

Living Our Dreams

Living My Dreams

A collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy provider throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.



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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 the editing of submissions and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they were received.

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

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My American Dream

Six years ago when I was in Ecuador I had an American dream. I thought only of a good future for my children. I never imagined what impact the radical change would be on my life. At that moment I didn't think of my husband and myself. My children were growing and my country didn't offer opportunities for young people. My country had political corruption and was going bankrupt. Ecuador was among the poorest countries in the world. Politicians worked only for their benefit. At this time my husband was diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome. He was depressed and we made the decision that coming to this country was the best option we had. It was the most important decision we ever made.

Now six years later, I think about the difficulties of living here and wonder if I made the right decision. I had a good education in my country but felt ignorant in this country because I could not understand or speak English. In Ecuador it isn't important to speak English. As a doctor in Ecuador I was respected, I considered myself part of the high middle-class of society. Now I have a lower middle-class life. I take care of many people but not as a doctor. I don't have many friends or family near me and it makes me feel lonely. As for my family, my husband is happy and his health is stable. My son is not so happy because he works as a cook and wishes to go back to Ecuador. Both of my daughters are happy and going to the university. I feel sad because my American dream isn't what I thought it would be for me. I dreamed I would have the same kind of life here as I had in Ecuador, but I was wrong.

By Rosa Abadie

Rosa is a student at the Literacy Council of Manatee County in Bradenton, Florida. Her teacher is Sharlya Gold.

You Can Do What You Think You Cannot

To do the thing I think I cannot do means, to me, that I must try very hard to better myself in reading and spelling. I wanted to join the military when I was younger, but I felt I couldn't make it. So I wondered if perhaps I could try to better myself by coming to school. I would like to help my kids with homework. I read a little more than I did before. Coming to school is helping me to better my self-esteem in my everyday life. I look up words I cannot spell. I fill out paperwork. I have learned by coming to school that I can do what I thought I could not do.

Essay in response to the Eleanor Roosevelt quote

By Sarah Abernathy

Sarah is a busy working mom. She is a diligent student despite a hectic schedule. She never hesitates to help out other students because she has a heart of gold

A Loving Family

Having a family that loves one another is one of the best things that can happen to a person. If one of the family members gets sick, they will get looked after by the rest of the family. They will pay the bills, prepare food and take him or her to the doctor. A person will feel much happier knowing that there is someone there for them. That will even help the person restore to better health faster.

Sometimes it gets hard on some families because of the way one person in the family thinks. If this person just thinks about what he or she wants and not what is best for the whole family, then the whole family will suffer. A family must learn to work together in everything, from washing clothes, cooking dinner, cleaning the house and paying the bills. Like a football team, each player has a part to play. So, if they want to win they have to play together.

Also, families must talk about things that bother them. It is best for a family to be true to each other, because being true to each other will help that family to be happier and stay together. A family that trusts each other will be a loving family and whatever problems they face, they will go through them victoriously.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a loving family and I know that is one of the best things that can happen to a person. I hope that my children will have the same feelings.

By Anonymous Author

When I Was Little I Used To.....

The sweet memories of my childhood in Portugal often bring a smile to my face. How important it is that we never forget what we used to do and how we used to think when we were little.

One of the most pleasant memories I have is when I walked to the beach, very close to my house, with my friends, spend time just rolling down the white dunes of sand. Was a continuous cycle of going up the dunes, the higher the better and then just carelessly roll down, feeling the warm soft sand against our small fit bodies. So much laughter, so much fun! Afterwards, we would go in the

cold salty water and wash off the sand. The sun was bright, the shore was enchanting, the friends were fun and life was beautiful.

One other thing that I remember doing and it comes so naturally for little ones is to run, all the time. When I was outside playing I would run even when it was not necessary to run. When at home from one room to the other I would run. I wish I had the energy for that now, if only for a few minutes a day.

How beautiful is to be a child, to be cared for, to be vibrant, to be innocent and to think that life never ends.

I cherish these memories, but because I'm no longer a child, I think painfully of the children that don't have fun, don't have parents to care for them, millions that shamefully don't even have food. May we remember them in our prayers.

By Ana M. Almeida

A Polish Experience in the U.S.

I began my new life in the US in November, 2005. After one year I may tell you that I have many positive experiences in this country. I have met new cultures, traditions, people and languages.

People have been very helpful to me. First, a positive experience for me was that people can always find time for you and try to be helpful everywhere. It was interesting the first time I went to my job. Everyone was friendly and tried to help me, explaining and showing me what was necessary. It's really nice to know that each new day will be great for you, and every time when you need any help you can get this help from your manager or another employee.

In the US all ages can be active. Another, a positive experience for me is the activities for all ages. It doesn't matter how old are you, you may do whatever you want. You may travel, drive, play and spend your free time however you like. In my country, Poland, usually older people spend more of their off-time at home. They cannot be excited and happy about each new day. In general, people are more selfish and boring than Americans.

If you want to live in the US you may be sure that every day brings to you new pleasant experiences and satisfaction. People here will take time to be friendly and helpful to you. No matter what age you are, you can enjoy whatever activities you choose. Your life in the US can have positive experiences. I know.

I live in the US almost one year. I am married and I have one 3-years old daughter. My teachers name is Marry Ann Adams.

By Anonymous Author

Autumn Leaves

Leaves falling from the trees
yellow, brown, green, red
torn whole, half, any shape
rolling along in the wind.

Crispy sound
Swirls round
in every direction.

Oh how nice they feel underfoot
when you crunch on them.

By Anonymous Author

The Happiest Time Stage of My Life

When I was 10 years old, my parents started a small bakery business. My dad was a baker and for a while the small business was making such good money that they decided to open two more locations. I think that this stage was the better part of our lives, because we were very economically stable. After time the business started to slow down and my parents closed one store and then they decided to close the second. They didn't want to lose everything so they got a loan from a bank, but the interest was so high that they couldn't pay it. I remember the people from the bank taking things from my house, so they could cover the payment. After they took everything from my house, my parents started working for nothing. They worked so hard but I remember they couldn't rebuild.

After one year, my parents decided to immigrate to the United States, leaving my older sister and me in Mexico with my aunt. I was like 13 years old and couldn't understand that the big problem was that we had to stay alone in Mexico. After a few months, my sister had some problems with my aunt and she kicked us out of her house. My sister was like my second mom. She started to take care of me. She left the University and started working so that we could rent a small apartment. My parents sent money to us but it wasn't much, so my sister stated to work full time to get more money so I could continue to study. I love my sister so much and I always will be agradecida (grateful) to her for all the things that she did for me.

This stage was the saddest and most horrible time of our lives.

After two years we came to the United States to be with my parents. I started to study at the High School. My sister started a new job; she met her husband and got married. Now I am married and I have a beautiful family. I have four children, twin boys and two girls (three years and two years old).

This stage is the happiest time of my life.

By Miriam Avalos

Believe in Yourself

About six months ago, I only knew how to look over words on forms that I was asked to fill out or read. Even though I'm fifty-one years old, I only have a third grade education. So I always had someone there to handle things like reading the mail or writing checks for all my bills. I always wanted to do something about it, but I was always told I couldn't. So much until you believe you can't. When I was young, I had to help raise my younger brothers and sisters due to the fact that there were seven of us and no father. I had to be the second mother so I didn't really have time for me and my education. So as time went on I had my own three kids and I had to raise them as a single parent and my brothers' and sisters' children. Now that my kids are older, it's hard sometimes for them to do the things I need them to do. I got to the point where I needed to do something about it. Now I could get mad and blame the whole world or listen to the people who always told me I couldn't do it. Or I could show them I could do it.

Now don't get me wrong. I need the support of the people in my life who love me, my children. They have pushed me and made me believe I could do it. So now I'm in this program at Lauderhill Middle School at night. Now I know sounds and words. I even pick up books just to read them for fun. I break words down and

sound them out. It's just endless, all the things I would never have tried reading. I'm learning and going to keep doing it. I am very happy now thanks to the teachers in the reading program but the most importantly; thanks go to my children.

By Anonymous Author

Obstacles to Baghdad

Near the objective, wild and fierce
The field of expectation
Storms of sand, blood
Peace, religious rhetoric, fulfilling obligation.

Here in the street, suicide bomber
Eyes wet, women and children
Defensive barricade, either death or surrender
Weakness of the fear, armored human.

Yet, north to south, the towns raid
At the apex, avoiding misunderstanding,
Neither invasion nor occupation, world freedom, we said.

(50 miles to Baghdad – 7 Iraqi women and children shot,
refusing the order to stop)

By Andre Biene-Aimie

Andre is named after his father. He is the third child of a family of eight. Andre came from Haiti and 2002., took GED classes at GGALS with Polly Spring and Trudy Christianson. Andre is a member of PTK and working on AA at Edison College, hoping to transfer to USF for a Civil Engineering Degree.

Living my Dream

Upon my release, living my dream is going to be my biggest goal in life. My first dream to fulfill is going to be being a top notch parent to my little girl. My second dream is going to be achieved in the work place. I am currently a construction worker, but I am a laborer right now. I plan on being a Project Manager. Living these dreams is going to be a struggle, but the reward will be well worth it.

By Joshua Boone

Joshua is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Tonia Wells.

A Life of Fulfilled Opportunities

I was born in the countryside near a small town in Colombia. I saw daily how my mother, the only support for 9 children, had to work and I was determined to live a different life. At 13, my first opportunity came when I got a job in the town near my home. I liked the work and I continued to go to school. The next opportunity came when I received an offer to travel to the capital, Bogota, to work as a companion to a wealthy elderly couple. I was just 16 but I decided to go with them. Everything was so different from my little town where there were no skyscrapers, or elevators, or escalators or urban busses. I felt very inadequate and unskilled!

During the 8 months that I worked for the couple, I also went to school to take some courses in typewriting and bookkeeping. I

saved as much money as I could and soon I was able to rent a private room. I found jobs as a secretary, but unfortunately, I had to quit most of them because of sexual harassment. I had decided early in my life that I would rather have nothing to eat than to accept such disgusting and awful propositions. For two years, my life was miserable. Although I was able to earn enough to pay the rent, I didn't have enough extra to buy food or meet any other expenses. Thanks to my mother who mailed me boxes of food, I was able to persevere until the next big opportunity.

After so many unpleasant experiences, I decided to try something new and different. When I looked in the Employment section of the newspaper I found to my surprise, a big five star advertisement. A large successful Sport Center needed salespersons. This seemed like a tremendous opportunity because successful salespersons would receive big commissions, certificates, prizes and much more. I immediately phoned for an interview, even though it seemed too good to be true. Also, my close friends were not very optimistic about my chances. I was still rather shy and I was completely ignorant of the market.

Nevertheless, the main sales manager, who interviewed me, was very motivational and convinced me that I should work for the Center. I was soon introduced to the manager of the group I would work with and who would train me for the work I was to do. He told me that the only requirements to work there were a pleasant disposition, and eagerness to become an effective salesperson. When I was shown the Center, I was amazed at how big it was. There was an Olympic size swimming pool, many kinds of racket courts, including twenty tennis courts, saunas, steam baths, and areas for massages. The huge gym was equipped with several types of exercise machines and also several classrooms for aerobics and yoga. There were even doctors who specialized in sports and nutrition. I was eager to begin my new job and was determined to take advantage of this opportunity.

I liked selling and I liked that I was helping people by selling something healthful. I Worked hard and soon I became one of the top and respected salespersons. Of the 80 salespersons I often made three, and sometimes, four times as much as the Center's doctors. Although many of my colleagues were jealous of my successful selling record, I stayed with the Center for over five years...until another great opportunity was presented to me.

Through my hairdresser, I met another elderly and wealthy couple who were planning to move to United States. They were moving to Florida to be near their daughter and her family and to have treatment for the lady's skin cancer. They were very happy to learn that I, also, wanted to come to the U.S. The couple's daughter was eight months pregnant, so they were planning to leave very soon. When I told them I couldn't go because I didn't have a visa, they called a friend who was working in the American Embassy and she was able to arrange a visa for me in a matter of a few hours.

I flew to Miami with the couple and I stayed with them in their big beautiful house. But I was very lonely. I didn't know any one. I couldn't speak any English. I had no transportation. For me, it was a desolate place. But rather than feeling sorry for myself and my situation, I decided to do something about it. I had the phone number of a Colombian lady living in Miami who gave me the step by step information needed to get a student visa. I began my study of English in the public school and then I went to a Community College for two years. At the same time, I began my study of nursing and soon I got my work permit. Upon completing the nursing program, I began full time work as a nurse.

I was very happy with my life; I had a good job, many friends to spend time with and opportunities to meet people. In fact, it was one of my friends who introduced me to a handsome and

successful American who became my husband. I have been married for nearly ten years and we have two good looking boys. I became a US citizen, September 29, 2004. Never in my wildest dreams as a child, did I think there might even be a possibility that I would, someday, live in this extraordinary country. I am so grateful for the many opportunities I have had and I am proud of my self for having the courage and determination to take advantage of them. For me the American Dream is real!

Very special thanks to Dr. Hash and my tutor, Linda Wilson, for all their support and encouraging me to improve my writing and speaking.

By Luz Bratt

Luz would like to spend a very special thanks to Dr. Hash, and his tutor, Linda Wilson, for all their support and encouraging him to improve his writing and speaking.

Jordan's Story

One day I was walking down the street and I came upon a little puppy that had a note on his collar. So I took the note off and I began to open it. Suddenly every thing went black. It was a black out; the sun was gone. I did not know what to do so I freaked out! I know that is not the *best* thing to do. After a while I calmed myself down by telling myself that everything is fine and I'd be ok.

Just at that moment, though, a car came down the road and hit the little puppy. I felt really bad for about two seconds but I got over it. I started walking on and then the same car circled back around and this time the driver tried to hit me. So I dove into the bushes. I was really scared because the car had just missed me. I

jumped out of the bushes and started running fast. I got to the end of the road.

I looked back and I saw a man with a tall top hat on and he was dressed in red, white, and blue. He also had a white beard. It was Uncle Sam. He was after me because I didn't pay my taxes. So it turns out even good guys can be bad people in this world if they don't pay their taxes.

By the way, in case you're wondering, the little note on the dog's collar was a message from the IRS. It said, "Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to sell this cute little puppy on e-bay for \$300,000 so that you can pay your back taxes and avoid going to jail." This puppy will self destruct in 30 seconds... the end

By Jordan Brown

*Jordan attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida.
His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

Angel Tree

Christmas is a special time of year when families come together and enjoy one of God's most important times, celebrating Jesus' birthday. But it hurts you when some families are looking under the tree and there's nothing there. I always wonder how I can help. Is there a way to put smiles on children's faces? Yes, there is-Angel Tree.

Angel Tree is a program our church has had for over ten years. How does it work? Everyone in the church brings a gift for a boy or a girl, and we pick out the families who are in need. This year we found four families.

There were lots of gifts to give to these families. It took over four weeks to get the gifts and separate them among the families they should go to. After filling the bags, we started our journey in our church bus, like it was Santa's Sleigh.

Our first stop had one child. We greeted the family with love and a song, *Joy to the World*. Then we gave the gifts. I loved how the child's eyes lit up with joy. They thanked us and wished us Happy Holidays. And now for the next stop. Like the first one, we sang a song and wished them Merry Christmas and also discussed the true meaning of Christmas. Oh, how they smiled! Once more we were off on our journey. Next, there was a young girl with a big smile on her face. We repeated our song and story and gave the gifts. Then the last stop of our journey came. There were three children, two girls and one boy, who received lots of gifts. Oh, how their eyes lit up as we sang and gave more candy. Our hearts were filled with joy. On our way home we were thankful to help these families. We know there are many more, but we did our best.

Had our journey ended? Oh no! It had not. When we returned to the church, we were told that a parent called and said that the gifts they received did not have their child's name on them. It was an honest mistake. Each child's name started with a "K". God works in mysterious ways. Going back to the places to switch the gifts between the children, it was amazing how one girl and two girls still got the same number of gifts. Both families were still happy. Now our journey has ended and we made all the families happy and put smiles on the children's faces.

Christmas is a very great time of year. It is time with your family and the time for all the fruit cake you can throw away. The number one most important thing is to say Happy Birthday to Jesus by helping others.

By Teresa Brown

Teresa is a mother of one child, Taymilia. She is a hard working student at Gulf Coast Community College. Her teacher is Barbara Crowell.

Everything Is Not A Dream

Wondering is this a DREAM.
Why is the world I live in so cruel and mean?
Closing my eyes and having to pray cause the thing I see around
my way
Not talking at all cause the world is involved
The government is being untrue
Well as you know that's nothing new
More Kids leaving their families to go fight in Iraq
And nobody cares because they might not come back
Watching the news finding out it's true
But if only you knew that could have been you
Thinking about everything
Like how the world has change
A lot of violence in wars and gangs
And this is not a DREAM this is everyday life, this is why my
family can't sleep at night.

What is the world coming to?

By Amanda Bryant

Living My Dreams

I was sitting at the kitchen table in our beautiful house of peace in Florida, conversing with some of my friends, talking about the church in general. My soul was grieved at its spiritual condition worldwide. As I stood up to walk across the room to the piano, I heard the Holy Spirit speak. I felt that the Holy Spirit was telling me to prepare my heart for what is about to take place very shortly all over the world, and particularly among my people. As I sat down at the piano to play, the Holy Spirit gave me a new song.

Since that day I have watched and seen many earth shaking events take place. Everyone has agreed with what the Lord spoke to my heart. Wherever I go I hear people say that things will never be the same, and they aren't! The evil that was released on that day is not the only change, there are also positive changes taking place. The Almighty is still on the throne and nothing can happen which He does not permit. He even stands in the midst of our tragedies, and brings something good out of our sorrows and heartaches. We may not see it now, but we will. Never have a doubt. Why is it that the older you get the harder you have to work? I would think that at 40 it would be possible to retire and live a life of leisure. Even when we take time out to go to our little cottage at the lake, it's work.

We have had the pleasure of having special friends come and stay with us when we have had the opportunity. We remember a beautiful time with the minister and his family. It makes me smile when we're so blessed and united together. Another of our visitors was the man who lives with angels. They brought their angels

along all the way from Ohio. I didn't see them but I knew they were here. We sang songs about heaven. They love the place and always are glad when we finally come to dying, so they can carry us there and take a vacation after us wearing them out down here for so long. In spite of physical problems, it has been a wonderful year so far. I am now free from pain and I am happy and rich in the joys of the Lord.

Others seem to be complaining but then most of them are younger. When you have lived a long as I have, you have the advantage over the young ones. I have a busy time ahead. I was just looking at my calendar for the rest of the year and decided it sure was a good thing that I took a few days off when I did. We found a wonderful tour guide and she helped me arrange an itinerary. I wanted to go and pray, but I also wanted to see the traditional sights, as this was my first time. As I began my prayer journey, the Lord placed in my heart that I was to prophesy by song as well as pray. I left with tremendous sense of expectation that I were at the prophetic edge of time for GOD to move on behalf of his beloved Florida.

I have taken all of this to heart and prayed if it is God's will that He would make this dream available to me. I want to walk in the will of God because I believe I have come to the day of the transference of the wealth and God is going to enlarge the curtains of my tent and I am going to be able to accommodate many who are coming to worship the Lord in Florida and pray. I am crossing rivers I have never crossed before, and I am going where I have never gone before. As a result I will become the possessor of properties that I have never possessed before. This is the seventh and my time has come. When God says its time for a change, he often uses a woman

By Tonjua Burnley

*Tonjua Burnley is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility.
Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.*

Who I Was Before And Who I Was After I Got Saved

When I was young, I used to tell people off and used to steal out of stores. When I was not saved I was a bad person and when people came up to me and said, "Do you believe in God?" I always looked at them like they were crazy.

When I was a bad person I would not listen to my parents. When they used to tell me to do something I would stomp my feet and throw my hands up in the air. I thank God that I changed my life around and one Sunday I went to church and heard what the pastor said to the crowd. The pastor looked at me when he said these words, "If you go to God in prayer, he will bless you."

So when the pastor said, "Anybody need prayer?" I went to the offering call and I told the pastor that I wanted to give my life to God. I got baptized in a pool downstairs in a pretty white church. The pastor told me to cross my arms over my chest and hold my breath. The pastor took me down in the water. I could feel the devil coming off of me. So I say to people who do not have their life with God, you better, because this world is coming to a end. So people better get right with God.

By Belinda Campbell

Belinda is twenty years old. She lives in Monticello, Florida and attends the Adult Education Class at Lively. She belongs to the Welauren Missionary Baptist Church.

The Story of Me and My Grandma And the Times We Had

My Grandma was a special person in my life. Every time she smiled my day went right. It was like a warm feeling in my heart. I remember all the beatings she gave me when I was bad. It made me realize that my life was more important than the trouble I was getting into. I remember the days we went walking, talking and laughing, her telling me how my mama was raised and the trouble they got into. She told me how my uncle stole my granddaddy's car and how my mama fought my granddaddy in a club. I liked hearing about what they were like back in the day. My Grandma was a sweet, kind, loving person and I always was around her. She was like a mother to me. I would have done anything for her, no matter what it would have took. She was my heart.

By Lorenzo Campbell

Lorenzo is a 21 year old young man who attends adult education classes at Lively. He hopes to have his own business in barbering or carpentry some day.

My Perspective of 911 Tragedy

It is very important for me to talk and remember what happened on September 11 2001. I will never forget that day. When I saw the news, I was in Puerto Rico and turned the TV on, and in that moment the second tower was attacked. Let me tell you that I felt paralyzed, shocked, and panicked for days.

During this weekend, I had the opportunity to see some documentaries, talk shows and news remembering the tragedy of

911. The emotional for me was the interview with the spouse of the Pilot of United 93, the airplane that crashed in Pennsylvania. Believe me, I can't remember her name, but for me she and the others who suffered the tragedy more closely and personally are heroes too. In the interview, she is talking about that day when she received four calls from her husband. In my mind I was thinking "oh my Dear God". She is so brave; I have no doubt that Jesus has control of her life now. She is a good speaker even when she said, "I'm afraid to talk in front of the people." In addition, you have to see her talking of that moment and see how she sees her life today. How she has the tough work of raising three girls alone. She talked about dealing with the tragedy and the emotions (ups and downs) of her daughters.

I finish by telling you that we all have to pray a lot. Not only for God to Bless America, but pray for the end of the war of the world.

By Iris Y. Cardic

Iris is married to Oscar Cardic. She completed a Masters degree in Organizational Psychology from Bayamon` Central University in Puerto Rico. She also has a Bachelors Degree in Psychology. She's living at Fort Walton Beach because her husband is serving in the military. She is planning to continue a doctoral degree and find a job in counseling. Her teacher is Mary Ann.

All Grown Up

I happen to be thirty-three years old. I did not graduate from high school. Instead of finishing the few credits I lacked it seemed more important to go out and get to work making money. I guess at eighteen years old, I thought I was all grown up.

When I was a little older I moved to Ft. Lauderdale. I started working in the restaurant business. As the years went on I became a young and successful restaurant manager. Once again I thought I was all grown up.

I met my wonderful husband while working in the restaurant industry. We have two beautiful children. We have had our share of ups and downs, but fortunately, there have been more ups than downs. Once again I thought I was all grown up.

I am presently thirty-three years old and attending Adult Education Classes. I've come to learn that the world is so much larger than I ever knew.

I realize that I am still not...all grown up.

By Jennifer Carroll

Jennifer Carroll attends the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. She lives in Pace, Fl with her Husband David and two children, Dillan and Payton.

A Journalist Journey

I'm Harry Castiblanco. I was born in Bogotá on December 3 1977. I studied at the Agustiniano School from elementary up to high school. I liked studying and sports. I always thought about studying Journalism, which seemed to me an interesting and social career. "The power of communicating and informing people is the main task of a journalist. Presenting the newsy facts to the world and looking for the truths are journalists' responsibilities." These are words I believe as a professional journalist. At university, my

grades reflected my efforts as I was recognized for being a good student. I'm proud to say that I graduated with honors from the Central University of Bogotá in August of the 2003.

I left Colombia because I was threatened with death by the Para-militaries (AUC or Colombian United Self-defenses). They wanted to kill me for my activity as a journalist, photographer and human right advocate. I participated in the Database of Political Violence and Human Rights organization. I wrote articles for "The Night and Fog" in which they register the multiple human rights violations and infractions. They also were after me because I refused to give them information regarding the Massacre in Bojaya-Bellavista (I Collide), Commune 13 (Medellín), Barrancabermeja the other version, and Debt with the Humanity. Those publications represented the real profile of the Para-military state in Colombia. I also refused to give them a list of names of high officials of the organization. Those officials work in different conflict areas in the country. I worked for them from July 1999 to March 2005.

Besides working as a journalist, I also carried out workshops for human rights in the different communities. I recorded information and pictures of places in conflict, areas such as the black, indigenous, and rural communities and places of poverty, where there is political persecution. The guerrillas slaughter, kidnap, and torture men, women and children. In their subversive acts, they are violating human rights and the humanitarian international right.

For a long time I thought that I could defend the human rights. I thought that exercising my journalistic work I would help my country to be in peace. But I also realized I had no option. If I wanted to be alive I had to leave. I did not want to be a martyr of a dirty war in which they place you to defend the human rights with guns pointing to your forehead to shoot you. Therefore I was

determined to leave the country.

It has not been easy to begin a new life in a country that you don't know very well. But this situation becomes part of me and I am a political refugee in the United States. Whenever I go through my bad moments I think that I must have faith in myself, faith in God and faith that my dreams will be achieved. My goals and dreams come closer and closer. I'm improving my English, and I hope to finish my classes at Mid Florida Tech, go to university to seek my Masters in Journalism. I wish to be able to contribute to the community and the nation that gave me this opportunity to live without fear and with happiness.

By Harry Castiblanco

*Harry is a student at Mid-Florida Tech in Orlando, Florida.
His teacher is Marilia Daros.*

An Orphan Cat (Orphie)

This story begins in Venezuela, where a group of street cats lived only on waste food from nearby restaurants and of what families in the neighborhood gave them. Neighbors liked to have cats around because they took care of poisonous snakes.

One day one of the cats gave birth to three kitties: two males and one female. When the kitties were still small, a neighbor shot the mother cat. The little kitties for obvious reasons had a lot of problems to stay alive; so, they had to be very special cats to remain in this world. Unfortunately, the two males died because their mom could not feed them and they were only depending of the good will of the people around. The female kitty remained alive; she was very smart and little by little won the love of the

people, especially in one family. They received her in their home, took her to the vet and cleaned her. The kitty felt part of the family; she followed the lady like a dog guarding that nobody got close to her. In reward the cat got food and care; but the cute thing was that she shared her food with her friends from the street: invited them in and waited until they finished their food. Also, every morning she went to the kitchen's screen door and rubbed noses with her father cat that was a family cat too. An incredible thing was that, in one occasion, she didn't let her lady get in the shower because she knew that the water was steaming hot.

When the family had to immigrate to the US, the kitty was taken with them to live a good and protected life. Her legal name became Orphie Gonzalez. In a way, she achieved her American Dream.

By Cesar

I'm Cesar, 24 years old. I've been in the U.S.A. for two and a half years. Some friends told me about the programs offered by the Literacy Council. I'm just following the English program 'cause I would like to be able to speak in English correctly. You've helped me already to feel surer when I need to talk to someone.

The Hurricane

My name is Johana and I want to talk about something that happened to me when I was seven years old. This is one important thing out of many that happened in my life.

It was during the night, when I was sleeping. My mom told me, "despiértese por favor, (wake up please)," and I asked, "por que?" and she said, "mira afuera (look through the window)." Then I saw what looked like a big wave and she said it was 'un

huracan'. At that age I didn't understand what 'un hurican' was but when I heard and saw the water I understood.

We had been living in un banco de río'' (a dry riverbed) for five years. In el banco de río a lot of families were living and I had a lot of friends, but when the huracan passed over the river no house was left standing, and all the families lost their houses and they needed to move to another place. Some stayed, like us. We were trying to find some of our things. We lived for a while in that riverbed with only a little roof that my father built. Then we moved to a new house. The house only had two rooms and a little porch and it didn't have windows and doors, electricity, or water.

In that house we lived with other families. At that time my family was a family of four. All the families cooked together and tried to clean and repair the house. Meanwhile each family was trying to find a place to live. We were the last who stayed in the house. During the time when we lived with the other families, I had fun because most of my friends were living with us. But sometimes I heard stories of what the huracan did to the families who were living in the banco de río. A lot of people lost their houses, others lost family members. Some of them didn't find the bodies and others found bodies of people who drowned underground. One of the stories that I remember and will never forget is when the police found a woman because they saw her hand over the ground. When they dug to pull the body out they found a baby in the other arm of the woman.

She died trying to protect her baby and shouting for help. They also found a man who was in a tree with two of his sons. It was a tragic story for a lot of families. We only lost our house which is something that we can replace, and I'm thankful to God because I can write about this story and remember the people who can't.

By Johana Cervantes

A Favorite Day

When I was little, living in Mexico City, I remember my mother sending me to buy cooking oil. The store was five blocks from our home, near my father's job. I liked to go so I could stop in his shop. He was a wonderful cook and he made the most delicious cakes and custard. He could make a lot more desserts but my favorite was the Balta's home made custard. He named it because it was a secret recipe. When my dad saw me, he asked me if I wanted custard and I said, "Yes, I'd love to."

I sat in the chair and started eating. When I finished eating, I asked my father if I could get some money to buy potato chips. He looked at me and said, "Yes". He gave me money and I went to buy my chips. Then I remembered the cooking oil.

I ran back to my dad's shop and asked for more money to buy the oil. My father asked if my mother had sent me. After three hours, my father had to take me home because my mother was upset. I never forgot that day.

By Guadalupe Chavez

Dumpling Life

Dumplings were always a good food on the weekend or on a holiday in my family when I was a kid. It was an auspicious holiday atmosphere when the whole family made dumplings around the table. Father kneaded dough, my mother made the stuffing, grandmother was responsible for cooking the dumplings and my older sister and I were responsible for counting them. Everyone in the family was very happy and joyful.

Our relationship with our neighbor was very close when we lived in the “Si He Yuan” (huge house for several families living together in China). A bowl of dumplings was sent to each neighbor if any of the families made dumplings on the weekend or on a holiday. I liked the dumplings my neighbors made at that time. I thought the dumplings they made were more delicious than ours. After I grew up, I knew the dumplings my mother made were the most delicious in the world because of the dumplings my mother made means our family story.

I have never forgotten the dumplings made for the Chinese New Year’s Eve in my childhood. All the kids were running, laughing and playing with the fireworks together in the big yard after eating the New Year’s supper. Parents made the dumplings at home and we knew it was time to go home to eat dumplings again when the firecracker resounded at midnight. We were tired and hungry and the feeling was really wonderful when I tasted the first dumpling. We ate them again and again until we felt our bellies get full and it made us sleepy. I enjoyed them in my life at that time. Even now I still have this problem of getting sleepy after eating a lot of dumplings.

Not only eating the dumpling but also making the dumpling is a pleasant thing to do. My mother was very interested in wrapping the dumplings although she didn’t like to eat meat. Mother always made dumplings when we had guests at home or on the weekend. It took her two hours to knead the dough, make the stuffing, and wrap the dumplings. We were always proud that my mother could make them very quickly, and that they were beautiful and had a good taste. My mother taught me step by step when I was a child. I still remember Mother making two hundred dumplings one time for my sister’s party. We really enjoyed the dumplings at the party. Sister and I thanked her for giving us good dumpling memories from our childhood.

There are all kinds of stuffing inside the dumplings, ground pork with green onion, pork with cabbage, and beef with vegetable. After I grew up and the lives got better, we all no longer liked eating only meat dumplings; we started to fill them with fresh seafood and vegetables inside the dumplings, like fresh shrimp, squid, mushroom and bean. We can see how the Chinese living standard develops from the changed dumpling stuffing.

The dumpling is not only a kind of good food but also a kind of nostalgia. A friend I met in Madison, Wisconsin, Mrs. Yang was born in LiaoLing, China, and her family immigrated to the United States when she was very little. She had never been back to LiaoLing. All she recalled about her hometown came from her mother's dumpling story. She said to me that her mother told her one story of the past when she made dumplings each week. So she had a warm memory of her hometown every time she ate the dumplings.

Chinese in the United States have much in common because of the dumplings - the same nostalgia, the same happiness. The dumplings make Chinese who have never met before feel together. I have been in the United States for almost five years and have celebrated four Chinese New Years in the United States. Almost all of the Chinese in our community made the dumplings together in our Eagle Heights Community Center every Chinese New Year's Eve. They came from everywhere in China but we could do the same thing together, making and eating dumplings, communicating with each other, laughing and dancing that night. The good smell of the dumplings filled the whole center and everyone was joyful and feeling part of the big family.

How wonderful is Chinese New Year! How wonderful is dumpling life!

By Lingping Chen

Lingping came from China five years ago to join her husband who was studying for his PhD. She moved to Jacksonville after her husband graduated and got his first job at the University of FL Proton Therapy Institute. She attends ESL class at the Southeast Branch Center for Adult Learner in the Jacksonville Public Library. Her teacher is Becky Welty.

My Life Story

Learning English is rather difficult for those grown-ups whose native language is not English, especially for the seniors. I have studied in both beginners/intermediate and advanced classes in Palm Coast. Let me share with new comers my experience.

I immigrated to the U.S.A. many years ago. In the past, I worked for a Chinese Import Company in New York. All the employees in that company were Chinese. I seldom had the opportunity to speak English. In 1995, I retired and moved down to Palm Coast. I found all my neighbors in this new surroundings were Americans. There were no Chinese stores either. I felt very nervous. I knew I couldn't do without English if I decided to settle in this city. Therefore, I decided to enroll in the ESOL class.

I was told that there were two free ESOL classes for beginners/intermediate located in Corporate Plaza near my house. One was on Monday and Wednesday; the other was on Tuesday and Thursday. Both were from 12:00 to 3:00. Since I had leisure time, I enrolled in both classes in order to improve my English quickly.

When I first entered these two classes, both teachers gave me a hearty welcome, which lessened my nervousness and encouraged

me. I knew it was difficult for ESOL class teachers to teach grown-up students from different counties with different cultures and backgrounds. But our teachers selected a very good teaching material and used very effective teaching methods to interest all of us. They also provided us with free books, among them: Picture Dictionary (for new vocabularies), Real-Life English (for basic conversation), Basic English Grammar, and Easy English News. Besides, we could also learn grammar, pronunciation, conversation, and composition from the computer programs in the class.

During the first two years, I really improved a lot, not only in conversation but also in written English. I wrote some compositions as my homework and submitted them to my teachers for correction. They encouraged me to send them to the newspapers or magazines for publication. Luckily, one of them, entitled “My First Love” was published by Palm Coast Lifestyles Magazine in the February 2005 issue, which greatly encouraged me.

Two years later, I shifted to the advanced class. It is located in the Palm Coat High School on route 100. The teacher is also an experienced one. He teaches very strictly. First of all, he does not allow students to speak any language in class except English. In addition, he always records some CNN or other news to play in class to train our listening comprehension, and gives many chances to practice English conversation. He assigns a lot of homework, which we need to spend at least a few hours to do it at home.

The more I study, the more I like the classes. They give me the opportunity to build my confidence in speaking and writing English. Moreover, in the classes I have made a lot of new friends from different countries, which makes my life more significant.

By Eugene Chiang

Learning English

English is so hard.
But it helps me understand.
I feel so happy.

By Aeryon Cho

Aeryon has been married for 29 years and has two children; Donna and Denny. She is a student of Literacy Volunteers of Lee County. Her teacher is Jaycine Lester.

Changes

Our life is made up of many choices. One simple choice could change everything. People look back on their lives and say if I could do it all over, I'd change this or that. Those same people look at me like I'm crazy because I say I'd change nothing. How can I say nothing? If I would have made one different choice I would have changed everything and I love my life and I would change nothing. I would redo a bad marriage because I have two wonderful kids. I would redo losing everything and start over because I found a wonderful man and I have two more wonderful children. I love being their mother and his wife.

Finally, after every chance and choice that I made in my life it finally feels complete. There is no change I'd make. If I had to do it all over again, I would still want to end up here. You only have one life, so you can't sit back and wonder if or why. You have to make the best of it. You should always be happy where you are. I have been sad and I often wondered why things happened. This took up a lot of time and energy. I am now happy with my life, my

children and my wonderful husband. I put all of my time and energy into this so they will be just as happy as me.

By Angela Clark

Angela is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Tonia Wells.

A New Beginning

My name is Ronniann Cooper. I entered Columbia County's Adult Education Program in Lake City, Florida during August of 2003. The main reason why I went back to school to earn my GED was because I needed to find a job in the area. I moved to Lake City in 2003 and had been a certified welder in three states and with the Coast Guard. The closest place for me to work was in Jacksonville, Florida, which was sixty miles from home. I did not want to make that commute with two young children and a teenager. I went to a local restaurant and was told that I had to have my high school diploma in order to be a waitress.

I got a little upset about the fact that I did not have a diploma and could not get a job that paid \$2.15 an hour. One of the reasons that I had not gotten my GED was because I could not afford childcare for my two kids. I was looking at a local newspaper when I saw an ad for free childcare while you go back to school. I decided to call the Even Start Program at the Adult Education Center. Since I couldn't get a job, I decided to go back and get my GED. When I entered the program in August, I took the TABE and had some pretty low scores. I didn't let it discourage me and I decided to study my butt off and pass the GED test.

While attending classes, a few things happened along the way. During one of the months I attended classes, I was elected Student

of the Month. I still have my certificate and it is hanging on my wall at home. I was also awarded a Mentoring certificate for tutoring while I was in class. This is also hanging next to my GED which I received in December of 2003.

I had a once in a lifetime experience with all of my teachers! I would not change it a bit. If any thing, I try to convince anyone who has the time and need a high school diploma, to go for it and not let anything stand in their way. I now work for the same programs that helped me. I have seven credits at our local community college and plan to earn a BS degree. I still am working on my education and I won't stop until I have my degree!

By Ronniann Cooper

Ronniann has been married to her husband, John for 7 years. They have six children, with three living at home and one grandchild. Ronniann is currently attending LCCC, pursuing a degree in juvenile justice. She is employed with Columbia County VACE and is an Even Start Liaison, reading coach, and mentor for adult education students.

It's Raining

I can't figure out where I am, but everywhere rain falls down without mercy.

"It's raining" I keep saying. Now, these words aren't as powerful as before. In 2065, even my sons couldn't believe that I used to wash my car with pure water and that in my youth, there was war because of the petroleum. It's hard to explain this energy source to them, since they never saw oil. They were my last family members, all because of this 3rd WWW, World Water War. They also didn't believe me that Antarctica was a neutral zone,

only for research purposes. Now, the plains are under seawater and the mountains are full of people.

I wish I could leave immediately. I didn't go because at seventy-seven (starting the last half of common longevity) you're able to choose. I chose wrong, like always.

It's easy for me to remember the rain. I'm sure it's because with this weather I received the most fatal news and it pushed me to commit my worst decision.

In normal conditions, the rain is a freedom symbol or at least a proof that the environment surrounding you is big enough to have a water cycle. With the stormy weather comes some of your free will. The one influenced by the rain status. In a storm, the lightning bolt is a symbol of power or a representation of fear. Anyways, the streak gives you a warning of what's coming. On the other hand consecutively, you have the thunder. You can think about it as a scream of pain, an angry shout, or a pre-battle speech (like the cries that encouraged the army in the middle era). It takes some time for the thunder to come. When it does, you must be prepared.

Standing under the storm, raising your arms up to the sky shows your inner strength. It doesn't matter if water is falling down. You know there's a reason to be like that. But if you're on your knees and arms on the floor, it's a living proof of your own weakness. As you see, all of them have opposed meanings. It depends on you to understand them correctly or the way you want. There are a lot of things that can be (or not) on your side in a storm. I just see them now. I wish that I could change the decision I made but it's too late.

On that day, I remember every second. I just stepped out of my house and suddenly a heavy storm starts with a lightning bolt

striking far away. I know I should have brought some glasses to take advantage of the water falling like everyone. I just didn't, yet another bad decision. The mailman visited town, so I walked to the mailbox in milliseconds. I opened it and another lightning bolt fell really close. Its light impressed me. My God, I didn't get all those warnings! I swear I felt the rain turning heavier and faster when I took out the Army letter. A sharp pain in my chest appeared as I was comprehending what happened without even opening the note. My sons died. I walked to the cliff while the thunder was reverberating. Encouraging me to do what I feared most, I dropped off the letter and with it my life. Emptiness filled me. I was thinking, "What's life's meaning if nobody is going to remember you?" I didn't remember that its purpose is "Live to make somebody smile when remembering you." You don't earn it because you have been born, but I don't deserve that. I can see it clearly now, the reason of all this rain surrounding me. I'm tied to my past. I thought I was going to be free dying. Jumping was my most horrible decision. I'm sure there isn't one punishment worse than this one.

I only have recollections of lived moments, between them, the strongest one, the one of my cowardly response. Below the rain again, I wish I could have a second chance; now, nobody is going to remember me.

Unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to forget the rain.

By Mauro Dall' Agnese

Mission Trip to Jamaica

I went on a mission trip with some people from my church, The Victorious Life Church in Wesley Chapel, Florida. There are

other people from other churches that partner with us. There are many preparations that form a mission trip like prayer meetings, raising money and getting prayer partners to hold one another up in prayer before we leave and when we are on the trip too. Also, the congregation prays for the missionaries when they come back from the trip because they need that support in knowing that someone is standing in prayer for them.

Our trip was to bring medical aid and evangelism. We took a doctor, nurses, food, and clothing as well as other supplies. In Jamaica, we are put into different teams. There is the medical team, the evangelistic team, and the prayer team. I was put on the prayer team for one year.

One day, an elderly woman comes for prayer. I ask her what she wanted to pray for, and she answered that she needed prayer for her foot. I asked her to put her foot on my lap. I took her foot into both of my hands. I wasn't crying at that time, but immediately when I wrapped my hands around her foot, I began to cry uncontrollably.

The Lord spoke to me telling me to wipe my tears with my hands and rub the tears on the woman's feet, so I did. I was still crying uncontrollably. The Lord spoke again and asked me to repeat rubbing my tears on the woman's feet. By now, I had dirt and foot odor on my hands, but I rubbed her feet again. By the time I finished praying with her, it looked like I took the woman's feet and put them under a water faucet. Suddenly, the woman was better.

I love the Lord when he works through me the way He did in Jamaica. Every year I look forward to going back to Jamaica. For me, I wish that everyone could go on a mission trip. It will change lives forever.

By Charlotte Daniel

Charlotte is a single lady who works with children at a local childcare center. She enjoys learning and is working toward getting her GED.

Sunglasses Found

My husband and I have a new hobby: biking. This is the time of the week when we leave our worries and our friends at home and share a laugh and our thoughts in nature.

As usual, on the second Sunday of November, we set our bikes on the car and went to Tom Brown Park. This is the beauty of Florida: the weather is always on your side. We feel sorry that soon we will have to leave it, so, now more than ever we take advantage of every sun ray God blesses us with.

When our legs, or to be more precise- my legs, were tired we decided to go home. When we reached the exit of the park, my husband saw something on the road; actually he almost drove over it. He stopped the car and went to see what it was. He came back with a case of sunglasses in his hands. "Look what was on the road" he told me. Sweaty and tired, I had no interest in a pair of scratched sunglasses. "Leave them on the side of the road so they will be no danger for other cars and maybe the owner will look for them and find them eventually." I told him. "No", my husband said. "There is little chance for the person who lost them to find them in the grass. Let's take them and try to return them next time to the Lost and Found kiosk." I agreed, I put them in the glove compartment, and we went back home. These sunglasses reminded me of my friend Esther, also my classmate, who broke hers a while ago. My thoughts wandered to her, because these sunglasses were a prescription sunglasses pair. Esther was really upset when she

broke them, and I thought the owner of this pair must feel the same.

The next week-end we didn't go biking because it was a rainy one, so, silent and unnoticed the lost sunglasses spent two weeks in our car. When the sun changed its mind and decided to show up again, we went to the park again. I should mention that only very occasionally I open the glove compartment and I almost forgot about the sunglasses, but that day I decided not to take my keys with me but leave them in the car. When I opened the compartment- surprise: the sunglasses were still there.

"Look what I found" I told my husband. "Let's return them you Good Samaritan." I lovingly teased him. But we looked for the Lost and Found kiosk in vain. Our beautiful, favorite park does not have one. Or, at least we couldn't find it. So, the sunglasses ended up for the second time in our glove compartment.

The next morning, as usual, I picked Esther and Suzy up to go to school. We started sharing our weekends and what we had done lately. Esther told us that when she came to the car she saw her neighbors' wallet on the picnic table outside. They had a party the evening before, and they must have forgotten it on the table. She knocked on the door, nobody answered, so she dropped it off at our community's police station on her way to my car. This immediately reminded me of the sunglasses. I told Esther to open the glove compartment and to take them out and I began to tell them their story.

Esther, like any other woman, tried them on. "I can not believe it", she said, "They are just my prescription". "Then yours they should be", I replied. Esther is a lighthearted, witty personality. Without more ado she started joking about how she looked like an 80's movie star and so on. From a joke to another we arrived at school. In the classroom, playfully Esther told me: "And you know what Vivi, next time when you give me a present, make sure

that it is made in the U.S., not in China.” Nancy, a colleague of ours, turned pale. “May I see your sunglasses?” she asked Esther in a shaky voice. Esther looked at me with a funny face and we started to laugh. “No, seriously, where did you buy those sunglasses?” demanded Nancy.

“Why? Did you, by mistake, lose a pair like this one?” asked Esther.

The response was the one we already anticipated: “Yes”.

It turned out that two weeks ago Nancy had mysteriously lost her sunglasses. She could not recall the time or the circumstances, but she felt really miserable about it. In fact, everyone in the class, but Esther and I, knew about it because she told them one day when we missed the class. No one could believe that from a city with over 150,000 people I was the one to find them. Neither my husband nor I could.

Weird and wonderful things occur every day, but when it happens to you, it changes your perspective about world. I started asking myself if it was just a pure coincidence or if the whole story was meant to be this way. Do I know the answer? No. But, for sure, I’m thankful that I was the one to make Nancy happy again.

By Viviana Daraban

Viviana is a student at the Leon County School in Tallahassee, florida. Her Teacher is Susan Lester.

Conquering Lion

Dear Lord please take it away
These thoughts in my mind that troubles me day by day

Shadows bouncing off my walls at night
I'm so scared, I feel me slipping deeper, deeper within myself
Why does it feel like my mind is trying to chain me down
How long will it be until everything collapses
I know I'm in trouble
Trapped in these four walls with no windows
Alone, cold, wet, and dark nothing could live within these
walls
Staring out through the back of my eyes Screaming yearning
for a glance of hope
Air escaping my lungs, like a run away slave
With every outburst
Clawing at these walls
Nails bending back, breaking off
Trying to escape my world, my prison
Nothing but trouble
Don't know where to run if I break free
I'm so worried
I wanna get out
I'll escape out of my thoughts
Time and time again
Me feeling out of place
Keeps me confident in my mental prison
They no longer hold me down
Nothing is for certain
I just wanna get out
My walls, closing in on me
I'm stronger each time trouble comes along
Now I'm like the conquering lion
The conquering lion within will break off these chains
Giving the victory
I shall break every link
Again and again roaring and pulling
Trouble, you can't tame me anymore
Give me the victory of breaking free

From this mental battle
Pulling and roaring
Clawing into the ground I stand on
To get a grip on life
Popping the links to the titanium thorned chain
I wear these chains so handsomely
7 time around my neck with each attempt of breaking free
I feel me slipping off into myself
Deeper and deeper I go
Drip drop, drip drop
I bleed with pleas
Songs of redemption
Dear Lord take this away
Give me the strength I need to conquer this war
I can't give up, I'm getting close
To My Salvation.

By David

Dedication to My Daughter, Markita "Washington" Gorman

Thirty years ago on December 2, 1976, I gave birth to a beautiful little girl, who I named Markita LaTrelle Washington. Our story took place earlier in my life. Forty-eight years and ten moths ago I, Barbara "Washington" Allen, was born to Joseph Earl Washington and Lois Carolyn "Noble" Washington.

We lived in a little town called Mayport, Florida. Mayport is a small fishing and shrimping community. During this time my father was a fisherman. You may recognize this town by the adjoining military base (Mayport Naval Station).

My mom, Lois, had her first child (Arness Washington), my oldest brother and was married at the age of fifteen. That should explain why she was not ready to be a mother and had no knowledge of raising children. My dysfunctional family proves that.

I remember living with my father, Joseph, until I was about fifteen; then we ended up with my mother, Lois. Being raised most of my childhood years by my father, or shall I say “shelter was being provided”, I was placed or rather forced into the role of mother for one older and two younger siblings. But what did I know about being a mother figure, not having had a resident mother.

I became one of those children looking for what was lacking in my life, but of course, looking in all the wrong places. I don't remember my mom ever showing or telling me she loved me. I may sound a bit bitter but I was forced into this position.

Meanwhile Mrs. Washington, my mother, went on her merry way breeding more children that maybe she felt she was ready to care for now. Of course, the four children she left behind were treated like strangers. Strangers are really treated better.

My three siblings and I were reunited with my mother in my eighth grade year. I thought “WOW”; I finally get to be what I was at the time – a child. It didn't quite work that way. I'M ALL GROWN UP NOW! I have three siblings that are now my responsibility.

At that time in my life I needed guidance. No one ever told me little girls needed to change their panties everyday, brush your teeth, just plain daily hygiene. To me knowing the importance of an education was like knowing that people really lived on the

moon. School was someplace I had to go; no one ever told me I had to participate.

My mom, to my knowledge, never cared about education. I know for a fact she never tried to instill the importance of it in any of her eight children. She always told us that if we didn't want to go to school, don't take a chair from someone who does. To children, that is music to their ears. Of course, school became a place to hang out.

I made it half way through my twelfth grade year, then "HELLO", my daughter, Markita, was born December 2, 1976; then I was married December 20, 1976. Over the next thirty years, I tried to complete my education but two weak subjects, science and history, along with my lack of self esteem kept me in a negative state of mind.

This year, 2006, I've had a major change in my life. I've had to become totally dependent on myself. This year could make or break me. With my daughter in front of me pulling me all the way, I decided I didn't want to be broken so I stepped up to the plate with a new attitude.

I ended a nine year going nowhere relationship and job. Got a stress free job, stress free relationship, new residence and enrolled in an adult continuing education class. GUES WHAT? I conquered my fear of science and history, took the exam, and PASSED. I plan to continue my education.

My daughter, Marikita, now 30 years old, is my INSPIRATION. Since she started school twenty-five years ago, she has never stopped educating herself, nor has she stopped pushing me. I especially want to finish school for my three children, Markita, Teneka, Rodney, and my three grandchildren, Khari, Jerry, and Janae; in hope that the non caring ends here.

Thank you, Markita, for being what your mother lacked her entire life – that someone special who cares. **I LOVE YOU!**

By Anonymous Author

What Freedom Means To Me

For me, freedom means many things:

To express our ideas, feelings and beliefs. To be able to choose what to do. To travel to any location. Saying no to fear. Accepting the challenges of life. To be concerned about the freedom of others. Not to depend on any addiction. To follow our dreams

Freedom is not free. Brave men have paid the price for our freedom with their lives. Freedom is the most valuable condition that a human being can have, together with good health, we can do everything we want to do. For these reasons everyone should take care of their health and protect our freedom.

At this moment of my life I don't feel freedom because I live in a country where another language is spoken. It is a disadvantage, temporarily, right now. I am not able to make new friends who speak English. Until I learn English I will not feel my total freedom.

By Elsa de Goncalves

An Unforgettable Experience

Culebra is a little island on the northeast of Puerto Rico. This island – municipality has a population of about 2,800 habitants living there permanently. Culebra is very mountainous. The green mountains end in the blue sea with white sand. Above the sky is an intense blue. The songs of the birds, the sound of the waves beating the edge of the beach, making a foamy ribbon over the sand, all together, giving a magnificent view. It is spectacular. Some people of the Big Island (Puerto Rico), Europeans, USA citizens and others have beach houses on the mountains around the island. The view of the white houses with red roofs dispersed over the green mountains is very interesting.

On the New Year's Eve, my family and I decided to go to Culebra to do something different and celebrate the festivity there. The tradition in the island on New Year's Eve is very particular. Early in the evening most of the people dress up and go to the church. Then, everybody; habitants, visitors, rich and poor go to the square in the middle of the town, carrying foods, drinks and their own tables and chairs to celebrate together like a big happy family. There are fireworks and music, sponsored by the mayor of the city. Everybody dances and sings Christmas songs until dawn when people start to return home.

For my family and I, this was an unforgettable experience. Really, we enjoyed it. I invite you to visit le Culebra in this special night. I am sure you will also enjoy a lot and want to visit again.

By Margarita de Jesus

Margarita is an ESOL student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando, her teacher is Vince Scalise

Living My Dreams

I must tell you that while growing up on the streets, learning to read was not important (so I thought back then). I always thought that if I could sling a hammer and work a tape measure I would always be able to find work. I had never anticipated that an accident on the job would leave me injured and unable to be a laborer. I soon realized that by not being able to read, my options were limited at best and often non-existent. Today it is a joy to be able to read what my stepdaughter has written. Reading has changed every thing about my life. This is living a dream.

I lived in the streets from the time I was six years old. I got involved with drinking and drugs. I did not have parents who cared about me. They had lots of children so the welfare checks kept getting bigger. I lived in vacant buildings with rats, bats, and cockroaches. I had become complacent and accepted my role in life and never let any one know I could not read or write. I soon realized that by not being able to read, my options were limited at best and often non-existent.

I got into a twelve-step program for my drug addiction. A sponsor found out I could not read. At this time I was in my forties. Going in and out of jails most of my life I did not find the need to let any one know that I could not read. I thought I had an image to up hold. My sponsor took me to the library and signed me up for the literacy program. That was the start of my life. After I had been hurt on the job, I could no longer work the jobs I had before and had to learn a new trade. Because I now knew how to read, I was able to go to ACE, get my high school diploma, and continue my education through a technical school.

My wife has a daughter from a previous marriage. For many years I really wanted to be part of her life but my shame and guilt

kept me from being honest about not being educated. When visiting family over the Christmas holiday my stepdaughter, Angela, had written a poem for me to read.

I Am

I am, the child of sorrow
I am, the child of pain.

I am, the wind that stands still
I am, the wind that doesn't blow.

I am, a book with no pages
I am, a book that is never read.

I am, a question that is asked
I am, an answer that is untold.

I am, what people want me to be
But not what I really am.

--Angela Christine Mathauer

I am amazed how this poem identifies me and because of the Literacy program I can read the poem and know this is not me today. I thought I would be alone and dead by now. I love the idea of having a family today. Today it is a joy to be able to read what she has written and now be able to read with the grandchildren.

In closing I would like to say for someone from the streets to get the life I have is beyond my wildest dreams. Learning to read has opened up a whole new world and life for me. I not only have a high school diploma but went on to architectural school, and not only do I have a family I have a career.

Today I am living my dream.

By Joses DeMoranville

Joses' formal education ceased at the third grade until, as an adult, he sought to learn how to read.

My Country's History

My name is Jean Jacques Dessalines; I was born in Ill Guinea, Africa, in 1758. From the day I was born, I was taught that I was a special and gifted young man. I was brought to Cape Francais (now Cap Haitian), where a French planter purchased me, whose name I subsequently assumed. I always thought that being a slave was against natural laws. In 1791, I left my master and joined the insurgent army under Biassou, a rebel leader. What would follow would remain in history as unique and one of the greatest events in the nineteenth century.

In the servile war that followed I distinguished myself and became adjutant general of Jean Francois, the Negro Commander. Later I sided with Toussaint Louverture whose ideas were more defined. I showed him lot of respect. Toussaint allied with the Spanish when I joined him; he later joined the French. In the campaign that followed, having attained the rank of lieutenant general, I led my men against the mulatto chief Rigaud. My success, with the promptness and energy evinced in this movement, recommended me to Toussaint who invariably sent me where the utmost severity was considered necessary. My name spread terror everywhere I went and thousands of mulattoes were slaughtered, butchered, or shot under my orders. It was a must to eliminate those mulattoes who were spying on us for the French.

I led a most dissolute life and enriched my men by extensive robberies perpetrated under the guise of legal confiscations. I had to do so because I wanted complete obedience of my men; we wanted guns and munitions. In 1802 I conducted a guerilla war against General Leclerc, who had been sent to Haiti by Napoleon to restore order in the colony. My obstinate defense of St Marc against Leclerc and Lieutenant Bonder was characteristic. When unable to hold the town any longer I burned it, a practice I would use all over during the war. I set fire to my own palace and butchered all the white colons of the place because of their role in the combat. I also butchered all those I met on my retreat. Later I submitted to General Leclerc after the affair Crete a Pierrot. Peace having been established, I was made governor of the southern part of the island, with the rank of general. With that move they thought they had me. I played along; cooled of for a while. I would never forget my oath that was ending slavery, fighting the French, and returning the land to its people. I waited for the perfect occasion to strike the French again. It came when the French arrested my mentor, Toussaint Louverture. After being arrested he was taken to France where he died.

I had a motive, another dramatic event had happened when the yellow fever attacked the French army, numbering among its victims, General Leclerc, who had defeated me months before. I declared war on the French and asked them to leave the country. They refused; General Rochambeau rose to commander of the French and at once adopted retaliatory measures against my insurgents. He tortured to death the Negro general, Maurepas, along with his entire family. A terrible retribution was determined. I erected 500 gibbets and hanged half a French regiment that I had captured by a bold countermarch. Now the mulattoes joined my cause and wanted to fight against the French. They wanted to create a new state also. I had a considerable force. A war of extermination followed and in December 1803, aided by an

English squadron, the French were compelled to evacuate the island.

On January 1, 1804, I proclaimed the independence of Haiti before blacks and mulattoes. My Secretary of War, Boironn Tonnere, read the Act of Independence. Our independence was unique; we were the first black free independent nation. We were the second free country on the American continent. We would help others gain theirs as well (Koupe Tet boule kay). January 1st of 1804 was the greatest day in Haitian history and the identity of blacks all over the world. We had defeated Napoleon's invincible army. Since then January 1st was retained for our holiday, our Independence Day. That's my country's history; there no better history.

By Jean Jacques Dessalines

My Life

When I decided to get married I was living with my family and I never thought I would have travel to another country. My husband was living in the US and I had to come to the US with him. It was very hard for me to stay alone without anybody I knew. My parents, brothers and sisters were living in Mexico.

My husband and I decided to go live with my brothers, they were living in Florida, and he thought I would feel better. I just wanted to be with some of my family. At that time I was pregnant. Mi niña (my daughter) was born in Florida, but when my daughter was two months my husband wanted to move back to Texas. That's where all his family was. He used to live there. Six months later I got pregnant again.

My husband couldn't find work and he had to come back to Florida. I had to stay with his family because I was pregnant and couldn't travel. It was hard for me because I had my daughter but nobody else from my family.

Mi niño (my son) was born in Texas. We had just been there for one month and then we moved again to Florida because my husband had to come back to his work, that's where he works. At that time until now we have been living in Florida.

By Isabel Diaz

The Story

I remember when I was a child my mom was always very loving. She was a single mom with my sister and I. I remember always going with my mom to sell clothes. She would take two big bags, one in each hand, walking with me in the town. When she would go to another town she had to walk too, because we did not have transportation. We would walk for approximately two hours. I loved this time because she always told beautiful stories. I remember one called, 'El Hogro' about a Giant. He had a big house with a garden and fruit trees. He was always mad and never happy. He did not smile. Nobody went to the Giants house, everybody thought he was bad. One day some children were playing in the garden in the fruit trees. He exclaimed that he did not like it when anybody played or smiled. One child said, "puedes jugar y sonreir con nosotros tambien, (you can play and smile with us too)." He understood that when you share and play with others, life is happy. This is the little story my mom would tell me.

By Samantha Diaz

A Mother's Love

I'm a part time mom, or at least I try to be,
I love my children, now this you can see.

Unfortunately this situation is sad,
You see these two beautiful boys, they live with their dad.

I fell all alone in this battle I face,
My children and I shouldn't have been out of place.

I drive over 800 miles and several states in between,
Praying when I see them, their father's not mean.

I work full time hours and pay child support,
I don't have to worry, it goes through the court.

The rest of my money, I save it aside
Because I know soon I will go for a ride.

Thousands of dollars I spend every year,
Trying to bond with the ones that are dear.

My mind is a mess, and my heart is broken,
No one understands, so I just haven't spoken.

Can anyone help me, I'm losing will power,
I won't give up on my kids, so I guess I will sour.

My sister is loyal, I can't thank her enough,
For being there for me, when times have been rough.

My mom is a wonder, but boy is she wrong,
I am weak and I'm brittle and so far from strong.

Living Our Dreams

I have lots of friends, who all have my back,
But I fooled them all, cause I'm way off track.

My patience is low and my stress is high,
I hold everything in so n o one sees me cry.

This last trip that I took was the worst that I had,
I can't even remember ever being so mad.

My car broke down and forced us to walk,
It was several miles, much more than a block.

Our hotel was poor, as cheap as can be,
I had to get then boys off that street, so don't you see.

We waited for hours for my dad to arrive,
All I could do is thank God we're alive.

We went back to fix the car, and we tried,
But the Plymouth Laser just had its last ride.

So now here I am, alone on the Greyhound,
Missing my children, I feel my heart pound.

I lost so much by being away,
But I dream of the day, I join PTA.

Stress and aggravation are starting to wear on me,
But my babies are worth it, now you can see.

Can anybody help me, does anyone understand,
A mother's love is more than a loving hand.

By Misti Dwyer

Misti attends Okaloosa Walton College in Niceville, Fl. Her teacher is Sarah Wiley. She has taught her to believe in herself. She is married to an incredible man, a mother of two beautiful boys, and raising her nephew. After graduating with her GED, she has full intentions to pursue a degree in writing. She is blessed to have her family supporting her through her new journey.

Experience in the US

I have lived in the US for one year. Leaving here has been an interesting experience for me. My husband and I bought our first house. We also got a new family member. I'm very much enjoying living in the US now. We finally got a yard and pretty house. Every neighbor is very nice and friendly to us. I'm very happy and lucky to find such a good house and good neighbors.

My husband and I got a new family member which is a puppy. We named him Buddy because he will be our best friend, and we will be together always.

He is sweet and a handful of a dog. I have to take him walking every day. That has made me go out, and it gives me a chance to meet new people and to speak English. Buddy has brought us happiness and joy. Also, Buddy has made my heart braver and sweeter than before.

My experience in the US is always a big challenge and is changing my life. I'm very much enjoying living in the US. Having a house makes my husband and me feel at home and more responsible. Just looking at my new family member Buddy makes me smile every day. I hope I can keep this happiness forever.

By Anonymous Author

My Father, My Mother, Myself

The happiest memories of my childhood life were with my father and mother. Although they are both deceased today, their memories keep them both very alive in my heart and soul everyday of my life.

I remember on my 6th birthday my father promised me a radio. I waited on the steps of our porch the day of my birthday while he went shopping to get it. He pulled up in his car with the box. I was so excited when I opened it. He never failed when he promised me something. My father was a strong advocate for the importance of a good education. He tried to impress on me how difficult life can be without it. My father passed away in 1973 due to lung cancer. I believed it was a true blessing that I had my daughter Tina before he passed. She was a comfort to me during that difficult time.

My happiest memories of my mother are of when we were getting ready for the holidays. She always enjoyed shopping for outfits for my siblings and me. On the morning of the holiday she would prepare us for the special church event. Then we would travel to her sister's home where they would all prepare the holiday dinner for us. Today this tradition is still carried on to the new generation thanks to my mother's and her siblings' beliefs. These are just a few of the memories.

In my present life I have three grandchildren and I would like to impress on them how important a good education is in today's world. Hopefully they will continue on to college to become professional people and have careers they enjoy in their lives.

Even though both my parents are departed, in their remembrances I would like to complete my GED, having learned how important education is. A GED will also help to fulfill my own dreams and hopes. My GED is just a start for me.

The wonderful memories that my parents have given me in my childhood, make me feel confidence in my adult life today. And I thank them today and always.

By Shirley J Fallon

Shirley is married with one daughter and three grandchildren. She is a former CAN specializing in Alzheimer's care and is seeking her GED to make a career change. She also likes to keep her mind stimulated. Shirley attends GED classes at Manatee Community College's Jobs Etc. Program in Bradenton, Fl.

Don't Give Up On Me

If only I could read,
I would feel I belong
To a growing society, who
Cares how I get along.

They say it wasn't my fault.
They say it wasn't my fault,
But I'm an adult now,
Who will teach me now?
It's never too late and
I'm willing to learn.
So, don't give up on me,
There are so many lessons to learn.

I am so grateful for the Volusia Literacy Program. It has provided a pathway for me to become a literate member of our community. And a special thanks to all volunteers who are willing to give what they know, so I can give what I know.

By Jacqueline Field

Ms. Fields is a 52 year old female, totally committed to improving her skills to obtain her GED. She is employed full-time assisting the elderly with daily life skills. She entered the program in the spring of 2002 at level 2 reading and is currently at level 6. She has submitted several writings but this one seems to have the most impact.

Living My Dreams

Living my dream would be for me to become an American Sign Language Interpreter. I was born and raised in Okinawa, so my first language is Japanese. Learning a second language, English, is an on-going struggle for me. This personal experience has fueled my desire to help others and I currently work in an Exceptional Students Education school as a Teacher's Assistant. I am also the substitute American Sign Language Interpreter for one of the Special Education students who is deaf.

When I first started working with Special Education students, I realized that by using my hands, I would find it easier to talk with the children. The local college offered American Sign Language (ASL) classes at night, so I enrolled to be able to better understand "my special students". As I was learning ASL, which is a visual language, I realized that my understanding of English was improving. I also found that I really enjoyed learning a third language. Completing the American Sign Language 1 and 2 classes at Okaloosa Walton College has given me an insight into the Deaf Culture that I did not realize existed. Some of the communication problems that Deaf people and our Special Education children have are similar to the problems I have with

English. This has given me a deep rooted desire to want to communicate with others in their own language.

Communicating with the Deaf Community has helped me to understand and has made it easier to establish a rapport with our Special Education students. The Speech Therapists at our school have shown me some techniques that enable me to communicate with our students with more positive results. They have also have given me valuable advice on how I can reach into our students minds. I have realized that I can not teach the students from my level. I need to get on their level if I am going to be able to effectively reach these special children. This also holds true for communicating with the Deaf.

I have learned to see them as the real people they are, not as someone who is disabled, but as fellow human beings who speak a different language, just like me.

I would like to help bridge the language gap between hearing people and Deaf people. My husband has taken the ASL 1 and 2 classes at the college and we are now both involved with an area Deaf Fellowship group and with the Deaf Ministry at our church. Besides, when we get older, we might lose our hearing and using American Sign Language will allow us to communicate with each other.

I am furthering my education by taking English as a Second Language (ESOL) and General Education Classes at the college, as well as continuing my self study of ASL via the internet, with DVDs, and with books. My wonderful ESOL instructor and his assistant are helping me to improve my English in a fun and effective manner. When I am surfing the internet for information on American Sign Language, sometimes several hours have passed by. Time seems to fly as if I am in another world. I really

enjoy all of the different learning tools that are offered.

Once I become fluent in American Sign Language, I plan on taking the ASL Interpreter classes at the area university. These classes will enable me to take the challenging NAD-RID National Interpreter Certification (NIC) tests. Once I finish all of these steps, I will be “Living My Dream” as an American Sign Language Interpreter.

By Shigeko Freeman

Shigeko is married with two grown children. She is enrolled in Family Literacy English classes and her instructor is Mr. Brian Jones and his assistant is his wife Ms. Melody Jones. Shigeko enjoys being in the class with many international students.

Pop Moves In

At first, I talked to Pop to see if he was ready to move in. He said “Yes”. I wasn’t sure he would be happy living in Clearwater. When he came to visit, we had a good time. But, he did not want to live alone. So, we decided to move him in, and we all get along very well.

For me, it’s nice to come home to someone who is so pleasant. We do things together. We have a good time. He helps me do grocery shopping and cooking. We go to lunch. We watch old movies. He’s very neat, helpful, and considerate.

When we go to his doctor, he appreciates that I go in, also. Tony and I used to worry about him being alone. We used to feel sad when we would leave him in Naples. Even my grandchildren like Pop, especially Jenny. She likes to spend time with him.

Now that Pop moved in, we are happier.

By Victoria Gabriello

Experiences in the U.S.

I have lived in the U.S. for the last four years. I think a positive experience for me here in the U.S. was becoming a cancer survivor. Another great experience was the opportunity to publish a book.

I was in technical training for my job in the Air Force at Sheppard AFB in Texas when I was diagnosed with cancer. Soon after I was transferred to Lackland AFB in Texas where I had surgery for the removal of the cancer. After that I received radiation therapy to eliminate any possibility that the cancer might come back. Becoming a survivor for me was the beginning of a new life.

I have also had an opportunity to publish a book of poems. After years of writing poems, I made a selection of some of my poems and published them under the title *When Returns the Spring/ Cuando Regrese la Primavera*. The book was done on both English and Spanish and is selling in the internet on Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com.

The positive experience of being a cancer survivor has made me feel like I was reborn to a new life. The positive experience of publishing a book was for me the completion of a lost dream. The positive experiences I have had in the U.S. have made me see life with a different point of view.

By Edward Garcia

The Funny Scary Story

One day on Halloween Day I had dressed up as a scarecrow and sat on my front porch. My Auntie and cousin had come over and they thought I was fake and started to play around with me. Then I lifted my head up and they both jumped and started screaming. Then, after that my mom came home and I hid in the closet with a big knife with ketchup smeared on it. My granny told my mom to get something out of the closet for her and then she opened the door and I jumped out and screamed. That was so funny to me that night.

A truly scary time was when my Granny and Auntie told me that our neighborhood used to be haunted. There used to be an old juke joint right across the street from us. A man and lady were at the place when the lady's husband set her on fire and she ran out and down the highway. My Granny said after that day they closed the place down and you could hear a song playing from the juke box at the same time every afternoon. Even though I never heard the song playing the story still spooked me out.

By Michael Garrison

Michael attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL, where his teacher is Rhonda Currier.

What is a Father?

A father is a rock
that can't be moved.
A rough road that can't
be driven on.
A father is that unspoken

love that every little boy needs
in his life but is not
shown.
He is the hero of
the household.
My father was there
for me, but never told
me he loved me.
I guess it was mano machoism
but now sometimes I wish
I could've heard those words
time to time.

By Timothy Gay

Timothy is a GED student in Tallahassee working to become a homebuilder.

My New Year's Goals

For this new year, 2007, my personal goal is being healthy, happy and surrounded by my loved ones. I'm also looking forward to an opportunity where I can develop my professional career in systems engineering. I would like to work in an industry checking all the processes, improving computer systems and also designing useful things. One of the most important things to me for this year is finally becoming stable economically' as much as possible. I hope during this year wherever I go and whatever I do, it will be a result of making good decisions.

By Elizabeth Goncalves

Elizabeth Goncalves is a student at Literacy Services of IRC, Inc. Her tutor is Joe Askren.

My Journey Through Life

When I was a child, I had a hard time in school. I was a German immigrant during World War II. Language was difficult for me. I was very quiet when I was real young, but as I grew, I understood and spoke both English and German. As I went to school my report card showed that I could not keep up with the class and that I did not get along well with other children. As a result, I was evaluated and sent to a “special school.” This was the beginning of not learning anything.

After leaving the “special school” with a fake graduation certificate at sixteen years old, I went to work in gas stations, department stores, and a butcher shop where I was a delivery boy. I worked all kinds of jobs until I was about nineteen years old, and I still had problems with my education.

At nineteen years old, I joined the U.S. Merchant Marines. I worked on all kinds of ships and traveled all over the world. I worked with all kinds of people from all walks of life. I saw many different cultures in this world. This one job I had, I worked for an oceanographic ship, Anton Bruun, one of the finest ocean-going vessels afloat in 1966. While on this ship, I spent fourteen months on the west side of South America between Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and lots of time in the Galapagos Islands working along side a famous scientific staff. It was one of the best times of my life.

When I was twenty-seven, I stopped going to sea for a while. I got married and raised children. I went to work on the docks as a

longshoreman for about three years. I then got into my own bar business for about a year; it did well. After that I got a job working with an elevator construction company. It was a good job and interesting work. I worked there about a year and a half. I also bought an on-going delicatessen business. I did really well and worked lots of hours. I was getting tired, so I sold out after two years. I was thirty-three years old, and still I was having problems reading and writing.

For the next seven years, from 1973 to 1980, I lived in Central America. I returned to sea in 1986. In 1990 computers came out, and I started to learn how to write e-mails to my wife. At this time I also read the Bible, which helped me to read better. I retired from the Merchant Marines and have now decided to go back to school to learn how to read and write correctly and then maybe return to Central America.

By Hans Gottschlich

Hans is a senior citizen who is a student at Gulf Coast Community College. He has returned to finish his high school education after being out of school for over fifty years. His teacher is Barbara Crowell.

My Mom

My mom is the person who has been a wonder in my life. My mom has taught me to enjoy music and be a great cook; she has also taught me to be a good dresser.

From my mom I learned about how to enjoy music. Every day we would listen to gospel music or R and B. We would mimic the

people on the radio or stereo. I never could hold a note, but my mom can sing like a bird. But I still enjoy music every day.

My mom taught me about being a great cook. I would sit on a stool and watch her while she cooked. She would say, "You have to learn how to cook to be able to take care of me." Even when I wanted to play or watch TV, she would always say, "It's a time and a place for everything." Still, to this day, I am learning about cooking.

One of the most important things my mom taught me is how to be a nice dresser. We would model clothes to see who looked the best. She would say, "Take notes, because when you go out, you never know who you might meet." Still, to this day, she wears her clothes and I always tell my mom she looks pretty. She smiles and says to me, "So do you." Whenever we go to church or any where, we dress to know for sure we are looking good.

My mom has influenced me in so many ways. She has taught me a lot. She taught me to learn to enjoy music, to be a great cook and a great dresser. Thank you, Mom, for showing me all the things that I need to know in life.

By Winifred Green

Winifred is a widow mother of six children. She is a student at Lively in Tallahassee. Winifred knows that going to Lively has given her opportunities.

In Memory of My Uncle Jim

My Uncle Jim had a great influence in my life. He always took an interest in his sister's kids. He fought in World War II. After the war he took me under his wing and showed me the facts of life. He got me my first job as a plumber's helper.

As a little kid Uncle Jim was always so funny and made me and my brothers and sisters laugh. When he came over to our house he would bring us gifts and sing and dance with us. When he went off to war, we were all very sad. All my uncles served in World War II. After the war he came home with lots of gifts for us and a new Aunt Verna that he met and married in Ft. Sill Oklahoma where he was discharged.

He went to work as a plumber. I was working with my father as a carpenter but was more interested in his job. One cold winter day the plumbers were all standing and sitting around a nice warm lead pot heater. I had hit my cold thumb with a hammer and while thawing it out at that nice lead pot heater I decided that I too wanted to be a plumber. So I ask my uncle if he thought his boss would hire me as his helper. With his help I went on to be a journeyman plumber. Then after 3 years of duty in the U. S. Army, during the Korean War. I went to school under the G.I. bill of rights. I received my Master Plumbers licenses in March of 1966. My uncle was so proud of me.

My Uncle Jim was a great man in my eyes. He was funny and cared about his nephews and nieces. He went to war for his country, taught me about life and gave me a great trade and career that has taken me through life. When he passed away I took it very hard and will miss him forever.

By Arnold Gruning

Arnold served in Korea from 1952 – 1953. He was awarded the Purple Heart Combat Infantry Badge. He and his wife, Mary, have been married 52 years! They have three daughters. They have six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, Arnold attends GED classes in Leon County, Florida.

My New Life

It seems that in a short time my life has taken a completely different path since August, I have moved from North Carolina back to Florida to be with my family and get away from the cold. Secondly, about a week after I moved back to Florida, I found out that I was pregnant. Excited, but scared I told my family the news. I found out a couple months later it was a girl. I sat at night and thought about how I was going to take care of this new life that had been shared with me. Her dad wasn't around and never would be so I would have to take care of her by myself (with the help of my family). I know it will not be easy, but definitely rewarding. I soon found out about a program offered at T.R. Jackson Pre-K Center through Santa Rosa Adult School. I can get my GED and take parenting classes to ensure that my little girl and my future will be successful. With the help of a loving, caring and skilled teacher, I will have my GED and be able to start college in the fall if all goes well. Although this is not going to be easy, I am going to do my best to provide a future for my baby and be the best mother that I can be.

By Crystal Haberer

My name is Crystal. I am eight months pregnant with a little girl. I am going to the Santa Rosa Adult School to obtain my G.E.D.

My Son Did the Cutest Thing

Little kids do the cutest things. This story is about my son. My son's name is Kosy Hall. He was born in West Africa, Nigeria. We came here when he was four years old. When he got here, he was going through culture shock. I was, too. You know how curious

young children can be, and how they love to experiment. Well, that was the case with my son. He is very experimental, he loves science. He likes to know about rocks, worms, how things grow and form, etc.

Early one morning I went into my son's room to clean it up. Well, I got the shock of my life. I found one dozen eggs underneath his pillow. At first, I was puzzled. However, I tried to figure out what was going on. Before I actually drew my mother into the situation, I thought of a few reasons why he would do such a thing. Maybe he gets hungry in the middle of the night, since we did not have enough food when we lived in Nigeria. Sometimes there might not be enough food to fill him up until morning, so he might hide food. I thought of everything; at the end, I gave up.

Finally, I called my mom. My mom and I asked my son why those eggs are under your pillow, and why did you take them out of the refrigerator? I told him, "You better have a good explanation for this". Then he told us that his teacher taught him about hibernating and that heat helps to hatch eggs into baby chickens. So, he said, "Mom, I thought if I lay on the eggs and give them heat from my body that the eggs will hatch. If the eggs hatch we will then have enough chickens to lay more eggs and Grandma doesn't have to buy any more eggs." So I explained to him that he was right. Hibernating and heat from a light bulb or body heat can hatch the eggs. I told him it was a nice thought to try to help the family but please do not take any eggs out of the refrigerator. Still today I don't know how he managed to sleep on one dozen eggs without crushing them.

By Kimberly Hall

Kimberly Hall is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is Ms. Chaundra L. Whitehead

Three Experiences in the U.S.A.

I've been living in America about six years. I realize a lot of differences from where I came from. I came from China. Here are three of them: the way to teach a child, how helpful people can be, and going to college.

The way to teach a child is encourage him more than deny. One day I showed my father-in-law a word that my five-year-old boy wrote on a paper. My boy was just learning spelling words. He was so excited that he could spell it out by himself, and wrote it out. That was his first time to write a word. His grandpa said, "Just encourage him if he did good on it, and try not to say 'not good' if he missed it. "I think this is a very good way to encourage a child to do something. Also, I was checking my boy's homework papers from his kindergarten. The teacher marked smiley faces when he did good work; even wrote "Great" or "Excellent!" if he really did well. I have never seen papers marked "Bad" or "X" signs on it. I think this is a very good way to encourage a child to do something. I really appreciate their kind, also smart attitude to teach the child: give them more space to dare to make mistakes and explore freely in their mind.

As I worked in Dollar Tree, I know everyone was helping me. One day a customer was asking me where she could find a scrapbook. I thought she was looking for a reading book, so I showed her the reading book isle. Later she showed me where she found it, and I knew I had shown her the wrong place. Then I realized I misunderstood the meaning of "scrapbook". She explained me the meaning. Now I remember this word so well because of her help. Sometimes if I couldn't understand what item my customer was asking about, my manager always explained to me very patiently. I feel the people here in the U.S.A. are very polite and warm-hearted to help people. It's easier to work here in

the U.S.A. without stress as a cashier. This encourage me to go to work. I'm not afraid to face new people here.

Another experience in the U.S.A. is our English class here at the college. I tried to go to college so hard in my country, but I failed for four years. I thought it would be impossible to go to college in the future. But now I have the chance to enroll in this program, even free. I don't care if I'll not get a degree, but this is an education. It is what I was looking for. I came here for increase my vocabulary at beginning, but now I learned more than English words and grammar. It's about life. This is so great for the new foreign people who need such kind of help.

Now I learned how to teach my child in a better way, encouraged him instead of scold him. Also I learned to be more patient when I am waiting to check me out and the cashier makes a mistake. I wouldn't get mad so easily, because I know it is not easy to be a cashier. The college gives me more opportunity to study English, know more knowledge about life, and philosophy, too. It's much more than just a degree. I really appreciate all the experiences in America. It's a great harvest in my life.

By Weihong Hatton

Weihong is a mother of five-year-old boy: Marco. She is a ESOL student in Ft. Walton Beach. Weihong feels that the ESOL program has helped her increase her vocabulary. She really enjoys the program. Her teacher is Mary Ann. Weihong is from China.

In Remembrance of Me

Remember all the times
You could have made peace.

Remember all the times
You could have been a friend.

Remember all the times
You could have shared precious moments-
In the absolute love of God.
Remember all the times
You could have done a good deed.

Remember all the times
You could have given encouragement in time of need.
Remember all the times
You could have spoken a prayer for someone today.

Remember to always love one another
And keep my commandments deep within your hearts to stay.
Remember to always do good to those who trespass against
you.
Remember to always speak my name and do the works I know.

Remember to always speak truth in whatever you do.
Remember my love is like the rivers that do ever flow.
Remember to always stay rooted and grounded like a tree.
These I tell you, do in remembrance of me.

By Judy Hernandez

*Judy Hernandez is a student at Dixie Adult Education Program
– Old Town. Her teacher is Kathy B. Haas.*

From the Streets to JESUS

At the age of three is where I began my life. I have no memory of birth to age three. I was in a foster home for kids to be adopted. I was given a new home and a name. My name was Linda Kay Hicks. I came into a ready-made family with two kids already. They were boys. I became a Presbyterian at that time not fully understanding about God, but I learned as I grew up. My younger days were fun as I was learning new responsibilities. I learned to cook, clean and to take a spanking and keep on going. By the time I reached my teens my life changed in a lot of ways. My loving family changed. My two older stepbrothers grew up and moved out, so by then it was just the additional stepbrother and I.

My parents started drinking and so needless to say little Linda had to grow up quick. My older brothers didn't understand so they blamed me for everything including my parents' drinking problem. There were plenty of fights and arguments. I was told by my stepmother to call and lie to her employer on several occasions. I had to at times clean up after my stepfathers' bouts with drinking. I had to drive one or the other parent to detoxification and had to take care of the house as well as my younger stepbrother. By the time I turned fifteen I started to stray away drinking, using drugs and running away from home. I was sneaking around seeing a twenty-two year old and yes even sex.

At eighteen I finally decided to move away from home. I met a guy and got married just to run away from all my problems. By nineteen we had had my first child, a girl that I put up for adoption. By then I had understood why in some way my mother gave me up. In my early twenties I got married again, by the way I divorced the first guy. In 1985 I had my second girl. She was a biracial, beautiful, smart child. I started having problems in that marriage. My husband was white so you can figure out how all that went. By 1990 I was still married and by 1991 had my third girl and on my

way to a divorce or so I thought. I gave it a bit longer and by late 1991 I finally divorced. With two girls to take care of, I struggled for a long time to keep them but lost them to the government, due to lack of a stable roof. So I gave up on life and myself and began a life of prostitution and drugging and in and out of jail from 1991 to 1998.

In 1998 I rededicated myself to God. I was released from the county jail and stayed with the chaplain of the jail until I went to Teen Challenge in Columbus, Georgia. I was very enthusiastic about God and I took HIS hand and ran until I couldn't run anymore. I graduated from the program after fifteen months and worked as an intern from three months. Then, bam! A light of flashing I went through burned out. I left and when I did I held strong until one day I stopped going to church and became involved with work. By then I had met a man while I was on fire for God and today we are still a team by God's will.

Yes, we both have gotten involved in a work and rest routine or just plain ole survival. Now, God again has put me to rest to be with him and listen to what I have been doing only God has to lead and guide me again and yes I give him all the praise, glory and honor in all His ways.

I do pray this story will give some young person the will to just call on the name of Jesus when times are hard and troubled.

By Linda Hicks

Linda Hicks is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

My Autobiography

I was born to Lee Hill and Ortence Hill. My mother is from Manderville, Louisiana. My father is from Boemine, Georgia.

In the 1800's my grandfather was a turpentine dipper. This means he would chip away at the pine trees to release the sap and then collect it in buckets to be made into turpentine. During that time there weren't many jobs for blacks. Before long my father was also a turpentine dipper and farmer.

My mother had fifteen children. I am the thirteenth child. I remember in 1950 we didn't have electricity or water. Wells pumped by hand would supply our water. We had to wash clothes on a scrub board and rinse them clean in a tub of water.

My Dad had so many kids that Santa Rosa County decided to give him his own school bus to carry us back and forth from school. In September and October we didn't go to school so we could help work the farm fields. Only two of the fifteen siblings got to finish their education. I was one of the lucky two.

I had dropped out of high school because I was pregnant. I got married and had a son. I decided go back to school and in 1978, I got my GED. In 2005 I got a divorce, and it wasn't good. I had to pay my ex-husband a lot of money. I was depressed and lost my sense of mind.

Now, I have healed somewhat and my attitude is coming back up. However, I have realized that much of my earlier education has been lost in the trauma. I have a new goal to recover what I lost and achieve a better job. So, I attend Adult Education Class 2 days a week while working a full-time job. I live alone and provide for myself and I am worth the effort to climb back up to the top!

By Stella Hill

Rest In Peace

Under this soil lies a special breed
A man that is caring, kind and special, indeed
A man that loved life, and held the earth ever so dear
He went through life without any fear
When the day came and the old man heard his name
He left this earth knowing nothing would ever be the same.

A small man compared to most
With a heart that cared for all
He never said very much, to cry or boast
He tried to do all things, to his best
His word was shown by his action, for all to see
The love of life, and all it can be.

Today I know more care, less hate.

By Larry Dean Hollopeter

*I have lived here in Florida the major portion of my entire life.
I love it here and it is my home. My instructor, Polly Spring, helps
guide me toward higher education.*

What I Miss Most About My Freedom

As I sit in this correctional facility and think about my lost freedom, it is thoughts of my five children that haunt me the most. I miss so many things about my children, but there are three particular things that weigh heaviest on my heart. One of them is

the after-school chaos. Another is my dinner kitchen cluster, and the last is my daughter's hair.

The kids and I played around all the time, but it is the memories of the after-school chaos that I cherish most. Everyday, like clockwork, between 2:20 and 2:40 pm, the chaos would begin. My five kids and their friends, my "adopt-a-kids," would be in the front yard, yelling and screaming, so excited about the school day coming to an end. I was excited too. I would get a big sweaty hug and kiss from each of them as I distributed after-school popsicles. The kids would then exchange the highlights of their day with me as they ate their treats. The innocent expressions so full of childhood dreams are forever engraved in my mind. Memories like these can never be replaced, and it breaks my heart to know that I have not only robbed myself of these, but I'm depriving my precious children as well.

What I used to think of as hectic and annoying moments are often what I miss the most.

One of those is what I call the dinner kitchen cluster at my house. All of my kids managed to work their way into the kitchen just before dinner was done. My two older boys would argue over who got the bigger taste of the main course, and teasing each other for getting caught picking at whatever else was ready to be served. My two girls would get aggravated because the boys wouldn't stop and then they would begin to argue over who would help the "piggish boys" set the table. Meanwhile, my five-year old was at my feet whining for more of something on his taster spoon because he is hungry and the whole house smells delicious. As I sit here in this jail with thoughts of that family interaction and togetherness, I pray that my kids are doing better without me than I am doing without them. Every evening around dinner time, no matter what I am doing, I find myself wondering how much they miss me.

I miss my daughter's hair for more than one reason. She and I used to bond over braids. When she washed her hair in the sink and asked me to braid it, we both knew that was her signal that she needed to talk. As she confided in me, I would offer guidance and support while braiding. I miss the faint sweet smell of her jasmine shampoo. Its delicate aroma would linger in the air for hours after she left. Even though braiding my daughter's hair and enjoying the scent of her shampoo seems a small thing, I hold it dear to my heart because it is the small things that mean so much.

I know now that it is life's split-second decisions and choices that affect us and our loved ones the longest. Poor decisions can strip us of the things that are most valuable to us, OUR CHILDREN. My children are a major part of my life and my heart hurts for the lost yesterdays, todays and tomorrows I can never get back. I am fortunate though because I will get a second chance while my kids are still young. Take care of your children, decisions and choices so you don't have to rely on a second chance.

By Tonya Howe

Tonya H. is a single mother of five children. She has been studying for her G.E.D. though CFCC (Levy) while incarcerated at the Levy County Jail. She is very grateful for the opportunity to improve herself. Her teacher is Mr. Dale Fugel.

The Gates to Heaven in Hell: What Jail Can Mean

It's late and I'm driving. I know I shouldn't be because my license is suspended. Here I go again. Then sure enough as usual my luck runs out. Here come the flashing blue and red lights, the

uniforms and the handcuffs. My freedom will soon be taken away. It's nobody's fault but my own. The pain, the suffering, the guilt and the shame. The shame of having to tell my friends and loved ones that I will not be with them again for a while. This is not my first time going to jail.

So, now I'm back. Back to what I call Hell on Earth, that is jail. I sit in my cell and look out the window, just beyond the glass, the bars and the razor wire fences. The days are now slowing down. They start to drag by. I count the hours and the minutes. When will I be free? Free and home again. I look around this place, not a lot of smiles just a lot of frowns. This place we know as jail has never been a happy place to be. There is one thing that has always happened to me, that is I've found has also happened to some of the other inmates.

We realize that we are not as alone or lonely as we think we are. We do have a friend, a very close friend, and one who has never left our side. One who has been with us on every ride. Through the good and the bad times, the happy and the sad. That is our one friend who has always loved us unconditionally and who has always forgiven us for our sins. Our Higher Power, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Father. The One, the Holy Almighty One that is God. So here I sit in my cell with you, God by my side, my Higher Power. He has me thinking and thinking hard. Why? Why am I back? What am I really back here for this time? I know it has to be more than just the legal issues, because my life was really messed up this time. It has to be something much deeper inside.

I know my life on the outside was going down the wrong path. Just on a downhill slide. So then God came along and pulled me to his side. There He showed me a path just for me, because the path I was on was the wrong one. A dead end road to nowhere. In doing God's will, my Higher Power as some may refer to him. Now he

has shown me, a better and much brighter path, one with new and more options along the way, a way to turn my life around.

Now my dreams will all fall into place. As my time flies by in the jail I used to call Hell on Earth, my journey has shown me now what the real meaning of jail is. He pulls us aside when we need a break from the real Hell on Earth and that is what we sometimes think we had mistaken as our freedom. Where we were really prisoners in our own lives. So, to get locked up and really take a break, a good look at ourselves, some time out to stop and think about what we really want in life and where we are going. Sometimes jail can be the perfect place for that if we just give it to God our Higher Power, we can turn this negative into a positive. We can come out of this new. We as some say can be “born again” in the eyes of the Lord and knowing I will be living His will and someday be by His side. So to live my dream is to live ever-lasting life. No matter where I am I can start to live my dream. Locked up or free, with my Higher Power for me that is God. It’s simple, I live His will and things will just fall into place, and soon I’m free and back home and to find I’m now living my dream.

By Anchana Hurbutt

Anchana Hurbutt is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

Untitled

My name is Irina. I was born in the German city of Schwerin. My parents had lived for many years in that remarkable place before I was born.

When I was 7 years old, we moved to Siberia, Russia. My mother is a doctor, and her friends there offered our family very

good work, an apartment and additional opportunities for me in my life. Russia is very huge country - beautiful and full interesting stories.

I grew up, I attended and graduated from Academy of Technologies in Moscow , a very big city. My special foreign subject always was the German language.

I worked for a large transport company regulating truck and train schedules.

I had a very happy life with success, a wonderful boss and colleagues in an amicable company. I had career growth and liked my work. The business brought good income for me to live, travel and help my parents.

My good friend Tania from Russia moved to Orlando, Florida. When we lived in Russia, we worked together and often had supper together at a restaurant.

We discussed our future plans. Tania left for the U.S. and now she is happy with her husband and child. Her family has big house near a wonderful park and lake.

It was through Tania and husband that I met my husband. He is fair, true and a wonderful man for me and our family. We have common goals and harmony. I live in Tampa and I study English language. I am starting a new page in my life.

I have my lectures every day and about learning English here are some my ideas:

* I need in many respects to study, because I need to understand, read and write English to have a worthy life and future

business. I have to work hard if I want to achieve something in this life!

* I want to travel. I have been to many European countries. It is always very exciting to meet new people and to see new places. When you get to a foreign country you always want to learn as much as possible about places you've heard about so you always have to read city - guides and ask local people for help.

* That's why I pay so much attention to my English lessons. The English language remains the most popular international language in the world. It's very useful to speak English fluently. It helps to destroy many artificial barriers between people.

* For me fluency in English provides a passport to the ever expanding world. Now, I buy very many new English books and magazines every month because, I want to know everything. These books help me very much to understand that everything depends on me, on my intelligence, courage, endurance, patience and readiness to meet success and luck and all I want.

* My life now is full of creativity and hard work, but I so like it, and I understand that I cannot make a professional career here without English. That's why both my success and my career depend on my progress in English.

I'm glad, that I have a magnificent, competent teacher. She is wonderful woman and a good friend for my family.

By Irina

A Walk Through the Park

The autumn is here

And the golden leaves
are drifting through the sky.

The birds are singing as I walk through the park.

Oh, how I love the summer and fall
when everything is so rich
with colors of gold
green
and brown.

Poem by Virginia Jewett

Virginia is an active student attending classes at the Jacksonville Public Library. She is a budding poet with keen insight and wisdom. Her peers often look to her for guidance.

The Importance of Goals or Dreams

Living my dreams would not take much. A little piece and quite at a lake would be nice. Coming home to a wife would be nice. Some of us sell ourselves short. When it comes to life, the things we take for granted or the things we just pass up unknowingly. Living my dream starts at respecting time and love when it's there. To know that all it takes is a small piece of something to make it a lot.

By Donnie G. Johnson

Donnie G. Johnson lives in Milton, Fl. His teacher is Tonia Wells.

Hero

I am my own hero because I am a wonderful mother of four children. I am a good cook and I love being a mother. I was a foster mother for a while and I enjoy being a foster mother and I hope to do it again one day.

I am a wonderful mother because I listen to my children when they are talking to me. I give them advice about life and things they need to know. I am a good mother because when my children have school events, like when it is children's night I take them. These are the things that make me a wonderful mother.

These are the things that make me a good cook. I am a good cook because on special days like Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays and the Fourth of July, my relatives ask me to cook. My specialties are collard greens and corn bread stuffing from scratch. My children tell me my cooking is the best in the world and that makes me feel good.

I also was a foster mother for a little while. I enjoy being a foster mother. The children that lived with me and my family were good children and if they need a home again they are welcome to come again. We took the children to the park, to the movies, out to eat, and sometimes my class had children's fun night and we were there, too.

These are the things that make me my own hero. And a wonderful mother and foster mother.

By Magnolia Johnson

Magnolia Johnson is a wife and mother of four children: Allen, Jessica, Joshua and Adrian. Her son Allen inspired her to go back to school to get her G.E.D. When Magnolia started school she

found out she likes to write and she really likes her story about her hero.

Motherhood is Forever

On January 2, 2006, 5:31 PM my world changed completely. The world stopped, everything was silent, and a single tear fell from my eye as I looked at my baby girl for the very first time. My dream had come true. I was a mommy. The one thing I had always looked forward to as a little girl. My daughter is my world. It was time to begin my walk through motherhood. Someone and someone who made me feel so special and complete. To know she is mine to love, care for, nourish, and raise to the very best of my ability. Every road has its bumps, but I am ready for whatever this beautiful road brings. Motherhood is forever, and of all the rights a woman may have, being a mother is the best!

By Latoshia Jones

Latshia Jones is the mother of an amazing little girl name Jaelyn. Being a mother is her passion in life. She enjoys the Even Start program she attends to get her G.E.D. and make a life for her daughter. Her teacher is Tonia Wells.

What is a Father?

A father is a person who loves and cares about his loved ones, and will be there for them through hardship, adversity. A father is someone who is very attentive to his kids, very responsible for his kids' actions.

A father is his kids' heart and soul
and who is very firm with his kids' production
and also who is very attentive to
his kids' problems.

By Travis Jones

*Travis Jones is a G.E.D. student who live in Tallahassee, FL
who enjoys sports, music, etc.*

My Future

I have been told I can talk a saint into sinning, by way of rationalizing the most irrational ideas. Strong women intimidate people; in many ways it is more of a burden than a blessing. I could give you a dozen reasons why I dropped out, but the truth is they do not hold up.

School was hell, constantly being compared to perfect siblings and academic idols. The classes were too easy, a review of last year, and the year before that. The only challenge was trying to be accepted. Sadly, whom you were friends with seemed just as important to teachers as the students. Plagued by social anxiety I tried for schools my junior year, but they were all the same. The only escape was to get away from it all. A choice I would take back but the only option I saw at the time.

The truth was hard to admit, but I made a mistake. What is important now is the future. School starts again in the fall, and I will be seen inside a classroom for the first time in three years. Financially unprepared and terrified of failure, I am determined to set things right. Education is so important and very necessary with

today's lifestyles. My desire to be a successful businesswoman is undeniable. The future is being written today, and the pen is in my hand.

By Selinda L. Kirchen

I have received my high school diploma and presently attend Lansing Community College in Michigan. I attended GGACC G.E.D. classes in 2004.

My Life In The U.S.A

I have many positive experiences in the United States of America but the two most important are my job and my family.

My job is what I really want to do for the rest of my life. I am meeting very nice people, helping them, and getting a nice pay check to help my husband. If I had this job in my country, I would not have enough pay check to help to pay the credit card bill because my country does not pay enough.

My second positive experience is having a new family and living close to my sisters. I have a very nice, happy marriage, and I am dreaming of having a baby, I have my dream family. I have two sisters who both live in the United States of America. I can go visit them more easily. If I lived in Turkey, it would be too expensive to see them, but living in the United States of America it doesn't cost me that much.

I can easily write too many thoughts, but being in a close family and having a nice, lovely job are what I really want all my life. I am really happy to be in the United States of America. I have a very positive life here. I can't imagine this life if I was still

in Turkey. I am already proud to live in the United States of America and want to be an American.

By Ferah Knox

Ferah is a married, hard working dental assistant and college student. She is really enjoying the ESOL class. Her teacher is Mary Ann Adams, and she likes to talk with her. She loves family and people. Ferah is from Turkey

Katrina

Hurricane Katrina devastated cities along the Gulf Coast. This category four hurricane was very destructive. The people in this area lost every things. When Katrina hit, many people were injured or died. The city of New Orleans was totally evacuated.

Residents of New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast lost everything. When the big storm hit along entire coast, it damaged houses, businesses, and even ruined whatever are belongings of them. Even so, many people lost their mind during the difficult circumstance.

Many people were injured or died as a result of the hurricane. Certainly, the category four hurricane had a powerful impact to houses and buildings. Then they collapsed and many victims could not get away on time. Thus we saw many injured people from the news. And more sad news when we saw some people lost their lives.

All of New Orleans was ordered to evacuate. The U.S. has an excellent warning system about weather forecasts, including the government. All medias tried to warn the residents of New

Orleans to understand the geography of the city. In fact, New Orleans city is located under the sea level and is surrounding with water from the Gulf and a lake. When the massive storm like Katrina hit the city, the city would turn to under water from the good amount of flood. However, people who lived in or around the city better evacuate to the safe place. Also many families came to Florida.

The aftermath of Katrina is that numerous people needed help seriously because they lost everything with the storm. They are seeking to replace their belongings, and they will adjust their lives as well as they can.

More sadness for those who lost their loved one, either their relatives or pets. They will definitely remember the bitter experience a very long time. We are thankful to the teams of Coast Guard, military and Red Cross who rescued the injured people along the Gulf Coast and in New Orleans.

In conclusion, so many people have been suffering from the hurricane during evacuation. They did not have sufficient support for their life. Even though, Katrina had passed for a while, the bitter memories are still there for people to think and talk about!

By Kedsuda Kopala

My name is Kedsua Kopala. I am married and have a nine-year-old son. Thailand is where I'm from. I am an ESOL student at OWC-Fort Walton Beach. My teacher is Mary Ann Adams. The ESOL class is very helpful for improving my English, reading and writing skills. My goal is to get my G.E.D. so I can get a good job.

Alabama Games

In some places, like California, people go surfing for fun. People in New York City go skateboarding. Some people in Texas like to ride horses. In a small town in Alabama, people love to go cow tippin'. Alabama has a lot of farm land which means there are lots of cows standing around. The fact is most cows sleep standing up. That isn't smart on the cow's part because it means cow tippin' isn't that hard to do.

There are two major rules you need to know first. When you are getting ready to go always do as follows: 1) Don't wear white or any bright colors, because you don't want to get shot, (sometimes the farmers aren't too happy with you). 2) If it has been raining for the past few days don't go. It's better to wait and go another day than to have a cow sitting on your head. To go cow tippin' you need to go about 11:30 at night. You have to wait to make sure everyone else is asleep. You don't want anyone to see you.

Sometimes the field can be muddy in some spots, but just keep an eye on the ground. You have to be on some hard ground like grass or dried mud. Aiming is important too because you want to try to run and hit somewhere between the middle and the end of the cow. One thing is don't put too much of your weight forward because as you run toward the cow, instead run at the cow like a football linebacker who hits and stays on his feet. After the hit you might have to duck and run away from the cow. The cows usually start to make a lot of noise at this point so that would be the reason for the duck and run.

Now to me I just honestly feel sorry for the poor beast. The innocent thing is just standing there sleeping and you come along and give it the scare of its life. Then the cow is all muddy and worried. That cow probably isn't going back to sleep that night.

After all the excitement though, all is well again in my small town of Stevenson, Alabama.

By April Kowdis

April attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Fl. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier. She has been with the teacher for 2 months and enjoy it a whole lot.

Untitled

The experience most repetitive in my live has been moving to new places and changing homes. When I lived in my country, Venezuela, I lived in eleven different places, in different states and cities. I experienced many wonderful places and people. I lived in Puerto La Cruz. Puerto La Cruz is on the coast. There I lived on the beach.

When I arrived to the USA I lived in Hardeeville in Louisiana. I liked the people and Mardi Gras. Then I lived in Tennessee. The city I lived in was a quiet city and it was very beautiful. I live in Florida right now. I want to move again because I like to know new places and new people.

By Roxana Lara

I Am Almost Living My Dream

I am almost living my dream. My dream is to get my G.E.D. and to go to college to become a nurse. To accomplish my dream I must improve my reading and writing skills.

I have come a long way. I was born in Jamaica. My Father could not read or write but my mother could read and write for she completed high school. My mother had thirteen children, seven girls and six boys. Life was hard. All I saw growing up was poverty. We would wake up hungry and have nothing for breakfast. We would go days without eating.

We were allowed to go to school but my family didn't have the money for the school uniforms or to give us for lunch. I didn't start attending school until age ten. We only attended school for a few months each school year. We had to walk miles on dirt roads in order to get to school so our shoes would wear out. My family didn't have the money to buy us new shoes so we would end up having to stop attending school. People would laugh at us as we got older for walking around without shoes.

As I was growing up I kept thinking that I would go to the United States one day. When we would leave the country and go to the market in town I would see people that traveled to the United States and England. It was then that I realized that there were people that had a better life than us.

My mother was a woman of strong faith in God and always said God will provide. She would gather all the children around her and read the Bible to us. She said that she would not be with us always but that we should know that God is always with us. God continues to see me through every day and he will enable me to live my dream.

At the age of seventeen I moved from the country to Kingston in order to take a job as a housekeeper. In addition to taking care of the people's homes I also took care of their children. I had to leave my first son Nigel, who was just seven months old, in the care of my mother while I lived in Kingston. Due to the generosity of the family I worked for in Kingston, I was able to come to the

United States when I was twenty-three years old to work for one of their family members in New York City.

Sixteen years ago while I was still living in New York I started the literacy program at the Fordham Center for Reading and Writing. Due to family responsibilities there were many times that I had to stop attending the program.

In 2002 I moved to Florida and got involved in a literacy program at my son's school. Due to getting a job I had to stop the program at my son's school but I realized that I must continue my studies so I joined the Adult Education G.E.D. Program in Palm Beach County. Once I started the adult program I realized it was too advanced and that I had to get one on one help for my reading and writing. It was at this time that I joined the literacy program through the Palm Beach County library system. Since joining the literacy program in Palm Beach County I have obtained my driver's license and gained employment as a lunch aide in a local school.

I thank God for the literacy programs that have impacted my life. They will help enable me to obtain my dream of getting my G.E.D. along with the help of my tutors. I am determined to reach my dream with the help of God.

By Medora Latiff

Medora is married with three sons: Nigel, Roger and Sean. She is a student of the Pam Beach County Library System in West Palm Beach, FL. Medora feels that the literacy program is the greatest thing for any adult who wants to go back to school. Her teachers are Rachel and Linda.

Living in the United States

I have lived in United State since 1996.I was born in Hong Kong, a very big city. I loved my country. When I started to live in the United State, I was lost. Because I had never lived in a very small town. When I met my husband, he changed my life. After I got married, I dreamed about my family. We travel every year at our anniversary.

My husband changed my life in the United States. Before I met him, I always worked. Six days a week. When it was my day off, I ran to pay the bill or went shopping with my mom. Every week I did the same things. I was bored of that. Now, I still have to work every day, but I am happy .He calls me every day to check on me, to see if I am ok. When we have a day off, we go shopping, go to see a movie and go eat out together. I enjoy my life right now. We are planning to have a baby together.

Traveling my favorite thing to do in the United State. My husband and I love to travel. We plan every year on our anniversary to travel to a different place. We hope on our 50th anniversary, that we have traveled the 50 states in America.

Since I started living in America .I couldn't find my future, what I was going to do. Then I found my husband. He is the one change in my life; he changed my thinking. Now my positives in the United States are my family and travel.

By Maggie Lee

The Father I Want to Be

The father I want to be

is the father who's there through
the good and the bad.

The father I want to be is the
A father I never had.

The father I want to be
Is a father who corrects his child
When he is wrong.

The father I want to be is
A father who never leaves his child
alone.

By Rishardo Lee

*Rishardo Lee is a G.E.D. student in Tallahassee, FL who plans
on being a barber and a chef.*

Failures & Triumphs of Marolyn Macy

On May 21, 1976, I was born in Ocala, Florida. I was the second child for my mom. My dad on the other hand already had twenty-two children from other relationships. He was a pastor. Mom was one of seven brothers and sisters.

Life would seriously change when my mother's mom died. She was eight years old. Grand dad had it very hard with seven children. He asked his daughter to help him with the children because she was the oldest. She helped him to take care of one of the children which happened to be my mother. While living with her sister, something unimaginable happened to her. My aunt's husband sexually assaulted my mother at the age of sixteen years

old. Because of the assault, she had a child. My aunt was not happy.

My mother started attending a new church. This is where she met my dad. Eventually he wanted her to move in and help with children. The only catch was that she had to give up her only son who was seven years old at the time. It was very hard for her to give him up, but she did because of the embarrassment that the child had belonged to her sister's husband. She had given him to his great aunt on his father's side.

After moving in, the only help that she got was in his bed. This is probably where I came in. It was a new start for my mom. It would be her own child that she would be able to love and be loved back without having to give her up. With twenty-two children, his wife, and other women she lived her life with her daughter and without her only son. Mom wanted the best of life, but it would take more time before she would get there. There is nothing wrong with going to heaven, but at what cost one must ask herself, It seems like every step forward was two steps backward.

At this time dad was at his thirty-ninth child. Being vulnerable, she became like the other women of the church and had a sexual encounter with him. Mom was very educated, smart, and kind hearted, but no common sense. She would give the world to everyone around her, but never think of herself.

When I was a child I thought it was so good to have so many brothers and sisters. After time passed and I got older, it wasn't cool anymore. I started to understand and a lot of things became clear to me.

My dad later moved to Miami with his wife and their children. I thought to myself I wanted out of this strange life. I wanted a dad more than anything else. Mom did not know I knew she had a

son. One day my sisters sat me down and asked if I knew that I had a brother named Patrick? I told them no...no...no, a brother I asked? She said, "Yes! You have a brother!" He was loving, and friendly just like your mom. I had confronted my mother about Kimberly telling me about Patrick and she broke down crying. She had explained the reason why she did not tell me about him was because of certain circumstances. At six years old I had no idea what certain circumstances meant until I got older.

Living in a ten bedroom house in a small town with so many brothers and sisters, we made the best of life. Even though I had seen the struggles my mother had gone through and all the mistakes she made, I have learned a lot about life's lessons, triumphs, and failures. I also learned about being strong when you have to and taking charge of my own life. Now, I'm married with a loving husband and two children of my own. I see that life is what you make of it and not what others want you to make of it. Because of all I went through, I could not focus on school. Now I am at Lake Tech getting my G.E.D

By Rose Lindo

*Names in the story are fictitious.

This is a true story about my life.

What is a Father?

A father is like no other, he can never be replaced.
He's always there in the light and never has forsaken me
through my tough nights.
A father is like a big brother that I never had.
To let me know everything is all good when I'm down and
feeling sad.

A father did what he could or thought to be true.
So what is a father? A father is my guide
who always tried to be there.
A father in my childhood held me high in the air.
A father is my father, being all he could to me!

By Tony Ling

Tony is a father of 2 children, boys Jaylonn and Byron. He is a student in a G.E.D. program in Tallahassee, FL.

My Life

I was born in Panama. My high school in my country in was a Catholic school where I learned my first lessons in English.

One year after my graduation, I began at the university but when I had started the second year in Economic I started my first job in the airport working in KLM Airlines so because of the changing schedules I left the university.

There, I met the man who would become my husband. Four years later, my first daughter Cathia was born, and in three years our daughters Nynoska and Vilka were born.

My husband continued working at the airport as station manager of our Panamanian airline "COPA".

While my daughters were growing I had different jobs in travel agencies, but when I had saved some capital I opened my own travel agency "JET-SOL".

Everything was well. My daughters were studying in our American school (learning English that would help them later), my agency growing with new business accounts and clients. But the military were in charge and everything changed. We had to take the decision to come to U.S.A. when most of the companies were in strike and all schools were closed indefinitely.

Asylum was granted to my husband and we changed the tourist visa to student visa for our daughters. I continued with my tourist visa because I need to leave and re-entry to U.S. legally.

My three daughters finished the university, they married and two years ago we changed our status to resident and I came to live with our family. At present I have been surrounded with the love of my family and four beautiful grand-daughters.

Now with my life calm and my husband retired, I would like to learn English. I think I can fulfill this dream as soon as possible if I study hard, because I need to understand my growing family and help other people. Thanks to God and all my teachers and all the people who are making this dream come true!

By Maria Llorente

Living My Dream

Living my dream is more than fantasy; it's a goal for life. My dreams are to establish a non-profit organization called the Aaliyah Foundation, to provide a better life for my grandchildren and me and to touch the lives of children and the elderly that are hospitalized.

My dream of establishing the Aaliyah Foundation originated from developing the hobby of crochet in 1990. It has and can be

helpful in alleviating stress, tension, depression and anxiety for myself and for others. Some consider it to be the new yoga. There are lots of other benefits to learning the craft of crocheting, such as having to make items that can also be for donations. I dream of proving relief to others such as hospitalized children, those mentally challenged and in Geriatric centers. There is no greater reward than seeing a child's bright smile at receiving a hand made stuffed toy or an elderly man or woman relaxing with slippers warming their feet.

Growing up in a single parent home with two brothers and one sister, there was very little due to the lack of income. I feel that by benefiting from experience and circumstances, I am better able to provide valuable insight to the needs and desires of my grandchildren and to help guide them on a brighter path to the future. I love crocheting. I can make anything off the top of my head. I like making Afghans and backpacks for kids. Crocheting is a great hobby because it has a beginning point and an ending point. When you've finished your last project and your last stitch, you know you have achieved and successfully completed a task.

In our society today with all the attention disorders and stress, crocheting can help take my mind to another place. It also takes my mind off daily activities. When I am crocheting my mind is focused on the project I'm trying to successfully complete. I started out with a lot of behavioral problems and wanting attention because no one took the time to teach me anything. So when is our society going to turn back the hands of time and do things the old fashioned way and teach little girls how to make baby doll clothes and teach little boys how to fish? I feel that we can try to win our children back is by teaching them moral respect for themselves. We have to start them off very young to have good coping skills and having good values in their lives. Teaching someone how to crochet is also teaching people how to help themselves. This is what works for me.

Living my dream is like a jigsaw puzzle. I have to make sure that every piece is in place and there is no missing piece. After I am released from prison my plans are to go to the city of St. Petersburg, Florida to apply for a business license so I can learn how to run a business. I also need to get my license to operate out of my own home. I want to go and apply for a grant or funds and go to the community churches and organizations so I can raise donations. Once I have raised the donations, I can start making my items to take around to hospitalized children, elderly centers, the mentally challenged and the Geriatric centers.

Once my foundation is established I would like to regenerate some of the funds and donations back into the community in the areas I feel are well needed. Also, my goal is to help the children to believe in themselves and to stay motivated. The Aaliyah Foundation will bring a new positive outlook in our society to give our hearts to people who need love and also to touch the lives of others. One day you will see me on the Oprah Winfrey Show sitting side by side and showing her and the world what The Aaliyah Foundation is. Yes, this is my dream. I pray that it will be a big success.

By Felicia Logan

Felicia Logan is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

My Life in the US

I am living in the US right now. I have been living here about eight years. I love this country because it is very different from my country. The US helps a lot of people around the world. When I

came here, I was impressed. I could see that the US gave opportunity to everyone. This country has good programs to help poor people. I enjoy seeing my children going to school, even if I don't have any money to help the school financially.

The US is good to help people. They help the poor people. I had an experience about that. Some years ago my husband and I were jobless. We did not have any money to pay our rent and food. Some friends told me about the Social Service program, and I went to apply. They gave me a lot of help while my husband found a job; I was very thankful.

The US schools have good programs to help Hispanic people. When my older son was all ready to go to school, his teacher called me for a meeting. She told me about the ESL program. She said that my son will learn to speak clearly and understand better. I agreed that he could be assisted. I try to assist at the school when it is possible. I asked if there was any program for me, too. They gave me information about Adult Education and where I could go. I am studying in the ESL class at Okaloosa Walton College.

I love this country because it helps people. My family is happy living here.

By Maria Lopez

My name is Maria Lopez. I come from El Salvador. I have been living in the U.S. eight years. I am in ESOL class. My teacher's name is Mary Ann Adams.

Human Behavior since Infancy

The future is in the hands of our children because of this the human values are essentials for our future.

The education of the children is the most important facet in the development of the human being. The first years of a child form the basis of their personality. Everything in their environment affects them directly.

The behavior of their parents in front of them, the treatment between each member inside of the family, the authority of the parents without violence, represent for the children an example to be following them and all those images of the infancy never can be erased of their minds.

On the other hand, in the school is not only important to teach different academic aspects, is relevant to emphasize in several human values such as humanity, solidarity and respect.

Today the high speed of the information makes everything very fast and it makes everybody spend a lot of time in their jobs and sometimes forget their family, especially their children and ignore that they are receiving a lot of information from many resources and it is building concepts in the mind of the children.

Which are those concepts? The parents should orient the information that their children receive by television, internet their friends, etc.

If we take care of our children, we will have an excellent future with less violence and more development in benefit of the humanity.

By Adriana Lopez-Castillo

Adriana is an ESOL student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. Her teachers are Vince Scalise and Nancy Cooper.

How I Met My Husband

I really have known my husband since 4th grade and actually he was my boyfriend in 5th grade. We just liked to talk a lot on the phone and after school we always met in the same place, but in 6th grade he came to the USA.

Sometimes he used to call me but I moved and I didn't know anything about him, until one day I wanted to go visit a new school with my friend. I felt desperate, like if I didn't do it right then, I would never do it. I said, "When my friend comes, tell her to wait for me." I took the bus in Mexico and he took the same bus too. I couldn't believe it was him because he was in the USA, We both got out at the same place, and then I said "Eric" and he said, "Were you in there with me?"

We went out a few times, and we started our relationship again. Since then I believe in destiny. You can find the man of your dreams when you never know it.

By Alma Lovera

Alma Lovera is originally from Mexico. She has lived in the USA for 5 years. She is married, has a 3-year old daughter, and what she likes best is spending time with her family.

The Dreams Inside of Me

As I sit back and reminisce on the dreams I've had while growing up, some of them still consume my thoughts today as an adult. The dreams inside of me, one of my main dreams was I wanted to go into the Air Force and make a decent career out of it, but my family had different expectations of me. They wanted me to go to college and that's where I ended up. So, another dream on

my agenda was to become a professional basketball player. I was doing what others wanted. Making other people happy besides myself. That gave me the attitude that I would never truly give it my all. I attempted to fulfill this dream, but through the bad choices I made, my basketball career quickly became a casualty and a dream unfulfilled.

My choices led both my dreams and myself down a road of destruction and isolation. My dreams became undesirable and unattainable for me. As I went through my struggles and my ups and downs, my dreams took a backseat to the life I had begun to live. Each day as I saw young children going down the same path that I had chosen, making the same bad choices, it gave me the inspiration and desire to help those youth. I wanted to be a motivational speaker for the youth and have a program implemented called Dreams of a Young Mind, but I know I didn't and couldn't have done all this without the intervention of God. He became a major part of my life and helped me to make wiser and better choices and helping others along the way.

By Cynthia Luke

Cynthia Luke is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

Return of the Miclo

It had been many years since I had returned home. It was a vacation with a lot of childhood memories. You see Jamaica was where I was raised; very close to the beach I was standing on, just as beautiful as I had remembered.

My thoughts were broken by a group of kids playing in the surf. One of the boys, in particular, caught my eye. That unusual

hat he was wearing; just like Emerson's - my best friend and my first crush. He was 12 and I was 10. The tragedy was that he had drowned RIGHT HERE! Nearly 40 years ago. An older man approached the boys - Emerson's Father? Could it be?! I froze wanting to say something -- but what?

I was staying at my mother's. The two of us were having dinner and catching up on old times. I told her about seeing Emerson's father at the beach. She looked stunned -- a very strange feeling overcame me. "Joyce that could not be" my mother said "presumed drowned, he disappeared on his boat 10 years ago." I just wanted to change the subject; but that hat I would not forget.

A knock at the door would bring our feelings at ease. It was my brother John and his twin sons. We hugged. His sons were now 19, very strong and handsome young men. John had two charter fishing boats that his boys helped him with. We talked and laughed until it was very late. "Well Joyce, tomorrow we take you fishing." John said. I love to fish and could not wait.

The next morning we left the marina early. I was with John and his son Jesse. The morning was a little breezy with clear skies, but in the distance there was a patch of dark clouds. We anchored on a large reef about three miles out. "I will bait your hook just this once." My brother said. I told him "Don't worry; I will catch the biggest fish without any help!" We fished for a while catching a few undersize snappers and tossing them back. John motioned to Jesse "Pull in your lines, we will do a little trolling and give Joyce a chance to show her stuff."

The darker clouds seemed to be getting closer. John said not to worry, that was typical in the summer. The left outrigger started to jump. Jesse grabbed hold of the bucking reel, placing it in the holder of the fighting chair. "OK Joyce, she is all yours." I took

the seat and started reeling for my life. Whatever it was, it was VERY BIG. For a while I pulled in and the drag went out. Then out of nowhere, a beautiful sailfish rose from the ocean and started doing the moonwalk backwards on his tail. What a sight! All three of us shared the excitement.

BOOM! A lightening bolt crashed down just missing the boat. Then the skies turned charcoal grey. Excited about the sailfish, no one noticed that the storm was now engulfing us. "It looks bad!" John said and went over to the wheel to start up the boat. The engine turned over but would not start. He kept trying, but no luck. The boat was rocking back and forth. Jesse pulled open the engine cover, and then a large wave caught us broadside. Jesse flew into the top striking his head knocking him out. On his back lying on the deck, blood was trickling from a gash in his head. John radioed for help as I went for the first aid kit. To make things worse, the anchor broke away and we were drifting in very rough seas. I stopped the bleeding and put a large gauze bandage on Jesse's head. All we could do now was pray.

My eyes opened up from the morning sun's rays. I had fallen asleep next to Jesse from exhaustion. To my surprise, we were being towed by another boat. John sat behind our boat's wheel grinning. "We are going to make it" John said "that boat seemed to have come from nowhere." The best news was Jessie was awake, he would be ok.

The boat towing us pulled into the marina then cut us loose next to the dock. The unusual thing was that they just took off. We waved and thanked them as they went by. A very weird feeling overcame me. The man driving the boat was the one I had seen on the beach and the little boy was with him wearing Emerson's hat.

Later that day my mother told me the name of the boat that disappeared 10 years ago was the *Miclo* -- the same name of the one that rescued us!

By Joyce Mack

My Mistakes

My name is Elizabeth Maggard and I have been a depressed person for as long as I can remember. At the age of nine I recall already having thoughts that I wasn't good enough. When I was twelve my Grandmother, who was the only one that made me feel special, passed away and that sent me even deeper into my emotional pit.

I recall three major decisions that I have made that turned out to be huge mistakes with enormous consequences to my life and a bunch of other people's around me. In each of these situations I have learned valuable lessons.

When I was 15 I made my first major mistake. I married a man 20 years my senior, just so I could get away from my parents. I thought I had it made. Until three days after our wedding he started hitting me. By the time I figured out that I was wrong and I needed my parents, they had moved to Florida. They had no idea what was going on with me and my marriage. After a few months I had enough and moved to Florida with my parents, and filed for divorce. From that mistake I had learned "Don't let any one hit you".

Then when I was 20 I had my daughter, my pride and joy, Mandie. When she was a few months old the depression really kicked in. I felt like I *was not* and *could not* be a good mother. So I turned to drinking, I thought it would make things better. It worked

only for a while. Then that was not enough again, so my roommate introduced me to crack. I thought that was the answer to all my problems. Then I went to harder drugs. So on and off for a few years I was partying on a regular basis. Then one day I woke up and realized I was addicted.

I thought I had hidden my addictions from every one, but I was so wrong. One day my dad confronted me, and we got in a really big fight. As always I was so messed up I didnt know if I was coming or going. And I blamed him for every thing I did wrong. I jumped in my car and left. About a mile down the road I swerved to miss a deer and clipped a telephone pole, I over corrected and slung the car across the road and ended up 15 feet up in the trees. When I came to, I realized my daughter was in the car with me. All I saw was blood every where coming from her head. She fell out of the car window trying to get out to go and get help. When I came to again, I was in the hospital, and still blaming every one else. That's when my mom told me I had to get help or I could not come home and I would never see my daughter again. So that's when I went into rehab. March of 2000.

In 2001 I had been clean and sober for a year. But I was trying to deal with guilt over what I had done to Mandie. I went to Doctor after Doctor and found no help. So one day I could not take it any more. I did the only think I could think of; I tried to kill my self by taking an overdose. I took 200 Xanax. When I woke up I was on life support and saw the looks on my family's faces and knew I had made a major mistake again. I realized that I had so much more to live for because they were standing right in front of me.

Then a month later I got a call that changed my life. I was told that my best friend had killed himself on Dec.17, 2001. His wife blamed me for this. She said T.C was told I had killed myself and he blamed himself for not being there for me. In his note he said

that he could not go through the meeting and staying clean without me. That made me realize what I do has a big affect on others lives as well as mine. As I was dealing with his death I was trying to help my mom with my father who was really sick. Then on Dec. 24, 2001 at 7 a.m. my father passed away. This was really hard to deal with. I never got to tell him I was sorry for every thing I had done and blamed on him. But I did get to tell him I loved him very much. His response was, " I love you, too P.B. I love you, too.

Now 5 years later I am clean and sober. I have met the man of my dreams and we are getting married on Feb. 14.2007. I realize now that what I do in my life affects me and every one around me. Now I know that I have so much to live for.

By Elizabeth Maggard

Gateway Home

The emergency room was full. Everything was very noisy and fast paced. He had come in at 6:37 a.m. He was pronounced dead. They said he had massive blood loss by the time he had reached the hospital.

He lay there motionless, could not see or feel anything. All of a sudden he saw a bright light escape his body. He knew he was dead, but that didn't matter, he was ready to see God.

He started to float towards the bright light when he heard a voice saying, "Don't look back." The man felt very comfortable and peaceful inside the bright light.

Instantly the light vanished and he saw himself standing at a beautiful golden gate. God came before him and asked, "Have you repented all your sins and are you ready to come join me?"

“Yes,” the man replied, “I have been very faithful to you oh Lord.”

The gates opened and a sudden rush of the most sweet-smelling fragrance filled his nose. The man moved toward the gates. He did not walk; in fact, he could not feel his legs. He sort of drifted through the gates into the kingdom of heaven.

Clouds surrounded him. Every breath he took was filled with so much oxygen, his head spun. The love he felt in this place was so strong. He knew he was home.

By Sarah Makhoul

Written by Sarah Makhoul on January 30, 2007. Sara is enrolled in the ABE/GED program at Seminole Community College. After her GED, she hopes to go to college to pursue marine biology and photography. Sarah enjoys surfing and outdoor activities, and she loves animals.

Who I Was is Not Who I am

The days and the nights know.
They are witnesses to my sincerity,
to my innocence of soul,
to all that I was and all I am now.

I was the best of the fragrances
that perfumed your surroundings.
You let me shelter you,
Illusions filled my heart.

I gave you everything

that I was and everything that I am.
Now I know that you did not understand the infinity of my
love.
Love is two people growing together and growing separately.

You have your illusions, too.
They are about a woman who does what you say.
You want to be my father,
my mother, my lover, and my boss.

You have caused a great emptiness
in my soul and an immense
pain in my heart.
I am suffering more than you can know.

I need you, but in a loving way.
Not a father, not a mother, not a boss.
I reject living in a shadow,
Doing as you say.

My soul is empty except for sadness.
You are still a part of me.
You know it's true, but if you don't
accept to be my lover,
I shall not wrap you in the flame of my love again.
I shall not give hope to my heart again.

By Beatriz Martinez

*Beatriz Martinez came from Honduras. She has two children
and teaches at Headstart in Manatee County. She has been
studying English for four years with her tutor at the Literacy
Council of Manatee County. Her very lucky tutor is Sharlyia Gold.*

My GED Degree

I have to have my GED before I leave this world. I need this to complete myself. In order for me to achieve my goal, I have to go back to school! My, what a scary feeling! Let's face it, I'm afraid I can't do it. However, there's only one way to find out and that is to just do it.

First think I have to do is get my GED. I will have to enroll in classes somewhere in order to accomplish this goal. I was at Remington College taking computer classes with only one year to complete the course when I transferred back to Florida from San Diego. The laws here on the east coast are different about getting college credits without a GED.

I went to the community college to enroll in the program and spent the day in orientation. It seemed like it wasn't the right place for me. I came to the library and to my surprise they offered classes also. I met Jenny, took the assessment and it's been downhill from there. I am looking forward to achieving my goal-something I thought I couldn't do.

By Rose McMahon

Street Racing

Racing has been an interest of mine that I learned to enjoy from the males in my family. I was first introduced to racing by my dad when I was 13. He took me to the local racetrack. At age 15, he took me to the local drag strip for the first time. It was then I learned about drag racing. At age 16, in Birmingham, Alabama, my cousin took me to my first street-race.

That first street race is something I'll never forget. We met up with a group of about seven car loads of people. We followed them to a deserted area near the railroad tracks. The locals there call it "Race Road". My cousin and I got into his truck and headed down to the starting line. As we sat there waiting for the second car to get in place I was nervous and excited all at the same time. The opposing car then pulled up and was ready to race. A person walked between the two cars to signal us to go. He threw his hands down and we set off with tires screeching and the truck shaking. We thought we were going to win but close to the end of the road the other car narrowly inched past us and won the race.

After the race we sat there with the rest of the group and hung out talking. We then heard on the police scanner that cops were coming to check out the area. So we got out of there fast.

Street racing to me is a big rush. You never know when the cops are going to show up and you have to run. I like the unique custom cars I get to see. The smell of the burning rubber and the loud music everybody's playing from their cars adds to the enjoyment. The noise of the engines when they first take off has that loud revving sound to it just like at the drag strip. Whether it's at the drag strip or on a deserted road downtown, street racing is a thrill to me. I hope to be involved in this sport for years to come.

By Julian Melvin

Julian Melvin attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. His teacher is Rhonda Currier. His favorite hobby is film making and screen writing.

The Key

Love is the key to happiness.
Happiness is the key to love.
I feel your love,
Yet you don't see.
I feel your pain
As if it were a part of me.
Time slows down
When thinking of you.
The world to be is you and me-
The shine and joy of your true love.
Words can't say
What love can do.
But, all I can say
Is that I love you!

By Nathan Mincey

Nathan has relocated from New York and is studying for his G.E.D. at Lake Technical Center in Eustis. He plans on pursuing a career as a Licensed Practical Nurse.

Living My Dream

It is important for me to live my dream so that I can accomplish my vision. First, I must write my novels, then submit them to a publisher. It is important that I critique and revise my written literature.

Next, I'm grateful that I enrolled in ABE School, because it allowed me to find my niche and apply myself with the rules of writing. My teacher Mrs. Stanton has so professionally taught me,

the fundamentals of Language, which helped me improve my writing skills, but if it wasn't for Mrs. Johnson, my ABE 11 teacher, I would have never been inspired. It is necessary to stay focused on your goal so that your determination will allow you to do what you thought was impossible.

Also, because I prioritized what was important to make my dream become a reality, the outcome was seven novels and three short children's stories. This is proof that even while attending school to obtain my G.E.D., which is a dream also, I'm multitasking towards my goals simultaneously. Needless to say, my novels are written and the education in which I sought out to get has also become a reality, because I am learning and my books have been completed.

In addition, with relentless hard work everything I dream of doing is happening in my broken life. I've become empowered by mentors and God to achieve what the opposition least expected. Therefore, I have proven that education and determination is vital to human progression. In conclusion, because of my decision I decided to take advantage of education while serving time. I became more productive and literate enough to make my dream a reality. In which I do live out daily with learning and having others who are confined read the literature I wrote. I can expect my dreams to flourish into a success story.

By Shirley Mitchell

Shirley Mitchell is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

Unsolved Mystery

While we live in the world, we experience a number of things that we don't expect to happen to us. Sometimes it can be unbelievable and incredible things that happen to us. Even very humble things can point us toward life's mysteries. This is one incident that happened to me. It is absolutely a mystery and a happy story.

Exactly four weeks ago, I lost my sunglasses. They were my precious ones that I had paid a lot for. The lenses were fitted especially to my eyesight. After my glasses disappeared, I tried to find them everywhere in my house and in my car. I even searched my pockets in all my clothes in the closet and all the drawers. I looked in the refrigerator and in the oven. Nowhere in my house, could I find my glasses. So I asked my husband, my son and my cousin in turn if they had seen my glasses and after a few minutes, I asked them again and again. I was sure that I put them in the place where I usually did. It was all ineffective and useless. I couldn't find them. Without my glasses, I didn't have any terrible trouble in my day's life. I had another cheaper pair I could use instead of the pair I had lost. But I still wanted to look for them.

I couldn't stop thinking about the glasses. I started to try to remember exactly what I did on the day when I lost them. It was the third Saturday on the 21st of October. My husband had gone to Korea a week before because of his research. My son, my cousin and I had got up a little later than as usual, around 9 o'clock. We all took a shower and had breakfast. After I dropped my son at FSU to attend the Tallahassee Symphony Youth Orchestra at 9:55, I went to an orchard to pick persimmons with my cousin while my son practiced playing the violin. I picked up my son at 11:45 and went back home. Through this entire process, of course, I wore

my sunglasses. After lunch, about 4 o'clock, my cousin and I went to the Korean grocery store while my son enjoyed playing computer games. On the way home, I asked my cousin to buy a loaf of bread at Publix near my house and I waited for her in the car wearing the sunglasses. After we came back home, I took them off and put them on the table. We didn't go out anywhere in the afternoon.

The next day, we went to church and I forgot to bring my glasses. I mentioned to my cousin that it was too bright to be without sunglasses. In the afternoon, around 4 o'clock, I went to the Tallahassee airport to pick up my husband from Korea. I didn't wear my sunglasses then either. At that time, I mentioned to my cousin I couldn't find my sunglasses. From then until now, whenever I wore my other glasses, I asked my husband if he had seen my glasses. But it was a joke. It wasn't a big deal for me.

During the next week, in my English class, a classmate named Alexis demonstrated art therapy for the class. We each had to scribble on the paper with our eyes closed, then look at our scribbling to see what images we saw. I found a big pair of glasses and a person who I suspected to be my cousin. Then, almost 3 weeks passed. On Monday November 13th, before class, while I was sitting on my chair, my classmate, Esther, sitting in front of me, took out a case of sunglasses the same as mine and talked about them with Vivi, another classmate, who was sitting next to her. I wasn't surprised at that. I thought she probably had the same brand as mine, and I asked her where she had bought them. But Esther suddenly asked me the reason why I wanted to see them. I answered, "I lost mine". Then Vivi said that her husband and she had picked them up on the street near the Tom Brown Park. But there was nobody there, so they put the glasses in the box in the car hoping to find the owner, and they forgot about them and left them in the car for two weeks. When Esther said to Vivi that her glasses

were broken, Vivi remembered the glasses and gave them to Esther on Monday morning in our classroom, and I noticed them.

It is still mystery to me. I don't know what happened. Amazing. Maybe it could be my mistake but mysteries happen to us, sometimes. And I believe Alexis' art therapy worked: I released a lot of energy regarding my lost glasses, and that energy somehow brought the glasses back to me.

Interestingly, Esther and Vivi had not been in class for the art therapy demonstration; they knew nothing about my lost glasses.

By Nancy Moon

Nancy Moon is a student who attends ACE (Adult & Community Education). She feels that ACE has helped her brush up on her English skills. She really enjoys the program. Her teacher is Susan Lester.

My Living Dream

Joan Borysenko wrote, "The question is not whether we will die, but how we will live." My living dream is to become a proactive High School teacher. Firstly, I am ravenous to master my skills in order to become a paramount in pedagogy. Then, I believe my own difficult experience can be an advantage at helping students to overcome challenging homes environment. In addition, I would stress my belief that true power is knowledge via a complete schooling, as a present you give to yourself.

Perhaps my primary characteristic is my willingness to be savvy about the mechanisms of relationships. Nevertheless, teachers' enthusiasm without a proper high training will surely dry

out the energy of the best ones. I want to be strongly prepared for there is plethora of emotional tanks to fill at school. Since two years, I volunteer in an English and in a French classrooms, in High School, to grasp some experience on my own . Children are emotional beings who communicate emotionally, using behavior to translate their feelings. For instance, bad behavior is often the result of a bad coping mechanisms of children emotionally or physically hurt. I would like to be able to know more than the persona's perimeter of my students but their emotional volume too. In others words, what they have been filled up with.

As Anais Nin wrote, "Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." I trust my own difficult experience as a child will help me to give unconditionally to those students in the need of more than grasping the lesson plans, despite it is the undisputed purpose of schools. After a gruesome start in life as an abused child, I was capable to thrive amid life's turbulences. I ultimately managed not to become a persecutor myself. I also sustained a good moral character, thanks to my trust in God, by picking outside of my family better role models as well as intensive therapy. Indeed, I empathize with struggling students who may lack a built-in set of social instruction due to dysfunctional households. I reason that role modeling, especially with these challenging undergraduates, is better than lecturing if I want to increase their critical and creative thinking, knowing children are the mirror of what you give to them. More specifically, I can reinforce some good feelings students are born with (motivation, empathy...) teachable virtues (responsibility, self-motivation...). At that point, the strongest preventive to rule breaking is no longer the students' concern about their parents or teachers' disapproval, but their loss of self-love. By this approach, I intend to foster love in them, to avoid bore or struggle for power but create a safety zone in my futures classrooms and bring them to shape lofty visions of their future.

As Lao Tzu has declared “He who conquers others is strong: he who conquers himself is mighty.” I would use my knowledge that getting educated is the genuine freedom in life. All worldwide studies show that people with a complete education are socially and politically very much involved. I would add: “and successful.” As an illustration, those people vote massively for the reason they acknowledge the importance of not leaving everything in the only hands of fate. Furthermore, the more people are educated, the more they comprehend how to heal their childhood wounds, avoiding the classic trap of finding a mate who will fill the strengths and abilities that they may lack.

By all means, my most passionate dream is to be a high-school teacher. Eventually, my zeal to master my skills will enable me to become a headmaster in education. Next, as a survivor, I hope to train my future students more effectively, walking me through the penury of love and interest of numerous students. Therefore, I am certain that a complete instruction emphasizes wholeness. As the U.S. Department of Education estimates that the nation will be in need of more than two million teachers by the decade’s end, I expect to be part of new pools of talent of “highly certified teachers” that Troops-to-Teachers or Teach for America are seeking to tap. Hence, here I am everyday, enjoying my classes, absorbing the best I am being taught. As you can see, my living dream is very much alive!

By Mina Morsli-Mainelli

This is My Dream

When I was a young child, age three, I was a Daddy’s girl. I spent all my time with my dad. I would go hunting or ride motorcycles. At the age of seven my dad left my mom, my baby brother and me. From then on I was a very unhappy child. It was

just the three of us, then one day my mom got married. I did not like another man telling me what I could or couldn't do. So at the age of thirteen I moved out and in with my dad. This is where I thought my dream would now become true. At thirteen I met Richard Mosely who was twenty-two. He gave me it all. Then one day I found out I was having a baby. I knew in my mind my child would not grow up like me. Well, we got married and had a daughter. After she was born things went down hill. He hit me and was very jealous so I filed for a divorce at the age of sixteen.

In 1990 again I met a man and he raised my daughter as his own. We had two girls and one boy together, but years into this relationship and I gave up and moved out. In 1999 my life was finally going as planned. In 2000 we had a little boy and in 2002 we had a little girl. Then, things took a turn for the worse. He turned me on to drugs. I'm telling you that I really thought that things were going great. Then on our fifth year he started hitting on me. He led me to think I caused him to beat on me. Well, in 2003 me kids got taken away and placed with his sister because of the abuse. I left and went to a woman's shelter, and my kids begged me not to go back. Well, I did and on Easter day he came to get my kids.

There went my dream. So, what did I do? I turned to the streets. I gave up on life. I went from running the game of drugs to trying to overdose on pills. In 2005, another man came into my life and he became a friend to me. No matter where, how or what time it was he was there to listen to me. I started having strong feelings for this man and he was so good to me, but that life was not me. In 2005 I was arrested. When I got to Lowell Correctional Institution I still had one problem, I was eight months pregnant and I did not want to give birth. I wanted to hold my child close to me. On January 6, 2006 I gave birth to a little girl. I thought the first loss of my kids was bad. Well nothing like giving birth and holding your baby one day and the next you are alone. The day my little

girl left my arms I told God that day that I was going to do this for my kids.

On February 2006 I left to go to court for my baby. When I got to the county jail I called my friend. We talked and when I arrived back at Lowell I had letters and cards from this man who was waiting on me. My dream was to marry this man and to get my kids back into my life. One day I had mail call and it was a letter from my eighteen year old and photos of my kids, all seven. I cried until I had no tears left. On December 16, 2006 I got a visit from my eighteen year old that I had not seen in three years and my baby whom I had not held since birth. My dream was just beginning. I now call my kids and they come to see me now. I am getting married and all seven of my kids are in my life again. This is my dream come true!

By Melinda Mosely

Melinda Mosely is a ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

Food for Our Soul

Everything that our Lord offers us is marvelous and even more when we can enjoy it through our sense of hearing. His purpose was perfect because he blessed us with music to delight us and feed our soul.

In this short writing, I wish to give you a time of relaxation to transport you to the spiritual calmness of reflection that produces such interesting subject.

Everyone might open their ears to nature's melodies and praise sounds of a symphony orchestrated by who created it for us. The original language of nature, from its hills, trees, birds, fish, insects, wild animals, oceans including our angels whom with their harps and incredible voices announced the most significant birth in human history "the nativity of Child Jesus Christ" filling our hearts and our homes with peace and happiness.

It is so wonderful the strength and joy of the bird's songs which involves a mysterious halo through green woodland and captivates its surroundings with its melodious trill. The firefly also gifts us its songs and source of light.

The breeze that whispers and caresses leads us to melancholy and tree branches with sounds of its leaves like the keys on a piano produce a unique melody.

There is so much music in the ocean...we can hear the roar as rough and rolling wild waves come crashing on the shore like cymbals in a marching band. We could listen to the music of the ocean all day long and imagine with our eyes closed a great festivity... many couples dancing celebrating a very important event with the rhythm of the waves like a beautiful soft dance.

There is innumerable music that God gave us but there is one, the more "hoped for" that moves us and makes us thank Him more every day "the sweet babble" and first words from our children when they call us mom – dad. Thank you my God! This is music too! How much you have given us!

In addition to beautiful nature's music, our Lord didn't forget to create talented creatures with musical potential to give joy to human and a great variety of rhythm such as choir in churches, national anthem in each country and folklore music from each

region, bands, duet, trio, quartet, jazz, orchestra, classical music, opera, etc.

There is music that touches profoundly and leaves an enduring mark in our physics such as Ave Maria or a five symphony Beethoven.

Music is a positive word in our lives; it even helps us improve our health while lifting our spirits. People with health problems have been resilient with music therapy and women who have listened to music during their pregnancy have said to have very smart children.

Musical instruments such as violins, guitars and harps speak to us with its strings making us vibrate our hearts. Also, the piano, cymbals, drums and other instruments combined make great orchestras that accompany great singers to the merry of all of us.

How beautiful and comforting is the music!

Our respect to all whom are dedicated to this valuable art.

By Nieves T. Nouel

Living My Dream

Hi. My name is Jamie, and I am involved in the Even Start Program in Milton, Florida. I have a two year old son named Anthony. I AM "Living my Dream!" After I dropped out of high school, I never imagined that I would be able to go back to school and actually have a graduation. When I finish GED classes, I would like to attend college. I would like to receive my degree in Administrative Assistant. Once I finish college I plan on finding a

good job, so I can buy a house for me and my family to live in. I would for my son to be able to have almost anything he wants. Growing up I didn't get a lot of what I wanted, and I don't want my son growing up wishing he had something. Part of my dream is for my son to grown up very respectful. He needs to know that no matter how old he is, I am still his mom and his dad is still his dad. I was taught that in life you have to struggle to get where you want to be, so I am here in the middle of a struggle. I am only a few steps away from my dream.

By Jamie Noto

Jamie Noto is a single mother of one, Anthony and she is hoping this program will allow her to get her G.E.D. and then from there to be able to go up the ladder of success.

Was Talking With My Shadow

One day I was talking with my shadow and asking a lot of different questions about how will my life be in five or ten years. I have lot dreams of reach. I started to think about my future and then I realized if I want my dreams to come true I really have to work on them, because you can do everything you want if you feel from your heart and ask God to help you to do it.

One of my dreams was to meet a good person who I can share my life with all help me make them come true. I did; I found a good husband, Ronald and we have two wonderful children Julio and Miranda. After they were born I wondered how I could be a good mother. It was something I had to teach myself, because there are no good mother schools. It's hard to say if I have been successful, but I am think I am doing well. I'm trying to teach them good values, and show them, how to be good with other people. I hope in the future they will remember all they have learned and the

time we spent together. They are still young, but one day I will see the results and I will feel good that another dream came true. Even though they are young I feel proud of them.

My biggest dream was when I left Costa Rica and came to the United State. That was a big change for my family. I started to make new dreams. At first I was afraid because of the differences in culture and language. I think to get used to this country wasn't too hard, but not being able to communicate with other people was a big challenge. I have children and later around they will go to school and I have to communicate with their teachers. Also I knew that I will make new friends so I wanted to improve my English. Now, for this reason new dreams start to grown in my brain. I wanted to learn the language of my new home. I joined the Palm Beach County Adult Literacy Program and I am now living this dream.

Every day I work hard to learn English and I feel in my heart that if I continue to improve I will make my dreams a reality. This country gives big opportunities to everybody. When we moved here, we decided to look for those opportunities. Ronald's friend asked him if he wanted to work in designs and built custom closets company. Ronald didn't want to accept his friend offer, but I encouraged him. I persuaded him not be afraid, and reminded him dreams can be real if you want. I knew in Costa Rica he was doing other things but he believed in himself and he tried it and now, he is very happy and proud of how well he is doing.

We started a new project in our lives. We wanted to have our own business. I knew this new project won't be easy to make true. Little by little it will happen. We are working in the right direction. I know that one day we will see are dreams materialize. We continue dreaming as a family, but I have my own dreams also. I don't now if they will come true, but I am asking my self the same question that I did ten years ago.

How will our lives be in ten years? Will we live here, move back to Costa Rica or pack and move to a new country. I don't have the answer to my questions right now, but we are still dreaming. The size of our dreams doesn't matter. They can be big or small. It also doesn't matter how hard we have to work for them but I know for sure that all the dreams that I have can come true if I first put them in my brain and feel them from my heart. We have to really try to make our dreams come true.

By Guissella Obando

Leaving Eritrea

I'm Mohamed Omerdin from Eritrea. Eritrea is in the north of Africa. It is south of the Red Sea, north of Ethiopia, east of Sudan and west of Djibouti. My country is at war so when you turn 18 you must serve in the army. When you join the army you must do what you are told to do. If they tell you to hurt someone, you must do it or you will get hurt. If they tell you to kill, you must kill or you will be killed. So, when I turned 18 I had no option and I was sent to a town close to a Red Sea beach. Ten other friends who also joined the army did not like the way we live and wished to live in another country. "What is out there?" we quietly questioned ourselves. "There must be a better country". Our desperate eyes communicated our intentions of running away. Without telling anyone else we started planning our gateway to freedom. Several times we would wake up in the middle of the night and discuss the possibilities of leaving. We did not share our ideas with our families as we did not want to put them at risk. We had to collect money from family and friends in order to buy enough fuel to cross Saudi Arabia. One night we took a boat and left. The soldiers attacked us but we made it.

When we arrived in Saudi Arabia we turned ourselves in. They arrested us. The Saudi government sent our cases to the United Nations. Many people from Eritrea flee to Saudi Arabia. I was in jail for 6 months when they sent me to a camp. I worked in the camp for one year and a half. One day, after checking my past, they put me on a plane and sent me to the United States.

After being 2 years apart, I called my mom and told her what had happened to me. She couldn't believe I was alive. She told me that my dad was arrested the year before and that he was leaving the prison in 3 months. Then he would have to work in a camp, so she was having a hard time supporting the family. I told her not to worry about me. The United Nations gave me 3 months of rent, clothing and food stamps till I got a job. They found me a job and I am working for Shingle Creek Resort. They also provide me bus tickets and English classes. I'm studying at Mid Florida Tech in the Palmas program. I'm learning English and soon I'll join a technical program.

I'm happy in the United States. In a year, I will get my green card and in 5 years my citizenship. I already enjoyed the American Halloween and Thanksgiving. It seems that having fun and helping each other are important American values. I'm working hard and making the most of this great opportunity.

Note: Eritrea emerged from its long war of independence in 1993 only to plunge once again into military conflict, first with Yemen and then, more devastatingly, with its old adversary, Ethiopia. Today, a fragile peace prevails and Eritrea faces the gigantic tasks of rebuilding its infrastructure and of developing its economy after more than 30 years of fighting.

By Mohamed Omerdin

*Mohamed Omerdin is a student at ESOL – Palmas Program.
His teacher is Marilia Conte Daros.*

A Silhouette

Dead vines wrap loosely around the old iron gate
Once lovely flowers, they now have met their fate
Brittle stiff brown foliage, still linger at this time
before were velvet soft petals, that nestled on the vine
A rustling sound is heard now, from rain and chilly wind
crumpled on the rustic bars, with no more life within
Earlier that summer, the dew had left a shine, that flowed
into the mist of dawn, the sight was so divine
A fragrance once spilled into the air, that would turn our
heads to smell. When we saw the beauty there, our hearts
could only swell. Now dead buds lie under heavy growth, that
spiral down the frame. Leaves fall off now and then, but the
thorns remain the same. The sun goes down and the moon
creeps up to cast a different light. A fog rolls in around the
gate, looks dead against the night. When the roses were so full
of life, and the stars were shining bright. They gleamed a
silhouette against the sky, for all to share delight
Flowers come and go, not one is exactly the same.
But a perfect rose on the vine, then gone, is such an awful
shame.

By Marsha O'Neill

An Immigrant: A New Beginning in America

Being in the U.S. for the last two years, I have experienced a lot of things that I have never thought would happen. I want to be as successful as anyone., but I know it will not be easy.

I came to the U.S. July 27 of 2004. I didn't know a word of English. I remember that day when I got off the airplane at the Miami International Airport. I couldn't understand a word the officials were telling me. If it weren't for another Haitian who helped me, I might have stayed at the airport the whole day.

Coming from another country to live in America is not easy. It's like starting all over again, especially for those of us who had almost finished school in our home country. We had to leave our native land to pursue our dreams. But no matter how hard it is, I've got to force myself not to give up because I am not going to regret it.

America is one of the best countries to live in. I go to school everyday where I do not have to pay a cent. For me, it's a privilege because I used to struggle so much to pay for my education. I sometimes had to work for a little bit of money and had to pay much more than what I was making at that time. One of the best things I like about living in the U.S. is while I'm going to school, I can work and earn some money to send to my family in Haiti.

Nowadays, writing in English is something I enjoy doing. Two years ago, it was an impossible task for me. I remember one day that I had an appointment at East Area Adult School for a CASAS test. That was the first test I took to determine my level in English. That same day, I also remember staying for school. After school, I went home thinking I would never speak or understand English. But that wasn't the case. As days went by, I began to understand English little by little.

To live in the U.S. you ought to speak English to earn a degree or get a job promotion. There is a piece of advice I'd like to give to an immigrant. No matter where you come from, when you live in the U.S., try not to allow work to keep you from going to school.

This may be difficult for those with families to support. But don't give up, you won't be disappointed.

I have been studying English for two years or so and now all I want to do is complete my GED, go to college and get a degree. Anyway, the main thing is that an immigrant who doesn't know English should go to school and learn the language to fulfill his or her dream and be successful!

The United States, what a country! It's a country full of opportunities, a free country, well organized and without discrimination against any race, religion or sex. It is a country every nation in the world wishes to be like.

Coming to live in America is a great thing because there are lots of things I can benefit from like going to college, sometimes without having to pay. Becoming a citizen is what I am aspiring to. I want to travel the world and make lots of money. I also want to earn a college degree, and if I do, then I would be the first one in my family to do so and that would be awesome!

By Jean Oreste

My Grandfather

Someone who I greatly admire is my grandfather. My grandfather came to the U.S. through Ellis Island when he was fourteen. He had to find work which was hard as he is Sicilian. Prejudices were strong then. In spite of that obstacle he did not quit. He eventually opened a bushel business for farmers.

Then, after he married my grandmother, he bought a large amount of real estate in south Florida and moved there. He opened

a full business and over many years he bought more real estate, mostly woods and swampland. He kept it and over time it became valuable. He ran his business until he retired at the age of eighty-one.

After that, he started selling his real estate parcels and now is very well off. You would not know it by looking at him. He lives a relatively simple life and tends to his groves and garden in the back of his and my grandmother's house. He usually comes in dirty and sweating.

He has come from another country speaking no English and made something of himself. Even at the age of eighty-four he still works hard every day tending to his home and four acres. He is the foundation on which my family stands and this is why I am very proud of and admire my grandfather.

By Anthony Otero

Anthony Otero attends Santa Rosa Adult School. His teacher is Rhonda Currier. He enjoys exercising and will become a father for the first time very soon.

Untitled

When I was little my life used to be very happy and I had a lot of fun with my brothers and sisters, but it was a little bit hard because my father used to work in the Agricultura, he was a farm worker. So it wasn't very much money for all of us. Even with that I was able to go to Escuela Primaria (primary school) for six years, Escuela Secundaria (High school) for 3 years, and Academia Comercial (Community College) for three years.

I used to be very friendly, I danced a lot of folk songs, I used to sing in front of my group of friends. But what I really wanted was to finish studying and start working to help my father because it was only his salary for all my 13 brothers and sisters. Many of us were studying. So I did start working. I worked for five years as a secretary. Then I decided to come to the US to study English.

In the US I met a boyfriend, before my husband. Everything was good for nine months but when I decided to go back to Mexico to see my parents he thought that I would never come back. So he decided to take me with him without my permission. He prepared everything for that.

I was going on a trip to Mexico on Sunday, so the Friday before that I was preparing everything for my trip. Then he called me and invited me to go to the park near my house to talk and I went. We talked for 20 minutes. When I decided to go back to the house he asked me if I could listen to a song he had for me in his car. Of course I did. It was very nice of me.

When I tried to get out of the car I couldn't. He locked all the doors, the only door that could open was on the driver's side. HE started driving and didn't say a word. I told him that wasn't the right way and I tried to convince him, telling him many things. The only thing he said was he was doing that because he was afraid of losing me. He was driving to Miami but I convinced him to stop at a gas station in Okeechobee. From there I called my brother. He told me not to get back in the car and wait for them.

I didn't want to but my brother's wife called the police. The police took us to the police station and I waited for my brother there. I didn't press charges on my boyfriend so they let him go. The next Sunday I went to Mexico and I stayed there for a few months, then I came back.

That experience in my life helped me a lot because I know I can take on any situation that comes my way.

Later I met my husband and 16 months after that we got married and now we have two beautiful children.

By Felicitas Palomare

My Dream Come True

I first became aware of the Hillsborough Literacy Council while attending a Bible study group at College Hill Library in Tampa. The instructor asked me how I felt about the study group, and I told her about my handicap – my inability to read, write and spell. I wanted to be able to improve my vocabulary as well. The instructor informed me of a program associated with the library to help adult non-readers. She gave me a phone number to call and told me they would help me get a tutor.

I phoned the Council the next day and left a message asking for someone to call me back. I received a return phone call from the Council and the woman told me she thought she might have a tutor for me right away. She said this tutor would probably be able to meet with me at the times I was available. Being a truck driver, my hours vary so it was important to work with someone who was flexible when it came to the days and the times we would meet. She asked me how soon I wanted to get started and I said “yesterday”!

I received a phone call from my potential tutor that day and several days later we met for the first time at Seminole Heights Library in Tampa. We talked about our schedules, my reading level and tutoring locations and decided that we would start meeting with each other twice a week. She asked me how much I

could read and I told her I could only read enough to get by. She immediately ordered Laubach Book 1 for me from the Literacy Council and we began working that week.

We've been working together almost three years and we are now in Book 3. When I first started it was a struggle because I had a lot of things keeping me from reaching my goals and accomplishing my dream. I am proud of the fact that I have written two stories since I have been enrolled in the program. I have kept myself disciplined even though it has been rough. My desire is to complete all four books and graduate from the program.

I was never ashamed of my inability to read and I do not suffer from low self-esteem as a result. But I feel a lot better about myself now that I can finally see my dream coming true after struggling for years. One of my favorite Bible verses is "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me". As a result, I have been made a stronger person now that I am on the road to becoming a better reader.

By Michael Perdue

Michael is a 47 year old truck driver and father of three, grandfather of six. This is the second story he has written for the Florida Literacy Coalition and the third story for the Hillsborough Literacy Council. His tutor is Brenda Balla.

My Story...

When I was in Spain a friend called me and she asked me if she could give my phone number to Andy because he asked for me and I said, "yes you can, if you have my picture and my address give him that too."

After a while we lost touch. Then I found his phone number in the USA and I called him. We used to talk every day, like we were looking right at each other.

And he invited me to come here, so I came to the USA. He was waiting for me at the airport but I couldn't see him because he was hidden behind a column. When I found him I asked him, "why were you hidden?" He said he was afraid, "I thought if she is fat and an old woman what do I do now?"

I was afraid too because I had gone fifteen years without seeing him. He was my first boyfriend. When we met again it was very fun and happy, as if we had been together that whole time. I wished that the time wouldn't end and I said, "Here is my man." We married the next month and now we are the parents of twin girls. But that's another story.

By Lilia Pettay

Bonding

I was looking for ideas for Christmas presents for friends and family members. Homemade presents are the best and I enjoy crafts and making Afghans. One day I was in a craft store with my mom and I saw kits to make tree skirts. They were made with yarn and I like working with yarn. This would be a great idea for the presents. So I bought one and took it home.

I was at the kitchen table sorting the colors of yarn when dad came in and asked what I was doing. Immediately, I got him involved. Dad was colorblind so distinguishing the colors was difficult for him. The project soon became our nightly ritual. He would sit down with a beer and me with a Diet Pepsi and we

started working on the tree skirt. The first one would be for my brother, David. This one turned out to be the most difficult to make. The skirt was to look like stained glass so it required a lot more colors. We made one with cardinal birds and candles for my brother, Jim. Our friends Pat & Chuck also got the stained glass skirt. The last one we made was for mom and it was a Santa Claus skirt. Mom collects Santa's. It was good therapy for me as it was a good way to release tension.

We worked on the skirts for about an hour every afternoon. Dad was retired and it was a good time for us to bond. Then mom would come home and kick us out of the kitchen so she could make dinner. Later in the evening, she would look at our work and realize that some of the colors weren't right so we had to re-do some of our work the next day.

This was a very good time in my life. It took about three months to make each tree skirt and I remember it fondly because it was time I spend with dad before he got sick. In all, we made six tree skirts together.

By Susan Phillips

Susan is one of three children. She has two brothers. Susan is a Canadian citizen but has lived in the United States since she was five years old; first in Illinois for a few years and then in Wisconsin. She moved to Florida with her mother, Betty, in January of 2006. Pet sitting & walking, cleaning houses, spending time with the elderly, swimming and doing crafts are some of the things she enjoys. Her tutor is Judy Cassidy.

Summer & Autumn

Summer

The sun is shining with leaves of green
You walk along
You turn and spin into a dream.

The earth is like a mosaic
drifting into autumn
as the sky sings and whispers
like the gold of leaves.

And the wind fingers ripple in the trees.

Summer and autumn
like the dark
you cannot see it
but you can feel the change.

By Nathaniel J. Pickett

The Old Me and the New Me

It all started when I was five years old. I woke up in the middle of the night and I cut all my hair off. The next morning my Mom and Granna went into the kitchen and saw hair in the garbage. My Mom and Granna came and woke me up and took the cover from over my head and said, "What the heck? Why did you cut all of your hair off?" I said, "I want to be a boy." So, my Mom made me go to Day Care looking like a boy and the kids started making fun of me. The next thing I knew I was beating up the kids because they were calling me a boy. That got me kicked out of Day Care. It turns out that I had A.D.H.D.

When I was twelve years old I pushed a teacher for taking my pencil. I pushed a teacher so hard that he fell on the ground. I went to jail for pushing the teacher. The reason he took my pencil is because I was writing on the walls. The reason I was writing on the walls is because I was mad about getting kicked out of class. I got kicked out of class for cursing the teacher. I was cursing the teacher because she had piled six days worth of make-up work on my desk on my first day back to school after six days of skipping class. The reason I skipped class for six days is simply because I didn't want to go. So, there I was in the front office writing on the walls when this teacher grabbed the pencil out of my hand. I blew up! (Hey, it was an expensive mechanical pencil that cost about five bucks!) So, that's how I first ended up in jail. I was there for five days.

Then when I was fourteen years old I went to my first program at Milton Girls Facility. (I don't even remember what I did to get sent there.) I stayed in there for about two years. I got out when I was sixteen years old.

I started going to this new school called Raiders. I got into trouble there, too. I got into trouble for skipping class four days in a row. So I got a referral and I had to go to the front office. The dean suspended me for skipping class. The resource officer called my probation officer and she said that I had to be in court the next day. So, the next day I went to court and the judge decided that I had violated my probation. She could have sent me back to jail. Instead of sending me to jail they committed me to a program. I had to go to a Commitment Staffing to see what program I was going to.

On April 17, 2006 I went to my second program. It was a thirty day wilderness program. We couldn't shower, we had to wake up early and we had to eat weird stuff. We had to dig a hole in order

to use as a toilet. It was horrible, so on April 21, 2006 I escaped from the woods. I was in Yulee, Florida at the time. After I escaped I was free for all of ten minutes. They caught me walking on the sidewalk and sent me back to jail in Gainesville. I stayed in jail for about twenty-one days when they decided try me in a third program in Starke, Florida. I stayed in that program for about seven months. I was seventeen then.

My third program was very different because I was living in a house setting with six people. There was me and three other girls plus the home parents and their granddaughter. I got to go to regular school, go to the mall, and do just about anything I wanted to do as long as I followed the rules of the house parents. When I got into the third program they started me on some new meds that made a world of difference for me. I found that I didn't get mad as easily as I used to. I could keep my attitude under control better. Finally, I felt like a normal kid. On December 21, 2006 I graduated from the third program and came home.

Now I am going to this great school called ABE/GED. I am doing very well at this point. I am staying out of trouble and listening to my Mother everyday.

I want to be a teacher when I grow up. I want to help other kids that have trouble in school like I did. When I was little I always wanted to be a teacher. Even though I never liked school, teachers always seemed like they were smart and cool! I feel excited about living my life now!

By Lauren Pinkney

Lauren Pinkney attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier. She has a lot going for herself. She likes going to the movies, mall, park and she loves to talk on the phone.

My Experience in the United States

When I decided to take English class, my goal and my dream was to be able to write, read and learn how to spell the words. But in the class our teacher made us write; I was nervous. Didn't know how to start. I didn't know how to write, to put words together to make a sentence. To spell all the words is very hard for me.

Last week my teacher sat beside me and was very patient to guide me on how to write. I said to her, "I can't write!". She said "Yes, you can."

Then we went home. I went to exercise and kept thinking. I said to myself, "What is wrong with me? What is happening? " My dream is to write, and to keep my mind working all day.

It reminded me when my kids were small I told them the first thing is to try everything. If you make a mistake, you will learn by your mistakes. Now they have good careers and a bright future. We are so proud of them.

Now in my old age, I am trying to learn English. I think it is very hard, but I will give myself the best shot--try one word at a time. One day I will accumulate the words I can write. I will say "yes" I can write. I will show my children; they will be proud of me. I try hard to prove for myself, "Yes, I can."

I thank Mrs. Adams for good help, and she is very patient. I think someday my wish will come true. Well tomorrow is another day. Also, it is my feeling that I will be able to write.

By Yen (CheChe) Polek

I come from Taiwan, Taipei. I have lived in America for 28 years. I have three children. I have a happy life. I will continue to go to school to learn English. My goal in ESOL is to be able to write.

The Principle That Guides My Life

The principle that guides my life is hard work. I think that hard work is important because first, you can provide for your family and they will be proud of you. Also, it makes you understand that through hard work you can have more. Finally, hard work is critical to me because my parents raised me by showing me and telling me that work is a good thing because you will feel good about yourself.

I think industriousness is such a good thing because you can provide for your family. The reasons why I think it is necessary are because when you work hard your family will be proud of you, and that will make you feel good. Hard work can also show good character. It will show what kind of a person you are to everyone and they will think more of you because you work so hard. And that will make you feel good about yourself because everyone will be so proud of you.

I also think hard work is essential because it will make you understand what you really have. And that can show you that you can do anything you want to. Hard work can show you that nothing is impossible and you can do more in your life. With hard work, comes money. And all of that will show you that you have to earn what you want out of life.

I think that labor is valuable because my parents raised me by showing me and telling me that hard work is a good thing. Both of

my parents work very hard in our family business. And they also tell me that hard work makes you a better person because you can provide for your family and yourself.

Hard work can do a lot for you and it does not take much. You just have to have the will power to do it. And believe me, it will make you feel good when you are finished. So go and work hard!

By Justin Powell

Justin is a 22 year old student in Lively's G.E.D. class in Tallahassee, FL. He graduated from Greensboro high school in Greensboro, FL in 2004. He hopes to one day attend a community college to study construction, agricultural nurseries, or horse training.

My Million Dollar Trip

I have always wanted to go to Las Vegas. That is the place that I always imagine to be. There are three reasons why I would love to visit. For example, I could go to a casino, I could go shopping, and I could meet different people.

To begin, I can say that I have always wanted to go to a casino. The first time I went, I was with my mom and dad in the Bahamas. I wasn't old enough to play. I wanted to play the slot machines so bad. I love seeing all the quarters come out. And I would love to win the jackpot.

If I won the jackpot at the casino, I would go shopping. I would buy an outfit with a matching purse, shoes and hat. I love shopping in a beautiful place. There are so many things I would buy. I know I would spend all my money shopping in Las Vegas.

I love to meet different people. I like to see the environment they live in and how it's different from mine. I would like to get to know some people because I would love for them to tell me a good spot to hang out. I love going out to clubs. I wouldn't mind for someone to show me around to some of the clubs.

I love to travel from place to place. Exploring different things and different people, that's my thing. In conclusion, I would say that it's okay to travel a lot, because you get to learn a lot. I'm the type of person that would love to explore the world. So when I get rich, or get some money, Las Vegas would be the first place I'd go.

By Faquita Pugh

Faquina is a girl that's studying hard to get her G.E.D. She wants to go to school for cosmetology and open up her own day spa, and do a little modeling on the side.

Living the Dream

At Seminole Community College, the slogan around campus is, "be yourself only better." It is known that education is knowledge, which can never be stolen like a vehicle; therefore I urge all youths to pursue this challenge, as an opportunity neglected may not return, so be courageous and take the chance.

Growing up in my native country Guyana, one of our neighbors who always wanted to have children experienced problems and never thought they could have a child of their own. They showered my siblings and me with unconditional love.

She was in her mid 40's when she found out she was pregnant. Their son was born a few months before they immigrated to Canada. Her husband died of a heart attack when her son was five

years old. She had rough times, but worked hard to raise her child with help from friends and relatives. She instilled great social and moral values in him.

This child grew up to be a person with a big voice and an even bigger heart. He had a dream and a passion to accomplish it. Recently in Canada, at age 15 he stood at the podium with a lanky frame and childlike face, with passion and wisdom which by far exceed his age. In the audience were hundreds of speakers, including world leaders and community activists who listened attentively when he opened his mouth.

He spoke about giving youth hopes and dreams in order to break the cycle of poverty and violence and to help them to succeed and accomplish their dreams. He said, “Youths are the present, so give them the chance.” He has a natural passion for political life and public service. In my opinion, he is a perfect example of what young people can do if they put their mind to it.

He is constantly challenged by his dream to one day become the first visible minority prime minister. The leaders who were seated in the audience were impressed with the speaker’s important ideas and they were honored that they gave the speaker a chance to voice his opinions. For this motivating and inspiring speech the speaker won several prestigious awards.

This young man, in my opinion, is one example that if we give youths the opportunity to succeed and accomplish their dreams, they will have hope. They can then aspire to whatever they want to be. Encouragement and dedication are key attributes to youths living their dream.

By Kamala Punit

Kamala Punit, originally from Guyana, is currently a student at Seminole Community College and enrolled in GED courses.

Good Experiences in the U.S.

As I have lived in the U.S. I have two positive experiences to share. One of my positive experiences in the U.S. was to have the opportunity to travel for three whole years. Another positive experience for me was meeting my husband.

I enjoyed so much seeing different cities of this country. I would spend at least ten more years just traveling, staying in hotels without worries about cleaning, cooking or making my bed. I would invest my thinking on how to find the best way to explore each city, like I did in Colorado, New Mexico, Madison, San Antonio and others.

An important positive experience for me was meeting my husband. I had the great opportunity to start the family of my dreams with him. It has been wonderful not just because of him, and the good man he has been. Also because of my two precious girls, too. And the invaluable chance of being a mother.

I never expected to come to this country, but am glad I did it. Now my life is better in many ways compared to the way it was in my country.

By Mary Ramirez

I am the mother of two girls: Natalie and Nicole. I am a student of Okaloosa Walton College. I am so glad that I am taking ESOL classes. These classes are helping me a lot with my English skills. My teacher is Mary Ann Adams. I am from Columbia.

The Rosa Resendiz Story

Hi my name is Rosa Resendiz. I would like to tell you about when I was a girl. It actually was really hard because my parents separated when I was 12 years old. That was very sad for me. I was the baby in the home. I stayed with my brothers in the house of my father. Afterwards, when I was 13 years old, I went to live with my mama at the house of my grandmother. But it was all the same to me. I was alone all the time. My mother worked all day. She did not have time for me.

The years passed and I turned 15 years old. My brother came to work in the U.S. for 2 years. He talked on the phone with me and asked do you want your quinceaños? But my mother and I did not have our own house. I said that it is better if you send the money to our mother to build our own house. He sent the money and my mama began to buy all the materials.

When she has every thing, she hired a bricklayer. He began to build the house. He did it in more or less 3 months. When the house was done, we moved in to our new house. We felt so happy and I began to work. We were in very good health and secure financially. Every Saturday I went to dance with my boyfriend who is now my husband. I married him when I was 17 years old. We lived in his house for six months. Afterwards, he came to work in the U.S. He asked me to come to here with him because he missed me a lot. And I came.

By Rosa Resendiz

My Journey

My life journey has led me to become a better person. I've been up and down; I've been depressed, and I've been stressed. My journey has led me to my family and to my closest friend Bridgette. My journey has led me to find love, laughter, and happiness. My journey has led me to be a more patient and forgiving person and to be thoughtful and considerate of others. My journey has led me to become a better, more stable mother, friend, lover, sister and aunt. I've made a lot of mistakes and I've learned from them all. At age 33, I never thought I'd be going for my G.E. D. Now that I'm actually doing it, I ask myself "Why did I wait so long? Was it fear? Embarrassment?" I don't know about that, but I know I've made the right decision, not only for me, but for my children's future as well. I'm so proud of myself. I know that my journey will lead me to exactly where I need to be; I'm so willing to follow. My journey is not over. It's only the beginning. I am determined to show my children that Mommy can not only accomplish what she set her mind to do, but that they can also do whatever it is they want. With determination and persistence anything is absolutely possible. My journey has led me to achieve, believe, dream, conquer, and my journey has led me to just be blessed!

My life,
My love,
My dream,
My journey!

By Jacquelynn Richardson

Jacquelynn Richardson is a new addition to our class, the Pinellas County Even Start Class. She is a motivated student with an outgoing personality. She is the mother of four children:

Chencia, Astante, Tariq, and Jada-Faith. She is committed to coming to class and encourages others to achieve as well. Her G.E.D. teacher is AnnMarie Kokash and her parent educator is Lindy Hayduke.

My Experience in Adult Literacy League

I'm going to talk about my experience in this organization. I came from Puerto Rico in 1993. I have an Associate in Secretarial Sciences from Catholic University of Puerto Rico, but I couldn't speak English.

In these years here in Orlando, I visited several English programs, but none of them filled my expectations. One day I saw an interview on a Spanish channel with Mrs. Ricarda Contreras. I began one year ago with Mr. Vince Scalise. Today I can visit doctors and have work interviews in English. In these visits I don't need interpreters. This is very important to me.

I was nominated for the National Adult Education Honor Society. I'm very proud of this because I never thought this would happen and much less here in United States.

All of these things I owe to Adult Literacy League, Mr. Vince Scalise and my tutor Mrs. Laura Whitfield.

Thank you very much and I am very grateful with all of my heart for the help that I received from them. I hope others can appreciate and take advantage of a program like this to succeed. I want to speak English without problems and to continue ahead with my dreams.

By Carmen Rivera

*Carmen is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando.
Her teachers are Vince Scalise and Laura Whitfield.*

Living My Dreams

All my life it has been my dream to see the world. I wanted to travel, but I could not afford it. When I learned to read, I began to travel the world by reading. By reading I have traveled much of the world, so I will keep on reading. The more I read, the more knowledge I get.

In my real life, I can now read and understand my auto mechanic books so I can fix my car and my truck. I am also now able to help my neighbors who are from Cuba with reading English.

I am living my dreams.

By Jerry Rivers

Why I Came to the USA

I'm from Mexico, and one of the reasons I am in this country is because I got married to an American guy. It was one of those good reasons that push you forward to achieve new goals and daring new adventures of a way ticket. I remember when I was a student in High School and I was attending English class, my teacher told the group how important it was to learn English as a second language. Besides, it is an international language and according to her, "success" is writing in English. I guess I never paid attention to this, but today I just turn around and see how correct my teacher was. I'm living in Jacksonville Florida, a city

where the majority of the people speak English and, without doubt, if I want to be successful I have to speak English.

Nowadays, the topic of immigration and being surrounded by people from all over the world it's not news. The United States has become a cosmopolitan country by diversity of different cultures and languages, sharing just one thing in common: everybody speaks English as a second language.

I have been improving my English for the last three years and I guess I'll keep doing this for the rest of my life. Decisiveness and optimism are the keys for a quality life, but speaking English is the key to survival in this country.

By Marisa Rogina

Marisa Rogina was born and raised in Celaya, Mexico, a little town south of Mexico City. She is the youngest of a family of two with one older brother. She has been happily married for three years to her "American guy", and has a degree in Communication and Public Relations.

(Marissa also writes: a special gratitude to my teachers for their patience and for all their time spent with me. Thanks to them I am able to write this. To my husband for his patience and experience, to my brother for his wisdom and to my mom for letting me fly away and fulfill my dreams.)

Untitled

Sometimes I find myself
lost in thoughts.
Wondering the paths I have chosen.

Is it right or is it wrong-
the pain I've caused,
the pain I've endured?

Who decides my fate, my future- me?
Who could know, will I be happy?
My heart's desire is just this one thing.
This one thing that is everything.
Happiness to build a life upon.
Happiness to grow old and die with.
People to love and people to hate.
People to miss and people found too late.
Loves I have lost and loves I have gained.

Someone said- we choose to be happy.
If happiness is a choice,
why are people not happy?
Foolishness?

By Luciane Rosa

Memories of My Childhood

It could be a story of my life; it could be a memory of my childhood or maybe things that I will never forget.

The most important person in my life was my grandma. I remember my grandma making cheese and then she would give me a piece of that cheese.

In my childhood, I was really impish. I also had fun by playing many games. I made my own kites and then competed with my friends to see which kite would fly the farthest. Also, playing

soccer was one of my favorite games. I did a lot of things but I am not able to find words to explain. But I'd never change anything. It was so much fun.

By Gustavo Rosales

Gustavo Rosales says he started his adventures in his English class one year ago, and although he felt it was really hard because everybody spoke better than he did, he knows his English is improving and he has written this small essay describing part of his life in Guatemala.

Untitled

My Name is Maricela. I was born in Mexico and I came to the USA in 1999. I live in Orlando with my husband and my two children. We have one daughter. Her name is Maritza and she is 5 years old. She is in Kindergarten. I have one son. His name is Luis. He is 7 years old. He is in the 1st grade. They are good students.

My husband works in construction. He loves his work. I work at home, cleaning the house, cooking food. But the most difficult and important work is taking care of my children. I love my kids. I enjoy playing with them. We like to go to walk. They love to exercise. This is all my family in this country, I don't have more family here.

By Maricela Ruiz

Hang-Gliding

The most fun, and the scariest time I ever had was in Springville, Alabama. A friend and I were watching hang-gliding one afternoon, when we had a chance to buy two hang gliders that were almost new. The area was far from where we lived. We bought them anyway, and remembered some tall mountains in Saint Claire County, just forty- five minutes away from where we lived. We had traveled this back country road many times before and enjoyed the beautiful view. With only two lessons, we got brave and tried it. This experience was our first time in this area and our first attempt at hang gliding. After making a few adjustments by trimming some trees, with permission from a farmer we had started a new sport in our area.

Flying wasn't new to us, but this was different, as we had no motor. I was very scared at first, because of the big rocks just below our take off run. The head winds were perfect. We had eighty degrees of directional head winds most of the year, which is a real benefit. Soon the word was out, and people came from as far as even Birmingham, to hang glide there on weekends.

One day four of us wanted to check out a mountain, in Talladega County. This was the highest point in Alabama. There was no way that any of us were going to jump from any of those heights. We just enjoyed the view in the State Park that day and left.

Soon after this, two of my friends wanted to ride the thermals in wind conditions that were too fast and unsafe. As a matter of fact, one of them went despite my warnings and ended up tearing off a wing on a barbed wire fence. He was lucky not to be face first on the ground. There are two more years of hang-gliding adventures that I could tell. However, I will conclude this story by

saying, “Hang in there and have fun in your life, even if life sometimes gives you a surprising turn of events.”

By Ken Salter

Ken Salter attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL, where his teacher is Rhonda Currier. He moved to Florida in 2000 from Alabama. He worked in construction until he suffered an injury to his back and had to have surgery. He hopes to be retrained for a new job this year.

What the G.E.D Means to Me

My name is Jamie and I am 21 years old. I am getting my GED to be a better role model for my children. This will allow me to get a better job that I like. I am also going to feel better about myself.

I think having my GED will help me understand my children’s school work. I won’t have to call for help, or feel embarrassed. Hopefully, this will bring us closer together. I also hope this helps them follow in my footsteps.

After my GED, I plan to enroll in college. When I finally get a college degree, I plan to become a detention officer. I will be able to feel comfortable knowing I have a job that pays well. Having an education will allow me to go further than I ever thought.

Also, the diploma will make me feel good about myself. I will no longer need to worry about work. I am so excited that I will be taking the test soon. I know once I have the degree, there will be no need to feel insecure.

Hopefully, the GED diploma will help me start a new life. I will be able to help my children with their school work. I will be able to start a new job. Also, knowing all this and having my diploma will help me feel good about myself.

By Jamie Sander

Jamie is married and has 2 children, Lisa, age 5 and Christopher, age 1 year. She is planning to take her GED test in March 2007. After she earns her diploma, she plans to attend St. Petersburg College to become a detention officer. She attends adult education classes at Lealman Elementary in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Anne Morgan.

Wrapped and Twisted

Harsh words and violent blows,
Hidden secrets nobody knows,
Eyes are open hands are fisted,
Deep inside I'm wrapped and twisted.

So many tricks and so many lies,
Too many whens too many whys,
Nobody's special and nobody's gifted,
I'm just me so wrapped and twisted.

Sleeping awake, choking on a dream,
Listening loudly to a silent scream,
Call my mind the number's unlisted,
Lost in someone wrapped and twisted.

On my knees, alive but dead,
Look at the invisible blood that I've bled,

I'm not gone yet, but my mind has drifted,
Don't expect much, I'm wrapped and twisted.

Burnt out, wasted, empty, and hollow,
Today's just yesterday's tomorrow,
The sun died out and the ashes sifted,
I'm still here all wrapped and twisted.

By Mindy Schindler

*Mindy is a teen Mom. Her baby, Kayla, is 8 months old. She loves to write poetry and she wrote *Wrapped and Twisted* for a friend who was going through rough times. She attends adult education classes at Lealman Elementary in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Anne Morgan*

This is My Story

Hello there; my name is Christina Sears and this is my story. I go to GED classes four times a week. I want to get a diploma for High School Credits. That way, I can go on to college to become whatever I decide to be. My favorite subjects in school are writing and spelling. These just seem to come the easiest to me.

When I was a child in school many years ago, I was in band. I was a trumpet player; the only girl of 15 players. I was recognized as a first chair for two years out of the three years I was in band. My band teacher said that I was very good and could get a scholarship to go on to college. He was very upset when I dropped out. However, he understood that becoming a mother was more important to me.

I really don't know too much to say. I really don't have any free time. I work 40 or more hours a week. On top of that, I go to counseling sessions every Thursday afternoon. I go to other meetings three days a week when I am able. Most importantly, I take care of my ten year old son Ty.

I have a lot of activities going on in my life. I hope to improve my life by getting an education that will lead to better hours and a better paying job. Perhaps I will even achieve a dream career.

By Christina Sears

Christina Sears attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier. She is a great mother and friend. She also provides wonderful technical support to her Adult Basic Education teacher and classmates.

The Child of My Neighbor

I do not remember any situation in particular with a person or a relative who has bothered me very much. Probably one child in my neighborhood, who was very naughty.

People said that he was very bad to his mother and his sisters and his games were always very rough and cruel. He liked beating up other children. His aunt was my friend. She was always complaining about the behavior of her nephew, to the point where once she told me that this child had burned the tail of his cat. Both of us were terrified. He loved a lot one programs on television every Saturday. Once this show wasn't presented because of technical reasons, this child was infuriated so badly that he broke the TV set. His acts always were scaring others

Some years later, when we were already adults I visited his family again and asked for him and they said to me that he was a very good and organized person who had excellent behavior, and that he was studying medicine. I was very glad for his family.

By Esther Seleson

Truth of Life

We meet many people in the journey of life

Some for a moment

And a few for life
Time keeps on passing

And we start living in hearts of each other

We all think in the same way
that

We can not live alive without each other

Then

We all separate from each other

And

Live alive.....

By Muhammed Shahid

Muhammed Shahid is an ESOL student at the Center for Adult Learning, Jacksonville Public Library, in Jacksonville, FL. His teacher is Helen Hill.

Slower Than the Rest

I knew I was slow in school because I didn't read well. Because I didn't read well they put me where I didn't understand. I wasn't fast. I was slow. I learned later I had to work hard so I could make it in the world today.

By Anonymous Author

Living My Dream

I have a big dream. The first step in reaching my dream is to get my education. The second step is to get a career type job. My last step is to buy a big house. In my first step, I would get a Degree in Education because I love kids. I will try to get two degrees. In my second step, I would get a job working with kids. I would like to work in a day care center or a public school. In my last step, after making all that money, I would like to buy my big dream house (at least six bedrooms).

By Lashanda Smith

Lashanda Smith; 27; mother; good friend

A Second Chance

I'm David Smoot and I am 47 years of age. I consider myself to be a pretty bright guy. I've had my own business and I have made millions of dollars. Until some of what I thought were good friends - alcohol and drugs, -became a part of my life. At the start, I had worked hard from a very early age. I worked a paper route. I remember the papers were delivered to my house. I remember early on always looking for a way to pull my own weight. I also remember a job earning \$40.00- \$50.00 bucks a day selling flowers at intersections in the beach area. It was great to get paid, and I worked only after school until dark. That was great money for a 13 year old kid in the early 70's. With that job I was able to save up to buy a new 1976 "Red Honda Ellsinore" 125 Motocross Bike. I wanted to go "pro". Most of the guys were from rich and supportive families. I was pretty good when I first started as a novice. I was winning just about everything in sight. Then I became intermediate. The next step was "pro". I was determined to become a professional.

Then I started skipping school so I could practice for upcoming events. I did this for almost 1 ½ years. In the beginning of my school years, I made A's and B's. I didn't feel I had to worry about missing class here and there. Eventually my grades started to drop. I wanted riding to be my professional living. "Pros" were earning \$50,000 dollars a year and up back in the 70's. I was then introduced to alcohol and marijuana. This was making it very hard for me to see my goals. Eventually motocross was taking a back seat to my partying and having fun.

Even with all this going on, I was one of the top riders in Southern California. I was always in the media. I was the number one qualifier out of Ascot and Irwindale Speedways in 1977. This allowed me to participate in the very first stadium motocross event

in the United States. This was held at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. All the manufactures were there: Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki. I had the talent. If I could finish in the top 10 in the main event of the Intermediate Division, I was more than likely going to become pro. Something bad happened the weekend before the race. I was at a track testing. While I was between stunts, I was driving while I was high. I accidentally placed my hand in between the chain guard and sprocket and tore off three of my fingers. Blood was everywhere. I was rushed to Saddleback Community Hospital, minus three fingers. I was in the Emergency Room for reconstructive surgery and someone came in saying they found the fingers. He had them in an ice cooler and is now a hero. He saved my fingers and got them to the hospital in time for the surgery. They were able to sew them back on. I have full use of my hand today.

Alcohol and drugs took away the possibility of me going “pro”. Alcohol and drugs lied to me and told me everything is going to be ok. Today, I look back and see how blind I was to the deceiver, “King Alcohol and his cousin, Drugs.” I am going to miss my friends, but I have to sever my ties. They’ve never been my true friends; they’ve always lied to me, promising me that everything is going to be ok.

The good news is today I am making a change. I am trusting in God. I am staying clean and getting my GED. Today I also plan on doing God’s work helping other suffering addicts. I also have plans and goals again. I am going to work for God and myself. I have plans to open up my own center called C.A.R.S. (Cocaine, Alcohol, Recovery, Systems) Today I am making a difference. May God Bless You.

By David Smoot

David is a single dad to three grown beautiful children: Chenelle, Jasmine and Sean, Carreitti. David is a student in the SRCO Jail/GED program. David's main focus is to brush up on math and computer skills. He has owned several successful businesses in Southern California.

Roots

My father was the head bookkeeper in a big shipbuilding factory. My mother was an engineer in the same factory. My two brothers were also engineers. My childhood was very happy and cheerful. Russian people are very friendly and hospitable. My mother baked tasty pies. She played the guitar very well. She was also a good artist and taught me how to do it. All my relatives were very cultural and kind people. We liked people of all nationalities. I had a grant to attend the highest technical school in Russia. All students have grants to attend school. Everybody had free medication, doctors and sanatoriums. The food was very inexpensive. It was also inexpensive to travel by airplanes, trains and ships. I liked going to the museums and theatres. The museums were free.

I graduated in 1975 as an engineer and welder of ships. I married the captain of a big ship. We had a daughter. She is now 28 years old and is a psychologist. My son is 34 years old and is a producer and television cameraman.

I lived in the Ukraine from 1980 to 2004. I worked as an engineer until 1987. I had to change my job when my son became sick from cancer after Chernobyl. I needed more time to care for him. Fortunately, he is healthy now.

I have been divorced since 1984. I came to the United States in January 2004. I married a kind American man, Ron Mann, in March 2004. I like the people and the culture of the United States. I know many American scientists, actors and writers. I am happy in America.

By Olga Sukhoruchkina

My name is Olga Sukhoruchkina. I was born on May 26, 1949 in Severodvinsk, Russia. The city of Sverodvinsk lies near the White Sea.

A Confession

I was watching you sleep the other day
And prayed that it would last
The peace that rested on your face
I'd never seen in the past.

I was watching you speak a while ago
And hoped that you'd go on
The way your words, they had no end
Your spirit seemed so strong.

I was watching you fight the other day
And prayed my tears would dry
All this I knew was done for me
And couldn't figure why.

I was watching you smile a while ago
And stared in total awe.
Was it me that made you shine?
Was that triumph that I saw?

And all this time you've waited
And all this time you've helped.
And all the things you sacrificed
For me to grow up well.

And all the tears you dried.
And all the pain you soothed.
And all the truths you had to hide
Without a simple thank-you.

But I was watching you the other day
And I realized I can't wait
To tell you how much I appreciate
And love you in every way.

By Kirstie Surface

Kirstie Surface is a student at Central Florida Community College, Adult Education Program. Her teacher is Dennis Radice.

HOW DOES IT FEEL BEING UNLOVED

I was born in a small town in Ethiopia. When I was about five years old, both my parents passed away. I have brothers and sisters but all of us were kids. We had nobody in our lives to protect and care for us except our grandmother, but she was getting old, in her 70's. It was a very hard situation for her to take care of five children, so she started to give us to different relatives so we could have a better life and future.

One day, she took me to the City and gave me away to one of my relatives (now my adoptive family). That was a terrible day in my life, to separate from my grandmother. It was a really hard

situation, especially for a little kid who lost her parents like me. I got really hurt.

I didn't even had a chance to make a choice. Grandma left me there. Then, I felt something inside of me, and I said to myself: "You have nobody to protect and care about you in your life."

That was a very bad thought for a little kid, and after I told this to myself I started to feel terrible about me.

Just think if someone feels sick physically, the doctor will cure that person with different medication. But when someone feels loneliness and unwanted and hopelessness like I felt, what is cure that person?, only love.

My adoptive family didn't understand all this. They did everything which was good for me, they tried to make me happy the way they thought best, but I had never been happy in my life. I really appreciate my adoptive parents, they made a lot of sacrifices to change my life, especially my Dad. I know they tried to show me their love by doing good things in my life and I really appreciate that.

I started to think good thoughts. I said to myself: "Everything can't be terrible in life and also everything can't be perfect and joyful like I wanted it to be." God gives me special and wonderful things in life but also he took away from me the most important and unique love I ever had. But I don't question God anymore about it because always his decisions and actions have a purpose.

Today, I'm in the U.S. living with my wonderful brother Nati and his loving wife, Woube, and I'm getting the love and attention I didn't get when I was a kid.

In one way or another miracles do happen in life and I'm the happiest person ever before because I got what I always wanted in life, love.

By Abebech Tesfaye

Thanksgiving Dinner

My favorite Thanksgiving dinner is turkey and pecan pie.

The Thanksgiving last week, I baked a 19-pound (lb) turkey. I stuffed the turkey with stuffing. I made it with a variety of ingredients. I put in sausage, celery, pecans, apples, raisins, dried cherries, eggs, salt, pepper, and bread crumbs.

We ate stuffing, mashed potatoes, and sweet snap peas with the turkey. Everything was very delicious.

For dessert, we enjoyed pecan pie and ice cream. The pie and the turkey we bought at Costco Supermarket.

We had four people at Thanksgiving dinner, but we had so much food. Thank God for this, and thank God for blessing us everyday.

I think I'm going to make turkey dinner at Christmas again. It's my favorite dinner.

By Anonymous Author

The Job That's Meant for Me

The job that's meant for me would be a job in the Japanese anime business.

One reason is that I'd like to supervise how the story would go. The Japanese aren't really doing it very well. Heck, they might as well just ask their bosses to fire them. If you've seen the anime they made you'd know what I meant.

Secondly, I'm the only one that notices the flaws in the shows. I'd like for the shows to make sense with their ideas once again. You'll know what I'm talking about when you see them.

Finally, I'd like to make the cartoons much better. Let's give the people something they'd like instead of something they'll regret paying for. What animator would be proud of something that disappoints the viewer?

The reason that a job in the Japanese anime business is the job for me is that I would enjoy supervising how the story would and should go. I feel that the Japanese really are doing pretty badly. They might as well ask their bosses for the pink slip you'd know what I'm talking about if you saw the cartoons they made. I'm also the only one that sees the errors in the cartoons. They have to make the ideas of the story clear. If you seen the cartoons you'll notice that they don't make sense and I want the anime shows to be a lot better after all we want the people to get what they want not something they want their money back for. After all what kind of cartoonist would be pleased with something that displeases the people who watch the shows? These are the reasons I believe the job in the Japanese anime business is meant for me.

By Anonymous Author

A Cry Out

Daddy, daddy, I love you so... just how much you'll never know

Please don't fuss when I call you on the phone...even though I did
wrong
I apologize for my mistakes... but Daddy, Daddy, it's not too late
Don't turn your back on me... I need you, Daddy, can't you see
Walk with me through this deadly disease... I know it's hard,
Daddy, but please
I have taken a step... by going to a substance abuse group
I love you, Daddy, don't turn me loose!
Daddy, Daddy, I know you'll understand
Please, Daddy, I'm just asking for a hand
Even though I cannot see... I'll hear it in your voice when you speak
to me
That you'll say, "This is my last time!"
Thank you, Daddy, for peace of mind... I LOVE YOU

Patricia Thomas

*Patricia Thomas is a G.E.D. student and a mother of two,
Ashley Dixon and Timmie Jordan. Family Literacy has really
helped her brush up on her poem writing.*

Living my Dream

My biggest dream that I could have is to finish my GED and go to Capps College. I started living my dream a couple of months ago. It has been very hard at times to really stick with it and not back out. This is my fourth time going back to school. I realize now that you have to really want to do something bad enough to really reach what goal you have set. Back when I was younger, I wanted to finish my schooling, but there was too many things getting in my way. It was not important back then, like it is now.

I am now living my dream by showing my kids that you can get what you want by putting your mind to it and finish what you start. It is time for me to get what I desire and what I have been dreaming about for years. When I fulfill this dream, I will get to start on a new dream. I would like to become a Medical Assistant. When I finish, I would like to get a job at a doctor's office. That is how I am going to live my dream, getting my GED is only the beginning.

By Tonya Wales

The Best Period of My Life

The best period of my life was during my teenaged years when I thought the world was at my fingertips. I remember going to the beach and skating with my friends, my dear friend Mary, and my first boyfriend.

I remember the fun we all had swimming all day. My friend Mary and I would stay in the water 'till we looked like prunes. Swimming made us very hungry, so after prying ourselves from the water, we'd fix hot dogs and hamburgers, and oh, the foods tasted so good. After we all ate so much, we became lazy, so we'd take a nap in the warm sand. We would stay at the beach all day so that we could see the sunset. What beautiful sunsets!

On weekend afternoons, we would go to the movie theater in town. We saw many a good movie. At night we would go skating. I loved to skate, gliding around on the wood floor. It was like flying. There were many places teens could go. We could go to the drive-in movies, or the dances at the Union Hall.

I remember my very first date. I was fifteen. Sammy Hampton was his name. Sammy and I went on a school picnic at Hillsborough State Park. Sammy and I dated for a long time. We'd go to the movies or to the dance, and wherever we went, we had fun.

The most wonderful time of the night was driving around Russell's Drive-In Restaurant. We had to cruise around just to see who was there! Of course, we always wanted them to see us too and what car we were in. My father would let Sammy drive his Chevrolet Bel-Air convertible. It was fantastic!! We would park and the carhops would wait on us. We would eat hamburgers and drink Pepsi and sit in our cars. Then, we'd get out and walk around and talk to everyone there.

On Sundays, everyone went to church. Sometimes I would go with Sammy to his church and sometimes Sammy would go with me to mine. Sometimes we would have big dinners after services and our friends would come and eat with us. I can remember sitting in the swing on our front porch with Sammy after one of those big dinners.

Christmas was a wonderful time. I would get so excited trying to pick out presents for everyone. I have to admit, I had the most fun picking out my present for Sammy.

Those were wonderful years. I am much older now, and time has drifted by. I think about Mary and Sammy and our time on the beach and the picnics at Hillsborough State Park and smile. Life goes on, but I still have the memory of those years engraved in my heart.

By Veatrice Walker

Veatrice is a charming lady. She is 70 years young and working on achieving her G.E.D. Veatrice works and after earning her G.E.D., she would like to be in human services.

Dreams Filled and Unfulfilled

My name is Kim Washington. I am a lot of things and one of those things is an adult learner. I am a product of poverty, alcohol and drug addiction, and all the childhood abuses that accompany that. I am also an over-achiever. Reading and writing, or English as a second language are not my problem. My situation is about fulfilling all your dreams and having nothing left. It's about the loss of self-respect and the void of nothingness. It's about living in that void. It's about how much alike we all are, no matter where we have been, where we are, or where we are going.

I was the only child in my family to graduate from high school. Considering my family life this was a very big achievement. I went into the military to pay for schooling. I did a few years in college, then went to nursing school and became a registered nurse. Along the way I became a drug addict and alcoholic, but through the Grace of God, I have achieved the status of recovering drug addict and alcoholic. I got involved with Martial Arts, and I have achieved the level of 2nd Degree Black Belt. During my training as a Martial Artist, I began to have the dream of having my own school. The more I thought about fulfilling this dream, the more I became unhappy about my nursing career. I felt like I could not insert another tube in another orifice in another human being. I left the nursing world behind; found a building and opened a Martial Arts School. I was very happy. I was so happy basking in my fulfilled dream, I did not pay attention to the business end of my business. I had to close the school, but I was so happy for having the opportunity to live my dream, I did not care.

I was so happy and pleased with myself; I decided to take any kind of minimum wage job to support myself. One year and several jobs later, I began having anxiety attacks. I decided I should go back to nursing and stop fooling around. Every time I started to go on an interview for a nursing job, I would get an anxiety attack and not go. I continued with minimum wage jobs as my self-respect and self-esteem fell lower and lower. I stayed in jobs shorter and shorter spans of time as each job got lower and lower on the socio-economic scale of society. It got to the point that my dog was really the only thing that kept me going. I knew if I became homeless or went into a shelter, I would have to give him up.

I got a job at a local four-year college in housekeeping so I could go to school for free. I took a course there with the well-to-do teenagers. I was uncomfortable, so I quit that job and took a long honest look at myself. I realized another degree was not what I needed. I needed some marketable skills to get another career going. There is a saying, "When the student is ready the teacher appears." Someone told me about Traviss Career Center.

By this time I was living with my oldest daughter. She took me to Traviss one day. From the moment I walked through the door at that place, I have had nothing but kindness, encouragement, and help to get me back on the road to success. My first day in school I wrote a letter of thank you to the director for having the good sense to surround himself with such an excellent staff of kind and caring people.

My teacher is an advocate for me in every way. She gently prods me into action to get involved in workshops and groups. She enlisted me as a Traviss Ambassador. I give tours, and talk about the benefits of getting career skills at Traviss. I am also the elected secretary of the Business Professionals of America. Traviss has

created a compassionate environment of growth and learning. Every day a little piece of my self-esteem and dignity return to me through the encouragement and kindness being given to me at Travis Career Center. I am going to be a legal secretary one day, but it is my own self-respect that makes me a better human being.

In closing I would like to say reading and writing is not my problem. English as a second language is not my problem. I have lived a life that has shown me, lack of knowledge and skills, or abundance of knowledge and skills are just things on the outside that separate us. Deep down inside all of us are our fears, strengths, and weaknesses. These are the things that draw us all together, no matter where we have been, where we are, or where we are going.

By Kim Washington

Kim is going through a complete career change at over 50 years old. She is a registered nurse who experienced "burn out." She attends Travis Career Center. She believes the program at Travis will provide her with the skills needed to enter the legal profession. Her instructor is Doris Scott.

What I Have Achieved

I am thanking God for what I have achieved in life. Most of all, I thank Him for health and strength, a beautiful home, a loving wife and my children. Since coming to the U.S., I have achieved a new job, a house, and five nice children. These things make me feel proud and happy.

I got a new job. I used to repair jewelry. I used to repair watches in Jamaica. When I came to Florida, I could not get a job

repairing watches, so I got a job repairing houses. Today, I am a carpenter. I am proud of the work I do.

I got married to a beautiful woman. She is a loving wife and a friend. She makes me very happy. We purchased a lovely home. We have lived there for 14 years. I just finished some refurbishing on it. It uplifted the place and made it more beautiful and also brought the value up. I am very comfortable with it.

I have five grown children, four daughters and one son. One daughter lives here, and the others live in Jamaica. They are very nice and loving children. They make me feel very proud.

I am a loving husband and very kind-hearted. I like to be at home with my family. I don't have a lot of friends, but the few that I have most are from Jamaica. I worship on Sunday. I am very thankful to God for all I have and all I have achieved. God gave me health and strength and everything I own. Without God I could never have owned or achieved anything.

By Anonymous Author

Broward County Library Learning Services/Each One Teach One

Mother's Death

On December 16th, 2000, on a Sunday night, I drove from my home in Pensacola to Milton, Florida to visit my parents and my sister. My mother and Father were elderly; Mother was 74 years of age and my Father 78. On that Sunday night I had just left the house and gone back to Pensacola. My Mother called me just to check up on me. She always called to see if I had made it home. We talked for a while. Then she said, "O.K., I'm going to bed now. I said,"O.K., I will be off work this weekend and I'll be back." She said, "O.K." and we hung up the phone.

About one hour later the phone rang and it was a girl who lives down the street from my mother's house. She said, "Linda, you need to come back over here your mom's house is on fire." I said, "I'm on my way." I left to go to the hospital and when I got there I asked the nurse for the Walker family. "She said, "Baby, you need to go to your mother's house." I said, "Oh, my God." The nurse said, "Baby, when you get there, there will be fire trucks. They may not let you through. You need to tell them that's your mother's house." And he let go.

I ran over to the house crying, "Mom, Mom." My sister grabbed me and said, "She's gone with her sister and brother in heaven." Then I said, "Where is my son, Chris?" He was right there. He grabbed me and said, "Mom, it will be all right."

So we all went to the hospital where my father was. We were praying for him. He had to stay in the hospital for two or three days. Fortunately, he made it out in time for the funeral.

We learned later that the fire had been caused by my father accidentally dropping a cigarette into some turpentine in their basement floor. My father lived to be 81 years of age and he never really got over her tragic death.

My sister and I are trying to hang in there.

By Linda Whigum

Linda Whigum attends Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL where her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Living My Dream

My name is Bertha White. I have seven children, four boys and three girls. They all live in Gainesville, Florida. They are very loving and caring kids. My dream and desire for them is to have them join a big spiritual church, with all of us being members, and see them singing in the choir. Keasha is 29 years old, and he plays football. Eric is 26 years old and he is a plaster. Bertha is 24 years old and she is a manager in housekeeping. Terral is 23 years old, and works at the Dollar General warehouse. Victoria is 21 years old and works at a daycare. Tatyana is 19 and works at Wal-Mart. I am so very proud of them.

Even though I made some bad choices, and huge mistakes, I still taught my children values, respect, and morals. We had a hard time in our past. It was a struggle not having a good man or husband, or even a supportive father. I had to rely on my own will and determination to survive, no matter what. If I wanted to give up, I just couldn't for the life of my children. They mean the world to me. I always wanted the best for them like any other parent, so I found myself praying and trusting in God. This was a new way of doing things for me.

I can honestly say that I know it was God's will to see my children and I through all the terrible times. I am so grateful for the love that he has given me. Even though I am here doing time in prison, God is still taking care of my family and me. He is answering all of my prayers, and I am so grateful and honored for that. The point that I am trying to make is to always dream the highest dreams. You can always trust and believe that with Christ, we can do all things. Reach for the sky!

By Bertha White

*Bertha White is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility.
Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.*

Third Time is a Charm

This is my third time attempting to receive my GED, so that I can go to college and become the woman I've always dreamed of becoming. I have faith in myself, so therefore, I'm not letting anything get into my way. I have two beautiful children, a fiancé, a job and school three days a week, so I carry a lot of responsibilities. Although it is quite hard and overwhelming at times, I am willing to do whatever it takes, to achieve my goals. I am looking forward to all of the new things that my future holds for me. I have an extreme amount of support from my family, friends and awesome teacher, Tonia. I am excited about graduating and applying to college to study Interior Design and to become a substitute teacher. I was once told by someone that I would never succeed in anything I tried to do; well I'm very happy to say that's the total opposite of how my life is. All my dreams are becoming a reality.

By Michelle Wilson

I Am...

I am a phenomenal woman. No truer words have ever been spoken. I am a strong, independent, black woman. I am also the mother of five children, two girls and three boys. I was fifteen years old when my first son Duvan was born in 1979. Then in 1982 at the age of eighteen my first daughter was born and I named her Tarka. My second son was born to me in 1986 as my third child, I named him Tony. I was twenty-two when Kadeem came along as

my third son, which was my fourth child. I was twenty-four and finally by surprise my second daughter was born. I named her Onetha. She e was my fifth and final child and I was thirty-one when that miracle came into my life.

As a single mother and phenomenal woman., I have raised all of my children. I did all of this without the financial or emotional support of their fathers. All of my children are still very near and dear to me. Which brings me to being a strong, independent, black woman. Becoming a mother at such a young age forced me to grow up. I begrudge nothing in my past. It is what has made me the strong, black woman that is here today. With the births of my five angels and the fact that I've raised them all on my own is a testament to the phenomenal woman that I am, I have never looked back nor regretted any of the decisions that I've made, and that is what I am a phenomenal woman.

By Roneitha Wilson

Roneitha Wilson is a ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her instructor is MarLinda S. Monroe-Johnson.

My Difficulties

When my first child started the second grade we had many problems in Wekiva Elementary School. At first they said that my child had to take an exam (a test), because we speak another language other than English, but my son had attended a regular English class in first grade. After that they said, "He needs ESL program."

I talked to his teacher and she said that she didn't know why he didn't pass the test because he was fine and he understood

everything in class. Their conclusion was that he needed to change the school because they didn't have an ESL program.

Bear Lake Elementary was the school nearest that had ESL. When he attended Bear Lake the ESL teacher said that she didn't know why they transferred him to this school, because he can take regular English class.

Three or four months later the ESL teacher called me to a conference and told me that he needed to return to Wekiva School because he didn't need more ESL class. But I decided that he would finish the school year in the same school because he had an adjusting problem.

When the new school year started I registered at Wekiva because that was the school that he had to go to and they wanted to put him again in ESL class. I was upset with the problem and I decided to leave him in the ESL program.

One day my child met a kid on the bus. The child was in fourth grade. My child took his friend to my house and his friend liked a keychain that had a screwdriver on it. The friend took my son on the side and told him, "if you like my plastic bracelet we can trade it for the screwdriver." My son answered, "this isn't mine, this is my dad's," but his friend insisted. The next morning the kid told my child again about the keychain and said, "Can I take it for two days and I give you the bracelet?" My son accepted.

My child took the screwdriver and traded it, the bus driver saw that and took my child and his friend to the principal's office. The principal asked my child, "Why do you want to change the keychain for the bracelet?" He answered, "Because I like it." The same question the principal asked to the friend and he said, "Because I have an enemy on the bus and if he me molesta (bothers me) I will pinch him with the screwdriver."

The principal called me and said that I had to go to school because he would like to talk to me about a serious problem with my child. When I arrived at school I saw my child with his eyes red because he was crying for about two hours, and he told me, "I didn't do nothing bad mami, I only wanted the plastic bracelet. Lo siento mami (I'm sorry)." I entered the principal's office but I didn't say anything, only heard what he said. He talked about my child as a criminal.

After that I called my husband and I explained everything that the principal said. My husband and I went to school and the principal said that my child would be suspended for a week and he filled out a paper that said that my child took a criminal object to school and every school where he will go should be notified about that, "as un asesino, (assassin)." My husband told the principal that, "por favor, give him a chance, because he didn't know what problems a keychain can cause or how dangerous it would be." And my husband argued that, "he is only seven years old and this would be prejudicial (detrimental) to my child and, "I don't know why this happened because my wife is always pendiente de que (careful that) our child brings nothing to school." And, "if you have children you know that sometimes they do things."

The principal said, "con mis hijos nunca pasaria algo asi (my kids never do things like this)." And argued, "he is dichoso (lucky) that I didn't call the police."

My husband se incomodos y le dije major dejalo asi, para evitar un problem mayor (was upset by this but I told him its better if he just leaves it as it is, to avoid a bigger problem)." But I know, cual es la cause de tontos obtacolos en esta escuela para el niño el razismo (a cause of many problems at this school is racism).

After that my son didn't like the school as before.

By Yudelkys Vilchez

Finding the Key that Unlocked My Dyslexia: a 25-Year Struggle

I was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1955, and put in foster care at the age of two. This had a profound and lasting affect on my life. I felt abandoned, angry and frustrated. In fourth grade I realized I could not read like everyone else. I felt I didn't belong at home or school.

Teachers did not know how to help me. Each year I passed to the next grade, even though I was not learning. I just gave up and thought, "who cares?" I hung out with others with similar attitudes. I felt accepted but this did not help me learn to read or get skills needed to get a decent job. At age 17, I dropped out of school.

I worked at various jobs which people with better skills wouldn't take. Except for a few true friends, I had little support from others. My anger and frustration continued. I had a chip on my shoulder.

At twenty my world changed. My daughter Marion was born. I was determined she would never suffer like I did. I wanted to give her everything I didn't have: a happy home, love and support, but most important -- an **education**. Fortunately, Marion was a bright and happy child. She excelled in school. I am proud that she graduated from college, became a teacher, and is doing well today.

Marion's birth in 1975, was a powerful motivation to learn to read. I bought many kits that promised to teach me. Nothing

worked. When I was in my mid-20's a remedial reading teacher suggested I get tested. I learned I was dyslexic. My problem now had a name, but I could not find any place to help me find the solution.

I devoted myself as a single-mother to raising Marion. I did housecleaning and other jobs, using the money to make sure Marion had the basics – especially school supplies. In 1992, I met Sal, who became my best friend, and we married in 1997. In 2002, we moved to Cape Coral, Florida.

Marion gave me a powerful reason to renew my vow to learn to read in 2003: my granddaughter, Sophia, was born. I contacted the Literacy Volunteers of Lee County. Tutors tried to help, but the methods that worked for students without dyslexia did not work for me. In 2005, LVLC's Anne Liebermann realized I needed a dyslexia tutor. She matched me with a new volunteer, Steve Chupack. He uses The Barton Reading and Spelling System, a multi-sensory, Orton-Gillingham influenced program.

Since August, 2005, we have met 2-3 times a week, sessions lasting 60-90 minutes. For the first time, I learned to hear and pronounce clearly the sounds words are made of, and to spell these sounds correctly. I learned about vowels, consonants, digraphs, unit syllables, the Kiss the Cat spelling rule, and other "tricks" that are part of the Barton System. He taught me how to overcome the challenge of multi-syllable words by dividing them into bite-size syllables. ("You eat an elephant a bite at a time," he would remind me when I was afraid of being overwhelmed.) It has been hard work, but fun, and so satisfying to see my progress. I still have more to learn, but I am proud to say I can read stories to my granddaughter and let me tell you it is great!

My dream is to help others so they do not have to suffer as I did. I plan to get my GED and some day take college courses.

Learning to read should be everyone's **right**. Texas law requires all problem readers be tested for dyslexia. **All** states should have a similar law. If dyslexia is caught early, everyone benefits. I had to wait twenty-five years between the time I was told I was dyslexic and the time I received the appropriate help. What a high price I have paid for this delay! Schools should understand that there are **no lost causes** when it comes to learning how to read. We need more public awareness, more trained teachers, volunteers, and advocates.

By Carmen Volpetti

Thank you Susan Barton. Thank you, Steve, for giving me the key that has unlocked the door to reading. This is Carmen's story, in her own words, as told to Steve Chupack, a Certified Barton Reading and Spelling System dyslexia tutor. He tutors Carmen through Literacy Volunteers of Lee County, and also tutors clients in the Cape Coral-Fort Myers area. Carmen is a Literacy Ambassador for the Florida Literacy Coalition.

Scary Story

It was a dark and quiet night. Faint sounds of children laughing, playing around, and hollering. I walk down the street looking for a party.

I start to walk down this one street that seemed to get darker and darker the farther and farther you go into. I continue on through the dark neighborhood. Mad laughter and screams come from a distance.

I fallow towards the noises thinking there is a party going on. I enter into an ever darker park of the hood. Noises start to come out from around me.

I pick up my pace and continue forward thinking it's just a couple of squirrels. Faster and faster I walk, darker and darker it gets, the louder the noises around me get.

I begin to run. Dead end. I turn around looking for what is making such noises. It's coming from all around me. I freak. I fall to the ground screaming out loud. I cover my head as it is all around me.

Silence... I lift my head up and look around. Nothing to be seen or heard. I stand... Begin to walk back with a pace. A black cat walks out right beside me. Follows me... like it is trying to guide me.

I look ahead. There is a street light shining on the black cat tar down the street. The black cat walks right into the light. And down a street that I did not notice before.

I follow down the street the cat went down. Something tells me that I should fallow it. I walk down some, the light goes out. Pitch black.

As my eyes adjust to the darkness, I follow the cat's meows. I can not see where it is leading me. I continue. I see a light yet again. The cat is gone. I continue on to the light. I can not see any more around me. I stand and look around. No houses, no people, no sky, nothing but pitch black, other than the light I am walking toward. I stand there under the light as I look afar into, nothing. A big breeze blows and cools my body off. I begin to see houses. Then, I see a person. I walk towards them to find out how I get out of the maze of a neighbor hood. I get right up to him. He turns

around and looks down at me. I look directly at this person, it's me! I try to say something, but all that comes out of my mouth is "Meow".

I run down the street, under a street light and see my shadow, I am a black cat! The black cat that guided me through the streets...

By Charles York

Charles York, a student at Santa Rosa Adult Learning Center, Mrs. Rhonda is his teacher. Seventeen years old, "dark and mysterious."

Camping and Fishing

Every year between September and December, a couple of my friends and I rent a cabin at Mary's Fish Camp in Homosassa Springs, Florida for the weekend. We go up there to have a great time and to fish for Mullet. For those who are not fish experts, mullet is a bright silver-colored fish that is best caught in the fall or winter. These fish actually migrate south for the winter into warmer waters. It is a very good tasting fish that is best eaten after it is smoked. We also scout about for other types of fish such as amber jack, cat fish, and red or drum fish. Besides catching fish, our only other goal is to have fun.

We have a great time trying to fish for mullet. That is our target fish, but any fish that will bite is the fish for us. Even though there's not that much to do around Mary's Fish Camp, we always have a good time when we're here. We all sit around the banks of the canal that is a mix of fresh and salt water or brackish waters. Sometimes we rent a pontoon boat and invite other friends over to join us for a boat ride along the canal to enjoy the beautiful view; we even stop and fish for a while.

Best of all, after a long day of fishing, my best friend cleans the fish and fries some of our catch while the rest of us get ready for a great fish fry with all our other friends. After the fish fry, we all sit around with a belly full of fish, play some card games, talk, and drink beer. We reminisce and of course we tell fish stories. Of course, what would fishing be without the story about the one that got away!

Every year when the weather begins to cool down and the fall season is at hand, we think about packing our things and heading up to Mary's Fish Camp. Not only can we see Florida's nature at its best, but the fish dare us to gather and angle for them. Most people look forward to Thanksgiving - turkey and stuffing, but we'd rather sit on the bank of that canal and fish away. There's nothing lazier than fishing and nothing more exciting than going to Mary's Fish Camp for the weekend.

By Petra Zamora

Petra is a good student at PHCC's ABE/GED Program. She is a hard worker, and with the help of math tutor Lori Azadian, Petra is not far from her G.E.D. Petra is a wonderful artist, so her goal is to go into graphic design.

Experiences in the US

I have lived in the US for three months. When asking me "what are positive experiences for you here?", there are at least two. One is my husband will be happy if I stay here. Another is I will try to become a good doctor.

My husband is an American. He likes living here. The following reasons are keeping him happy here:

1. His family members are all living here. He loves them very much, and they love him very much, too.
2. He likes his job as Family and Children attorney.
3. He feels comfortable living here with a familiar culture, friends, native language, great food and pleasant weather. If my husband is happy, then I will be happy, too.

I am trying to become a doctor. I am lucky because I am qualified to take the USLME test as a foreign medical graduate to join the Resident Program. That could help me become a good doctor, studying and working in the advanced technology medical environment here in the United States.

By Cathleen Zhang

Cathleen is from China. She has lived in EWB with her husband for three months. They will have a baby in March 2007. She enjoys classes of ESOL at OWC very much with her teacher Mary Ann. She has improved her English and made many nice friends from different countries. Now she is preparing for a medical exam to be a doctor here.
