

NEW BEGINNINGS



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

New Beginnings

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports, and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 250 adult education, literacy, and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.



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This book is dedicated to Florida's adult learners and the teachers, tutors, managers, and programs that support them. Thanks to all of the adult learners who contributed to this book.

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Preface

This book was designed to give adult learners the opportunity to build confidence while also improving their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Adult learners enrolled in adult education, ESOL, literacy, and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing, reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. As always, the editorial committee has chosen to minimize the editing of submissions, and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or any other affiliated organization.

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

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My Experience in Adult Education

A Light of a New Life

Everybody's lives were difficult during the pandemic including mine. I was a university student in Myanmar, a developing country that does not have enough vaccines. I was hopeful that the vaccines would be given to us so that all learning centers would be reopened again in 2021. Also, I was excited about my future plans - graduating from my university, going to America, continuing my education and working there.

Unfortunately, those plans vanished because of the uprising of a military coup that overthrew Myanmar's democratically elected government. This was the darkest time of my life ever because under the dictatorship we lost all our democracy, human rights, and also our future. But I did not give up on my dreams. Luckily, I got to join Ms. Josephson's virtual English class and it gives me hope.

I am thankful to my aunt who helped me enroll in this class. The tuition fee is affordable and the class hours are flexible. I was very happy and yet nervous at the same time, because it was my very first time communicating in English, with different people around the world I have never met before, in this class.

When I first joined the class, Ms. Josephson, my teacher, waited and warmly welcomed me and a friend who is the same nationality as me. Living there helped me to communicate without difficulty. But my teacher encouraged me not to be shy or scared and to speak up. She is very nice and friendly to all of her students. She takes care of and supports us like a mother. She teaches and guides us to improve not only English skills, but also our life and career. She is always there for us to discuss any matter.

I am grateful to meet and mingle with all my classmates. They are really kind to me. Some of them have their own career and they can manage their life well between work and education. They inspired me a lot. I also learned about cultures and good personalities from them. We are not the same age but we respect

and value each other like a family. It certainly is such a warm atmosphere at the adult education center.

I am motivated because of the cheerfulness of my teacher and friends. My English has improved tremendously. I could speak up and I don't feel afraid of English anymore. I also improved my knowledge, mindset and other skills from this class. I gained a lot of strength for my life ahead. If someone asks me about one of the happiest times, I will definitely answer that it is the time being in Ms. Josephson's class.

Chu Chu is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. She would like a career in Information Technology. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

ESOL

I have 20 years living in the USA. My first language is Spanish. I work hard with my basic English. I moved to Florida from New York, and I feel I need to speak and learn more English. I decided to sign up for school. I went to Daytona College then transferred to Flagler Technical College ESOL Program.

In my first two months at the school, I think the dynamic of the teacher is interesting. The environment is very nice and quiet and good for learning and to be focused. The teacher is very patient with us. I love it when we ask questions, and he makes a facial expression before he answers.

I love traveling and meeting new people. English gives you access to multiple cultures as the global language, and you can open doors for businesses.

One of the books we are using is so funny. The name of the book is Speak English like an American. It is based on idioms. I have new words in my vocabulary.

NOW, here I come!!

Chary Dornoy is a student at Flagler Technical College ESOL Program. Her teacher is Alex Davlantes.

My School Family

Hello, my name is Chwegens Altidor. I arrived in the United States without knowing any English. As an immigrant, my goal is to speak and communicate in English so when talking to others, I would understand.

I want to explain a little about my experience at the adult school here in Belle Glade, Florida. The name of my school is West Technical Education Center. I have been here for 7 months. I am in Mrs. Vickers class. I enjoy coming to class each night. In my teacher's class, she has 3 important but simple rules. The first rule is English only. When we speak even if we say it incorrectly it must be in English. The second rule is learning something new each night. She encourages us to try new words and phrases. The third one is what I like the most, have fun!! I never thought school would be this fun. We are all like a family here at my school.

After class when I get home, I share a new word that I learned with my mother. For example, "dress" for women and she asks me what is that? I explained to her in her language that it is the name of the clothes that women wear. My mother can also benefit from what I have learned. We are learning together, and we can create a very pleasant environment in our family.

I am very proud to be a student of Mrs. Vickers. She is a good person. She is always willing to help her student to go further.

Chwegens Altidor is a student at West Technical Education Center. His teacher's name is Carolyn Vickers.

My Experience at Clearview Adult Education Center

I am 75 years old. I have a son who has been living in the USA since 2001, and two lovely grandchildren. My son asked me to stay with them in order to spend more time together; therefore, I am here for a long period.

I have studied a lot. I have two Bachelor's degrees and a Master Degree in Business, so I never thought of going to school again. But under these circumstances, I need to speak English

fluently, so my daughter in law searched where I can improve my English. She found the Clearview Adult Education Center and made an appointment to look if I can go to study.

The first impression was amazing; all the people received me so kindly and politely that I felt grateful and happy. I had the interview and the initial test, and then decided to begin the classes.

The other good experience was the teachers I have; they are so gentle and very smart with a lot of knowledge to teach. My many thanks to them. The experience with my age to go again to study was so good that I don't believe it, so I recommend it strongly.

Jorge Brizi is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Experience in Adult Learning School

My name is Berta Beltran, and I did not want to go to school at the age of 68. I thought it was so embarrassing to go to study English at my age. A good friend said, "It's not too late". I signed up online, but I didn't like it. She said, "It would be best to go in person." Clearview Adult was the school she told me to go to.

I came, and I met so many people who wanted to learn too. I can read English much better now, but sometimes I don't understand what it means. Sometimes, my friend helps me to say some words right and tells me what they mean.

My teachers are a really big help and have taught me everything I know today. I have been in the U.S. for a long time, and I always wanted to learn English. I want to thank you, my teachers Nicole, Laura, Terri and Inguna for giving me a chance to understand English and read English more. If it wasn't for my teachers and my friends, I don't know what I would have done.

Berta Beltran is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Back to School at 38!

I never thought that at the age of 38 I would need to go back to school and start studying again as a married woman and the mother of two children, and this time, in a new country with a different language.

Why? I had a career in business, but knowledge of English hadn't been my strength. In my new home in Tucson, Arizona, I needed to take a Family Medical Dictionary with me to all of my doctors' appointments. At parent/teacher meetings, I didn't understand most of the conversation. It was all just jumbled words. But the best example of my need for better English skills was while dealing with the house alarm which I had forgotten to disarm. When I entered my home, the alarm "went off." The alarm company representative called to check if everything was o.k. When he asked me if my alarm had "gone off," I didn't understand the meaning of the phrasal verb, "gone off." I didn't know whether to say, "Yes, it is off," meaning, I had turned it off as soon as I heard it, or, "No, it is on," meaning, I had already reset it to "on." That embarrassing situation of words provoked me to enroll in an Adult Education program.

At one point, we left the United States for Mexico, but life brought me back to Jacksonville, Florida at the age of 54. The first thing I knew I was going to do, was visit my local library and look for their English courses. Luckily, I found one in my neighborhood. I realized that I didn't need to start learning English from scratch, but only to reinforce and practice. Fortunately, my library had different levels already in progress with excellent teachers and volunteers.

Not only am I learning English but also, I am acquiring computer skills. During the coronavirus outbreak, my library decided to continue our classes online. My teacher created a whole new structure in a short amount of time, so we didn't miss our sessions. She taught us digital skills so that we could continue with our learning. I am eternally grateful.

Definitely, I will never stop studying and learning. Now, I am able to have conversations, talk with doctors, make friends, and even write in English! All this makes me feel so much more comfortable with my life and my new home.

Isabel Guerrero is a student at Center for Adult Learning-Jacksonville Public Library. Her teacher is Naomi Chase.

Improving My Life

Having a learning disability leads to difficulties in reading. I was feeling trapped in life and tired of hiding my reading problem; I was ready for a change. With the help of my family, we found a program at Literacy for Adults. I would like to share a little of my journey.

I've been in the program, Literacy for Adults, for over 3 years to get help for my reading. Most of my lessons are awesome, but there are some that are very difficult. With my teacher's encouragement she helps me to keep going. She works with me to get through the difficult lessons. This program has helped me with not feeling trapped and lost in life. My reading and writing skills have improved.

Now I can say that I enjoy reading, writing, and reading out loud. This was something I ran from in the past. I don't feel trapped at a job, I'm not afraid to apply for a better-paying job or to take a test to move up in a job. This program has improved the quality of my life.

Sherry Flowers is a student at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Her teacher is Kathleen Dyer.

New Confidence

My experience with adult education is going well at the present time. A few years ago, there were a lot of struggles and a halt to my schooling. Personal problems along with a time that I was needed to support my mother and father through working had to take priority. Eventually, after three years of being out of school, I was presented an opportunity by a family friend. The next thing I know, this lady is setting me up to be enrolled in an after-school GED program.

So, there I was talking with the school's GED/Work-force enroller, and suddenly I am on a new journey attending classes.

I realize how much focus and dedication I now have, and that my education can be achieved. Even with failure in the past there is always success to follow when you do not give up. I am glad to be doing what it takes to get it done. I am fortunate to have the support and stability from my friends, family, and from my faith.

After working hard in class, taking unit quizzes, and persevering, I passed my Language Arts subtest! I have three more subject subtests to go in order to complete my diploma. It is a new year and I have confidence that I will achieve my educational goals. Everything that has happened has fallen into place with time and room to grow.

Not all of it has been a breeze. There are days when I am wiped out from work and responsibilities at home. Sometimes it takes that third cup of coffee to keep me afloat while I am trying not to sink. Even a little bit of effort goes a long way. Organizing, planning, and meditating help me to keep moving.

Take my advice: it is never too late to change the road you are on, and you should not give up. Even if it seems hard, you must push past the obstacles and celebrate the little steps of progress along the way. Look for and find help, and do not be afraid; you have the power to do what needs to be done if you really want it. Quitting is not the answer; it will build strength in you to not give up...even if it takes a lot more time than you envisioned.

My adult education experience really has been a life changing process. I know that this is what it takes to better myself and prepare me for my future. Just getting here to this level has deepened my perspective and shown me that I am on the right path. Perhaps reading about my experience will help you, too.

Eve Esperanza is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

A Life Long Learner Speaks

I began to take English classes because I needed to improve my knowledge of the language, particularly with my speaking skills and my understanding of the spoken word. I am attending a very good English class. My teacher, Ms. Miriani, is one of the

best I have ever met, and I have met many having studied for many years of my life. She has the ability to keep us active for endless hours without us losing focus. Furthermore, she is fun and always appears to be happy.

My experience in adult education (AE) has been a beautiful success in more ways than one. For example, before I began the AE-English course, I was always working from my home at my computer, and I had relatively few contacts with other people. I could not speak English well with other people and, in general, I was relatively alone for many hours of the day. After I began in AE, my day-to-day life has become more socially active and therefore more fun.

One of the most exciting things about my experience in AE is having contact with people from different countries and learning about their cultures. I have met people from Mexico, Haiti, India, Thailand, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Morocco. Our English class really represents a multicultural group of people.

Another enjoyable aspect I have shared with my classmates is participating in some holiday activities. For example, during Christmastime we all collaborated to decorate our classroom. We also made Christmas cards to give to isolated nursing home residents. We also shared a brunch where each one of us brought a typical or traditional food dish from our country.

I have learned a lot of new things about English during my time in AE. Additionally, I have learned a lot about the culture of the countries where my classmates come from. This has really been a very beautiful time for me. I thank my teacher very much for keeping us so active and interested in what we are learning. I also thank my classmates and the volunteers who are helping us for being so kind and friendly.

Nelda Dezzio is a Venezuelan Environmental Scientist. She is a retired researcher working remotely as a Scientific Consultant. She has lived in America for one year.

The Difference Between English Classes and a Tutor

I am going to start by telling you about my first English class in Fellsmere, but also how I started at Literacy Services and what the difference is between learning with a tutor or in a class with more than 15 students.

I was a student in Fellsmere for some years, where I started my first English class. I was shy, nervous and scared, but I needed to do it if I wanted to be independent, so I was brave and faced all my fears. I wanted to depend on myself and move forward.

In that time our class was in groups of 15 students or more depending on how many people came in on any day. The group that I was in was 4th, 5th and 6th grades, so basically with I was in 4th grade, the lowest grade. However, when the teacher asked questions, I did not have the opportunity to answer anything because the students who were in higher grades than me answered earlier than me. The teachers were happy to have someone answer and moved on. During these years I learned the basics that I needed, but I couldn't speak English.

After those classes, Juana Casa, the head of Head Start, told me about Literacy Services in Fellsmere. I applied and got a call about my new tutor, Ms. Carol. When I started with Ms. Carol, she came with materials. She was thinking I couldn't understand anything – maybe I was PreK in English. “I don't know what you know, so I start at the beginning,” she explained. She gave me a test of which book I should use, but she also had me talk in short sentences that I could use in all the places I went, like an appointment for my child. And I started talking! I tried it! I worked with her 1-1/2 or 2 years and received the ESL Student of the Year award in 2013.

Then I moved to Texas but came back soon after. I had a different tutor. That tutor – and all the tutors I had – made me feel comfortable. Each tutor has given me time, comfort and confidence. Now the conversation class is good, too. Before I took it, I was nervous making calls, but the class has helped me get over my nerves. I can make calls now. The Conversation Class is a group like the earlier Fellsmere class, but the teachers listen to us and correct us and explain why. Each student is treated equally.

In my experience, having tutors that can focus on each student makes a difference. Each tutor I have had has made a difference in my life.

Juana Cruz is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Linda Villamil.

Never Stop Learning

My English learning began when my husband and I came to America about 10 years ago. We both went to register for the class at the college. We were assigned to a teacher, Ms. Josephson. She explained all the material in a very clear and understandable way, even for those who did not know English at all.

Every time I was in the classroom, she gave us new knowledge. Each day there were other vocabulary words to learn, and much more. My teacher gave us many resources from various tools and sources. There was always something to do. No one idles in her class. With so much relevant material to prepare us for work readiness and higher learning, the job we will get in the future will be better than the previous one. In Ms. Josephson's class, students are inspired to learn, to be skillful, and to not quit.

I studied for a short time because I got pregnant. I had to put my studies on pause temporarily. Due to the fact that all of my friends speak Russian, this does not help me learn English at all. I have no practice in spoken English, and I am less motivated to study on my own. Of course, in 10 years I have learned some vocabularies but this is not enough for free communication.

Now my children are no longer babies, so I have some free time. I decided to go back to class because I am still unable to speak English well. In fact, it is very important if I want to stay in this country. I hope this attempt to learn a new language will be more successful this time. Please note, even if you think you know the language or you are learning well, there is always something you can learn more. So, never stop learning.

Anastasiya attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Setting Goals, Pursuing Dreams

Why do people decide to move to other countries? How easy is it for adult learners to learn a new foreign language? What is the appropriate age to learn a foreign language?

These are complex and challenging processes. They take time, patience, focus, motivation, and confidence. How fast these processes happen depends on what you want and when you want it.

People move because of their desire to have new experiences that allow them to achieve their personal and professional goals. I was one of them! Two years ago, I decided to leave my beautiful country, Colombia; I left my family and my job. It was a big step in my life but, at the same time, one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Before I came to the United States, something that always scared me was to learn English as an adult, but I took the first step. I looked for a college where I could take online classes. I found one of the best: Lorenzo Walker Technical College. In my first class, I felt nervous and shy; nothing came out of my mouth when my teacher asked me questions. I didn't know pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. With my teacher's support I improved my learning skills. I met different people who had been focused on finding success as they developed their abilities to learn English as well. That was a big motivation for me. Everyone experienced and enjoyed their own process, slow or fast; it didn't matter. They were aware that lack of time, work, family, and friends could get in the way of studying. We were a learning community; we knew each other; we were able to share interests and worries; we learned from mistakes. There was nothing better than making friends with those who supported and shared this new process. It was a wonderful experience.

How is my brain adapting to new words, grammar, and pronunciation at my age? Neuroplasticity—with every repetition of a word, a sentence, a right environment, and stimulation, we reinforce the specific language areas of learning that allow the brain to grow. So, I have no worries about my age. I should be feeling confident and trusting in my capacities to continue learning; barriers are only in my mind.

I finished my Level 6-Advanced course. I got a certification of achievement. I feel proud of myself. I had the privilege of having excellent teachers and college staff assisting me during my process. I am grateful for that.

Paula Ibarguen is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.

Myself in Class

I was almost 18 years old when I came to America. I did not have the chance to attend high school here because I was told that I was not eligible to enroll on account of my age. The staff gave me a paper to bring it to the Adult Education office.

I did not know any English when I arrived here. It was not easy in class. I could not understand what my teacher said. I was embarrassed, but I kept going to class, did my class assignments, homework, and practiced English every day. Through many practices in and outside of class, following my teacher's instruction, guidance, and advice, my English started to get better.

Many times, after work, I am too tired to go to class. I used to ride my bicycle to class, and it takes about half an hour one way. But now I drive my car. Thank goodness for Google Classroom and virtual class, I can still be in class and never miss it.

My teacher is very resourceful. She gave us many lessons and activities from YouTube videos, Burlington English program, and many relevant websites so that all students can repeat them as many times as we want. She is very systematic, strict, and sensible. She manages her class like a family at home. We are sisters and brothers in this class. We help and respect each other. My teacher is also our mentor. She not only teaches English, but she also prepares and explains to us about life in general.

I have grown to enjoy being in this class and value the teaching from my teacher, my guide. There is no other Adult Education center like this one in Key West. I am grateful to be a student in this class.

Niclore attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Am in the Driver's Seat Now

In my life, I have had a lot of experiences, for example: my birth, my time in the womb of my mother, my time as a child in school, and in general. In a few words, I will share some comparisons of my experiences in adult education.

My adult education experiences totally differ from when my parents were in control to my being in the driver's seat. Now, I can go to school, study or not and no one will say anything to me except possibly the teacher. And trust me, she does! Back then when I was under my parents' control it was their obligation to watch over me. They observed my notes or scores to know how I was doing things. This was very stressful for me although I had no other alternative then.

So, now being in adult education, it forces me to be mature and to take charge of my own responsibilities and learning. Attending classes, I received a new education on how to treat myself and others, on how to keep my courage up even when in the red light of my life. My adult education shows me how to take responsibility for a brighter future. It teaches me how to have better success for my country and the whole world. My only regret is that I wish I could see my parents now, but they went to eternal life, so young. I know in my heart that they are proud of me.

After all, I realize my adult education is the greatest experience I could have in my life. In fact, life is good; when you believe in education you can change or impact the world.

John Obed Schamma Fenelon, was born in Haiti and where he completed his extensive studies from primary school through attaining his license in law. Since that period, he is now the founder and director of a young adult school: ETEC Elschamma Technic Center. Later he established another school at Anse-Rouge and 7 Orphanages centers. John is currently studying English with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

I Trust My Teacher

My experience in Adult Education is something special. I feel good because I am starting to realize my dreams. I feel very happy and more motivated when my teacher, Ms. Josephson, talks to us. She always tells us to stay focused. She is very helpful and I make a lot of progress. I have met many people from various countries in the class. I share my ideas with them. I learn from them and they learn from me, too. I like this interaction.

I have been in class for three months. I like the technology system we use. Each student has access to a Chromebook provided by the class. To make it easier for us to learn we use many platforms such as Google Classroom, Remind, Burlington English, Mango Languages, myfloridareadytowork, and many more. This is one of the biggest privileges for me here since I have to learn English. Not only did I learn a lot in class, but it also became easier for me to understand the society, the culture, and things around me.

When I first came to class, I had a hard time understanding English, especially when Ms. Josephson taught and talked to all of us because I could not speak much English. Sometimes she makes me stand up to talk to the class. I did not do it because I did not want to just say anything that does not make sense. But she always tells me to try and keep on trying. "Say what you know. If you want to speak English, you need to open your mouth and speak the language. It does not matter if you make mistakes. I will help you. I need to hear your speech." These tips help me not be unsure and fearful. Just do it. Being in this class, I do not only learn English, it also helps me to be at peace in my mind.

Jean Claudelson Denis attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience in Adult Education

My experience in the Family Service Center is very good. In school, I learn to speak, write, read, and spell. Sometimes I help my classmates. A few years ago, I didn't feel very good because

my mother passed away when school started. For me, coming to school was awesome because I didn't feel alone in my house.

I like to go to school because I learn English and help other people. The teachers always teach a lot of things. I told my friends and my neighbors that studying English is very good for everyone. The Family Service Center has many opportunities for everyone. However, I really like coming to school.

While I study, I learn about different cultures, new friends, other languages, and different opinions. It's hard to study other languages, but it is good for me. I have different experiences with other people. Finally, those are my experiences coming to Adult Education.

Maria is a student at the Family Service Center, Arcadia, FL. She is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph's ABE/ESOL class. Maria is an excellent student and is working towards her academic goals.

My Experience at Palm Beach Central Adult Education

One of my dearest friends recommended the adult education program to me and I have had a beautiful experience. It helped me achieve my goal of American citizenship and meeting new people.

I came to Palm Beach Central to take citizenship classes. I came to class very nervous, but sometimes very desperate to learn anything because my goal was to be a citizen of America. I accomplished that goal, but then my teacher invited us to take the English course. I decided to take it to improve my English skills to become more fluent in the way of speaking, writing, and reading English.

Adult education was very helpful for me and for many. I appreciate all the help I've gotten from my teachers and other classmates. We would all help each other in developing new skills and practices. During my time with the class, I became incredibly close to my teachers and fellow classmates. I learned about their cultures and languages to be better informed and educated.

The adult education program is successful for many because it provides comfort and patience for everyone. I'm very pleased that I have come in contact with the adult education program that one of my dearest friends had recommended to me.

Marcia Giacoma is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Unfinished Hope

My name is Mirian and I would like to tell you about myself. I was born in Flores de Oriente Limón, Colón, Honduras. I grew up with my parents until I was seven years old. Then I lived with my grandmother, who is my Mom's Mom.

I came to this country when I was twenty years old to be with my mother, who was already here.

My favorite memory is when I was seven years old and in Honduras. My family and I spent our last Christmas together, when we enjoyed fireworks and traditional food of tamales. That was the last time my brothers, sister and parents were together. Santa Claus never came to my home in Honduras, but we were very happy with whatever we had.

I didn't have a good education. When I met my tutor, she helped me a lot. I feel she is an angel in my life. I feel very grateful to all the people who spend their time teaching others, making a difference every day. It takes a hand to open a mind and touch a heart.

I feel blessed to be in this country and learning the language has improved my life. I'll never stop dreaming. I'll never lose hope.

Mirian Manjevar is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Emily Sherwood.

ESOL Inspiration

Hi there! If you are here in the USA, a great thing you can do for yourself is learning English! Put it as a very important goal in your life. It will help you for all the time you are here.

In an ESOL class, you will have a really good experience learning English and have a good time with the teachers and the other classmates who are also learning English. Make your life better with English.

My name is Marcio, I am from Brazil. I want to speak about my experiences since I started an ESOL class. I started ESOL classes about 3 years ago in the Basic English class. Now I am in the Advanced class. It's been a long journey but every mile I walked learning English makes a big difference in my life. Now I have a better position at my job, and I can speak with other people without being afraid of mispronouncing words.

I just have one thing to say: "Don't give up your dreams."

Marcio Pires is a student at Flagler Technical College. His teacher is Shannon McCurdy.

How is ESOL Helping Me to Reach My Goals?

ESOL is my new beginning in the United States and a personal challenge. As part of my new life as a retiree, I moved to Palm Coast, Florida a year ago. There are many new things to do and to know, especially to improve my English language. It is a good time to leave fear behind and do my best out of my home-country.

To be capable of communicating with English-speaking people, I decided to apply to the ESOL Program offered by Florida Technical College. One of the requirements as an ESOL student is to take CASAS test. This test determines the level of comprehension in English language, and to assign me to the correct group. I scored in Level 6 and was oriented about the curriculum in the advanced group. I was scared because I thought that this level will be difficult in that moment, but I accepted my new Senior challenge!!!

Then, after seven weeks in the program, I felt comfortable with the class. The ESOL Program has allowed me to learn idioms that are frequently used by American people during their informal conversation. Also, my teacher encourages me to speak English with the correct pronunciation, answers my questions or doubts with examples, and motivates me to increase my vocabulary. All lessons and exercises in advance course guide me during my process to learn English as American people do. This program helps me to communicate effectively and properly in my normal or regular activities, that is my goal.

ESOL Program is one of the best opportunities for people of foreign countries with different languages, and it is a great bridge to find any professional job or work as a volunteer in any community organization.

Haydée Torres-Pagán is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Shannon McCurdy.

Worth the Wait

My first attempt, one out of several attempts, in achieving my high school diploma at an adult education school was in 1994. I had been kicked out of all public schools in 1988; I was in the tenth grade. In those days, there was the crack pandemic, and times were hard for me as a child because my parents were a product of that environment. From trials and tribulations of the time, I failed in my education, yet I was waiting for the right fit. I either had to work to house and feed my children or go to school and be homeless and hungry. So, I chose to work. Over time, so much had hindered me until I had had enough!

I will now fast forward to 2019. After being released from jail rehabilitation, for me shall I say, “I got on board to making changes and the best change was to achieve my diploma.” I must say that the road was not easy. I started all over and enrolled into adult education classes. I was able to take some of the official GED© tests in a reasonable amount of study time. For two of my GED tests, I started on a roll and passed my reasoning through language arts and social studies GED tests on the first attempt. Then, I got the big head and thought I had it all wrapped up. My next test was science. Oh-boy! I failed on the first try. My feel-

ings were hurt, but then I went back and regrouped, studied, and passed the second time. Then, I needed to tackle math. I never knew it would be so challenging. Not the first, not the second, not the third, and not the fourth attempt did I pass my math. The crazy thing is that I would take my practice tests at the school, and I would always get the message “likely to pass.” The positive reinforcement of “likely to pass” led me completely to believe I had what it took to pass my math.

On the day of my test, I was confident that all I had studied would come to my memory, and I could pass with flying colors. When the scores came in and I saw the message “stay in the course”, that heartbreak was real! I called my teacher, and she encouraged me not to give up. I gathered my thoughts and realized how far I had come and told myself not to stop.

My learning cycle is a part of my life and is supported by my faith. Surely, as Jesus is my Lord and Savior, this next time with my perseverance and resilience in “staying the course,” I will be a 2022 graduate.

Tameco Ingram is a student at Tomlison Adult Learning Center at St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Holly Heintz.

How Adult Education Can be Part of Your Life Without a Diploma

Education has been present all my life. I have studied since I was young, and to tell you the truth, I wasn't the best student. I didn't like to study when I was in High School, however, I continued studying after I graduated. It's not as expensive to study in college in my country, Venezuela compared to the USA, and I took many cheap and free courses. I have earned many degrees, diplomas, and certificates though I don't feel I'm super smart.

Why did I continue studying even though I wasn't a good student? In some cases, situations forced me to continue studying. For example, right now I'm taking English classes because I'm living in the USA, and of course, I need to improve my communications skills. These classes gave me the opportunity to meet new people, learn new cultures about other countries while I'm practicing English. Also, I have made some good friends.

Learning as an adult is, for me, not about a grade or a teacher's opinion. It is about measuring my own growth. Not surprisingly, I enjoy learning now that I can choose what I learn, no matter if I received a piece of paper called a "Degree". In the end, degrees don't make people smarter than those who do not have them.

Children and adults can continuously learn, whether we are in classrooms, at work, or in social settings and I believe that we always have the ability to learn something new. Knowledge is infinite and it doesn't have an age.

Samantha Suarez is a student at the Center for Adult Learning in Jacksonville Public Library. Her teacher is Naomi Chase.

My Experience in Adult Education

I am Ecuadorian, and I came to the United States about a year ago with many expectations and illusions, but also great challenges. One of them is facing a language other than mine. I felt powerless because I could not perform basic activities such as going to the bank or carrying out any procedure, and I needed third parties to help me do it. Then, I understood that I had two options; give up and return to my country or overcome the obstacles and learn the language. At the end of the day, it was me who decided to come here; I am the person who must adapt to this country and not wait for it to adapt to me. The United States welcomes us and offers us countless opportunities. It is up to us to take those opportunities for our benefit. The country has productive people, and we are not a burden for the government.

I had tried many ways to learn English: downloading applications, watching movies, online classes, among others, but I felt that my learning was not progressing. To this, I added the dislike that I had taken to the language because of the anti-pedagogical way with which I was taught in my country. Learning became more difficult. I had also heard that for adults it is more difficult if not impossible to learn a new language.

The outlook seemed very negative for me; however, I found out about the existence of Clearview Adult Education Center. From the first moment, I felt the sincerity and support with

which they treat each person. Even the GPS had misdirected me, and when I called to ask for the address again, the person who assisted me came out to meet me. I immediately knew that I was in the right place. As the days went by, and I got to know the different teachers, I was able to realize that they all had a common factor: patience, tolerance, and good treatment for each student. To this was added meeting people from different countries with different customs and languages but with difficulties and fears, similar to mine.

It is not easy, many times I feel frustration, but I am aware that it only depends on me since the Clearview Adult Education Center puts everything it has at my service: facilities, teachers, administrative and support staff, so that this new objective that I have (to learn the English language) can be reached. I have decided that I am going to graduate from this Educational Center, and, if God gives me life and health, I am going to do so.

To finish, I can only thank the Clearview Adult Education Center for their laudable mission and for the support they provide to each of the immigrants who studies here.

Alex Benavides Revilo is a student at Clearwater Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

First Step: Learn English

I am from Haiti. I have been in Key West for just a few months. Therefore, I am very new in the Adult Education class. My first step is to find a learning center to learn English. I am really comfortable in this class. It is really fun to learn and the teacher is very patient with us.

I look forward to learning English so that I can understand and have proper dialog with the people around me. I need to be able to speak English so that I can look for a job and start earning money to pay my rent, utility bills, phone bills and buy a laptop. I know I am very slow right now, but in time I will gradually get to speak English and do more for myself and my family.

Anoucelet Prince is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

School Can Change Your Life

In my opinion, education is the most important thing in life. When people move to a new country where the language is different than the one they speak, knowing and learning the language of the new country is very important since it will open many doors in life.

I remembered that when I first came to the USA, it was very difficult to understand when someone spoke to me. I had trouble with that. Not knowing the language of the country made me feel frustrated.

So, I used my mind. I went to school. I met some dynamic and enthusiastic teachers. They love their jobs. Everything I have learned in class has been a pleasure. The method used by the teachers makes me happy. I knew that school could change life and it did that for me.

It's never too late to learn. Before I started going to school, I felt bad that I wasn't able to speak English. Now I can communicate. Being able to communicate with people helped me in a lot of ways. Before going to school, I wasn't able to understand my boss and the guests at work. Now that's no longer the case.

In conclusion, I am very happy I made the decision to go to school because my experience with adult education has been great.

Viviane Petit Frere is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Experience in Adult Education

Being a grandmother, I never thought I would be going back to school. At first, I felt intimidated, but I signed up. When I enrolled at Clearview Adult Education Center, it was the best decision I have ever made.

Since attending my classes, I have been feeling more confident to express myself. My goal has always been to improve my English. My teachers have helped me with this goal. Being in this school has opened up new friendships with my teachers and my

classmates. My classmates are from all over the world, which has helped me to get to know new international customs.

I would like to personally thank my teachers and the school staff for helping me to be better in English, and they have also helped my confidence grow.

If anyone has a goal to better themselves and learn English, Clearview Adult Education Center is the place to be.

Hilda Morales is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Learning, Improving, and Reaching My Goals

I am from Aguascalientes, Mexico. Since I first came to the United States in 2017, one of my priorities was to go to school and focus on learning English. For this reason, I decided to go to Manatee Technical College to ask for information. I enrolled in the ESOL class. My experience was a bit difficult because when I took my first exam, I did not understand anything. It was frustrating for me not to be able to communicate with people. My biggest fear was speaking in front of a group. I remember that some classmates helped me to translate, and in this way, I could understand and learn to communicate in class.

When the semester ended, I was going to have my baby and I was sad because I thought I would not be able to continue my studies. I remember that I went to speak with the counselor at the school to discuss my situation. She gave me options to continue studying and this time I was taking classes online. For me it was important to be able to continue studying, but at the same time it was a bit difficult. I had to study by myself. I did not have a teacher to explain grammar to me. I continued without giving up and focused on listening, which was very challenging for me.

I had a beautiful experience when my online teacher recognized me for being a good student. She invited me to participate in the National Adult Education Honor Society. On April 22, 2019, a ceremony was held with other students. For me, it was a great experience and motivation to continue learning English.

Now I am studying in person in the ESOL program already at level 6. I am also in a very interesting program with the Manatee Literacy Council. I am taking conversation classes, which for me is a great opportunity because I can continue improving my speaking and my pronunciation. There are many volunteer tutors who do a good job since they support us and encourage us to be confident. They help us to pronounce, read and have a good conversation, and at the same time lose our fear of speaking.

I am happy now with one more reason to continue learning, because I have a volunteer tutor named Ann Day, who is helping me to read and to improve my pronunciation. We are on a very interesting subject where I am learning about the history of the United States. She has motivated me a lot. It is very important to me because my great goal is to become an American citizen.

One of my best phrases that I have learned is, “We are always learning something new.”

Esmeralda Montes is a learner at Manatee Literacy Council in Manatee County, Florida. Her tutor is Ann Day.

A Turning Point In My Life

I Am Rich

Hi, my name is Ana. I am 56 years old. I am the kind of person who needs to make her dream come true. From a very young age, I began to dream of great adventures. Throughout my life I have had the luck and tenacity to make them happen.

I particularly remember one of those dreams that has marked my life forever. I was around 24 years old, and I had finished my university studies. I needed a resounding change in my existence. I needed to go from a life with all the comfort of a big city to life in its simplest expression. I decided to move to a remote island in Brazil. My adventure started. I went to Trancoso, a lost island in Bahia State. Trancoso is an old fishing village. A perfect line of colored adobe and clay houses make up this little bohemian village. Behind the cliff was the most majestic sea I have ever seen. Silky white sand beaches and huge palm trees to protect you from the sun.

It is in this paradise that I rented a little house. As soon as I settled in, my neighbor invited me to his house. His house, also made of adobe, had an earth floor and a large hammock used as a bed. My neighbor Joan was a fisherman who owned a boat, two chickens, an old record player, and two albums. "I am Joan. I am rich," he introduced himself.

Every morning I listened to the same ritual from my house: Joan's voices calling his chickens, "Macucuuuu!!! Sofrenildaaaaa!!!" and the chicken answered him, "Cocoroco!" During the afternoon the same songs from his two albums played over and over again—reggae music. And he repeated to me, "I am rich."

At sunset, the natives, the hippies, and bohemians from different parts of the world met in the square called "El Cuadrado." People drank, danced, sang, and laughed. The days passed, walking on the beach and swimming in the ocean until you dropped. Dance, dance, and more dance. One night watching the sky full of stars I told myself, "I am rich."

Ana Marchetti is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

U.S. Citizenship

It all started when I won the green card and came to the country of my dreams. I came to this country mostly for my kids, Samvel and Spartak. For them to have a great life, I would do anything! Adrenaline rushed in me as I stepped foot into this new country not knowing what to expect. It was really hard from the start. My husband and I worked shifts, but it was all worth it because now we have the house of our dreams. The only thing left to do is to become a legal citizen of America.

It's a year later from getting our dream home and my kids are almost at their last steps of high school, so I knew my next goal was to take the U.S. Citizenship test. I wanted to become a legal citizen of America. The day of me taking the U.S. Citizenship test was getting closer and closer. I was really nervous but I didn't let the stress get to me. I faithfully studied day after day, hour after hour, and so I found myself standing in front of the big doors ready to take the U.S. Citizenship test. It was time for me to put my studying to the test.

At the end, I walked out of that room proud! Everything paid off, all that studying and hard work, and for that I want to thank my teacher Mrs. Denise and my classmates for taking time with me and helping me study. Thank you all! Reading together and everything we have done together has helped me the most. So I want to say to anyone in this world that is going to take that test: don't be stressed or nervous. Study and do your best. Believe in yourself like I believe in you because I know that you will do great!

Anna Mirijanyan is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Denise Reardon.

Building My Resilience

A long time ago, in the 70s, a little girl was born in Caracas, Venezuela. She had a particular name because her parents were hippies. During her first four years, she lived with her parents until they got divorced. She began to live with her father and on the weekdays with her mother. Starting at that age, someone she loved began to touch her inappropriately, although she was growing up playful and smart. When she was 11 years old, her life changed; something was wrong, and she showed her mother what bothered her—some kind of illness in her private parts. Since then, that girl has visited a lot of psychiatrists, psychologists, and gynecologists. From that moment, her mother and brothers moved throughout the country until she reached adolescence. She had two stepfathers and her life at home was a disaster full of fighting, strong language, drugs, and alcohol. However, she continued studying; she managed to be a leader at her high school. She participated in the youth protests and demonstrations that were very popular in Latin America.

One day, her little sister got sick so their mother had to take her to the capital city. For more than a year, her mother and sister lived in another city. The girl of my story was cared for by her brother. When she was 17 years old, she met her first boyfriend, got her high school diploma, and then became a mother a year and a half later. She had a strong, healthy, and beautiful child. The girl began to work when the baby was six months old. Between work and study, she earned her second diploma as a technician. In the meantime, she was pregnant again, but lost the baby almost five months later. The girl kept working and studying. She got pregnant again, and her second and last child was born. She graduated from college.

After that, the girl began her own small business. When her youngest son was two years old, she found out that her husband had another child, who had become sick and couldn't walk. Eight years passed and the same thing happened again. The girl decided to travel to another country. She wanted a new life. Unfortunately, her sons didn't travel with her. Seven long years passed before she could meet with her children. She met a good man and married him. It was at that moment when she finally went through a breaking point in her life. She got to know Jesus Christ and her life changed. Now she knew about forgiveness. In fact,

after 35 years, she spoke with the person who caused damage in her childhood.

One day, a coworker told her about an adult education program called ESOL, and this woman started her English classes in the nation that gave her the opportunity to start a new life. Miracles exist when the heart is able to believe and accept them. That girl from Caracas, Venezuela now has a wish to one day become an American citizen. That girl is me.

God Bless America.

— *Anonymous Author*

Medicine vs God's Will

It was March 23rd, 2020. I felt so happy and very nervous at the same time. Arrangements had been made for my sister and I to welcome my beloved mom to Nicaragua. We had not seen her for seven years. She lives in the U.S. The day before picking her up at the airport, I could not sleep because I was anxious to see her, especially during the midst of an early stage of COVID-19.

We got to the airport at eleven o'clock and waited there for about an hour because the flight arrived late. We looked forward to greeting her, embracing her, feeling her warmth, and seeing her big smile. We continued waiting for her until she finally showed up. When I hugged my mom, I felt that she was very slim. I was so happy to have her stay with us. She told us that she had been coughing for seven months. I am a medical doctor, and I did some tests to determine the cause of her cough. She did not have COVID-19. However, her chest X-Ray revealed several tumors in her lungs and a surgery would not help because it was at metastasis stage. The survival rate was very low in her case. This was the turning point in my life.

I prayed to God for her healing, but I could see that she was not getting any better. On May 24, she stayed at my house with me and my sister. We had a lot of fun. We enjoyed this day very much. Everyone was very happy. We laughed, we talked, and we joked. My son recited a poem each to his wife and to my mom. I helped my son write the poem. We gave it the title "Día Especial."

It means every day is special because we have our mom. Before I went to bed, I prayed to God not to let my mom suffer. My beloved mom passed away peacefully the next morning. She had lung cancer. I will always be grateful for an exceptional mom. She is the one and only kind. She is irreplaceable.

This experience and life situation has changed me totally. It taught me to continue studying about sickness and finding the solution. Also, to have empathy with the people who come to me for consultation about their health issues. My mind was in a limbo. It was like it had two parts. One part that knows what is going to happen and the other trusting in God to do his will.

Armando Montoya attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Change

Being a woman living in this judgmental world is hard. We seem to get caught up in the way society wants us to live, and not how we should be living. We get so comfortable with trying to impress and keep up with others—“keeping up with the Jones” as the old folks call it—that we forget what really matters and what we are truly living for. I spent so many years trying to please others and not living out my own potential. I spent too many years trying to get it right; I could never get it right because I wasn’t doing it for me. I was doing it for the approval of others. I spent too many years hiding my truths. It’s taken me up until now to realize that I was just living. No career, no goals, just out here living.

I always pictured myself at this age (35) successful, working a job that I love, and being the best mom that I can be. It took me a while to figure out what my purpose was. Having my twins, which made me a mother of three, was my breaking point. Finally, I realized that I had to do better. It was time I got up and figured out how I was going to take care of myself and three kids.

I had no high school diploma but had a couple of trades that I had been falling back on. But that wasn’t enough for me. I wanted more. I needed more and knew I needed my high school diploma to be able to put myself in a position to win. It was time

to be stable. I was tired of just making it and just getting by. I was ready to win. I have kids depending on me and something has to be done. It was time for a change.

Stepping out on faith, I went and signed up for adult education. The first step to making a change and reaching my goals was to get my GED. I did everything I had to do to start the class. After being in the class a couple weeks and reaching out, I found out I didn't need the GED. All I have to do is pass the SAT reading test or ACT reading test. Now I'm studying to take those tests. With faith, knowledge, and the proper tutoring, I know I will do great. Reaching this goal and receiving my diploma will be the change that I need.

Tanekia King is a student attending West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

COVID Changed My Life

My daughter, her husband, and two children moved to the U.S. in 2018 due to the political conflicts that my country, Venezuela, presents. On February 17, 2020, I came to the U.S. for my eldest grandson's birthday and was planning to return to Venezuela on in February 2021.

In February 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic arrived and all airports around the world were closed. This situation forced me to stay in this country until airports were allowed to reopen. July 2020 soon arrived and I made an official request to the USCIS for an extension of my stay. I was granted six more months to legally remain in the United States.

In December 2020, the Maiquetía International Airport in Venezuela reopened and after only 15 days, they closed again. Due to this situation, I decided to spend Christmas with my family and return in February 2021.

On January 20, 2021, President Trump granted the Deferred Mandatory Departure benefit for Venezuelans who were in the United States as of January 19, 2021! To take part in this, I decided to stay in the U.S. since my only daughter was already living in this country and I wanted to be with her.

In addition, on March 8, 2021, President Biden granted Venezuelans the benefit of Temporary Protected Status (TPS). I completed all the necessary legal procedures for the TPS. Now I am happily studying and learning English at Oldsmar Adult ESOL School. I found a job and started working with a private insurance company. I had always wanted to start working here in insurance, since I had background experience and certifications in the insurance field in Venezuela.

Currently, I am one very happy and lucky woman living with my family and believing in miracles! I wait for what exciting outcomes the year 2022 brings. I foresee great prosperity, an abundance of good health, money earnings, and lots of love!

Aura Ramirez is a student in the ESOL Adult Education class at the Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Never Give Up!

Thirteen years ago, I was trying to get my GED, but my immature mind and life put it on the back burner. When I was in class, I was not even trying. I just didn't care. I always thought school wasn't for me, but that was the immature, fixed mindset of an "I thought I knew it all" young kid. I even got in trouble for fishing in the pond next to the school on my lunch break. I took my GED test and passed everything, but math—crazy right?

Soon after that, life hit me like a ton of bricks. My mom, sister, and a friend were driving back from the grocery store. The roads were wet, and they lost control of the vehicle. All three passed away. I had to grow up pretty quickly.

So, I started working and never looked back. I've done concrete, asphalt, framing, and any other trade I could learn. I did pretty well, but I was struggling. Depression and bad habits held me back a bit, and by the grace of God I had no more depression, and I dropped the bad habits. My confidence is now at an all-time high. I have a chance to change my life around. I have a chance to be the best version of myself. I want to thank God, my dad, and my friends who were there through the hard times, and last, but not least, my teacher Miss Mariann.

Be strong and never give up!

Colton Wright is a student attending Flagler Technical College. His teacher is Mariann Mahnke.

You Can Do Whatever You Want!

What to expect from a young adult, who was born in a humble family and lived all her life in a modest neighborhood in Brazil? She would probably live following her parents' advice, being a good person, working hard to be able to make a living of her own and pay the bills, and maybe luckily visiting another city or state of the country when on vacation.

Travel abroad? Unimaginable! Too expensive and unreachable for her "social class." But what is impossible for an open-hearted, 19-year-old who worked hard from very early and learned from daddy to save money for the future? Nothing at all! Not because she was too brave or confident, but because at this age, uncertainty or fear do not even come to mind. What a great period in life!

So, there she goes. Resigns from a good job, gets all the money saved in the bank, and suddenly it was time to practice all the English she had learned after years and years in the evening classes. Firstly, the plan was to live in England for three months. Fifteen days after arrival, the money saved in a lifetime was shrinking like clothes washed in hot water. As hardworking as she had always been and with a bit of luck, she was offered a job as a nanny, looking after three kids in exchange for a place to live and food on top of weekly wages. It was the opportunity she needed to stay in England longer and totally changed the course of her life.

Uncountable lessons can be learned when living abroad, out of your comfort zone and away from family and friends to give you love and support. First of all, an experience like that makes you stronger. It gives you the maturity you need to make choices and face the consequences. From a positive point of view, the tough times can be seen as the way life is teaching you lessons. It also changes the way you think of yourself as a person, as a part of something much bigger than the little community you come

from. You meet people that live, dress, or eat differently from you, and that is totally okay! Life is more than that and you are part of it. Most of all, living abroad makes you realize that no matter where you are, or the language you speak, your heart will always be with the people you love the most, who are just waiting for you to go through the glass door at the arrivals gate to warm you up with a long and loving hug!

To conclude, don't wait until the opportunities come and knock on your door. Instead, make it happen—just go through and do it! You deserve nothing but the best. And yes, YOU can!

Elisandra Maeda is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

A Turning Point in My Life

A few years ago, in my country, the Dominican Republic, I was working long days. As a result of this, I missed many things about the growth of my children and the power to enjoy the relationship between my husband and me.

Since I took a lot of time to do work, housework, and children's homework, among other things, very seldom did we go out to share as a family, as a couple, or go on vacation. Most of the money we earned was to save and invest in real estate.

This whole situation generated a lot of stress in my life. Today, I have different health situations in my body, which got worse here in the USA since I was doing a very heavy job working excessive hours where I continue to work today.

Some time ago, I decided to make a change in my life. Now I am working less. I have changed my priorities. I spend more time with my children. I also dedicate quality time to myself, and I am trying to enjoy everything in my life: my husband, children, and friends, and of course my relationship with God, who is first in my life. I no longer give as much importance to money as before. We go out to share and go on vacation. I am trying to relax more and do one thing at a time. I have even changed the way I eat, among other things.

I was a perfectionist before. I demanded that my children do things very neatly and me too, which generated a lot of stress and anger when it did not turn out as I wanted. Things caused me a lot of emotional damage because I liked everything to be in order, and I hardly ever had time for myself or for playing with my children.

For this reason, I decided to do the right thing whenever possible without all the eagerness that I had before. Now I enjoy every moment of my life with my family. I enjoy simple living, working less, and feeling healthier. I am happier than before when almost everything bothered me.

Fanny Fulcar is a student attending Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.

My World Turned Upside Down Twice

On January 12, 2010, my world was turned upside down after the death of my husband. In that moment, I didn't have a taste for life—I was empty. At the end of the day, I told myself, "I have my child and for that reason I must be alive for him because now he has only me to support him." That situation pushed me to make a turning point in my life. From that point forward, I would have to be double in everything I will have to do. Sometimes it's very hard and sad to pretend everything is okay, but when I think about my son's future I say, "Junie, let's go! Alveen's future is in your hands after God's." Sometimes when everything becomes dark for me, I ask myself, "What did I do wrong to get a hard life like this?" When I begin thinking about my husband, I feel like I lost the most precious person in my life, because we were classmates first, then good friends, then engaged, then married.

Twelve years after my husband's death, when our son was only 14, my life turned upside down again! On July 15, 2021, I was on vacation when the United States government offered immigrants the possibility to stay in the country. Life did not give me a choice to decide. With my country out of control, and the level of security almost non-existent, it obliged me to make my second hardest decision in my life. I went for it. I'm here, with new experiences, a new language, and sometimes bad situations because of this decision. I am now living without my only baby, which is tougher

to endure than my husband's death in 2010. Having to live without my son is like living without oxygen.

Sometimes, I feel my life is empty because the two men I really LOVE in my life are not next to me. I suffer in my soul because when I laugh, my heart does not smile. Every January 12th in a new year makes me even sadder. For now, my prayer to God is to give me the ability, health, and strength to work hard so that one day my son can be with me again.

Marie Junie Fils-Aime Georges was born in Haiti (Aux Cayes) and worked in the Police Nationale d'Haiti's Administration for 18 years. Her 14-year-old son lives with her mother and little sister in Haiti. She has lived in the USA since July 2021. She is a student in the ESOL program at Atlantic Technical College- Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus with Ms. F. Johnson will continue to pursue her nursing certification.

Hard Times

I had never thought that one day I would suddenly leave my country and my loved ones to go live in another place. Only the thought of having been forced to leave my old life to go and start all over again in a foreign and unknown land scared me to death. I shed a lot of tears when I finally understood that to save my life, and my children's and family's lives, I needed to take this route. And so, my journey began.

I never got it fully into my head that one day I would be standing at Port-au-Prince airport saying goodbye to my husband, who has been living with me since our marriage, without really knowing when I would be able to see him again. Only God knew.

Truthfully, in this life, certain bad irreversible circumstances force us to make difficult and hard decisions to endure and live. A few days before my departure, I had become an insomniac and I spent my nights crying, until one evening when my eldest son caught me crying. After explaining to him that I was going to miss everything—my mom, my family, my dad, my life, and, even more, my husband, he promised to always be with me to help me and that I should not cry.

Also, a good friend told me to thank God for having my life saved with my family instead of whining because I had no other solutions that could protect us. I must leave, we must not go back. I tried to take my courage in both hands. But imagine a woman who is spoiled by her husband and who has people in her service who suddenly goes to a foreign country with a foreign language, different manners, different habits, where she must start all over again—it is not an easy thing to do.

Being a woman alone in a house who must take care of her two young children and who must do everything in the house when she did not have this sole responsibility before, and who must arrange, classify, tinker, and must do everything by herself is not easy. This experience made me understand that we are all travelers, because our current life can unexpectedly turn upside down and cause us to change direction, to change our current life to another.

I do my best not to sadden my children, but every time I think about this decision, I cry. Whenever I remember that my husband was always with me to help me around the house, but everything is my responsibility in this foreign land, I cry too.

God will make a way where nobody sees a way.

— *Anonymous Author*

A New Start

My name is Ziad, I'm from Morocco and I'm 20 years old. I moved to the USA on November 13, 2021. My mom was the happiest mom in the world when I arrived because the last time we had met was three years prior. I now live in Sebring and it is a wonderful city to start a new life.

As you can imagine, it was very difficult for me to leave my country, my friends, and everything related to Morocco behind me. The culture is very different between the two countries, and I found that the language barrier restricted my participation in new activities. Since my family owns a Moroccan restaurant, I started helping out there to fill my spare time and gain more exposure to the English language.

Even though I had more contact with Americans at the restaurant, it was still difficult for me to speak English. When I wanted to start a conversation with someone the words disappeared from my mind. I knew I needed to continue to learn English, so I signed up at a public college. I remember the first time I joined the classroom, it was an unforgettable day. My class has made me stronger and more confident in myself. This class was the only reason I overcame my fear of speaking English and it also gave me a chance to meet new friends and make relationships.

It's been two months since I've arrived here in America. I'm speaking English more fluently and I don't have any problems communicating with others. I hope to get a job in a supermarket to help myself integrate more with the American people. My life has changed so much and I'm focused on my future to achieve my goals. As everyone knows, the USA symbolizes freedom and dignity, so I'm really very happy and proud at the idea of spending the rest of my life in this beautiful country.

Ziad Mhamdi is a student at South Florida State College, where they take classes with Ms. Miriani.

My Sister Maria Elena

The inflection points are those instants, moments, or situations, which happen unexpectedly—life changes and cannot be as before. In my case, life changed this weekend when receiving the sad news of the death of my sister, Maria Elena, in Venezuela. Her death came unexpectedly. On January 1, she went to the hospital, and then she died on Saturday, January 8, 2022. I am devastated because I am far away from home. She was buried yesterday in Caracas, Venezuela. I was not present in the last hours of her beautiful life. Rest in peace.

Maria Elena was the third sister of my family. She was a person of calm character and very responsible in her performance. She was a good companion-like sister and confidant. I always felt her support. Her higher studies were at the Central University of Venezuela at the Caracas campus, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. This title led her to teaching as a professor of art and artistic expression in high schools and universities. She was frequently in many art exhibitions observing in detail the

samples of the Museums of Fine Arts and Contemporary Art in Caracas.

Together, we visited The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and traveled to Spain to visit the Prado Museum in Madrid. The same in Paris, France, where we admired the permanent exhibitions in the Louvre Museum. We also saw Roman and Florentine art up close in Florence, Italy.

Remembering these beautiful moments, I think I can mark a turning point in my life: the death of a loved one. When we talk about turning points in life, we think, “They are moments that completely change your future, sometimes for the better, and other times for the worse.”

Gloria López is from Venezuela and is a diligent student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Robert Baum.

Changing Life During a Pandemic

I never imagined a big change in life with my family during the pandemic. At the beginning of the year 2021, after being closed in the house with my family for about 10 months due to the COVID shutdown, we thought we were continuing staying home during for another year because it was still a critical situation in Mexico during those days, so my husband was working online and my kids were taking classes online.

During that year, I attended several meetings related to the graduation from elementary and middle schools for my kids, and I was preparing my information to start looking for a job. I thought my kids already grew up enough, so they don't need me any more at home. I needed a change in my life. There were several ideas on how to celebrate graduations. Most of the parents agreed to have in person graduation by taking all precautions, and others preferred virtual celebration. My kids really wanted to see their classmates again just to say goodbye from school. During that time, I started to complete all requirements for my kids to get enrolled in new schools. One of the requirements was to take a special course, so they started to take an extra class beside their normal class online.

If I wanted to get a good job I needed to improve my English, so I started to look for a virtual class. I received calls and information from different English schools. At the same time, I was preparing my information. I was happy with my decision.

During the pandemic, unfortunately many people lost their jobs. The situation was very difficult. My husband was blessed with his job; he was working hard from home. He was afraid about this uncertain situation and started to look for a new opportunity in the same company but outside the country, just in case something changed. He thought it might be impossible to find an opportunity during this time.

Suddenly he received an answer from a Florida company. He attended some virtual interviews and quickly received a job offer thanks to a good recommendation from his boss, but he was told he should be there on April 18, if not this opportunity could be lost. After he got a passport and the permissions, we decided to move all together.

We are now living in Florida. We didn't have the opportunity to say goodbye to our family and friends due to the pandemic. My kids continued taking classes online from Mexico and attended virtual graduations (their extra classes were canceled). At the beginning, it was hard to get used to this city.

Now, my Kids and I are enrolled in schools in Palm Beach County, and my husband develops his skills in a new quality department. We think this great opportunity will change our life.

Irma Carrera is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

One Day Changed My Life

Hello, my name is Javier Aguilar. I am a student at West Technical Education Center. I am in Mrs. Carolyn Vickers's class. I would like to share with you about a turning point in my life.

I came from Mexico in 1995 to try to have a better life, different from the one I had in my country. I started working in a restaurant. I worked there for a year and then I got a better job.

The new job was packing vegetables. I was working at that job for a year and two months, but then my work permit expired. When I went to renew it, the immigration office told me that I would be deported to my home country. I was detained in a deportation center for three months and they sent me to my country for ten years. In all that time, I could not return to the United States.

That was when my life took a drastic turn. I left everything behind, my wife and my daughter, and returned to my country. At that time, the situation in my country was very difficult. But thank God, I was lucky enough to go out looking for a job and I soon found one. What I earned was little, but I had to work to be able to pay for my family to come to Mexico. After not even two months, I accomplished that and in no time my family came to Mexico. The good thing is that they loved where I lived and they stayed for ten years. They came to visit their grandmother, my wife's mother, about every two years. And after twelve years, I was able to apply to enter the United States again.

Guess what? I applied and was accepted to come back. I thank God they accepted me. I have been here since 2016. What a journey! That is my story about a turning point in my life.

Javier Aguilar is a student at West Technical Education Center. His teacher is Mrs. Carolyn Vickers.

My First Child

It's extremely wonderful to become a parent. I was tremendously happy to learn my wife was pregnant. After only one month since our wedding and by our one-year anniversary, we were having our first child together. That was exciting news for us and we had a lot of things to think about. Because I had just come to the U.S., I was learning the language that would help me to take my responsibility as a parent.

A lot of people, like our friends and family, were happy for us for having our first child together. They were all cheerful for this gift that God gave us. Being a parent isn't easy, but we know that God will help us make the right decision for our daughter. During delivery, as usual people can have some stress, but for us, spending a couple of days at the hospital was a little stressful

because my wife ended up having a cesarean. That didn't take our happiness away, and we were happier to see the baby than worried about the cesarean. The nurses and the doctors at the hospital gave us good treatment, and their smiles helped us go through that week we spent there.

However, as a new parent I learned there are a lot of qualities I need to develop more, like patience and a lot of comprehension between me and my wife. But the most important one is to understand the new baby's sleeping and feeding habits and all of the advice our friends and family give to us, which help us go through the tough times of a newborn. It's amazing to have her, and she is teaching us a lot of things we didn't know about ourselves.

To say the least, my wife and I have received the best gift of 2021 that we will cherish forever. Our little girl loves to smile in her sleep just like me. We are so thrilled to take care of her more and more every day; we like holding our little girl so much. Now we can say we understand the joy parents have when they see their child for the first time. We named her Ninshee, and we are so happy with our daughter that God gave us.

Luckner Joseph is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Migrating to the United States at the Beginning of the Pandemic

I was born and raised in Kazakhstan. My dream was to live in America. We applied for a green card and won! We were very excited because we had to move to another country with different traditions and a different language. When we bought tickets to America, they began to talk about the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in our country. The day of our departure came, and we said goodbye to our relatives at the airport. When we arrived in Moscow, we learned that our plane was the last one to take off from the airport, as our airport was closed due to the outbreak of COVID-19. We were so very lucky! In March 2020, we immigrated to America.

In New York, at John F. Kennedy international Airport, we waited for a transfer for 12 hours. At the airport, we were almost alone. It was very cold and our children slept on suitcases. We didn't know anything about COVID-19, but we were wearing masks during the entire trip. After a night spent at the cold airport in New York, we found ourselves in the sunny city of Tampa, Florida.

As soon as we arrived in America, we immediately noticed that the people around us were very friendly, they always smiled and asked, "How are you doing?" When we checked into our apartments, it turned out that in our community, as elsewhere, due to the pandemic, the swimming pools and the gym were closed. Our children studied online. In the summertime, we walked to school for one hour to get a free lunch for our children. Because of the pandemic, we waited a long time for our documents. Later, I learned to drive and got a Florida driver's license. It has been a very difficult year for us.

At the beginning of 2021, I started to go to the English courses at Oldsmar. I met many interesting people. I made new friends and found my first job cleaning hotel rooms. My husband continues to work, and the children go to school. I am improving my English and study daily in my ESOL classes. My goal is to go to college. We have taken many trips and enjoy discovering America and American life. I know my family and I have a lot of new and interesting things ahead because our dream has come true—we live in America!

Mariya Mostovykh is an Adult ESOL student at CAEC, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Never Give Up!

I came from Venezuela to Clearwater, Florida. It was a long journey full of many ups and downs. I was married for many years and had four children who were born in my wonderful native country full of opportunities (at that time). My marital happiness ended, and I decided to make the trip that would fulfill my dream—a dream I achieved, but it was not easy! Today, I feel very proud and blessed for having reached my desired goal.

I will start my story by saying I was very fortunate to meet a Spanish family with beautiful, good children. I took care of them, and they took care of me too. I was their nanny for three years. It was a great job that allowed me to work with a fabulous family that lifted my spirit and gave me energy too. I had to say goodbye to this family when my legal papers arrived. I needed to move forward to the next steps and follow my journey.

I started working in a company as a printing machine operator for fifteen consecutive years. This was a very dangerous job for my health because I used chemical products for printing. Fortunately, it did not affect my health and I thank God, because my efforts and perseverance brought my children from Venezuela to the U.S.A. Luckily, they are not living the situation in which the country is right now.

In summary, I thank the people who helped me on this journey each day. Due to the many opportunities and good fortune I received, my consistency and not giving up even when times were tough, and all the very hard work, I was able to fulfill my American dream. I learned a lesson which I tell every immigrant who has a dream: Never give up, it is worth it!

Elda Rosales is a student attending CAEC, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

A Change of Heart

It was in the early morning of November 2, 2020. I was driving home from work. There was a forest on both sides of the road. Suddenly, a female deer jumped on the road in front of my car. There was no chance; I couldn't avoid the accident. My car hit the deer fatally, and the front of my car was completely destroyed. Luckily, nothing happened to me.

After that, I looked over my life carefully. I understood that I could have lost my life in this accident. I decided to change my whole life, so that was a turning point. Over the last few years, I had been working very hard because I wanted to prove to myself that I was doing my job well. I worked in a hospital as a midwife. I managed my own birth school, where I prepared new parents for their baby's delivery and taught them how to take care of the

newborn babies. I promoted long breastfeeding and I taught moms how to do it. My job gave me a lot of satisfaction. The patients and their families were very satisfied with my work.

For me, the most important thing should be my family; they were unhappy that I was away from home all day. My longest vacation lasted from three to five days because at that time, the most important thing was work. I knew I had to change it because I would lose my family, who would not take it anymore. My husband told me that he was offered a job in the USA for three years. It would be my best decision if I went go there with him. When I told my husband not to worry, that I would go with him and will be there with him, he was very happy. He did not believe I could quit my job. As I had decided, I did so and flew to Tampa with him.

Currently, I spend a lot of time with my husband, and I try to enjoy staying here as much as possible. I try to see and learn everything and travel as much as time allows, because America is a beautiful country and has many wonderful places to see. I've always dreamed about communicating in English, but I never had time for that because I was always working. I signed up for adult education classes and I'm learning English. This is my time, and I have to use it as best as I can because I might not get any more good chances to do it in my life.

Nikola Kraszewska is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Goodbye, Vero Beach!

We will be moving to Modesto, CA for excellent jobs that will continue to challenge us. While we are living in a new part of the US, we will always remember Vero Beach. In four years, from 2017 to 2021, Vero Beach gave us many blessings.

It was in Vero Beach that:

We both found jobs at a juice factory – Orlando as Production Manager and Veruzka as Quality Control Technician, then Quality Control Manager. We got many new certifications while working there.

We met three wonderful tutors who became friends. They helped us with everything, not just English.

Our daughter Sophia enrolled in tennis lessons, played the Naughty Manatee in The Nutcracker on the Indian River (2017), and became a student at Gifford Youth Orchestra. She is now an intermediate level musician and has had many concerts—mostly virtual during the pandemic. She can still take GYO violin lessons by Zoom and they sent her a full-size violin as she’s growing in size as well as talent.

Veruzka’s mother came from Venezuela to live with us full time. We couldn’t have done all that we’ve done without Sophia’s wonderful abuela.

We met many dear friends through Pathway Church, through Sophia’s activities and through Literacy Services.

We became first-time home buyers and loved living in our beautiful new home for 16 months. Sophia finally got the dog she had always wanted, and Bella has become a lively member of the family.

We both started job searches to develop our careers. We had many frustrating moments, but we persisted and both got jobs at ConAgra in Oakdale, CA. Shortly after, we became first-time home sellers!

And it was in Vero Beach that our son, Orlando Jr., was born, already—and so easily—an American citizen.

We love you, Vero Beach. Thank you for all you offered us. We will miss so many people, and we are very excited about our new adventure.

Veruzka Vera and Orlando Garcia attended classes at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Their teacher was Linda Barker.

Three Weeks Changed My Life

Who would think that traveling for three weeks would lead to never going home? Leaving your family and friends for new

opportunities, new dreams, and to literally start a new life from scratch is not easy. Well, that's what happened to me. The pandemic has been an unexpected turning point in my life.

First my plans changed greatly. I had planned to visit my sister for three weeks in Peru. The pandemic started, and I didn't go back to my home in Venezuela. I stopped my future career because at the time I was attending the RN program at Colegio Universitario de Enfermeria Centro Medico de Caracas. Also, I couldn't be with my dad, my mom, my little sister, and my friends in Caracas. Above all, I had to start a new life because I moved to America. Life is full of changes. Go for it!

Second, I've become very emotional. The more I think about my family and friends, the more I miss them. I call them as often as I can and talk to them for a long time thanks to smartphones! Not to mention the time when my birthday comes. I miss family dinners, birthday parties, walking with my family, watching movies, and talking at the table for hours. Equally important is my wonderful tiny doggy whom I miss a lot. I miss playing, petting, carrying, and being with him. However, I say to myself, "Keep your chin up!"

In the meantime, I am enjoying the vast opportunities America has offered me. I actually live in Clearwater, which is a beautiful city with precious beaches. I have started to learn English at Clearwater Adult Education Center. In the future, I want to go to college. I have made new friends at my school from many countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Senegal, and many more. I have learned a lot about new cultures. We are like a family. What a small, peaceful world class!

In conclusion, leaving your country is so hard—you experience many things, many feelings, and many opportunities. We can view the different perspectives of things, but it is our choice if we want to grow or remain stagnant. Unexpected changes or turning points may freeze you or mature you. I have chosen to grow and be successful. What about you?

Pamela Marquina is from Venezuela and is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her future goal is to go to college and become a Registered Nurse.

Emigrate

How hard can it be to leave your country and friends to find a better future? Emigration can be hard at the beginning, but is a beautiful experience where you will be able to make new friends. This is also an opportunity to find a job, achieve your goals and dreams, and even have time to know another culture and a new language.

First, emigrating means leaving family and friends in your native country, and so many times those are the people that you most love in the world. You have to be strong and understand that it is for your own good and personal aspiration. Another important point is that you don't know when you will see those people again, or even if it is going to be possible to see them again. For example, in my experience, my grandma died and I couldn't say goodbye to her because I wasn't in my country. But in my opinion, that's a new reason and an inspiration to fight and believe even more in my dreams.

Then, about the theme of finding a job and achieving your goals: although it's challenging in the beginning, in a new country where you don't know anybody, and everything is in another language, once you start nothing will stop you. The key is to not give up trying to improve in everything. There are so many opportunities in this country, and you can always see that the effort is worth it. The opportunities will let you have a better quality of life.

Another point about emigration is that learning to speak another language is a wonderful experience. I received English lessons in school in my country, and I also went to a course of English in my free time, but that's never the same as being here and having to talk to other people to make new friends and learn more about the culture or the traditional food.

Finally, besides learning a new language, other things work differently. For example, in my country the driving rules are different. It is against the law to turn right at a red traffic light. The school system is also different. In my country we study with the same classmates from primary school through high school; we become like a family.

My conclusion is that emigrating can be difficult at the beginning, but with time you'll be good and you will achieve your goals and dreams in this country. With faith and hard work, everything will be possible.

Paola Dalessio is an student ESOL at Palm Beach central ACE. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

When I Really Became a Student

If there's one thing in my life I'm proud of, it absolutely would be the enjoyment I feel of being a student. Right now, I really like to learn, and it's very easy for me. I could understand most of the general subjects without struggling back at the end of high school. Except for biology; I hate biology. And right now, I think the subjects that I want to learn for my career will be easy for me to understand.

But it wasn't like this before. It wasn't until 2019 when I realized that the method of my studies had been wrong, from elementary until almost the end of high school. In that period of time, all I did was receive information from my teachers, memorizing it until the end of the term, and when the final exams were taking place, I'd just repeat that information into the sheets of paper. Actually, this method worked very well, or so I thought. It's true that my grades were pretty good. My name was always in the top three students of the class, and my grandmother and mother were very happy with it. I felt really smart even though when the term finished, I'd forget almost everything I had learned.

Then, in 2019, for some family reasons, I dropped out of high school. The situation with my family was complicated, so I just accepted it, hoping to continue my studies later. But it wasn't that easy; I really felt the necessity of continuing to study.

Then, to solve this problem, or at least try to, I went to the community library in my town with the intention of studying by myself. After a couple of weeks of trying, I felt completely helpless; I couldn't understand nearly anything from the textbooks by myself even if the subjects were the ones I already knew from my years of high school.

From that year I started to take my studies seriously. Every time I tried to learn something new, I wouldn't conform with only remembering the theory. I needed to fully understand the whole thing before feeling satisfied.

When I returned to school one year later, learning was way more simple and easy than before, as I described at the beginning. Now, I'm learning English at this adult school, and I'm looking forward to getting into the PBSC next year.

If you're reading this, you're probably an adult student too, so I hope you do well with your studies; and remember, do it in the right way! Otherwise, it's only a waste of time.

Santiago Delgado is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Self-Discovery

All my life, I never thought I had a talent. I was not artistic or athletic like other kids at school. When I joined the GED program and started writing for the essay book, I soon found out that writing was my hidden talent. It turned out that writing could change my life.

For the longest time, expressing my feelings was difficult. My feelings were held in and often expressed in various negative ways. The emotions came out as anger, lashing out at other people, and even depression and anxiety. I was never able to express the way I was truly feeling verbally.

After I started the adult education classes, I learned of the Florida Literacy essay book through my amazing teacher. She required me to write something to send into the book. I wrote an essay that was about my learning disability. This experience opened my understanding about expressing myself in words.

Later, I even wrote a story for a mystery writing contest and won 2nd place. That is when I truly found out that I have a talent for writing. It has changed the way I think and express myself, so I have fewer negative emotions building up in me. I'll also men-

tion writing really helped a lot with my grammar and vocabulary. Now, I enjoy different forms of writing, such as funny pieces and some from the heart.

Finally, I am so thankful I got the opportunity to discover my love and talent for writing.

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

It Is Time for Change; It Is Time for Me

My name is Suky; I was raised in Venezuela. Unfortunately, I grew up in a family where abuse was present: I was prey for my own father, and my older brother. My mother never did anything about it.

I came to United States 26 years ago to stay in my older brother's house. I thought perhaps he may have changed, but the abuse continued, not only sexually, but also through brainwashing, manipulation, intimidation, disgrace, and control.

I have two kids. I tried to do my best to raise them despite my situation, but they also suffered abuse, and later they became abusers towards me. I thought of leaving my brother's house; how much worse could it be? I didn't have a personality—I had too much fear. My identity was taken away. I was nothing, incapable of dealing with my own life. I realized I didn't want to continue to be the poor victim; I was tired of being mistreated. I finally left my brother's house. I have not had contact with him or my children since.

I decided to educate myself about abuse, the consequences, and what I could do to get over it. I also prayed, as I believe God is a real power. I began meditating, listening to healing music, and reading everything about energy and chakras. It was a long process.

Three long years have passed. I have been in difficult situations, unsafe places, and slept in my car for one year and two months. I lived at Lotus House Shelter for Women for six

months. During all of this, I never lost my faith. I have forgiven my family; my heart is at peace.

Currently, I'm pursuing my GED at Lindsey Hopkins Technical College. I am a licensed nail technician and enrolled in online courses to obtain my medical pedicure certification. I plan to go to college to become a podiatrist.

I am planning a project for The Podiatry Institute, to introduce my own technique for treating nail fungus and ingrown toenails and demonstrate how traditional techniques the doctors utilize are very aggressive, traumatic, and unnecessary. I also wish to write books about sexual abuse, how to identify abusers, being a victim, and how a mother's children could be victims too.

I am grateful to be in this country as a U.S. citizen and develop as a person. I am grateful to have both Ms. Brownlow and Mr. Karayan as teachers. I am grateful for all their help and support.

Suky Yasui attends Lindsey Hopkins Technical College in Miami, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Christina Brownlow.

Baking a Cake in the United States

When I lived in Mexico, I had never cooked anything. When I came to the United States ten years ago, I started working in a restaurant. The chef trained me and told me that I had a talent for decorating pastry. That was a compliment because he had won second place in a reality show called Top Chef.

The first time I made a cake, it was a cheesecake. The chef told me I had to start making the cakes in the restaurant. I was very nervous because I had never made a cake before. The chef told me that I had to read the recipe and do it as the recipe said. I looked for all the ingredients, put them in the cake mixer, and began to make the cake. I preheated the oven to the temperature that the recipe said, and I put it to cook. I was nervous that it would burn. I put the timer on and took the cake out when the timer buzzed. When the chef saw the cake, he told me that for my first time making a cake, I had done very well.

I have been baking cakes in the United States for three years. The chef of Avanzare taught me many new things like decorating cakes and making caramelized fruit. I remember what the chef taught me, and I keep learning. I like to live and bake cakes in the United States.

Juan Cruz is a student of Literacy Services of Indian River County. His teacher is Jeannine Cohoe.

English and Marriage

I loved living in Colombia with my parents and very large family. After receiving word of my aunt's knee surgery, I came to the United States to care for her. One day, I was walking to the trash and I noticed a very handsome young man who had a beautiful smile walking his dog. He could speak a bit of Spanish; I couldn't speak English at all. As time went by, he finally asked me to dinner and our love story began.

Our communication was difficult and I saw that English was being taught at the Vero Beach library. I met Debbie and started my English lessons. My attraction to Jeremiah became love and while we hit a few bumps along the way, our love led us to marry two years ago. Successfully learning the language allowed me to begin to enjoy married life in the United States. Debbie's hard work and patience with me has allowed me to prepare for my present employment and form friendships with Jeremiah's family and friends.

Natalie Willis is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Debbie Espeland.

My Special Person

Change is part of our lives, and we have to accept it. Sometimes I think I am not ready to start a family. I was scared because I didn't have the life skills to be a woman, but never say never. How did it happen to me? I didn't really want to meet anyone. It was just a day like any other, but it became so special because I met a great person. That was the best turning point in my life.

First, my husband became very successful with little resources. He had only finished middle school in Mexico when he came to this country. He started to work very hard for a company for many years. But one day he wanted to change his life and decided to learn English. He went to school. He only took English classes for three months and then studied to become a licensed landscaper. After many years working for the company, he decided to start his business. Where there is a will, there is a way!

Second, he is a very caring person. Family is very important to him. He is a very loving husband and father. For example, he surprised me with a beautiful gift on our anniversary and my favorite is the flower bouquet I received when I opened the door. In addition, he is present at every important event of our children. His presence motivates them and makes them happy.

When I worry about something or when I think I cannot do something, he is always there for me. He is my rock—he never lets me down. The day I lost my lovely brother, I was thinking to myself that I cannot live anymore. I was so sad that I did not care about anything. But my husband was always there, supporting me and giving me the strength to carry on. He is my sunshine in my clouded times.

To summarize, you should never doubt your abilities that you know you have. Find the man of your dreams and form a beautiful family. Beautiful families make beautiful societies.

Teofila Espanol is a student in the ESOL Program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Yllka Bejo.

The Pandemic Changed My Life

I come from a family full of traditions with a square mentality. I grew up in a country full of possibilities. When I had my whole life well-planned and shaped according to my expectations, my life changed overnight. As it tends to happen, I believed everything that happened in life was somehow under my control. Also, the life that was planned out for me from birth would fall naturally, as I had seen my parents' life and my grandparents before them. But I was obviously wrong.

It all started with a simple vacation to the United States with my husband to visit our eldest daughter. We arrived with just a suitcase and were happy to escape a bit from the political situation in our country, Venezuela. We had everything planned: what we were going to do and where we were going to go. Suddenly, the Coronavirus crept into our world, changing everything. Instead of a month of vacation, we lived outside our comfort zone for a year in the middle of a pandemic.

The political and health situation in my country was getting worse and worse, thanks to a law in this country. It gave us the opportunity to stay temporarily. So, during this time I discovered that there are things and situations in life that I cannot control. We had our plans and expectations, but God had his way and we had to go with it. I recognized it is for the best.

I understand that through changes and difficulties, the Lord molds our character to challenge afflictions with faith and optimism. So, I am grateful for everything—for the small things and for the big ones. I learned to contemplate the beauty and perfection of creation, to value life, people around me, and the warmth of a hug. Above all, I comprehend that every decision that one makes in life has consequences in the short or long term. In life, we never stop learning. There is no age to stop studying, reading, knowing, experimenting, feeling, no matter how many times we stumble. Get up and move on.

We must not stop dreaming, growing, and doing well. I had this thought that at 50 years of age I am going to retire and live on my income in my country with my family. Instead, I am in the U.S., learning a new language and customs, starting almost from scratch, without my parents. THANK YOU, God, because all the changes have been for the better. I am not afraid of changes and challenges. I make the most of all the opportunities in life that God offers me.

Yara attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Anxiously Waiting for a Breakthrough

For me, it is not easy to define the exact moment in my life that will be a turning point. I just finished high school and am looking forward to my college education, checking the location, and thinking of my future. I think about where I will work, find a good-paying job, and whether I should live in my country. This could be the beginning of my life changing.

February 28 was my last day of high school. Like everybody else, I was happy that school had ended. I no longer had to share with my friends our feelings and our test scores. Instead, I started to discuss every day with my friends about colleges and which major I would choose. I was confused, so I decided to wait for my test results then make a decision. Days passed and meanwhile, I planned to study legal law because I'm interested in lawsuits; but my family disagrees. Most of the students were not able to attend the class because of the changes in the amendment or some were actively participating in demonstrations to the military coup. Nevertheless, I decided to learn accounting online for our family business expansion. I met many customers with different characters and figured out how to communicate with them easily.

Another option is trying to enroll in a college in another country to pursue higher education. But this was delayed because of the visa and immigration legalities. I personally think that I can handle college because I have matured more after I finished high school due to my experience with many people who came to me as customers. I'm close to the turning point of my life. I need to choose between the path to advance my education or staying home and doing random work. I'm a little hesitant about what I am going to choose because if I make the wrong choice, I will have to pay for it for the rest of my life. Hence, it would hinder me from reaching my goal quickly.

In my opinion, for every situation, we have to draw conclusions and make useful lessons. I have met a lot of people and they are all different, as well as their way of life and their outlook on life. Some of them learn from their mistakes and constantly use their own life experience, while others fall under the exterior influence. This can be our parents, or mass opinion, which we all are constantly pressed by—TV screens, magazines, newspapers, and the internet. Frankly, I am now in limbo waiting for a break-

through. I hope to make be a reasonable, realistic, and smart choice for my academic and career for my life.

Zu Zue Ko attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Rodziah Josephson.

A Turning Point in My Life

One of the biggest turning points of my life was moving to the United States. I used to live in Palestine, and It was not the safest because of the war that was going on. Me and my husband decided to take our children and go live in Jordan until we could move to the United States.

When we first got to the United States, it was a new life that was very unfamiliar and hard at first, but it taught us so much. Being in the United States helped us grow as family and give a better life for a better future for our children.

Another reason why it was one of the biggest turning points is the fact that I got to finally see my parents and family after not being able to see them for nine years. My father's dream was to bring me to the United States as I was the last one out of my siblings that wasn't living in here. My father died two months after we got to United States, it felt as if this was his last wish, and when it became true he died. This was a very sad time for me and my whole family, but I was thankful that I was around all of them during these difficult times.

This big turning point in my life taught me to stay strong and always have faith. It also taught me to be thankful for all the loved ones in my life and how family is everything.

First, me and my husband and kids lived in war. Life was not safe then, and all we wanted was to give our children a better life and future. Moving to the United States was one of the best decisions and biggest opportunities to give them the education and life they deserved. We were all able to learn a second language which was hard at first. Me and my family are still growing and learning from this opportunity of moving to this county.

Second, I was able to see my parents and family after nine years. Life was much more difficult when I did not have my family around. Being able to see them and be around them through everything I experienced in my life here was a big blessing.

Third, one of my father's last wishes was to see me living around him. I was the only one in the family who did not live in the United States. When I finally got to the country, my father was able to see me living here happy, then he passed away four months after.

In conclusion, moving to the United States was one of the biggest turning point in my life because I was able to provide a better life and future for my children, was able to finally get to see my family, and was able to make my father's last wish come true.

Shirin Alsaro is a student from ACE of Leon County. Her teacher is Jordan Bellott.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

Focus on My Dreams

Advice allows me to assert more effort. The best advice I have ever received is to focus on my dreams. The knowledge I gained is that learning and school can help me achieve many things in my life.

My life has changed from these tips. I hope to be a great soldier. My dream is to join and serve in the military in the US. My parents are my greatest counselors.

Jonas Galette attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Helping Hand

No one is born knowing everything. Listening to others is important. Advice can make a world of difference, it can change a life, help build a community or save the world.

In January 2010, I was in the Dominican Republic after the devastating earthquake in Haiti during which I lost 4 fingers of my right hand. They were broken and I was there for medical assistance. Indeed, after my surgical operation and as soon as I saw that my fingers were not there anymore, I was plunged into total despair. A few days later, I met someone who told me about an aid organization (Borno). He advised me to go there to find help. I can say that this advice has changed my life. It helped me a lot because I found support on several planes including immigration status, financial aid, and psychological support.

In terms of immigration status, Borno was very helpful. I had to stay more than a year in the Dominican Republic and at that time the undocumented were not treated well. They gave us (my children and me) the necessary documents to move around.

Financially they were extremely helpful by giving me food, and they bought everything that I needed for my school and gave me a small business to support my family.

The moral support I received from them was the most important because I was so affected, I started to lose my memory. I was so traumatized, I wondered if I would recover. I was depressed. I had several sessions of therapy with the unforgettable Psychologist Jn-Mary Louis who recommended that I go to school. He thought that an activity would be useful for my treatment and school was the best option.

Thanks to the advice of this gentleman, months later I graduated as a home designer. And years later, when I went back to my country, I won the first prize in the business plan competition in which I participated. This allowed me with the support of the Etre Ayisyen Foundation, MercyCorps, and Intel, to open my own business (Mercilia's Belkay Manufacturing). I obtained a US business visa and now I'm planning to bring my company to the United States and continue to execute my project here.

Wherever you are, if you are reading this story, be proud of yourself because your advice has been helpful.

Mercilia Aurelius is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

The best advice I have ever received was to be independent, strong, and fair when facing any situation in life. That is why I strive to do my best in any situation. I try to be prepared for good and bad times. Accepting a good piece of advice can change one's life for the best.

I like to be independent and self-sufficient. I strive to reach new goals and prove to myself that I can achieve any goal that I set. I work many hours, take care of my children, the house and go to English class at night. To be self-sufficient we must believe in ourselves. It will be hard but not impossible. I face life with strength and courage knowing that I am capable of overcoming adversity as well as enjoying good times.

I like to be kind to myself and others, show respect the same that I expect from others. I try to be a good person that loves and forgives, while also keeping a positive attitude and learning from all experiences. I have learned that it is important to listen to others with respect and an open mind, to express opinions and emotions without anger. To give and receive love with gratitude. In that way one can become a better person.

I am an independent and strong woman that treats others with respect. I try to set a good example for my children and teach them that with hard work and compassion everything is possible. I am thankful for the advice that I have received and fortunate to learn from it and pass it on to my children.

Baudelia Mendoza is a student in the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

In 2009, I received the advice that has impacted my life the most. It was a Saturday afternoon, and I was receiving a diploma on human talent management. That day, my professor's wife, Olga, was there. My husband introduced me to her. When we met, it was like she scanned me and could see through me. She made a direct comment that I disliked at the time, but I knew that it was certainly so. She said, "You know that when you get married and the children arrive you will have to stop working, because for a company you are an employee. For example, if you leave today, tomorrow they have another person in your position. But for your children you will be the only mother they will have."

That was very hard for me to hear at first because I wanted to get as high as I could professionally. However, at the same time I knew from experience that it is true. I grew up in a home where Mom had to work a lot. She had no other option. When I received Olga's advice, it was like she knew me in depth and at the same time she could see my future. When my children were born, I had the opportunity to decide and one of the most important things that helped me to do this decision were those words that were kept inside me like a treasure, knowing the veracity that these words have and all the repercussions they could have on my children.

Today I honor the life of Olga Carolina Villalobos who passed away in May 2021 but who lives in my mind through her wise and timely advice. With Love to Olga, Leydis.

Leydis Campos is a student of Whitney Strohmayer in the Advanced ESOL Program at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.

Keep Your Mind Positive

The best advice I have ever received was, “Don’t let anything destroy you, stay the person you are, you are an intelligent girl, and you can follow all your dreams.”

I remember it like it was yesterday. When I was in high school my teacher usually asked us, what would we do for our future and each time I usually said that I want to go to the university to earn a degree and become a doctor or agroecologist. Then when I started studying to be an agroecologist in the middle of the years, I felt discouraged and sometimes wanted to give up.

One day I found one of my friends, she saw me thinking a lot and asked me what was happening. I explained to her how I was feeling discouraged and thinking about giving up. She said to me, “Don’t let anything destroy you, stay the person you are, you are a smart person, and you can follow your dreams.”

Here I sit today, in school, still remembering my friend’s advice, following my dreams!

Ashley Pierre has been attending the ESOL High Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida for less than one year. She is a dedicated student and takes her education very seriously. After improving her English skills, she plans to continue her career pathway to earn a master’s degree in nursing.

Never Give Up Learning English

Has anyone given you some advice and you just ignore it? I have many times but one of the best pieces of advice I’ve gotten was from my English teacher. She is petite but dynamic. She talks with power and authority. My teacher uses her role to nurture her students like a mother who loves her children with

all her heart. She has many students of different walks of life, nationalities, beliefs, and values. But she treats all of us equally.

The best advice my teacher gave me is never to give up learning English. She utilizes English to motivate us, guide us, teach us, caution us, and help us. She said when you speak better English, you can get a better job or promotion at the workplace. She always tells us to speak loud and clear. It makes sense. Who is going to understand if you just mumble? Sometimes, it takes time to make adjustments because as we all grow older, we are set in our ways. It takes constant reminders and patience from my teacher to help us listen, understand, and take heed to her advice.

Jean Carly Waldo Pervil attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Rodziah Josephson.

My Bravest Moment

A Turning Point in My Life

My story started last year in the summer of 2021 when we decided to move to the U.S.A. At first, I was excited because I would travel and try something new. The time before the trip was hard for me. There were a lot of mixed feelings—fear, excitement, and sadness. I was sad because I didn't want to leave my home country, family, and friends. On one side, I was thinking of future study and a job to help my family. Unfortunately, job chances are very few in my country and it is difficult to find a job, especially for adults like me. It was hard for me to accept the idea of leaving my life, family, and friends. I was leaving my comfort zone. Also, the trip from Palestine to here was very hard and took a lot of time and money. I was very sick with COVID when I arrived in the United States, and it was very hard.

I started work after two weeks. It was difficult at first because my language skills were bad. I am working on it, and I am trying to get used to my new life and the new community. I know it's hard at the beginning, and I am trying and hope everything will be better for me and my family. I hope we will be able to meet my friends and family back home very soon.

Honestly, I am proud of myself now because I overcame my fear, and I am doing very good at my job, and I learned almost everything. With all the support from my family and friends I will get over all of this and achieve my dreams.

Mohammed Alsaqqa is a student in the Adult Community Education program at Leon County Schools. His teacher is Christina Eppes.

The Bravest

My bravest moment was when I decided to go back to school. Once before I tried to get a certificate on English for Speakers of Other Languages, but I did not succeed. I was unable to get a High School Diploma because I was eighteen years old and could not enter high school. Therefore, I was unable to complete my

education. I took the General Education Test in Michigan and tried to start college, but failed the English class required. I got discouraged and went to work. I was scared to try again.

I was raised by my grandmother in Mexico and moved to United States when I was 17 years old. I was living in Michigan and decided to continue with my education. All my work was in vain, and I felt like there was no hope for me. I spent seven years working in different jobs; milking cows, picking blueberries, washing dishes and cooking. I wanted to go back to school but was never brave enough to do it.

I moved to Lake Placid and one day I went to a store and saw a flier announcing English classes. I was brave enough to go and ask about it. I applied and was accepted without any problem. I attended classes every day and learned so much. I took different tests and moved to the advanced level. I even applied for a trade course and was accepted. In a week I will be going to trade school and continuing with my education. What a difference it has made in my life!

Looking at the way I overcame fear when registered for classes in Lake Placid, I believe I can overcome obstacles. I am not afraid of going to school anymore. I was very brave when I decided to try to go back to school again. It was a great decision.

Cristian Hernandez Lopez is a student at South Florida State College/ESOL. His teacher is Larid Lopez.

Carmen's Life-Changing Experience

It was a clear day. On that evening, the air blew, dragging the dry leaves out of the trees. Suddenly, I got a phone call. It was bad news. My sister was found dead. It altered my emotions in an exaggerated way.

I don't know when or what time I made the bad decision. I boarded a plane to my home country, not knowing what was waiting for me. When I got to my destination, I saw the coffin. I had to swallow my tears because I felt bad. I had not seen my sister in over thirty years. I didn't know I had to see her like this for the last time. Eventually, I couldn't control myself. I cried and

cried until I couldn't cry anymore. Then I understood that storms don't work by themselves but come with a lot of thunder and lightning.

I was supposed to be there for only three days. I thought I would return home as quickly as possible. When I got to the airport on the third day, my documents were checked. I was told that there was a mistake on my exit permit. I realized that I couldn't leave. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't go back home to see my kids or my family.

Every morning I went to the riverside and sat on the largest stone that I could find near the stream to cry and calm my anguish and anxiety that was consuming me. I wanted to be close to my children to hug them and tell them how much I love them. I was lonely. The river was my only friend. I saw how the water crawled on the earth every minute, every second. The noise of the water was unforgettable. I felt in my heart as if the stream was consoling me. I tried blaming myself. I realized that I'm no longer from there. I had already gotten used to a different life.

One night I had a dream where God warned me of my return home. In that dream, I saw an angel in the form of a plane coming towards me. I woke up thankful. I put my hands on the Bible with faith that God will let me out of this country. I prayed every night until my prayer became reality, and my exit permit was accepted. My spirit returned to my body.

This journey made me realize that I should learn to appreciate life and give thanks to God. I left my home country and all of my bad emotions and boarded that plane with no hesitation. Since that time, I have not returned to my home country. That was a life-changing experience.

Carmen Lopez is an Advanced ESOL student at Orange Technical College – East Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Bravery for My Baby

The bravest moment of my life came in May 2017. I faced a scary situation. The doctor warned it may not be safe to deliver my son naturally, and I may need a cesarean section. This

frightened me out of my mind. In 2016, I had gotten pregnant for the first time. My first baby was coming, and I was so excited. However, it turned out to be a difficult pregnancy. I had morning sickness all day long, not just mornings.

My husband was so attentive and tried to make sure that I was comfortable. I was in and out of the hospital with complications that gave the doctors the idea that I might lose my baby. My body could not keep up with the fast-paced changes. Many fears raced through my head. What if I ate or drank something that was going to hurt him? Was I staying off my feet enough? I could barely think straight. Yet seeing his sweet little face and hearing his heartbeat over the ultrasound made my worries go away. My heartbeat calmed down. My thoughts stopped racing. I could breathe. Once I saw my little boy safe and sound in my belly, I knew I was doing my job to protect him. After that I stayed calm, followed the doctor's orders, and believed everything would be okay.

On May 6, 2017 at 9 p.m., my husband and I were sitting in a hospital room once again with complications. Time ticked by slowly as we nervously waited for the doctor. A nurse came in to inform us they would be releasing me to go home. My heart dropped; I could feel there was something wrong. And yet they were sending us home. This is when I knew I had to be brave for my son. As I stood up to change, my husband briskly left the room to inform the nurse that we were, in fact, not leaving. She took one look and immediately left to get the doctor. Again, I calmed myself knowing whatever was about to happen, I had to be prepared. The doctor ran some tests but did not want to wait for the results. We prepared for emergency surgery.

At first, I felt ashamed that my body could not do what it was meant to do—birth my child. They rushed me to the operating room and left my husband outside. I thought, Great, my first baby and they're going to make me do this alone. Once my meds were given, they allowed him back in. I was so relieved to see his face and know we were in this together. At 10:52 p.m., my 5 lb. 1.1 oz. completely healthy baby boy was born. We named him Tyler. Once I could hold him and touch his little hands, everything was right in the world.

Dana Castleberry is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Early Motherhood

Growing up, I did not have much. At age 12, I gave up school to take care of both my little brothers. It was at this time, that I became their “mother.” I was forced to grow much earlier than expected. I ended up learning from them as I grew with them. My teenage years were spent being a mother to my younger brothers who were one and three years old at that time.

The story began when my mother decided to go to England to make a better life for all of us; yet she never returned. My brothers and I stayed in Jamaica. This is why I had to become my brothers’ mother. This became my bravest moment. I did not know what to expect. I was a young girl myself. I ended up adopting a true, loving, and caring bond for my brothers. My father migrated to Canada and again, we were left behind. However, he did try for us to migrate to Canada, but I kept putting the application aside.

Most of the time, I did not know how to make ends meet, but somehow as I began to write prayers of thanksgiving to God for everything, I realized the more I talked to God, the more I was able to do for my brothers. I made sure that they were in school, loved, and cared for. I realized that it is a blessing to be obedient to our Creator. He allowed me to migrate to the United States in 2013. I made sure my brothers were here with me. I was not going to leave them behind. We are here together as one and still growing.

As time went on, at the age of 20 and then 26, I gave birth to two beautiful girls. Now I have four children to be a mother to. I became a CNA and worked continuously to make sure they received an education that I never had yet.

In conclusion, my bravest moment in my life was becoming a mother to my brothers at an early age. There were times when we had a shortage of food, and I went without eating so the children could have food to eat. I always put my four children first in my

life; however, today I am grateful that I can put myself first since they are doing well and are taken care of. I am a hard worker.

I never realized I could slow down to become brave enough to register myself in school. I decided to return to school to continue my education and reach my goals. Because of the experience of attending school and participating as a member of our School Advisory Committee, I am no longer afraid to achieve more in my life. I am looking forward to making more brave moments.

Sherry-Kaye Malcolm is a student attending Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Ines Sosa.

I Met My Angel

December 3, 2008 was the day that my wife had scheduled a caesarean section. It was a pregnancy without any problems. After many monthly reviews and controls, our first daughter was finally born. After more than eight hours of labor, we finally met Valeria. Life had placed me in one of the most beautiful moments in the world. I couldn't believe what I had in my arms

A week later, my daughter was drowning. She was not breathing well. We received a diagnosis—it was a congenital malformation of the heart (coarctation of the aorta) where an operation had to be done immediately. This operation was extremely delicate; the probability of survival that they gave us was 50 percent.

After a thousand exams and studies, she was finally operated on. Six hours later, the doctor informs us that the operation was a complete success. This recovery did not last long, and they informed us that there was bleeding and they had to intervene again. The second intervention lasted five hours. There were no saints remaining that we would not call on in these days. It was possible to correct the problem, and the operation was completed successfully. The heart recovered, and my daughter was healthy. A week later she started with a lot of coughing, and another diagnosis was presented. This time she had contracted a very strong hospital-acquired bacteria and had to enter her third and last battle.

On January 11, 2009, we were informed that she had passed away. A very deep pain entered my body, especially for my first daughter. From this moment, I knew that something special was happening. I was in a very privileged place.

On December 4, 2021, like on every December 4, I sat up when I woke up remembering her and telling her that I wanted to know about her, and I wanted a sign to know if she was taking care of me. That same day when I got home from work, tired, I decided to walk my dog. He approached two girls and began to bark at them with great fury, and they had to grab him so he wouldn't hurt them. This girl had an older sister that I did not know. This was the first time I saw her. This teenager introduces himself and tells me, "Nice to meet you, I'm Valeria." I could not believe it—it was this sign that I asked for, precisely on her birthday and her name was the same as my angel. I baptized her as my guardian angel.

Luis Alfonso Hernandez Rivera is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

A Mother's Courage

I'm a Latina mother of three beautiful children—ages ten, nine, and six—and wife to a handsome man. My story begins on the day my oldest son's school principal asked to meet me to discuss my son's academic progress. The news was horrible as he said that because of my son's lack of English language skills, they were going to return him to the second grade! I was broken-hearted; his news terrified me, and I broke into tears. I had arrived at a crucial, embarrassing moment in my life. Because of my own English language barrier, I felt every mother's fear of not being able to help their child succeed.

As time went on, the situation quickly began to get worse, and I became self-conscious about not doing anything about it. Realizing I needed someone to help my son with his homework, I believed I had only two options, and I had to choose quickly. I could either remain frustrated, or I could learn English. The choice I made was "the bravest moment of my life".

I got up and started looking for information on the internet on how and where to take English classes. I was prepared to face the challenges that life had presented me, especially if the outcome resulted in my being able to help people. Determined, I took my phone and dialed the office phone number for ESOL classes that I had found. A kind and spectacular person answered all my questions, and I decided to enroll in an English class at South Florida State College, where I am currently attending.

It was the best decision I have ever made. I now understand that the bad moments in my life were not failures, but opportunities to lead me to something better. I was able to share with my three beautiful children my new knowledge of English. As a result, they have improved their grades, with two of them on the honor roll, and I thank God for that.

Remember, nothing is impossible! Barriers and impossibilities are set by ourselves from the moment that we decide to not do something to change our situation. I want to thank GOD for this wonderful opportunity and for the good people that He has put on my path, especially my English instructor Denise Miriani.

Daniela Cruz is a Mexican student. She is currently a Sunday school class teacher for kids at "Casa de Dios para las Naciones" in Frostproof, FL.

My Bravest Moment

August 21, 2021 was the most terrible day of my life. That day my husband died after suffering from cancer for a few years. Even when it was terrible I discovered how brave I can be. We did not have any relatives in Florida. My husband knew some English but I was just starting ESOL classes. I did not have a job because I was scared of not being able to communicate when needed. When he died, there was no one to lean on.

My husband was diagnosed with cancer and it was metastases. The health insurance referred him to an agency that would go to our home to check him on a daily basis. I was always praying for his recovery. At night I was concerned that he would die without any help. So many days went by without any improvement. I watched him deteriorating. I was so scared of the unknown.

On August 21st I gave my husband the last medicine at midnight. I was laying close to him and felt his weak breath. I knew that his time was coming. I started to pray for his health and for strength to let him go if it was time. At 12:50 he died. I was desperate not knowing what to do. Soon I decided that I was all that he had, and I needed to be brave to face what comes with the death of a loved one. I owed it to him not to fall apart.

I called the agency that was helping my husband and told them that he died. They sent someone to our home. In the meantime, I got all my strength and looked for documents that might be needed, his birth certificate, marriage certificate, medical records, and medicines. I looked for nice clothes to put on him if needed. I do not know how I was able to move forward and get everything ready. I realized that I was braver and more capable than I ever thought.

That day I discovered that inside of me, there was the ability to take care of things and move forward. I never thought that I was going to be able to see my husband die without falling apart. That I was going to be able to take care of all the arrangements and paperwork needed. And of all things I never thought that I would be going for a driver's license and a full-time job. Now I know that I can face anything that comes my way. I am strong and capable!

Gladis Odon Marte is a student at South Florida State College/ESOL. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

My Bravest Moment

I was close to being 13 years old when I made the decision to leave my house, my parents, and my siblings, with my heart broken in pieces. But I knew it was something that I needed to do for a better future. So, I came to live with my sister in Georgia. I cared for her kids, and she gave me some money. I started a new life.

I worked for about four years, cleaning her house and caring for her kids. After that I worked in some rug companies. Then I met my husband. I moved in with him and started a new journey. Now we have three kids. My oldest attends the university.

Finally, I feel so proud of my decision because it didn't just change my life, but now my kids can have a better future too.

Graciela Agundis is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia, FL. She is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph's ABE/ESOL class. Graciela is an excellent student and is working towards her academic goals.

My Bravest Moment

I believe that there are many brave moments in everyone's life, but I think that the bravest moments for a person are not only because of what she did, but because she was in unfavorable circumstances and conditions, and, although everyone was opposed to her, she still insisted on doing what she thought was right.

In September 2016, a strong hurricane named Irma hit Florida. Most of the people fled after the news announcement, However, I chose to listen to the opinions of the elders and stay at home because in Chinese culture, to show respect, the younger generations generally follow the teachings of the elders. They think everything will be fine.

But the next day, the news reports said the center of the hurricane would move in the direction of my home area. When I saw the news, I decided to evacuate with my children although the elders had persuaded me to stay and stopped. Moreover, I didn't even know where to go after leaving. I still chose to do it.

At that moment, the only things on my mind were packing, food and drink, containers for gasoline, and if the children's seatbelts were fastened! My heart was full of determination, and I know that only leaving could make me completely at ease. At that moment, I only listened to my inner voice. Then I took the children to Georgia. We stayed in the hotel for three days and returned home after the hurricane had left. This is my bravest moment. I am proud of myself.

Ling Qiu is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguno Ozols.

A Day I Will Not Forget

November 2, 2016 is a day that I will not forget. I was sitting outside one lazy evening in a neighborhood in Haiti just passing the time doing nothing. In front of me is a small street and on the other side of the street across from me is a grocery store. Cars are rolling down the street while some people are shopping and the children are playing.

Then out of nowhere, I heard a voice of a little boy crying. He must have got out of his house close by. I was told that he was looking for his Mama. I was surprised no one was with him. He stood on the curb watching the grocery store across the street. He was standing there for quite a while. His cry got louder.

Finally, he spotted his Mama in the grocery store and wanted to get over to her. He got so excited to see her and without much thinking, he ran across to the store. At the same time, there was a car driving towards him and the driver did not see the little boy. When I saw that, I quickly jumped out of my chair and dashed into the street shouting and waving to the driver to stop his car. I dove to catch the little crying boy in my arms. Thank goodness, he was saved.

I guess there must be a destined reason why I sat outside on that particular day on a sunny evening in that neighborhood. It was meant for me to save a boy's life. I was glad that I acted promptly. I was a bit bruised but most importantly no one was dead. Have you ever experienced something like this in your life? Accidents happen in a blink of an eye. We must stay alert at all times and watch out for each other.

Michel Asmen Jeantine is and English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Baking With Love

My personal story about staying home during the COVID-19 pandemic was how I learned to bake a cake. Throughout my adulthood, I never learned how to make a cake. While staying at home, I had nothing much to do. So, to not bore myself to death,

I decided that I should do something to help me stay active and healthy.

I thought of so many things, but the thing that interests me most is working on baking pastries. I went to the store and bought the items for recipes. I took two cups of milk and added one cup of flour, a tablespoon of vanilla, three eggs, four spoons of sugar, and half of stick butter. I mixed the ingredients and poured the mixture into the baking pan. I placed it into the oven at 200 degrees for an hour. After an hour, I pulled it out of the oven and I tasted it to see if it came out good, and it was.

I invited my household to enjoy my new skill. We also learned how to make tea. I taught my family how to make tea to help with COVID-19 symptoms. I mixed it with ginger, lemon, cloves, honey, cinnamon, and anise. I boiled them and added honey and cinnamon to a boiling pot from the tea. This tea helps my family stay healthy.

Mona Peck is an ESOL student at West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

My Bravest Moment

My bravest moment was the day that I decided to take a flight to visit my daughter during the Covid19 pandemic. After being home for over a year with depression and fear of the health implications of such pandemic, I decided to go to see my only daughter in Florida.

In order to do that I left the rest of my family behind. At the time I had problems with a foot, and it was a challenge to walk. I started to develop depression. Health problems and total confinement were too hard for me to handle. I knew that I needed to do something to keep my sanity. Nevertheless, I was scared.

Due to my age and health conditions my family did not want any physical contact with each other. The fear of Covid infection was a constant thought. In my country thousands were dying. It felt like there was no way out. With all those fears and people trying to convince me to stay home, I made the decision to stay in another country with my daughter. I was very brave, knowing of

all the risks involved with international travel during a pandemic.

I do not regret the decision to travel during the pandemic. I have been with my daughter for five months and will be ready to go back home soon. I received all three vaccines and will continue to take care of my health. I think that I was bravest than ever traveling during such difficult times. But it was worth taking the risk to feel close to others.

Nora Castillo Mantilla is a student at South Florida State College/ESOL. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

With Time and Love

Hello, my name is Lorena. I married very young in Mexico at the age of 14. Then I came to the United States with my husband believing that life would be better here. But no, he started beating me and my life became hell.

I had four pregnancies of which I lost two babies, but was able to keep two beautiful children. After having my two children, I took courage and said that no one will ever hit me again, let alone in front of my children, because that was not the education I wanted for them. So I took all the courage that I had in my heart and, in front of my husband, I ran out of the house and I told him that if he came back, I would call the police. He left and didn't come back.

After I lived alone for a year, working hard to move my children forward, I met a great man with whom I am living now. He is not my husband for now, but he is my partner. He became the father of my children. At first I believed that they were all the same, but with time and his love, I was discovering that there are wonderful men too. Now we have three kids, one beautiful girl and two beautiful boys. I thank God for putting this man in my path.

Lorena Mendez is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Beyond My Imagination

I am from Brazil. My son and I just arrived in the United States. The bravest moment I have lately is leaving my home country to come and live here in America. I think it is the bravest thing I have ever done in my life. Can you imagine leaving your family and all the things you have already acquired in your home country to go somewhere to experience the unknown? Well, many people do this for a variety of reasons. I did it for love.

Learning a new language and stepping out of my comfort zone to start a new life means taking big chance with real risk. On the other hand, it is good to know English and it helps in my ability to live in the United States. I could not have imagined that one day this would happen to me, and I believe it is fate that put this challenge in my path. So, I am going to enjoy it.

Wanderlucia Dos Passos Santos attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Stella

Stella is a young, discreet and intelligent girl living a romance with a young man of her age in the ESOL program. Hardworking and energetic, the boy Michael discovers cancer in his body, and his union with Stella becomes even more sensitive after Stella tells him her secret.

It was supposed to be just another school romance novel, despite all the effort, day after day, to learn the second language in a program for foreigners. Stella decides to live in a country where her feelings are in tune with the patriotism and freedom that she has found in this country. United States is a country of opportunities, not only for work because it is a capitalist country, but also for diversity, an opportunity to express what is the most precious. Being ourselves makes us feel as if in a calm sea with a cool breeze, and the sound of the waves seems to make us dance to the melody of love.

Stella is in love, but for that it is necessary to reveal her transsexuality, and it is not an easy speech for some men still in a sexist and prejudiced world. At school, Stella already lives

openly and documented with her sexual orientation. Being a beautiful, discreet, and intelligent woman, she does not suffer so many prejudices because of her soft skin and feminine features. She disguises her secret by sounding her sweet and almost imperceptible low voice that calmly and controlled seduces and involves great friends in whose group she is a part. Stella, always surrounded and adored by everyone who knows her, makes her days happy and fun.

Michael, enchanted by these feelings of acceptance, finds in Stella the love he needs—to spend the difficult days after chemotherapy and drugs that hinder his ability to concentrate on studies. Michael, after learning about Stella’s secret, has to accept that life is not so perfect.

Her most courageous moment talks about accepting homosexuality within the school and dealing with the diversities that life imposes on her.

Sergio Santanna is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Never Give Up!

As immigrants, we face a lot of difficult challenges that put us out of our comfort zones, making us uncomfortable. However, those same challenges help us become stronger and powerful people every time that we can overcome them.

I still remember that I wasn’t able to ask simple questions like “Where is the bathroom?”, “Can I get a coffee?”, “How can I go to...?”, “How much is..?” and many more. I knew that the actual challenge was trying to understand their response. But little by little, I was getting to know new words and feeling more confident. If you are in the same situation, don’t panic. Ask questions as many times as you need, and don’t stop learning the language. It’s going to be okay.

I know, a new life in a new country sounds intimidating, but you can do it! Observe the situation around you in detail and try to absorb as much as you can. Learn about this new culture, connect with native people online or in-person, learn how people

live their lives, talk to others about their experiences as an immigrant, watch the news, and learn as much as you can from them.

Life is not easy, but it is beautiful. Everyone can become who they please, but they have to work for it. Challenges are going to come day by day and it is our courage to keep going that defines us. Everything is possible. Just never give up!

Luz Marina Salcedo is a student from the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. Her tutor is Barbara Huddleston.

My Goals and Ambitions

New Opportunities

Opportunities do not come up all the time. I am lucky to live in USA and I am taking advantage of it. I had heard the words American dream before. However, when I got here, it was so different from what I had imagined. It is really a great country, but you must work hard to be successful. As a hardworking person I have set high goals to reach my dreams.

Getting a good education is crucial. I could not finish school in my country, so my short-term goal is to get my high school diploma. I have worked for ten years and I am not happy with my English. I am working on my comprehension, writing, listening, and speaking skills in my English classes at Clearwater Adult Education Center. My teachers are helping me a lot and they are so patient with me. I had never tried to write in the past. Now, I am practicing how to write complete sentences, paragraphs, and short essays. I feel more confident and I am not scared to speak or write in English. Knowledge is power!

I also want to get a better job so I can provide a better life for my children. I work very long hours. When I get an education and become certified as a CNA, I will have a better job. This will help me spend more time with my kids and help them with their homework. I want to be a good role model to them so they can value education and work hard for their dreams, too. I want to motivate them to attend college or find their hidden talents and fly high. Why? Because how wonderful would it be to give back to this country of great opportunities!

In conclusion, my life will be better once I accomplish these goals and ambitions. I can see a better future for my family. I know it is a long road ahead but I will keep going.

Alicia Cuyuch is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Yllka Bejo.

Someone I Admire

Someone I admire is my daughter, Maria. When she was 16 years old, she had a dream clearly in her mind in reference to her future. She finished high school at age 17. She then said “I want to go to another country. I don’t want to study here”. She knew that Andes and Rosario University offered scholarships for her excellent results, but she didn’t accept these offers. She was only focused on, “what can I do to achieve my goal?” She wanted to fly out to another country, and work for her dreams, leaving behind her family, friends, and everything... Her decision was always firm.

She came with us to the United States for a vacation to visit our oldest son. After some people listened to our daughter, they decided to help her. She accepted their offer. She could help take care of their babies and they would teach her the French language, culture, and customs, because they had lived in France. She stayed with them for four months. When she returned to Colombia with some money that she managed to save, she paid for her French courses and applied for the au pair program; one family accepted her. She worked very hard before flying to Paris, France. Over time she never looked back, she was brave and determined in search of achieving her dream, her goal.

When she arrived in Paris, the family who hired her was waiting patiently for her. She obtained an apartment near that family who hired her to take care of three girls, and she continued to study French. At the end of one year with them, she enrolled in college until she graduated.

One day she attended an arts festival and met a gentleman who was performing Malabares, and without speaking they shared the act with the contact ball. They spent some time together, then they fell in love and decided to stay together. They traveled around Europe, did plays, and collected money. They also made friends and visited beautiful places. Later, she got married and now has two children: one girl and one boy. They currently live in France, in the Bretana region.

I admire her determination, her desire to learn, her clarity and commitment. She doesn’t fear when she has a goal or dream, she fights until she reaches it. She respects nature, is simple and

honest, loves her family, and loves animals. She makes friends easily, is a kind person, she knows how to listen, and is a great companion in life. I love my younger daughter, and she is someone I admire.

Martha Guterrez De Arraeaza is an ESOL student in the Adult Education program at Palm Beach Central High. Her teacher is Verna Walters.

My Entrepreneurial Goal and Ambitions

“Whatever your mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.” – Napoleon Hill.

This quote is from the book “Think and Grow Rich”, 1937.

Since my youngest age, even if I was an employee, I have always seen myself as my own boss. Believing in the above quote, I knew my dream of having a profitable company would come true. The United States is where anything is possible, every dream can come true, and that’s why when I made the difficult decision to migrate to the US, I said to myself, “I am going to build my own company”.

In the last decade, the internet and globalization have changed everything about purchasing and selling. Today, we don’t need to have a huge stock or a physical place to have a store, but we need a domain name, the necessary knowledge to build and manage an online business, and the money to pay an agency to do everything for us. This business model is called drop-shipping, and it’s available to everyone, regardless of the location, education, and so on. Regarding these advantages, and the freedom that I would get by not working a full-time job or worry about inventory or packing, made drop-shipping the perfect business model for me.

On November 3, 2021, I registered my online company SCHICKLADY LLC on Sunbiz. By December 2021, I got my EIN for the website: www.schicklady.com. Schicklady is an open company; we serve customers all over the world, and people all over the world can join us to be our partner. How does it work? We are an affiliate program that earns up to 20% of the commission from our partners, for any successful referral. Now that

the dream to have a company has come true, our ambitions are (with the help of God) to make it become a profitable business and build our own brand. The thing that I confirm for myself in this adventure is that each of us needs to see the realization of our dream, believe in it, and take action to make it real. Because believing without action is useless, and action without faith is worthless too. So, if I have faith and take action on my dream, the sky is the limit.

Cherly Damus is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Master English for a Better Future

One of my short-term goals is to learn English and master both writing and speaking since this will generate more job opportunities for me. Of course, it is also for a better salary and communication with other people, which is very important to me. With good English skills, I will be able to apply for a promotion at work. I am doing this to help my family, my two daughters and my wife, who are in my country of origin, Nicaragua.

My greatest ambition is to bring my family to the US and give them a decent life here. Among other ambitions is to buy a car, travel to other states like New York, and visit Tomorrowland. I do not want to make any more mistakes when speaking such as not knowing what to say or not understanding what people tell me. I want to speak fluently and write correctly in English.

I hope to be able to fulfill all of my goals and ambitions. I will put a lot of effort and interest in the class. This will help me learn faster. I know that with the guidance from my teacher and with a lot of practice I will be able to achieve. Unlike my country, English is the gateway to advance myself in the US. There are many jobs here and they are well paid, too. When converting the US currency into Cordoba (Peso), it is a huge difference.

Yader Caceres is a student of Ms. Josephson. He is in the English Class at Monroe County Adult Education Center.

Achieving Our Goals

Achieving our goals have always played an important role in the building of our lives. Since we got married, my husband and I have wanted to build a family, have enough time to enjoy life with our children, teach them good values and give them a good education. In the beginning, I was working at a civil engineering company, but I didn't have enough time with my family. I made the decision to move to Barranquilla, Colombia so my husband and I could work together to create our company that imported kitchen supplies from the USA and then sell them to hotels and restaurants. During these nine years, we not only learned much about trade and kitchen supplies, but we also tried to show our children different ways to work and achieve our goals. At the end of the year, we dream about our goals by writing them on paper. We call these papers "the dream tree".

This year we are beginning a new adventure to achieve our goals. We moved to the USA to create a similar company, working in both companies, each one being a complement of the other. We are also processing our business visas so that we can work and live in this country for a long time. Like any great goal, this adventure began with great effort, packing up all dreams and memories, engraving them in our souls so that later they will drive us and allow us to strengthen ourselves in our day-to-day challenges.

In these five months of adventure, we have discovered many amazing things. Looking closely, we discover that in this country, it is built around the environment and not on it. Birds, deer, turtles, alligators, and all kinds of animals' roam between the houses. The architecture adapts to the thousands of natural environments that we see every day in each neighborhood.

We have also enjoyed walking with our children and dogs along the Celebration Town Trails. In these moments, we have discovered that we go from a natural environment full of all kinds of animals to homes where their tastes express and celebrate their heritage on their porches. As we walk by, people say hello kindly and want to share some story with you. This is amazing and has allowed us to follow on the way to achieve our goals and be part of this society.

Ana Fajardo is a student at West Osceola Library. Her teacher is Barbara Huddleston.

Life Experiences

My name is Jaclin Gueriney, I am a father of two children. I'm very flattered by writing this essay to talk mainly about my goals and my ambitions. My goals and my ambitions are to speak English fluently in the next two years and to have a better job. The achievement of these goals is possible in the participation of the English course with Mrs. Vickers.

A common problem among foreign language speakers can be to speak too quickly. It can be tempting to try and get words out quickly, but while it might feel good to get the words out, rushing can often lead to confusion and miscommunication. Instead of speaking quickly, I must tell myself to slow down and keep what I say simple. To begin with, speaking English may sound slightly stiff or robotic, but if clear communication is your aim, then this will really help. Over time, as I become more familiar with the language, I will try to speed up again to make my speech sound more natural.

To speak English better today, I must make time available for personal learning, communicate with other people and get rid of shyness to move forward. Since my registration in the English course at West Tech, especially with the dynamics developed by my teacher Mrs. Vickers, I have noticed a clear improvement in my pronunciation. The practical sessions have also allowed me to learn a lot of vocabulary.

Many people feel shy or embarrassed when speaking English. Don't be! Act as if you are the most confident person you know - in fact, be the most confident "you". By acting as if you are confident, you create or strengthen neural networks in your brain. So the next time you speak, you may feel more confident as you are used to this situation. So, act confident, and over time you will feel confident, and indeed, be confident!

As the English saying goes. If I want to do something well then, you'll have to put in a lot of hard work, make mistakes and learn something from them. I use Google Translate on my phone,

speak to it in English and see if google can write perfectly what I'm saying. While I'm practicing, I don't think of myself as a student - as someone who is learning the language. Instead, I think of myself as someone who is using English - because I am!

If I make a mistake, I keep going. It's important to understand that very few people, even native speakers, speak English flawlessly and that we all make mistakes. If I get embarrassed or shy once I've made a mistake, this is probably what people will notice, not the mistake itself. So, I keep going when I'm speaking English.

Four months before coming to the course with Mrs. Vickers I had great difficulty in reading and understanding anything in English. But since September 2021, I have felt I've made improvements in reading and communications. I notice especially when I work with my children, because the task becomes easier.

This improvement will help me, and my children communicate better with other people. When I receive emails in English, I can understand without seeking support from others. So, my goals and my ambitions are in my reach.

Jaclin Gueriney is an ESOL student. His teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

When Plan A Fails, Choose Plan B

We all are born to live on this earth. Everybody has different kinds of career paths they are interested in, and goals and ambitions are very crucial for everyone's life. Some people could not chase their dreams because they gave up too quickly or they were faced with incredible dilemmas.

I had a bright dream when I was in high school. My Plan A was to become a chemical engineer. After high school, my scores were high enough to be accepted as a student in the chemical engineering class at the university. I was very happy to attend the classes. After I graduated from the university, I tried to look for a job as a chemical engineer. But at that time my country was not yet inventing chemical industries. Therefore, I had a slim chance to find a job for my profession.

Fortunately, I realized I could open my own shop. So, as my Plan B, I changed my career path to be a businesswoman. It was not easy to change my path so soon. I decided to open a clothing brand store. It has been almost 14 years. Business was good and I earned a lot of money in those years.

Now my ambition is to expand my shop. I want to open new stores and run them for the next ten years. I need to take a break from this business when I reach retirement age. I want to travel around the world with my hubby. My country does not have health care insurance for elderly people. I am just depositing my money in the bank for my old age to be happy, healthy, and comfortable. I also have some plans to donate some of my savings for education, orphans, and senior citizens.

Phyu Chaw Chaw Htun attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Healthy Eating for My Family

I don't know if it's called fast food, but in Mexico most of the people choose to eat what we call fritanga-food like fried hard tacos, soft tacos of steak, chorizo and many other parts of the cow, enchiladas, too. As a result, there is obesity at an early age. People are sick with high cholesterol and diabetes. We are not educated to eat healthy food. On the other hand, sometimes the organic food is more expensive than the regular food, so the people choose to buy the cheap food. However, it can help to buy some organic food.

My goal is for my family to have good eating habits. I will try to make healthy food and have my family eat more chicken, vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and less red meat. Now, I focus more on reading the labels because the junk food contains sugar, salt, fats and more which contribute to obesity and diabetes, and several heart problems. I think, if we eat healthily, we can live without many health problems.

Healthy food also helps save money. It is cheaper to cook healthy food at home than to go out to eat all the time. We should teach kids to eat healthily from an early age.

Ruth Hernandez is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teachers are Robert Baum and Melissa Palermo.

My Only Desire

In life, everyone should have a goal and an ambition to move forward with those goals. According to some people, whatever they want to achieve in life, one must struggle and work hard to achieve it. No one in the world is successful without having experienced constraints. Therefore, before even achieving a goal, one must think about the conveniences and inconveniences that they will have to meet, and it is up to that person to know how to approach it and to have a good plan to execute it.

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person envisions, plans, and commits to achieve. My main goal is going to school to learn nursing. I am aware how important it is, so I have a plan to study, focus on my decision, and fix my eyes on what I want to be in the future.

Ambition is a strong desire to do or to achieve something. To reach my goals, I must take my daily learning seriously so I can allow my goal to become a reality. I made a commitment, and I wish to attain worldly success, by putting in effort. Many people suffering in hospitals will need a dedicated nurse, like me, to help save their lives. I have a strong desire and determination to work hard to achieve success, because I don't like seeing sick people suffer. In my country, there are few opportunities for young people with confidence and strong ambition. Determining goals not only motivates us but can also improve our mental health and our level of personal and professional success. Everything you want to do in life, setting goals is essential.

Once I began to understand that I must succeed in my life, I made the decision to directly focus on my goal to advance on this journey. For this reason, I force myself to come to school every day to guarantee my success. When I first came to school, the idea of success was already there.

My main goal is to be counted amongst the best nurses in the world. The idea of helping people in need, being a service to the

community and being useful to my family is paramount for my future.

You may wonder, “will it be possible to achieve all these goals?”, I can affirmatively answer yes. Once I fix myself towards a goal, I go to school with courage, and determination. Nothing will be able to prevent me from reaching this goal and I will remain focused on my goal decisively until it becomes a reality.

Carline Louis is an ESOL student at Atlantic Technical College. Her teacher is Fayne Johnson.

My Goals and Ambitions

Life pretends to be difficult sometimes. There are plenty of things we must face and deal with. Planification is mandatory to achieve our precious desires. In that way, goals and ambitions come at the right time. They allow us to build ourselves in a specific way. They are a future projection. The meaning behind our goals and ambitions are our weapon.

As we have started a new year, in my culture we make a review of the previous year and renew the objectives for the upcoming year. My specific destination is clear, “to be successful”. It’s so meaningful for me to be successful that it urges me to keep moving forward. Short-term and long-term goals are relevant. I want to earn my Nursing Assistant Certification with good mention and be the prizewinner of my class in the next three months.

My goals and ambitions are to obtain a great job, afford myself my first car and search for stability in this country. I will move up from an entry-level Medical Assistant to an LPN or RN at the end of the year.

What should I do to reach my goals? “Ambition” is the key. The struggle is real! I prioritize my goals over everything with consistent prayer in my life. If God doesn’t approve my goals, there will be no way to realize them. I will stay focused no matter what comes my way. I will stand straight, increase my determination, and surround myself with motivated people.

2022 is my year! I already claim it. To be at ease, I must work for it. There's no secret. I am a conqueror! Carefully and patiently, I am creating my pathway because at the end of the day, hard work always pays off.

Faradia Lefort is a student in the CCPS Adult and Community Education ESOL program. Her teacher is Migdalia Luciano.

I Have a Dream

I have a dream that my grandchildren, Israel, Royal, Rayhionna, and Chance will grow up to be respectable young men and women.

I have a dream that Royal and Chance being young boys of color won't have to go through police brutality because of their skin color.

I have a dream that they give respect and in return respect be given to them. I have a dream that they become successful young men of color.

I have a dream that my granddaughters Israel and Rayhionna not be taken advantage of and that they become strong and independent young women of color.

I have a dream that they both attend the college of their choice and succeed to make a great life for themselves.

I have a dream that all my grandchildren be law abiding citizens, doing the right thing even when no one is watching.

My dream today is for their success and freedom.

Thomasina Nesbit is a student at Lancaster Education. Her teacher is Brett Taylor.

I Am Up for the Challenge

In life, everyone must contemplate goals and ambitions to attain a good future. I would like to summarize my goals and ambitions for you.

My goals are to improve my English and earn a degree to have a better life. A long time ago, I nurtured the idea to get a profession in which I can help sick people because I'm very compassionate. However, English is my second language and I'm a late learner so it's very difficult for me to adapt. I can't keep a dialogue going for five minutes and my speech is very rough. Despite that, I want, need, and desire to attain my goal.

Thankfully, I have a good teacher who encourages me to increase my vocabulary, motivates me to read every day and makes me feel confident that I can and will achieve my goals. This country offers great opportunities to anybody desiring to pursue their studies. I'll take this advantage to achieve my goals. This is a challenge I must take! Even though I'm an adult and have a lot of responsibilities, I don't give up. Sooner or later, I will be a nurse and maybe even an RN; anything is possible if you believe in yourself. Where there is a will, there is a way.

Marie Justine Moise is a student studying English in the Advanced Level with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus in Fort Lauderdale.

My Goals and Ambitions

I am starting a new year and I am living in the United States where a different language is spoken. I decided to redo my life goals and ambitions to involve several activities I do in this country.

I realize that I must prioritize these goals according to my needs. I decided to organize my ideas into three goals: improving my skills to speak English, focusing on health and fitness, and getting a better job.

I could improve my English skills by attending school at ACE every day, speaking with my classmates and by speaking English outside of school.

I will focus on health and fitness by going running three times per week and lifting weights as a complement twice a week. I will also try to eat more fruits and vegetables every day. Lastly, I could enter in fitness competitions such as The Tallahassee Half Marathon, GFNY Half Marathon, or Walt Disney World Half Marathon to keep myself motivated.

Finally, I could focus on getting a better job by learning more about credential evaluations and translations for individuals who have completed all education outside the United States. I will also make a resume and evaluate several kinds of jobs which I could do in the same area. If I explore different options, I won't "put all my eggs in one basket."

In conclusion, setting my goals and making a plan are important for this year, 2022. A goal without a plan is just a wish.

— *Anonymous Author*

Work and Sacrifice

Since I was very young, I liked history, and the people who caught my attention the most were the military heroes. It was because of this hobby that I knew that I wanted to be a soldier like them; I felt that this was a job that was going to make me proud of myself. For various reasons I didn't join Colombia's military, I studied law instead.

When I came to the US, I thought about going back to my original vocation. After doing my research, my goal now is to be a marine officer. To become a marine officer, you need to have a college degree, be a US citizen, and be under 32. I have a degree, and I am under 32, but I'm not a citizen yet, so I'm going to join as an enlisted marine to earn my citizenship through the military. After I become a citizen, I can opt to become an officer within the Marine Corps. Currently, I am studying English at CSTEC, to become fluent in the language.

In the future I see myself as an officer, serving my second home country, probably doing something related with law, since I'm already a lawyer. This is also a job that is well paid, and that gives you a lot of benefits and prestige. It also allows you to travel around the world and learn a lot of useful traits such as discipline and always being on time.

This is my main goal in life. I know that it will require a lot of work and sacrifice, but I feel that it will be worth it because I'm going to feel personally satisfied by doing something I enjoy.

Kevin Noguera is a student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Still Focused on My Dream

My goal and ambitions are to have my own business and to help people who don't, win. My name is Vionette Poulard, I'm 28 years old, I'm Haitian and I live in the United States.

Today, I want to explain my main goal and ambition. Since I was 10 years old, I have had the same goal; I want to become a successful entrepreneur. For me, a successful businesswoman means to have a big business running, where I can employ a lot of people. My goal is for the business to grow large enough for me to open another one.

My other goals and ambitions are to help all children without mothers and fathers. I will send them to school, live with them, and care for them as if they were my children. I love children very much and I like to see that things go well for them.

I will not lie to you; I will make every effort to make you laugh because I want to have a big business and if it works out as I have envisioned, I can help some people in need.

I also have a different goal and ambition that I'd like to share. In September 2020, I left my country to live in the United States with great sadness because I left my son behind. After I left, I never slept. I have a goal and ambition for my son to come and live with me, which is not easy, but I want to do it. I pray that

God will help me with my goals and ambitions, because I want to make them a reality.

I take this opportunity to tell you that all who live must have goals and ambitions. Well, that's good advice for us. It was a pleasure to share mine.

Vionette Poulard is an ESOL student at Atlantic Technical College. Her teacher is Fayne Johnson.

The Dentist and Her Goals

I am Norely Sanchez, originally from Venezuela. I am married with three kids: two boys and one girl. In my country, I went to university and graduated as a general dentist. Due to political reasons, my family and I had to leave Venezuela. We settled in the city of St Petersburg, Florida.

Since I arrived in this country, I have always had the dream to work in the dentistry field which I have studied for and developed my professional work experience. My first job in this country did not have to do with dentistry, but I felt the need to interact with other people. I knew I needed to learn English from the very beginning.

At my first job, it was difficult for me to get along with my co-workers due to my lack of ability to speak English. One day I was feeling very bad because I could not understand a word of what my co-workers were saying to me. I took the right decision and enrolled in an English School.

At the beginning, things were very difficult. I had to go to work and take care of my family, so I had to re-arrange my time in order to attend the English classes. We have a daughter with special needs, so it was necessary for my husband and my two sons to take care of my daughter, so that I could attend school.

Another thing that made everything very hard was the COVID pandemic. I had to study online, and later the school reopened face-to-face classes. I feel very lucky that I have met English teachers with a high level of professionalism and patience. The teachers have made my learning process smoother and steadier.

I am very focused on learning English, so I try hard not to skip even one class. I also keep all my notes and copies for every class in my 'Bible', which is a binder or portfolio containing each of my daily classes. In this way, I have been able to move forward.

When I first started, my English level was very basic, and I couldn't say anything. I expect that soon I can overcome the language barrier, and my English will be more fluent so that I can advance in my professional career and my daily life.

Norely Sanchez is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Never Stop Your Dreams.

My name is Sigi, I was born in Costa Rica. I am from Costa Rica, but now I live in two places, Costa Rica and St Pete, Florida. My story is very simple because I am a simple person. When I was a child, I always dreamt of studying in the US. I don't know why because my country has spectacular universities and good study centers to get educated but studying in the US was my dream.

The most challenging thing is that this is how I grew up; this is how I developed as a professional. I studied for two professional careers. I started my professional development, and I started a family. I got married, and we had two children, both of whom are now professionals in their own careers.

For various reasons, I always had to travel to the U.S. - for training, for job meetings, for shopping at the end of the year, for family or personal holidays. Somehow, I always came back to the US.

Due to my professional development, I had the opportunity to visit different states, such as Chicago, Las Vegas, Miami, New York City, and other cities that always amazed me with their splendor, their people, culture, and the country's progress.

Now, years later, my children are starting their professional careers, finishing their universities, and leaving home as nature intended. But it doesn't end there for me. For one of my sons,

after years of working in a big American company, the company made the decision to transfer him to work in the US. My son as a great professional takes the challenge and starts his new life living in the City of Tampa.

As I am a restless person, I decided to come to visit him for some time. Once I was in his house, I thought, "What could I be doing if I stayed here in this beautiful city with such a hot climate?" And so, I started to study. I started attending English classes. It was incredible - I started at the University of Tampa, a very structured and cold group. There was no human quality. Later I started in an education center in Pinellas County (Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Pete). When I started the classes, it was a huge shock. The people who received me were incredible - kind and dedicated. The teachers were amazing and great professionals. I began living my dream studying English in the U.S. only recently, years later in my life. I never had the opportunity to study English as I have now - at almost 60 years of age. I have continued to learn English at Clearview Adult Education Center and I will continue for as long as God allows.

Sigifredo Saenz is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Set Goals and Dreams Can Come True

I have always believed that dreams can come true if you set goals, make plans, and focus on achieving them. I have shared this belief with my daughters since they were little girls and they have seen how I have reached my goals and achieved my dreams so I could provide them with a better life. I will continue to set examples for them by working hard and trying to reach as high as I can, without forgetting that God is my support and my provider.

I have had many dreams and goals, but three of great importance in my life are to get an education, to live in the United States, and to have my daughters join me in this country. I focused on these goals without distraction. It was not easy, but I have achieved all three. However, I still have a lot to do.

For me, education is a never-ending goal. That is why I am taking classes to improve my English. My next education goal is to earn a bachelor's degree in Social Work followed by a Master's; that way I might reach a better position at the organization I currently work for, or at another one. Once that comes about, I will focus on my next goal: to buy a house! But I always remember that none of this could be possible if God is not with me. This is why I also take time every day to read the Bible to strengthen my spiritual life, giving others the best version of myself.

We have been blessed with the opportunity to dream and to fulfill our dreams by focusing on our goals. Often it requires taking one small step at a time and not giving up. It is satisfying to reassess and look back on what I have achieved, but I know I have a long way to go. That is alright. I realize that I will never stop dreaming, setting new goals, and trying to be a better person every day.

Bexy Wiersma is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Favorite Place

Sakura

Since I came here two years ago, I have not been back to Japan because of COVID-19 like other people. Even though here in the U.S., I can see lots of Japanese stuff, like sushi, ramen and anime, I sometimes really want to see quite beautiful Japanese landscapes. Especially “sakura”, which are cherry blossoms.

In spring, we can see the most incredible full bloom cherry blossoms in numerous areas in Japan. I’ve seen amazing full bloom cherry blossoms since I was a child. They just stand strongly, and white and pink petals are blown around by the wind like powder snow. When I face them, my mind suddenly stops thinking. I can’t think anymore in the shower of cherry blossoms. Petals blow and dance in the wind, falling down on the road, the surface of the pond, or on your shoulder. Falling petals make us aware of the fragile beauty of life and of love. That’s a form of happiness in and of itself; that may not be fun and gorgeous though. Immediately after we’ve stopped thinking, we’re going to recognize a precious person for us. They might be the one who you haven’t seen for years, or the person you can’t see anymore. They’re the ones you want to show stunning cherry blossoms to.

Most of the cherry blossoms have been around for a long while, some of them from 100 years ago. The oldest cherry blossom tree has been from 2000 years ago! What have they seen for an incredibly long time? What do they think of us? They could’ve seen the changing era and humanity. They might make fun of us who discriminate, hate, rule and fight, even though we’re the same human beings.

At that moment, I realized that what I’m worried about is that every single day doesn’t have meaning and value. We’re always having lots of problems like our future, health, finances, job, and family which includes things we can’t change like race, religion, background, and where we were born and more.

I wish I could ignore those things that bother me. We must make an effort and focus on what we really want to do even if someone discriminates, is arrogant, hates or says something wrong to us. Cherry blossoms make us stop thinking and take a rest. They make us realize that humans are alone, weak and vulnerable. But they're also telling us that you are valuable just to be.

Michiko Akahori is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Where My Family Is

I closed my eyes for a few minutes and thought about my favorite place. I remembered many places I visited, beautiful countries, cities, beaches but I could not find a specific one. I did not understand why it was so difficult for me to locate it, but after thinking about it for several minutes I concluded that my favorite place is and it will always be where my favorite people are, my family.

There are beautiful and majestic places with wonderful people, beautiful houses, but in my mind, no place is perfect without their company. I think about the closeness of our loved ones, smiles, love, words, company, stories, sorrows, joys, and being there makes the place have a magical and special aura. A few days ago, my father was ill, and my daughter wrote me a letter with beautiful words of love and positive thoughts and at that moment I confirmed that my best support and strength is my family.

The family is a wonderful treasure in which we find a space of tranquility, positive reinforcement, and personal dedication. It is to carry out exchanges that allow us to grow, consolidating our strengths and recognizing our weaknesses. As Pope Francis said, "Having a place to go is called home, having a people to love is called family, and having both is called blessing".

In my favorite place, in the company of my favorite people, perfection does not exist. We are far from it, but we consciously or unconsciously try to work at our best every day. Remembering

that mistakes are valid and that they allow us to grow, triumphs should make us humbler, and teamwork will always be more valuable than individualism, as Michael Jordan teaches us, “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships”.

I am aware at some point our children will have their favorite places. It will surely not coincide with mine, but my heart will feel full of tranquility and happiness knowing that they are free, independent beings, shining like stars on a clear night. As Denis Waitley says, “The best gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence”.

When this happens, my heart will be loaded with wonderful memories, smiles, and experiences. I will remember the words of Becky Aligada, “Memories are the treasures that are kept trapped in the warehouse of our souls, to keep our hearts warm while we are alone”. I will continue to acknowledge and thank God until the last day of my life for allowing me to always be in my favorite place.

Angela Correa Reyes attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Rodziah Josephson.

Describing the Intangible

It is the summer of 1980. The sun is burning. I, a nine-year-old girl, am standing on the huge open-air stage amid children’s choirs with thousands of children. The Baltic Sea is roaring behind me, and the roof of the stage resembles a giant seashell. On the left side of the stage, at the top of a tall tower, the festive flame is burning, reminiscent of the Olympic flame. On a high pedestal in front of the choir, dressed in a beautiful folk costume, the conductor is standing majestically. The audience is applauding. What is happening now is taking my breath away!

The Estonian National Song and Dance Festival is one of the largest amateur choral events in the world and titled by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The celebration takes place in early July every five years in the capital of Estonia, Tallinn, and gathers the entire “singing and dancing country” for three days.

Both the song and the dance concerts are held in the open air, so you need to be prepared for rainfall or scorching sun. However, despite any weather conditions, about a hundred thousand spectators come to be a part of this grand event!

The celebration starts with an impressive three-mile-long procession that passes through the center of Tallinn, in which performers dressed in colorful national costumes take part.

The main and one of the most spectacular scenes of the festival is the lighting of the festive flame that announces the beginning of the Song and Dance Festival. A torch is lit in Tartu, the birthplace of the festival, and is carried across the country to the capital of Estonia.

The Flame is lit – the Song and Dance Festival has begun! On the huge stage at the bottom of the hill that leads to the sea at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds, the sounds of beautiful Estonian songs are heard.

Simultaneously with the song concert, at the Tallinn's Central Stadium, a dance performance is held. Traditionally, this is a grandiose staging with a plot. A huge number of dancers in national costumes are dancing around the field forming beautiful figures and ornaments. The celebration continues until late at night.

The feeling of the Song and Dance Festival is inexpressible, and it can be comprehended only by becoming a part of it no matter who you are; a singer, dancer or spectator!

It is the summer of 2017. It is pouring rain. I am standing on the huge open-air stage amid children's choirs with thousands of children now including my young students. The Baltic Sea is roaring behind us, and the Flame of the festival is burning. What is happening now is still taking my breath away!

Diane Anissina is a student at Center for Adult Learning – Jacksonville Public Library. Her teacher is Naomi Chase.

I Love Key West

I used to travel to many places amazing places but one day my friend, Ricardo, ask me to travel with him to Key West. He said to me, "Let's go there". He promised me that I will fall in love with this place. So, I said, "Yes".

This happened 15 years ago. He was right. When we arrived in Key West, I saw the most wonderful places. It is very historical and had a lot opportunities for me. And I decided to stay. I never went back to my country, Cuba. I feel safe, relaxed, and happy. I found my true self here. I was alone most the time. It is about time that I start to create my dreams.

One of my dreams was to run on the beach, jump into the ocean and scream. I do that in the morning. I have all my passion for this place and I would like to be here forever. I love the sunrise and the sunset. When it rains, the weather is the best. One day I would like to invite all my friends from this class to the restaurant where I work, and everyone can enjoy the churrasco. I love Key West. .

Juan Carlos Betancur attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Refuge

This name really belongs to that place.

Refuge is a beautiful place in Haiti at Kenscoff. It is a little park many people like. My first-time visiting was December 2018. My boyfriend and I decided to go there.

Curiously, I was faced with this incredible nature because it was not like those other parks we used to go to. I wanted to explore each part of it, so we went far away from the other visitors. We walked together between the highest trees that I have ever seen before. Those green mountains with the fresh smell of grass and parsley. This is how we found our favorite place.

The further we got, the more we could enjoy the place, and my love for it increased. There were so many different kinds and col-

ors of rocks from the ground like gray, yellow, white, black, even red. At almost 2 o'clock, the sun disappeared to make way for a cold fog. We walked through it. We kept talking and laughing.

I was cold, and it didn't matter because it was the first time I felt so peaceful. A few minutes later, the fog lifted, and it seemed it took all my problems, all my stress away. We forgot about all our hardships. We even forgot about time. We couldn't stay later than 5pm because it was so far from home, yet we left at almost 8. From the bottom of my heart, I didn't want to leave, but I had to. That was a wonderful day I will never forget. Since that day, this place has been our refuge.

Dayana Juste is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Too Beautiful to be Real

My dream was to go to the Caribbean Sea, enjoy the weather and nature, and meet people.

I was young, I had a dream, it was to know the Caribbean Sea, and see with my eyes, what it looked like, how life there was, and how different it was from my country.

So, with my best friend we went seven days on a Caribbean Island in Cozumel, Mexico. It was our first plane trip to another country and without our parents. We stayed at a hotel by the sea; an ecological reserve. The whole landscape was very different from our country, vegetation, small animals, many lizards and turtles too. Lots of beautiful birds.

The vegetation was also very different, there were palm trees with very large coconuts and we drank fresh coconut water. What a treat! The Caribbean Sea was transparent and so warm.

We swam, we also snorkeled, which was very difficult for me! I kept swallowing water with that mask, but I wanted to explore underwater and see the corals, they were amazing! So many different shapes that filled my soul and made me feel like I left the

earth, so unreal. I felt as if I was on another planet, so peaceful and yet, so alive.

We also had the opportunity to meet local people. They were very friendly. They sold us typical local crafts, bracelets, bags, etc.

The food was a problem for me because it was very spicy, and in our country Colombia, we were not used to it. They did prepare a delicious hibiscus and tamarind water, which I did enjoy.

This was the most incredible trip. I will never forget this great experience. My best friend and I got to know a different culture, a different climate, with fauna and an unbelievable beach with its white sand and colorful fish of all kinds.

This wonderful adventure of my youth meant and still means, so much to me. It confirmed that no matter what, a person must follow their dreams, even when they seem difficult to reach or too beautiful to be real!

Maria Martina Garcia is a student of Ms. Angela Faiola for Adult ESOL.

What a Wonderful Place!

I'm really happy to talk about my favorite place, "Citadelle Laferrière," which is a fortress. It is located in Cap-Haitien, Haiti, in the middle of a big mountain, and it is a wonder of the world.

When I was in high school, the principal of my school decided to take the students of my class to visit Citadelle Laferrière. On that day, all the students were very excited because they were going to visit a new city and at the same time a historical heritage site. We went by bus and traveled 252 kilometers from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haitien. Once we arrived, we had to climb a big mountain to get to the fortress.

This tourist site has a particular architecture, and it is the most beautiful monument in the country. Its construction arouses curiosity, and people always want to know how the masons were able to achieve this masterpiece on that mountain. There

are several guides who are there to tell visitors about the history of the place which is linked with that of our country.

To reach the fortress, we had to take a long walk and climb the mountain. But it was totally worth it because it's a place that will always remain engraved in the memory of its visitors.

This day was a memorable day in my life; I really enjoyed it. I recommend Citadelle Laferrière to anyone visiting Haiti, and I believe they will not be disappointed.

Mary Mompremier Duclaire is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Beautiful City of Destin

My favorite place is Destin, Florida. Destin is a city in north-west Florida. Destin has a beautiful beach, and the sand is very soft. It has many kinds of wildlife habitats. There are many state parks: Henderson Beach State Park, Topsail Hill State Park, Grayson Beach State Park, and Eden State Park. Some of these parks include a rainforest.

We went to Destin last year as a family. We stayed in Topsail Hill State Park, which is very close to Destin. The water of the beach is very clear. You can even see the fish while swimming. It has a wonderful sight to see the dolphins at sunrise in the morning.

There are dolphin shows very close to park. There are also ship tours to see the dolphins. Topsail Hill State Park has a nice area for walking and bicycling. You can have a good time as a family by the pool and playground for children. You can also fish. Destin is especially nice during spring and summer.

Esra Yakisikli is a student at ACE. His teacher is Jordan Billott.

Where the Sun is Always Shining

My favorite place is the beach because every summer I like to go there to relax and enjoy spending time with my family.

I love the water and the sand. The sun seems to always be shining. The air smells like salt and sand. In the summer people flock to the beach for vacation, and there are usually people everywhere. I like when it is not as crowded, because it is calmer. When we go there, we have a stress-free time. For example, my kids play in the water and the sand, and I play with them. It's really good for me to go to the beach with my family.

In conclusion, I like to go to the beach with my family because we enjoy it a lot. That's why the beach is my favorite place.

Miglène Michel is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Caribbean Queen

My favorite place to go is Caribbean. I like the food, people, and the different languages. Before Covid I use to visit the Caribbean a lot.

The food is delicious. They cook the food differently. Caribbean's use different seasonings to cook their food. They rarely use ovens but always use charcoal. As a result their food is prepared different. I like the fresh fish and vegetables they use. I love the rice and beans, salmon, and seafood. My favorite seafood is crab, lobster, and shrimp.

People who cook the food are nice, and they know how to talk to the customer. I enjoy listening and talking with the elders; they have the best stories to tell.

The Caribbean is a beautiful place to me. My favorite place is something to make my families happy for the Holidays always.

Marie St. Fleur is a student at West Technical Education Center and is being taught by Zanovia Manderville.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is the state of Michoacán in Mexico, where I used to live with my grandparents. The state has beautiful landscape, wonderful weather and an incredible variety of wildlife and flora.

Michoacán has an impressive landscape. It transports one to a magical experience, it is like entering to a different world. There are vast extensions of plains where agave grows. Also, high mountains with lakes and waterfalls, and mystical ruins of ancient civilizations. It is beautiful and enchanting!

The weather in Michoacán is warm and pleasant. During the day one can see how the skin glows under the sun rays. Suddenly at night it feels soft under the cool breeze. The temperature there stays almost the same year-round. It is very pleasant to live in Michoacán.

Thanks to the combination of landscape and great weather it gives life and nurtures various species of animals such as pheasants, flying squirrels, anteaters, macaws, and the beautiful Monarch butterfly. One can enjoy farms with agave, red dahlias, and palm trees. It is a pleasure to the eyes!

I love the state of Michoacán in Mexico. It brings back wonderful memories of my grandparents and how happy I was with them. Everyone should take time to visit that wonderful state in Mexico. I do not regret the time that I spent there, and you would not either.

Jessica Mendoza is an ESOL student of Mr. Lopez at South Florida State College.

Closer to the Sky

Since I moved to the U.S., I have been living in Florida. I love the sunny days and the natural springs. They remind me of Mexico and its cenotes in Yucatan. I also like that I just need to drive less than an hour to get to the beach. But, if you ask me what I prefer: the mountains or the beach, I would say without thinking, the mountains.

The first place I visited outside Florida was between North Carolina and Tennessee. It is called The Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is famous because it contains part of the Appalachian Trail which is a 3,500 km walk-journey that only experienced hikers may attempt to complete. My family and I did not decide to go there because we were experienced hikers, but because we wanted to be in a cabin made of wood, with hot chocolate and a big fireplace, as we had seen in the movies.

However, when we got there, we were amazed by the beauty of the place. A natural fog covered the peaks of the mountains, and it made us feel like we were closer to the sky. We had not seen anything like that before. We just tried to take pictures of everything intending to immortalize the moment. As I was watching that imposing scene, I remember feeling so small, but at the same time, a massive feeling of hope and peace started to overflow me.

At that time, I had been living in the U.S. for six months, and I had been having a rough time adapting to the new lifestyle. I missed my family, my career, and my country. But being surrounded by the immense mountains showed me that there is a world that I did not know and wanted to see. I understood that growing means being out of what is known to you and that all the effort would be worth it because investing in your growth is always rewarding.

When we headed back home, I enrolled in ESOL classes, got my driver's permit, searched for job opportunities, and hit my English books every chance that I had. I started to see the glass half-full, not half-empty.

Even though I am not yet where I want to be, I can joyfully recognize how much I have achieved and advanced. I have checked off seeing snow and visiting other cliffs from my bucket list. I have learned a new language and made good friends. The Smoky Mountains will always have a special meaning for me. That place gave me the courage to keep going in this dream to make the U.S. my home.

Sarai Rangel Mateo is a student of Ms. Naomi Chase at The Center of Adult Learning.

My Favorite Place: Nuristan

My favorite place is Nuristan Province. This province is located in the country of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has 34 provinces and one of them is Nuristan.

Nuristan is a beautiful place because Nuristan has nice weather, high mountains, and flowing rivers. Nuristan is a popular place for sightseeing because it has different cultures and different foods. Nuristan has nice weather in the winter season. Nuristan is so cool in the winter, but in the spring season it is warm. The Spring season lasts for seven months and this is the most popular time to visit.

Nuristan has high mountains that cover the whole country. Different animals also exist in the mountains. Nuristan has flowing rivers. These rivers start from the mountains. The people of Nuristan use river water for drinking because it is natural water.

Nuristan Province is my favorite place because there are many cultures. Nuristan province people have different cultures and religions. The people speak ten different languages, separate from each other. Nuristan's music, dancing, cooking and wedding parties are different from other provinces of Afghanistan.

The weather, the high mountains and flowing rivers, and different cultures are very popular. Many people visit for sightseeing. These are three reasons that I love the Nuristan Province.

Mohammad Javed Nuristani is a student at ESOL. His teacher is Jordan Bellott.

A Delicious Routine

My favorite place is a small village full of old houses clinging to the mountains. If you come with me and wake up early on a Sunday morning, you will discover a messy food market where each farmer tries to sell his weekly seasonal harvest by his own rules. After that, at Mass you will feel how the residents are worn by the time as well.

The main place of this village is a garden around an old church

where locals love to walk around at night. A story says that some time ago the pathway was higher than the grass next to it, but it's not the case anymore because people have walked too much on it. Across the street there are a few coffee shops. In front of them you will see, seated around square tables, old card players moving their strong and heavy worker hands quickly, nervously, and hear them yelling at each other sometimes, but never without a smile or a friendly wink at the end. You will recognize the shoemaker, a farmer, the doctor and the town hall custodian sitting at the same table, but without their professional hats. Around them

our children's cries have been replaced by our sons' and nephews' complaints. Soon it will be my turn to play cards with them.

On the way home, you will stop at the grocery store 'Salumeria d'Agostino'. There, the fantastic smell that mixes deli meats like Prosciutto and Mortadella with fresh baked Sfogliatella pastries and hot bread will make you want to empty the shelves as fast as Mr. d'Agostino fills them. Next to it, the 'Camilletti pizzeria' will be your last detour. Different varieties of pizzas 'alla taglia' will attract you like a mosquito attracted by a light.

It will be time to come back home and share these treasures with your family. Finding your way in the labyrinth alleys is not easy; you must know your way if you don't want to get lost. After you climb the cobblestone street you must turn left at the big vacant house; once you have passed by the priest's house you must go under the wood arch, but be careful because Mrs. Puzzuoli likes to water her plants at the window at 6pm, so the pavement will be wet; continue until you get to the house that has big stone steps covered in mold, and after that turn right. If your brain went somewhere else you will find your direction by following the shouts of children playing soccer. Every evening after school, everybody can hear their passion for soccer when, just before their moms call them home for pasta dinner, one of them score a goal between the two jackets they put on the dusty ground.

This place has a name, it's Sant'Elia in Italy, my mother's native village

Patrick Muscedere is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Beautiful Place to Visit

If you were a tourist in my hometown, I would recommend places for you to visit, such as the Orlando Science Center, Downtown Orlando, and Harry P. Leu Gardens. These places are very special. Not only does it give you fun experiences, but it also allows you to get a chance to expand your knowledge of your environment.

The Orlando Science Center offers many fun programs, activities, and exhibits for people of different ages. A great deal about the wonderful world of science and technology can be learned at this place. Here, you can discover the secrets behind lasers, take a remarkable tour of our solar system, explore the inside of the earth, find out what your body does to food, and what food does to your body.

Downtown Orlando, on the other hand, is the combination of cultural points of interests, extraordinary restaurants, great musical entertainment, and a variety of shopping areas. In addition to this, Downtown Orlando has some beautiful parks. One of them even has a gorgeous lake called Eola, which has become the city's most appealing landmark with its majestic fountain in the middle. Family and friends can have a relaxing time together by having a picnic on the shore or paddle in a graceful swan boat on the lake.

If you enjoy nature, you will love the Harry P. Leu Gardens. This place has miles of cemented walkways that take you through garden settings, which allows you to view a beautiful collection of flowers, smell the largest rose garden in Florida, and see the bamboo backyard. There are also varieties of herbs, vegetables, and butterflies!

After all, Harry P. Leu Gardens has very large acres of peaceful grounds that let you enjoy the beauty of nature at an easy going pace. You can stroll along the roundabout path shaded by ancient oaks, forests of camellias, and other giant trees.

It's no wonder Orlando is one of the world's leading travel destinations. More than 35 million people visit our area every year. With these exciting places in my hometown, anyone who visits the many attractions, activities, and events will have a marvelous

time and fall in love with Orlando just like I did. That is what makes Central Florida a great place to visit and live.

Xuan Nguyen is an Advanced ESOL student of Mrs. Rosalind Shell at Orange Technical College – East Campus.

On the Field

My favorite place is on the soccer field with my friend, Jean Relle. The field is very big and large. In my country, there is always a need for players. My friend and I were always there ready to play. We played together in my country, Haiti, for long time.

I like to play soccer and basketball with my friend. Every day after work we went to the field or courts. We never relaxed at home. After a while it became harder for me to play because of my leg injury, but my friend would play with me regardless, because he was a good friend and knew that playing soccer made me feel better. My good friend played with me but never passed to me. I had to stop playing with a big group because it was too painful. Then, my friend moved to Canada.

I am trying to find equipment to support my leg, but I have not been successful. I never played soccer again. I have some medical complications, but I am feeling better now and think about playing soccer, I have no idea where to start but I need to search around to see if I can find another group to join. I know it will not be the same without my friend on the field with me, but soccer still makes me feel better and brings back good memories of friend.

Keraldy Emmanuel Pierre is a student at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus. His teacher is Fayne Johnson.

Curiously Unusual

Curiously unusual for some people, when I say that: “Any place where I can be alone can be my favorite place.” I say this for many reasons, let me tell you why.

To begin with, sometimes I want to have some time to myself. Imagine if I said, “my bedroom can be one of my favorite places,” do you know why? My bedroom is a place where I can speak very calmly with my God, I can read a book, I can remain alone with myself, I can watch my k-drama in absolute silence without any interruptions.

Furthermore, I don't like places where there are many people. So, I don't go outside too much. I pass my time with my family at home. When I arrive at my house after class, after church or anyplace I go, I always go straight to my bedroom. It's just normal and simple for me to stay there, me and myself. You might think I do this because I don't have friends, but that is not the case. I meet with my friends and I speak with my family extensively, but as I said in the beginning, my favorite place is anywhere where I can reflect on my life or speak to myself.

Finally, I could not even imagine someone without a place where this person can be alone with themselves, because for me, I love to spend time with myself.

Jose Darline Pierre is a student at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus. His teacher is Fayne Johnson.

Bok Tower Gardens

My favorite place is where butterflies, Japanese flowers, magnolia hybrids, fish, and bell sounds can be found, The Bok Tower Gardens in Florida. This uplifting and peaceful place is celebrating its 200th anniversary this year. A gift to America from an immigrant from the Netherlands, Edward W Bok, who was grateful of the opportunities that were presented to him.

January is my favorite season to go because it is strawberry season, and if you take the county roads instead of I-4 leaving from Tampa you will find the Berry Farm where you can pick fresh strawberries. Also, if you go in January another bonus is that you will find huge orange farm trees welcoming you.

Now, once you get there you will lose yourself in the middle of beauty; an encounter with nature that removes your focus on your problems and gives you hope. You will find a variety of

plants, flowers, trees, a pond with fish, a beautiful, neo-Gothic Singing Tower carillon, and a wonderful view.

Sofia Gomez is in a Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas conversation class taught by Pat Bauer.

My Favorite Place

Everyone has a favorite place. For some people it could be a city, a country or even a more specific place such as a school, a house, or a park. However, for me, my favorite “place” is the people I love.

To begin with, everyone has a different opinion about happiness, but I choose to believe that you can find happiness in people. I came to this conclusion because I am from Venezuela and the country has been through very difficult times. Each day gets worse. However, the people of my country are the most loving and kind people in the world. Those people, like my family and friends, make me feel good despite the country’s situation. For example, in Venezuela it is very common to be friends with everyone. For this reason, you can feel love and kindness even from people that you are not very close to. This includes neighbors or coworkers, as well as acquaintances. That’s why Venezuela is special because of its people. In essence, the right people can make you feel like you are in the best place.

Moreover, we can agree that a nice place is not the same without the people you love. In my case, I’ve had the opportunity of being in beautiful places and countries. For example, I am in the United States which is a beautiful and great country. It is a place where everyone wants to live. Although U.S. has a lot of good things, I can feel the lack of my family and friends’ love. When you are in a bad moment or mood, a simple hug from someone you love can help you feel better. Since I arrived in the U.S., I have had what I needed to live a quiet life, but I don’t have the same happiness I had when I was with my family.

Therefore, we should think about the home that makes us feel special not the house. For me, my favorite “place” is my mom, my dad, my sister, and my best friends. They are my favorite place because my mom and dad give me love, advice, and everything

I need to be great. My sister has taken care of me for as long as I can remember; I was a Christmas gift to her from my parents. The reason why I was born is because my sister asked my parents for a brother. My friends are special because they make me feel happy, and they bring me great joy.

Any place in the world is going to be the best if you are with the people you love, because in my opinion, the places don't make the people, the people make the places. Real happiness comes from people.

Leonardo Melo Ponte is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Yllka Bejo.

My Favorite Place

Mecca is a place that attracts many visitors. Every year the number of tourists increases. The geographic position makes Mecca an attractive place. It is also my favorite place, and every Muslim believes it is important to make a pilgrimage there at some point in one's life.

First, it is so beautiful. Mecca is the home to the world's largest mosque. The mosque's name is Kaaba. It means "cube" in Arabic. It is a square building elegantly draped in a silk and cotton veil. The structure is roughly fifty feet high, and it is about thirty-five feet at its base. The interior contains several silver and gold lamps. During most of the year, the Kaaba is covered with an enormous cloth of black. The elevation is nine hundred and nine feet above sea level. It is surrounded by many mountains like Sirat and Jabat. The mountain Hira is the one in which the Prophet Mohamed sought isolation and received visions. Mecca is a great artistic place.

Mecca is also a historical religious site. It is considered the spiritual center of Islam. It is where the Prophet Mohamed had received his first revelation from God. Before the rise of Islam, Mecca was a polytheistic sanctuary and a site for pilgrimages of people throughout the Arabian Peninsula. It was also an important city for trade and commerce during the pre-Islamic period. Now, Mecca begins the qiblah which points to the direction of prayer for all Muslim community.

Furthermore, Mecca is necessary for every Muslim because it is the hometown of Islam's Prophet Mohamed. It is the place where the prophet received the holy book, Koran. In Islam, the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca is fundamental to every adult at least once in his lifetime. Visiting Mecca is known as "Hadji" which is an Arabic term that shows respect to those who have made this pilgrimage to Mecca. It is the fifth of the fundamental Muslim practices and institutions known as the Five Pillars of Islam. Also, every Muslim believes that after they visit Mecca, they are newborn because God forgives all their sins. Today, no non-Muslims are permitted to enter Mecca.

In conclusion, Mecca is my favorite place. It is such a peaceful environment! Also, it contains a richness of historical knowledge about the Muslim religion.

Dieynaba Seye is a student of Yllka Bejo, in the ESOL program at the Clearwater Adult Education Center.

Home Sweet Home

I live in Myanmar. It is full of beautiful places to relax. Among them, I love to visit Rock Hill, a place which is four and a half acres long and about 16 miles away from my home. I feel very peaceful because I can sense the nature down in my soul. Rock Hill is not only a relaxing place but also my workplace. The rocks are broken down into tiny pieces and cleaned with the rock splitter machine. They are useful for road paving, constructing bridges, and buildings.

My job is to build highways, roads, and bridges. Additionally, I am building a house in Rock Hill. I started building this house a couple of weeks ago. I decided to do this because it is a better place to live away from the city. Also, living in the city is not good for health especially when inhaling fumes from the automobiles. It is noisy and chaotic. I prefer to be where it is quiet.

Two days ago, I went to Rock Hill again. At nighttime, I could hear an owl hooting and the nightingales were singing. When I woke up in the morning, I could hardly wait to walk to the small warm porch to enjoy the scenery. The trees are large and close together as they slap their leaves in the wind. The squirrels start-

ed to come out slowly as if they were playing hide and seek. The air was crisp and filled with the smell of summer flowers and lilac. The white tin metal building stands on the edge of the woods. I enjoy this time alone to gather my thoughts and feelings for the

day. A feeling of peace and tranquility comes from observing my backyard. The sounds, sights, and smell are the most amazing.

As I take one last moment to reflect on such beauty, I realize the secrets of this earth. I may never know unless I take time off from my daily work, spend time observing and taking pleasure in nature. As according to Albert Einstein, "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand things better."

Khin Thanda Oo is an English student of Ms. Josephson at the Adult Education Monroe County.

Sunset Cliffs

The magnificent view from the cliff to the ocean is wide-spreading around more than 180°. It takes your breath away when you look at these endless blue expanses of the ocean. It seems that your soul becomes light and filled with amazing feelings. But then, life stops for a moment, and an unbelievable calm falls on a tired head, puzzled by endless thoughts and problems. The wind ruffles the hair which is scattered over the shoulders, falling on the face, and tickling the cheeks. This place is Sunset Cliffs Natural Park in San Diego, California, established in 1983. It covers an area of 68 acres and extends along the coastline of the peninsula Point Loma.

Who has counted the many tourists who passed along the paths of this beautiful park for such a long period of existence? When you approach along the narrow trails at the edge of the hill, where the raging waves with white crests are visible far below, and the breath of the ocean becomes even more audible, a little fear begins to fill the body, and the skin becomes covered with small pimples from amazing delight mixed with some horror. How long has it been since this park became a frequent tourist attraction? This place's primordial purity and spirituality retain their strength and charm.

The beach under the rocks is usually deserted, and only lone surfers cuts the waves. Here you can see people engaged in meditation and sitting on the ground, looking into the endless expanses of the ocean. Sometimes marriage corteges visit this place to take beautiful photos for memory. Many people come here to watch the amazing sunset and enjoy the beautiful colors of the sky, the sun, and the ocean. You can imagine that the sun approaching the horizon changes the color of the sky. It becomes pinker and pinker, especially close to the water, with reflections of yellow and crimson. Steep steps along the rock wall descend to the beach. You can see caves there. On the rocky shore, the vibrant life of small creatures like crabs exists.

It is impossible not to love this beautiful place, where you are so close to nature, to the universe, where you feel so free and calm. You can dream, and every dream turns into a plan that seems to be possible. Whenever I return home after walking on the rocks and enjoying the view of the ocean, I feel a huge surge of strength, energy, and a positive mood.

Tatiana Zhdanova has a medical degree and Ph.D form the University of Russia. She is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Patricia Bauer.

I Carry Your Light and Aroma on My Skin

When you think about Venezuela, you probably think about many nightmarish things; the simplest can be delinquency. But you can also revive a picture of 2017's disturbances where a lot of young people died because they wanted to make the country that they loved great again, and the most common image is of an evil man with a ridiculous mustache who calls himself "president" singing something embarrassing on TV. With all that data in your head, it's comprehensible that you say to yourself: "What a horrendous place!"

Nonetheless, what you don't know is Venezuela is more than that. It's the happiness, the childhoods, and the growing up of 30 million people. It doesn't matter where we are, in Germany or Argentina, we belong to the 353,841 square miles that saw us become the persons we are today.

Right now, there is a Venezuelan in Canada going through the most intense cold he has ever felt, knowing that in his country the sun is shining as it does every day of the year, remembering the time he didn't have to worry about the snow on his car because it was always summer. He remembers the satisfaction he felt when he crossed Maracaibo's bridge with his mother to visit his family for the last time. He misses all that, but he can't go back.

There's a girl in Miami who is not freezing cold, but she can't go to her window and see the Avila Mountain anymore, even though she remembers seeing it every morning driving to school, and it seemed like a painting. She wants to see it again; she wants to feel the peace that it used to convey to her, but she knows she won't be seeing it again for a long time.

Our national anthem says, we are desert, jungle, snow and volcano. I didn't understand why it mentioned a volcano if we don't have one, but now I know that we were the volcano who destroyed the desert, jungle and snow. We never learned how to take care of the place that gave us life. We still don't know, but we want to revive it, and we wish it were as easy as watering a garden of dried flowers, but it is not.

However, Venezuela is that abandoned mother who, no matter what, will not stop loving her children. It doesn't matter the damage she suffers because of them; her biggest pain is that they are not with her, and she waits for the day they all come back to her arms, and everything will be the same again. She is not only a country, but also the mother of 30 million.

Sara Serna is a student at Miami Dade College Adult ESOL Program. Her teacher is Robert Kelso.

My Bedroom

A favorite place is supposed to be where someone feels good, protected, and out of danger. Among all the places at home and in the world, my bedroom is my favorite. I love it because when I'm in there I feel confident, calm, and happy. I can say I created my own world there.

In my bedroom, I feel like the world is mine. It is in this place where I reflect about what I must do in my life – whether it is my education, business, family, friendships, or goals and ambitions. When I'm in this place I don't have to know anything about what is happening with anything or anybody. I feel healthy, and happy, and when I pass my day in there, I feel very peaceful and relaxed.

When I decide to take a break from what's going on in my life, I just stay in my bedroom and try to think clearly about my ideas. I talk to myself, analyze what I am doing and what I really should do. And when I find myself in this moment, I realize I'm just unfocused.

In the past when I was feeling bad, I went to the park to cry, but now I found a place where no one comes to bother me. Sometimes when I stay in my favorite place my mom thinks I'm in a period of depression, and she becomes worried. In this case, I must make her understand that's what I need to make me good and happy when I feel lonely or overtaken by the events. In my room I eat, I sleep, I do my hair, I do my homework, I do everything in there. It's also my club because when I need to enjoy myself, I make some music, take a bottle of alcohol, and start to dance. When I listen to music in my favorite place, I feel like I live in a world that belongs to me. A world without problems, without diseases, without anything, just me. Me and myself.

You need to know that, when you choose a favorite place, you need to make sure that it's the greatest and the best, because this place is going to be the most important for you in your life. This is where you are going to pass your free time, it will be like a mother for you, when you feel bad, you feel so lonely, it will be your first instinct, the first place that will come to mind. I really love my bedroom; I will not change it for anyone. That's my favorite place!

Lovedine Titus is an ESOL student at Atlantic Technical College. Her teacher is Fayne Johnson.

Torry Island

Everyone has a favorite place, whether it be because they love the food, the culture, or its beautiful scenery. My favorite place is a nearby lake called Torry Island in my small town of Belle Glade. This place is very fond and dear to my heart. For one, I have been going there since I was a child with my family.

As I grew up, I adopted it as my own through my trials and tribulations in life. And lastly, I love the peace and quiet I feel when I go there.

Torry Island, or as some may know it “The Marina” is a very special place to me. Ever since I was young, my family would go there, along with my aunts and cousins. At first it was just a place we would go to walk or even fish. We have even done several family gatherings there. These family gatherings would entail amazing fish fry made by my Aunt Tina, and boat rides on my Dad’s boat. It was always definitely a good time when we would go there.

As the years passed and I grew up into an adult, I went through certain trials in my life. Now, Torry Island was not just a good place to enjoy with family, but it also came to be like a safe haven to me, a place I could always go to and feel free. Whether it be if I needed to cry or a place to have a chat with a good friend. I have shed many tears there and have had meaningful conversations there.

Lastly, the peace and quiet there is like no other. You see, I am a single mother of four beautiful kids. But sometimes I need a bit of time to myself, and the Marina never fails. The sounds of the birds singing by day or the crickets chirping by night, there is something just so soothing about it. I know for a fact I can always go there to clear my head.

Torry Island is my favorite place, but only because of the sentimental value I have for it and what it means to me. I can always go there when I need to, whether it’s to have a fish fry with my family or even just to spend some alone time there. For years and years to come, I will continue going there as I know many people in this small town will do as well.

Kassandra Rodriguez is a student at West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

The Green City

The city where my parents were born is called Pucallpa. It is one of the places that I appreciate the most because I grew up there and was able to learn the culture of this beautiful place. Pucallpa is one of my favorite places. My parents' family still lives there, and I would like to be able to be with them and share everything I could with them.

Peru is a country of many diversities, and beautiful and exotic places. It has many good things like Machhu Picchu and the Nazca lines. I have been in many countries in the 19 years of my life, but definitely by far, my special place is Pucallpa, better known as The Green City. In Peru, it is one of the places where I completely feel like an explorer.

The atmosphere is one of the best in the whole country. It can be sunny or rainy, but above all it is very fresh and cool. My parents taught me about this beautiful place, and every time I visit it is a moment of happiness for me. One reason why this is my favorite place is because of its diversity; it's very rich in flora and fauna. The animals are also very loved, and some can only be seen in Pucallpa.

The animals that abound in this place are many, but the most famous one of this place, is the 'paiche', a fish that can devour humans that can measure almost 3 meters long. Also, there is the little "sajino" pig.

Another thing that I enjoy a lot about this place are the legends. They have so many things that can make your skin crawl. The best known is about the 'tunche', a spirit that whistles at night, and when it does, it only means one thing; someone is about to die.

Something else that it has to offer is the Amazon River, the longest river in the world. In short, Pucallpa is a beautiful place to visit and have a good time. The food is the most enjoyable in the country. You can have juanes, tacachos, and much more, and

the people are super polite and friendly. They will be very happy to show you the places and guide you so that you have a better experience with your family. Thanks to the culture that its people transmit, it is one of my all-time favorite places that I hope I can visit many more times.

Josthink Cardenas Urquia is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Memories of Mexico

When I was a child in Mexico, I liked to go with my friends to the river in my town every afternoon after school. Near the river, there are cornfields, and on the riverbank, there are mango trees. We liked to jump out of the trees and fall into the water.

We ate mangoes, and my friends and I made a fire to roast the corn. We held competitions for who swam faster and played games in volleyball teams. It was a lot of fun because we swam

for a long time until sunset. Those were fun days with my friends. I miss those moments so much.

Today, the one who enjoys that river is my daughter when we visit her grandparents. I can't wait for the day I return and for my daughter to enjoy it just like me.

Lucia Garcia is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Marilyn Gartner.

Sao Jose Dos Campos

My name is Danilo. I am 18 years old. I am Brazilian. I was born in Mãe do Rio. My favorite place is the city where I grew up, São José Dos Campos, São Paulo. It is a small town but there is a lot of life in this place. The streets are busy. There are several parks with animals and birds.

What makes me happy is waking up every day to see the children on the street playing and the adults going to work. I love

talking to the gentlemen at work. They said the best thing is to go downtown in the late afternoon to see the beautiful and unique sunset.

I used to say that kindness begets kindness, and the people of this city were very kind. They always greet good morning with a huge smile. I think this city makes people very happy and there is no way to be sad in this busy city.

Danilo Dos Passos Santos attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

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

My Second Home

America is a dream country for millions of people in the world who want to visit or live here. I'm one of those people who dreamed about just visiting once. But destiny led me to marry an American guy. I am from Thailand, my hometown, Chiang Mai, is in the north of Thailand. It is a city surrounded by mountains, and it is more than seven hundred years old. I moved to St. Petersburg, Florida in 2015 and live with my husband. Chiang Mai and St. Petersburg have almost the same climates and crops.

Coming to America, I had to adjust my expectation about languages, cultures, and lifestyles. I know adjusting is not easy, but it's not too difficult. The first thing I started with was getting used to a husband who is different from a Thai man. My husband can't speak Thai at all. As for me, my English is not good either. When he talked to me, I could understand almost nothing except the last sentence. I asked him to use only basic words when talking to me. Sometimes we misunderstood each other, and I could not immediately explain.

One more thing—the American people are very direct. For example, when we went to see a baseball game, my husband was going to buy a drink and he asked me, "Do you want anything?" I said, "No, thanks." When he came back, he only had his own drink. It's different for Thai men. When women say "no," men know it means "yes," so they buy a drink for women too. It made me understand that next time I should be clear. Now I can understand and interact with my husband better because since 2019, I have attended Clear view Adult Education Center to learn English. And now I can also talk to my husband's family and my brother's family, as well as my neighbors and the general public.

In addition to adjusting to the spouse, I had to learn about the American culture. My first Christmas here, I thought they celebrated the same way as in my country, where the people come out to celebrate Christmas together. In the malls Christmas songs

play and Santa Claus comes to distribute gifts to the people who enter the mall, especially the children. Many houses have parties in the front yard or backyard and play music. But it turned out that everything was quiet. Americans celebrate Christmas in the house with no music. They have dinner together and give each other gifts. That first time, we went to my husband's sister house to celebrate.

These are just some examples. I have to learn a lot, but it's not a problem because I want to learn everything in my second home. I love both my first home and my second home. Thank you, destiny, for giving me today.

Butsakorn Chalungsooth Colucci attends Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

To start off, I am from Haiti and life in my home country is very different from life in the United States. My home country is not very stable right now, which makes living in it even more unsafe than before. In this essay, I will write about the main three life differences in my home country from the United States.

In my country, you have to work hard by yourself because no one will help you, except maybe your family and friends. Even if someone wants to work to make money, they can't because there is not enough work. That is why many people make their own little business. Some even carry a bucket full of water walking under the sun to try to make some money to survive. If someone wants their children to have a good education, they have to have plenty of money. That is why many kids in my country are not educated, because the school asks for a lot of money. Having enough money is not the only reason that children cannot get educated. Many schools don't pay their teachers and many teachers come to teach the students whenever they want because they know that they are not getting paid enough to teach. The U.S. is different because it has a lot of teachers.

Secondly, there aren't enough hospitals and people have to pay a lot of money to get care. Many people die because they

don't have enough money to get cured. There are lots of pregnant women who die because they don't have enough money and can't find a doctor to help them deliver the babies or do a C-section. People sometimes die because they have to have a private doctor, but having a private doctor comes with a cost because they are worth a lot of money, which most Haitian citizens cannot afford.

Thirdly, there is not enough justice. Sometimes, the person who is guilty is the one who gets freed because they have a lot of money. Sometimes someone might murder someone and not long after you see the murderer walking freely amongst other people. The bible says that justice raises a nation.

In conclusion, I love the United States because there's justice. They help kids and adults go to school. They help people with their health. One way they do that is by giving people insurance. That is one of the many reasons God has raised the U.S. because they have justice. My country is a good country, but it has many problems. God blesses America!

Anna Bien-Aime Paulius attends West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

Hi, I am Deepa. I am from Hyderabad, India. I have been living in the USA since 2014 with my husband. When I came here, I learned so many things and also changed my lifestyle.

In India, we follow different cultural activities and we wear different types of dresses, like sarees and salwar suits. We celebrate a lot of festivals, and we miss some of those festivals because we are living in the USA. In India many people don't make plans or follow the rules (although we follow important rules), and in the USA most people make plans and follow the rules. We have so much public transportation in India, so we easily travel from one place to another place, but in the USA they have less public transportation and that's why I had to learn to drive a car.

We have a lot of opportunities in the USA, and that's why I can easily improve myself. I think the USA is more advanced compared to India. I am glad to be living in the USA.

– *Anonymous Author*

Some Differences Between Americans and Puerto Ricans

“The American Dream” is real even though not all people share the same dream. Some come for better work, others for healthcare, or to be able to achieve what they could not achieve in their country of origin. This may be why people move to the U.S.A., but once here, they will find that people are not the same.

One of the things that differentiate Puerto Ricans from Americans is their willingness to help strangers. Puerto Ricans are naturally helpful because living on such a small island teaches us to depend on each other. Because of this we all have huge hearts. For example, in Puerto Rico if a person's vehicle is disabled on the road, strangers, including the police, stop to help you.

However, my experience in the U.S. is very different. My car was disabled in front of my son's school, and no one helped me. I, alone, had to push the car out of traffic and walk with my son to our house where I waited for my husband to arrive and fix our car. If that situation had happened in Puerto Rico, someone, even school staff, would have helped me and would have taken us home. I believe this is because in Puerto Rico, we have a tradition that if a stranger approaches you for help, you don't deny them what they need. We take this tradition with us wherever we live.

Puerto Ricans learn to live peacefully with people from other countries. We all help each other and we do not reject anyone because of their race or differences. This is in contrast to when we arrive in the U.S. We are often rejected and humiliated just for being Latino and speaking a different language. This does not mean that all the people in the U.S. are bad, because there are also good people who help Latinos and who try to help and understand us.

Even though we can achieve in the U.S. what we cannot achieve in Puerto Rico, it does not mean that we do not love our small island. No matter where we are, we always carry her in our hearts and minds.

Tatiana Aleman Rivera is an ESOL student at South Florida State College Adult Education. Her teacher is Denise Miriani. She has been in the U.S. for three and a half years, and learning to speak English is one of her goals in pursuit of “the American Dream.”

My Two Homes

Moving from a small City in Mexico to the United States of America was tough for me and my family. We came here knowing nothing about the culture. The food smells and tastes different from what we used to eat. From my point of view, people here in the U.S. have more opportunities and better jobs. Schools in the U.S. provides free education for students until 12th grade. That helped my parents a lot because they couldn't afford education in my country.

After coming to the U.S., I learned about different types of cultures: Blacks, Haitians, Jamaicans, Whites, and different races of Hispanic people, which makes our new life interesting. Over the past few years that I have been here, we have celebrated different holidays and socialize with different races.

For example, the food tastes different. Tacos, pizza, and cheeseburgers had a weird taste to us. My family and I were used to spicy food. But after coming to the U.S., we had to adjust to the taste different things. Now that I have been living here for a while, Momma often cooks spaghetti with meatballs, my favorite food.

Education in the U.S. is free. Coming to the U.S. showed me that education is the most important thing. But when I used to go to school in Mexico, my parents had to pay for my education, lunch, and transportation. It was hard for them because they couldn't afford it. Coming here to the U.S. gave me another opportunity at life.

I learned that education is the way of life. In my country, my parents and I suffered so much from poverty. We had to come to the U.S. for a better life. Coming to the United States was the best thing we did. We are learning so much about different types of cultures and foods. School was the best thing my parents have offered me. I learned so much from schools in the U.S. It showed me to be responsible and respect my elders.

Ezequiel Hernandez is a student at West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Their teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

My Incongruous Homes

Scientists admit that our planet is the only one amidst multiple others where life is possible, so far. This is globally true no matter the hemisphere, continent, climate, or culture. However, in *ceteris paribus*, life in particular countries might differ from others. Similarities and disparities are relevant among many separate societies. Having experienced living both in my native country, Haiti, and my adoptive country, the U.S.A., it's appropriate to find some dissimilarities between and within the people in these countries, even partially.

Lifestyle and living practices show deep disparities. Indeed, whereas American people are self-centered, focused on their own business, and time-worried, gossiping is a cup of tea for most Haitians. They like sympathizing with neighbors. Time doesn't have much importance. Loitering is widespread. Punctuality isn't valued enough. In Haiti, every event offers opportunities for, fraternization such as engagements, weddings, childbirth, "com-bite" (informal cooperative group helping a neighbor get work done), "raras" (popular entertainment), carnivals, flea markets, cockfights, religious ceremonies, Voodoo activities, illnesses, death, and funerals.

Sharing and/or exchanging food remains a common practice within the Haitian household community. A large number of the population live in rural areas, and they are desperately deprived of essential utilities and services like flowing water, electricity, transportation, schools, hospitals, firefighters, ambulances, jobs, and places of entertainment. The population develops resiliency and becomes accustomed to their situation promptly. Life in

Haiti reflects some primitive aspects in comparison with American civilization. Fewer Haitians pay taxes, and fiscal evasions are widespread.

Every country shows its degree of delinquency, but misgovernance explains why the level of social disturbance is so high in Haiti. This permanent reality compromises the possibility of growing wealth. Gangsterism is common in the cities. No one is secure. There are no rescue services. Anarchy spreads its evil wings over the country and seems to have been planned somewhere to maintain the country in chaos, precarity, and poverty. Haiti is no longer a dream paradise country. Oh my goodness!

Life is relatively simple in Haiti. Modernization is reluctant. The social structure is basically naive and primitive. Besides typical transportation, all over the country, motorcycles convey people from one place to another. Animal transportation is also practiced. Conversely for Haiti, wealthy progress goes steadily in the U.S.A. Anyone devoted to personal efforts can benefit the opportunities available here.

My home country, Haiti, is a minuscule developing land, while the U.S.A is a super huge developed country. Life in my home country, Haiti, differs from life in the U.S.A. like night differs from day. Anyway, Haiti stands indisputably as a candle that ignited the flame of liberty and indicated the way of emancipation to humanity.

Jean-Mick Deshommes is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

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

I was born and raised in Vietnam, then I moved to the U.S. It was a big opportunity for me to explore the new world. Everything is different here compared to where I come from. I got to learn about the differences between Vietnamese and American life.

Every country has different cultures. They can be clearly recognized as the differences of lifestyle. The American lifestyle

is more open than the Vietnamese lifestyle. Americans would like to move out of their parents' house when they are old enough. In Vietnam, people like to live with their parents until they get married. Even when they get married, they still live in the husband's family house. There are two or three generations that live in the same house. I used to share a bed with my sister. When my sister moved to the U.S., I sometimes slept with my parents in the same bed. We talked to each other about some funny things that happened in the day. Those were the best moments in my life. Families stay as close to each other as possible. It helps them solve a lot of problems. A son or daughter takes care of their parents and elderly family members.

The Vietnamese have a pretty strict ritual of greeting. It's important to show respect to other people, especially the elders. The Vietnamese greet the older people first, then the younger ones. The Americans can greet anyone they see first. When you meet an American, you ask, "How are you?" That's the way people greet each other, which means "Hello." In Vietnam, don't ask a stranger, "How are you?" This question makes people wonder "Do I look bad today?", "Do you think I'm sick?" Unless you really want to know their full health report, just say "Hello." Americans are fond of saying "I love you." They say it at least 100 times over a year. The Vietnamese are not. We don't share words of affection easily. It's typical of Vietnamese to demonstrate affection through gestures and actions. I haven't heard my parents say that "I love you" to me, but they always had their own way of showing me that they love me more than anything in their lives.

Another difference is entertainment. In this part, I would like to mention young people. Americans have Friday nights; Saturdays and Sundays are for relaxing after a week of hard work. However, for young Vietnamese people, every day could be a weekend, even Monday night. The Vietnamese like to spend their time at a coffee shop drinking milk tea, coffee, or many kinds of soft drinks. After work or school, friends and coworkers usually gather together, go to a restaurant, or just some places on a sidewalk to eat and talk. We have a lot of street food to choose from. It doesn't make you full, so you don't need to worry about dinner at home.

It's interesting to learn something new so that we can understand each other and do not get in a bad situation because of the different cultures.

Hong Thi Thuy Nguyen is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

I'm Brazilian, My Heart is American

I recently arrived in the U.S. Even though I have traveled to other countries, this time is different because I can see the great global multiplicity. Besides the difference in customs and culture here, I am also impressed by the diversity, mixture of race, color, sexuality, and freedom of expression. Looking for the opportunity I didn't have in my country, here I can obtain autonomy to be what I am.

I observe that people manage to obtain professional success almost always here. Safety is something I fell in love with in this country, whereas in my country, Brazil, it depends on your sexuality, color, and social class. We have to be very cautious when walking in some places which are very dangerous, unpleasant, and saddening.

It is very tropical and admirable in Brazil, but the lack of preservation of culture, and the limitation of access to study and education leads to bad things and a bad global reference. There is inequality in the society in my country.

Here in the U.S., people could speak two or even three languages very easily because there is easy access to language learning. Whereas in my country, it is difficult and there is limited access. So, it is one of the things that hinders the people to succeed in their life. The streets here are clean and have an easy visual identity of the distinctive structure it represents. On the other hand, these are few in number in my country.

I love being the Brazilian that I am, but my heart is American because of the quality of life, the right of expression, the power of choice, access, and information. I am grateful to be in the U.S. Thank you for the opportunity for a better life for my future. In return, I am able to contribute in some ways to this country that welcomed me.

Jose Milton Vilela Lira attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Christmas Celebrations in Bogota, Colombia, and Vero Beach

This is a story that brings me great joy and sometimes a little sadness. I remember Christmas as a special occasion every year since I was a little girl, and it is still special today. Christmas officially started on the 16th of December. We went through the ritual every night between 7 and 8 o'clock. We started with the prayers of the Christmas Novena, which follows the history of Maria and Josef until the birth of the Baby Jesus. We prayed with family, friends, and neighbors. After that we shared food and drink. The last event of each of the evenings ended at the soccer field, where young and old participated. We did this for nine days.

On Christmas Eve, the 24th of December, we all had gifts for each other. It always was a big event because the whole family was together—uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents. It was a big group and most of the time we were over 30 people. There is one Christmas I especially remember. I believe that I was seven years old, my three brothers and I (two older and one younger than me) all received roller skates. We had a wonderful time skating in the street.

We always waited to exchange gifts until midnight. After that, we had a big dinner with a special soup, and the aroma of the cooking could be experienced in the whole house. I can still “smell” it. We also had dessert. It is called natilla, a type of pudding. We didn't go to bed until sometime during the next day.

We spent Christmas Day with our families, and we usually had a BBQ. I have pleasant memories of visiting my great-grandparents.

Micheld Moreno is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Ursula Duguid.

I'm Coping

I am Vietnamese. I have been in the U.S. for over a year. Like everyone else, when I go to another country, I will experience a lot of changes in my life. I expected this challenge and am not surprised.

In my home country, there are very few houses with gardens, houses are close together, so we keep seeing each other all day. People are still poor, so they all travel by motorbike and have very few cars, unlike in the U.S. In Vietnam, familiar food is always around. In the U.S., when I crave for Vietnamese food, I have to go to places where there is a Vietnamese community, find a Vietnamese restaurant, or go to the closest oriental store to buy the ingredients and cook them by myself. This is a nuisance because I need a ride to go to the store but I don't have a permit to drive in the U.S. yet. By the time I get to do all these, I have already lost my appetite for my country's food.

America is a multiracial country. It is made up of many different people and cultures. Therefore, there are many celebration and festivals here. I am very happy and excited to discover and experience these things. On the contrary, there are limited celebrations in Vietnam and it is boring. Also, most people speak English here but I could only speak some. That's why I am attending the English class to overcome this barrier.

In general, there are many differences between the U.S. and Vietnam, from culture, language, work, and food. I'm trying to get over it and come to terms with them.

Huy Dinh Le attends the English class at Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Home

I have very good memories of my country, El Salvador. The difference between there and here is very big. The beaches are very different; the sand of the sea is darker there. There are mountains and trees, and here everything is flat and full of cane.

I remember that I got up early to go to school and that I liked to talk with my classmates while we ate in the school cafeteria.

In my country, you will see many people walking in the streets, people who pass by your house selling anything.

Christmas is happier there. I remember that I liked to go to the city dances and I liked to go out to visit small tourist places with my mom and my friends. I also frequently came to see my family here in Florida.

Now that I live here everything seemed very different to me than in my country. I realized that visiting is not the same as living here. In both places I had responsibilities, but now I have more. I've gotten used to it and over time I've learned to like it. I've known many beautiful places like Disney, Universal, and other places. I go more often to see my dad in North Carolina, and my mom also comes to visit me more. When I have vacations at work, I go to El Salvador to see my friends. This is my story.

Karla Mejia Santos is a student in the ESOL program at West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

Poor Country, Small Mentality

Sometimes when you try to do your best in everything you encounter many problems in your life. My name is Marie. My life is open for everyone. When I was a child, my mother always told me, "Do everything correctly in your life, and you'll have a good opportunity in the future." I tried to grow up with these words in my mind.

At school, I was an example student. I was not the best in everything, but I tried to do my best. After my high school, I went to Cuba to study for five years. "Great!" my mom said. She was so happy because in my country, it's difficult for many families to help their daughters to enter and finish high school and university because it is a poor country. I was so proud of my education that I told myself, "I need to help my country; there are a lot of problems in education".

I tried to write different projects and submit them to the ministry to which I belonged. There were very happy and told me, "Yes we can start with these projects in the city so that later

we can spread them across the whole country,” but it was just to make me feel important because they started the first part of the project, and after that they told me that the federal government didn’t have money for the second part. It was the very first disappointment of my professional life because the population was so happy to see young people who had lived in the streets finally have another opportunity to reintegrate into society through sport.

Over time, I understood the reality of my country. In poor countries, if you try to do something good to help, there are always some obstacles that stand in the way to keep you from doing the right thing. Authorities are so greedy; 99 percent of the projects remained in their drawers. Hopefully, one day, we don’t have to deal with this kind of people anymore.

Marie Brunache is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Let’s Act Differently for Haiti

I come from Haiti, a country where it is nice to live naturally all year round. Haiti has everything to be one of the most popular destinations in the world: beautiful beaches, hospitable people, delicious cuisine, exciting culture, and a great climate. Its flora and fauna offer multiple and varied fields of attraction for amateurs and scientists alike.

Haitian people have a glorious and enchanting historical past. From the 15th to the 18th century, Haiti had aroused the lust of the Western powers for mining (gold) and agriculture (sugar and spices). At the beginning of the 19th century, these people showed the way to social justice to the whole world by becoming the first black republic. At that time, Haiti had helped other countries to fight colonialism and gain their independence, like the USA at the battle of Savannah during American Revolutionary War in 1779. It also gave help to Simon Bolivar in his struggle for the liberation of peoples of some Latin America countries like Colombia and Venezuela. By proclaiming its independence, this republic of former slaves showed the way to freedom and equality of peoples to the whole world. Unfortunately, fratricidal struggles for power, the bad political and economic decisions of

our rulers supported by our partners of interest, have pushed this avant-garde nation into a trap of insecurity, poverty, instability, and acute violence.

The champion of freedom lags behind with its dreams broken, and its families bereaved by violence and languishing in poverty. In short, the difficulties faced by the Haitian people are multiple and the challenges are gigantic. However, the Haitian nation is resilient and never gives up the hope of seeing a new spring shine on the country. We can turn the tide. However, we have to start somewhere. First, let's work on the mentality of its sons and daughters.

We must think of Haiti differently by valuing its potential, creating opportunities and promoting effective results-oriented approaches in all areas of activity. We must act for Haiti differently by giving priority to the higher interests of the nation. International partners must collaborate differently with Haiti.

I dream of integrating American policy at a useful level in order to be able to impact actions aimed at the development and stability of Haïti, to raise a collective awareness of Haitian youth everywhere in their motivation to reshuffle Haiti. It is certain that Haiti, the land of freedom, still has extraordinary things to show the world. In pilgrimage, Muslims go to Mecca, Christians go to Jerusalem; blacks should think about visiting Haiti before passing away. Let's act for Haiti differently. May God bless Haiti!

Paulin Cange is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My New Home in the U.S.

My Name Lumang. I was born in Phnom Penh City in Cambodia. My country still has a king living in the Royal Palace. Phnom Penh City has a museum, and Chaktomuk River flows in front of the palace. Every year in November, people in Cambodia celebrate a water festival ceremony.

In 2008, my family moved to Siem Reap province. People in my country call it "Wonderlands." Siem Reap has a lot of tem-

ples, such as Angkor Wat that brings tourists from around the world who come to visit every year. They want to know about the culture, traditional clothes, and Khmer food. They especially want to see the sunrise on the top of Angkor Wat. It's so beautiful and amazing.

After I got married to my husband, I came to live in the United States. The first time in U.S. was very difficult for me. I couldn't go anywhere by myself. I didn't understand when some people talked to me. And I couldn't find a job because everything is different from Cambodia. I felt sad and lonely. I wanted to go back to my hometown. Something changed in my mind after I gave birth to my baby. I didn't want to go back to my country anymore. Now, I want to see my son grow up and get a better life in the future.

After being a housewife and taking care of a kid for many years, I felt bored. I needed to do something for myself. I wanted to go back to school again. I'm so glad that I found this school not too far from my home. Now, I can study English and practice with my classmates. And after I graduate, I can get a job that I like.

By the way, in the future, after my husband gets retired, I want to move back to my homeland because I want to live a simple life with beautiful nature in a quiet and peaceful place.

Lumang Sok is a student attending the Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Double Life

My life in Cambodia was different from life in the United States. When I lived in Cambodia, I had my own business where six to seven people worked for me. My main job was to supervise my employees. I had 15 acres of land that grew bananas and oranges and 100 acres that grew rice. I taught my team how to find ripe Pursat oranges and maintain the orange trees, like making sure to put fertilizer and to spray insecticide. Unlike the oranges in the United States, the Pursat oranges that are grown in Cambodia are green when unripe and later light-green when ripe. Our oranges were sold in local markets. For the rice, I made

sure my people knew how to use a tractor to dig ditches to place the rice seeds and manage the cows to flatten rice stalks. Finally, my team would harvest the rice and then sell it to distribution companies.

When I came to the U.S., my first job was a stocker at a small grocery store. From there, I moved on to work many jobs, like a butcher and a welder. I worked very hard to support my family by working as a machinist for a big company. I worked for nine hours as a supervisor for a farm and eight hours as a machinist. For welding and machinist, I was required to go to school for the job. I learned how to manually cut parts like a file, and later I used machines and computers to make the job easier. As a machinist, I helped make parts for missiles and mostly planes.

In Cambodia, I used to be a Buddhist monk when I was 18. I had to shave my head and eyebrows and finally wear an orange monk robe. As a monk, I learned many rules. There were several rules like never drink alcohol, or from sunrise to noon you are allowed to eat and drink, but after noon you are only allowed to drink. Another rule was that a monk cannot talk to a woman one-on-one where no one can see; it must be more than two people for it to be okay. An interesting rule was to never kill anything that is alive like mosquitoes or ants.

Now, in the U.S., I'm volunteering at my local temple as a Buddhist preacher assistant. From a monk in Cambodia to a preacher assistant in the U.S., I have helped collect donations for the monks and the temple. Another task for me as an assistant is leading the sermons and prayers in funerals and blessings for the people that follow the monk's chants. I organize some events with the local monks and other preachers such as house blessings and funerals for families.

Now that I am happily retired, my main future goal is to go to school and get a GED.

Sarin Ros is a student attending Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Someone I Admire

How My Dad Changed Our Lives for the Better

My dad wanted a better life for his family because life was very tough for us in Haiti. Before he left to come to the USA, he used to trudge miles to a lot of places - for example, to the store, church, and laundromat. My dad was a hard-working and strong man. He used to spend most of his time on his farm. He worked there for at least 10 hours per day.

My dad decided to go to the U.S. after hearing whispers from people talking about a place where you could change your entire life. He went to my mom to discuss it, and she agreed with him. He needed to find someone to take him for an affordable amount of money. For a couple of weeks, he scoured many different ports until he finally found someone. He sold some of his farm animals and he paid the fee and then waited for a week. He packed his belongings, said goodbye to us, and left.

The boat was wooden, and about two stories high. Most of the people had to stay in the cabin. There were exactly 249 people waiting in a mixture of fear and happiness when he and everyone else started packing onto the ship. He was very nervous and just put everything in God's hands, which gave him peace of mind.

When they were on the sea, the waves were very intense. There were no lights on the boats for safety. Everything was pitch-black and no one could see anything nor communicate with their families back home on the journey. No one on the ship had anything to eat for weeks, and everyone was freaking out because they didn't know if they'd make it. The ship sailed on the sea for about a month and finally landed in Key West, Florida during the night. This was a dream come true for those on the ship. Once off the boat, everyone rushed off to safety. When they disembarked in the port, some people already had family and friends in Florida waiting for their arrival. Everybody scurried to their cars. The cars were so jammed that people were sitting on one another.

My dad heard about the U.S and came over by boat to get a better life. He was able to make it and get a job and provide for

us back in Haiti. We later came to the U.S after a few years and were able to get a better education and more opportunities and connections.

Aunise Antoine has been a student at DePorres Place for one year, studying intermediate and advanced English grammar.

Miss You, Which Leaves Us Learning

I remember as if it were yesterday - she was generous, always calm, dedicated to the family, and kind with everyone around her. With her silky hands, with thin and sensitive skin, showing the signs of a long life and obstacles in life, she prepared that delicious cheese bread. Little did I know that someday I could learn how to make that wonder of bread, which I was delighted just to watch done, in addition to the crazy desire to try it before it was even finished.

Clearly from the first day she told me, her grandson, "To-day you are going to get your hands dirty to make our delicious cheese bread," I was thrilled. Every detail that happened as we prepared the recipe together - mixing the cassava (yuka) flour with olive oil, milk, salt and water, waiting while the dough rested, and then adding the eggs and cheese - was for me and still is magnificent. "Everything in its exact moment." I'll never forget these words.

However, the departure time in this life is there for all of us, and our dear grandmother went to find her rest. Days and days of missing her, and that feeling only increases with the passage of time. Above all the law of life is natural but knowing that I have had this immense opportunity to absorb everything, this learning of love, dedication and living in this unique and epic moment, I take it as a learning bag for the rest of my journey. I will continue to prepare our delicious cheese breads, in dedication to my grandmother Odete Maria Alves, my eternal second mother. Miss you forever and ever.

Thiago Alves Cunha is a student of Inguna Ozols at the Clearview Adult Education Center.

Carried Out by the Wind

When I was a little girl in the countryside, far away from Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, I went to school with my brother and my sister. I was raised by my grandma, a legend in our community. My brother, the middle child, was always the best student in the class while I was struggling to pass. Years went by, and my mom and my sister moved to France. As a tradition, after my oldest sister, it was my brother and I's turn to move to Port-au-Prince in order to attempt the secondary school level. At this time, in 9th grade, I realized that education should be used as the key to success. Since that time, I became the best student I've ever been.

Once I got older, I became a nurse, got married, and received my first 5-year visa in 2003. It's an incredible joy for every Haitian when you get your first visa. A few months later, I visited my sister in the USA, the one whose life was pushed away from me for years. By discovering my sister's life, I realized how courageous she was. She showed up in the US without anything. She left behind her life in France, her friends, her job, her degree, the French nationality that she had at that time, for a new life in America.

My sister was a very friendly, easygoing, humble, and compassionate person. Quickly, she learned English, went to Nova University, and became a nurse. Suddenly, as if she was in a nightmare, as if someone pulled out the carpet under her feet, she became sick, and she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Though she was very devastated, she could count on our family's support, especially mine. Courageously and quickly, she started the treatment with hope. Unfortunately, she didn't have any chance, she passed away two years later.

For me, the quality of the person that my sister was would never die. She flourished with me and my children, whom she considered hers, every time she had the opportunity to talk to them. Since then, I bring with me her passion, her motivation, and her determination to help people and follow her ideal by creating a better future for my children.

My sister, Gigie, was an angel. I know somewhere she's looking at me, happy and proud of her sister. She was my friend, my

confidant, and my children's second mom as she used to say. Very young, she disappeared quickly, as if she was carried out by the wind. As a Christian, I firmly believe that her mission was done and a new one was started; for better, or for worse.

Natacha Bataille at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Super Mom

The most important person in my life is my mother, Elcie Jean. She was born in Haiti on August 09, 1966. She married my father, Brunel Joseph. They have two children; I am the second one. She is my legend. She has been fighting for me since my birth, until today. I remember she said to me "never give-up because you are a soldier." She encourages me to fight day by day, to always walk forward and to not be scared.

One day, I saw my mom, my warrior, working in a field to feed me and to pay my education. She always takes care of my family. She is my doctor and teacher at home. She worked as a housekeeper. She would leave out early and came home super late, very tired. Sometimes I am saddened by our living conditions. I give strength as she always did for me. I remember the day when I finished my classical studies, she was happy yet sad because I was going to leave home to go to university. She hugged me and told me; I will always be with you.

My mother has a mysterious, big heart and is very friendly. She tries to rescue everybody and everything. I love my mom, she is my everything, my idol; I know she loves me too. I miss my family. I pray to God every day that he continues to bless my mom and my family. Thank you, Lord, for guiding my family.

Ednel Joseph is an ESOL student. His teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

Foundation Alejandra Velez Mejia

When I think of someone who I really admire and respect, I immediately think of my mother-in-law. She is an exceptional

person. Not just because she is my mother-in-law, but because of the special social work that she develops in Manizales, Colombia.

Her foundation's name is Foundation Alejandra Velez Mejia, and their work is to serve children with cancer, from all social backgrounds and in any conditions that they may be in. It's amazing when you talk to her, you can feel the energy and the passion she has for her work. She is completely altruistic and selfless. The foundation collects money by doing different activities, and she always has a good plan for each month. Of course, they have great benefactors, not only important people of our city. I think that she has more benefactors even out of the country, and those things are only done by her.

Her greatest work is carried out in January, when the bullfights are held in Manizales. She always manages to get the bullfighters to donate a bullfight for her foundation and for the children's hospital. It is surprising because they themselves go to visit the children, and they know all the situations that she goes through. Regardless of whether or not people like bullfighting, their work is unique. It is a joint effort with a single purpose, to have the budget to continue fighting for the children's life.

I think it is impossible not to consider her and her work as something magical. It is incredible to think that such a special person contributes so much to my life and my days. With her correct words and infinite love, she teaches us about commitment, compassion, selfless dedication, and all that is valuable in life. At her side, we understand the pain and the glory of all battles, and the meaning of being an angel in other's lives.

Manuela Jimenez Arroyave is a student at The Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Father

The person who I admire the most is my father: I have three reasons why I admire my father; he is caring and takes good care of me, he respects others' beliefs, and he never gives up on anything.

When I was a child, he did everything for me. He was adoring and caring. He wasn't dear to me alone, he also helped me and my siblings to study and play. He is a tailor, but he was always multitasking, talking to us as he sewed. He is still very busy, but he has always made time for me from his busy schedule.

My father has struggled a lot but never lost his patience and faith in himself. He always helps others in need, and he loves and respects his parents. He loves me very much and supports me in everything I do. He takes the family for outings twice a month. He made a big impact not only on me but on our entire family.

The third reason why my father is my favorite person, is because he never ignores an opportunity to help someone in need. He has a good sense of humor which is often targeted playfully at my mom. He is a self-made man; whatever he has achieved in his life is the result of his hard work and determination. My dad is a wise person, he loves to read, and he encourages me to study.

The most important thing is that I admire my father. He sacrificed a lot for me. He shared everything with me like a friend. He is one of the most fun-loving people I have ever seen. He is the most important person in my life.

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

A Mother's Love

What is the importance of a mother in our life? Growing up I got to know the importance of my mother and how she influenced my life in everything I do. For me the role of the mother is so important for the future of our society. For example, how she will bring up her child will create the balanced, intelligent man of tomorrow who respects the environment.

A child brought up with the love of his mother will produce a balanced child who will help to form a happy society. A child raised without the love of his mother will produce an unbalanced child and a lack of self-esteem, which can contribute to creating more violence in society.

Courageous fighter—these are two words that I have chosen among millions to describe my mother. She dedicated her life to working in a hospital so that she could give my brother and I a good education in one of the best schools in town. She did all of this because she believed in education even though she did not have the opportunity to complete her studies. To me, that means a lot. I still remember those days as if they were yesterday. One day after work she picked me up from school to walk home, during the journey she kept telling me that one day the condition in which we live will change. She has done this by sacrificing years of work despite the illnesses she had and continues to have.

One of the things that always motivated my mother to work even harder was my school performance. I worked very hard to make her proud of me. After a long time living with her, I can say that a mother is one who scolds but also forgives everything.

Huguens Bernadin is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

With You Every Day is Precious

We all have a special person in our life that we admire, it can be a family member, a pet, or a close friend. I admire a lot of people but the person I admire the most is my mother.

My mother's name is Ericka just like mine. She was born in Managua, Nicaragua. She married my father, and I am their only child. She has lived for 44 years in Nicaragua, and never traveled until February of last year when we decided to come to live in the United States because my father was already here. I remember that my mother was very nervous and scared to fly. Nevertheless, it was a lot of fun traveling with her and my little dog, Peluche.

I admire my mother not only because she is very intelligent, but she is also the best in everything she does. She is an incredible person: affectionate, kind, with a great heart helping people whenever she can. She is the greatest support I always need. Mom is very funny like me, except unlike me she is more sociable because she is not so shy. She is my handkerchief to cry on. She follows my jokes and the crazy things I do. Well, she also scolds me when necessary. Above all, she loves me as I am.

When we lived in Nicaragua, we liked helping many people who have economic challenges. My mother gave them clothes and food. I remember Indiana. She has 5 children and is a single mother. She took care of my grandmother and did housework for other people. She was very grateful to my mom for all the help she received. My mom always calls Indiana at Christmas to give her and her children more food and clothing that were a bit used but that they needed them.

Now, we live in Marathon, Florida. My mom works as a cook in a Cuban Restaurant because she has a gift for cooking. To me, mom can cook the most delicious food in the world. She works every day except Mondays which is her day off. She is very hardworking. She never fails to make us breakfast every morning before she leaves for work. When she comes back from work, I help her make lunch. My mother is irreplaceable.

My mom is my best friend. Even through hard times, she always does her best. She is persistent. She taught me to never give up, to always give my best, and to help everyone who needs it. Mom, to the world you are a mother, but to me, you are the world.

Ericka De Franco is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. She will be studying Business Administration at the college. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Never Give Up

When I was a child, I always listened to other children talk about the person they admired. Among them were singers, actresses, painters, etc. I often said that I didn't admire anyone because I thought that it had to be someone I could be like, who shared common hobbies; I was wrong. Throughout my life I realized that it's not necessary to have something in common, but that they have similar ethical values and do something that they are passionate about and dedicated to. In recent years I have gotten closer to my dad, and I got to know him better. Consequently, I can say that I admire him. I have learned a lot of things about him, and he has always advised me to be a better person.

My dad and I are a bit the same in terms of personality. We are responsible, honest, and independent, but he has something that I admire so much: he never gives up. When my dad was 17 years old, he had his first daughter, Diana. Usually, many teenagers don't take responsibility for their children that they had with their partners, and they disappear. Despite my dad being a teenager, he took care of his daughter, he continued to study in school, and he found a job to support his daughter. It was hard, but he never gave up.

He grew up and graduated from university, with a bachelor's degree in marketing. When I was born, my dad always tried to give me the best life. He supports me with whatever decision I make, but sometimes he says, "never stop studying because it's the only way that you can achieve your dreams." My dad is the reason why I came to America, even though I miss him. I got used to living with him and talking to him. My dad was there when I cried about my problems, and he always advised me in the best way. I know that he is proud of me.

Always admire someone who helps you to grow both professionally and personally. They teach you how you could be a better person, and maybe someday someone can admire you for who you are.

Daniela Chavez is a student at The Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Parents

Someone I admire is my parents. My parents are simple, kind, honest, empathetic, respectful, and God-fearing. They are persistent in educating me and my brothers with good values. They try to do the right things and with honor so that we would be a decent family. It is amazing they are still together after 41 years of marriage. I believe their faith in God is the prominent foundation that binds them tightly until this present moment.

My father says that my grandfather was tough when disciplining his children. He wanted to implant integrity and dignity in them. My father implements the same techniques on us hoping for the same result. He instills in us the cornerstone that God

is the center of our life. My father is a man who always thinks thoroughly before doing anything, calculates everything, and always has a plan B. He is a positive person, yet at the same time, is aware that something can also go wrong. That is why he is very cautious.

To make life more realistic, he uses many proverbs for life occasions such as “if it can happen to someone else, it can happen to you” and “everything could turn out fine, yes, but what if it doesn’t?”. This is his way of telling me that it is very significant to think deeply before making important decisions. His final advice is “always think of Jehovah God and how it will make Him feel from your actions”. During my adolescence, I was deviating from the spiritual path and doing things that my father disagreed with. I will never forget the way my father never gave up on me, and the love he showed me even after I disobeyed him.

My mother too has many fine qualities. I love and miss her so much. Whenever we had any disagreements, she tried to find a way to talk to me. She could get mad but not furious and would always ask me if I wanted something to eat. She is a special woman who wholeheartedly sacrifices her priorities to support her family, alongside her husband. She stays home and raises us while helping my dad in their business at the same time.

Now that I am an adult, this kind of upbringing really means a lot to me. I hope I can instill in my children the same good values and the important things in life that my parents taught me. I can say with great pride that I am grateful for the parents that I have. They are the dearest people, whom I admire most. My parents are very close to my heart.

Ammy Del Rosario Jimenez is a student at Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Courage and Bravery

Every day we face challenges, have new experiences, and meet new people. Every single person we meet has a story, a life that nobody knows and that is to be admired. We always admire the people who are around us, and our options or preferences change over the years.

If you asked me who I admired 20 years ago, I would have answered my family; my mother, my grandparents, my aunt, and uncles. I love them and thanks to them, I am the person that I am today. Now, with 34 years of life “experience” I have met a lot of people, and have had the opportunity to study, work, travel, and live in my country where everyone must overcome many challenges.

Without a doubt, I have gained admiration for immigrants; not only the immigrants who come to this country to have a better life, but also immigrants all around the entire world. There are billions of people who have escaped from their reality with just one thing in mind: to have a better quality of life for their families.

Since I was a kid, I started to study English in my country with my mother’s conviction that I could have a better future. I visualized my life in Colombia as a student, but things changed. I never imagined arriving in the United States, asking for asylum due to being a victim of social problems in Colombia. At that moment, I thought that I was faced with a terrible experience and that my life was getting worse.

My mind was changed when I met people from South and Central America, people who arrived in America as immigrants, crossing the border or swimming without identification, without money to buy food and with debts. Illiterate immigrants who did not know how to read or write because they never had the opportunity to learn it in their countries due to their conditions. How courageous! They arrived with just one philosophy, to have a better quality of life and an understanding that hard work will guide them. Even though they had to suffer from discrimination, poor treatment from their jobs, and bad salaries, they respect this country and follow the rules.

Although many locals do not believe it, immigrants help the United States to be a good country for everyone. Immigrants arrive in this country alone, destitute, with only courage and bravery, in the hopes that by working hard each day we will meet our goal of a better life. I admire all those people who are hardworking, studying English, pursuing a GED or other technical degrees. They work hard to be productive and respected while learning

American culture. Their goal is to get the most important thing in life, peace, and hope.

Angela Arias Martinez is a student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

Dreams Come True. Believe!

My mother is the person I admire the most. She was born in 1944, in a small town in the countryside of Brazil. In 1958, after 8 years of studying, she finished 8 grades and graduated from elementary school. At that time, there was no school to study at higher levels. But she wanted more because her dream was to become a teacher. She loves teaching and really wanted to be a part of helping children.

After she got married in 1963, she went to live in a bigger city where there was a school. With my father's support, in 1968 she began to study and graduated as a teacher in 1975. Then she went to work as a teacher in 1976 until she retired in 2000.

When she was working, she worked with young children and teenagers who had hearing or speaking disabilities. Nobody believed that those young children and teenagers could learn. She was able to help children with hearing and speaking disabilities learn to read and speak. The parents were amazed, and they would cry with emotion and joy, watching their children develop and grow up from school.

It was my mother's greatest happiness, seeing her students learn, discover things, develop, and evolve day by day. She also found joy in seeing their parents be happy with her work, which she did with such dedication and love; the parents showed so much gratitude. With that, she felt very fulfilled doing what she had dreamed of since she was a child. Her dream came true, thanks to her faith and hard work.

I really admire my mother, Terezinha, because she believed and fought for her dream. Today she is a volunteer at the elementary school where she worked until she retired. Through education, my mother transformed many lives for the better. Through

education we can transform the world to be fairer and better to everyone. Education transforms people. People transform the world.

Silvania Guimaraes is a student at Orange Technical College. Her teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.

Travels with Grannie

“Hey Grannie, where are we going for vacation?” When I was a child, I used to spend days and all vacation periods with my grandmother; we had a strong bond, and I think we had similar personalities. I adored her. She used to cook for me and tell me stories about her life when she was young, the difficulties she had, and the actions she took to survive. All that has encouraged me to follow in her steps. She wanted to become a nurse when she was younger, and she worked in that area not with a certificate, but as a volunteer when the hospital needed it. She lived in Panama for a short period of time, and then she got divorced and moved back to Costa Rica.

When I was in elementary school, we used to travel to the beaches in another province five hours away from the capital. She had family and friends there. When we arrived, all my friends came to say hi to us. They used to host dinner parties for us. I really enjoyed this time with her family and friends. We had a lot of adventures when we visited this place. We used to go to the rivers and spend the day there. During these trips my friends taught me how to ride a bike, and I fell a thousand times until I learned. I was happy with my Grannie wherever we went. I just enjoyed her presence and the love that we had for each other.

My Grannie always had something to teach me, something to make me laugh, something to stop my crying and something to eat because she loved to cook. When I got married, we used to call each other every day. I visited her often, and I didn't want to lose the relationship we had. When she got sick, I used to do her nails and give her a shower. I just wanted to support her in the same way she supported me. She was also the cleanest woman in the world to me.

I hope I can be somebody like her. I want to help and support anybody in my family, the way she did for me. I look back at the memories, and I think not only did she give me love, but she also showed me a lot of skills for life.

Jacqueline Matarrita Madrigal is a student at The Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

A Strong Mother

“A mother’s arms are more comforting than anything else.” - Princess Diana

My mom is the person I admire the most in the world because she is a loving but strong woman. Unfortunately, my father died early in my life, 3 months after my birth, leaving my mother suddenly alone to raise the family. Her life has been very difficult, as a single parent raising five children. Despite all the hardship, she never denied her responsibilities and always took care of her children, putting their needs first.

Despite the fact that she never had the opportunity to attend school, she provided for all her children’s education by herself. She did everything to give us a better education because she believes, “Education is the key to success.” This intelligent peasant woman made her success working hard cultivating her land to provide for her family. She always cared about us. I remember when she woke up early to prepare us breakfast, and after that went into the garden, always with a smile on her face, and full of energy. She never tired doing something when it came to the benefit of her children. She is an independent and powerful woman.

My mom is my role model, she teaches me how to cultivate my independence, and how to survive. She teaches me how to figure out how to take care myself, how to stand up for myself during confrontations and is always there for me. She always tells me, “Life is a struggle, don’t ever give up.”

My mom is a wonderful, loving woman. I want her to know that today she is my hero, I love her, and I admire her so much. I hope God gives her a long-life, so that we can stay together to

enjoy life because I want to give back to her as she deserves so much better.

I love you, my strong mom!

Altride Joseph, has been attending the ESOL Advanced class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida for one year. She is a dedicated student and takes her education very seriously. After improving her English skills, she plans to continue her career pathway to earn a master's degree in the field of sports medicine.

My Angel on Earth

For as long as I can remember, I always looked up to my mom. She has that sweet and soft yet strong and carrying presence. She's the kind of person who can make all your problems disappear just by hugging you and she's one of the most altruistic human beings I have ever met. Getting older has helped me highlight the reason why I admire her so much and why she's my favorite person on earth.

Living in a country where not all resources are available and affordable, you must work very hard to live well. Even though we were lucky enough to live in the capital, in one of the most developed cities, it wasn't easy. Growing up, I watched my parents working hard so I could have a better life. I also saw my mom sacrifice her first degree and change careers for my well-being, all so she could be here with me and for me.

Besides the fact that my school tuition was paid by my dad, Mama was the one who helped me with schoolwork and lessons. She was also the one that gave me this passion of learning, making sure that I'm thoroughly fulfilled by doing all she can to help me pursue my passion for dance.

I admire her not only for the fact that she has always been there for me but also for her adaptability and her ability to not be afraid to embark on new experiences and take risks. For nineteen years, I saw my mom obtain three other degrees; management, computer science, and cosmetology, go from working as a pharmacist to having her own pharmacy, and manage her own beauty salon, all at the same time.

To me, she is the definition of an independent woman. When she wants something, she works for it and pleases herself. For example, she has this habit of changing things around the house when dad isn't home, partly to surprise him, but also because she knows that he's going to say that she's wasting money. Yet as she always says, "you're the only person you are going to live with 24/7, so spoil yourself and be happy. We all live once."

My mom taught me patience, love, gratitude, recognition, and above all, appreciation for people. She taught how to stay strong and positive when times get tough, because "everything always gets better with time." She taught me to fight for my dreams, and that it's never too late to start a new path. If you really believe in it, anything is possible. Overall, she taught me how to be a human at its best.

Roberde Paul is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Favorite Literary Hero

My biggest dream was to visit London, the capital of Great Britain. I began to study English when I was a high school student in my native country. Studying a foreign language often encourages students to learn about the culture of the countries where it is spoken. And I was not an exception. After several years, I asked my teacher, "What books of British authors can I read?" She advised me to start with books by Conan Doyle. I was a teen, and his stories about detective Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson amazed me.

I loved these heroes as if they were real people. And it was not just me - Holmes' popularity and fame are so great that many people have believed him to be not a fictional character but a real person.

I watched several movies about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson with different actors. The British consider that the most successful presentation was by the Russian actor Vasiliy Livanov. I agree with them. The fictional address in the stories where Holmes lived in London is 221B Baker Street. It is one of the world's most famous addresses. Millions of Holmes' fans know it.

I wanted to visit London and Holmes' Museum. My dream came true in 2010. London is an amazing city! I saw all the famous buildings and, of course, Holmes' Museum. On the last day of the trip, I flipped a coin into the Thames River. I believe that I will go back there again.

Elena Ovsyannikova is a student at the Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Someone I Admire

Someone I admire is my dad, Elias Riera. He was a very simple man, with many problems that he knew how to overcome. Some of the things that he managed to do was overcome being separated from his parents from a very young age, prepare himself for the future, and encourage many teenagers to succeed in life.

He was separated from his parents and from his 14 brothers, because they were very poor. So, he was sent to live with an aunt when he was 8 years old. He prepared for the future and decided to study. His is a professional and a good person always. He dedicated his life to helping teenagers through education and teaching. He taught them to overcome circumstances and discover new opportunities in life.

At first, he studied during the day and worked at night. He helped his parents and his aunt, then he got a scholarship a degree in education. He married and formed a beautiful family He dedicated his life and love to them, above all things.

He was selected to go to study in the USA and was recognized as one of the best directors of the Ministry of Education. From the hand of God, he always thanked his work for helping others.

Later he became director of INAM, an educational center for adolescents with addictions and behavior problems. In a kind, natural and very spontaneous way, he won the hearts and respect of all the boys in the center. He taught them how important they were and the potential they held in their hands.

In conclusion, love for God and for yourself is the first thing you must work on to be successful. Second, you must set a goal and work every day with love and discipline. Third, be grateful, forgive and help others whenever you can. This will fulfill you as a person and you will be an example to live a beautiful life. I love you dad and thank you for everything.

Deily Riera is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Grandfather, Ramón García

Ramon Garcia is my grandfather whom I admire a lot because he is a warrior and a role model. Ramón married in 1973 and had 5 children over the years with his wife Elena. Ramon worked as a salesman in the Dominican Republic so that his children would not lack anything.

In 1980, his wife left for the USA to work while he stayed with the children, being mom and dad for them. In 1983, they left to the US to reunite and be together. In 1987, working in a construction site, Ramon fell from a 4th floor and broke his spine, leaving him disabled. However, this accident did not stop him. After he recovered a little in his wheelchair, he helped take care of his grandchildren and studied English.

In 2001, he graduated from English and today at 77 years of age after having been hospitalized many times, having had cerebral palsy, etc... he is much better and continues to be funny and see the positives in life.

Coraima Rosario is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Hector Vargas.

My Superhero is Real

Everybody has heard about superheroes. Most of the time when we were children our parents read to us about them. They have amazing stories that make us dream about these fantastic characters, their adventures, and feats. So, why is a parent going to want to tell this kind of story to their child? Well, these stories

inculcate values in our children, such as building confidence, instilling compassion, showing that anyone can change the world, etc. In my case, when I was a child, I looked for these values from a closer and more real source: my mother.

From the time I first became conscious, I have seen my mother do what everyone said she couldn't achieve. She is a short and thin woman, delicate as the petal of a rose, but at the same time strong and determined. When she was in high school, she decided to be an engineer, a mechanical engineer. Everybody said to her that this career wasn't for her, but she did it. When my grandfather passed away, life changed overnight. I was just 2 years old, and my mother got a divorce around the same time. She was able to be the head of my family (my grandmother, my cousin, and I) and supported us with her work. Despite all her obligations, my mother was by my side for every second of my childhood. She always made time to play, guide my steps, help me with homework, and give me love. I'm sure she has super-powers.

I like superhero stories, but indeed I like real-life superhero stories more. My mother has made me so independent that I can tackle all sorts of situations in my life. It's all because of my mother's teaching and guidance that helped me to become the woman that I am today. I admire her as an icon and inspiration to which I look up every day. I hope I will also be able to give the same upbringing to my children.

Yunet Leon Perez is a student at The Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.

My Father

This essay is based on my father's life, a man with courage, humility, intelligence, and perseverance. He achieved success and the admiration of many.

It was the year 1943, when my father at the age of barely 12 years had to leave his family home to move to the city of Barcelona, Venezuela. He left in search of a better future for him, his mom, and his brothers. Motivated by the sudden death of his father, and because he was the eldest son, he was forced at a very

early age to face the responsibility of carrying the burden of his family of 6. His mother had been very disturbed by the death of her husband.

Encouraged by his uncle, who had a small poultry farming business, my dad started working with him, and for more than 10 years he was acquiring knowledge and management of a poultry farm. When the time came, my father decided to become independent and start his own business, since he already had a little capital to invest. To continue helping his family, he transferred two of his brothers to Barcelona, and integrated them into his new adventure.

Over the years, my father, being a man with few studies, managed to have one of the largest poultry companies that existed in Venezuela. He always maintained perseverance and honesty in his work, as these were values instilled in him during his childhood.

Even without having studied any university career, my father was a very educated person. He liked to read and learn, to the point that he was elected Deputy to the Congress of Venezuela. He loved his country and the city that received him since he was a child. He wanted to improve the conditions of the State and running for that position was the only way his claims could be taken into consideration.

He remained active in his company for many years, until age no longer allowed him to continue working. He left my brothers in charge of the company. He died at the age of 87, leaving a great pain in my heart, because I could not enjoy being by his side during the last years of his life. That great man was Humberto Moya Meneses, my father.

I thank God for allowing me to have such a great man as my father. I admire him and I am proud because he instilled values in me such as respect, perseverance, humility and honesty. These values will remain for the rest of my life.

Delis Valerio is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Keep Going and Inspire Someone

Since I started living in the USA, I have met many interesting people that I admire. I haven't had a chance to meet enough people face-to-face because I'm little shy and their stories are so impressive. I feel like they can't understand how I was enjoying what they were sharing with me, because I was only able to answer them with nice comments. I often felt frustrated, because for some stories, it was difficult to express all my feelings correctly.

When I started to write this essay, I started thinking about each person I admire and I realized that I can't choose my preferred one, but I can share my impression about one. This person came from France to work in the dream land, but when he arrived in USA, he realized he quickly needed to learn how to survive in a big company with so many competitive people, who constantly boasted about themselves, without any shyness and humility. He felt alone and was ready to give up his nice job to go back to his country. However, he decided to try to look for someone to be his friend or love, and he found the right person. He had come to USA just to work, and sometime later he found love. Now, he has built his own family. He is still living in USA, working hard in the same company, and learning the new culture. His company even decided to offer him a green card, because he has a special talent for his job.

I'm grateful to all kinds of people I've met in the Unites States; people with different cultures, stories, languages, hair, ages, and beauty. Each of them has inspired me to be stronger, more hopeful and to believe in my dreams. For all the people that have crossed my life, I would like them to know - including you who is reading this essay - your story can inspire, help and be meaningful for someone else. Don't be shy about who you are, where you come from, or your accent. You can always make a difference someone's life, because what everybody is looking for is joy, happiness and peace - which your story can give.

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

My Hero

Someone I admire is my mother, Rosemary. She was a kind and ambitious person. She taught me and my brother how to run things around the house and how to take care of ourselves.

I admire my mother because she was a person who understood my needs, goals, and life situations. She was inspirational because she taught me and my brother, Jason, how to cook and do things. Sometimes I didn't have any money, and she helped me by providing me with benefits to go to school and work. Thank God for my mother, Rosemary.

I also admire my mother for her incredible skills as a mother and a hard worker. My mother worked hard every day to supply for her children. Her positive attitude towards life kept the family together.

Unfortunately, due to health reasons, I recently lost my mom on July 10, 2021. She will always be in my heart, and I will never forget the life lessons she has taught me.

Corretta Woodstock is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Ines Sosa.

Someone I Admire

The person I admire is Martin Luther King, Jr. He was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929, and he passed away in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968. When he was born, his name was Michael King, Jr.

He dedicated a large part of his life to the fight for equality and the recognition of the human rights of the black population in the United States. He promoted the uprising against segregation, especially in buses, schools, and universities. He organized and carried out various peaceful demonstrations, non-discrimination, and other civil rights from the city of Selma, Alabama.

King was a theologian and consecrated pastor of the Baptist Church. He was jailed in 1962 in Georgia for leading an anti-racism demonstration and released in 1963 after paying a heavy

fine. In that same year he led a march in Washington for labor and freedom in which he delivered his prophetic speech, "I have a dream" that qualified him as one of the greatest speakers in history.

On October 14, 1964, at only 35 years old, he received the Nobel Peace Prize (he is currently the youngest person to receive this distinction). After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, King continued his fight for the equality of the black race until on April 4, 1968, he was assassinated in a Memphis motel by James Earl Ray.

The legacy of Martin Luther King inspires immigrants, and especially young "dreamers" to continue the fight for their rights at a time when they claim to feel "attacked" by segregationist policies, just as he did in the 1960s.

I admire Martin Luther King for his non-violent fight for the rights of African Americans and for trying to end racial segregation in the country. I also admire him, because he had a dream and put all his efforts to make it come true,

Iraida Carrica is a student at ACE of Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

Personal Stories

Opportunities and Limitations

My name is Adriana Rodriguez. I am from Bogota, Colombia. I lived there for 41 years. I am now 43 years old. I have 3 kids, 3 grandchildren and 5 sisters, all of them are together with my parents in Colombia. I arrived in this country 2 years ago. I moved to this country to get new opportunities. In my country I dedicated myself to selling mass consumer products for a company named Nutresa. I worked there for 15 years.

When I moved to this country, I realized all the opportunities that there were and also all that I had to face. I still feel that I have many opportunities, but I am also aware of my limitations. At this moment I work for a food producing company and sell Obamacare insurance. I got married again more than a month ago. He does not speak Spanish but that has not been an impediment for me.

I am deeply grateful to Lorraine, who has been the person who has been in my learning process. It has been she who, with her patience and dedication, has helped me achieve what little I know at this time. I only have words of gratitude since I consider that in such a short time I have managed to advance in this country, and it is thanks to the help of Lorraine.

Adriana Rodriguez is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Lorraine Ledford.

What is My Great Inspiration?

The engine that drives me now is my daughter and her children, my four beloved grandchildren. I have lived alone in my apartment for about 9 years after my husband died. One day, I received a call from my daughter who I had not heard from for about 11 years. It was a surprise for me. She tells me to help me mom, and she starts crying and telling me about the suffering she was going through. She tells me that she lives in Ecuador, that the father of her three youngest children has taken them for ten

days and that she cannot find them. At that time, the baby was three years old, the girl seven, and the other nine years old. They could be in Peru, Chile, Brazil, countries that they traveled previously and she tells me a little about what she has endured.

At that time I had a trip to New York planned with my best friend. Of course I couldn't go through with my plans. I met my daughter in Ecuador and I took care of Brayan, my eldest grandson, who by then was going to be 15 years old. Then we went looking for the children everywhere where she thought they would be. I knew many parts of Ecuador, we looked in Peru. We arrived in Chile by bus, and for each country we passed, we left photos and went to the Colombian embassy of each country, but no one gave us a reason. We spent about three months on that journey looking everywhere, but we did not find a trace of them.

In Colombia, we informed the authorities. After a year, the authorities found them, the government took the children for another year, the whole family was suffering and helping, and the father of the children was in prison. Now, they are very judicious, they are studying and my greatest wish is for them to be great professionally. I help them as much as I can.

I did not know them! On June 25 of this year, I traveled to Colombia and I was welcomed by three beautiful little people! My grandchildren! What emotion, what joy!

Now I am inspired by them, they are the engine that moves me in this life to move forward and set a good example.

Auramaria Gonzalez is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Kathie Arlaud.

Undoubtedly Priceless

It all started when I was 20 years old. I was very anxious and a little nervous because I was going to have my first baby. It was a day that I will never forget because I was going to meet my baby since I had only seen him in dreams. My whole pregnancy was a bit complicated and at the time of giving birth it was by cesarean section. Though it was very risky, I was not worried about that. I just wanted my baby to be fine.

A new stage in my life had just begun and I never regretted it. At the moment that I held my baby in my arms and saw how small and fragile he was, I felt very scared. I was worried and thought that I wouldn't take good care of him since this is my first baby. I didn't even know how to clean or bathe him. There were many things that I felt that I started to cry. Although my mother was with me, I felt trapped in my thoughts.

The first night as a mother was a high point of my life. It is surely one of the episodes that I will remember forever. I had finished feeding my baby and he cried a lot. I felt like I was the worst mother since I did not know what to do. I took my baby and put him on my chest. Surprisingly, my baby stopped crying and he looked at me with those little eyes full of tears. I felt that he just needed to feel my warmth. It was magical. What I felt was a true mother-son connection. I think that only those of us who feel true love for someone can understand it.

That same night I felt the need to always protect him. Although time has passed by, I still see him the same way. My feelings have not changed and I hope they never will. My baby's love for me is the most sincere thing I have ever experienced in my entire life. Of course, I know that my mother loves me because I am her daughter. But to know and really feel that someone loves you like that from my baby, it is something that is certainly priceless.

My son is my strength to meet my goals. He encourages me to be a better mother every day. I want him to feel proud of me. I always want to give him the best. My son is now five years old. He is very smart and I am very proud of him. I hope to always be there for him. Whenever he needs me I will always be there regardless of the conditions, because he changed my life.

Aniuska Talavara attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Free as Birds

I was raised by my father and his wife. When they separated, I felt like I was being pulled to the left and the right. It got too messy and I was given the option to move in with my biological

mom. That move led me to have freedom, but it wasn't the type of freedom that I needed. I got with the wrong crowd.

I started skipping school. I quit school. I realized that the type of freedom and guidance that I had prior to moving in with my biological mother was the actual amount of support that I needed all along, like the amount of freedom that a bird has, like the decorative birds on the wall at my grandmother's house. My grandmother always told me the birds remind her of being free.

As an adult with a lot of responsibility, I realize that not having an education means I'm not free to do too much. I look at life like I don't have enough. I don't feel as free. To me, freedom pertaining to the birds symbolizes independence. Birds have the ability to get up and fly whenever they want without being told when to. The possibilities of their lives are not limited.

My grandmother gave me the same set of birds before she passed away. I took the birds and I decorated my house. No matter what, if you put your mind to it, you can fly high like a bird. The birds remind me of perseverance and growth.

Antoinique Jackson is a student from Literacy Alliance of Northeastern Florida in Jacksonville. Her teacher is Elizabeth Lawrence.

The Adventure of Everilda's Life

I was born in a small town on a riverbank in Magangue, Colombia. I have seven siblings, four brothers and three sisters. I am the third child; one brother and one sister are older than I am. My father was a farmer. He had two farms with a large herd of more than 100 cattle, as well as horses, donkeys, cows, chickens, and ducks. He had orchards of mangos, plantains, cacao, avocado, guava, yucca, guanabana, oranges, and lemons. My brothers and I went to the farm for vacation. The farm had a beautiful waterfall, and we took a shower every morning there.

My father lived with us in the town and travelled every week to the farm. All my family moved to the big city of Barranquilla in search of opportunities when I was 17. I attended Universidad Autónoma del Caribe. There, I studied accounting and hotel

administration and I received degrees in both fields. I worked as a secretary, and at some jobs in hotels like supervisor of hotel cleaning staff, cashier, and finally assistant manager.

I met my ex-husband at the university. He was studying accounting too. We got married and I had my daughter, who is the greatest gift that God has given me. When she was one year old, I divorced my husband and, almost at the same time, I lost my good job.

I worked in my brother's company as an office administrator. The company was a small rattan furniture factory. It wasn't easy until my daughter graduated from high school and went to study in Germany. That and the death of my mother made me very sad. My mother's death was hard for me because I cared for her. I missed both of them a lot.

I decided to travel to the United States to work due to the few job opportunities in my country. Here, I met Frank at a barbecue at my friend Diana's house. I didn't want to talk to him because I didn't understand him. But he said, "No problem. Someday we can understand. The more important is the love." Three months after I met him, I had to fly to Colombia, but he said to me, "I want to marry you." I came back to the United States after three months in Colombia. In one month, Frank said to me again that he wanted to marry me. We got married in November 2019.

I applied for my green card, and I am awaiting approval. Upon my arrival in Florida, I began to study English at Literacy Services, which, in addition to learning a little, has given me the opportunity to meet such special people as Elida, Maria, Donna, Joane, and Faye, who have been like angels for me. I volunteer in the Fellsmere Office, and I am a member of the student committee. I aspire one day to speak and understand English very well and be the student of the year. I would also like to have a good job and have my green card as soon as possible.

I like the United States because there are job opportunities for older people. I am happy to see a lot of older people working in many places where I go. In my home country, people cannot find jobs when they are over 35 years old. There are not as many opportunities to work as there are here. I see older people do a lot of activities such as tutoring and volunteering in this country.

It is hard in my home country when the people are pensioners because they don't have more to do.

Everlida Guerra is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Faye Sheppard.

With God All Things Are Possible

I'm Cuban and when I was twenty five years old I flew to Ecuador and lived there for nine months. Later my husband and I decided to come to the U.S. We traveled through eight countries to get here but we finally arrived. We were starting a new beginning. This was especially true because I arrived here 7 months pregnant.

I was scared when I arrived. It was not only our first child but also our new country. Except for my husband, I felt alone without knowing a word of English or how to drive. I was here without the support of family. However I was happy that my daughter was born in this country, because in Cuba there is no chance to have a better life. In the U.S., we can all have a better life as long as we make an effort.

I also understand that life in the U.S. is lonelier. You have to learn most things by yourself, but at the same time, you learn things that you would never have imagined doing. For example, I have had to learn to repair the plumbing in my house, install tile, repair the walls, etc. I have learned another language and visited new places. If I still lived in Cuba, I would not have had the opportunity to visit Niagara Falls.

When my second daughter was born, I thought it would be much more difficult for me with two little girls. I admit it was difficult, but this country gave me lots of help and made me feel secure. My husband found an excellent job giving us the opportunity to excel and fulfill our dreams. With the blessings of GOD we will continue forward.

Every new beginning is difficult. We will always feel a little afraid when we try something new, but the most important thing in our lives is to live with GOD because nothing is impossible with Him.

Yenisey Acosta is from Cuba, she a student in Adult Education ESOL at S.F.S.C in Avon Park, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Denise Miriani.

How Did I Get Into Adult Education?

My decision of why I stopped teaching pre-kindergarten and became a college professor was due to various factors. Initially, Mrs. La Torre, the principal of the school La Alborada, in Lima-Peru, with whom I had been working for seven years, told me that she saw great potential in me and she advised me that I could grow in my area of work. She said that the school was very grateful and that they would miss me for all the knowledge and love that I have given and shared to the children over time. However, I realized that I would be able to increase and improve in other areas of education.

I define myself as a person who likes to accept challenges in life, and achieve more experiences in life. Through many years of hard work and dedication in my field of education, I was able to teach at the universities like Instituto Pedagógico Nacional Montterrico and Universidad Católica Sedes Sapientiae in Lima Peru.

After that, I managed to work for thirteen years in the Ministry of Education of Peru, my country.

I wanted to advance professionally in my teaching career, but I had fears and insecurities that prevented me from moving forward. However, with resilience, I started studying again, improving other skills to become a great teacher for adults in college. So, I started teaching at the University, and it was an incredible personal and professional feeling. I discovered skills that I had never put into practice before and thanks to all this, I like being able to share my knowledge and strengthen the capacities of others in adult education.

In other words, today I can say that moving to adult education was due to the advice of the principal of the school where I worked, my pleasure in always accepting and achieving new challenges throughout life and my desire to move forward professionally in my teaching career.

Blanca Fiascunari is a student at Palm Beach Central ACE. Her teacher is Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Way it Was from My Own Experience

In the 1960s I lived in Gifford and had to go to Vero to see the doctor. We couldn't share the front door with the white people. We had to go around the building to the back door. We waited in a separate waiting room and had to wait for hours to see the doctor.

We were able to take our kids to the playground downtown but there were separate water fountains. We were able to go to the grocery store, but we had to be back in Gifford by six o'clock for the curfew.

We were not permitted to sit down and eat in a restaurant. If you wanted food to go you had to order from the back of the restaurant. We didn't do this, as we cooked our own food at home.

Before integration, black children went to school in Gifford. The teachers were very dedicated and kind. They worked hard to make sure the students got a good education. It wasn't easy because the teachers had to make do. They got leftover books or old editions from Vero schools. The teachers had a good relationship with parents.

Gifford High School, 1963. The teachers in the integrated school treated the black students differently than the white kids. They didn't have the patience and I was able to observe this. There was not a free kindergarten, and I wanted my child to be prepared for first grade, so I had to pay for it. The kids who didn't have kindergarten struggled in the first grade.

Before integration in Vero in 1968 I knew the system wasn't right or fair, but I had no other choice. We have come a long way from the early 60s. A lot of doors have opened for minorities but as those doors opened there is a fork in the road where things seemed to be going backward again. Life is better for my kids than for me, and I have hope for my grandchildren that the

future will be better for them, but they will always have to be on their guard.

– *Anonymous Author*

Sisters

This story is about having sisters. I have two dear sisters. Our childhood fights were always over dolls. I had a few dolls with bobbed hair and eyes drawn with pens. When the fuss was more serious after a big argument, our mother used to say, “I want you to hold each other for thirty minutes”. Or when we fought over a cake, she would have one of us cut the cake and the others would choose their pieces. We shared the same room and also the closet. This made us experience and share countless special moments.

We were also very close to our grandmother. She was as sweet and caring as all grandmothers should be. In my country, people say that grandmothers are made of sugar. She told us many stories about her birthplace of Tras-os-Montes in Portugal and about what primitive life was like there. She said that they washed the clothes in the river.

As teenagers, we shared secrets and were always ready to defend each other. Today we are adults, and we are still very close. We go through difficult times and inexplicable situations, but a long hug always means “I’m here for you”. Sitting on the couch and remembering fun times, fights and hugs given by our mother makes us even closer. I hope we will stay like that for the rest of our lives.

Rosnette Mattos Badaro is a student with Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Prayer For A Princess House

My name is Pilar, I am Peruvian, and I am an immigrant. I have been in United States for four years. I am really here for my daughter. I think she will have more opportunities here than in Peru.

I am a single mom, I was an accountant in Peru, but I couldn't afford the expenses. Each year was worse than the last. I had so much stress that I became sick. When I felt better, I decided to go to the United States. It was the most difficult decision in my life. I was afraid. I knew I probably would not work in my career field, and I would have to start at zero. I know that my situation is not unique. I thought to myself, *Here we go.*

I began to sell all of my possessions. What I could not sell, I donated. Each of my family and friends received a random appliance that I was unable to sell. Each possession was difficult to buy, now I had to sell them. It was difficult for me, but I decided to begin a new life with my daughter.

I didn't know how to explain to a seven-year-old girl why her mommy was giving her toys to other kids. She was crying, she didn't understand. I told her, "If you give your toys to other kids, I am sure God will give you better things." No matter what I said, she was sad, especially when I donated her little princess castle. I told her, "Remember! God will have many things for you." I said to myself, *Please God, help me!*

I prepared her birthday picnic before we left for the U.S., but I asked each guest not to give her a gift of a toy, but to give a tip instead, if they wished. I tried to prepare her for not getting any toys at her party. She couldn't understand why her mommy would do that to her. I broke her heart. Every little girl wants toys... always. She was happy at her birthday picnic. I was surprised because her friend's parents gave to her more than 100 dollars. I wondered why I didn't just ask for cash before. This was the last day she spent with her friends. It was a very sad good-bye.

My siblings took us to the airport. My sister promised that she wouldn't cry, but she lied. I couldn't cry, I had to be strong for my daughter. We are lucky because my parents live in the USA. They helped us get used to life here. Since we arrived here, our experiences have been good for the most part. We received help from wonderful people that I hadn't even met.

I will never forget during our first week here, a neighbor told me that she had a present for my daughter. She delivered her the biggest princess castle that you could ever imagine. It was taller

than my daughter. When we saw it, we were in shock. My daughter said to me, "Mom! You are right! God gave me that." I replied, "Yes, he did," and said to myself, *Thank you God!*

– *Anonymous Author*

From Darkness to an Ember of Hope

A lot of people never realize how blessed they are to be a part of a family that is guided with love, safety and security; that even in times of struggle always lie a foundation of love and support. I mention this because a lot of us aren't so lucky. We never felt the warmth of a loving mother or sustain guidance of a caring father. My name is Brittany, I'm 28 and am currently incarcerated for the next 10 years. This is my story of survival from the darkness. An ember of hope growing in the distance for my future.

I was born and raised in Punta Gorda, FL, a small town off the major highway. I took residence in a two bedroom, single wide trailer. My family consisted of my father, mother and older brother. My mother worked day and night trying to support us. When she wasn't working, I never felt I existed due to her favoritism to my brother. My father was an abusive alcoholic, when he wasn't laying hands on my brother, I was the one receiving the wrath. My earliest memory of abuse was age receiving his wrath. My earliest memory of abuse was the age of three, I tried to protect my brother only to have my father grab my hair and throw me into a glass cabinet. The scar above my eye is still present as a surreal memory. My brother was someone I looked up to until I reached age five. For the next four years he molested me and forced me to do unspeakable things. I gained enough courage to confront my parents who were upset at first. The next day arose as if the conversation never happened.

School was a safe haven and a type of escape but even that turned bitter. I began to be bullied. So I started skipping classes which made me fall behind and led me to be placed in a second chance school. I continued to spiral, choosing to get involved with the wrong crowd. By 16 I was addicted to pills hoping I would OD. I then met Kenny who was 26 and selling drugs. I thought I was in love with him and later decided to drop out of school to start a family of my own. For the next 10 years I en-

dured mental, emotional and physical abuse. He tried to kill me three times during which we had 5 young children, and one day tragedy struck and now here I sit in prison. It was my incarceration that saved me. I have met the most amazing women, that gave me the support I needed to love myself. I have since obtained my GED and am now enrolled in college to become an author. They have given me strength to stand from within the darkness and walk out of this fence to embrace freedom and true happiness for the first time.

Ms. Brittaney Williams is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, where she obtained her GED three months into her stay. Her hometown is Punta Gorda, Florida.

We Adults

The challenge we adults have when entering school to learn any trade is that we must overcome our own social limits that Latinos carry. These limits are imposed by our family, our children and our own beliefs, which determine what we can or cannot do, and we have believed it.

We find in this culture the opportunity to reach our dreams and reinvent ourselves as human beings. How many of us believe in yourselves? How many people wonder why we hadn't done this before? It is a pleasure to measure our limits without fear of being wrong and without fear of starting over because we will never be the same. It feels like being a little child learning to ride a bicycle, with the emotion of knowing that we can and that we are capable. I challenge you to be emotional and throw away the fear of speaking unclearly like when we were children, but with the hope of being understood by many more.

Take your bike and if you fall, even better, because you will get up stronger than ever. We must insist, resist, and persist.

Clara Ines Rios Mariaca attends East Area Adult School in Auburndale, FL. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.

Life Inspired

My name is Juan Gabriel Calderón. I was born in Cordoba, Argentina. I am 28 years old. Since I was a child, I always believed that life is an adventure with incredible things and unique opportunities. The road was a little difficult for social acceptance. I could not understand why the world can be a cruel place. As I grew up into adulthood, things are were difficult and a little dark in my case, but there was always that light at the end of the tunnel. This made me reconsider what was right or wrong.

I had the intuition that I was going to migrate like the birds: inhabiting new places, the adventure of the unknown, and the fear of the new. I have gained strength by being away from my home town and moving to another country, having to learn another language, and embracing another culture. They have helped me to discover somewhere in any part of the world I will never be alone. I see someone fighting for my own harmony and I am grateful to be where I am telling and writing my life story.

Learning from mistakes will strengthen me. I know that I have a long way to go and life will teach me to be better than I was yesterday. My favorite life quote is “Resist with your feet on the ground, and your eyes looking at the sky, knowing and discovering that the control of your life is in your actions and showing that we can be a little better than we were yesterday”. I never stopped. I cried no more power but there was always that voice that would not stop ringing in my head.

I have tried with so many keys and I just wanted to give up. But I didn't because I also have dreams and goals. Now, my life is happy. I met love, I found this person who gives everything to me. I want to be with him for a lifetime. Thank you Kilian for taking me to the stars and showing me a true sincere love and making my days full of adventures. My life is a puzzle that is being put together every day until I complete all the pieces with love, pain, anger, and desire. I am a human being. I will never be perfect, but I can be happy.

Juan Calderon attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Felt Like a Hero

I clipped my ski boots into bindings, tightened the last buckle on them, grabbed my poles as I had done it a million times before, and I started to move down the mountain, this time very, very slowly. There were not many people on the slope despite the sunny but frosty day. Suddenly, the snow rustled. Oh no, somebody was close behind me. Panic started to overtake me and tears trickled down my face. I stopped skiing immediately and turned around. It was my husband. "Do not worry, you can do it," he said, seeing fear in my eyes. "You can do it," he repeated.

That moment had brought my memories back. The same place on the same day one year ago; even the weather was the same. Our friends and my family took advantage of the last day of winter break, and we went skiing. We spent a really great day together joking and laughing in a gondola and enjoying sliding down the slope. Actually, it was our last ride that day. As always, I was the slowest of our bunch. I was enjoying the ride downhill a half empty slope, curving the turns from left to right. I was in seventh heaven! I love skiing very much; it has been a part of me since my childhood. I like the excitement and the sense of freedom.

My skis are gliding through powder snow; a child is passing me on my right fast, very fast. When the child is approximately two meters in front of me, he turns to his left directly in my way. "Don't do it!" I want to scream. Too late. Our skis cross. I do not want to hurt the child, so I am falling on my right side on purpose to not bump into him. I hit my head against snow. Crack! Whack! My first thought is, Thank goodness I am wearing my helmet. The child does not even stop and keeps gliding downhill. I am trying to stand up leaning on my right arm. I can't do it, there is no power in my arm. I try it again and again without success. Somebody stops by me and helps me to stand up. Ouch! Strong pain is expanding from my shoulder to fingers. I can hardly move. This pain is getting stronger and stronger. However, I ride downhill by myself.

I ended up in hospital with 13 metal nails and screws in my right shoulder after a long and complicated surgery. The joint and the bone were broken into many pieces. Unfortunately, I won't be able to move my arm and lift it up as before; it is a permanent injury.

Today, exactly one year after that accident, I am standing on skis again. With tears in my eyes, I can hear that cracking sound, I can feel that pain again. And I know if not today, then never. What is stronger – my passion or my fear? Then I hear my husband shout, “You can do it!” I start moving. Slowly. Very slowly. First curve, then next one, after that another. I am getting faster and faster. I can hardly see through the tears that I am at the end of the slope. This time, these are tears of joy. I am proud of myself for overcoming my fear. And I know that skiing will be a part of my life forever.

Jana Bednarcikova attends Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Family

I love my family despite the differences. Everybody has his or her own values. My parents always watch over our happiness; they mean everything to us. The most important person in my life, however, is my son Sami!

When Sami was born, I felt my life change completely for good. With him, I learn every day. He is the principal reason why I work hard to learn English and take care of my health.

Sam and I always enjoy our time together. The things that we both like to do together are, going to the beach to see the sunset, watching movies, doing exercise, eating ice cream looking at the ocean, talking, travel together, and so on. Together we have been learning how to take care of each other. Samuel is the most beautiful thing that happened to me.

Claudia Bernal is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Iguna Ozols.

Adios Oaxaca

When I left Mexico, my dream was to arrive safely in the United States. I knew it was no easy thing to accomplish.

I left Oaxaca promising my mother that I would only be in the US for three years and would return home to continue studying. I told my mother this story because I knew she was very sad at the thought of my leaving home. I must admit, I was sad too. As you can probably guess, I could not fulfill that promise to my mom.

Fourteen years have passed, and because I cannot travel freely back to Mexico, I hope and pray to see her soon. At the same time, I am so happy to be here in the US, where I started working in a restaurant as a chef. Being here has afforded me the chance to learn to cook different cuisines such as hibachi and sushi.

Thanks to my work opportunities, I was able to send my sister to nursing school, and she graduated as a nurse in Mexico. I have also been able to build a house for my mother. Like many people who immigrate to the US, I send money to her for her expenses. I remember how hard my mother worked to raise my brother and me, I'm so happy that I am able to give her something in return.

– *Anonymous Author*

My Life

My life has been a roller coaster for the past nine months. I went from feeling like I had my family complete to feeling like a failure and battling depression. Finally, I was able to find myself again.

I was in a thirteen-year relationship with my high school sweetheart. We have three beautiful children together and four birds. I've felt complete within but in June all that went crashing down when we separated.

After I realized that it was really over between us, I experienced depression for the first time in my life. I remember crying every day asking myself why. Day by day it would worsen. I wouldn't eat or sleep and I would lock myself in my room with the lights off! I had started to shut my kids out because I felt that I had failed them. A month and a half went by when I decided to seek professional help. It was the best decision I had made!

Finally, after going through this rough patch in my life, I found “Deisy” all over again. In September, I had enrolled in a phlebotomy course and in October I was blessed with a job offer at Metro by T-Mobile when I went there to purchase a phone. I was unemployed for six years, being a stay-at-home mom and a housewife. I couldn’t be any happier with my achievements, though it’s not the end but the beginning of my new journey!

I’ve come to accept that it is okay to be a single parent and still be happy with yourself! Sometimes we have to go through tough times to realize how strong we really are. God wouldn’t give you battles he knew you couldn’t win!

Deisy Salazar is a student at West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

A Lonely Life

My name is Jacquenel Durosier, and I was born on October 30,1979, in a small town located on the northeast coast of Haiti. Haiti is a black country located in the Caribbean and the Greater

Antilles. Its capital is Port-au-Prince. Its official languages are Creole and French.

I studied ‘Economics Sciences at the State University of Haiti for a period of four years. Two years later, more precisely in 2008, I was registered with the National Police as an officer after spending nine months in training sessions at the National Academy in the capital.

I am married to Philomene Etienne; she is a jurist by profession. We are the parents of two little boys who were born in the United States in 2016 and 2018.

Today is one of the best moments in my life to explain my story through my writings at Clearview Adult Education Center in the United States. I grew up in a very small and modest family. I did not have any brothers or sisters. My father was a farmer, and my mother was a trader. Whenever they went out, they always left me alone at home with restrictions which meant I was not allowed to go and play with the other children in the neighbor-

hood. Because of this, I really experienced a difficult childhood. If, by any chance, my father noticed that I was leaving the house during his absence, he would punish me severely. My mom was always by my side and wanted me to play with the children at certain times, but because of my father, she was obliged to maintain the situation as my father wanted it. Growing up in this way, I realized that my life was different from other children in my area because I was living a very restricted life.

So, my life has changed a little bit at the moment. I had to leave my area and go to a university in another city. My parents were the ones who controlled my life like a jailer who watched prisoners. I'm not saying my rights were really being violated because they wanted my life to be righteous, and I had to be different from other children in the community. Even though today I have become a parent like they are, they want to believe that I am still the same child from the old days.

Jacquenel Durosier is a student in Inguna Ozols's class at Clearview Adult Education Center.

The Right Decision: LOVE

Everything started two months before I moved to the United States, August 2021. I was in Buenos Aires, Argentina. My family had already moved, and I stayed in my country because I had things to do. My mind was in the United States too, getting things ready for the new life in a different country, practicing English, seeing people I wasn't going to see for a long time, etc.

One day I decided to see a girl that I had known when I was 10 years old. I hadn't seen that girl in years, but I had her Instagram and number; we were connected. So I sent her a message saying let's meet. She said yes, and we started to organize the meeting. I always liked her, but in two months I was going to another country for a year! I was convinced that I was not going to fall in love... Yes, I got confused. The days were passing, and we were doing all the things together. Before we knew it, we had already fallen in love.

The moment that no one expected would come. My plane would leave in a week, and there was a lot to talk about it. Be-

tween tears and hugs, we were saying all the truth, all the things that had been happening to us. “I never felt like this.” “I don’t want to lose you for a year.” “Why not try?” We decided to try it. We passed the fear, the doubts, the vertigo, and we jumped into the void, not knowing what was going to happen, but neither of us wanted to stay with the intrigue. Today I can tell you that I didn’t know what love was before this happened. I realized that love is capable of achieving anything, and the motivational feeling that being in love gives you, and doing things to see the other person happy, does not give you anything.

The end of this story is that we are still the same or more in love than the first day. After five months without seeing each other, regardless of the distance, we feel closer than ever. She is coming shortly to visit me after a long time, and when this distant year ends, we will plan what remains for us. Never let anything stop you from fulfilling your wishes, and never let anything stop you from growing. A phrase that helped me a lot to make this decision was, “Making the right decision can also make us cry.”

Eugenio Tanferna is from Argentina. He’s a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

No Regrets

I am from Argentina. At the age of 18, I became independent and began to work with the Argentina government as an assistant of ceremonial and protocol of the Ministry of Culture of the Nation. I got to travel, went to different countries, learned various cultures, and met many people. When I had free time I would get on a plane.

One of my favorite destinations has always been Miami, Florida because of the parties, the weather, and especially my friends. Miami always made me feel at home. One day I woke up in my country and the dollar dropped by 65% which meant that my earning was less. That same day I bought my ticket and told my parents that in 10 days I needed to fly to Miami again. It was not very pleasant news for my family, but they always supported me in my decisions.

I sold and gave away my belongings and 10 days later that was how I started a new life from ground zero. When I arrived in Miami, I was super nervous to go through immigration checkpoint. At work I had taken 54 days of vacation that I had in my favor in case I regretted it and wanted to return to Argentina but I was sure that was not going to happen. After I left the airport, I called my best friend in Miami and told him that I was at the airport and I needed to stay with him for a while until I got my apartment. I lived with my friend for two months. My workplace was 35 blocks from my house. In the store, I took care of everything: cleaning, preparing food, ordering, closing, and the cash register. They paid me very little.

After work I had to run to the bus stop so as not to miss it, otherwise I had to wait for 45 minutes to catch the next one. If I took Uber I had to spend two hours' worth of work. Sometimes while I was waiting for the bus I wanted to cry because I missed my life in Argentina. There, I had a chauffeur. My previous job treated me like a VIP. It was a hard change but I was always positive and I think that better things will come soon. In January I moved and met the owner of the apartment. She told me that I was very pretty and I could make a lot of money at her work place. And that is how I got to know Key West.

Daniela Toscano attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Three Generations of Family

I like to cook dinner for my family. I like to make tacos for them. We like to have dinner together every night. I like to play games with my children, too. We play ping pong and I like to go to the beach with them. Friday is a day for the movies.

I am from Colima, Mexico. My husband and I have lived here for eighteen years. My parents visited in March 2020 for two weeks. Because of COVID, they stayed four months. My children liked that and were sad when they went home. So, this year in June, they went to Mexico to stay with our parents for two weeks. Now, we can talk about Mexico together at dinner.

Elvia Gutierrez is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Chris Cram.

Starting Over in America

Growing up in a small town in the Dominican Republic meant that my life would be very predictable. I went to my local high school, and then to college outside of town. After college, I returned home to work in the family business. My dad was a technician, so I became one too. I had to start from the bottom in my family business.

It was hard because I had a more advanced vision than my father. I had the degree, but was missing the experience. It took me several years to establish my own voice in the business. Life continued, I fell in love and established my family. Small changes occurred, but basically things remained the same, until we decided to begin the long process to move to the United States.

It took years to get approved, but when the time came, I felt shocked. I would say goodbye to the town I grew up in, and to my whole life as I knew it. Unfortunately, I had to close the family business. It was sad because as I started to pack, it was like packing parts of my life into boxes. I worried because all my life I worked in my family business. How was I going to lead my family in a new country? How was I going to obtain a job apart from what I knew? The last months in my country passed very fast.

In July of 2019, I started over in the United States, with my head full of ideas and uncertainties. We spent the first month as an adventure and vacation but my head was focused on one thing - obtaining a job. As the head of the family, I was willing to work in anything to provide for my family. My first job was working in a store, organizing items, and accommodating boxes. When I least expected it, another door opened with a job in a hotel with better salary and working conditions. At first it was very hard. One of my struggles was the language, but that didn't stop me because I was determined. Working with new people was another struggle because I used to work with relatives, but now with strangers.

As the time passed everything became easier. We took English classes at Learn to Read. Even though my English wasn't perfect, I just made myself talk and my English improved every day little by little. Now I'm ready for the next door to open. One thing I learned from leaving my hometown is that nothing grows in the comfort zone. I am ready for the next challenge. I know that I will succeed in this country because I am not alone. I have God with me and my family. Every day is a new opportunity to grow as a person and that's what I'm doing.

Jose Rafael Estrella is a student at Learn to Read St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

My Life Story

I remember when my mom passed away, it was very difficult for me because my mom was everything to me. She was my friend and she was the best mother. I can't ever, ever forget her. When she passed away, I felt lost and destroyed. I said, what can

I become without my mother, because I put all my trust in my mom.

I was eighteen years old; I was at school, and I didn't know what I could do because I didn't have anybody to help. It was terrible for me. I have three sisters and three brothers. I passed all my life in the private school. My mother always made us happy and comfortable. When I was with my mother, I felt comfortable and safe.

One day, I woke up in the morning and sat down in a chair. I asked myself some questions. I said, "What can I do without my mother?" Where should I go with my life? For I thought all was done. I really wanted to die because without my mom, my life was meaningless. I didn't want to live. I cried every single day. I didn't want to talk to anybody. One year passed and I didn't do anything positive by myself. One day, I woke up and I asked God to tell me what I could do with myself. I know my mother died, but I was still alive. I had not died! I really wanted to do something positive with myself, I had a dream to become a nurse, but I had to go back to school, finish school, and go to the university.

When I was in my second year at the university, I met my first love. He was in the fifth year of medical university in Cuba. I fell in love. When he finished studying, he came back to Haiti so that he could work for the Haitian State. When I came back to Haiti after three months, he didn't love me anymore, because his parents told him I was too poor for him. He left me alone, and I felt lost again. I didn't know where I was. I cried every day, but I was still going to the university. Perhaps I wanted to change my life despite everything. I wanted to continue my way. After two years I graduated in nursing, and then after three months I had a better job in the ministries of the government in Haiti. I could help myself and help my family.

Finally, I finished by realizing that nobody could make me happy, only Jesus and me can give joy, because my happiness does not come from my husband, it does not come from my family, and it does not come from my friends, either. But my happiness comes from Jesus. I advise us to never believe or depend on anybody, just believe in Jesus. After that, believe in yourself and never, ever give up on your dreams. If you feel down, wake up and follow your dream.

Gerline Eugene attends East Area Adult School in Auburndale, FL. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.

Luigi's Adventure

My life felt ordinary until a journey changed everything completely. I had dreamt of living abroad since I was little, feeling like the world was enormous and I was trapped on an island, the Dominican Republic. Thoughts of traveling the world, meeting new people, and learning about other cultures excited me. This dream was never lost, it was in the making.

My family began the immigration process when I was 4, and I spent my childhood thinking I would soon leave. At the end of every school year, I'd say "I probably won't be back next year - I'll be leaving soon." Then when school began again I'd say, "Well not yet, but soon!" By end of my sophomore year, I gave up and was involved with life. Little did I know that the immigration process was finally done and this was shocking. On one hand, my dream finally came true, but I really liked my life there. It was

very hard to say goodbye, but I was soon filled with hope, faith, and a sense of adventure.

We left on July 4th, 2019 and I was both excited and scared. Being in a new country for the first time is an incredible feeling. We spent the first month as tourists, visiting New York and other fun places. Vacation came to an end as we faced the reality of getting jobs, looking for schools and housing. We moved to Florida. When we arrived, we noticed big differences. People here were nicer, but everyone spoke English. That wasn't a problem for me because I studied in a bilingual school, but my parents spoke little English. Because of this, I had to mature, figure things out on my own and to be more responsible helping my parents.

My first impression at high school was that everyone was so mature. My classmates worked, had cars, and seemed like adults - and everyone was so tall. In my country, I was average height, but here I was short. I learned about the educational system quickly and had to take many tests. After initial struggles, I finally relaxed and was enjoying my senior year, but everything changed with the pandemic. The last time I saw my friends was before spring break and then everything went online. I even graduated online. Things for my family changed too.

My parents started taking English classes at Learn to Read, and I joined them. I was able to help them progress, and it also helped me with expressions, idioms and cultural things that I could ask about. I'm now enjoying college. When you are willing to get out of your comfort zone and follow your dreams, everything lines up. Having dreams is not like a fairytale, where everything is perfect, and all goes along according to plan. On the contrary, you must work hard, trust in yourself, and have a lot of faith. I still don't know what the future holds for me, but I know it will be amazing.

Luigi Estrella is a student at Learn to Read St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

April

I'm a student of LCUP and every year I write something for Express Yourself. Last year in April 2020, I started to write. I had the inspiration for this title because it was this month.

When I had written almost half of my essay, something happened that was a harsh reality. Sad and bad news paralyzed everything. On the news you only could hear doctors, hospitals, and death.

I was sad and my mind was paralyzed too. The months passed and now everything began to return to normality. I'm returning again to finish what I had started. This is the happy beginning and the sad ending that, for me, represents the month of April.

Everybody knows that April is the fourth month of the year, when spring starts. You look at the sky and you can see a brilliant sun at any time of day. You can hear the birds singing. They enjoy flying and you can see they are happy. The flowers rise up again. It always rains a lot in April too. April is poetry month. It brings inspiration to begin different things that bring happiness to families.

I stopped here, and what happened last year in April 2020? What changed? The answer is that everything changed. I couldn't be outside in nature because this year was different. All the customs we love in April that bring happiness disappeared. You can say that April arrived with sadness, sorrow, death, and dying. I ask, "What happened?" I heard a voice answer, "An invisible enemy arrived during the month before April. You can't see it, but you can feel it." The scientists are working to find ways to fight this plague to stop thousands of families from crying over the loss of their loved ones.

This year, April 2021 arrived but the pandemic continues. It is our duty to listen and obey the doctors to follow the rules. This way we will see the end. Altogether pray that our Lord, with his divine light, will enlighten the scientists to exterminate this murderer that hides in darkness with different names, but whose real name is COVID-19.

I hope the brightness of a new day returns to light up the sky with a beautiful and bright day.

Gladys Lago is a student from the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Susanne Carter.

My Life in the USA

I was 21 years old when I came alone to the United States. I left my 4-year-old daughter, Joshaira, with my parents because they were the only ones who could take care of her. I was a single mother and I believed there were more opportunities here.

My friend, Michael, lived in Wisconsin and helped me get there. I worked and sent some money to my parents to help with my daughter. I met my husband while I was working there and He is Cuban. We were married in Wisconsin but came to Florida because he does not like the cold weather. Our son, Landi, was born July 9, 2010.

When I was in Wisconsin, English Without Barriers gave me classes with many other students. In three months, I began to learn English. Then I moved to Florida. Sometimes I felt frustrated because I did not have very much English. I wanted to learn more English. My friend, Marisol, told me about Literacy Services. My first tutor was Gianay and I studied with her for four months. She moved away. Then I got a new tutor, Faye, and we have been studying for six months.

I like to exercise in my free time. I have small handheld weights and large barbells (25 and 35 pounds). I work out five days a week. I have many indoor plants on my front porch including bougainvillea, cactus, bamboo, pothos. My son and I watch movies together and play hide-and-seek. I play soccer with him. I look forward to the time when my husband and I own our own home. I also want to continue to improve my English.

Flor Celinda is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Faye Sheppard.

My Gardener Provides

No church meetings. No lunches with friends. No visiting. The corona virus has taken it all away. I miss the teachings from the Bible, fellowship with friends, and special outings. Prosperity has declined along with my lifestyle. Where could I connect with God?

Anxiety, sadness, turmoil and uncertainty, I faced. All of these were becoming overwhelming. But I didn't want to burden anyone else. I tried hard to be careful and not inconvenience or hurt others.

One Sunday morning I really needed someone to talk to, but no one was around. On an impulse, I started working in my garden. As I worked, it seemed as though the plants were encouraging me. And as I sowed seeds, I also began to sow prayers. As I dug into the rich soil, it occurred to me that there were similarities between the plants and me. We both strive to thrive and stay alive. I was so fascinated with the different colors and structures that I forgot my worries.

I began to notice the plants which were pale and drooping. They were like me. They needed something to come back to life. And just like that, rich with knowledge, I realized that as I can be the gardener for my plants and revive them. God is the gardener for me. He can revive me. How does He provide for me? He has given me my garden. Through it, He lifts me up and gives me strength. As He gives to me, I give to my plants.

It is springtime now and as I look at my garden full of healthy life. I am filled with joy. These plants have become my food, my shade, my privacy, my protection and most of all, the place where I can connect with my God.

What is going on now in the world is a mystery. I don't understand it. I am just glad my garden is in my life. I am just glad that God is in my life. My Gardener provides.

Gail Hartfield began working on reading, writing, and public speaking at DePorres Place in October of 2012, with her volunteer tutor Clare Wilson. Gail wrote her first short story, "The Eavesdropper" in 2018, with encouragement from Clare. In 2019, she wrote an essay

entitled “Just a Piece of Cake,” and in 2020, an essay entitled, “My Favorite Day.” In 2021, she wrote an essay called “The Turning Point in My Life.” Gail was also featured in a video produced by the Florida Literacy Coalition, entitled, Literacy Stories 3: Gail, which is available on YouTube.

The Ups and Downs of my Life

I was born in Brazil, but I lived my first years in Albany, California. My father went to study architecture at the University of California. At this time, the Governor of California was Ronald Regan. And three years later, man stepped on the moon. At the age of five, I moved to Mexico, and at nine years old, I returned to Brazil. I grew up with diverse cultures and realities.

I am a senior graphic designer and professional photographer. I am a published author and main editor. I have held successful art exhibitions. I have comprehensive photographic experience in advertising, studio, industry, and hotel photography. I do logo design and brand management. Because of my job, I have had the opportunity to travel around the world. I have been married to a beautiful ballet dancer, Adriana, for 11 years. I have a daughter, Marina, she is 23 years old and studies medicine. My wife has a son, Gabriel. He is 16 years old.

People ask me why I came to America. This answer has two reasons: the first is a childhood dream of returning to America, and the second reason was the violence and insecurity in Brazil. When we arrived in Orlando 2017, I was full of hope for a better life. But I did not imagine that the next few years would be the most difficult years of my life.

We were misguided by the immigration lawyer. We were heavily exploited by my visa sponsor. As I did not know the laws and my rights, they took advantage of our naivety. My wife and I had troubled times. After a year, we got out of this horrible situation, but I was depressed and had no hope.

Fortunately, we attended a church that helped us. I also had a hospital that helped me with my depression, I started studying English as this was always a problem, so I could communicate better. A new friend suggested the Adult Literacy League. At the

Adult Literacy League, I received a tutor, suggestions for new immigration lawyers, and I was treated with respect. We never have any idea how important supporting a stranger is. Look, listen, guide, and socialize. We have the power to make our community better, learning from each other and growing with similarities and differences.

I am grateful to the three institutions that saved my life and gave me hope to believe in my dreams. Thank you so much to Grace Medical Home, Saint Michael's Episcopal Church, and Adult Literacy League. I am also grateful to my wife Adriana Duarte Pontual, Dr. Carter, Father Rick Luoni, Gina Solomon, and especially my tutor and friend Louis Mendes.

Finally, I am here to contribute. I believe I can make a positive difference in our community in Orlando.

Henry Pontual is a student from the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. His tutor is Louis Mendes.

Tears of Joy

My husband has 5 children and I have two children. I never imagined taking care of a baby years later after our children were adults, a baby who would call me "Mami Lily."

My youngest daughter was taking care of a nine-month-old infant. One day she brought this baby home. She gave me him me to hold because he was heavy for her. My daughter had met the baby's mother in her last year of school. One day the child's mother called my daughter because she could not find someone to take care of her baby. With the passing of the weeks and months, this child became the happiness of our days. Learning about the difficulties of his home life became our greatest sadness. Who could've imagined how my family's life would change because of the hardships his parents were going through? Without going into too many personal details, after some time, this child spent more and more time with us, not days, but months!

When Hurricane Irma arrived, his mother decided to go out of state. We went to the airport to say our heart broken goodbyes, but still thinking that they would return soon. This was not so. After many difficulties, this poor boy was sent to a foster home.

Meanwhile, here in Florida, we worried and felt so sad for this child.

Fourteen months later, the boy finally returned to Florida, and we decided to visit him only to discover the two-year-old was in a dire family situation. We were concerned and wanted the best quality of life for him. I got deeply involved. I looked for help, for nurseries where they did not charge money. I found the perfect place where there were wonderful people who, knowing the case of this child, offered great help to the child. What a relief this was. Now his new routine of life began and he learned discipline. He learned to socialize. We are happy with the great progress of the child. His parent made us the official guardians of the child!

This very much-loved boy finished his vpk with a diploma and now he is five years old, speaks Spanish and English, is in kindergarten studying each day, and is happy and healthy. He currently still lives with Mami Lily and his extended family. We are happy to have been able to help this child and tears of sadness are now tears of joy!

Liliana Isaza is a student with Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

My Lifetime English Journey

In the summer of 1980 somewhere in Eastern Europe, I was playing with my neighbor, two girls who were older and smarter than me. I really enjoyed playing with them. Since their apartment was next to ours, we could meet whenever we wanted.

On that sunny summer day, they were teaching me the English alphabet. Although I was only 10 years old, I was preparing for my English class. I knew that this year we would study a second language. When I had to choose a second language, I would choose English. It was my secret plan; I wanted to impress the teacher and demonstrate my knowledge of English on the very first day of class. So, I spent many days trying to learn the ABC song. As I learned it, I was so proud of myself, trying to imagine how everybody in my class would be amazed.

In my country, during that time there were some rules about second language assignments. Half of the class would learn English and the other half of the class must learn German. When that day came, almost everybody from my class chose to learn English. For that reason, the teacher decided to divide us equally. Unfortunately, I was included in the class to learn German. That was a very sad day for me and my journey to learn English came to a halt.

When I graduated high school, I remembered my dream to learn English. I took many private lessons. It has been so long now. I forgot everything I learned, even the song. I started to study English from the beginner's level. I got the basics but speaking in English for me was almost impossible. I kept learning and I even took some English courses. Even though it lasted for many years, I still did not master this language

The breaking point in my English journey happened when I was visiting my fabulous and curious niece. At that time, she was seven years old and lived in Seattle. At first, I could not understand what she said. We spent a lot of time together and she corrected my mistakes so sincerely. To my surprise, I could speak English and people understood what I said. This experience inspired me to continue my English journey until I can speak with all my heart to the whole world.

Iлона Тубыте attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Piece of Cake

I remember exactly that specific moment, despite being only 15 years old. I was with my parents at an uncle's house, celebrating his 70th birthday, in a typical family gathering. My family is a mixture of Italian and Spanish blood. In these types of meetings, they shout like Italians, they fight like the Spanish, and they laugh and eat like both!

Everyone is seated around a long table, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and many more descendants, all taking turns telling the same anecdotes (as always). Each interrupting one another and adding their same old jokes. Aunt Nelly's famous elbow that,

in a sort of celebration tradition, would swiftly sink into my ribs every 30 seconds.

To improve the situation, oblivious to all the conversations, I served myself a big piece of chocolate cake. There, with my silver fork, I cut a large, delicious portion, and that moment when I was about to put it in my mouth, Aunt Nelly looked at me, and with her index finger points at the chocolate cake in my dish and yells, “You, young man, will have many children if you eat that chocolate cake!”

After this phrase was spoken, there was a strange silence. My eyes dropped, the chocolate cake looked afraid too, and I felt the harassment of the family’s stares. I tried to continue to eat the cake. Aunt Nelly, seeing the fork about to enter my mouth, without saying a word and with a hunter’s reflex, pushed the chocolate cake filled fork away from my lips as if it were to save me from a terrorist attack attempt.

The silence was more evident, and I felt an obligation to respond. Time stopped. My dad, my mom, my grandparents, and everyone waited for words to come out of my mouth. Even the little ones had remained still, expecting my response. I stood up, got on the chair, turned my head slowly from side to side, looking each family member in the eye while taking a deep breath and

with a firmly said with 100-percent conviction, “CHILDREN? I WILL NEVER HAVE CHILDREN!”

The author of this story had his first child at age 27 and his fifth at 47.

Jorge Austi is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Angela Faiola.

A Life Opportunity

My name is Samuel and I am from Haiti. To me an immigrant life is about seeking an opportunity in a new country. I believe no one would leave their country if everything is going well, but there are circumstances that make it obligatory. It is either to save their life or to live a better life.

I come from a country where human rights are not respected. It is the bandits who are making the news of violence. Leaders in my country do not take responsibility to help their people and their country. These are reasons why so many immigrants are seeking asylum in the United States. Getting to the USA is not easy. Sometimes many of us die on the way, by sea or by land. Immigrant Trail is a reality movie that no one would love to play.

I am one among the immigrants who have come to this country looking for a better life for my future and the future of my family. I will look for resources that can help me learn the English language, find a job, and be a good citizen. There is an abundance of help available, and I know that I will succeed if I work hard, with help from this country. I will also be an asset to the United States.

Jean Samuel Pierre attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Miracles Exist

It was a morning in July, twenty-eight years ago. We were installing power lines for the festivities of my beautiful city. It was a sunny and cloudy day, the temperature around 82 degrees Fahrenheit and two days left before of the party. Everybody it was in a hurry.

That morning, we collected electrical materials and went to the workplace. Upon arrival at the workplace, the work safety meeting was held and materials and tools to be used were prepared, as well as clothing and safety equipment. The leader carried out the distribution of activities, and we began. My activities included installation and energization of a power transformer with which the voltage to be used in the premises of the festive event would be converted. The voltage conversion that the transformer would do was from 7620 volts to 120 volts of alternating current. I had to work at a height of four meters on a centrifuged concrete post. The work process was normal, and after three hours it was necessary to energize the main transformer. I proceeded to carry out the energizing maneuver.

I started the maneuver of connection of the electrical line that would feed the transformer, and at the moment that I would perform the tightening, I slipped and lost my balance. This caused me to lose the safety distance, and I touched the line that I was energizing with the glove of my right hand. This resulted in an electric shock that entered my index finger and exited at the ankle of my right foot. At the moment of contact, I fainted with a tendency opposite to the energized power line—a situation that saved me—so I am able to give you this testimony.

After the event, I woke up when my leader was putting his arms between my legs to get me down to the solid ground. I felt my body was warm and my nervous system a little agitated.

Two hundred meters away was the social security hospital to which I had access, and I walked because I felt good only with the heat on my index finger similar to that of burning it with fire.

I am happy to be alive.

Jose A. Ventura Perez attends Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Twins and Horses

My name is Lorena Rodriquez. I am forty-six years old. I wish to tell you my story.

When I was eighteen years old my mother decided to put an ad in the New York Times to find me a job as a nanny in the United States. I got a job with a family in Virginia to care for their twin boys. Their parents wished for the boys to learn Spanish. Spanish is my first language and English is my second language.

The twins, Henry and Peter, were four years old. They were in preschool in the mornings and with me in the afternoons. The family lived on a horse farm in Virginia. The boys loved the horses and loved going to the barn almost every afternoon.

It was wonderful to take care of Henry and Peter. The six months of my work visa went by quickly. During the six months, I traveled with the family and took care of Henry and Peter. We

traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii and visited Maui, Lanai and several of the other islands. After the Hawaii trip we returned to Virginia.

I met my husband, Cesar, at their Virginia horse farm. He trained and cared for the horses. The twins loved to go to the barn and visit the horses, and Cesar would tell them all about the horses. The three of them were very good together, and the boys had fun learning about the horses.

Lorena Rodriguez is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Jane Bentley.

My Life Story

Hello! My name is Jane and I want to tell my story. When I was little and I had problems, I thought that some superhero was going to come and help me. I always thought someone had to help me.

At the end of February 2021, I came out positive with COVID-19. I was sick for two months with very strong symptoms.

I thought I was going to die. So, I remembered my life and how hard it was to come to the United States.

Walking alone with my five-year-old son—and I didn't know I was 5 weeks pregnant—I went to a country far from my mother and arrived as a single mother, thinking that I would go to my cousin's house. When they found out that I was pregnant, they asked me to leave their house because I would not be able to work with a baby and pay the rent. I got married, and I had two more children. I worked very hard together with my husband to buy a house. I did not enjoy time with my children because of work.

It took five years for me to stop working. I dedicated myself to my family and my chores in the house. One day, I looked in the mirror weakly, still coughing and I could hear the voice inside me saying, "You are the superhero you have been looking for all your life." I used an asthma inhaler, and the cough went away. I was born again!

I always wanted to learn English. Through a friend, I found out about the Family Service Center that gave classes. I talked to them, and they told me there are only two months left in the semester. I told her it was okay; I have no time to waste! I want to study. It was difficult for me, not knowing the verbs and rules of English. Many times, I have wanted to throw in the towel. I talk to my children and they motivate me to keep going. I'm still studying even if you do not understand anything. I hope soon to speak and write English and see my dream come true. My life has not been easy at all, and I have always been positive, and I know that I will not give up. I will continue studying until I achieve my goal, getting the GED.

Janet Vazquez is a student at the Family Service Center, Arcadia, FL. She is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph's ABE/ESOL class. Janet is an excellent student and is working towards her academic goals.

Investment is My Life

My name is Luis Garcia. I am 26 years old. I am a married man with three children. I am Honduran but a year ago I became a U.S. citizen. I work in real estate. Apart from that, I am an entrepreneur. I invest in properties to sell or put them up for rent on Airbnb. I really like business because there are many possibilities to earn a lot of money. Being able to speak English fluently will give me more business opportunities. Hence, my family and I can live well and travel a lot.

Years ago I realized that hard work and earning money was not just going to a construction site and working for someone else. My concept of working hard has now changed to working smart. Four years ago, I accomplished that and now I make much more money. Things are going very well for me. I was able to buy my first house and that helped me to buy two more. Now, I can see the work of a more intelligent mind, great returns, and expectation.

What I must do is to learn and study the subject. It helps me invest intelligently and reap more money three times. I began to study digital currencies and benefit from it, too. I have invested with coins, and I am doing very well. I try to apply what I earn

toward reinvesting again until I can have a certain amount of money. I learned to move money from the coins and continue to buy more. The money from the houses can pay for themselves, and they can create additional money to buy other units.

Luis Garcia attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Home Is Everywhere

Born in Hanoi, I did not grow up and know my place of birth. Very soon after I was born, my family left the North of Vietnam to go to the South. We chose the political regime that we thought was the more livable regime.

But we left, leaving everything behind. Thereafter my family had a new life in the South. It was very difficult, and that was the price to pay to gain freedom.

At the time, my aunt who was living in Laos and who owned a hairdressing salon, had decided to bring us to Laos. Therefore, my mother was able to work in the hairdressing salon with my aunt. That year I was seven years old. I didn't have too much trouble adapting to this new life and new school. It was a Franco-Vietnamese school because there were a lot of Vietnamese in Laos. And so was life until when I was seventeen. Due to the family situation, my family again returned to the Southern Vietnam, and it was under circumstances of war. However, we lived in the capital and were safe from bombing and bullets resounding in the distant sky.

This was why, later, my father, as a French citizen, was able to take us to France, once again to regain some lost freedom! And this time we lost freedom in the last part of the country, the South of Vietnam.

France opened its arms to us, and my daughter and me stayed there until last year; it was almost 36 years. I thought I would end my life there because I was getting old.

But life decided otherwise, and I thought it was predestination...

Eleven years ago, my current husband and I met again in Paris after forty years without news from each other. Meanwhile, I was free and he too. Neither of us had partners). So we resumed our unfinished love story. We got married in France and continued to live there for ten years. Then as he got older, he found winters in Paris to be too long and hard!

That is why, after careful consideration, we made the necessary preparations to return to the United States, because my husband is an American citizen.

We chose Florida for its mild climate, and here we are. Once again, I find myself starting my life over in a whole new place, and probably this time will be the very last.

Lien Ha Le Ngo is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Iguna Ozols.

Starting from Scratch

Undoubtedly, in my life, situations have arisen that happen unexpectedly. They have happened to almost all of us, some with melodious connotations and others with discomfort; however, for many immigrants like me, leaving your country to fulfill life aspirations can be the most amazing experience and with great expectations. It is still a world to discover and start from scratch.

Well, it is said that the situations for everyone is different, depending on the circumstances in which you arrive, adapt, or drown in the system of this country. My arrival in this new life was a roller coaster of emotions and colors. Having the support of my family was great and a blessing integrated with many opportunities. Although, it is also important to highlight that not all stories with a beginning or end can always happily be as bright as the sun because the culture changes. Moving from the country where you lived most of your life, you have your favorite people, your closest family and dreams, and now you are moving into a complex situation and learning to adapt to a new beginning.

In life, I have characterized myself as a woman very determined to get ahead with my effort and dedication. Although I lack discipline, I always try to do things a thousand times until I

get it right in one of those attempts. In the United States, we are living what I call “starting from scratch.” After a few good years here, I have not only changed my world, but I have changed my life completely. The situation that has been the greatest I have ever had to experience is that it has made me feel great and happy. It has allowed me to fulfill myself and exploit my greatest potentials and talents that I had never thought I could have. I speak not only of the economic issue from which many flee their countries but to continue building dreams. It is important, yes. Well, it cannot be denied, but I must admit that personally the most virtuous thing of all is to be able to live peacefully, feel happy in what I do, and daydream with every opportunity that this great country offers me of which I want to belong until I die. Logically, without leaving behind my roots and my humble heart.

Thanks to my new life. Thanks to God for each year that allows me to live the greatness of this world and gives me the understanding that I am just a grain of sand here and my end as a human being on earth.

Michelly Arango is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College – East Campus. Her teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.

No School Uniform

I was born on December 16, 1989. I am from Guanajuato, Mexico. When I was a girl, my dream was to be a teacher or a doctor. I really liked going to school but there were many difficulties in my family. I am the oldest of six children. When my brother was born there were complications. He had asthma at 4 months old. My mother spent most of her time at the hospital. My father went to the hospital after work. They had large expenses because they had to buy medicines that he needed to continue living. At that time, my sisters and I spent entire weeks at my grandmother’s house. My mother had some depression, perhaps because of her situation.

When I finished elementary school, I entered middle school. I was very happy but when I was there for 3 months my parents talked to me about a decision they had to make. I had to leave school because they could not cover my expenses for the uniform. I needed to have a uniform in order to attend school.

I was only 11 years old, but I understood the situation. I told my parents that it was ok and stopped going to school. I didn't want them to know that I was very sad. I cried at night so that my parents wouldn't see me.

When I didn't go to school, my teacher went to talk to my parents to see why I couldn't go. They told her they couldn't buy my uniforms I needed to go to school. My teacher wanted me to go to school so she gave me her uniform. My mother fixed it, and I finished middle school.

After that I had to go to work to help my family. I could not continue studying because of the expense of high school and uniforms. I worked but earned very little. It was not enough for school, and I needed to help my parents.

I met my husband who had lived in Florida since he was 10 years old. We were married in Mexico where we had our first child. He wanted me to come to the US; the immigration process was expensive. After we purchased a home in Vero Beach, I wanted to go to school to learn English but first needed to live here for one year.

I got a job, but I still had the desire to continue studying. I now have a tutor for citizenship. I am very excited to become a citizen and improve my English.

I hope to earn my GED. It is my dream to continue studying and get a good job. I look forward to it with the help of God.

Miriam Gonzalez is a student Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Karen Leedahl.

My Favorite Day

My absolute favorite day is any day that my family spends time together. One of my favorite ways to begin the day is in the morning, when we have breakfast together. We talk about our plans for the day, we talk about where we will go or simple things like what is happening with our lives.

Another one of my favorite ways to spend the day is watching my grandkids play in the yard at my house. I also get great satisfaction by watching my older sons with their wives. I enjoy watching them, having conversations and growing their families.

It's really fabulous to go to the beach with my family. Wake up early, to prepare everything that we are going to take. First, I make my coffee, then I check everything is ready to start our day on the beach. While my husband is driving, we talk about many things and we enjoy the landscape while listening to Mexican music. I like to walk on the beach, sit on the sand with my husband and watch my grandkids play and make sand castles with Carol. She is my granddaughter and she is a beautiful girl. I think the sunset is beautiful and magical.

Having a day with my family together is and will always be my favorite day.

Elsa Garcia is a student at the Family Service Center, Arcadia, FL. She is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph's ABE/ESOL class. Elsa is an excellent student and is excited to learn and practice English.

Why I Came to the U.S.

Life is made up of positive and negative events. Some can teach you many things and others can change our way of life and lead us to make difficult decisions. So what is the event that has impacted my life?

Indeed, I live my life modestly. My husband and I lived in the town of Carrefour in Port-au-Prince, Haiti that we called "the Pearl of the Antilles" because the environment was clean and welcoming. The people were respectful and thoughtful, and the help was there.

But this feeling of tranquility had turned into a nightmare. With political instability in 2017 until the death of the president, I had the impression of living in a cemetery. I saw many people around me who died either by armed gangs or by the virus. It was the only thing I was thinking about. It was terrifying and sad!

The stress caused by the trauma had deteriorated my health, however I learned two things: 1st, do not take anything for granted, everything can change at any time. 2nd, only God must be the center of your life, because that alone is eternal and can control everything. Overcoming the threat of kidnapping and the instinct for survival forced me to leave my husband, my job, my friends, and a lifetime behind me that I still can't accept.

Sandra Létang is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Favorite Day

Christmas is the best time of the year. On Christmas days everything turns into color and lights. These are days to exchange gifts and share love with family and friends. Christmas is time for delicious food. The Christmas's days are day of joy and happiness. My first Christmas was in 2016 when I came to this country, because in the country where I came from, there is no Christmas. My two sons and my husband were also with me that Christmas. We always spend it together every Christmas season and I hope they will be like this forever.

Marlen Placeres is a student at the Family Service Center, Arcadia, FL. She is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph's ABE/ESOL class. Marlen is an excellent student and is excited to learn and practice English.

My Daughters Made Me Strong

Hello, my name is Marisela. I came to the United States with my 2-year-old daughter 23 years ago. We came empty handed—no car, no extra clothing, nowhere to stay, and little money. I struggled finding a job due to lack of education and not speaking English. My sister invited us to live with her, where there were already 7-8 people. We said yes because we didn't have options. The house was tiny. We slept on the floor. I felt paralyzed, angry and sad. Eventually I got a job working in the fields. It was a tiring job, working long hours in the blazing sun picking oranges, grapefruit and weeds. I would get home with my shoes and feet all wet, my back hurting and bad headaches. Six months later my

then-husband came to the United States. I thought our lives were going to change, but they didn't.

I started working in a fast-food restaurant, which was better than in the fields. I had two more daughters. My situation hadn't gotten better. I got a second job working long hours on my feet at a packing house. Working two jobs wasn't easy. I woke up when my daughters were still asleep and the house was silent and dark. When I came home, it felt like nothing changed. The house felt lonely and silent. I had little interaction with my daughters, and my oldest daughter was acting like the mom at home. I realized that my life needed to change.

One day I took my oldest daughter to the library where I met Elida who told me about an adult English program. I told my then-husband about it. He said, "Do what you want, but make sure you cook, clean, iron my clothes, and find someone to take care of the kids." That made me think I didn't want him in my life. We divorced, and I started a new life – just my daughters and me. They encouraged me to learn English.

Four years later, I met and married my current husband. Now I'm able to speak, write and read English. I work every day to practice and get better, and I'm very grateful for all this program has done for me. I have accomplished so much. Now I have my own cleaning business, have purchased a home with my husband, and have more time to spend with my family. When we have family night, the house is filled with laughter, noises of food sizzling, and cartoons playing on TV while my granddaughter dances to the music.

I feel like a different person – that I'm capable of doing anything. I feel more independent. There is much more that I would love to accomplish. My goals for the future are to get my GED, work on getting my citizenship, and continue expanding my cleaning business.

Marisela Kempf is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Linda Barker.

Spreading Love with Words

My name is Mayra Zampar. I am married, 42 years old, Brazilian. Also, I'm an architect and used to be a workaholic in Brazil. However, the most important thing about me is that I'm a mother of two kids, 7 and 12 years each. I became a mother when I was 30 years old, and this event really changed my life.

Finally, I am very proud to say that I am an immigrant. I've been living in the USA with my family for almost five years. It's been a beautiful journey up until now. I love to spend my time with my family and special friends. I am a believer in true friendships. A few years ago, studying English, I discovered that I do love writing. I hope I can fulfill my dream by writing a book where I can share my life experiences, encourage people, and spread love with words.

Mayra Zampar is a student at the Adult Literacy League. Her teacher is Barbara Huddleston.

Never Give Up on Your Dream

Last year, on my 35th birthday, I decided that I wanted to get serious about reading and making myself a better person. I had been thinking about doing this my whole life, but never had the time. I was always too busy working and taking care of others around me, but I decided that it was now my time. I had to do what was best for me.

I signed up for reading classes at Learn to Read, and for counseling, but I had to wait to get started because of Covid slowing everything down. I waited and finally in August was able to get started in both. It was worth the wait!

I graduated from high school in 2004. Even though I have a diploma, I never learned to read. Somehow I was able to slip by. This was no longer working for me. I didn't like being limited and being held back from job possibilities because I couldn't read. I had started reading classes in the past but something always stopped me. Now I was not going to be stopped. I just had my 36th birthday and I am in fact reading! I have been working

with my tutor twice a week and I have made good progress. I also meet with a counselor once a week and this has helped me too.

I have a new job, with better benefits and I have learned to say no to distractions and drama. One of the first things I started reading was recipes. I love to cook and so reading recipes made sense to me. I also like short stories and to read the lyrics to gospel and R and B music. I have also started reading Bible verses and I really like that. If I can do this, then you can too! Don't let anyone or anything stop you from accomplishing your goals! Don't let age stop you or any pressures from family or friends. Don't let anything get in your way! Don't stop! Just start now!

Eric Mitchell is a student at Learn to Read St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

Something Positive I Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Eleven months ago, the COVID-19 virus was officially announced; we have heard about the infections, the deaths of many people and also different ways to avoid the disease. All this has invaded us with fear and confusion. When we reacted, we had to decide to live other ways and look for positive solutions to keep us healthy. I decided to continue the English classes virtually learning little by little through technology while at the same time sharing with my family because we all had more hours at home.

In an attempt to attend to other situations, I learned online to buy personal items: food, drinks, clothes and even a puzzle. Later I learned to communicate with more people, relatives and friends through the different platforms and participated in the birthday party of my niece in the city of Sidney in Australia. I had the opportunity to share with family and friends from other countries; all this without leaving my room. At the beginning of the pandemic, I learned to make masks for my family and some neighbors.

Today I feel that I have learned to seek solutions and I know that there are many more positive things that we can and are going to learn. Thus, we can enjoy this new way of life that the pandemic has imposed on us. From now on we are going to

strengthen ourselves and cultivate our positive spirit. Currently, I feel more positive and relaxed because I have already taken the two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, although I know that I must continue to take care of myself and comply with the safety regulations imposed.

Nancy Sanchez is a student at ACE of SDPBC, Northtech Satellites, Highland. Her teacher is Mary Rodriguez.

Moving to the United States

I have always admired the way of life in U.S.A. for the people's sense of citizenship, freedom, rights, and, most of all, their patriotism. The desire to have a good old age with better conditions, to help my relatives, and give my wife a new hope led me to a turning point in my life.

I had been a dentist for almost 20 years in my country, and now after moving to the USA, I am an immigrant with a complicated situation, many uncertainties, and a long way to go.

Leaving your country for another one is very hard, mentally and emotionally. Before you find your place, you will face insecurity, anguish, fear, and you will probably think about giving up several times.

During these moments, you must look inside yourself, seek strength in what you believe. In my case, I pray to God, keep my mom's memory in mind, and nurture all the energy that my friends have sent to me. However, it's still too hard to struggle against time and the language. Understanding and communication are essential for survival, and to help us with this issue, the ESOL schools are amazing. They not only teach English, but also promote a familiar environment that helps all students feel welcome.

I decided to write this essay for all people who are in the same situation as me. I would like to tell you, "Keep moving! Have courage!"

Despite the storm, against your fears, you have to fight. Try to help those who are suffering with your positive energy. Every-

thing is going to be alright at the right time. Be patient and believe in what GOD has reserved for you. Try to do your best, and someday, when you look back in time, you will say: I fought a good battle; I deserve my reward!

Nilton Souza attends Clearview Adult Education Center in St. Petersburg, FL. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Wakeup Call

A turning point in my life was when I realized that I didn't have a future in my home country Venezuela. My friends and neighbors had already left for foreign countries all over the globe. One day, I looked around and realized that I was the youngest person left in my apartment complex. I will always remember the day that one of my neighbors came to me and told me, "You need to leave, you're going to lose the best years of your life in this disaster. Don't do that to yourself." It was a wakeup call. The government had fallen, our money was worthless, and most situations seemed hopeless. It was when I woke up from my "Venezuelan Dream" and then I started to calculate inch by inch the life that I was living there.

In Venezuela, I was a trained accountant. Before I left, I wasn't working in my field, because the companies weren't paying very well. Honestly, the salary I would have been making wasn't enough to buy food or cover the basics needs. The economic situation was holding the country hostage. Because the economic situation was so horrible, Venezuelans felt as if they were "living in the highest inflation in the world."

Because of the uncertainty surrounding me, I decided to start my own small and digital business to survive there. I had to reinvent myself by becoming a social media manager. I was managing social media accounts of some clients that I was able to get. One client was a plastic surgeon and I used to accompany her in the operation room in order to take pictures and record videos for the promotion of her services. It was a whole new world for me because I had never experienced anything like that before.

I got a crash course in biology and thought that I would faint or vomit. Later, I got used to it and it ended up being a good experience. My clients were happy with my work. Because of

my country imploding, I discovered potential that I never even dreamed of. They say, “crisis always brings us new opportunities” and I can confirm it.

Although I was working for myself, it wasn’t enough to erase the bad situation that we were living. I needed more, and my clients refused to pay me what I knew I was worth. One day, I put everything I could fit into my luggage and left for the land of

opportunity! I have been in the USA for the past four years, and I have never looked back.

– *Anonymous Author*

Life is an Adventure

My life has been quite an adventure. I have had difficult moments and also very good moments. From each of them I have learned a lot to grow internally. I have made good decisions and bad ones, too. At age 15, I had a beautiful baby but I did not know what to do with her. She grew up into a beautiful woman who filled me with great pride. She is extremely intelligent and disciplined. She obtained very good grades in school, college and the university. Currently, she is a wonderful daughter, sister and human being with very good feelings. She is a cheerful young woman, sociable but to be a mom is the last thing on her mind.

When she was 15 years old, I had my second child with better preparation because I have gained the experience of being a mom previously. I waited for my baby boy with great hope and I enjoyed every moment of it. My son, with the same virtues as his sister, is a magnificent student, a great man, and also a great son, a good brother, and a friend. They both live in Costa Rica. They are very well and have made very good decisions in their lives.

Mesmerizing my past, I remember with nostalgia and great pleasure my childhood. I had a lot of playtime with card games, hopscotch, spinning tops, hide and seek to mention a few. It was such a healthy time without technology. There was so much respect for older people, teachers, and parents. There were no house phones, only public telephones where we lined up to make calls. There were no supermarkets. We wore hand-me-down

clothes. The whole family would get together to watch black and white movies on the television. We had a lot of space to run, jump, and play.

Those years have gone by so fast. When I look in the mirror many times I wonder who that person is reflected in the mirror. My life is still an adventure. I never thought at my age I would be here living with my husband. Therefore, let's enjoy each day as if it were the last. The nectar of life does not repeat itself, it advances vertiginously. Life is beautiful. It is more beautiful with a good attitude. Between planting and harvesting there is a waiting time. Things arrive at the right time. The U.S. is a wonderful country that opens the doors for new opportunities. How nice it is when they speak to us in English. This universal language as we understand a little more every day, we realize that it is part of a great adventure. However, the greater adventure is living!

Orietta Garcia Gomez attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Wishing and Hoping

My name is Yen. I am from Vietnam. I am married and have two sons. My oldest son is 27 years old and the youngest one is 21. I have been in the US for over a year. I came here with my husband and my younger son, but my oldest son had to stay in Vietnam for some reason.

When I first came to the US, I missed my hometown and my oldest son very much. After being here for four months, I got a job and I worked at Lee Nails in Key West. On the first day of work, I was very surprised because I have no experience and my English is not very good. That is why I had to ask the owner for a lot of help. I enjoy my work but it will be more enjoyable if I can understand and speak English well.

Meanwhile, I am studying English. I could only go to class three times a week. Learning a language is not easy. I must try to be consistent because it takes a lot of practice. My teacher, Ms. Josephson, is very dedicated to all of her students. I like her very much. I wish that I could hear and speak English better so that I could go anywhere and do anything. I am sure one day I will.

Yen Nguyen attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Unexpected Happened

It was the end of the school year and as always, we go north for a vacation for two weeks. Unfortunately, my husband got sick. We could not believe what we were experiencing that moment.

We understood that money does not matter. There were many days of anguish. We called many places and they did not want to admit him. It was a nightmare being in a place that we have no knowledge of the surroundings. It was very difficult for me to handle the situation and yet have to show a positive attitude to my children who did not know what was happening. They asked why their father was always in bed. Well, I made up a little white lie.

Luckily, my husband has a wonderful friend who was very kind to accommodate us at his house. The sickness got worse. My husband had high fever and difficulty to breathe on his own. We got him to the hospital and the doctor told me if he tested positive and that we might not be seeing him anymore. I remember those words very clearly. I could not believe my ears. After a few hours, the doctor returned to inform us that his test result was negative. My husband left the hospital feeling very traumatized. After a few days he felt better. A friend offered to help bring us home to Key West.

We were glad to be home. What a relief! Thank you to dear friends who helped us during his recovery. Now, we live day by day with gratitude and enjoy ourselves more.

Paola Zapeda attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Who I Am

July 11, 2021 was a day unlike any other. For two long months I had studied hard for this day to come. I thought to myself, "To-

day is the day I take the Certified Nurse Assistant exam.” My next thought was, “What have I gotten myself into?” I was diagnosed with dyslexia and labeled a slow learner since childhood. However, that has never stopped me from doing what I love. Then it was time for me to begin my exam. I was shaking in my four-inch high heeled shoes. I was one of the last students to sit for the test that day.

When I was finished, I could not believe that I had passed with a score of 95%. I was shocked! This was the first time I had finished and accomplished something I had started. Also, this was the first time I truly felt proud of myself. Most of my life I had been told that I could never be somebody. Still, I did not let those words define my life.

Who I am is someone who overcomes obstacles to achieve a goal. I value people around me, but if they try to limit me by their low opinion, I make it my goal to show them they’re wrong about me! Achieving my CNA credential, I have gained confidence. As I continue this journey called life, I will face my fears, and I will succeed over every mountain in my way.

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

More Than an English Class

For many people, when I tell my story, they consider me lucky. Often, these people think that I am complaining on a full

stomach. When I tell my story to my old colleagues and friends in Quebec, they see only the bright side of my story.

Leaving a promising career, leaving family and friends, selling my first house where I had accumulated lots of memories, finding myself in a country where I did not speak the language, all aroused dark feelings. Frustration, sadness, fear, and insecurity filled me for a few months after my husband, my two young sons, and I arrived in Jacksonville, Florida.

Many tears flowed the first few weeks. In front of my children, I was a smiling and optimistic mother, but I cried at night when

they were in bed. One morning, I got up and decided to roll up my sleeves and stop feeling sorry for myself.

With shaking hands, I grabbed the phone and made an appointment with the library to participate in the ESOL program. I will never forget my first class. When I got home, I was smiling, happy, and I felt light. I had just communicated with people who were living in the same reality as me.

For the first time, I felt in my place. The fear of speaking English was gone. I didn't feel judged by the people around me. The teacher took a personal interest in the students. The closeness of the professors in this program is something that greatly surprised me. The teachers were there to help you learn English, but even more, they wanted to get to know who you were.

A lot of time has passed since my first class, four long years of being part of this magnificent program. But the Library ESOL program is so much more than a program for me. Its dedicated, caring teachers, the students from countries all over the world, neurosurgeons, lawyers, accountants, journalists, teachers; they are open-minded people that have made me grow. These people are also the ones who celebrated the coming of my unborn child without even knowing me. ESOL has been more than an English class; it is the family that I don't have in this country.

Melanie Pelchat is a student in the ESOL program at Jacksonville Public Library. Her teacher is Naomi Chase.

Aisha's Story

My life story is like a fairy tale in many ways. My childhood was filled with beautiful dreams and ambitions for the future. The innocence of my early years and the dreams for a meaningful life ended abruptly when I was 18 years old. I started a marriage that I realized was bad almost immediately.

At the age of 19, I had my first child – a baby girl. It was a wonderful experience for me. This was a gift from God. But my marriage and the conduct of my ex-husband made me so miserable that I barely realized the years were passing until I gave birth to my 2nd child- a son. Two years later, living in the same

situation and simply letting time fly, I had my 3rd child- another beautiful son. Regardless of the circumstances, I have always considered my children gifts from God. Then, a time of turmoil began by my ex-husband and his family. I was psychologically abused and treated with disrespect.

As much as I wanted to leave, I promised myself that I would stay until my kids were old enough to take care of themselves. And so, I stayed for 21 years. When my kids were old enough, I was blessed by the Lord to obtain a visitor Visa to the USA – the first of my dreams to come true.

The clouds around me began to clear as I traveled to America at the age of 42. After only 5 days in the US, I learned that my eldest, was involved in a horrific accident, so I had to return to Jordan, my hometown. My son suffered terrible injuries to the point of breaking bones of which he still has critical problems.

A year after the accident my divorce finally happened, and I came back to America. Just 4 days after I arrived, I met a wonderful man who would give light to my life, would fulfill and complete me, my new husband. He helped me get started and actually helping my kids too.

I have now started going to school to learn English as a second language and can finally work to provide a new life for my children. First, I want them to have real careers in America and later have their families when they're really ready.

Now I feel blessed with my husband, and school, and knowing that my children will be coming soon and join my new family. I hope everyone who reads this will take a lesson from my story. The lesson is not to give up when everyone is against you. We must set goals and work hard, with faith in God to achieve them. If you do not give up, life will come to you – perhaps not the way you expect – you just should TRY.

Aisha Abu Othman is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

My Mom and I

One of the most memorable story in life is how I was raised by my mom through the love she had for me. Together, we had good and bad times. After four years of marriage, my father turned onto a new path. He separated from my mother and started a new life with another woman. As a child, I was compassionate because I could feel my mother's pain. From my mother, I learned so many good things, but the best one is the love she had for me. My mother is the person who makes me understand what love is and the meaning of true love. She never slacked off in the face of life's trials to meet my needs.

Even though my father did not stay at home with us, he always came to visit us. He brought me money to give to my mom. Unfortunately, when I was nine years old, I lost my dad in a terrible car accident. Since that day, I only saw my mom sacrifice herself every day to support me and little sister. Seeing all of my mom's efforts and sacrifices, I never felt my father's absence in my life. Knowing her misery and suffering, I promised my mom that I that I would do my best in school and college to complete my studies with honors. My mother dreamed of seeing me become a great doctor, a lawyer or an engineer.

On my last high school class, my mother got seriously sick. She spent about two years with severe chest pain. We visited almost all the major hospitals in the city with her, saw different renowned doctors but she never found a solution. During these two years of her illness I went to school by obligation, but mentally I suffered a lot. All my thoughts were turned towards my mother and our future. I was overthinking about our life, our habit, our bonding. I couldn't see myself continuing to live without my mother by my side. I was confused, depressed, and desperate. I was almost completely insane.

On the morning of 2009, my mom passed away. Since that day, I became a person without vision, sickly, great emptiness in the heart, and mentally handicapped. Without her, I lost everything. It is very painful to reminisce my memory about her, but it is also like a therapy to me when I share this story of my mother and I. Always love your mother.

Jean Wesly attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

American Dream in Progress

My name is Armando. I immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen. I was full of dreams, goals, and was looking for a better life. Twenty years have passed since then. My twenty years here in the US have been anything but easy. My life here has been full of effort, heartbreak and hard work. However, even with all my triumphs and struggles, I have not yet achieved all that I wish to accomplish.

My next goal is to speak, read and write in English with ease. My desire to improve my English is what led me to register for adult ESOL classes. My immediate goal is to learn as much as possible and graduate from the class. America really is the land of opportunity, and I plan to make the most of mine.

J. Armando Castillo Pineda is a student at Suncoast Technical College. His teacher is Tonya Richardson.

The Carrot is Already Cooked

The story of my life is quite a life of struggles converted into successes. I, the first son, come from a less fortunate family of 4 children, barely having the possibility of eating. The situation of our life was unbalanced like that of the life of others in our community. Life was difficult for us; my mother abandoned my

father for reasons I didn't know and fled with me. Consequently, I didn't know the life of a child in a balanced family for years.

Just like that, life takes another turn. My father found us after eight years of searching, he had already moved to the United States for a better life. He placed me in my uncle's care and enrolled me in one of the biggest schools in the city. I worked hard and earned good grades. I always dreamed of becoming someone great with my big, good heart.

After a few years, my aunt began to mistreat me making me work like a slave, doing house chores while her children watched TV or slept. I was afraid to tell my father about the situation. I endured everything with courage because I knew that one day, I would take the hand of my destiny. My father and his brother had a misunderstanding, and my life became more than hell during my final year of school. They chased me out of their house telling me that I would be nothing in life without them and that the carrot is already cooked.

I went to live with a sister of my mother's and continued to study. Shortly after, I went to the police academy. Earning a little money, I helped my mother by giving her a new life. One day, I saved my uncle who was being attacked. He was scared to see me after more than nine years. Now, they considered me to be great and yet, had no courage to look me in the eyes. Eight years later, I left to live in the United States and to work on achieving the rest of my goals; I am close to seventy percent. My final goal is to earn enough money to help my family, people in need and to have a prosperous life. I have always wished to become a millionaire and continue to work harder to achieve it.

My advice today is none other than to always have courage in life, to face the good and the bad situations. Always be strong and remain firm on your objectives, and do not let anyone define your life or your destiny, it depends only on you. Always have a heart filled with love for your neighbors, and with your efforts granted, God will help you to realize your dreams.

Today, I am the head of my family because I believed in myself. Never give up on your goals, use disappointments as a motivator and see how you will succeed in your life too.

Ricardo Flerzile, has been attending the ESOL High Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida for one year. He is a dedicated student and takes his education very seriously. After improving his English skills, he plans to continue his career pathway to earn a master's degree in mechanic automotive.

The Joke That Changed My Life

When my husband and I won a green card, everything changed. My superhero husband and I had been married for

six years. He is strong, serious and my superhero. He runs into burning buildings to save people. He is a firefighter.

One evening, he was spending quality time with his friend Zywiec (a brand of Polish beer), when Zywiec convinced him that he should enter the lottery for an American green card. The next day, once Zywiec had left him alone, he told me that he had applied for the green card as a joke. I thought he had lost his mind. He had spoken about wanting to live in Australia, so of course he applied to become a US citizen... now you are as confused as I was.

Eight months later, we were happy, and were both working in jobs that we enjoyed. I was not only happy, but very pregnant with our first baby. A letter arrived in the post saying that we had won a lottery spot, however, we had to complete a lot of paperwork in order to accept the invitation.

We decided to take the opportunity offered to us. We left everything we knew; our house, work, friends and our beloved family. He left first to try and prepare the way for our family in the US. My baby and I left Poland and touched down in the US. I was afraid that we would not succeed, that we would not be able to deal with a one-year-old child and the language barrier. The world belongs to the brave, so we made the very best of our opportunity to come to the US. It was not easy, but we did it! I do not regret the decision to move. I know it was a good choice.

We have a new home, new jobs and our child is now graduating from high school. We try to visit our families and friends in Poland every year. And to think that my husband sent the green card application as a joke.

– *Anonymous Author*

A Beginning is Not an End

Hello, my name is Rosalba Zarate and today I'm going to tell you my personal story. I was born on December 22th 1983, in Tlaxcala, Tlaxcala de Xicohtencatl, Mexico. When I was born, I only knew what my dad told me about my birth. I don't know if it's the real story or not. Now that I'm older, all my relatives

have told me a different story. To be honest, I don't know if I'll ever know the real story, but my dad's version was that my mom didn't want me to live and upon my birth she wanted to flush me down the toilet. Thankfully, my dad stopped her.

I have a brother who is a year and a half older than I but we didn't grow up together. My grandparents didn't want my mother to live with them when she split up with my father, so they ran her out of the house and took us in to raise. My brother lived with my dad's family and I went to live with my dad's grandmother. I don't know why, but so it was.

We lived like this until my dad decided to start a new family with a woman who, for many years, was my stepmother. When I discovered she wasn't my real mom, I didn't like this idea and I decided to escape from her care. I was thinking, "I'm not the daughter of this lady and I'm not going to pretend that she is my mother". As a young child, I didn't pay much attention to family matters, but as I grew older, these things were important to me. So far, I am still looking for my real mother so I can discover the true story of my life's beginning.

Now I will tell you about my present family. I have a 16 years old daughter and a son, who this year, turns 15 years old. No matter what happened in my early life, today they are my reason to continue to strive for a better life every day. I am very proud to have experienced these situations because it has taught me important lessons. For me, God is first and I ask Him daily for another opportunity to be a better human. Thank you God.

Rosalba Zarate is a student in the ESOL Adult Program at S.F.S.C. in Avon Park, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Denise Miriani. She is Learning to speak English very well.

Patience is Virtue

I am from Guatemala. When I was a child, I saw how my parents struggled to earn a living. It got worse when my dad died. Growing up, my dream was to help my mom improve her lifestyle. Though it was heart-breaking to leave my mom, I migrated to the United States looking for a better opportunity 17 years ago.

I thought coming to this country would be easy. But apparently it was not as I expected.

I landed in Virginia. I was just 16 years old. I did not have any legal documents to get a job and also I was pregnant at that time. After 3 months, my sister and her family helped me find a job. It was challenging because I did not know any English and I had to work at night for one year. Sadly, my salary was very low.

I was living with my older sister. I was afraid to tell her that I was pregnant because of my age. I thought that she would dislodge me out of her house. I hid my pregnancy from her for nine months until one day she found out that I was pregnant, a day before I was going to give birth. A month later, I went back to work. Every time I had to go to work, my sister would take care of my baby. My life got complicated because I was a single mother with a night shift job. I was hoping that something good would happen and it would change my life. The father of my first daughter was in Guatemala and he also didn't know that I was pregnant until after my baby was born.

Two years later, I got into a relationship with the father of my two daughters. He worked and I stayed home with our children. I could not work for about five years because it was hard to find a job and I was taking care of three little girls. We could not afford to find a babysitter. So, we moved from Virginia to Key West, Florida. Finally, I got a better job opportunity. When my three daughters started going to school, I was able to start working. I also thought about going back to school. After 10 years, I was blessed with another baby girl. I have 4 girls total, the oldest is 16 years old, my second child is 15, my third child is 14 and my little one is 4. Now all of my three children are older and my baby girl just started going to school. I finally have the time to go to back to school too. I hope to finish the English class and the rest of my GED coursework, as well. Then, I would like to study nursing to become a Registered Nurse.

Hogla Rodriguez attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Dominican Doctor Comes to the U.S.

As a doctor you must have certain important qualities, such as empathy, dedication, and patience. I worked in the medical field for 12 years. I learned a lot and grew as a person. Once you accomplish your goals in life, there comes a moment of uncertainty. What comes next? What is life after you've reached a certain point? For me everything started to change when my family and I decided to move to the United States and knew my life was never going to be the same.

In the Dominican Republic, I was a doctor and the director of a clinic. Starting over in a new country would result in a change of career. I accepted this and decided to make some changes in my life before we moved. First, I decided to quit my job, and look for other opportunities. Moving to the United States, I would have to work in all types of jobs. To work as a doctor in the United States you must complete several evaluations and it is a very long process. I didn't want to go through all of that, so I obtained a job as a health and nutrition teacher. At first, it was tough to adjust to this new field, but with time it became easier.

A few years passed and the immigration process was finally complete. My family and I moved to the United States without knowing how our lives would change. It took a long time to adapt to this new country. It was difficult not knowing the language or how the system worked. I felt lost without knowing where I was heading. Then the pandemic started and this changed my life forever. I had a job, taking care of an elderly person, but it ended because of the pandemic. At this moment in my life, I felt completely unmotivated. However, when I least expected it, everything changed. During the quarantine I discovered a new lifestyle.

My goal as a doctor had been to cure an illness, but never how to prevent it. Now I discovered the importance of functional medicine. This opened my mind to a new world. I changed my eating habits, I started to workout, and to meditate. I took the pandemic as an opportunity to work on myself. How could I advance in life without knowing who I am. At this point, I enrolled my husband and myself at Learn to Read to improve our English skills. I knew English academically, but was not comfortable speaking. Everything started to change because I started changing inside. I have obtained a new job, taking care of a wonderful

child. I don't know exactly where I'm heading, but I am confident that with God I will find my way. I am thankful that Learn to Read has given me the opportunity to share my story.

Sol Hernandez is a student at Learn to Read St. Johns County. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

Hobbies

The word hobby sounds like something easy, fun and exclusive for certain people, but for many people like me it is synonymous with good mental health.

The world is full of stressful people, moments and things and doing an activity that makes us happy and clears our minds of daily problems is very important to continue with our lives. Hobbies whatever their goal is to relax. If not then we can't call it a hobby.

I think that if we don't have a hobby in our life, it would be very routine. Hobbies are like "the seasoning that gives seasoning to our life", in my case, I have several hobbies, cooking, walking, socializing, doing crosswords puzzles, reading novels. They make me forget for a moment the problems and the routine and give me a more joyful approach to carry out my day to day.

I have lived in 3 countries and adapting to them has not been easy; different cultures, different people, different jobs, depending on that I have had to look for different activities that fill my life and help me move forward now and adapt to the environment in which I am living.

I don't conceive that there are people who do not have free a time to do what they like and what makes them happy, many times we don't give ourselves that gift of leaving free time to do what we like.

Choosing a hobby depends on several factors, first, it would be the free time we have, second, the creativity or skills to do it, because for example, if I like fishing and I can't

Do it, instead of being relaxing. It would be rather stressful or frustrating, although many times with practice you learnt. Third, how much I am willing to spend on this hobby, so when choosing activities that I can do in my free time we must think about those factors, although many times we choose something simple and don't need to think so much.

Having a hobby makes us mentally healthy. For me it isn't having free time, it is having a necessary time!!!

Suyapa Marisol Ponce is an ESOL Student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

From the U.S. to Costa Rica and Back

Hello, I am Víctor Rojas. I was born in Philadelphia and moved to Costa Rica with my mom and younger brother in 2006. I attended elementary through senior high school without any problem. I was good in English class because I retained some from living in the US. I decided to go to high school in mechanical engineering, which I enjoyed a lot. In 2019, I did an Internship at the Bridgestone Factory in Costa Rica.

The day of my graduation was a turning point for me. I was speaking with my uncle about the idea of moving to Florida to live with him. Then the pandemic of Covid 19 struck, causing the closure of the International Airport and the US embassy. I was stuck in Costa Rica for an unknown period. I spent that time improving my English and learning how to live in the United States and how to get a new US passport.

After some months the airport reopened. I was very excited when I arrived at the Miami airport and passed migration and security. After a one connecting flight, I arrived at the Orlando International Airport.

Two weeks later, my uncle introduced me to Elida of Literacy Services in Fellsmere, FL. She registered me, gave me a Mango Languages account, told me about a conversation group, and later gave me a private tutor, who said he was very impressed by the level of my English.

Our first classes focused on idioms and pronunciation through music videos and tv shows. I mentioned that I was interested in the Apprenticeship Program at Piper Aircraft, so we decided to make a schedule of all the requirements I needed to cover.

I needed to get my GED, create a resume, write an essay, and have an interview. My tutor told me to make an outline of my ideas, ordered from the most important to the least important. After that I wrote a draft, and we reviewed what I had written. I made corrections to the grammar and improved the structure of the essay. We also worked on listening to the questions asked and responding to them and how to dress correctly for the occasion.

The big day arrived! I was surprised that I was not nervous during the interview process. The tips and practice that my tutor gave me helped me feel more confident. When I later received the call from HR, I accepted the job.

I would like to thank my Tutor Dom. Without his help, I would not have been able to achieve my GED, the title of Student of the Year, or the application for the Piper program. Thank you, Elida and Literacy Services of Indian River County, for giving me help and support. My story is an example of how much this organization helps those who want to improve themselves.

Victor Rojas is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. His teacher is Dom Restuccia.

Start Again

I'm from Venezuela, a beautiful country but with economic and safety difficulties. We moved to Puerto Rico at the right time, on January 6, 2006, our adventures began.

We started a new chapter in Puerto Rico with our four-year-old son and I was six months pregnant, it made me feel nervous and sad about this change in life because we were always surrounded by our families and we supported each other in Venezuela.

Puerto Rico was our first adventure, even though we were nervous and feeling alone, our neighbors opened the door to us and my son started to have friends. I realized why they call it “La isla del encanto” (The island of charm). The natives are wonderful and they always made us feel welcome.

We started again in 2014 in Weston, Florida. Although I understood and read a little bit of English, it was difficult for me to speak English and there I started English class by ESOL. I got a job as a babysitter and that helped me to practice my English, I felt great to be able to communicate with the wonderful families who trust me to take care of their children.

Then in 2018, my mom got sick and died in Venezuela. This was devastating for my family. Crying for my mom without being able to say goodbye and four months later another family member died. My aunt who was very loved by me died in Spain and I couldn't say goodbye to her either.

We moved to Naples in August 2018. We didn't know that this new chapter was going to be the hardest for me. I got a fever and I felt sick, I had encephalitis in January 2019. It was like a shut-down in a computer but in my body. I was hospitalized for one month, of which I only remember the last week.

Encephalitis affected my memory, taste, smell and my point of view in life. The first year after that was the hardest, I forgot English and I didn't know anyone and my husband helped me because it was difficult to communicate with my children's school, the doctors and community.

Then in 2020, I started online English classes. It's never too late to start again. I signed up for English classes and it has been a great gift. I have met nice and wonderful people. I feel more confident to talk in English.

I enjoy life, the little details, nature, talking with my family and friends and living in Naples now. You can always start again!

Maria Evelyn Rodriguez is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.

I Love You, Dad

The first time I saw him was the day I was born, and on that day I knew he would be my one and only true love. My dad taught me respect, understanding, and love for others. He coached me to enrich myself intellectually, to have diplomas, my license, and to never depend on men. Being a woman is not a mistake in life. I need to show everyone that I have my place in this world.

The day I wanted to practice the Muslim religion, he said to me: “My daughter, before you start, learn those of others. God is in you and it’s up to you to know how to honor Him correctly.” Thanks to dad, I studied Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. This allowed me to be tolerant towards humanity and our planet. He enlightened me to reach out to others and to go beyond my limits. He said making mistakes in life is not a flaw but it could be an opportunity or a good life lesson. He was always next to me when I made good or bad decisions. He dried my tears when I was disappointed in people and life. He healed my wounds when I fell and my heart when it was broken.

Today, my dad has been gone for one year. He has completed his journey on this earth. He is not here to advise me. I won’t see him coming home ringing the bell and going through my cupboards for chocolate. I will no longer hear his voice shouting, “SAMOUMA ! Where’s my crazy? Come. We are going to go to the supermarket”. I will not see him running to the bathroom to use all my perfumes.

I feel really sorry to have gone this far without hugging him like it was the last time, for lying to him and looking into his eyes knowing I will not return. I did not want to disappoint him and see his tears. My dad knew if he had asked I would not have left for Saint Barthelemy. Despite everything he forgave me because I am his beloved daughter, the apple of his eye!”

My dad left this earth on December 28, 2020, and my heart has been bleeding until today. If I could have my way, I would have liked to leave with him but I know that is not what he would have wanted for me. I love my dad very much. He will forever remain in my mind and in my heart. I love you, dad.

Samia attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Retirement

When I retired it changed everything; Each day is a holiday for me. For example, I no longer have an obligation to work. I have time to enjoy things like biking, paddle boarding and swimming.

I also have more time to enjoy traveling from my home in Quebec to places in the United States and abroad.

However, retirement was at first. I had many questions before I decided to retire. One question I had was “What is the amount of my fixed cost?” The most complicated question I had was “How many years will I stay alive?” Of course, nobody can send me this answer.

Finally, I enjoy living in Florida in the winter time, learning English, going back at home and we will prepare for the next trip in the fall.

Serge Roux is a student at the Family Service Center, Arcadia, FL. He is currently enrolled in Mrs. Dawn Randolph’s ABE/ESOL class. Serge is an excellent student and is excited to learn and practice English.

Two Bolivias?

I found a small town in North Carolina called Bolivia, the same as my home country. The name of the mayor is Jane Marston.

One Sunday, when the church was opening for the service, a group of people traveling with GPS saw the sign “Bolivia” and stopped to take pictures. The pastor asked them why they took the pictures, and they answered, “because we are from Bolivia, South America.” They spoke with the pastor about the history and gave him a present—a Bolivian flag.

Bolivia, North Carolina, is a small town with a road running through where there are small businesses, one fire station, one

post office, some churches, one elementary school called Bolivia, and about 200 people.

The name came about because in 1900, the railway used to come from Bolivia, South America, with fertilizers in bags with Bolivian inscriptions. The people wanted to put a name to the town. Everybody gave different known names, and one person suggested the name on the bag, and they all agreed.

Some fun facts:

Bolivia, North Carolina, has an elevation of 43 feet; the highest place in Bolivia, South America, is 21,463 feet.

Bolivia, North Carolina, was incorporated as a town in 1911; Bolivia, South America, was established in 1825 and named after Simón Bolívar, leader of South American independence.

Finally, a big difference between both names is the Bolivia town has an exit to the sea and the country of Bolivia with 11,000,000 inhabitants, does not exit to the sea!

Fanny Sanchez is from Bolivia, and is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas and the Hispanic Outreach Center in Clearwater; and a new citizen of The United States. Her teacher is Robert Baum.

Living Through Loneliness

You know the saying, “you can feel your mother’s touch?” Like when a newborn comes out, it cries for the mother and once the child feels her chest, the warmth of her voice calms them.

On December 14th, I told my mom goodbye. I walked out of the house without even acknowledging her and mad at her, not knowing that was the last time I would see or hear her voice. That night, I stayed up throughout the night thinking about her, my life, with multiple emotions running inside my head like the movie *Inside Out*—anger, sadness, joy, disgust, and fear. I eventually called my dad and that’s when my life went upside down in five minutes. He called me back to let me know my mom stopped breathing.

Every day I have the biggest regret walking out and knowing I could have saved her. I didn't go to the hospital until that next morning. Upon finally arriving, I no longer felt I had a reason to be on this earth. I knew it was the end. Her hands were cold and her body was lifeless. I knew I failed my mother. December 16th at 8 p.m. is a phone call I'll always remember. It was her last heartbeat.

My days without her have taken me to my darkest days. I blame myself for not realizing the pain my mom suffered for days. Depression puts you in a dark place of isolation, guilt, and persistent sadness. I started to neglect myself. April 5th, two days after my mom's birthday, is when I felt the loneliness. Listening to music made everything worse and drinking didn't numb any pain. I picked up a knife and slicing my wrist took my pain away. But then I realized I was only making it worse. I called my dad and he rushed home to hold me. I realized my purpose.

I look at my arm everyday as a constant reminder that nothing is worth harming yourself. My loneliness taught me to find myself. My mom always told me, "God gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers." Loneliness taught me to find my voice and a reason to keep going. Loneliness taught me to protect myself from making bad decisions. Loneliness taught me to be the woman I am. I am a caterpillar who found her wings and I will flourish to be a butterfly.

Taylor Wright is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeastern Florida in Jacksonville. Her teacher is Elizabeth Lawrence.

From Hobby to Business

At five years old, I remember my mom had a Singer sewing machine. She sewed clothes in December "La Lambada" celebration, a popular musical event in my country, Colombia. She made black and white polka dot dresses and skirts. I was so proud of her and her talent. At that moment, I told myself that I would like to sew clothes like my mom. Some of these clothes were sold and some were for me. She did this to help my dad with household expenses. Not only she was earning money but she also enjoyed it.

The hours were long and sometimes until late at night. She involved all of us in this beautiful hobby. My dad made the largest wooden worktable in the neighborhood. We used this table to cut the fabric with mother's patterns and trim the leftover threads of finished garments.

Many years later, I got married and had two beautiful children. Then a great thought about "The American Dream" popped up. It is full of illusions. I left my country, my custom, and my people. At the beginning, when I arrived in the U.S., I stayed home to take care of my children. Sometimes, I got bored and wondered what I could do while taking care of them. One day my husband came home and told me that he had sold his car for \$200. To me, it would be good idea to buy a sewing machine. I took that money and bought a Singer machine just like my mom's. It was a moment of great joy. All my childhood memories were revived. I was excited to think of everything I could do after so many years.

I advertised my service as "Seamstress" on a social network. I received many calls. There were many work orders to complete. I managed to do them well and got compliments from my clients. This hobby proved to be a great tool in 2019 pandemic need for masks. It led me to design and create them together with my husband. We donated them to schools, daycares and people who needed them. On July 4 of that same year, my husband and I decided to create a company to sell them due to requests from large companies. Now, I include my whole family making face masks, like my mom included us. I hope this legacy continues with my kids.

Viviana Torres is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Like My Life

My personal story is different from most families. My mother and my brother were sick in Mexico. Unfortunately, my mother and brother died 3 years ago in Mexico. I miss them so much. My mother was my best friend. They were my only family. Now I am left with memories. I had a daughter shortly after their death. I talk to my daughter Pilar about them all the time. Now she is my

world. She is twelve years old. She is the only family I have here in Belle Glade.

I am engaged to be married to a nice and handsome man who I met at work. I am a tractor driver. He is a trainer for the same company where we both work. I would like to become a mechanic and learn more things on my job. But I would like a better job so that I can spend more time with my daughter. I'm here at West Tech to learn English and I am doing my best. Sometimes the words are complicated and it is not the same. Having my daughter takes time and patience. I would like to go back to the past and study with my daughter so she would be able to speak both languages English and Spanish. Life has not been easy but I am happy I have my daughter, because she is my life, my love, my world, and my everything.

Veronica Campos is a student at West Techicanal Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

Ready For A New Chapter

My life is filled with grace and blessing from God. All my personal journeys are protected and secured by divine protection. In previous years, I decided to leave my country, Haiti, to live abroad because my life was in mortal danger. I was a teacher in my country. I taught experimental science at the 7th, 8th, and 9th grade level.

Being a teacher involved great responsibilities. After class, I always took the time to talk with my students, discouraging them from getting involved in gang affairs. I had some students who were part of and were members of neighborhood gangs. It took a long time for them to decide to abandon the cartels. I instilled in them that a peaceful life and a clear conscience do not indulge in illegal business.

There are many gangs in my country. They battle to control certain strategic areas. This aroused the interests of people who are part of the political class and the elite class to fight in order to achieve their ends. Certain leaders who were in power wanted to be re-elected at all costs. They paid money and supplied weap-

ons to the cartels who controlled the areas. They used the young people in the neighborhoods to burn and falsify the results of the ballot boxes. For these kinds of people, I was an obstacle because I advised my students not to be involved.

The deputy of the zone even wanted to pay me but I refused to participate in their dirty business. The Deputy of Cite Soleil paid people to kill. There were many people who wanted me dead because of my non-involvement in shady business. At that time, going to Chile was much easier, so I left the country to live in Chile for several years. It was in Chile that I met a girl, Alomise, and we got married. We were blessed with a child.

In 2018-2019, Chile experienced political unrest due to rising transportation prices. There was massive destruction and robberies. My family was accused of a crime. The Police of Chile carried out a criminal investigation where I lived and made an arrest. Once again my life was in danger. We left Chile and came to the US. Hence, here I am ready to begin a new life, a new chapter. I look forward to a great future here. I am excited to improve my English, learn work skills that are required in this country, and get advice and guidance from my teacher.

Valory Verrone attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Rosita's Personal Story

In the beginning of my life I was born in Port Salut, Haiti near Les Cayes. I was there my whole life, pretty much until I had my first child at the age of 26. After that, I was working all the time so I could provide for my son until I had enough money to move with him to the United States. The best decision I've decided to make really. Ten years later, I had my second child at the age of 34. Two years later at the age of 36 I had my third and last child which changed my life forever.

In addition to later on in my life, I've been trying my best to support my children and their needs. That isn't all though, I've been trying to have a better life for me as well and trying to figure out what I would like to do with my life. When I first moved to the United States, I stayed with family. After I got enough

money and motivation to move, I bought my first home, which I still resides today right here in Delray Beach, Florida. I'm super thankful and blessed for what I have accomplished over the years in America.

Lastly, I wouldn't have been the greater version of myself as I am today if it wasn't for Miss Siena. Many years ago, I joined this English program named Village Readers. The second best decision I've ever made in my life. People don't realize how much Village Readers has changed my life. I couldn't thank Miss Siena enough for all she has done to help me. That's my personal story.

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

From Uncertainty to a Varying Tranquility

By 2015, Venezuela's problematic condition was headed into an irreversible chaos. This was happening in a land full of treasures, such as natural monuments and beautiful women, the biggest oil reserve in the world, beaches and mountains that resemble the Eden, as well as 8 Miss Universe crowns. The thought of basic needs like food became to be a burden. People embarking in long lines to be able to purchase a limited list of first necessity products. A good bottle of wine, as well as any type of board cheese, became inaccessible for middle class professionals. "What to do?" was the recurrent question at that point in time. "Migrating" the simplicity of this word implies a high emotional cost as well as the sacrifice that comes with making this decision.

In brief, the question is: what to do with one's attachments, friends and moments built through the years.

A destination arose from far: United States of America. Aside from the complications that a different language brings, there were other uncertainties that were not very clear. Now, it's been almost 5 years, and there are still many things to be clarified. In the meantime, I focus on the small achievements: my daughter attending Berklee College and this service that Clearview offers - learning English. As it was said by Napoleon and my father, "Haste makes waste."

This experience has been long and draining in many aspects.

On one hand, there is the difficulty that comes with being unable to express political, social, and behavioral thoughts that were part of my profession and that I had to explain on a daily basis. With this, the situation seems more difficult than one could imagine. At times, this causes frustration and unrest. However, this experience demonstrates that strength in all shapes and forms must be grown and kept in order to go on. As I said before, my daughter attending one of the most prestigious music schools in the world is a very satisfying achievement, so I'll continue on very optimistically. Thank you again Clearview, for your help with learning English

Hector Tulio Villegas Vaquen is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Iguna Ozols.

We Continue the Fight

By the year 2005, I had graduated from the University as a biologist. Since I was a child, I have been passionate about everything related to life in all its expression. I remember that a teacher saw that passion in me and told me these words..." when you see the light, follow it, do not be afraid to sink into the mud, because if you don't follow it, you will spend your life wondering if it could have been your star". This is how, on that day, I began the fight for everything that would be in the future, and, to this day, I continue to fight. I never give up. There are battles that are difficult for me, and I stop, but it is only a short rest. This is how I began, and that is how I will end, always fighting and enjoying the process.

After graduating, I moved to Argentina. In this country I trained in cytogenetics and became an embryologist. This is how I began to discover how wonderful the formation of life is. This is how I discovered how important and how wonderful it is to preserve it and value it at every moment. This fight to understand how wonderful life is has impassioned me so far in my life. Every day I continue to discover wonderful things and know that if I had not followed that light, I would never have enjoyed this process.

My struggle now is this new country, new language, and culture. I know it will not be easy for me, but I will not let myself be

defeated. I have a lot to learn here, and I have just started. There are days that I do not understand anything and then I stop for a deep and continuous breath. There are battles that one chooses, others that we unintentionally face. The good thing in both cases is to win them and go on and on. No matter the time, you must continue.

It is the wonderful thing in life that every day there is a new challenge; something nice to do. Let's not allow ourselves to be defeated. Let's continue fighting. Never give up.

Yoanky Ibarra Tendero is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

I Am a Conqueror

2021 was a very challenging year for the human race, including me. I will never forget that year because I was diagnosed with cancer. I was very upset because I have a 5-year old boy. At that time, I was thinking I needed to make a plan for myself. I should stop crying because I need to be strong and I need to survive for my son and my family. So, I told my family, friends and my teacher about the news. Everybody advised me to be calm. My husband told me not to be scared and not to worry too much about it. He told me that we would go through it together.

We looked for a doctor and a hospital that could treat my cancer effectively. Finally, we found University Health Sylvester Hospital in Miami. I have four kinds of doctors: chemotherapy doctor, surgery doctor, radiation doctor, and implant doctor.

They did a thorough check up on my body. We had meetings with them every week. The treatment started in April. My chemo doctor told me that I needed chemotherapy 12 times, but I was so lucky because the doctor did not find the tumor after the third chemo. Then, I had the surgery. However, there are still some of the cancer cells remaining in my body. The second surgery was painful and I could not move my right hand for a couple of weeks.

Six months later, on October 4, I received the good news. The doctor told me I am cancer free. I was excited and could not wait to share this great news with my family, friends, and my teacher. I had a celebration for it during my birthday get together. My treatment is not finished yet, though. I have just completed the 5-week radiation. Now, I am waiting for the implant. My implant doctor's appointments are in June and July. So, all of my treatments will be over in August 2022.

I want to thank my son and my husband, family, friends, and my teacher for their support and for being close to me. I am not depressed anymore. I am a conqueror.

Winn Winn Htun is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Day

Off Day from Work

There are many memorable days in every person's life. Some might prefer Monday, while others like a different day of the week better. Everybody has their personal reason about their preference. Several people appreciate holidays, including me. The name of the holiday is not as important as a day of no work. We all get to rest from being busy at work. I notice that the first workday after the holiday is the hardest because we all have to have to go back to the grind and make an adjustment.

In my case, prior to coming to the United States, I used to work a lot as a military pilot in my country, Serbia, and spent many days on duty together with my coworkers. I had to work over the holidays, Sundays, and the weekends. It was very hard to say what my favorite day was. I had plans to spend New Year's Eve with my friends. We prepared everything we needed and suddenly we received summon for work duty. As a military man, I had to be obedient, but I cannot say that I was happy.

I remember very well that I spent 70 days on duty per year. That was a difficult job for me, but I was young. I had many friends who worked with me, and I can say time went by fast.

Now, I live in the United States. These days I am a cook at Half Shell Raw Bar, a famous and original seafood restaurant in Key West. It is a very big restaurant. Reservations are recommended. I enjoy my new job and cooking has always been my favorite. Because I am not as young as I used to be, I need to rest after three or four working days. My manager is obliged to grant me a day to relax. Hence, my favorite day is my off day.

Radoslaw Babic attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Day

There are seven days in a week. My favorite day of the week is Sunday. What Friday is to most people is what Sunday means to me. Sunday is the last day of the week. I'm always excited for the week to end so I can enjoy a Sunday. Sunday has always been my favorite day ever since I was a child. So, it is something I've looked forward to. Sunday is the day I have a day off from work, it is the time I choose to praise and worship God, and most importantly it is the day I get to spend time with my family and friends.

Like most adults I enjoy my time off from work. Work can be stressful. You have to deal with long hours, smile and be polite in the face of rude customers, and sometimes not be paid a livable wage. So, Sunday is also one of the days where I have a day off. If I had it my way, I would have more days off than work days. On my days off I choose that time to chill and relax at my house. I watch some TV and I do some chores around the house. I use Sunday as a day to recharge and get my mind together so I can come to work on Monday refreshed.

I am a very religious woman. So, Sunday is also the day I choose to worship the Lord and all he has done for me. I am very thankful that when I immigrated to America that the Lord has blessed me in many ways. I have a house, a family and a stable job. Usually, I go to church on Sundays and Saturdays. But since the corona virus has happened, I've decided to not go to church for safety reasons. Instead, I choose to have my own version of "church" at home. Every morning I wake up and pray for a good five minutes. I pray to the Lord and thank him for allowing me to live another day.

Lastly, Sunday is also the day I can spend time with my family and friends. I am a very family-oriented person. So family is number one to me. My friends are also important to me too. I use Sunday to cook for my family, and sometimes I cook for my neighbors too. Cooking is my way of showing love to the people I care about. I use Sunday to talk to my relatives over the phone. Most of my relatives don't live in America. They either live in Paris or Haiti. So, I always make sure to call every Sunday so I can keep tabs on them and make sure they're ok. With my friends

sometimes I'll drive to their house to hang out with them. I like to chat about life, work, and family with my friends.

To conclude, having a day off from work, worshipping God, and hanging with friends and family is why Sunday is my favorite day. Sunday holds a special place in my heart, and I hope to look forward to more great Sundays in the future.

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

The Day My Life Changed

When I graduated from high school and went to university, I wanted to work hard and have a great career. My roommate (also my best friend) always told me not to study hard and go have fun sometimes. I was thinking I needed 10 more years for love, marriage and having kids. Until April 3, 2007. In the third year of university my best friend decided to get married. Even though I had so many classes and exams, I decided to go to my roommate's wedding.

The day before the wedding, I went on a 4-hour bus ride. I arrived in my friend's city. She came to pick me up and I hugged her. Meanwhile I was shocked. Even though love and marriage were too far for me, I met the man of my dreams. In one second, I lived happiness and sadness. He was walking toward us, and my heart was racing. My friend introduced me to him, he was her brother. And I felt so bad when she told me he was her older brother. I never met him because I knew that he lived in the USA. We had always talked about going on vacation there with my best friend, but we could never go because my parents didn't allow me to since I was the youngest child in the family. I was in LOVE.

I was looking for him at her engagement party, but I couldn't find him, so we didn't have a chance to talk. The next day at the wedding, he asked me to dance with him. We talked about our dreams and the future. The next day he wanted to talk more with me and asked questions about me. We didn't have enough time to get to know each other because he had to go back to the USA, and I had to go back to my family. We had a good time together for a couple of days but then we had to leave each other. While

he was in the USA, and I was in Turkey, we talked a lot. Then our families met. Everything happened so fast. My school, my dreams, and my career were in second place.

Six months later, we decided to get married. After a year passed, we had our gorgeous daughter. Four years later we had our handsome son. And now I take care of my kids 24/7 and my career is motherhood.

Sebiha Buyuknisan is an ESOL student at Palm Beach central ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Ms.Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Trip to Sea World

My family and I went on a trip to Sea World. My husband Roberto and my daughters Angelyn and Yamileth and son Benjy and I all went. My sister-in-law and her daughters, Karen and Allison and grandson Kayden were with us too. Karen's husband Louis and Allison's boyfriend Drew were also a part of our big family group to spend a day in Sea World.

We went in the spring, It was our first time out since the start of the pandemic. I was excited! We did need to wear masks. That was ok, because we were glad just to be out!

When we first went in, we saw the roller coasters. Roller coasters make me nervous. They scare me! My nephew and Allison's boyfriend went on right away. After the roller coasters we all walked around and saw the tanks of fish. We saw clown fish and sea horses and fish of many different colors.

Then we went to the shows. We saw killer whale, dolphins, and sea lions. I liked the killer whale show. The sea lion show was funny. My dog Charlie sometimes barks like a sea lion!

After the shows we went to eat. I was getting very hungry. My husband Roberto and my daughter and I had fried chicken. It tasted so good! Angelyn and Benjy had pizza.

After we ate, we all went to the gift shop. Benjy bought a hat with Oscar the Grouch on it. He loves Sesame Street. Yamileth

wanted a stuffed doll from Sesame Street. Angelyn got a stuffed Cookie Monster. My children were so happy.

My trip to Sea World was amazing. I loved being with my family and I hope we can return.

Guadalupe Maria Bazan is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Betty Jane Moulton.

My Family Time

Hello. I want to share a little about my family, especially something that I enjoy every Sunday. I used to have Sunday breakfast with my sisters, but about twelve years ago, I decided to prepare breakfast time with my family instead of with my sisters because my family was growing and there were too many people with my sisters and their families. I prepare breakfast for my family at home at 10:30 when they come home from mass, and I do it with a lot of joy.

When I'm cooking, it smells like delicious, spicy Mexican food—tortillas, tacos with meat and cilantro, and fresh chiles. It sounds like onions and beans frying and pancakes cooking. I don't like my house or my clothes to smell like frying oil, so whenever I make Carne al Pastor, I prepare my meat outside because I don't like this smell in my house.

I enjoy so much to see my table full of my family sharing anecdotes and telling jokes. Although breakfast is not so rich, what makes it rich is that we share time as a family. I hope with pleasure every Sunday to be with my family. I'm happy because it's not only my daughters but their husbands – whom I consider my sons – and my grandchildren. And now my youngest daughter's boyfriend comes, too! They stay all Sunday, sometimes painting or watching movies and eating dinner.

Sometimes I ask, "Do you want lunch for tomorrow?" and everyone says, "YES!"

Guille Cendejas is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Linda Barker.

Good Memories of My Fiftieth Birthday

I celebrated my fiftieth birthday in Colombia, South America, with family and friends.

In the morning we went to Chia, a town of Cundinamarca, where they had a dance festival at the principal park. It was very folkloric. In the middle of the day, we went to a restaurant and ate lunch. We had agiaco; that is a typical soup.

In the night my sister had a very special surprise at her house: my friends from school were there! Cris, Zamira, Vicki, Beatriz, and a few of my sister's friends. We sang with the karaoke machine, and then a guitar player arrived. The musician's name was Carlos Valderrama, with a marvelous voice. He was a very talented singer. He also plays classical guitar. He sang beautifully, and my niece also sang. She has a very powerful voice.

My sister had a mora cake. Mora is a delicious fruit. My sister also decorated the house with balloons. They sang "Feliz Cumpleaños" to me. It was very powerful, and it made me cry. Some people said some words to me that touched my soul. It was an amazing day!

My friend Cris gave me a beautiful hummingbird, a symbolic bird, made with crystals.

My sister Terry gave me a very touching card that made me reflect. She also gave me some money. My friends gave me a beautiful purse, called a Wayuu bag, made by the Wayuu Indians. My sister's friends gave me a very special cream.

I took some pictures with my family and friends. It was a very memorable day!

Lorraine Denning is a student from Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Lorriane Ledford.

Every Day is Special

Love every day. Here is my encouragement for all of us. The more we develop good habits, the more interesting our life

becomes. Small steps lead to big goals. It is better to go at the speed of a turtle than to come up with excuses every time. When you spend time preparing healthy food at home, you extend your life by several years. When you exercise for 30 minutes a day, you save money on medication. When you do your education for an hour a day, you increase your importance in society, increase your social circle. When you talk to your loved ones for a few minutes a day, you maintain your emotional health.

You need to remember your goal. Everyone has difficulties in life. What sets winners apart is they don't stop training when they're in trouble. No one is born a winner. There is no need to be afraid of mistakes and failures. A small child falls many times before learning to walk. If it does not occur to him then this occupation is not for him.

It is in our power to make each day better than the previous one. My best day is yet to come. I'm excited every day. Our actions make up our whole life. We are the creators of our destiny. Luck is easy to catch but hard to keep. There are so many opportunities in our world right now. You can learn new things at any age. The internet is available in all corners of the planet, even in the most remote.

We need to learn to like every day. Daily useful routine will make life happy. Every person should make himself better than yesterday. Get the best version of yourself. Be a role model for other people. Our world can become kinder and better. Do useful and simple things. But first of all you need to start with yourself. You need to learn to love yourself, only after that you can give love to other people.

We live in different conditions. We have a different financial situation. Different age, weather, and climatic conditions and so on. The main thing is to find harmony and balance with yourself.

Olga Mannik is a student at Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Rodziah Josephson.

Prince or Princess?

I remember the moment when the rare and beautiful, yet eerie feeling surfaced in me. That typical Floridian afternoon could not be a warm afternoon of any day, especially touching the phone which sounded as loud as my heartbeat.

Motherhood came unexpectedly to me. A mixture of fear and joy surrounded all my moments after the big news. This milestone is as wonderful as it is frightening. And that day I would know if my inestimable wait would bring a boy or a girl. I always dreamed of being a mother of a girl. Although a mother's heart is endowed with impartiality, that was my desire from as far as I could remember, too impossible to hide.

Suddenly, the repeated ringing of the phone interrupted my wild thoughts and I breathlessly blurted out a scream in the form of hello. The nurse on the other end held the phone away from her ear, trying to contain the shock she received.

She said, "Lady, is everything alright?"

I said, "Yes." But knowing for certain my total lack of emotional control, that was truly remarkable.

She said, "Do you really want to know your baby's sex over the phone?"

I quickly said, "Yes, now please."

There was a five-second pause for what felt like forever and suddenly it sounded like, "IT'S A GIRL!"

I hung up the phone and cried like a child with such joy. I stood there in tears, in that moment of mine. My mother's sense came through, and she was there inside me, in my body, and it felt like I already felt her as part of my soul. My girl was a reality. She was slowly growing up secretly within me, my dream, my princess, my daughter.

Thais Nass is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher Angela Faiola.

Sunday Sundae

There are seven days in a week. I think many people have a favorite day in a week. My favorite day is Sunday.

I work every day except Sunday. It's my free day when I can do all my personal activities. Like go to the laundry to wash the clothes, make some calls on the phone to share ideas with my relatives and friends inside or outside the country, and go to the grocery store to buy everything I need to cook at home.

This is also the day I enjoy with my family. We like soccer so much. We always watch it on television. We go to the park where the children can play together and meet new friends and talk about school. I ask my kids what they want to become in the future after their studies. Sometimes we go to the beach to swim in the ocean. Sometimes we go the movies too.

The last thing I do on this day is I always participate in a meeting with a group of people. We talk about our area where we're from. We talk about how we can develop this area to improve roads, have drinking water for the community, have a health center, and have schools to educate the children in our community.

In fact, I think Sunday is really the best day for me because, it's my day off and I can do all of my favorite activities.

Luder Exanor is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

Halloween Festivities

I will tell you about Halloween which is celebrated each year on October 31. It is a new holiday for me, and this year, 2022, I too will celebrate it with family. I'm very happy and excited to experience it because I have only seen it on social media. For me, scary is fun because I like everything related to horror. I'm a person that doesn't know the meaning of fear and when I'm in a scary situation fear turns into laughter.

I am confident I will enjoy this day because many people do what I like to do: watch horror movies and visit scary places. I

enjoy viewing horror movies because they are my favorite genre. When I watch them, I feel entertained, not afraid, because in reality it is acting and nothing else. In Morocco I visited a lot of scary places that I discovered with my friends. We would explore deserted old villages in the mountains. There are a lot of old scary rumors about these areas.

Here are some other examples of traditional Halloween activities I look forward to experiencing. People make bonfires and light candles in the dark. Others wear scary masks to frighten people and have parties at night with their family and friends. Then there is eating candy and caramel apples. I have heard that there is nothing as nostalgic as eating candy and caramel apples on this holiday and this delicious tradition will be another way to enjoy this event.

My first Halloween will be here soon, and I know it will not be my last. I can't wait to tell my old friends in Morocco about it. I hope that by that time I will have new American friends to celebrate with.

Moad Mhamdi is a student at South Florida State College. His teacher is Ms. Miriani.

The Day with Purpose

My favorite day is the day I realize why I was born and why I am here. I believe that we all have a purpose in life, and that we are in this world not by chance since we all have a why and a what for.

On my favorite day I understand that my way of acting can affect people for better or worse. For this reason, I believe that day I was born to be an agent of change and to be able to affect the lives of others for good. I am certain that day the world changes when I change.

I accept as true that day I was born to help build and not destroy others and I really hope that you would accept this reality, too.

Reynier Obando attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe Country. His teacher Is Ms. Josephson.

Every Day is My Favorite Day

My favorite day, hmmm..., I think I don't have a "favorite day," and let me tell you why I don't. Every morning that God gives me the opportunity to wake up, to be able to open my eyes, and be able to breathe already makes it special. Probably many people have not been able to do it but I have.

Also, I don't know what things can happen to me each day. They are probably good things. For instance, I received a text message telling me that I have a job and I will start on Monday. That is good news for me. Another good news is that I can attend the English class so that one day I can speak it as I have always dreamed of, and it has been my goal for a long time.

On the contrary, I could receive bad news such as when my elderly mother broke her arm on January 1, 2021. I had to run like crazy accompanying her to all her appointments. Maybe something strange might happen. For example, the day my dog, Canuto, died and we went to bury him near my mother's house. Another instance, I had been given a beautiful dog named Luna because the owner couldn't take care of her. When Luna saw us, she kissed us as if to say, "Take me with you because I was waiting for you." Of course, we took her to our house and now she is part of our family.

Possibly, sad things could happen such as the death of several of our friends due to COVID-19 and knowing how this has changed our lives and the whole world. In short, every day is a new day, full of many things to learn, value, improve, change, respect, and love. That is why for me every day is my favorite because there is never one day the same as another and it is a fresh new slate I can write on all over again.

Maria Placidon attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Surprise Moment

Since I was a child, I dreamed about driving a car. I always thought that when I was 18, I would have my driver's license and my car. In my country, for the first driver's license you have to be 18 years old.

When I was 18, that didn't happen. I couldn't pay for my car and my parents couldn't afford it. I had to save up a lot of money for my dreams. Between several moments, low and high, it took me a while to realize it. So, at 21, I got it. I bought my first dream car and got my driver's license. When I went to get my driver's license, I told the instructor that I didn't even know how to start the car because I didn't have a car at home.

My uncle and my brother helped me learn to drive, and I was very excited and happy. After a few weeks I was driving in a place I didn't know, and I turned onto a street where I was going against the traffic and hit another car. The driver was very angry and yelled at me saying that he used the car to work and that I would have to pay his working days until the car was fixed. After that day, I was very scared, traumatized, and couldn't drive anymore.

A few months later, I was with my friend in his car on a busy street. The light turned red, and he just stopped the car and got out and got into the backseat. I didn't understand anything. So, he told me, "It's your turn to drive. I know you can do it. If you don't get in the driver's seat and drive now, we'll be here as long as you need to!" The light turned green, and the cars behind us honked their horns, and I had no choice but to get into the driver's seat and start driving.

After that day, I started driving my car again and never stopped. I started driving to different new places. This happened over 20 years ago. I never crashed my car again because of my fault, and I pray every day that it doesn't happen.

That moment that day was very special. I never thought my friend would do that. Maybe if he hadn't encouraged me, I wouldn't have gone back to driving or it would have taken longer. We are still friends today, and sometimes we remember that mo

ment, and we laugh a lot. Surprise moments, and special friends are forever.

Ilza Oliveira is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Birth of My Princesses

I could say that in my life I have been on excellent days that brought to me a lot of joy. I could mention the day when I got my master's degree and my Ph.D. I believe that this goal gives me happiness but is more related to a professional goal that was achieved and not so much with a personal one. But my favorite days, I say in plural because are two days.

The first one was when I received the news that I am going to be a father of a warrior girl. Even the day was December 24th of 2012 at noon when the gynecologist reveals to us the sex of our first baby. I was so happy and excited because my first baby was a girl, I dreamed all nights trying to imagine how she might look like. Unfortunately, the day when she was born, I could not be there because I was working in Colombia and my wife was in Mexico. I arrived the next day and immediately went to the hospital to see my princess. The first thing was to carry her in my arms, put her very close to my chest, feel her smells, her skin, her little hands, and her fingers that were incredible and magic, my heart was beating close to 200 bpm of happiness. At that moment I felt completed, but I felt bad for not arriving on time to receive her during the labor and put on her first clothes and be the second person that she touches next to her mom.

The second day was almost two years after, our second baby arrived. Another lovely girl. With her, I had the opportunity to live all the experiences that I lost with my first baby. I received her after the labor. When I saw her, heard her voice crying, touched her, helped the assistant nurse put her clothes on, that was amazing. My white dreamer (how I call my daughter), came to bring us kind, infinitive love, kisses, hugs, and teach me how to be a better person and father. I continue learning from both. After that, I could say that I felt so happy and complete because in my few experiences, the opportunity that we had to create life,

seeing them, knowing that they have a part of me, it is just out of this world, it is my miracle being true.

For these reasons, those days are the favorites of my life so far and allow me to smile every morning when I saw them.

Carlos Polo is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. His teacher is Bob Crews.

Christmas Love

There are many special days that people celebrate. Christmas is my favorite. It is a National and International Day. Christmas is celebrated differently by culture. Christmas is also a time to spend a lot of money. Christmas is also a festival day where people celebrate and remember Jesus.

During Christmas, you can feel happiness, joy, and love from family members and others. It's a time to give and receive gifts and share meals with family and friends. There isn't a better feeling in the world than when a loved one opens the present you give them, and they smile.

Christmas is a day where people travel more to see their family: children, friends, grandkids, grandparents, and parents, they haven't seen in a long time. People enjoy that day to be relaxed, talk about subjects, and tell each other stories. They also take this time to play games and visit places. They prepare good food and settle around the table to eat together.

They also gather and eat at the church on Christmas Eve. Some people go to church to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. This day is as enjoyable as Christmas Day.

In my country, Haiti, people celebrate Christmas Day differently from the U.S. On Christmas Eve, most of the people go to the church to celebrate the birth of Jesus until midnight. They gather to make a lot of food. They have baked homemade cakes and usually make something called kremas (which is good). In Haiti, Christmas celebration starts Christmas Eve and don't end till New Year Day.

Everyone is happily celebrating, listening to loud music, shooting fireworks, and socializing with family and friends. They decorate with fanals (which is used to decorate for Haitian Christmas). Some people buy and decorate Christmas trees and clean their houses.

Even though Christmas is a time to spend a lot of money, it is also time to spend time with family and friends. I love Christmas and enjoy it every year.

Junie Orelus is a student at West Technical Education Center. Their teacher is Zanovia Manderville.

An Enjoyable Trip with Mom

My favorite day was when I traveled with my mother as a gift for her birthday last year. We took a trip to Ushuaia in South Argentina. It was in the summer season, but it was not hot in the south. It was quite cool. At times it drizzled, and the sun came out.

We were excited when we arrived. It is a lovely place, known as the End of the World. Many international tourists go there to see the glaciers, but due to the pandemic there were only local tourists. For a week we did boat tours, walked through the forest, and took lots of photos. We went to the mall and bought clothes. We went out to eat at various restaurants. The seafood was delicious food and the drinks, too. The hotel was incredible. It had everything, so we enjoyed the whole place. It was our first trip together. She was happy and so was I.

There was a day that we wanted to see a glacier. We hiked some trails for an hour. We were warm but we didn't have the right shoes. We went up a mountain. There was snow, but we couldn't get to the other side where the glacier was. The road was uphill, quite narrow and there was a lot of wind. We got scared. It was a dangerous adventure. Luckily, we were able to go down without any problem. We could not believe that we were so high up.

The week went by so quickly. All good things have to come to an end. We took the plane back to Buenos Aires. We did not

want to go home and promised to do this again. We would like to explore other provinces in the South. My next gift for my mom is a trip to the Caribbean beaches together.

Victoria Rodriguez attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Princess

This is a story about my princess. My daughter Miriam was born on June 17, 2003. When she was born, she got really sick because she had a heart murmur. All her life she would get sick until she was nine years old, when she started to get healthy. Since she was six years old Miriam had dreamed about her sweet fifteenth birthday. She wanted to wear a big dress and have a big party. So, we started working hard on her party.

Our family rented a hall in Melbourne, Florida. We had flowers and lights and streamers for decorations. We had carnitas with beans and rice and salad for food. We had pretzels, nuts, and strawberries for dessert.

All of our family and friends came to the hall. We had about 400 people at her birthday party. Miriam had fourteen girls and boys in her queen's court. All of the people were dancing and having fun. We had many Mexican dances to the music. Miriam danced with her dad.

The birthday party was from noon until Midnight. After the party my family had to mop the floors, put the chairs away, and clean the hall. We got home at 4 in the morning. It was one of the best days of my life.

Ruby Serrato is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Bill Moulton.

Jade's Graduation

My daughter, Jade, graduated high school this year. It was a goal of hers, and it made me very happy that she achieved her goal. Jade came to America from Cuba with zero English when

she was 15 years old. Everything was new. She began a new life: new friends, new language, and new teachers. Despite all these difficulties, she managed to overcome, and she achieved her goal over the next three years.

The graduation ceremony was in the football stadium at Vero Beach High School at 8 a.m. on Saturday, May 22nd. It began to rain, but the ceremony continued, and it was beautiful. I was very emotional. I saw her with all her friends, and she was so happy. My husband and I were so proud of her.

After the ceremony, some friends invited Jade to Applebee's for lunch. I went home to prepare for our party. My husband helped a lot! We had a small celebration with family and close friends that night. We had barbeque and cake.

Now Jade wants to join the army. She is waiting for an appointment to take a test that will determine what job she could get. I am very proud of all her hard work!

Yoania Santa Maria is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Jordie Wooldridge.

Special Sundays

My favorite day is Sunday. Why? I like Sunday because I relax more, I see friends and family on this day, and I have time to do my favorite pastimes. This makes me happy!

One reason why I like Sundays because I can get enough sleep and not rush anywhere in the morning. I completely give myself up to rest. There are no alarm clocks ringing, and I don't look at my clock.

The next reason why I love this day is because on Sundays I meet with my best friend, who lives 15 minutes from me. We go for a walk at the park, we sit in a coffee shop, talk, and share the problems and joys of our week. We talk about our families, and this is good for both of us.

Lastly, on this day I can devote Sunday evenings to my favorite pastimes I like to embroider, reading books, listen to music,

and watch movies. On a weekday, I have little time for such activities. Instead, Sundays gives me this opportunity. I love feeling so relaxed in the evening and paying more attention and better quality time with my husband too. We talk about our family and share our opinions.

Sunday is such a beautiful, fun, and relaxing day for me because of all these special moments that happen only on this day!

Farida Sitdikova is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher Angela Faiola.

Happy Days

I have many happy days. One of them is September 25, 2007. I found out that I was expecting my first baby. We did not know the gender and prayed that everything would be fine. The days passed and we waited anxiously for our baby's arrival. On May 10, 2008, we welcomed our baby girl, Ashly, with great joy.

When Ashly was 9 years old, we had to be separated so that she could obtain her residency in the United States, leaving me alone in my country, El Salvador. They were five sad months because I was away from her. Then, she returned home to celebrate her 10th birthday. I was very glad to see her. We lived together while my husband went back to America.

In September 2017, I got married. This is a special day for the three of us because it was a wish that our daughter had asked us for quite a while. It was not possible then because of the pending immigration paperwork. Now, we are able to start my residency process. We are thankful because we got united as a family again under the same roof. My immigration papers were successfully processed.

On November 3, 2021, I was blessed to conceive another baby. Ashly wanted a little brother. We are patiently waiting for his arrival.

Karen Soriano De Lemus attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Day to Remember

It all started on Tuesday, October 27, 2009. I was getting contractions and had to rush to the hospital. The next day, I was still in the hospital until 11:59 pm when my beautiful baby boy was born. My son, Isaac Felix Nunez Alexis, was born on Wednesday, October 28, 2009. The plan was to have a natural birth, but his umbilical cord was around his neck and an emergency C-section was scheduled immediately. I was very confused and did not know exactly what was happening. I only knew my baby was going to be born.

My son is half Puerto Rican and half Haitian. He is a bright and intelligent kid. He makes me a better mom, woman, and human being.

I love my son with all my heart. He is my joy, happiness, and my world. His birth was one of the best days of my life. Actually, it is my favorite day.

I always stay positive and smile often because God blessed me with a wonderful child. I did not realize how much I love my son to pieces. I am still trying to figure out motherhood, but someday I will.

Being a mother is heartwarming, loving, kind, and a blessing. I have to make decisions that have to be great for me and my son. My son is my motivation for me to continue going to school and get my GED diploma. He is the reason why I sleep peacefully at night. When I hug my son, I am grateful to have unconditional love, unlimited kisses, and hugs. To be a mother makes me feel unstoppable and powerful, just like a superhero that does the unthinkable. I find myself being bold, brave, and fearless.

I love my son, and I make sure he knows; I tell him every day and night. My son makes me proud to be his mother. I could not have asked for a better son.

Vanessa Nunez is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Ines Sosa.

No Rush on Saturday

My favorite day (I would say) is Saturday. I begin this day early in the morning at 6:00 a.m. I do not rush on Saturday. I start it with a cup of coffee, some light snacks, and read the news on my iPad. After that, I go to ice hockey practice for two hours. What I usually enjoy after that is breakfast, coffee, desserts, and chatting with my teammates. It usually takes at least an hour. It's almost 1:00 p.m. when I get out of the ice arena. Outside should be sunny which is rare in the climate zone where I reside, Lithuania. Then I go home and take a little rest for about a couple of hours. In the evening, I would prefer some barbecue with friends or relatives.

That is how I would like to spend my Saturday. But do not get me wrong, I do not want to live the same day every day. It will become a nightmare like in the movie, Groundhog Day with Bill Murray. The beauty of life is that every day is different and a lot of them I can call "My Favorite Day" and I wish for many good days in the future.

Arturas Trublinas attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Original Poetry

My Thoughts

We can shine even if we're in different places
We change.
We always change.
That's why I could conform to anything,
We're rolling in this big circle called "Changes."
We would be transformed,
We changed,
We made it,
That's why we couldn't be together.
We're supposed to be constantly changing,
That's why we need to make this life alive.

Talking about me

Who could know that someone extremely happy has a lot of
wars inside her mind?
You have such a beautiful smile even with all your scars
Your eyes says so much about you
The way your hair plays with the wind
Your honesty and compassion
The way your eyes shine bright when you talk about the things
that you love
Your sensuality when you dance
You're not perfect but that's what makes you so perfect to me.
You're a wonderful woman.

*Barbara Delgado is an ECCR student at Orange Technical College –
East Campus. Her teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.*

Haiku

From one day to other
the lazy autumn sun falls
and caresses me

Evening to evening
subtle horizon crosses
slow end of the light

From night to night
the bright stardust nourishes
the full-bodied moon

The skies without birds
desolate grassy country
glacial nakedness

Mighty southern winds
pregnant with abundant rains
exhausted they fall

Sprawling frozen fields
shriveled icy harvests
the sun does not shine

The walkabouts are
those that awaken the nights
that stir, yawn and stretch

I am bewildered
the libation of the bee
sugary nectar

Sun already sets
the sad melancholy is
night that is coming

*Alicia Klein Brizi is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center.
Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.*

Heart On My Sleeve

Too quick to give up my heart, words spoken too fast to take back. Always the one with my feelings hurt, putting everything out on a track. Honestly outspoken. Blatantly blunt, often disrespectful. When my mind begins to rumble, these are the thoughts that slip onto my paper.

Some things are heartfelt, even though I'm quiet, heartless. Most likely looking for love in the wrong places, lusting for the same sex. I am always led by my emotions. Though my eyes won't let my tears slide down. It's like a window pane looking in the mirror, searching for my soul; all I see is clear brown eyes staring back at me. I am always lonely, though I chose to be. Sometimes I want people around me but shrinking back in my shell when they surround me. I want to be loved, not ready to settle down, wondering if one day I'll find the one ready to marry.

I've done some unspeakable things, always hurting the ones closest to me. I hate rejection and hate to be told no. I'll find a way to do things myself. In a room full of many, I am still alone because even though my body is here, I am trapped in my dome. I am left thinking, unaware of my surroundings; getting stuck on thoughts that often leave me adrift, sometimes my sanity slips. Feeling like a lost cause, wanting to be rescued from myself. I am my biggest enemy, screaming for help, though no words leave my mouth. My brain has control of me; I feel like locking my body out.

Ms. Jessica Davilma is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida. Her hometown is Davie, Florida. She is a student in Ms. Campfield's ABE 3 class in pursuit of her GED.

Desperately Blind

I thought it would be easy to forget your name.
As if trying to fly away,
distance makes me feel safe.
It's the memories that keep me sane.

Don't get lost among my words.
As I was, enchanted by your grace.

Blind, in this darkness game.
My weakness was being naive.

Now out of the game, with a messy head.
I recognize my role in this chaotic world.
It's simple, the consciousness said.

Please, don't try to escape, deep breath.
He/she was your life's byword.
You were as invisible as the air.

*Jenny Daniela Gutierrez is an ESOL Student at OTC East Campus.
Her teacher is Mrs. Rosalind Shell.*

A New Leaf

Forgiveness is a beautiful gift to you and to others.
Love has worth when you share it.
Open your heart to the most rewarding feelings in your life.
Understanding will teach you to accept people who are
different than you.
Compassion to one another will take you a long way.
Strive for a better life for you and for your family.
Be humble in everything that you do.
Share your time with others.
Be generous when giving to the ones you love and to strangers.
Have the courage to stand up for what is right.
Greatness is in you when you show these qualities.

*Carol Arrieta attends the literacy program at Cooper Memorial
Library. Her teacher is Wanda Klaas.*

Hope

Hope is the anchor we cling to when we're tempest-tossed on
life's sea.

Hope gives us courage to hang on, no matter how bad before
you know it.

Hope is a candle that's shining through and through.

When we've lost our course in the night, look up cause there's
always a steadfast light at night; that is guaranteed to guide us

straight back to the path which we know to be right.

Hope brings new strength for life's journey, endurance for running the race.

When we are tired, hope helps us, to keep a bright smile on our face even when that's far from the case.

Hope sees a brighter tomorrow and helps set our gaze toward the sky.

Knowing behind every dark cloud, a rainbow will always appear...

Nanny Lynn Jackson is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is DelaQuese Jernigan.

Literary Skull

Halloween appears,
and the death volunteers
at Clearview Adult E. Center.
She is not searching for a shelter.
She is waiting for teacher Inguna
to give her some tuna.

When teacher Inguna arrives
the skull is surprised
she is wearing a mask
It is not a task.
It is COVID time.

All the students are fully vaccinated,
and the death is feeling aggravated.

ESOL students are feeling happy,
but the death is snappy
while they think she is gone,
She is waiting for them at dawn.

Between masks, vaccines and safe space
the death is in disgrace
she is trying to attack back,
but she has lost her track.

She is returning to the burial ground
This October has been a trivial round.

Death is taking her last breath
but remember, she is not fully dead
she will hide
for some time

to plan her next prank,
and next year, she is coming back.

Jhoana Trujillo Posadas is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Teacher

In class I see your smiles glow
With kindness that never makes me feel low
Your benevolent gaze allows me to grow
Through your support and action they show

I'm happy that you `re my teacher
A teacher is like a mother
You make my life better
I enjoy being here this year

It's you who helps me
It's you who teaches me
It's you who encourages me
It's you who builds the confidence in me

Thank you very much for having a beautiful sight
That sees the future of us all so bright
Guiding us towards a path of light
Tireless and with all your might

Leila Bougoutaiya attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Yes, He Saves

I have been through a lot of heartache and pain. I have been hurt, bruised and down.

But my God turned it all around.

I feel him in my heart, I feel him in my soul.

My God, my God, please hold me and never let me go.

I once was on the straight path, but admit I strayed away.

I was like a lost sheep, but God helped me find my way.

I want you to know, God saved me, over and over again,

Yes, it is true, I know God has also brought me through.

God can save you, He definitely saved me,

Now I get to fulfill my destiny.

He never left you, He never left me. He will always be there for you and me.

Praise his name, show him your care. Our God is loyal, patient, and fair.

I went through a lot of trial and so did you. Just when I thought everything was wrong,

God saved me and brought me through. The same experience can happen for you.

Old things have passed away. It is time to put on the new.

Only Jesus Christ can bring us through.

The father, the son, and the holy spirit are one. One true God in three persons.

All our lives are truly worth it. Look into the sky and you will see,

Our real home in Heaven for you and me.

He hears our cries and sees our hurts,

He is by our side even when we fall, he picks us up and guides us through it all.

The savior will crown us in glory. To shine as the stars of the sky.

He will wipe all our tears away, away from our eyes,

When we cry, he cries. He owns us all, my, my, my.

He died to clear our debts, He died to reconcile us back to God.

All our sins have been swept. Jesus saved us; I know myself.

He can save you too. Just ask him for his help.

Life is so much better, with him at the center, it is filled with joy and happiness, just read the scriptures.

Not saying it is going to be perfect, what I am really trying to say to you...

Yes, Jesus is more than worth it. Jesus loves us no matter what.

He is by our side when we feel alone. Look around you, all the love he has shown.

He knows all of our names, the very hairs on our heads, on the cross is the innocent blood he shed.

He watches over us 24/7, he never sleeps. He is out mighty Shepard, and we are his sheep.

He saves us because he dies, for you and for me.

Aquanette Johnson is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is DelaQuese Jernigan.

My English Teacher

Our teacher teaches us English
And makes learning real fun.
He teaches us grammar
And minds our manner.

Stories and poems alike,
He makes them come alive.
Homework and classwork is easy to do,
Because he makes it all clear to you.

Teaches adjectives and nouns,
Verbs and pronouns,
Comprehension and letter writing.

Neither does he teach in haste,
nor does he give time to waste.
This is our dear English teacher,
Who is our class leader—Teacher Bob

Karene Mota is from Mexico and is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher Robert Baum feels honored.

What the American Dream Means to Me

Seek, Knock, Ask

To me, an American Dream means making my dream come true in America. I am from El Salvador. I have been in the U.S. for 28 years. Before I came here, I imagined that one day I would achieve my dream. The main dream is to have a profession as a Registered Nurse in America. Next is to purchase a house for my mom.

My life in America began with being in Texas for 2 years. My first job was a cashier. Then I moved to Key West, Florida. My friend invited me to Key West. I like this place very much. It is very relaxing, has no crimes, and is easy to go anywhere because it is 2 miles by 4 miles in size. In Key West, I worked as a housekeeper for five years and as a cashier for seven years. Those jobs were temporary.

I attended English classes to improve my English. Currently, I am an assistant nurse but my dream is to become a registered nurse. Nothing comes easy. It requires asking the right questions, getting the resources, hard work, discipline, and dedication. This is a fact - being in America much help is available. As the saying goes: Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be open. Ask and you shall be given.

Reyna Henderson is an English student at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Living My Dream

The first time I was in the USA I was 14 years old and I visited my uncle in Anchorage, Ak. Even though it was winter and too cold, I loved it. Then I visited him for 4 months and went to Junior high school. Later in life I visited him in Houston. At that moment I made the decision to live in USA, and that was my biggest dream.

I fell in love with the culture, how civilized and respectful people are while driving, how clean everything is. I love the museums, aquariums, theme parks, the language, and the streets with no holes. Later in life, my husband and I had the opportunity to cross the border between Mexico (Tijuana) and USA (San Diego). Walking, in that place you could really see the big difference between those two worlds.

Life had different plans for me at that time. I married, had two girls and I realized that I would do anything to give my girls better options and a different perspective on life so they could decide how they want to live their lives. We contacted an immigration attorney to start this adventure, and we were able to be our own sponsors.

I arrived in this country in March 2020, when the pandemic started. I feel happy to have accomplished my biggest dream. I must admit that we are privileged to have this life. I can afford to rent in a nice neighborhood with the best district public schools. My husband and I have good jobs, related to our careers. We have saved more money in these months than ever in our lives, and our emergency fund is ready, so we are prepared to keep growing. I have found welcoming and friendly people by playing tennis. I have a lot of mental and physical peace, and I can drive, walk and bike feeling myself safe, enjoying life instead of being in a defense mode all the time. I think that is what is important in life. I am happy to pay taxes because we can see it, in schools, in roads, everywhere.

I am thankful to have come to this country, and that USA opened its door to me and my family. I think I belong here, and we will have amazing experiences and opportunities. I miss the rest of my family, but I know they are happy for us and for the life we have here. I know no matter where we are, they are always with us. They can visit us, and we will be an example for all the people we left behind. They can achieve their own dreams they just need to dream big, work hard and go for it.

Angelica Ma. Barrera-Garcia is from Colombia. She is married and has two lovely daughters. She works as a professor for the Coastal Marine Education and Research Academy. She is a student of Patricia Bauer at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

What the American Dream Means to Me

I am from an island which is situated in the Caribbean Ocean named Cuba. The people there are very helpful and sociable. I was born in the middle of this archipelago. My childhood was very happy. I went to school and became a lawyer, but like all the other professionals, I could not make enough money to live because of the political regime.

One day, my husband and I decided to fight for our dream and started our journey toward the greatest country in the world, the United States of America. We passed through seven countries and experienced different cultures. The people we met were nice but very poor, just like in my country.

The trip lasted three months and it was very hard because sometimes we had to sleep in the woods. We were also victims of a scam, and did not have a lot of money left, and for many days we were hungry. However, we would do this all over again, because after all of this struggle we arrived to our destination: the United States, the country we love, the land of the free! Here, we have an excellent life. We know we made the best decision when we left Cuba. Today we are blessed; we have a beautiful son, ael. He is an American citizen. We own a house and a business too. I'm studying English so I can help my son and communicate properly.

This is my dream, the greatest dream of my life. I can only say: Thank you United States for welcoming my husband and I, and giving us a great life opportunity and making our dream come true.

Disgney Napoles is a student in the ESOL program at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, FL. Her teacher is Mariza Abdalla.

This is Me

My name is Guerby Jean Louis, and I'm 26 years old. I'm from Haiti and now I live in Lantana Florida. I lived with my parents in Haiti. My parents are from Haiti, and I grew up there but my father died when I was little.

I traveled with my church to Spain, France, Mexico, Dominican Republic and ended in Maroc, Africa, where I stayed for 2 years. After that I came here to the United States of America where I live with my brother and sister.

I want to improve my English, study a career, work, and have a family. I am at my first step, taking Adult English classes at Rolling Green Adult ESOL.

Guerby Jean Louis is a student at North Tech/Rolling Green Adult ESOL. His teacher is Luz Dary Gracia.

My American Dream

The United States represents for most foreigners hope. Hope to live free and safe. Many migrants leave their country due to insecurity, poverty, lack of work, or natural disaster. It wasn't my case. I came from Paris, France. Before my departure, I worked 25 years in the same company. My husband worked too, and my two sons went to elementary school. Why choose to leave that life to come to the United States?

On the occasion of the Martin Luther King Jr birthday celebration, I studied African-American history at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. The French history is different; even if France was the first country to abolish slavery in 1794, she retained colonies until the 20th century. Most black people who live in France, citizens or not, think that a part of the population is still racist, and they have to fight against prejudice. This feeling is frequent about the work-place, advanced degree diploma or not. When you have no diploma, it could be hard to find an employer who trusts you and agrees to train you. When you graduate (sometimes with a PhD or other diploma), there is a glass ceiling that does not allow you to access the position of manager in companies. Even though I have never experienced racism, it was different for my husband. This glass ceiling is still in his mind, and he hopes our children will not be confronted with it in their future.

The second reason is linked to my boys' sporting skills. My two sons have been practicing for a few years a sport which is not really popular in France. It's different here. They began tour-

naments when they were in France, and each year we came to Florida for practicing. But we considered it would be better for us to live here permanently. In fact, in France it is hard for the kids to practice a sport after school. Apart from Wednesday, the days are long and kids have a lot of homework after school. Moreover, Florida offers an advantage for all the outdoor sports; we could practice 365 days per year. The other advantage to practicing their sport in the United States is that they are able to train and play in tournaments with young people who are so successful. The competition leads to improvement.

I don't know if my sons could be pro in their sport. I don't know how the situation will evolve. When we decided to live in the United States, we had our idea of the American dream. Today we know that we made the best decision for our family and we hope.

Caroline Jacques is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The American Dream means to me that every person can become what he wants and achieve everything on his own. There are three aspects of society that make The American Dream a reality for my family: the conditions of the education system, collegiate financial assistance, and the acceptance of diversity. The United States developed according to its own laws. Freedom, in its various manifestations, means very much in this country. Freedom means that you can become what you want to be in life too.

First, the education system in schools and universities provides opportunities for students to develop their talents and abilities to the maximum. Students can choose subjects that are interesting and necessary. They can choose an educational path, and then change it if they want. Additionally, they can try out for sports, and participate in social activities and volunteering. They not only get a profession, but also the chance to become active, involved, and useful members of society.

Second, even though in the United States one must pay for higher education, there are many ways of getting financial assistance to students - a system of scholarships and grants. For smart, motivated students, education costs less or becomes free. There are educational loans with deferred payments for the duration of study. In this way, the biggest obstacle to education is overcome.

Finally, every person is important to American society. Race, gender, age, health status, appearance, sexual orientation, religious and political views, and material status will not be an obstacle on the chosen path. Knowledge, skills, and hard work are important. Diversity is one of the most important achievements of a democratic society.

In summary, when I think of The American Dream it means that a person can become whoever he wants and achieve any heights. The sky is the limit. The education system helps to develop the individual abilities of each person. Financial aid solves the problem of the high cost of education. Diversity gives everyone equal rights along the way. I am glad that the American Dream is becoming a reality for my family.

Iuliia Kosareva is a student at the Adult and Community Education (ACE) program. Her teacher is Jordan Bellott.

A Better Life

Have you ever thought about what the American dream means to most people? To me the American dream means a lot because it basically means you have more and better opportunities.

To begin with, the American dream means a better life. In my opinion being able to live the American dream means having more opportunities to live a better life than you were before because it introduces you to better jobs, better house, and a better country to live in. By giving you better opportunities to have these things, it makes your life easier and better.

To continue, the American dream not only gives you better opportunities at life, but it also gives your family better opportunities. For example, if you're a parent, it gives your child a better

education so they can have a better future. A better job helps you to give your child what they need for school and their necessities. If you're the child, it gives your parent opportunities. You can contribute to your other family members in your home country by sending them money which gives them a chance to buy their necessities.

To finish with, a lot of people think the American dream is not that much, because it might be hard to live in a new country and learn the language. But even though those things might be true, you can fix that. It's not that hard to learn the language and when you do learn the language life becomes way easier. Even if you don't learn the language, it's just a matter of time for you to get used to living in the country and then life gets a lot easier, and you start to get around more.

In conclusion, not a lot of people have the opportunity to live the American dream but those who do are really fortunate. I think the American dream is a really good opportunity to live and have because it gives you more opportunities in life and makes your life a lot better.

Ingrid Salazar is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Best Decision of My Life

My American Dream did not come alive until I came to America. I will not forget the day when I landed in Miami. I planned to stay in two places, Miami and Key West. Being by myself so far from home, I found my special treatment for my soul. Sunrises were perfect for me. I was able to dream and think about my future. It is so meaningful to me that I began seeing myself as part of the Key West community.

When it was getting closer to the end of my vacation, I had second thoughts about my future. I started thinking that I would love to give myself a chance and try to stay and do everything that I dreamed of.

Back home, I worked with my sister Ilona in the beauty industry. Also, I did face painting and tattoos for kids and parties.

Deep in my heart, I was wondering about something else. My inner self pushed me for my life's adventure. Of course, so many difficulties and hard work were ahead of me. I never imagined it. I remember today how crazy it sounded to me that the American Dream is now going to be part of my breath, my life, my engine, my love.

After 10 years, I can truly say that I've been living my American Dream. In September 2013, I met Michael at the wine bar "Vinos." He was working alone in the wedding industry for over 19 years. After a couple of years, we created a wedding company, Conch Concierge Weddings. I worked so hard to what I needed to know about the wedding business, customer service, and learning to communicate professionally. I am very proud that I met my best business partner, Michael, who helps with all my inquiries about making our clients' wedding day perfect.

Additionally, I am a photographer and a florist. Flowers are my passion. I love to create beauty for my customers. In March of 2018, I was blessed with the perfect man, Jed, and we have lived together for over 3 years. We have two beautiful GSP dogs, Jolene and Trucker. In fact, he has the best restaurant in Key West, Louie's Backyard. My family is very supportive of my decision to stay in the USA. I cannot wait to become an American citizen. America gave me more possibilities to be creative in different fields than I could imagine. I am so grateful to the Key West community for being so friendly and loving to me. Above all, being so close to nature led me to the best decision of my life.

Rasa Tubyte attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Dream in the USA

The American dream is the opportunity that people from different countries seek when they come to the USA. More opportunities in life, work, and personal or professional development.

Due to my personal situation, I decided to live this experience because I needed to learn the language and look for a job opportunity. It is a very hard road because you are far from your family, your country, the customs, and the culture.

Every sacrifice has its reward and that is my motivation from day to day. I am here with a purpose and to fulfill a goal. I have to take this opportunity and make it worth being away from home. This opportunity is mainly helping me to develop personally and professionally. I will be bi-lingual after I learn a new language. This will help me to adapt to the different cultures and different customs.

In this life, nothing is easy, if we want something we have to fight for it. As I meet different people who are leaving their mark on my life in this new country, I hope to be able to achieve my American dream that I seek so much.

Alondra Morena is an ESOL Student at Palm Beach Central ACE in Palm Beach County, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Life of an Immigrant

The land of the dream...

Some risk their life for it, some dream it will come one day.

We leave everything behind.

No family, no money, a new language to learn.

Some have good jobs, some just make it through day by day.

We come here for a better future, for the next generation to live better than we did.

Some leave poverty, some leave a war behind, some leave for their dreams to come true.

We look for something better.

We struggle, we try, and we work hard.

We wake up and look at life like it is a blessing.

I'm grateful my parents brought me here.
I thank them for working hard.

I thank them for their hard struggles.

The land of the “dream” is not just a dream once you’re here.

It’s the hard work you do to achieve that dream.

Laura Urrea Ramirez is a student in the Pinellas County Job Corps Center. Her teacher is Holly Heintz.

My American Dream

My son, Helbert, is starting a new business. He is an Industrial Engineer from Colombia. He studied Business Administration in the United States. He became a lawyer three years ago from the American University in Washington, D.C. He wanted to study law not exactly to work as a lawyer, but to know the law, since he knew it would help him in running his business.

The first time that he arrived in the United States was in 2000. He was nineteen years old. He studied English for one-year in New York and worked part-time in a restaurant as a waiter. Later, he made his career in Colombia as an Industrial Engineer.

Later my two children, Helbert and Dianita, decided to move to the USA. Helbert started working as an employee and, one day he decided to learn how to buy houses, to renovate them and sell them later. Today he has seven small, not fancy houses rented in Florida. Recently he bought a law firm with two offices, one in Tampa and the other in Miami. His goal is to learn how to administer the firm. He needs to understand and learn everything.

The story of my daughter, Dianita, is similar. She studied Medicine in Colombia. After coming to the US, Dianita studied three years at the Miami University to become licensed in Internal Medicine. Then she trained in Geriatric medicine at the Harvard University in Boston and later she studied Hospice and Palliative Care from the George Washington University in Washington D.C. Dianita had many opportunities for work and she has chosen to work at the VA Hospital in Orlando.

I am a proud mother because my two children are an example to follow - both have been working hard to be successful. They are not only brother and sister, they are also very good friends and they help each other every day. I didn't plan to live in the USA but they wanted that and they helped me to do it. I have been studying English and I prepared the interview to be a citizen of the United States and I got my citizenship this year. I live happily here. I enjoy living with my son I know he soon will decide where he is going to live in Florida.

Isita Zamora is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.

Go and Get It

When I was little I dreamed of coming to the United States. I imagined the mountains, the roads, the big buildings, the beaches, and the snow. What the American dream means to me is the life that I am living now in the U.S. I have a beautiful family, I own my house, and I have been working for it with Pania for 10 years.

Having lived here in the United States for many years, I have realized that all of us immigrants come here with the same dream. We all want the happiness for us and our families. When we come to the United States with a dream of a good life, sometimes we sacrifice many things in our lives just because of that American dream. Many of us left our families for years without seeing them, only with the hope that they have the same dream as ours. I remember when I arrived in the United States alone without my family, alone with my dream.

My first job was at a gas station. I did not understand anything. With fear I stood in front of the cash register and said "Hi." I was very nervous but with all my fear I did not give up. I worked at the gas station for a few years. I was 19 years old and had daughter. I needed more money to send to my mother in my country. So, I quit the gas station and got a job in the field driving a tractor. I did this job for 3 years. The pay was good but driving a tractor in the field is not for me. Then, I got a job in a restaurant as a waitress.

One day I sat down and told myself, “Anicia, this is not your American dream. Remember that you came here with a dream.” So, I changed jobs again. I decided to work in department stores. In 2012, I applied for an assistant position and was rejected. I felt sad but I never gave up. As time passed by, I got the position as an assistant and after a few months I was promoted to be the general manager. I was elated. I felt that I deserved it very much. I worked hard and could afford to buy a house and provide a good life for my children. Everything in America is possible if you put your mind and the effort to fulfill it. It’s your dream. It’s your life. Go and get it.

Anicia Whitaker attends the English class at the Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Why Voting is Important to Me

My Vote, My Choice

For a long time, women were considered the weaker sex. They were limited to household chores because they were too fragile, uneducated, and too vulnerable. So many titles that have taken away a lot from them, including the power to make important choices in their lives, such as access to education or the right to choose leaders. It took until the 1800's for women to be educated on the same level as men, and over a century later they finally had the right to vote.

Times have changed but women still do not have full autonomy of themselves. Today they still face many prejudices. Among the most serious, they are not paid the same as men for the same positions, they are refused certain positions because they are supposedly "more sensitive" and therefore are unable to make certain decisions. In some countries they still do not have access to education. And too often, the woman's body is in the middle of debate without her consent, which always leads to rules on how to use her own body that do not suit her. There are so many barriers that prevent women from reaching their full potential.

Women deserve to be valued and one of the ways we can change that is to vote. As a woman, voting has become more than a right. It has become imperative because the right to vote was not given to me, it is an achievement that I intend to cherish and use wisely. After all the struggles that allowed me to have this right, it is my duty to exercise it, so I can choose who will represent my interests and not let other people decide for me.

Because voting is choosing who will lead us, it becomes essential to do so, not only because I am a woman but also because I am an inhabitant of this planet. My vote is a way to contribute to the election of leaders who know my needs, who act to meet them, and who act for a better future for me and the planet.

Bertonise Exare Cesar is an ESOL Student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Yeni Carranza.

Let's Go Out and Vote

Voting is important to me because it is my duty and a right of every citizen. It is necessary to exercise our freedom. Nobody should choose for me. I decide on my choice of candidate who runs for the election.

Participating in elections is a way of supporting politics. It is also knowing how to elect authorities that govern the country, so that they can satisfy the needs of citizens. It is an act to maintain a fair democracy and the right to vote. Voting for a candidate that we trust can impact the national and international economy.

We must defend the idea of democracy. So, one of the best ways is to do so is by voting in the elections and living in a more globalized and connected world beyond borders. There are so many problems that cannot be solved alone, and we need help from other sister countries. That is why we must know how to choose people with good character and honesty so that they can fulfill the needs and care for the people.

Participating in federal and state elections is a way to ensure that we have a voice in the decisions that benefit our society. When people reach their voting age, including me, we must exercise our rights as citizens. Therefore, let's go out and vote!

Lessly Madrid Rivera is a student at Adult Education Monroe County. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why Voting is Important to Me

I am from Cuba. In my country, there have never been elections for president. Democracy is not exercised, and the people cannot express their opinion. We have been subjected to a single regime for more than 60 years. There is repression by the government when you want to freely express your ideals. Presently, people are experiencing difficult moments due to the repression they are facing for not wanting to silence their voice and express their ideas freely.

Living in Cuba without the right to vote means living in silence. For many years, the government tried to hide from the

people what was happening at an international level and how in different parts of the world, people were peacefully protesting and demanding rights.

Access to the internet arrived late, which opened people's eyes to another reality. The town was awakened and began to demand democracy. They have always manipulated us into believing that the United States is the culprit of our misfortune, but that is not true. It is a country full of great opportunities, it is a country that helps immigrants, it is a country that aids low-income people.

Now in this wonderful country that has welcomed me and to whom I am very grateful, a country of free expression and democracy, I can exercise my right to vote. In the United States, my vote is my voice, and my voice counts. It is a right that every Citizen deserves to have. Vote for the people who look out for your interests. You must not let another decide for you, for your community, for your salary, for the education of your children, for your safety. With our vote we can improve the life of everyone around us.

My goal for next year is to become a US citizen, study and prepare for the exam and with great pride. I will cast my vote in the next elections of 2024. In conclusion, we are grateful to God to be here in America.

Massiel Gonzalez is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.

Voting in U.S.A. is Different Than Voting in Cuba

Countries around the world have different systems of voting. Countries with freedom have a democratic system of voting, but in a country where people cannot express themselves, they do not have a choice. I would like to contrast the voting process between Cuba and USA. In my country, Cuba, the citizens cannot choose anything because voting over there is rigged.

Cuba has only one single political and dominant party, the government. This is the Communist Party of Cuba which was established in 1959 and is the same today. No one can choose who

they want because there is only one candidate that the government appoints. There is no electoral campaign! What a farce!

In Cuba, people are persecuted if they speak out. According to the news, the government has arrested 525 political prisoners in the past 12 months because they were part of the protest. This number could be higher. They also torture and abuse them. The government restricts their human rights. This is absurd because Cuba is geographically so close to the most democratic country in the world, USA. Mentality matters!

I am happy to live in the US and enjoy the freedoms of this country. People here can freely express their will. People have the right to choose, and they know the different candidates through social media, TV debates, community meetings, and newspapers. So, they are well informed before voting. I would like to see this in Cuba so that Cuban people can enjoy the same freedoms and human rights.

Voting is very different in a country where freedoms may be expressed by the people who can choose freely, versus a country where you can't express anything but must accept the person who the government imposes.

– *Anonymous Author*

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