

MILESTONES



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

Milestones

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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Someone or Something I Admire

People I Admire: Brazilian Teachers

In my country, Brazil, teachers are like heroes without specific tools for teaching. Although they do not have the resources they need, they do not avoid their mission: imparting knowledge. No doubt this is the mission of educators globally.

Most Brazilians hold the common idea that it is otherwise in the university. However, given the opportunity to study in one of the best in my country, I could see the truth: The best instructors had few resources and materials. Once more, these educators are likewise heroes preparing adults for their professions.

Primarily, the public schools have problems, too. In fact, they do not receive sufficient per pupil investments for these years. Our heroes contend with illiteracy because repeating a grade is avoided by the system. Consequently, there are students who only know how to copy; they do not only read without comprehension, but they also write without coherence.

Does this problem have a solution? We do not know! Perhaps we can listen to what those heroes are begging for in their classrooms. It is not a solution, but it could be a solid start.

Jessica M. Beltrame is currently an Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida. K.H. Niedbalec is her instructor.

Someone I Admire

The person I admire is Carlos Juan Finlay, a great Cuban physician and researcher. He was born on December 3, 1833 in Puerto Principe, Cuba. He joined Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1853 and graduated in 1855. Later, he continued his education in Havana, Cuba and Paris, France.

In Cuba's universities we study about Dr. Carlos Juan Finlay work. Specifically, in Medicine History class we studied about the research done by Dr. Carlos Juan Finlay in the neighborhood of El Cerro, Havana, when cholera epidemic occurred in 1868. Dr. Finlay realized a detailed investigation in sick cases and reached to the conclusion that sanitary measures needed to be taken in contaminated water to stop the epidemic.

Finlay's work was carried out during the 1870s. He was the first to theorize (1881) that the mosquito was the disease vector, causing yellow fever. A year later, Finlay named the mosquito, which transmits the yellow fever: "Aedes Aegypti." The sanitary authorities followed Finlay's recommendations to control the mosquito population and the disease. The authorities carried out the sanitary measures suggested by Finlay to combat the mosquito and stop the epidemic of yellow fever. From 1902 to 1909, Finlay worked as the chief health officer of Cuba. During that period he was credited to discover the yellow fever vector.

Dr. Finlay's findings helped save many lives in America. It reduced the incidence and prevalence of the disease in Panama during the construction of the Panama's Canal in 1903. Prior to this date, about 10% of the workers had died each year from yellow fever and malaria.

Dr. Finlay was interested in many diseases and wrote articles about leprosy, cholera, and also plant diseases. He especially worried about yellow fever and wrote as much as 40 articles about it. Finlay was nominated seven times for the Nobel Prize in Medicine, but he was never awarded the

prize. I personally think that it was just unfair. However, France gave him the National Order of the Legion of Honors in 1908.

Carlos Juan Finlay was an extraordinary scientist, a hard worker who dedicated his life to scientific investigation. Actually, I think he was a fabulous person. Dr. Finlay died in 1915, in Havana, Cuba. The anniversary of his birthday in December 3 is celebrated throughout America as the "Day of American Medicine."

I admire Carlos Juan Finlay very much because he was an excellent physician and a researcher. He always worried about people's health and realized the importance of discovering the transmitting agent of the yellow fever. He stepped into history as the discoverer of the transmitting agent of yellow fever. That is why he is a worthy historical person of admiration.

Miriam Bolet is a student at The English Center in Miami. Her teacher is Ms. Mariani.

My Mother Is My Compass

Mrs. Paula N. Brown is a strong, caring compassionate and loving woman. She is a God fearing woman who knows how to seek the Lord in holy prayer. She has instilled morals, values and a strong work ethic in her children and grandchildren. I want to let her know that I respect all that she has done for my family. Mrs. Brown is my mother.

I admire my mother for being in my life when times were difficult in our family. There was a time in my life when I did not know where to turn and I felt like I was all alone. I was getting into trouble and hanging around with the wrong crowd. My mother came to me and said, "Let us pray, for God knows all things and He will help you make better choices." I looked at her as if to say, "Mom, how did you know I needed it?"

My mother is a blessing to people in all the parts of her life. She is a wonderful grandmother to her five grandchildren. She spends a lot of time with them when she is off work. She takes them to parks, movies and church. She works as a caregiver and gives comfort to many.

I admire her personality and the way she lifts me up when I am feeling down. I love her smile and laugh; they brighten the day. She has a gift for multitasking different projects. Sometimes I am overwhelmed to see all that she does. I am proud of all her accomplishments. She can do whatever she sets her mind to do.

Mrs. Brown is an all-over special person. She is very motivated and is always reminding us to never give up because it will get better and that we need to pray about it. I know in my heart that she wants us to do well in everything we do.

Mrs. Paula N. Brown is both the roots and the backbone of our family. I hope that I can be half the woman, mother and friend to my kids as she has been to my siblings and me.

Tarsha Brown attends GED classes at Community Connections in Jacksonville. She is the mother of two. Her teacher is Nancy Devereux.

The Warrior

My father-in-law is the most optimistic, persevering, friendly and confident man that I know. If someone needs anything, has a problem or wants advice, he always has the perfect words to make a person feel good! He has had many difficult situations in his life, but he always finds a way to confront them. He is the world's most persevering person I have known, and he has never given up. He has an energy that makes you feel confident and safe. He loves his family above all things.

My father-in-law is the world's most optimistic man. When he is around, all the people around him feel the same.

To me, he is the person that always has the right words: “Yes. Of course. Sure. Everything is possible.” The best phrase I have heard him say is, “The sky is the limit”, and he applies this phrase in his life. He is always available to help without expecting anything in return.

My father-in-law’s life has had good and bad times, but in the bad times is when he is the best. Only he knows how to be happy in the worst of times. In those moments, he teaches us that no matter what happens, you should always lift your head and move forward.

When you are with him you feel that he is trustworthy, and you never feel that he can do wrong. He teaches us that we must always do the right thing no matter what the situation is. He is a tireless worker, and he does everything to make his family happy. He is an excellent husband, brother, friend and grandfather, but especially father, and his two sons are very proud of their father.

My father-in-law is all this and more. I am happy and very lucky to meet someone so special and to be a part of his family. He always will be like my dad.

Elsa Calzada studied English in an ESL class at NWF State College in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

Fun Time

I admire people when they are having a good, fun time at a party. Obviously, you might think this is a silly thing to admire. To me it is really important to witness a positive, joyful celebration at any kind of party, be it full of children, teenagers, or adults. The word ‘party’ gives an image of music, dance, food, and alcoholic drinks (most of the time), but if people are in control of their consumption of alcohol, they will have an enjoyable time.

Also, if people at the party have beautiful hearts, meaning that they are not going to abuse the people in attendance and or behave crazily on the dance floor,

everybody will be happy because there won't be any accidents or tragedies. So, do you agree with me now?

Richelord Camille is from Haiti. He attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Someone I Admire

My name is Nadine Charles and I'm from Haiti. My mom is the most important person in my life. Today I will talk about my mom. My mom is the person I admire the most. She is a very caring person. She carried me for nine months. When I was born she took very good care of me. When I was in Haiti my mom helped me a lot, she paid for my school, and she always had something nice to say to me that was encouraging. Because my mother cared so much for me; I pray to God every single day to keep my mom alive.

This is why I enrolled into Dunbar Community School. I would like to earn my diploma, and make my mother proud of me. Once I earn my diploma I want to go to college to become a licensed cosmetologist. I also have dreams of opening my very own business. With the success of my business, I will be able to assist my mom with the care and life style she provided for me.

My mom means a lot to me, even though we don't live in the same country, she remains in my heart. I think about her every day, she's my hero. I really love my mom, because she has a good heart, good spirit, and she is not a selfish person. I thank God for the great mom he gave me. My mom is the best mom in the world. I love my mom!

Nadine Charles is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Who is My Hero?

My boyfriend Mikey is my hero. He is always there for me and helps me out when I need him. He is my hero

because he respects me, cares for me, and he's always by my side, and is the sweetest guy ever.

Mikey, my boyfriend, always has respect for me and that's what I admire about him. He asked me to a FSU football game and it was going to be just the two of us on a date, but he asked if I wanted to bring my best friend because he was doing all of it for my birthday and wanted to make sure that I was going to be excited with whatever he did for me. When he asked me if I wanted my best friend to come, I said, "No, thanks, I just want the two of us to be together." He respects my friends that I hang out with and I am glad he respects them.

Mikey is always caring for me. I say that because when I'm going places he checks up on me. When I don't text him back for a while he gets really worried and calls me. He's always asking how my day was. He is the most caring guy I have known. Mikey is by my side when I need him even if he's in the middle of doing something. He will drop everything he is doing and come help me with whatever I need help with. He adores me for who I am and he's the sweetest guy that I have met. I'm very proud that I have him in my life.

My boyfriend Mikey is my hero because he has respect for me, takes great care of me, and he is always by my side. I appreciate him with all my heart and he's a great, most wonderful guy in the world. I admire everything about him.

Brittany Fitchner is a student at Adult and Community Education in Florida. Her teacher is Mrs. Anne Meisenzahl. She is beautiful and smart girl. Brittany likes to achieve goals she has in her life and thinks she can do anything she puts her mind to.

My Mom

I admire my mom so much. I watched her work night and day to provide for us. My mom was a single parent with five kids of her own and four other kids that were not hers, but she had a heart of gold. It didn't matter if they were

friends, family, or someone she had never met; she helped everybody. I'm glad God made my mom a strong, beautiful, powerful woman.

She made me the strong, beautiful woman I am today. I can truly say I admire my mom because even though she was a single parent she didn't throw in the towel and give up on life and her kids. She stood strong and kept her faith in God. I want to tell God thank you for keeping my mother around to see me go back to school to get my GED and become successful in this world.

Clara Horne is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Mom

My mom was born September 21, 1941. She was raised in Detroit, Michigan, and she was a registered nurse at Detroit Receiving Hospital. She got involved with a man by the name of Samuel D. Hunter, and they got married and had two beautiful sons.

My mom and dad divorced. My mom lost her job, and we moved to a housing project on the Eastside of Detroit. My mom got on public assistance and raised two sons on her own with nobody's help.

My mom was so strong that she did not take any handouts. She did not like it when people gave us money, so she would tell us to give it back. She continued to be strong when she found out that she had breast cancer. She made sure my brother and I went to school. My mom paid the rent and made sure we had food.

In conclusion, my life was turned upside down on June 14, 1989 when my mom died. I was never the same. I went to jail at the age of seventeen, and I got around the wrong crowd. But I can say my mom walks with me now because I am doing better.

Scott Hunter is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

A Great Basketball Player

Kevin Durant is a person I admire for his phenomenal basketball skill. He is going to be one of the greatest scorers; if not the greatest in NBA history by the time he retires. Durant is leading the NBA in points per game, and he is in the lead for the MVP award this year. Durant had a streak of 12 games with 30 plus points. The only 2 other players with a longer streak are Tracy McGrady and Kobe Bryant. During the streak, he had games where he went for 45 points, then the next game 54, and then 48. He would have been able to keep the streak going, but his team, the Oklahoma City Thunder, was shutting out the Nets. They didn't let him play the 4th quarter because they didn't want to brag about being ahead that much.

Kevin Durant is the only player besides Michael Jordan to win the scoring title for most points per game in the NBA 3 years in a row. Durant is at an advantage in scoring because of his height and extreme reach. He is already 6'11", close to 7ft tall, and his arms are amazingly long. He has a mid-range game and can shoot 3 pointers. He is the most all around scoring player in the NBA.

Steven Keller is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

The Person I Admire: Pope Francis

I was wondering about whom I could write an essay and after going through different newspapers and magazines, in particular Time, I decided on Pope Francis, because he seems friendlier, simpler, and more accessible than other popes.

While his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, were both professors of theology, put more emphasis on doctrine and theology, Francis, a former janitor, chemical technician and literature teacher, emphasizes the Christian tradition of serving others and loving humanity.

Francis is urging for a renewed focus of serving the poor, pushing his Cardinals to abandon their psychology of monarchy, and to get rid of the lavish Vatican. "The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials."

As Cardinal and Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Jorge Mario Bergoglio made a yearly pastoral visit to places of conflict and sorrow. On other days, there were journeys to neighborhoods to help so many in need of so much. No one was too poor or too filthy for a visit. "Reza por mi," he would ask almost everyone he met, "Pray for me." When on March 13, Bergoglio became Pope, he made the same request of the world: "Pray for me." He picked the name Francis, which pays tribute to St. Francis of Assisi, a 13th century patron saint of the poor.

Since becoming the first non-European pontiff since the eighth century, Pope Francis hasn't disappointed. He has rejected the stylish Vatican apartment, limousines, and wardrobe of previous popes, to live, travel, and dress simply and humbly.

He celebrated his recent birthday with homeless men and drew attention for kissing a severely disfigured man and washing the feet of girls in a juvenile jail. Surely, there is no Catholic leader at Christmas who is closer in his own practice to the teaching and life of Jesus.

Francis has pushed for an end to culture wars, urging bishops to spend more time healing and less time fighting political battles. Where the previous Church hierarchy denied communion to divorced people, he says that communion is open for all and not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. Pope Francis has censured the Roman Catholic church for focusing too much on gays, abortion, and contraception, saying the church has become "obsessed" with those issues to the detriment of its larger mission to be "home for all." He started a revolution by answering a reporter's question about gay priests by saying, "If someone is gay, who searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge?"

In conclusion, I admire Pope Francis for commanding his revolutionary vision, which is much needed as the church needs to evolve and adapt to the changing world. He is not only a pioneer but has also shown to be a very sensitive and caring person. Lastly, I feel a greater connection with him as he comes from a Latin country and we share the same mother tongue.

Raquel Latuff is an Academic ESOL student at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

My Favorite Teacher

My name is Lesly Francois and I am from Haiti. I am a student at William H. Turner Adult Education. I came to the United States after I completed my secondary school in Haiti. I am very happy to be here because in the United States you can be all you want to be. After studying English at William H. Turner Adult, I will continue to go to College in the evening. I have a daughter and I love her very much. She is my motivation. I want to offer her the best in life.

At William H. Turner, my teachers are all very good, but this semester my teacher is special. Her name is Ms. Innocent and she is a great teacher. She was born in Miami Florida. After graduation from High School, she attended Florida International University and St Thomas University. She has a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in counseling. She is the mother of two boys .One is in High School and one is in first grade. She likes to read and she dances after school. She is excellent.

She motivates her students. She wants us to excel in her class. She starts class on time and her class is very interesting. The students are familiar with her expectations because she is consistent. Do not try to be late in her class; she will give you an extra assignment to compensate. At the end of the week, she gives the class a short test and it usually comes with a treat before leaving. You can hear her pleasant voice teaching from far in the hallway. She is never tired. She will make sure you understand the concept. She

comes in early and she will not mind staying late with a student. I have not missed one day of class so far since I started in January. Her class is never empty, even on a rainy day.

Ms. Innocent prepares us to take the test at the end of the semester and she already voiced that she wants each one of us to pass the class at the end of the semester and move on to the next level. She doesn't teach us English only, she also teaches us life skills. At the end of the lesson she tries to incorporate what we studied with something we will use in our life. Her positive attitude is contagious in the class. We are all determined to do well. She is a counselor at an elementary school during the day therefore she brings us information for our children that are attending the public schools. I have a daughter in school, so she shares valuable information with me when I need it. I will miss my favorite teacher at the end of the semester.

Lesly Francois is a student at William H. Turner Adult.

My Best Friend is a Strong Woman

Hello my name is Maria Juarez. I will tell you about someone I admire, her name is Panchita. She is 82 years old and was born in Mexico. She got married young and had five children. Her husband died when her children were young and so she moved to Texas. Later she remarried with an evil man. He was a drunk and he did not like working so she needed to work more.

She is a strong woman. She worked night and day to support her family and so her children could have a good education. In the morning she went to work in a factory, at lunchtime she sold cosmetics and beauty supplies, and at night she made tamales to sell. Panchita worked hard and never asked for help. That is one reason why I admire her.

She is determined, for example, she lived with her husband about 33 years and then she decided to divorce him. It was not easy to achieve, but she did not stop. Later she moved to Florida, to be with her friends and others relatives and to

escape her ex-husband. Here she cares for her grandchildren and her daughter who has disabilities. When she thought all was good one of her sons had a car accident and died. She suffered a lot but never lost faith or gets discouraged. She always gave thanks for all things. Also, she is friendly, always saying what she feels without offending anyone. When I'm worried she is always there to advise and encourage me. I love my best friend Panchita.

Therefore, Panchita is my hero, because she is still standing after surviving many difficulties in her life, and she continues to sell tamales. Panchita's story taught me to keep going through all the trouble, to work for my children to have a better education and future. I learned to put my life in God's hands, to appreciate all that I have and never look back.

Maria Juarez is an English student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Katie Mominee. She lives with her husband and has three daughters, Lily, Aby and Susy.

Someone I Admire

My mother was the eleventh child of thirteen children. Her parents were farmers and very poor. Every other year my grandmother got pregnant and had a baby. During the first and second year of the baby's life, my grandmother used to take care of the baby, and then she got pregnant again. Due to the fact that there were 13 children, every child was only fed milk the first two years of her or his entire life. The older children had to take care of the younger children because my grandmother was pregnant again.

When my mother turned seven years old, she was aware of the lack of food and money in her family, so she decided to start working as a house cleaner to help my grandmother. Before she started her school day, she would go to work. One of her tasks was serving breakfast to the children of the house. Nonetheless, my mother could not eat what the children were having for breakfast; she would

eat the bread crumbs that were on the table cloth and the sips of milk that were left over in the cups. Of course, my mother did not get good grades in school; in fact, she barely finished elementary school. She could not go to middle school or high school anyway because her parents could not afford the tuition.

Eventually, my mother got a job as a housekeeper in different houses around her hometown until she turned fourteen. Then she went to work in Mexico City as a housekeeper because they would pay her more money in the city than in her hometown. My mother worked in four different houses of foreigners from France, Spain, United States, and Mexico. Moreover, she learned how to cook international dishes and social etiquette. She was a very hard worker in every house she worked in, so she would get very good references to work someplace else. Also, her employers would let her live in the house with her two little daughters, and while she worked, my sister and I would go to school.

After years of working in the city, my mother had to move back to her hometown with my sister and me because her mother was getting old and she needed someone to help her with a traditional Mexican food stand that my mother still sets up in the plaza in my hometown today. Through the years, my grandparents got very ill and my mother had to buy them expensive medicine. On top of that, my mother had to pay other expenses for us, such as bus fare for college, tuition, and fees, and the stand food was not paying the bills. Luckily, my mother got a job as a housekeeper with a general practitioner who could get the expensive medicine that my grandparents needed, and my mother would barter her services for the medicine.

My mother has worked hard and persevered to provide her family with its needs. Today, I recognize all that my mother has done for her family and I truly look up to her for all the strength she has to keep going. I have learned the value of hard work by working as hard as my mother has done, and every day I try to accomplish lots of

things because tomorrow might be too late. I am better a person. Nonetheless, my mother is the best and I won't compare how hard she works to how hard I work.

Claudia Melendez is a student at Dave Thomas East Community School.

A Special Grandfather

Who are the oldest people in your family that taught you good experiences to become successful in your life? Everybody has a grandparent no matter how old you are. Our grandparents are the oldest people in our family who teach us many good things by telling us and demonstrating with their personalities. They have so much experience from throughout the years that they have been living; they share it with us to become successful in our lives. Fermin Miguel, my grandfather, did this with me in my childhood, which I'm going to share with you.

Nature is the most beautiful in the world with its color, fresh smell, and the peace you can feel being there. My grandfather took me away to ride in the forest with the three horses that we had every afternoon and sometimes in the morning, too. While the horses were eating, he would tell me about the trees, rivers, flowers, and all kinds of plants we found which we had to care for because nature is a special gift that God gave us. Therefore, I love and appreciate all nature.

My grandfather also taught me how to give thanks to God and believe in him. As I was growing in age, I was also growing in faith in God, observing how he prayed and appreciating the times he taught me to sing. Together we gave thanks to God for all the things we had around, believing that he is with us and is going to help us when we need him.

Honesty is a characteristic to become successful in life. One more thing that I learned from my grandfather who passed away is to be honest with myself and with other people, by always telling the truth, never lying to them.

Being honest will open the door to new and important things.

We should appreciate all the things that we have and the people who are with us, especially our grandparents: taking care of them, loving them, and giving them time to listen to their advice and good experiences. Although they may seem boring and unremarkable some days, they will be our guides in our journey through life. Even though they won't be with us, their words will remain in our minds and hearts just as my grandfather, Fermin Miguel's teaching has remained in me, and I will never forget them for the rest of my life.

Floricela Miguel is in the Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Despite her soft-spoken and humble demeanor, she is quick to take on new challenges in and outside of class. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

I Admire Taylor Swift

I admire Taylor Swift as my hero for a lot of reasons. My most fun time was getting to see Taylor Swift perform at the 2011 CMA Music Festival. I admire Taylor for the way she writes her own songs and the way she reacts when the fans go crazy after a performance by her. The second reason I admire Taylor Swift is because I think she is so cute. I think she is cute because of her blond hair and because of the way she dresses. I like her dresses because they are so full of sparkles and glitter. The third and final reason I chose Taylor Swift as my hero is because she is one of those kinds of people in country music who is not only very talented, but is also one of the most popular artists in music today. She is very nice to everybody she meets.

I think highly of Taylor for the way she composes her own songs and the way she sings about songs involving love and kindness. One my favorite songs by

Taylor Swift is a song called 22 because it is a good song to dance and move to.

I admire Taylor's personality and her relationship with other artists. I chose Taylor Swift as my hero because she is a country singer who is very young and talented. She has a very good voice.

Marc Philbrick is very talented and nice to everybody he meets and he loves Taylor Swift very much as both a performer and a person.

My Hero

The reason I call my Dad a hero is because he is the one who really means a lot to me and makes me happy every time I see him. From my Dad, I learned how to be a gentle person. I admire his gentleness. He taught me how to say hello to someone with my voice and smile in the end. The people are always friendly at school, so I just be myself, be gentle, greet them, and smile.

When my Dad speaks, I listen and understand him by looking in his eyes. My hearing is fuzzy, but I keep my eyes open all the time. It wasn't easy to do what my dad said, but I obeyed him every time he needed something.

The best thing is how lovable, caring, and responsible my Dad is. When I hug him I feel his love. Still to this day even when he's far away, he hasn't forgotten about me and I've been dreaming about my dad who always makes me happy and gentle.

In the end, my Dad moved to the other city and married to another woman named Lisa. No matter how many years have passed, he shall remember me as much as I remember him. That's why I love my dad who is my hero.

Triston Robinson is a student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Fl. His Teacher is Anne Meisenzahl. He is interested in reading, movies, history, and biographies, sports, video games, model kits, and sports.

MOM! THERE IS ONLY ONE

My name is Solayne and I was born in Cuba. When I was 5 years old, I moved to Italy. I decided to talk about my mother because she's the example in my life. Also, as a perfect example she has been a mother and a father for me.

When I was 3, my mother moved to Italy searching to find a better life for the both of us. Although it was very hard for her, she had to leave me with my grandmother. I remember how much I missed her. When talking with her on the telephone, I can remember always crying. My mom would always say "do not worry, soon we will be together." Finally, at the age of 5, my grandmother and I moved to Italy. The family was finally together again!

Looking back and even the way I look at her today, my mother remains my example in life. I have seen her make many, many, sacrifices, changing her goals and ambitions so that I may have a life full of enjoyments and few disappointments threw out my life. My mother's goals for me are to have every opportunity that she did not have as a young person as I am. I truly admire my mother because she has encouraged me to achieve my goals in life and not let any distractions get in my way. My mom is everything to me: my friend, my sister, my concealer and angel too. Thanks mom, for all of your sacrifices you gave up, just for me. I love you mom, so very much.

Solayne Santos is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Someone I Admire

Everyone has someone to admire in his/her life. There are a few important people in my life to admire, but the most admirable person is my mother. My mother's name is Mamita. She is 70 years old. She was born and grew up in Haiti, but now she is here, living with me in the United States of America.

My mother is an amazing woman. She did everything to raise us, without a father. She worked very hard and that is what makes us who we are today. My mother's strength and intelligence for a woman growing up in a third world country is outstanding. That is why she is a role model to me; and mostly, that is the reason I admire her with all my heart. She has always a very special place in my heart.

I admire her, the most, because she is very strong, very intelligent and very beautiful person that I know. She loves and takes care of her family very well. The strength of my mother is unbelievable. She used to work so hard every day. She used to be on her feet every day. The only time she rested was when she was sleeping. My mother never refused to work until she retired. Despite, her low level of education, she has accomplished a lot of things in her life. For example, she used to manage her own restaurant and her fishing boat by herself. She educated all her six children without a help of her husband. For me, all these things are the work of an intelligent woman.

The reason I said my mother is beautiful because she is five feet two inches tall. She is very petite. She weighs one hundred ten pounds. She has long curly black hair; sometimes many people think she is an Indian descendent. Although, my mother was not happy that our father was not in our life, she never stopped showing how much she loves us. She never let us suffer with any problems. She is always there for us when we need her. My mother played two roles in our life. She played the role as our mother as well as our father.

Marie Dorcin Solage is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

The Importance of Water

Something I really admire in this world is water. Water is one of the sources of life for all living things on earth. If the earth did not have valleys and mountains, water would cover this entire planet. Without food we can survive for a

number of weeks, but without water we will experience problems after three days.

I admire water because people need water more than food. To me, there is no better music than the music made by the rain. I admire water's simplicity. It does not have color, odor, or flavor, but its application is very widespread across the globe.

Water is used for drinking, cooking, firefighting, cleaning, and many other things. Water is used in almost everything and in people's lives. People can use water, even when it is in its icy state, in medicine, and in drinks. The uniqueness of water is that it can be in any of three states: solid, liquid, or gaseous. Only a few substances can be so easily flexible like water. The most important thing to remember is water can exist without us, but we cannot exist without water.

Ifeta Tiresias is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

The Beautiful Margarita

In big families grandparents are the most important members. They are the heart and the center; all the family system moves around them. Many of us have memories spending part our lives with our grandparents, especially in childhood. I had the opportunity to meet my four grandparents. Three of them passed away with good marks on my life, but today I have the fortune to have my mother's mom still alive.

She is called Margoth. Her real name is Margarita Eloisa, but for as long as I can remember she hasn't used her real name. She is 93 years old, but looks like 80. She has seven children, sixteen grandchildren, and seventeen great – grandchildren. Her life was not easy; she had to raise her children practically by herself, because my grandfather was in he Navy, and spent months away from home. She was a strict mother and grandmother. In contrast to other grandparents, she did not play with her

grandchildren or spoil them. When she looked after her grandchildren, she gave us home responsibilities and duties, especially the girls. She wanted to teach us to be good women and wives like her.

Despite being a strict woman, she is a good grandmother. Over the years she has become more sensitive, more special, more like a grandmother. Everybody in the family loves and tries to be close to her, no matter how far away we are. I love to hear stories about her life, and learn about them. She is a beautiful, funny, active, strong woman, and the best cook I have never known. Her facility to socialize and make friends is her best skill.

My grandmother had and still has a positive influence on me. She taught me discipline, organization, strength, and the way I can achieve a long and good life close to the people I love. I am thankful to have her as my grandmother, and I hope she can stay with us until God permits.

Maria Fernanda Vela has been a student in the Academic ESOL class at the AEC in West Palm Beach since August. She is the welcoming face and voice of the "The AEC Student News." Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

A Good Friend

A friend is good for numerous reasons. He or she is loyal through both good and bad times. A good friend is honest. He or she accepts your flaws no matter how bad they are. Loyalty is what most people look for in a friend. A good friend will stick around when your parents are going through a divorce, when you need to let off anger, or share in a special event. A good friend will celebrate with you no matter what.

Being honest is very important in a friendship. An honest friend will tell you the truth about an uncomfortable situation. An honest friend will not keep secrets or lie to you. Nobody is perfect. A true friend will accept your flaws

no matter how bad they may be. When you make mistakes, you will be forgiven because that's what real friends do.

All in all, a good friend is hard to come across. When you find the right friend who is loyal, honest, and accept your flaws, you have a true friend.

Kahlahari Williams is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Aaron Ralston: 127 Hour Survivor

A person that is a hero to me is a hiker named Aaron Ralston. The reason this person is a hero to me is because he inspired me in many ways. He inspired me to never give up and to never give in no matter what the situation is.

Aaron Ralston was a hiker who was very interested in climbing and hiking until one day when he went hiking into the canyons by himself, he was climbing and all of a sudden, he was trapped by a huge boulder and was left stranded without anyone for five days. Aaron was low on food and he had enough water to last him for a couple of days.

While Aaron was stranded in that deep hole with his arm trapped by the boulder, he was going crazy, he was suffering from hallucinations and he was at the point to where he thought he was going to die. When he ran out of food and he was running low on water, Aaron started thinking to himself. Aaron was wondering how he got himself into this situation. Aaron didn't tell anyone where he was going and he didn't leave a note or anything to inform anyone where he would be.

After suffering from this humongous boulder, Aaron decided to fight back and escape from the terror that would scar him for the rest of his life. It was a painful experience, but in an act of bravery Aaron had decided to separate him from the boulder and so he snapped the bone of his trapped arm. He grabbed his knife and amputated his arm, finally freeing himself from the boulder, but as he was amputating his arm he had a vision of this young child who he would

find out is his son. This inspired Aaron to push himself to the fullest to free himself from this pain. After he finally freed himself, Aaron packed his stuff and left the canyon where he was rescued.

Aaron Ralston is now a motivational Speaker and he tells his story about what really happened in that canyon. Aaron Ralston was an inspiration to me because he taught me that every second counts in life and that you can get through anything as long as you believe and don't give up. He is a hero to me because he was not afraid to go through all that pain and suffering, he was eager to free himself and save his own life. He is my hero and he always will be to me still to this day.

Kris Williams is a student at Adult Community Education in Tallahassee, Fl. His teacher is Anne Meisenzahl. His goals are to become a journalist, write music, and become a chef.

My Experience in Adult Education

The Importance of Learning English

I came to the United States from Syria about a year ago. Syria is one of the countries in the Middle East. In Syria, I studied Agricultural Engineering and worked in poultry farming for 35 years. I gained knowledge from working with many companies in Syria. When I came to the United States my experience made it easy for me to get a job. In the beginning, I was pleased with my first offer and began to work. I worked in my new job for six months. It was a difficult period because I do not speak English and had problems understanding the staff. This led to problems at work.

So, I decided to leave work and learn English. I moved near my daughter in Niceville, Florida. She helped me to choose a college, Northwest Florida State College, and I'm taking ESOL classes. Now I am happy with my teacher who helps me and my friends from many different countries. I will continue my learning because I think it is the basis to integrate into the community. I know this step is difficult, but very important to my long-term goals. The lack of opportunity to work in the field of poultry in Niceville, made me look for different domain. Learning English will help me to integrate American society and choose the right business.

Tony Ahmar and his wife Therese are both students at Northwest Florida State College enrolled in the ESOL Program. Tony is from Syria. His teacher is Brian Jones.

Lost in the Shadows

Last year I spoke at the Florida Literacy Conference. That gave me confidence to talk in front of people. This year I had the opportunity to talk to some “at risk” students in my town. I just tried to show them where I came from, and how it is up to them to learn to read. I told them how important it is to learn to read and stay in school.

I addressed one group where most of the students want to compete in professional sports. I tried to encourage them to stay in school and then enter college because your chances are greater to live your dream. Some of the other students want to be doctors, or lawyers, and this applies to them too. They must stay in school and finish college, and their chances in life will be better.

I’ll never forget a song I used to listen to when I was a young man age seventeen or eighteen. It was a James Brown record that said, “Without an education, you might as well be dead.” I have come to the conclusion that this is a profound statement. No education means you get the lowest job and the lowest salary. This will keep you from owning a car or owning a decent house.

Fortunately, I was given a second chance in life to learn how to read. Not knowing how to read was a thorn in my side on a daily basis. I had to dodge conversations with people. I wasn’t sure I was pronouncing words right, and I was afraid to let them know I couldn’t read. This went on from the age of six to the age of sixty.

Anonymous

Never Stop Learning

Hi my name is Candelaria and I’m from Guatemala. My husband and I have four children: Pascual, Maria, Miguel, and Rogelio. I have been living here for fourteen years. I started to learn English because I understand learn English is important to use all time at school, with my children, or doctor appointment .Wherever I go, I need It.

One time, I had an appointment, at the doctor's office. The nurse asked me if I had someone to translate for me, she asked me if I speak English. I said, "I do not speak English." When I told her my son speaks English, she told me "your son can't translate for you because he is under age." She was upset, and she wanted to change my appointment. I told her I don't want to change my appointment in Spanish. When I was arguing with the nurse, the doctor entered the room, and he asked what was happening. The nurse and I explained to him about my situation. He told me, I'm Italian, I speak little Spanish if you speak slowly I'll understand you. Finally he understood me, and checks my son. That was the reason I decided to learn English.

In the beginning it was fatiguing, but it not impossible. I never stopped studying English. I tried day by day, so that I could speak English fluently. It was not easy, there are always difficulties, and everything was negative for me because I didn't have confidence in myself. It was confusing to write English when I'm used to Spanish.

When I realized that studying makes me happy and it changed my life little by little I started to speak, pronounce words, to understand people.

Now, my life is gratifying because I can speak English, it is better than before. My passion is to continue studying, and I believe in myself, and I have a wise family, and intelligent teacher they tell me all the time to never look back, keep going you can do it, you can learn more. When I talk with my children's teachers, they tell me they are happy because now I speak English very well.

Learning English is complicated but useful. These challenging experiences taught me to never give up learning English. The lesson I learn is that if you don't know English you cannot understand people who speak English.

Candelaria is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

I Know I Can!

I'm a student in an adult education literacy program- ELCATE and I'm from the island of Hispaniola. As a student enrolled in this program, I have to say that it was difficult for me to really get comfortable at the beginning, because of my English level of speaking and understanding.

The first step started when I came to the United States in October of 2012. After a few days I went to a high school, but they told my parents that I couldn't enroll because I wouldn't be able to graduate or have enough credits to go to the university. It was difficult to accept this because I was only 17 years old.

Since that date, I'm learning English to get my GED, a career and a better life. Sometimes I wasn't quite sure what I really wanted to do because I was afraid of speaking, afraid of making mistakes. Even though I failed on some tests I didn't give up. I was disappointed with my test scores because I did my best to pass.

Sometimes my weaknesses made me cry, but there was my teacher's story. She also cried a lot when she first came to the United States, but her teachers told her to have courage, so she now encourages me to keep up. She helps me to be more determined to achieve my goals. I remained positive, do what my teacher asks me to do and have faith in myself. I can tell by writing this story that my English has improved. I have my heart set on doing my best to be an orthopedic surgeon in the future.

I'm so happy today that I have no regrets about the choice I made to come to Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology. In only 8 months in the ELCATE program I have learned to write sentences and essays. This is because I have a demanding teacher who knows that I can do it. The program that she created, the activities, vocabulary and conversations have enabled me to be proud of my English. I believe all immigrants like my teacher and I who share our story can do it also.

Levelda Edmond is a student in Graciela Somoza's ELCATE class at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology in Naples, FL.

How Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

Hello, my name is Maria Espino. I was born in Mexico, I am a mother of 5 children. Their names are; Joel (age 15), Lucero (age 12), Araceli (age 10), Elisa (age 8) and Saray (age 3). I attend classes at Dunedin Public Library, The teachers at Dunedin Public Library are striving to help me read and write in English. I gave thanks to all the hard working teachers in Dunedin Public Library, Especially Ms. Dot Naegele. She is my diligent tutor that helps me with everything, Thank you Ms. Dot. Before I came to this marvelous program, I didn't know as much English as I do now, I was disoriented. When I took my children to the Doctor or the Dentist, it was crucial to communicate with the doctor or whoever else I was speaking to, I was frantic because I didn't understand nothing of what they were saying. But now I can speak and write more fluently than before, now I can read a book to my youngest daughter and it feels great! Also I can attend my children's meetings or have a conference with the teacher if I need to know something; I can finally communicate with my children's teachers and Principals.

I will never forget the time my tutor teacher said to my daughter "Don't laugh at your mom when she speaks English" "on the contrary, they should help or teach her more English" Now my daughters and my son are helping me in English. I feel happy that I could attend this program; this has been a lot of help for me so I can go on in the future. I hope this program will continue! Thanks to all the staff and teachers that strive to help us learn this language that is very important for us and for all parents that have their own families so we can help our children to read and write as little or as much as we learned from this amazing program.

My decision is to keep learning English, for in the future I can find a better job so I can sustain my children, that's the reason I'm in this program to learn how to read and write in English so I can get ahead in life and do things that some Hispanic people can't do. I will keep going strong

in this program and hope my wishes will come true. Thank you so much! And God Bless this program! And staff and tutors and also teachers!

Maria Espino is the mother of five children. She is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas program. She studies English with her tutor Dot Naegele at the Dunedin Library.

My Experience in Adult Education

I have lived in the United States for about four years, and am currently taking adult education classes at a local college. I am from Bogota, Colombia, and since I came to this country I have studied English.

Adult education is a wonderful option for people who want to continue their learning experience. There are two advantages of adult education: it improves skills for a better job or promotion, and helps people gain self-confidence. The first advantage from adult education is improving skills for a better job or promotion. Knowledge opens the door for everything that we want. My first steps were finding out where to take English classes, enrolling in the ESOL program, and doing my best to use it to the fullest. I am 54 years old and I think that people can now obtain knowledge easier than in other times by attending classes in residence or through the web. I prefer to go to college in the classroom to interact with the teachers and classmates. I know that theory, practice, and training in a specific field, bring security, capacity and autonomy for development of job responsibilities. Education increases the possibility of a promotion or better job by a high percent.

The second advantage of adult education is that it increases self- confidence. When people know how to do things, they can work with quality, discipline and commitment. Their confidence grows thanks to study, because learning provides knowledge to perform tasks without mistakes. People learn to make decisions naturally, timely and appropriately for every situation, allowing greater personal growth and contribution to an organization. Even though I have a degree from my country, I did not

want to even submit an application for work, because I feel I am not ready to take a job with responsibility. So I will study English until I feel more qualified to take a job in this country.

For those reasons, right now, adult education is the best way for me to reach my goals of getting a good job and in the near future to validate my college degree.

Beatriz is a student at Northwest Florida State College enrolled in both the GED and ESOL Programs. She is from Columbia. Her teacher is Brian Jones.

An Enjoyable Learning Moment

How is your English class? Mine is an active and enjoyable one. I learn something new every day. The teacher helps us and corrects our mistakes instantly. I need that because I don't have time to wait for another day to learn from my mistakes. My favorite part is when we gather around the table and participate in her daily teaching and class activities that she has prepared for us. She uses the projector to show on the screen what she is talking about. Visual tools, auditory video, interactive online websites are great ways to make us understand English language better. I am glad that my teacher utilizes digital media in this class. Another interesting thing in this class is that we help each other to do our in-class assignments. Everyone is willing to spend some of their precious time to explain in their native languages to assist others understand difficult words or sentences.

I feel like I belong to a one international big family when I attend this class. I try to recommend my friends to come to class. It makes me feel more confident each day and I know it will make them, too.

Yanellis Gordillo is from Cuba. She attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Dear Diary

My name is Lili. I am 19 from Hungary. You may not know where Hungary is. It is situated in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin, 5382 miles from the United States. It's quite far from here, isn't it?

The reason I am writing is to tell you about my experiences in the last few months. I just graduated from high school and came to the U.S. to improve my English before going to university. I was very excited when I enrolled at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. After I took a placement test, I was ready to go to my class. I was first placed in Advanced ESOL and transferred to Academic ESOL a month later. These two levels are designed for students who already have a working knowledge of English and who want to consolidate their understanding in order to progress in their academic or professional career.

I remember the first day I went to school. I was excited, nervous and shy at the same time. I went to the front desk for some information about my class. A kind lady led me to my class and introduced me to my teacher, Nancy Gardner. She is a very kind and dedicated teacher. I am very grateful to her. I am really enjoying my days in class. We have almost the same schedule every day. We spend one hour in the computer lab where every student has his/her own access to Burlington English. Before and after lab, we do a lot of different activities in our classroom. One of my favorite activities is when we focus on accent reduction. In my class, there are students from all over the world. What I really enjoy is the opportunity to look at other cultures and languages. Even though one of our class rules is to only speak English in class, lots of my Spanish, Haitian and Brazilian friends explain things in their native language. I really love listening to different languages. Sometimes I try to guess what my classmates are speaking about or determine if we have something similar in Hungarian. We also work together in pairs a lot and in small groups, so everybody gets the opportunity to express his/her own ideas. That is the reason why we have become a big great

team. We have had discussions about famous Americans as well as Miley Cyrus and Saturday Night Live.

I am very grateful to this school and my teacher because they have given me lifelong experiences and friends. I do not know where I'd be without them. This school has really showed me the way to become somebody who knows American history, who understands the daily routine of a real American, who knows how they celebrate their holidays, and even how to "TP a house" at Halloween.

Lili Horvath is an Academic ESOL student at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

A Passion for Learning

My experience in Adult Education has been challenging, inspirational and feelings of self-accomplishment. I have always had a passion for learning. Education was the best choice I could have made for myself.

Being challenged by what I have learned has made me want to learn more. After completing a task that I thought I would never score a good grade on, when I finally did, this propelled me to aim higher with my learning.

My experience in education was inspirational because I began to bond with my fellow classmates. I got to meet people from different walks of life. I was fortunate enough to meet some people that would encourage me along the way and I would do the same for them.

Every time I completed a subject, I felt accomplished and confident that my goal was getting closer. By me learning new things, it gave me the confidence to try other new and exciting options.

My experience in Adult Education has been priceless. To be challenged, inspired, and self-accomplished, education is a gift that you could only give to yourself. To share that gift with others and embrace it with teachers, classmates and others is truly a blessing.

Keila Lee enrolled in the GED program at Dunbar Community School in 2012 as a married young mother without a job. She wanted to get a job to provide additional income to help her family. She reached her goals in 2013. She has a full time job.

Accepting New Challenges as an Adult Education Student

My name is Eva Volmar Lyncee. I was born in Haiti. I lived in my country for thirty-one years. I was married in Haiti and I have one boy with my husband. My son was born in August 16, 2008 in Haiti.

My life in Haiti was so good because at that time my dreams became a reality. I wanted to live with my family, have a job, my house, my car, and my parents near me. All these things happened there, but I came in United States in June 16, 2013 with plans to take care of my son because he is sick. He has WILLS TUMER disease. He had surgery for his right kidney to be removed and he took six months chemotherapy and radiation after surgery.

I started my English classes at the APOPKA FAMILY CENTER with Westside Tech in October 2013 because I live in Apopka and my cousin told me about this school. It is very important for me to speak English very well. There are several reasons for learning English but the most important is because I live in United States now and I need to find a good job that will help me to support my husband financially. Later on I would also like to complete a master's degree in Logistics. I studied in Haiti Secretariat Diplomatic and Logistics in Guadeloupe and would like to continue my career in this field. Another reason for learning English is to help my son with his schoolwork.

Since I started my ESOL class many things are new to me. I like my English class because my teacher helps me to learn English. Although I took English classes in my country in High School I was able to speak it only sometimes with my husband. My husband speaks English and he is a U.S. citizen. My teacher gives me homework every time and she lends me the book to practice at home.

She also gives me websites where I can find English practice programs. My teacher involves me in many activities in the classroom for ESL students.

Frankly, I love my teacher because she is very patient, very nice with the students and teaches very well. That is why I invited my mother who is 77 years old to come to the class to see if she can learn English with my teacher. I also brought my husband and my son to visit the class one night because I wanted them to meet and see my teacher because she is a nice person.

I like all the classes that my teacher gives me especially because she is always in the same joyful mood. The day my husband and my son accompanied me to the class was a great experience because of the way how my teacher received us.

I like to meet with my classmates because they are from other countries. Although I don't speak their language and they don't speak my language, we do the practice in English only and this makes you feel part of a group. For the time being my English level is doing better. Before there were some grammar rules I could not apply but now it's different.

Now, I have a challenge: to find how to make a difference between my life now and that in Haiti. It has not been easy to get established in a foreign country or to speak the language, to adopt another culture, work and go to school. But, I want to go ahead because I like fighting for what I believe. And, someday I will teach my son in English very well.

Eva Volmar Lyncee is a student at Westside Tech.

How Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

Hello, my name is Marcos (Mark in English) and I came to this country a few years ago. After coming to Texas, I just worked since I had to financially support my family in Mexico so I had no opportunity to study English.

After a few years of just working, I realized that I must focus my efforts and will to develop other skills including improving my English.

If I could speak and read English better then I could realize new goals by taking advantage of training offered in this country as technology in the construction business to complement my professional education as an Architect. Knowing English better meant chatting with my new American friends, getting more tools to improve my personal life, and help to find a professional job. With limited communication skills in English, it was hard to relate to people or things in the USA and slowed down my progress in reaching important personal and professional goals.

A year ago, I moved to Florida to take care of my father and to seek new opportunities. I reviewed my goals and learned about the Conversation Club at the Dunedin Public Library. Ms. Pat and the teachers helped me with improving my conversation and writing skills as well as building my confidence to speak in class and help others.

Not too long ago, I was assigned a tutor to help me prepare for the GED test, which gave me much joy. My new tutor, Ms. Michele Caputo, is “muy simpatica” or very understanding. She has transformed my interest in learning. She has a physical disability, which reminds me that I need to work harder to overcome my learning challenges. She gives me strength to meet my goals. Sometimes, I meet obstacles and look for excuses to relax. But seeing my tutor struggle every week to meet with me despite her physical problems, I forget about the excuses and I stay faithful to the struggle of mastering the English language.

In the future, my goals are going to pass the GED and going to college and finish a degree. I hope to have my own business one day. I am considering taking the US Citizenship test.

Improving my English has changed my life. With help from my GED tutor and the teachers from the Conversation Club, I will succeed. Yes, I can. Thanks for your help.

Marcos Martinez came here from Mexico a few years ago. He is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. He studies English with his tutor Michele Caputo at the Dunedin Library.

How Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

When I came to America ten years ago, Spanish was my only language. I did not understand how important it was to learn English. Now I know that learning English will give me independence. Not being able to accomplish tasks such as talking to my children's teachers, understanding orders at work, and even going to the grocery store showed me that life would be easier if I knew English.

I did not know what to expect when I first went to conversation class at the library. I admit I was nervous and did not know if it would help me. After a while when I found out how kind everyone was, I no longer felt nervous. The teachers really want us to learn English and they are very helpful when teaching. I can tell that they really care about their students. I am very thankful for the literacy program and those involved in the program.

I've been with a tutor since May of 2013 and I am seeing some improvement. I would be lying if I said that my life was completely changed for the better. But that does not mean that it has not changed my life at all. I understand that you cannot learn a new language in a day and know that it will take some time. The biggest change that has happened to my life is that I have confidence in my self to speak English in public. That confidence has given me a lot of pride in myself. I used to be shy when speaking with people in English but now I am eager to join conversations. The biggest change that I have in my life is that I now have the independence that I came to America to enjoy.

Teresa Pena is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. She studies English with her tutor Gary Richey at the Dunedin Library.

How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in The U.S.

Life in Haiti

My name is Lineda Altimeaux. I am from Haiti. I have been in the United States for three years. The United States is very different from my country. I am going to do my best to tell you the differences between Haiti and the United States in English.

In Haiti there are no jobs and no opportunities to go to college. So, while living in Haiti there are no opportunities to have a job, but in the United States there are a lot of jobs if you are educated and willing to work. This is why I'm going to Dunbar Community School to learn something so I can get my GED. My parents love me because I am very focused about my only dream. I praise God every day to keep my promise and never give up in my life.

I remember very well everything about my country and the place where I was born. I made a lot of friends in the United States. I was happy. I will think about my dreams. I promised God and my parents to keep my dreams. When I go back to Haiti I need everyone to be happy for me because I will help the children and bring something to every child in Haiti.

Lineda Altimeaux is a student in Vicki McDonald's ESOL class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

Culture Shock: Lifestyle Differences

Living in Thailand all my life was simple and less stressful than in the U.S.A. When I was in Thailand my mother and I would go to the market every day to get fresh food. But we would also go into the woods and pick fresh

mushrooms and some vegetables, depending on the season of the year. We would also go ant egg hunting to use in cooking. My mother and I would use a long bamboo stick and tie up a basket at the end of the stick, we looked for the biggest nest of ants then we start shaking the nest of the ants in the trees. We had fun and at times, the ants would bite us on our arms, legs and feet to mention a few places.

In America people like to go shopping once a week and buy frozen food and also canned food. In the U.S.A., I notice that people love to eat bread, (sandwiches). When I eat this kind of food I feel like my stomach's empty. When I eat food here that is sweet, I do not really like it, because in Thailand sweet food is only for dessert. In the U.S.A., you have different foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I see many restaurants have this on menus. But in Thailand, we can eat the same food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. For example, we can have many kinds of foods like rice, soup, fried vegetables, seafood, beef, chicken, duck, pork, bugs and many different kinds of fresh fruit every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But here I see many people just like eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, pancakes and cereal for breakfast.

People in my county are very polite and caring. I find most people in the USA are stressed and always in a hurry, not all, but many. My husband tells me they are in a hurry to go nowhere. Thailand is known to be the "Land of Smiles". Also, children and young people respect their parents, teachers, and elderly. Here, I am not so sure they do this all the time.

It is not easy to find my size! I shop in the juniors department and most of the time I cannot find clothes that fit me. America sizes are too big! I am a very petite lady!

In Thailand we do not lock the house while people are there, but here I have noticed that once someone comes into the house the owners lock the door behind them out of habit or to keep dishonest people honest. Also, in Thailand we keep the windows open, but here the windows are closed and locked when you are not at home and even when you

are home! In Thailand the owners of the land and house they don't need to pay tax, while in America you have to pay tax every year on the land and house. Houses in Thailand don't need to have insurance, in America you have to have insurance for house, car. Some businesses in Thailand you can open in your house like supermarket, barbershop, and dry-cleaner without license, permit, and taxes. In Thailand you can eat 3 times a day for only 5 dollars!

In closing I like being here in America; it's all I have ever dreamed it would be. Most importantly I believe education is freedom. You can better your life in many ways such as knowledge, work, and social skills. In America I have this wonderful opportunity.

Oraya Brundage is a student at the Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology-ELCATE program in the Adult Education Division. She is a native of Thailand and has lived in Naples for a year and three months. She is considering opening her own business or becoming a teacher.

Life in Thailand

I am from Thailand, which is in Southeast Asia. Even though Thailand is a fast developing country, Thai people are still conservative. I have lived in the U.S. almost six years and I think that there is a big different between life in the U.S. and life in Thailand in many ways such as freedom, the safety and security system, family bonds, etc.

In the U.S. everyone has equal rights no matter if they have different ages, genders, skin colors or nationalities. People have freedom to express their opinions in public and this is respected, which makes American people have self-confidence to do things by themselves. On the other hand, in Thailand children are taught to respect older people and children are not supposed to give opinions, which can be against others. As a consequence, Thai people don't have freedom and don't have self-confidence to express their

opinions in public because they are afraid that their opinions may oppose someone else's opinions.

Safety in the U.S. is more efficient than in Thailand. When people need help they can call 911 and police will arrive shortly. On the contrary, in Thailand, 191 is not efficient; many times nobody answers or if they do answer, help arrives very late or never arrives. The financial security system in the U.S. is more reliable, especially credit cards. When people have identity theft, they just call a credit card company to cancel and they don't have to take responsibility for the debt. This financial security system is totally different in Thailand. Once a credit card is stolen it's difficult to cancel. You have to file a police report and prove that somebody used your card. When you go to court you will most likely lose the case and have to pay everything, which is usually more than the debt on the credit card.

Family bonds in Thailand are stronger compared to the U.S. It's very common to see several generations live in the same house or grandparents will take care of grandchildren when the parents go to work. Most Thai people will take care of parents and grandparents when they are getting older or send money back home if they live overseas; whereas, in the U.S. most people live by themselves and don't take care of parents and grandparents when they are getting older. Many people go back to see their parents only once a year on Christmas.

Even though there's a lot of freedom and a strong safety and security system in the U.S., many Thai people still want to go back to Thailand to be with their family.

Pirada Charoenchit is an ESOL student at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries program. Her teacher is Brigita Gahr.

Trained by My Life

I will never forget how difficult it was to get an apartment for my family. I started looking for an apartment to rent when we had been in the United States only four months. We realized that it was too hard to get an appropriate apartment because there were some factors.

First, we needed an apartment that was close to my little brother's middle school and each work place of my parents and me, so we could take the buses to work on time, and my little brother could go to school by himself whenever the school asked him to get there.

Second, we didn't have any credit because we were new in America. For most landlords, good credit is a requirement of renting an apartment. If you have good credit, you have a better chance of getting the apartment. We didn't have any credit, so some landlords didn't choose us as their tenants or others raised the rent up so high, we couldn't afford it.

Third, I was the only person who knew English in my family, but my English was too terrible to communicate with people. Either the agent didn't know what I wanted, or I couldn't understand what she said. Because of that, an agent refused to offer me service. Therefore, I called a Chinese agent for help. She asked me to give her 100 dollars as a service fee no matter if she helped me get a suitable living place. At that time, nobody gave me a hand, a new immigrant, who was not good at English, didn't know rental rules in Florida, and was totally lost in this foreign country.

However, I believed that I was being trained for life. Fortune kept others from helping me because it taught me that the compass was already in my hand, which was my persistence. Furthermore, it showed me never to give up no matter how difficult the problem you are facing is. Try your best to solve it, and you will beat it in the end. Eventually, I got a satisfactory apartment since I kept searching the real estate listings and speaking to agents with my broken

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

English. The process of renting challenged me to get closer to American life.

Hailin Chen is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She volunteers every day in the Listening Lab at our school. Her positive attitude and enthusiasm for life keep her classmates and teacher smiling.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

My name is Jean Ordinel Georges. I am from Haiti. My life in Haiti is very different from my life in the United States. In Haiti, I helped my father grow different kinds of crops, but here I am a cook. In my country it is not really acceptable for man to be a cook. Here, I have no choice because if I don't have this job, I won't have the money. Another thing is the different culture and beliefs. Haitians are very strong religious people. They are proud of their culture. When I go to the Haitian church, it is always full. When I checked about the American church, there were few people. The Haitians do not eat the same food like the Americans. We do not eat collard greens, stuffed peppers, lasagna, or macaroni and cheese. We eat mainly rice and beans with chicken and plantains. Though we are so different, I enjoy being in the United States. I like the people, the food, the music, and the culture here.

Jean Ordinel Georges is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the United States

This essay is about the importance of taking care of the whole family. Most couples dream about their future, one day becoming parents, and then eventually grandparents. In my country, Morocco, the family starts with two people, a man and a woman. They get married and have children. The mother stays home and takes care of the children, giving them the love, and attention they need to grow. The father

goes out to work from sunrise to sunset to provide a good and happy life for his family. Every family wants their children to grow up and be safe. I have come to see that here in America; many families put their elderly parents into nursing homes. I have noticed that this happens even when the extended family is big. In my country, this never happens. We believe in giving back to our elderly parents all the love and attention that they gave to us when we were children. There is a saying that parents can take care of a dozen children, but a dozen adult children cannot take care of two ageing parents. I believe that trying to explain that you cannot take care of your elderly parents because you have your own family is a poor excuse. We must not forget the sacrifices that our parents made for us; it is our duty to give back. This expression of love and respect also provides a good example to our young children. With this example, we hope that our children will take care of us when we become old and need help.

It is my dream to learn English well enough to go to college and become a nurse. I enjoy helping people, especially those that have special needs. I never want to see anyone dying sad and lonely. Although I do not feel it is right to put the elderly in nursing homes, I want to become a nurse in the nursing home because I have so much love to give and would take great care of them.

Hanna Jaghri is a student at the Palm Harbor Community School ESOL Program. Her teacher is Dr. Flytzanis.

How Life in Ukraine Differs from Life in the U.S.

Life in Ukraine differs from life in the U.S. in many ways. I would like to tell about some of the differences from my point of view.

Differences in everyday life and life conditions are the most noticeable to me. Computers, AV and photo equipment, cars, motorcycles, clothes, and gas are cheaper in the U.S. than in Ukraine. The goods and services that people consume often have higher prices than in Ukraine,

for example: food, barber services, beauty salons, apartment rent, car and medical insurances. However, salaries in the information technology industry are higher in the U.S., so I can afford a better car and better apartment than I had in Ukraine.

My office and working place are almost the same as they were in Ukraine. However, the U.S. company I work for has more restrictions like dress code, fewer vacation days, and no paid sick leave. In Ukraine I could always wear casual clothes; no suit and tie were required. I also had more vacation days and paid sick leave.

Among things I dislike in the U.S. are the stricter rules in some communities such as prohibiting painting a house with a not-approved color or being obligated to cut the grass in your own yard. You also need to get special permission to have a pet in your apartment. I never heard about similar rules in Ukraine. You can do whatever you want with your house or your yard. You can have pets without asking for any permission in Ukraine.

I was impressed by how well many things are organized in the U.S. For example, it is very easy to get a driver's license or motorcycle endorsement; there is no need to attend auto school. In Ukraine, people have to attend auto school for three months before they are allowed to pass driving and road rules tests to get a driver's license.

Unlike in Ukraine, the mail system in the U.S. is secure. Important documents are sent via regular mail service like credit cards, driver licenses, passports or social security numbers. In Ukraine, letters and packages can be lost or stolen and I think nobody would send a credit card or a passport via regular mail service. Special secure and expensive services are used instead to send important documents.

Some other differences are expensive medical services and higher education. It is free or costs much less in Ukraine than in the U.S. I cannot compare the quality of

higher education, but I heard of very good universities in the U.S.

In conclusion, if you have a good job with a good salary, life in the U.S. can be better than in Ukraine unless you strongly disagree with some restrictions in office and everyday life.

Oleg Lypkan is an ESOL student at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries program. His teacher is Brigita Gahr.

Guatemala and the United States

There are three ways life in my country, Guatemala, differs from life in the U.S: the language, the economy, and the education.

First, the language in Guatemala is the Spanish language, also there are approximately twenty four different dialects and they are: Kiche, Queqchi, Kaqchiquel, Mam, Poqomchi, Tz'utujil, Achi, Q'anjob'al, Ixil, Akateko, Popti, Chuj, Poqomam, Ch'orti, Awakateco, Sakapulteko, Sikapaquense, Garifuna, Uspanteko, Tektiteko, Mopan, Xinca, and Itza. The school system teaches the Spanish language as the first language, and also the English language as an alternative language. In the U.S. the language is English.

Second, the bad economy in Guatemala makes it a problem for parents to send their children to school. They prefer that their children work and help to support the family. The transportation is another problem. Sometimes children have to walk hours to arrive at the nearby school. There are not enough teachers, so the government needs to hire more teachers and pay appropriate salaries. In U.S. the economy is much better, so there are more schools, more teachers, better transportation, and the salaries are more appropriate.

Third, the education in Guatemala is available for everybody who wants to climb and reach the top of the hill;

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

there are public and private schools and universities. The schools have these levels: pre-primary, primary, elementary, high school, university. Parents must pay for their children's education. In the U.S., education is free.

In conclusion, Guatemala differs from U.S life in the language, the economy, and the education.

Wilhem Martinez is a student at Dunbar Community School. His goal is to get his GED and attend college. He wants to become an x-ray technician. His teacher is Anna Franta.

The Life in Brazil

Brazil is a beautiful country with a big dimension and the people are so nice and have different customs in all the country, but have a lot of things in common too. The life in Brazil is more fun than U.S., and the food is so good (awesome). In Brazil everybody can go to school or college for free, independent how much money do you have, and public health is about the same.

There are so many beautiful beaches and cities to look up. The people are friendly, helpful and happy. If you need any help to anything you always going to find it. In U.S. looks to me that everybody is so busy trying to make new friendships and have fun.

Brazil is a big country and because of this, different regions have different customs. There are words that have different meanings in several parts of the country, or things that have different names, like "cassava" that can be in Portuguese: mandioca, macaxeira or aipim, depending of the region.

Continuing about the food, it is awesome! The food is so good! Everything is fresh and tasteful. The food is not fatty. For me, in U.S. almost all food is fatty and because of this sometimes it makes me sick. But there are some foods here that I like, but they are from others countries.

In Brazil, like many countries, the school and college are not perfect, but there are a lot of good and excellent

places to study for free. There are private places too, but it is your choice. The same happens with the public hospital. You don't need to prove that you don't have money to pay; it is public for everyone.

If you don't know Brazil, you need to go there! It will be an excellent experience for you! Brazilians are the best hosts! Everybody who has a chance to know Brazil wants to go back again.

Tarcianna Meireles is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Life in Two Worlds

My name is Arellys Plaza and I am from Ecuador. I am 18 years old. My life was so different in the United States than in my home country. First of all, I do not have my parents and my sisters here, so I have to depend by myself. In Ecuador, I spoke Spanish, but here I have to learn English because I want to go to college.

Here, I can walk on the streets in piece without fear of being robbed for cellphones, wallets, purse, jewelries and money or being killed for not defending myself. I love my country, but living there is very dangerous. Every day, I watch the news from my country and I always see a lot of people being killed by robbers.

Here in America, I have more opportunities to work and to study. In Ecuador, the base salary is about \$340 per month. Here, I can earn that amount in a week, but I have to work hard. However in both countries there are many beautiful places to visit.

In Ecuador, I had three meals a day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Here, I eat only two meals, only breakfast and dinner because my aunt leaves her job at 3:00 pm. When she gets home she starts cooking and the dinner is ready. The food here is more expensive than Ecuador. In Ecuador with \$10.00 I can eat a good meal for three people.

Here I have met a lot of people from different parts of the world, and I can make a lot of new friends. However, my really good friends are in Ecuador. My friendship with them is amazing. I miss my family and my friends, but I see my future here in the United States. I have been here only for six months and all this time I have been learning to become a more responsible and mature person.

Arelys Plaza is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School in Tampa. Her goal is to become a veterinarian one day. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Haiti is Different from America

My name is Charles and I am from Haiti. I left my country in January 2013. People in Haiti think life in America is like paradise. Every Haitian wants to come and take advantage, but they don't know the consequences when you arrive, especially when you don't have someone to count on. Life in Haiti is different from America and there are big differences.

In Haiti, life is so much better for me than in the United States. When I was in Haiti I was feeling free even though we didn't have enough money or a job, but we can survive without them because if we were hungry we could find someone or a family could give you something. In the United States it's not easy. Even your parents humiliate you and put you out; you have to take care of yourself to survive. America is the best country that helps the youngest citizens who have goals to become something in life. The United States allows you to be someone in the society. But I learned something here, the humiliation helps you to be strong and motivates you to learn and become someone important where people will give you respect, especially the ones who humiliated you.

I hope my dream will come true and I will return to my country and share my experience and create more activity for the youth, enjoy myself, and be proud of my work.

Charles Roselene is a student at Delray Full Service Center.

Life in Mexico

I was born in a small town in San Luis, Potosi, Mexico. When I was six years old, I helped my father on the farm in my free time. I always loved when my father would encourage me to strive for a better life. He would say “Ok, my girl next week, I’m going to pay you for helping me out on the farm.” Not only did I help my dad on the farm, I also helped my mom too; we would and make dinner every day. She would teach me how to make tortillas, chicken soup, and hash. I had to learn how to do laundry. I was starting to realize how difficult and hard life is.

When I was only fourteen years old, I came to Florida. It made me realize that life here is very different than in this country. The USA has machines to do everything here. In my country we do everything by hand. Also, The salary here is very different the money I would make for one month in Mexico, and it can be made here in one week.

I thank my mom and dad for sending me to this country. It is difficult to live in this country without an education; I have managed to make my own life here.

My two brothers are here with me in this country, Nino and Adrian. Maybe this is the reason I continue living in the USA. They both have good jobs, and for the first time I have seen them smile. After their first year, my brothers and I moved in together to help share the expenses. I am very happy here in the USA. I am raising my family here as US citizens. I have two boys and one beautiful girl.

I love living here in the USA, but I miss my country. I was living a very poor life, and the experience in my home country was very challenging and very difficult to make a living. I will never forget the hard times. There are times when I just sit quietly and see the beautiful mountains, the fresh rivers, and all the animals. Florida is completely different. Although, I never see any mountains or a fresh river here, I love living here and watching the sunset. It is very beautiful and it is truly different from my country.
Carmela Torres is studying at Dunbar Community School. She is in level 6. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

What Does the American Dream Mean to Me?

The American Dream

James Truslow writes in his book *The Epic of American* “the American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement”. Today many Hispanic people still believe in the American Dream, but the reality is this dream doesn’t exist. The dream is a wish that man has and only with effort, dedication, confidence and perseverance can he achieve it independent of where he is in the world. Everything in life is dependent on you, just you, and nobody else.

Sometimes a person spends his life waiting for that perfect moment, not realizing that this moment, this opportunity is right before him.

When it is said to look for opportunities, this doesn’t mean to come to American is synonymous with wealth. Reaching the United State is synonymous with struggle, sacrifice and loneliness. The opportunities exist. A person has to search for those prospects, and to be ready when he finds it. Do not let a nation dictate what the American dream is.

On many occasions financial comfort depends on having two jobs, which leads to taking time away from the family. It also may limit education and professional development. This is happening today, in an era where President Obama in a speech for American Progress indicated that the American Dream is at risk due to the increasing economic inequality in the country and criticizes the deficit of opportunities for citizens. If you have a dream, no matter where you are if you have discipline, commitment and perseverance you can do it! You have to trust yourself.

Linda Rosado is a Literacy/ESOL student at Marianne Beck Memorial Library.

The American Dream

I wanted a better life for myself and my family.
In Mexico you have to survive an uncertain future.
Education is very low; the discrimination is very high.
The more money people have the more corrupt they are.
I crossed the desert four times for a better life and a better future.
The desert is very dangerous.
It is a double-edged sword.
During the day it is very hot; at night it is very cold.
To survive three days and three nights in the desert you need a lot of luck.
You can only bring a gallon of water, a sweater and the clothes on your back.
The “Coyotes” help you cross the desert.
If you get caught, you tell immigration the coyotes helped you. All Mexican people know who the coyotes really are.
They are supposed to be your guide, but when you start your walk
You realize that the “Coyotes” do not have a heart.
They only want your money. They will leave you to die in the desert.
Somehow I survived walking through the desert.
I brought my family to The U.S.A.
They were very difficult times.
My brothers were only children.
I gave them-the chance that I never had.
They were brought up with a higher education.
My brothers have careers and opportunities.
Now they have a bright future ahead.
When you suffer the most, you learn the most, and eventually you gain the most.
If I ever had to go back to Mexico, I would go happily...
Do you know why? Because I know how to work hard,
Thank God.

Here or in Mexico I would be able to go forward.
I love the US because it is the country that I learned to earn
money,
Because of the laws and the security that it gives you
Because of all the opportunities this country gives you.
Here you can make your dreams come true.
That's the difference between the U.S. and Mexico.
In Mexico, dreams are only dreams
They never come true
And with the years, the dreams become dust.
Anonymous

Dreaming in Colors

My dreaming in color never fades. When I dream in colors, it is always about my education, my life journey, and helping others.

Education is a dream that will never leave me. I study very hard on my free time. It helps me out when I'm working on my assignments in class. I put all my effort into studying. Without studying, my education and my future are covered in darkness.

My life journey gives me strength to endure. Endurance strengthens my character. I am learning in life how things can become hard sometimes. The joy of the Lord is my strength in life. Without glory in my life, I will always be let down. My life is all I have.

Finally, I dream about helping others. I volunteer to help out with the youth to connect them with God. I do it from the bottom of my heart because I feel the youth need more leadership. When I help others, I receive the joy of love. I am very proud of myself and how I can become a leader by helping others.

My education is very important. My life journey can build my faith in life. Helping others make me look at the world in a different way. These are some of the reasons why I dream in color.

Keon Cody is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Living the American Dream

It was late May when worries started crumbling my mom's heart. Tears were rolling down her face; she just found out she was pregnant with her fourth child - me. It was during the communist leadership of Ceausescu in Romania when life was difficult. There was no outside media allowed; there was a curfew. There was a ration on water, electricity, and food. Those were hard times to raise a family.

From an early age, I had to learn how to be independent, strong, and fight for my dreams. I still remember how I used to walk myself to and from preschool. I wore a house key around my neck, and had to let myself in. I didn't have any toys, so I always had to find creative ways to play.

We had to wake up early each morning and get in a roller coaster like line just so we could get a half pound of bread, one tablespoon of butter, and one pint of milk per person. It didn't matter if you were sick; you had to be there, otherwise you would not get your ration of food. We had a small garden where my mom grew vegetables. We raised a pig all year round. At Christmas time we butchered him and made different dishes that would last until the next year. Lard was one of our daily foods.

I was about five when there was an epidemic of Hepatitis A. Both my sister and I had to be hospitalized for three weeks. Every day a nurse would come with an antique glass syringe and needle to draw blood from my tiny veins. When we came home my sister and I had to be on a strict low fat diet. My dad bought a chicken on the black market so my mom could make some soup for us. My brother wanted some of it, but he was only allowed to taste a little of it. He wanted more, but with tears in her eyes my mom had to explain to him why he couldn't have more.

Once the revolution came things got better. I learned about America. Soon after that a dream was born in my heart that one day I would live there. I was eighteen when

my family and I moved to the U.S.A. My dream became a reality. I worked hard, saved money, and put myself through art school. I became a famous, successful artist. America offered me a better future, one that I could not even imagine. I would never forget the open arms, the love, and the guidance I received when I first arrived and long after. This is my country that I love and I am very proud to be part of. Thank you America, for making my family and me a part of this dream.

Tabita, a Romanian immigrant, is working as a faux painter pursuing her GED through Lee County's Adult Education program. Her plans are to attend college and become a physician assistant. Her teachers are Lisa Gumm and Brian Granstra.

What the American Dream Means to Me

After arriving in America, I travelled to different parts of the US. These experiences showed me very clearly that I had been alienated from nature and the world; I was raised and had lived most of my life in a big city, Seoul, Korea, a fast paced society.

Likewise I realized how strongly my Korean background and upbringing affected the way I understood the world. Many countries have attacked Korea throughout its 5000-year history: there have been continuous wars, principally as a result of its special geographic location. In fact, since the Korean War (1950-1953), Korea has been forcefully divided between competing ideologies, communism and capitalism.

Surprisingly, my sense of being Korean is made stronger through my physical presence in America. To me, it is a paradox. It was necessary for me to leave Korea to feel Korean.

Many questions have emerged in me about my previously held beliefs and assumptions, which I blindly held while living in Korea. Now I feel the desire to free myself from the distortions of my education, my national heritage, and my tribe. As a result of my American

awakening, I hope to regain my First Primal Language and discover a method of perceiving the world based on intuition, not simply a mindless obedience and discipline for work.

Yanglim Lee is an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa. Kathryn H. Niedbalec is her instructor.

I Believe

Everywhere on earth, we are living with the “American Dream” in our heart. Today, it is almost inconceivable to imagine our planet without the United States of America. This country represents the breath that keeps the world alive. It’s the only place where all the nations live in harmony, which make it a little world in the world.

It is easier to believe that the “American Dream” represents only abundance of money, but to me, I believe the “American Dream” is:

- To choose life over death.
- To dry those tears that blind us and believe that God has great projects for our lives.
- To be free, to have the right to live, speak, and never lower our eyes in front of anyone.
- To fall, get up, start again, and give the best of ourselves in every situation.
- To see the sun illuminate our steps rather than feel it over our shoulders.
- To believe in education, studies, and to work in other ways to build our days.
- To refuse to sleep under the bridge, yield on drugs, theft, rape, and facilitate inequities.
- To let manifest God’s voice in us and rebuke the destructive evil.
- To put everyone first and never reject or abandon a friend, a parent, a son, or daughter.
- To respect the humans, the animals, nature, and allow them make us happy.

- To surround ourselves with people that will lift us up and never give up on love.
- To never diminish, hurt, or make someone cry and also learn to ask for forgiveness.
- To never reproduce the bad things done to you and reach out to the older and smaller than you.
- To learn to give and accept to receive, learn to say thank you, and to be grateful.
- To appreciate and admire what the ancients have done and imagine and build the future.
- To know that even though the sun goes down today, it will rise up again tomorrow.

In other words, it's not simply to possess a million dollars, it's also to be able to share love and to give a million kisses to whom that matters to you. And that power of love is what makes the United States of America one unique country, the first world power. The "American Dream" leads us to believe in one world, one family, one heart, one God.

Luc Michel S. Maitre, a believer in the "American Dream," is a student at Lindsey Hopkins Tech Education Center.

Dreaming in Color

When I'm awake, life seems black and gray. Struggling to fall asleep, finally my dreams have taken on a form of reality. Dreaming in color, oh how vivid life seems! This journey on the rainbow, I pray it is eternity. The alarm goes off; I'm back to black and gray "sighs".

With no job, and no income, I'm stuck day dreaming of what could be. Everyone around me has their toll money to cross their dreams, but no one's going anywhere. If you have ever watched a movie in black and gray, you'll notice, it's very remote from one with color. Same people, same plot but dull and very dead.

Success is similar to a roller coaster ride. There are many ups and downs before you actually reach your peak, a struggle we all face but we cover it up with contentment.

The moment I ever reach my peak what once seemed black and gray will now be filled with color.

My dreams are big and bright; how can I miss them? Dreams of changing the world and helping others reach theirs... But most of all leaving a positive but productive legacy behind, one my children could use as motivation to accomplish their dreams. My dreams will be the fuel to drive others to discover their reasons for being created.

The alarm goes off and reality just slapped me in the face. I'm not successful though my dreams have ambitions to be. This life of black and gray needs some color adjustment. But for now I breathe with frustration and face reality. Dreaming in color!

Diamond Wall is a student at Dunbar Community School.

The American Dream

What does it mean? Can it come true? Since I was a child, I heard about the American Dream. I remember people talking about leaving their families and going to the United States; they dreamt of finding a better job or, in other words, of getting higher pay, thus being able to help their families. Consequently, many families in our countries have at least one parent absent. For this reason, many children grow up with only their mother or grandparents.

On the other hand, for this dream to become true it is not an easy road. Even when you come here with your visa and have a college education, the first barrier that you will find is the language, because you need to speak fluently if you want to work in your field. Furthermore, in recent years the economy is not as good as it used to be in the past. However, you will find many community and federal programs like ESOL that will help you to learn and to improve your English.

The American Dream

The American Dream can be true; all you need is to have a great attitude and to stay focused in order to achieve your goal.

Iris Chavez is a student at South Area Adult Community Education Center.

An Encounter That Changed My Life

An Encounter that Changed My Life

The event that changed my life is the day that my daughter was born. My daughter was born on July 7 at 9:15 at night. Now she is 20 years old. I remember dreaming of that moment and seeing her for the first time. I loved her.

In the beginning, it was hard to take care of my baby. I was slowly learning, seeing her so fragile and little. I struggled to learn more. Her first word was “papa” at 8 months old, soon after she began to walk.

Her first day in daycare was the longest day of my life because we had never been separated. She was always smiling and playful. When she started school, each year we received diplomas for her achievement and dedication in school.

Now, I see her diploma on the wall of my house. I thank God and my parents because they taught me to be the person I am and I taught my daughter. My daughter changed my life.

Sara Avila is a student in Vicki McDonald's ESOL class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

The Boy Who Wanted to Succeed

Failed, failed, and failed! These are the words I saw and heard each and every day; everything I do I fail at. I felt like I could never do anything right. It's just a never-ending cycle of failing. Each and every day I tried my best, but I just can't outrun my failures. They chase me and wail me down to the ground to where I just don't want to pick

myself back up anymore. Everything is just too hard for me to even bear.

Then one day after school, I decided to go for a walk. I walked for hours, and out of nowhere an older man that I have never seen before walked right up next to me and noticed I was down in the dumps. He just plain out told me, “Everything in life happens for a reason; you just have to keep your head up high and know that you’re giving it your all, and you’ll succeed with anything!”

I remembered those words, and they carried me through and gave me confidence that anybody can accomplish anything if you just put your mind to it.

The next day I had the biggest test of my life; at least it seemed that way to me. It was the test to see if I would pass the 10th grade or not. I was honestly pretty scared. I kept thinking, “What if I don’t pass?” Every time that question came to my mind, I kept thinking about the message that man had told me. “Keep your head high and know that you’re giving it your all, and you can succeed with anything!” His words just kept racing through my mind as I was doing the test, and I knew I could do it!

Three days after that test, my teacher walked up to me and handed me my test results. I dropped to the floor almost in tears as I looked at my results; I let out a deep exhale of air and screamed, “I passed!”

Zak Bennett is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

My Life Experience: How God Change My Life

I am writing this story to inform you about my personal events and to tell you about some of the things I had to overcome in my life. Also, I know with God’s help, he made it all possible.

As a child, I always attended church, but I really never knew the actual purpose of going to church. Since not knowing the purpose, I didn’t take the word of the Lord

seriously. Like many other people, I did my share of wrong doings. I used to go out late at night to the clubs and drink all night. Then I would sometimes go to church the next morning like nothing happened.

I was trying to hide that part of my life from the people in church. I thought there wasn't a heaven or hell that I could go to. But one night something convinced me because I wasn't living right. On that same night as I was walking home from the club; I passed by a graveyard. It made me think, "If I die tonight where will my soul go?"

The event that happened that night opened my eyes and made me realize the way I was living wasn't right. The Bible states "that you can please God by doing his will, which means being holy and living for him." Therefore, that's what I started doing.

So, when I turned my life to God, that's when I started to receive blessings from the Lord. He also taught me that it is the power in his name that helps me through any tough situation. He will be there to guide me through hard times.

Nick Caldwell is an Adult Community Education ABE student.

Broken

My heart is shattered like a glass cup that falls on a hard wood floor. The tears flow down my face like a waterfall in a rainforest. The feeling of sorrow and hurt is like the feeling of a stomachache. No words say when a heart has been broken into millions of pieces; I often ask myself, "Why me?" No matter how much I try to find a way to move past my sadness, that familiar pain keeps coming back. Where is the sunshine, blue skies, and rainbows in my life? Will I ever have that again?

Naomi Moon is a young woman with a kind spirit who is trying to find her way. She is a student of Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill, Florida State College at Jacksonville.

No Longer Bound

The encounter that changed my life forever was an encounter with God at the beginning of this year. It was a retreat that was held at my church for women only. The retreat was for us to have a closer experience with our creator. The retreat's title was "Breaking Free." Trust me, it was freedom ringing.

First, we had to attend ten days of classes before the actual weekend of the retreat. We started by preparing our hearts to forgive anyone that may have hurt or offended us in the past or present time in our lives.

Next, our Co-Pastor, Denise Johnson, handed out a piece of paper with a list of titles: family members, schoolteachers, classmates, job co-workers, former employers, neighbors, and past intimate relationships. The instructions were to write the names of all people, starting from the largest incident to the smallest that may have offended, abused, or given any to us.

The first night of the women's encounter was amazing. We bowed on our knees, began to cry before the Lord, and asked God to help us to forgive every person named on the paper. While we were crying, soft, loving, worshipful music was playing. The church was filled with God's presence, a feeling of love and joy. Inside my chest, I felt my heart beginning to become more tender, lighter, and softer.

On the last day of the women's retreat, they prepared a lovely breakfast and lunch. In between both meals we watched movie clips on forgiveness and freedom that encouraged us to never give up. We were instructed to tear up all the handouts we had received and place them before the cross in the church to release everything unto God.

To conclude, this event changed my life. I am no longer bound, but I am free from all hurt, pain, lack of forgiveness, and rejection by others. I am now filled with joy, love, peace, and forgiveness. So always remember to forgive others, because God always forgives us.

Jameisha Redding is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Story

I'm Marlene Vazquez; I came to this country nine years ago from Mexico. It was different from my country, the language, the people, and the food. But now that I am here, my dreams and goals will not cause me to become frustrated because of the difference. I had to succeed because I was a single woman in this new country. The only important thing that kept me striving was God and my church family.

Eighteen months later, although I was not without my immediate family support, I met this handsome gentleman and got married. I have been married for seven years and live in Lehigh Acres, Florida. I have a very nice family. My husband Gregoreo, my son Joshua, and I are happy. God has truly blessed me.

Now I understand this is a blessed country with many opportunities, which I didn't have before, thank GOD. Although, I haven't reached many of my goals, I am still pursuing them. Now I am a student at Dunbar Community School and have passed my CASA exam. I now am studying at a level 5, whereas before I was at a level 3. I have supportive classmates and an excellent teacher. My goal is to excel in reading, writing, and English. Then I want to get my GED and go to college to better my future.

Thanks to this institution for having these programs so that many immigrants can overcome their challenges in this new country. And thanks for having excellent and trained teachers as Mrs. Savage.

Marlene Vazquez is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

How I Met the Love of My Life

After two terrible years in my life, I decided to take a break and travel on vacation with my friend's family to the U.S. This trip completely changed my life because I met my future husband.

My story begins like this, I have a Brazilian friend who lives in the U.S. and I sent him an email to let him know that I would be visiting the United States in the next month; I wanted to meet up with him because it would be my first visit there. In a few hours, he answered my email and told me that he would not be there at the time of my visit, but that he had an American friend who was learning English and would love to meet us. He gave his friend my email and after that day his friend and I started to talk-by email and agreed to meet.

During my trip, I met him three times, and it was amazing. We started to exchange a lot of emails and phone calls, and he decided to visit me in Brazil. I fell in love with him. After many visits, we decided to date, got engaged, and finally after one year, we got married.

Since I was a child, I always heard someone say: "After the storm, always comes the calm." And now I believe this for sure, because after some bad and difficult years, I met the love of my life.

Karoline Wood is a student at the South Area Community/Adult Education Center.

My Favorite Place

Red Maples

Autumn marks the transition from summer into winter; it's the shift from warm to cold weather, also the arrival of night becomes noticeable earlier. Therefore, the leaves gradually turn crisp and bright yellow, orange, and red. The Red Maple gets its name from their red foliage. It's one of nature's grandest displays, and it's the best time of year to plan a hike. Either dry leaves are falling, crackling under your foot, or fall's windstorm blows away most of the leaves, we can hear the symphony of the nature and imagine her power. We are so close; we can feel it. This sounds, like a dream, we want to immortalize that moment.

The leaves start to pile up at the foot of the principal element on our nature painting, Red Maples. Vibrant colors are slowly replaced by the harshness of cold. We dive into winter; the forest wears a white blanket. Everything seems to be sleepy except the whistling toward the trees' branches. It's both terrible and grandiose.

Days, weeks, months pass, and one fine morning, the weather's ascension wins through to a better life beyond, and the shadow of winter's life disappears. Crick! Crack! The water flows under the snow, and signals that the land is warm again. Finally, nature wakes up, and Red Maple comes out of hibernation. Then the moment that we wait for arrives; the syrup farmers are able to recover the liquid circulating between the wood and the bark of the maple trees, and then the party begins. The people open the rustic little houses built among maple forests, named Sugar Shacks where the sweet water is boiled and becomes maple syrup. The sugaring season changes every year; we are at the mercy of Mother Nature.

My Favorite Place

Against all odds, Red Maples can continue to be tapped for sap until they are over 100 years old. It is with pride, that the Red Maple leaf is the symbol on the Canadian flag.

Nicole Belanger is in the Academic ESOL class at the AEC in West Palm Beach. She is a hard worker and dedicated learner, creating and sharing study guides for her fellow students, and always finding new projects to keep us busy. She is a daily help to her teacher Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Tourist Eyes

My favorite place is the United States. I traveled from Northwest Florida on Interstate 65 to Chicago then to the West Coast to Washington State. Then, I traveled along the Pacific Coast to San Francisco through California to Las Vegas. The Hoover Dam is a terrific monument just like Mount Rushmore. You can stay with one leg in Nevada with the other leg in Arizona. The Grand Canyon and the big Winslow Crater in Arizona is interesting to see. I like to travel but I haven't seen Texas, Alaska, and New England. The Hawaiian Islands are very nice places. Every year, we go to Germany. My friend has German roots, and he likes Germany. I see my country now with tourist eyes. I hope we can travel for a long time. Both countries, United States and Germany, are beautiful places to live.

Ute Feuerbach is a student in the ESOL program at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Stacey Richard.

My Special Place

The most beautiful place I have ever seen was Grutas de Tolantongo. It is located in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. This is a magical place where you can relax admiring breathtaking nature. The main part of Tolantongo has a beautiful camping area that has all the services, you can also find hot springs pools; and hot water pools coming from the mountain, a tunnel and caves where you can camp a long the river.

I visited this place with my brother and his family, we had to go by climbing down the side of the mountain and the river, sleeping in tents, cooking over open fires next to hot water, the sound of water was relaxing entering the cave walking around and leaving this one a cave that has a pool and in the center a jet of hot water coming out of the roof and people are sitting relaxing or swimming.

By late afternoon we were going to prepare us for campfire cooking. We cooked roast beef and after dinner we sit and talk and enjoy nature, fresh air and nature. It's nice to share with the family out door and the beauty of nature, playing, telling stories at night beside, the campfire burning marsh mallows and hot dogs and sometimes even people from around get together and we got to dance but everything this must be done before 12 pm by camp rules so that the other people do not complain about the noise.

We also enjoyed the beautiful sunrise around the mountains and breakfast outdoors with the birds singing. We relaxed and admired the evening.

Paulina Hernandez is a student at S. B. Idea's "Parent Power" Family Literacy Academy at Forest Hill Elementary, West Palm Beach. Her teachers are Sue Bauer and Hani Zainuddi.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Sun Splash Family Water Park. I enjoy it because you get to ride in the Lazy River in a flotation device and listen to music as you float along the river. There will also be a big, long, circular slide where you and a family member will go down the slide together in a flotation tube. When you both go down the slide, it goes fairly quickly, but when you reach the end, you might enjoy it and may want to go again. You can also bring your own food.

Lakeesha Hillard is a student at the Family Service Center.

The White Street Pier

I am from El Salvador and have been in the United States for nine months. No matter where I am, I enjoy having my own favorite place. This is necessary for me because I need to look into myself every now and then.

My favorite place is the pier at the end of White Street. I like the peace scenery of the water and birds flying in the sky. I appreciate nature very much. When the clock strikes five, I get on my roller blade and head to the pier. Sometimes, there are some people walking around but they are not loud and noisy. I will sit on the bench to think about my present life and my future. Whenever I am sad, I will go there to get away from my sisters, brothers, mom, and dad. At times, I will read a self-help book about how to improve my life. Some people think I am boring, but that is all right. I know what I need – peace within is very important to me.

Kevin O. Juarez is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Arizona

My favorite place is Arizona. I was born in Benson. It is very dry and hot, unlike Florida, where it is damp and rains a lot. Arizona has sand storms where sand and wind blow all over.

The mountains are so wonderful, and when the sun goes down the skies look like something from heaven. The skies are golden brown and bright yellow. It's the most breathtaking thing I have ever seen.

Kartchner Caverns in Arizona is home for thousands of bats. The caves are closed during the summer so the bats can care for their babies. You can go see the bat caves and the water from the icicles drips on your nose for good luck. In conclusion, Arizona is my favorite place to see.

Katherine Killackey is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Everyone Has a Special Place

My favorite place to go is to the beach. One reason for this is because I love to play in the refreshing water. Secondly I love to enjoy the beauty of nature. Lastly I love watching the sunrise above the water.

The beach is the most amazing place to be. The reason is simply because the water is always clear and refreshing. I enjoy being able to play in the ocean's water because it's relaxing and peaceful. I wouldn't mind learning how to surf. I love how the water feels cold against my skin.

Secondly I love watching the beauty of nature while at the beach. I enjoy watching the white seagulls soar. Watching the nature at the beach is amazingly peaceful. I love how the pink, yellow and orange sun rises over the water at the end of the day. Another thing I like seeing at the beach is the art people make out of sand.

I love going to the beach just to watch the sun rise. I love to watch the sun shines over the water. It amazes me how all of God's creation leaves us in awe. Being at the beach makes me feel at peace it also makes me relaxed. I enjoy feeling the sun against my skin. I love the colors of the sunset. I enjoy watch as the sun

The beach is my favorite place because the water is always refreshing. I also love the view of nature, mainly because I enjoy watching the sunshine over the water.

Susan Knotts is an Adult and Community Education student.

Tibet: A Holy Place

Tibet, China is the only place that I desire to go a second time. I have traveled abroad to somewhere such as Italy, Egypt, India...and they all have beautiful views and impressive culture, but deeply in my heart no place will beat Tibet.

Tibet is on the highest grassland. When we drove around mountains, I felt like clouds just floated above our

car. If I could jump higher, I would touch them. Clouds changed shapes so quickly like a magic.

Grass there is not commonly green; it is a kind of thick, rich, dark green. Despite the harsh winters, the grass is tenacious and lives very well.

One day, we went to Mount JOLMO LUNGMA, We wound around the steep mountain road filled with potholes. It took us twice the time to arrive to our camp. But a bad thing leads to a good result. Late at night when we were getting close to the campsite, infinite stars hung on the black sky. The stars were so close together; there was no darkness in the night sky. The stars shimmered and flashed, brighter than ever. I would remember that night forever.

Except natural views, Buddhist there made me moved. Tibetans live a simple life with few requirement and they devote themselves to Buddhism. As we were on the way toward LHASA, I have met two pilgrims groveling with their whole bodies along the roadside; they would keep groveling from their villages until they reached a temple in LHASA. It was hundreds kilometers and would take them months to arrive. Usually a young man pushes a wooden cart following a pilgrim, all they carry on the cart are food, bedding and a tent, and they stop anywhere to rest at nights. While I saw their rough faces and dirty robes, I was silent and tears streamed down my eyes

Tibet is such a pure, original land. No doubt it is my favorite place. How about you?

Mei Long is from China and a student at the Center for Adult Learning.

My Hometown

My special place I value the most is my hometown Atlanta, Georgia, because it's where my most beautiful memories are. I miss my hometown and I hope one day I move back to Atlanta. I miss the places I would travel to and visit. There are great places to see in Atlanta.

I also miss my family in Atlanta. They were always there when we needed the help. My friends were always there for me no matter what. We would go to my uncle's store and get the sweetest popsicles ever and eat an entire box on hot days sometimes. We would have the best conversations ever in most beautiful places. We found new and different places to hang out almost every day. There wasn't a place we haven't seen.

The best part of the last day was going to our favorite spot to chill. It was a special park we went to play all day until the sun went down. We'd watch the sun set over the horizon it was the most beautiful thing you'll ever see.

After an awesome day with my friends, watching the sunset was one of my favorite moments. It was nighttime and I would go outside and stare at the moon and feel the moonlight on me like someone was watching over me, protecting me from all evil. I would look at the moon so long until I fell asleep under the beautiful moonlight rays.

If I ever go back to Atlanta, the first thing I would do is go to my hometown park that was special to me, I would stay there until the sunset comes shining on the green grass going down. It was the most beautiful site ever I will never forget. After the sunset I would wait for the moon to show and stare at it in a deep trance and I would go into a deep sleep under the beautiful moon in my hometown.

Brittany Mann is a GED student at Ace –Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee, Fl. She's from Thomasville and is 18 years old. Her goal is to become an officer in the K9 UNIT in law enforcement and go into photography. Her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Fort Lauderdale. Fort Lauderdale is fun, the temperature is nice and the people are friendly. I had a lot of fun when I visited Fort Lauderdale. Friday is a very special day in Fort Lauderdale. Every Friday, I went to different restaurants with my friend because of the

My Favorite Place

discounts. I also went to the Festival Game, which is not so expensive on Friday. Policemen were at the game. They kept us safe from violence.

I liked the temperature; it was nice, the sun was shining and I did not have to wear coat, long pants, boots or scarf. During the spring in Fort Lauderdale, my skin was never dry. This is why I like to go to Fort Lauderdale. When it is cold in Fort Myers, I go there to get warm.

I like the people in Fort Lauderdale because they are friendly and they have very good attitudes. They shared with people who did not have which is one of the most important thing to me because I like to share.

In conclusion, my favorite place is Fort Lauderdale because of the temperature, it is nice and the people are friendly. I would like to go to Fort Lauderdale for every vacation!

Stephanie Moi Meme was enrolled in ESOL for one year. She enrolled at Dunbar Community School in GED the Fall of 2013. Her teacher is Helen Hicks-Wiley.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is my school because it is the best place that I can learn to achieve my goals, to become a better person in the future.

School is the best place that gives me good education. It helps me to become whatever I want if I have a goal. Even though I am poor, I can become a rich person after I get a good education. School helps me to fulfill my dreams but it is not something that I supposed to wait for until it comes to me, but I need to work hard to achieve it. If I do not go to school, it is difficult to become a good citizen. Without a good education the world would not have a better place in my future. Education is the foundation for me to lead a better life.

My School is Gary Adult High School. This is my first school in the United States. I learn a lot of thing here. My

teacher is very helpful and friendly with all the students. She is very patient and directs us to improve our English. First, I thought English is a very difficult language to learn but now I love to learn new things every day. My goal is to study well and get my GED from this school.

Finally, education is the greatest thing that I need in my life. School is the best place that I can achieve my goals. That is the reason for my school is my favorite place.

Islande Prinska is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School in Tampa. She is from Haiti. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Relax at the Beach

At the beach, there are many activities to enjoy. I like to go swimming, shopping and eat at different restaurants. I am joyful and peaceful at the beach.

I enjoy listening as wave's crash to the shore and enjoy swimming through the waves. Sometimes, when I am lucky I can see the dolphins swim by me. Usually, I like to swim in the morning when it is nice and peaceful. Sometimes when I cannot sleep, I go to the beach in the evening. It is very peaceful swimming as the sun goes down. Swimming is a very relaxing thing to do I can always imagine my troubles just floating away.

There are many nice stores at the beach. When my friends and I go to the beach, I always end up buying cute summer clothes at the shops along the boardwalks. I like how the stores along the beach carry all the unique and updated swimsuit styles. Most of my swimsuits come from the beach. There is always a large variety of cute summer beachwear in all the stores. All the stores carry different seashells, and adorable beach accessories. One year I bought a keychain shaped like a surfboard with a big shark bite in the side.

There are many good restaurants where you can get lunch. I always work up an appetite with all the shopping, and swimming. The variety of food is excellent; I can get

hot dogs, and popcorn from the vendors along the street or sit down for a full service meal. You can choose hamburgers, and different foods served by a local pub consisting of chicken wings, and nachos. You can also choose fancier restaurants with fresh caught ocean fish. I prefer the fish because it is definitely fresh, and nowhere else can serve it that fresh.

The beach is also very peaceful. Everywhere you look you see people relaxing in the sunshine on a beautiful day. It is also peaceful just lying on the water as the waves carry you into shore. It's very peaceful watching the sunset at the end of the day. When I'm at the beach I let all my worries just float away on the waves. I always leave the beach feeling very relaxed, and content. I would suggest to anyone who wants to have a fun, relaxing day to go to the beach, and enjoy all the activities the beach has to offer. The beach has something fun for everyone.

Angela Robertson enrolled into the GED program at Dunbar Community School to increase her TABE score. She wants to enroll in the LP program at one of the local school.

A Special Place: School

I love school because it reminds me of kindergarten just a little bit. School is my passion and life. When I'm in it, it's serious. When I'm out, I will make people laugh. There are three subjects that keep me focused in class: math, reading, and the double S for social studies.

Social studies is one way to keep me interested, because I'm hypnotized when it comes to the world and the president.

I have read tons and tons of books from either the library, when I need peace and quiet, or school. But it doesn't matter to me because I love to read.

I'm crazy in love with numbers, because everywhere I go, it's numbers. If I eat, sleep or dream, it's numbers.

Math will forever be my life. School gives you knowledge and power.

Pierre Thomas is a student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida. His teachers are Anne Meisenzahl and Mr. Charles Williams. Pierre is smart and, I'm not going to lie, cute. He loves to read about lots of subjects, but the one he loves most is romance.

The Beach

I love the beach. It is a beautiful place to see the sunrise as a symbol of a new day full of many opportunities. It is also a wonderful place to watch the sunset as a mark of the end of the day is approaching. It is like a dream to see the sun disappears into the horizon. Nothing can compare to such a unique sensation that I have when I see the sun shining on the water, the amazing distance of the horizon, the touch of the sand on my feet, the feeling of the ocean breeze touching my face and blowing into my hair, and the sight of various people having fun on the beach. I don't mind seeing some businesses at the beach to provide services to the people, but I do mind when people purposely trash the beach. Nonetheless, the beach is always my favorite place to enjoy what nature could offer.

Rocael Zacarias is from Guatemala. He attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals and Ambitions

My Goals and Ambitions

The importance of setting goals is the most importance thing you can do in your life. Without goals, you have no direction and no ambition to become successful. You need drive to stay in school and trouble finding a career that will support your needs.

As with most people engaged in this class, I have contemplated the question, what do I want to accomplish in my life. This intricate question burdens many people not just those of us that have chosen to continue their education. I have seen it with my own children, as they anticipate which career path will lead them to a comfortable life, with financial stability.

My obvious good and reason for enrolling in this school like every other student is to complete this program, and earn my degree. However, the completion of my goal depends on me being responsible enough to study and participate in my ESOL class. My first objective was to convince myself to enroll into this program, which was an arduous task. There were so many things to anticipate. One, how would I juggle my profession, and family life, along with the workload of a student? Secondly, the most difficult task that I had to overcome, was figuring out the how to manage my own business in Haiti from the USA. Moreover, I am facing difficulties in finding a balance in my life and schoolwork.

Many people might ask why you need a degree when so many things are going right in your life. My obvious answer is that higher education is a priceless resource that gives me personal satisfaction, and returning to school to complete a task that I started earlier in life, gives me a

feeling of accomplishment. God has a plan for each of us, just follow your destination, and do not let anyone put you down. Be who you are. I remember when my father past away, life was so hard for me, but we were holding on with confidence because God's grace we survived. Reaching your goals and ambitions are foremost the most important thing you can do in your life.

Kilmene Almonor is a student at Dunbar Community School; he is a student of Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Dream

I have a dream. My dream is to become a jet pilot. The dream is not to pilot private jets, but to become an Air Force pilot like my Dad used to be. It's a dream that has never changed since I was a kid. Someday I want to fly in the sky!

Why have I had this dream for such a long time? I think because of my Dad, the person who I most respect and admire. He is a retired Air Force pilot. He survived the Vietnam War and flew in many countries in his life. During my life he told me many stories. Some of the stories were sad and some were exciting, and now my Dad is my dream. I want to be like him. I want to make him feel proud.

I've seen many comments and stories on-line that being a jet pilot is hard work, but I don't care about those comments or how hard becoming a pilot may be. I will work hard, and do my best to become an Air Force pilot to fulfill my dream of flying.

To join the military, I know I must be able to understand English. So I registered for GED and ESOL classes at a local college. After I complete these classes, I will try hard to get into a good college. After entry into college, the first thing I want to do is to meet new people and make good friends. I have a lot of friends, but they are all in Japan. Yes, I'm from Japan. My Dad is an American and my Mom is Japanese. So, for now, I'm a person with

dual citizenship. I eventually plan to choose American nationality so I can join the American military.

Becoming an Air Force pilot is my dream and goal. I work hard in class and tell myself, "You will become a pilot", for encouragement. I can't think of anything beyond this goal. Maybe my next dream will be to get married or become a teacher. I have no idea. I am sure I will try hard to enjoy my life, and I believe writing this story is my first step towards becoming a pilot. I hope someday I'll be like my Dad.

John Kenneth Baker Jr. is a student at Northwest Florida State College. He is enrolled in both the GED and ESOL Programs. He is from Japan. His teacher is Brian Jones.

Aspirations For My Future

The year is 2013 and I am currently 18 years old. Ten years from now I will be 28 and a lot can happen in that span of time. The future is indeterminate and I have the power to change it based on my actions alone. Hopefully, my actions will be positive and I will be able to make a good difference for myself and the people around me. My first goal is to graduate from the current program I am in (I am in the DSC Adult Ed program) with a diploma. Once I get my diploma I will be able to get into a college. I am hoping to get into university and the subject I will major should have something to do with art. The reason I will choose art is because it's a pretty good major for me because it is the thing I am truly passionate about. I love drawing and painting and I try practicing at least once every week. Although I have my passions, I also have my doubts and I need to make sure that my inner turmoil doesn't get in the way with any of my ambitions.

I have lived in Florida for all of my life and it would be an amazing change in scenery and pace if I were able to move to another state. Before I will be able to achieve this goal, I will first need to buy a car and get a good paying job.

The job I get will hopefully be a position where can do my duty on my own. Once I get this career and a car, I will drive to a beautiful area where there is a bountiful amount of beautiful nature. The area I currently live in is very flat and I need an alluring environment in order to inspire me. The last thing that I want is romance. So hopefully, by then I will be in a relationship. With the right drive and motivation, I will be able to truly fulfill my aspirations for my future.

Stephan Bell is a student at Daytona State College.

Goals and Ambitions

My name is Rachelle; I am from a beautiful small country call Haiti. I came to the USA to follow my goals, and ambitions. I have many goals stored in my mind about what I want to do with my life. There are 3 goals that are really important to me. My first goal is to complete my English course at Dunbar Community School, my second goal, is to go to college, and earn a degree in physical therapy. Thirdly, I would like to fund a center for children who have no family in my country.

Once I reach my own personal goals, and my ambitions, I will be able to return to my country an open a center for children who do not have any living families. There, I will tell them about the importance of education. I will also, tell them about setting goals and ambitions, and always strive for a better life. I believe in God, and I know that my dreams will come true.

My goals and ambitions are to help children who have no families; because they will become the adults to replace us tomorrow. I ask God every day, to help me in accomplish my goals and ambitions.

Education and Love are the best things that a child needs in life.

Rachelle's Borgat Boniface is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to get my GED, to further my education and also, be the best mother, leader and provider for my kids that I can be.

I'm now enrolled in GED classes at an adult education school, Dunbar Community School, to get my GED. My GED will help me achieve and move forward in accomplishing my goals and ambitions. Now that I'm enrolled in school, I feel more motivated and focused in class; and I am excited about learning. With all the knowledge and skills that I'm learning, they will be useful as I move on to take my GED test. The knowledge and skills will prepare me to move forward to college. It will also be helpful in the future with my kids.

Once I receive my GED, I will continue my education in the medical field. I will enroll in a local college. It is my intention to take classes to become a C.N.A. and later, further my education in the medical field. It has always been an ambition of mine to work in the medical field, so I want to work hard and stay focused so that I can accomplish.

I want to be successful and most importantly, make my family and kids proud of me achieving my goals and ambitions. I want to start building a successful life, career, stability and security for my children and me. I have grown older and now understand that without a high school education or a GED, I cannot be the best mother, provider or leader for my children. I want to be their role model in every respect.

I am encouraged. I will get my GED, my C.N.A. and be the best mother, leader and provider to and for my children. I will remain motivated and focused on my goals and ambitions.

Colisha Browder enrolled in Dunbar Community School after being out of school thirteen years. Her goal is to get a GED Diploma.

One Healthy World of People

Wouldn't you like to see everyone healthy in this world? I would. Health is the most important part of our well-being. This is my goal – to ensure that each person is in good health. Just look around us. People have all kinds of health issues. The major world health concerns include HIV/AIDS and avian flu, natural disasters e.g. droughts and floods, women's health issues e.g. domestic violence, sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy, vaccination for polio and yellow fever, malaria; and neurological disorders. On the national level obesity, cancer, smoking, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases are a few to mention.

Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone is healthy in this world? We would not have to spend so much money on health insurance, medical bills, and prescriptions. We can concentrate on higher education, safety, and entertainment. It is my desire to help people locally and globally be aware of good nutrition, regular exercise, and personal hygiene. I would not allow any companies to produce unhealthy food such as candies, cookies, desserts, and ice cream. In addition, I will prohibit pesticides, hormones injected into the livestock, and food products.

I think this is possible if we can work together starting with our own family, then into our neighborhood, city, state, country, and gradually to the world at large. I know we can do this if we all come to think for the common good of all people in the world. Let's do it!

Stevens Clermont is from Haiti. He attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Bilingual Teacher

My name is Marcos De Jesus Suero, a native of the Dominican Republic. I am forty-nine years old. I graduated from High School in the Dominican Republic and I also went to UTESA University for two years to study modern languages. It was not possible for me to continue my

schooling there because I had to move to Spain where I resided for ten years before immigrating to the United States sixteen months ago. I am the father of two children from my first marriage and they are both living in Spain. In Spain, I was working as a gardener because I could not find a better job in addition; I did not find time to go to school. I had to work to provide for my family. I have decided to relocate to the United States because I believe I will have a better chance to go back to school and have a career there. Last year, I decide to come to school to learn English. I registered at William H. Turner Adult Education at night. I am making great progress in the English language. I am already in High Intermediate. . I am currently working as a landscaper here because I had the experience from Spain, but I know I will not stop there.

After completion of the ESOL program, I will enroll at a College to study to become a teacher. I would like to become a bilingual teacher. I think it will be a good career for me because I will do what I like to do best: teaching and I will also help others. I am working to save money to continue my schooling. In my country, I have always admired the teachers that taught me at the University and I believed that one day I will be able to teach. Learning English properly is very important for me, I will do my best to master the language and then go on to College.

A degree in College will open many doors for me. I will be able to get a better job to help my family and I will also be able to make my dream a reality. I will not stop going to school until I complete my studies to become a bilingual teacher. I am very happy I came to the United States sixteen months ago because I feel like I will have a better chance to complete my career. I know it will take me more time because I have many responsibilities I have to attend to and also I will need money to further my education. I know I will not give up with all the positive people surrounding me in my class. I will excel beyond what is expected of me and become the bilingual teacher I intend to be and inspire others.

Marcos is a student at William H. Turner Adult Education.

Climbing Mountains

All of us have ambitions and goals in our lives. Mine in particular has many of them. My first goal was to start to study in the university and begin my professional career, but this is only the start.

With my ambitions and goals, I think I'll never stop. Since I moved to America in 2011, I have been learning English first of all because this is going to put me in the right place to climb the mountain. If I can't communicate, I can't go ahead. I know it is difficult to speak another language with the same fluency that I speak my mother tongue, but if I study hard enough, I can become competent.

At the same time I think that careers complete us in many ways. There are a lot of sacrifices to make, but the results justify everything. That is why I think I will continue my studies and enroll in a college or university to take another step up. Of course, I have not forgotten about what I want to do. I would like to work in the field I most love, accounting or finance. At this time, it is not possible because of my lack of language fluency, but with effort, I am going to make this barrier disappear. Thus, in two or three years, I'll be half way up the middle of the mountain.

Parallel to everything, I also plan to build my family and give my child the best education and preparation for her life that I can.

These topics are the most important to me, but I am also interested in travelling to some places that I have always wanted to see. I want to see Europe and America and understand more about their culture, history and language.

What can I say; I have a lot of climbing to do!

Elaine Diaz is currently an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida. Kathryn H. Niedbalec is her teacher.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Marie Dorisme. I am from Haiti. I have been in the United States for 8 years. In English, I am going to do my best to tell you my story. In my country Haiti, it was very different for us to achieve an education. There are no opportunities to get ahead in life. When I was in Haiti, my family did not have any money to pay for my school. They worked at the Flea market to send me to school. I attended school in Haiti at age 7.

For me, the United States is the best country to reach your goals. I left school because I had to work and help support my family. I left in 1989, and God has blessed me with 6 beautiful children. They are smart and doing well for themselves. Four of my children have graduated high school and college. The other two are still working on their education at this time.

When I came to the United States, I saw a lot of opportunities to reach my goals. My goals are to earn my GED and be able to attend college. My mother and father have only myself as a daughter. They love me very much, and I really love them too. My dream is to make my parents proud, and to make my family including my 5 grandchildren proud of my accomplishments. I have enrolled at Dunbar Community School to make my goals a reality. I am always looking at English books trying to learn new words. I also speak English to my children to help with my dialogue. I do not know how long it will take me to finish my education, or to reach my goals, and live my dream, the American dream. I will continue and never give up.

Marie Dorisme is studying at Dunbar Community School. She is in ESOL class level 6. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Personal Story and Future Goals

My name is Julia Esteban and I am from Guatemala. This is my personal story and future goals. I was fourteen years old when I came to the United States with my aunt. I have lived here for more than fifteen years, and I will share

my personal story and goals with you. It is my goal to speak, write, and read English fluently, because education here in the USA is very important and it is a valuable tool to have.

Living here in United States, allows me the opportunity to learn and further my education. This is why I have enrolled into Dunbar Community School. I am so excited about improving my English, speaking, writing, and reading skills. When all of this is accomplished, I will be able to acquire my GED. Having my GED will allow me to attain and a better paying job, with that being said, I will be able to negotiate the type of job, and the pay I want for my services.

Learning English, for me is very important. I will be able to help my children with their homework, everyday reading and even their listening skills. Sometime they need my help with their homework. It makes me feel good about myself when I am able to help them. I am happy to help them with anything they need.

This is why it is very important for me to complete my educational goals, in speaking, writing, and reading English. I will be happy with me! When completed. Thanks, to my teacher; Mrs. Savage, I have learned that education here in the USA is very important, and it is a valuable tool to have.

Julia Esteban is studying at Dunbar Community School. She is in ESOL class level 6. Her is teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Life In 10 Years: Can I Get To Where I Want?

Not many 16 year olds start thinking about their goals and ambitions, but a lot of them should. Start with a ten-year plan and think about where you want to be and do. Being an adult education student at Daytona State College has made me start thinking about things like that. When I am 26, I see myself starting or already started in my career. I also hope I am in or about to be in grad school for my masters or above. I even wish to be married with at least one child. Setting your goals and ambitions high, like I

have, really makes you want to strive to be the best you can be.

Being an accountant is something I've wanted to do for a while now. I love numbers and I'm really good at math. I hope that I'm started in my career and doing something that I want to do. It would give me security in financial areas. I would be happy getting up everyday to go to work, because I have the privilege to have a job that I want. A lot of people don't get started in their careers early and end up stuck doing something they don't like. I don't want that for myself. I want to be successful and do what makes me happy.

I don't just want to limit myself to a four year degree if I can better it and get a masters or higher. I hope I can be already started in grad school so I can have the higher education that I want and have worked so hard for. Plus, getting a better education for my career will lead to job promotions and higher pay. That's motivation right there.

Being married to the love of your life sounds perfect, right? I don't want to be alone everyday after work or on the weekends. I want to be able to look over and have my husband right there with me. To live our lives together, everyday would be perfect. Also, I want a child at this point. I don't want to wait to long and it be to late. Maybe only having one will be what I want at that point so I don't want anymore before then.

In ten years if I'm not where I want to be, then am I really being successful? I don't think so. I hope I reach all my goals and ambitions. I want to be started in my career and have the highest education I can. I also want to be married with one child. I don't think my goals are to difficult to reach, so I'm going to work as hard as I can. Being unsuccessful is not an option in my life.

Kristi Ferraro is a student at Daytona State College.

An Unyielding Love

Everyone has goals and dreams in life and I'm no different. Ever since I was young, I had an unyielding love for computers and video games. So naturally, my goal is to one day become a video game developer. However, before I can do that, I would need three things; a GED, a degree in Software Engineering/Programming and in Video Game Development.

To be able to accomplish my dream, I would need a GED. This is why I'm here at Dunbar Community School. Having a GED will open many doors for me. It will allow me to take all of the classes required and I would be able to get a job to help pay for the said classes (software engineering/ programming, video game development). These classes will be needed to achieve my goal.

Furthermore, in addition to a GED I would also need a degree in Software Engineering/Programming. Although this will help me learn how to code and program all of the things required to develop video games, this is not the only reason I've decided to pursue this. Not only will it tremendously help me with developing games but it is also a safety net of sorts. Say that I would no longer have the desire to develop games; I could still use my degree to land a job in another field of work such as creating computer software or IT management.

Lastly, I would need a degree in video game development to learn how to not only code a game but also how to fix bugs and other game breaking problems that might occur during development of games. It would also teach me the fundamentals of creating story arcs, character development, scenario scripting and the coding that goes into the game's physics. All of these things come together when creating a game and it is no easy task.

In conclusion, those are currently my goals and ambition. I'll get my GED, degree in Software development/programming and video game development to reach my goal of creating video games. Through a lot of

work, I'm sure that I will be able to achieve them and make them a reality.

Ramon Fleuri enrolled in Dunbar Community School to get his GED. He is 17 years old and is very focused.

My 10-Year Plan

My goals for the next 10 years are to go to and finish college, get my dream job, and get married with the love of my life, my current girlfriend. I plan to achieve my goals step by step. I have already started my first step by enrolling in an adult education program at Daytona State College to get my high school diploma.

First is to get into college and graduate. I will accomplish this by working hard through my adult education classes, and try to do it as fast as possible. Once I finish my adult education and get my high school diploma, I will be able to get into college and be one step closer to completing my goal. When I'm in college and I choose the career I want, I will have to continue to work hard and put my best foot forward to graduate from college. This will complete my first goal.

My second goal is to get my dream job. This, of course will only be possible if I complete my first goal. Once I get my degree in Sign Language interpreting, this will make it a lot easier to get my dream job of being an ASL interpreter. I plan on using my experience of interpreting for my brother my whole life to show that I am capable of being a good, professional interpreter. Hopefully this will help me obtain my dream job.

My last goal is to get married to the love of my life, my girlfriend. Now, I set this as my last goal because obviously I will need a job to support my wife and a house. Also be able to pay for all the bills and other costs.

These are my goals and how I plan to achieve them. I hope I can fulfill them before the 10 years. Since I have

already started working towards them, it seems like I will be able to.

Johnathan Gonzalez is a student at Daytona State College.

Improving My Future

When I was younger, I had so much fun in my life. My father, my dog Yankee, and I used to go to every place together. I used to have a lot of fun. To be honest, I don't regret anything in my life. The only thing I would change about my childhood is not being able to study that much. I didn't like school at all. I didn't even find the time to go to school. I was always playing with my friends hanging out. Now here I am improving my life by taking my GED diploma so I can have a better future.

When I finish with my diploma, I would like to go to the Marines. My father, my grandfather, and my uncles went to the military. I don't want to be the exception for not going. I want to improve my future by going to the Marines and at the same time, while I'm in there, I will try to study any career that they can offer me.

If I get to join the Marines, I'm going to give the best of me. In that way, I know I can count on my team members in the same way they can count on me. I'm going to do anything I can as long as I see the country I'm living in is in peace.

When I get out of the military, I want to open a small barbershop business. I have always liked to cut hair. I started cutting my own hair, then my father's hair, and now my friends' hair. The only thing I need to do is take my GED and go into a school so I can get the barber's license. I know that in the future, I'm going to be a good barber. But, that's not anything I want to be. Maybe, I might not go to the marines, or become a barber. All I know is that time and effort will decide what I'm going to be in my future.

First, I need to finish with my high school diploma. I need to pass each of these tests. I promised myself that I'm

going to get 500 or higher on those tests. That's all I can say about what I'm going to do to improve my future and how I'm going to make it happen.

Luis Hernandez met his goal! He took all five tests on December 6, 2013 and passed all tests. Luis is originally from Cuba.

My Life Improvement

Education is one of the improvements I want to make in my life. I want a better education for a several reasons. With a better education, I will earn more money and not have to do a hard labor job that may pay less. People will have more respect for me with a higher education. However, my main reason for a better education is to make my parents proud.

I want a better education to earn more money. I believe people with higher education work hard to move upward but not like the ones who work hard manually. Because of my belief, I want to do some improvement in my education.

With a high education level, people will have more respect for me. In my personal observation, I realize that people with higher education level have more respect in this society. My personal observations makes want to be a high educate men.

I want to make my parents proud. The main reason in my improvement is to make my parent proud. By looking on my parent education levels, I want to have a level of education that is higher than my parents' level of education. I think if I have a higher level of education than my parents, they will be proud.

I want to make an improvement in my level of education because I want to earn more, to have more respect and also to make my parents proud.

Jean Louis was enrolled in the ESOL program for one year before enrolling in the GED program at Dunbar Community School. He got his GED and is now registered at a local college. His teachers are Helen Hicks-Wiley and Anna Franta.

My Goals and Ambitions

Wouldn't it be worthless to live your life without having any dreams or goals?

My name is Samantha Joseph, I was born in Haiti, it's been almost six months since I left Haiti and came to live in the United States. I am enrolled at Dunbar Community School; I am currently taking ESOL classes.

Even though, I graduated high school in Haiti, my dreams have always been to relocate to the United States. Knowing this would give me the opportunity to attend a prestige's University. My three main goals are to become a great doctor, a successful businesswoman, and Master the English language.

Becoming a General Doctor is my first goal. As a young child all I could think about was helping people who were in need. Growing up in an environment and seeing people crying for medical attention gave me the enthusiasm and determination to help make a change in someone's life. Imagine you were next to a dying person, as I have been; all I could think about was helping them. This is one of the reasons why I will complete my goal.

My second goal is to become a successful businesswoman. Being able to manage or even being the owner of a successful company is my life's dream. Sharing my knowledge and traveling around the world to meet new people, and give advice, for me is an accomplishment.

Last, but not least, mastering English. This is my foremost goal to accomplish; because it's this impact that will make achieving my dreams and goals all come true. Because of the language barrier, it inhibited me from speaking proper English. I am striving for perfect communication; as I always wanted to master it. I remember when I first came to Dunbar Community School, I was shy and speechless, my teacher Mrs. Savage, always said, "Samantha speak loud, I know you can do this." She always found a way for me to overcome my obstacles. This is what I call determination. From here on, I plan to read

out loud, constantly communicate with others in English, and participate in all activities.

In conclusion, no matter how difficult life gets, you should always follow your decided method in achieving your goals, and ambitions.

Samantha Joseph is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Eunite Metelus; I'm going to talk about my ambitions. I'm from Haiti; I came to Florida in 1994. I'm married, and I have 4 children. My goals and ambitions are to complete my education. In my native country Haiti, I could not go to school; I tried many, many, times to complete high school. I finally gave up. I had to work pay bills; and take care of my children. Also, help take care of my family in Haiti. Right now, I have children who are in college, high school, and in elementary. I realize now this is the best time for me to complete my education. I pray to God that he helps me to remain focus, and give me knowledge, wisdom, and understanding to learn. I am not giving up anymore. I refuse to go backwards, I am moving forward.

My goals are to earn my GED so that I can have a better life, and a job that I want, not a job that I have to take. I have learned that education is very important because any place you apply for a job they ask if you have a high school diploma, even if it's a dishwashing position. In that case, when you don't have it you are not going to get the job to help care for your family, and pay your bills. Sometimes, I feel ashamed of myself. When I came to the United States in 1994, I was young only twenty-three years old. Because I had my children I could not go to school. Nevertheless, this is my time to attend school and earn my GED. When I have my diploma I will feel better about myself, and be a better person. I know my family is going to be happy for me. Because when I told my kids I am in school they were so

happy about it. I have to do my best to graduate; this is my goal.

When I have my GED, I want to continue my education. My ambition is to become a license practical nurse. Then further my education in the field of nursing to become a registered nurse. This will allow me to better help myself, and my family in Haiti the church, and the people there in need. I understand having my high school diploma will be the beginning to open doors that always appeared to remain closed. Everywhere you go, it is all about education. My goals and my ambitions are to have mine.

Eunite Metelus is a student at Dunbar Community School; she is in ESOL levels 5 & 6. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Life Is Short

Some people, like me, go through life with blinders on, living day by day and not feeling anything; just going through the motions; smiling and laughing, but not knowing why.

“Life is short” is something that my mom would often say to me. This is something I now know to be true, as I look in the mirror at a much older man. I have worked as long as I can remember. Even as a child picking fruit with my father at my side, he would tell all of us kids to hurry and pick faster so we could have enough money at the end of the day to buy some candy. I was so proud and happy when my father gave me my nickel to spend as I felt.

As a young man, now many years ago, I would often daydream about living in Florida, for what reason I do not know. At the time, I was going to school at the local high school and working nights and weekends at a car wash and body shop. The owner of the car wash/body shop was named Bill. This man would put up with my bad English and lack of wanting to work. As a teenage kid, I would often dream of what was waiting for me in my future and what was in the world for me to see.

I now have made Florida my home and I find myself going to school. To tell you the truth, it was not easy for me; but my tutor, Mrs. Nancy, has made it very easy and has made me feel welcomed and at ease. Going back to school is what I needed to continue my education and to put the pieces back together that were missing in my life. I now know what all those dreams were telling me. And that is I must be true to myself, seek what is missing in my life and believe in what I stand for.

I will do the best I can, not only on the test, but the rest of my life. I now have newly found hope, inspired by the people who have encouraged me to keep working hard and believe that I can do what I set out to accomplish. So I would like to say a THANK YOU to all of those people; my friends (no, my family) who have helped me along the way. I will go from here (the learning center) wishing the best to all who have touched my heart. Getting to know all of you has made me a much richer man, knowing that I take a bit of knowledge that you were all so kind to share with me.

May God bless you and keep you well.

Martin Mirelez is a GED student at Community Connections of Jacksonville. His teacher is Nancy Devereux.

My Goal and Ambition

In life you have to fight hard for what you want. The importance of setting goals is the most significant thing you can do in your life. Goals are something that you desire to achieve in the future - a mission, a plan of action. It can be anything.

When I was a little girl I wanted to be a lawyer. Due to the circumstances of life I dropped my dream. I moved from country-to-country trying to find myself. I wasted a lot of time. Everyday I wished for something new. But I knew what I really wanted.

I moved to Florida not too long ago and things became very hard. Then I found myself a little job. It's not much, but it's everything that I needed.

My goal is to be a lawyer. And I'm very determined to achieving that. I believe in myself. I know what I want. I know becoming a lawyer takes a lot of time and studies, but I will make it through. A believer always finds a way to make things happen.

My friends, giving up is not an option. Always have a goal. I never thought I was going to be able to go back to school and think about my dream again. You can do the same. Just because something happens from the past, that doesn't mean your life is over. Keep your head high. Life is too short. Just learn from your mistakes and the new results won't be the same.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.

Magda Monestime comes from Haiti. Now she is at Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center. Ms. Will is her ABE teacher.

My G.E.D

Why do I want to get my G.E.D? The three reasons why I want to get my G.E.D. are to further my education and go to college, get a job and to better my life and to show my family that I am trying to do something with my life. Getting my G.E.D. will show that I am striving to do better.

I want to get my G.E.D. to further my education and go to college. G.E.D isn't enough for me; I would be letting myself down if I didn't at least try. After getting my diploma, I plan to attend Edison and transfer to a university once I get my 60 credits or after been there for the 2 years. College has been a goal for me since I was 14 and I plan on meeting that goal one day.

A diploma will help me get a job and get my life on track. I know, once I get this obstacle out of my way, doors

will open and opportunities will present themselves. When this is all done and over with, I'll be able to get a better job. A better job will lead toward bettering my life and getting things I need, such as a car, my own place and maybe help out with my family when they need me.

It is important to prove to my family that I am not a loser and I didn't give up on myself or my future. My whole life, my family looked at me and saw success. They thought I was going to graduate and be the first one to go to college. But, when I dropped out of high school, all I saw on their faces were disappointment. I plan to prove to them that I can get my diploma and go to college and show them that I can make something of myself. And, I also want to set a good example for my younger siblings.

So, these are my three reasons why I want to get my G.E.D. and I know if I work hard enough I will meet these goals and show my family that I can succeed. And of course prove to myself that it's not too late and giving up is never an option.

Joseph Murphy is a student at Dunbar Community School.

It is Possible

I came to the United States with many dreams to realize. First and foremost is to work hard for a living to support my family. Second is to learn English. My ambition is to open my own business to create jobs and contribute to the economy of this country. I want to give back to the community for the opportunity that the people and government of this country have given to me.

I was in an accident four years ago. I lost one leg, all five toes on my right foot and some parts of my body were burnt. I am thankful for the recovery and I am excited to go back to class right after that. I am thankful that there is no age limit to attend higher learning here. I will keep on studying until I reach the goals in my life.

Jose Navarrete is from Nicaragua. He attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Adline Olivier and I was born in Haiti. When I was a teenager my ambition was to become a nurse practitioner (ARNP). By the time I was finished with high school, my mother had died and my father had passed away when my mom was pregnant. I grew up with my aunt and she decided to help me, but she was a businesswoman. She forced me to go to college to study accounting, so I did and I worked at the National Credit Bank for two years. I was a cashier.

But my dream never changed. I decided to start nursing school. I worked for a hospital in my country. The disturbance of political events caused a lot of problems for me in accomplishing all of the goals that I had carefully planned for my future.

Now I am in the United States and I have a job. I'm working as a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant). I am back in school and I'm learning English so that soon I will start the nursing program at LWIT. I have worked very hard because I want to follow my dream, the one I have hoped for my future.

My ambition is to be a nurse. I will be a nurse! I think this profession fits me because I like to listen, observe and help people. I understand that nothing is easy, but success cannot occur without hard work.

Adline Olivier is a student at LWIT in Mrs. Somoza's ELCATE class. She plans to enroll in the LPN program next year.

Everyone Wants to Improve Their Life

There are three things that I would like to improve in my life: education, better job and family time. Improving my education is very important to me. Education is the key

that opens doors to knowledge, opportunities, experiences and a better future to succeed in life. Today, I can take advantage of many resources to improve my education.

Finding a better job is another way to improve my life. Today, the price of living increases every day. The only way to improve and have economic stability is to get a better job. A better job will provide a quality life for my family.

Family time is essential part of life. I believe that spending time with my family brings closer relationships with loved ones. Every minute spent with family is very grateful and unforgettable. Improving family time brings happiness, trust and blessing.

Making improvements in life involves education, getting a better job, and family time. These improvements will bring life success, economic stability and closer relationship with family.

Elsy Peffley is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Education: The Key to Success

It's been more than 15 years. I was in the 11th grade in high school. A teacher told us that the three most important things in the development and progress of a person is education, education and again education. Since that day I use this advice to achieve goals. I want to be a very competent doctor, help my fellow human beings and then work for their happiness.

In life it's never too late to do something good and the only way that can lead someone to achieve these objectives is to believe in yourself, in your capacities and make sacrifices night and day to get there. I knew some bad moments in my life because I went to college in a foreign country and there Haitians are not very welcome because the history that unites Dominican Republic and Haiti is not too favorable for Haitians. But every day I told myself when I'm going to class that nothing and nobody can stop me

from realizing my goals. No matter how many times I have to take a class, I would, because I know in life the good things are realized by making great sacrifices. Thanks to God and my dedication I became a doctor.

For me it's just the beginning. As a general doctor, I have to keep studying to pass the USMLE test because I want to be able to become an excellent cardiologist. To do this I must first learn, speak and communicate perfectly in English. For this reason at the present time, I'm a student at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology in Academic English Skills. Every day I come to class is a plus in the pursuit of my goals because my teacher is pushing me forward with my dreams.

No matter the price of these sacrifices, no matter where you are in life, no matter how difficult your life is today, you should never give up on your dreams. I'll never forget these words of my mother, she always tells me: "The best one is not one who never falls, but one who tries to get up every time he falls. This becomes my credo and my song for every day.

Wolf Perceval is a student at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology in the Adult Education-Academic Skills Level 7. He's from Haiti. His teacher is Mrs. Graciela Somoza.

Why Do I Want To Get My G.E.D?

Why do I want to get my G.E.D? That's a simple question, so I'll give it a simple answer. Well for a start, I would like to pursue a respectable photography career, enroll into a reputable art institute, and become one of the most recognizable photographers.

I want to get my G.E.D because I want to pursue a respectable photography career. I have a deep passion for the art of photography and anything related to film. Becoming a photographer is really important to my future. It's one of my many talents God has given me and has been my career plan for years. I really don't see me doing

anything else besides being a photographer. My career as a photographer will set forth when I get my G.E.D.

With this being said, I need my G.E.D, so I can enroll into the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale to improve my photography skills. Hopefully, with my degree, future employers will notice my art and skills. If I learn as much as I can at the art institute by studying hard, someday I can have a creditable photography career.

My G.E.D would allow me to become one of the most recognizable photographers. With my degree, I can establish an honorable photography career for a while. Then, with a lot of hard work and a little luck, my pictures will start getting some recognition that they truly desire.

So, to answer a simple question, I want to get my G.E.D. so I can become one of the most recognizable photographers, enroll into the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, graduate with my photography degree and establish a respectable photography career. Then, with some hard work and determination, I will be one of the most recognizable photographers. This is the reason why I want to get my G.E.D!

John Rinvil is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Improving My Life

There are a lot of improvements that I want and need to make in my life. So to start, I know that I need to improve on the choices that I make. I sometimes make the wrong choices that get me in bad predicaments and I lose focus on what's important.

However, the most important reason that I want to improve my life is for my daughter. I want her to grow and have anything she needs. I know in order for her to have that, I have to succeed and reach my goals. This means finishing my G.E.D and going to college to become a nurse.

I also need to improve on my thoughts; thinking so much causes me to get overwhelmed and sometimes upset. I

figured out that a good way to improve my life is to be around positive people and to keep positive thoughts on my mind. By doing that, I'll be the person my daughter could look up to.

Making the right choices, getting my GED and going to college are all improvements that will help me have a better future and better tomorrow. I'm never going to give up.

Christina Sevenski is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Aspiration: My Hopes and Goals

The future seems to hold a lot. You really can't predict what is going to happen, but people have hopes and aspiration to help them curve their paths along their way on this 3rd stone from the sun. It helps to keep you going. Everyone has their own hopes and goals so here's mine.

Currently, my goal is to complete high school here at Daytona State. This goal is important to not only me but to my family as well. They want to see me do good just like everyone wants their child to do well. They really help me on completing this goal by keeping me going. This one is for you mom and dad, thank you.

Once completing high school I hope to go on and get a course in HVAC and hope to be a certified air conditioning technician. My old man owns an air conditioning company and one day I hope to work there. It would make him as well as my mom awfully proud if I were to finish trade school. I hope to eventually manage the company as well.

My goals are not all about work. What's work without play right? I'm really hoping to invest into a nice flat boat so I can go saltwater fishing with my friends and family. Getting some time out on the water is always a goal of mine (even if its on a small boat at the moment). It would make me feel great knowing 'wow I just paid for this, and its mine'. I think a boat would be a great thing to own in the future.

Housing was never really a big goal. I don't need a fancy home, just one that's just right. I would love to live somewhere near Clearwater Beach or New Smyrna so I could be close to the beach and the Florida sunshine. It's the little things in life you got to appreciate otherwise they might pass you up.

My goals are not something that will happen overnight. Everyday though I get a step closer to my goals and that's what is keeping me going. Drive on.

Austin Smith is a student at Daytona State College

Goals and Ambitions

My goal is to get my GED, then to start studying to become a patient care assistant at Cape Coral hospital at the end of this year. Also, I want to obtain my nursing license, so that I can work in a hospital. My dream is to become a patient care assistant.

My ambition is to have a good paying job and earn lots of money. This will allow me to save money for my child to have an education and a good life in the future. This too will also, allow her to have a better education, and that she will be able to study at a collage level. I do not want her to have to worry about money when she is being educated, and or completing her degree. As a parent, I want to have money saved for the future.

Nevertheless, I need to continue studying so that one day all my dreams and goals will come true. First, God will help me and bless all the members in my family, and my teacher, I appreciate this opportunity to express my thanks to Mrs. Savage. I love you so much. God bless you.

My name is Mayeli Vasquez. I am studying at Dunbar Community School; I am in ESOL class level 6. My teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Knowing Yourself

The most difficult thing that I have done is knowing my goal and taking the first steps to reach it. Someone asked Thales, a Greek philosopher, what the most difficult thing in life was. His answer was “knowing yourself.” In the past decade, my life was so easy. I was a normal student. I didn't think about goals or dreams. I thought I could find them later.

A great change in my life was that I came to the USA. Everything was different; everyone around me had goal. Under this influence, I thought I had to know what kind of person I am and what I want to do in future. I found out that I like math and physics. I decided to enroll in a school.

I went to Palm Beach State College (PBSC), but I didn't pass the test. I asked a lot of people what I should do, and they told me different ways to do it. I was really confused and upset until my teacher told me how to enroll in the school. I went to PBSC again last week and gave them an application. I decided to go to there this year in August. I want to be an engineer.

Now nothing is so difficult for me because I know what I want and what to do to get it.

Ying Li has been a student in the Academic ESOL class at the AEC in West Palm Beach since January. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Original Poetry

My Loving One

I wish you have a good night
By letting Jesus' word be your light
He will always be on your side
If you ask Him to help you in your fight,
I hope to protect you even when I die
Because I remember sleeping in your arm
Every night.
I can't stand by the light of your eyes
I will give my life to not see you die.
You're more beautiful than a diamond in the sky.
Mother, for you I like to fight
Even with pain, when you near me I feel all right.
I won't forget how your skin was so bright
The sound of your voice still memorized in my mind
Your beauty makes me proud to say, "I'm your child".

Ayrton Jimmy Jean-Louis is a student at Dunbar Community School.

O Haiti

O Haiti, my beautiful mother,	You are still alive with your warm and attractive beaches,
O Haiti, exotic country,	Coconut trees, fruit trees and gazebos,
O Haiti beauty queen,	Your waterfalls, rivers, water springs,
O Haiti, my native country,	Plains and mountains.
O Haiti, symbol of Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood,	Your savory, delicious and healthy foods,
O Haiti, light of the world,	A paradise where tourists visit and enjoy,
Proud and strong, fighting for Independence,	Your “griot” (fried pork dish),
Rich with your diverse culture and art,	Rice and beans with “ djon djon” (mushrooms),
French and Haitian Creole,	Grilled lobster and fish,
Your head held high, First Black Republic,	Soup “ jomou” (Squash soup) that represents your freedom.
You abolished slavery.	You are strong like a woman,
How can I forget you?	Though poor always struggling in rough times
After memories of singing in the choir,	O Haiti Stand up!
Going on field trips,	Beautiful lady, arise from your darkness and sadness,
Beautiful monuments,	With your riches and courage, stand up and defend yourself.
The Citadelle Laferriere,	You need a consoling hero to reassure you.
The Fortress, Ti Mouillage,	Don’t forget,
The Museum Pantheon and National Theatre	Your children will always be there for you.
The Carnival, the music of the world	
O Haiti, I am nostalgic for your shores,	
O Haiti, you embraced tragedies,	
The earthquake of 2010	Devastated and left you in great distress.

Marie Francoise Blaise is a student in Mrs. Somoza's Academic Skills Level 7 class at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology in Naples Florida. She is from in Haiti, Jacmel where she was a teacher. She wants to enroll in the LPN program next semester.

Their Hands

Their hands, when she was born,
Held her oh so lovingly and tenderly.
Their hands soothed her when she fell and cried,
And told her everything was going to be all right.
Their hands that when she was very sick,
Were folded in prayer for her to recover,
And they told her they loved her and always would love her.
Their hands, that when she got home from the hospital,
Exercised her body with incredible faith so she would be
able to walk again,
And when she couldn't,
Their hands made pretty aprons to keep her from falling
from her wheelchair,
And gave her speech therapy by holding
Ice cream cones for her to lick to exercise her mouth,
And popsicle sticks for control,
And lots of saying words over and over.
Their hands that when she was treated unfairly,
Wrote letters and fought hard for her and others like her.
Their hands have spanked her and held her tightly when she
cried.
Their hands came from their parents who taught them to
love and care.
Yes, their hands have been through a lot.
But now, their hands are frail, and yet oh so beautiful, in
showing
The richness of love for her family, friends, and especially
for her.
And yes, their hands might be frail,
But they can still hold a crying baby or adult.
And have them feel comforted.
Oh, how she loves their hands. And you know what?
She always will love them.

Theresa R. DeFoor is a GED student at Florida State College in Jacksonville. Theresa is physically challenged and uses her computer with a knee switch. Her teacher is Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill.

Mind the Gap

A cold breeze runs through the station
Stinging skin, slowing blood flow
Yet there sit a girl most patient
Lost to her own sweet sorrow

Not a reason to shiver, she fronts the cold
Stoking the coals that burn in her gut
Slaying ghosts of lies she's been told
She'll forge ahead, crawl if she must

Counting her blessed losses, she barely hears
The vessel to bring her to a place unknown
Silencing those defiant pains, she holds her tears
Everything falls under one mechanical tone

A symphony of hydraulics cries their final note
As they bring this mighty metallic steed to a halt
She picks up her bags, hides in her coat
Wincing at the burning of her cheeks from the salt

A stumbling saunter moves her to a stand
The ache in her heart drives her back
The conductor offers a smile and a hand
"Mind the Gap"

Raised by wolves and loved by women, El Guapo supersedes any challenge with the greatest of ease. Hard nature is El Guapo's only teacher.

Reflection

Looking in the mirror, who is that I see?
By the way I feel and think, surely this is not me.

I'm a soul deserted and left alone; trapped inside an
honorable abode.
This physical form is a prison, not home.
This misrepresentation of me acts so calm, understanding,
and serene.
Got it together, all mapped out... THIS CAN'T BE ME?!
I'm bombarded with insecurities; life's abandoned the
meaning of care free.
If the true me was looking back you would see that,
My entire demeanor is out of whack.
Borderline homicidal, suicidal, controversial, out of control.
I look back at that mirror, this girl looks naïve...
She really doesn't know.
But as she ease through life as the so called punches role,
These same punches heighten my strife; hitting me in the
head in the nose, in the throat.
I'm unable to breathe; life got me in a inescapable choke
hold.
Sister in the mirror, "LOOK BACK AT ME"!
I'm sure my reflection has a story to be told
But, you're not ready to face reality, accept the truth to
unfold.
See, you possible can't be an image of me;
I'm depressed, too scared to confess,
But hold it all in and reply, "I'm blessed".
You can't comprehend my anger, pain, resentment, despair.
Staring back at you in the mirror I see none of it there
Just strength at you in the mirror I see none of it there.
Just strength, strong-will, selflessness, and determination to
name a few.
Me versus you...
Really, who's mirroring who?

*April Ellison is a recent graduate of the Architectural Drafting
program at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida.*

We All Do

We all have a life,
but we all live it differently.

You have your issues; I have them too.
You live it the way you want to.
I live mine differently than you.
There are some things we all go through.
Hardships, difficulties, tragedies occur.
It changes us, so no longer do we feel secure.
Things happen that we never expected
before we wake up every morning.
If we're lucky to see a new day,
hoping everything will go smooth today.
But we all know it doesn't happen every day.
There will be days that are grey,
but hopefully the sunshine makes a way.
We should live it anyway,
because we should be thankful to be alive today.
No one, not even God or anything you believe in,
said life will be easy.
They would be lying to you,
because we see the stuff we face
and it's not something we take lightly,
especially if it's a tragedy.
Everyone in this life will have something to face
but it doesn't mean we should give up
and let failure take place.
We have to stand strong
and believe we can finish the race.
Whatever was started must be finished;
once completed we have won it.
We all are human beings; there are always things
that we are going to be seeing.
Whether it's us or others' failure,
but that's when we prove to life
it can't knock us down.
We are all champions, not losers
unless we believe it that way about ourselves
and say our paths are headed far down.

Jamilisse Flores is creative student who has been writing poetry since she was a girl. She is a student of Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill, Florida State College at Jacksonville.

Prayer for the Old

Oh, my omnipotent Lord,
I implore you this day
To have compassion for me
For the rest of my life.
Long ago I was like an oak tree,
As strong as Hercules.
I had my treasures:
My youth and my health.
Now I have only the memories.
When I was younger,
It was always like spring,
And I felt
The craziness of passionate love.
Today I am looking into the sunset
And I gaze at the horizon
And the beautiful view.
I walk slowly in the
Afternoon of my life,
Fearing that the night
May soon come.
Tomorrow the world will forget us.
My body is old and tired,
My hair has changed
From black to cloud-like white.
Like a baby,
I smile a toothless grin,
I struggle to walk,
Others feed me and care for me.
The circle is complete.

Giovanni Gonzalez has studied with her tutor Barbara Werner for three years in the Literacy Volunteers of Collier County program.

THE REAL ME

Sometimes I wish I could just spit out a verse;
To let them see the real me.

Then I just sit back and curse cuz I hide the me that I want them to see.

I hide behind lies of fake tries and shadowed eyes, behind masks of fake tears and no fears.

Then I ask why?

Why do I keep hopes and dreams under lock and key for fear that they'll somehow see the real me?

Why should I hide behind shadowed eyes and fake tries, when the real me is who I really want them to see?

Sara Hull of Melbourne, Florida, is a student in Ms. McCall's Transition Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida.

A Burned Angel

At the age of seven, we sat together,
Grandparents side-by-side, happier than ever.
Grandpa stood up with a stride
to the garage, all smiles were wide.
With the flick of a switch a spark flew,
into the gas a flame blew.
In seconds the house was a fiery inferno.
Panic set in and we fled outside,
Grandpa was still stuck inside.
Carried out, he was rushed away.
We prayed everything would be okay.
Months went by and we eagerly waited
Then a doctor came and clearly stated,
"Your Grandfather is fine, he will be okay"
Severely burned and slightly mangled,
We are blessed by a burned angel.

Molly Kiel is a student Daytona State College Adult Education.

My Hero

Many of us consider someone as a hero. My hero is my dad.
My father protects and loves me for who I am.

There isn't anything in the world that my dad can't do.
He is strong, caring, and gentle to me.
I know my dad would never hurt me.
My father protects me.
He is strong as a bear, he is brave as a tiger, and he is as
smart as a deer.
My father loves me for who I am.
He sees that I am as pretty as a flower, and as sweet as
honey.
I am as happy as a squirrel.
Also, I am brave as an eagle.

*Jennifer Knotts is a student at Adult Community Education.
Her teacher's name is Ms. Anne Meisenzahl.*

HARMONY

A Musical Agreement of Sounds, An Internal Calm
How do you have Harmony without believing?
How do you believe without harmony?
Harmony is like sound that goes beyond the waves.
Harmony and belief are what you need to pray.
Harmony is what the world needs!
Harmony is light that flows from your feet.
You see light shines like harmony flows;
and harmony and light are good for your soul.
See God is an internal calm.
You need to use harmony so you can't feel down,
so use harmony as a "Musical Agreement" of sound.
Trust me, God wouldn't make you feel down!
When are you going to bring your harmonies and beliefs
around?
Are you going to stand there with all of your grief?
Don't you want to feel His "Internal Calm?"
Just give it up; it's all in your palms.
Put your hands together for Harmony and Belief.
Belief and Harmony; trust me.
From Me to You.
At the end of it all, you will sing a Symphony.

Jasmine Lopez is a new GED student. She is employed, married and a mother. Her goal is to finish and get her high school diploma in 2014.

Judgment

How can you judge another by the color of his skin?
Suppose the Lord looked at yours and said you couldn't
enter in.
We all have our stereotypes; this I know is true
Before you condemn another's race, just take a look at you
What makes you think you're a superior race that God put
on this earth
You didn't have anything to do with that, your color was
determined at birth
When you start to thinking you are better than others, let me
put this thought in your head
God never told you what color he was; now take that to
your bed

*Jennifer Lord is a student in the Florida State College at
Jacksonville Learning for Living Program class at New Heights of
N.E. FL. Her instructor is Mrs. Carolyn Parker.*

LET THE PAIN HEAL YOUR SOUL

WHEN YOUR SOUL HAS BEEN HURT
AND YOU DON'T FIND
THE RIGHT WORDS TO SAY,
JUST GET A PEN, IT WILL HELP YOU
TO SAY WHAT YOU FEEL INSIDE.

IF YOUR EMOTIONS HAVE BEEN HURT,
DON'T CRY!! ALL YOU HAVE
TO DO IS ENDURE THE PAIN BECAUSE
IT WILL HELP YOU TO HEAL INSIDE.

DON'T COMPLAIN ABOUT IT...
JUST LOOK INSIDE OF YOURSELF.

THERE YOU HAVE THE ANSWER
BECAUSE NOBODY KNOWS
YOU -- LIKE YOU DO.

LET THE PAIN HEAL YOUR SOUL
LET THE PAIN COMFORT
YOU INSIDE BECAUSE AFTER
ALL THE PAIN, THERE IS A NEW
DAWN WAITING FOR YOU.

Oliva Mauricio is an online GED student with TLC Online at The English Center. Oliva loves writing and learning new things. Her instructor is Ms. Pruitt.

We Both Bleed Blood

I thank God for Civil Rights
and those who fought for my life,
from being whipped and chained,
picking cotton in the rain.
Race was an issue
and now today it's a mixture.
Segregation does not exist
and our lives we did risk.
Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation.
It was the biggest thing that happened
for all Blacks around the nation.
Why am I being criticized?
I think it is time for you to recognize
that my race is just a color,
we all bleed the same color.
Has there ever been a difference
Between Blacks and Whites today?
I couldn't tell you anything because we're all just the same.

Jeanne Michel is in Ms. Pace's GED class at Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center. I'm also a local female rapper that enjoys writing lyrics.

She Was

She was born in a faraway town
She was the middle of a large bunch
She was raised as an immaculate flower
Not to be touched by any dirty hands.

She was awakened by the raw real life
Facing the scary and frightening world outside
But she was dreaming of a marvelous love
Finding a man who will give her the moon.

She found a man who gave her some love
A few good times to hide into her heart
She never knew why that man went away
Leaving her lonely, and longing love again.

She received the better gift from him
The most important present of her life
A lovely one, a little man who filled her life
With lots of laughs, with lots of bliss.

She gave her son beyond the right amount
Giving the moon, giving the sky, giving the stars
She never saw how far it will be reaching
How will life teach him the lesson.

She was there supporting all his failures
Filling the gaps he left in every step
She was content because at every ending
She was the one and only he could count on.

She put away her being and her life
She couldn't have guessed how fast the end would come
She was astonished, she fell apart
She was broken down when he was gone.
She was torn out by his last flight
Without a note, without goodbye.
She was alone with all her mourning
And she stopped her soul from feeling again.

Mildred Montas Mejia is a student at Sheridan Technical Center.

IMAGES

Shadows of reflections as a looking glass image,
We look upon these to see ourselves
In different lights.
Seeing,
We examine ourselves,
Casting away imperfections.
If only life was as a mirror, that we might
Cast off the imperfections of life itself!
Or cover it up, change it,
Make it a fairy tale existence.
Is what we are inside
the beautiful we should be?
Or is not the inside where we should be beautiful itself
or oneself?

*Johan Moody attends the ICAN! Adult Learning Program in
Tampa, Florida. His instructor is Gladys B. Miranda, M. Ed.*

NEVER

I never thought I'd ever be here, and when I imagined
someone who had, I was overcome with fear.
I guess I was always convinced; only the worst people could
ever be condemned inside a barbed wire fence.
But then I made such a small mistake, and now I find
myself on the opposite side of the gate. I remember all the
times I used to pass Gadsden, and with shame I admit not
once did I feel an ounce of compassion. Being here has
taught me a valuable lesson that even the worst trials have
unimaginable blessings.
I'll take home with me the priceless knowledge I have
gained, to be a better me that without prison I never would
have obtained.

*Latasha Parker is a student in Mrs. McCall's Transition Program
at Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

I Have a Dream

How would the world be like without music?
 Music comes in different cultures and harmonies around the
 whole world.
 It's almost like a religion.
 I have a passion for music;
 It's like my inspiration when I have problems.
 I go running to music.
 When I listen to music, it's not just music.
 I can feel my soul beat,
 Going with the rhythm of the beat.
 When I listen to my favorite music
 Like Hip-Hop and R&B
 It's like I'm in a small world
 Just surrounded with all types of beats coming from
 different viewpoints.
 The music brings imagination in my head and
 Happiness and a smile on my face.
 I have a dream
 That one day music will bring the world to a better place.
 All different races will listen to music to make peace.

*Lincolnson Paul from Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education
 Center. He is a student of Ms. Will, ABE Writing. This poem is
 dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The Cell

Last night I heard a teardrop fall
 As I lay awake in bed
 It told a story we all know
 But keep inside our head

It talked of faded laughter
 And dreams that won't come true
 It reminisced about childhood days
 And things we used to do

It talked of love that's long since gone
 And love that might have grown

It spoke of things we would have done
If we had only known

It remembered the taste of birthday cake
And the smell of Christmas trees
It recalled the ocean to a bay
That's as a man he'll never see

But in the dark, the last sound heard
Still echoes in my ears
And that is the sound a prison cell makes
when it's filling up with tears

*This was a joint effort between Nicholas Mezie at Charlotte
Correctional Institute and Dominique Poteat at Gadsden
Correctional Facility. Dominique is a student in the Transition
Program under Ms. Marva McCall.*

I Am From...

I am from a quiet, wise mother who taught me to be
friendly.
I am from a father who enjoyed working on the family car
and emphasized the importance of keeping family together.
I am from a mother who was a traditional Malagasy cook –
haricot seasoned with tomato sauce topped with boiled
tilapia.
I am from learning to cook traditional dishes with my
mother on Saturdays and Sundays.
I am from raising ducks and chickens, tending rice fields,
and planting seven gardens for food.
I am from playing soccer with my eleven brothers and
sisters.
I am from building my body by studying martial arts to
defend myself – not to fight unless there was a good reason.
I am from practicing the dangerous sport of Aikido on city
streets.
I am from petting lemurs with multi-colored tails, while
eating in a restaurant at the beach.

I am from drinking the juice of the Traveller's Tree
(Ravinala), by poking a hole in it with a nail.
I am from using the leaves of the Ravinala to cook peanuts
and make cassava cake.
I am from a land that houses the Queen's Palace in the
mountains.
I am from playing lawn tennis at the university.
I am from teaching and working for everything that I am
interested in.
I am from country music, creativity, and curiosity.
I am from Madagascar.

*Mbolatiana Rabekoto is a distance-learning student with TLC
Online at The English Center. He speaks French and is a terrific
chef.*

From Fright to Freedom

My body is just a shell
I feel I have died inside
At times I'll sit and yell
All I want to do is just crawl into myself and hide

I'm scared to feel
I am scared to love
Some day to feel is to heal
Some say to love is like something from above

To come out is to find yourself
To find yourself is to know just who you are

No one can put you on a shelf
No one can free you from tar
Only you can start toward your future
Only you can free yourself from your past.

*Janet Saulsberry is a student in Dr. Jones' GED class at Gadsden
Correctional Facility.*

Wasted Time

The time that I've wasted is my biggest regret,
spent in these places I will never forget.
Just sittin and thinkin of the things that I've done,
the crying, the laughin, the hurt and the fun.
Now it's just me and my hard-driven guilt,
behind a wall of emptiness that I allowed to be built.
I'm trapped in my body just wanting to run,
back to my youth with its laughter and fun.
But the chase is over and there's no place to hide,
everything is gone including my pride.
With reality suddenly right in my face,
I'm scared, alone, and stuck in this place.
Now memories of the past flash through my head,
and the pain is obvious by the tears that I shed.
I ask myself why and where I went wrong.
I guess I was weak when I should have been strong.
Living for the party and the wings I had grown,
my feelings were lost, afraid to be shown.
As I look at my past it's easy to see,
the fear that I had was the fear to be me.
I'd pretend to be rugged so fast and so cool,
when actually I was lost, a blinded old fool.
I'm getting to old for this tiresome game,
of acting real hard with no sense of shame.
It's time that I change and get on with my life,
fulfilling my dreams for a family and wife.
What my future will hold I really don't know,
but the years that I've wasting are starting to show.
I hope I can make it,
I at least have to try,
Because I'm heading toward death
and I don't want to die.

Martin Smitley in an ABE/GED student.

Just Dream

Never give up on your dreams.

Never give up, so much to achieve.
There is so much out there.
Just dream.

Never give up on your dreams.
Never give up. You must believe.
There is so much out there.
Just dream.

Never give up. Keep the hope.
Never give up. Grab hold of the rope,
and you can pull yourself through
for you.

I know sometimes it gets rough,
but don't give up,
because you have all of us.

Never give in. You can win.
Never doubt. Don't pull out,
and your dreams will come true.
Just dream.

Just dream, just dream, just dream.
Just dream, just dream,
and never give up.

Lee Stephens has been writing songs for many years. He is a student of Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill at Florida State College at Jacksonville.

The Reason I Pray

I fell apart, I lost my mind
I walked out of my kids life
I stumbled and crawled
I withered and wept, made promises I couldn't have kept
I've been upside down and on my knees
Begging for more, wanting to be free
I've tried and lost
I've gone the wrong way

I've completely lost track of hours and days
I've wanted more and gave up all
Pleading for something to break my fall
I hated myself and also you
I didn't know what I was going to do
I stayed in the dark, wouldn't eat
My ways of living were killing me
I was strung out and sideways inside and about
I lived in hell without a doubt
Now someone has changed my wants and needs
There are no demons controlling me
It's now or never, I have a choice
God has shown me faith since He heard my voice

Kimberly Sutter is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida, where Ms. Cooney and Ms. Adams are her teachers.

The Voice

The Voice is the voice I hear every morning
The Voice is the voice that keeps me moving
The Voice wakes me up to see a new day
The Voice is the voice that tells me to get up
The Voice let me see that person with that same voice The
Voice helps me speak the words I need to say
The Voice wants me to worship that special voice The
Voice is the man upstairs I love
The Voice speaks through my heart
The Voice that wakes me up to see family and friends
It's just that voice I really love

De'Ante Taylor is a student of Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill at Florida State College at Jacksonville. He aspires to be a writer.

I Am From...

I am from my big box of action figures and making a huge mess every time I decided to spark my creativity for hours. I am from my awesome coloring books and my monster box of 64 crayons with the little sharpener in the middle, giving color to my imagination!

I am from playing hide-and-seek with friends and enjoying the wonderful outdoors on hot summer days.
 I am from the Argentinean steaks and delicacies that my father used to create to add a little flavor in my life.
 I am from visiting my mom on the weekends and enjoying the most amazing Cuban food ever made.
 I am from soccer where passion and emotion take over and give one of the greatest feelings of pride in the world.
 I am from Star Wars where light sabers, lasers, and aliens come to life.
 I am from Michael Jordan -- the greatest player to ever hit the court, who amazed everyone with his incredible talent.
 I am from The Fresh Prince introducing the world to one of the funniest television shows ever made.
 I am from family gatherings during holidays and creating memories to cherish for a lifetime.
 I am from the attitude era of wrestling where The Rock and Stone Cold battled it out for the WWF Championship, while The Undertaker created the most impactful streaks of history.
 I am from the cool breeze, soft sand, and sound of the calming ocean as I step foot on the beaches of Miami.
 I am from going to Blockbuster on a Sunday night to get the newest 2-day rental.
 I am from what we do in life....echoes in eternity.

Abraham Waker is a distance-learning student studying for his GED with TLC Online at The English Center. His teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

The Answer

Scared, hurt and confused
 is the little girl hidden inside.
 She could not handle the world,
 so a deep place she chose to hide,
 unappreciated and scarcely loved,
 so her hurt would go unnoticed.
 Her dream and aspiration so far away,
 they slowly floated.

No one cares, so why should I?
I'd rather join my friends;
(unlike home) they love me
and promise to be with me till the end.
The exciting and promiscuous things they do, I want to
learn.
So, when will I get my chance to have sex?
I want my turn.
Hanging out with dudes, smoking and drinking is the way to
live.
I wanna do this all my life; there's nothing else to do and
my life has nothing else to give.
Men whom my family trusted
thought it best if they showed me new tricks.
I thought I was too old to be raped,
but my body went into shock
so I couldn't resist.
I know I'm a whore.
This is a conversation made about a thirteen year-old girl.
Now, her youth is gone,
and sadly produces a naïve woman into the world.
No more childish games,
because the new crowd won't look at it the same.
They don't consider her a teenager;
they only recognize the illusion of the woman she
became.
It's hard to see the elevation from a child to a woman
Who has grown well before her time.
Constantly on a paper chase,
and a new man, she tries to find.
Yearning for love
and for some way to extinguish the pain that burns so deep,
to her respect is a possession she never got to keep.
She may look as if she is satisfied with what you may see.
When really lonely, insecure and emptiness
is her reality.
Not really understanding what life is,
so she searches for a place to belong.
Now, years later, she now knows

God was the answer all along.

Benita Williams of Gainesville, Florida, is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida (Gadsden County), where she recently achieved her GED under Ms. Lee's GED class.

MISERABLE DAY

Wake up, Wake up!
So hard to lift my head

Stand up, Stand up!
Today is a day I dread so cold, so cold

Body so heavy!
Can't breathe, Can't Breathe

Throat closed, nose clogged
hungry, hungry
too hard to eat coffee, coffee a great morning threat
drink, drink
soothes my sore throat

Messy, Messy
hair unbrushed, shirt untucked
door call, door call.
OOPS! Can't even make my bed no warning, no warning
must go to class

Rush, Rush
that's what we must do. Can't think, can't think
My brain won't work
My bed, My bed
It's All I think!

Laura Williams is a student in the Transition Program under Ms. Marva McCall at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

A Father's Love

Maria,
Love hurts and the wounds are deep
at night it's hard to sleep.
This love that hurts so bad, and so often.
Started off sweet, something soft like cotton.
Love has been lost but never forgotten.
I feel myself falling and I can't stop,
it feels like a long, long, lonely drop.
Boom! Hit rock bottom!
Now I'm resting in sorrow.
My prayer is that love will find us again tomorrow.
Although functional love does not come cheap,
our wounds will heal but the scars we will keep.
I sit locked-up trying to find a reason,
my wounds wide open battling my demons.
I've pushed you away but there's no room for pity.
No excuse, I'm just a man praying you understand.
I fall short everyday,
but to make it up; I'll do whatever it takes.
Am I worth your heart, worth your tears?
Is coming home to me your worst fear?
I'm in a dark lonely place, call it my abyss,
and it saddens me to think like this.
Your heart and mind trapped in a maze,
and all I want is to keep you happy and safe.
You're trying to find a way out with some peace,
without having to settle for the least.
Just so you know, you're my everything, my world,
My Maria, my princess, my baby girl.
I would fight a thousand armies alone
just to make sure you stay on your throne.
Where you belong wearing your crown,
walking with your head up, never looking down.
I miss you.
I love you.
I want you near.
Without any pain.
Without any fear.
Unfortunately, my little princess, your wounds are deep
and God knows my heart's desire is to have you back for keeps!

Shawn Zapata is an ABE/GED student.

I Wonder

It's all over, and time for me is no more... I wonder.
 Did I love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind, or did I
 just love all that was mine... I wonder.
 Did I love my neighbor as myself, or did I save all my love
 for myself... I wonder.
 Did I surrender all to Him, or did I surrender all to them... I
 wonder.
 Did I forgive all who offed, or did I just pretend... I
 wonder.
 Was I light in darkness, or was I the darkness in light... I
 wonder.
 Did I work to help the poor, or did I just close my door... I
 wonder.
 Did I do my best to pass every test, or was I just a pest...
 Oh, Lord, I wonder.
 Did I put my trust in Him, or did I put my trust in them... I
 wonder.
 Was I hungry for more Him, or was I hungry for more of
 them... I wonder.
 Was I the as salt in the world, or was I as black hot
 pepper... I wonder.
 Did I bow to them or did I bow only to Him... I wonder.
 Did I repent of all, or did I slip and fall... I wonder.
 My life is over, and my time is spent.
 Oh, Lord, with all my heart, I now repent...
 I wonder.

Polly Butler wrote this poem about her faith in Jesus Christ. She is a student of Dr. Betsy Stoutmorrill, Florida State College at Jacksonville.

Personal Story

My Personal Story

My name is Yarelys Aguirre and I am from Venezuela. I came to the United States in 2007 with my husband Argemiro Diaz and my daughter Stefany. We decided to come to this country because we were seeking a better future, but when we arrived we found there was a language barrier.

My husband was an electrical engineer in my country, Venezuela. However, because he did not speak English, employment was unattainable here in the United States. It wasn't until he attended Dunbar Community School for four years and excelled in English, that he received employment in Naples, Florida as a highly trained electrical engineer.

My daughter Stefany is eight years old. She's in the third grade and attends elementary school in Cape Coral, Florida. Cape Carol is where we now live. She speaks and writes English well and assists me when difficulty prevails.

For me, it was difficult to leave my country, mother, and siblings, but I thank GOD every day for being here for my family and me. I am a student of Dunbar Community School and my goal is to learn, speak, and write English and then take my GED to further my education.

Yarelys Aguirre is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Personal Story

My name is Lourdes Alcantara. I came to the United States fifteen years ago from Mexico with my husband Miguel and my daughter Yesica. We live in North Fort

Myers. My husband works in carpet installation. My daughter goes to public school and I attend Dunbar Community School.

When I came to the United States 15 years ago, I lived in Chicago for one year. During the first month, I spent my days crying and missing my family while looking out the window watching the snowfall. My only joy was my daughter Yesica who was a year old at the time. Thanks to God and my daughter the sadness started to disappear. My biggest difficulty was coming to this country, and not knowing enough English. Getting used to just the funds or extras my husband bought home was a little bit hard because he was the only one working. With rent, paying bills, and buying groceries the money went flying out the door. Also with the cold winter weather we could only buy what was needed. Our only vehicle was my daughter's stroller (Yes, a stroller!). On that capable stroller, we carried groceries, laundry, and other necessities.

That's why I motivate myself, and my family daily to move forward. I have always wanted to become a nurse and this is one goal I am going to accomplish. I want to become an excellent nurse. I feel this will motivate my family to start a career earlier in life and for them to make their own mark in this new life that is given to them. My only words I will leave behind to them are always show kindness to everyone and never, ever, despise anyone. And to know that having an education is a very major role in life living here in the United States.

Four months ago I went back to school to continue my education. I had a choice between having an education or just remain stagnant. Life is good when you can make your own decision regarding what you want out of it and where you want to go to get it. I attend Dunbar Community School, my teacher is Mrs. Savage, and we are all like a large family. My goals are to learn perfect English, complete my GED, attend college and give my family the quality of life I didn't have.

Lourdes Alcantara is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers, FL. Her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Bush Tonic

It was a hot Sunday morning in the summer of 1968. My father was boiling bush tonic in a large three-legged iron pot out in the open back yard. My brothers, sisters and I, eager to taste the brew, were busily fetching firewood to hasten its preparation. The red hot fire crackled and sparkled in the intense heat. Flames and smoke lashed out from underneath the jet black pot as we continue to poke wood into the three compact spaces.

After a while, father told us to stop trucking wood. We sat down under the spreading poinciana tree and chatted euphorically about the amount we were expecting to get. Father listened intently to our exuberant gestures and reminded us that the bush tonic can be very strong. We watched with unrelenting eyes as the pot bubbled and seethed, spilling its precious content into the raging fire.

We waited with bated breath for the exotic brew to be ready. After what seemed to be a very long time, father stop feeding the fire. It smoldered for a while then finally went out. He cautiously took the steaming pot from the three large firestones. We all shouted, "Hurrah!"

Soon he began taking the boiled bushes from the pot: wild yam, Seville orange, strong back, chaney root, sarsaparilla, young coconut, bitter yam, lemon grass, dandelion, garlic, dog blood, cinnamon, pumpkin seeds, aloe vera, rosemary, ginger and other medicinal bushes used in making the tonic. Afterwards, he cooled some of the brew. Later, he added sugar and condensed milk proportionately. Now ready, everyone winced at the rustic brew. However, Tim and I each had a cupful.

Before long, my cousin Theo, my brother Tim and I were off to the field to tend to the cows. On the way, Tim kept on saying, "I know something but I am not telling a man..." At the same time, we saw a patch of guava trees laden with the ripe yellow fruits. We ignored him and raced

towards the trees to get a good meal. We watered the cows and wended home.

On Arrival I went into my room, looked in the mirror then bawled, “Whoo! Whoo! Whoo !” Everybody, hearing the disturbing noise, rushed inside the room to see what was wrong. “What is wrong with you Betty?” inquired mother. “Nothing. Nothing,” I replied. Knowing that I drank the brew earlier she quickly mixed some very sweet sugar and water, gave to me and Tim, and said, “Drink, that will counteract the brew,” she said. We quaffed it off instantly. She put us in bed and eventually we fell asleep. Somebody woke us at dinner time. We were sober again.

Since that day I have been abstemious in my eating and drinking habits. The indelible experience even now seems surreal.

Claudette Alexander is a General Development Education student at the Lee County School. His hobbies are reading, floriculture, and writing poems and children stories. Her ambition is to become a registered nurse.

My Life

I was born on April 8th, 1972 in the beautiful city of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I was raised in a family of five sisters and two brothers. After graduating from high school, I moved to the United States of America back in 1996. I am a Christian and serve God. I am married to a wonderful man. Six months after my wedding, I enrolled in a nursing school to become an assistant nurse. I worked as a nurse for six years. After having a serious surgery, my doctors recommended not lifting heavy things; therefore, I had to end my job as assistant nurse. Later, I attended a commercial license school to become a school bus driver.

I am now employed by Orange County Public Schools as a school bus driver. I now have three kids, two boys and one girl. My oldest child is named Ivener David Alexi. The middle age child is Alexandra Daniella Alexi, and my youngest is Samuel Christopher Alexi. My dream is to go to school to become a certified nurse. I am working

towards that goal. At Westside Tech, I am improving my English skills. Living in United States with my husband and my kids has been wonderful!!

Maricile Alexi is a student at Westside Tech.

Freedom and Love

Love is the most important aspect in everyone's life, even more important than food. All human beings come into this world alone, but free. No one can survive alone. Human beings need other people in their lives. Although no one wants to be controlled by others, we need relationships. In a good relationship, this is not an issue. Love is a requirement in relationships; but you must first love yourself before you can love another. Hopefully, there will be mutual love between the people in the relationship.

The first relationship is that between a baby and the parents or family. This is where the child first learns to love. Family is the first unit in society. This is how society is built, it all begins with love. However, in order for society to survive, human beings must have freedom. Respect goes along with freedom. It has been said that one's freedom ends where another person's freedom begins. This means that I'm allowed to do anything, until my actions interfere with another person's life. If I interfere with another person's life, then I am taking away that person's freedom. So there is no true freedom, when another person's freedom is taken away. When there is freedom, people have the opportunity to think. When people are free to think, great things can be created. Without freedom and love, we just exist. These are my beliefs. These are the reasons why freedom and love are so necessary and important.

Abdulmohsin Alsultani is a student at the Palm Harbor Community School ESOL Program. His teacher is Dr. Flytzanis.

My Sweet Life

I was born in Honduras. I grew up in the country, but then I moved to the city to study. My dream was to learn

other languages and be a doctor. Unfortunately, my parents had no money for me continue studying.

I got married when I was 21 years old. When my first child was born, I was afraid of raising my child in my country because there is a lot of crime. Then I decided to move to the U.S.

We started with nothing, only the sadness of leaving my family and many illusions to beat in this beautiful country. It was hard to get used to another place. Work was hard the first few years. Not able to speak English, I did not have good opportunities. Not understanding meetings in school, my child went through many difficulties.

I have already been in the U.S. for nine years and now I have two beautiful daughters. We are still struggling to get ahead. I started to study English; and I'm excited because I'm fulfilling one of the dreams of my youth.

I do not have great wealth, but I thank God I have a beautiful family. My goal is to learn more English and to find a better job. I want my children to study in the future and be good people in society.

Florinda Argueta is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee. She is from Honduras and is happy to learn English.

My Hard Work Pays Off

When I was 16 years old, I have always wanted to be an architect. I also wanted to study at the University of Lima in Peru. So, I studied very hard for two months in order to prepare for the admission test. Many people registered to take the test but the university could only accept 50 applicants. The reason why there were so many of us competing for entrance are due to the fact that it is the best private university in my country.

The test was at 8:00 o'clock in the morning. The night before, I could not sleep. Two hours before the test, I felt that I forgotten everything that I had studied. My mind was

blank. I was so nervous and I could feel the sweat in my hands. My mom waited for me while I took the test. It lasted for two and a half hours. Personally, I thought the test was very hard. After I finished the test, I went to find my mother. At the same time, I was thinking that I did badly. I waited for four hours to check the list of selected applicants into the university. It was a big surprise for me when I saw the list and found my name in the tenth place of acceptance into the university.

This experience enhanced my belief that I will benefit from my effort and hard work I put into my studies. It was worthy sacrifice of my time and energy.

Flavia Barrientos is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Something About My Life

In 1997, when I was 3 years old, I lived in the country of Guatemala. My grandmother really loved me. One day my brother and I were playing and an accident happened to me. I broke my arm with a piece of wood. My grandmother became so worried about me that she fell under the weather. The ambulance came and took her to the hospital. She had a heart attack and she died. My family and I were really sad because she really loved our family as much we did her.

I came from a poor family. We lived a DIFFICULT life, but every day we tried to keep going ahead to live better than before. My country it's is really poor. In the past, we have been in difficult circumstances; but we survived, always wanting to move forward. Always wanting to have a better life in the future or better jobs and live better than we have experienced in our past. In 2010, I studied till 10th grade high school in my country. Sometimes a person has childhood dreams but sometimes the circumstances don't allow you to reach your dreams.

One day I decided to come to the United States and continue to try to keep studying and make my dreams come

true. I want to get my GED and then go to the army and keep moving forward to a better future. Life is difficult but not impossible for us. If we stay sunken into problems, we never achieve what we want. Sometimes we feel like life ends when we are feeling bad, but we have to breathe deeply to solve our problems, be strong and always stay with the mindset that “we can.”

Adolfo Bautista is a student at Westside Tech.

Heavenly Food

My favorite food is chicken tenders. There are three reasons why chicken tenders are my favorite food. Chicken tenders feel warm, sound crunchy, and smell like heaven.

First, chicken tenders are my favorite food because of the warm feeling. When chicken tenders are finished frying, then you get them out of the oil they feel crispy, warm, and rough. You can see a little bit of steam coming out of them when you add sauce to them such as honey barbecue, barbecue sauce, or sweet and tangy.

Second, chicken tenders are my favorite food because they make sounds while eating them. If the chicken tenders are fried well, they make an extremely hard crunching sound and crumble in your mouth when you bite them. But when they cool down, they have a silent sound which kind of makes them melt in your mouth.

Finally, chicken tenders are my favorite food because they smell like heaven. To be honest, I’ve never been in heaven or know what heaven looks like, but you can tell that the smell of chicken tenders come from in a place called heaven because they just smell magnificent.

In conclusion, chicken tenders are my favorite food because they feel warm, sound crunchy, and smell like heaven.

Kerny Benacin is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Difficult Times

I graduated from high school in 2010, and it was the most difficult thing I have done in my life so far. I was born in a poor country. I used to live in a small countryside town named Marchand, where I attended elementary and middle school. It did not have electricity to study at night. A few years later, I left and went to Saint-Marc city. It was different than Marchand because it had electricity and so on.

I often went to school from 7 am to 1 pm. My parents did not have enough money to take me. Sometimes I had to study all day without eating anything. Even so, I still concentrated. I had many friends, and often we met in a good place after school to study. We studied math and chemistry together.

I didn't get much attention from my parents. That meant when I came home from school, neither of them asked me anything about lessons, homework, or anything like that. I had to decide to take school seriously myself. Also, I had a back problem, which was the most difficult part for me. I missed a lot of school days. I am so thankful to Jehovah God. He helped me get better, and I passed all my classes. Finally in July 2010, I graduated.

Ginel Bien Aime is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. He is a very hard worker and a dedicated student.

The Day That Changed My Life

I was born in Haiti, with a hole in my heart. I never went to school. I had surgery to fix the hole, but I got sick again. When I arrived in the United States in 2004 and went to the hospital in St. Petersburg, I was very sick. I was seventeen. I didn't speak English. I didn't understand what was happening, but I knew I was going to have surgery again.

There was water in my lung and the doctors had to treat me for almost a month before the surgery. Then I had

the surgery, but the doctor told the family I was living with that he was taking a chance. He didn't know if I was going to make it.

Since the surgery I have stayed with the same family in St. Petersburg. They didn't know me, but they opened their house to me. They treated me like I'm their own daughter. They wanted good things for me.

Now I am twenty-seven. I go to Tomlinson Adult Learning Center and I am learning to read and write. I have taken a course in cake decorating and I would like to work at that. My friend is teaching me how to paint with watercolors. I hope that maybe one day I can be a real painter. I am starting work as a caregiver for a boy who can't stand or walk. I will help him get ready for school in the morning. I am very happy to help him, not just for the money. I have to be careful, but my life is pretty good.

Synthia Bovil is a student in ABE-Reading Class.

A Difficult Decision

On March 26, 1971, at 7:15 pm, a pretty little girl was born in a hospital in Cali, Colombia. She was the 10th and last baby in her family. The nurses at the hospital loved this little girl because she was so tiny and so fuzzy like a teddy bear, so the nurses fought to give her the first bath. Her parents decided to name her Sandra Ximena. Yes, that is me!

Time ran along. I grew up, and lived a normal family life. I went to school. I discovered my first big love, and I started planning my future. Years later, I was working and joined the university. I started living my adult independent life! Living my life in 2005, the road brought me to the United States. I got married and began a new beautiful life in South Georgia. I learned gardening by observing the women of my new in-laws. I learned how to grow vegetables, flowers, and decorative shrubs in my garden. I learned how to keep my yard nice and clean and discovered my passion in gardening.

In 2009, life gave me a tough test to overcome. I was diagnosed with the most aggressive type of breast cancer. Fighting the disease, I had to undergo multiple surgeries and chemotherapy; these were two years of physical torment, which tested my spiritual strength. At that time, I faced the most difficult decision of my life: to say goodbye to my left breast. I was 38 years old. However, with this experience, I discovered the real sense of the words ‘compassion’ and ‘solidarity’ thanks to the people around me.

Now I am in full recovery and my spirit is stronger than ever. In March 2013, I moved to South Florida to spend more time with my two sisters who live in West Palm Beach. At present, I am attending ESOL classes at the Adult Education Center in order to improve my English skills. My goal is to go to college and study for a technical career. I know that education offers more opportunities in the job market. These days I am giving a new twist to my life.

Sandra Bush is a student in the Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center. She has both a strong spirit and a gentle countenance. She is quick to take on any class challenge, and is always willing to lend a hand to those around her. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

My Autobiography

My story starts on September 28, 1976 in the small city of Cucuta, Colombia. My parents and I lived a short time in this city to move to Caracas, Venezuela, where we lived for 11 years. I’m the oldest daughter of three kids. I have a very caring brother and tech savvy sister!

When I was a child, I always felt mistreated by my mom. She always used to tell me “I hate you, Paola!” The truth is I can never forget these words, though now I would like to think they were not true.

When I was 11 years old, I was like a mom to my brother and sister when my mom and dad got divorced. We moved with my mom to my paradise—Medellin. This city

is known as the City of the Eternal Spring. We have trees with different colors, fruits, and flowers year-round.

When I was 15 years old, I became a professional dancer of Tango and Milonga and worked as a teacher of dance in a school in Medellin. In the year 2000, I received my degree in Civil Engineering and I started working in my profession.

The most beautiful day in my life was March 10, 2003 ... my little girl, Laura Camila was born and with her I was born again! She is the best reason to continue living and keep pressing forward. Her big, brown eyes, her perfectly tanned skin, and beautiful smile were the best things I had ever seen. In this moment, I understood how much God loved me; he sent me an angel! She is my life and my all! I'm the proudest single mom in this world!

I opened my own company of women's clothing in 2007. The name is "Pca2 fashion" and in 2009 I came for the first time to USA. Every 3 months, I would come to buy sets of samples to get ideas to design new collections, manufacture and sell in the different cities of my country or simply come for vacation with my family for a short time.

In June 2011, I attempted to make changes in my life because my company went bankrupt. I felt so alone and discouraged. I lost hope. It is then that I met my lovely fiancé, John. We have been living together for a year in Orlando. He is my compliment, the part I needed to make me feel complete! Now I have all I like in my life: one good man beside me, three beautiful children, and two very cute dogs! This is almost perfect!

Though the difficult part in this new world to me is not having my family close to me, it is the culture and customs of this country and the food; it's very different!! Now, I go to school to study English and I feel very happy because this is the first step to start living a new way of life in this country.

Yenny Cardenas is a student at Westside Tech.

My Autobiography

My name is Richardson Charles. I was born on November 13th, 1992. I'm from the small town of Carrefour, Haiti. I lived with my mom, two sisters and a brother. I used to go to school every day and do all my activities. When I was 5 years old, I asked my mom "Where is my dad?" she answered, "He's in Florida." My dad moved to Florida and took my brother and my older sisters. I used to talk by phone with my dad but I did not remember how he looked.

On May 10th, 2010, my dad went back to Haiti. My mom and dad got officially married. My father went back to Florida by himself. I was so happy that I was able to see my dad before he went back to Florida. After three years, my dad took my little sister, my mom, and I to live with him.

At first, it was very hard for me because I didn't know English. After three months of living in Florida, I decided to go to school. I was very nervous the first day of school because I didn't understand English. People at my new school were very friendly.

It has been nine months since I moved to United States. I want to stay here the rest of my life. My goal is to finish my ESOL class and take my GED. It has not been easy but I want to continue my life here in United States!

Richardson Charles is a student at Westside Tech.

Tears That Turn Into Joy

My name is Hilda Clavijo. I am from Lima Peru. I came to the USA when I was 3 years old with my parents. Growing up as a child was hard. I was unable to go to school because my parents were not legal in the USA. I had to stay home with a lady that I did not know when my parents went to work. I have a brother, and a sister, who were born in the USA. I also, have 2 other sisters, and 1 brother that live in Peru.

Growing up as young girl, I had to stay home alone and do the housework. My father would teach me math, and leave me math homework before going to work. I remember as a child seeing my father abuse of my mother. I always had to get in between them so he would stop hitting her; but then he would hit me, for getting involved. My brother and sister were too young to defend my mother from my father. My brother would go to his room and my sister would hide until everything was over.

My father started drinking every day and would not go to work. My mother had to have two jobs to support the household. As a teenager, I was home alone with my father most of the times because he could not keep a job. So I would spend a lot of time with my father, until he started coming home every day smelling of beer, and alcohol. I was afraid of my father, and I did not understand what was happening to me. Or, why my father was behaving in a manner that was not appropriate with me. It is very hard for me to go into detail about my life as a young girl. I kept this secret for 3 years. I was fifteen when I shared with my mother what happened to me. I was so scared, and felt so alone and no one to help me.

Turning a bad situation into something good, In 1997 I became a US citizen, and I start working for the school board. With this job, I could be close to my children. In 2000, I gave my life to Christ and for 7 years I live my life for the Lord, and for my kids. In 2001, my son Gus, decided to drop out of school and got married. That really hurt me because I wanted a better life for him. In 2007, I remarried my husband Eduardo, giving us a second chance.

In 2007, my daughter graduated from high school, and attended FGCU. I was very proud of her because at her age I had a baby. In 2010, my youngest son graduated from high school and attended Edison. Although, my children were doing great, my marriage once again was fell apart. In 2013, I was divorced. Later, I attended Dunbar Community School to earn my GED, and hopefully one day I will attend college.

Hilda Clavijo is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Separation of My Parents

When someone grows up in a family with great values and family union, the meaning of the word “separation” can be very difficult to understand. When my parents decided to separate, for me the meaning of this word only became associated with loneliness and depression. One of my biggest fears has always been to be alone. When my parents separated loneliness became a reality. The mere fact that anyone understands how you feel or what you do to stop thinking about it, makes you reach a point of loneliness with yourself. For me, it was very difficult to understand loneliness because rather than try to be around people or talk about different subjects; I chose not to think about it.

At the end, I always felt lonely. Following the loneliness that I had, I started to acquire a total depression in every way. I had no desire to continue with my goals. I was always sad and thoughtful. I sought many excuses for not doing what I had to do at work and college. I took pills for depression, and sometimes drank alcohol to forget that I felt depressed. I began to think it was my fault my parents had separated. For me, the separation of my parents has been the biggest challenge I have had to face in my life. I overcame my fear of loneliness and depression. I completely changed my way of living. What is clear to me is that everything happens for a reason. I just have to learn from my experiences and accept that sometimes nothing is as one would like it to be.

Eduardo Culiola studied English at NWF State College in FWB, Florida.

Too Many Jobs, Too Little Money

My name is Giordany. I am from Haiti. I came to the United States in 1993 with my wife and two children. The

first thing I did was to get a job to support my family. My first job was as a baker at Winn Dixie. My second job was as a cook at Checkers fast food place. My third job was in the storage department at Kmart. As years went by, I began to realize that I was working too hard with very little pay. I know my problem was that I could hardly understand English.

One day, I shared my life experience with a friend. He took interest in me and told me that I should go to school. After two weeks, I enrolled in an adult English class. I am so happy that I can write and speak English much better now. My advice to all of you who are like me is to make time to learn English. It will help you understand what English speakers say to you, around you, at any place and any time.

Jean Giordany Desire is in Ms. Josephson's English class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

A Kite

If I were to be a toy, I would definitely be a kite. These soaring, playful objects are not monochrome, as many tend to be bright and colorful. Although kites are free, they loyally return to their native place after traveling to new heights. A kite is like a free spirit, without worry and with a different perception of the world, seeing it below in a different light.

As a child, I always loved kites. I flew them with my brother and sister, I would imagine myself flying in an array of radiant colors. I could be a happy yellow, hopeful green, powerful red or even multicolored. To me, the colors represented energy and youthfulness, the opposite of dull grays or safe earth tones. The bright colors in were emblematic, in those handmade kites, of adventure and edge.

I remember my father flying those beautiful, free form paper toys that rose higher than I thought possible, and flawlessly flew through thin air. I would have to wait

impatiently for my brother to fly the kite. When my chance came, I would hold the kite and direct it to fly and I could create my fantasy world for my kite and me. Being the pilot on an airplane and traveling to a far away land, my dreams became bigger and bigger through the lenses of my kite.

I dreamed of flying freely in the sky. Going to places that I had never been, swerving through the clouds and looking down upon little shapes that I can only guess were people or cars. I would make stops in other worlds, unknown to most, taking trips to the moon, the sun, and back again. After reading about geography, I urged to get a taste of things I had only seen on paper.

A kite is a symbol of freedom. It is opportunity and a chance to create excitement and to see the world in a different angle. However, when it comes down to it, a kite has its ties to home. It is in the hands of someone who understands its need to leave the ground, explore, fly away, but always faithfully returns home.

Vilma Escriche is a single mother of two children. She is a student of Ms. Will at Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center.

Looking Forward to a Bright Future

I just moved to the United States recently. My wife and I are from Haiti. She was here first and I came later. The first thing she did for me was to get me into an English class. That is one smart woman. Although I was a science teacher in Haiti, I cannot be a teacher here until I learn English. I like my class. My teacher is nice, strong in helping me and other students to achieve our goals.

I feel good about my life now. After I can speak, write, and listen in English well, I am sure I can get a good job. I will have a better future. I am reminding myself daily that I can make it.

Jean Jocelyn Francois is from Haiti. He attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Bond of Love

On August 7, 2005, my boyfriend and I made a commitment to love each other despite the distance and all the obstacles we might've had. Two weeks before, we went to my dad's jewelry workshop because we wanted a symbolic gift.

"A promise ring?" my dad asked. And of course we were in the right place. He made us a gold and silver ring and inscribed our names between two hearts. He included our commitment date inside the ring. Years passed, and we ended our relationship because it was tough to be in a long distance relationship when you are young and immature.

I decided that a good way to start this stage was throwing away all the things that reminded me of him. However, there was just one thing I couldn't throw away, my promise ring. Maybe it was the fact that my dad made it for us in a way of accepting our love, or perhaps I was not willing to forget my first love. So I decided to save it in a little box under my bed. There were moments when I would just go under my bed looking for my promise ring and put it on. Many feelings came out every time I did this. I felt like a teenager once again.

Our paths met again in April 2009. The first and only thing he wanted to know was if I still had the promise ring. Fortunately I did, and it meant so much to both of us. A year later, my promise ring wasn't under my bed anymore because he and I found a reason to put it back on.

Now I don't only have a promise ring made by my dad. He made my engagement and wedding rings also. My husband decided the style he wanted for me, but my dad put his creativity into it, so it would come out really nice.

These rings not only mean how much I love the person I want to spend the rest of my life with, but also how my family accepts our lifelong commitment. I'm pretty sure that my dad made my wedding rings with much love. He thought that it was not only a metal but a symbol to remind me the reason why I wanted to marry my boyfriend, and all

I'm willing to do in order to succeed as a couple and as a human being.

Sara Giraldo is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She is the heart of our class, and will be greatly admired and remembered by her classmates.

Bag of Rocks

It has been a while since I have thought about my bag of rocks. I was about nine years old and living in the country with my daddy. We had just moved there. It was a fun and interesting time in my life.

My daddy was a single parent with three young kids, which included my older sister and younger brother.

At the beginning of the school year we were ready to start our new school. Every morning my daddy would call us to wake up for school. Our wake up time was at 6:00 a.m., however our daddy would call us at 5:00 a.m. I really wanted to sleep that extra hour, but this was his way of making sure we would be awake at 6:00 am.

He would always have breakfast ready for us. After breakfast, we had to start walking to the school. It was a long walk. In the wintertime it was still dark outside. Since my daddy had to work on the farm, he couldn't take us to school. We had to walk alone.

My daddy worried about our safety. Even if I wasn't the oldest, he trusted that I should be responsible to watch over my brother and sister on our way to school and back home. One way I thought to keep us safe was to collect rocks and save them in my bag. On my way to school I started to collect rocks that I had seen on the ground. I figured if someone tried to come close to us and do something bad, I would throw rocks at them. To me at the time, it seemed like a good idea.

I carried the rocks in my bag throughout the year, going back and forth to school. I never had to use the rocks

to protect my brother and sister or me. The only time I was tempted to use my rocks was one day leaving my class and a boy tried to kiss me. He came out of nowhere and he was very fast. He kissed me and started running away. I really wanted to throw a rock at him, but I didn't.

To this day, my bag of rocks is something my brother and sister like to talk about. They like to talk about how heavy my bag of rocks was, how I never let them take rocks from the bag, how I could walk back and forth from school everyday while carrying rocks in my bag.

This story has been passed on to my kids, and my brother and sister's kids. My kids love to hear about my bag of rocks. Of course, I let my kids know that it was different living during that time in that situation.

Lucia Grisez is in the Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She is a kind soul, much loved by her classmates and teacher, Leslie McBride-Salmon.

A Never Ending Cycle

My name is Katisha Grissett. My childhood was a rough experience, including helping my mother avoid an abusive husband. As a teenager I followed in her footsteps and found myself in an abusive relationship. This appeared to be normal to me because I always thought hitting meant love. Later I gave birth to my first child, Sterling, knowing nothing about being a mother. My mother never taught me since no one ever taught her. Sterling's daddy would keep tabs on me, and get mad at me if I did not come home on time. So, like most relationships, that did not last long. At this point in time, I was 18 with a six month old, and on to the next guy that came my way. I was looking for someone to love me the way I wanted to be loved. I started dating this older guy named Charles. He gave me anything I asked for; he even took me and my son into his home. We called ourselves a family; at least that's what I thought. I ended up pregnant again with my son Jeremiah, and then my daughter Ashantie. Soon after he began hitting me, choking me,

keeping me in the house, calling me all kinds of names, forcing me to have sex with him, and keeping me from my family. He even turned me against my own mother. After having Jeremiah I suffered from depression. I went from a loving teen to someone's mother in a matter of seconds. Plus, I was living with a man who not only lied about his age, but took me away from my mother so that he could keep me all to himself.

On March 15, 2013, I was convicted of child abuse. One weekend my son's father and I got into a very heated argument that led to him choking and shaking me so hard that the skin around my neck began to pill. I also had blood all over my nightgown. After the fight, I took my three month old and shook him repeatedly. I was just overwhelmed and I did not know what to do. I even contemplated killing myself and my children. It was a very dark time for me.

Now I am sitting in prison serving a two-year sentence, and I can honestly say that I am more mature now, at 24, than I was at 19. I want to return home and make amends with my family and those who love me. I know that I don't have to be hurt to be loved by someone. Maybe the cycle can finally end with me.

Katisha Grissett is ABE II student.

Dream Girl

My name is Alice Guedes. I am fifty years old and the proud mother of three beautiful daughters. My oldest daughter is 29 years old and lives in Brazil. My other daughters are 23 and 15 years old; they both reside with me in the United States. I am also the proud grandmother of a very handsome grandson. My youngest daughter is a freshman in High School and wants to become a veterinarian after graduation. I am very proud of her.

I was born and raised in Brazil where I received all my formal education. I am also a graduate from the University of Rio de Janeiro, where I received a degree in psychology.

After graduation, it was almost impossible to obtain a job in my chosen profession. I was forced to work as a store clerk to support my children. It was then when I realized that I would have a better opportunity if I migrated to the United States. I knew I would have a better life there.

I came to the United States 18 years ago to seek the American dream, not only for myself, but also for my children. I want to go to College and study to become a nurse. I enjoy working with others and I think I will do a great job. I want to be of service to others, and nursing will provide me with that opportunity. The only way I can make this dream a reality is to further my education. As a result, I am currently attending night school taking ESOL classes at William H. Turner Technical Adult Education to perfect my English. I am so excited to come to school because I never had the opportunity to attend before, because I always had to work to provide for my family. In my free time, I used to read books in English to learn the language.

My life in the United States has not been easy. I find that in order to survive, sometimes, I have to take jobs cleaning houses to care for my children. As a result, I am suffering from terrible health problems. I am not able to continue doing the same work. But, I refuse to allow these obstacles to get in the way of continuing my education. I find that determination is the key to accomplishing any goal, being long term or short term. I am looking for opportunities to receive a scholarship to help pay for my classes; this would eliminate some of my worries as it pertains to paying for my class. Many times paying for my class is very stressful. Often times I have to neglect a bill in order to pay for my class. I want to make my dream a reality. I will not quit studying.

Alice Guedes is a student at William H. Turner Adult Education.

My Hardest Time

My personal story focuses on the most difficult times in my life. As I look back, I realize I did survive and did

move on. For that I feel strong. There are three things that happened living in the United States that were the most difficult for me.

The first and most difficult thing was losing my first babies. When I was 3 months pregnant, my babies died in my womb. I was going to have twins and it was difficult for me to get over losing them.

The second was the death of my grandmother. I have pain in my heart because she was still young and I will never see her. I came over to the United States and left my grandmother with my uncle. One day I called my grandmother, but she had died and I could not go see her. It was 25 years ago and I miss her very much. It is difficult for me to accept.

The third difficult thing was to deal with the disease of breast cancer that affected my mom. This was very stressful for me. A week ago she had a doctor appointment for a mammogram, biopsy, and therapy for her arm. Thank God, everything is good and the difficult times are behind me. I am strong and I can survive.

Magdalena Gutierrez is a student at S. B. Idea's "Parent Power" Family Literacy Academy at Forest Hill Elementary, West Palm Beach. She has 1 child. Her teachers are Sue Bauer and Hani Zainuddi.

I'm Thankful

I came to the United States on July 4, 2002. I have so many things to be thankful for. First, I am thankful for the financial assistance that has been given to me since I got to this country. Second, I want to thank those people who have helped me to receive my citizenship. Third, thank you for keeping your doors open for someone like me to learn English.

Despite my age, I am still attending class because education does not have age limits. Fourth, I want to thank all my classmates who have been good to me by helping me

in my class work. Finally, I want to thank my teacher for her patience, advice, motivation, and teachings. It is because of you, I have a very happy life here. May all of you be abundantly blessed.

Margarita Hernandez is from Cuba. She attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Personal Story

My name is Maria Hernandez; I'm a student at Dunbar Community School. I came to the United States eight years ago from Mexico with my husband and our children. We live in North Fort Myers, Florida.

I'm studying English because I need to speak perfect English to help my children with their schoolwork, and to communicate with different people. My goal is to get my GED and one day to attend college to further my education. I know this will allow me to have more opportunities in finding a good job with benefits, and even a step closer to attending college.

My aspirations are to improve the lives of my children and husband in this great country by earning my GED. I know this will allow me to obtain a better job; then I can be very supportive of my family to achieve the same goals. My strengths consist of my personal growth to improve the standard of living for my family for now and in the future.

My ambitions are to keep pressing forward without having to look back.

Maria Hernandez is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

The Unlawful Kill

May 6, 2008, a fatal day. The day someone decided to take the father of my children away.

I was at work when I received the phone call.

It was one that I never expected to receive that early in my life at all.

It was my best friend, frantic and heartbroken, as she delivered me the news.

Once she told me I didn't know what to do.

She said to me, "Toccarra someone just shot and killed Freddie."

Instantly I was numb and empty.

So here I am left sad and alone.

I'm left with two children without a father in the home.

The guy who killed him made a mistake.

He didn't realize whose life he was about to take.

When he did it he was ready and willing.

I can't believe he committed this unlawful killing.

The cops and news crews were already in the area.

Investigating and filming a different murder in that area.

Freddie was with a crowd of people standing around to see what had happened.

When his killer decided to come from behind and shoot him in the head, leaving his family and friends feeling alone and saddened.

A few days later his killer was caught by the police sitting outside of his home with a beer can.

And by then he was aware that he killed the wrong man.

Yet ready and willing, he committed this unlawful killing.

Toccarra Jackson is a student at Lee County Adult and Career Education School learning the skills and tools needed to prepare myself for college or vocational school.

"The Unlawful Killing" is a real life experience that actually happened in her life and she thanks God every day for strength. Each day of her life is appreciated as she learns and grows into an even better person than she was the day before.

I Am Because God Is

Like the manna that fell from the sky to supply nourishment to Moses's tribe, I waited for you. I waited on many a lonely nights, broken and limped, waiting for a sign. I waited for a sign from you to save me. I looked up at the

sky for you God and I waited, hoping, praying, devastated, and needing you to save me from the lightning and thunder of his curses, slaps, and blows. Through blood-shot swollen eyes and a self-mutilated pride, I waited because I had no one else to save me. I believed in you because I had no one. I needed you because my life was slipping from a state of purgatory into the depths of hell and I no longer could handle the fact that if I stayed my demise would be coming.

I had no one to save me from his threats that shot like venom into my veins leaving me immobilized and stranded when he dared me to leave. I had no one to believe me when I confessed about the abuse that I received. But deep down I knew that you did. You always knew. Like Moses's people all alone in that desert, you protected them through the torment of beatings and being enslaved, so deep down I knew you would rid me of my chains. But then I realized the God I called my Father was already in me and it was with that epiphany that I got the courage to leave. I fought him with all my might and took a step out on faith, and it is because of that I am alive today. I am because God is.

Dorothy Jean-Claude is an aspiring authoress. She loves to read and write and my dream is to have a best selling novel.

Reading: A Whole New World

There are a lot of things that I can do in my free time, but reading is my favorite activity. Through reading books, I have discovered a whole new world to visit, explore and increase my vocabulary.

When I was much younger my mom used to say, "You can never read enough, so read all that you can." She said this to me because I didn't like to read when I was younger. My mom encouraged me to read. Once I started reading, I realized how much I enjoyed reading. My reading time became very special. The best part of reading was that I could visit a lot of different places and never leave my bedroom. I would take myself to places that I only dreamed

that I could go. Through reading my books, these places became real. I didn't know that there were so many beautiful places in the world and that I could visit them just by reading. WOW!

Reading really gives me a lot of excitement in my life. Sometimes, when I am reading, I explore the streets, shops, parks, and museums. In my mind, I see the streets names, the details of the buildings, the actions on the street and some of the interesting things in the museum. I can't wait to get my hands on a good book. I realize now that I was missing out on a lot of things by not reading; now I can say, "I love to read" and it is my favorite free time activity.

As I began to read more and more, I noticed that my vocabulary increased. I participated more in different discussions and communicated with people more. Reading has given me more confidence to speak on certain topics. Reading has done so much for my self-esteem.

There are a lot of things that I can do in my free time. However, reading opens a whole new world to visit, to explore and to improve my vocabulary. Reading is my favorite free time activity.

Linda Johnson Pinckney at 58 years old, after rearing four children, decided to enrolled in GED at Dunbar Community School to get her GED Diploma.

I Love My Family

My name is Cecilia J. Juarez. I am from La Piedad, Michoacán, Mexico. I'm 32 years old. I came to the United States when I was 19 years old. I came to the United States from Mexico with my husband thirteen years ago. I came to the United States because I wanted a better life for my family and for me.

We have three beautiful children, Carla Janeth, Jeny Elizabeth, and Juan Diego Dominguez. Carla is thirteen years old. She is a beautiful girl, who likes music, plays the guitar, and is a very smart student. Jeny is eleven years old;

she is a beautiful girl, who also likes music and art. She likes to play the saxophone. Although she is very intelligent, at times she doesn't like to go to school. Juan is my little boy. He is eight years old, very handsome and very intelligent. He enjoys playing the drums and playing ski sports. Juan likes to go to school.

My husband is my best friend; he is 34 years old. He is from Mexico DF. But he grew up in La Piedad, Michoacán, Mexico. He came to the United States with me when he was 21 years old, He is very handsome and a very hard worker. He likes our family and he is a good man. We live in Orlando Florida. My children, my husband, and I go to school five days a week. My husband and I drive my children to school then we drive to school together. We study from 7:40 to 10:40 a.m. I like my school because I learn English. Sometimes my class is difficult for me because I speak another language. It's difficult for me, but not impossible. I need to learn English because it is indispensable to me. My teacher is Ms. Silva. She is a good teacher; she is from Puerto Rico. She came to the United States when she was 14 years old.

My story wouldn't be complete unless I mentioned that I love my children my husband and my friends because they are everything to me. I love my life!

Cecilia Juarez is a student at Westside Tech.

What I Miss

I'm overwhelmed with sadness to explain, "What I miss."

First, I really miss my mother. I heard that she passed away a few days after my birth. Until now I can't tell how she looked. My heart is laden with sorrow every Mother's Day. Sadness is the sole ruler in my mind because I don't have any face to recall.

Secondly, It might sound weird or funny to say that I miss my dad's leftovers. Even though I left my own food on

the table, my dad's always tasted better to me. I'm separated for almost four years from my dad who's living in Haiti, so I really miss him and his food.

Thirdly, once upon a time, I was able to lace my shoes up on my own, now I rely on people to do that for me. I was also able to carry two things at once, clapping my hands when at church or elsewhere whenever the moment struck me, but now I'm simply a spectator of these things. It bothers me a lot when I'm at church and they are praying.

After prayer is over, the Lord is given a round of applause. People glance at me watching what I'm going to do. In this case I just wear my courageous face and act blind to their looks because, unfortunately, I have no arm to do that.

I'm not trying to offend my mighty God who saved my life through the earthquake because in all honesty, my life is worth every penny in the whole world. It's kind of hard to accept the will of God and the fact that I really miss my arm.

Finally, I'd say that I miss the respect younger people used to have for elders. It's true that every epoch brings new truth, new style, new belief, and new behavior but respect remains universal. For instance, in bus traffic some young people don't mind cursing out loud in front of everybody, elders or others combined. They just don't care. I hate that and I miss the old behavior of respect.

In conclusion, I miss my country (Haiti), which I left since 2011, along with my friends there, and the all the things I talked about earlier. The depth of my heart is sad because of them and several memories are dancing in my mind right now, which makes me feel uncomfortable. They have many meanings to me and I really miss them.

Junior Jean-Francois is in Mr. Ortega's computer systems program at Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center. Reading and writing are his passions!

Nicolas's Birth

The most memorable moment in my life was Nicolas's birth. When I figured out that I was pregnant, my life changed. It was the most unforgettable the moments that my husband and I experienced: the pregnancy, which was not planned, the delivery day, and the end of maternity leave.

I was very frightened when I figured out that I was pregnant. My husband and I did not plan this; we had just married one month before. However, we breathed deep and received the news like God's wedding gift. My whole pregnancy was wonderful. I did not feel morning sickness, pain or tiredness. Instead, I was very excited to do a lot of things. The first time the baby kicked in my belly, and the day that I found out the gender, were two adorable moments in my pregnancy.

After forty very anxious weeks passed, finally the milestone day arrived. It was a very special day for us because our son was born on the same day as my husband's birthday – June 9. My husband, who was at my side throughout the delivery, held Nicolas in his arms and showed me our son. It was an extraordinary moment for us. However, everything was new to us: crying baby, feeding and bathing the baby. My mother came to help us for a few days; I was so glad and grateful for her support and patience. After she left, I was sure that my mother's teaching was better than all the best-seller books and magazines.

After four months of maternity leave, it was time to go back to my job. I started to look for a good nursery for my baby. It was very hard to trust a baby nursery to care for my baby with love, patience and affection like mine. My husband and I were very worried. It took twenty days to get back to my job. I thought about quitting my job, but I could not because we had bought our own apartment, and we needed my salary. After a long journey, we found a great nursery, which was safe and trusting, and they had lovely

professionals. We enrolled Nicolas, and I went back to my job very soon. It took three months to adjust.

Finally, for my husband and I to have Nicolas was a fabulous and memorable moment in our lives. In fact, our God's wedding gift made us become more responsible, mature and full of love. Nicolas made our family life better.

Glauciele Klava studied ESOL at NWF State College in FWB, Florida.

Everybody is Good at Something

Everybody is good at something, but I am good at being a hard-working woman for a few reasons. I love making people happy. I love getting bills paid and out of the way, and I am also a very dedicated worker.

I love making people happy which is really good customer service. I make it my duty to make sure the customers leave with exactly what they were looking for, plus a big smile. It is always good to know the customers, but never get too personal.

When I pay my bills on time, I love it. I always stay on top of important things. Even though sometimes things get a little rough, I just stay strong and keep smiling. Life has just begun for me and I realize bills will always be growing as the days go by.

I am a dedicated worker. I can do any and everything in the store that needs to be done fast and correct. Whenever we are short a person in the store, it is a guarantee they will call me. I will not tell them no because I know bills need to be paid, and a customer's day needs to be brightened.

I am a good worker because I love making people happy, I love getting my bills paid, and I am a dedicated worker. Most definitely, I am good at something.

Caitlin Kohler is a student at Dunbar Community School. She is employed full time and is enrolled in the GED program. Her teacher is Helen Hicks-Wiley.

The Mystery Boy

I was born in Hunan, China with a deformed left leg. I was depressed since I had to crawl everywhere. My parents could not afford to get my leg repaired. At age 4 or 5 they left me at a train station. The weather was cold and snowy. A nice man found me and took me to an orphan home in Hunan to be cared for.

At age 7 or 8, two nice ladies from Beijing came to the orphan home to take me to Beijing to get my leg fixed. I was excited. They took me shopping and bought me clothes and they took me to my favorite place to eat, KFC.

The next day at the train station, a man spilled cooking oil on me. I got very mad, but he said he was sorry. I heard the train coming; so I quickly changed clothes, and the ladies and I boarded. About four hours later we arrived in Beijing.

The next day we visited many places; however, we didn't get to see the Great Wall of China. After two weeks, the ladies took me to the big hospital to get my leg fixed. They left me with the nurse and I cried.

Two months later the ladies returned and told me they had found another home for me in Shivan, China. Upon arriving, a lady named Yenmama greeted us and told me 15 children lived at the home. She introduced us to everyone and showed me around. They sent me to school for the first time in my life. Being a troublemaker, they kicked me out.

Yenmama took my hand and told me about Jesus Christ, a man she said who blessed me and died for my sins. She taught me to pray for others and myself. I have been praying for my enemies and those I love. As the years passed my behavior improved. Yenmama was proud of me and told me I was a good boy since I was helping people and not getting into trouble.

At fourteen, I learned that I had to find a family before I turned fifteen or I would have to be on my own. I prayed to God for a family. One month before my fifteenth

birthday my prayers were answered. When I heard that a family wanted me I felt so happy. Yenmama and I traveled by train to meet my new American mom. My new mom and I spent about a week in China getting to know each other. We left China and arrived at night in Florida. My new dad and big sister greeted us at the airport. Dad drove us to my new home. The next day they took me to meet all the family. I was happy at last starting my new life in America at age 15.

Joel Kuhicek is a student in the Florida State College at Jacksonville Learning for Living Program class at the Mental Health Resource Center-Milestones Recovery Center. His teacher is Mrs. Margaret Mathis.

My Personal Story

My life, so far, has not been so easy. I am alone all the time with two young kids. My life has not been so easy; I've been through a lot. I've never really had a good role model to show me right from wrong. As a child, I was left alone a lot. I didn't really receive much attention or love. I never pursued my education because I felt as if it was not worth it.

At fifteen years old, I found I was pregnant with my first child, a girl. My pregnancy was great other than the fact that her father was incarcerated. So, I was left all alone with this baby girl, but I never gave up. I knew I couldn't do half the stuff I wanted to do with a child because I had no help from anyone. Things got rough along the way, but I've always managed to find a way out.

As the time passed, things got better for me. I met this wonderful guy and fell in love all over again. He was great with my daughter and he took care of us. Everything was going great. Then we found out that I was pregnant with my second child. Although neither one of us was ready to have another baby; there was nothing we could do but love our child.

My life has not been easy. I have struggled as a young mother, and left alone with nowhere to turn, but I have always managed to find a way out.

I am going to get my GED!

Kabrina Lara is enrolled in the GED program at Dunbar Community School.

A Personal Story

I was born and raised in Cuba where I got my degree as an Industrial Engineer. Looking for a better future, I decided to leave my country when I was 25. In February of 1995, my husband and I decided to go to Moscow, the easiest way to leave Cuba at that time. Besides, my husband had studied at a university in Saint Petersburg, and he still had friends there. We only needed to get an invitation from a Russian citizen as nobody was allowed to travel abroad without government authorization.

When we arrived in Moscow, we only had \$100 in our pockets. We had to start from scratch. My husband knew Russian, but I only knew how to say: “Spasiva,” “Da,” and “Niet.” I eventually found a job working in a Mexican restaurant from 12 am to 12 pm Monday through Sunday. It was a very difficult time. I started with learning the Russian alphabet to be able to read and communicate with others as nobody spoke English or Spanish for that matter. For instance, while working as a waitress, a customer once ordered a coca cola for his “Baditel” outside in the car. I had no clue, so I brought him a coke with ice, without ice, in a glass, in a can. When I discovered “Baditel” meant “driver,” I understood how important communicative skills are in any language.

After two years in the restaurant and the birth of my oldest son, Brian, we decided to start up, our own company importing Spanish products like wine and cheese to the Russian market. After almost three years, I told my husband I couldn’t stand the bitter weather anymore, and I

also wanted a better future for our son. We sold our business and then moved to Spain.

In 2000, we started life again; I was pregnant also with our second child, Alejandro. We optimistically bought a home in Madrid, but the first year was really tough. We didn't have legal status, and finding work was nearly impossible. Fortunately, my husband found work as a waiter for a few months. Alejandro was born in 2001, the year we received our employment authorization cards. After that, we worked in different engineering companies and also set up our own consulting company. When the situation in Spain started to worsen, however, we decided to move to the United States.

Looking for a better life and future, we only came to the United States four months ago. Now we are here, starting from scratch for the third time. It is another big challenge. We have a long way to go to achieve our goals here, but we will obviously never give up. The third time is the charm!

Aymee Lopez is currently an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida. Kathryn H. Niedbalec is her instructor.

My True Story

My name is Mirenia Lopez. I am from Cuba. I came here one year ago with my husband and my two children by airplane. I think we are a very lucky family to have had the opportunity to come to this country of many opportunities.

I was married 14 years ago. My husband's name is AdaLuis Hernandez Arencibia. He works very hard for his family. I have two children: one boy and one girl. At this moment, my girl is nine years old and she is in the fourth grade. She is a very brave girl because she did not know any English and now she is ready and bilingual. My boy is four years old. He is in preschool. I think he will be ready to begin kindergarten in August.

I study in Dunbar Community School because I want to learn English to help my children with their homework and I want to find a good job for me; this is my biggest ambition. The other ambition of mine is to visit my family in Cuba because I miss them so much. Then I can visit my favorite place. That is Varadero Beach. I have my best memories as a child and adolescent there. I love that place. I hope to fulfill this dream because it is currently impossible because I don't have U.S. residency in my hands. In the future I want to be a citizen of this country, when I will be ready with my English. I think it is very important for me because I could choose my President.

Mirenia Lopez is a student in Vicki McDonald's ESOL class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

Tuscany, Our Last Trip

Usually, we traveled twice a year and visited other countries and cultures, but this was a long time ago. My daughter is a student in Florida, and I don't see her very often. After a year and half, she came back to Germany and visited her family. We had a plan. We would travel together. We had wanted to go to Tuscany for a long time. We planned our journey over Skype and it was a funny and good start.

Two days before we were supposed to leave, I got sick with a bad cold, but we decided to go anyway. We flew from Berlin to Florence via Vienna. Oh, what a surprise we found in Vienna: a small propeller plane waiting for us. I had never flown on a small propeller plane before. We felt every air pocket. This was our first adventure.

When we arrived in Tuscany, we rented a car, and it was the smallest car I ever saw. It was a Smart Car. I had never driven a car like this before. I felt very vulnerable on the road because the car was so small and driving in Italy is very difficult compared to Germany. The traffic rules are taken as friendly suggestions. What a miracle, we did not have any accidents.

We did not have any GPS to help us find our hotel. We only had a small road map. Somehow we found our way to San Gimignano. It is a very beautiful old small city. We explored it, and we loved it; the city was covered in history and wherever you went the smell of flowers, pine trees, wine, and coffee followed you. It was lovely. The beautiful view of the unique landscape was amazing - it was Tuscany just as I imagined.

On our way back to Florence, we visited Siena, Volterra, Pisa and some beautiful small villages. We visited so many churches I cannot even remember how many. When we arrived in Florence, the hotel was not very nice and more expensive than it was worth. However, it was in the middle of the city, and we could walk everywhere. Florence is like one a big museum. The most important places I recommend visiting are The Cathedral of Florence, Uffizien, Ponte Vecchio, Palazzo Vecchio, Piazza della Signoria (home of Michelangelo's David), and the Palazzo Pitti. There was also an ice cream festival, and we ate the most delicious ice cream every day. The food was delicious: pizza, bread, cheese, spaghetti, and the wine.

Our return flight was difficult. The flight was canceled because the weather was horrible. We finally arrived in Berlin safely after a long journey back. My daughter and I had a wonderful time together. Tuscany was just as I imagined it, and today I remember it through my heart and the beautiful scarves I bought there.

Andrea Lützenberg is studying ESOL at Daytona State College Palm Coast, FL. Her teacher is Shannon Riley Eliasson.

Being in the USA Is a Challenge

Hello! My name is Brenda Maldonado. I'm from Honduras, and now I'm living in the USA with my mom and sister. We all came to this beautiful country together. It is said that Honduras is a perfect place for everybody to live, nevertheless, it wasn't for me.

Initially, I did not want to leave what I considered a perfect life; In Honduras, I had a great job, good friends, and a lovely father. I was finishing my career as lawyer, so what else could I want? An awesome relationship would have been nice, but it did not work out that way for me. Consequently, this is why I came with my family to the USA.

Now that I'm here, I can assure to everybody that this is a wonderful place to live, it is beautiful and more than that, it is safe. However, nothing is easy here. Living here in the USA is a continuous CHALLENGE. My first days were incredible; I did not have time to miss my country due to my family who took me to Disney, the Magic Kingdom. I have had the opportunities to go to many awesome places, but everything must come to an end. It was time for reality to sink in. Beginning with how much I miss my Daddy, friends, family, and the freedom I had there. When time came and I had to venture out along, it was hard; I did not know the city, so I usually took a lot of wrong turns to go everywhere. (In moments like that I just wanted to cry).

Right now, I'm studying English at Dunbar Community School to increase my skills, and making good choices to find a better job; which I am finding difficult to do. I now know this to be true "Education plays an important part here in the USA." Without it you will only qualify for the lower paying jobs. It is a must to have an excellent education to have the type of job we all dream of, 6 figures. This is not Honduras; here we have to give our two-hundred percent to get what we want.

I just want to say that I love the USA; this country offers a lot of opportunities for everyone. The opportunities here are not given to you. One must go out and hit the pavement; you must work hard to add value to your life here in the states. In order to gain what you want out of life you should do it with love, hope, kindness, and Education. Education will help you to lend a hand to all of the people you love.

Brenda Maldonado is studying at Dunbar Community School. She is in ESOL class level 6. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

Leaving My Country

It's a decision that I made almost a year ago, after thinking about it for a long time. Leaving my country and coming to the U.S.A is the most difficult thing I have done in my life

First of all, to live outside of my native country seems a little bit difficult for me, especially now being in the U.S.A. It's almost like I am starting all over. It's the most difficult because I left my lovely family, friends, my jobs, and everything.

Now I'm starting a new life with a new family in a different country. I have to study a new language, new culture, and go to school to get a degree, even though I already had one in my country. One of the most important things is that I'm getting older, which means less time and less energy to realize my dream. No matter where I am, I have to follow my dream. My dad always told me "You were born to work hard and be successful in your life."

I remember how I used to take care of some of my family, especially my mom, after the death of my father in 2004. It was very difficult to make this decision; at that time it was a drama for me to choose between my life in my country and my fiancé in the U.S.A.

After the death of my father, life was difficult for us. I had to take some responsibility. We are seven people in this family: three brothers (I the third child) and two beautiful sisters plus my lovely mom. I am not the most important person in this family, but I'm the only one who had a degree and got a good job with a reasonable salary. Could you imagine how much that pressure was? Anyway, I made this decision, and I think this will be good for me and my family in the future. Now at this present moment, almost one year after, I sure miss my family and friends, but everything is going well. I can say the hand of the Lord is upon me.

All the details above changed my life completely, but not my dream. This decision is the most difficult thing I have done in my life. Despite everything, I have joined my other half who has been waiting for me for a long time.

Ones Magloire has been in the U.S. for 11 months and studying at the AEC in West Palm Beach since August. He is currently in Leslie McBride Salmon's Academic ESOL class. He is a volunteer assistant in the Listening Lab at the AEC and a leader among his fellow students.

Life is Not Easy

I was born and raised in Cuba for 13 years. Then my family and I moved to Spain. The Cubans, including us, thought that living in another country was better than our native home. We were wrong! The image we had of a foreign country was not what we expected. We lived in a small house in Spain. My dad had to find a job quickly before our savings ran out. School was difficult for me because of a different Spanish dialect that I was not familiar with. My classmates always laughed at me. Then things got worse when my parents opened a grocery store. At first we thought that this would help us survive, but it didn't. We did not make any gain from the store. As a result of hard work and lack of rest, my parents started to get sick and my grandmother suffered from gradual loss of memory.

Finally, we sold the store to recover the three years of financial loss. What a relief! My father and I are now in the United States. We are so happy here. Now, I can concentrate on my studies. I want to study medicine. My father can focus on getting a job. My dream is to buy a house and a boat because I love diving and fishing. I believe our life will be better here.

Randy Marquez is in Ms. Josephson's English class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West.

Good Bye Moldova, Hello America

My name is Nicolae. I grew up in Moldova. I have a lot of memories of the time I spent with my parents, my childhood friends, and my schoolmates. I like this country because it is covered with an immense beauty of nature at the parks, beaches, and rivers. In addition, it has monasteries and excellent museum filled with over 263,00 pieces of art among which about 165,000 are original pieces of national heritage. The cost of clothes, electronic items, toys, produce, and food are very cheap compared to the United States, Japan, and Germany. Though Moldova has its charm, the people are not earning much money. Companies do not pay us well. Therefore, my wife and I decided that we should try something new in our lives. So, we left for the United States two years ago. My wish is to open my own business in TV satellites. I will visit Moldova in the future, but meanwhile I am enjoying my stay here.

Nicolae Marusic is in Ms. Josephson's English class at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West

My Personal Story

Truthfully, it was very difficult for me to get my GED. I was a 44-year-old woman with a learning disability, going through my second divorce, and this was my fourth attempt at the exam. In many ways, I seemed to already be defeated.

I quit high school during my sophomore year, and took on two jobs so that I could earn my own way and break from an unhealthy home-life. Soon thereafter, I enrolled into a secretarial course to further my education. During that time period, I took the GED exam for the first time. Unfortunately, I missed a passing score by a few points.

I eventually got married and moved to Europe where I was able to take coursework provided by the Air Force and American Red Cross allowing me to find employment as a dental assistant. Five years later my husband and I divorced, and I moved to Colorado. While working as a dental assistant in Colorado, I began studying for my second

attempt at the GED. Again, I failed only the math portion of the exam.

During the following 6 years, I met my second husband, got married, my father passed, my dog died, I sustained a head injury in a car accident and I moved back to Europe. Although my life was in disarray during this time, I still retook every part of the GED exam and passed everything except for the math portion with high scores.

While in Germany, I began studying yoga and ultimately went on to teach yoga in Belgium. Everything seemed to be going great when after 8 years of marriage, my second husband asked for a divorce. So within a week, I was back in the States and living with my mother in Florida.

I knew then that I would need to find a way to fend for myself, so I started studying for my fourth attempt at the GED. However, the combination of memory issues caused by my head injury, my learning disability, and my impending divorce made it a daunting task.

I had already told Dr. Turner and my mother that this was going to be my final attempt. I was scared, frustrated and confused. Math was all that stood between me and the GED, and it felt as though I had never seen it before—nothing seemed to click. I had lost my confidence and my will.

At Mrs. Currier's suggestion, I attended extra classes. I also decided to relax my mind as I worked. I watched my test scores climb dramatically in a week. I was ecstatic. She noticed that I had finally found something that worked. I found that my fear was what was blocking my learning. Persistence combined with a relaxed, calm mind became my formula for success! I earned my high-school diploma in December 2013!

Loretta McLaughlin is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

My Story on My Education

Bullies and my learning disabilities will not stop me from getting my high school diploma!

When I was in the third grade, I was put into a special class for people who have learning disabilities. I stayed in classes like that until I got into eighth grade. As you may have guessed, I was not on my grade level. This made me very sad because I always heard kids make fun of me and the other kids who were in those classes. Sometimes I didn't want to go to school at all because I was scared.

Well, after all that, I graduated out of middle school to high school. Everything got WORSE for me. I was put into regular classes. The work got harder, and the kids got meaner! I hated trying to do my work and not understanding it. What I really did not like were the kids who picked on me all the time. I went and told the teacher, but she didn't do anything about it. It got to the point that I just dropped out of school in the middle of ninth grade.

Just because I dropped out of that high school did not mean I was going to let that stop me from getting my diploma. So that is when I found the Santa Rosa Adult School. When I started at this school, I was so scared, but I had to get over my fear of it. And so that is what I did! When I first got here it was hard. I was scoring on a second grade level with my basic skills, but I just kept telling myself I could do it! I still tell myself I can do this! I have been in here for three years now, but I am not giving up on this. I have brought my basic skills up about four to five grade levels.

Over the years I have let those kids take too much from me, but this is one thing I'm not letting them take. If I have to stay here another three years I will, because after all the difficulties, I still believe in myself. I know I can do it!

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

MAY I?

I never thought I would be living in the United States; it was one of the furthest things from my mind. But, now I am here and it has been eight months since I set foot, for the first time, on “American ground.”

Yet, I do not feel that I am living here, that this is my new home. In my mind I still think that my stay is not going to be long, that tomorrow I will be in my country again. Now, I have the same feeling that I had those weekends when I went to my cousin’s house, when I knew that in a few days I would be home again; those days when, if I wanted to do something, I needed to ask for permission, I had to say “May I ...?”

That’s how my experience of living in the United States has been so far. I have not accepted this country as my new country. When I go out, I have no idea of what is right and what is wrong. I feel confused; inside I feel the need to ask someone if what I am doing is correct, if I have permission to do it, if I may do it. This feeling is curious and amusing because when I go out I ask myself “May I cross the street now?” “May I turn now?” “May I go to that place?” “May I say this?” “May I walk through here?” “May I do this?” “May I do that?” These two words are always on my mind “May I?” “May I?” “May I?”

It is not like when I used to walk around Bogota where, in some ways, I did whatever I wanted, just like walking through my living room. I am sure one day I will feel as comfortable as I was in Colombia; but meanwhile, if I meet you on the street I am going to ask you “May I?”

Juan Diego Montaña is an ELCATE student in Mrs. Graciela Somoza’s Academic Skills program, at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology, Adult Education Division. He came from Colombia and plans to study Music Production in college in the United States.

The Beauty of the Grand Canyon

My visit to the Grand Canyon was amazing because I saw one of the most beautiful sights of my life. When I was looking around, I understood how wonderful and powerful nature was. The Grand Canyon is a natural work.

The Canyon was created by the Colorado River, whose channel undermined the ground for millions of years. Then I wondered how the water could have created something so magnificent?

It was then I realized how powerful nature is. We are part of it too, because we are as perfect as the Grand Canyon. That visit to this natural wonder reminded me that we are small and that our life is short.

The Grand Canyon and what it is now took millions of years to form. Millions of years when the river flowed, it exposed layer after layer of sedimentation. That makes me wonder, how many other marvels are out there, to be appreciated by mankind?

This visit left me totally impressed by all the layers of time that can be seen in the Grand Canyon. A history of millions of years old could be seen in the scenery during the trip, including the traces left by extinct volcanoes.

This trip made me very happy because I could see a native natural wonder which taught me to appreciate each sight, and made me realize how old the planet is. For those who still have not had the opportunity to visit this beautiful place I invite you to do so.

Nathaly Ng is a student at Broward County English Café.

My Autobiography

My name is Francilia Omega. I was born in the beautiful country of Haiti. I have four sisters and three brothers. I'm the youngest daughter. I had a very difficult childhood because of my speech delay problem. My mother always hurt me when I was not able to express myself. I

was extremely sad. My speech got better after my teenage years. After graduating from high school, I went to Diquini School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti to study Nursing (LPN). I stayed at the same job for 20 years. While I was working as a LPN, I studied to become a registered nurse. Later, I got married and had my beautiful son (he's my life!). Three months after his birth, I divorced his father.

After the earthquake in my country back in January 2010, my life took a tragic turn. I lost everything. I was homeless and ended up in Orlando, Florida at my sister's house. It wasn't easy because I did not know the language. I enrolled at Westside Tech but was not able to stay long because I had to work. While I was working, I got my CAN (Certified Nurse's Assistant) license. I've been working ever since. Now I'm back at Westside Tech to improve my English in order to go back to Nursing School.

This is my story! I will never give up! I will continue to move forward!

Francilia Omega is a student at Westside Tech.

Cuzco Makes Me Feel Alive!

If you ask me how many times I've been there (Cuzco, Peru), there's no answer.

Every time I'm on vacation, I go to Cuzco. I love how the fresh air that blows in your face, how it smells, how beautiful the mountains and plants are, all clean and natural. People are friendly with you. There's always been a connection there. Mostly when I open my room's window.

During one of my trips, mom told me we were going to Machu Pichu, an awesome place full of ruins where you can see how our ancestors (Peru's ancestors) lived. I remember feeling anxious all the previous week and finally, that day came and it was the most peaceful, amazing adventure of my life.

Those big ruins (Machu Pichu) turned out to be a great part of our trip. We arrived by plane or bus, stayed at my

grandmothers's house, went to Machu Pichu, and climbed the Wayna Pichu Mountain, which is a very high mountain from where you can see all the ruins.

Wayna Pichu was the place that made me feel the wind blowing through my body and it seems like it's going to take you. It seemed to be like flying with the feet on the ground. Feeling a connection like that does not happen every day. So you better enjoy it a lot!

Valeria Alexandra Flores Pacheco a student in the Miramar Branch Library English Café located in Broward County. My teachers are Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz. She thanks them for all their help.

Life Without My Mother

After my mother passed away in 2011, I went through a lot of difficult moments in my life. Why was the death of my mother so hard for me? I will explain the reasons why it was so hard for me to live without my mother.

My mother and I were so close. The reason why we were so close was that I had two brothers and one sister, but they were not living with us; my brothers were out of the country and my sister was living with her husband. Only my mother and I were in the house. She was the one who did everything for me, like cooking, cleaning the house, and doing my laundry. I could say she was everything. After her death, it was like starting a training class. I had to begin learning how to do everything on my own. My mom loved me so much; she never gave me a chance to do anything. She was a great mother to me, and I cannot forget her. It is still so hard for me; I am still always thinking about her.

There's only one thing I hope. I want God to put someone in my way that will be able to replace my mother. This is the goal of my prayers. Even though she passed away, I can say that I'll love her forever.

Riche Pachou has been in the Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach since January. He is a

hard worker and rarely misses a class. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My First Time in China

I went on a trip to China for the first time with my parents. My father drove to Fort Lauderdale to get to the airport. We flew to Los Angeles. When we got to Los Angeles, we stayed with my grandmother for one day. The next day we flew to Vancouver, Canada, and then to Shanghai. The flight took 19 hours to get to China. When we got there my father had already reserved a tour bus that took us to the hotel. The next morning we had brunch, and then our journey began. On the tour we had 16 people on the bus with us.

The first stop was a pearl farm. We learned about genuine pearls and imitation pearls. We also visited two gorgeous botanical gardens. We had a banquet in a restaurant, and then stayed in the hotel. The following morning we went to a big city call Nanjing.

When we got to Nanjing there was a temple, and the temple was on top of the peak. There were 90 sets of steps to get to the top of the mountain, and I had pleasant time going up to the temple. Then we went to a jade workshop. We went to a different city the next day, and we went to a silk factory. We went to another town, we visited a green tea plantation and at night we saw an amazing show.

We returned to Shanghai, and we saw Pearl Tower Station. I went up in the elevator to go to the top of the Pearl Tower Station where I could see the whole city area from the top. On the second floor I saw another view of the city. There was glass all around me, and I could see through the glass. I felt like I was going to fall to the ground. At night we went on a boat ride down the river. The ship was so enormous, and we passed by the Pearl Tower Station.

The tour ended, and my parents and I flew to Beijing. We got to the hotel, and it was called Happy Dragon Hostel.

We took the subway to get around Beijing in the morning. We went to the enormous, beautiful Forbidden City. The next day we visited the Olympic Park where they had the 2008 summer Olympics. Following day we went to Great Wall of China. I had lovely time in China with my parents.

Manuel Pao is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Respect

I remember when I was in the university; I had problems with some school subjects because I needed to read some books in English. I decided that my sons should not have the same problem, so I decided to come to the United States to learn English. The amazing thing about coming here is that we aren't only learning English, but we're learning about another culture.

Now, I am happy because my sons are learning English very fast, and I am learning English, too. In the beginning, it was very difficult for us, but we never gave up. My sons watched me study every day. One day, they asked me, "Why can't you speak English like us, if you study every day?" The truth is that I really don't know why, but I know I will continue to study every day until I can speak confidently with other people.

This country gave me the opportunity to teach my sons about another culture. We have learned many important things. One of them is that every person must be respected regardless of: race, religion, disability, sex, age, income, country of origin, education, language, or IQ because it is very easy to put a label on a person. But if we remove labels from people, we can meet wonderful people everywhere. This country helped me to teach my sons the importance of respecting people. It has shown us that many people really don't believe in using labels.

My sons and I have read some history about this country and how many people have fought for civil rights

like: Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglas, and Martin Luther King, Jr. When I saw the movie about Ruby Bridges, who was the first child integrated into white schools in 1960, it was a poignant movie for me.

My sons and I have met genial people in this country. I want my sons to learn not to put labels on people no matter which country they live in. One of the most important things is to respect all people. The only thing they need to know about another person is “if that person has a good heart.”

Penelope Pena is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

It's Never Too Late

My name is Belen Penalba. I was born in Nicaragua. I came to the United States for love. My sweetheart and I left our families, friends, and country to pursue our dream to start a family here. Paulo Coelho says, “When someone wants something, you should know that it is a risk but life worth.” I knew that it was not going to be easy and it was going to take time because of my lack of English skills.

I regret not taking advantage of the free time to study English as well as the opportunity to study it when my father could pay for my studies. How I wish that young people understood how important it is to study. I want them to understand that they must seize the condition when it is favorable, especially on weekends or during summer break. I know later on they will regret if they ignore this precious moments. On the other hand, it is never too late to start as the writer, George Eliot said, “It is never too late to start to be the person you could have been.” For this reason is why I am now studying English. In addition, to remove that barrier and to move forward, I came to this country to fulfill my goal.

Belen Penalba Reyes is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

When You Feel He is Not, He is Always with You

My name is Lusvi Josefina Perez Gonzalez. I from Guatemala; I was born in 1983, when the war in my country in its was most critical stage. In my first five years of life I saw weapons in the hands of my father every day and we lived in fear. My father was a secret agent of the army and infiltrated by a year with the opponents. When he fulfilled his mission, he opted to leave the country for fear of reprisals.

He chose to come to the U.S.A. I remember when my dad kissed me goodbye on the cheek. For many years, we heard nothing from him. I thought the worst; he died during his attempt to come here. The reality was different. He had formed a new family in the United States. Receiving this news was very painful because he never explained it to me. Without a father, it was very difficult. Every year on Father's Day I cried because I missed him a lot. I hated him for leaving me when I needed him the most.

In 1996 the peace treaty was signed in my country. My father came back home, but I was so confused. I did not know whether to hug him or challenge him for his abandonment. I refused to call him dad. He tried to force me to love and respect him, but I only hated him more than before. Two months later, I received news that he was gone once again without saying goodbye and I was devastated.

In 2001, I finished school and decided to come to the U.S.A. to find my dad. When I finally saw him in front of me, I started to cry because I felt so happy. I could not believe he asked for my forgiveness and we forgave each other. We shared eight months together. Then he decided to go back to Guatemala. However, now our relationship is different because the time I spent with my dad was wonderful.

I thought that life was cruel to me. I forgot God promised me, if my father and mother abandoned me that he never would. I know he is always with me. Every second of

my life, even if I cannot see him, he always is there by my side.

My past taught me that although there is peace around me, if I do not pardon the people who offended me, I will never feel peace within. When I forgive, I receive more than I can give. Nowadays, I learn how beautiful every day is when I feel peace into my heart. If you have peace inside you, you have the secret for a happy life.

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

When I Couldn't Speak English

I am John Pierre. I came from the beautiful country of Haiti. I have two kids, one boy and one girl. We live together in the city of Ocoee, Fl. We came to United States on September 16, 2012. That was my first day in this country! I'd like to explain to you how my first day of school was!

It was my dream to come to United States. It is such a beautiful country. After a few days, I went to school to enroll in English classes because I couldn't speak English. It was interesting! Before I began the class, I took a test called CASAS. After that, I knew which class to attend. My teacher's name was Mrs. Maria Wells. When I arrived in her class the teacher spoke. I didn't understand anything she said. I was frustrated because I couldn't understand her. I worked really hard. After a few months, I felt much better and I saw my progress go up.

Now that I've shared about my language barrier when I first came to this country, I can say that my English has gotten a lot better. Now I have new teachers because I have improved and I have learned more words and sentences. That's good for me!

The most important thing I want to do is to learn a technical profession -Building Construction. I took the TABE test last week I didn't have the score the school recommended but now I have a new plan to prepare for the

future. The next test date is on August 2014. I 'm really interested to complete this program. Thanks to both of my teachers, Mrs. Silva-Johnson and Mrs. Carmichael, my English has improved. I believe one day I will have all I want.

John Pierre is a student at Westside Tech.

How the Literacy Council Made an Impact In My Life

Growing up as a child, I was not a bright student and found it very hard to learn. Therefore, I decided to take up sewing on my own by taking old clothes apart and making patterns of them to sew something new.

I managed pretty well in making money to help support my family, but something was missing. I did not have the education I needed. My English was very poor. I wanted to go back to school, but the money was not there.

Many years later, married with five children, I came into contact with the Literacy Council while doing community service. I found out that it helped students by finding tutors to help them get their GED. I became very excited about it, so I signed up. Weeks later, the director told me she had found someone who turned out to be very patient with me.

I can say I have come a long way from where I started. I have learned more in my adult life that I ever learned as a young student. I just would like to say to the Literacy Council, thank you. You have made a big difference in my life, more than you will ever know. Again, I say, thank you.

Donna Price is a Bahamian born mother of five adult children who came to us first as a volunteer, and then became a learner.

Why?

The most difficult thing I have done in my life was to accept the kidnapping and death of my brother, Gustavo, whose nickname was Taboco. Fourteen years ago, the guerrilla bandits kidnapped him and told my family to pay the ransom of one-fourth of a million dollars. Three days later the police found his body in the river with two gunshots in the back of his head.

To lose my brother was a tragedy for the entire family. Two months later, I lost my father because he couldn't accept his son's death in this tragic manner. These two events affected everyone in the family. For example, my son, who was only nine years old, had never experienced anything this horrible, and as a result, he stopped going to church and stopped praying. He stopped believing in God.

Gustavo was only thirty-three years old. He had a wife and three children. Today my nephews are professionals: one is a veterinarian, one is a computer technician, and the other is a lawyer. I am very proud of them for not allowing this tragedy to rule their lives. For me, my heart is broken, and when I remember the crying and great sadness, I cannot speak.

I hope this never happens to another person. For me to write this essay is the second most difficult thing I have ever done because I had to remember when my brother was killed. Why?

Nelsy J. Restrepo is a student at DePorres P.L.A.C.E.

My Rehabilitation Process

One of the most difficult things I have ever done in my life was to stop working. I'm a proud rehabilitation counselor. That is not just my profession; it is my vocation for life, even though I'm not practicing it now. I worked for many years providing services to people with disabilities in my community. In all those years of service, I was able to see so many difficult situations, but I also witnessed the

power of the human being to cope and successfully overcome their hardships. That was the beauty of my job.

Throughout my work I had the opportunity to do what I liked the most, interact with people and guide them to a self-sufficient life. I was able to be productive, creative, and efficient, providing the right rehabilitation process to everyone I worked with. The work environment was very dynamic, interesting, and exciting. Doing my job, I felt great satisfaction and fulfillment. I was very passionate and committed to my work, and I really valued it. This is why the decision to stop working was so difficult.

When my family and I decided to move to the U.S., I had to quit my job as a counselor in my country. Saying goodbye to my co-workers and to my clients was a very difficult moment. I wasn't sure that I would see them again, or if I would ever have a job like that again. I was afraid; I felt uncertain about my future. As time passed, my family started to encourage me to do something about it. I began to work with myself in the same way I used to work as a counselor. I started to have higher expectations of myself for my future. Also, I began to explore and understand my options and set my goals. At this time, I'm making my work plan with achievable steps. Most of all I need to understand that it is another process of life in which I need to work hard and consistently at without despair.

For now I'm taking English lessons at the Adult Education Center. Everyday I can see improvements in my English. Therefore, I'm more confident with myself. I believe I'm on track to achieve my goals. I hope very soon I can work again.

Jazmin Rivera is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She is a member of the AEC's School Advisory Council and a much loved volunteer assistant in the AEC's Listening Lab.

The Key to Success

Many people learn all the things they know in school. However, in my case, the one thing I learned from the outside world was how to become a mother. It made me responsible, smarter, and independent.

Becoming a mother at 18 and barely knowing what life was about was scary. I knew I had to be responsible and start planning a future for my daughter and myself. Being a single mother was the hardest part because I was doing all the work with no help. Not being able to focus on my future led me to work full time at a restaurant.

In addition, becoming a mother and being young in my mind made me think smarter. I wanted more from life. I saw no stopping and only greatness ahead. I wanted to be the person my daughter looked up to. School became my priority and the party scene was not in the picture. The only picture I wanted to see was a diploma with a degree on it.

Furthermore, the outside world became rough but taught me a lot about life. I never gave up. I would always say to myself, "being positive is the key to success." I was raising a child alone at the age of 18, had a full time job, and was going to school. Life gave me the will power to succeed not only for my daughter but for myself.

In conclusion, many have learned in school everything they know. However, what I learned from the outside world was how to become a responsible, smarter, and independent mother. The outside world put me through many obstacles but never gave me a reason to quit.

Michelle Rodriguez, a young single mother at 18 enrolled in GED at DCS. She took advantage of the day and night program based on her work schedule. Teachers: Helen V. Hicks-Wiley/Gabriela Pesantes-Ortega.

My Personal Story

My name is Edna Rodrigues Goulart; I am from Brazil, but I live in Fort Myers. I have been living in the U.S.A for

thirteen years. I am married and have four children, three sons and one daughter. My children all married here in the U.S.A., which increased my family to three daughters-in-laws and one son-in-law. I am honored to be blessed with seven grandchildren, five granddaughters, and two grandsons.

My father and my mother live in Brazil. I have two other sisters, one brother, one sister-in-law, one brother-in-law, seven nephews and four nieces. I have one sister that lives here in the U.S.A. In Fort Myers, my father, my brother, my husband, and I are Pastors. My family works very hard to help people in Brazil who abuse drugs and alcohol. The name of the Church is Second Church Assembly of God. We teach the gospel straight from the Bible. We pray that God can change lives of the people who need help.

Edna Rodrigues Goulart is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Little Scott

A lot of people say that a dog is a person's best friend, but this phrase sometimes changes according to a dog's breed. Large dogs are stigmatized because many believe that these dogs are aggressive and have killer instincts. I myself know this is not true.

I have two large, beautiful Rottweilers, Princess and Roth. On April 21, 2013, Princess gave me three pretty puppies. Even though they were born in good condition, it was not until a month later that we realized one of them was not doing well. The last puppy was smaller than the others and to be honest he was a little inattentive visually and aurally; however, he was the best puppy that I have ever had.

After two months, he still lagged behind his siblings. I always took special care of him, and he knew this, so little Scott was always near me. He ran around me and jumped all the time. When I took him and his brothers to the

veterinarian, the vet told me that little Scott had a special condition. Because he was the last puppy to be born, he did not have enough food and space to grow healthy. Because of his special condition, he also had to be given special medicine and special food to keep him alive.

A month later, Scott was not able to recognize people and he occasionally lost control of himself with other animals, so we had to make the difficult decision—the worst decision in my life—to euthanize him. His presence had changed my life. How could someone feel so much love for a pet? How could my relationship with a special puppy affect me so? But it did.

In the end, I know the decision we made was for the best, but I cannot avoid feeling sadness for my loss.

Miriam Romero is an ESOL Academic Skills student.

Children Around You

Many times, I have heard that a housewife is a driver, a cook, a teacher, and more; but have you ever heard what a child is? Have you asked yourself what are your children for you? The first five years of their lives they learn everything from you; they speak like you and they act like you. Whatever you expect from them, they expect from you.

If you dedicate time and listen to them, play with them, and care for them, you will learn from them so many things that you could not imagine. They can also be our great teachers! Sometimes they can be our drivers too; oh yeah, they drive us crazy! But in silence they are talking to us, they are asking us for help; but we are deep in our routine and do not listen to them.

Wouldn't you like to awake in the morning smelling a delicious breakfast? Well, make that breakfast a learning experience and spend time with your children in your kitchen, and do not be like a village jealous mother-in-law that says, "two people do not fit in a small kitchen". The time spent together would be great for both. It is sad to hear

every day in the news that many young children are killing themselves or killing somebody else while we are working hard and doing over time to pay our houses or our last model car. What are we doing to our children? When will we, the parents, stop this - ignoring them? What is the worth of a house without family?

You can give all kinds of service and attention to your new car, but when you have spent all of its miles, believe me, it will leave you in the middle of nowhere; but, if you give the same to your child, it will be another story. I, a happy mother, invite you to swim in your child's ocean of questions, in his river of problems and try to understand him. Things can be easy for you or can seem like nothing to you; but for them it might cost them their lives. I learned from a movie a beautiful message that I would like to share with you:

“There is no manual on how to be a good parent, but there are many ways to be one.”

Maria Rosales is a student at S. B. Idea's "Parent Power" Family Literacy Academy at Forest Hill Elementary, West Palm Beach. She has 3 children. Her teachers are Sue Bauer & Hani Zainuddi.

People Who Have a Disability

My name is Dwight Daley, and I was in a special education class back in elementary, middle school, and high school. I am very smart, and I can read and do math, language arts, social studies, and science. Most students in my class were equal and some were smart. I graduated from high school, and my name was in the yearbook. The year I graduated was 1999, and I was 19. I finished high school in Broward County, Florida.

I love working with people who have a disability. I can help them with problems and situations. I can teach them a lot of stuff like reading, math, social studies, and science. If I were a teacher for people who have a disability, like a special education teacher, they could learn a lot from me.

Dwight Daley is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Love for Life and Nature

When I was 16 years old, a friend invited me to go hunting. For me, it sounded amazing; I had never participated in something like that. I said yes.

We lived in a small town called, “El Espinal”. He got a dart shotgun and we went to the outskirts of town, shooting every animal we saw: small birds, iguanas and lizards.

He used a cord to tie all the small birds together as a chain count. In the afternoon, we arrived at our neck of the woods and he threw the chain of birds in a hole by the side of the street.

This action impacted me strongly, it was a disdain for life and nature. We killed animals only to throw their bodies in a hole. It is not an action of which I can be proud. It made me care about anything I do and focus on nature conservation, looking for a better world.

Francisco Segura is a student in the Miramar Branch Library English Café located in Broward County. My teachers are Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz. He thanks them for all their help.

My Personal Story

My name is Rosemene Senat. I am 29 years old. I was born in a small village in Haiti called Mirebalais. My father is a landscaper and a tailor, and my mother is a seamstress. I am the second child in my family of six children. I lived with a good educated family and there was always in peace and joy during my childhood. My parents love their children and give their support whenever necessary. That makes me love them so much more than I can imagine. They sent me to a school when I was two and half years old. They always taught me history about my country. When I was eight years old, I had been sick for long time. I had a fever called

Typhoid and my limbs were hurt very badly. My mother took me to many hospitals in the state, and then I finally recovered after five months.

After getting my primary education at age of thirteen in 1998, I moved to the city to my aunt's house to begin my high school. My mother came to visit me with my older brother every month. Sometimes, it was very difficult for me to live without my family, but my goal was to obtain a good education and become a reputable person. My mother always said, "You must keep your sense and do what you have to do because you are my lovely child and I want you to have success in your life." Those words made me strong enough to face the difficulties I encountered. Every holiday, I returned to my home to enjoy some good time with my family that I missed so much. While I returned to school I felt stressed because I had to leave my family again, but I promised myself to achieve my dreams come true.

After, I obtained my high school diploma in 2005; I went to a technical center to start my first year of nursing. There I met a gentleman; I was very obsessed with him. Suddenly, he had to travel to the United States. I wondered if I could ever see him again in my life. Unexpectedly, he returned to Haiti and we got married. After that, he brought me to the United States with him. I am very proud of my husband.

My goal is to spend my time wisely because I think when the time is gone; it is gone forever. Even though it is difficult, I want to learn English well and become a nurse. Then, I can find a job to take care of myself and my family. I am happy to be here at Gary Adult High School because this is the best place I can learn English to achieve my future goals.

*Rosemene Senat is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School.
Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.*

What I Am Thankful For

I am grateful to have a family in my life.
I am thankful having God in my life and I enjoy church music every Sunday.
I am thankful for education because it's good to learn and it's good for teachers to help out and teach us things that we don't know like reading, math, social studies and other things.
And I am blessed for being alive.
And I am blessed to have a roof over my head.

Christopher Sean Severe is a student at Adult and Community Education In Tallahassee, FL. His teacher is Anne Meisenzahl. He is interested in sports like basketball and football and video games. His favorite game system is PS3. He enjoys his family very much.

This Is My Story

My name is Ron Shipley and I have Dyslexia. I have struggled with it my entire life. As a child, I was a stutterer with a speech impairment. School was torture.

I remember an embarrassing and humiliating moment when I was in 7th grade, and my teacher discovered that I couldn't read or write. She began the class by telling the students how important it is to know how to read and write, while looking at me several times. I started to get that sinking feeling. You know, the one you get when something bad is about to happen? Then she looked at me and told me to read a paragraph. My heart was pounding. I looked at the words on the page with tears in my eyes when I heard a whispering voice behind me reading the words, and I spoke the words out loud. That little girl saved me. Afterwards, I looked back at her and whispered, "thank you." I didn't even know her name.

I was getting nothing out of school – couldn't read or write! I knew I wanted to be a carpenter in junior high school. I always liked working with my hands, always

building things out of scrap. I quit high school in the 12th grade when I was 18, and got a job as a laborer building houses. Over time, I worked my way up to carpenter. Five years later, I landed a job in the commercial construction building industry as a carpenter and worked my way up to Superintendent, eventually working on multimillion-dollar projects.

Dyslexia is NOT a deal breaker for success; but you must work hard to cope with it in order to be successful at whatever you choose to do in your life.

I'd signed up for the adult literacy programs in the past, but never saw it through. Each time, I made small improvements, but not enough to read a book or write a letter or an email. When I signed up again with the Mount Dora Library, I was paired with Betty as my tutor. When I began, my reading level was second grade. Betty got me believing in myself. She motivated me and gave me the confidence I needed. I am reading on a 6th grade level now and will keep working to improve.

I am 57 years old, and just finished reading my 3rd book! I am also writing emails and other correspondence for work. Betty took me to the next level. I have more confidence in myself that I have ever had.

I can't thank the Literacy Coalition, staff and volunteers enough for the work and time they put into this program. A special thanks goes out to Betty Schwarten. We have built a friendship that will last forever.

Ron Shipley works with his tutor Betty Schwarten at Mount Dora Library.

My Last Frontier

I would like to share with you the best experience I had traveling years ago. When I went to Skagway, Alaska in the spring of 2001, it was not a vacation trip. With my daughter and son-in-law, I decided to work as sales associates in a fine jewelry store. We had a big surprise when we arrived

by ferry from Juneau, the capital city of Alaska, to discover that Skagway is only a little town with two streets and twenty avenues and a population of 1,200 souls.

Skagway is located inside of the “Inside Passage” where the cruise ships go in the summer, with thousands of tourists, visiting other beautiful towns like Sitka, Ketchikan, etc., and enjoying the view of the big glaciers.

The days passed very quickly. We worked long hours, but we had time to go hiking, visiting little towns and gardens full of beautiful flowers and vegetables. Because of the long days with sunlight, they grow bigger than normal.

We also used to go fishing and watch the salmon coming from the ocean into the little streams in their cycle of life. At nighttime, in August and September, when the sky was clear, without clouds, we used to see the “Northern Lights”. This is the most magnificent experience when God starts painting the sky with an explosion of greens, reds, and whites in a constant motion.

We had also the great experience to share with native people from Alaska, learning about their culture and enjoying all the wonders of “The Last Frontier”.

The best years of my life were in this little town, living for ten years consecutively, from May to December and spending the winter in Florida, New Mexico and St. Thomas, USVI.

I want to go back!

Teddy Roosevelt-Sierra a student in the Miramar Branch Library English Café located in Broward County. His teachers are Gloria Jackson and Sandy Horowitz. He thanks them for all their help.

The Lost Child

My name is Mae Ella Smith. I was born in Clearwater, FL and I am 53 years old. I'm a mother of six grown kids and many grandchildren whom I have yet to meet.

I came from the poor side of the family. My mother kept me at home to cook, clean, and wash. I also had to keep my sister and brother, so I did not have any schooling. After a while, I grew tired of all of the hard work and negativity, and I started getting in all kinds of trouble. During that time I also began having children. In between the kids came jail and prison life. When I went to prison, my sister took the responsibility of my children. This put a lot of stress on her, and my children would be all upset when I'd leave.

When I came to prison for the fourth time, in 2003, I received a fifteen year sentence. I had to explain to my children that I'd be out of their lives, and that their aunt would have to raise them. This made me think about what I was doing to my family, and what I was doing with my life. I decided then to do something with myself.

I was transferred to Gadsden Correctional Facility on December 15, 2010. There, I enrolled myself in school and took the TABE test that same month. I scored an average of 0.1. Three years and a lot of hard work later, my scores are at 3.9 overall. This may not seem like much, however when I started I could not read, write, or even tell time. Now, thanks to my schooling, I can do all three and so much more. I have become very proud of myself.

I have put my kids and my sister through a lot with all of my choices in life, but I do thank God that my family has stood and continues to stand by me. When I get out, my goal is to be there for all of them; to show them that they do mean a lot to me, and to continue to work on my education.

Mae Ella Smith in an ABE II student.

My Dog

My dog's name is Chance, and I love her very much. She is a one-year-old, and her color is brown and white. Her eyes are brownish. She is a very active dog. She is scared of loud noises. She also loves Alpo canned dog food. She likes

to run after cars. She doesn't like cats. Chance likes to sleep in her bed, and she also likes to sleep in my arms.

She likes to jump on me. Chance enjoys playing with her balls and stuffed teddy bear. She likes to take very long walks and smell the grass. She loves to play in the sand. Chance likes to play with the little kids. Chance gives some kisses to kids. Chance likes to look at the birds. I'm very happy to have her as my dog. Chance and I love to do things together, and I hope she will be with me forever.

Debra Spivey is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

It's Never Too Late to Get an Education

Throughout my life, I have learned that there is no excuse to miss opportunities to create success or simply to improve my life. People make excuses!

I have known people who told me that they couldn't continue a career because they got married or they had babies. Others have told me they couldn't improve their life due to lack of money. I can tell you, however, that everything is possible if you want it to be. You just have to take the chance in the moment and do your best at whatever you choose to do.

I have lived through many difficult events throughout my life, but they have not stopped me. I lost two of my brothers; one of my brothers died at 18 due to cancer, and my other brother at 30 was killed due to the prevalence of crime in Venezuela.

Most of my life, I grew up away from my family because I needed to study and prepare myself to be a professional. I was married for 12 years and, unfortunately, the marriage didn't work out. Now, I am alone with my two kids but always stand up and keep going!

Currently, I live in the United States. I am in another country, with another culture, learning another language, observing other behaviors, and facing new challenges. I am

adapting to this new life with my two girls and preparing every day to adapt myself to a new life structure.

A few times I have felt really bad and without strength. However, I have also learned to have a positive attitude. I have learned to look on the bright side of negative situations. I have even learned to exclude or ignore people who do not contribute to my growth or who are not in agreement with my moving forward in life or with my goals and directions.

After some consideration, I decided to go back to school to improve my English skills for my job and for my new life in the United States. It is never too late! I never doubted going back to school because I felt I was too old. On the contrary, I don't care about my age.

Every day gives you an opportunity to learn something new. And sometimes you also need to look for opportunities and resources to learn something by yourself. The world has changed, and you have many options to improve your life by planning your time according to your needs.

Don't let life pass you by without attempting to do something you really want. It's never too late to take the opportunity to get an education. Take your time to think, and to reflect about all that you can do. Remember, your excuses won't allow you to move forward. Only you can do that!

Liliana Strubinger is a distance-learning student with TLC Online at The English Center whose goal is to speak, read, and write English fluently. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Self-Preservation

I've spent the last eleven years of my life as a host in a human wasteland or warehouse. I've maintained my identity, individuality, and humanity under extremely difficult circumstances. The systematic institutionalization that is so common and prevalent did not consume me or swallow me up whole.

I have become a better person despite the debilitating, dehumanizing, brain washing process that I have been forced to accept and endure. When I contemplate my life, before it was so brutally and dispassionately snatched away from me, it is perplexing as to who I was then and who I am now. I was self-absorbed, selfish, and addicted to making bad choices and searching for instant gratification.

I didn't understand who I was, and I continued to do the same things over and over again, expecting different results. A miserable life of heartache, chaos, and confusion ensued, and then I was suddenly plunged into this realm of nothingness. I was alive here, but dead to my free world life and to the people in it.

The pain was excruciating! I felt as though I was literally being torn to pieces. I could not believe, understand, or accept what was happening and yet it was happening. I have had to ignore how I truly feel and be brave and strong; bear discomfort without complaint, and suffer relentless judgment, discrimination, retaliation, and persecution.

This life has broken me down so many times, in so many ways; yet I have made a shocking transformation. I have evolved into the epitome of positive growth and change. Now, I'm better and stronger than I was before, and I will emerge my best self! As I dutifully complete the rest of my time, I pray continuously that I never become a specimen in their collection of tortured souls. A prisoner caught in a concrete and cast iron web.

Tammica Summers is enrolled in a LifeSkills class under Ms. Drymon at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

A Jewel in the Darkness

There once was a beautiful jewel lost in the darkness. This woman did not know that she was a jewel, more precious than diamonds. She did not know her value. This woman grew up around negative people. No one showed love or gave each other an encouraging word. Everyone

only cared about themselves, so the woman became a product of her environment. She wandered around in the darkness like everyone else, looking for love and fulfillment in all of the wrong places.

Somewhere along life's highway, fear had robbed this poor woman of the joy of living. Living in fear is living in darkness. Life just passed this broken woman right on by. It is a sad thing to travel throughout life's highway and not build any relationships, or experience true friendships or love. No one ever showed her what love looked like. Everyone wanted something from her. They only wanted to take from her, never wanting to give. She wondered what her life would have been like if she had finished high school and gone to college. Perhaps she could have moved to another state. She wondered sometimes if people would have liked her better if she were taller or thinner, if her skin was lighter or darker. This woman didn't realize who she was, so she never learned to be all that God intended her to be.

After more than 30 years of wandering in the darkness, she heard wisdom calling her, "Woman, woman, you are beautiful and wonderfully made. You were not given the spirit of fear. I gave you the spirit of joy and a sound mind. Woman of God, I love you with an everlasting love. My child, you are more than a conqueror, you are precious to me. Woman, you are a "diamond." Fly high above your circumstances, and let your light shine brightly. People will know that you are a woman of the most High GOD. I will never leave you."

Finally, she came out of darkness into the light and was made whole. She now realizes what a precious jewel she always was!

Joann Taylor is married, a mother and a full-time caregiver. She is determined to complete her GED studies, and get her high school diploma after a 40-year absence.

A Miracle to Tell

I am a nurse and I have worked for eleven years. I have known many patients, taking with me something from each. I've always helped each of my patients to the best of my ability, treating each as if they were my own family.

I have seen great sadness in the families of my seriously ill patients. I never imagined the heartache I would feel when the patient was my own family member, the most important one of all, my mom. The one that gave me life, the one that never seemed to be sick or weak, was suddenly given the worse clinical diagnosis, deadly cancer. The most painful news was that my mother's tumor appeared in a very private and vulnerable area for a woman, an area that normally gives life, but in her case was taking it away. So many feelings go through your mind, every part of your body shakes, and the tears come out without asking. You feel sorrow, anguish, and desperation. Questions invade your mind. How much time is left for her? What do we have to do? How will I tell the family? And the question we all ask, why did it happen to her?

Medical appointments, interviews with specialists, and many tests ultimately determine a treatment plan that may not work, but it is all there is. The saddest part was seeing her in the chemotherapy room, scared, pale, with tears in her eyes; and me, the great nurse, unable to help her, unable to say anything, a knot in my throat. Without hope, I looked to the sky and just said, "God I give her to you, please heal her". Then like a miracle from God, despite her low weight, despite how bad she felt, everything began to change. Like a passing storm, the sun began to shine again.

After long days, eternal months, with no doctor believing what he was seeing, my mother, like in a dream, came out victorious. Thanks to God, medicine, the treatment, and the doctors; she fought this cruel disease, and won. The tears come out again without permission, but this time from happiness.

Licett is a student at Northwest Florida State College enrolled in the ESOL Program. She is from Columbia. She dedicates this story to her mom. Her teacher is Brian Jones.

My Personal Story

A day I always remember was when my husband and I took our first cruise. We were so happy because we were on our first vacation together. We were going to be on the Caribbean cruise for seven days. I was very excited because many years ago I wanted to go on a cruise.

On the first day we went to the restaurant for breakfast. After that, we walked to different places on the ship. We ate different kinds of food on the ship. At night we went to dance at the club and enjoyed many kinds of music.

The next day, we went to the pool, which was shared with other people of different countries. I recommend cruises to people who take vacations because they can enjoy the ship ports with others. For me, it was a great vacation with my husband that I will not forget.

Monica Valencia is a student in the Miramar Branch Library English Café located in Broward County. Her teachers are Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz. She thanks them for all their help.

Love Over Fifty

I was a single parent and I lived in Miami when I met Julio, my current husband. I was 50 years old. Julio had his friend, Jaime, come from Venezuela. After Julio arrived in the United States of America, Jaime suggested that Julio answer the ad to meet someone in the Spanish newspaper "El Clarin." My old friend Nancy answered the ad for me, Julio got my mail, and we exchanged phone numbers. He called me daily, we had good conversations, he finally visited my house and we went to Bayside Park. I visited his apartment, too and I cooked chicken with rice for us. He loved it. Thanks to God and our friends, Jaime and Nancy, Julio and I met.

We started living together and four months later, we secretly got married. My family found out from a card sent in the mail from an immigration lawyer. They were very angry with us because we did not confide in them.

We bought our own condominium eight years ago. We have been together 12 years. Julio is a peaceful person and that is why I fell in love with him. We love each other and our relationship is beautiful.

We visited Chile, and I met his family, his three daughters, sisters, and brother. We visited Mexico, Dominican Republic, The Bahamas, California, the Grand Canyon, Reno, Utah and Las Vegas. If God is willing, we will keep travelling in the future.

Some weekends we go to Bayside Park for dancing. We also like to go to the beach to barbeque and swim. For Thanksgiving days, we volunteer to feed the homeless with our grandsons. The boys meet the unfortunate people and help them. In the future, when we retire, we would like to volunteer with the Red Cross and hospitals.

Julio is a work addict. He had two jobs while he was studying to become an American citizen and English at the same time. We worked very hard, but on different schedules, and didn't have enough time together. I worked the second shift and we didn't see each other. When I came from work, Julio was sleeping, and when Julio woke up in the morning, I was sleeping. The only time we had together was the weekends. I was transferred to the first shift and I started at five o'clock a.m. so I had to wake up at 3:30 a.m. Life is not easy and we have ups and downs. When we have different opinions, we wait for the next day and talk about them more calmly. Love over fifty is not only possible but is wonderful.

Gisela Villar works at Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation and has learned a lot in the past three years from the Project LEAD program in Miami, Florida. Her tutor is Barbara Papademetriou.

A Good Friend

A good friend can be hard to find, and a good friend is for life. However, I am a lucky person that I had one good friend for forty-five years. Her name was Nina Rush; she was from Monaco. She was a very beautiful woman, and a fun and giving person. I loved her like my sister, but she passed away last year on April 6, 2012. I miss her very much.

I met Nina in 1967, when I was working in Tainan, Taiwan Navy, Army and Air Force Exchange store. One day she came to me and said, "Goodbye. We are going back to the United States." I wished them good luck and to have a safe trip home. I thought that we would never see each other again, but something happened to my life after she left. I met my husband (Dave), and we got married in 1969. After six months he got an assignment to go back to the US Tyndall AFB, Florida.

That was the first time away from home for me. I was homesick. I missed my family, but my husband was very good to me. He took me out to meet people, his friends and family. We had lots of fun. One day we were shopping at the commissary, and we saw a beautiful woman that looked like Nina who I had met in Taiwan. As we walked closer, we were so happy to see each other again.

I introduced my husband to Nina; then she invited us to her home for Christmas dinner. She was a good cook! We all enjoyed dinner and then met all her friends and family. After Christmas, we became close friends. She taught me to cook, to belly dance and to learn to drive the car. She and her husband always made sure I was OK when my husband was out of the country. Being a military wife is not easy, but God gave me a good friend Nina. She was just like my sister. She helped me learn about military life. We shared ideas and learned from each other and had lots of fun.

Well, it is very emotional for me that she passed away. She was very sick, but she is not in pain anymore; she is

with God. By the way, her beautiful face is always in my mind, and I will never forget her. Our friendship was a lot of fun, and we helped each other when we had bad times and good times. I often think of her. I miss that she is not here anymore to share things with.

Meaia Ward studied in an ESOL class at NWF State College in FWB, Florida.

My Trouble Reading Wrestling

When I was 3, I liked to watch wrestling on T.V. In the audience of 1,000 fans there were many signs. My curiosity was piqued what these signs said. There were signs of my favorite wrestlers Ric Flair and Sting, but I could not read what the signs said about them.

By the time I was 8, it was a new era in wrestling. An organization called the W.W.E. (World Wrestling Entertainment) began promoting wrestling professionals for greater entertainment for the fans. On the screen there was lots more to read – show names, new wrestler names and more signs with audiences being over 17,000 and there was merchandise, shirts, posters, hats, and magazines! I couldn't read any of this, because I didn't know how to read.

My first W.W.E. wrestling match was “The Rock vs. Triple-H”. Since then I've been hooked. No matter where you are you can always remember your first match, but I began to wonder more about what all the signs said.

By the time I was 24 I still couldn't read. I was feeling really bad, left out and like I was not part of society. I couldn't even enjoy watching wrestling.

One day my dad saw a sign on the street that said “Adult Literacy League – help someone learn to read”. He encouraged me to go and see if they could help me learn to read. It took courage, but I signed up to learn to read. It took several months to find a tutor for me. Once I had my ALL tutor, within 6 months I began to read the cover of my wrestling magazines! Wrestling has new super stars all the

time and now I am beginning to read these new names like Daniel Bryan, Dolph Ziggler, and Kofikingston.

My old memories of frustration are gone and now I am improving my reading and writing every day: reading T.V. shows, books, the Bible, and information on the Internet. Anything is possible for me now – a G.E.D., being an author, or even becoming involved with professional wrestling!

Jeremy White, 24, is a student at ALL (Adult Literacy League), in Orlando, Florida.

Who Am I?

Living an everyday life of who I have become, screaming on the inside knowing there is no way out; time goes by the world keeps spinning guessing who I am is the beginning.

A chance I take, knowing who I am is a privilege. Which one are you; a friend or a foe, which is to say. My life is way off, only God knows me best.

Time goes by, looking in the mirror, I only see a girl hurt inside. Being misunderstood by people, wondering where I came from, looking for comfort in men and not finding it.

Pain grows harder trying to forgive; where do I go? Turning in circles, getting dizzy, falling to my knees screaming for help stretched out arms down to the floor, “Lord, oh Lord help me.”

Never giving up on who I was is only a joke not sent from above. Seeking God for help was only a start. It was time for me to do something smart.

Who I was then is not who I am today. Holding on to God only took me higher. I’m no longer bound, no longer hurt; God has freed me from the dirt.

Telling the world what’s on my heart is just a start. So living my life in everyday world has only showed me who I

have become no longer screaming, I have found my way out.

I'm now a woman who loves God and married with kids; never giving up on who I have become. That's why I'm just the one created by God; so with my arms raised high and my knees bow down I thank God for my everyday life.

Esperanza Williams, a young mother of four children, decided to get her GED after eleven years. She enrolled in the GED program at Dunbar Community School. Her hope is to graduate in May 2014.

A Turning Point in My Life

My Turning Point

I worked as a Social Worker for fifteen years, in Puerto Rico, two years in the Department of Children and Families and thirteen years with the Department of Education. Each day for me was a challenge, bringing the opportunity to help people improve their way of living.

At J.G. school, I worked with families by identifying their needs and encouraging them to reach their goals. My primary objective was to focus on the students. I made activities to prevent social problems like drugs use and bullying or to increase student self-esteem. For instance, if a student needed a service to improve his academic performance, I helped with his needs. I also coordinated with external resources from the community to help him. I prepared an intervention plan to follow up on his progress, academically or personally.

As time passed, each day brought a new challenge. It was increasingly difficult to accomplish the goals that I had for each day. The environment at the school turned stressful: sometimes the students would fight with each other by name calling, or they would steal someone's personal possessions like key chains, toys and even money.

I tried to resolve these incidents with the parents, but it was difficult to do so. Some parents disrespected the teachers and supported their children by justifying their child's inappropriate actions. It was exasperating.

It was hard coping with all these problems. I didn't receive the support that I needed from my supervisor when he didn't take the appropriate corrective actions to improve school discipline or to resolve the situations that were affecting some students. The parents constantly argued

about this and asked me for help. I became oversaturated with responsibilities and with a lot of administrative paper work, too.

Every day I needed to complete reports for my job and prepare to be evaluated. Sometimes I brought my job home to finish it, taking time away from my family. I was stressed, felt tired, and got little sleep. I loved my job and what I was doing, but I thought that I needed to make some changes in my life: I needed a new beginning. Thankfully, my husband was very supportive, and after a year of planning, we decided to move to America.

Now I feel better. I have time to share with my family, and I have started studying English. In the near future, I would like to resume working as a Social Worker. I know in my heart that everything is going to be better. I really believe it.

Eileen Barreto is currently an ESOL Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida. Kathryn Niedbalec is her instructor.

A Turning Point in My Life

On June 7th 2012 my life partner, Jose, and I had one of the most amazing turning points in my life. Alivia was born. I was so nervous and scared. I knew it was time to mature.

Alivia was born weighing 7lb & 1oz at 22in long. My partner and I were ready for a child. I quit working and took a year off to raise the baby. I never knew how amazing being a parent was until I was able to experience it myself. It seemed like the 1st year went by really fast. One min she was barely able to move and then the next she was walking. I recorded every single moment. I look back all the time and my heart just melts all over again.

Everything wasn't always amazing. There were times when I was scared and didn't know what to do. This was our first child and we barely had any help. Our story is a

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little different than most. We didn't go to an agency or anything like that. An acquaintance we have known for a few years approached me while I was at the store. I realized she was pregnant and she was explaining that she and her boyfriend did not want the baby. I stood there in total shock. I couldn't believe what I had just heard. Without any hesitation I blurted out "we will take the baby". You would of thought she won the lottery the way her eyes lit up. I told her I had to talk it over with Jose, which of course he agreed.

The original plan was for us to adopt her completely. After Alivia was born, she barely saw her mother. Jose and I paid for everything. We didn't receive any assistance or government help, which we didn't need anyways. We reevaluated our whole lives to make it possible for us to be able to afford everything Alivia needed and to make sure she had everything we didn't have as children. We quit smoking and it helped us save over a \$1000 a month.

After about a year, Alivia's mom got a new boyfriend and decided she wants to be a mom now. We had an ugly battle in court and even though she gave her baby up in a gas station. The judge ruled in her favor and on October 26, 2013 we lost all rights for Alivia. We have not seen or heard about her since then. Sometimes life throws things at you that you have no control over.

I don't regret any of this. With this experience I really matured and became a better person.

This was a major turning point in my life. It didn't have a happy ending, but I will never forget my amazing experience.

Brandon Brooks is a student at Lee County Adult School.

And I Keep On Walking

We came to USA with my family in December 2003 on an adventure to achieve the American dream. My wife, a MD doctor in Chile, was fluent in English. I had extensive experience in banking for over 22 years, development of computer systems, networks, security, etc.

I did not know the English language. What job could I work without the need for the language? Gardening or landscaping. I started my own company, Eco Greenland Co. I would have little contact with people, lot of sun, nature, and I could be my own boss.

The gardens are strenuous and hard, particularly in the summer months, since in Florida everything that is green grows extremely fast in every direction. I spent almost ten years increasingly isolated; social gatherings were torture since I was not able to understand or communicate. I almost did not answer the phone and so time passed.

At home, everyone dominated both languages (Spanish and English) and efforts were being made to speak both languages, but it is always more enjoyable and relaxed to navigate the day in our native language.

My wife left one day to Idaho to do her medical residency for three years, which would bring major changes to our lives. She never came back.

My oldest daughter was a volunteer in this Library and my youngest daughter was happily working in it, too. They enrolled me in the courses to learn English at the Library. At first, I was anxious and nervous, but later I went with pleasure and happiness. I knew that at some point I should take the road to learn English, despite the little free time my job left me, and this opportunity couldn't be let go.

You provided me everything: time, books, learning spaces, and a teacher. I was fortunate to have an excellent teacher and friend (Terry Thomas), whose special philosophy of life introduced an entertaining way to this new path.

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I am fifty-six years old, and at this stage of my life it has been far from easy. With Terry, we have shared good times together - eating, fishing, and he has even invited me to social events. This is what made the difference between learning in a classroom and learning as I walk through life.

Learning to speak a new language has been a unique experience in my life. It has been a gradual process. Those that know me have evaluated my actual progress, especially in the social aspect because the human being is eminently communicative and social.

Thanks, Palm Harbor Library. Thanks, Terry Thomas.

Raul Caceres is a father of 2 living in Palm Harbor.

No Matter What You Go Through in Life

No matter what you go through in life, no matter how hard it was to get through, the best way to gain strength and knowledge is to always look at your circumstances as a learning experience. Next time, you will find yourself stronger and smarter. Life alone is a blessing. It's what you become of it. You're in charge of the direction your life takes. It is never too late to make a detour to get on a different road. It is never too late to yield into a better path that will take you to a higher level.

In life, what you give you will receive. That's everywhere and in everything. We let out air when we exhale, correct? "Every action has an equal reaction" (read that in Rhonda Byrne's books "The Magic"). Therefore, you will let air in when you inhale. The law of attraction is real and it applies to all things.

The energy you carry throughout your day is very important. It's what you're going to put out in the atmosphere. What you put out in the atmosphere is very important. It will determine the way of your mood. It determines the kind of day you will have. The energy you put out plays a big part of what you may receive throughout the day.

When you start off your morning with even the smallest complaints, try to make a good observation. How does it make you feel as you're getting ready to start your day? When you come into contact with someone, how do you greet them? How high is your energy level? Are you genuinely smiling?

Try for a whole week to go through your day watching what you say. Again, make a good observation. How does it make you feel as you're getting ready to start your day? When you come into contact with someone, how do you greet them? How high is your energy level? Are you genuinely smiling?

You will only rise at the level of your understanding. Put out the best of you in everything you do in life. That way, life has no other choice but to feed you good things. One more thing...even in the smallest things, there is gratefulness. The attitude of gratitude will always help you in putting good out there.

Stephany Concepcion is a recent GED graduate from Florida Women's Reception Center.

How I Changed My Life

There is so much to tell in such few words. I should tell you when I was born. I was born at 3:21 PM, June 15, 1973, in a small hospital in Springfield, MA. The second David G Dunham had finally made his way to the world.

I was always pretty smart, kind of stuck on myself. I should begin with how I became the way I am today. I was just out of high school. I thought I was a high school graduate, but I but only had a certificate of completion. It all went downhill from there.

What I mean by that is I had turned to other options like drinking and doing drugs. My drink of choice was Jack Daniels and the drug was pain pills. After a while it was all fun and life was ok. I had a fulltime job and my own place. However, I hit bottom just as any addict would at some

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point. I turned to a friend for help; he had decided to take me to these things called AA meetings and NA meetings. I looked at him and said, "I don't need these meetings." He said, "Oh, yes, you do need them." So I went to AA meetings and NA meetings.

Guess what? I started to like these meetings. We lived together for a while then the money ran out. We both were not working. Times for me were very hard. The job market was going down slowly. But I had managed to do okay for myself. I wasn't drinking or drugging anymore. I should be grateful; it has been twenty years of being clean.

Now I am hopefully able to get back what I had lost. I have a beautiful fiancé and am getting married this Christmas Eve. I am also possibly starting a new job. I have an interview tomorrow at 9:45 am. I hope to get the job. I want the life that every man deserves. You know, a house, kids, truck, car, cat, and a dog.

I have always been ambitious and cautious at the same time. Being forty has really enlightened me because of the fact that I am really starting over. Hey! I think that's what they call the baby boomer age, right? I should tell you that I have given my life to Jesus. Yes, I am a born again Christian. Really, I am just a man coming into middle age, hair going gray, and going bald. So now you know about me. I am glad to share my story, and I hope you enjoy it. What is your wonderful story? Let's hear yours.

David Dunham is a GED student at Dixie Hollins Adult Education Center. His teacher is AnnMarie Kokash.

A Turning Point in My Life

I'm from Syria. I lived in Damascus all my life. I think Syria was one of the best countries because of the beautiful landscapes and history. There are mountains, the sea, the desert and many relics. Damascus, the capital, is about 5,000 years old. In the city there are six million people.

Most of people were very active and loved their work and social lives. My life was successful and happy with my husband and my three children, a son and two daughters. I had a comfortable home and a chicken farm where my husband and I worked. My older daughter got married and moved to the United States about seven years ago.

Then, three years ago, my life changed for the worse when my country was permeated with the chaos. Terrorism spread and there were explosions everywhere. One example, in a country town called Maloula, there were churches that were hundreds of years old, and the residents worked with plants and animals like sheep and cows. The terrorists entered, killed some people, stole icons, and burnt the old churches and peoples' homes. We became frustrated, and stayed at home all of the first year. We didn't know what to do.

Finally, we decided to visit my daughter in the United States. I believe this may be the first step to continue my life here. I'm learning English in a local college, and am now happy with my friend and my teacher. In my opinion, college is the key to success in finding work and to understand the American culture and community.

Therese and her husband Tony are students at Northwest Florida State College enrolled in the ESOL Program. She is from Syria. Her teacher is Brian Jones.

Ta'Kaya

A turning point in my life was the birth of my two-year-old daughter, Ta'Kaya. She was eight pounds and four ounces. She makes me very happy, and she motivates me to be the best that I can be.

Ta'Kaya motivates me to be the best mom and person that I can be. She motivates me to continue to go to school to obtain my GED. After obtaining my GED, I will then find a job to support us, so we can live our lives without the struggles of worrying about what's next.

A Turning Point in My Life

Ta’Kaya makes me a very happy and proud mom. She just brightens up my day. When I am sad and crying, she comes up to me and wipes away my tears and says, “Mommy it will be alright,” and then smiles and kisses me. Ta’Kaya loves singing “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” with me, and she enjoys going to the park and beach. Ta’Kaya says things that I wouldn’t imagine a two-year-old saying. One day as I was getting her ready for school I told Ta’Kaya to hurry up, so she could leave for daycare and she replied, “Stop rushing me Mommy, gosh.” I couldn’t stop laughing because it was so unexpected.

In conclusion, Ta’Kaya makes very happy and motivates me to be the best I can be.

Tiffany Hall is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

The English Language is Universal

The English language is universal and very important in this country we live in. I came from a foreign country, however, when I came to USA, learning English was not a priority for me at that time because, I had to work to support my family. Now that my kids are grown up, I realize how important it is to speak English. This is why I am making an effort to speak the American Language English. In my opinion, learning English is important because it helps for a better understanding and provides a positive way of communicating with others.

Imagine being able to understand and talk to anyone you meet. Learning English fluently will give me an opportunity to encounter new people from a different culture and maybe make friends. I have friends who only speak my native language, which is Spanish. On the other hand, getting to know other people will improve my social and interpersonal skills. In addition, the more I speak to new people in English, I will learn more English, and there is no charge for the practice.

Learning English also will enhance your career opportunities in this country. At this time period, the economy is very poor, and employers are demanding many things from their employees, A GED or a college degree. My goal is to someday have a career in the health field. This will allow me to become more of a professional with a chance for a better future. I will be a role model for my family, and also be very proud of myself for accomplishing this goal.

The opportunities will be great in numbers for me when I master the English Language. People have no idea how important it is to learn English as soon as you arrive to this country. I made the mistake of waiting many years before return to school. If I would have studied younger, I could have had a better job. It is never too late to learn, this is why I am learning as much as I can now. I do not want to stay in a job that offers no future for the rest of my life.

In conclusion, learning English is extremely important because it will improve my communication with everyone. It offers the opportunity for having a career and a better paying job. Learning a new language is the most difficult in my opinion, but most rewarding in the end.

Judith Hernandez is a student at Dunbar Community School; her teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Finding Light in the Darkness

I've always lived to learn the right ways of life, never breaking the rules or always going to church. I never really saw the other side of things. There was a turning point in my life and it made me the person I am today.

I grew up being homeless with my dad when I wasn't staying with my mom and two older brothers. She was never home because she had to support us, so I was back and forth between motels and hotels up the beach line near South Daytona. My dad was the bad stereotypical dad,

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depressed, into drugs, and anger every time he touched a bit of alcohol. I had to realize a lot at a young age.

After my dad left and my brothers moved away I got a new dad, my step-father. He pretty much raised me, I knew little, yet knew so much about the wrong things.

Back then society would have made me look like an innocent, loving Jesus, church going angel, but I new I was acting ignorant. I was taught to judge the poor, the weak minded, but why did I? I lived that life before. If an item didn't have an expensive price on it, I didn't care for it. I was blinded by real things and real problems, but that's when I found beauty in a place there was said to be none.

In the 9th grade, my first year of high school, I was ready, but nervous. I've been a geek and bullied like my years of life prior and I didn't want it to happen this year. It was a four-day weekend and my parents went out of town and left me with my cousins. They were pretty popular in the social world and for some reason I thought they were the coolest things ever. However, this weekend, my life was about to change forever. They invited me to a party, mind you it was my first party ever, I said "sure" and we went. There was a party in Deltona that night was probably the best night of my life, kids dancing, laughing, and drifting their cars out of pure arrogance. No one cared, it was nice having the feeling of having reckless fun and going out of your element.

I've been to many parties since that night and have had a lot of crazy experiences, but the craziest thing was to realize true happiness, true struggle, get to meet new people, share adventures, shed tears, and get to learn about others dreams. And that's when I found the light in the darkness.

Joshua Lezon is a student at Daytona State College.

Empowerment

Everyone who thinks about Brazil probably first thinks about Carnaval, friendly people, soccer players, and beautiful beaches. On the other hand, some may also think about Brazil's social problems and high cost of living, all of which are true. My having the experience of living both in the United States and in Brazil has opened my eyes to critically analyze my country and how my background living in two different places might help me to become a stronger person.

Despite Brazil's a pleasant weather and very friendly, talkative, and creative people, there are huge social and infrastructural problems. Unfortunately, the urban violence such as burglaries and thefts is so big that anyone might feel unsafe sometimes. Besides, there are traffic jams everywhere and anytime, which used to make my daily way home from work so hard. Living there is also very expensive. My husband and I used to have great jobs and work very hard to try to reach a comfortable life. We were planning to get married soon, but before that, we wanted enough money to pay our bills, to buy our own apartment, and to raise our future children.

Unlike others, I never had the dream of living in the United States, nor had I been here before moving from my country. But since my husband was invited to come here to work and I came with him, I have fallen in love with this country. It was inescapable to start comparing the United States to Brazil: the fantastic infrastructure, the feeling of being safe, and how cheap everything was. I realized that life in United States is fair and why a lot of people dream to come here to live. The cities have great public services, such as schools, parks, police, community centers, weather forecasting and more. Everything here works. In addition to these positive factors, anyone, without any doubt, can work hard to get a successful life.

It is what the Americans call the "American Dream." It is true that life here might be easy or difficult, but one always has a choice, opportunity, and a path to elect.

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After spending two and a half years living in the United States, I feel more confident and stronger to make decisions. I have learned how to respect different opinions, religions, and habits, which is so important, and I understand that the key to my future is and will always be in my hands. I'm sure the experience of living in two different countries is valuable to anybody. There is no perfect place or situation, but life is made of choices about everything around us. Every place has positive and negative points, and everyone has the power to make his or her life more pleasant and decide the best way forward.

Alene Bandeira Lima is an Academic ESOL student at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

Catch a Dream

A life changing experience that happened to me was when I was invited to the Catch a Dream Foundation in Manassala, Mississippi. The Catch a Dream Foundation is a program that gives disabled children a hunting experience. This experience has made a large impact in my life. I was able to shoot a deer with a rifle and I got to enjoy this experience with my family. This made me believe that I can do anything that other people can do even if I have a visual impairment. I say always believe in yourself and to not let people tell you otherwise.

When I got to Mississippi, the director met me and my family at the airport and took us to the cabin on a paper mill property where I was going to stay. The cabin was set up for me. I was given hunting cloths and deer calls. Later, I went to test different rifles to see which one would fit me. Next morning, I went on my first hunt. Sadly, I did not catch anything. The next day I went out again and I shot my first deer. Everyone there called me One-Shot-Eddy. On my last day, the foundation had a big party brunch in my honor. The director called me to the podium and gave me five gifts.

First, he gave me a picture of the deer in the woods. Next, I received a camouflage bible. Then, I was given a

plaque that made me a member of the Catch a Dream Foundation. Afterwards, I received a book from the founder of the foundation on his hunting trips. Lastly, I got my own rifle to take home to continue hunting with my uncle. I really enjoyed this experience. I hope other children can enjoy the same great experience as I did.

Eduardo Limonta is a legally blind student in the Lee County Adult and Career Education program.

A Turning Point in My Life

In December of 2001, my family started a traditional dancing group called “Danza Azteca Guadalupana”. It was made of family at first, but soon started to attract people from our community that wanted to join our group. We started doing this for religious purposes. Soon enough we were being called by different organizations across Florida to go perform. To show others about what we dance, why we dance, and at the same time educate on Mexican Heritage.

We dress in typical Aztec outfits and walk barefoot as the Aztecs would in their time. Every dance has a different name and a different meaning. Our “Head Apaches”, as we would call them, they teach us these dances. It was the eldest of the sisters, Maria Guadalupe Torres and the eldest of the brothers, Leobardo Navarro. They formed this group to get our family closer together, so that we would not lose that special bond we have always had, and it worked. We would spend 5 days out of the week together practicing our dances, laughing and enjoying the family company. Those are the best memories of my life.

In May 2006, at a routine check-up at her doctor’s office Maria became ill. She was then sent to the hospital, she had many health issues. In the beginning of June 2006 Maria passed away. She was only 40yrs old. She was the heart and soul of our family. A woman of many attributes. She was someone whose willingness would go

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beyond anyone's expectations. No matter what the situation she would make the best of it.

We have pulled together as a family and till this day we still do our Aztec dances in her honor and religiously. We will keep this tradition going on for new generations and many years to come. She would sure be proud of us, that 12 years later we are still together, and our group is growing bigger and stronger by the years.

Maria was my best friend, my confident and over all my big sister. I could not see life without her, but what I have learned is that if we keep doing what we all love to do, she will be present in spirit and thought where ever we go. She is my inspiration and I will make her proud every day of my life.

Vanessa Loreda is a student at Lee County Adult and Career Education.

A Goodbye Full of Love

Being a mother is the greatest job in the world; it is a miracle, and the most precious gift any woman can receive. I am a mother of two wonderful boys. They are my little piece of heaven, my air and my entire happiness. I give thanks to God everyday for them, and I pray that I can stay in their lives forever.

The happy moments do not always last forever. However, you have to live life day by day. It is a difficult moment when you realize that you need to leave your children and let them live their lives.

My husband and I have always desired that our children would go to college and take advantage of the education in this country. My kids have been really good students and have always received awards for their outstanding achievements. For this reason we were thinking that they would be in college one day.

When my older son, Andres, was in middle school, in seventh grade, he showed his interest to join the military

forces. At that time I helped him find a program in the county that would have oriented him about his choice of interest in the military. I was thinking that maybe he would change his mind if he knew more about the military life and all the changes and sacrifices that you need to make when you choose this life. He was in a NJROTC program (Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) during his entire high school career and that program helped him to understand the rules, the style, and the discipline. Sad enough I saw day by day my son worked really hard and dream to be a Marine.

Three years ago, when my older son was in his senior year, he told me that he decided to be a soldier in the Marines. That day I understood some things. Soon I was going to say goodbye to my lovely son, and harder yet, my son was going to be part of the military, and he did not want to go to college. However, I accepted that my son loved his choice and I blessed him to continue with his life.

I was pretty sad that my son would not attend college as we had hoped. At the same time I had to say goodbye to my son and hello to a newer, military version of my son. I am proud of my children. I am thankful for my boys. I am happy with my family, but I hope one day I can find the strength I need to say goodbye to my youngest son too. Also I think how wonderful the world would be if we could find a book as a manual to educate and prepare to let go our children.

Liliana Madrid is in the Academic ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She volunteered to be class assistant this semester, helping both her teacher, Leslie McBride-Salmon, and her fellow students keep organized and on track.

Life Altering Decisions

Everyone should experience a “turning point” in life. A “turning point” means to me that you are making life-altering decisions to better yourself as a person for the future. Some of the most effective things I’ve done were

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probably some of the hardest decisions I had to make; nevertheless, in the end, it was well worth it. I'm still in the process of my "turning point". However, here are some of the things I've done to better myself. Well, first off, I've stopped partying which included doing some things that I cannot mention. I've discovered more productive things to do such as basketball, and further my education which is turning out to be a lot better for me psychologically and physically.

I have also separated myself from the friends that will drag me down in life from the ones that are beneficial to me. It was a hard sacrifice that involved me ending a 10 year long friendship, but it was well worth it in the end. My phrase is "eliminate the ones you are going to carry the weight of on your back for your entire life."

I didn't stop there; I had to keep going. I got a job working on the beach so I could pay for some of my own expenses. My getting a job helped my financial stability a lot. It allowed me to work around my school schedule so I could fit everything into my daily needs. By doing this, it also helped my dad because he was helping with my bills and now he doesn't have to carry my weight on his back quite as much.

So these few life changing decisions I've made has not only affected me, it has also affected others. I've gained the respect I feel I deserve and things can only move forward from now on.

Stephen Moyon is a student at Dunbar Community School.

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Every person has a dream that she wants to achieve at one point in life. Sometimes it is difficult to imagine how hard it can be to achieve our dream, but it is a challenge and we have to discover how to solve it. Coming to the United States was a mystery to me because I never realized how different from Cuba it is.

Since I came here, I have been studying English. I have met great people who have helped me a lot. Consequently, my life has changed. I have a job that has become an important part of my life. I have discovered new feelings caring for the elderly people, and I think my work is important because people have to be patient and kind not only at work, but also in life too. Sometimes I wake up and I feel sad because I miss my family in Cuba, but it gives me the desire to continue because I want to go and visit them in the future. In this country, I have learned how to drive, and I have become more independent and learned to be positive because every person has reasons to cry or laugh; it is part of life. I eventually want to become a nurse, but now I am focusing on English, my key to winning. I know, however, it takes time to learn a second language, so I must be patient with myself too.

I think every step in life is a challenge and I must not give up no matter what comes. Perhaps I will unlock the good things hiding behind the uncertainties of what life has for me here in America.

Leidilena Nicolau is an ESOL student.

America, You Changed My Life

My family and I came to the United States five months ago. Thank goodness we found a job at a Chinese Restaurant. My daughter is 13 years old. She is in seventh grade. Of course, we all have no English skills. I am so happy that she is learning some English every day in school now. I am doing the same thing too at the adult education center, but my husband is not. He is content with his work and does not desire to learn it. That's all right. My daughter and I will help him.

We are all happy here. I attend class every day. I am beginning to understand simple words and sentences. I have a long way to reach my goal, but every little bit helps me to get closer. I can't wait to speak English with my friends from all over the world in class. Coming to America

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is a turning point in my life and my family. We plan to make this place our home.

Yan Ping Ou is from China. She attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

To Be or Not to Be?

During my personal experience with the Learn to Read Jacksonville program- I am getting better and better in my ability to read and learning to live my life clean and un-addicted to drugs. I enjoy working with my one-on-one tutor and attending weekly computer classes. This has really been a key turning point in my life.

However, this is the question I used to ask myself— Why am I on drugs? I had no answers, but I had a desire to smoke crack cocaine- my drug of choice. At that time, crack cocaine was my best friend in the world. Even when I did not have crack, I worked to get it. I stole, I took and I lied to get the necessary money, so I could see my friend (crack cocaine). Even though, I could never get enough, I could never depart from my friend...crack!

Each day got worse and worse. I begin to feel that crack cocaine and I grew closer and closer every day. Before crack—I had a wife, a house with four bedrooms, two baths, carport, big back yard, and a big front yard. I had name-branded clothes and name-branded shoes. I had a good job. I was making about \$800 per week. I had a boss man that loved my work as a roofer. He could call on me any day. However, all of a sudden- a key turning point happened in my life. You can say that I was at the wrong place, wrong time, wrong people! I tried something new- one hit, one little piece of my best friend (crack cocaine). I thought that I had a friend for life. I never knew that this little rock could cost me my life.

What I had is now gone from my life, because my bad experience with that little piece of rock made me give it up! But wait- maybe not- I then found myself again—out in the

wilderness, homeless, hungry, thirsty, disgusted and looking for my friend (crack cocaine)!

Yes, I was addicted- I was so addicted! I wanted help, but I was afraid to ask. My friend brought me down and as before, I found myself eating out of a dumpster. But one day- I cried and I cried asking the Lord to release me from this demon. I asked Him to help me find a better friend.

It took some time. It took me fifteen (15) years, but I tell you, it can be done. So, with the help of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ- I turned my life around for the better. And when I tell you it can be done- it can, but you have to really want to change. From 1980-2011, I was an addict. But now, I am a child of God. I truly believe that with prayer all things are possible!

Larry Paige is a student at Learn to Read, Jacksonville.

Death

At age sixty-nine, I had a turning point in my life that changed my life and my way of thinking.

I began life in the Ohio countryside, a great place to grow up. I say this because it was so beautiful- the hills, hollows, valleys, and the people. Most of the people were farmers and hunters, as a result, I loved the land and hunting with a passion. In those days people hunted for food for the table, furs for money, and the pleasure and relaxation of the hunt, which molded my life.

Upon growing up, I met a lovely young lady, fell in love, and married. Fifty-two years later, still married with six adult children, I was still hunting and shooting animals, but in those days only for pleasure and the excitement. As a result of my passion for hunting, my children turned out to be hunters also. Brady and David loved hunting as much as I did and Melanie enjoyed it at times. The three of us often hunted together- both daytime hunting and nighttime hunting with my raccoon hounds.

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Early one morning on August 12, 1987, the phone rang and when I answered, my daughter, Susan, was crying hysterically! "Dad, Dave was in an accident with his motorcycle, and I don't think..." she screamed. "Dad, Dave is dead!"

After the funeral, I was grieving and thinking how fragile life becomes after you are born, and every living creature has the right to live as long as it can without man's interference, unless in some way it's a danger or a problem.

So I changed my life and never hunted again and tried very hard not to cause the death of any living creature, unless it was a danger to humans.

Bill Payne is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Difficult Times, Tough Decisions

One of the most tragic experiences in my life is related to Hurricane Michelle, the most aggressive storm ever registered in Cuba. In 2001, my family and I became refugees in the neighbor's house. They owned a well-constructed house. The storm was horrible, flying objects from everywhere; our houses were breaking down piece by piece. There were a lot of crashing noises. It was pouring and the floors got flooded very quickly.

I was 11 years old and I pictured that day as the moment when I made the decision to transform myself into a grown man, the man of the house. I was so angry when I saw my mom crying because half of the house's roof was gone. From that day until now nothing was the same. I decided not to be a child anymore; I wanted to show my family that I was capable of stepping in and doing what men do.

There was so much destruction and misery that anybody could ever imagine. At the time the catastrophe was over, it was pitch black everywhere. Many times my mother said that Cubans try to laugh out of the misery, but

this time was different. In fact, I saw people on the streets crying and blaming like never before. There were no deaths in our village, which was the good news.

The daylight came later showing people the debris. Roofs were mostly turned into pieces. Many hens in my backyard were drowned. The trees were laid on the ground, and the old fence was gone. Our mattresses and clothes were soaking wet and our documents were gone. The first thing I did was grab a machete and start cutting the branches of the fallen trees. We started eating the food out of the refrigerator that was about to get rotten. That would be the nicest food in many days to come. Days later we were at the point of eating one meal a day, which was either potato or rice. We didn't hear from the government for weeks. I never liked to kill an animal, but the rooster was one of the survivors, and it was probably going to starve to death. The feeling of grabbing it by the neck was horrible, but that was part of my transition into a man. So I took his life, and then my mother encouraged me to cut it up. It was one of the most difficult things I have ever done.

Finally the government showed up and sent some food and fuel with the purpose of cooking and lighting at night. People repaired their houses with materials donated from different countries. That awful experience changed my life. It made me a tougher person than before. I hope children don't have to go through experiences like this in their lifetime.

Carlos Reloba is an Academic ESOL student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's class at the AEC in West Palm Beach. He is loved by his classmates and gave our class its mantra, "English is beautiful."

True Story of My Life

I remember when I was just 13
The world was full of dope dealers and dope fiends
Everywhere I turned there was drama
Baby Daddies hitting Baby Mamas

A Turning Point in My Life

Ma was so far many states away living with pops never a
stable place to stay
No more childhood stories had to grow up pretty fast
Closing my eyes hoping this nightmare would go away and
just pass
Had my little brother right by my side, he would never fuss,
we'd never fight
Both of us on the streets, struggling to support our life.
Did what we just did to survive
We had to keep secrets and tell a bunch of lies
True story of my life
Looking back to where I was then
It is still the same now, nothing's changed, there is no end.
Now I am sitting here in the pen I was looking at a life
sentence, but the judge gave me 10, went from wearing
khakis to oranges, to blues
Now I am sitting in da box, red uniform, and no shoes So
much time on my hands, lonely and forgotten...
What happened to all my friends that would say "Yo, what's
poppin?"
Them ride or die friends
The ones that said "I'll write you, and send you some flix"
It is the same old story, just another remix
What I say is no lie
This is the true story of my life...
Finally opened the book called "The Holy Bible", you know
the one:
The Good News, The Gospel, Taught me about a God who
is so real
How he sent his only Begotten Son down to earth just to
make a deal
Figured I'd get on my knees and just pray. Ask Jesus Christ
of Nazareth to show me the way
Tell him everything that I have done so wrong, how I left
behind a husband and 6 sons
I never again want to sin, because I do not want to be on a
Loser Team, but one that wins
Solitary Confinement is a place to make you think. Only
good thing about it, you got your own john and your own
sink

It will break you down and put you on both knees
Make you open your eyes, see your sin; The Truth, reality
Read verse after verse and scripture after scripture
Reading 2 of them helped me get a better picture, Romans
6:23 The wages of sin is death and John 3:16 a way to
eternal life
For there is One God, one mediator between man and God,
and that's his Son Jesus Christ. Read it in 2 Timothy 2:5
I am saved now and born again, only through Jesus Christ.
This is the true story of my life.

Rebecca Rodriguez is enrolled in GED under Dr. Merrill Jones at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

If You Only Believe

This theme “A turning point in my life” spins in my head to think about what marks a turning point in my life. As I take a few moments to think more seriously I realize that I know the answer.

It was that exciting day when I received those few unbelievable words from a telephone call: “You are a winner of a Green Card. Congratulations!” It was a shock. I was filled with euphoria of happiness and optimism that I almost had a nervous breakdown. This powerful period of exhilaration made the world to become a new place for me. My friends were astounded at the news and they wished they were as lucky as me. I am equally surprised and thank my lucky star.

This Green Card allows me to move to the United States. I am now residing in the beautiful, sunny conch island of Key West. It is not all smooth and easy, but I am gradually getting closer to what I wish to be doing. I know that my future will be brighter here. I am content right now.

Ihor Rymaruk is from Ukraine. He is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Looking Forward to What the Future Holds

My parents have instilled in me the value of a good education and as well as reaping the rewards of hard work. They, more than anyone, have exemplified what it means to work hard for everything you want. I experienced some very difficult moments in Haiti, but more importantly, I focus on the more positive moments in my life.

My favorite activities outside of school include going to the beach with my friends and dining at restaurants. I also visited many Haitian museums and historical palaces. Many people do not realize that Haiti is a country rich in culture and history. I was very active outside my home. My favorite sports include basketball and soccer.

In Haiti, I worked with my parents. They owned a small retail shop where they sold everything from food to clothes and everything in between. My parents worked tirelessly to support myself and my sister.

When my mother approached me with the idea of living in Miami, I was a bit torn. My life in Haiti was all I had ever known. She said that life in the United States would be a better life for me. I did not know much about the United States. I only had a vision of what the United States would be like through my television screen. The United States seemed like a very cool place to live. People always seemed to be happy, homes were gigantic, and everyone always had money to participate in fun activities.

I had always hoped to finish my education Haiti before I would leave the country. Unfortunately, that was not the case. I had to immediately apply for a passport. I feel that God has granted me an amazing blessing to allow me to live in the United States.

My life in the United States was nothing like I expected. I didn't speak English and I didn't go out because I didn't have any friends. I registered at Miami Beach Adult Education to learn English and I haven't looked back since. I feel that my life has changed for the better. I am starting

from the bottom and I will continue to work towards improving my life and the life of my family.

The best thing about living in Miami has been meeting people from all walks of life. My classmates are friendly and they share their experiences from their home countries.

My ultimate goal is to work in the music industry. I am working towards becoming a sound engineer. I have learned many new things about life. I learned that I should always be patient in everything I do. This is a new world for me and I know that it won't be easy. I am confident that with my perseverance and the support of my family, I will be able to accomplish all my goals.

McGervens Ste. Croix is a talented young man from Cap Haitian, Haiti. He is dedicated to completing his ESOL studies in order to accomplish his goals of becoming a sound engineer.

Life as a Homeless Person Getting Better

Hello. My name is Robert Toti and I would like to share my story of being homeless. It all started in 2001 when I got fired from my great job as a banquet chef. I was a heavy drinker and it led me to drinking on the job. That, of course, got me terminated and started a domino effect in my life. I didn't realize I was an alcoholic. The walls started crumbling down from not paying bills and having to lose my electric, cable, water and then my apartment of eight years. I had a little money saved, but that disappeared like smoke.

My alcoholism intensified and I had to stay at people's homes or as we like to say, I was "couch surfing." But, I burned those bridges and ended up on the street. I had to live under a bridge for three months until the local police kicked me out and suggested a homeless place called "Tent City" a.k.a. Pinellas Hope. So I agreed. When I got there, they had rules to follow or I would be thrown out. I had no problem with them. One rule was to go to AA meetings. Another thing they suggested was to go to the school they offered by Dixie Hollins Adult Education Center. That's

A Turning Point in My Life

where I met Jenn, Adam, and AnnMarie. They were very helpful in getting my grades up and getting back to college or trade school. It was tough in the beginning, but they made it so I didn't have to but wanted to go to class almost every day, each in their own way. It is amazing how different the three were, but all had the same goal to help me better my grades and my mind which helped me with my alcohol problem and to think clearer. My grades improved from 4.0s to 9.0s for TABE scores. I was amazed.

Also, I had stated my sobriety date of April 3, 2012 and have not picked up since. I didn't continue my school at that time, but went to the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center, and completed the program almost a whole year later still sober. I haven't got a job or finished school yet due to a medical problem I am dealing with that keeps me from being on my feet too long. Now, I am back at tent city, but not giving up, thanks to people like Jenn, Adam, AnnMarie and places like Pinellas Hope and Salvation Army.

Thankful for the tools to be sober and clear minded in what God has planned in my future, I close with a great saying from Jim Valvano that I always remember. "Don't give up. Don't ever give up." It works. You just have to put your mind to it!

Bob Toti is a student at Pinellas Hope GED Class, part of Dixie Hollins Adult Education Center. He is an enthusiastic student and great encourager to the students as well as the teachers. His teachers are Jennifer Harrington, Adam Mayefsky and AnnMarie Kokash.

Why Voting is Important

My Goal Is To Vote in the United States

I grew up in a small town in Mexico. I was encouraged by my mother to always remain focused and complete my educational goals. I can hear her saying, “Remember to study hard until you reach your goal, as a Chemical Engineer.” I worked for more than 40 years, with a series of experiences. Each one of the experiences gave me more knowledge. Sometimes it is hard to realize when we have gained the knowledge that is required to complete any task.

However, the political decisions of the Government in Mexico played an important impact in many lives such as the economy, safety, and opportunities that the system run of a Democratic Government. All of the Governments’ are chosen in much the same way no matter what party they represent. However, the vote by the common citizens holds the power of almost each and every election that goes on.

I remembered that civic voting has been a right to each and every citizen. When I came to the United States, I focused on my goal to improve my knowledge and to learn English at Dunbar Community School. I studied the history and the philosophies that inspired the heritage and Constitution of the United States of America. My goals are to obtain my Citizenship and continue to study English, American History, American manners, and visit many cities and places in the U.S. I think that a person is never too old to stop learning.

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at age twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young”. In the near future, when I become a citizen, I will be able to

Why Voting is Important

vote because that directly impacts the everyday lives of the residents in this great country, which is crucial to the way that the Government runs.

Javier Luna is a student at Dunbar Community School; his teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

The Right to Vote

My name is Veronica. I am from Venezuela, where today we have a deplorable political condition. One of the causes is the absence of citizens voting. This is the reason that has made a lot of young people, including myself, interested in helping our country. Therefore the most important thing that we can do is to vote.

When people vote, it helps democracy to succeed. The vote supports the citizens to build the country that they wish, for example, a nation without corruption, with favorable laws and good politics. In a democratic country, citizens have rights that they are supposed to use. Voting is one of the most essential because it gives citizens the option to elect who is going to manage their country. Voting allows communication with the government. Specifically, citizens are the judge in the election. In other words, your voice is persuasive. Certainly the opinion of the nation is relevant to the government; that is why they want to hear what you have to say.

On the contrary, if you do not vote, you are giving others the right to choose for you. Consequently, you will probably be ruled by a person who does not have the same interests or political views as you. The lack of voters can also affect a large group of citizens whose votes were not enough to support their selection. I think citizens need more education about elections in order to increase interest in the vote. Also, people need to be informed about how their decisions can affect or change their lives and to clarify any confusion. Through education, citizens become aware that their vote can affect the laws, the education, and the economy of the country.

To conclude, voting is a way to empower citizens. There is nothing better to me than to live in a country where citizens actively participate in the development of their nation. In my opinion, the government should be democratic, where the majority has the capacity to delegate the authority. With freedom of expression, people have equal rights and opportunities to say and choose what they believe or desire.

Veronica Tineo is an English student at Immokalee Technical Center for about one year. Her teacher is Katie Mominée.

My Favorite Day

The Basketball Court

When I have time to myself, I grab my ball and go play basketball. I grab some old pair of shoes, gym shorts, and a tank top. Before I leave the house, I make sure my ball has enough air in it. After that's done, I am on my way to the court.

Once I arrive at the court, people are practicing or playing a game. I put my belongings down and begin my stretch. Then I put on my shoes and join a game. There will be at least six other teammates.

When the game starts, I will have a person to guard throughout the game. The same person I guard will be guarding me, too. My goal throughout the game will be shooting all my shots from the three-point line. I know there will be someone trying to block my shots so I have to be aware of the other teammates.

Finally the clock runs out, the game ends. I grab my bags and tell my teammates "good job." I like to do this on my time because it takes a lot of stress off my mind. It's a great sport to play and it motivates me.

Anthony Anderson is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Favorite Day

Fridays have always been special to me. I am really enthusiastic about Friday, because, I know it's just one day before the weekend. On Friday mornings, I always plan what I'm going to do when school is out. I can finally take a rest after five days of hard work.

After school, I go with my friends to the nearby canteen to eat something delicious to eat. We chat, share

experiences and discuss our plans for the weekend. The time spent with my schoolmate's means a lot to me, and then I go to a gym where I exercise for an hour or two. I get home at or around 4 o'clock pm. spend the rest of the time talking with my family, and later I head up to my room. It's one of the most pleasurable moments when I finally can take a break to just relax. I often read a book or watch a movie and simply enjoy the moments of peace and quiet.

In the evening, I go out with my friends to explore the city. We spend many hours wandering around, having lots of fun. When I get home from a night out on the town it's usually pretty late, I am exhausted and I go straight to bed. Luckily I don't have to get up early the next morning. The weekend allows me one more day of rest. On Sunday, I am totally relaxing and getting ready for Mrs. Savage's class on Monday.

Friday is my favorite day of the week because it's a beginning of the weekend during which I can recharge my batteries and enjoy time with my friends.

McKenzie Baucage is a student at Dunbar Community School; he is a student of Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

A Star is Born

On Thursday October 18, 2012, a star was born. Her name was Mya Elaine Kampfner. It was a very chilly morning. I remember it just like it was yesterday.

My grandma and I were grocery shopping because I was being induced on the Tuesday coming up. We started at Publix and then we went to Walmart to finish up getting stuff for my hospital bag. I had everything that was needed; all I had to do was try on my new sweats. So I went to the dressing room to try them on. Then it happened, I thought I had just peed on myself when I was trying them on, but I stayed calm. I came out of the dressing room and told my grandma, "either my water just broke or I peed on myself." Her face turned flushed, but I didn't pay it any mind; we finished up and checked out.

My Favorite Day

We drove to her house and I ate breakfast. She cooked my favorite food: bacon, eggs and toast. And then I felt a little pain and pressure.

I knew it was that time, so I called my doctor. She told me to go ahead and come in. When we arrived, we went straight to the back and she checked me. Indeed it was time and she weighed me. My doctor, Carol-Ann was her name, was so excited- I think more than I was. She told me it was her father's birthday.

I went across the street to Memorial Hospital. At that time, I was extremely nervous and overwhelmed. I had decided to do a natural birth with no meds, so I had to walk and move. My Dad brought his tablet so I could Skype.

When it started to get uncomfortable, I went back to my room and took a shower. Then it got extremely intense. I was ready for it to be over. My nurse's name was Julia – sweetest lady I have ever met. She checked me again and I was 7 cm. It was almost that time, but it wasn't coming quickly enough. Everything got on my nerves including people talking and the lights.

Then it was time and everyone was joyous and anxious. I was ready to meet my angel. Moments later, she was here and I forgot everything else except her. The feeling was magical and unexplainable. Mya was so perfect, a head full of curly hair and soft to touch.

Sometimes I wish I would have waited, but all in all, on October 18, 2012 my daughter Mya was born and it is my favorite day.

Stephanie Beane is a student at Community Connections.

Weekend Cook

Sometimes, I like to cook on the grill. I like to fix chicken and vegetables. My wife makes the salad and the sauce. If the weather is good, I cook for the family. Sometimes, I make meatloaf plus add in onions and green

peppers. I put the meat in the pan and place it on the hot grill. Then I close the lid down, so it cooks. It cooks for 30 minutes. I let everyone put on their own salt and pepper.

We have all kinds of drinks such as Kool-Aid, iced tea, beer, and soda. We all have a real good time, eating, drinking and, talking.

Dale Eggleston is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. Dale has been working with his tutors Arline and Sandra. He continues to make progress. Dale grew up never having the chance to go to school.

I Wish Every Day Is Sunday

Sunday is my favorite day for many reasons. First, I was born on Sunday. Next, I go to church for worship service on Sunday mornings. After church I go home and discuss politics with my friends. I have lunch at noon. At 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon I visit the sick folks at the hospital. Sometimes in the evening, I go to the movies with my girlfriend.

Also, I love Sunday because it is the first day of the week. On Sunday, the people from my country Haiti put on nice clothes. They laugh and give smiles to other people.

Jean Yvon Guerrier is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Christmas

My favorite holiday is Christmas. Christmas is my favorite holiday because it's Jesus birthday. Christmas is about getting together with family, shopping for gifts, putting up decorations, and singing Christmas songs.

When my family gets together we laugh, talk, cook, or even go shopping at Wal-Mart, Bealls, or the thrift stores. When we come back from shopping, we put up the decorations like the: Christmas tree, lights around the house, garland around doors and windows.

My Favorite Day

When we finish, the decorations are beautiful to look at. The songs we sing are: I Wish You a Merry Christmas, Silent Night, Jingle Bells, and Joy to the World. That's why Christmas is my favorite holiday of the year.

Mechille Luster is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Sunday

My favorite day is Sunday. I like Sunday because I have time to go to church, visit my friends, and relax with my kids a little bit. At church, I enjoy praying, worshipping the Lord, greeting people, and a lot of good things that make me happy.

After church, I visit my friends; we eat together, and have a good time like sharing conversation and opinions. On Sunday afternoon, I take my kids to the park, have fun with them and go back home to do the laundry. I get clothes ready for them for the next day. We eat dinner; I help them with the homework, and we sit together watching TV.

Sandrine Noel is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Christmas Day

I am new to this class. I do not know enough English to express myself, but I am going to give it a try. My favorite day is December 25th. It is Christmas Day. I like the Christmas songs and music that are played at the stores, over the radio and on TV. My family always invites friends to a small party. I enjoy meeting new people on this day. Most of all I like the gift exchange for each other. Every year, I can't wait for this day to come.

Omlene Osias is from Haiti. She attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

July 16, 2003

I remember the most special day in my life. It was July 16, 2003, when my little princess was born. Her name is Melisa and she is 10 years old. Her eyes are brown and very expressive. Her hair is dark and wavy. Her lips are as red as a cherry. She is so beautiful and adorable.

Melisa likes gymnastics. She has class twice a week, every Tuesday and Wednesday at 5:30 pm. She doesn't like to practice sports too much, but gymnastics really fascinates her. For now, it's the only sport in which she participates.

Melisa loves to draw, and she's taking art classes every Friday. Her teacher is very talented. He noticed that Melisa has gifted hands. So he has taught her how to draw eyes, noses and mouths. She is doing very, very well, in his opinion. Melisa really likes her class.

Melisa loves to read. Her favorite kind of book is a diary. She has a collection of 13 from the "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" series by Jeff Kinney. She has a wonderful ability to focus. If she likes a book, she starts to read and doesn't stop until she is finished.

Melisa is a very good girl. She gets good grades in school and every day shows me how responsible she is. For example, as part of her homework she has to read for 30 minutes every day. When she is on the bus coming home, she prefers to spend her time reading instead of goofing off.

If you are a parent, it won't surprise you when I say "SHE IS THE BEST DAUGHTER EVER!" Maybe we can all claim to be part of a new syndrome, "The Loving Parent" syndrome.

In any event, I'm very proud of Melisa and I know that time goes by too fast. So I'm enjoying every moment I share with her. Thank goodness for my favorite day, July 16, 2003. I love you, Melisa.

Adriana Villareal is a student with Literacy Volunteers of Collier County.

My Favorite Day

The Best Time of My Life

To give birth to my eldest daughter was the best time of my life. I was so excited emotionally and I was happy that she was healthy! Several things made me nervous upon her arrival; seeing her so beautiful, gave me the most extreme relief I have ever had.

I was happy my pregnancy was over .I was grateful that all of my worries were gone and that I can finally see, smell, and kiss my little girl. The feeling of holding this little person that was nourished and carried for nine months inside of me was wonderful. It's truly a feeling difficult to explain in words.

Being a first time mother, my excitement was bursting at the seams as well as my protective instincts. I was very cautious in not letting anything disturb her .This was my most prized possession; therefore, I had to make sure she was well kept.

Everyday, from the day she was born to the present day, my daughter, Soley Analice, is the highlight of my day. When she plays dress up, while she sleeps, inhaling her delicious baby scent, and feeling the pride of her milestones are the ultimate things for me .I have never been so happy .

To this day, having my daughter has been the best thing that has happened to me .The experience, the joy, the one of a kind emotion makes 2009 the best time of my life.

Yunedsi Buzon is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Favorite Day is Friday

I love Fridays it's the end of the week and you get to party. You also get to hang out with family members and get things done. First, Fridays are the best because working all week long can take a lot out of you and sometimes you need a break to have fun and party. Second, you get to take the time to go see relatives that might not live close by you

and that's an advantage Friday gives you. Lastly, you can get things done on your day off.

Kenneth Adams is a student at Lee County Adult and Career Education.

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