'm still looking for changes until I achieve my goal.

At six years old, my family moved from Venezuela to Haiti. This was a new for me because I had go to school in French although I only spoke Spanish. Over time, I got used to the language. I made many friends at school and in the neighborhood where I lived. My family has always been with me, they always looked out for the welfare of our family.

When I finished high school, my parents advised me to return to my home country and continue my studies. I was twenty years old when I returned to Venezuela. I didn't speak Spanish well, I learned by watching TV., listening to music and practicing with family members. Although I didn't speak perfectly, I started college one year later. In reality, the start was not easy, because I felt different from others and could not speak and understand well as they did. Sometimes they made fun of my accent. Although this was a bad time during my studies, I decided to move on, never give up, and focused only on my goal.

As a result, I graduated from college and started working. Two years later, I got married and had a beautiful girl. She changed my life and brings me great happiness. Every day, I give thanks to God for everything that has happened in my life, even the great things that have not yet arrived!

Now, I have been living in United States for seven months with my family. We are very excited to speak English. I feel more prepared and mature to take on this new challenge because of my life experiences. Now, I have a bigger reason to keep working, it's my daughter. I want to be an example for her life. Actually, I am studying English at Immokalee Technical Center. My teachers help me day by day to continue learning, they are great and positive people.

In short, my goals have not yet fully been achieved. After studying English, I would like to get a Masters in financial management because I studied that in Venezuela and I plan to get a better job. These experiences are a part of my life I'll never forget, so I'm still working to achieve for my goal and dream. Sometimes in life, changes are required, so we must always be willing to realize our dream anywhere we are. Life is a mixture of happy and sad moments, with most in-between. However, we must keep our eyes focused on the positive.

Maria Tanis is a student at Immokalee Technical Center.

Lessons of Life

Almost every day, when Esperanza washes the breakfast dishes, she thinks, "What a beautiful view of my neighborhood! Look at this tree! It is so different than the other trees that I have known before, but it is amazing! It looks like a dress from the 1920s, with its fringes flying through the air!" This is Esperanza's moment to put her mind at rest, or to organize her day or to make a profound reflection.

Today, just today, she started to think of different experiences in her life, and she started to smile, "...wow!" She remembered a day when a friend needed help because he did not have his car, because it was broken and the mechanic told him that he needed a lot of time and a lot of money to fix it.

And John, Esperanza's friend, did not have time or money. John spoke with Esperanza and she quickly tried to find a solution, without a lot of thought.

“I got it!” Esperanza said. “I have a friend in my college who could help you. I will talk with him because you need a person with a car to go to work and he needs some money.” In a few hours John’s problem was resolved.

In the next few days, Esperanza needed help from her college friend. She needed a ride to her doctor’s appointment, and her old car was broken that morning . . .and, to her surprise he said,

“Sorry Esperanza, I can’t do it. John needs me and he pays me!” Esperanza continued washing the dishes; she smiled again, what a life! And immediately, she remembered one day when she was trying to find a parking spot. She had made a lot of laps around the parking lot, but on this day, the mission was impossible. She decided to stop and wait. Suddenly, a big man from the other car pointed at her and he said, “Roll down your window!”

Esperanza thought, “What a rude tone! And he did not say please or anything!” Esperanza thought if she should do it or not. She felt scared. Finally, she put her window down.

In this moment the rude man said to her,
 “Are you looking for a parking spot?”
 Esperanza was surprised and said, “Yes, yes please!”
 And the man said to her,
 “In the other corner there is a parking spot. It was mine!”
 Esperanza said thank you.
 In her kitchen, with her lifeless gaze over the neighborhood, she smiled again. . . You never know!

Indira Vazquez is an ESOL student studying at Lake County Library in Clermont, Florida. Her tutor is Sandra Stout.

An Extraordinary Dinner

Can you imagine having dinner with Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Adolph Hitler together? Two famous people well known in the world for their influences on humanity—the first one with extremely positive actions and the second one, in a shocking negative way.

Mother Teresa was born in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, on August 26, 1910. She was a humanitarian; her entire life was fully devoted to helping the poor, the sick, the needy, and the helpless. Adolf Hitler, was born in Austria in 1889. He became infamous as the personification of human evil. His name is linked to the Holocaust, and the extermination of Jews and other “undesirables.” He also has been blamed for being the principle cause of the Second World War, in which over 70 million people died. Despite that both of them are deceased, nowadays they are still remembered because their feats left a deep mark on human beings, through the impact they caused. Now they are part of our history forever.

I’ve chosen these personalities, just to compare two extremely different behaviors, and how they could affect people in negative or positive ways as well. Moreover, by this comparison I also want to encourage more people, to make an extra effort to increase the love and unity. Even though, they might not have a common topic to talk about, I think they could get along well, since both of them have had positions of leadership. Mother Teresa was an “angel,” and Hitler an infamous dictator. Maybe he could have the opportunity for regretting, and to confess his heavy charge of unforgivable and unforgettable sins. It could be a great opportunity for him. In fact, Hitler was as hard as he seemed to be, maybe more than that. However, sometimes power transforms people, and as a result there are some situations that we can’t see as far as we should see, and people around us encourage us to make many mistakes. I would like to ask Adolph Hitler what he would do if he had the choice of being born again. On the other hand, I’m sure Mother Teresa as an “Angel” doesn’t need to be born again. She always will be around us forever.

In my opinion everyone should have the opportunity for regretting, no matter what could have happened in the past. Don’t you think it’s time for looking throughout the good things, and keeping this in our minds? It’s not only about what happened before. It’s about the best you can do from now on. Why not? Why wouldn’t Mother Teresa do this? Forgive him! As a matter of fact, how many times has The Lord forgiven us?

Fernando Villanueva is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Vacation in Europe

My younger daughter invited me to go with her and her two sons on a trip to Europe. We flew for 10 hours from Miami to Paris, France. I was surprised to see so much security personnel inside the Charles de Gaulle Airport.

We took the metro to the Louvre Museum. The principal attraction is the Mona Lisa picture. It was painted in 1452 by Leonardo da Vinci. In general, it was a beautiful experience for the family. We visited the Versailles Palace and saw the lovely gardens, with a lot of statues, fountains and flowers. We walked the Latin Quarter. It was interesting to see locks on the bridge we walked across. I never saw so many locks in my life.

We visited the Notre Dame Chapel. The building began in 1589 and finished in 1800, made by hand. There were so many antiques and pretty designs all over the chapel. We enjoyed a picnic in the lovely Lexington Gardens. What caught my attention at night in Paris was that at 11:00 p.m., it was still light. I liked this. We went to Provence Avignon by train, rented a car and drove to L'Isle-sur-la Sorgue, a little town with a river in the middle. We saw guards at the cold castle on top of the mountains.

Our family enjoyed a delicious homemade breakfast, with homemade jam, from apricots that were homegrown. After a tour of a lavender museum, we drove to Nice and went to the beach at Cannes.

We flew to Venice, Italy and stayed two days in San Murano. We toured a glass-blowing factory, which was very interesting but hot because of the fire used to heat the glass. We traveled by water bus in Venice, which was built 2000 years ago. I wonder how they built so many building in the water. I was shocked, because at that time they didn't have computers or tools we have today and had to build all that by hand.

We took a water bus to the train station and then went to Florence, Italy. We saw the statue of David. We crossed the Ponte Vecchio Bridge and went to the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella. The chapel is beautiful.

The family drove to a Chianti wine testing at Montefiore, a medieval village in the mountains. The view is beautiful and we saw the grapes growing in straight lines. We drove to Rome and saw the Coliseum, the Trevi Fountain, the Parliament, the Pantheon, the main plaza and ate gelato. I enjoyed the St. Peter Basilica at the Vatican, the biggest church I've ever seen; it was very peaceful.

For dinner on our last night, we ate antipasto, which was 15 plates of appetizers and they were delicious. We drank seven wines. It was a beautiful night. I loved Europe.

Gisela Villar works at Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation and has learned a lot in the past four years from the Project LEAD program in Miami, Florida. Her tutor is Barbara Papademetriou.

Wanted

I am Janey. I was born and grew up in Beijing, China. I have always accepted the influence of Chinese traditional culture. I am honest, kind and filial to my parents. I took care of them in their older age. My father was paralyzed in bed and could not provide for himself. We did not have money to hire a nanny, so I did everything for him.

When I was a young girl, many boys wanted to become my boyfriend and marry me. I told each boy, "If you want to marry me, you must take care of my parents with me." From then on, the boys went away from me. They were no longer interested in me. Time passed quickly. Ten years later, my father died and I took care of my mother.

I never gave up. I believed I would find a real man to love me. A Chinese old saying: "Just do good things; don't worry about your future." When I was 45 years old and still single in 2011, an American white man named Mark wrote an E-mail to me. His sincerity moved me. Every day, we wrote communications to discuss our outlook on life and values. We talked to each other about the happiness and sadness in life.

Ten months later, he came to Beijing to meet me. He said, “in person you are so much more beautiful than pictures.” We went to The Great Wall and other historical sites. He ate the Chinese food I cooked every day. He was very happy. On the weekend, my big family ate dinner at a restaurant and met Mark for the first time. All my family liked Mark very much. I thought maybe this is fate.

Mark told my brother, “I want to marry your sister, Janey. I hope your big family all agrees.” Everyone was surprised. My aunt asked Mark, “Can you treat her well?” Mark answered, “Yes, I can.” Mark used his actions to prove “Love”.

In May 2012, Mark came to Beijing to meet me again. Our happy days were too short. After he left Beijing, my mother told me, “Mark really loves you, you have found a good man.” I was relieved. After a month, my mother died peacefully in her sleep. I grieved. Waiting for K-1 VISA made the days long. We were suffering from separation.

Finally, I arrived in Tampa in May 2014. We got married on July 8. We didn’t have the luxury of a wedding, only the commitment to each other and an eternal promise.

Now, I am learning English in Tampa at HCPLC. I am very grateful to my teacher Sylvia. She patiently corrects my English pronunciation, listening and speaking. Although I am 49 years old, my memory is good and I have confidence to learn English well, to start my new life in America.

Janey Wang is a student with the Hillsborough Literacy Council.

Bow Hunting

Do you have something that you really like to do? Many people have a favorite thing to do. Mine is bow hunting. There are many reasons why bow hunting is my favorite thing to do: it’s fun, challenging, and an adrenaline rush, but the main reason why it’s my favorite thing to do, is the experience. To me, there’s nothing better than waking up before sun rises and going out to the woods, getting in the tree stand and watching the woods waking up around you.

It's beautiful and so relaxing seeing all the animals start moving around, hearing the birds chirping, watching the squirrels run around. Don't even get me started on the adrenaline rush. When a big buck walks out, I get nervous making sure not to make any quick movements. I reach up for my bow, I stand up very slowly and quietly and wait for him to get into range. The monster buck gets forty yards away, my heart's pounding; I draw my bow back and send an arrow right through him. He runs about thirty yards and falls over. My adrenaline is pumping, and I'm so excited! The feeling that you get when you get a deer with your bow is great. I love bow hunting and that's why it's my favorite thing to do.

Trenton White is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Beth King.

My Story

My name is Mischelle Wilburn. I am 45 years of age, and I am serving a 16 year mandatory sentence. I am HIV positive. I was diagnosed with HIV in 1999. Since my diagnosis, a lot has changed within me and my life.

When I found out I had the virus, I felt alone and very betrayed by the man who infected me. He was my boyfriend for eight months. We used protection every time we had sex. I lived with him, he betrayed me, never gave me a choice, he lied to me! During the duration of our relationship, three condoms broke on different occasions. I thought I was pregnant because my cycle was late. A friend shared with me that he had full blown AIDS.

I knew I contracted the virus even before I took my next step. I knew on that day before any tests, before any word was spoken from my lips, that I was positive. Needless to say, I left my boyfriend, and over the weeks I didn't feel any different until about a month after I was told that had he AIDS. I believe that mentally, I worked myself up to bring on the sickness sooner.

I was walking home from the beach and all of a sudden, my whole body started to ache. I broke out into a sweat, and starting vomiting. This was the flu like symptoms that people experience after being infected by the virus.

I knew I was experiencing this as I was lying on the ground that day. I was taken to the crack house (it was closer than my house), and there, I laid on the cold floor for two days, until a real friend came by and helped me home.

I was surrounded by a room full of women in the county jail the day I received my results, but knowing that I contracted the virus, and having the proof in black and white, made it more of a reality. I felt scared. How could I stop getting high? How would I deal with this? Most of all, I was worried about how my parents would take the news. Well, when I was sent back to my cell that day, I made the decision not to keep my condition from anyone. I would educate myself and help others, and not be held captive to virus that could and wanted to take control of me.

When I told my parents, their first reaction was ARE YOU SURE? My mom and dad, I told them on the phone, so I couldn't see their reactions, I could only hear it. After two years, I was arrested and sentenced to sixteen years. I have tested undetectable for four years. My blood work is AWESOME! My last White Blood Cell count, was 768. Without GOD, eating healthy, and exercise, I couldn't say that.

If you have sex, you get tested, and use you own condoms. There are haters out there who will poke holes through the condoms, just to infect someone, because they've gotten infected. Thank you for listening to me.

THE MAN WHO INFECTED ME, PASSED AWAY IN 2004.

Mischelle Wilburn is a student in Ms. McCall's Transition course at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

My Life and How A Person Can Change

I was born on January 25, 1954 and when I was three years old my mother died. I lived with my godmother for a while after my mother's death. Once my father remarried, I went to live with him and his new family. Our childhood life was good and I loved my new mother because she made my brother and me feel as if we were her natural children. I will always love her for the way she treated us and the things she did for us.

I dropped out of school at 15 years old and started a life that lead me down the path of drinking and getting into trouble, which landed me in jail. Between the ages of 20 and 23 years old, I had 3 children. I was unable to care for them properly and I gave my youngest two children up for adoption. I continued to be on the path to nowhere for quite some time. In order to support myself and my one child, I picked fruit in the groves. In 1970, I reunited with my son and daughter, whom I had given up for adoption. It was not easy for us in the beginning, but as they forgave me I had to learn to forgive myself. We have become very close over the years and we are a happy family today.

The daughter that I raised started having children at 14 years old and ended up with 4 children that I helped to care for. When I was 41 years old, the life that I had led changed for the better. I stopped drinking and joined church again. I got a job at a nursing home and was able to take care of my family. When I was 47 years old my oldest daughter, who was 27 at the time, died of AIDS. I raised and cared for her children. Today, I am raising three great-grandsons, helping my daughter with her 3 children, and supporting a granddaughter with her 3 children. I am studying reading, English and math at Parent Academy to get my GED because I need this for myself. I also want to be an example to my grandchildren and great- grandchildren to show them that you are never too old to get an education. On February 4, 2015 I adopted two of my great-grandsons and will adopt the third on March 1, 2015. I wrote this story to let it be known that you can make a change in your life with God's help and the will of your own. I have forgiven myself and moved on, because God gave me another chance to get it right.

Annie Williams is a student at Parent Academy of St Lucie County. Her teachers are Isabella Escalona and Joan Moore.

My Family's First Encounter with the United States

We arrived in the United States in August, 2011. It was a long trip lasting about 20 hours. We got here tired, but happy. We found Weston as a lovely quiet city, which surprised us with its clean streets, the plenty of greenery, neatness, and convenience. On our second day in Weston, I said to my husband, that I'd like to stay here forever. And to this day, I cannot get used to the fact that street animals are squirrels and lizards, not abandoned cats and dogs.

Our first assignment was finding a home because we needed a permanent address for enrolling our son in a school. After numerous visits and reviews of various houses and apartments, it turned out that only one apartment was available for us, and it was less suitable than others. However, we have lived in this flat for more than 3 years now, and we really feel well with it.

Soon came the first day of school. Needless to say that all of us were excited about it. Our chicks were to enter the grand strange world named American School. During the first month of school the ESOL program was yet to start. The first question, we asked our son when he had returned from school was "How is your class today?" and the second one was, "What is new about ESOL?" The answer was "I did not understand anything. No news about ESOL." Finally, the ESOL lessons started, and Tom felt better at school. Then came the great day in Tom's American life, the first time he raised his hand in class and answered the teacher's question. Mrs. Jacobson, Tom's teacher, handed him a greeting card and the whole class applauded. Tom and all of us were on top of the world. There were many interesting trips and events at Tom's school. It was really a happy year in his life.

For some reason we were much less worried about our daughter's first day of school. She was just 3 years old, cute, nice, and sociable. Everyone liked her; and we did not foresee any problem with her. Actually, she had only one terrible day, the first morning, when she was crying in her teacher's arms, and I was crying outside her classroom.

Dasi made a good impression on the children and on the teachers and soon became a popular favorite. She began to correct our English pronunciation and to speak Hebrew with a new order of words in the interrogative sentences. She put the prepositions at the end of her questions like in English. It was so funny.

Now our kids are good students, and I hope, we will have an interesting life here.

Tatyana Liraz is a student at the English Café at Weston Branch Library – Broward County.

Ready for School

I enjoy getting ready for school. There are three reasons I enjoy getting ready for school. I like to wake up early, eat breakfast, and go to school. First, I wake up early. I wake up at 7 AM, and then I take a short shower and get dressed.

Second, I eat breakfast. I enjoy Captain Crunch with milk every morning. Sometimes I eat eggs and tomatoes. I put little salt and pepper on the eggs, and then I put some tomatoes on them.

Third, I go to school. I like to go to school to learn new things everyday like math, language, and science. I have wonderful teachers to teach me.

In conclusion, there are three reasons I enjoy getting ready for school. I like to wake up early, eat breakfast, and go to school.

Manuel Pao is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Fridays

My favorite day is Friday. This day means you can have fun with your friends and with your family. I think you should appreciate spending time with them. I'm going to tell you about the many activities I did on my favorite day when I was in Haiti and now that I am in the USA.

While I was in Haiti, every Friday I spent all of my time with my friends Joana and Melissa. I could not wait to see them. Every Friday morning at 6:00 a.m., we exercised before we went to the supermarket. While shopping in the supermarket we bought ice cream, popcorn, and soda. . Later in the evening we went to a party with my cousins to celebrate a birthday. We danced and drank together until midnight. We certainly had lots of fun!

When I came to the United States, my family took me to McDonalds. They ordered breakfast. I had eggs, sausage, biscuit and strawberry shake. Afterwards, we went in the park to play baseball. I really enjoyed spending time with my family. They love me so much and they make me happy.

Now, every Friday night I spend time with my best friend Jennifer at her house listening to music. When we do this we don't want anyone disturbing us, because I feel great. After spending time with my friend, I go home to my room and watch a video on my computer. At 11:00 p.m., I read my bible and praise God before I go to sleep. It has been a pleasure writing about my favorite day. I can't wait until next Friday, because I'm going to do more exciting things.

Christelle is a student of technical center in Immokalee. Her teacher's name is Katie Mominee.

If I Were the Creator

In the present world, we have many inequalities that cause a lack of world peace. Nelson Mandela once said “I hate race discrimination most intensely and in all its manifestation. I have fought it all during my life. I fight it now, and will do so until the end of my days.” If I were the creator I would create a world without racial segregation or difference between rich and poor.

I would create a world without racial segregation to avoid aspects of inferiority and superiority. In today’s world, skin color is one of the major issues that segregate some of us. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the African-American civil rights movement. Nelson Mandela was a leader for the same movement in Africa. Likewise, various other activists fought for harmony throughout the world. They wanted equality for everyone.

Therefor they have left a moral legacy; we will talk about them for all of eternity to let people know how they have inspired the world. We live in a world where an economic class system creates a division among the rich and poor. Several of the poor have dreams to become rich one day. Some of them are willing to do anything for money like steal, kill, and many other harmful things. They don’t do it by their will, they just do it to be equal with the rich. That’s why I would give everyone equal opportunity. If everyone had equal access to resource such as education, food, money, and everything necessary, I’m very sure they wouldn’t do it. Dodinsky said “Equal distribution of wealth does not mean we all should be millionaires — it only means no one should die of hunger.”

I did not choose this topic to show you that our creator has made mistakes. I just wanted to show you if everything were created in common, the world would be different. We wouldn’t have division between races and economic inequality. We would have peace around the world.

Widmison is a hardworking student at Immokalee Technical Center.

English is Difficult

My name is Robenson Jean Charles. I am from Haiti. I have been in United States since 2002. I am so bad that I still cannot speak proper English. It is so difficult for me. Thank goodness that there are English classes at the college. I took so many classes at the college. Even my kids helped me. Still my pronunciation is not good. Now I am attending another class. The program in this class helps me a lot. Though I am struggling, I will not give up. One of these years, I will speak proper English.

Robenson Jean Charles attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Step by Step

My name is Maricela Palomino. I am from Peru. I have been here for 14 months. I arrived in United States in December 2013. Although it was an exciting moment to see my husband who is living in this country, it was also a sad moment because I miss my parents and siblings. They are in Peru. It was also not an easy feeling because everything in United States is so different compared to my country. Very importantly, I have to learn to manage my own life and as well as learn to speak English so that I can communicate with the people at my workplace. Without hesitation, I enrolled in the English class. This is my first step for a better future. My ambition is to work in the field of pharmacy. I hope to master the English language and pursue my study in pharmacy soon.

Maricela Palomino attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Favorite Place

Natural Navarre

I have been to over twenty states, but I would have to say my favorite place is Navarre, FL. Navarre, FL has all sorts of things going for it, including the beautiful beaches, the pristine rivers, miles of woods, and wild life surrounding.

To start off, Navarre Beach is the most beautiful beach I have ever been to and the least crowded. In fact, the welcome sign even states, “Navarre Beach: Florida’s Best Kept Secret”. The entire beach is covered in blinding, pure white sand, which is actually the whitest sand in the world. Dead in the middle of the beach is one of the world’s largest fishing piers with a pier bar and bait store. There is all sorts of fun to be had.

If that wasn’t enough, Navarre is riddled with numerous rivers. All of the rivers have amazing brackish water fishing, meaning that you are able to fresh and salt water fish in them. There is a ton of popular swimming spots with everything from rope swings to diving boards along the rivers. Also, many families come from all over the area just to go canoeing or kayaking down Navarre’s rivers.

To finish off, a major part of Navarre is covered with woods and teeming with wildlife. Throughout the woods are many trails for all kinds of activities from ATV riding to hiking. The woods have marked areas for all different kinds of hunting, have some of the area’s best hunting and are open to the public, and Navarre’s woods are so thick and deep in some places, that it is quite common to see a bear roaming around.

There are many more but these were just a few reasons why Navarre, FL has got to be my favorite place.

Dylan Adams is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Beth King.

My Favorite Place

Since I was very young, I had the dream of traveling, to experience different cultures, scenery, and especially places with pleasant weather, and enchanting beaches. I was lucky to visit different countries and was enchanted with their natural beauty.

On one of these trips, in a well-known restaurant of the area I was visiting, where you can dance on the beach under the stars, I happened to meet the love of my life. It was love at first sight. After a short while he moved to my country so we could be together. Soon, we married and we had a beautiful baby.

For various reasons we had proposed to return to the city where we had originally met to live permanently. It was a difficult decision for me because I had strong ties to friends, family, and my job in my country. Finally, after a lot of discussions we decided to move. Only now can I say I am enamored of this place where we are blessed with miles of gorgeous beaches. It's one of the few beaches in the world where you can park your car on the sand. It's so convenient for a big family to bring umbrellas, chairs, coolers, toys, etc. On this beach you can ride your bicycle, run, play volleyball, or just relax. The waves are warm and inviting to swim all summer long and most of the Fall and Spring. It is beach where my baby took her first steps.

There are plenty of good restaurants here good for socialization, where you can enjoy exquisite seafood for a fair price. There is no lack of activities here. There are constantly free concerts, sporting events, street fairs, fishing, boating, surfing, minor league baseball games, motorcycle festivals, and the most famous automotive races in the world, just to name a few. Every event is punctuated with fireworks in the evening. The weather is as warm as most of the people here.

Every time we travel to other places, no matter how exciting or exotic, I always look forward to returning. I can definitely say, that this is my home sweet home and has become my favorite place in the world- Daytona Beach, Florida.

Giannina Biglia is a student at Daytona State College. Her teacher is Yvonne Ward.

Antigua Guatemala Restaurant

My name is Edin Cardona De Leon. I am from Guatemala. I have been in the United States for eight months. My favorite place is Antigua Guatemala Restaurant in Miami. It is a fine place to eat. One day my uncle asked me, “Where do you want to eat on your birthday?” I told him about this restaurant. He is so nice and we drove to Miami to celebrate my birthday. I love the food because that is the kind of food I like to eat. The place is very clean. On the walls are pictures of beautiful places from my country, such as Cerrito del Carmen and Cathedral Memorial Tecun Uman. That day was a treat for me.

Edin Cardona De Leon attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls is located on the Niagara River, and it is near the border of Canada and United States. The cities of Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada and Niagara Falls, New York are both North America natural wonders. Niagara Falls flows with scenic views right through Niagara Falls state park and just beyond is Waterfall Vista. Niagara is filled with splendid discoveries and fantastic attractions. Niagara Falls is the union of three falls that connect at the Niagara River. It’s a gorgeous place to go with your family or just to have a very romantic date with your loved one.

There are many things you can do at the park, such as going very near the Falls in a cruise or you can go wild and walk behind the falls or simply enjoy them from far away and walk around the park. The cruise is really exciting and is not too expensive; it’s affordable and it’s a very nice experience.

Once you are on the boat, you get to enjoy the Falls at a closer look, and you can feel the strength of the water coming towards you because they get you very close to the Falls and you can feel the water hitting your face.

Then you get the nostalgic feeling of seeing the water coming down that big fall and splashing you. In the river, you start thinking of how amazing and perfect Mother Nature is and how many beautiful wonders it holds. In the winter time especially in November and December this wonder gets completely frozen, giving us another way to enjoy them. It's an amazing place to relax and take pictures.

It's a very nice place. I loved it and it was the best vacation that I have ever had. I want to go back again with my family and friends. I recommend everyone to visit at some point in their lives. It is the ideal place to take vacations.

Delmy Chinchilla is from El Salvador. She is currently attending Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida. Her teacher is Vania Llovera.

Las Vegas

My favorite place for a vacation is Las Vegas, Nevada. Las Vegas is an exciting place. The casinos are an exciting place to be with friends. At night everything is illuminated. In the summer the weather is perfect; it is hot but not sticky. With this kind of weather, we wear very comfortable clothing like shorts, t-shirts and sandals.

My husband and I visited many recreational places in Las Vegas. It happened last year; it was a very short weekend trip, but still it was unforgettable. One of our favorite places to visit was Vegas Balloon Rides. We enjoyed a balloon ride, because it offered a spectacular view of Las Vegas Valley, including the city and desert areas. We loved Mount Charleston; it has outdoor activities, such as horseback riding, camping and hiking. The variety of food in Las Vegas is very delicious and the service is excellent. The flavor of the food is unique and the food is fresh, which gives you a countless variety of dishes. You have the opportunity to eat at indoor and outdoor restaurants; it is quite a cozy experience. While waiting for the food, we enjoyed the peacefulness of a patio garden and the sunset. The exquisite flavor of grilled salmon with roasted vegetables had a remarkable taste of diverse flavors.

I recommend everyone to visit Las Vegas; it is an unforgettable place. Everyone needs to experience the casinos, recreational places, and enjoy the varieties of food at least once in their life. Las Vegas is a marvelous place.

Maria De La Cruz is currently attending Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, FL. She is from Mexico; her teacher is Vania Llovera.

My Country

My special place that I value the most is my home, my country, Haiti. I value this place because it's where my most beautiful memories are. I miss Haiti and hope one day I will move back. Once in a while I would travel back and visit. There are great, wonderful places to see in Haiti, especially where I was born in Croix-des-Bouquets! I also miss my wonderful family in Haiti. They were always there for me when I needed their help. My mom was the number one person there for me no matter what. I remember sometimes we would spend some time together at my daughter's house and sleepover, cook, and do a little cleaning. We would have the best conversations ever! We would go to the best places in town. We found new and different places to see every day. There probably wasn't one place we hadn't seen. I will forever love my country. I will never forget where I came from and where I am today.

In conclusion, I love my country. I have had so many awesome and fun memories there. I wish to go back because I miss my family and my beautiful mom. She is my rock, best friend, and everything to me.

Marie Dorisme is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Jacksonville, Florida

My favorite place is Jacksonville, mainly because my family lives there. The weather is always amazing. I get to visit my family often because they are not too far for me to travel. It is a dream of mine to live there someday.

When the evening arrives, and the sun begins to set, it's spectacular. The sunset looks beautiful. When we gather together in the backyard we have a lot of fun. My favorite part is lighting the fire. When I'm with my family I feel very happy because I can really enjoy those moments. I wish to spend more time with all my family. I would like to have a house in Jacksonville someday. Jacksonville is a large city with a very large population. It has different places you can go and be entertained.

My kids love being there. I really don't think there would be any difficulties finding a job. In conclusion, Jacksonville is my favorite place. It's where most of my family lives. I love Jacksonville because it's not far from me to drive when we have family events. Just thinking about the beautiful sunset when we are gathered in the backyard puts a smile on my face. Lighting the fire when dusk sets in is my favorite part of the evening. Although, the population is large I wouldn't turn down the opportunity to live there. I would recommend you to visit Jacksonville. It's a beautiful place.

Esperanza Espinoza is from Mexico, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Great Escape

Juniper Springs is one of the oldest and best known recreation areas on the East Coast, Florida. It is located between Ocala and Ormond Beach. The access road to this famous camping area can be found on the North side of SR 40 just 4.6 miles west of the Intersection of CR19 and SR40. Juniper and Fern Hammock Springs produce millions of gallons of water every day, with constant temperature of seventy-two degrees Fahrenheit.

This recreation complex offers extensive activities for the day users and overnight campers, depending on the weather. Swimming, hiking, bicycling, picnicking, snorkeling, kayaking, paddling, and bird watching are all available to visitors. A good look at the unique and ancient construction, of the Millhouse is worthwhile. The interesting Sweetwater cabin with its own spring, swimming area, and canoes can be rented whenever available. It has an easy access parking area, restroom facilities, tables, grills, snacks for sale, and so on. This is a very busy place, especially in the summer months.

It is my favorite place because my family and I can spend quality time in this area, whether chatting, playing family games, grilling barbecues, reading, taking short walks in the woods, etc. Swimming in the clear spring water, is rejuvenating. The atmosphere is really peaceful, and secure. Moving to Ocala from Colombia, where safety was almost non-existent, feeling safe is something we give much value to.

Nonetheless, our daily life here is hectic, since providing for the family, education, housing, and transportation expenses, etc. place much stress on me on a daily basis. Therefore this camping area is a very important part of my life. My family and I feel grateful to be able to enjoy going to Juniper Recreation Area. It is just about twenty-five minutes from where we live, and it is inexpensive to spend the day there relaxing and recharging my energy. Indeed, my whole family feels the same way. We are blessed for having such a gift from nature. It is my great place to escape.

Pedro Garzon lives with his wife in Ocala, Florida. They have two sons. He is a student of the ESOL program at Marion County Literacy Council. His teacher is Midori Storms.

My Trip to a Park in Cuba

Something about getting on a plane, flying across the world, and seeing a new country excites me. When you travel to a new country, you get into a routine of someone who already lives there. Yes of course it's going to feel surreal at first, but then after a few days you begin to feel comfortable there. It begins to feel like a second home in a way.

The feeling of not knowing what you're going to experience or see in this country is exciting and makes you get nerves in a good way. Today I'm going to tell you about my trip to Cuba. It was unlike any trip I'd ever been on before. It was adventurous, beautiful, fun, and so relaxing. When I was told we were going to Cuba in July, I was really excited but I had no idea what it was going to be like. I got really giddy and nervous because going back to my country and exploring my own culture is so fun and exciting to even just think about.

There were adventure parks in Cuba. These weren't just any parks, to say the least. The first park we went to was called "LENNIN" where we went cave swimming in pitch-black caves with bats. Don't worry we didn't get attacked by any. The caves were actually beautiful especially when you got out of them and you were just swimming outside. There were vines, flowers, waterfalls, and even a stained glass filled cave with a statue in the center. It was an amazing experience.

The next thing we did was to go swimming in what we call in our country nature pools. What are nature pools, you must be asking. Well, natural pools are pools made by the earth and ocean. Basically, at the bottom of a cliff there are two circle pools surrounded by stones to prevent you from drifting out into the roaring sea. The waves crash into the pools, thus making a natural pool. But the really cool thing about these pools was first they were like wave pools because they had you moving all around. Secondly, because my family and I were the first ones to get into the natural pools thus making everyone else want to get in. So we got everyone to get into the pools.

The last thing we did at "LENNIN" was going in this really cool machine that took you up thousands of feet to see Cuba and all the beautiful scenery. It was simply breathtaking. Those were mainly the cool things we did at "LENNIN".

The things I experienced in Cuba will always hold an important place in my memories. My trip to Cuba was simply incredible and a bit life changing. I enjoyed it so much I want to go back again sometime very soon.

Bryan Gonzalez is from Mexico, he is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Home, My Favorite Place

My name is Mika Green. I am from Japan. I came to the United States of America about 20 years ago. I have lived in four different states and two different countries. I have moved 10 times. Luckily, everywhere I have lived there were nice neighbors around me.

The first place I lived in was California. I love California. There are many fun entertaining places. The weather was very nice, but the houses were very expensive. Next was Yokosuka, Japan. It is my country, so I felt very comfortable to live there. Then I moved to Illinois. It is a beautiful place, but it was too cold for me. I felt like I was living in a freezer. After that, I moved to South Korea. It was good for me because it was very close to my hometown in Japan. However, I did not understand the language. Therefore, it was a little uncomfortable for me to be there.

Then I moved again. This time we moved to Georgia. I lived in a nice, quiet place in the countryside, but there were too many bugs. As soon as I went outside, I was attacked by hundreds of gnats. Now, we are situated in Key West, Florida. I love Key West. There are nice beaches, a beautiful ocean view, and nice weather every day. Do I want to live here forever? I do not know. I feel like I am so isolated. After all these experiences, I ask myself one more time.

What is my favorite place? My final answer is my home where my kids and my husband are. No matter where I live, I am happy as long as my kids are with me. They bring me joy, happiness, and fun daily. My favorite place is where my family is.

Mika Green attends the ESOL Academic Skills class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

My Lovely City

My favorite place is the city where I was born. The name of this city is Thessaloniki. It is in the northern part of Greece, and it is the country's second largest city with a population of almost 800,000 people. It is the most beautiful city in Greece, with castles and a great view of Olympus, the mountain of 12 gods.

The King of Macedonia, Kassandros, named the city after his wife, who was also the sister of Alexander the Great. This name is a combination of two words: Thessalon and Niki (like Nike) which means the victory of Macedonians against the Thessalons.

I love this place because it is full of history, museums, and historic buildings like the White Tower and it has the perfect combination of sea and mountains. I lived there 18 years discovering the kindness and hospitality of the residents. I loved the coffee shops in the square with the restaurants and taverns featuring amazing traditional food and fresh fish. I enjoyed the many night clubs with Greek live music and all the stores with fashionable clothes. The main reason that I love Thessaloniki is that my relatives and my friends live there and it was there that I met my husband.

Joanna Charoula Grigoriadou is from Greece and has been living in the U.S.A. for ten months. She is in Susan Mitchell's Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.

A Beautiful Holiday in the Smokey Mountains

Two winters ago, my family and I took a little vacation to Tennessee. We left from Tampa just after midnight on a Saturday. Sergio, my son, was driving. The kids and I soon fell asleep, but the beautiful scenery woke us up and we were full of enthusiasm! The landscape around us was wonderful! We spent the night in Georgia and immediately we began to see that it was snowing. While we approached Tennessee, we started to see the white peaks of the mountains. The cabin we rented was high amid the Appalachians. Behind our cabin was a river of crystal and noisy waters. It was surrounded by moss and ferns of all varieties.

After that first day, it stopped snowing and although it was very cold, we were able to walk right through fragrant woods that had a great variety of species of trees, wildflowers and small waterfalls that slid on a bed of rocks and mosses. Also, we visited an Aboriginal Reservation.

On this trip, we saw many new and interesting things and animals, such as black bears. It was a relaxing ride. Our time in the mountains was only one week, but all of us returned renewed!

Edglia “Noemi” Maldonado is an ESOL student at Aparicio-Levy Technical College in Ms. Smith’s class. Noemi is from Argentina, but now lives in Tampa. She is a proud grandmother of 7 grandchildren.

Belgrade: My True and Honest Friend

Oh, there are so many great places on this planet Earth! Can you imagine that you should pick only one place? I know I can.

For years, I have been dreaming of moving to Belgrade. It is the capital and the largest city in Serbia. Lively and breathtaking, Belgrade is by far the friendliest city. You can see a lot of people from all over the world that come there for one reason only: to enjoy a beauty that this unselfish city can offer. There is a famous song that says how the city is his only friend and companion, and even though I had a lot of friends there, sometimes I felt like this city will always be my true, honest friend. The literal translation of Belgrade means

The White City, but this city is colorful and full of life. There are so many things that you can see and do. For example, there is a big ancient fortress called Kalemegdan, which stands there like a crown of the city. From there you can see how Danube kisses Sava. Also, there is a big monument The Pobednik or The Victor that proudly represents this city, because Belgrade won against all enemies that tried to destroy this city and kill his soul. It is probably the most powerful, most popular visual symbol of Belgrade. The main pedestrian street, Knez Mihailova, is flanked by historical buildings, and walking around this street and discovering its secrets in every piece of concrete of its architecture can fill your day with enjoyment.

Let’s not forget about nightlife, which is the real magnet for a young population nowadays. Wherever you go, you will be hosted by a positive vibe, and you will have a feeling like you are at home.

People go out during all week days, and they do it spontaneously, at any given time and regardless of the amount of work that awaits them the following day. Floating river clubs, we call them Splav, are a special feature of Belgrade nightlife. I enjoyed spending my weekends there during the summer. Sometimes, we stayed out until morning so we could see how a new day is born above the city. The most popular pedestrian street, after Knez Mihailova, is Skadarlija, which is also my old neighborhood. It is an old bohemian street, alive at any time of the day. I would always suggest starting the night out from here. Great food, the best ambiance, and an always smiling staff will make your day. So, there is always a fun time once the sun goes down or when it comes up.

Now I ask you, do you understand why I will always pick this city as my favorite place? Even though this was a short story about my city, I think that people will trust me and go visit Belgrade once they have a chance.

Jelena Mancevic is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic Skills ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Grandmother's Village

For many years my favorite place has been a village in Russia, where my grandmother lived. Every summer my brother and I visited our grandma.

After living in a big city, life in the village was very much different for us. Almost everything was different. It was like another world. In the city, we had an apartment downtown on the third floor. Grandma had a wooden house close to the forest. In her village everybody knew everybody, and it was safe to go anywhere in the village, even in the woods. Life was very simple and close to nature. You didn't need fancy clothes, and very often, we didn't even need our shoes. Grandma never had a TV, and she didn't have a telephone until the last couple of years of her life. There was no water inside her home. Grandma had a garden where she grew vegetables. She also had a cow and chickens, so we had milk, homemade butter, cheese, eggs and fresh vegetables much of the time.

Grandma lived with two younger sisters, and her oldest sister usually visited us every summer. Sometimes our cousins visited us and it would be crowded. We had only three beds in the home, and if we had more visitors came we had to put mats on the floor. Usually, grandma's day started at 4 A.M. It was time to milk the cow, work at home, and work in the garden all day until dark. Of course, we helped grandma with any kind of work, but it was fun for us like another game.

For us kids, the day usually didn't start so early. We had a lot of freedom and we could play with our friends all day long. We could go to the forest for the mushrooms or for the strawberries. We could go to the pond to swim, fish, climb trees, build wood houses, and play a lot of other games. However, there was one important rule for us that had to be followed; when the cows come home, we must come home too. It's time to then have a glass of fresh milk and go to bed.

So, it was my favorite place. Now it looks very different from what I remember. My grandma and her sisters have died. My cousins grew up and now have their own families. Grandma's home has been empty for the last couple of years, and the weeds are growing everywhere. Sometimes when I smell odors in a cow pasture, or when I smell fresh cut grass, it reminds me of my happy childhood times. I would not trade any of these memories for anything in the world. They are a part of me.

Olena Murray is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida. Her teacher is Aimee Holzer.

My Country

Hi my name is Cassandra, today is really special for me because I'm writing about my lovely country. The name of my country is Haiti, and I want everyone to know how wonderland Haiti is and I am going to explain it. Haiti, the name means mountains country, it's a Caribbean country and it occupies the western smaller portion of the island of Hispaniola. It also occupies a small satellite island for tourists including Iles-a- vache, which includes Port Morgan and Abaka Bay resorts; in French the nickname is "la Perl des Antille" (the pearl of the Antille).

The capital is Port -au-Prince, the official languages is French and Haitian Creole the name of the money use is “ Gourdes”. Gaining its independence in 1804, Haiti was the first independence nation of Latino America and the Caribbean, the second republic successful in a war of independence against a European Colonial.

The culture of Haiti is a diverse mix of French, African rhythms and Spanish. A very popular dance today is compass, short for compass direct, a modern meringue made popular by Nemours Jean Baptiste, on a recording released in 1955. Dancing is an important part of Haiti’s culture.

In conclusion, Haiti is a paradise; the people there are so friendly and amazing. I would like everyone to have a chance to visit there because there is always something new to see. I want to say thanks because you took time to read my description of Haiti and I hope you’ve enjoyed it.

Cassandra Paul is from Haiti, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Favorite Place

In my life, I have gotten to know a lot of interesting places; I know most of the European countries and some places on the Eastern Coast of the United States. I can’t say I have only one favorite place. I love London, Paris, Venice, Berlin, Atlanta, and Copenhagen. I enjoy being on a summit in the Pyrenees, looking at the Atlantic Ocean from the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland, walking around the Amsterdam channels, or drinking a good jar of beer in a Prague tavern. If I had to choose my favorite place in America, I would choose New York City.

I have always loved great cities, and I have always been fascinated with New York, with its urban landscape, its cosmopolitan taste, its way of life, and, of course, its thousands of tourist attractions. I have visited the city twice. The first time was in 2010. I was enchanted by my first view of the city. I remember when I arrived at night at Newark airport and quickly looked across the Hudson River from the Jersey shore and saw all those lights going up to the dark sky.

What a wonderful view! On this first trip, I visited many of the city's wonders such as the Empire State Building with its great city view; Liberty Island; Midtown, where I saw Rockefeller Center, St. Patrick Cathedral, and the U.N. Building; Central Park; Greenwich Village; and three of New York's great museums: the MoMa, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Natural History Museum.

Another reason I love New York happened on my second trip. On this occasion, I traveled to the city to marry my spouse because in Florida we couldn't marry at that time. It was June, 2014, and at that time, we had less time to enjoy the city; however, we did have enough time to discover some places like the awesome Guggenheim Museum, a masterpiece of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and to walk through Central Park, SoHo, TriBeCa, Little Italy, and Chinatown. On my wedding day, we took a quick look at the One World Trade Center, where we felt the sad memory of September 11th. Finally, to say goodbye to the city, we walked along the Brooklyn Bridge, enjoying the view of Lower Manhattan.

There are many reasons to love New York. One can taste international food in one of the thousands of its restaurants, watch a Broadway musical, go shopping in SoHo or Midtown, relax in Central Park, or just enjoy walking and breathing the singular atmosphere of this great city, a puzzle of people from every place in the world, a city in which there is always something new to discover, a city where everything seems to be possible.

Luis Rodriguez is in Dave Thomas East's ESOL program. He comes from Spain. His teacher is Nancy Gardner.

Cuba is a Wonderful Place

From my point of view the most beautiful place in the world is Cuba. I was born there, in Ciudad de la Habana. I traveled from occidental to oriental part. Cuba is an island surrounded by sea, the temperature is tropical and there are no abrupt changes in weather conditions. The vegetation is varied and there are many nature reserves. On the northern coast there are spectacular natural beaches with fine white sand and crystal clear water.

One of the best beaches in the world is located in the city of Matanzas, called Varadero. Cuban food is unique, characterized by the use of onion, garlic, pepper and some spices such as cumin, bay leaf and oregano. The distinctive dish is roast pork, yucca, salad and congri. Thinking about it makes my mouth water. Cuban people are very friendly and very good hosts, very talkative and spirited. One of the things they enjoy most is dancing; they dance with great rhythm that becomes contagious.

Cuba is an excellent tourist spot. There you can snorkel, swim, horseback riding, caving, hunting and hiking. On the other hand, there are many places to enjoy the night until sunrise. My country is tempting to enjoy. It is my favorite place because it is where my most beautiful memories are.

Silvia Regalado is from Cuba, she is a student in ESOL Level 6 at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Favorite Place

I had the opportunity to work in a travel agency, Viajes Paraiso, for 25 years. I have traveled by airplanes, cruise ships, and trains to such places like Greece, China, Japan, and the United States. Of all the places that I have traveled, Israel is my favorite place.

Israel's capital city is Jerusalem, and for the world Tel Aviv. Its summers are hot and dry, while the winters are mild with moderate rainfall. The south part of the country is arid. Principally, the languages are Hebrew, Arabic, English, German, and French. The religions are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In Israel, respect is given to all different religions.

Israel, in fact, enjoys cultural diversity because its people have come from the symbolic four corners of the world. Many people call a Kibbutz home. It is rich in agriculture, education, and cultural diversity. The Jordan River provides the major source of fresh water in the region. In this river, Jesus was baptized. I had the opportunity to use this water for my daughter's baptism.

South of the Sea of Galilee was where almost all of the disciples of Jesus were chosen, such as, Simon and his brother Andres, Santiago, and Juan. The Jordon Valley lies entirely below sea level, and the Dead Sea is about 1,300 feet below sea level. Many travelers come here to rest and rejuvenate.

In Tel Aviv, jewelry is made from diamonds and precious stones. It has beautiful beaches and hotels. Bethlehem is famous for the Nativity of Jesus, while Jerusalem is where Jesus walked and performed several miracles. Other memorable places I have visited in Jerusalem were the Old City of David, Prayers at the Western Wall Tunnels, Mount of Olives, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Out of all my travels around the world, Israel is my favorite place. I think it is a privilege to have been able to walk where Jesus lived in the Promised Land.

Emilia Sandoral is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida. Her teacher is Aimee Holzer.

The River

Everyone has a place that makes them feel happy and relaxed. For some, this might be the beach, the movies, or even their own room. For me, it's the river. This is the one place in the world where everything seems to be okay. It's almost as if the world stands still for the time being and life just seems to be filled with joy.

I can almost picture it now: the sounds of running water, leaves rustling in the wind, wildlife singing the songs of nature and the smell of fresh pine, oak and sometimes fire, or even the reflecting river showing what would be if I were to look up.

Then there are tons of fun things you can do when you get there. For instance: camping, having a cook out, fishing, swimming, and even spending good old quality "electronic free" time with your family and friends.

The possibilities are endless, and so is the fun, but the number one thing I enjoy about the river is the feeling you get when you realize that we, as humans, do not need all of this fancy technology like smart phones, TV and computers to have the time of our lives. So, I encourage you to go out and experience this for yourself because no amount of words can describe the beauty or fun you will come across out there.

David Tolbert is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Beth King.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is St. Augustine. This city is the country's oldest city. I love this place because when I am there I like to walk around and explore interesting things. There are so many hidden shops and restaurants on the side streets, not to mention some great Spanish architecture.

When I am in St. Augustine I always visit the Castillo de San Marcos - the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. From this place, there is a beautiful view on the Matanzas Bay. Then I imagine the big ships which flowed into the bay almost four hundred years ago. In my imagination I see couples dressed in costumes from past eras and walking the shores of the bay.

I love walking by St. George Street which is lined with historic homes. On this street there is the Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse. Then, I feel like I am in one of Europe's old cities. While taking a walk, I sit on a bench to rest among the greenery and beautiful flowers. After visiting interesting places, it is time for lunch. My favorite restaurant is named Pizza Time - in which the owner is a native Italian. This restaurant has a very friendly team and familiar atmosphere. There I ate the best Italian pizza in the world. I love St. Augustine. This city has a romantic atmosphere. When I come back home from St. Augustine, I feel relaxed and calm. I am glad that this beautiful and extraordinary small city is near to me, so I can visit it often.

Katarzyna Wiak is a student at Daytona State College. Her teacher is Yvonne Ward.

My Fairytale Place: Polish Version

I would like to introduce you to the most peaceful and beautiful place that I have ever been. It's called Otulina, and it is located 40 kilometers from the Polish capital, Warsaw.

On the very edge of the Kampinos Forest you will come across a unique, charming and exceptional place. Pine and birch woods ensure a dry microclimate, while wide-stretching oaks endow the nook with special character.

It's an agro-tourist place, so you can come here with your family and rest, far away from the city noise. If you choose this place, you will not be disappointed. This lovely area has two buildings. The main building- DOM - (House) is designated for housing the guests who want to stay for a night. The second building -STODOLA- (Stable) is designated for hosting workshops, and for holding different kinds of meetings or events. In the house there is a domestic atmosphere, and you can feel it when you first step in there. The fireplace immediately makes you feel warm, especially in the winter, when it is really cold.

The smell of the wood and every detail makes you feel like you are in your own house. When you leave the house you can see a place outside where you can make a fire. In the night it looks uniquely beautiful. You can stay warm, make a hot sausage or just listen as somebody plays a guitar. If you have a chance to stand alone in the middle of the property, you can hear the trilling of birds. During the walk along the path to the main road you can see many wild animals like rabbits, deer, boars, moose and even snakes.

In Poland, there are about five thousand places similar to this one. Now, you may be wondering why I chose this exact place. The most surprising thing is that it was my work place for 5 years. During my studies, I was looking for a temporary job, and I found this amazing place. But I don't mean only the place or property. The most important thing that came across to me were the people I met there. They weren't only coworkers. They were like my best friends! Because all of the employees and the boss were about the same age as my mother, I felt like I had three new wonderful "mothers"!

My dream is to be the same great boss like I had there, Joanna Konecka. She, along with the others, taught me to believe in other people, to never give up, to believe in my own dreams, and to follow my chosen path. I had their support all the time, and now, here I am!

Paulina Wisniewska is a learner in the Jupiter Community High School Adult ESOL Program. She is from Poland. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Kunming - My Favorite City

Kunming, a fantastic city, is located in the south-west part of China. I like Kunming so much because it is not only a colorful and magical city, but also is a lovely place where I met my husband and my best friends.

Kunming is the capital of Yunnan Province and it is also called Spring City, because there is only spring in Kunming. This allows Kunming to be the biggest flower producing city of China. So the happy thing is people can buy flowers very inexpensively. In addition, Dian Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Yunnan Province is also in Kunming. Dian Lake is the home of sea gulls who always fly from the cold north part to the warm south in winter. To see and feed the sea gulls in winter is my favorite activity.

Kunming also has a beautiful mountain, Western Hill, which is a good place for riding a bicycle or climbing. My husband and I frequently went to climb the mountain. When you arrive at the top of the hill, you feel that it is the happiest thing in the world. Kunming is also a magical city. That is because half of the nationalities of China live in the city. It is very common to see people of different nationalities dressed in many colorful national costumes in the street. Different ethnic minorities hold activities and celebrations for all kinds of traditional festivals. All of this makes Kunming such an exotic city.

Kunming has given me so many sweet memories. After graduating from the university, I went to Kunming to be a graduate student. It was there that I met my future husband who also arrived that year. It is really fate that brought us together.

We fell in love in the second year and got married in the third year. I also met the most amazing roommates who became my best friends. On sunny afternoons, we would often lie down on the green lawn of the school and talk about our secrets. And we made a promise that we would be bridesmaids for each other. My friends have made good on their promise, since they were the bridesmaids in my wedding. My wedding is an unforgettable memory!

All of the streets in Kunming have our footprints. We like to explore the tastes of various snacks and delicious food. We like to search all of the interesting places.

So, Kunming is not just a city for me, she also gives me so much treasure. I will always cherish this special city and miss the blue sky, white clouds, brilliant sunshine, kind people and especially the people I loved.

Huimin Xu is from China. She is a learner in the Adult ESOL Program at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Key West, Where Paradise Begins

My name is Ramiro Saenz. I am Nicaragua. I have been here for 17 years. My favorite place is Key West. It is small, about four miles by two miles in size. I like this place very much because I can walk or ride my bicycle to work. During my free time, I go to the beach to enjoy the scenery, breeze, and tranquility. Sometimes I go alone. My two daughters live here too. I like to watch them having a happy time on the beach. In the evenings during the week, my friend and I take the bus to go to the English class. The ride is long, but it is worth it.

On weekends, you will find many tourists watching the sunset by the water. Many people like to walk on Duval Street, visiting the bars and window shopping. This is the busiest part of town. If you want to come to Key West, I encourage you to come during Fantasy Fest. It is one of the most attractive events on this island. We here are a very relaxed and slow moving people. That is what I like about it.

Ramiro Saenz attends the ESOL class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

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