



# **THE PATH TAKEN**

**A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS**

# The Path Taken

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 300 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**

## **My Breakthrough Experience in Learning English**

I took my first English class during my teenage years in Mexico. I learned words, phrases, grammar, and usage during the middle and senior high school as one of many subjects.

After becoming an architect in Mexico, I decided to immigrate to the United States. Then I faced new challenges in learning this language. I resorted to the few words I remembered from my high school English classes. It helped me a lot in forming sentences and using limited vocabulary. Poor pronunciation prevented me from understanding and communicating with the people I worked with in the U.S. It was difficult but using willpower, listening hard, and losing the fear of speaking, I began talking with people using better English.

In Texas, I faced bullying from my co-nationals. They mocked me for not knowing how to speak or write English well. Since moving to Florida, I am more fluent and self-confident in English through the wonderful teachers at the literacy council and co-workers who selflessly helped me.

I have assisted my classmates by translating for them, correcting their pronunciation, and advising them to speak louder because they were afraid of making mistakes. I helped them in Spanish since not everyone had a high school education in Mexico or other countries.

My breakthrough experiences in learning English were the following:

1. When I lost the fear of speaking English, whether it was correct or not.
2. When I started thinking in English rather than translating from Spanish to English in my head.
3. When I learned more specific words about my woodworking trade and communicating with customers, co-workers, and bosses.

I still have many challenges and things to learn yet in mastering English. I seem to be more patient with myself in correcting English mistakes and forgiving of others' grammatical and usage errors.

Good luck on your journey to learning better English. Muchas gracias to those who have helped and encouraged me along the way.

*Marcos Martinez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. His tutor is Martin Haffey.*

## **My Experience in Adult Education**

When I was a newcomer in the United States, English had been a major obstacle for me. After a couple days a friend of mine told me about "adult education." From this moment, I was very interested to register in an English class. I acquired a lot of experiences there that I would like to share.

First, in adult education I met so many friends that I consider as a family. For example, I learned English together with Mohr. Now he is living in his country Brazil but I still talk to him via Facebook. That's how I learned, by coincidence, my sister lives close to Mohr's house in Brazil! Now they sometimes visit each other. As another example, for my birthday, the teacher and the students celebrated with me, they sang happy birthday, and after that we ate cake and drank Coca-Cola together. We also celebrated May 18th together, the day of independence of my country.

Then, in adult education I learned several things about America. I have become familiar with the United States' maps in general. I'm able to locate each state on the map. I also know why it is important to participate in the census decennially in this country. At the school, the teachers invited specialists of different branches of knowledge to make presentations about taxes, health insurance, and social security etc.

The last thing the adult education left in my mind, is good English. I improved my English there in less than six months.

Before I registered at the school I could not understand when American people talked to me. Now I understand much better. Now I even dream in English! This is something that had never happened before. Oh! I almost forget to tell you--in my classroom my classmates started to call me "Mr. English."

In conclusion, my experience in adult education is very successful, great, and beautiful. I look forward to living this moment again and again when I think back on my time in adult education. I finish to say that this was one of the best chapters in my life.

*Wideno Joseph was a fashion designer in Haiti. He moved to the Dominican Republic to study engineering. He's currently an ESOL student at Village Readers. His teacher is Siena Mayers.*

### **An Entire Life Changed**

My favorite day is my first day of school at the Adult Education Center because it was my first day in a school to learn another language that I didn't speak before. I was really itching to get started and coming to that school to learn English was one of my dreams.

I was scared because I didn't speak that language before. In my country, they teach English but I wasn't interested because I didn't like it. Coming to the AEC was a challenge for me and for my life. I've found a good school and met people I never thought I'd meet. This has changed my entire life.

I remember my first day at school was terrible and funny because only my teacher spoke English. The rest of us spoke different languages, and she didn't speak our language either. We spoke three different languages, and no one could understand each other. We came from different countries; however, she was very patient with us.

This school gave me activities to take part in student leadership and some other opportunities, too. I am in a competition with myself to go to school every single day even though sometimes I don't feel good. I come because I realize



my life and my future depends on education because without education we are nothing. I want to be an example for other young people who come here to make themselves better. Because when they come here and see a different culture and system, sometimes they are scared to make decisions for themselves.

Some immigrants like go to school and complete their education because they think they can't speak English. They are afraid of social things like going to school and meeting some amazing people like I did, someone who can help them have confidence in themselves. That is why I came here to the Adult Education Center, to prove to them and myself that we can do this.

*Markenly Exalus is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **A Rugged Sunny Road**

My name is Jianjun Oosse. I'm 65 years old this year. I came to the United States from China in 2014. This situation means that I stepped into a difficult road to learn English. I talked like this because of my age and my language. Everyone knows that Chinese is square Chinese character, and English is an alphabetic writing. These are two complete different forms of the languages. I've never spoken English before, but now I have to adapt to everything here, because I've come here, and have to live here. So every day in here is a serious challenge for me. Every day, I'm trying to climb the peak of English learning since coming here.

After I came here, I quickly found the Palm Harbor Community School and stayed there until now. No matter the wind or rain, I insisted on attendance, therefore I was always awarded a prize for perfect attendance. All teachers in the school knew me, and I have become an old student who can't graduate forever. Because I understand deeply that my duty is not only to complete several exams and several textbooks in the school, but a language's adaptability – being able to understand native speakers.

In 2017, I took the driver's license exam. The test is conducted at DMV. It is required to complete a certain number of correct answers within a certain period of time to pass. There is no dictionary and no interpreter. It relies entirely on an individual to complete independently in front of the computer. This means I must have good reading skills. The test claim for a quick reading and making a correct judgment during the exam. When I got the study booklet, I figured out what they mean, word by word, sentence by sentence, and paragraph by paragraph. I wrote the new words on the index card, and read and recited repeatedly. I also practiced a large amount of simulation exam questions online. "Hard work pays off." I succeeded! When I got my driver's license, I'm able to proudly declare to everyone: I've passed my reading difficulty.

Even more surprising is this year, I participated in and passed the USCIS Naturalization interview and test to officially become a U.S. citizen. Recalling the experience before the exam is really like a dream. Everyone knows that the Naturalization interview requires person to understand 100 questions about American history and civics. But this is only a small part of the interview. I can master it quickly through learning. Most parts of the interviews are conducted by the examiner asking random questions about the information you provided in the form N-400. The range of such an interview is large and flexible. It is inconvenient to learn by rote. This means that you must have better listening skills. My God! My worst thing is listening. But it's not hard anymore and I have to do it. So I listened to the video material repeatedly. I understood it first, then I wrote down the entire sentences of the audio, and simulated the rhythm and tone of the host to read it every day. In this way, my listening was raised a step. This led me to understand and accurately answer the examiner's questions during the interview. When the examiner told me the results of the passage, I couldn't believe it. I asked back, "Did I really pass?" When the examiner confirmed it again, I stood up excitedly and held his hand and said, "Thank God, thank you!" Of course I can achieve this little success. First of all, I would like to thank all the teachers who coached me, Barbara, Denise and Honey. Their credit is indispensable. "Once a teacher, always a father." I'll forever remember the hard work of the teachers.

The famous Russian writer Gorky said, "One should spend his

life in this way, when he thought about his past he isn't regretful for wasting time, he isn't ashamed for doing nothing." Looking back at living in the United States for more than four years, I cultivate every day, and harvest every day. Although my English listening is still not well now, I firmly believe that over time, my dream will come true. I'm sure that I will speak fluently in English.

*Jianjun Oosse is a current student at the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library.*

## **Beautiful Experiences**

When I was a child, I was very restless. I didn't give much importance to study; I just wanted to play with my classmates. I was not the brain of the class although I liked to participate in school activities. I had wonderful teachers, and each one left me with a unique experience. This has helped me throughout my schooling and education.

Elementary school in Mexico was the launch of an unforgettable adventure. On this adventure, I met teachers who left their mark; one of them was my second grade teacher Ms. Gloria. She had a very peculiar teaching method. To learn multiplication, she put us on our knees for a while. To escape, I asked to use the bathroom and tried taking as long as I could. Despite that, she was a good, strict, and unforgettable teacher. I know it wasn't the best method to teach, yet I learned well. My sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Camacho, was a great person, and always had something new to teach us. Rest in peace Mr. Jesus Camacho. When I graduated from elementary school, great changes awaited as I continued making my own path. Meeting new teachers and classmates would be a challenge in middle school. The only middle school nearby was forty minutes every day walking, and I did it with pleasure. The love I had to study made the effort worth it. That is how three years passed. My teachers during this time were excellent. Each of them loved their profession, so I loved that I learned in a friendly environment. My favorite class was industrial technical drawing, and my teacher, Ms. Ana Bertha, was the best in her field. Thanks to her, I knew what I wanted to study. I was the only

young woman in a class of thirty young men. They didn't like that the only woman was better than they were. I only remained in architecture for a time. I finished studying accounting. At that time, my family was struggling financially and studying in this field was expensive. So I opted for a short run and graduated as an accountant.

With the passage of time, I emigrated to the United States lacking the English language but with a hunger to continue learning. Now I've found the perfect place to learn English at the Adult Education Center. Despite the short time I have been in College and Career Readiness with Ms. Leslie, she has helped me better understand as I get used to English conversation. Now I feel safer to continue learning. As my mom told me, "I never went to school to learn, but if I had gone, imagine what I would have done."

*Maria Elena Lopez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in WPB. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Welcome Place**

I am 45 years old and the last 25 years have been spent in the same house, close to my family, old friends, and the college where I dedicated 11 years, to graduating with my masters and doctorate. Everything was safe, known, programmed, and lasting. Becoming an immigrant in Florida meant a turning point in my life. When you are in this situation, you need to rebuild yourself. It's like being a child again. We need to learn again what to do without thinking. Practical life issues such as opening a bank account or getting a driver's license can be a big challenge, especially if you don't speak English. Starting new friendships with people who know nothing about where I come from, discovering new tastes, flavors and leisures, knowing how American society works are so demanding. The freshness of the novelty, the excitement and the opportunity for a new start, of a reinvention is always present. It's like diving into the unknown every day. But every challenge also brings fear of the unknown, the longing of those left behind, the familiar life to which I was accustomed, and the routine that brought a warm

feeling. I think about Christmas, New Year's, birthdays and all the commemorative celebrations I won't be at. The thought is inevitable: as time goes by, do they still remember me?

Everything that constituted our identity is falling behind. I'm just what I carry inside me. The Writer José Saramago, said that you must leave the island to see the island. In this process, I observe my country from afar and give new meaning to my experiences. I always think about my collection of books that stayed in Brazil, my life experiences, and everything I was able to absorb and carry in my brain, soul, and heart.

When inserting yourself into this new culture, learning the language of the place where you are is the best way to communicate, fit into the culture of the country and understand how the society works. This is where ESOL comes in my life. I went to learn a language and came across a place of friendly and welcoming understanding. Teaching English is carried out with care and affection. Teachers and staff are sensitive to the multicultural environment made up of students of different ages, backgrounds, cultures, and countries, and all that we have in common--the experience of immigration. I've had the chance to talk to people who face similar questions to mine and to hear the words, "I feel the same" comforts my heart. Every day, at the entrance of the Adult Education Center, I read the following words on the wall: Challenge and Perseverance. Nothing better summarizes this great adventure.

*Isabel Padilha is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's CCR class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Experience in Adult Education in the USA**

When you read the experience about my adult education, you will see how much it can help you to develop your life's goals with the help of friends and family. A mistake made by many people who come to the USA is to think that the most important thing is to get a job. They concentrate all their energy on working and they neglect their education, especially studying English. In my opinion, this is terribly wrong because they are putting limits on what they can accomplish. I recommend that they work hard and

go to school to learn English because this will help them to learn other skills for other professions as well. This is a great way that they can better their lives.

For many years my wife and I made this mistake, but now we have taken the step to learn English at South Florida State College. We have found nice teachers to help us; their support is wonderful because now the more we continue to learn, the better we feel. We have been studying English for two months and we are excited to see how much our English has improved with our excellent teachers helping us. This has been wonderful because my wife and I had lost hope that we could improve our language skills when we passed 50 years old.

We are learning English at the advance level and we see that we are never going to stop. After we finish studying, we are going to study for personal development. This is fantastic because now we are looking at what career options we can have with our new skills.

*The author and his wife started studying English in October 2019. His teacher is Ms. Melanie Proteau Blake.*

### **Don't Give Up!**

My name is Anastasia. I arrived in Kentucky in 2018. Then I moved to Key West in that same year. Without hesitation, I enrolled in the English classes. There, I met this particular teacher. She is pure and excellent. She is passionate about her work. She feels gratified when she sees the improvement made by her students because their English is no longer a barrier for growth and progression.

At the beginning, I did not understand anything, I tried to process what she said. It was not easy. As time went on I grasp the words within the context but I did not understand the macro idea. Even so, I went to my class every day. I said to myself, "One day I will understand."

My teacher made us do journal writing daily. We can only write in English. She read our journal and paid attention to how

we write each letter, word, punctuation, grammar and sentence structure. She corrected everything. I thought it was silly, at first. I am here to learn English not graphology, but I realized the importance of writing. It speaks about me. It is my presentation to the world. When you fill out a job application, for example, people can deduce if you are a serious person or not. Now when I see the first few pages of my journal, I realize how much I have advanced. I recognize my mistakes. I know how to write proper sentence in English. Over time, I feel more confident because I understand when people speak to me. I could respond. I am able to carry on a conversation in English.

On April 9, 2019, I got a job at the Artisans. This store sells a bit of everything and mostly jewelry. I had the opportunity to practice my English. I was forced to speak in English with the customers. When I gave information about each jewelry, I listened when they talked to each other. I could tell there are different and nicer ways to say the same thing. When another client came, I used the words I had just learned.

My boss noticed my improvement and she gave me more responsibilities. I did them effectively. To my surprise, they gave me the keys to their store to open and close it independently. I felt very happy to know that they trusted me. Then I became Pandora's ambassador, and I was promoted to be the assistant manager. All this would not have been possible without the help and support from my teacher and the resources made available to us.

*Anastasia Chanto is a Career and College Readiness student at the Monroe County Adult Education. She wants to be a nurse. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Learning as an Adult**

My experience as a student in adulthood has some difficulties but also has many advantages. It is more difficult now than when I was young because at this time, I have less time to study. As an adult, I have to work, and I spend all day between classes and work. At the end of the day when I arrive at my house, and I always have something to do. I don't have time to study. I have

more worries, and I can't concentrate on my studies.

But in doing this essay, I have realized that there are many good things to study in adulthood. It is also good to learn English or study something else because I can exercise my mind. It is good to learn new things, and in my case, I am learning English. While learning English, I can communicate with other people and find a better job.

Also, it is good to learn English or study something else because I can exercise my mind. When I learn another language, my mind grows and prevents diseases such as Alzheimer. Learning helps improve memory, concentration, and helps me to multitask. It helps to create new personal relationships.

In conclusion, learning is difficult, but I have to say that all people have to search to learn something and help improve many aspects of our lives. This will serve as an engine or an impulse for me to continue learning.

*Sonia Guitian is from Venezuela. She is a student in Rosalind Shell's ESOL class at OTC-Winter Park Campus in Winter Park, FL.*

## **No Complaints**

There really is nothing better than learning a new language, like English.

And what better way to do it than in this class. My experience in adult education is great. I have learned a lot. I got the chance to talk to all students in my class. I am learning more than I could imagine.

The methods of learning is excellent. Everything is very didactic. I am very comfortable in the class with an unparalleled environment compared to my country. Every student is being treated equally. The staff and faculty of the department are aware of our needs.

My first day of class was a very pleasant experience. I am happy to find the right place to learn a new language. The



class schedule does not interfere with my work. I meet many interesting people from all continents.

We have a teacher who works hard to help all students from all walks of life. I started on the basic level but now I am at the high intermediate level. I highly recommend those of you who want to learn English to come to this class.

*Roger Matamoros attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. He wants to be a general doctor. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Listen, Watch, and Practice a Lot!**

Education is the art of shaping a person by developing his/her qualities so as to allow him/her to face his/her life. Now, that is profound. I don't know about you but I need education.

Here I am at Adult Education. Why? For the obvious reason. I enrolled in the English class to learn the language because I do not speak English at all. At the beginning, I felt very annoyed because I could not understand when somebody talked to me. I did not know what to say in response.

But one day, I told myself, "I wish I can speak English. What should I do?" And I hear my teacher said to pay attention when she talks. Look at her lips and mouth movement. You can learn faster by watching the person when he/she talks. Listen to the sound of the words. Repeat those words many times. Go to YouTube and google classroom. Install apps in your cellphones. Spend time to listen and watch the English lessons that she recommends. Practice a lot. It sounds so easy. I needed that. So, I followed her instruction. Truly, after that I can speak English.

My teacher is impressed with my improvement. I can talk with and understand her, my classmates, customers and people at work. Being able to speak English not only makes me happy but also everyone around me.

So, listen to me. If you have a wish, find out how to make it come true.

Be open-minded. Pay attention to your teacher. Listen, watch, and practice a lot. Believe in yourself that you can make it.

*Meranda Sylla is studying English at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She is anxious to graduate from this class. She would like to be a nurse. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Confident, Ready, Happy**

My experience in Adult Education has been amazing. It has helped me to open up myself. I can communicate with my coworkers. I can speak, write and read English better than before. I have been going to the Adult Education English class in Key West for one year. On my first day, I did not understand much. I felt afraid to talk, to answer or to explain something. My teacher is very helpful. She brings us out of our shells - to be brave and professional. She is strong. She teaches me how to speak properly, how to pronounce the words correctly, and to read even outside the class. And now I feel confident. I am ready. I feel happy.

I am not nervous, anymore. I used to feel terrible and get upset. I remember when I was at work, the customer asked me something and I could not give an answer. I tried to run away and hide. My coworkers used to talk about my lack of communication in English with the customers. I felt embarrassed and shameful. But those were the days. I am a different person now. My coworkers call me every time to do something for them.

There is so much that I have gained from attending the English class. I have a good teacher. She wants me to be successful. My classmates are nice. We help each other. I have more friends because I speak and understand much better.

*Marjorie Tunice is persistent, diligent, and attentive. She would like to be a pharmacist. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **I Made a Good Choice**

My name is Junior Jean Willy. I am from Haiti. I have been in America for about eight months. I am 22 years old. My first experience in adult education is to focus on learning English. In this class, I learn how to listen, speak, read and write proper English. We have many resources and a good learning atmosphere. I am sure that I made a good choice to do this because English should be learned by all who want to live in America. Being literate in English will help us to move onto anything we desire to do as a career in the job world.

English is not an easy language to learn but with commitment, consistency, and communication, everyone can do it. Do not fear to speak up, even if you do not know how to say the word. My teacher helped me from the first day I stepped into her classroom. I realize that without good pronunciation, native English speakers do not understand us.

Like other new non English speaking students, I am hesitant to talk in class in English because I do not want to look awkward and feel embarrassed. My teacher kept urging us to speak English no matter how much we know. She wants us to simply speak. To learn and speak English, we must try to speak it.

Slowly, I did. Fear cannot keep me down anymore. Now, I can talk in English better than before.

So, be open-minded and follow the guide of the teacher. I encourage you to come and join our class. It will be a good choice to make.

*Junior Jean Willy works and attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Learning English**

My goal in adult education is to improve my writing and pronunciation. I thank very much my teachers, Ms. Miriani, Ms. Milly and Ms. Castro.

In my country, Ecuador, English education is only basic in elementary, middle and high school. You can only learn good English in very expensive and private schools.

I want to learn more and get a better job because it has been very hard working in restaurants for a long time.

In my experience in adult education, I have lost my fear of speaking English with people. I would like to learn more English and take my citizenship test.

Coming to English class will help me. In class, I have different partners and I practice to improve my English with them. I also watch TV and listen to music to learn faster.

*Gladys Wong, from Ecuador, is a student in Adult Education ESOL in Avon Park, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Denise Miriani.*

## **My Teachers**

I believe that teachers are an unbroken part of everyone's life. I joined the tutoring class to learn English. Later it turned into getting my GED.

I had studied up to 7th grade in India. My knowledge of English was very low. I was unfamiliar with many science, social studies, and math words. It was just like starting the 1st grade again.

My English teacher was Mr. Ben, my social studies and science teacher was Mrs. Laura, and Mrs. Rhonda was my math teacher.

Mr. Ben was a veteran and volunteered at Hernando Elementary School. He noticed my limited knowledge of English and started with basics. He always gave me the vocabulary words and corrected my English writing. If I fell asleep in the class, he laughed loudly. He made me pronounce the "WHAT" word more than 100 times. Because of my accent, I pronounced it "VHAT." Afterward, he gave me a sticker that said, "Good job."

Mrs. Rhonda was an engineer. After moving to Florida she

bought a blueberry farm. During her leisure, time she was my tutor. She bought me a math calculator. She taught me about percentages, Algebra, and many other math problems. Sometimes it took me hours to understand the answer. She always watched my homework and progress.

Mrs. Laura was just simple and used various teaching techniques. She taught me from basic level books. I have studied science and social studies in my language. (Kannada is my language. It is one of the Southern Indian languages.) Writing an essay was difficult for me. But, because of her guidance, it became easy. We have exchanged thoughts of history and the cultures of our two nations. I understand the value of the US Constitution. Science facts helped me to implement safety precautions in my life. Once she told me, "Learning is a tool to beautify our life."

In the end, everything happened because of my teachers' love of teaching. I never felt that the GED was hard. I thank all of the library staff, the Florida Literacy Coalition, and of course, my teachers.

*Narahari Rao Ganesha is a student in the Citrus County Literacy Program at Lakes Region Library in Inverness. His tutor is Laura Haffkoss.*

## **Overcoming Obstacles**

Successful people say, "When you want something, you have to work hard for it." Likewise, my experience in adult education has been very hard since I started learning English. Before my formal studies, many people around me from my country told me that I would eventually learn English from the street, but I started studying at Brewster anyway.

I started studying at a basic level and now I'm at an advanced level. During my studies, I have faced many challenges and worked hard to overcome my obstacles. One challenge was understanding the pronunciation of native English speakers. (Actually, they swallow their words!) As my husband speaks English fluently, I constantly used to ask him what people said,

which frustrated me. Now as my listening skills have improved, so has my independence and self-esteem.

A few months after starting class, I faced another challenge. One day my teacher asked us to give an impromptu talk about the education system in our countries. After mentally organizing what to say, I was so nervous when my turn came that I could only utter a few incoherent words. This situation deeply depressed me, and I felt like giving up and discontinuing my studies. However later that evening I realized I must change my studying habits, deactivate my social media, improve my listening, and think in English if I wanted positive results.

One day I had a grammar test—it was not the first one—and after the test I was with my friends in the cafeteria and they were talking and laughing. Suddenly, I burst into tears, they calmed me down and asked me why I had cried. They could not believe that I was crying about the test. I felt so stressed I couldn't help myself. Later my teacher was very understanding when she talked to me privately and reviewed my test results, showing me how much I had actually improved.

After this situation, everything changed: I relaxed and realized that I had to be confident—which is what I started to do. When it was time for my next presentation came, and I worked hard to prepare. Although I was nervous, something inside of me kept saying, “You can do it.” And I did. For the first time, my presentation was great, and I received a very good evaluation. I felt that I have a key now to continue what I have been started. Now, I knew I had the key to continue what I had started—making English a positive rather than a negative force in my life.

*Ms. Asma Shamaileh is a College & Career Readiness student at Brewster Technical College.*

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

### **Overcoming**

My life was changed at an early age. Due to my mother's medical conditions, I dropped out of school in the 7th grade. My sister and I got jobs to help out financially. When I was 14, I met a man who was a drug dealer six years older than me. During my first time going back to school to receive my high school diploma, I became pregnant, but had a miscarriage. I went back after this to finish school, only needing two credits to graduate. But I became pregnant again. The father of my children went to prison and demanded that I quit school to get a job and support myself and all of his needs while in prison. At the time, I was living with my mom, with no strong support system to encourage me to do what was right or wrong.

After having five kids, I was being verbally, physically, mentally, emotionally, and sexually abused by my children's father. This all went on, while also dealing with him having multiple sexual female partners. All that had a huge impact on my life. It was affecting me in so many ways. Many days and nights, I did not know if I was going to wake up dead or alive. I tried many times to leave, all while he threatened to kill me. If I got my family involved, he made verbal threats on what he would do to them. I prayed many days and nights to get me and my children out.

One day, God answered my prayers. When our youngest daughter was 7 months old, he was arrested and sent back to prison. I decided to take back everything that was stolen from me at a young age. The first step was going back to school to receive my high school diploma to further my career. I always push my kids harder because I want them to have a better life than me. My kids have already broken the generational curse, all five of my children have graduated from high school. Now it's my turn.

*Daniele Palmer is a student at North Tech-Career Source in Palm Springs, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Tiqkia Barrow.*

## **My Time to Shine**

My turning point started in 2009. That year was the most devastating time in my life. After my mom's death, I knew I had to do the one thing she always wanted, and that was for me to get my GED. However, I couldn't right away because I became a mother figure to my younger siblings and my four cousins that my mother was raising.

I always knew I wanted to go back to school but, then the bills wouldn't get paid if I did. I had to work a 12-hour shift every day just to make ends meet. My stepfather helped as much as he could, but everything was all on me. Years went by and all the kids ended up growing up and going their own path.

Finally, I said it is time to do what my mother always worked hard for, and that was for me to finish school. So I made a vow to myself: 2020 is the year I will make my mother proud, so that is how I ended up here. Sometimes I feel like giving up because I feel I'm too old to be getting my GED. However, the teachers are amazing and they are not giving up on me, so it encourages me to finish and not give up on myself.

*Beatrice Francois is a student at North Tech-Career Source. Her teacher is Ms. Tiqkia Barrow.*

## **Finish Well**

My life problems started around the age of eight. I was a virgin and I was raped by a family member. It caused me to be afraid, sad and withdrawn, which in turn kept me from reporting it to my lovely mother, who was doing her best to raise her four children on her own. I also didn't want to disappoint her, so I buried it so deep inside of me.

As I grew older, I found myself very sexual with boys. I got pregnant at a young age—13. I was 13 years old and having a baby, and my school didn't allow young girls like me to go to school because they didn't want to set a bad examples for others.



So I had to drop out. After having my baby and dropping out of school for a year, I realized I wasn't ready for motherhood. I was a teenager and still wanted to have fun. I left my son with my mother and sister and I went out into the world. To make a long story short, I became an alcoholic and drug-addict, hanging with bad company and eventually dating abusive men. I even found myself smoking crack with my baby sister, who used to be home with my mother helping take care of my son. I also received a DUI.

I think what brought me to the end of my lifestyle is when I found myself doing drugs with my little sister. She and I came to our senses to clean our lives up together. Thank God we did, because our mother became very sick and we had to take care of her. We took care of her for six months and then she passed away. God knew she needed us, and I was so thankful I was able to be there for her in her last months, days, and hours on this earth. I have worked over the years by the grace of God with no education or diploma. God has been so good to me. He led me to the paths of wonderful people who have been so good to me, including my current GED program. There's no turning back, I must finish well.

*Caroline Dyce is a student at North Tech-Career Source in Palm Springs, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Tiqkia Barrow.*

## **Becoming a Mother**

Everybody has a turning point in life to change their life style completely.

When I lived in South Korea, I always heard that a woman's life completely changed after she got married. But my life didn't change at all after I got married. I didn't change any of my life style. I just worked and pursued my goal for myself, and my husband also lived his life. However, we tried to be considerate of each other's needs. In spite of these efforts, I usually focused on me, and things that I liked to do, what I liked to eat, and where I wanted to go.

It was when I became a mother that I met my turning point,

not when I got married as I'd expected. My former life focused on myself and my new life has focused on kids. I still remember the day I became a mom. It was such a marvelous moment. After that day, most of my life was devoted to my kids. I didn't know much about raising kids and I made many mistakes as a new mom. Even though I made many mistakes, I was sure of one thing: I thought about how to care for others and not myself. It was so important for me to think about what they wanted to eat, what they liked to do, and what they wanted instead of what I wanted. For instance, I used to watch movies for grown-ups at the theater, but then I watched kids' movie with my daughter.

Sometimes, I have come back to egocentricity while raising kids. I wanted to have my own time and do my favorite activities by myself. However, it can never last for long. I know there will be a time when the kids will be independent and will not need my care anymore. At that time, I will meet another watershed moment.

Am I happy about this change? Yes, I am happy even though I don't have enough time for myself and I can't do whatever I want. I have enjoyed these moments, and will until I will meet another turning point.

*TK Lee is a student at ACE of Leon County. Her teacher is Christine Poreba.*

## **My Turning Point**

Starting at a young age, drugs have been in my family. Everywhere I looked someone was high! My sister drowned in the pool due to the use of drugs. No one paid attention to us kids. So, as a result, she crawled out of her playpen and right into the pool.

The state took me, my sister, and my little brother away. We went to stay with my aunt and uncle. So, they gave my mother and father an ultimatum: either get clean or lose their kids. Thank goodness, my father chose to get clean. On the other hand, my mother chose her addiction over her children. So as a result, I grew up without a mother.

I started acting out in school, and then that led to me hanging with the wrong crowd. So I started doing drugs and stealing cars. My sister and brother, on the other hand, took the other route. They stayed in school and did what normal children do... STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. So I was using drugs and doing anything and everything I could do to mask the pain. Then my uncle got murdered, and my life went downhill even more from there. I dropped out of school and didn't care about my life. I finally went to jail and served time for two years, up until I was 18, then I got released.

I started doing good and went back to school, and life had purpose again. Then somehow I found my way back to old friends and I started using drugs again. But this time, I met my so-called best friend, Nicole. I got out of jail, and about a month later she did too. She was using heroin, and one day I asked to take a hit and it changed my life in the worst way. Nicole died last year due to an overdose, and so did my boyfriend at the time. I got way too deep into the drug world, and then I met Lenny, who of course was a dope dealer. He always made sure I had my drugs as long as I kept making him money, until one day it all ended and he left me like nothing.

I moved back home to figure out what and where I want to be in my life. So I'm fighting to kick drugs and get my GED, and change what my past always was, to a new future that I know I am worthy of. That's why I come every day, even though everyone tells me I should just get a job, and that I don't need my GED. But, I know in my heart of hearts, coming back to school is right where I need to be.

*Candis Warner is a student at North-Tech Career Source. Her teacher is Tiqkia Barrow.*

## **Street Life**

I was almost killed because I let the street life take over. I ended up in prison and labeled a Queen Pin.

I really never had to live the life I chose. I was living what most call a five-star life. I had everything I ever wanted. I chose

the streets; street life, fame, money and drugs. In 2006, I met the father of my two older daughters. I was popular, everyone loved me. I was known everywhere I went. My then-lifestyle took over my life. I was 7 months pregnant in 2008. The father of my kids and myself engaged in an argument. In the midst of it, I called him to come and pick me up. He said he couldn't because he had to handle some business. I knew what he meant by that, but I didn't care, I just wanted to be with him. He finally came and picked me up. We continue arguing once we go together.

Arguing back and forth consumed him. He wasn't focused while driving. Two strange vehicles were in traffic as well, constantly switching lanes; a black truck and a Taurus. Before I knew it, glass shattered. The father or my kids began reaching for his weapon and starting firing. I started to taste metal. My daughters' father looked over and saw me struggling. He reached over and began to put pressure on what seemed to be my heart. He then started bleeding. I began to get light-headed so I laid the seat back. He leaned over and lightly kissed me and said sorry and that he loved me. I said I love you too and he proceeded to start choking on his own blood.

I blacked out and was airlifted to Jackson Memorial hospital where an emergency C-section was done. I was in ICU and my daughter was out in NICU with a breathing and feeding tube. I woke up to LAPD and the FBI in my room. My mother happened to be by my side, holding my hand, telling me that everything was okay. I asked what was going on, and where was Germaine? My mom told me he died. The car had over 100 bullet holes in it and that he was shot 16 times and I was shot 3 times. I was lucky to be alive. There were three kilos of cocaine and the truck and three-fifths of liquid cocaine in bottles along with other things. They wanted answers. I couldn't give them the answers they wanted because I didn't know what was in the car. At that moment, all I wanted was my baby. My life hasn't been the same since.

*Ms. Jeanna Marie Dubois is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Broward County. She is a student in Adult Basic Education II class taught by Mrs. Myra Williams.*

## **Don't Wait Until It's Too Late**

When I was a little girl, my parents were busy working to support our family. I remember that my grandmother was the one who took care of me, my brothers and sisters. We all grew up with love and kindness from her.

Time goes by. No one realizes that the more we grow up and get stronger, the more grandmother gets weaker every single day. There is one thing I knew about grandmother, she has never been to the beach and never seen the ocean. Actually, she has never asked for a trip but, I thought that would be something I could do to make her happy. So, I made my determination that one day I will take her to the beach.

I lost count of how many times I couldn't make it happen for my grandmother. I kept postponing it for later. I was waiting for the best time, without knowing that a turning point of my life was coming to me. Suddenly, grandmother became so ill. She stayed in the hospital and did not get better. Finally, she passed away. In return for grandmother's kindness to my family, I will never get a chance to make her happy. That's a regret I'll have for the rest of my life. I wish that I could turn back time.

I shall definitely feel sorry every time that I think of my grandmother, but in the meantime, it will also remind me to be careful and never hesitate to do good things for people who remain in my life.

*Bussararat Chesnutt is a student in the Adult Education Program at Pensacola State College. Her teacher is Linda Lewandowski.*

## **My Ray of Hope**

A famous quote by Brett Wilson states, "Every story has an ending, but in life every ending is a new beginning." This quote has inspired me on my new beginning. Somehow over the years, I lost myself somewhere down the road. I was overworked and

underpaid. I was quitting all my dreams, but someone came and rescued me from drowning.

I was having a mental break down with all the pain I kept inside, and I was giving up everything and everyone that meant the most to me. I lost myself through it all. I felt as if my jobs were sucking the life out of me. I was disconnected from my children, and was never able to see their special programs at school activities, because I was always working.

I was a single parent, and was struggling to make ends meet. My personal struggles were also overwhelming. I made bad decisions with relationships and suffered physical and mental abuse. I also struggled with addictions. Then, God sent me someone who saved me.

Someone walked into my life and changed it completely. We were two very different people, but I am glad that I decided to give us a chance. I had never before experienced a relationship like this. He was a romantic, and acted like the perfect gentleman, always opening doors for me. He rubbed my feet after a long stressful day, and did everything he could to make me feel happy and relaxed. He continued to do this every day. He has seen the really bad side of me, the lowest part of my life, my demons. Yet he never ran away from them or from me. He was everything I wanted in a significant other.

Then one day I was crying because my son and I were arguing, and I just broke down. This special man gave me the longest hug until I stopped crying. My youngest daughter came into my room, and I turned around to see what she needed. When I turned back around to him, I realized that he was on one knee, asking me to marry him. I said “yes” to the happiest moment of my life. I had been proposed to before, but not like that.

On January 17, 2015 we were married. Our first year was very tough, because I wasn't sure what my role as a wife should be. Neither one of us had been married before. He was very patient with me. My husband has taught me so much since we have been together. He is now the chief breadwinner of our home, and he takes care of me and my children. He loves them as if they are his own. He has taught me how to be a wife, a better mother, and how to love myself.

*Mona Shows is a student at the Adult Literacy Program at the West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, Florida. Her teacher is Mrs. Julie Maxwell.*

## **Lost Girl**

The last few years have been very hard for me. I went through a lot that has made me a better person today. I would have never thought that I would have ever gone through the things I've been through in the last four years. Losing my mother, but gaining a new life, losing my kids and being homeless. The one thing I can say is that everything made me a stronger woman at the end of the day.

In the beginning of 2015, I lost my mother to lung cancer that she was fighting for most of my life. Losing my mother was the hardest thing that I thought would happen to me; it was as if I lost a big part of myself. At that point, I lost the will to live; I became very depressed and withdrawn from everyone and everything. In the middle of 2015, I found out that I was pregnant with my first child. It was like a breath of fresh air, as if someone gave me a gift of life. I had something and someone to live for again. Things couldn't have been better. Then everything changed for the worse once again and I was not ready for it at all.

After having two beautiful children, they were taken from me in the blink of an eye because of an angry neighbor who wanted my daughter for herself. I lost everything that gave me hope and happiness. She made me seem like a bad person and parent to everyone, even my family. I lost my children because of someone else that hated me as a person. She made everyone believe that my kids would be better with her. Within a few months, my son was badly beaten by this woman. I still couldn't get my kids back after finding that I was no harm to my children. Things only got worse from there.

Shortly after losing my kids, I became homeless, that was one of my biggest fears in life, and it came true. Having nowhere to call home or a place to lay my head was very shameful for me. During it all, the only person I had was my husband. Together, we were homeless for close to two years, with little family help

at all. Sleeping outside in the woods, in the rain and the cold was something I will never forget.

Nothing could prepare me for that life, but it made me stronger than I ever thought I would be. Losing my mother was hard. Losing my kids was worse, and being homeless made me never forget. I am no longer homeless, but still haven't gotten over my mother passing and I'm still fighting for my children to this day. However, I wake up every day with a smile on my face.

*Alberta Evans is a GED student at PBC Adult & Community Ed, North Tech Satellite at Vita Nova. Her teachers are Mrs. Barrow-Dye & Mrs. Gladney.*

## **Life of Rakiria: Chapter 1**

You know people are where they are because of traumatic events in their lives. It does not specifically have to be a bad thing, just a lesson learned and something to grow from. It is something to look back at and to strive from. Well, that is what you call a turning point and I want tell you all about mine.

I know we all aren't strangers to hard times. Having to grow up and become an adult at the age of 13, or even younger. I have never had a real childhood and tough times were normal to me. There is one specific turning point in my life out of the many. I knew that I wanted to become who I am now, to thrive and succeed.

I remember when my family and I became homeless for the first time. During this period of my life, we had to face many challenges that included sleepless and hot nights. Sneaking into bathroom parks to get clean and sleeping in a small van outside my mom's jobs waiting for her shift to end.

After half a year had passed, everything seemed to settle down and we were all settled in to a new apartment. Then things started to tumble and bring us back to square one. However, with all that was happening with us—not being in school and being separated from our mom—we had a wonderful opportunity to be placed with this nice family that was willing to take us in,



not knowing that it would be a positive change. We were happier than ever, in spite of being away from our mom. However, within that year, my aunt had passed away, but that didn't hold me back. I decided to go back to school and things couldn't be better. My family is now reunited and happy.

This is my reality, and the many turning points that led me to where I am today. This is why I push and strive to become the best at what I do. I want to show everyone, especially my siblings, that you can go through hardships and still come out great. You just have to get to that certain event, that certain point in your life, where you make up your mind on what you want, and strive to be great.

*Rakiria Banks is a GED student at PBC Adult & Community Ed, North Tech Satellite at Vita Nova. Her teachers are Mrs. Barrow-Dye & Mrs. Gladney.*

## **What a Journey**

Staying in school was always a huge goal for me, but what encouraged me to attend school again was living on the streets for three months with my brother by my side. August 22, 2019, is the day I'll never forget.

Consequently, living in the streets was one of the most heartbreaking, mournful, depressing experiences I've ever been through. At the time, I thought that I'd be living in the streets the rest of my life with my brother in a new city, with no one to talk to, no place to stay, and nothing to eat or drink. Just at that moment, I thought it was all over for both of us. For instance, our first day on the streets, my brother and I had a hard time finding a simple spot to lay our heads, not knowing that if the law catches us sleeping outside in a park we could be arrested, or maybe something more cold and cruel. My brother and I also had to walk around the whole city for hours without any sleep, waiting until sunrise just to ask a few strangers for small change. That's something we didn't enjoy doing because we were so used to making our own money without begging or asking.

What hurt us so deeply was just seeing each other cry.

Looking into my brother's eyes and him, looking into mine was another wake-up call staying out there in the streets. That was something that broke us, two men, deep inside. Another horrible situation was sleeping under a bridge with drug addicts. For example, while still in the streets, my brother and I were blessed with a job and our boss would pick us up from the park every morning around 6:30. Now, sleeping under the bridge was the hard part because the addicts would take their drugs around 12-3 in the morning. It was difficult trying to sleep and hearing the addicts moan as they insert drugs in their arms. When the drugs were in their systems, they would act crazy by yelling things they aren't aware of themselves, or fighting with the other addicts that slept next to them. There were times when my brother and I couldn't sleep so we would just look around, and as we are up at those late hours, we would watch the addicts stick needles in their arms. It was sickening and a real eye-opener for both of us.

Through all the trials, tribulations, emotional breakdowns, and the sorrows, I learned great survival skills. Now that I'm away from the streets, I can aim at getting my high school diploma and continue getting my life together. Even though the journey of life has hurt me so badly, the journey has also made me appreciate life even better.

*Michael Gillion-Young is a GED student at PBC Adult & Community Ed, North Tech Satellite at Vita Nova. His teachers are Mrs. Barrow-Dye & Mrs. Gladney.*

### **Make the Decision Immediately**

My name is Blanca. I have a beautiful daughter and wonderful grandchildren. When I was 33 years old, my doctor told me: "Are you thinking of having children? You have to decide right now, because in a short time you won't be able to; your womb has serious problems."

First decision: I got pregnant but in the first month the doctor said I had preeclampsia, and 30 years ago we did not have the scientific advances that we have today. My doctor said, "It is

very dangerous; when you give birth, you have only a 10 percent chance of survival.”

Second decision: I continued with my pregnancy, and three times the baby wanted to be born, but finally on August 21st, my tiny new baby was born. I was surprised I survived! During her first year, I raised her like a kangaroo. I kept her in a sling and carried her everywhere.

Five years later, I asked my sister who lived in the USA if my daughter could learn English in this country for a year by herself. She said yes and I sent my daughter to live in the United States when she was six years old.

Third decision: My daughter left without me, but when the time came that she was to return to Colombia, she called me and said “Mom, I do not want to come back. Please come here with my dad!” I was in shock and very sad. I went to the US Embassy and was denied twice. The third time, we got accepted. For two years, I did not see my daughter. I was so happy when I was finally able to come the USA and see her again.

Fourth decision: I decided to live in this country. I had to come to terms with the decision to leave my native country, my parents, my job, and my family. But it was all for the future of my daughter.

Now I understand that we survived because of the Lord, he had a big purpose for her: to help and save the lives of children who are victims of abuse from their own parents, and to teach parents how to treat their loved ones. She is an investigator of child abuse. She is also an excellent mother, wife, daughter, and worker.

I thank GOD for showing me such a rewarding path.

*Blanca Patino Flor is an ESOL student at South Florida State College. She is in Ms. Blake’s advanced class.*

## **Finding My Way on My Mother's Words**

In the beginning, when I arrived to the United States, I remember feeling that my heart was broken. I only thought of the people I had left behind. It was extremely difficult to start again in a new country. The next days were worse, but I found refuge in my bedroom. My room became my sanctuary. While I was there, I could be anywhere I wanted, or be anybody I wanted. I could transform myself into a magical being and in that way, I was able to see my family together again. I felt without motivation or will. I was really sad and missed everyone in my family.

I was months lost in the safe haven of my room. Returning to my country was a solace in the middle of my desperation. I was constantly homesick and depressed. I did not want to go out or meet anybody. I did not see any future in this country. Needless to say, my mother was increasingly worried about me. One day, as I was in my stupor of day dreaming, I heard a voice in my head. The voice was telling me, "Good girl, you need to wake up. You are now in the United States and the only dream you need is to fight for your future. All of your dreams will become true. And you will be able to achieve all of your goals here." The voice kept going on and on, and suddenly I was really listening to reason for the first time since I had arrived in this country. The voice was not a dream, it was my mother who entered my room and tried for the last time to wake me up.

Immediately, something changed in me. I acknowledged that I was placing all my strength in the wrong place. I had wasted so much time! The next day, I started to work on my future and I thought about each opportunity that I now had. I always wanted to become a dentist, and today I have the chance to strive. Unexpectedly, I had goals, motivation, and the realization that I had the possibility to see my family together again if I did the right thing.

At last, it was my mother and her powerful words that changed my mind and helped me find the inspiration to find the strength. She showed me the way to bring my family together again.

*Daniela Marquez is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Regla Requena.*

## Coming Out

What an experience! Coming out of anything can be overwhelming. But coming out of the closet, so to speak, and to your parents of all people—you're talking about a trip, and a true trip it was. Well here's my story, and I'm sticking with it.

The year of 2007 was my release. I told my daddy and then my mother. Their reaction? Use your imagination! My dad was loving, caring, and more accepting. My mother on the other hand, to this day is just dealing with it. Thanks to my nosy little distant cousin, who blabbed my little secret before I could tell anyone. So, when it got back to my mother, she was shocked.

So my story unfolds—dad picked me up from school and took me out to eat. He kept asking if there was anything I wanted to tell him. Scared to death of what he might say, I kept saying no! He saw right through me and knew that I was lying. I took a deep breath and told him that I was gay. From then on, he accepted and supported me, trying to understand how I was feeling and what I was dealing with.

My mother only accepted it because I'm still her child. Over time, our relationship has been rocky with ups and downs. From an early age, my mother and I were like peas in a pod. My grandmother joked about how much we rip and run the streets. Needless to say, after my coming out, we don't really talk about my sexual preference; it upsets her.

Growing up wasn't easy. It was hard as hell for me because my sexual orientation was not accepted by most. People were so cruel and mean to me just because of it. I hadn't done anything but be me. I was beaten, jumped, spat on, and raped because I was gay. Because of these situations, mother thought it would be better to move to Florida. Of course, I didn't want to go. I didn't want to be away from my family, or my dad.

Well, we moved! I can honestly say that it was probably the

best move my mother made. I think it made me a better person, I mean, besides the point that I'm currently in the Gadsden County Jail. Coming out was amazing, it was truly a relief, a weight lifted off my shoulders. After revealing my sexual preference, I decided to be transgender, I honestly love the look and the feel of being a woman, the beauty of my hair, nails, and makeup.

In life there are choices, sometimes we're scared and nervous of being who we are. As I look back over my life, I don't regret coming out as a gay transgender. Be true to yourself, love yourself, BE YOU.

*Brittian Lea is a transgender inmate currently housed in the Gadsden County Jail. Brenda G. Johnson is their ABE teacher.*

### **My Bright Journey**

When I came to the U.S., I was already in love with the country, because it was my dream to come here. Even now I remember when I arrived at the airport, I was so excited! Yes, I am here! This moment of arriving here was the biggest turning point in my life. Once I got out of the airport, my new life began. There were a lot of new things I needed to learn, like the culture and etiquette. I feel grateful whenever I think about my journey.

I worked several years in a restaurant. I liked my job very much because it was a way to provide money for my parents in China. When my parents received it, I felt like everything paid off because they could now enjoy an easier life.

As time went by, I got married and started a family. I have two children now. Sometimes I think it is incredible how I become a mother. It makes me feel warm and happy! I'm thankful for the life I have been given.

*Cindy Zheng is a student at ACE of Leon County. Her teacher is Christine Poreba.*

## Two Precious Seconds

I was running to reach my car, my heart pounding and my hands shaking as I tried to open the door. I heard a shot behind me, but I couldn't stop trying to get inside. Some of my followers were laughing and shouting profanities at me, but I was determined to flee from the group of thugs. I was driving away when, on the other side of the university block, a group of my classmates flagged me down asking desperately for a ride. The breaking news said that the downtown was being attacked by guerrillas. No buses circulated around the university that night.

I didn't know how many students got into my car. I drove as fast as I could, directly to my house, the only place that I felt safe. Suddenly out of nowhere a group of armed guerrillas, their faces covered with red handkerchiefs, appeared in front of us. I thought, "This is the end." And there we were, young students with dreams, hopes, and futures ahead, against a group of fight pickers, criminals, and kidnappers. We did not want to be involved in a stupid war; we wanted to be professionals or lawyers, managing companies or running businesses. I felt extremely angry when a mean looking man approached my window pointing an AK-47 at me. At that moment, I threw the car in reverse and without thinking made a u-turn and fled from them. The army appeared behind them and the crossfire began. I barely remember the screams, shots, and explosions sounding everywhere. It was turmoil.

Finally we reached my sweet home. I embraced and kissed my parents deeply as they had been afraid for me. It was 1982, during the civil war between communist guerrillas who wanted to forcefully take control of El Salvador and the government that tried to defend itself via its army. Eight students, including me—shaking and talking nervously, girls crying, but alive without injuries—got out of my car.

The terrible ordeal we lived that night made me reflect about the literal meaning of life. The civil war, any war actually, is a waste. The consequences were the same: death, destruction, sadness, nothing good and nothing changes after war. But who survives that war, who lives in the middle, who suffers every step of that foolish war, who thinks there might be no tomorrow? We are left stronger and more appreciative of life. I promised myself

never to protest for food or things because I saw a lot of poverty and sadness; never to be sad because life is beautiful when we love; never to be bored because there is so much to do; and never hate because it is the origin of mankind's madness.

*Ms. Maira Rivera Rivas is currently a student in Brewster Technical College's College & Career Readiness class.*

### **My Trip to New York City**

My story begins when I decided to celebrate my 40th birthday in the city of my dreams: New York. I had never had the opportunity to visit the U.S. before; my life didn't give me the privilege to travel and accomplish my desires. I had my son when I was 27 years old and I raised him alone. I made a lot of sacrifices to provide a joyful and peaceful life for him. In return, he filled and inspired every moment of my life. We really enjoyed the time spent together.

Consequently, six months before October, I made an executive decision and I told my son about my intention to do something really special to celebrate my 40th birthday, something that I have waited for a long time: to go together to the "Big Apple." To do this, we had to skip the summer holidays. He was immediately excited, and he said yes, while he hugged me strongly. Finally, one of my dreams could come true!

I could not guess that this trip would have changed my life forever. Sometimes something unexpected happens and turns the course of life in a different direction.

It was the end of September, and we were almost ready for our trip to New York, when a thought passed in my mind, a memory of my past that I did not consider for a long time. While I was coming back home after a day's work, I thought about him—the father of my son. I knew he lived in Miami because we have talked once or twice years ago, but we have never considered to meet. In that moment, while I was on the platform waiting for the train, I decided to write him a simple email in which I asked him to contact me because I needed to talk. I did not expect any



answer, he never answered me in the past. But I was wrong, I received an email back immediately.

I could not believe it! A new story was beginning. I told him about my trip to New York and his last opportunity to know his son, Tommaso. I do not know why that day he decided to answer back to my email, and why he never did in the past. What I know, without a doubt, is the enthusiasm I heard in his voice when he told me his decision to meet us in New York.

The time spent together in the “Big Apple” was incredible, unexpected and magical. Those were the most important five days of our lives. Eight months later, Tommaso and I left Italy, our friends, and our family to start a new life and a new family in the USA.

*Valeria Randis originally from Italy came to the U.S. a few months ago and lives with her husband and son. She earned a doctorate in Constitutional Law. She attends Adult ESOL College and Career Readiness (CCR) at the Atlantic Technical College - Ashe Campus with Ms. F. Johnson. She loves reading, the beach, and learning new things.*

## **Behind the Scars**

A scar is a mark that is left on your skin after a wound heals. Another definition is a feeling of great emotional pain or sadness that is caused by a bad experience that lasts for a long time. After a traffic accident, I had both scars. However, without difficult situations to add spice to our lives, it might as well be dull and boring. They are what makes us feel alive.

In January 2008, I was driving a motorcycle on my way to work. It was 7:30 in the morning. I stopped at a traffic light, and a dump truck made a turn to the right and hit the back of my motorcycle. It pulled me along for more than three feet. This was the closest I have been to facing death. I remember screaming for someone to help. The truck stopped. I was terrified, and then I felt a huge pain go over my legs. I realized that I had sustained major injuries to my legs. For this reason, I needed a dermabrasion. It is a surgery to remove skin burned by the pavement. It left a large scar on my left thigh that made me feel insecure for many years.

After two weeks in the hospital, I could finally go home. Unfortunately, I lost proprioception of the movement of my legs. Therefore, I could not walk. For a couple of weeks, I was depressed, asking myself, “Why is this happening to me?” Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Everything that happens in our lives, positively or negatively, happens for a reason, as long as you can reflect, learn from, and appreciate it. Every moment can allow you to grow into the person you are meant to become. Then my spiritual and physical scars made me grow stronger and empowered.

I had to learn how to walk again. I had to attend physical therapy for four months after the accident. I had to learn how to use a wheelchair, walker, and crutches. Every time that I felt I was losing my faith, I had the support of my family to help me get through it all. These hard times made me build determination and inner strength.

Years ago, each time I saw my scar tissue, I felt insecure with my body image. Today I feel like a winner, because I know the story behind it. Facing these bad moments made me start over, be brave enough to find the life I want, and courageous enough to chase it. Also it made me love myself in the way I always meant to.

*Yeimy Serrano is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Changes in My Life**

I want to tell you about the changes that have marked my life. My first change was when I was six years old. For me it was all play, but one day my parents woke me up and dressed me in a school uniform and led me to school. My first day of school, I wanted to play, but I was corrected, and I understood that I was there to learn. As I did not go to kindergarten, the change was hard. In my country, elementary school is for six years.

After that, another change happened which was the continuation of my studies at another school for a period of

three years. The change was big. My classmates were older than me, especially those in the ninth grade who abused those new entries. Then came another change. My next step was three more years at preparatory school. When I finished my first year, my girlfriend gave me the news that she was expecting a baby. That was big news, which created a big change. I had to leave my studies and get a job. That was not easy after not finishing my studies. It was hard for several years, but we wanted something better, something different for our family.

One day, we made the decision to move to the United States and started another change when we settled in West Palm Beach. We worked hard to learn. My family and I made this country our home. We have achieved a lot with the English we learned. We got several diplomas and worked hard. But the time came for me a year ago to make yet another change. After many years of hard work, fatigue, and health issues, I retired from work. Now retired, I managed to get my license as a real estate agent, and I am currently a student at the Adult Education Center.

*Pedro Ahuatzin is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Starting a New Life**

Your life can suddenly change. That happened to me almost three years ago. It was supposed to be a normal day in our lives. My husband and I woke up early, and he prepared breakfast every morning. While we had it, we were reading the newspaper and discussing the economic situation of our country. After that we were getting ready to go to our radio program. I never imagined that would be our last moments together, because that day he closed his eyes forever.

He used to tell me life has to continue. Therefore, one day, after crying and with my broken heart, feeling so alone in my room, missing everything about him, I decided to come to the

United States and get my green card as my husband always wanted.

As soon as possible, I bought my ticket, and I started preparing all the requirements to present my case to the immigration department. Eight months ago, I arrived in this great country with my baggage full of pain and tears. I was not sure about my decision, but I just did it. The trip seemed longer than usual, so I was hugging my sister and smiling a little bit.

Once here, I attended the meeting with my lawyers and presented all the papers. By that time everything was going perfectly, but the day before going back to my country, I received a call from my lawyers telling me that I had to postpone my trip for at least three months because the embassy of my country had been closed.

I was so surprised about what they told me, because the original idea was to present my case and then come back and wait for an answer in my country. I thought I was going to have time to leave everything in order. I had my family, my job, business, and a lot of things waiting for me. That night I couldn't sleep thinking about what to do. I knew that soon I would come to live here but not right away. The next day I talked to my family, and all of them encouraged me to stay here.

Presently, I have nine months in this country. Everything is better now. My life has changed; I am involved in other activities, and studying at the Adult Educational Center, which is a very nice experience. Even though I miss my country and family a lot, something dawned on me: I was starting a new life.

*Delmy Varela is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

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

My name is Selda and I'm from Turkey. When my husband and I met, I had lived in Turkey all my life but he had lived in America for 13 years. He returned to Turkey in 2006 and we met later that year, then we got married in 2008. Everything was great; we rented a house, we bought new furniture, and our wedding was amazing.

Two weeks after our wedding my husband said, “I have to say something: I want to return to America.” I was shocked and I stared at him in stunned silence. We hadn’t talked about it before, so I asked him, “Why?” After talking for just one hour, he convinced me. I couldn’t believe my life had changed in an hour. My feelings were very messy. The hardest part was telling my family and my friends; they were shocked too. Nobody was ready for such a decision and my mother cried so much.

My husband started the applications for a green card. Meanwhile he started looking for a job in America. The next step was the moving process; our items were new and I wanted to bring them to America. We packed everything and loaded it on a ship.

My husband came to America first because he would begin his job. I would come in about two months. It gave me time to spend with my loved ones. Finally the day of separation had come. It was one of the hardest days of my life. I just remember that I was crying the whole way, but I was also very excited. I arrived at JFK international Airport on January 9, 2009.

Sometimes I miss my country and loved ones very much, but since I came to America I have never regretted it. I love living here. Now when I remember the moment when my life changed, I smile.

*Selda Gocay is a student in the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Melanie Blake.*

## **An Unexpected Personal Growth in the United States**

After I came to the U.S., my life changed enormously. In some aspects, it made my life more abundant in a positive way, but I sometimes feel frustrated while I’m getting used to the new environment. I often get homesick because I miss my family, friends, and my home country. I became more sensitive than I have ever been. However, I can certainly say that living in the U.S. became a turning point in my life.

If I had not come to the U.S., I would have regretted it my

entire life. I made many friends who are from various countries as well as American friends. After I met them, I realized that I had a narrow perspective on other cultures. I even had ridiculous prejudices about other countries, but my friends helped me open my eyes to other cultures, which broadened my perspective on the world. Also, I get to have more attention to imperative world issues, such as cultural conflicts between countries, climate change, and the epidemics that have happened over other countries. Before I came to the U.S., I thought that I would become familiar with only American culture, but now I see that, beyond that, I have developed a positive attitude toward many cultures.

Also, living in the U.S. made me change my lifestyle and how to spend my time with family. In my home country, I didn't have enough time to spend with my family. I was so busy every day because I had to work late at night. My work was always a top priority for me, more than the time I spent with family. It sometimes made me exhausted and depressed. However, I changed my mind on the priority in my life after I moved to the U.S. I guess that many people who live in the city where I live think about the importance of the balance between family and work. I feel like they don't want to sacrifice their family because of their work. This mood is quite different from the usual surroundings in my country. The different atmosphere inspired me to live all moments of my life in a meaningful way. Thus, I have done my best to spend my time with my loved ones after I thought about what would be the most important thing in my life.

Lastly, living in the U.S. has affected my personality even though I've only been here a relatively short time. Through adjusting to the new environment, I have more confidence and I believe in myself more than I did before. I do not hesitate to meet new friends and participate in new activities unlike I used to do. This attitude made me strong and adventurous. This turning point is what I've never expected before I came to the U.S.

*Yeun Choi is a student at ACE of Leon in Tallahassee. His teacher is Christine Poreba.*

## **I Am a Proud Immigrant**

My name is Ana Karen Mejia and I am proud to tell the story of my immigration to the United States. I was born in San Juan Del Rio, Queretaro, Mexico in 2000. At the age of 1 ½, I crossed the border with my mom to start our new life in America. At that age, still a toddler, I remember very little about Mexico, but as the years passed my mom told me many of the reasons she made the decision to come to the United States. I understood the main reason for her decision was that there was a lot of violence in our hometown, and my mom wanted me to grow up in a safe environment.

My memories after coming to this country began in preschool. I felt weird being one of the only students who didn't speak English and whose mother only spoke Spanish. It took me three years to learn how to write and speak fluently in English. School was difficult because whenever the teacher asked me something, I understood what she was saying but I couldn't answer her. Luckily, I met someone who would translate everything for me, and we are still friends to this day.

My school years were filled with good and bad memories. In elementary school, I had some hard times because I was often bullied. The students told me to go back to my country because I didn't fit in with them. Things started improving in middle school, feeling more confident about myself as my English improved. I had four true friends who remain my friends today at age 20. When I was in eighth grade, I had my Quinceañera. I invited everyone including family, close friends, and teachers. During the father-daughter dance, I cried from all the emotion inside me. I still remember the words of my mom and dad. They told me that I am still their little girl, their little princess, and they don't care how old I am, I will always be their baby princess.

High school was a challenge for me due to all the drama, fights, drugs, etc. My immigration lawyer warned me to stay away from this so I can easily gain citizenship. I started the paperwork when I was 16 and I'm still waiting for it. Then imagine how I felt when the dean asked me to leave school because of bad behavior and failing grades. I was brought to tears. Looking back, I realized that what started out as bad news was in fact the reason I turned my life around. My guidance

counselor suggested I get my GED and move forward. As I write this, I am enrolled in the Adult Education program at SFSC working toward my GED. Getting second chances seems to be my life story.

*Ana Karen Mejia is a student in the Adult Education program at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Ms. Jasmine Groover.*

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

Everyone in their life experiences a tragic event. Whether it may be large or small, these occurrences change us physically, mentally and emotionally, which brings a state of discouragement. As for my case, one of my major crises that led to a devastating turning point in my life happened when my oldest daughter, Kelly was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis (JRA) at such a young age.

A flashback 10 years earlier: Life was great, watching my daughter Kelly's first smile, taking her first steps, saying her first words. She was a happy child. Life stood still as I saw her grow.

At the age of seven, she had just started the second grade. She loved going to school. She was always ready to undertake any given task. I remember the smile on her face as she giggled and played.

Just when you think you're living the life, an unexpected dark storm approaches, creating a nightmare. The phone rang! The nurse from school informed me that my daughter Kelly was unable to walk. My heart dropped as I was driving down a dark road, afraid and unaware of what was approaching. Upon my arrival, I found my daughter unable to walk and drove straight to the hospital.

Indeed she had been diagnosed with JRA. We are now in a war, a battle between good and evil. We call her illness a "demon" of pain. Kelly was no longer alone in the storm that had dragged her down in a hole and tied her down with chains. We were now incarcerated with her. We must keep standing strong, trusting God in faith. It might be stormy now, but it can't rain



forever. The beauty of life is while we can not undo what is done, we can see it, understand it, learn from it, and make a change so that every new moment is spent not in regret, guilt, fear, or anger but in wisdom, understanding, and love.

Every day is a new day. You'll never be able to find happiness if you don't move on.

*Maria Centeno is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Kathleen Keen.*

### **The Change in My Life**

The day that changed my life is the day I decided to go back to school. It started when I was hired to DJ the COBA party for the college at the World Golf Village.

I started going back to school in January of 2018 in the Adult Education Department. I decided that after I got my high school diploma I would go to college, so I auditioned for the Florida School of the Arts. Finding out that I passed the audition made me even more determined to get my diploma. I could live out my dream of getting a degree in art and being an artist. It took me 14 months to get my diploma, and now that I am in college, I find some things easy and some things hard, like trying to complete work projects on time and keeping my portfolio organized, pictures dated, and keeping up with classes. Some of the easy things are doing the work, except for Digital Media, but it is starting to be easier. It took me 27 years to get back in school and it was well worth it; the teachers are awesome here and the classes are great. I am positive this college thing will get easier.

Being in college has been a positive experience. Some things are easy and some things are hard, but overall it's awesome being here. The Spring Fling and Fall Frolic are really fun, and the Viking Center is a great place to hang out and relax, do your homework, play pool and ping pong and other games, or get something to eat. The Lunchbox has really great food, and I like hanging out and talking to the other students. The college has awesome staff that work here, so I would say the St. Johns River State College has been a really positive change in my life.

*Ricky Adkins is a June 2019 graduate of the Saint Johns River State College Adult Education Program and is now a student at Florida School of the Arts.*

## **I Chose the Right “What If”**

As a young child growing up, you only think about playing outside with your friends or doing the chores your parents told you to do. Your only responsibility is school and you just wish you can grow up faster. As a teenager, things change a little. You get more freedom so you do more of the things you like. You don't like when your parents tell you what to do. At this age it's when the decisions we make start to pave the way of our future life. When we are presented with decisions and take action we always end up thinking afterwards, “What if?” What if the decision I made wasn't the correct one, but what if it *was* the correct one? As I reflect back on my life, I think my greatest “what if” moment was the turning point in my life. I got married!

Making the decision of getting married is a major one and one that really defines your future. What is to follow, living with someone else, is a real turning point. However, personally, the decision of getting married was not the toughest one, but the one that came afterwards. My husband and I talked about our plans after getting married, however, he never mentioned that he had plans to come to the USA. That was the toughest decision for me to make because I didn't know if I should go with him or stay. My family was against me going to the USA, so it made the decision harder to know what path to take. My final decision was to go with him and leave my family behind.

Coming to the USA was very difficult for me because I couldn't count on the help of my family. I had only one aunt who was already living in the USA and she helped us out a bit. It was hard adjusting to the USA, especially since I didn't speak English. Twenty-two years ago, it wasn't like it is now, where most people speak or understand Spanish. However, I knew that I needed to learn English in order to communicate with people, so I decided to go to school and learn. I'm currently still going to school to perfect my English.

Making a decision in life is never easy, even when you are getting advice from others. Decisions change the path of your future life and you're always stuck with the "what if." What if I had chosen the other option? Would things be better? However, we should always be reminded to live in the present. The present is what we have to pave a different way into our future by making better choices than the ones we made before.

*Ana Lilia Pahua is a student in the Parent Power Alliance at S.B. Idea, Inc. Her teacher is Heralie Guaramata.*

### **Dying With Hope**

On February 12, 2018, I was diagnosed with end-stage renal failure, and my former professor Jane Regan, who is a U.S. citizen, volunteered to donate a kidney. Jane's love has changed my life and I salute her exceptional courage. By making the decision to donate one of her kidneys, she saved my life. Jane's gesture clearly goes beyond her humanitarian act. I will never cease to emphasize the uniqueness of her courage. All of this is true. But if the hero goes so far as to sacrifice his life by giving it for a cause, Jane did it to save my life. It seems clear that Jane knew exactly what she was risking. But she did not hesitate. This is the first point to emphasize.

Secondly, one wonders what motivated her. The sense of love for the other, certainly. On December 20, 2019, while I was on dialysis, I received a call from Jane telling me that she had received the result of her last radiology test, and unfortunately it detected a stone in her right kidney. I remained calm and continued to trust God. For He alone has the power to change the course of things. I keep praying, because nothing happens for nothing. The reason why this stone was detected is that God, in His infinite grace, did not want me to receive a sick or damaged kidney. I place all my hope in God. I didn't even want to share this sad news with anyone. But Jane encouraged me to do so. She offered to lead a campaign to find me a kidney if it was confirmed that she could no longer be a donor. She insisted that I approach other people about my case, because you never know what God has in store for you. And I told her frankly that I am

uncomfortable with the idea of begging for a kidney. But if other folks would do it, I would appreciate it very much.

I changed my mind and decided to inform Project Light's teachers of the sad news. Matthew Suddes, a colleague for whom I have great esteem, told me, "Lafontaine, we have all thought of you. Sincerely, if you want one of my kidneys, I will give you one. I know that the problem is correspondence. I'll pray for you. God is our only option." All of this is powerful evidence that the organs have no color. Love transcends everything and exists beyond borders. Unfortunately, my colleague Suddes is not a match. As a believer, my deliverance is not far off. Dying with hope, I will be freed from the repeated dialysis that is turning my life upside down.

*Lafontaine Orvild is a Haitian author, French and Philosophy teacher, and former volunteer teacher at Project Light of Manatee.*

## **Thank You**

There is always something good that comes out of something bad. I am Cesar Espino. I am from Guatemala. When I was 26 years old, I dreamed about coming to America.

It all started when my mom died. She was the pillar of my house. She took care of me and my brothers until the day she died. She guided us in everything. My whole life changed because my mom had her own business and we had to close it. This is the beginning of financial problems for me because I played an important part in her business. I was married and had a three-year-old daughter, and I didn't have enough money to give them what they needed. I could not afford to supply them meals three times a day and clothes to wear.

I felt hopeless, until one day my uncle called me to tell me about his son, who was doing well economically in the United States. I went home to tell my wife this, and I told her that I had made the decision to migrate to the United States. Fortunately, I have a good cousin who helped advance money to me to cover the travelling expenses. I promised him that I would pay him back when I earned enough money myself. It took him about

a year to raise the money I needed for my travelling expenses. While waiting for this to happen, I got a temporary job as a delivery person to meet the needs of my family.

On January 28, 2006, I started my journey to the United States. I left my home to the bus station towards the Mexican border. It took a month and 18 days to cross Mexico. I walked, swam across the Rio Grande, rode the bus, and took a train. Thank God it was not very dangerous to get to my destination. Everything was smooth for me to be here. I am grateful to my cousin, who also helped me find a job in a restaurant called Two Friends in Key West where I worked for five years.

I am so thankful to be in the United States. I am able to support my daughter through college and have a better life away from crimes and financial difficulty.

*Cesar Espino is a student in the Monroe County Adult Education program. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Personal Story**

God? Please, I can't do this anymore. Why did you allow this to happen to me?

Have you ever felt like you couldn't take one more step or even one more breath in this thing called life? One thing I can say about life is that life is very precious. I had a beautiful home, a car, my four beautiful girls, and my family. As years went by, my grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer. By age 76, she had gotten so sick, she couldn't fight it anymore. Not even a year later, she passed away. My mom was also diagnosed with cancer after my grandmother passed away. I felt as if I had no life. Everything and everybody was leaving me.

I started getting into drugs. I had gotten into my addiction so bad that my life took a turn for the worse. I lost my house, my car, my kids, my mother, and my grandmother. I felt as if I had nothing to live for. In the process of losing everything and my addiction, I began to think about my siblings. My older brother lived in California, my little sister was in the Army, my

other sister was a manager at her job, my brother that lived in California was a supervisor at his job, and I was the black sheep of all of my siblings.

I was living on the street as a result of my addiction. I got caught up with the wrong people while on the streets, which landed me here in prison, where I did not want to be. In prison, I got into school. I've gotten better with language, math and reading. During my childhood, I grew up with SLD, which is a learning disability. It took me longer to grasp and process things. Prison opened my eyes to things the streets couldn't. I am here for a reason, even if it is just to go to school. I told myself I needed this. I was proud of myself. I learned so much and I'm still learning thanks to my teacher Ms. Pugh. She takes her time to work with me on things that will help me once I leave prison. Hopefully when I get back into society, I can get my girls back, and be with my brothers and sisters. I plan to get my life straight again so that I'm in everyone's life.

*Ms. Nicole Hernandez is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Panama City, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

## **Florida Blues**

I have three children: Alexis, my oldest; Martin, my son; and my youngest, Isabell. Mother, Martha Blood, and father, Martin.

Sitting in my room, pondering the news. The life I was living, has got me in blues. There are no more excuses, no lies will set me free. My face all over the news, everyone got to see.

I played the game, I lived the life. Chasing the men, living in strife. I hurt so many people and let so many down. I broke so many hearts, I was the talk of the town.

But here I sit in prison, and now the joke is on me. The game I was playing, put me where I need to be. Now I sit alone and think, and thoughts run through my mind. I wish I could forget them, so many that I dread.

Person after person, so many that I hurt. How I'm not buried, six feet below the dirt. God has shown me everything. I got to see it all. Tears rolling down my face, on my knees I had to fall.

Please God, forgive me. On your son, I cried his name. Only Jesus can save me from the life I lived in shame. I thank you God in Heaven, for surely saving me. Now I understand why Jesus died for me.

I live my life for God, he set me on my way to tell everyone, only Jesus each and every day. What I am telling you, I know you have heard before: change the way you're living, or enjoy the view behind bars.

You'll stand before a judge, as he gives you the news, "I am sending you to prison, to wear the Florida Blues."

*Ms. Alicia M. Guajardo is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. Her hometown is Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class taught by Mrs. Cynthia Phillips.*

## **My Teenage Self**

If I could talk to my teenage self, I would say, "Now Tamara, you know you're wrong for hitting that girl in the face like that. Don't you know you could get expelled from school?" It happened again and again. I found myself going down the wrong path in my teenage years. I always was getting into trouble, mainly at school. Every day it was something.

I just wanted to do right. This is so not me! Oh my God! Tamara, are you really in there? I need you to get back in focus.

I kept getting into trouble. One day I got arrested. I had to stay in the Juvenile Detention Center for 21 days. I was crying so hard because I'd never experienced anything like this. After those 21 days were up, I had to go to Second Chance, a school for bad kids. I'd say to myself, "I'm going to do right," but dang it! I really didn't know what was going in my head. I felt like I didn't belong in that school! I wish I would have kept my hands to myself. I should have had some self-control, but I ended up on

my way to a level 8 program for girls called Vernon Place, located on the border line of Alabama. I thought to myself that I was never getting out that program. They had a group every single day where we'd sit around and talk about issues in the past. Some girls gave out good advice. I must admit it helped me out a lot with my anger issues. If I could be my teenage self again, I would have just easily walked away from confrontations.

*Tamara Hopkins is a very intelligent, loving, caring person. She is a mother of two wonderful children. She attends the GED class at Adult & Community Education School in Leon County. Her teacher is Ms. Anne Meisenzahl.*

## **Changing My Life**

What motivates me to focus on my GED are the things that I did in my past that made me look at my life differently. Those things are being homeless, getting beat on every day, and almost getting raped.

I had to wake up and look at my life and make some changes so I moved in with my mom. I started going back to school. Even though I was behind, I still was able to start my senior year after all of that. I got kicked out of school over some crazy stuff. After that, I never gave up on trying to be something in life.

I'm in school at ACE working on my GED, and I am working on finding a stable job and apartment. I'm not where I want to be in my life, but I am going to try my best and do what's best for me, and I don't care what people say.

*Nakay Stebbins is a brave, intelligent 25-year-old woman who is student at ACE of Leon. Her teacher is Ms. Meisenzahl.*



# The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

## A Chance Encounter

When asked for the best advice a person has ever received, I don't think many would remember, let alone be able to pick out a time anyone stopped and gave them guidance. I also struggled with that concept until I thought of a time that represented who I was and what I'm about. It may not be that big of a deal because thinking about that same information I had gotten has led me to delusions of grandeur. If asked instead how many times someone may have let someone down or broken a promise, then the audience would be more receptive and able to give an accurate response. But me, personally, I have received countless dialogue from a countless number of people. However, the most memorable were tips I got from a famous skateboarder named Josiah.

Josiah Gatlyn, currently age 29 and living in Goldsboro, NC, is sponsored by big skating companies like zero, Dvs, and RVCA. He has been featured in big contests like Tampa am. Plus my favorite skater was known for skating the streets Miami, Florida where I lived. I had just finished watching a video of him on YouTube, and in this video, he had done a trick off of what was the biggest staircase I had ever seen. I remember thinking to myself, "I wonder how many tries or attempts it took him to land that." About a week later after a day of skating, I was super tired when I got home that night but decided to walk to the local Wal-Mart for a candy bar. Once there, I went to where the chocolate was kept. I must have been there for about 10 minutes trying to pick something out. Just as I was about to settle on a Reese's cup, I turn my head to the left and who do I see? Josiah walking around the store. I quickly grabbed the candy bar and rushed over to him. I introduced myself and asked what he was doing in the store. He told me he was shopping for a new video game controller. Before going home I thought that it was so cool to run into him on short notice like that. I finally got a chance to ask him about the staircase and how many tries it took him to land the trick. He told me it took 9 tries and he wasn't leaving until he landed it. When I asked him how to do a trick off the stairs, he told me to get lots of speed and bend my knees a lot. That was

the best advice I ever got from anybody, and it came from my favorite skateboarder. What a world we live in!

*Raheem Forbes is a student at Atlantic Technical College-Ashe Campus. He is currently in the GED program. His teacher is Donna M. Johnson.*

### **The Voice of Reason**

Being around people who can lead you is such a blessing, isn't it? Not everybody has the chance to have at least one person in their life who they can count on. I have the opportunity to spend time with a strong, smart, and intelligent woman. She inspired me in so many ways and other people around her.

One day, as we were on our way to the airport, my auntie and one of her friends started to make fun of everything that was around us. I was very sad because I didn't feel like going back to Florida. I was thinking about all the memories that we had together, and all the things that we'd done.

Suddenly, I heard a voice. I didn't realize it was my auntie until I came back to earth. It's funny, but I was in the sky for real. She started like this, "Stop playing now. I have something really important to tell my daughter." And with tears in my eyes, I was ready to hear what she was about to tell me. She said, and I quote, "If you want to do something great in your life, work hard to make it happen. Don't ever lower your standards to fit in places that you don't belong. Always keep your head up. You are beautiful, smart, and you can win it all with God's help and your hard work. Believe in your dreams and believe in yourself. I'll always be there for you."

When I was done listening to all that, I was very happy even though I felt tears of joy. I felt more confident about my dreams, and I was ready to face all the challenges that were waiting for me. This was the best advice I have ever received. I am encouraging everyone that is struggling with things that sometimes drive you crazy. Do not give up. Fight for your dreams. Make them happen, and don't ever forget to be the best version of yourself.

*Landy Jacques is in the College and Career Readiness class at the*

*Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Wake Up Early**

I guess we all have received good advice that we could never forget for the rest of our lives. That could be a strong, soft, wise, or nice piece of advice depending on the situation or circumstance. “Wake up early,” said my father when I was around six years old. Why did he tell me that? What was that supposed to mean for a lad who didn’t understand anything yet?

Each morning since I was six years old, Dad used to wake me up at 4:30 to go to my elementary school because we lived so far, and there were a lot of traffic jams. One morning he came upset into my bedroom and told me, “Wake up earlier okay Alain.” I was too young to understand the first time. However, when I noticed that I never arrived late at school, and my teachers used to congratulate me for my punctuality, I started to understand. One Sunday, when I was ten, he came to me and told me again, “Waking up early, my son, is the best advice I can give you,” and wisely tried to explain to me why. He said when someone wakes up early, he will have time to do all he wants during the day because the day will be longer. Moreover, he said that the world belongs to those who get up early; only the lazy, the elderly, and sick people like to stay in bed. To finish, my dad said, “Even though you think you have nothing to do, wake up early, read something, or do some physical or yoga exercises unless you are sick.”

Later I kept wondering why Dad took his time to explain to me why I should get up early. A few years later, when I went to high school, he bought me an alarm clock and an alarm watch. Therefore, I started to wake up earlier than my father did. It was like a challenge to know who was getting up earlier. I was late to my high school once or twice per year regardless of my efforts because sometimes the traffic started at 5 am, and we could not do anything to avoid it.

This is the best advice that I have ever received. Due to that, I am never late for an appointment because I wake up early each day.

*Alain Nelson is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **Good Advice for a Life Changing**

I grew up in a family where saying NO to my parents was not an option if I wanted to be a GOOD child. I wasn't allowed to give my opinion in any discussion with older people in front of them. I could only receive orders and accomplish them. The fear of punishment from my parents and the fear of what people could say about me shaped and programmed my thinking to be a "YES" child. By acting like that, everyone in my entourage saw in me the "little respectful and lily-livered boy," and I was delighted.

After I graduated from high school, I decided to move to an outlandish country in order to pursue my career goal. Quickly, I realized that I am facing enormous difficulties in my studies and in my daily life—difficulties shaped mostly by my fears of childhood, and the fact that it was the first time I left my family and friends to live in another culture. I was not able to defend my rights in the presence of teachers and classmates, and even in front of people I met on a daily basis. As a result, being an A student, I gradually turned out to be a C student.

After years of struggling, I decided to attack and face my fears. I began the greatest journey that changed my entire life and I am now extremely satisfied to be the person I am today. I was suddenly interested in everything related to the subject. I conducted research, I read books and I learned from motivational speakers online.

In my research, I found two steps that I am overjoyed to share with everyone who faces what I have been through. The first one is as simple as learning to say NO to others, because everyone can say YES but it takes a LEADER to say NO. Secondly, it is crucial to protect my circle of influence because circle of influence means power: power of decision, power of action, power of choice, and power to protect my values, my dreams, my happiness and mostly my loved ones.

People are afraid to say NO to others for fear of being rejected, but we have to be aware of the fact that when we have negative or toxic feedback from this person to whom we unfortunately say NO, we didn't really count for this person. We were only considered as a simple product to handle and there is no reason to feel guilty.

Hoping that my advice will be helpful, I want to tell everyone who is struggling with any kind of fears that the greatest enemy you have to fight with is yourself. You are a wonderful, marvelous and extraordinary person who possesses an inherent capacity to overcome everything.

*Jean Fedner is a Doctor of Medicine who received his diploma from Universidad Tecnologica de Santiago, DR in 2013. He returned to Haiti, where he worked for a few years before moving to the U.S. He attends CCR class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College in Florida.*

### **Whom Do You Trust?**

The best advice I have ever received is to put God first in everything I do. I always believe that, and everything goes smoothly when I put my faith and trust in God. That advice has really helped me a lot to be more positive and more open to new things. It has also helped me not let any negative energy ruin my positivity.

Having my son has been a big part of my life. He has helped me to be myself, honest, truthful, and loyal. By following the advice of trusting God first, I also try to be the best mom, daughter, and friend. Putting God first is always going to be a part of my life, and it is going to make me a better person. I am still trying to change my ways for the best. I have a great family and great friends.

I always learn something new every day, and I always try to stay positive. I try to remove myself from any negative energy around me by not surrounding myself with negative people. Not a lot of people stay positive or follow the right decision. I try to make the best decision with the help of God and my friends. My son is 10 years old, and he has been a big part of my decision not to abort. God gave me this wonderful child for a reason.

The best advice I have ever received was to put God first. I am still learning. Sometimes I feel like giving up and not staying positive, but it is not in my nature to do so. I will do my best to keep that advice close to my heart. The best advice I have ever received, “To always put God first in everything you do.”

*Vanessa Nunez is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her teacher is Cheryl Viola.*

### **Mom Knows Best**

It all started when we were kids. My mother always had my sisters and I to do cooking, an important skill that females should know in my culture. For her this is essential. People should know their roles and responsibilities, and they should learn while they are young. This is also a preparation for me and my sisters so that we can be independent as we grow older. Of course, we did not enjoy nor like it.

During that time, the most difficult part for me was trying to cut the chicken. She taught us how to cut chicken the proper way. We also learn from mom how to take care of the house. What I mean is how to clean the interior of the house to make it look neat and tidy. My mom used ways that were reasonable during her era. That is very nice of her to teach us because I will never say that my mom never taught me anything.

Looking back, I am grateful to my mom for teaching us and making us do what is best for us as females. It is an invaluable experience because it is something that will stay with us forever. I will hand her wisdom down to my next generation. My mom’s advice is, “Never neglect your responsibility.”

*Simone Haflin is a student in the Monroe County Adult Education program in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Listen to Your Parents**

The best advice I have ever received is from my parents. The key words are WORK HARD and BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. Until today, it still rings in my ears - “If you want something, you

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need to work hard for it. Education is one of the most important part in life. If you want to be successful, it is necessary to learn and work hard. Do not let anyone tell you, 'You cannot do it!' You can achieve anything you want. You just have to work hard and believe in yourself."

As a mother, I pass on this valuable advice to my children. Since they are non-Americans, they have to put in extra effort in order to achieve their goals.

This advice helps me guide my children into getting a good education. They listen to me and their grandparents. As a result, both of my children are currently studying at the university. Two of them are recipients of athletic scholarships and they are in Kansas. My other son is majoring in traumatology in Mexico City. I am very proud of them.

*Angelica Cabrera attends the English class in the Monroe County Adult Education program in Key West. She would like to work in hotel management and administration. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Bravest Moment**

### **The Possible Dream**

When I came to the United States 20 years ago, I felt surrounded by four walls. I could not see the walls or touch the walls. But I could feel the walls were there because I could not speak the language. I was not able to talk to people. I was scared and lonely. I did not know about the opportunities in my community.

The walls began to slowly disappear when I had my four children. I started to learn the language. I learned about resources for my family such as the library and Literacy Council. The walls began to go away.

When my oldest son began Head Start 17 years ago, I could not understand anything about the program without the help of a translator. The bus driver who took us to Head Start each day did not believe that my son was only 3 years old because Miguel was tall. He made me buy a ticket for a 5-year-old child. The only way I could try to communicate with him was to hold up 3 fingers. This made me angry and frustrated but also motivated to learn English.

This year my youngest son began Head Start. I went to parent orientation and understood everything about the program. I did not need a translator. I did not need to hold up 3 fingers to communicate with the bus driver.

When I began work as a housekeeper in a motel, I met a big wall. I could not communicate with the guests. I could only point to many, many things such as shampoo, soap, and toilet paper. Sometimes they asked me questions I could not answer. I felt nervous because I did not know how to answer back. Learning English has helped me to talk with people, answer questions, translate for coworkers and guests, assume more responsibilities, and get promotions in my job.

Learning English has not only helped me. It has helped my family as well. Learning English has helped me to push my children to get a better education. The English language is a tool



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I found to help me find resources for my children. This is the best gift I can give my children.

It has not been easy to learn English. With persistence, day by day, I have gained confidence. Learning English has made me strong. The wall has disappeared.

*Juana Lopez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Susan Carter.*

### **My Bravest Moment**

I want to tell you a little story about my bravest moment. One day my friend and I were going to climb a mountain in Haiti, I had no idea how high the mountain was, but my friend and I decided to go alone anyway. We climbed for many hours and reached the peak: Pic De La Selle at the height of 8,793' feet.

When we started our hike I saw how high it was and it made my heart beat fast. My friend looked at me and he saw in my eyes that I was afraid of going up to the mountain. My friend said to me "obstacles don't have to stop you."

I thank God for having a friend that will always inspire me through the toughest times and through problems that I thought would be impossible. Without those inspirational words, I don't know how I would have gotten through that difficult climb.

If you run into a wall don't turn around and don't give up, figure out how to climb your mountain. Get through it or work around it and overcome your obstacles without hesitation. That was my bravest moment.

*Esaie Morival is from Haiti. He is an ESOL student at South Florida State College.*

### **My Bravest Decision**

"Do you believe that people might think twice before taking the responsibility for an abandoned baby?" My name is Iveline.

I'm from Haiti in a small town known as Jean Rabel. One day, my friend and I were walking down the road while we came back home from school and heard a voice like a baby who was crying. We started to follow that voice, and we saw a child on the ground in a hole. We started asking for help, but the people of that neighborhood did not want to take care of that baby. That day I became that baby's mother. I was only 17 years old at the time.

That beautiful girl changed everything in my life. This important decision was so difficult for me because I did not have any job, and I was still a student. At the time, my mother was living in the U.S. and sending money to take care of me and my little sister in Haiti. I took responsibility for that baby and named her Bernie. Learning to be a parent was the hardest thing for me although I felt like I was receiving a great blessing. This was the hardest and bravest decision I have ever made.

*Iveline Pierre Val is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Just Do It**

Everyone wants to be brave, but it is not easy for us. Sometimes, we fear rejection and failure. I will tell you a story about my bravest moment.

When I was in college, I wanted to be an intern in a newspaper. It was difficult because I didn't know any reporters. So I decided to go to the largest local newspaper with my classmate who had been accepted as an intern there. While my classmate talked with her supervisor, I saw a man sitting next door. I thought the man maybe was a famous reporter because I had seen his picture in the newspaper. I said to myself it was a good chance to speak something to the man, then I walked into the next door and asked him if I could be his intern. I didn't even know where the courage came from. He looked me up and down for a full minute. I felt embarrassed and just wanted to flee! Finally, he said to me, "You can come." I worked in the newspaper as an intern for six months and learned a lot from the reporter. I also got my first job because

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I wrote a lot of news during my internship when I graduated from college.

Thanks to the first time I was so brave, I was able to have the courage to come to the U.S. and start a new challenge. Just do it if you want to do something. Once you start doing what you want to do, you have already succeeded.

*Yanmei Zhang is a student attending ACE of Leon.*

### **Being Brave**

My definitely bravest moment was when my family and I immigrated to the United States. It was a decision that my family had to make, and we were not prepared for the change. That moment meant that I had to leave everything behind and begin my life all over again. I left my material things that I had worked so hard to get. I left my job of 22 years. When we immigrated to this country, we had to leave my mother, sisters, brothers, cousins, coworkers, and neighbors behind, people that we love dearly.

We didn't speak English. We had no money saved. We had to sell things out of our house, such as appliances, furniture, cars, etc. I had to learn to speak a new language, learn a new culture, new laws, etc. I did not know when I would see my family in my country of Venezuela again.

It is important to be brave in any moment and understand that change is necessary to improve your life. To be brave means that you should not stop trying to achieve your goals. In my country, we say, "Who does not risk, does not win, does not lose." Because relationships are very important, I was fortunate that when I moved to the U.S., the people in the U.S. were receptive and charitable.

*Karen Spencer is an ESOL student at OTC-Winter Park Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

## Slowly But Surely

I have so many stories of my life that I do not know which one to tell. I was born in Venezuela, in the city of Caracas. I have always been an independent person. I live alone since I was 18 years old. It is not easy because when you decide to live on your own there are so many things that could happen to you. As for me, it has been a great challenge.

I have been able to create a life that between hits and misadventures have made me grow into an experienced and knowledgeable human being. Presently, I am the mother of a beautiful girl. She is 8 years old but she is not with me now. She is in Venezuela living with her grandparents. We decided that I would come to the United States to settle in, first. Previously, we had migrated to Ecuador and it was quite hard because I had no support from anyone to take care of daughter. I had to work and I worked night shifts. While I was at work, my daughter was alone at home because I had no means to pay a nanny. Well, fast forward - with that experience I decided that I want to do things differently now. Thank God, I am happy to have wonderful people in my life, including my daughter's grandparents (of her father's side). Even though I do not have a love relationship with my daughter's dad, I can count on them. I am very grateful for all the things that have happened to me in my life in spite of many difficult times. They are teaching moments that molded me to be who I am today.

Now I am in America because I am trying to stick to my plan to settle down because I want my daughter to be with me here as soon as possible. I miss her a lot, but I know this is a process and that it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice things and situations to be able to achieve what I want.

Since I arrived in Key West, I started working in a Sushi Restaurant and it has been a great challenge because I am a hostess and my level of conversational English is very low. Though I have learned English in school in my country, now I get to learn it face-to-face in America because my other desire is to speak English fluently.

*Natacha Morales attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She wants to speak English fluently and brings her daughter to America. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Every Moment is My Bravest Moment**

My name is Ileana Barrios. I am 36 years old and I am from Nicaragua. I am married to an American and I have two children. My oldest daughter is Maria Alejandra. She is 7 years old. My youngest daughter is Lizrosa. She is 10 years old. We also have a cat and dog.

I want to share with you my bravest moment. Twelve years ago, I decided to live in the United States. Since that day, for me, every day is my bravest moment. Living in a strange country requires a lot of courage because of the difference in value and culture. It also takes a whole different level of acceptance.

Now I am happy because I love this country like my own. The Americans are very nice, welcoming and friendly. Of course, everyone's experience is unique but I will try my best to face every day with boldness. It is not easy for me to endure the challenging moments because the immigration department decided to reopen my legal case when there was not much hope. Moreover, it is very expensive to pay the attorney to handle my case. Up to this day, I have six years of struggling not to be deported. I am striving to succeed. I want to show that I am a good citizen – maintain my job to contribute to the community, follow the rules, and obey the law. I want to work towards a better life. Currently, I am attending class to learn English. I would have liked to do this much earlier, but I could not. Therefore, I am doing it now and I am glad I could.

So personally, every day is my bravest moment on this beautiful island. I aim to have a better life for me and my family. Live every moment. Laugh every day. Love beyond words.

*Ileana Barrios attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She is pressing forward towards having a better life for herself and her family. She is determined and courageous. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Sacrifice for My Family**

In 2015, I left Haiti and travelled with my mom to the United States. Two years later, I graduated from high school in this country. Then I had a part-time job. Everything was fine. We were very happy until my mom got sick. The doctor said that she was very lucky to survive and she could not go to work. She needed to heal. I was very shocked. I did not know what to do. All of my thoughts were for her to recover right away because I have two brothers in Haiti who are dependent on both of us. The disease made mom so weak. Day by day she became worse. Since mom was helpless, I became the sole bread winner of my family. I kept thinking about what I was going to do to help. Then I finally came up with a decision.

My decision was that I had to make a sacrifice for my family. I had to do it the right way. That is what my mom taught us – “Always make sure you do the right thing for a good life.” So, I decided to enroll in the CNA class because I did not earn enough money with my part-time job. The CNA job pays well and the class does not take long to graduate. As I said it was a sacrifice I made because CNA is not what I wanted to study. I started going to the CNA class even though I did not like it. I make sure that I passed all of my exams. I finally obtained the CNA diploma and found a job that hired Nurse Aide. I was so glad. I was able to help my mom. I took care of her and my brothers. I was always there for her doctor’s appointments. I did not cry. I focused on her, made her happy, gave my brothers what they needed rather than buying myself new clothes, or getting my hair done, or even saving my money for my future.

I gave my all to take good care of my family. I am so pleased and proud that I did it. I love my mom so much and my brothers, too. I will never regret what I did for them. I am so grateful that God has given me strength and motivation to never stop until I accomplish what I want the best for my life and my family.

*Berly Bellune is a very kind, thoughtful, and caring person. She is anxious to become a naturalized citizen and pursue a career in nursing. Meanwhile, she attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Bravest Moment**

**Bang! Bang! Bang!**

I remember the sound so vividly. Eighteen years ago, I was only 6 years old at the time. I can feel the window shatter, as if it happened yesterday. “Lay down!” I heard my mom’s voice screaming at me from the front seat. I did as I was told. I guess it’s true when they say fear is learned, because I wasn’t afraid at all. Once the gunshots stopped, tires screeched, but we were at a standstill. “I’m shot!” my dad spoke to my mom in a low tone from the driver seat. She instantly grabbed him and carried him to the passenger side, and drove as fast as she could. She reassured him the entire ride home that everything would be fine. Once we got there, it was almost like the helicopter met us there to air lift him to Jackson North’s Trauma Unit. I looked at my dad with sadness in my eyes, he smiled at me and told me through the pain “I’ll be back home, its nothing to be scared of.” After our signature high-five, I knew I had no other option but to be brave. When I think of my bravest moments, I’m most certain that at 6 years old, I was as brave as I could have ever been.

*Ms. Brianna Purcell is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida, with a hometown of Miami, Florida. She is a student in the GED class, facilitated by Aides Edricka Cook and Marley Stone, and supervised by Ms. Dela’Quese Jernigan.*

# My Goals and Ambitions

## Changes Within

My life is full of many things that have taken me through an unfulfilled destiny. Although I've come out on top at times, other times, I've just made do. There comes a time in your life where sometimes things must change for the better. Like deciding to get my high school diploma so that I can further advance myself financially and for my mental stability. I've been at it for a while now. I plan to have my diploma by this term. This is my time to shine for me.

Furthermore, by receiving my diploma, I will also show my 8-year-old son to never to give up on anything that can make his life change for the better. It has taken a lot of determination and effort to keep going, but I will finish. Then I will know that I have finally accomplished my change. Even though I get a bit frustrated, I look toward a great reward in the end. I call it putting my best foot forward and staying focused on what is in front of me, and not looking back at the past. I'm already a winner within.

*Erica Woods is a GED student at PBC Adult & Community Ed, North Tech Satellite at Vita Nova. Her teachers are Mrs. Barrow-Dye & Mrs. Gladney.*

## For Juliett

In life, there are so many choices. One of the choices I made and have regretted is not finishing school. Now I'm a single mother of a three-year-old daughter. Over time, I learned to believe in myself and learned not to doubt myself. I tell myself that I can do it this time and that it's never too late. One of my biggest motivations is my daughter. Because of her, I decided to enroll again in school and get my high school diploma.

First, being a single mother is not easy but it's not impossible. Being a mother is the best thing that could have happened to me.



She is my biggest motivation to get up in the morning and get far in life. Seeing her smile and knowing that she counts on me keeps me going. There are days I just want to give up. I see her and push the negative thoughts out of my head.

Second, there have been times when I have struggled with not having enough money for bills, car payment, or food. I don't have a good job because all the good jobs that are out there require a high school diploma. When more and more struggles come my way, that's when I think to myself, "change this life, do something different in your life." It's on me to change this lifecycle. There have been times that I go to the store with my daughter, and she wants a toy. Because of not having enough money, I have to say no. Even though it breaks my heart, there's nothing I can do.

Third, one of my biggest dreams is to work in the medical field. I have always seen myself being someone important in my family's life. No one in my family has been to college and no one has a good career or a good job. I want to be the one who can make my daughter and my family proud. I also see a better future for my daughter and me. I know it would be more money, less struggle, something that I love doing and a better position.

If you are not happy where you are, change it, you can do it! Never give up and it's never too late. This is the reason I decided to finish school. I want to get it done to begin a new chapter with my daughter. In the end, I want to say I did it. Life has not been easy, but if I don't work hard, I know I won't end up anywhere far.

*Arcenia Toribio is a GED student at Palm Beach County Adult & Community Ed, North Tech Satellite at Vita Nova. Her teachers are Mrs. Barrow-Dye & Mrs. Gladney.*

## **Goals and Ambitions**

Goals and ambitions are two different things one should have in his or her life. In order to have a successful life, everyone must have a goal. A goal is something to have or accomplished for a successful life. I have created a map of my goals and ambitions

that will lead to a better future.

I have goals and ambitions for a better future. My biggest goal is to be an entrepreneur. In order to accomplish my goal, I have started my education to get my GED. When I finish, I plan to enter college to have a better future for my life. I'm planning to study auto mechanics in Collier County because I really like cars. After I finish college, I'm going to work in my career for a few years. After that, I'm going to start with my dream career as a business owner. I am really excited to accomplish this goal.

To make a goal is easy but to have ambitions to complete a goal is not something one should just think about without action. It is one thing to dream about it, but it takes a lot of ambition to go for it and complete it.

*My name is Ben, I'm a student at Lorenzo Technical College, and my teacher is Ms. Khris Betten. She is an excellent teacher and I really appreciate her.*

### **The Wonderful World of Nursing, Science, and Dialysis**

When I was child, I loved to play medicine with my dolls. As my mother was sick, I used the medicine containers that her nurse discarded to play with my dolls. It was amazing for me to see how medicines and the care the nurse gave my mother made her recover so well. I always wanted to be a doctor but, for some reason in life, I could not achieve it. I think God wanted me to be a nurse. Nursing is a profession of much humanism. It requires a lot of commitment, dedication, and even sacrifices.

I studied for 5 years to become a nurse. In that period of time, I performed clinical practices in the area of internal medicine, orthopedics, emergency, pediatrics, geriatrics, hemodialysis, etc. The area that created the greatest impact in my life was hemodialysis. I come from Nicaragua, a beautiful country that is rich in natural resources but economically poor. For many patients with terminal chronic kidney disease, the last hope for life expectancy is hemodialysis since kidney transplants are very expensive.

When I graduated, I had the opportunity to work in a nephrology clinic. There we were introduced to modern machines and we received many trainings. The new machines were touchscreen, with sodium, bicarbonate and ultrafiltration profiles, adjustable to the needs of each patient. They used a bicarbonate powder cartridge. With the old machines, it was necessary to dilute the bicarbonate manually, so there were often cases of sepsis due to bad practice. The new machines have a message history, 30-minute backup battery, blood pump, air detector, blood pressure meter, and washing and disinfection programs. All of this was amazing to me. Patients went to the session three times a week, which lasted between 3 and 4 hours. I remember that they arrived with their best smile, most of them were in conversation with their colleagues, doctors and nurses. Some slept during the session while others listened to music. When we knew about their birthdays, we always sang happy birthday to them.

There were also difficult times. Some were decompensated or sad because of family problems, but without a doubt, we were a big family and we tried to turn the bad moments into good ones. I loved my job, I love my profession and I want to continue. There is always something new to learn.

It is incredible that through renal science and technology, a renal substitute has been created, capable of improving and prolong the life of patients with terminal chronic kidney disease and a great ally for nurses.

There is no better job in the world than being able to save lives and help improve their quality of life.

*Tahiris Ramirez is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Regla Requena.*

## **Just Do It**

Goals: A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or a group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve. People endeavor to reach goals within a finite time by setting deadlines.

**Ambitions:** A strong desire to do or achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work.

I picked this topic because I'm the person with big dreams. My first goal and my first ambition are to earn my GED and enter a university or college. When I finished my last year of high school, I took a break in Venezuela with my family and then looked for different universities and colleges best for me. I want to obtain a scholarship for sports (soccer or tennis) because they help to pay for my career. When I finish my career, I will look for a good job or maybe play on a soccer team.

I want to have a family and sons, travel around the world and, the most important thing, health for my family and me. To be able to achieve these dreams, I need to work hard every day on my studies and my body.

*The author is a student in the Adult Education program at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Their teacher is Ms. Khris Betten.*

### **Look Forward to my Dream to Come True**

My name is Marie N. Liceus. I'm from Haiti. I'd like to share with you about my goals and ambitions that I have now that I'm living in the U.S. One day, when I was younger, I saw my mother suffer for 3 days in pain about her teeth. It was very hard for me to see that. It pushed me to want to become a dentist.

When I grew up after my graduation, I decided to take the test at the university to become a dentist. Unfortunately, I wasn't successful. I changed my major by studying accounting. I got my degree. After a month, I got a job at a bank and stayed there for 13 years as a manager.

When I came to the U.S. last year, I realized that I still have the possibility to follow my dream of becoming a dentist. However, my English didn't meet the requirement for that, so I went back to school to learn English first. As I'm studying, I'm looking for a part-time job that can help me to make some money because I want to go to college. My goal is to become a

dentist in the United States. Therefore, I can do something that I like and feel well all the time.

I plan on opening my own clinic. At the end, I know that will be difficult for me, but I will be persistent. I am motivated about achieving my goal and look forward to a better future.

*Marie N. Liceus is a student in the ESOL program at Collier County Adult Education. Her teacher is Whitney Strohmayer.*

### **Reachable and Achievable**

Back when I was in high school, I was considered an ambitious student by my friends, my classmates, and my teachers. Even before I attended the university, I always knew what I wanted to be in life. My goal has always been to be a reputable businesswoman. Working in an office normally requires a unique attire, which I greatly admire. I enjoy wearing heels and want to be able to differentiate myself from others. I love to work in groups and help others figure out their roles. I want them to be able to complete their tasks and prepare them to be future leaders.

A few years from now, I would also like to open a shelter in my community to help those in need. My first priority would be to those who cannot pay for housing. I would create special programs to help them develop the skills needed to be integrated into the workforce. For those who do not have the opportunity to get further with their education, I would provide scholarships, giving those who are serious about their education a chance to pursue a better life.

I want to bless the kids who cannot afford to go to school because of their financial situation. Being able to share what I have would serve me well for I take pride and comfort in helping someone in need. Seeing the smile on one's face allows me to rejoice as well and helps me live a life full of purpose.

My ambition is to become a respectable woman who is able to work hard for success.

*Michelande Pierrelus is originally from Haiti. In love with math, physics and chemistry; she earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in her country. She is now attending Advanced ESOL classes at Atlantic Technical College- Arthur Ashe, Jr. Campus with Ms. F. Johnson.*

### **Going Places with Literacy**

My name is Birong Zheng; I am from China. I came to United States in 2001 when I was 19. I met my husband in Florida, and we married. We have two boys. One is thirteen years old, he is in the middle school. The other is ten years old, he is in the elementary school. We run a small Chinese take-out restaurant in Palm Harbor since 2006. My husband and I work very hard; we work a lot of hours to raise our family.

I always wanted to go back to school. My dream is to speak fluent English. After doing research, I found out that the library has tutors who can help me. Luckily, I met my teacher Maryann Todd. After a few times meeting, Maryann knew my learning level. According to that, we borrowed study books from the library to teach me basic grammar, reading, and pronunciation. Every time we meet, we always talk about what happened in the last week. Maryann listens to me and corrects me. I always have homework after we meet. A lot of time, Maryann asks me to write an essay about the book we just studied and what I thought.

She teaches me a lot. Little by little, she helps me improve my English in reading, writing and speaking. Maryann is a very nice person. She's not just my teacher, she is my friend and mentor in my life. Every time I have any problem, she always helps me to analyze it and gives me suggestions. I hope one day I can go back to school and finish my college degree. Then I can find a better job and spend more time with my family.

*Birong Zheng is currently studying ESL at the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library.*

## **My Dreams Becoming a Reality**

Every second in time I ask myself, what can I do to realize who I want to be in the future? The most successful I have ever been was when my dreams came true. Moving to the United States was my dream and with this opportunity, I feel the power that comes to focus on what is around me, choosing my path to success.

The ability to triumph by myself was an important survival tool to keep me on my path. I always want to live a better life and focus on where I am and where I want to be. This was my objective, my goal, and I know every great dream always begins with a dreamer reminding himself what they have inside. For me, it is my strength, my patience and my passion to reach my goals.

In my country, I thought things were easier on the other side but when I came to the United States, I saw it was very different from what I perceived back in my country. This fact hit me between the eyes. Although my English was not enough and I wanted to speak like a Native American, I knew I had to go to school to take ESOL classes, pass the GED, go to college, and get a master's degree to have a better job to take care of my family. Despite this fact, I know it is difficult to have that entirely but I try to do my best and I know sometimes that life will come up on me like a hurricane regardless of my determination.

Nonetheless, I know it will not remain forever. I realize life can be like an elevator, going up and down at any time. I believe I can manage this either way. I have chosen my path to success and have prepared for those waves. I will learn to surf the best way I can to succeed.

To win is to do it right and respectfully. No matter how slowly I am learning, I do not have to stop as long as I achieve that vision and I am progressing toward my goals. I will not give up and I choose what I really like, therefore, I remain focused even with the strong forces of that hurricane or anything else put in my path.

Ever since I was old enough to think about what I would like to be, my parents often told me "work very hard, allow for

good times and for difficult times, and success will come soon” because it is not the fight, it is the fighter who lived. I was putting those words in my mind in order to fight for this success and hope that one day, my words will no longer be a dream but my reality.

*Johnson Lubin has been living in the U.S for only eight months. He is originally from Haiti. He is attending the ESOL High Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. Johnson is a dedicated student and takes his education very seriously. After improving his English skills, he plans to continue on his career pathway in the field of accounting.*

### **An Unbroken Dream**

I grew up in Guatemala with my parents. At age 12, I started my education. I started with first grade. It was so hard for me to retain what my teacher told me. I failed the first grade three times. I failed the second grade three times too. After that, I dropped out of school. I went to work to help my parents. At the age of 19, I decided to come to the United States.

My first days here, I felt so blessed from God because my dream came true. After a few months, I started working at a restaurant called Pita Grill. I was working as a dishwasher. My first experience in the restaurant was amazing. My boss taught me things related with my responsibilities in English. I felt excited because every day I was learning new things. It was a long process, and I learned a lot. It took me almost three years to move to different positions in the restaurant and be promoted.

After the fourth year, I decided to go back to school, but I did not know where I should go. A coworker told me about the Adult Education Center. My first day at school was hard for me to understand, but I kept going. Because if I drop out of school again, I will never get my education. It takes me one hour to get to school and another hour to come back home. However, I feel so excited about moving forward to achieve my goals. At the moment, I am in ESOL level 7 and taking GED classes too.

*Aurelio Mateo attends the College and Career Readiness class and ABE classes at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach every*



*single day. His teachers are Leslie McBride-Salmon, Ines Sosa, Cheryl Landers, and Marcie Tau. We could not be more proud.*

## **Work Hard and Just Believe**

I am Alberto Palmetta, and I was born in Argentina in 1990. I graduated from university as a physical education teacher. I'm a professional boxer and former Olympian. I would like to share a great moment in my life that shows that everything is possible.

I was on the Argentinean Olympic Team for eight years. My first qualification tournament was in 2012. My big goal came, but it was not possible at that time. Days after losing my fight with Rosniel Iglesias, the former Olympic Gold Medalist from Cuba, my mind said, "Okay Beto, this was not your time. You are not training like Olympian yet; you do not have experience yet. You have to do everything that you can from now until the next Olympic qualification." I thought to myself, "Okay, I have four years to become professional in my career." I learned in that moment that everything happens for a reason, bad things or good things.

Time for action. I formed a team in addition to the Olympic Team because I understood that to be an athlete, you must get different professionals to work on the goal. I worked with a nutritionist, a conditioning coach, my boxing coach, a psychologist and doctor. I worked hard for four years. I won different medals and, in 2016, the day came for the Olympic Qualification Tournament. The night before starting the competition, I cried, and I thought about my way until that moment. I could remember everything I had done to be in that moment. I said to myself, "It doesn't matter if you win or lose, you did everything that you could do." I was at peace with myself because I was ready for that moment. I fought five times in six days, and finally I achieved my dream. I want to tell you something; when you do everything that you have to do, and when you are responsible with yourself, for sure you will be closer to achieve your goal.

*Alberto Palmetta is a former Olympian and current professional boxer. He is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center. His teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## Chasing a Dream

When I was a little girl I had many goals and ambitions. I knew that I wanted to be in the medical field because I wanted to help people. I knew that it was going to be a hard goal to reach but I was determined to accomplish it.

We had a big family of eight, and I was one of the youngest. In order to go to school, I had to get permission from my parents. Every day before I could leave I had a list of chores that needed to be done. They included making breakfast for the family, cleaning the house, and feeding the animals. After I was done, I was allowed to go to school.

I would happily walk about five miles to school every day because there was no school bus. I remember always getting straight A's and being proud but I could never share my grades with my mother because she did not know how to read. I tried hard to stay in school, but it was not possible for me to reach my goal if I stayed in my country.

When I turned seventeen, I began my journey to the United States. When I arrived, I was very excited and eager to start school. But because my parents weren't in the United States with me, I had to work to support myself. Eventually, I had to drop out of school. I began working in a tree nursery where I trimmed and planted trees all day in the hot sun. I would wake up at 5:00 in the morning, fix my own lunch and go to work. After a while, I forgot about school because I was making just enough money to pay my bills and send money back home to my parents. Like all other teenagers, I fell in love and got married. When I had my children, my focus was to raise them well.

Years later, my children have grown up, and I'm back in school. My job as a mother was complete and my children are now professionals with good careers. I am back in school to continue reaching my own goals. I want to become a certified nutritionist and I am determined to reach that goal. First, I'll get my GED and then I want to earn my degree as a nutritionist. I want to follow this path because I know I'll enjoy working in the health field and I want to help people.

*Lilia Rodriguez is a student in Ms. Melanie Blake's ESOL class at South Florida State College.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

I am from the Dominican Republic and I always dreamed of becoming nurse. When I was eighteen years old, I moved to Puerto Rico. In August 2010, when I was 22 years old, I enrolled at Antilleans Adventist University located in city of Mayaguez and started studying nursing science. In 2014, I graduated and received my degree in nursing. In November 2014, I started to work as a nurse in Puerto Rico.

During the next 5 years, I worked at Adventist Hospital in Mayaguez PR. But I felt disappointed with myself because I wanted to work as a nurse in Florida where my family lives but I couldn't because I didn't speak English. I decided to research what kind of English courses are offered in Florida, and I found out about the ESOL programs for adults.

Three months later, I decided to move to Florida and enroll at South Florida State College in the ESOL program. I have enrolled in two classes, and I study eight hours a day from Monday to Friday. Since starting the ESOL program, my life has changed dramatically.

Now my English is improving. I can have basic conversations with people, I can speak with customer service representatives by phone and solve my problems. My next step is to improve my conversation skills and understanding of many accents in English. Later on, I'm going to prepare for a job interview and get a better job for myself and my family.

*Pablo Fernandez and his wife have been living in Sebring for two months. He is a student of the ESOL program at South Florida State College.*

## **I Am Passionate For My Future**

My name is Sergio Uriel. I have many goals for my life. My first goal is to earn my GED. I also want to work on two careers at Lorenzo Walker Technical College: airplane and airframe mechanic. Why those careers? Well, I love to fix airframes for hours. In Mexico, I worked as a mechanic's helper at the airport and discovered my passion for airplanes.

My next goal is to become a great pilot. This goal is harder than my other goals because it is very expensive. The price of this career is about \$30,000, so I need to do a lot of hard work. But with the help of applying for financial aid, I will be able to overcome this financial obstacle.

My third goal is to have my own business. I want to sell parts for airplanes, fix them, and teach people how to fly them among other things.

The fourth goal is to be a helper. For that reason I want to have a lot of money. I'd like to help other people who can't continue their studies, who can't pay for their medication, and give money to those who need it.

When I get older, I would like to be the president of Mexico. I want to change many things including ending corruption, the way we educate, improving opportunities for everyone, teaching to take care of nature, ending impunity, etc... I'm passionate about achieving my goals.

*Sergio Uriel almost 18 years old. He has been in the U.S. for one year. He is taking English class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.*

## **My Dream Will Come True**

It has always been my desire to be on the side of the unfortunate. When all hope seems tarnished, someone to jump in and make a difference in the lives of those people.

Here in the U.S. and around the world, people are not getting treated fairly. Women and children abused. People being judged

by the color of their skin not by their value. They can't rely on the law to help them and no one else wanted to help them. Therefore, I need the proper lawyer training in order to help. Being a lawyer means committing oneself to the fair administration of justice and to doing one's part in facilitating true access to justice. I know this will require a lot of work but the sky's the limit. I'm not going to say NO but I'm going to say I can do it if I study every day, do my homework, and focus on what I want. That is why I want to do it.

In 10 years, I will have my own law firm and help those people who don't find someone to help them. I want to say to someone who thinks it is hard to attend his/her purpose "Don't give up, never say No in life."

*Samshalie Asse is a 19-year-old student in an advanced English class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College and lives in Naples, FL.*

### **My Future Accomplishment**

I want to accomplish many things in life. My goals and ambitions are to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, earn my GED, and go to college to become a great psychologist to better understand people. After that I will eventually start to make money. At that time, I will start to think about marrying my prince charming.

I will be able to give my help economically and intellectually to children who don't have many resources such as being able to attend school; have someone to take care of them; and someone to talk with and ask for advice, especially when they don't know what to do. This will make me happy, comfortable and make my family even more proud of me.

I am going to achieve my goals by going to college and getting my psychologist degree. I will attend school in the U.S. and also in Haiti because I want to help children in Haiti as well. I will do these things in the future because now I am too young and my focus is finishing my English classes.

At this time, I do not yet have enough resources to obtain

all of my goals. My parents will help support me because they are responsible for me, but I know I am also responsible for my future. I have confidence and faith that God will help me find a way, protect me, give me more intelligence, good health and a long life to achieve all my goals. I have a dream!

*The author is a 17 year-old student in the advanced English class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.*

### **Don't Be Naive**

My name is Vladimir Neustroev. I am 22 years old and I was born in Russia. Each person during their childhood dreamed of becoming an astronaut, soldier, or a great athlete. It doesn't matter. As time passed by, we got our first life experience. At the same time, the people and processes around us influenced our worldview. So, those dreamers now dream of becoming bankers and businessmen.

My goal, at this moment, is to open my own business. First, I want to sell souvenirs and, when I get comfortable, I will move to market it via an online store. In Russia, I graduated from college with a degree in IT technology. Therefore, I can create a good website for my store. I find it interesting. Also, in my plan, I would like to pursue further my education in America. Which one? I have not decided yet but the main thing is not to stand still! After I finish learning English, I will start learning Spanish. I would also like to travel around Latin America. My desire is to own real estate somewhere in San Diego. Then, I want to marry a beautiful girl and live together happily ever after. Sounds good, right?

Many people who come to this country naively believe that life here is very simple and they will get what they want without doing anything. I will not lie, I thought so too. But this country made it clear to me: "Friend, if you don't want to move, don't want to improve, you have no place here." I learned it perfectly. I avoid meaningless parties, bad habits, and began to eat right and monitor my daily routine. This is why I am in a language class. And this is why I am writing this essay. It is to remind myself once again of who I was, who I have become and where I

am going. Much more remains to be done for my purposes, but I am ready to meet any difficulties. I am sure that you are ready, too. You just need to get started and believe in yourself and your strengths. Good luck, dear friends!

*Vladimir Nuestroev is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Many More Ambitions to Achieve**

I spent a great part of my life amounting to 20 years of daily routine and hard work in education. I attended 3 years of preschool, 6 years of primary school, 6 years of high school and 5 years in university. Those years consist of constant studying, getting up very early to arrive to school on time, going to bed very late to study for important exams, and making plans accordingly so that it did not affect my work schedule. In general, it is difficult to describe all the situations that we go through during this extensive yet exciting stretch of life. Thus, we reach adulthood and have not yet fulfilled the goals, dreams and ambitions that we set at some point.

There are many goals and dreams that I have satisfactorily fulfilled, but I still have many more ambitions and objectives to achieve. At this stage of my life I am 35 years old, a mother of a 10-year old boy, an administrator by profession, an immigrant who moved three years ago from Venezuela, and the wife of an American husband (for 2 years) who does not speak Spanish. My immediate goal is to improve my English, improve my pronunciation, writing and reading and aim to graduate in May of this year. Then I would like to continue my studies to prepare and take the citizenship test.

With effort, dedication, and persistence, I believe deeply that I will achieve my goal successfully. This triumph does not only fill me with joy and happiness but also my husband, my son, my family's parents and my friends who are my great support in this challenge.

*Yohana Figuera attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. Her goal is to become a business administrator in the bank. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Going After My Dream**

My name is Marlon Ramos. I am from Guatemala. I have been here for about one year. I work in construction.

When I was nine years old, I always told my parents that I wanted to be an artist. I sang in high school and was awarded a trophy. I like romantic songs and raps. I write my own songs. I like to sing only in Spanish. My parents and friends support me to become a singer. I would like to buy tracks to increase more level in my music.

Though life is so difficult, unpleasant things happen along the way and make me feel guilty, it does not stop me from following my dream. When I earn a lot of money from my fame, I would like to help children who are suffering and hungry.

*Marlon Ramos is studying English at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Ready, Get Set, Go!**

A life without goals is like a moving vehicle without direction or light. Life would make no sense without goals and a strong desire to make it happen. Success is the fruit of hard labor with a well-defined objective.

Often, when we await to measure every difficulty and balance every perplexity we meet, we will do very little. Always, obstacles and difficulties tend to discourage and turn us down, but with firm and determined purpose, we will prevail and conquer. Hesitation in making good decisions inclines us to failure. We must promptly take advantage of every opportunity that leads to success. This has always been a booster that keeps me to my objective to get my license in building and construction. My strong desire to achieve this goal allows me to invest my time and resources in the project. I like the domain very much, so I am working hard to have all the skills required through an Apprenticeship Program at College of the Florida Keys.



The United States of America is a country of hope and opportunities. Those who desire to succeed must stick to their dreams. Eventually, their dreams will come true. Also, they need to be independent. In other words, be self-sustainable. Only those who can take care of themselves are truly independent. With no skills at all, there will be no open door. Being independent, one is in charge of one's own decision and is in control. I will never stop learning to perfect anything that is a constructive asset to my success. In America, technology is accessible to everyone. I stand a good chance to achieve my goal faster and easier. Everyone can become whatever he/she wants through perseverance and hard work. I have never stopped working on my dream to become an entrepreneur and be useful to the country, especially my community or wherever life lands me. To me, it is a fact that no one should stop striving to reach a set goal.

My advice to everyone is to set a goal in life and cling to reach it no matter what it takes to succeed. It is worth it to suffer for some time knowing that you will have a better life later on.

*Jean Esaie Henriseme is a role model in the College and Career Readiness class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. He always strives to be better and never misses a moment of opportunity to go higher. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **You Can Do This!**

A goal is something that is set by someone to reach and an ambition is a strong desire to do or achieve something requiring determination and hard work. I have always set goals which I never fulfilled and time went by until I promised myself to fulfill what I promised. A strong desire was born in my heart as an ambition in wanting to achieve all my goals.

Last year, I set three goals which I fulfilled but I lacked one of the most important ones which was going to school to learn English. I had to meet what I promised myself. So, I did my best to be in school and that's how I achieved my goal. Thus, I fulfilled my three goals.

Now I am starting to work on my inspiration and I know the

way forward. My ambition is to have what I want and this gives me strength to continue and achieve my dreams. Sometimes it can be difficult and there are many obstacles but with clarity about what I want, I will achieve it. So, remove the “I can’t” from our minds. When we give up, “I can’t” gives order to our mind to continue in failure. Sometimes we make thousands of excuses for not moving forward and we get stuck in our comfort zone. Getting stuck in our comfort zone is what makes us not achieve our goals.

My ambition this year is to be fluent in English so that I will be able to attend decorator seminars and to learn about what I like. It is my time and I do not want to set limits. I want to take advantage of what life is giving me. The decision we make today will be the result of our tomorrow. We have to try no matter how many times we fall. The important thing is not to stay down there when we fall. It is to get up and continue and say, “YOU CAN DO THIS.”

When I achieve my goals and ambitions, I will feel great. It is a joy within me that cannot be explained. As according to Jeremiah 29:11 - “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans of well-being and not of calamity, to give you a future and hope.” Amen.

*Cecilia Barrios attends the Monroe County Adult Education English class in Key West. She would like to be an event decorator. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Driving to the Vet Conference in My '68 Ford Mustang**

Most of us have big dreams for our life and certain goals to achieve. Setting goals is very important in life, whether it's short-term or long-term goals. A goal is an idea of the future that a person plans to achieve. It is very important to have goals set because it'll help give you an idea of what you want to do in life and for something you can look forward to achieving. My top three goals are to further my education, to have my dream job as a vet, and to save up enough money for my dream car.

My first goal is to further my education. I want to finish school to get my GED and go to college. It is important to finish high school because it will give me a better chance to get into college and do what I really want to do in life. For instance, a good education will give me the opportunity to get a good paying job, a nice house, and vehicle. Another reason to complete my schooling is because most young adults with a college degree are better off financially than those without.

My second goal is to have my dream job as a veterinarian. Becoming a vet one day has been my dream since I was a little kid. The average vet gets paid \$88,770 yearly in the United States, and they will see about 3,900 to 5,200 animal patients per year. Some of the reasons I want to become a vet are getting to be around animals all day that need my help. I will get a lifetime learning experience. Also, the work is very interesting, and it provides a very excellent salary.

My final goal is to save up enough money for my dream car. My dream car is a red 1968 Ford Mustang. The reason I want this car is because I like the older ones more than I do the newer ones. Some of the ways I plan to save up money are limiting unnecessary spending, calculating how much to put down on it, and setting a budget to cover other car related expenses.

You see no matter the type of goals you have, if you work hard, you can accomplish anything you want.

*Ryleigh Kossmann is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.*

### **Focus on My Future**

I want to make a change in my country Haiti. My goal in the future is to motivate, educate, and help kids understand the importance of education. I will reflect on the subject of my goals

and ambitions. I think every morning when somebody wakes up, he should think about a dream or a goal.

Every morning, I wake up and I work on myself. I know that

life is not easy for people. The world belongs to the person who works hard. My ambition is to follow my father's footsteps. He was a senator in Haiti. Being a senator will give me the opportunity to focus on improving education for everyone.

Finally, I can say I wake up every day to make my dream come true!

*Pierre Rickell is a new student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College who has been studying English for only two weeks.*

### **Sandy's Goals for Success**

My goals are to get my GED, pursue a degree as an attorney, and raise my grandchildren. Once I accomplish those three goals, I feel as if I would then know and feel successful. I want an education to show my children that I didn't give up. I also know that education is a key to success. My dream as a little girl has always been to be an attorney. Helping people receive justice is something I have wanted to do for a while now. You have to be willing to put in the extra work and grind to reach your goals and to make your dreams come true.

My children and grandchildren are the most important people in my life. Their happiness and well-being is what matters to me. One of my main reasons for setting goals and trying to achieve them is to show my family that I am not a quitter. I will continue to push and strive for success for them. I want them to see how important it is not to give up on your dreams.

My GED is the first step of the bigger plan for me. I have to start there and put in all the necessary work and efforts to make this happen. The sky is the limit. Never give up, push forward for the ultimate prize at the end. The only thing that can stop me from being successful is me.

*Ms. Sandy Bulla is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy FL, with a hometown of Johnson City, Tennessee. She is a student in the GED inmate-led class.*

## **I Have a Desire to Inspire**

To be a voice when you can't speak.

To be a light when you can't see.

On this road, I have felt deep gut-wrenching misery.

That feeling of being ripped in half.

Split straight down the middle.

Like flesh burning from your body.

Bones snapping into pieces.

The pain of heartache, I have felt it...

Too much baggage and not enough strength.

But through it all I have healed.

It's crazy how I'm finding myself inside a cage.

Being degraded daily.

Their mission to deteriorate.

The last little bit of self-worth that a woman has.

My soul is similar to M.L.K. I have a dream. A dream and a desire to inspire.

*Ms. Selina Marquez is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Fort Meyers. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II taught by Mrs. Myra Williams.*

## **Helping the Children**

My name is Grecham B. Toliver. My goal and ambition is to get my GED. When I get home, I want to open a non-

profit organization for children with parents who suffer from addictions and financial problems in order to stop children from going down the same route as their parents. I want to help the next generation to do better and make the world a better place. I want the world to stop all the hatred and stop being so violent. There's just so much violence in today's world.

The older generation is where the examples should be coming from. They should lead by example and do better for themselves and teach the next generation how to succeed. We need to start creating better neighborhoods and make playgrounds safer for kids to play. Just because a school or a playground is in what is considered a "bad neighborhood" doesn't mean we should turn our backs and not make it better. I truly hope that I can be the start of making a difference in the world.

*Ms. Grechem Toliver is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. Her home town is Tampa, FL. She a student in Adult Basic Education III, class taught by Mrs. Cynthia Phillips.*

## **A Remembrance Consultant**

Have you thought about your end-of-life wishes? Do you have an idea of what your loved ones might want? How will others remember you and your loved ones? Many people wait to ask themselves and to ask their loved ones the sensitive questions regarding the end of life. My goal is to educate, support, and help others to prepare for the end of life and to help remember their loved ones after they pass.

In this modern day, not everything is black and white. There are many options when it comes to end-of-life care, burial, cremation, and service personalization. Waiting until the last minute to talk with your loved ones and make all the decisions necessary for your own end of life can leave you in a daze, overwhelmed and confused. Making those important decisions at the time of a loss can be even harder when you are affected by grief. I hope to be a source of information and a guide for those who would like to pre-plan their end of life wishes or are faced with an unexpected death.

When we lose loved ones, there may be times that we may want to read something they wrote, hear their voice again or pass on their unique story to someone who may not have had the opportunity to meet them. How are those things possible without pre-planning or coming to terms with the fact that we are all going to die? I hope to guide others through remembrance activities that will help preserve who they are. I wish I had something that told the story of my great-grandparents to look over, treasure and pass down.

I chose to follow my calling to serve others after my father passed away a year ago. The journey has been emotional and full of decisions that I hadn't yet prepared for at the age of 29. To achieve my goals, I am currently completing the Adult Education Program and will obtain my diploma. I am also starting my volunteer journey with Hospice to become involved in end of life care and bereavement. I plan to move onto college after my time with adult education has come to an end. I am excited to enter the field of serving others and making a difference in their lives.

*Angela Aubrey, a mother of two, is a student of South Florida State College Adult Education Program. Her teacher is the amazing Jasmine Groover.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

To have a better life in this country is good, but you have to set goals and ambitions to have it. We need to be focused, positive, and motivated to get success.

Therefore, one of my goals is to have better skills in reading, speaking, listening, and writing to pass the ESOL classes. Then, I can go up to the higher ESOL levels, pass them and move on to ABE/GED program. To achieve all that, I have to come to class every day, participate in the course activities, speak English in class, watch TV with captions, and go on YouTube to practice more. Also, when I go to the pharmacy or any other place, I should listen and speak to people to practice my English skills.

After I finish the GED classes and get my certificate, I will continue my career passion as an administrative assistant. This

will help me to get financial stability and save money to buy a car and a house. Now, I think I will be able to bring my daughter here to have a complete family.

*Marie Michele Moisset is a high intermediate ESOL student at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus. She came from Haiti on October 3, 2019. Her ten-year-old daughter stayed in Haiti with her mom and her sister.*



## **My Favorite Place**

### **A Pleasant Holiday in My Home Country**

For summer vacation, I went to Costa Rica to visit my family after four years of not seeing them. I couldn't believe that day was finally here. While my son and I were inside the plane, big smiles covered our faces and butterflies were in our stomachs. I could see Costa Rica, its mountains, the green spaces. It looked so beautiful from above.

My mother, sisters and nephews were waiting for us at the airport. I couldn't contain the tears when I saw them. Three weeks of fun awaited us and spending time with my loved ones was what I was waiting for.

The first weekend of being there, all my relatives gathered at my uncle's vacation house. While we were driving, I took a good picture of the street people selling different kinds of fruits. It was so nice to see them waving as we drove by. I must say that the streets are not as good as here, but we laughed when we felt the car jump. I'm pretty sure the kids enjoyed it.

We had a great time cooking, singing karaoke, drinking our local beer and the kids playing soccer and jumping in the pool too. This weekend was so special for me. A group of my childhood friends decided on going out to have dinner at a typical Costa Rica restaurant and, later, we went to the most popular club in the capital. That night I danced like I never did before.

In the last days, it was gratifying to be able to do some things, like celebrating my son's birthday along with his cousins and friends, visiting my 97-year-old grandmother, enjoying my newborn niece and continuing to eat my mom's great cooking. Then it was time for us to go back to my new home, the United States.

*Steffani Johnson is a student of the Literacy Council of Uppper Pinellas. Her tutor is Joan VanZandt.*

## The Torch of Light

I would like to express my own experience about what I felt when I saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time almost 40 years ago. For me, it was surprise and admiration.

For all the people who have never seen it, the Statue is a beautiful lady. She wears a crown on her head and a long gown. The Statue is on Bedloe's Island (also called Liberty Island) in New York City. She stands 385 feet tall. Her index finger is 8 feet long. In her right hand, she holds a torch that represents "the light." In the other hand, she holds a tablet with the date July 4, 1776. This date represents the birthday of the United States of America. But..... who made the Statue?

The United States and France were friends, and France helped the U. S. to win its independence. Frederic August Barthold had the idea to make a statue for the United States. He started creating it in 1875 and finished it in 1884. To make her face, Barthold was inspired by the beautiful face of his mother.

In the 19th century, the Statue became a symbol to all immigrants—the "Symbol of Liberty." In 1980 it was restored and now the Statue has a new and brilliant torch. The Statue's complete name is "Liberty Enlightening the World."

When I walked up the long, narrow steps of the Statue, I thought I would never get to the top. But then I came to a small window where I could look out and see all of New York City. I felt close to the sky.

Do you like this short history of the Statue of Liberty? If you ever go to New York City, please don't forget to visit this beautiful lady. She is waiting with open arms for all the immigrant people.

*Gladys Lago is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Susanne Carter.*

## **My Favorite National Park**

I want to let you know about my favorite place. I traveled to several national parks in the U.S. last summer for my vacation. There are 59 national parks in U.S. I went to seven of them. The most wondrous place was Yellowstone National Park. There were a lot of water basins and geysers that I can't see in my country. This place was formed from the heat underground that is like a volcano.

The famous geyser is called Old Faithful, in which water rises up every one and a half hours or two hours. So many people waited to see the scene and everyone shouted for joy at the same time when a huge water column went up.

There were diverse water basins that had different colors like a rainbow. The famous one is Grand Prismatic Spring. Water basins can often be called springs. It looks like a rainbow lake emitting smoke. A man was flying a drone to take a picture even though there was a sign forbidding it.

Another wonderful place is Mud Springs. Another place is named "Soup and Stew." It looks like boiling soup and stew with bubbles made of white mud.

Also, I really loved another place called Grand Canyon of Yellowstone. This place seemed like a gorgeous landscape painting of China. There was harmony with trees, cliffs, flowers and a waterfall.

In addition, I saw a lot of bison going through the road when the sun went down. I waited for them to pass by for almost half an hour. The most popular animal is definitely the bears. People often stopped the car in the road to see an adorable baby bear.

If I have an opportunity, I'd really liked to go back again. Visiting National Parks such as Yellowstone was refreshing and broadened my view. I want to recommend that place as a fantastic place to travel for summer vacation.

*Young Ah Kim is a student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, FL.*

## **The Only Place for Me**

Everybody has a favorite place in the world. It can be a place you have visited or a place you want to visit or the place where you were born. My favorite place is the latter, the place where I was born. This is a beautiful, little place in Haiti called St. Marc. It is a charming little village in the countryside, void of electricity, cars and technology.

St. Marc is a happy place that makes me laugh because of how wonderful it is. It is a very quiet place, with lots of beautiful girls, and everyone knows everyone. The most beautiful thing about it is the sunset. It is truly unbelievable. From the top of the mountain, you can see the sun hiding behind the sea.

The local rivers in St. Marc are the best. They are always packed with people talking or making jokes. At the same time, you can enjoy the beauty of nature: the sunrise, beautiful sunsets, the moon, and starlit skies at night. I miss it every single day, and I hope that one day soon, I will get the chance to visit there again. There is no place like it in the world.

*Chanel Pierre is a student at the Adult Literacy Program at the West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, Florida. His teacher is Mrs. Julie Maxwell.*

## **My Favorite Place**

My name is Fidelene, I would like to tell you in a few words about my favorite place. I am a member of a growing, vibrant church named Bethel Assembly of Saints. I said growing because of the great things the Lord is doing among his people every day. The ministry has been around since the late 1990s. It is a very nice building. From the outside it looks small but the inside is where the beauty of it is. It is very spacious, nicely furnished, and comfortable.

The most important thing is the ministering committee: the ushers, pastorals, and praise and worship team. The worship

is great, we have very good musicians, singers, and a director. We sing gospel, spirit-filled, upbeat contemporary blend, and traditional. We do praise and worship seminars at least twice a year; we also have Bible study every week. Also, there is the children ministry. We teach them about the Bible, songs, a lot of crafts, and activities. The people are lovely, it is a safe and caring environment. Anyone who likes fellowship would feel at home in my church. We are a big happy family. Everyone is welcome no matter what your background is, the grace God is sufficient to cover it all. We all are a bunch of sinners, saved by grace. Members and visitors will have peace in their soul, joy in their hearts, and the love of God is vivid among his people.

Just like the passage in the Bible states, “Better is one day in your courts, better is one day in your house, than thousands elsewhere.” I could not say it any better myself. I enjoy every minute in church, it’s the place where I belong. I know everyone would feel at home too, if he or she were there with us.

*My name is Fidelene, I am a student from Lorenzo Walker Technical College. I am taking remediation classes to bring up my TABE scores for the Nursing Program. Miss Khris is my teacher.*

## **The Mall of Happiness**

My favorite place is in the mall. I like to go to the mall with my friends to buy our things because there are varieties of clothes. Sometimes we eat ice cream, walk around and see the shops. All the places are beautiful in the mall.

I like to go to the mall because there are good brand stores and shoes too. When I go shopping with my friends, people give us good service and that’s why I like to go to the mall with my friends.

Then, when we finished buying our things, we start to take pictures. After we go to buy hamburgers to eat, we sit down to have a great time.

*Olga Aguilar Garcia is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Khris Betten.*

## **The Beach is My Favorite Place to Be**

Going to the beach is my passion. According to several different studies, a trip to the beach is very beneficial for us. The health benefits of the beach include showing reduced stress levels and making us happier and more creative. For this reason, almost every Sunday, I go to the beach.

The beach is the best place for me. When I am at the beach, I am really comfortable, especially when the weather is nice. There are a number of things you can do at the beach. One that I enjoy is walking along the water's edge. Not only is this enjoyable but you will be using calories at the same time. Even simply walking on the beach is a better and more strenuous workout, since walking on sand requires more effort than walking on a hard surface. The benefits could easily beat those from going to the gym. The outdoor activities are endless: surfing, jet skiing, swimming, sailing, playing and volleyball all require a lot of stamina and energy.

Saltwater and sand can be good for your skin too. You may sleep better at the beach, with the sound of the ocean lulling you to sweet dreams. I always drift off when I am at the beach. Both the sun and waves work together to relax your body and mind. After a day at the beach, it's a great moment to consume different kinds of seafood.

The beach is the best place; I like it!

*Theophile Odelin is studying with Ms. F. Johnson in the Advanced-level ESOL Adult Education program at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Campus. He wants to improve his English and continue on his career pathway in Informational Technology.*

## **The Magic of Tulips**

On a short trip to Holland, my eyes were amazed with such beauty. While the plane was flying through the air, you could see many water channels surrounded by long lines of different colors. The colored lines were large fields full of dazzling tulips.

On the horizon, I noticed some rotor blades of old windmills. My mind didn't believe what my eyes saw. I didn't know that the tulips were so beautiful. They had so many colors and such an extensive variety.

My best experience was riding a bicycle among the tulip fields. The smell of flowers is magical. Tulips are very fragile; their petals are silky, and their leaves are long and pointed. The flower fields are aligned perfectly, and they are seeded by colors. The windmills look like they are taken from an old storybook. The use of the mills is important because they drain the water from the lower parts to the dikes to be able to cultivate the land. After a long day between tulips, windmills, and water channels, I fell deeply asleep. In my mind, this wonderful experience was recorded like a trip through a fairy tale.

*Yadira Menendez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Magic Town**

Mazamitla, Jalisco, is one of the 121 magical towns in Mexico. This town is considered by many people as the Mexican Switzerland for its natural beauty and folklore. The word Mazamitla comes from the Nahuatl "Mazamictlan" which means "Next to the dead deer." This city was founded by the Aztecs in 1165.

This place is characterized by the generosity, hospitality, and nobility of its people. It is located in the heart of the Sierra del Tigre. It is rich in pine and oak forests, dairy products, canned fruit, and punch. This beautiful corner has a semi-dry climate throughout the year with temperatures of 20 degrees. Mazamitla has many traditions, and some of them are very peculiar, such as the blessing of the animals on May 15, the day of the birth of Saint San Isidro Labrador. Another, that is no longer very popular, is when a girl runs away with her boyfriend. As a sign of regret, she has to go to the altar with the young seducer carrying a black cross.

There is a typical dish called “boat” which is a rich broth of three meats and pulque. Pulque is a very traditional and popular drink in Mexico. Another dish is meat with adobo, jocoque, and requeson. Their sweets are particularly delicious and are made of pumpkin and coconut in addition to the milk and quince paste, among others, but these are the ones that my family and I enjoy the most when we visit this place.

Mazamitla has many activities such as horseback or ATV riding through the forest. It also has some beautiful cabins with chimneys and large gardens where you can have evenings in the moonlight singing, and drinking your delicious Zarzamora punch. They also have their traditional festivities such as the Virgin of Guadalupe’s novena from December 4 to the 12, the national holidays from September 13 to 17, which is when more people come from different parts of the world, to enjoy hospitality, as well as food, and music like Mariachi.

At parties, the streets are adorned with paper figures of many colors, and you can enjoy a quiet and safe environment with the family delighting in the view of the beautiful old houses with large and amazing interior courtyards decorated with lots of flowers of various colors and colorful peacocks walking through the courtyards. These houses were built in the early 19th century.

At night in the main square, you can enjoy a fireworks show. This and much more you can take pleasure in this magical town called Mazamitla.

*Sara Gomez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **A Dream Come True**

My favorite place is the beautiful beach of Tairona Park located in Santa Marta, a coastal city of Colombia. It’s a magic place to rest and disconnect from the routine. Its beaches reflect the pureness of its waters and the beauty of nature.



Yearly, it is visited by thousands of tourists and native people wrapping themselves in the magic of its culture. You can also find very close to this place, the Wayuu or Gajiros which are aboriginals of the Guajira peninsula, on the Caribbean Sea. Their colorful and handmade crafts are recognized worldwide. It is worth knowing this area, taking ecological walks, and enjoying the tropical weather surrounded by its fauna and flora.

This place has majestic hotels, where you can live and unforgettable holiday, or if you prefer, you can go camping and prepare your own meals; this way you can save a lot of money and do different things out of the ordinary.

Another wonderful experience is meeting people from all over the world who are joining in the same cause of disconnecting from the routine, by not using cell phones and living with only with daylight and sunset. They find other ways to spend the night. It is a good time to talk, to express our feelings and appreciations about life. It is giving time to the truly important.

I hope very soon to visit this place again and feel that. I will make my dream come true, the next time accompanied by our son. We would love to show him life from another perspective and teach him to value family time without any distractions of technology or superficial things. Tairona is an impressive world full of peace and renewal.

*Paola Corredor is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **Chalvire**

It is a pleasure to talk about a place that has marked me a lot since my adolescence in its heavenly aspect, a public place whose name is Chalvire. It is located more precisely in Aux Cayes, my hometown, that I love very much. Chalvire is a public place that I frequented quite often with my family, especially in the afternoon after our activities. This place is wonderful, pleasant in its entirety by its atmosphere provided to people. It is crowned with a mountain of trees, things I love, with its view of

the sea. There are birds that share with the guests while singing the chorus of alleluia. The sound of the ebb and flow of the waves of the sea and the currents of wind give me a thrill. You see hundreds of people who take part in each other's activities, others who communicate with each other, and children who enjoy all kinds of games. My favorite activities were to swing, to ride, to listen to adults who tell fabulous stories. Many beautiful activities that this place offers flourish.

Finally, there are many activities of perfect harmony that make the happiness that I still taste and that I would like to one day be able to visit again to relive those moments.

*Carline Laguerre is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **School is Amazing!**

How many children do you think love their school and their teachers? Most children like going to school every morning as long as the teachers are good. When I was four years old, many of the reasons I liked to go to school were learning by repetition with friends, drawing pictures, playing games, and singing with teachers. My lunch box always fascinated me. My schooling in kindergarten was a great memory for me. However, later I had other reasons to like going to school, such as the importance of a good education. I attended Catholic schools in Haiti, but at this time, I am studying English at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. I am craving to speak my best English in a few months so that I can pursue my career in nursing at Palm Beach State College, which will begin soon.

Since I was a little girl, school was crucial for me. I had a big sister. When she used to go to school, I always wanted to go too because it was my dream to see myself one day dressed up and holding my lunch box. The next year, my parents finally decided to enroll me in a kindergarten. My school was situated quite near my home. I enjoyed walking down to school every day with my gorgeous lunch box. I always sat next to my big sister when she studied. Therefore, before I went to school, I already knew

my numbers, colors, pictures, and the shape of certain things. I longed for my previous teachers when I had to quit the class. I had many exceptional teachers because they were caring and kind, creating positive learning activities. I loved school. It was a place to find other people your age, all gathered together, learning, and making new friends. I loved sitting next to my friends and watching movies.

I think of early education as a place to shape children into citizens of the world to be responsible and law-abiding members of society. In fact, schools help children to understand why being in school is crucial. In the future, I want to get a good job. For me, school teaches me how to be an independent person with life skills that I will need later in life. Some people think school might not seem important now, but later in life, the things we learned will be helpful for any situation. According to Anthony J.D'Angelo, "Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow." So, keep learning. School is amazing! Never say you are too old to be in school.

*Lowdy Francois is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **My Favorite Place**

I've been to a wonderful place in Winter Haven, Florida. Winter Haven is a small town hidden away among several lakes. It was a sunny bright warm day in May. I felt very excited to be on the big yellow school bus with my friends and my mother. Everyone was chatting around and ready to on rides and have lots of fun. As we arrived, I just knew that this day would forever be in my memory.

Legoland is a joyful place when everyone is elated. Once you get in there all you see is people laughing, running around and having fun eating getting snow cones, cotton candy, and balloons. Our class was separated in groups of five; so we all went to different areas. Our group first went to a building to try and build a little vehicle out of Legos. Our vehicles were all different sizes. My vehicle was the smallest. We finished quickly

to see which vehicle could win the mini race. I ended up winning the race and got a little medal.

There was also a beautiful garden, which seemed so fascinating. The way they placed the flowers in the garden made it look so aesthetic. In the garden there were also little butterflies, with beautiful wings. They were fluttering everywhere. We also saw a small fountain with cute tiny birds enjoying the water. We also found a mini group of ladybugs. They were black and red happily eating leaves.

As we left the garden, we saw an area with several rides. We got on the roller coaster it made many loops, making me a little dizzy. Another ride took us up and back down. That ride was very cool because you could see everything from the top. I viewed the beauty of the day. The sun shone down upon the crowd and happiness became real to me.

As we were getting ready to leave we took a picture in the water area, we ate some nachos and lots of candy. Finally, we went to build one last thing for us to take home. I built a flower out of big Legos. My flower was pink and decently big. I keep it with me to always remember my favorite place.

*Nancy Centeno is a student at West Area Adult School in Polk County. Her teacher is Kathleen Keen.*

## **Rostov-on-Don**

I was born in Russia in the small country town with a quiet and a very simple life style. All my childhood I dream about something different, about big city, about active life. When I was a teenager, my family finally moved to another city, Rostov-on-Don. It did not take me long to fall in love with this new place.

One of the reasons I love this place is its geographic location, comfortable climate and natural beauty. It has a very rich history and amazing architecture. Even when I am busy and in a rush, I always pay attention to the surroundings and enjoy the views.

But the main reason why I love it is the very special bonding

I have here. I was raised in this city and numerous wonderful things happened to me in this place. I have most of my closest friends from school. In addition, I met my husband while we were studying at the university. I built my new life here. Also, it is here that I found my true self.

For me, the perfect way to relax and recharge my batteries is to be in my hometown with my closest people, my family, and my friends. This is a quality time, especially, spending time together and enjoying being with each other. Several good memories connect me with my lovely city and it is so difficult to describe something that I love with words because it is such a special feeling in my heart and my soul.

For others, their special place might be their parents' or grandparents' house or something else. Of course, I remember my grandma's home all my life and keep the warm feelings and memories – it was my childhood days. Now, I like to travel. I have been to different countries and seen many wonderful places. Presently, my stop is in the United States of America. I adore this country and especially Key West. This place is so different and the island life style in particular - I love it. But I miss my home city. Not only the people I am close to who live there, but the place, as well. I love Rostov-on-Don dearly and I will always return to visit it.

*Nataliya Ilchenko is a College and Career Readiness student at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Take Me to the Ocean**

Every man in the world has a favorite place and mine is the ocean. It is a place where he captives his mind, feels comfortable and safe. It is also a place to go in times of sadness. A place to throw concerns away or a place that may remind your beautiful memories and you love sitting there reminiscing those moments. It may be a place to change the mood, too.

I like the ocean because it can take you to another world where you replay your beautiful memories. It gives you the

psychological comfort and happiness with its breaking waves. The ocean is one of the most beautiful blessings for man. It shows the greatness of the Creator. Words cannot describe the ocean's beauty and charm which is an inspiration to many poets and writers. Poems and thoughts that talked about the ocean are uncountable.

I am just as happy to be sitting on the beach to relax and think while watching and listening to the sound of the waves. I have fun with my friends and relatives. I am delighted to barbecue, enjoy the climate, scenery, and listening to music at the same time. One of the fun things we do is playing the XO game on sand besides playing water war or fighting water balloons. We also play volleyball.

The ocean has a great impact on human soul. It is a source of hope and renewed activity. Everyone I know likes to go to the beach because it is a natural place to have fun and rest.

*Muzaffar Nigmatov attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **The Forest**

Many people have some place they really enjoy visiting or living. Some even have one special place that is their favorite place to be. What is my favorite place? I guess it would be the forest. Ever since I was a kid, I loved going camping in the woods.

Camping out in the woods is great. It is fun building a little bonfire and roasting hotdogs on it. Then when the sun goes down, I enjoy looking at the stars in the night sky. I guess I just like to feel close to nature. This includes watching the animals in their natural habitat, such as deer running in the fields and ducks flying free.

Most of the time I take my dogs with me. Rex and Ruby, my Labradors, love running and playing in the wide-open fields. I usually prefer to just sit by the river and enjoy the peace and quiet.

Sometimes I do a bit of magnet fishing while I am at the river's edge. This is basically just me throwing a large round magnet with a rope tied onto it, into the water. Then I pull some garbage and junk out of the river. My catch is mostly just old fishing equipment like rods, hooks, a tackle box or other random junk. The most interesting catch I have made is a whole bicycle! You can learn more about magnet fishing on YouTube, as that is how I first heard of it.

So, the forest is my favorite place. It's relaxing to be out among the animals and trees and stars, and it's exciting to explore the adventures that I may get into in the forest.

*Zane Kaehler is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.*

### **My Favorite Place**

I'm a small town girl with 2 older brothers and 2 beautiful children.

Everyone has a favorite place they go to so they can unwind, relax, have a great time, make memories, and just plain have fun. That favorite place can be any number of places; bowling, the library, skating, camping, family homes, hometowns, some would even say that their favorite place is their own space! But, if you ask me, I would say my favorite place would be the Wakulla River in my hometown of Wakulla.

Not only is it absolutely beautiful with the crystal clear water, wonderful wildlife bobbing all around, and the breath-taking scenery, it's also a place to come together with friends and family. The memories I have of this favorite place of mine are always...blue. Not the depressing drab blue, but a pale sky blue background with sparkling water below.

In these memories I'm always smiling, having a great time, laughing and joking with friends doing what we came to do; swim. I can remember my teeth chattering when I'd come out of the water, but it didn't stop me from wanting to go right back in.

Goose prickles all along my suntanned skin, but I wasn't ready to go home.

Out of all these things that made the Wakulla River my favorite place the number one is the people. Mostly people that I grew up with my whole life in this little town, or newcomers, it didn't matter though! They were there for the same reason I was.

Maybe life is about our favorite places, maybe they get us through tough times. Maybe they help us get through the day, or through the week. Life is about happiness, about coming together, and enjoying what we have.... And what we have are our favorite places.

*Ms. Santana Bush is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Wakulla County, Florida. She is a student in Mrs. Cynthia Phillips Adult Basic Education III class.*

### **Palestine the Heart, and Jericho the Pulse**

My favorite place is my country, which for me means peace, love, security and warm relationships. My peaceful homeland, it's not a big homeland, but she has a big heart for her children even when she is sad because there are Israeli people sharing her with her children.

I was born in Jericho, it's the legal entrance to Palestine and contains the Dead Sea. I was raised and studied there, and I never imagined that someday I would leave it to move to another country. She still holds all my thought.

Jericho means crazy and strange weather! She has only three seasons: spring, summer, winter. The spring season begins from March to May, two months of a green painting colored by flowers and grass. In the summer season, the sun is hotter than the other seasons, it lasts from June to October and although it's sunny, the green painting is still bright. Finally, in my favorite season winter, the warm and romantic weather makes me fall love again with my country. It gives me positive energy for her life and future.



The Path Taken

I feel so proud to be one of Palestine's children and I hope peace and blessing for my wonderful country. Someday, I will return to my favorite place, favorite people and to my soul home.

*Manal Jalayta is a student at South Florida State College and Ms. Denise Miriani is her teacher.*

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

### **What I Never Saw in My Country Until I Came to the USA**

Brazil and the USA are huge and they have many cultures inside. Two big countries in America that are so similar and so different. Although both countries are made up of many ethnicities, the interracial families are more common in Brazil than here. My Family is a good example from a typical Brazilian mix that have ancestries from Portugal, Italy, Africa and Brazilian indigenous. The United States has a low diversity inside the family group and it apparently formed groups for different cultures.

The Sunshine State is the place in the U.S.A. that has weather similar to Brazil's coldest state. The relations in Brazil, like its weather, are warmer than here. Brazilians love to be together with family and friends. Every Sunday is a good reason to cook a barbecue and invite family and friends. Brazilians usually choose a university that has the best balance between the education quality and the shortest distance from family. In the past they always went to their family's region after finishing their major, but times are changing and good job opportunities are not easy to find and many students don't go back to their family's region.

Americans seem more polite than Brazilians, but Brazilians are friendlier. If you take the same bus every day to work in the USA, the bus driver will ask you if you are good, but in Brazil he just says hi. However, if you don't take the bus one day or more in Brazil when you go back he'll ask if everything is okay with you. My perception is that they care more deeply. The Brazilians make emotional connections very quickly.

The food is another huge difference. Here the food is more industrialized than Brazil. It's easy to find any frozen food in the supermarket for a low price, but fresh food like vegetables and fruits are expensive. In Brazil it's the opposite, you can

find many street Markets that occur once a week in each neighborhood organized for small farmers with good prices. The restaurants in Brazil usually have a buffet with many dishes and you pay by weight of what you eat. A similar thing happens in companies, they have a restaurant inside to provide food for employees.

The typical dishes are consumed very frequently in Brazil and they are based in indigenous and African cultures with some modification from the other cultures. Rice and beans is a mandatory dish on Brazilian tables as are dishes with corn and yucca flour. There are many other differences. I could understand that these differences create the fingerprints of each country and they are unique and beautiful.

*Luana Silveira de Oliveira is a student at ACE of Leon. Her teacher is Christine Poreba.*

### **How Life in My Country is Different Than the U.S.**

My name is Sandy; I am 16 years old. I came from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Today is my pleasure to talk about how life in my country is different than the U.S.

Haiti is a beautiful country with lovely people and magnificent beaches but the government is very awful. I moved from Haiti to the U.S. on August 3rd, 2014 after my 11th birthday. I was so happy; my dad gave me this move for my 11th birthday. I was thankful to God because he gave me the greatest father in the world.

Haiti is very different than the U.S. Here we have more security than Haiti. When I was in Haiti sometimes I felt scared when people were fighting with the president. School is different too but I think some schools in Haiti are better than the U.S. The students learn more stuff in Haiti than in the U.S. On the other hand, schools in the U.S are good too. In Haiti, our religion is Voodoo but most of Haitian are Christian. Haitian kids respect their parents more than kids in the U.S because Haitian parents raised their kids differently. Haitian parents go very hard on their kids. If they make a decision they stick with it and no one

can make them change their mind. Haitian kids are very humble to people. Also in Haiti we have a lot of historical resources from our past too. In Haiti, we have a lot of cultural activities. There are big parades in February where people are dancing, drinking, and having fun. The food in Haiti is very different than the food in the U.S. I like Haitian food more than food in the U.S. If someone tries Haitian food, he or she will not stop asking to eat it again. Trust me it is very delicious. As a matter of fact, I am very happy and proud to be Haitian.

*My name is Sandy, I am from Port Au Prince, Haiti I am 16 years old. I attend school at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL.*

### **The Food Differences Between China and the U.S.**

Last summer, I came to the U.S. from China. After only a few weeks, I realized that there are so many differences between China and the U.S., especially the food.

In China, there is a famous saying: “Food is the god of the people.” We like eating food and we also like cooking food. If you want to understand China, you must understand the food first. In China, most people like pork. About sixty percent of all the meals consumed in China contain pork, compared with only twenty percent poultry. But in the U.S., the favorite meal is chicken. Fried chicken is very popular in restaurants, like the Chick-fil-A, McDonald’s and Popeyes. In China, we also eat a lot of vegetables and we prefer fried vegetables. Whereas in the US, people like salad and other raw vegetables. Chinese people don’t like cold water and often drink warm water. Americans like to add ice to every beverage and they like ice cream best for desert.

Now, I’m becoming more used to the American food and beginning to like cheese and hamburgers. I believe the more I live here, the more differences I will find.

*Shulei Sun is a student in the ESOL class taught by Christine Poreba at ACE of Leon.*

## **Differences Between Haiti and the U.S.**

I have been living in the United States for 4 years. I have learned a lot of things about this country and I realize how many ways my home country is different than life in the U.S.

The education system between these 2 countries are very different. Haiti has a poor education system that needs seriously to update. In Haiti a lot of schools have no licenses and some of the teachers have no requirements to perform well. Most of the buildings are not comfortable and they have no labs. Contrary to my country, in the U.S., every school has a license. They have everything that the students need. All teachers have the perfect requirements to perform.

All political systems have some problems, but the political system in my home country is worse than the U.S. Every Haitian dreams to become the next president because for them presidency means they will be rich. They don't think and act for the poor people. They think only about their pocket and their wallet, but in the U.S. they respect each other and most of them care for all people.

The taste of food varies depending on the country. My first month here was so difficult. I couldn't eat like when I was in Haiti. Most American food had a strange taste. Haitian food is more delicious than U.S. food.

Finally, I love my new life in the United States but sometimes I miss my home country too.

*Marie Carline Romain is an ESOL student at Village Readers. Her teacher is Siena Mayers. She is the proud mother of three handsome boys. She likes French music and kompa.*

## **Life in Haiti Differs From Life in the U.S.**

Life in my country of Haiti wasn't bad. I worked for one of the biggest department stores in Haiti. The only bad thing about the job was that the salary was low and things like school, food, and

clothes were expensive. It was difficult to save money and own things like cars, things that I liked, but I survived anyway.

In the U.S., it is different. The U.S. offers more chances to find good jobs and get a good paycheck. In the U.S., I can easily make plans to own things because it is easier to buy things, even though I still can't save a lot of money. I thank God and God Bless America.

*Saintane Borgela is a student in ESOL at OTC-Winter Park Campus, and his teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

## **The Flavors of My Country**

My name is Elizabeth, I came to the United States two years ago. I love different kinds of food and here I can try foods from different parts of the world, but I really miss Ecuadorian food. Ecuador has some very special foods and flavors. The problem is that even though I can find similar food in this country, it's not exactly like in Ecuador. If American people tried the type of food I am talking about I think they would like it.

In Ecuador if you ask what the typical food is, they will say it depends on the region. For example, on the coast there is sea food. In the mountains there are farm animals (cows, chickens, pigs) and corn beans, potatoes, quinoa, and in the Amazon there are plantains, fish, yucca, tropical fruits, and sometimes the people eat strange foods such as big ants. There is a variety of food in the USA; a few months ago, I visited Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian and Mexican restaurants. All of this is new to me.

It is important to note that Ecuador has very different customs. In the US people don't like to see the faces of animals they eat but in Ecuador it is normal. Something else that is not common in the US and makes people uncomfortable is that we eat guinea pig, it is named cuy and it's a farm animal, but here it is a pet. The other thing that is different is the names of food. For example, we have a rice dish named bandera, which means flag; we have guatita, or beef stomach; and encebollado, which is a fish soup with many onions. The dishes sound weird but they are

tasty. We have more types of food according to the region, city, or celebration.

I still have a lot to learn about the food in this country and I am learning a lot about new foods here. I really enjoy tasting new flavors.

*Elizabeth Bonilla is a student in the advanced class of the ESOL program at South Florida State College.*

### **A World of Difference: Bangladesh vs the U.S.**

I spent the first 25 years of my life in my home country, Bangladesh. I used to think that, day to day life was the same everywhere. Now I know there are many differences. Coming to the U.S. was a turning point of my life.

Firstly, the U.S. was the first foreign country I have ever visited. Secondly, I was going to start my newly married life far away from home. I had a mixed experience with everything. I would like to share the areas where I saw the biggest differences. I was really surprised to see people in the U.S. usually say 'Hello' and 'smile' at strangers randomly. By contrast, in my country we never talk or smile at strangers. In a foreign country if an American or someone international sees you and says 'Hello' or 'smiles' at you it feels very warm and welcoming. In the U.S. people love to help each other a lot, especially husbands and kids help to do household work in their family but in my country usually at home women or servants work and husbands and kids never help with household work. Personally, I like the fact that the kids are made more independent by doing little chores around the house.

I also like the rules and regulations in the U.S. especially the traffic rules are appreciated. In my country most of the people are not concerned about rules, In the U.S. I was amazed to see that in the big line in a restaurant or while waiting for customer service everyone stays in a line patiently for a long time. On the contrary, this would not happen in Bangladesh.

I should talk about the most important thing for me and that

is the food difference between the U.S. and Bangladesh. I love the food of my country. I liked to taste the food from different restaurants but in the U.S. I cannot go to the restaurants often because I am not a big fan of international food and it is also expensive here, though it has a good effect on me because I have learned many Bangladeshi recipes in the US through YouTube.

Another thing I noticed here is about education. In Bangladesh, education expenses such as books, materials are cheaper and tuition fees are free in public university, but in the U.S. the education materials, books and tuition fees are costly. But I like the friendly relation between teachers and students here. In my country the teachers are usually too strict to the students.

In conclusion, I would say that it is hard to explain every difference between Bangladesh and the U.S. There is a world of difference between the two countries, but I am enjoying learning about these differences in the U.S.

*Ayesha Siddika is a student at ACE of Leon. Her teacher is Christine Poreba.*

## **Transitioning to the United States**

Forty-eight years ago, I was born and raised in Port de Paix, Haiti. Back then, the city was very peaceful. I grew up with my sibling and cousins. When I was kid, there were no cellphones, televisions and parks. I knew the feeling of going outside and enjoyed playing in the sand and rain. As I grew up, things changed for me. Thinking back, this country really differed from my home country.

In my country, I had my own house; I provided my own electricity and water. Here in the United States, one must pay to own homes; most payments are done through the bank. The light and water bills in the United States are overly expensive.

One big difference, I noticed between the two countries is having a Social Security System. Haiti did not have this system. In Haiti, the police or ambulance is not made available 24/7.



If you have an emergency at night, you must find ways to deal with it yourself. Here, help is always made available 24/7. Life Insurance and Health insurances will become almost an obligation in the United States for each individual and this is much different in Haiti. Only public officials and employees of the private companies have been especially supporting Health Insurance.

The U.S is a diverse nation. When you go to any public place, you meet people from many different countries. Back in Haiti, you mostly saw black Haitians, some Cubans and some Dominicans come over to work and you may see tourists on a regular basis.

Life in the U.S is much more stressful, and busier than life in Haiti. My life in my home country and my life in the U.S differs in many ways. Over time, I am slowly adapting to this new way of living in the United States while still keeping some of my good memories from my home country.

*Louna Eugene was born in Port de Paix, Haiti. After her classical studies, she studied nursing at the university and earned her degree in Health Administration. She was formally employed for 18 years with the North West Sanitary as a Program Coordinator. She currently lives in Lauderdale Lakes with her husband and two sons since 2018. She is attending Advanced ESOL classes at Atlantic Technical College-Arthur Ashe, Jr. Campus with Ms. F. Johnson. She is very passionate about learning new skills and following instructions.*

### **Differences Between Brazil and the U.S.**

What are some of the most relevant differences between Brazil and the United States?

Customs in general, form the personality of each country. Remarkable differences between Brazil and the United States are present in everyday situations. It is important to remember, the United States is a huge country. Laws, rules and culture can change according to region, state or city. Whereas these things are consistent throughout Brazil.

Brazilians are known to be a very friendly people because

they start conversations easily. In any environment, Brazilians use the opportunity to meet someone new and talk about various subjects. In Brazil, the relationships between people are affectionate and receptive, even when the people have just met. In the United States, however, it is different. Americans value their personal space, so they are more private, goodbyes with hugs and kisses on the face are uncommon. This behavior doesn't mean that the American is rude or indifferent, rather the approach and level of conversation when people are still getting to know each other is less intimate.

In more formal settings, Americans often call themselves by their title and last name. It may seem strange, but Americans still value formality primarily in professional relations. In Brazil this is not common, Brazilians traveling to the U.S can find themselves in embarrassing situations because we use first names. For example, in America, the student should never address their professor by the first name because this is seen as a sign of disrespect.

Another striking cultural difference is a gastronomic custom. Although fast foods and canned foods have a big place in American cuisine, it is possible to find a vast and varied menu at establishments that offer dishes for all tastes and different nationalities. In contrast, the Brazilian cuisine has specific flavors. The ingredients of the Brazilian cuisine are produced in the country which contributes to the quality of the flavor. Traditional examples are coffee and barbecue whose taste is consistent in all parts the country.

An additional culturally different custom is tipping. In Brazil the tip is seen as something optional. If you like the service provided you can offer up to 10% of the amount. Whereas in the United States it is expected to be paid and is considered part of the worker's wage. For example, it is practically a rule to tip waiters and porters. A tip is no less than 20% according to the satisfaction of the service provided and as an indicator of quality and a way of gratifying and motivating servers.

In conclusion, Culture is a very important factor in any country, and each has peculiarities and influences that need to be understood and respected by tourists and immigrants. Recognizing these key aspects will result in good relationships,

adaptations, great experiences and avoiding uncomfortable situations.

*Domingos de Oliveira Pereira is a student at South Florida State College ESOL program, his teacher is Ms. Denise Miriani.*

### **What is the Difference Between My Home Country and the United States?**

There are many differences between my country and the United States. My native country is Colombia where we have customs, food, people, everything is different. On the subject of people and customs, Colombia has is a joyful culture. All the time Colombians are partying and people are very cheerful and friendly. The meals there are totally different than here and the truth is that I get used to not eating the same foods there. Maybe they can be prepared here, but the taste is not the same. However, the educational system is not as strong.

In the United States it is different. The American culture varies greatly with what I am used to growing up in Colombia. The people are friendly but have different personalities. In the aspect of going out with friends, it is also very different here in the United States. You do not easily get friends compared to having an infinite amount of friends in my country. Of course I miss that, but I have to get used to life sometimes it gives you changes and you have to accept them. We can get something out of this. For example, a better future and a better education. I think in this country I have a very important opportunity to learn more things. This country is a country where if you want to have a good future, you can.

*Dayanna Caballero is 17 years old and studying at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in the Adult Education program.*

### **My Life Started Since I Arrived in the United States**

I was born in Haiti into a family of two girls and one boy. Throughout my childhood, everybody taught me that school is the way to be successful with my life. I went to school, I obtained

my high school diploma, and then everyone kept advising me that attending the university is the only way to be successful. Moving forward, I realized that no one spoke to me about how to get a job, even though getting a job is the hardest thing to accomplish in Haiti.

Close to the end of the last class in high school is where the big problems began. Getting a high school diploma should be a big moment in the life of every young Haitian but with the doubt about their future hanging over them, they are actually not sure of anything and the celebration seems suddenly clouded with despair.

After receiving my high school diploma, I went to the Dominican Republic to study Mechanical Engineering for 4 years and then came back to Haiti. Three years back In Haiti from Dominican Republic; I still did not have any job. Where is all the advice now that I really could use it? All that time spent on studying and I still could not afford anything for myself. I knew a change had to happen if I wanted to improve my life.

Then my life started since the day I arrived to America. My life in America differs from life in Haiti because in America I can go to school and work. In America there is always a way to get a job, earn a career and work all at the same time. The best thing for me in America is a secured future. God Bless the America Dream!

*Evens Pierre-Louis was born in Haiti in a family of four children. He went to the Dominican Republic to earn a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Now living in the USA since August 2019, he is attending the Advanced Level ESOL program with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College in Fort Lauderdale. Evens is preparing to enroll in an Automotive Certification CTE Course this fall.*

## **Respect Our Differences**

My name is Jarouyporn Hurapan. I am from Thailand. My religion is Buddhism. I have four brothers and four sisters. I used to work at Bangkok Hospital for 15 years. It was at the rehabilitation center as a physiotherapist assistant. I have been in the United States for six years. Now I am living in Key West. I

have worked at a Nail Bar and Lounge for about five years. I have two jobs.

I notice many differences between living here and Thailand. First, it is the food. I am used to eating hot spicy food such as Pad Thai, papaya salad, sticky rice, seafood, Tom Yum. I enjoy exotic tropical fruits such as durian, jackfruit, and mangosteen. I cannot find these here easily. If I do, they are very expensive. I do not really enjoy fast food, pizza, and sour things.

Next, people generally drive very fast in this country. They go beyond the speed limit. They do not respect the road signs. It really makes me scared. Even though I am a careful driver, I can be involved in an accident because of other people's carelessness.

I discover people in America are sometimes inconsiderate and selfish. Foreigners who have been living here have changed to be competitive and self-centered. Even the Thai people are not so respectful of each other. I am not happy about this kind of personality.

Although many things are different, I like living in America because it is easy to get a job that pays decently. I learn to cope with the difference because it is better for me to live here, economically.

*Jarouyporn Hurapan attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She loves working in the nail salon. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **In Spite of the Differences**

The differences between my country and the US are many. I come from Mexico City where there is a lot of hustle and many people everywhere. Instead, Key West is a very small town. Everyone knows and respects each other. As for food, for the Mexicans, they are very varied. I used to eat many different kinds of food to satisfy my cravings, such as delicious tacos. There are street carts where people can buy and eat food in each corner.

Another difference is the weather. In my country, it is cooler because it is very mild. So, it is not so hot. I used to wear coats and heels but here I am in shorts and sandals. That is a big difference. In Mexico City, it is impossible to enjoy the sunset like the one I can enjoy here. In Key West, the sunset is magical and the sky is spectacular.

There is more. My birthplace is constantly surrounded by people at all times. But here I have not yet been able to have great friends. I think it is because people tend to work a lot. In my country, we dance to “cumbia” music. Here, the music among the Latinos is “reggaeton”.

Family ties are important to us. Mexican children do not leave their family’s nest. The nest usually gets very large. The house is extended. We build another story above our parents’ houses. Thus, families are kept together forever. In contrast, American children leave their family’s home when they turn 18. They start living on their own and only return to visit them on special occasions and holidays.

In spite of these differences, I am making the best of my life in the US. I can’t complain. I like the USA.

*Abigail Acevedo attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She would like to have a career in photography. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Live in Two Nations**

Growing up in Nicaragua was pretty easy because the situation was normal. I paid for somebody to clean, somebody to make food, and to wash because there weren’t any dishwashers or dryers. I paid for security and child care. The houses were bigger, with a big backyard where the kids played. For this reason, the families were bigger with three, four or more children. The people were friendly and kind. Our children spend more time with their friends or classmates. School parents are united and we worked together. However, now in Nicaragua, the situation is hard and sad because it is dangerous to raise a family there. My husband and I decided to move to the United States for

safety and more opportunities especially for the education of our children.

Living in the US is harder for me because of the language barrier. When I have appointments, it's hard to feel confident in speaking English. I tend to search out people who speak Spanish. Also, it is more expensive to hire help around the house. I can only afford to rent a house instead of owning because it is too expensive. I miss my family and friends especially my two sisters however, I'm blessed and thankful to God for this opportunity for being here! I'm living in two nations because I live in the US, but my heart is in Nicaragua!

*Cidiana Sirias is married with four children: Andrea, Adriana, Jothan, and Jose. She has been studying English for over a year and is presently a housewife.*

### **My New Beginning**

When a person comes from another country, it's sometimes hard to adapt to the new surroundings to begin their new life. In my home country, life was easier. I think, the time passed more slowly in Mexico and time flies in the United States. Also, family was the most important. My family was always there for me.

The town where I grew up in was San Luis Potosi, Mexico. Even though it is a big city, it is very traditional. The family is always there for support, parties, and any problems that may arise. Now, life is a little harder. It is lonely. The everyday routine is hard to get used to. To be honest, it's not all true. We can have more things, more opportunity for growth. We have more liberty and more justice compared to my county. The beginning is hard, but not impossible!

*Yolanda Salas is married and a mother of two teenagers. She has been living in the US for about 20 years. Presently, she is taking English classes because she wants to advance her career with the help of her instructor, Whitney Strohmeyer.*

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

When you live in Haiti there are different ways to lead your life. Each country has its own way of handling their country issues. I will write bellow a few differences between life in Haiti and that of USA.

Haiti is a good country. They used to give it the nickname “the Pearl of the Antilles.” People love their country, they go to school from elementary to high school. When they finish high school, they go to college in different cities like: Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitian, and Gonaives to continue their education. Some even go to study in foreign countries like Dominican Republic, United States, Canada, and France. Some people go to work, but it is not the same as in USA. In Haiti, only nurses who work at the hospital and people who work as security at the bank work at night. Life is difficult in Haiti, however when someone gets the opportunity to study abroad it is sometimes a great thing.

In the USA it is different. People go to work at any time and any day. School is very important in the USA. People do not have much time for their family. They need go to work to save money to pay their bills, but for example there is also opportunity too, to prepare for their future life for when they get older. In the USA, there are many ways to transport kids to school, but in Haiti is not the same.

There are a lot of things to say but I have no time to write them all. There is a big difference between the way of life in Haiti and that of the USA, because of all the better things there are in the USA—for example electricity, roads, streets, security, etc.—but for Haiti it is not the same. I love my country. There are also many good things there too.

Finally, for me life in my home country is good too, but it differs from life in the USA. That’s my opinion!

*Rosemanie Moreau Ambroise came to the USA only twelve months ago. Her family came before. She was lab technician in Haiti. She is now a student in the ESOL program at Atlantic Technical College – Arthur Ashe Jr. Campus, taught by Ms. Ana Maria Rivero.*



## Someone I Admire

### Why My Mom is Great

I admire my mom. She was generous, loving, and did a good job raising me and my siblings.

My mom was generous. I remember before my mom died, there were some neighbors who didn't have money to pay the school for their children. She paid for them. She liked people in the world. When someone needed help, she cared enough to give help.

My mom did a good job raising me and my siblings. She was hard-working. She prepared the food for the family. She cleaned. When I was sad, she approached me to give me love.

I think my mom loved me the most. When my mom came home from work, she stopped by the store to buy something for me. When she got home, she secretly gave me treats like a cup of fried plantains. She gave me a middle name, Maud. I remember the first time I went to Haiti, when I saw her, she told me "Maud! Next time you come back, you won't see your mom." She was right. That was the last time I saw her.

In conclusion, I love my mom very very much. She was great and a hard-working woman. She worked very hard and was very good at her work. She took care of her family, neighbors, and poor people. She was a wonderful mom.

*Marie Maud Ambroise is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers. She loves to throw parties.*

### My Friend Fenilde

Someone I admire is my friend. Her name is Fenilde, she's very friendly and confident. She smiles a lot.

I admire Fenilde because she's a hard worker. I remember the first time I saw Fenilde, I was at work. My coworkers told me to do something I couldn't do. At that moment, she entered in the middle of the people. She said, "She's my sister and I will help her." It's not common to see some people try to help you like that. She knew how to do everything. After that, I had less stress. That's why I admire her so much.

We became great friends. I will continue to pray to God to bless her even more than before.

*Miglène Michel is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.*

### **The Grave and Love**

Mary is a twenty-year-old girl. She loved a young man and married him. She became pregnant and then she miscarried. Then Mary went to the doctor. The doctor told her, "You have kidney failure and you must have kidney dialysis." She lived with that situation for years. The husband's younger brothers told him to break up with Mary, but he refused very hard.

Finally, the husband found a kidney donor and the operation went perfectly. Every day, the young man climbed a tree to see Mary through the window. Mary's doctor blocked the young man from visiting. She got better and there was a party the last night in the hospital. It was the end of her sad days. But that night, she died.

The young man lived his days in darkness and his nights in never-ending sorrow. He went to her grave every week and goes still to the present day. He speaks with her and waits for the day he will meet her again.

He married again and calls his new wife the name Mary. Then he called his daughter the name Mary. There was not love in the marriage, but his brothers ordered him to marry again.

If you have so much love, you must keep it (treasure it) so that the love does not drop on the road and you cannot find it

again. Because life is long, but with love, life is short. You are always famished for more love.

This is a true story. Mary and George are my aunt and uncle. My Uncle George tells me I look like Aunt Mary.

*Marsil Masoud is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Gaye Staskiel.*

## **My Mom**

Honestly, I have someone special who I admire and adore so much in my life, and this is my beautiful and immaculate mother. That's why I have three things I want to share about my mother with you.

First, she's very smart. She's 76 years old and she still believes in education. I remember when I was a kid, she always dropped me off at school and helped me do my homework. She controlled everything in the house.

Second, she's very generous. She's always here to support me in every activity or decision I'm making. I remember when I got married, she was the first person to prepare everything for me. She likes to share money and food with her family in Haiti. When someone knocks on my mom's door, she's always ready and open to help.

Third, she's a good cook! She taught me how to prepare good food and how to clean my home. She works very hard and she's successful in her life.

In conclusion, my mom is one of the best moms in the world. She's indispensable for me. That's why I admire her so much in my life.

*Yonel Princeton has two children. He likes to dance to Haitian compas music. He is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. His wonderful teacher is Siena Mayers.*

## **Showing Love, Passion, and Dedication**

The famous writer Simon Sinek once said, “There are only two ways to influence human behavior: You can manipulate or you can inspire it.” This is how Pastor Orlando and Pastor Maritza have inspired me to be the best in all that I do. That is why I admire them.

Ten years ago they came into my life when they moved to Clewiston from Miami. They are the two most loving and caring persons that I have ever known. The move was a big change for them, but they did it because they love God so much. You can see this love through their actions, and the way they treat and care for others.

Pastor Orlando and Maritza opened a food bank that helped feed a lot of people in Clewiston and Montura Ranch. They have done a lot of good things throughout all these years. Every year at Christmas for the past five years they do a big festival to give away toys and food in Clewiston, Montura Ranch, and Belle Glade.

Watching them work in all the areas at church and outside of church makes me love them even more, and want to follow their example. I admire them for the love, passion and dedication that they put into everything they do, especially the love that they show to the common people.

*Tomasa Garcia Lucas is a student in the Adult Literacy Program at the West Technical Education Center in Belle Glade, Florida. Her teacher is Mrs. Julie Maxwell.*

## **The Person I Admire – My Mother**

I admire my mother because she is very smart, ambitious, and she worked very hard to realize her dreams. She is the most important person in my life.

I admire her because she always knew the answer to every question. She likes to learn new things every day. She is always also a very respectable mother, very patient and enthusiastic.

She helps other people solve problems. She has a great sense of humor.

She is retired now, but she was a hard worker because she woke up early every day to go to work. She is careful with everything she does. She was always determined to work as hard and as much as possible to make sure her family had what it needed. She never complained that she was tired. As long as her family was ok, she was ok. I have always admired my mom for all of the hard work that she does. She is the strongest person I know.

She is very important to me. She always told me that I have to get better every day. And I listened to her because she was my good role model. She would tell me all of the things she knew about life. In my life I want to have many goals like her. If we are far away, our heart will always be together.

In conclusion, my mother made me the man I am today. She wouldn't allow anyone's opinion to interfere with me. I admire my mother and I love her. She is my favorite person in my life. I always make her proud.

*Jean Milbin is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers. He has a beautiful 2-year-old daughter who makes him happy every day.*

### **My Mom, My All**

My name is Phara, I came to the USA on January 15, 2015, with a sadness of leaving my mother and my brother behind in my country (Haiti), and a hope that one day we are going to be together again. My mother is the person I love the most in this world. I am extremely grateful to have a woman like my mother.

She would sacrifice her life for me and my brother. When I was growing up, we could not spend time together because she had to go out to buy and sell her merchandise (i.e. bed sheet, bed cover, beanies, scarf, tissue, and foulard). Sometimes I didn't see her for a week, so we had to sleep with

neighbors because she had to travel long distances to sell her merchandise. She's been doing this commerce for her whole life to take care of us, even on cold or hot days. She got out early in the morning before the sunrise and came home in the darkness. Sometimes we did not have a chance to see her because we were already asleep. The next day she started the same journey again, and again until Sunday. She stayed home instead of taking the day off, relaxing, going out, and having fun. She would rather cook delicious food for us, do laundry, clean the house, and make sure we were good.

What makes me admire her the most is that she's the strongest woman I know. She takes care of her two children's (a girl and a boy) necessities without their father's help. Another thing I adore about my mom is that she pushes us on our education even though she did not have the chance to attend school in her life. My brother and I are half siblings, sharing a single mother that does all she can to take care of us.

My mother is lovable, a hard worker, sweet, funny, and beautiful in and out. She is a good caretaker to her mother, a friendly neighbor, a loyal friend, and a marvelous mother. She is a role model for me, she inspires me to go through life without giving up on any circumstances.

*The author is a student in Ms. Khris Betten's class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. She is studying to earn her high school diploma.*

### **The One Who is Always There**

I knew of some obstacles, because when I came for the first time to the United States, I could not hear anything in English. I was deathly afraid to speak because I did not want anybody laughing at me, so I remained silent and kept to myself. I knew I would never succeed here if I remained in a scared state of being. I did a little soul searching and told myself why I was afraid, thinking through this dilemma, I realized that I am supposed to talk and if I did make a mistake, somebody would help me. Then in the back of my mind, there was a special voice always guiding me and pushing me forward: my sister.

Someone I admire the most in the world is my sister. Her name is Demercie Pierre and she is my second older sister. Why do I admire her? Because I did not know my mother as she had died, I was only one year old. Consequently, my sister took care of me like her own daughter. She raised me by herself and provided me a good education. The reason I admire her is that when I was a little girl, she always wanted me dressed in a beautiful dress just like other girls in my community. She wanted me to be just like the other girls regardless of our situation. She is an excellent example for all sisters to follow. I could and still can tell her my secrets. When I am stressed, she is always talking to me and giving me good advice. She has a good heart, she is friendly, honest, and loves everybody.

I remembered, she always told me, “I love you my little sister. You are all I have in the world.” It is an honor to publish her name out of my respect for such a kind loving selfless person. I love you so much, my sister.

*Lucienne Pierre is from Haiti and has lived in Florida for two years. She is a student in Ms. F. Johnson’s College and Career Readiness (CCR) class at Atlantic Technical College in Fort Lauderdale. She plans to attend the nursing program after completing her English studies.*

## **Flying Without Wings**

Many people feel admiration towards someone for his exceptional qualities. Perhaps people admire an artist, scientist, athlete, friend or relative. Or maybe a superhero who made us dream that we were able to fly and have special powers when we were children.

I have always had a special person whom I admire. That person has been close to me in all stages of my life since I can remember because he is my mother’s youngest brother. The memories I have of him taking me by the hand to go to school when I was very young are the only ones that will exist in my mind where I can see him standing and walking. More than forty years ago, when he was just nineteen years old, he suffered a terrible car accident that took away the possibility of walking again and left him bedridden, with only little mobility

in the upper part of his body, and unable to meet basic needs on his own.

However, the story of Tío Hector is not only based on such sad and painful events. It took him a few years to accept his situation with fortitude, courage, and determination. But thanks to his love for life, his family, God, and his mental strength, he has been able to continue building stories in his life despite so many hard years.

To talk about Tío Hector is to talk about endless conversations. His sense of humor and ability to tell stories are remarkable. He loves to make friends and lovingly cultivate and maintain those relationships. He also loves music, and he could play the guitar. After his accident, and because of the immobility of his fingers, he could no longer do that. However, he found in painting the best way to express his art and feelings.

He discovered how much he liked to paint and his ability to do it despite not being able to hold a brush between his fingers. But he used his ingenuity and managed to master his technique and create beautiful and inspiring paintings. The prize for his talent has been obtained by exhibiting his works at events organized by the government in his native Veracruz, México.

Tío Hector has always said that as long as his mind is not sick or disabled, he can continue flying wherever he wishes, even if he has no wings. Tío Hector is to me, and for all who know him, an example to follow, an extraordinary superhero who does not need a cape, wings, or special powers to fly. His physical possibilities are limited, but his thoughts will always be unlimited and allow him to continue flying wherever he wants to go.

*Nancy Navarro is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*



## **The Most Precious Heritage**

What do you think a great life means? What kind of legacy would you like to leave to your descendants? What do you think would make your life worthwhile?

When I started thinking about this story, I had a bunch of ideas. In fact, I would like to tell you my grandmother's story, so I started recollecting much advice, teachings, and quotations of hers. I had dozens of ideas in mind, and I started trying to figure out the most important thing she left for us. Suddenly, it dawned on me that the most precious teaching of hers was never really said but is a collection of her actions. I can listen to her speaking very clearly, not with my ears, but from the bottom of my heart. "My dear, you don't need to do big things to leave a great legacy; the small and simple daily actions can really make the difference." I think many of us spend an entire life trying to do something "great" when the most important things are really the simple ones, our actions.

My Grandma Terezinha, was a very simple woman. Her father was an immigrant that came from Genova, Italy to Brazil due to the labor shortage during the decades of the industrial revolution. She got married to my grandpa and had two daughters. My grandpa got sick with severe diabetes and a few months later passed away when Terezinha was still very young, about 40 years old. Then, she decided to sell her house and share the amount with her daughters, living with them and her beloved grandchildren.

Her entire life was an inspiration for me. She was passionate about people. I have so many beautiful memories of many places we went. For every single person that she met, she had some words of encouragement, hope, and love. I was young, but I can remember one day, a woman that she met in the hospital told her, "You are like an angel that God sent me to say those words today."

As my mom had a mental disease, my grandma always had this role in my life, and I can tell you that most of the choices that I made were inspired by her. I have no idea what I would be if she didn't exist in my life.

Today I realized how great and significant her life was. How many lives besides ours, her family, did she have the opportunity to change just with a simple conversation in a bank line?

Her life was all about love, patience, and resilience. This is the most precious heritage that any person can leave to this world.

*Adriana Bim is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **What My Parents Mean to Me**

I want to say what my parents mean to me, those two wonderful people who gave me life. Although I often tell them how wonderful they are, I want to express everything that I feel because I am proud to have them as my parents with their virtues and mistakes. For me, they are the best human beings and almost perfect parents. They have been a great example for my life.

I deeply love my parents. My father is a man of integrity—generous, humble, affectionate, hardworking, and grateful for life. My mother is a beautiful woman with white hair, a jovial spirit, and she is always ready for her whole family. I think I always followed their rules and learned solid values and parameters of what it is to be a good person and a woman. Seeing their smiles with my achievements makes me happier than my own goals. I know that sometimes I am selfish because I think only about myself. Maybe I don't know how to prove it, but I want my dad to know that I love and admire him because he is the most important person in my life. Knowing that he is as human as I is important because I know how much he suffered. I know that sometimes he has problems, but he keeps them to himself and from my mother and family so we don't worry.

As a child, the most beautiful words that were taught to me were dad and mom, words that I say today with emotion, pride,

and especially with love. Today I can't hug my parents because they live far away, but I always have them in my mind and my heart.

*Yajaira Hedrich is a College and Career Readiness student at OTC-Winter Park Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

### **With Students in Hand, a Teacher She Stands**

The person that I deeply admire is my teacher, Mrs. Rhonda Currier, who is honestly the best teacher I have ever had. She has made such an impact on my life and helped me in so many ways. I have always struggled with both reading and comprehending things no matter how hard I tried. I eventually gave up and quit school at 16. With my mom's encouragement, I started adult education and eventually met Mrs. Currier.

This wonderful teacher has not only explained to me so that I could understand what I was learning, she has also taught me with different methods to remember, so that I would never forget. She taught me to love and enjoy learning, something I had never done before. For example, she taught me a short cut she calls "Criss-Cross, Applesauce" that helps me remember how to add and subtract fractions. And, the Macarena is now my favorite brain exercise to stimulate learning. She explains differently to each student, but it's in a style so that we can understand what we are learning. She doesn't let us get discouraged. She believes in her students' potential and helps them set goals and achieve them.

Mrs. Currier is a real superhero because being a teacher is not always easy, yet somehow, she always finds a way to make it work. Mrs. Currier has been a beacon in my life. She is such an inspiration. If I didn't have her to illuminate everything, I would never have known my potential nor set goals for my future to finish my GED and become a writer.

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

## **The One Who Inspires Me**

Someone I admire is the Lord. When I came to prison, I just wanted to give up. I had no faith. I felt like a failure. What I came to realize is that I should never not have faith and trust in him, my father, the Lord. The Lord has brought me out of the darkness and showed me the light. He has helped me tremendously in my stay in prison. The strength I needed to get through it, He has given it to me. I now know that it was best for me to come here. Being here, He has allowed me to see my better self and become what He planned for me to be. It's like we're transformers, he transforms us from what we were, into what He planned for us to be.

The Lord has given me the faith and strength I needed to go and be someone, and make something of myself. The Lord has been my inspiration. He has been my guide to being a better me. I'm blessed every day that I'm able to breathe fresh air. I have two additional blessings He's given me; a 7-month-old and a 23-month-old (girls). That has given me another chance to do it all over. This time I am going to do it right because I have the good Lord on my side. I can go home to two babies and another chance at life with them.

The Lord is good. I can honestly say that when I wake up every morning with a smile on my face, it's because of His presence in me. The Lord's love is unconditional. There's not a better feeling than the Lord's presence. The more I look toward him, the more prosperity comes my way. Thank you Lord, you are my inspiration.

*Ms. Jamie Ballard is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida, with a hometown of Keystone Heights, Florida. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

## **Sister**

Someone I admire most is definitely my sister. Her name is Lori L. Yates. She is six years older than I am. We share the same mother. She's a God-fearing woman, a beloved daughter,

The Path Taken

a faithful wife, mother of four boys, a loyal friend, and as my sister, she is my rock.

She loves the Lord and her family. She is one of the strongest women I have ever met. She's independent. She's involved in community and school events.

She always has an encouraging word, a smile on her face and love in her heart. If I'm half the woman, mother, and friend she is, then I'm blessed beyond measures.

I count my sister as one of my biggest blessings, a gift straight from God. I look up to her in so many ways she doesn't even know.

I thank the Lord each and every day for choosing her to be my one and only sister.

*Ms. Jackie N. Powell is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy FL, with a hometown of Ponce de Leon, Florida. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II taught by Mrs. Myra Williams.*

## **A Friend's Faith**

I was born in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. I have lived in Jacksonville, Florida for the last 14 years. I am the oldest of nine children. I love my new family in Jacksonville. I have four children.

Someone I admire is my best friend Michael. He has faith like no other. I met Michael while I was at one of the lowest points of my life, seven years ago. He accepted me into his life with open arms, an open heart, and a ton of patience. Regardless of what he had going on in his life, he was always there for me and showed me what true friendship was really about. What I admire most about Michael is that he has a love for God that amazes me. His strong faith fills me with hope.

Michael never backed down when it came to teaching me the word of God. He was always praying with someone, for someone, or just telling about the bible. Michael has a

strong family bond and is not afraid to show a softer side of himself. Seeing how Michael is is something that I have never experienced before in my life. That's not how I was brought up. My upbringing was somewhat filled with dysfunction and abuse. I was completely out of control and broken when I met Michael. I could not understand how he was so at peace and showed so much love for those around him. At first, I pushed him away, because I could not understand his faith and how he was so strong in it.

At that time, I knew nothing about the Lord. I had no idea how powerful, forgiving, and full of unconditional love God truly was. Michael showed me that and made me a believer through his actions and faith. He showed me how joyous life could be. Because of my drama, violence, and drug issue, I wasn't able to accept what Michael was bringing, I put him through so much. Michael has come to my rescue more times that I deserve.

Michael had been through some tough times of his own. Losing his mother and daughter in the same month, and also losing a cousin. The way Michael was dealing with that made me a believer. Michael showed faith and prayed through those tough times and came out of them okay. All that Michael had been through in his own life, he was being there for the next. I can honestly say that God's love shows through Michael. I will always admire Michael for being a man of God. His strong faith has never faded and his patience never left him. The love in him will continue to amaze me. Michael is someone I admire for his love, strength, faith, and belief in God.

*Ms. Latonna Red Owl is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida, with a hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. She is a student in the GED FastTrack class facilitated by Aide Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Dela'Quese Jernigan.*

## **Someone I Admire**

I dedicate this story to a pastor that I've known for about 20 years. She's not just a pastor, but she's like a spiritual mother, sister, and a best friend. She has helped me in many ways.

When I first attended her church, I did not know a soul. It was a small church, but now it's very big. She was young, and I did not feel comfortable sharing problems with her because of her youth. After a few times, I learned how capable she was. The first thing she helped me with was dealing with three deaths in my family. She actually drove an hour to visit and console me through these tough times. She comforted me and gave me spiritual guidance and emotional support to help me deal with these losses and helped me carry on.

She gave me advice on how to be a good wife, mother, and grandmother. She also guided me from a woman's perspective on dealing with things in life. She even gave me lessons on money and how to manage it. She helped me make a budget. In addition, she showed me how to get legal advice.

Mainly, she told me not to be afraid to try new things just because I am a woman. I learned that I was capable of doing many things. She helped me build up my self-confidence. She encouraged me to work and go back to school to work on my GED. It's never too late to follow your dreams!

Finally, it is now my honor to reveal this special lady:  
Pastora Elizabeth Fuentes. I love you!

*Alicia Castillo is a student with the Family Service Center in Arcadia, and is involved with the Goodwill workplace literacy program.*

## **Never Give Up**

I am a redeemed loving mother of eight beautiful children who give me purpose in life.

Someone whom I admire is Donna Tanner, whom most call MeMe; she is my hero. God put her in my life, at the lowest point of my life. I was strung out on drugs, my children had gotten taken away, and I was at a point of trying to take my own life. When I met Donna, I realized God had other plans for me. I discovered that I was pregnant by her son just shortly after I was arrested on probation violation. I was alone and very

scared. I couldn't deal with the thought of having another child taken away from me.

I woke up and had received some mail from MeMe expressing that she wanted to be there for me and my family. Soon after, we began to speak daily. She made me feel loved and cared for. That was something that I hadn't experienced in a long time. Not long after my arrest, I was sentenced to rehab and she was there every step of the way. During that time, MeMe made me feel worthy again. I felt like with her and God, I was going to be okay.

In 2 years, this woman has loved me more than I can remember anyone ever loving and caring for me. She still has not given up on me. When I gave birth to my son Dakota Lewis Tanner, I was healthy and drug free; he was able to come home with me. For the first time in 10 years, I had faith and felt courageous. All of it was thanks to MeMe. In spite of my flaws, she still gave me a chance and didn't give up on me.

I am currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correctional Facility for 31.6 months for a probation violation. Even though I made a mistake, she still instills the courage and belief in me that I can do the right thing. She encouraged me to turn myself in. Once again, she has been there every step of the way. She has encouraged me to pursue my GED and take betterment classes that will help me be a better mother and a better woman.

Donna Tanner has my children and is taking great care of them. She will have them until I'm released from prison. She is my hero, she gives me hope, and she's my inspiration. So I encourage everyone, just like she encouraged me, never give up.

*Ms. Crystal Dimmitri is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida, with a hometown of Lakeland, Florida. She is a student in the GED FastTrack class facilitated by Aide Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Dela'Quese Jernigan.*

### **Someone I Admire**

The person I admire the most is my sister. I admire my sister because she is a hero in my life. She did everything for me, she



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is my best friend. I can tell her anything, my sister is someone I can trust.

She is like a mom for me, she takes time for me. I never remember her pushing me out of the way, she cared about me. For all she has done for me, she is special in my life.

When I have something going on she is always there for me. I think when my mother died she supported me, that is why I called her a hero, she did everything for me.

My sister is a role model. I love her and admire her with my aching heart forever and always.

*Micheline Frederic is from Haiti. She is 36 years old, married, and has two children. She came to the USA on December 14, 2012. She wants to be a nurse, and is going to school to learn more English.*

## **My Mom**

The word “family”, for me, is everything. It represents love, life, harmony, security, and peace. It is necessary to explore different feelings for our own family. At this precise moment I miss and wish to see my parents. Thanks to technology, video calls feel as if my parents are near me.

Mothers are special. I admire and support my mother at all times. I'm very grateful for her in my life. My mom is everything to me, she knows me very well. She knows when I'm sad, angry or happy, of course, she is my mom! Likewise, I know when she is worried or calm.

If you have a mother, love everything about her, value and respect her. Take care of her. You have a mother, so love your mom. I love you mom, see you soon.

*Jomarys Lopez Garcia is a student of the South Florida State College ESOL Program, and her teacher is Ms. Denise Miriani. She is from Puerto Rico.*

## Someone I Admire

Every person on earth has someone they admire in their lives. I am so proud of myself for saying who I admire so much in my life.

The person I admire, the person who is always there for me, is my best friend. His name is Vince. We have been friends for 30 years. He has always been with me, in the good times and in the bad times. He is really smart at school and has many other good qualities. I will always admire him and his life. He will always be the best friend, only death could separate us.

We have had many years together since we are friends. We live like two brothers, but we will stay like that for longer years to come if God continues to give us life, though I will still admire him all my life.

*Perin Vincent came to the USA in May 2019. He is in the ESOL Program at Arthur Ashe Jr. He is planning to study to be a mechanic.*

## Ms. Johnson

I would like to honor Fayne Johnson for the way she is doing her job.

She is the most amazing teacher that I have come across in my life. Her dedication to teaching is permitting us to learn very fast, and she knows how to motivate us. I assume that her teaching method can change education in the world better than you think. I remember the first day when I came into her classroom, everything was strange for me. I asked myself: how am I going to adapt to this class? However, it did not even take two days to get accustomed with her teaching.

Apart from her teaching career, I believe she is a nice woman too, because she always gives us some good advice that can help us in our life. She is very carefree, always smiling. Sometimes, I wonder if she has ever known some sad moments in her life because she is always happy. I tested her so many times by

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doing things that can make her angry in the class, but she always finds the best way to control the situation.

Furthermore, we really appreciate her creative thinking and positive attitude, and her valuable time at the school. She has been a source of inspiration throughout my career, she is simply the best.

Thank you, Ms. Johnson, all the students love you.

*Bertho Romanov Romondt is originally from Haiti. He is presently studying ESOL Advanced level at Atlantic Technical College - Arthur Ashe Campus with Ms. F. Johnson in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.*

## Personal Stories

### My Three Languages

Good morning! Buenos dias! Ki hats'ì!

I am now learning my third language. I grew up in the Mexican state of Hidalgo, where my family, and most of the people in my small village, spoke both Spanish and Otomi. Otomi is an indigenous language. In elementary school, we learned both Spanish and Otomi, but we had only one Otomi book. In middle and high school, we learned only Spanish and some basic English words.

When I came to the United States at the age of twenty, I did not hear the Otomi language spoken anymore. I only spoke it when I talked with my family members in Mexico on the telephone. I began working at Bon Appetit Restaurant ten years ago. One day I was surprised to hear the cooks speaking Otomi in the kitchen. It made me happy to hear the language again. After many years, my mind quickly reminded me how to speak it. Now I practice speaking Otomi with the cooks, and no one else knows what we are saying.

Of the three languages, English has been the easiest for me to learn, although it is very hard to pronounce words like “although.” I learned to speak Spanish and Otomi as I was growing up, but I didn’t study either language. I spoke Otomi as I was growing up, but I never learned to read or write Otomi. As I am learning to speak English, I am also studying it, so I understand it better.

The hardest part of learning English is the pronunciation. In Spanish, words sound exactly the way they are spelled. In English, very few words are spelled the same way as they sound. My co-workers at Bon Appetit help me with my pronunciation. One American co-worker likes to help me with my homework. I am helping him to learn Spanish.

I want to continue learning English to speak like an American. But when I go back to Mexico, I want to speak with

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people and understand what they say in Otomi. Otomi was the first language in Hidalgo. It is a part of my grandparents, my parents, and me. I want to keep Otomi in my heart always.

Thank you! Gracias! Jamadi!

*Rita Escalante is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Susanne Carter.*

### **My Journey to the United States**

Before I traveled to the USA, I was a mother in Haiti and I used to sell things for people to wear. I never thought I would come to the US, but it happened. My dad sent for me.

The day I got to the United States, I was so excited to see my dad again. When I saw him, I was so happy because we hadn't seen each other in a long time. The same day we talked a lot about my children because I left them in Haiti.

This country is good for me. It gave me an opportunity to work and have paychecks to send to my family. After a few years, I applied for my two children to come. They came here so now we live together.

Since they came, I had another baby, and now all my kids get along together. I prayed so hard for this moment, and thank God for that.

*Edeline Dorceus lives in Delray Beach and is an ESOL student at Village Readers. Her teacher is Siena Mayers. She loves to do activities with her children.*

### **My Time in the Air Force**

On January 3, 1989, I joined the air force of Haiti. I was young and very strong. We were 45 guys taking part in this group. We stayed for six months and after, we signed a contract for six years. They didn't want our families coming to see us.

In 1994, when the President Aristide came, he demobilized the air force of Haiti. My wife and I were in the embassy of Santo Domingo and then, we started to travel in the Dominican Republic. We bought T-shirts and panties to bring to sell them in Haiti. After four trips of trading, we earned enough money to buy a house. In July 24, 1999, my wife and I were married. During the honeymoon, we conceived a daughter. Her name is Bedjina. I wanted to know other countries. I made an appointment at the embassy of the United States of America. The ambassador gave me a year visa.

I can conclude by saying that the idea of participating in the air force of Haiti is realized. I have not a lot of money but I can live with what I have. My dreams are realized. I have a beautiful family thanks to the help of Jesus Christ.

*Clebert Beauzier is an ESOL student at Village Readers. His teacher is Siena Mayers. He has five kids. His favorite sports are tennis and soccer. He's from Port-au Prince, Haiti.*

## **Personal Story**

I'm from Haiti and I'm going to tell you how my life was when I was in my country. It wasn't easy to have a good life there, people didn't like me and I didn't know why, so I decided to leave Haiti. Since I've left, I'm getting a good education and I'm helping people around me: I send money for homeless people and I'm trying to have a good relationships with people around me.

When I visited Haiti last year, people were happy to see me. I was so proud of myself! The United States is an amazing country, it gives a lot of opportunity to people. When I'm walking down the street, people respect me because I'm always here for them when they need me to do something. My friends, I have some advice for you; don't act like you are the son of a King or a President when people talk to you on the street, try to be there for them and help them.

*The author is an ESOL student in Ms.Blake's Advanced class at South Florida State College.*

## How I Learned to Drive

When I was in 9th grade I started to talk about cars with my friend and how great it would be to drive some vehicles. Some of my friends were learning how to drive (I was 14), some of my friends taught me some basics facts and then they told me: “Don’t let your dad teach you to drive”, and that just made me think a little bit. They were saying that sometimes dad can be not nice to you because they want you to do it well by the first time.

My dad is not a person with enough patience. I took the advice because not only my friends were saying the same thing. My dad didn’t like the idea of teaching me either because he thought I was too young (I wasn’t tall enough and I was still looking like a kid).

How I did learn was unexpected. One of my uncles worked for a truck company as a driver of a Freightliner Century. I used to go with him on the weekends and know some places. One night we stopped by a gas station and he was really tired then he looked at me and told me: “Take the driver’s seat you’re going to drive.” I was surprised and happy. There wasn’t too much traffic at night or police officers. My first time wasn’t bad he taught me a lot. After that night I went to help him on every trip of his.

The next day my dad saw me parking my uncle’s truck. He told me: “I see you can do it now”, then he asked me to go for some friend in his pick-up truck, a Nissan King-Cab 1985. When I started the engine and shifted gears the truck stalled and I tried like for seven times and it just stalled, I thought It was the clutch. My dad was having a disappointed face.

When I asked my uncle about it, he told me it was because my dad’s truck is gas-powered which is different to diesel-powered so the manual transmission behave different. I think the way I learned to drive is different; I learned a lot by others and by experiences. My friends were happy that I became a truck operator and I didn’t start by small cars. I was sixteen when my dad let me drive some of his vehicles and he was proud of my ability on the wheel.

*Ivan Aragon is a student at ACE of Leon County. His teacher is Christine Poreba.*

### **God Did It – Gone But Not Forgotten!**

In October 2016, I lost my son, someone that meant the world to me and still does to this day. Losing him is a pain I wouldn't wish on anyone. People might say they know how you feel, but they don't. If you haven't had this happen to you, then you don't know the pain. Each day you would think the pain gets better, but it does not.

Well I'm here to tell you it does, it's left up to you. I would stay in bed and sleep trying to not feel the pain, but it was still there. One day a friend came to me and said, "You have to try and get through this. I know it hurts, but you're gonna make yourself sick. You have a daughter who still needs you."

One day she asked me if I had a bible, and I said yes. She said, "Turn to Matthew 5:4 and read what it says." I picked up my Bible and read the scripture, it read, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." I began to feel a little better, so she and other ladies around me started giving me more scriptures to read.

During all of my reading and praying, something happened that gave me more strength, and eased the pain even more. While sleeping one night, God came to me in a dream and covered me, rubbing my arm and letting me know I was going to be fine. He said, "Your son is OK, it's not like you won't see him again. Just believe and you will!" I felt even better. I started going to Bible study, got closer to God, and it's the best thing I could have done.

I have to say, without Him and the people He put in my life, I don't think I could have started the healing process. He also put a friend in my life who's like a sister, I know that was also part of his plan. My advice to anyone who thinks they can't move pass the pain, you can, it's only up to you. I know that if it wasn't for my belief in God I would still be lost in pain, GOD DID IT- WON'T HE DO IT.



*Sabrina Robinson is a student in the ABE class, located in the Gadsden County Florida Jail. Brenda G. Johnson is her teacher.*

## **Pressing On**

Life happens! Everybody makes mistakes in life or encounter events that may cause setbacks, hinder or motivate them to make a life altering change. But in the end, it's up to that person to choose their destiny.

My story began on December 29, 1986, life was brought into my lungs. However, at the age of three life began to happen. I was taken from my parents because of their addictions and having been diagnosed with HIV AIDS. It was truly a blessing to have family members to step in, my Aunt and Uncle adopted me. They were great parents, they pushed me to be my best and excel in life. My uncle passed when I was seven years old, although I was very young, I pressed my way through that challenge.

Then at the age of 15, I overheard my aunt and my godmother my making arrangements to have been adopted out of the family. Overhearing their conversation was devastating and led to me experiencing marijuana. I thought this was going to help me cope with pain and hurt, I felt like no one wanted me, but most of all I learned the truth about my parents. Life challenges continued to happen. I lost my favorite uncle in 2001 – he taught us a lot about life. He built my first basketball hoop and club house. After losing my uncle, I stepped into the bad side life. I began drinking heavily, skipping class and trying out different things. Another bad mistake, in 2007 I decided to drop out of school. Wrong Answer! Things have been on a downward spiral ever since.

Hard drugs: cocaine, popping pills, and molly entered the scene, thus landing me in jail for the first time in 2016. As if nothing else could happen, in April 2017 my aunt passed, a major blow and setback for me. I distanced myself from my family, turning my back on them, one bad relationship after another, my life became more and more reckless. I felt that nobody loved or cared about me, I lost my sense of direction. But my family and friends didn't give up on me, they kept me in prayer. Prayer

is a powerful thing – THANK GOD for FAMILY, FRIENDS and PRAYER!

Now it has been three years, I have fought back and I decided not to let nothing keep me down. I reunited with my family and am now making better decisions. That bad relationship that I was trapped in, I got out. My current situation, being incarcerated in the Gadsden County Florida Jail, I've decided to put it in the hands of the Lord and let Him work it out.

We may fall sometimes in life, don't let anything hinder you. God wants you to be your best! Press On!

*Lloyd Anderson is an inmate in the Gadsden County Jail ABE class. His ABE teacher is Brenda G. Johnson*

## **Personal History**

My name is William. I'm 19 years old. I'm from Venezuela. I lived in U.S.A for a 1 year. I don't really like to come to the United States, but I have to.

I worked in the hot sun. I ate pizza every day. The air is polluted, a lot of dust. They smoked cigarettes very much, I could not breathe. Sometimes, I smelled the sea. I carried many heavy shovel. It is very scabrous and dirty. Everybody told very noisy. The boss is always angry. Sometimes, I saw snakes and crocodiles. The bright light makes my eyes squint zoom. But, it has many trees around me; so i felt peaceful.

The time I worked in construction is a nightmare. I had some experiences.

*William Zambrano is a student attending Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He wants to earn his GED, is learning English, and has a little family.*

## Go Forward

When I was a child, everywhere I found only Japanese. Americans might be surprised if they hear this. However, there was an American base near my house, and sometimes I saw muscular people with tattoos on the train. They looked different from us and spoke English. I was watching them like parallel-world people. I will never forget about the first day of English class. Usually we stand up and bow to the teacher when the class starts. It means respect for the teacher and the other classmates, but the teacher said, “Hello, how are you?” Then she told us, “Say I’m fine thank you, and you?”, and we repeated. Then she said, “I’m fine.” “How cool the greeting was!” I thought. This first day of class was an opportunity for me to develop a more global perspective. Now I’m studying in the United States because of my husband’s work, and I’m planning to get a job.

Usually Japanese students start studying English from the 9th grade. I was really excited to learn another language. The school focused on teaching Japanese Language Arts and English. The teachers thought it was important to know our own language before the students studied a second language. I studied not only recent language but also old Japanese and Chinese literature. The more I studied my language, the more I wanted to know other countries. I traveled to more than 15 countries during the long vacations of college and work.

Two years ago, I came to the United States because my husband wanted to research neuroscience. I want to be a backseat player of my family. In order to be so, I have to improve English, so I am taking an ESOL class at the Adult Education Center.

In the future, I am thinking about getting a job because I also want to support our household budget. I have to improve and have more confidence in my speaking skills.

When I was young, when I just started to learn English, I would never have believed that I would be looking for a job in America. I think my past educational experience won’t be wasted. Sometimes I think, “Does that have meaning for learning?” However, I believe experiences give life to our future. They are on the same path. My ESOL classmate said, “Everyone

who came to the US from other countries started from zero. If you don't know the words and phrases, just learn them." Starting a new thing is very scary, yet I will have the courage to overcome it and go forward.

*Tomomi Adachi is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **Still There?**

How much time do we invest in what we really like? Life is ironic, don't you think?

People invest too much time in something for the future, but what does the word future mean? Where do I come from? "To be or not to be?" I know many questions and few answers.

Living in the present moment is crucial to success. Being aware of the here and now will help you live a better life. Many people worry about the past and the future, but everything is happening

The world is changing, and it's time to change our priorities. We can find many ways. One of them is to be conscious about our environment. Another can be our healthy life, not just physically or how we look. However, I think it is more than that. We should be focused too. In others words, each one is responsible for a part of this world, and we can create a common conscience and live a quiet life without neglecting our goals.

*Marioli Cespedes is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **A Love Story**

I'm from a small village called El Alto in the south of Honduras. One day my sister and I were walking to our village from a nearby village. A guy reached us and said, "Hello! How

are you?" I said, "I'm fine thanks." Then he started talking to me, and he told me, "When you grow up, we will get married." I was scared and surprised, and I said, "No." Then I told him, "When I grow up, you will have a lot of children." At that time, I was 11 years old, and he was 23 years old. So, in 1997, he went to live in Florida. After that, I didn't hear anything about him.

Six years later, he returned to Honduras to visit his family. He asked his brother about me. His brother said, "She already grew up, and she's pretty." Then, he got my phone number right away, and he called me to start a friendship. Then he prepared a mother's day party, and he invited me. My sister and I were on a hammock. Around 9 p.m., he arrived home, and we met again because he only remembered me when I was small and not when I was a teen. We talked for five hours, and then he asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend. I said, "Yes." During that time, he spent a week with me. Then he went back to the U.S.

We planned our marriage in detail. Time passed, and then he came to Honduras again to marry me. When we had 15 days being married, I decided to go to the U.S to live with him because we no longer wanted to be separated and go through the same as when we were dating. I came to the U.S in 2007. It was not easy for me to get used to a new country totally different from mine. I'm grateful that God allowed me to live in this great nation where I have learned so much, especially to speak English and meet beautiful people.

Two months later in May, I got pregnant with my first baby; his name is Josue. My husband and I were so happy to have him in our lives. Two years later our second baby was born; her name is Hellen. Two years later, our youngest baby was born, and his name is Aiden. I didn't think or imagine that God, my Lord, did his great blessing to have this beautiful family. I'm grateful every day and enjoy taking care of them, and the most important thing is I'm a good mom to my children and wife to my husband and home.

*Elsy Izaguirre is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in WPB. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

## **My Personal Story**

My name is Solymar Gonzalez Gonzalez. I am from Utuado, Puerto Rico but now I live in Lake Placid, Florida. I moved to Florida looking for more and better opportunities than the ones I had in Puerto Rico. It is very hard to find a job in Puerto Rico and everything is expensive. A lot of people don't have any other option but to move away. I am one of many that took that path.

When I moved to Florida I was frustrated because of my limited English proficiency. I could not speak fluently. My Hispanic accent was very strong. I was committed to improve and decided to apply for a job. I tried to get a part time job and did. I know that God has something better for me.

I have lived in Florida for almost four years. My dream is to become a registered nurse and work in this country. I believed in the importance of staying healthy. To provide information on health issues and to help people stay healthy is very important to me. I am passionate about helping others.

This year I decided to make big changes in my life. I just started ESOL classes. I will improve my English skills and continue with nursing training. I know that I can be more than a part time employee. I know that I was born to do anything and never settle for less.

*My name is Solymar Gonzalez Gonzalez. I live in Lake Placid, Florida. This year I am starting a wonderful journey that will help me improve my English skills and allow me to continue a nursing career, and eventually get my dream job. Once those goals are met, I want to buy a house. I am confident that with determination and hard work, I will succeed.*

## **My Personal Life, Saint Louis du Nord**

When I was in Haiti, I remember growing up in a small city with my family, friends and enemies too. First, all of St. Louis is a very nice place to visit. We have beautiful beaches, churches and many trees. We have many types of trees like mangoes, avocado, and coconut. They also have nice restaurants, with good food. There are nice hotels too.

St. Louis is covered with the leaves of the trees. That's why it makes you healthy and keeps you fresh.

The day we celebrate in St. Louis is on Aug 27. It is also my birthday so my friends and I also have a party and after that we can continue to go out and enjoy that day!

Many artists and people who are in other countries come to celebrate every year. They also decorate all the places on that day to make St Louis clean to attract more visitors. I hope one day I'll go back to see my family, friends and my old school.

*My name is Woody Duroseau, I have been in the USA for 2 years. I study English and GED at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL.*

### **Being a Good Father**

I am a father of a 10-year old boy. I've been thinking I was a pretty good dad for 10 years because I always tried to spend time with him in a busy life. But after coming here, to Tallahassee, I realized that my way of thinking was totally wrong and I have come to know the most important thing in raising a kid.

Like any father in South Korea, I also lived a busy life. Even on a weekend, I often went to work. So I did not have much time for being with my son. I always felt sorry for him and so I've put a great deal of importance on spending time with my son and struggled to make time to spend with him. At that time, spending time with my son was a kind of responsibility for me, like working at the office. But here, I can have more time to be with him. Actually I am spending most of my time with my son. In other words, being with him is not a job anymore. In this process, my son and I are getting to know each other more and more.

I take him to school every morning, and I always tell him something useful. But one day, he said to me, "Dad, I just want you to be a friend, not a person who gives advice." It was the first time he had said anything like that to me. I was a little shocked to hear that, but at the moment I knew it was his heart, I was

somehow happy. This is because I found out my son's true desire. It felt as if I had found a treasure ship in the sea. Since then, I've been trying to be 'a friend' rather than being 'a dad.'

I have to go back to my busy life again in five months. Although I will have less time to spend with him again, I hope I can try to know him more and share our thoughts. Because, as he has helped to teach me, the most important thing for my son is not just spending time with him but knowing and understanding him.

*Woongrai Kim is a student at ACE of Leon County. His teacher is Christine Poreba.*

### **A Personal Story**

Every day when I got home from school, I cleaned up the house with my sisters and I would often hear my brothers and sisters talking about going to the lake. I wanted to play with my brothers and their friends, but they always told me not to follow them, but I was hardheaded, and I did anyhow. I followed them to the lake and when they jumped in, I jumped in too. I did not know how to swim but I wasn't afraid and they came and got me. As time changed and the older I got, the more I jumped in the lake and my brothers came and got me each time.

Then when I was probably about 15, my brothers and their friends and I were going to cross the lake. Because I didn't know how to swim, one of our friends was giving me a piggy back ride and he had a cramp and knocked me off. I went to the bottom of the lake and I just stood at the bottom with my hands up. I was under the water. I don't know how much time passed. I remember standing on grass and seaweed. And I heard my brother Andrew say that he was going down one more time to find me and if he didn't find me, he was going to tell mom that I had drowned. I had my hands up and he caught my hands and pulled me up. I don't remember, but he took me to the shore. He

said he saw an alligator and a snake in the lake after he got me out. We didn't tell our mom about it.



I still don't know how to swim. I thank God for saving me from being drowned.

*Mary Lyles is a student with the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. Her tutor is Amy Durand.*

### **My Favorite Person**

My favorite person is Jasleen, my fourth child. She was born on November 27th, 2015, and died on September 16th, 2016. She was born with Pena-Shokeir Syndrome, which is rare in the medical field. There is very little encouragement for recovery.

Jasleen was born with many limitations. She couldn't move, and according to the doctors she would never do so. The doctors gave her three months to live. God had another plan for her and started to work in her life favorably. She was fighting every day against the medical predictions, in spite of her condition. She transmitted her happiness to everyone who knew her with her smile. She taught us to live and enjoy every day that we have. She had us understand that we are privileged because like her, there are many people with limitations who are happy. Jasleen showed us that anything is possible if we accept what God gives.

God called Jasleen when she was almost ten months old. She had 80 percent movement throughout her body. The doctors could not understand her departure, because everything was evolving for the good. I know that God called her in her sleep when her mission was over. Her mission was to save our family. Our little baby reunited our family with more attention, love, and harmony among us. Jasleen is my favorite person; she taught so much in such little time.

*Lucia Adriana Torres is a student in the Parent Power Alliance program at S.B. Idea, Inc. Her teacher is Heralie Guaramata.*

## Personal Story

Hello, I am Richard Pena and today I'm going to tell you my personal story. I was born on February 11th, 2002, in Venezuela. I lived with my mom, my brother, and my uncle. My parents got divorced when I was a kid. So, my brother and I visited my dad every weekend.

I used to spend many hours playing video games and watching videos on YouTube. Because of that, I learned a lot about how computers and phones work. I always felt attracted about making websites, apps, or programs. When I finished high school, I built an app for a graduation project. It was a social media build using a website that programmed each line of code by itself. Therefore, I decided to learn about programming, and I choose JavaScript because it's an easy language and one of the most famous programming languages.

Last year, I came to the United States with my brother, and I took an online course about Web development. I watched a lot of videos about the same topic. I learned HTML, CSS, SASS, JavaScript and jQuery, and this year I started working at Charley's, a fast food restaurant. I started saving money to help my family in my country and to buy a new computer. All of this helped me to create my first website, which was launched December 2019, and that is my personal story.

*Richard Pena is in the College and Career Readiness class at OTC-Winter Park Campus, Winter Park, FL. His teacher is Rosalind Shell.*

## My Dream

When I was a little girl in Haiti, I had a dream to be a nurse. My mother was abandoned by my father. I did not have any possibility to go to school, so I realized my dream was out of reach. At 17 years old, I was married. Life was very difficult for me, so I decided to go back to school.

I graduated high school in 2003, and graduated college in 2010. After 4 years, I got my license in nursing. In March 2017, I came to the United States with my mother. Now, I am learning

English at Lorenzo Walker. My goals are to go to college and get a degree, and work as a nurse at a hospital and help people feel better. I realize my dream can come true!

*Yolnide Germain is married and has 3 beautiful children. She is taking English classes to eventually become a nurse.*

## Second Chances

I was born in Nicaragua. When I was 6 years old, a war was started by a group of revolutionaries. My parents decided to send me out of the country, because the new regime passed a law that any young man has to go to military service. I lost my brother due to this situation. My parents made the decision to keep me safe and sent me to live with my sister in Guatemala.

In Guatemala, my sister studied medicine. Due to the war, there weren't any colleges to go to in Nicaragua. During that time, I studied in Guatemala the first years and continued on to high school. When the political situation changed and the democracy came back, I decided to go back to my parents and my country and graduate High School.

Then, I came to the US to follow a girl I met in Nicaragua. I got married to her and started working in a dental office as a dental assistant. When I was working, the dentist whom I worked for told me that I had to study dentistry and I should go back to my country to study. I decided to go back with one child and my wife to study dentistry. I graduated university with my bachelor's degree in dentistry. I started working as a dentist.

I ran my own practice for 10 years. I had a happy life and economic success. However, you never know when life will turn on you.

Sadly, the political situation started again in Nicaragua and I remembered my past. The actual president decided to stay in power for eternity and began killing protesters, students, and old people in the streets. The entire country was in danger. Groups of people that worked for the government stole houses, kidnapped protesters, and attacked the Catholic churches.

My wife and I decided to leave the country with our children, because it was not a secure place to live. It happened to me again!

I feel strongly that America has good human rights and that you feel protected. Coming back to the U.S for a second time, I thanked God and realized we have many opportunities for a second chance at starting a new life. America is the country for second chances and new opportunities.

*Jorge Valenzuela is married to a beautiful wife with three children. Presently, he is taking English classes to advance his career.*

### **Reunited With My Family**

I am Chantal Reyes. I am 26 years old. In Nicaragua, I am a dentist. For political reasons, I left my country. Right now, I am in the United States. Therefore, I do not have a profession here yet.

I consider myself a dreamer, a believer, and loving person. I like reading, listening to romantic music, and spending time with my family and friends. I enjoy eating buffalo wings.

Since I was little, my mom taught me to work hard to achieve my dreams. This year, my goal is to learn English because it is an important language for communication, study, and stability in the United States. When I was 20 years old, mom left to come to this country. She's lived in Miami for five years. She has been successful to bring me to be with her and my sister.

I am very happy to be reunited with my family. I have a job at a hotel in Key West. I get up at 5:00 a.m. to get myself ready to go to work. I am also taking an English class. I would like to continue to be a dentist in this country. With the help from my teacher and support from my family, I am certain that I will achieve my goal.

*Chantal Reyes attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Improving Along the Way**

My name is Iroda Raupova. I am from Uzbekistan. I have been in the United States for 1 1/2 years. I want to share a personal story about myself. I am a very shy person. Being a Muslim girl, I have to be very careful about what I wear, how I speak, and where I go. In September, 2019, my husband encouraged me to go and learn English. I was so happy. Not only I am learning the language but also I have the chance to get out of the house. I am usually at home doing the housework. Though it is my duty, I also would like to be outside to be among other people.

I enjoy the English class. The teacher is nice and helpful. The students are friendly and the atmosphere is comfortable. I started at high beginning level and now I am at high intermediate level. I am better at reading than listening. I think people talk too fast in English and I cannot understand.

But a few months ago, my teachers said to me, “Iroda, you speak very well. I can see that you are more open and confident of yourself.” I agree with her. I have been able to speak more without being afraid to make mistakes. To me, I learn from my mistakes. My teacher always corrects my mistakes and I like that.

So, I want to keep going to class and study as much as I can because my goal is to open my own beauty salon and also have a bakery business. Now, I want to perfect my English in order to be a successful businesswoman.

*Iroda Raupova attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She has many goals to achieve in the US. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **A New Life, a Fresh Start**

My name is Mynor Lopez. I am from Guatemala. I want to share with you my journey of coming to America. For other people, they fly. But for me, I did not. The entire trip was

difficult. I risked myself for a better life in this country. And when I am here, my life starts from ground zero.

During the passage, a few people in my group and I were locked in a cellar for more than two days without food. We faced persecution. A 19 year old girl was captured and threatened to death. She made an exchange and was released. She continued to live her dream of crossing the border into America.

At the time we were crossing the border, I could see how beautiful and wonderful the country, America, is. The first seven days, my group and I were locked in a warehouse in Texas until the immigration officers found us. We were taken to the detention base for immigrants who cross the border illegally. The immigration officer was kind and I was taken to a shelter for children under 18 years of age. I had to present some evidence and was released.

I am here now. It is a good place to start a new life and make new friends. My biggest dream is to complete my high school diploma. I need to have a good job to support all the expenses necessary to achieve my goal, my dreams. Then I would like to help those who are in need. In order to accomplish these things, I must try my best.

Obstacles are not going to be a barrier that prevents me from achieving my dreams. Experience is a lesson that motivates me. Apart from difficulties, everything can be achieved. Effort and wisdom will lead me to success.

*Mynor Lopez is studying English at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. He is anxious to move forward with his new life in USA. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Thank You, America!**

My name is Kender Ilara. I left Haiti on May 28, 2019 to come to America. I have three sisters and four brothers. I have come with a goal to continue my schooling and dreaming up my dream. I want to work, help women, and my family to prepare them for the future. I have always dreamed of becoming an

educated person with good character, responsible, respectful and helpful to others.

I want to help my family because the economic situation in Haiti does not allow them to have jobs. My country is not creating jobs for its people. So, they are all hoping on me to help them. I feel obligated to them.

January 12, 2010 is a memorial date for me. It was Tuesday. I went to school. A few hours after school, there was an earthquake in Haiti. Buildings and homes collapsed. I waited until it is safe to walk around the damaged area to look for my family and relatives. It was a very sad day for the people of Haiti.

After 10 years of the earthquake, I do not see any improvement in Haiti. We have a corrupt leader who has been running our country. This caused unhappiness and hopelessness to the people. Many Haitians chose to leave Haiti, including me. I am happy to be in America where human rights are respected. I am glad I have a job. I know that I am safe here. I can work and help my family. I will go to school and study English. My circumstances motivate me to be study hard, work hard, and help my people.

Thank you America, for accepting me to be here. You give me a place to live, a dream to go after, and a hope to believe.

*Kender Ilara is very keen to help his family and the people in Haiti. He is attending the Monroe County Adult Ed English class, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My First Time Driving on the Highway in America**

I had an appointment for a green card renewal interview at an immigration office in Miami on February 22 at 9:15 a.m. So, my husband and I left our house at 4:30 a.m. I was really nervous because this is first time driving on the highway. Usually, my husband is the one who drives. But he couldn't, because he just underwent an arm surgery. That's why I had to do the driving.

On this day, the weather turned cold. I am convinced that I

will not be sleepy while driving because of this cold air will keep me awake. It is still dark in the morning. After passing Stock Island, the lights in the town disappeared and it was starting to get dark. I thought it is natural that road lights will illuminate, just like in Japan. But this is not the case here. So, I focused on the taillights of the car in front of me. Fear kept creeping inside of me when we got to the Seven Mile Bridge. My husband knew that I was scared. He told me to relax. That calmed me down.

After about two hours of driving, the sky began to light up. The sun rose. My heart leapt with joy. The sky is bright, I can drive as I want. And behold, the other drivers exceeded me at a violent speed. Whoa, is this a racetrack? It was almost three hours- we were getting close to Homestead. The road became crowded with cars rushing to work or school. I carefully watched the road signs and listened to the voice guidance from Google maps to invade the highway.

The speed limit is 75 mph. I was driving within the speed limit. The car behind was tailgating me, insistently. The number of lanes suddenly increased to five. I began to worry about which lane to drive on. Other drivers changed lanes without turning on the blinking lights nor made space between cars. Honestly, that was bad driving. As a result, I saw some cars crashed into each other. My heart beat faster, driving stress increased, eye fatigue and shoulder stiffness peaked.

Finally, we arrived safely at our destination. I drove over 4 hours one way. I am proud of myself. I don't need go there again soon even though I want to shop at the Japanese grocery store in Miami. When my husband can move his shoulders and drive, I would like to challenge the highway driving with him again. Never give up!

*Emiko Jans is from Japan. She believes in trying new things in America. Presently, she is attending the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*



## **Chaos in My Native Land**

My name is Eliesser. What I am going to share with you is not only what I have read from history books, but also heard from my grandparents who had told me. Moreover, I received it as part of the history lesson of my country in my classroom, which, coincidentally, in my life I never imagined living it. This is the beginning and struggle of a social resistance that took me to date for self-exile. It really started on April 18, 2018 in Leon, Nicaragua.

When I went to Leon on the very next day in the morning, it seemed like a state of war and people took what they could from their business. Many said “History Is Repeating Itself,” and I truly think it is. From that day in my country nothing is normal, but the government wants it to appear it is. Besides seeing all those people trying to save what little they could, I also found police patrols and stations burned in the corners and looted businesses. There were people looking for their relatives. A part of the historic center of my city was burned and this scared the population. It is incredible what was happening, but at the same time, people were tired of so much injustice, repression, and violations of human rights and freedom of expression. All of the above is disastrous, and the people crave for peace and democracy.

As things went by me, I learned that the mobs of governments protected by the national police and law order of the president had looted, burned and caused panic that day, and every other day until today. Also, with the days passing by, those same mobs were responsible for destabilizing the peaceful protest that had already spread in every corner of the country. My participation in these peaceful marches brought me reprisals and threats of torture, going to jail or even death by the police and government paramilitaries. For that reason, I decided to flee from my country leaving behind my only family (my mother and my nephew), my friends and my land, my culture and my friends.

It has not been easy, but it was worth it. I was very well received by the immigration authorities of the United States. Thanks to them, today I carry an asylum process, which safeguards my physical and psychological integrity.

*Eliesser Gomez is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education English class, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Life in my Country, Life in the U.S.**

My name is Erica Cedano. I am originally from the Dominican Republic. I became an American when I was 8. I'm going to tell how I got to America and I'm merely going to touch on the differences between the cultures; family culture, food, and living conditions. By the end I hope you appreciate my story.

My dad became an American citizen and brought me to New York. I had to take a small boat to Puerto Rico. Once on the boat, there were no stops or bathrooms for two and a half days. The trip was very dangerous. Many people have died in those same boats from dehydration or the boat flipping over. The size of the boats isn't usually suitable for ocean conditions. Once in those waters, you can be eaten by sharks or drown. I got off the boat in Puerto Rico. That's where I stayed until my dad was able to pay for my ticket to New York. A strange and scary time.

In my native country, women don't work. We are totally dependent on the man of the house for whatever we may need. Meal times are set for everyone and must be prepared and on the table by the time your family gets home. Although we are so dependent on men, we do have values that rival "the south." One way we do that is by feeding our neighbors. If they don't have a meal, you prepare one for them. Families sit down together and eat three times a day. We don't have all the media distractions. A woman's life is determined by the kind of man she marries in my native country.

As for living conditions in America, they are much better than my countries conditions. In the Dominican Republic, every morning you would have to walk to the river for water. There are no showers and toilets either. We make ways. Health wise, we have less obese issues. One thing we struggle with that gives us problems were the Haitians. They invade us, which messes with safety and peace. Even with living in fear, we somehow still prevail. Some people are able to escape and make it to America, like myself. The people I know is now transcending.

*Ms. Erica Cedano is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Kissimmee, FL. She is a student in Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

## **Time to Talk**

I am a widow and survivor of addiction and abuse, learning to conquer the past by letting go of the anger and pain by forgiveness.

Hello, it's me. Why are we in this mess again? Why is it that no matter how high you climb, it always seems like you lose your footing and end up on the ground? Let's take a look.

You were naturally born a daddy's girl, and, boy, how you loved him. Then one day, momma took you away from that love. It was then that the sexual abuse began. You knew in your heart all you had to do was be a big girl and tell the truth, until you did.

"After all, it's not your fault that it has happened more than once right?" "You're just trying to ruin the best thing that's ever happened to your mother," is what grandma convinced her to believe. Somehow, I became the enemy. In the fury, hurt and anger, you decided it's best to be a motherless child than to cause yourself, or her, any more pain. You ran away declaring that no matter what the future held, your kids will always be protected, loved, and never hurt by any man.

Then one day you became a childless mother. Why? Now broken, defeated and overwhelmed with self-disappointment and anger, you had become everything you hated. Why not try that drug that you have always been accused of doing? After all, the alcohol wasn't strong enough to cover up this pain. Wow!

You really showed them huh? Now, it is nearly 20 years after your first hit of meth. You have been in and out of jail, rehabs, and institutions. The Women's Trauma Unit that I put myself in helped me realize that I am a survivor and no longer a victim. The empowerment I discovered in that shed a life changing light, and I knew that there was a God in Heaven.

I fought the good fight and helped everyone I could in sight. I put myself on the back burner to make it right. Why can't I get right? I was living a good life. After all, I'm better than some, yet worse than others. I shouldn't complain. Right? What's missing? God said, "Peace, be still and know that I am there."

New Year's Eve, I woke up to a message about forgiveness and anger and holding those things in can hinder us from growing. That there will be stumbling blocks for us that are unconsciously setting us up for failure. There it was. I never realized just how much hurt, anger, and pain I've been carrying and how unforgiving I have been.

Annette, there's your answer. There's nearly 45 years of built up pain, anger, and resentment that has been keeping you in bondage. Letting it go will set you free. Not just from these prison walls, but from the prison inside me.

Thank you God for 2019 being my freedom year. Instilling in me a promise that I can do all things through Christ. I know that you will give me the strength to let the past go. Nobody knows me better than you. God help me as 2020 starts. My year of new beginnings. Please allow my spirit to give you unconditional praise as I sing to you my song.

I am somebody, because God loves me just the way that I am. His love is higher, deeper, and it's wider. Yeah, you know he loves me!

*Ms. Annette Skidmore is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy FL, with a hometown of Winter Haven, Florida. She is a student in Mrs. Cynthia Phillips Adult Basic Education III class.*

## **Autobiography**

My name is Danactus Demiko Montgomery. I was born in Abilene, Texas on September 4, 2001. My mother's name is Rashanda Montgomery. My dad's name is Nicholas Bryant Powell. My name "Danatacus" is a Greek god's name. Living in Texas, I couldn't really tell you because I don't remember, but I was told stories such as: we were very poor. My mama was

addicted to cocaine and my dad was trapping (selling drugs.) My grandmother would pay our bills in a little apartment. My granny would take me to church every Sunday and they would pray for me. The church actually gave me my name “Deno.” But I was a lonely child until I turned 2 years old, and that’s when my sister was born: “Brandy Nicole Powell.” She got our dad’s last name and I got our momma’s last name. But that year changed my life forever.

The year was 2003. She was around 5 months old and I was 2. We were in the house with my mama, her friend, and my dad. My mama went to sleep and my dad was asleep, too. Her friend was watching us, and I guess I was making too much noise. So my mama woke up and grabbed me and pulled me in the room with her. She went back to sleep and I was hollering and crying because I used the bathroom on myself, so I was itchy. She woke up again and she had beat me with a belt, so I was crying, and I was on the end of the bed. She had kicked me in the face with boots. My whole right side was swollen, and my eye was shut. I was bleeding from my head. My sister was crying, too, but she didn’t touch her because that’s when my dad woke up. When he saw what happened, the report says he grabbed me and my sister and took us downstairs, and my mama’s friend called the police. It was late at night.

The police arrived and took everyone out of the house and kept me in. When my granny arrived, one of the police told her to grab his hand because he knew when she saw me she would pass out or freak out. So, they brought me and sister out and when she saw me, she started crying and going crazy. She ran over there with us and hugged me tight. I was bleeding out of my right eye; that’s what took her out. Well, the ambulance came and took me to the hospital, and they told me I would never be able to see again out of my right eye. They were just telling my mama I was going to have all these problem that obviously I don’t have now.

Now, what happened to my dad and mama? Well, my mama went to prison, and they gave her 6 years. My dad had a drug warrant, so he went to prison too on that same night, but not for long. Now I was so young that I didn’t know what a mama was. When my granny took me and my sister, that’s who I called mama, and that’s who I still call mama.

When she got us, I was 2 and my sister was 5 months. She got us that same night. A year later we moved to Tallahassee, Florida, and that's when I started my childhood. My dad moved with us, and I lived a normal childhood with my sister. Me and my sister grew up so close, like we were all we got. But then my daddy got arrested when I was 7 and she was 5.

When I was 6 years old, my mama was bathing me and saw that I had a bump on my leg. She took me to the hospital, and they told me I had a tumor. They removed it, but it grew back stronger, so I had to go to Atlanta and undergo treatment and surgery. They almost amputated my leg, but they removed something. I can't remember, but I think it's called my hamstring.

I moved to Las Vegas with my uncle in the summer that I was eight years old so that I'd have a man in my life. Then I found out that my dad got 20 years in jail. My uncle was crying, but I felt numb. It was hard for me to feel anything. When I was 9, I was playing with my stepsisters and cousin and they were pulling me, and I was hanging onto the door. My uncle's girlfriend's son, who I called my brother, closed the door and a big chunk of my finger came off. You could see it on the floor. I was panicking. When my uncle came home, he was crying and took me to the hospital, and now it's kind of grown back. Then I moved all around the country with my uncle, and things just didn't work out. I moved back to Texas when I was 16 to live with my mama, but that didn't work out either. I moved back with my granny when I was 17 and got enrolled in ACE.

Now I've been in ACE for a year and some months, and I am very close to getting my GED. What I want to do when I get my GED is enroll myself in culinary school and start my own restaurant.

*Danactus Demiko Montgomery is a student at ACE of Leon. His teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.*

## **My Favorite Things to Do In Haiti**

My favorite things to do in Haiti have something to do with sports, or the beach. What did I like to do in Haiti? I liked to play soccer every day. Where did I play soccer? I played soccer in the park, with my friends, with two teams; teams that have different color uniforms. I'm usually the goalkeeper, and some people tell me that I'm good at it.

Another thing that I like to do is go to the beach. I like to gather with friends there. All the people bring food. For example, I bring rice and somebody else brings beans. This allows us to have a picnic beside the ocean.

Because I'm new in Florida and I really like to play soccer, it's unfortunate that I don't have friends to play soccer with me. I like to go to the beach but the beach is too far away from my house.

*Djovensky Edouard is a student in the South Florida State College's ESOL program and Ms. Miriani is his teacher.*

## **Crane Incident**

I was a crane operator for more than twenty years, and I am now retired. To be a crane operator, you have to go to school for 800 hours. I liked doing that job because it was a challenge every day. Also, I earned a great salary.

One kind of crane that I worked on was a tall tower crane. We were building a hospital on this job, and there were more than 100 workers. Each day I had to inspect the crane at the start of the day. There was a large cable that I would look at closely first.

Then I would go up many steps on the crane to a height of 100 feet, which would take 20 minutes of inspection time.

My assistant of the job was called the signal operator/rigger. He would secure a load onto the cable. These loads could weigh up to 5,000 pounds, so he had to be very careful.

One time I had a new helper whose name was Stephan. He was a young man with no experience. I had to train him each day. He was always very nervous. One day we had a load of 2,000 pounds. The load was lifted to about 100 feet, and suddenly it unhooked and fell to the ground. It had not been properly secured. Nobody was hurt, but someone could have been killed.

In conclusion, no matter what kind of work you do, everyone should have the right kind of training and follow the right steps. Safety is so important. I am glad that nobody ever got hurt when I was a crane operator.

*Jean-Yves Gagnon is an adult education student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. He lives in Quebec and attends school each winter. His instructor is Dr. Michael McCoy.*

### **A Present from God**

When I arrived to The United States on May 15, 2018, I came with many expectations. I did not know what it was going to be like. At first, I spent 15 days with my friends in Miami. Then, a friend called me to come to Naples because there was a job for me. I planned to work for some time, because immigration allowed me to be here as a tourist for six months. At the end, I would have to return to Venezuela or go to Mexico, wait 6 another months and return again to the United States.

After 12 days of being in Naples, a roommate arranged a blind date and I accepted it. Luckily, the gentleman was very kind and very attentive. We clicked, and we became engaged a week later. On June 25th, he asked me to marry him with an engagement ring. I accepted and planned our wedding for August 25th, 2018.

I've been happily married for a year and 5 months. My present from God is being with my wonderful husband.

*JC Graterol has been taking English classes for a little more than year. She is happily married and presently enjoys being a housewife in Naples, FL.*



## **My Favorite Day**

### **My Favorite Holiday**

When I was a child, my favorite holiday was Chinese Spring Festival, definitely. Spring Festival is Chinese New Year, which is determined by the Lunar Calendar.

I lived with my grandparents. On New Year's Eve, all my aunts and uncles would bring their children to our home. We cleaned the house, put up couplet and the character "FU" on the front door, and hung up lanterns. We cooked a great dinner together, with all kinds of delicious food, such as shrimp, chicken, pork, beef, vegetables, and fruits. It also must include a dish of fish, which means we've left food and money for the following year. We sat around a big round table and shared the dishes. Adults would drink Chinese spirits and beer. Kids enjoyed sweet drink which was always forbidden on the normal days. After dinner, aunts would lead the children to make dumplings. My grandparents would play mahjong or poker.

At night, we watched Spring Festival party on television. It was the only chance kids have to sleep late till midnight in the whole year. My mother boiled dumplings, we counted down to twelve o'clock, and lit the firecrackers.

The next day was the first day of New Year, I needed to get up earlier in the morning, put on new clothes, new socks, and a new red band on my hair. I paid a new year call to each relative who's older than me. Elders sent out "New Year money" in red envelopes in return. Sometimes I felt like I was the richest person in the world.

On the following six days, my parents hurriedly took me to visit my different relatives. We prepared a lot of gifts for each of the families. It was a great opportunity to meet all my relatives and friends.

After I married and had my own family, most of the time, we would visit either my or my husband's hometown and enjoy the spring festival with the big family. It was the time that I and

my husband became the big chef. We thought we should have more responsibility to pass the spirit of tradition to the next generation. We wish our daughter could enjoy the festival as we did before.

Since I've come to the U.S., I barely have time to prepare the great dinner, and do not have any relatives to go to. I invited my friends to dinner with us. I said "Happy New Year" to my relatives and friends by sending message through the internet.

Nevertheless, I really missed the lively spring festival as when I was a child.

This Spring Festival is very special, but there is a new Coronavirus spread in China. People are fighting with the disease by staying at home. They could not get together with their families and friends to celebrate the new year. I hope we can overcome it soon.

*Xiao Han is a student who's learning English in ACE program in Tallahassee, Florida. Her teacher is Christine Poreba.*

## **My Special Birthday**

My favorite day of the year is my birthday on December 25. This day is special for me and for many people in the world because on this day, we celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in our hearts and believe in the Son of God. When I was a child, my mother prepared our home to receive Christmas with our big family. She bought new clothes for her seven children and for my aunt because she lived with us, and prepared so much food for our dinner. Each time during Christmas dinner, I was very excited waiting for my birthday, and always after 12:00 everyone sang Happy Birthday to me.

When I woke up, I was happy to receive my birthday present and my Santa Claus gifts, but sometimes I only received one present for both, because we were a poor family. But I was always happy and grateful as our parents always taught us to be. When I grew up, I got married and had three children, and started to think December 25th is a day more special not

because I was born, but because every year I felt more and more the presence of Jesus Christ in my life.

I love Christmastime because so many people are happy and decorate their homes, their business, and the cities, so the Divine Light comes to their lives. In my home, we all enjoy Christmas, and I always decorate every place in our house with lights, trees, Christmas ornaments, but especially the representation of the birth of Jesus Christ in his manger with his angels, and the star that illuminates our path. For this day, I invite year after year, my family, my husband's family, and our friends to celebrate with us my favorite day with a delicious dinner, a lot of drinks, fruits, candies, cake, and a big party to start celebrating my life. We give thanks for the best gift received, which is my beautiful family and our health.

*Maridilia Urena is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.*

### **My Long-Awaited Daughter**

Can you imagine striving, taking care of yourself, and waiting so long for that great day? Well yes! The birth of my first daughter changed my life; all my best feelings of love, protection, and care overflowed.

Carrying a high-risk pregnancy is not easy. Discipline is needed to follow all the gynecologist's instructions and follow them step-by-step, as well as pay attention to diet and health care. Months go by and monitoring is more frequent in the hospital, up to four times a week, but the day is coming!

An induced labor can be faster, but painful too, five hours in which an Epidural made me sleep...instead of helping! It was time to push. I heard my girl's cry but only that, and then complications began when the bleeding occurred. It wasn't until the next day that I could finally see and hold my long-awaited daughter. The pain in my body eased at the sight of my little girl.

When you see that little face of your first child, it is

something so special that it cannot be described in words. The fragility of my baby made me think a thousand things at once. I talked to her, and she recognized my voice because during pregnancy, I always talked to her, read, and sang, despite all the complications. Knowing and feeling that I had my baby made me completely happy.

Being a mother is the greatest blessing that God gave to my life without a doubt.

*Maricruz Bautista is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **The One Who Changed My Life**

My favorite day was the birth of my son. Being a first-time mother is the most wonderful thing that has happened to me in my life. During pregnancy, I felt very happy and took care of my health, and food so that my son would develop very healthy. I enjoyed pregnancy, preparing everything for his arrival: his room, his toys, his clothes, and the most difficult thing was to find the perfect name for him. We wanted to identify him fully and after a long list of names and their meanings we chose SEBASTIAN. The name means “blessed,” because he was and is for us a blessing of God.

My son since he was conceived has meant reflection, future, joy, and above all a lot of learning. It took only 9 months to have him in my arms and see his perfection, his fragility, his tenderness. The tears that sprouted from my eyes were not of fear or uncertainty, but were of the most absolute happiness and fullness of the purest love, in all its extension that is felt. That little being just minutes from birth awakens the most beautiful emotions that a human being has.

We began our task as first-time parents, a great adventure in this responsibility of trying to be the best. All this I feel for my son would not have been possible without my husband who is my support now and supported me especially at the time of delivery. When Sebastian was born, the doctor and the nurses in unison

said, “He looks like Daddy”, and of course he felt enormously proud and happy. He kissed and blessed the hands of the doctor for bringing our son into the world. I have to confess that I felt a little jealous. I expected Sebastian to look like me, but that feeling vanished when I saw how good dad was. With his little experience, he did not dare to lift him in his arms for fear of hurting him. It was at that moment that he approached me, and we said to our son, “We promise you that it does not matter what happens, we will always be there for you, in the happy moments to applaud, and congratulate you, and in the not so happy moments to accompany, and listen and support you.”

In that moment, we knew what true happiness was and understood the great commitment we acquired with Sebastian, to grow and develop in a happy, harmonious, stable home for his physical, mental, and emotional health.

We changed his diapers, and he changed our lives and continues to do so at just twelve years old.

*Maria E. Vasquez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **Favorite Day**

Saturday is my favorite day and it starts in the morning with my three kids. We all go to school all week so Saturday I can enjoy them. I get up in the morning to go to their room, give them a kiss on their foreheads. I love to see them waking up and opening their eyes. I say, “Good morning my beautiful Monkeys,” and they answer me with, “good morning mommy.” After that they walk with me to the living room and I turn on the TV. They watch cartoons while I go to the kitchen to make pancakes for them. I put a pot on the stove and start making them; they go to the bathroom to brush their teeth. After I’m done preparing the pancakes, I put them on their plates with syrup and butter. They look deliciously golden, hot, fluffy, and melting. I call them to the table in the kitchen “Okay Monkeys, come on. Time for breakfast”.

Then after we are done, we get into the car, I put on music

and we sing, clap, and are so happy. When we arrive at the park, we start our walk and, on the way, we see rabbits, all kinds of singing birds, big turtles, and alligators. My kids are so excited, they say, “Mommy look! Look at all these animals that we can see.” So, we keep walking around the park, and on our way, we find some people walking too. They say hi to us, we say hi to them. At the end of our walk we go under the kiosk, we drink water, then I put on music and my Monkeys dance.

After we have been there for a while we go home. They take their showers and after they are done, they have free play while I prepare dinner. After dinner is done, we watch a movie and when the movie is over the day is over for us too. Then it is bedtime when I pray with them. We thank God for the great day he gave us and when we are done, I give them a kiss on their forehead, and we all go to bed.

*The author is originally from Mexico, and is now earning their GED at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Their teacher is Ms. Khris Betten.*

## **I Love Saturdays**

Saturday is my favorite day of the week, because it is the day I have to time to connect with myself, to share with the beings that I love, to enjoy the beauty of nature in each of the little things and immerse myself in that enjoyment.

I love to get up half an hour before dawn, make a delicious pot of Colombian coffee, give a kiss to my husband while he sleeps, put on a t-shirt, shorts, flip flops and go quickly to the beach to see the sunrise.

I love to feel the breeze of the air on my face and all of my body, I love to walk on the seashore and feel the waves caress my feet giving me their good morning.

I love to see the sun begin to appear large and majestic, making way in the sky so that we can see it and feel all its strength through its warm rays that hug us and fill us with its infinite love.

Then I lose my sight in the immense sea, giving him all my thoughts, worries, joys, and sorrows. I feel that this cleanses my mind, my soul and gives me a sense of humility and deep respect towards him. Sometimes I dive in, sometimes not; our connection is special, serene, peaceful, and free.

Another thing that makes Saturday special for me is that I can share more time with my husband, sitting on the balcony of the apartment and laughing with him about the things that happened to us during the week. We talk about our dreams, plan our next trip, taste good cheese and delight in the taste and smell of a good wine. Thank god for the miracle of life and all our experiences.

Finally, we dance, nothing is better than finishing the day dancing, it is one of my favorite hobbies. Dancing makes me remember the sea and that sensation of freedom, joy for life, connection with everything around me and the balance between mind, body and spirit.

Saturdays are so special for me!

*Claudia P. Salcedo Gomez was born in Colombia. She is a Food Engineer. She has been living in USA for five years and is an American citizen. She is married and cares for her father in Colombia, being an only child. She lives in Fort Lauderdale, loves sharing her time, enjoys the simplicity of life, and tries to be a better person every day.*

### **My Favorite Day is Sunday**

My favorite day is Sunday. I like Sunday because I see friends and family, I worship God, and I have a lot of fun.

On Sunday, we wake up early, have a nice breakfast, and then head to church. At church, I meet with some of my other relatives and we make much of that little time to catch up on what is going on in our lives. Then we worship God. I love to sing with a group. We pray with the Bible. Sometimes I lead the worship as well.

After church, I try to work out with my family at the park. It's a great way to spend some more quality time together. It's

important for me to share time with my family especially on weekends when we can all finally rest from our daily activities, work, studies, and responsibilities so that we can build a strong relation with our family having fun.

We have the most fun on Sundays--especially when it comes to watching the basketball game with my family. We cheer for our home town. Sometimes my husband takes us for lunch to a nice restaurant. It's a wonderful lunch. Later in the evening we all start to get things ready for another week. Spending time with my family is very important to me and also for them.

For these reasons, I love Sunday.

*Yolande Jean Joseph is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers. She is from Haiti, has 3 children, and loves to sing.*

## **Sunday Fun Day**

If I can vote what day is the best day of the week for me, I will highly recommend Sunday. Sunday is my favorite day on which I can do anything I want. I love the time when my sister and I work, play, and eat together. I am always off work on Sundays, but my sister works all week. So why do I love my Sundays? Because sometimes she has a day off too. "Teamwork makes the dream work", said BTS. That is why when I spend time with my sister, I feel I will have more motivation to do something.

At first, I go to church with my family. I feel relieved when the music is on, I feel happy when everybody says "Peace be with you" to each other, I feel merry when father blesses the children, and everything is wonderful. Then we go home, we have brunch. We eat noodles soup, our best food ever. Now we have energy, we play some jazz music, burn a candle, and we start to clean our bedroom. After the week, our bedroom is messed up, it takes few hours to finish. We throw away everything we do not need anymore, even though we still love it. We take a break, eat some ice cream, then we continue to clean. We do not feel tired, we feel so relaxed. The scent of candle, lightsome music, everything is perfect. Next, we watch the performances, funny shows of



a boy band that we love. We are obsessed with their voices, it makes our hearts melt and their movements, their dance are so cool, like a dancer. Moreover, the strong music makes us stand up and dance. Then, we watch their reality shows. They are so insane; we cannot handle that. Meanwhile, we eat some spicy snacks that make our mouths fiery hot. We slam some cold milk. My brother sees it and he gets mad, complaining that we are too loud and crazy. To give my brother some peace, we go shopping. We drive to the mall; we must not buy something. We just like to hang out, enjoy the clean air and the bustle sometimes makes you feel happy.

Maybe in the future, if I do not have a Sunday off nor my sister, I will still do those things. It is good when I spend time for myself. My sister and I will miss everything we do together, but we will do by ourselves, on our different day off, and mature together. I know all of that is a little silly, but “You don’t get old being stupid,” said Chili Davis.

*The author comes from Vietnam, and is now in the ESOL and GED programs at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, taught by Ms. Khris Betten.*

## **I Opened My Eyes and I was Really There**

Everyone has a favorite day in his or her life, mine was when my dream came true and I realized that I came to the United States on Sunday, November 24, 2019. It was a wonderful and amazing day for me.

I had both feelings inside of me: excited and sad. You may be asking why I had those two feelings. Primarily, I was excited because I left Haiti at the right moment and I was sad because I left my family, and friends behind. As one would imagine, I had a bittersweet moment.

Flying on an airplane for the first time was scary but I had lots of time to think. Even though I knew a new beginning of life was coming up, it did not stop me from thinking about the life I left behind.

On the next day, I could not imagine I was here. I kept opening my eyes wider and looked around me; I was really here! Now I can see clearly about the future although it is not going to be easy. I will have to work hard to achieve all my goals that I am aiming to achieve.

The day I came to the United States was my favorite day because of all the experiences that I had made and all the new feelings I had about starting my new life.

*Kemberly Blemur was born in Haiti. He is an ESOL student with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College in Florida and lives in Fort Lauderdale with his family. He is an IT technician. His biggest goal in life is to become a Telecommunication Engineer.*

## Original Poetry

### Perhaps

Words

Perhaps as I see it

The sound of leaves flying through the woods in a fall afternoon

A soft whisper on a warm night

A snowflake posing in the garden

An infinite rainbow of possible wonders

An eternal hope

An impossible dream made possible

A sweet lingering doubt

A magical dance from the universe

Yes. Perhaps. . .

*Ines Garay is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.  
She is a native of Argentina.*

### I Dream

A dream of love

A dream of compassion

A dream of beauty

A dream of destiny

A dream of eternity

A dream with my heart wide open

A dream of light surrounding me

With velvets colors falling from the sky

Running free with the light

A dream of the Sun kissing me

And the moon whispering my name

A dream of an ocean of love so pure and so deep

A profound love

A dream of the power of my words

Impacting your life

I dream a life where we shine

A life of love  
A life of giving  
An abundant life  
A life where we lift our spirits  
A life of forgiveness  
A life of healing with the light  
A life where shadows faint  
And the light shines  
A dream of love touching your heart  
A dream of angels walking with you  
I dream of a beautiful life.

*Carol Walker is a student at Cooper Memorial Library. Her teacher is Wanda Klaas.*

### **Behind These Walls**

Behind these walls is a woman named Shilya Patterson.  
Behind these walls she feels that she is trapped and can't get out.

Behind these walls is a mother trying to get out and do better for herself.

Behind these walls is a mother who wants to set an example for her children.

Behind these walls is a strong woman.

Behind these walls is a person who is fighting to do better.

Behind these walls is a woman who wants peace in her life.

Behind these walls is a woman who has gained her confidence back.

Behind these walls is a woman people had put down, and never thought would do good in life.

Then came the day, she broke out of these walls.

She said to herself, "I'm better than this. I will face my fears and accomplish my dreams."

The Path Taken

That's when she went back to school; the walls started to fall, and she saw the light behind them.

She knows this is a second chance for her.

And she is going to keep on pushing herself until she completes her journey.

That's when the walls will permanently fall.

And Shilya Patterson will walk forward in peace radiating her joy!

That's when the people will see who she really is.

*Shilya Patterson is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Rhonda Currier is her instructor.*

## **Who Am I?**

Who am I?

Am I a man....or a number in someone else's jaded system?

Am I the sum of all my faults....or simply a circumstance victim?

Can I be neither, or perhaps both, a sinner and a saint?

Can I choose of who I become....or is who I am considered fate?

Who am I?

Still the boy perhaps, with all the potential in the world?

One future day a man, with his hopes and dreams unfurled?

A father who's boy would hold him in the highest regard?

Passing on the persistent determination of working hard?

Who am I?

A life-long scholar with abundant knowledge to share?

A dedicated worker, maybe employee of the year?

Building on successes over trials and tribulations?

Standing in a roomful of smiles and congratulations?

Who am I, I say

A true advocate defending a just and worthy cause?

Or an unsuspecting criminal, with trouble accepting laws?

An aging, broken man, in desperate need of wins?

Or a rehabilitated soul, repenting all his sins?

Lord will you please forgive me, I must have lost my way  
I know I can do better, that I'm not afraid to say  
Destined for eternal failure, at times it surely seemed  
But once it's all said and done, a life hopefully redeemed

Mom, I don't know what to say, I know I let you down  
My way wasn't always right, this I have finally found  
I know that I can do better, perhaps that soon will show  
It has never been your fault, and this you should always know

Son, your father messed up, but for you I'll always be here  
In support of all you do, even if I'm not so near  
I tried to give you everything I've ever learned to grow you  
And yet there's still so much that I want and need to show you

My love....I know we had so many plans ahead for us  
But in the end I hope that's not all that's said for us  
There are still many days ahead, full of love and laughter  
From now until forever, you're my happily ever after

Who am I really?  
How did my life come to this?...for its important to never repeat  
Figuring out not why, but how, is a necessary feat  
I must stop asking myself why, for why I may not ever know  
All my many shortcomings, my pride will never let me show

So, who am I?  
Have I given up, a man at the end of his long rope?  
One rejected by society, one who's lost all hope?  
Absolutely not, because I'm putting the past behind me  
What I will not allow is my worst mistakes to define me

So who are you?

*Aleem Hamid is an inmate in the Florida Department of Corrections. He works as a tutor helping inmates earn their GED in Mr. R.L. Phillips' class at Okaloosa Correctional Institution.*

### **Front Porch Friday**

As I sit on the front porch, darkness is all around.  
The Sun will be rising soon, as the Moon floats to the ground.

The sounds of Mother Nature's night comes quickly to an end, so  
a new day begins.

As I listen to the Roosters crow on my front porch,  
the Sun slowly rises for the morning's approach.

The Mosquitoes take their last bite,  
while the Moths take their last flight.  
The Squirrels begin to bark and the Birds to chirp,  
for this is a new day, and yes, my friends it's  
Front Porch Friday

*Stephen Clay Walls is a student in the Adult Education program at  
Pensacola State College. His teacher is Linda Lewandowski.*

### **A Deep Blue Dream**

My mind is the ocean  
I sleepwalk as it holds me captive in its glistening waves

My mind is a vicious navigator  
It is both a gaudy gold compass and smudged paper map

My brazen psyche,  
It is not time  
For it is the life, time has left behind

My cloak-and-dagger of a subconscious reality  
A crescent escape with a life of its own

Vivid morphology of pictures and sounds,  
knows only the morning, as it highlights its vulnerability onto  
the boundless ground

While closing my eyes means I am visually impaired for the time being,

I open my eyes to voices of past and present. They sing with glee into my ears, as if new characters in an enchanted narrative

Not knowing when I shall wake from this portal of mystery and intrigue,

I blissfully take in every moment of every new universe, of every story that is undeniably unique.

How I pity a brain that is colorless and dull  
Unbeknownst to a Mediterranean world so full

In my dreams I drive Poseidon's taxi, a glossy white submarine,  
as the pungent salt smell and fish shooting by fill me with ease.

My powers of thought give me treasures of knowledge to help go  
through rigmarole that is the deep sea.

My mind has always steered me in the right direction, and in  
return

I thank it for its bristly candor of storytelling.

My favorite place is not a tangible spot.

It is a psychological playground in which I am on the cerebral  
swing sets more often than not.

In my dreams I slip into a turbulent blue ocean.

It is vast, deep and powerful, it is an alkaline mind potion.

In my day to day life, I live as though this turquoise lagoon is  
now on the mainland

The coastal rays beam on my skin, as golden powder devours my  
feet with every step

In a state of bittersweet ambiance, I look around,

I see characters building their own high-brow stories.

Each shade of the waves unleash differing intensities of blue,  
green, and white foaming hues



The Path Taken

Each having unrelated navigators, while others drive taxis onto diverging avenues.

*Brooklyn King is working on getting her GED with Linda Lewandowski, in the Adult Education Program at Pensacola State College.*

### **Through it All, I Continue to Smile**

How great is it to have a deep belly laugh?  
The kind where tears run down your cheeks,  
Or the kind when you have to fall off your feet.  
Well, have I got a laugh for you,  
Just when I thought that it would be impossible to do.  
Even with all the sorrow and pain I was going through.  
My happiness always seems to shine through.  
For here I am in the number once again.  
My pain and sorrows are coming to a dead end.  
You, Satan, tried to take my joyous spirit –  
Oh but God said I'm not finished.  
There is a joke to tell about Satan,  
Through it all, I continued to smile,  
so Satan, you can stop hatin'.  
Whatever your particular call is,  
your particular sacrifice  
that God asked you to make,  
also the particular cross He wishes you to embrace,  
is the path he wants you to trend.  
Just follow God and leave Satan in the wind.  
Ha! Ha! Ha! You will never get me –  
I rebuke you in the name of Jesus,  
now it's time for you to flee.  
You should have seen him  
trying to cross over God's Bridge,  
only to fall over and swim back to the other end.  
Yep, to see you fall over (LAUGHTER) what a laugh.  
It will always be like that  
when God directs your path.  
Over my mountains and through my trials,

I conquered it all,  
that's the reason I continue to smile.  
Didn't you know no weapons formed against me shall prosper,  
and that fear is the enemy,  
so I laid all my burdens on the altar.  
How I made it, you might ask?  
I was patient and strong- now look at me, my joy is the outcome.  
I'm still smiling from ear to ear,  
with a joyous spirit and happy feet.  
Satan, God said that you will not defeat,  
cause my love endureth for ever and ever, until the end of time.  
That is why through it all I will continue to SMILE.

*Narina Brewington and Sabrina Robinson are students in the Adult Basic Education class at the Gadsden County Jail. Brenda G. Johnson is their instructor.*

### **The Turtle and the Hare: A Recovery Story**

All the animals of the forest gathered 'round  
'Cuz they knew today it was going down  
They settled down to find a good place  
So they could watch today's big race  
It's Turtle versus Hare, and it was plain to see  
The Hare was an addict and the Turtle in recovery  
The Hare had been drinking; it hopped up and stumbled  
The Turtle crept up quietly, remaining humble  
He patiently waited at the starting line, remembering his  
program  
While the Hare went behind a tree and snorted a whole gram  
He came out bouncing and was ready to roll  
The animals of the forests said, "Ready, set, go!"  
The Hare flew off in a drug-induced haze  
While the Turtle closed his eyes and took a moment to pray  
From a distance the hare yelled, "No one's faster than me!"  
But the Turtle just smiled and started off slowly  
He called his sponsor, a sloth named Steve  
Who said, "God and AA will get you through times like these."  
Coming down from his high, thinking, "Turtle won't catch up!"

The Hare veered off the trail to re-up  
Sammy the Squirrel had various drugs in his shack  
But was out of powder coke, so the Hare bought some crack  
He took hits from his pipe up in a tree  
But became paranoid and stuck, peeking through the leaves  
Needing something to help come down from the crack  
The Hare took some Xanax then laid down for a nap  
He woke up and saw Turtle ahead on the trail  
So he took out his phone to call Slimy the Snail  
Said he needed some help to finish the race  
Slimy said he had some methamphetamine to help him keep  
pace  
But the Hare was broke so he made a stop  
To sell his gold chain at the forest pawn shop  
He did some meth and flew past Turtle in the woods  
When he spotted a shortcut that went through the forest hood  
He took a break from the race, looking for some heroin to shoot  
When he happened upon a bunny prostitute  
He gave her his cash but as he reached for a breast  
She took out a badge placing him under arrest  
Scared and dope sick in the forest jail  
The Hare called the Turtle to try to make bail  
But he couldn't answer 'cuz right at that time  
Turtle was busy crossing the finish line  
The forest animals cheered over and over  
And knew he'd won because he stayed sober  
The moral of the story is you too can overcome life's hurdles  
If you praise God and work a program, just like the Turtle.

*Joseph McPadden is a literacy student in the Dunklin Program in Martin County. His teacher is Donna Musso.*

## **Crash**

After the crash, I thought I lost you.  
Now you're out of a coma and you have no clue.

I cried because you don't remember me,  
and you lost most of your memory.

I know it's going to be sad, but remember XXXTENTACION's  
"Bad"?

We love that song. Remember we used to always order a subway  
foot long?

You ate one side; I ate the other. As we got close, I would see all  
the mess of ketchup and mayo on your face, and the feeling was  
so cute to embrace.

Remember we used to write poems and you couldn't finish,  
because when I read them you felt complete?

Remember the first time we met? I was shy and you wondered  
why,  
but as I opened up my life to you, slowly I started to see a wife in  
you.

Remember we used to fight and say we never cared?  
But I know you were scared, and I didn't want to lose all the  
years we shared;  
losing you was what I feared.

You wake up to a smile and a kiss on your forehead and say  
you're mine and how much I love you every second of the day.

So, please, I don't want to lose all the memories we created... I  
hope it's not too late.

*Raneil Scarlett is from Jamaica. He is a GED student at Atlantic  
Technical College-Arthur Ashe Campus. His teacher is Ms. Donna  
Johnson.*

## **Who Are You?**

Who were you?  
Or should I say, who are you?  
Your laugh sounds like a birdsong,  
Captivating everyone at the beginning of the day.  
You smell like a Caribbean coffee made by a grandmother,

The Path Taken

Trying to get her modern grandchild comfortable in her old way of life.

Who are you?

You look so brave; you look so strong.

But truly, there are all of these messes left by the past inside of you.

Nonetheless, you still smile.

Your smile is beautiful.

But I'd rather see you when you are dissimulating your tears under the water coming from the faucet, pretending you are enjoying a bath.

And at this moment,

I could have touched your shoulder and told you how powerful you are.

Who are you?

Why are you so mysterious?

I wish I could read in your mind to know how hurt you are.

I wish I could feel how broken your heart is.

Every time I see you thinking you can't do it all by yourself, because they left you,

As your father did when you were young.

They all promised they will come back, and you smile knowing it is the last goodbye.

But you have overcome, gone through these destructions and found yourself.

Who are you?

How can you still have hope?

I wish I could be as strong as you are.

I wish I could be this brave.

They have told you that you are dumb and weak.

They have torn you up time after time.

And each time you have proudly sewed yourself up,

Took your horse and rode it all the way to show them how wrong they were.

You smile when you see how confused they are,

While they are watching the brand new you that you have created.

And still confused they keep asking themselves,  
Who are you?

*Saika Sainte is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Leslie McBride-Salmon.*

### **Never Give Up, There is Always a Way**

God, I come to you brokenhearted  
For this life I'm living  
Seems to be out of my control  
I no longer want to suffer;  
I am done with the struggle.  
I hide my tears when I say your name,  
But the pain in my heart is still the same.  
Although I smile and seem okay  
I'm actually dying inside with all this pain.

I'm struggling to find my way back  
Some days are easier, other days are hard,  
Most days I'm so tired of this life  
As I may struggle through it all  
You will see struggle...  
But never see me fall.

I have caused so much pain to the one's I love  
I am praying to the Lord for help  
Please heal me Oh Lord  
Allow me to walk and run again.  
I will not let my life go to waste.  
Although I lost my childhood and teen years too.  
I will not lose my adult years,  
For I would like to experience them too.

Help me Lord to accept I'm here to stay,  
Give me the strength and power you gave me,  
The day I climbed the mountain of Culiacán.

The Path Taken

Oh my Lord Jesus Christ help me stay focused on you,  
Kneel down to you to pray and stand up to anything else.

And when I am free of these chains  
I will walk out these gates  
Like a butterfly emerges  
And unfolds its grateful wings  
I will grow and develop  
With the love my mother gives  
I'm thankful for all the times  
When you encouraged me never to give up  
For God gave me my wings  
But mom, you taught me to fly  
And spread my wings.

As I choose to live life  
I'm thankful for you Lord for blessing me  
With a wonderful supporting family.  
Thank you for being here  
To rebuild our shattered life.  
And to build a new one full of blessings  
We will soar, laugh, and smile.  
This storm will disappear  
The sunshine light will reappear  
A big colorful rainbow will also be revealed.

There will come a time  
When you believe everything is finished,  
But that would just be the beginning.

I know without a doubt that you always  
Had the right path and way I was to take.

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

*Kelly Centeno is a student in Polk County Schools. Her teacher is Ms. Kathleen Keen.*

## **My Home, My Country**

Caracas, Venezuela- my home, my country  
Small, but a lot of different environments  
Beaches, mountains, desert, snow, forest  
Really cool to enjoy very special moments

Living at the beach, I can go walking  
It's a really quiet, peaceful place  
The sound of the birds chirping  
The sand on your body, the sun in your face

The mountain nearby the beaches, rivers, sweet water  
Many people go there to train, to enjoy the waterfalls  
To ride mountain bike, and sleep in a tent  
To enjoy nature, away from cellphones and phone calls

My best friend has a farm- we go there on the weekends  
When we grew up, we started to rotate,  
One weekend at the farm, another weekend on the beach  
Different places but the same idea- to relax, no headache

Now I miss a lot- the river and the mountain  
The farm, the beach, the mountain bike ride  
When you leave your country, your life totally changes  
But sweet memories stay in your mind and your heart, all right

*Luis Villavicencio is constantly moving from taking care of his daughters, going to work, and not missing important family events. He is in the College and Career Readiness English class at the Monroe County, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **The Sunlight's Dance**

The breezes were warm and soft  
Light was flooding over every inch of every valley, every  
mountain  
Every lake was dancing in the beautiful, hot sunlight  
The same light that has touched vast lands of other worlds before



this one

But it seems to have come to life in a beautiful new way, dancing  
with joy

Joy of finally making it to our world

Even though the life here has taken everything for granted

Even the light's dance is overlooked for the beauty that it is

But there is one thing that makes everything good again

That one thing makes the world stop; yet it's in harmony with  
everything at the same time

It's his smile

Not just any smile, the smile he only gives me

The way he smiles, but never looks anywhere except in my eyes

His eyes say it all; they say, "I love you and only you."

They say, "Nothing is more beautiful than you, not even the  
sunlight's dance"

Just then the most unforgettable thing happened

He bent down on one knee, and then he pulled out something I  
never expected

It was a ring

His eyes were saying a million amazing things, but his mouth  
only said four words

Those words were, "Will you marry me?"

All I could do was cry and say, "Yes!"

Smiling, he stood up and hugged me tightly

I could see tears threatening to fall from his beautiful chocolate  
eyes

Those eyes have seen the most horrible times and the best times

They have seen me cry, and they have seen me smile

Through the tough and horrible times, that look in his eyes has  
never changed

His eyes have always said, "You are the most beautiful thing I've  
ever seen, even when you cry.

I will love you for eternity."

He is the one person that can make me feel like I'm the only  
loved woman in this whole galaxy

His love is like the sunlight's dance

And though it has traveled so far, it has never been this alive

This strong for anyone else as it is for me

I am Persephone; he is my Hades.

*Haliegh Beene is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.*

## **A Place I Called Home**

(For Evelyn Arevalo)

A place I called home was amazing to me  
It was the only place I felt I should be  
Drinking coffee, just she and me  
Sometimes I'd look up from a sip, stare into her eyes  
Many times, she would catch me and smile  
And follow with the question, "Would you stay for a while?"  
She warmed my heart, and amplified the love in my soul  
She would tell me stories of her past, sadly, she had suffered  
abuse  
Her husband was a drunk, so angry and mean  
She admitted at times she had wanted to leave  
She explained how time felt like a thief in the night  
She often would cry and say she had "wasted her life"  
Some of her stories were tough to hear, and some were sad  
And then there were some that would make us both laugh  
Oh, and her laugh, so unique and so true,  
Her laugh alone would turn my gray skies blue  
Even a phone call, the mere sound of her voice  
Could she have any idea how that made me rejoice  
She made me so happy any time of day, I hope she knew it, before  
she went away  
She was my shelter, she was my calm, she was the woman that I  
called Mom  
That day she left was July twenty-third, two thousand-fourteen,  
It was by far the hardest day for me, I became as lonely as lonely  
could be  
Completely hollow, just empty inside, I was thirty-three, and I  
wanted to die  
I felt like an orphan with nowhere to go, I had lost my mother,  
my feeling of home  
I was sad, I was angry, depressed and blue, there was literally  
nothing anyone could do

## The Path Taken

I wanted to be alone to drown in my sorrow  
I wish I could have known there would be no more tomorrows  
If I had known that was our very last night  
I would have stayed at the hospital, kissing her head and holding  
her hand so tight  
Hugging on her until her very last breath  
It would have hurt so badly; I can even feel it now in my chest  
I'd wish for more time, for one more kiss  
For one more day, I didn't get to say all I wanted to say  
My tomorrows with you had come to an end, my beautiful  
mother, my very best friend  
Mommy, why did you have to go away? I still wish for every  
minute I have missed  
For every missed opportunity for just one more kiss  
Oh, dear mother, I pray that you know  
That next to you was my place I called home.

*Samantha D. Moore is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.*

## One Day at a Time

I have a wonderful husband name Josh and a beautiful family. I can't wait to go fishing and be with my loved ones. I am currently in school and can't wait to achieve the ultimate goal: A diploma.

I lay here on the bunk thinking of you, not knowing when this hell is going to end. Trying to focus on the things in my life I must do that will return me to my family and the lord God, whom is my best friend.

I used to have so much joy in my life; I was a very happy woman. But addiction and selfishness took over, causing me and my family so much strife. Please believe me, that wasn't my plan.

Today, I attended these classes with an open-mind, searching for the woman I and God know that I use to, and still can, be.

Happiness and true life I know I will find. Out of shackles I will be free.

For I must have faith in my God above. And get on my knees and pray; Shower me lord with your everlasting love and help me live the righteous way.

Please forgive me of my sins, and in my life please play a part. For I who has God will always win when I welcome him to rule in my heart.

So tonight I go to bed thinking of you and my new start, knowing that tomorrow I'll be fine; for my God has shown me the light; to live one day at a time.

*Ms. Kayla Burgett is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Panama City, FL – Bayou George. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

### **Dangerous Ride**

I used to drive so cautious.  
Obeying the safety rules of life.  
Abiding by all the signs and signals possible.  
Blinkers on when turning left or right.  
Determined not to get tickets, points, or marks against my name.  
Until one deviation from my morals.  
Sent me spiraling down towards the opposite lane.  
The sky's the limit.  
Oh how I adore that phrase.  
I began racing too fast, too furious.  
My life was a controlled maze.  
Running on fumes, a day of reckoning came.  
I observed that "man in the mirror".  
Shattered, discombobulated, yet yearning for a positive change.  
Illicit usage left me with scrapes.  
Bumps, bruises, and scars, from that dangerous ride.  
Second chances are not often granted.

The Path Taken

So when presented with the opportunity  
Extend your hand and grasp it with pride  
Sobriety is now my clean path.  
The safest ride that I will ever want to know.  
Thanks to my Father above who gives me strength.  
I'll continue to flourish and grow.

*Ms. Margaret Gregory is currently housed at Gadsden Correction facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Jacksonville Florida. She is currently a student in Fast Track GED led by Aide Ms. Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Dela'Queese Jernigan.*

### **Many Will Try**

Unspoken  
I turn to face the sky  
And still can't find out why  
The things that are on my mind  
Are crazier than meets the eye  
I could never wish this upon you  
But only you to I  
And with that I know, one day  
I will be sure to find  
My simplistic peace of mind  
Until then I shall sit and wonder  
About the things all left to ponder  
Gently broken,  
And always...  
Unspoken

*The author is a literacy student in the Dunklin Program in Martin County. His teacher is Donna Musso.*

# What the American Dream Means to Me

## The American Dream

The American dream for me and for many immigrants is that seed we sow in the great land of America the moment we arrive. It is the land of opportunity and the chance to be free.

With the passage of time, work will be the water for that seed. In America, the opportunity to work and make more money is possible for everyone. The effort will be fertilization for the plant to grow, until you can see the tree bloom and shout before the world, I got the American dream!

The possibilities are endless in this great country. The dream can be as big as or as small as anyone wants it to be.

Education makes the dream in America increase in many other possibilities. We can either be professionals in a huge cooperation or start a very productive business.

Something very important for the development of this tree is the growth of its roots, roots that must be strong and deep since we all know that a tree without roots cannot stand firm and for us, the emigrants, our roots are our families and friends.

Precisely, this is the American dream for me. Effort, dedication, and sacrifice to make my dream and that of my family come true, always cultivating values along the way.

*Sulenny Torres is a student in the Adult Education program at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Their teacher is Miss Jones.*

## The Cost of Poverty

For many, the “American Dream” stands for the belief that all individuals residing in the United States are given equal opportunity. A statement that those in search of financial success and social status may obtain so solely based on their hard work

and determination. The United States of America is founded on Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. It is painted as the white picket fences. What the “American Dream” means to me is just that: a dream and no longer a reality.

The ideal of equal opportunity has become a falsity. Personally, growing up in poverty has proved to be the most expensive thing. It is rent prices being quadruple the minimum wage. More often than not, one or both heads of the household are working more than one job attempting to provide for their family, so it is also daycare and babysitter bills. Poverty is not being able to afford to work. It is gas money or cab fees, phone bills, an interview outfit, and work clothes before your first paycheck. And when you have no money left, that’s expensive too. “A new report from Moeb’s Services, a respected economic research firm, shows overdraft revenue at banks, credit unions and thrift institutions totaled \$32 billion last year.” (Herb Weisbaum NBC News Article).

Our country’s future is students that are faced with paying so much for tuition that they continue to work solely to pay off that education and not for Life, Liberty, or the Pursuit of Happiness. For me, the “American Dream” is not a preschooler having school lunch debt. It is not a place where learning is no longer considered freedom but a price tag labeled privilege. For me, the “American Dream” means a life where we do not have to pay for being poor with added barriers, but are given equal opportunity to excel.

*Autumn Hindman is finishing her High School Diploma. She looks forward to continuing her education in college and building a career in a field that allows her to help her community.*

### **Let’s Do It!**

In one word, what the American dream means to me is “opportunity”. I came to the United States looking to fulfill my goals, dreams, and projects because in my country, people after a certain age are limited at getting a job.

I was terrified that I would not be productive or what

would happen to my future. I also wanted to study and start a business, which required money and/or investment, and the only possibility in my country for me was zero.

The United States provides equal opportunity to everyone. Therefore, I can work, complete my projects and have a profession. I can buy a house to have a business and feel productive despite my age. My goal is to study culinary arts and open my own restaurant. Then I can buy a house and enjoy the landscape and weather in the Florida Keys.

I learned that people without dreams allow their fear to stop them from moving forward. I now have 365 days each year of possibilities and opportunities to achieve my goals. Today, I can say that my life has a second chance.

In America I found not only professional opportunity, but also a personal companion. I am so lucky to have met someone who is now my husband. He supports me and exhorts me every day to follow my dreams. Additionally, I made many friends, discovered free education, and have emotional stability. I am grateful to have a scholarship to study culinary and improve my English.

Being in America is worth every tear, defeat, and moment because I know that I have the opportunity to accomplish my goals. Every day is a challenge when we live in this country, but it is a step to get closer to our destination in life. Here, progress and material prosperity is inevitable if we work hard to achieve it. Let's do it!

*Magnolia Ramirez attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She is very ambitious. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Freedom of Choice**

I am from Haiti. I am very happy that I am living in America. The wonderful thing about living in this country is the freedom people have in choosing what they want to be or what they want to do. No one can stop them from what they want to become or do, unless it is against the law.



I see people going to work and also taking classes at the same time. I also see people can open any business, buy houses, or choose any career that they want. Some people hold permanent jobs, others have temporary ones. Some prefer part-time, while others need full-time jobs. They can work in the restaurants, banks, grocery stores, cinemas, drugstores, schools, colleges, airports – you name it. This is the American dream.

So for me, the American dream means freedom of choice. I can choose what fits best for me. That is what I like about living in this country. I am grateful to be here and would like to live up to my American Dream.

*Julienne Josaphat is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education class in Key West. She would like to have a position as a manager. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Believe It, Profess It, Accept It**

Everyone has a dream, so do I. But what about the American dream?

To me, it is the ability to realize my dream while I am living in this country, the United States of America. The reason being that America is the land of opportunity. It means that it opens its arms to welcome people to live here and utilize the resources it has to achieve success in any field of their choice.

My American dream is to have a nice car and to live in a comfortable house. I dreamt about them when I was a little boy. I know that I have to work hard to realize this dream. The tough part about this whole thing is that I need a good paying job. Right now, I am a painter. I work long hours but I am not earning enough pay. Also, I need to be fluent in English. Then I need to complete my high school education and move on to college.

I would like to have a stable job and learn skills to better myself. I want to have two professions. I want to be a policeman because I want to enforce the law and ensure safety for the people. People need to know that they are safe to go anywhere. I care about the security of the place we live and wherever we

are. I also would like to be a mechanic. I want to be able to fix my own car. I dislike paying so much for others to repair my car when in fact I can do it myself free of charge.

Being in America, I stand a chance to achieve my dream because there are so many ways I can make my dreams come true. The main thing is to always remember: Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be open. Ask, and you shall be given. My teacher always tells us that we need to learn to open our mouth and ask for help. She also says that we belong in the high places. If you do not get there first, others will. I believe it, I profess it, and I accept it.

*Denilson Barrios is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education class in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Opportunity and Equality**

To me, the American dream means to get the same opportunity in everything that is available for everyone in this country. For example, I can earn the same amount of pay despite my race and skin color. I can obtain finance from the bank without unfairness evaluation.

Because I am now staying in this country, I am learning English. I want to understand and communicate with the people, read what is around me, and to be able to go for higher learning to become someone valuable to the community.

I have a son here with me. I want him to receive education of the same quality with the rest of his classmates. I would like to see him grow up with good character and have a good job. Our children are the future leaders of the world.

In this country, there are numerous things to do. If we take time to discover, ask, and have contact with the people, internet, and publications, we can fulfill our needs as well as our children's.

*Anielka Urey attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education, Key West. She wants to become a pharmacist. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **The American Dream**

The American writer James Truslow Adams said, “The American dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better, richer, and fuller for everyone, with opportunities for each according to their ability or achievement.”

Following this philosophy, it is easier to know that this idea is part of the American culture. It is the type of dream that every immigrant from a country with low resources would like to have, can become the freedom to spend all the money you want, have a family, and achieve all your goals.

During my writing, I asked many people about the American dream, people of different ages and countries who have had and shared experiences in the United States. Outside of this, there is much more than we think. The world is a very large and diverse place. One day you can be in Miami drinking mojitos at a party at 4 a.m., and the next day you can be wearing a cap to work within the same 12 hours on that job you hate so much. I met people who have been in Florida for more than 20 years working, and they have never been able to see a park with their family. But if America taught me something, it’s that we all have the same opportunities to achieve happiness; sometimes it costs them more than others. Freedom is the most famous word here, I think, which means the freedom to manage your own path.

I’m from Venezuela, a country that, because of the different problems, has not evolved in the best way. The American dream in my country is the only dream that most people want, to be able to live with basic comforts and not suffer a constant fear of going outside, to always be with your friends and family, have fun together in our culture, in our nation. I believe that the ideal is much more than that. I have been living the American dream for 2 years. Who knew that there are so many different cultures, so many traditions and places that I never thought I would ever see. I discovered that this issue is not only about having money or being successful, or even that everyone knows your name.

For me, it is to be with the people who love you, it is to be able to wake up every day knowing that there is something new to

do, and it is to find the strength to accept the loss of those who are no longer with us. It also means to fall a hundred times and stand up in each one, and then when you go home and go to sleep, you close your eyes thinking about how each new day is a dream come true.

*Javier Suarez is in ESOL class at OTC-Winter Park Campus in Winter Park, FL. Rosalind Shell is his teacher.*

## Why Voting is Important to Me

### A Great Privilege

Voting is one of the great privileges of living in a democracy. It provides recognition of one's opinions and choices. Voting is important as it creates a sense of responsibility in the leaders and makes them realize that they had been chosen over some other candidates, by the people, for performing in a professional and dedicated manner. Hopefully, this will compel the chosen political leaders to use the administrative power bestowed on them in a positive way for the benefit of the masses.

It was very important for me to vote as soon as I reached 18 years old. When you vote, you have the power to decide on the quality of life you want for yourself and your future generations. Voting is a part of our independence, this matters for our future, for the future of our family and for the future of our community.

Thomas Jefferson stated, "We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate."

Voting is our chance to stand up for the issues we care about. This is our life; we must take the time to help decide what is best for all people.

*Maleeva Jean Baptiste was born in Limbe and grew up in Cap Haitian. She has a bachelor's degree in nursing. She is attending Adult ESOL Career and College Readiness (CCR) classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus.*

### Voting is My Voice

Voting is a word defined by dictionary.com as "to support by one's vote." A concept that is well known by everyone, as it should be, considering that various matters about a country are decided by elections: presidents, judges, mayors, and governors

to name a few, are all voted upon by the general population, and if not they are decided by elected officials.

Why vote? I realize that nobody can force anyone to vote, but many citizens do vote because it is their civic duty and voting lets them have a voice. Through voting we can inform the government what we as the people want the administration and laws to do for us. For instance, if you feel the country does not have good security, you can vote for someone who promises a better situation, so you do not have to feel afraid. Changes can only happen by having your voice counted. This is one reason why voting is important to me.

Everyone must vote because if you do not vote, someone else will do it for you and the result may not be what you were hoping for, because every vote counts and that is how change occurs. This is why I want my vote to be counted. My opinion is important to me and my voice is through my right to vote.

I hope that in reading this essay I have convinced you to realize how important voting is to me.

*Ramscito Henry grew up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He lives with his wife in Lauderdale Lakes. He formerly worked as an aviation security agent and as a cargo security agent. At the moment, he is attending Advanced ESOL classes at Atlantic Technical College-Arthur Ashe, Jr. Campus with Ms. F. Johnson.*

### **Voting – What a Privilege!**

Voting is part of democracy. Democracy is when people decide about their own destiny and about the course where their country is heading to. Voting is synonymous to democracy, it is an integral part of the democracy. If the political system of the country does not allow its citizens to vote, then such a system is not democracy. The opposite is true. If citizens can participate in a freely honest, open, transparent election process, and make a choice, then we have a case of real democracy.

The United States of America is a democracy. Citizens of the USA can vote, and they do regularly exercise that right on various elections, be it local, state, or presidential elections. Voting rights

are written in the US constitution, which clearly states that voting is a right and a privilege.

The second word “privilege” is very important. It is not only a right of US citizens to vote, but it is also a privilege. It is a privilege because, first, not everybody can vote but only citizens of the United States can vote. Second, it is a privilege because US elections are a prime example of fair, honest, and transparent election process.

As with any process, if we do not practice it, then the process becomes unnecessary, corrupted, or misused. In short, all processes are prone to some degree of degradation. For example, to keep our house clean we need to practice cleaning the house on a regular basis. Or to keep our guitar skills we acquired, we need to keep practicing guitar playing also on a regular basis.

To summarize the above stated, voting is important to me because it is a privilege for me to vote in United States elections, and also I want to make sure that I contribute to the practice of voting. That will be my contribution to maintain and perfect the democracy in the United States of America.

*Vencislav Bujic attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education in Key West. He is a goal achiever and would like to be a general manager of a hotel. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Your Vote is Your Voice**

Voting is important to me. First, the eligibility to vote in the United States was established both through the United States Constitution and by state law. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the 24th Amendment to the Constitution, and related law, voting rights have been legally considered an issue related to election systems. In most democracies, eligible voters can vote in elections of representatives.

Second, the law does not require citizens to vote. In my opinion, voting is a very important part of any democracy. By voting, citizens are participating in the democratic process. Citizens vote

for leaders to represent them and their ideas, and the leaders support the citizens' interests.

I vote to choose leaders and representatives who will do things that are important to me, and tell the government what the citizens want. With a government elected by its citizens, it affects every aspect of our lives from schools to health care to homeland security. Voting is an important right in our society.

By voting, I am making my voice heard and registering my opinion on how I think the government should operate. I like to talk with my friends about voting and help them to understand that voting matters. Voting is important. My vote is my voice.

*Xuan Nguyen is in the ESOL class at OTC-Winter Park Campus. He is a Senior Boys Scout of Vietnam and America. His teacher's name is Rosalind Shell.*



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