

ACTUALLY,

I Can't.



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

Actually, I Can

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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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.



FLORIDA LITERACY COALITION, INC.

**Florida's Adult and Family Literacy
Resource Center**

**235 Maitland Ave. S, Suite 102
Maitland, FL 32751**

**Phone: (407) 246-7110
www.floridaliteracy.org**

**Florida Literacy Hotline
1 (800) 237-5113**

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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Karina Jimenez (Editor)
Nicole Caban
Heather Hepler Surrency
Wesley Pratt
Greg Smith
Ethan Smith
Susan Chapman
Noel King

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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

Life Experience

When I was in high school, I attended a program that taught life skills. I learned carpentry and brick masonry. I did receive my high school diploma and for that I am so grateful.

Society looks at people with learning disabilities as more likely to commit crimes, so I always live with that. Maybe that's why I love being alone. I can be away from the reading and writing that I find so stressful and I don't have to answer to anyone. Being outside, using my hands, I am more in control of me. I don't need to be so aware of how I respond to other people. I don't have to be on guard.

One thing about going through all of these challenges is that it has helped my wife and me recognize the signs in our children that indicate learning struggles. We knew to get tutoring when needed or ask for ideas. Thankfully, the world of education has advanced and there are many resources available.

Parents and teachers must pay attention to signs and offer help.

Carl McGee is a student at READ Lakeland, Inc. in Lakeland, Florida. He is married with four children and is an avid hunter. Carl has been working with a tutor, Ms. Kathy Turner, for four months.

Experience School Ourselves Love (ESOL)

My experience at ESOL has been wonderful. Ten months ago I came to live in the United States and the first barrier that I found was with the language. I was in a country that I did not know and could not understand with the little English I thought I knew. As the days went by I realized that if I wanted to progress and do important things for my life in this country, the first thing I had to do was to learn English.

I found a school called Atlantic Technical College in Margate,

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Florida. There, I enrolled to study English every night for 4 hours. I remember my first day of class, I was very nervous and scared because I thought I was not going to understand the teacher. However, I was very surprised because when I was in the class I realized that the teacher spoke very slowly and made me understand everything. I remember that night I came out very confident because I understood everything from the teacher. I left thinking that I was already an expert in English (Hahaha).

The next day I was faced with a female teacher when I entered the room. I realized that she was very strict and I loved that because I thought that would force me to learn more, but I also was afraid to think that I could be wrong. When she asked me something and I did not know the answer - that made me try harder and forced me to study more to excel in my classes. Five months later, I gained two levels higher than where I began. Without realizing it, I had already started to understand people when they talked to me and made me understand when I wanted to say something. Of course, I made many mistakes but it helped me understand.

Currently, I no longer live in Margate. I had to leave my school and that made me very sad because I loved to go there. Nevertheless, here in Key West I found my new school, Monroe County Adult Education. I am very excited. I have many expectations and want to work on learning English every day and meet new classmates. My advice is keep learning. The day will come when you understand English perfectly.

Diana Arredondo attends the English class at Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience in Adult Education

My name is Daniela Rodriguez. I'm from Venezuela, and I'll tell you a little about my experience in adult education in the U.S. Everything is new for me: new language, new class, new teacher and new cultural experiences. When I am learning English, everything seems difficult. However, if I pay attention to the class I can learn quickly. When I started with my English class,

it was challenging for me because in my country, Venezuela, the teachers didn't explain English the best way. I had education in English but most of the words that I learned were because I listened to a lot of music in English and I read the lyrics to know more about these songs.

I have been in the U.S for six months. I have been studying English for three months. Now I can speak and read in English better but not as well as I want to. I worked in a Mexican restaurant as a waitress. Sometimes many guests were Americans. When they tried to talk with me I did not understand them. My partner told me many times, "Hey honey, you need to learn English because if you want to work in this restaurant, you need to communicate better with the customers to know what they want to eat." Everything is step by step and I'll keep trying.

My goal of staying here is to learn English as quickly as possible because I want to speak more fluently. Then I will be able to communicate with an advanced English vocabulary with the people around me. My days in this school are very different and each day is a new experience. I started to study in level four in October, now I'm studying in level five. I'm taking class six hours daily. I hope to learn English perfectly, because I want my mom to feel proud of me and I know she will be.

Daniela Rodriguez studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. She is going to earn her GED, and is from Venezuela. She is 17 years old and lives with her family in Naples, Florida.

A Wonderful Experience in School

I am studying at the Palm Beach County Adult Education Center, whose students come from many countries in the world. I believe that life here is similar to the life at a university because I have to communicate with people who have different nationalities and speak different languages.

Nationality and language are two important factors that usually prevent a student from assimilating into a new environment. However, I think the experiences at the Adult Education Center can help me overcome these obstacles. In turn,

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I will support other international students. This is the way that I will contribute to integrating my own knowledge by being open to other nationalities.

U.S. schools can be quite a different experience from learning in other countries around the world because students have more opportunities for reaching their ambitions. Many countries are not comparable to the U.S. in size and diversity, so we have an advantage over most of the students around the world.

In fact, that's why many foreign students have access to higher education and most of the time they are successful. Hard work is another factor because lasting in this competition requires patience and perseverance. Sometimes, if students don't have enough tolerance they will give up studying. Therefore, all students should be careful about their path and think about each step.

At last, I'm glad to be a part of this educational system, and I'm looking forward to moving forward toward my future goals.

Al Ghasemi is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Experience at the AEC

How much can an adult's life change when they go back to school? When I came to this country in 1992, I had a lot of plans in my mind, but my life turned in a way that I didn't expect. Studying English after years of living in this country is a dream come true.

When I had to interrupt my academic life to come to the U.S., I felt frustrated and even worse than that was not knowing the language of the country that was now my nation. With the hard job of being a wife and mother of two, it made my dream of studying English even further away year after year. Until in 2017, when I moved to Florida and read in the newspaper about the AEC. I couldn't believe an English school was near my house, with a good price and only for adults!

My experiences at the AEC have been fantastic, wonderful, more than I could imagine. I met teachers that love their job, and they do it with enthusiasm, dynamism, and joy. I knew that an English school could change the lives of immigrants, but I didn't know that my life would change radically. Going back to school made me feel that I can do more even if I'm not a young girl. My teachers encourage me to continue because I can feel more confidence. Everything I have learned at the AEC has been with pleasure, and the methods used by the teachers make the students enjoy the classes.

After many years living in this country, I now have the sensation of freedom. Before I felt trapped inside a free nation. I'm not a person who can speak very good English yet, but I can communicate with others. This gave me a new vision about my future. I'm grateful to God for this opportunity. It's never too late to learn.

Rosangela Gonzalez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

One of the Best Experiences in My Life

The United States is one of the most important countries. When I arrived here, my entire life changed. The first step was to enter school. I have two years in West Area Adult School (WAAS). I was nervous the first week, but it was great because I met people from other countries and other cultures. I made friends and learned the history and culture of this country.

I started to study in WAAS in the morning every Monday through Friday in the city of Lakeland. The first week I learned the alphabet, numbers, and more. The teachers used diverse methods, such as playing games and memorization. During the third semester, I learned about the history and culture of the United States, in addition to the laws. For one teacher, it was important to practice the language outside of the school. I remember when we took the bus to visit the library. Now this semester, we visited Saint Augustine, the oldest city in the U.S. It was a fantastic experience.

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This has been a great time of life. I have studied with people from Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Guatemala, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, China, and Laos. It was great to learn English and to know other customs. In the fifth level, I have made more friends. One is from Bangladesh and another is from Turkey. I am continuing to learn English, while making friends from different parts of the world. It is a marvelous experience that a person can have in their life.

Indeed, in these two years, I have the guarantee that studying is one of the bases to expand our knowledge. On the other hand, experiencing the culture of this country, food, customs or traditions, clothing, and history has given me knowledge. For instance, I have learned about the act of saying or showing that you are grateful, especially to God during Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday in November. There are customs very different from those of my country, but others are very similar. With experience I understand the meaning of their culture.

My purpose in WAAS was to learn English. As a result, I have made friends from other countries. Of equal importance, I have learned the culture and customs of the U.S. In these past two years, I have shared together with my teachers and friends one of the best experiences in my life.

Imer Vela Mota is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Journey

I must first begin by saying “Thank You” to all those who have assisted me along this journey, from my fellow students and family members who have continually encouraged me, to my teachers who have always supported and pushed me to get to this point. This journey has been an incredible one, and the knowledge and lessons I have learned are priceless. As long as you are breathing, life is a journey of continuous learning where lessons are taught on a daily basis; but what you do with what you have learned is what really matters.

Looking back at the beginning of this journey, speaking

and writing proper English was a challenge due to my lack of knowledge of grammar and pronunciation. The main reason was that I was born and raised on an island where we spoke broken English, often known as creole. This form of English though widely spoken throughout the Caribbean, seemed completely natural as it was part of my culture.

However, as I did not have the opportunity to pursue education in a bilingual school where proper English was taught, moving to the United States of America presented itself as an eye opener to a vast amount of information and learning. I realized that this was an opportunity to improve myself overall. However, in order to make these improvements, I understood that obtaining a strong foundation was the key. At this point, I decided to enroll at the Adult Education Center (AEC) to further develop my knowledge of the English language.

Having reached the point that I am currently at now, I must admit that being a part of the AEC has changed my mindset on the importance of self-improvement and education. This experience has not only enhanced my knowledge, but grown my ambition to continue and complete my GED. After that, I would like to pursue a career in Interior Design with a focus on residential decoration as I am a very hands-on and crafty person. With such a strong foundation in place, and with the assistance and guidance of friends, family and of course the AEC, why not pursue my passion as a career?

The Adult Education Center has an incredible team that is committed and dedicated to creating an environment of vast learning and sharing of knowledge. It has been truly a pleasure and a life- changing experience being a part of this institution.

Judith McCoy is an ABE/GED student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Silvia Giovanardi. Judith is from Roatan, Bay Islands of Honduras, north of the mainland in the Caribbean.

Lots of Questions About My Future

Education has not been an easy task for me. Life as a teenager

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is already a scary learning experience for some. To add to that, growing up, I struggled with mental disabilities. People, sights, smells, sounds, and conversations can cause me to spiral down. Unable to speak, move, or focus, I am controlled by the frightful attacks that make my body fight against me. School only added to that grueling experience.

I eventually decided I needed something else. I was mentally unpredictable and it wasn't easy doing day to day tasks. I was constantly in and out of school, so as a result I tried homeschool. As I got older, it became harder due to the requirement of having to talk to other people. I eventually started fearing my computer. I knew I needed help. I once again talked to my doctor and we decided to try something different from most treatment plans. Could this make my life easier? I asked the question as did so many others. Soon enough, I had a dog all to myself. The treatment plan that was discussed and approved by my doctor was a service dog, trained to alert to me when I was beginning to panic. The dog is trained to help me come to my senses and prevent my panic attacks. Things started to become easier for me.

Now, the real challenge I was facing was my education. I feared returning to school and going to high school. Many things could go wrong due to the lack of knowledge our population has on service animals. What else could I do? What if I am not treated correctly due to being different? What if people don't like me because I have a service dog?

My cousin told me about how she was getting her GED. I asked her a million questions about what she thought. "Are the teachers nice?" "Are the students mean?" She talked about how funny and nice her teachers are, and how she loved them. As a result, I decided to enroll in Adult Education classes. I went to the facility and I took my placement test; it was nerve-racking. I felt like everyone was focused on me. I met a nice woman; she made me feel a little less tense. She told me my scores and my class schedule.

When I showed for the first day of my Adult Education classes, I discovered everyone in my classes, including the teachers, are super respectful and kind. We students are all here, we all have one goal: to graduate. Although sometimes it is more difficult

for an individual, I now know where I am and that I'm going to succeed. I am not that scared anymore, I feel confident even if I am a little different. Graduating is my goal. I faced my bravest moment and faced my biggest fear.

Kylie is an Adult Education student enrolled in Hernando County's Adult and Technical Education Program (GED). She brings her service dog, Luca, with her each class. Her teacher is Carrie LaBarge.

Determination and Courage

When I arrived in the USA in 2015, I did not know many things about English. Only some expressions such as “thank you,” “good morning,” “hello,” and a few more words. When I had to fill out my first application for ESOL, my husband went with me, because I did not have the courage to go alone.

I started in level 3 in the summer class of 2015. It was very funny and desperate at the same time. Many times, I did not understand at all what the teacher was saying, but she was great and did everything she could to teach me the best way. I remember once when she lie on the floor to teach me the meaning of the verb “to lie down.”

Some days I think I am good in English, but on the others, I think I am very bad. But I never give up. I try to read, to watch TV and whenever possible, I try to talk with native speakers.

I was taught from practically all the teachers from this school. Each one has a different method, but I like everyone very much and I am eternally grateful for each one of them.

I also received an Adult Education a certificate of “Student Honor” that makes me so happy. In my country (Brazil), unfortunately, there is not this kind of recognition. ESOL is much more than learning another language, I have met many people with different cultures and traditions.

Now, after three and a half years, I'm in the last level and I'm looking forward to get my “Academic Skills” certificate and starting some job here in the USA. Whenever it happens, I'll be

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happy for the achievement, but I'll surely miss every teacher who taught me and helped my dreams to become true. I'll take with me for the rest of my life, not only the learning, but the mainly good memories and eternal gratitude.

Lucianne is the mother of two and is an ESOL student at the Adult Education Center of Melbourne.

My Experience in Adult Education

My experience in adult education has been very good. The first day of school was a great day because it was a different experience than what I had experienced when I was a child. I liked my school very much. It was a very big school in Miami and it had a very big campus. My favorite activity was when we played games with the teacher and learned new vocabulary. I also enjoyed when we read stories about someone or something special. I studied with different people from different cultures; I believe it is very important to learn about other cultures, idioms, foods and customs.

All the teachers that I have had were very good, including my teacher at the moment. When you study as an adult you are a better student and you try to do as good as you can. I believe that I am progressing more and more every day.

I think that studying English has given me many opportunities to learn new skills. The most important thing I've learned is to be comfortable when speaking English. It is a new step in my life and it has given me the tools to find new jobs and to meet new people. Now I'm reaching all the goals I couldn't accomplish in the past.

Maria Nunez is a student in the ESOL program at South Florida State College in the Advanced Class, she loves to read and loves helping people.

Learning a Crazy Language

My name is Marcela. I'm from Colombia and we speak Spanish. All my life, I've always dreamed of speaking English,

but my English was really terrible. Sometimes I took English classes, but I never advanced past the “To Be” verb in the present tense. When I was 37 years old, I met an amazing American man and the translation app became my best friend. Our relationship advanced and we got married. That moment was fantastic, but when the party finished, I had a new life in a different country, and I needed to start over again. That was a big change, but I thought to myself: “I CAN DO IT!”

The first four month was the worst. I couldn’t read, understand and speak English. I felt like the Shakira song: “blind, deaf, and mute.” I decided to register in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) class and it was very good decision for me and the new family we are building. I’ve been advancing step by step. I can speak with my husband and his family. I am reading my first English book, and watching TV without subtitles.

ESOL class has helped me improve my English, but it has also given me the opportunity to meet new friends from different countries, cultures, and religions. Our holiday parties are very interesting and we have different kinds of food from all over the world. However, the most important part is in class you meet other people with same goals and dreams. The adult education programs at South Florida State College has given us many opportunities to reach our goals.

This anonymous author is a student at South Florida State College.

My Real Life Experience

My dream was to learn and speak English. I lived near the airport in my country, and when American people came to visit during their vacation time, I admired how they spoke in English. I said to myself, “One day I’ll be in the United States and I will learn that language.” However, when I came here it was different.

When I lived in Honduras, I was a full-time student and did not work. My life there was simpler. After I arrived in the United States, I needed a job to support my young daughter and my parents in Honduras. Time was passing quickly, as I worked long

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hours. Everything I had in mind to do I could not because of work. I thought about going to a school for adults, but I had no time. However, my mind did not change about learning English.

Finally, in 2018, I enrolled at West Area Adult School. I like studying because my teacher, Mrs. Holzer, teaches us well. We feel more confident speaking English. The most important thing is my relationship with my classmates. We share pleasant moments learning about each other's cultures. Each one of us is a little different, but we are trying to achieve the same goal of learning English.

I know we live in this time where English is a world language and it will help me in the future to obtain my professional goals. Currently, I put into practice everything I have learned, and I realize that I am able to say, "I did it!" I am happy for everything that I have obtained. I wish I could tell the Americans I saw at the Honduras airport so many years ago how they motivated me to learn English.

Nubia Mejia is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

The Most Difficult Time for Me in the USA

Upon coming to the USA I had a great vision for my life. After one month of attending an Adult Education program, I asked myself one question about this establishment, Atlantic Technical College. I wondered if this was the best place to receive my education, and so the story begins.

My father sent me to this school insisting this was where I needed to be, but immediately upon arriving at this place for the first time, my presence was very bizarre because I did not know anyone who could guide me on this track. The only thing on my mind was to make sense of this unknown land. Additionally, there was a larger problem for me, I had so many ideas but I could not find enough words to express myself and fear took over me day by day.

Eventually, one day I decided to face the obstacles and I realized life itself is a fight. I had to fight through my fears

because if I stopped fighting, I considered myself a dead person. Slowly, I would begin to study the words by heart and set my goal on the CASAS test. At this point in time I still wasn't understanding the adult education program. I always heard other students who were engaged in dialogue at the different levels discussing ways to improve their English. For example, listen to TV shows, listen to the radio, and listen to my favorite music, gospel. So I began to do those things.

My decision made me a winner today. Despite the fact that I don't know everything in this language, I do know that each day brings me greater knowledge and progress towards my education. As I travel this path through the adult education jungle I realize that my guides (teachers) are extremely important.

At the end I would like to say thank you so much to my teacher for all the different advice and guidance for my advancement in her class. Her methods are very rare and the way she teaches is extraordinary. I hope that you keep teaching and I believe that your efforts to guide and assist your students do not go unnoticed. Know that you are blessed each day to continue the passion you share with your students.

Robinson Clerveaux is from Haiti, he is married and he studies English with Ms. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College. He is working towards becoming a Pharmaceutical Technician in the near future.

Improving My Knowledge

Sometimes you feel trapped in the same place, in the same situation, because you feel that time passes and you do not know how to express yourself in English as you wish. Perhaps you think you do not have time to do something that improves your situation. However, it's never too late to start learning what you want.

In my case, I was frustrated when I did not speak English well or did not understand what someone said. For that reason, I am at the Adult Education Center, learning something different each day. This is thanks to the teachers who put all their effort into teaching us.

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I feel happy I am in the College and Career Readiness class, practically finishing my English course, and I can say that I already speak and understand English better.

Maria Roxana Santos is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

Comfortable and Rewarding

My name is Teresa Aranda. I am a citizen of the Republic of El Salvador. The reason why I am in United States is due to the official mission assigned to my husband who is a naval officer of my country. His main function is to serve as the link between the operations centers of the USA and El Salvador, carrying out maritime operations that combat illicit trafficking in the Central American region.

As the days go by, I am learning about the city of Key West. Little by little, I am getting to know the wives of the other navy officers from other nations who work with my husband. Several of them told me about the Adult Education English class, encouraging me to attend and explaining in detail how.

After a year attending this English program, I can say that it has been a very rewarding experience. First, I have not felt much of the distance to be away from home. Second, I am able to reactivate memory of my English which I have long forgotten for lack of practice.

I want to say that I feel very grateful to the institution and to the teacher, Miss Josephson, who is a very patient, disciplined and charismatic person. For that, I greatly admire her ability to help all of us who attend daily. I personally have felt satisfied with her teaching, since I consider that my vocabulary has been enriched and improved mainly as it relates to pronunciation.

Students from different countries are attending Adult Education classes with the hope of learning the language and being able to communicate without problem with the citizens of this country for a better development in American society. The

school has been like my second home since together with my classmates we had a good time talking and learning together.

I am about to finish my stay in this country and I take the satisfaction of having been part of this institution that opens the doors to all people regardless of race, religion or country. I admire the work done by Miss Josephson because I've learned a lot from her and enjoyed her friendship. I am thankful to be a part of this beautiful family made of my classmates with whom I shared pleasant moments in Adult Education.

Teresa Aranda is a teacher in El Salvador. She wants to bring home all the things she has learned about English. She attends the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Something Different in My Life

This story started when my mom wanted me to learn another language. People said “learning another language is easy.” But in my case it wasn't. Ten years ago in Venezuela my mom enrolled me in English class. In that moment I remember I was not interested to learn or speak another language. When I started with my class I was a little shy; the only thing I did was speak Spanish and my teacher scolded me every time. One day, the principal called my mom because in every class it was the same problem with me. They talked about my interest in learning English. The principal told me, “You never know what can happen in your life, a lot of people lose huge opportunities because they don't know or understand English, so please appreciate what your mom does for you.”

I went on a trip to Trinidad and Tobago that same week that my director talked to me, and in that trip I saw the importance of knowing English. It was a bit difficult because I understood people but I couldn't talk with them because I didn't know how. When I came back I decided to do my best in English. I understood what my mom and teacher told me, how speaking and learning another language was good. I started to become more excited and I started to speak English.

One day I did a presentation and my teacher was so proud of me he commented, “You have good pronunciation, you have

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made a lot of progress these months. Keep it up and soon you'll get far." When he told me that I felt good; I felt very proud of myself.

Today, I want to say thanks to my mom for giving me the opportunity to learn another language. Also, to my teacher and principal of the school. If they never told and showed me the importance of speaking English, I don't know what would have happened.

I'm here in Naples, Florida speaking English 24/7 and I feel good about that. I'm very proud of myself and I hope to continue like this to earn my GED, go to college and find a good job.

This anonymous author studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, where she is enrolled in ESOL and GED.

The Better Way

I am a married woman. I have two children. My son is seven years old, and my daughter will be three years old in February. I work as a cashier. I want to improve my English and get my GED, so I came to the Adult Education Center to learn English. Now, I am in the College and Career Readiness class. Mrs. Salmon is an experienced teacher. She knows her students. Her teaching method and activities help me. We are learning grammar, reading, writing, and speaking. We also do a lot of practice. I have learned a lot from her.

When the winter class began, I had a talk with her. She said, "Meifang, after this busy session, you should take a break." She knew I had taken the HHA class last semester in the afternoon. I decided to start my GED class this winter.

Last week, we learned the idiom 'to bite off.' My teacher used this idiom by making the sentence, "Meifang bit off more than she can chew." She told me that she saw I had a big stress at the end of last semester.

Later that night, I thought about what she had said. I remembered when I took two classes from the morning to the

afternoon. I spent a lot time at school. It made me stressed. If I start my GED now, it will be difficult for me. I have four subjects I need to complete. It will be hard for me after taking care of my family and work.

So I changed my mind. I am going to focus on College and Career Readiness first. I think that I have now 'bitten off what I CAN chew.' I will go step-by-step to improve my English and then prepare for the GED. I like this class and look forward to it.

Meifang Zhang is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

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A Turning Point In My Life

My Baby

I remember like it was yesterday. When I had my baby, I was feeling tired and my back hurt. My husband and I drove to the ER at the Manatee Hospital at 11:00 pm, but a nurse told me that I was not ready, and we went home. A few minutes later I told my husband, “We need to go back to the hospital. The pain in my back is getting worse.”

At the hospital, I spoke to the same nurse. This time she gave us a room and said, “I will be back to check on you.” When she came back, she brought a machine to tell her how much I had dilated. I was at Level 9, and I was supposed to be at Level 10 to be in labor. After 13 hours of pain, they induced me and gave me something for the pain.

At last, the doctor said, “I am going to prepare her for a C Section.” Then, the nurse took me to the labor room. A few minutes later, the anesthesiologist showed up and gave me an epidural. All I remember after that was the smell of burning meat. I did not know it was me.

When I woke up, the same nurse was beside me. She said, “Do you want to see your baby?.” I said, “Yes!”

When I held my baby in my arms, I felt so happy. Even though there were tears in my eyes, it was the best day of my life.

Kacy Paredes is a mother of two children: Jocelyn and Angelo. She is student of Manatee Literacy Council. Her teacher is Sharlyia Gold.

How to Fight for a Prize

I would like to express how I feel about my best friend, English.

Since I started living in the USA, I have made excuses and

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created obstacles to justify why I do not speak English or why I do not learn English quickly. One of them is that it is very difficult because of my age. Also, I do not have time and a lot of people speak Spanish here. It is my big problem.

My mom always says every problem has a solution. If I don't have a solution, it is not a problem. I understand this is not a problem because I have a lot of solutions. It is my fear of facing it. I think it was because when people talked to me in English, I could not breathe or I did not listen because I was scared. I always thought, "OMG, I forgot the words in English and in Spanish too. Help me God."

My mom always told me that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. It is 99% hard work with love. I knew that my worst enemy is fear, and I know that behind the fear, I can find wonderful things in all areas of my life: personal, social, mental, endless good things.

Today I am fighting my fears by studying, learning from my mistakes, making priorities, committing myself and loving what I do. I feel happy when I understand a little bit more and when I can talk with someone.

Every day, I go to the Adult Education Center and enjoy sitting at the front of the class, reading in English, using technology, and taking advantage of all the resources that are there to learn English. I need to always be ready to fight against my fears. I have to do things every day that help me to increase my knowledge.

The prize for speaking English is different for each person. For me, it is personal satisfaction and finding opportunities for a good job and the abilities that allow me to contribute more to society. I can help, and I would like to be a volunteer here. I grew up helping because that is what I saw my mom and my grandma doing all their lives.

I am very grateful to all the people who contribute to this prize of learning English: my teachers, my classmates, my family, my school and my library, which is one of my favorite places.

Patricia Kujundzic is in the College and Career Readiness class at the

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

Me After Hurricane Maria

Memories come to my mind after Hurricane Maria destroyed my country. The island was left without electricity or water. Food was scarce; gasoline rationed like ice. The lines to be able to acquire any service were from 7 to 8 hours long. The health system collapsed due to the high incidence of diseases. The schools closed, and the children lost their education. Many lost their jobs, and the economy succumbed. Still, today, many suffer the consequences of this natural disaster. Many people died, but others decided to immigrate like me.

After all that and having lost my mother and my husband for different reasons of health, I decided to come to the USA in December 2017 with a desire to work hard and overcome all that. Filled with many illusions and despite being an American citizen, it has been difficult due to the language. I keep fighting and trying because I'm not going to give up easily. It will never be too late to start, learn, or achieve what I set out to do, according to my Dad, who also died recently. I remember his words: "Follow your dreams no matter how difficult they are. Continue until you reach them, and fight for them." He knew that I could.

For that reason, I enrolled in the AEC. Improving English is my priority, and I think I'm achieving it! Thanks to the teachers who have been the best instruments in my learning. With their patience and knowledge, they made me a new person. I understand the language and although I still have things to learn, at least I can hold a conversation and communicate better. The knowledge I had of English was basic, and it is not enough here in the U.S. For now, I have to depend on other people, but I will continue to do my best to learn and improve the language to be completely bilingual. I know I will achieve it. I owe it to my Dad; I owe it to myself.

The USA is a country full of opportunities that I will make the most of; an opportunity that life is once again giving me. I have

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the best tools, the best teachers, and the best education services in this institution. Their professionalism was demonstrated from the first day I entered school. They made me feel comfortable, accepted and understood with the little English I knew. I was treated with respect and courtesy, always willing to clarify my doubts and questions. I have learned a lot with them. I'm very privileged. Anyone who asks me where I learned English to improve myself and reach my goals, I can proudly say, "I learned at the AEC, the best!"

Ada Acevedo is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

Life at Full Throttle

"Am I going to the United States?"

"Maybe. Let's talk about it."

I was born and raised in Japan. I came to the United States because my husband decided to work in this country. This is my turning point. Do you know how I felt? I had lived a satisfying life in my country. I had a job. I taught Karate to kids. I belonged to a volleyball club team, and I had a lot of friends. Every day I was happy.

I have two children. My daughter was 14 years old, and my son was 12 years old. They also loved their schools and their friends, so they did not want to live abroad. They asked me, crying, about how they could stay in Japan. I really think families should be together. I kept talking to my children every day. It was very hard, and we spent a long time talking about it. Finally, they consented to our new life.

Starting life in America, everything was new for us, especially for my kids. They didn't speak English at all. Although they didn't understand what teachers said, they worked very hard and kept getting good grades every term. I am proud of them, and I learned from them "to live my life at full throttle."

I have lived here for one year, and I am getting used to it. I

started learning English at the Adult Education Center. Teachers support our English improvement very much, so I am engaged in my studies seriously. I have some friends from different countries. They are so nice and friendly. I am not lonely now. I love my teachers. I love my friends, and I love to live in the United States.

Tomomi Adachi is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

A Turning Point for Me

When I started to play baseball, I was 7 years old and the game was only fun for me. Then, when I was 13, my way of seeing baseball changed. My family and I started to consider baseball as a future career and goal that we could reach. This plan started in a little program in Maracay, the place of my birth in Venezuela. With the blessing of people in my life, like my parents and other people that supported me, I was able to start developing my skills to reach the goal of getting a contract for a major league organization. I worked hard each week. My development was good. We were on a good path and we believed we could reach our goal.

When I was 15 years old, many tryouts were offered with opportunities to get a contract and the possibility of getting a good bonus. But things didn't turn out as planned. I did not do well in many tryouts. I had other opportunities but organizations were not interested in me. The time and the appropriate age to sign went by. I was disappointed that many of my friends reached their goal of signing at age 16 and I did not, but I kept fighting to get what I wanted.

However, there were more difficult moments coming. My 2014 was difficult. I was 17 years old, had few tryouts and the time was advancing against me. As 2015 arrived, many people turned their backs on me and, unfortunately, part of my family and some friends also lost faith in me. But every morning, I woke up with faith that my opportunity would come. When I was 18 years old, I was in the championship of an amateur league that

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I played in. Afterward, a teammate introduced me to an agent who worked with players over 16 years old. I started to work hard with him and even though the tryouts were few, he gave the maximum effort so that organizations could see me. Then the day arrived. On Tuesday, August 25th, 2015, the scout of the Houston Astros would go right to the field where I was training. What can I say? It was my day. It all came out very natural.

I will never forget that long tryout. My body was tired but my mind pushed me and told me that it was my great opportunity. On the bus on the way home, I cried because I knew I did a good job. On August 28th, 2015, I received the call and heard “Welcome to the Houston Astros!”

I believe that perseverance and faith will always bring success. God taught me on this day that his time is perfect and to keep fighting despite failing thousands of times. This was a turning point in my life.

Alfredo Angarita is a second baseman and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is from Maracay, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Not a Great Friend

The biggest turning point in my life was when I parted ways with my toxic friend Jack Daniels. Alcoholism runs in my family, plus, I have a very addictive personality. I should indicate that this isn't a story for the faint of heart.

I started drinking when I was 15, but didn't develop a problem until I was 17. I wish I knew then what kind of road it would lead to. But this story isn't about looking back; it's about moving forward.

My addiction was destroying my friends and family one by one until I got it more under control. Although, I wasn't hurting friendships and family anymore -- I was hurting myself by drinking in more private settings.

Not long after what I thought was something I had under

control, I was at my sister's wedding rehearsal; refreshments were being served as expected. Halfway through the event, I began to feel sick. When I finally got to the bathroom, I vomited a large amount of blood. After a night of uncertainty and horror in the E.R, I decided that this part of my life needed to be over.

I am proud of myself and happy that through blood, sweat, and some vomit, I realized that there is willpower in every human, including myself. I think my year and a half of sobriety is proof: nothing is impossible if you put your mind to it.

Adam Storck is an Adult Education student enrolled in Hernando County's Adult and Technical Education Program (GED). His teacher is Carrie LaBarge.

Just Go!

Life was good. I had a job. I had a degree, friends and family, but I missed something else. My dream was speaking English fluently. It was so beautiful when I saw people speaking, and I tried a lot classes but it was not the same. Then one day, I started to feel a big desire to travel the world. I wanted to know new places, new people, new cultures, and learn more about the world and about me. I need this time for me, enjoying more and not just living the same routine every day, every month.

I decided that I needed to move to the U.S. to learn English and to spend a great time living a different experience, traveling to all the places I can, and being free to be me. First of all, my heart fell in love with New York City, the big city, with the big buildings, a lot of people, a lot of lights, and a lot of fun. I knew I wanted to move to New York to improve my English, so I started the process. I found an Au Pair Program and saw my opportunity. It was not so easy. I talked with a lot of families, and four months later I found a family in Florida. Yeah, it was not my New York, but I decided to come. Now I've learned to like Florida with her beautiful sky and beautiful sun.

My bravest moment was when I decided to leave my life to start a new and unknown life in another country, with another language, and living by myself. Do I regret this? No, I do not.

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It has been a great experience. In a few months time, I've been to three countries. I have met new friends, and I've grown as a person. I've gotten to know more about me and my force, and I'm happy to be here living my dream.

Telma DaSilva is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

The Day I Got Injured

This happened 2 years ago. I was hanging out with my friends in a basketball court. We were just talking and chilling, and then another friend of mine brought a basketball for us to play a little pickup game. So we started to play a game of 3-on-3 with regular clothes, not in basketball gear; keep in mind I was wearing sandals and not basketball shoes.

Then we began to play and I can't remember if we were winning, but what I remember is the play when the injury happened. I stole the ball from one of my friends on the other team and I went on a fast break. All of a sudden, I went up for a layup and landed completely on my left ankle. I didn't feel the pain and when my friends were going to check on me, I said that I was good. However, I tried to get up and I couldn't stand on my left foot. So I fell again and then I started to feel the pain. It was the worst agony I've ever felt in my life. I didn't cry or anything, but I was close.

Then my friends helped me get to my house. That's when my mom drove me to the hospital to do an MRI. I had a fractured left ankle. I couldn't play basketball for months and that discouraged me. I was mad at myself because I knew that I shouldn't have been playing dressed that way. The worst thing about it is that I had a state championship tournament the next week! I was training so hard for this event and it was all gone in less than one minute.

Emanuelle Pagan is from Naples, FL and studies English and GED at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.

A Turning Point in My Life

During the 2017 season when I was playing baseball for the Greenville Astros, everything was fine until the last two months of the season. Something horrible happened. I began to feel a strange feeling in my right arm. A few days passed and the discomfort continued. I spoke with the trainer. We all thought it was tiredness in the shoulder, but during the next day off my hand started to get cold and the blood didn't pass. When we were playing on the road my hand didn't improve and I felt scared. I remember I told the trainer that I couldn't continue playing because it was difficult for me to throw with two frozen fingers. The trainer told me to go to the hospital, and the doctor explained to me that it could be a blocked artery and it was affecting my health. I didn't expect something like this at my young age. Then, when I called my family in the Dominican Republic it was painful because when I gave the bad news to my family, they were worried about what was happening. It broke my heart to hear my mom her crying, because she couldn't be with me.

The Houston Astros sent me to Dallas, Texas to detect where the artery blockage was and remove it. I was very afraid to die. I again called my mother and she was very distressed about what was happening and I was scared but I didn't want to show it. I told her everything would be fine and that God was with me protecting me. I arrived the day of the surgery. I prayed and begged the Lord to give me a second chance to do well. When I was in the operating room the trainer who was with me to help me in everything, spoke with my mother. I said I wanted to talk to her. I said, "mother, don't worry I'll be fine and I'll see you again, I love you." She said to me, "my son, I love you and I trust that I'll see you again, I cannot be with you physically but I am with you in your heart. God bless you."

At 9 o'clock in the morning I was admitted to be operated. I remember that I was asleep for 4 hours. When I woke up my first word was "Mommy" and the trainer was beside me. I said I wanted to talk to mommy. I sent her a voice note. I said "Mommy I'm alive." From that moment, my life changed completely because I began to appreciate life and I learned what it is to be on the verge of dying. Now I'm a better person and I'll be eternally grateful to God for giving me a new opportunity to do things better.

Felipe Tejada is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is graduating this year. He is from Mao, Dominican Republic. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Me and My New Verb

The youngest of three siblings, daughter of an Italian father and Venezuelan mother, I grew up with principles and values of home, where respect, helping your neighbor, and goodwill were fundamental pillars.

Since I was a kid, I liked being able to help and to be a nice person: help my family, my pets, my friends, my neighbors. That's why when I grew up I studied nursing. That way I could continue to help, but this time with scientific knowledge. I graduated with excellent grades and quickly found a job. It was the job of my dreams. I taught the nursing staff and doctors at the hospitals about infection prevention related to peripheral catheters and other pathologies that could be prevented by good practices. I was able to create my own schedule and could be totally creative in the activities and training I did. I worked with scientific associations, opinion leaders of the country, directors, and the best professionals from whom I learned a lot. Everything was perfect in my life. But, one day a turning point of my life happened. Due to the problems that the country was going through, I decided to emigrate to the United States, and start from scratch, so I came with two bags and my head full of doubts, but without fears, hoping to apply my knowledge here, and find a job as fascinating as the one I had.

But I realized that not everything was going to be the same. My first barrier was the language, I had no friends, no family here, and everything had changed. It seemed that everything had vanished. I only had the memory of what I was one day. The jobs were getting harder and harder to find and I felt that everything was lost. It wasn't easy to see how the dreams were disappearing. I began to cry, to blame myself for having left everything. Until one day, I realized that all limitations were in my mind, that I couldn't get ahead if I didn't do something

to move forward, so I decided to improve my English first, and look for alternatives that would lead me to find stability again. I understood that “starting from scratch” doesn’t always mean that we really don’t have anything. My knowledge, my desire to overcome and my inner strength were still there. It was time to understand that “starting” would be a repetitive verb for me for a while, but the most important thing was not to despair, but to always remain positive.

Today I thank God for giving me the wisdom to handle all these changes, accept myself as I am, and move forward. So here I am, believing in myself, because “I can and I will.”

Gianna Fasano is a student at West Area Adult School, where her teacher is Lori Cabrera.

Life

What is life? Life is a torrent of impressions. Life goes step by step, little by little. Life is a mystery. No one knows how their life will be until this moment. Life is like a book. It has a beginning and an end too. The middle is a mystery.

Each person has positive and negative experiences. A negative experience for me was when I had to leave my country with my family because we didn’t accept the Communist government.

I loved my country, Cuba. Everyone in my town knew each other and our families. It was sad to separate from my mother, sister, brother, and other relatives. I have not seen them for many years because I haven’t gone back.

At the beginning, when I came to the United States, it was very hard for me. I didn’t know this language. I spoke only Spanish. My friend Hilda was living in Elizabeth, New Jersey. She helped me a lot and taught me how to live in America. To be successful in this country I knew that I had to study English like I was a little girl again.

My family was grateful for the opportunity we received from this country. This country received us with open arms. The

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years have passed. Now my son is an honest man, happy with his family. My husband went on a long trip and never returned. But my life as a widow continued. These are normal ups and downs of life.

Continuing in the positive, if you endure the ups and downs of life, I'm sure you will have many happy moments. Today I am very happy. I have my family, friends, and my church. I continue studying. In my humble opinion, I am proud of my accomplishments.

Gladys Lago is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Susanne Carter.

A Turning Point in My Life

When I was in Colombia, I was happy to move to the United States, but I also felt like there were a lot of worries. A lot of 'ifs' and uneasiness about the changes in my life to come.

Just one day before my flight, my sister called and told me, "Leo, our brother and our neighbor were killed in our town." I felt so bad. I did not know what to do. I spoke with my siblings and some of our cousins to help me make the decision of whether I should go to our town or take the flight. They said that whatever decision I made was good with them. I decided to fly to the United States.

I think that it was the best thing I ever did in my life. My life and the life of my family changed completely from that moment on. It was not easy to get to this point. When I think now about all my worries, I am glad that with a lot of effort and hard work, they have vanished and no longer occupy my mind. I help my family financially, I have a home here and I am happy with my partner and his family.

Leonard Gonzalez is a student at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus. He is in Zuly Rosello's Level 6 ESOL class.

Scoliosis Strengthened Me!

When I was in middle school I found out that I had scoliosis. It was a month later when my parents noticed how bad it actually was. I couldn't stand straight up and when I walked I was off balance. My shoulders were uneven and the worst part was that I had trouble doing the things I was best at doing. I ran track in middle school, but I had trouble staying balanced. I was very good at running far distances, but there was a point in time when I started having a lot of trouble. I worried that I would not be able to run because of how bad the scoliosis really was. My parents took me to see the spine doctor and he informed me that I was going to have to wear a brace for 8-9 months, or I would have surgery. At that moment, I froze up. I was afraid if I wore a brace it wouldn't help as much. My doctor warned me that having the surgery could possibly paralyze me, or I could lose strength in my feet or legs if something went wrong. I would be out of school for weeks; I would be stuck in bed. My parents wanted me to get the surgery but I was scared. I finally decided that I would get the surgery only because I knew that it would give me the advantage to do the sports and hobbies I liked.

In spring of 2015, I was ready for the surgery. I brought a friend with me because I needed someone close by my side. My parents and grandparents came to support me through the surgery. It lasted 7 hours and after I spent a few days in the ICU. I didn't really remember anything before or after the surgery. I had to make a list of goals I wanted to accomplish in the next week while I was recovering in the hospital. I wasn't able to walk or sit up in bed, so those things became a few of my goals. The nurse informed me that most people who have had a similar surgery were not able to walk until the 5th or 6th day. Surprisingly I was able to walk on day three. Everyone kept telling me how proud they were and how strong I was for doing the things I thought I wasn't going to be able to do. Weeks later, I was back in school, and my doctor finally told me that I could begin training for track season. It was hard at first, but I was able to do it. I kept pushing myself to do more and I was proud of myself for achieving the things I thought I couldn't do again. At that point in my life, I knew that I wouldn't have to struggle any longer.

Jada Colbert is an Adult Education student enrolled in Hernando County's Adult and Technical Education Program (GED). She would like to go to college and major in cosmetology. Her teacher is Carrie LaBarge.

A Wounded Beast

Every day is a learning experience of your life. You will learn from the things that you have seen or the people that you have met, and then what you do makes you who you are.

When I came to the United States, I didn't know what I was going to face in the future. After a couple months I realized everyone here is friendly but not my friends. I speak a different language and have a totally different look. I just felt out of tune with the world. I got hurt from that. Everything for me was always negative, hopeless and useless. I refused to face the problem and hid in my cave like a little beast licking a wound alone. But things always change. When God closes a door, he will open another window for you.

Then she came. She is the special person who taught me how to take responsibility for another person and made me stronger both inside and outside. We grew up together in China. After a 15-year friendship, she came to the USA. At that time, we hadn't talked to each for almost 7 years, but when I settled down in Florida and invited her to come to work with me, she said yes without questions. She just simply trusted me. I knew that this was her first time away from her family. She didn't have a lot of work experience. She was not dependable enough for her age even though she is one year older than me and taller than me. In order to thank her for her trust, I decided to take good care of her in both life and work. I had to make some changes.

I started thinking more about the work and giving my boss some advice and actively solving the problems. Gradually, I became an employee whose boss thought highly of me. So I was able to cover her under my protection at work. She made me feel powerful and that I could do anything.

I started learning how to cook and gave her advice when she couldn't make decisions even just for clothes. We hung out almost every day off to see new things and meet new people. I was really happy with the changes. The wound is recovered by the power of helping people.

Hi strangers. I'm coming!

Shanshan Jiang is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

Becoming a Mother Changed My Life

The turning point in my life was when I found out I was pregnant. Actually, it's a pretty funny story. I was nervous that I was pregnant because my cycle was a few days late. I had a doctor's appointment coming up, so I thought: why not get them to test me? So I went to my appointment and asked the nurse to give me a pregnancy test. After taking the test, she looked at it and told me, "Looks like you're in the clear, but let me get a second opinion on this. I think I see a faint line." She came back and said that it was negative after another nurse had looked at it. Next thing I knew, my doctor came in the room and looked at the test that was still lying on the countertop. I told him, "Don't worry; it's negative." He looked very puzzled and told me it was positive.

I had a job at a restaurant. The baby's dad, let's just call him "Jimmy," was working at a local building supply store. Jimmy was excited about the baby at first. Pretty soon, though, he started slacking. He lost his job, then got another job and lost that, too. My parents, luckily, had an opening at their mobile home park, and they decided to let us move in about two months before the baby was born. This way we could live together when the baby came.

On September 25th, 2017 we welcomed little 5lb 9oz Peyton Grace into the world! I knew that I would have to get back into school so I could make something of myself to provide for this little girl that was depending on me. I kept telling Jimmy I wanted to go back to school, but he would always tell me that it wasn't the right time. Right before Peyton's first birthday, Jimmy up and left to move to Tennessee with his new girlfriend. So, Peyton and I moved back into my parents' house.

The first thing I wanted to do was get enrolled into school. Being a single parent, it is more important than ever. I had tried to go to night school in the past before becoming a mom. I ended

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up just quitting. Now I know I must finish this, so I can move on from here and have a career. I want to be able to provide for Peyton and myself.

This is the turning point in my life. I did learn one thing: Don't put all your confidence in someone else because you never know when things will change, and you will have to provide for yourself.

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

After Darkness There is Light

I lived in Fajardo, Puerto Rico for 30 years, near the beaches, rivers and forests. Fajardo is a popular tourist destination. My husband was a tour guide for a long time and the majority of my life was spent visiting the most beautiful places on the island. I worked 18 years as an administrative assistant at a financial department. I admit, this job was very important to me. I felt passion for everything that I did, but I worked a lot every day. One day, my older daughter told me, "Mami, I wish that you could work less and spend more time with me." These words broke my heart and I could not stop thinking about them.

It was necessary for me to make a difficult decision. I remember the date, one week before Thanksgiving. That same week my daughter had an important part in a show at school about gratitude. That night Janisha, my older daughter, took the microphone and she said, "I have a perfect example to explain to all of you the definition of gratitude. My mom gave up her job to spend more time with me." Her father and I had no words to explain what we felt. My family was happy. My husband's job was excellent and everything was perfect.

On September 2017, the catastrophe of Hurricane María changed everything. It was hard to find food, water, ice, medication and gas. People were fighting everywhere, while others were stealing, and the streets were not secure. Puerto Rico was devastated. The communication was poor and I could not communicate with my parents. My daughters' school was

closed for 4 months. Nothing looked good. Also, my husband lost his job and our savings was ending. We did not have enough money to pay the bills or rent, and we were tired with the everyday struggle.

We had the opportunity to move to Florida and start a new life. My husband always wanted to be part of the U.S. Army. He came from a military family, but due to certain situations he had not taken a step forward. He visited a recruiter's office and the doors opened in a wonderful way. To my husband, the limits did not exist. We felt confident and secure when he entered the Army.

In conclusion, life has taught me great lessons. God is the center of my life, money is necessary, but does not give happiness, and the problem is not bigger than me. If you have harmony in life you can live in peace and make excellent decisions.

Janice Miranda is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Looking to the New North

Sometimes you never realize your options when you leave a place that you feel is yours, a place called "home." Sometimes the necessities of life make you capable of doing everything you need to do to be well in life.

I remember, as if it had been yesterday, when Hurricane Maria passed through Puerto Rico destroying everything. Everything changed. Many people lost everything, and for others, including myself, we had better luck and didn't lose as much.

In my case, more than the damage to my house and not having electricity or water service, was losing my job. That was the source of my income to provide for my family. So, with few or no options in getting a job, I had to go somewhere else. Friends, in hard times, are a blessing. My friend told me to come to Florida with her to look for better opportunities. Without much thought, I came to Florida with her.

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The United States gave me the chance to provide for my family and look for better paths. Now I'm trying to improve my English and continue to pursue better things in life. In the meantime, I have more options. I have started to feel like I have a new home.

Melissa Burgos is a student at Orange Technical College (OTC) – Winter Park Campus, Winter Park, FL. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Never Stop Dreaming

My name is Magnolia Angel. I am from Colombia. I have been in the United States for 3 months. I am an engineer in mining technology, specializing in environmental planning and integral management of the natural resources with capacity to design, plan, manage and evaluate the exploitation of mines of metallic and non-metallic minerals to open pit and underground. I really love my job although in Colombia it is difficult to be a mine engineer because there are very few women in this area. Work is harder because we must always show that we have the same skills as the men. I worked for more than 35 years with the Colombian Government and private companies in the mining sector. I also taught at a university.

I have two adult children whom I love deeply, and they are the driving force of my life. My daughter traveled to the United States in 2013 and later she moved to Key West. After visiting her a few times, and after my son graduated and did not need financial help from me, I decided to move here.

I have wanted to learn English for a long time. Even though I tried a few times, I think I was not constant enough or perhaps my responsibility to educate my two children alone was my priority; therefore, I had to postpone my English studies until a later date.

Many of my friends and family think that I am crazy to make this change at my age, leave my economic and career stability to go after a dream to learn a new language. "You are old," they said, "At that age you do not learn another language." Anyway, this is the turning point of my life. Here I am, retired and settled in Key West.

Now, I am studying English at Monroe County Adult Education and I am working hard to make it. Not only I arrived in the United States to learn English, life gave me much more than that. I found the love of my life – this is also my dream. I always tell my children and friends that it does not matter how crazy a dream sounds, if I could achieve it, anyone could, too. Never stop dreaming.

Magnolia Angel is determined to master the English language. She is a student at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Turning Point in My Life

Even one meaningless decision can change everything. Who would think that a blind date could be a turning point in someone's life? How tricky life is. You cannot anticipate what God has prepared for you. Sometimes the last thing on your mind happens.

I came to America in September 2017 when I was traveling with the folk group, "Jedliniok," performing Polish regional dances and music; I played the violin in a quartet. We visited the northern United States and Canada. At the end of the trip, I was invited to visit my cousin Joanna, who lived in Florida. I was conflicted because I was supposed to start my last year of college in a few days. However, I had been dreaming of visiting Florida, so I could not waste the chance, and since I was in Toronto, which is relatively close to Tampa, I decided to visit Joanna.

Although we were not close, Joanna and I had a lot in common. She had an idea to set me up with one of her employees (Joanna and her husband own an air conditioning business) to show me city, and that is how I met Frank – my husband. When I first met him, I could not understand a word he said, despite my learning English in school for many years. What most surprised me is that even though our conversation was simple and we barely knew each other, we realized that we were meant to be together. Sometimes rationalism loses to intuition.

We had spent four wonderful days together before I returned to Poland. Then after four long months, I visited him in January

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during my winter break and he visited me in May. In July, I earned my master's degree in chemical technology; it was a crucial time for me because I had to make a decision about my future. At the end of August, he proposed to me and I finally came to the United States on September 20, 2018.

Our blind date began changes that I would never have imagined. Moving to another country and consequently leaving my family and friends have been difficult for me. I have been building my new life since then: I became a wife and gained a new family; I started talking in English, which is surprising me the most. Now I am improving my English skills to be able to work in my profession, and I am considering attending college to expand my professional knowledge. I am looking forward to discovering the opportunities that this "new life" has to offer.

Malgorzata Bevins is a student in K. H. Niedbalec's College and Career Readiness class at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, FL.

A Bold Move

The biggest turning point in my life was moving to the U.S.A. I remember clearly those few days before my flight: I could not sleep, could not eat, and I was very scared. One of the hardest moments was saying goodbye to my family and friends. I did not know when I would come back and see them again.

It is very hard to start everything from the beginning. If you do not have enough language skills for easy communication you will experience a difficult time in a new place. So, in small steps I am learning to live and be patient. Everything is different - weather, food, flavors, people, and places to work.

Now, I can say that after four years living in Key West, Florida, I feel confident. I have new friends. I know about myself more than before. And even though I miss my family back home, I feel that in America, I have found a new home. I have not decided yet when I would like to go back to my country but I know that it will be a second turning point in my life and second very hard decision because now my home is here. I try to be happy: catch the sun whenever I want, appreciate what I have,

travel as often as I can, and always be ready because I sense that we never know what will happen in life.

Monika Kubik is from Poland. She desires to speak proper English in order to get a promotion. She is attending the English class at Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Coming of Age

I would like to talk about a turning point in my life that I organized.

When my son was 15 years old I was so happy to celebrate this day because I saw at this age how he was growing up more than the other years since he was born. We celebrated his birthday in Haiti and everybody in his father's family were there to celebrate this day because he's the first grandson in the family.

That was amazing and everybody enjoyed and ate whatever they wanted to eat!

This was a turning point in my life because all my stresses were gone and I was so happy to see my son grown up like I had hoped and asked God for.

Marie Suzie is from Haiti and she attends the East Area Adult School in Auburndale, Florida. Her ESOL teacher is Mr David Barnie from Scotland.

Moving to the United States of America

Moving to a different country is a big decision where you will face challenges that benefit your future. I was the first in my family to move from the Dominican Republic to the United States. I got married and started a family. After the birth of my first child, we decided to raise our family in the USA. I left family and friends and got accustomed to a new culture and language.

I arrived in New York at the end of 2008. I was almost immediately introduced to an unusually cold climate during my

first winter. I had my second child, and after one year in New York, we decided to move to Florida, the Sunshine State. This climate was similar to the warm weather I was used to in the Dominican Republic, but the tropical beauty of the Dominican Republic is something I will always cherish.

I am grateful for the many opportunities and accomplishments that I have had here in the United States. I learned to drive and got a driver's license. I studied the history of the United States, and I became a U.S. Citizen. I was then able to request for my mother to travel to the United States; now she is a permanent resident of the USA. One of the most blessed and happiest moments of my life was when my mother arrived to this country. Since then, many of my other relatives have come to the United States. I am no longer alone in this country because I have been reunited with my family and made many new friends.

Another important event in my life was when my children started going to school full time, and I decided to continue my education at Seminole State College. I am very grateful to be in the GED program because it has given me a chance to become a better writer and increase my reading skills. My next goal is to get my GED. Having my GED will permit me the opportunity to be considered for better jobs and to study and start a career. This will allow me to set more goals and continue to accomplish further aspirations. I have also been fortunate to meet many people in the GED program from different cultures. We all come from different places and backgrounds, but we all have the common goal of learning and being successful through this program. I enjoy and am inspired by all their stories.

With dedication and persistence, anything and everything is possible. Moving to the United States was a big decision which changed my life by allowing me to achieve many dreams and goals.

Madelyn Rodriguez is married with two children, Joseph and Melany Rodriguez. She is an exemplary GED student in the School of Academic Foundations at Seminole State College.

New Experiences

Almost all my life my family has lived separate, but two years ago my parents surprisingly decided that we needed to move to the United States. At the beginning, I felt a little sad, because my life was satisfactory in Mexico. At that moment my mind just went back to the first time that I lived in the United States. I was 13 years old, and remembered that it was very difficult for me to make friends outside of English class. The other classmates spoke English and that made me feel very afraid.

Finally, the day arrived when I returned again to the US. It was September 25 and I landed in Miami and my new story started. I tried to enter regular high school but they told me that maybe the time from that moment to the graduation was not enough to earn all the credits that I needed. The school recommended another school; Lorenzo Walker Technical College.

I decided to enter the school, and started at level 2 of English. I have made new friends and learned a lot of things. In this process, many bad and good things have happened. Now I'm at level 6, I have passed one test of four to earn my GED. Additionally, I now work part time.

All these events are changing my life for the better and I hope to continue improving myself.

Mariana is a student in GED and ESOL at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples FL.

I Was Sad for a Long Time

“I'm a young woman of 20 years. Born in Peru and a lover of my country, I was sad for a long time and I did not want to admit it. Now, after saying it, I want to share my story to help other people.”

My childhood was very normal. I played, I danced, I cried, and I was feeling happy. My adolescence was with ups and downs, like everyone else. I realized that life was not too pretty:

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my parents separated, my sister died, and in my house, everyone was sad. I understood. Really.

Upon entering college, bad friends, broken hearts, and stress increased the pain. I could not stand it anymore. I wasn't prepared to endure so much, to pretend that nothing was happening to me. Then I collapsed.

I stopped going to college. I stopped smiling and I cried all the time. I didn't know who to tell. I felt lonely. I prayed a lot at night.

When I decided to talk, to share it, I felt like my heart was being relieved. By letting others help me, I stopped closing doors and reflected that things are transient. I understood that "difficult situations only happen to strong people."

Nathalia Chuchon, from Peru, is a student at Brevard Adult Education ESOL in Melbourne, Florida. Her teacher is Christopher "Kit" Adams.

Behind These Walls

Behind these walls is like being buried alive. No one can help you, everyone is above you. It's just a matter of time before you stop breathing.

Behind these walls is so much pain. It's so hard to hide, but you can only blame yourself. "Outta sight-Outta mind." You had so many friends. Where are they now when the pain sinks in?

Behind these walls your children are motherless. Who are they depending on during your absence, who is consoling and loving them the way only you can do? Knowing it hurts them from the inside out cause they're missing you without a doubt.

Behind these walls dreams disappear and nightmares begin. Everything you've been working hard on is "Gone with the Wind". No encouragement, only disgrace; it really makes you think that giving up is the only way to win this race.

Behind these walls you can make a change to give it to the Almighty God who has the whole world in his hand. He can clean up any disaster and make everything new again! My God would never leave or forsake you even after all the horrible things you've been through.

Behind these walls there is a peace of mind, faith the size of a mustard seed that your dreams will start back to climb. Learning from your mistakes is the best healing there is. That's when you can start to live life again.

Behind these walls I have learned so much. Thank you Father God for keeping in touch. Through it all, ups and downs, behind these walls I have been found.

Behind these walls, I will never return. God is my witness as I am blessed with wisdom. Knowing the difference between right and wrong – “Freedom is power and now is the time to live my life purposefully, worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless.” The days of unconcern and dysfunction are all GONE!

Narina Brewington, a single mother of three, was incarcerated in the Gadsden County Jail for almost a year before being released 1/24/2019. Ms. Brenda G. Johnson was her instructor.

Eye Opener

A turning point in my life became obvious to me one day at work, right in the middle of my shift. I was focused on finishing my task at hand just like any other day, any other shift. Only on this particular day, I guess I paid a little more attention to the way I was being treated by my fellow co-workers, as if my work was not as important and could take a back step to whatever they needed done at the time. My duties are very important because the information that I obtain from my patients is required before any medication is administered. I am a certified nurse assistant. I take vital signs, assist with patient care, and maintain a clean and safe environment.

I believe that my job is very crucial to both the nurses and doctors because I provide information that will influence

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and determine the outcome as to whether to give a certain medication or not. CNAs are not taken seriously and sometimes not looked at with respect because of their title. Usually our supervisors forget how valuable we really are until we are not available to assist them. CNAs are often the first person to approach the patient, which gives them the first one-on-one contact with the patient. The patients are more comfortable with us and see us in a different eye. They find it is easier to talk to us about their concerns.

To conclude my point, I have been a CNA for just about 16 years and have seen and heard a lot of things in the field -- unbelievable things, some that if you are not familiar with in this atmosphere, you would never even consider possible. I love my job and what it consists of, but it does not pay well unless you work longer hours and extra days.

For these reasons, I have decided to get my GED and pursue a degree in pulmonary science or more commonly known as respiratory therapy. Having a career in respiratory therapy will provide for a better life and future for me.

Pamela Edwards is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her teacher is Cheryl Viola.

Liberation of Paralyzed Words

I am from earth. After we are born as humans, we learn to belong to a family, a society, a country. We live with pride for the land, the nationality and the religion we were born into. When a baby is born, the Turks have a saying, "The baby came to the world." However, as the baby grows, it disregards being part of a larger whole and lives only with the sensation of being a part of the land and the language it was born into.

I'm in love with nature and life on this planet, but unfortunately it's too short. Therefore, it's not important where in the world we live, but how we live. I'm a person that was subjected to violence by my father throughout childhood and adolescence. Due to my family experiences and the country's egregious circumstances I am very familiar with violence, oppression, restriction and ban.

As a Turkish author of thirty-five stories published in literary magazines along with my previously published book and one in the works in Turkey, I have experienced censorship on occasion. As long as the soul deserves to live free, an author should have similar freedom to write, as desires to live freely.

Living in a country without the ability to communicate is like not living at all. As a result of communication barriers, I felt that I neither belonged to this land nor to the one I was born in. Thanks to a caring and dedicated teacher, for the first time I have faith that I will learn English and write my stories in this global language. She gave me hope, and for the first time I felt that someone in this country was listening, hearing, and respecting me. I wish that immigrants like myself would have teachers like Ms. Jordan. I've never met a person that teaches with such passion and love. I can't thank my teacher enough for enlightening my way.

I have so much to say and I've just begun. I have love to share with the people of the world. As Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of The Republic of Turkey, and the constant light of my path said, "A person should care about the serenity and welfare of all nations of the world as much as their own nation's existence and happiness, and should do their best to serve the happiness of all the world's nations, as well as valuing their own nation's happiness."

Conclusively, I would like to thank the United States for accepting my family and providing my daughter with a good education. As a mother nurtures her child, a nation nurtures its people. Sometimes the woman that loves and protects you is considered more of a mother to you than your biological one. Sometimes it's not the country you were born into, rather the country that protects, liberates, and cares for you, that is considered your homeland.

Julia Ortay is a Turkish author. Her book and stories are being published in Turkey. She is a student of Orange County Technical College Program in ESOL. Her teacher is Ms. Jordan. Her website is juliaortay.com.

Determined to Turn my Life Around

My name is Ramon. I was born June 1, 1985, in the USA. I work at a Good Year Auto Shop as a technician.

A turning point in my life was not only about letting go of the bad things that are not good for you or your past, but about making my own destiny. Some people call it fate, but fate is what happens when you let other people and external circumstances dictate your life. However, destiny is what happens when you commit to growing, learning, and taking chances. I made a decision and I stay firm on that decision not only for me, but for my kids and the people around me.

Life wasn't always easy for me when I was a kid. The leaders that I had weren't perfect. My parents came from Cuba in 1980 in El Mariel boatlift, so at that time things weren't easy for them, especially in a new country. I remember when I was finishing 2nd grade; my mom said my teacher informed her I was going to need special classes because I wasn't learning fast enough like the other kids. So, my mom signed the papers for me to attend. My dad had to be there too, but at that time he was in prison.

I remember when I started Middle School in 6th grade; the special classes program was called E.H. which stands for Emotional Handicap. I was in that program until 9th grade, when I dropped out. In E.H., classes were really bad. The kids were violent and I saw so many fights, I lost count. I would try to avoid those fights, but they always came to me, so I did what I had to do. After school, I didn't want to leave because home was worse. So many bad things happened at home that there are no words to describe it.

The first time I was put in jail I was only 11 years old. It was called Juvenile Detention Center. The second time was when I was 13. I was always in trouble with the law and I didn't care about the consequences. Once I turned 18, I got in trouble again, but this time I was considered an adult, so I was put in Dade County Jail. That was my turning point. Little by little, I decided to change my ways. I became tired of the life that I was living. Now, I am 33 years old and I look back and thank God for letting me make it this far. I have so many life stories that I need 10 million words to describe it or more. But I guess this will do.

To end this story, I will say never give up, keep pushing forward, and aim for the stars.

This anonymous author is a student at Project LEAD in Miami.

A Fighter

My name is Ronald Merlin. I'm from Chiapas, Mexico. I was born on December 11, 1985, and I'm an orphan.

It is not easy to be an orphan, and it's even more difficult living in the U.S.A. I have been blessed since I arrived in this country; I have met very good people who have given me the support and advice needed to move forward. Life has not been easy, but it has not been that difficult. The hardest thing for me has been to be without a mother. Thanks to God, I have moved forward and now I know that I am a blessed person.

In life we must always be positive and fight to reach the goals that we set. With faith in God and oneself everything can be achieved. I arrived in the United States on May 9, 2002. At first it was very hard. My first job was picking tomatoes, and I had never done that kind of work. But I asked God to guide me and help me get something better.

In August of 2005 I made the decision to move to Florida. It was not an easy decision, but that was when my life started to change. I wanted to start new things, to reach for a better future. One day I met a man who without knowing me gave me his support and love. He taught me not to give up and not to feel alone. I learned that as long as I'm responsible and dedicated to work I would never lack anything.

Thanks to these beliefs, I'm now a blessed person with everything that I need. The best thing is that now I can write, read, and speak enough English to enjoy a great job. Yes, I am a fighter because of many people that have shown me how to move forward and fight for my goals.

Ronald Merlin Marroquin is a student at the South Florida State College ESOL Program. His teacher is Larid Lopez.

Change Brings Changes

I was born in Sicily, the southernmost region of Italy. The place where I grew up is a small town of fishermen where you can see the mountain Etna, the highest active volcano in Europe. It's an amazing landscape! I'm happy to have grown up in this place because when I was a child, I was free to go around. I could swim in the Mediterranean and fish with my grandfather. I could take my bicycle to find hidden places that I'd never seen.

After I finished high school, I moved to Siena, a small city in Tuscany, where I attended the university. It was my first important change of my life. Actually, this choice I didn't make by myself but I followed the wishes of my friends who moved there! After I graduated, I came back to Sicily for a couple years, but I was unsatisfied by the environment. It was strange for me. The place that I love was not enough for me now. It was difficult for me to understand and accept myself without fear. It dawned on me that I really wanted to live in the United States where part of my family lives. Before I could do that, there was something that I had to do. I decided to continue studying in my field by moving to Turin, in Piedmont. It was for me that kind of thing that you need to finish before you leave in order to live without regrets. So, here we go!

There have been a few turning points in my life to bring me here, not just one. Change brings changes! More changes can lead to the breaking of some chains that everyone has due to our own weaknesses. Everything started from studying outside my hometown and now I feel ready to start a new life here more than ever. I'm looking forward to it! We will see what happens.

Luca Sicuso is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

I Want to Change My Life

The first time I came to the United States, I was scared of everything, but I think my bravest moment was when I wanted to change my life. I applied to enter the US military, and I applied for a job at an electronic company by myself. The first

time I was so scared, but I never gave up; the military did not accept me.

I think the best advice I got was when I talked with my friend. He has lived in the United States a long time and he has a lot of experience here. Right now, he is a mechanical engineer. He told me I need to go to school and not to work too much; don't care too much about money. "You need to care more about knowledge, because if you have knowledge and you are good at language, you can control your life."

I know now what to do to prepare. Next time, I can try one more time, because I am changing my life. I think the bravest moment is when you have victory over yourself.

Thuc Banh, from Vietnam, is a student at Brevard Adult Education ESOL in Melbourne, Florida. His teacher is Christopher "Kit" Adams

The Turning Point of My Life

Everyone has a turning point in their life. Some of them are a little different than others. I'm Tiffani Harris, a 30-year-old mother with 3 beautiful kids, born and raised in Tallahassee, Florida.

My life hasn't been easy. It hasn't been hard either. It's been what I've made of it. I never knew what I could do until I had to do it. When I got sentenced to 43 months in prison, I was devastated. I never imagined myself away from my kids, my mom, or any of my family. I thought it was the end of the world. I didn't see myself doing that much time. I fought and fought for a lesser plea, but unfortunately it didn't happen.

God had other plans for my life. There was a purpose for the time that I was sentenced. I was living freely and lavishly on the streets. I put God on the back burner because I had everything I needed and wanted. I didn't know coming to prison would transform my character, renew my mind, and change my way of thinking so dramatically. They say never question God so I never do. I knew there was a reason for everything that led me to where I was.

At first, I got lost in time, but as days went by I no longer thought about the time I was doing. I started looking forward to what I could get out of the time I was given. I came in contact with so many good-hearted people, so many people that I personally thought had no business being in prison. One thing I learned was to never judge people because you never know anyone's story. I learned how to encourage people instead of bringing them down. I learned how to be an up-lifter instead of a down-puller. I learned to go right instead of left. I gained patience, something that I didn't have a lot of. I learned to accept things that I couldn't change. I learned to turn to God instead of myself. I had to learn how to accept my past and keep moving. I no longer focused on the things I lost in the midst.

I look forward to what there is to gain. God's goodness is all around me. It's always easy for people to see the negative in us, what we don't have, what we didn't do, or what we should have done. I'm a conqueror, I'm no longer weak. I am strong. I'm no longer afraid. I'm confident, I'm no longer in debt, I'm prosperous, and I'm no longer the victim because I've got the victory.

Ms. Tiffani Harris is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Tallahassee, FL. She is the 30-year old mother to three children. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Myra Williams.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

Your Destiny is in Your Hands

My name is Anastasia Chanto. I am from Venezuela. The best advice I have ever received is from a quote by Charles R. Swindoll: “Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.” After I heard that, I realized sometimes people lose their focus. They get filled up with concerns, fears, doubts and they feel they cannot get out of their circumstances. Sadly, they are unable to see the alternatives and solutions around them. They concentrate only on the 10% of life and forget about the rest of the 90% left in themselves. If everyone put on their thinking caps, they could figure out how to solve the problem. Many people have the mental capacity but they do not use it to the fullest.

Certainly, there are adverse situations in which you do not have control of what happens such as what people say or do. You do not know if today will rain or shine, or if the third world war will begin tomorrow, or if the stock market will fall. But do you know that you have control of your own actions?

No matter what happens, the decision is in your hands. You can fall to the storm or fight with all your force and move on. You can see sunshine while others see darkness. You can see opportunities while others see obstacles. It is all in your mind and in your desire to achieve your goals. You must live life to the fullest and focus on the positives. Know that the bad moments are required for growth because it is there where your skills and constancy are measured and you can prove that you are fully equipped to face any challenges.

Anastasia Chanto wants to become a doctor in this country. She knows that she needs to learn English first. Now, she is a student at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Best Advice

Before migrating from my homeland, Egypt, I was really afraid of immigrating to the USA. I had listened to many Egyptians who had never travelled to America and dealt with Americans before, and most of their discussions criticized US politics and policies. In addition, around the time I had my immigration interview at the American Embassy in Cairo in February 2015, I was shocked at the horrible news of the three American Muslim students, two of whom wore Hijab (a traditional woman's head cover), who had been shot to death at residential complex of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I was really afraid of moving to America—especially because I am a Muslim woman who wears a Hijab. Upon reading the news, the first idea that came to my mind was “Suppose that it happens to me!”

I still remember the day when walking along the sea in Alexandria, Egypt, that I decided to go inside the mall to grab something to eat. All I could think about was the horrifying incident in Chapel Hill. The mall was crowded, and while I was searching for a table inside the food court, a friendly non-Egyptian woman offered to share her table with me. She started to speak in English, and she told me she was an American living in Alexandria. I thought this was a sign.

Normally I avoid discussing anything personal with strangers; however, I don't know why, but I opened up my heart to her! Perhaps it was that she seemed so kind and friendly and that motivated me to speak with her about all my fears about moving to the USA. She was an amazing listener with a quiet smile. I told her I feared moving to America and leaving everything back in Egypt and, in essence, cutting all my roots.

After listening to me, she looked at me and said, “I can understand why you feel like this, but you have a great smile, so keep smiling like that and you will do great in America.” She also asked me if I knew where I would live in the States, and she even offered that I stay in her house in Chicago if I could not find a place to stay in. At the end of our talk, she introduced herself: she was the director of the American International School in Alexandria.

It was the best advice I have ever received — keep smiling. Moving to America was a great turning point in my life. Since moving here, I realized that I should not judge a whole community because of only one action that someone did! I have met fantastic, supportive people while in America, and as the amazing lady I met in Alexandria advised me, I have kept smiling at everyone.

Allaa Emam is studying English with her instructor, Kathryn H. Niedbalec, in an ESOL College & Career Readiness course at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, FL.

Best Advice in the Form of a Question

I had a very difficult childhood. I wasn't taught life skills growing up, so at the age of seventeen, I got married not knowing any life skills. Pregnant with twins, married with no life skills, I felt as if I had fallen into a dark hole.

Fast forward to age twenty-two, five children, divorced, alone and NO education due to leaving school at the tender age of fifteen, the question now was; what am I going to do with myself?

I sat in my living room weeping and asking myself "why am I going through this?" Why didn't my mom teach me better?" I mean I don't even know how to balance a check book, or how to save.

Out of nowhere came this loud voice, "What did you do to get into this situation?" I was insulted by this question! "It's not my fault I'm in this situation!" The Holy Spirit responded, "Yes, it's true that you were not taught, but you are not a child anymore." Needless to say, I realized, I was without excuse. If I wanted better, then I had to do better. Like the Holy Spirit said, "...I'm not a child anymore."

Cassandra Rosario is a student at North Tech and her teacher is Mrs. Kia Barrow.

Best Advice a Person Gave You

Has someone ever given you good advice? People give you good advice because in the future it might do you some good. That's why it's good to listen to people. Let me tell you about the advice someone once gave me. When I started going to Prep I had low grades and a low GPA. People always tried to put me down. I had teachers at the school tell me "I was going to be nothing in life." I thought to myself..." ok." When that was said, I sat down and did my work, but I didn't understand the work, so I sat there and shut down because what she didn't know is that I really needed her help, not her criticism. So I walked out of the class room. When I got to the office, my principal was in there and he asked "Are u ok Mr. Williams?" I said "no." And that's when we had the talk. "Mr. Williams walking out and quitting will get you NOWHERE." "Pride will get you Nowhere, so swallow it and do what you need to do."

Davon Williams is a student at North Tech and his teacher is Ms. Kia Barrow.

Best Advice Ever!

The best advice my mother gave me was "stay in school so you could get your diploma and your G.E.D., and be somebody." That was the best advice my mother ever gave me. Till this day, I'm working on getting both diploma and G.E.D. After I get both I could finally get a good paying job. School is nothing to play with. You have to take school serious or you could end up failing and repeating the same grade again.

Additionally, I have a son to look after, so I want to set the right example and let my son see me walking down the right path. I attend school at North Tech High School. A school that helps you achieve your goal and what you want to be in life even helps you start your own business in the future. They have different trades that you want to do, for example: plumbing, welding — those are really good trades to learn too. "Therefore, kids, stay in school to be somebody."

Dontaveous Gibson is a student at North Tech/pre-apprentice program and her teacher is Tiqkia Barrow.

Go Back

Have you ever been given good advice that helped you later on in life? Well I have. The best advice I ever received was from my aggravating godmother, “go back.” Growing up seeing people that are successful gave me a desire to get my education. So now, I’m trying to show people that doubted me that I can and I will get my high school diploma. Even when I finish, I plan on furthering my education by going to college and becoming a DCF worker. Coming back to school, I was introduced to a lady that goes by the name of Ms. B. Getting to know her, she stuck by my side by first making me show up every day, she really inspires me because her story is similar to mine. She was a young single parent that really did not see her future, but she achieved everything she set her mind to. She bought her first house and she became very successful. Now I am going after my goals for my son. I’ve improved in all of my subject areas and I am grateful for my aggravating godmother for telling me to “go back to school.”

Jasmine Aris is a student at North Tech and her teacher is Mrs. Kia Barrow.

Best Advice

The best advice that I have ever gotten was to stay in school, because you need your education in life to get where you want to be and get the job that you want. I remember days I didn’t want to go to school. Many reasons that most wouldn’t understand, like loud students being annoying, me being quiet or what my peers may call different.

While this is how I felt and not going to school was my preference, I one day realized sitting at home was not going to get me anywhere. Well, I can’t take ALL the credit....it was really my mom that told me that if I didn’t get my education, then I was on a path to nowhere.

So, I finally got the motivation to get my education or at least to do something positive. Because what I was doing before wasn’t going to help me in the long run.

Jannel Merite is a student at North Tech and her teacher is Mrs. Kia Barrow.

Best Advice

Homage to my late uncle Walter for a quote that I take to heart every single day, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect.” At the time, this statement was nothing more than a silly quote that went from one ear and flew out the other. As I’ve aged, this quote has become valuable advice. Growing up, I was a small, under sized kid with a passion for basketball. I dreamed to one day become a professional even with my physical disadvantages. I would have to work twice as hard as my peers and from the beginning I knew this was no small task.

So for help, I reached out to my uncle Walter who was quite the player in college. He didn’t have low expectations and he told me, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect.” Hearing this statement, I practiced for countless hours, believing it would payoff someday. Today, I apply this same advice to my education and study habits. Remember, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect.”

Joshua Minott is a student at North Tech and his teacher is Mrs. Kia Barrow.

The Best Advice I Ever Received

When my friends and I were younger, we were always struggling with doing the right thing. Maybe we were selfish and immature, but whenever we did something wrong, we afterwards realized we had made a mistake. It is only from our mistakes that we are going to learn how to make things better.

I received advice years ago that comes to mind every time I’m facing hard times and doing things wrong. I remember when I was in high school, I was struggling with getting to school on time. At that time, it wasn’t that bad in my eyes because I knew some of my friends would be late and we would all be outside the school making jokes, laughing and having fun. What wasn’t pleasant was when they sent us home and said we had to be accompanied by our parents before allowing us back to class. Our ignorance and irresponsibility kept us away from our responsibilities and things still remained the same even after we promised to do things right, more times than we can count.

One day it seemed like half of the school was late, and everyone who passed in front of the school stopped and asked us “what is happening here?” When we told them we were late, they shook their head and said we needed to be punished. In my case, it was even worse because being late became common and being on time three times straight in a week might be considered a big accomplishment.

On this particular day, the gates were closed. My friend and I were joking, laughing and enjoying the day like usual until an elderly man came to me and asked me “did you guys get in trouble or what?” At the time, I felt ashamed and couldn’t lift my head, I whispered: “we are late”; he said: “I can’t hear you son, what?” I said it a little bit louder “well, we are late, they are probably going to send us back home.” He said: “Raise your head son and look at me in the eyes because what I’m about to tell you will be a gift, it will help you build your future.” First, “This opportunity you have, many people would give everything to have it, but unfortunately, they will never have it; second, don’t abuse the sacrifice your parents are making by messing this up. The only way you will have a better tomorrow, a tomorrow where you will be respected by everyone and become whoever you want to be; is to be on time and be motivated! Being motivated means fighting for your dream. Do you know how proud parents are seeing their children being educated and successful? Your future is right in front of you, take it seriously! Education is the key, and it starts today by making the choice to come early.”

After he left I told myself I would come to school early and take part in all my classes. I wanted to sure I learned what was being taught. I didn’t want to be a student everyone would remember as the guy who always missed class and came late to school. I started to come early and began getting better and better grades. I also became the Vice President of my class and the most interesting thing that happened was my teachers considered me one of the best students in class.

Jephthe Linus Alcindor is an ESOL student at South Florida State College, where his teacher is Melanie Proteau Blake.

My Mother Changed My Life

When I was a child, my brother, sister and I liked to play computer games or play outside with friends, but my mom made us do our homework or study for a test. My mom, Luz Pacheco, dedicated herself to her family and her job as a teacher. Although she spent many hours working, she found time to give us love and educate us on how to be responsible.

My mom always talked about her childhood and how supportive her dad was with her and her brother and sisters. My grandfather Roman and my grandmother Soledad had a tough life raising ten children, nine daughters and one son. They instilled in them the importance of studying. My grandfather always said to his daughters, “If you have a bad husband, you will be able to take care of yourselves because you have a profession.”

My mom always repeated her father’s words to us, and she used to say other phrases to encourage us to pursue our goals. “Querer es poder” (To want is power), “El tiempo es oro” (Time is gold), and “El que estudia triunfa” (If you study, you succeed). She also gave this advice to her students at school.

I will never forget those phrases. She motivated me to be a good student and a better person.

My mom passed away three years ago, and I dedicate this story to her.

Karem Paredes is a student of Manatee Literacy Council.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

The best advice I have ever received helped me to make a choice between work and school. I was really interested in a job, but I needed to focus on my school and I didn’t have enough time. My teacher made me understand it was more important for me to go to school daily. I was really close to getting my GED, so I knew I could pass my test if I focused on my school.

Since I have a family, getting a job was most important. When I found this job, I was excited because it was my first experience working. However, I was scared for my school. I started working from 8 am to 4 pm but my class started at 8 AM also. Therefore, I had only one-day to attend school. Unfortunately, I couldn't improve my English during my work because I usually spoke in my native language. Sometimes when a coworker spoke English it sounded incorrect.

As a result of hardly attending class, my teacher told me that my test score went down. I missed a lot of days that could have helped me do better. For example, I could have been studying Burlington, Angel, or doing activities in class. My Teacher said I can do it if I focus and keep going to class every day. I could pass my test and even graduate this year. After that, I quit my job immediately. I choose to stay in school. I think an education is not only important, it is the most important thing I can do in my life.

When you know better, you do better. I realize continuing to study and practicing daily in the future, I could have a better life. Focusing on my education is a better decision to me.

Myriam Britou is from Haiti. She came to the USA in 2015.

Love Yourself First

Everyone knows that life is a mix of perfection and imperfection. I considered myself one of the imperfections. In fact, I did not like my body, and I wondered why God put me in this body. Why this one? I was angry. I was fourteen and I was looking for the love of others. Every compliment from people, even the smallest, made me really happy. Also, every offense from them made me sad. My happiness and my sadness depended on others. They could make me laugh, cry, sad, or happy anytime they wanted. Yes, I was looking for their love because I could not love myself. I needed them to feel confidence in myself.

I was not doing anything, just looking at nature, when I saw her. My first crush was older than I was. She was sixteen. It took me a while to talk to her. When I finally did, we had a boring

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conversation that was my fault. Then she said, "I understand you. You are looking for something else. If you cannot love yourself, how could you ever love someone else? I got some advice for you. Love you first before you love others." Then she left. I remember every single word like it was yesterday.

I did not pay attention to what she said until the next day. Her advice came to my mind and played in a loop, at school, at home, everywhere. I took some time to reflect on it, and I realized it was such good advice that I had to work on it. So every morning before I went to school, every weekend before I hung out, every Sunday before I went to the church, I looked at myself in the mirror and said, "I love you."

I did not really believe it, but I kept doing it every day until I forgot the routine. One day when I was fifteen, someone said something bad to me. To my big surprise, it did not make me feel anything, no sadness, no emotion. I was okay. That is when I realized that I had fallen in love with myself, completely. I understood that my perfection and imperfection made me who I am. I am the person I was looking to for love.

"Love you first before you love others" is the best advice I have ever received and from someone I barely knew. If you are in the same situation as this fourteen-year-old kid was, tell yourself that you love you until it becomes true. Like the proverb says, "Happiness is not looking for perfection; it's tolerating imperfection." Our imperfection makes us perfect. Love yourself.

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

Take Heart

In the past few years I had a terrible disease. I didn't know what it was. But thanks to God, I came to the United States in 2016 and 2017. I was admitted to the hospital, I saw doctors, and they told me that I had a valve problem in my heart.

In January 2018, I had open heart surgery at the Winter Haven Hospital. The doctors gave me a big paper pillow heart

to protect my own heart. My family and friends wrote the best advice on it that I have ever received.

One of the best pieces of advice on it was: “You are going to be better and stronger. Take care, and I hope you are going to be good soon.”

Finally, I’m good. I feel better now thanks to God.

Osmy Jean works as an assistant chef and is now living a normal life thanks to medication and doctors at Winter Haven hospital. Mr. Barnie has taught him for a year.

The Best Advice

I grew up hearing advice from many people. So, the most important pieces of advice are from my mom and great-grandmother. I am thankful for them.

I thought my mother’s advice was only words to make me have a difficult life, but I was totally wrong! Now, I understand her phrases. For example, “para peliar se nesecitan dos” in English, “for a fight you need two people”. This advice is important for marriage to avoid a fight.

My great-grandmother was most peaceful with me. When I felt like nobody understood me, her advice to me was take it easy, “Roma no se hizo en un dia” in English, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”. Later, she encouraged me to try again. That kind of advice always makes me feel comfortable and brave.

My friends also give good advice. I like to listen to it because sometimes it helps with problems.

In conclusion, advice is never complete. I continue to listen to my mom’s tips. Now, I can appreciate it and I feel thankful for my great-grandmother, who was wise.

Rosa Pileo is married and has two beautiful daughters. She enjoys walking outdoors and spending time with her family. She moved to the United States from Chilapa Gro., Mexico.

Back to School Wasn't Easy for Me

When I was in my country I didn't have a chance to finish high school. I also didn't know if I was going to need a high school diploma. You see, just three months ago a friend I had just met gave me the best advice I have ever received.

I stop going to school in 2002 because I had a baby. After that my dad encouraged me to go back to school, although I refused. When I first came to the USA I struggled a lot because I couldn't speak English. I went to school but after three months I had to drop out and I had my third baby. As you can imagine years passed and I eventually attempted school once again. Unfortunately, I had to drop out once again because I had three kids to care of, as well as my husband. I would always say to myself: "I can't" isn't a good word." Friends and co-workers encouraged me and told me to go back to school. Sometimes, I knew what I wanted but I just didn't do it.

Later, a friend I had just met made me see things differently by telling me to stop underestimating myself, and he also asked me to make him a promise to stay in school. I did! Now I see how much I've improved and I see a future. I realized he was right and that makes me feel excited. I won't give school up again.

Wisline Laratte is from Haiti, a mom of three kids. Working as a certified nursing assistant and is a student at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe with Ms. Johnson. She is looking for a better future.

My Bravest Moment

An Unforgettable Day

It was Wednesday, June 18, 2014. I was on my way to go to work, and I was involved in a severe motor vehicle accident. It was raining, and the road was slippery. The driver in front of me made a quick stop. Suddenly, I stepped on my brake, and my car turned toward north instead of traveling east, and the westbound traffic cut me in half. At least five other drivers were involved in the accident.

I was airlifted to Delray Medical Center. I was in a coma. I did not respond to voices, sounds, or any sort of activity going on nearby. I was still alive, but my brain was functioning at its lowest stage of alertness. I did not initiate voluntary actions. I did not awaken for at least a month. I underwent multiple complicated surgeries. In addition, I also had several surgeries on my right elbow and my right shoulder. After a month, I was sent to Delray Rehabilitation Center for therapy. They taught me how to talk, walk, and eat again.

At the beginning, I was struggling, and I was having trouble feeding myself. I had to use a spoon with an extension handle to put food into my mouth. I couldn't shave or take a shower. My wife had to assist me doing so. My right elbow and right shoulder had limited rotation. I couldn't reach over my head. However, after four years, the quality of my life has improved physically and physiologically.

I was at fault in the accident, and I only had personal injury protection (PIP) auto insurance in my car. However, my health insurance covered all the hospital bills. It was over two million dollars. The other five drivers who were involved in the accident sued me for \$80,000, but my lawyer fought the case and I did not have to pay anything. They investigated the case, and they found that I was not talking or texting on the phone and I was not drunk when the accident happened.

Even though I could not go back to work, I am able to do a lot by myself. With the grace of God, I am alive. I am able to drive to school to go to the Adult Education Center to learn English. I learn something new every day when I come to school. Thank

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you God for giving me the strength to keep going. That was the most unforgettable day of my life.

Belou Cazeau is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Brother's Hero

Have you ever been in a situation where a big sister, 10 years old, had to make an emergency decision to rescue her smaller brother, a 7 year old, who accidentally fell in a river that was more like a deep hole? This required help -- immediate help!

Our family lived on a farm in the countryside on a hilly twenty-acre plot of land with different varieties of fruit trees, spice trees, coconut trees, and lumber trees. A beautiful scenery consisting of a hotel, a spa, and a river overlooked the estate. Tourists and visitors came to have a hot bath, where hot water poured out from the rocks.

My brother and I always helped our parents on the farm by picking fruits and spices. One sunny afternoon my father sent us to pick spices close by the river. As we went down the hill, we listened to the birds singing and seeing butterflies of different colors flying from one tree to another, and the sweet smell of the plants like perfume in the air. Upon reaching the river, we made a wrong decision to cross over to the other side, which we should not have done. As children, we were glad for an opportunity to look for shrimp and fish in the river before we picked the spices.

After we went on the other side of the river, the stones were slippery, and we had to pass by a deep hole. Upon reaching this section, we paused a little to look for fish in the water. Then suddenly, my brother lost his balance and fell in the deep water. Neither of us could swim, but I knew I had to do something immediately!

I quickly climbed off the rock into the deep water. I screamed to my brother to come! I stretched my hand towards him and quickly pulled him out of the water. I was terrified when he fell into the water, but after he was out of the water, I felt happy and relieved.

After resting for a while, we went to pick the spices on the other side close by and then we went home. We did not tell our parents what had happened. When I was older I asked myself the question, “Where did that courage come from?” God.

Elfreda Williams is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her teacher is Cheryl Viola.

Get Up and Continue

My name is Zorabel Fernandez, and I was born in Puerto Rico. I only have a sister and my parents. My childhood was normal and simple but happy. Every weekend my family went to my grandparents’ farm, and we met with my aunts and cousins where we grew up and had a great time. In my school years, I was in different schools, and I graduated from the University of Puerto Rico in Business Administration. In my younger years, I loved going to the beach and dancing. In my country, people are very happy, and we love to party and have fun either with family or friends.

I have worked in many things: banks, retirement system for the employees of the government of Puerto Rico, my own business, hardware store, hospitals, etc., in customer service. In the last five years, I have had many changes in my life for different reasons, but I think that everything depends on the attitude that one has in life. Because it is said that, “When life gives you lemons, you have to make a good lemonade.” So get up and continue.

I have been married for 26 years, and I have a 23-year-old daughter who is already an elementary school teacher and a 21-year-old son who is still studying at the university. God has blessed me with this family and with good children.

I have been in Florida for 9 months. My husband lost his job after Hurricane Maria and has been here for 1 year and 3 months. At the moment, I am learning English at the Adult Educational Center and working. To be honest, I have not gotten used to it here, and I miss my house and my family a lot in Puerto Rico. I really do not know how much longer we are here. I’m just learning a new language and a different culture without

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much pressure to see what a new change brings to my life. The important thing is that, “No matter what your life throws you, never stop swinging the bat.”

Zorabel Fernandez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Pain, Courage, and Happiness

When I was full of expectations, and the door of the future was opening for me, something unexpected happened. I lost my father at the beginning of my career. I had to continue despite the deep pain and sadness; however, I tried to do my best. It was a new life that was very difficult to face. During that new beginning, full of illusions and goals and infinite sadness, the sun of my life appeared, my son.

How painful my father's loss was, but how wonderful my son's arrival was. It has been a huge gift of God, which also represented a new challenge and a lot of courage was needed.

Having a child is so easy but raising him and facing this without help from my son's father was not easy. Here is all the advice and values I have received from my parents that are important.

It is a great challenge that life has put in my way, where my family love and support has been fundamental. I believe that all women who train and educate their children alone, with responsibility and values, are very brave. The presence of my son was a compensation to the huge emptiness that my father's death left. My father was a wonderful man and the best father.

Today my son is 17 years old. He is a good child, an excellent student, and I feel very proud of him. Furthermore, life gave me a great partner, my husband. Together we have created a beautiful home, a new life stage which also requires courage if you want to strengthen and maintain the marriage bond forever as my parents did.

It does not matter that I have had to postpone my dreams and

my initial goals a little. Nothing is more important at this moment than my son, and I want to focus on him. Therefore, now I feel happy and stable, and I am moving forward to my life challenges with all the possible enthusiasm and optimism together with my family.

I know my father looks down on me from heaven with satisfaction for having bravely faced all these stages of my life. And I infinitely thank God and my family for not leaving me alone in this whole process. I will miss my father forever; however, my son has brought to my life wonderful experiences and endless love.

Monica Gutierrez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Mind Over Matter

My bravest moment in life was also a turning point in my life. In January 2018, I found out I was going to welcome my fourth child into the world. One of the happiest days of my life would soon come to an end.

One night in April of 2018, my children, my husband and I, decided to take a walk after dinner. A car approached us and began to fire shots. I took a quick pause and looked around, not knowing what to do. I saw my children and reacted quickly and ran over to cover them as bullets flew everywhere. I knew I had to protect them from harm, holding them from anything dangerous, not caring what would happen to me. I could just hear the shots fly by my head. I could see them slightly pass my arms and legs.

When the car sped off, I told my children to get help from our neighbors and call 911! My husband lay helpless on the ground bleeding out for his life. I ran over and began to apply pressure. I looked back to see if the kids went to get help, but they just stood there with blank stares. From the screaming and crying, the neighbors came out rushing to help. I felt pain in my foot and fell. Everything went black after that.

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Weeks went by and I ended up losing my baby due to a miscarriage. My world and my life wasn't the same. No walking, no baby, no work, no money, and no help. My husband was disabled for the next six months. My kids were in fear. I wanted to give up.

The incident just replays in my mind over and over again. Noise brings trauma. There was no hope and no way out-- just darkness in our heads. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder had kicked in and we could not surpass these thoughts. Conversations were not even real, just reaction from my body of normality because in actuality, I was in another place.

I thought I lost everything. I did not lose everything though because I still had my children and my husband. Every day that goes by I get to wake up and see them because of my bravest moment. I was proud of myself for doing that because they still had a life to live.

We are still learning to heal and to be in a better state of mind. I am thankful for my family. I love my children and husband, and we will help each other get through this experience.

Jasmine Del Valle is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her teacher is Cheryl Viola.

Moving On

My bravest moment started when my husband asked my opinion about studying in the United States. I didn't think about it, I just said yes, let's do it! We were living at a place very different from our new destiny. We called our house a farmhouse because it was isolated from the city and had plantations, a lot of animals, fresh milk and yogurt. Every day I used to turn on the springs water to water the plants and to attract the birds, at the same time my son used to throws seeds for them.

In my backyard was an owl nest and sometimes it was possible to see a woodpecker, parrot and other nice animals. This was a place for those who like nature. So, we had moved to Melbourne, where it is very different from our farmhouse.

In Melbourne I have many options for good schools, stores, supermarkets, and restaurants. We have Disney! It is good to have Disney around. As you can see, it was a huge change in our lives, but a good one.

In my opinion, every time you leave the comfort zone is a chance to grow up and see you are able to handle the new or the unknown.

Natasha Monteiro is an ESOL student at the Adult Education Center in Melbourne.

My Bravest Moments

There are many occasions in our life when we have to decide to do something different from our regular life. One of my very important decisions was deciding to do my Ph.D. at Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, India. My counselor asked me about my choice between simply getting a degree easily or learning the things which could be useful later in life. I answered instantly that I wanted to learn something which could be useful in my latter years.

My guide was herself a vice chancellor of the university where I went for my Ph.D. She suggested that I first teach mathematics at the graduate level, which I had not done earlier. I accepted the challenge and taught three courses in three different semesters. Side by side, I was also attending computer science classes. While at the university, I attended several seminars related to mathematics and computer science. Since mathematics education was only included as a branch of mathematics in 2000, getting material was not easy. After all the efforts and encouragement, I was unable to finish my degree in time because of my family needs.

Another tough decision for me was when I came to the USA. After living here for a few months, I was thinking of returning to my country where life was easier for me. But when I got my Green Card, I thought twice before returning and decided to enroll at the Adult Education Center. I am enjoying learning at this school. I have finished my advanced level English. I also

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worked as a volunteer in the computer lab. At present, I am in the College and Career Readiness class. I am learning many new ideas. Someday, I want to finish my Ph.D. work. My experience in my country will be helpful for that.

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

Into the Unknown

The most difficult decision I had to make was the day I decided to come to live in the United States. It was very difficult for me to sit down with my mom and my dad and tell them that I would leave everything behind to start a new story in search of a better life.

I was in the last year of my college. In just one year, I was going to be a doctor. I was going to abandon five years of sacrifices. I also left my grandparents who were very old. I left the comforts of my home and my family to venture into the unknown in the search for a better life where I could fulfill my dreams.

I am very satisfied with the decision I made because despite being far from my family, I am fulfilling my dreams. I am studying English, and I know that very soon I will be able to study something related to medicine. I am very satisfied with my choice because this country has given me the opportunity to be free.

Alicia Triana is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Goals and Ambitions

Preparing for a New Beginning

My name is Milagros Aquino. I'm a 55 year old, Hispanic, single mother of five.

I've been incarcerated since April 26, 2010. I served 6 months at Lowell Annex, and on October 21, 2010 I was moved to Lowell Work Camp. It was good for me because I enjoying working while growing up.

My first six months went by pretty fast working in the kitchen. Then I overheard them talking about having a program training dogs. I was raised with dogs, and highly interested in the program. I wrote classification and asked to be one of the twelve to open the program. We trained each dog for eight weeks, which was enough time to get close to them. Those and other skills will help me better myself in life. After a year, I asked for a job change. While training dogs, it seemed like my time slowed down because we couldn't go out of the gate. Everything we did was mainly inside the dorm.

After training dogs, I worked as a gate orderly, which was okay. It was mainly just paperwork and cleaning. After a couple of weeks, I was asked if I wanted to work as a canteen orderly, which I did for three months. I worked every job at Lowell Work Camp, but enjoyed the car wash most. I did this for three years and four months. It was great during hot days, but not during the cold ones.

My last job at Lowell was in the Department of Forestry, which wasn't bad. I enjoyed the bus ride of an hour away. I did this for three months and was transferred to Gadsden Correctional Facility. I didn't like it at first, but now I have a plan.

My first goal is to continue to do well, and go home on a clean slate. I'm getting my GED so that when I go home I can attend small business school. I am going to push hard to open one or more businesses.

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I have the following ideas in mind: Doggie Day Care, where not only will I take care of your pet while you're on vacation, but I will train your dog, and teach him how to walk right beside you. I would also like to open up a small laundromat where you can drop off your laundry or 'do-it-yourself'. I also think that a car wash would be great. I would like to have a mobile car wash where I can come to your home or place of work, and wash your car so that you won't have to miss work. You will have your vehicle clean for that special day ahead of you.

I want to enjoy the rest of my life with my soul mate, and my family.

Ms. Milagros Aquino is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Myra Williams.

My Literacy Journey to Success

I want to share my history with you! My name is Ana Cotua. I'm 36 years old and I'm an accountant. I'm from Venezuela and I have been in the USA for 15 months with my husband and my daughter.

Venezuela is having the worst moment right now and unfortunately my family and I lived in a dangerous situation over there. That's why we had to leave our country. I didn't grow up thinking or dreaming of being an immigrant; but now I am, so I have to see the positive side of everything. Now, I'm in a beautiful country, knowing a new culture and learning a new language.

My way of learning the English language began in Venezuela. Before I came here, I took a class for 6 months, once per week. Once I moved here I went to the ESOL program in Oldsmar. Those classes helped me to get basic skills in grammar and writing, but I needed to improve my reading and communication skills, because I felt fearful to speak with others in English. It was then that my husband and I started to look for other options and we found the tutor program in the Palm Harbor Library. We signed up to get classes and they assigned us to Denise as my tutor and Mike as my husband's tutor. We started class at the

end of January, and during these months we have learned a lot. I meet Denise once per week and we can talk about how our week was and also we make some activities and reading. Sometimes I go with my husband to his class with Mike and I receive reinforcement in grammar and Reading. I also enjoy talking with him. Right now I feel better because I can understand when someone talks to me and I can speak and read so much better. Also, now I can help my daughter to do her homework. My daughter is very smart, she is in third grade and she got the language so fast. When I started to study with her she corrected me a lot, but now it is different. I'm helpful to her and that makes me happy, so I'm very thankful for Denise and Mike.

In addition to the tutor hours, I use different tools to study, such as Rosetta Stone app. I watch videos on Youtube and movies in English. I think learning a new language is a long process. I know it's not easy, but it's a plus in my life. I want to try to keep learning that new language to get a high level, and get more opportunities to do good things in this great country. The knowledge is infinite so I can't be comfortable with basic or poor skills. I have to work on it every day to succeed. Sometimes I have ups and downs, but the key is being constant and every day I can do better.

The language breaks limits and opens doors. Now I'm preparing forward to go to the next level, that is to go to the school, get a certificate in my career and find a professional job. I will never give up! And I want to invite you to start today and never stop!

Ana Cotua is a student at at Literacy Council of Palm Harbor. Her tutor is Denise Lynn.

My Stepping Stones to English

When I arrived in the USA from Brazil in 2004, I didn't speak English. After living in Boston for six months, I got to the intermediate level. Then, I moved back to Brazil for 12 years and didn't practice speaking much. Meanwhile my husband wasn't very good at speaking English either.

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Two years ago I came back to Florida to live. I brought my two sons this time - Bruno is 7 and Arthur is almost 3. Now my husband speaks better English than I do because he works outside of the house. I was looking for a place to help me to speak better because I didn't feel comfortable.

Then I found the literacy program at the Palm Harbor Library. Tanya, the person who matched me with my tutor, introduced me to Miss Lola. She is helping me to speak good English and improve every week. She is very nice. She speaks slowly and clearly. For me the hardest part is my pronunciation because of my Portuguese accent. Now I can say -ed at the end of a verb. Before people asked me to speak Spanish with them. Now nobody does.

When my son, Bruno talks to me, he mixes Portuguese with English. Arthur also speaks English, Portuguese and his own language. I can't imagine not being able to understand my sons. We just speak Portuguese at home, because for us it is important for them to speak both languages. Once I read that your bond with your children will probably not be as good if you give up your native language, and you don't know how to speak good English either.

My English has been improving by speaking to my friends and neighbors. I practice reading school notes, NPR News on the Internet, emails and magazines. I am also participating in a Toastmaster club. It is a place where groups of people go to learn how to speak better in public. For me, it is good to listen to all of them there. My Stepping Stones are improving every day. It is so good to be able to communicate better, now that I feel more confident reading, writing and speaking English.

Adria Fraga is a student at the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library in Palm Harbor, Florida. Her tutor is Lola Dickert.

Someone Will Do it for You

I am from Puerto Rico where I studied to become a health professional. One day, working on the Neonatal Critical Care Unit, I asked myself what it would be like to work in a pediatric

hospital in the United States. I imagined that it would be wonderful, that I would have the best equipment to be able to offer the best to the patients. At that moment, I did not plan to leave my country. I passionately worked for many years taking care of patients, while the thought of being part of a hospital became vague, until I did not remember it anymore.

During that time, my husband decided to advance in his studies to offer us a better future, and I could stay at home helping my daughters achieve their goals. I stayed home because I wanted to recover time lost with my family. Although I enjoyed being with my family, I still longed to work in my field. It was at that moment that I decided to study and train for a job that would allow me to do what I desired. I learned everything I know because of a teacher who, in addition to training me, told me something that I will never forget. “Opportunities are for those who take them. If you do not take them, someone will do it for you.”

That phrase inspired me, but I continued with my life as I had planned. My husband finished studying, and he asked me if we could move to the U.S. My response was a resounding “no.” I did not see why we would have to leave our comfortable life, our family, and make our kids go through a difficult transition. Every day he told me stories of people who told him they made the decision to move, and they were doing well.

I used to ask myself, “why?” How could I know if I would be okay if I did not try? Suddenly, the advice that had been given to me came to my mind. “Opportunities are for those who take them. If you do not take them, someone will do it for you.”

God helped us to take the next step. Moving was not easy; it still hurts, but I am certain that it was the best decision. Not only did my family achieve their goals, but I am very close to achieving mine. Soon, I will be working in the pediatric hospital that I once imagined. As I said, opportunities are for those who take them, and I am taking mine.

Glenda Baez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Disabilities Don't Hold Me Back

My goals and ambitions involve showing others that people with the disability of being deaf can do anything, except hear. Deaf people have been frustrated for a long time when trying to do things like enroll in schools and get jobs because of their disability. Also, they get frustrated when they are trying to go to doctors, or play sports, or communicate with their own deaf or hearing children's schools. Deaf children, and/or their parents, may be expected to communicate with hearing people without an interpreter. I desire to help end these frustrations.

I am currently working on my GED diploma. When I am done with my high school credential, I want to go on to college and study to do a career such as nursing, veterinary medicine, dermatology, dentistry, delivering babies, or even ultrasound technology. My goal is to be able to help other disabled persons who have a hard time communicating with hearing people within my chosen field.

For my future, I dream of making this world a better place than it is at the present. With my career, I want to make this world easier for other disabled people to get anything we need. I dream of the day we will have no worries about having trouble communicating with hearing people and hearing folks will be more comfortable with us!

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

My Goals and Ambitions

I'm planning to achieve my goals for a better future. Where do I see myself in ten years? In ten years, I can see myself having many of my goals accomplished. If not accomplished, I will be working on accomplishing those goals. I think if I accomplish my goals, it will make me feel confident and secure about my future and my family's future.

One of my main goals for the next ten years is to get a house. I think getting a house is very important, I would say

for everybody, especially when the family is getting bigger. In my opinion, getting a house before many other things is very important, because houses are very expensive. That's why it is my main goal for the next ten years.

Another goal I have for the next ten years is to encourage my children to attend college. I would like that my children have a career that will secure a good future for them. I didn't have that opportunity when I was young, so I want my children to have that opportunity. I try to explain to them how important it is to attend college.

Accomplishing my goals for the next ten years is going to be very hard, because life is tough nowadays. But, I'm going to do my best and work harder day after day. That way, I can get a house and at the same time, save money for when the time comes for my children to go to college.

Diego Lugo was born in Queretaro, Mexico. He began attending classes at the Family Service Center this year. He is 31 years old, married, and has two young daughters. He is a construction worker, working out-of-state. He is passionate about his work and family.

Never Say Never

I am Dorotea Chavez. I am from Mexico.

When we arrived in this country, we arrived without anything and we did not speak any English. I remember when I was in my country I said, "I am never going to another city or country". Now I am in another country with another language. My first days here, I said I was never going to learn English. Now, I want to tell you, if you are in this country please, never feel afraid or scared to speak in English. You can learn.

Now I have been almost ten years in this country. We have many opportunities, but you need to be motivated and continue to learn the language. The people are very friendly and kind. When I was in public areas, I felt scared when somebody came close to me. I would say I cannot talk with you because I do not know what to say. Now I feel better. Now, we have our own

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house. I have three children and for them I need to continue. Sometimes I talk with my daughter who is in high school. She has too much homework and sometimes it is too hard. I tell her, you can do it! You must try! Never say never! It is difficult for me because I am older. My head is full, and I need to work, but I am trying. I continue to go to class in Dunedin library, one day a week. Sometimes I say I don't want to go because I feel I do not learn anything, but, when I talk to other people, they say, "You speak very well." They are motivating me to continue. Now I feel better. I talk with everybody! I am saying, "Hello! Good morning! Have a good day!" I am feeling free and happy. That's why I tell you, "You can do it! Never say never!"

Dorotea is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Carol Kennedy.

Face Your Fears and Rise Above

I will never forget that day. It was my first day living in the USA. I was surrounded by many fears, fears of being alone in a new place. The night was silent, the sky was dark, and the stars were shining bright. One question came to my mind: "How can these stars be brave enough not to fear the dreadful sky?". That was a turning point in my life. I thought that the stars will never shine without darkness. It was at that moment when I realized that I have to be like these stars. I have to move on no matter what, and I have to stop fearing the darkness, as big dreams will not come true without overcoming obstacles and challenges.

I decided to stop waiting for the world to give me what I want, I started to give it to myself.

I know for sure that I have achieved many accomplishments in my life. I am a mom of four beautiful kids, I am a holder of a bachelor degree in English Literature and Language, and I worked as a teacher in my homeland. However, today I want to think of big goals in order to win big success. My goal is to be a good human being, to be a good mom, daughter, sister and wife. I want to wake up each day excited to bloom in a new way, to find my hidden capabilities, and to fly high in the sky without

any limitations or borders. I don't want to be better than anyone else, but be better than I used to be yesterday. My top-notch goal is to improve my English, to continue my education, and to get a master's degree in teaching, as I have a dream to become a certified teacher in the USA. I promise myself to work harder and harder to achieve my goals, and to stay motivated. I know it in my heart that I have a strong will towards my dreams. I will not stop and I will not allow anything to get in my way!

Eman Barri is a mother of four children. Her husband is working abroad so she is responsible for the day to day care of her children. She is a student in the ABE Program, formerly an ESOL student.

Goals and Ambitions

Since childhood, we start setting goals without knowing if they're reachable or not. As a teenager, I had goals which were to get my high school diploma, and to go to university to study finance to be able to work at a bank, because to be successful in life you need to study. My main goal is putting my best foot forward to begin something in my life. However, right now my goals are to complete English class and go to college.

I have been learning English since January 2018. My goal is to complete English class this year. When I arrived in the USA in November 2017 I couldn't speak English. Now, even though it's not 100% perfect, I can make people understand me. I started to make myself understand by paying attention in class, watching movies with subtitles, and practicing daily. It's difficult for me to come to school every day. Firstly, because I mostly work in the morning, despite that I try to go everyday even for an hour. Secondly, because I don't have a car, sometimes I have to walk or find rides. I know I can accomplish this goal with more practice and the help of my teacher teaching me more and being attentive to my questions and suggestions.

As a long term goal, I have to go to college because it'll help me in the future to choose my career. It's not going to be easy. First of all, I have to choose a college, and depending on the college choice I could have to move to another state or city. After that, I have to take remedial courses because it's been a while

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since I finished school. I have to refresh my brain then enroll and also take an entrance exam, make sure to be accepted, and start to study finance. I have to make sacrifices because I have to work. Also the U.S education system is mostly different in the way they resolve math here is different that the way we resolve it in my country. They have a variety of online labs but in my country, students don't use online labs, we don't know how it works. To complete this goal, I'll need help from my relatives to encourage and support me, as well as a counselor or tutor to give me good advice such as to participate actively and stay focused.

In summary, setting goals is important, make them reachable. Even if you meet numerous obstacles or are overwhelmed by the deadline, stay tireless. Dreams aren't something to wait for, they're something to work for. I'll keep reaching towards my goals and stay confident, because the choices I make turn the pages of my life and I'll see the outcome. Completing English class and going to College are my goals and ambitions. They are my doors to entrance and success in the USA.

Erlande Renfort is a student at Immokalee Technical College, and the teacher is Katie Mominee.

From Aid to Independence

I come from Haiti, a developing country that is often affected by natural disasters and epidemics. This causes us to receive much foreign aid. I was supported by it during my childhood. They gave me health care, paid for my studies, and rebuilt my house after Hurricane Anna back in 2004. It also helped after the devastating earthquake in 2010, and all this aid was very useful. I'm so grateful.

When I grew up, I realized this aid also destroys people like me. Even after the disasters, these organizations were present constantly. I was dependent on them. I had so many dreams and so many things that I wanted to have. I felt that I could have more than that. I said to myself, the only way I can be happy and have everything I want is to have a good education and use my skills so that I can be financially self-sufficient.

After graduating from high school, I decided to learn trades. I started with the small resources that I had. I took online courses. I made friends who had the same interest as me. I made a small business that, after years, grew. I became ready for emergencies. Now I can offer my knowledge and services to someone in exchange for money. This also helped me finance my move to the United States. After all this, I'm still looking forward to being more independent.

Frantzky Fatal is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is his teacher.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was a kid I had a dream of playing professional baseball and to be an example for kids. My dad is the biggest fan of baseball and he always wanted to have a son to introduce to baseball. His dream came true and I was born. When I turned 7 years old, I went to a baseball practice. It was not easy to be honest but I liked to play baseball. The first time I grabbed my first glove, my ball and my bat I had that feeling. It makes me feel special to play baseball.

Back then I was too little to make my own decisions, but one thing I knew: I wanted to play baseball.

My parents were very important because I always had their support, motivation and all that I needed to keep doing what I wanted to do. Another thing I wanted was to be a better person in all aspects. When I decided to dedicate my life to baseball, I was 14 years old. At that age I knew what I wanted to do. My contract came in Mexico for the "Red Devils" at 14. I went to an academy that the Red Devils have in Oaxaca, Mexico. When I was there I felt something special because I was so lucky to be there among a lot of guys from different parts of Mexico.

I remember my first bullpen there. It was unbelievable. The coaches talked a lot of good things about me but that was not good for me because I was not too humble. Bad things came after that. One day when I was doing my throwing program, I felt a

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pain in my elbow and it was horrible. I didn't know how difficult it was, because I was too inexperienced about that kind of thing. I had to wait a lot of time to start throwing balls again.

I went to Toluca, Mexico with a doctor and he helped me a lot. When I started throwing again I felt like I had a new arm. I was impressed. It was a long journey to play baseball again. At that time, I got ready and I set my goals. One of them was to sign for a big league team and I did it. The Houston Astros gave me the opportunity to play baseball in the USA. Everything was good until an injury came again but this time it was terrible because I couldn't throw balls again. It was not an easy decision but I kept my mind positive and set my goals again. Now I have a clear mind. My goals at this moment are to be healthy and to work hard every single day until the time comes to return to play baseball.

Gerardo Bojorquez is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a great student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from Mexico. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Stepping Stones

My name is Giancarlo Botarelli. I'm from Venezuela and I'm 41 years old. I studied computer software engineering, and I came to the USA with my daughter and my wife fourteen months ago. I started to study English a few years ago. I used to read a lot of books and manuals because of my profession and the algorithms that I used in software are in English too. I usually used to travel every year to different places such as Aruba, Curacao and the USA. I used to practice with the people in the hotels and the parks that we visited in the past.

Living here is too different. Now I have to work, study and understand everything in English. I have to help my daughter with her homework, and go shopping, and do everyday normal things that an American resident does. To reach this goal, I went to the ESOL program when I just came here, and that experience was amazing. However the tutoring at the library has been the

most personalized training ever. My tutor Mike is excellent! We talk about news and cultural things twice a week and I feel that the progress is faster than ever. Now I have a job as a salesman in a cellphone store. I'm also a server in a restaurant twice a week. I want to improve my English in order to find a better job, maybe in my area of software or sales. To be in this wonderful country has been a personal challenge, because it is a 180 degrees change to my lifestyle. I know if I keep the faith in myself, me and my family can do it better and dominate the language!

Giancarlos Botarelli is a student at the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library. His tutor is Mike Ganos.

My Limit Is the Sky

When I grew up, my parents taught me to become a successful and empowered woman. You have to be educated and work hard. They always told me, every person you see that succeeds in their life went to school. You get the same opportunities as them because you go to school. They put me in a private school when I was in Haiti.

I was fourteen when my dad wanted me to understand what he kept saying to me. I wanted to get an iPod, so he called me to his room and handed me some money. He made me count it and tell him the amount. It was the money for my iPod. He made me count it but did not buy it for me. Since that day, I understood. This is where my ambitions not only to learn English but to succeed come from.

I started almost four years ago; learning English is very challenging for me. I tried to go to college. I failed the entrance exam three times. I remember I cried the second time, but in spite of that, I did not give up. Now, I am in Level 7, only one more step to achieve my goal.

I studied philosophy when I was in high school. One philosopher named Victor Hugo said, "Those who live are those who struggle." I was not be able to understand what he was saying until now because I did not embrace life yet. I was a

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teenager, and I did not have responsibility. I had my parents by my side, but now I have to create my own path.

One of the best things I have learned is that you cannot reach your destiny without opposition. David will never become king without Goliath. Challenges are designed as a part of your destiny. I keep running my race, but I am not looking to the left nor to the right.

I thank my parents who made me become a strong and powerful woman, who made me believe in education. Even though I might fail, I will get up and keep trying.

Deletusse Jeanty is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Dad Is My Motivation

The one who motivates me to succeed the most is my dad. Throughout his life he has done many things, including raising eight children, with me being the youngest. My dad could always find a way to help, even when people thought that he couldn't. He often worked 56 hours a week, usually in other states, to support all of us.

I admire my dad. He's smart, kind and funny. Many other people I know would be by my dad's side no matter what, since he has helped many people by fixing their cars, plumbing and even roofs. One of my dad's closest friends is always ready to drop everything and help my dad if he needs it. I admire my dad for always being there for all of his kids, even after working endless shifts at work. He always came home to make dinner, help with homework, and fix as much as he could. I hope I can be as good as my dad. I hope to help everyone I can. I want to help as many people as I can.

I must admit my father isn't the only one who motivates me. My sister is a marine who is in college. She started college when I started classes at adult school. She makes sure I am doing my work. She makes sure I understand how to do math, and in return, I make sure her grammar and sentence structure are

right. My sister has always been there for me, even when she lived in another state. If I had a question, all I had to do was call her and she would help me. I have quite a few motivators other than my dad and sister. For example, my grandmother, who teaches at the college and often tests the students for their degrees, motivates me.

They motivate me as much as they can. I need to pass to make sure I make them proud. I shall pass no matter what. If a fellow student reads this then I believe you can do it, for yourself and your family or friends. Most people have motivators even if they don't know it. So, if you don't think anyone believes in you, you're sorely mistaken. I know for a fact there are at least 3 people who support you and want you to succeed. I believe everyone can succeed in life, no matter how bad of a start you had. You can always succeed! Now, I know this is about my motivations and my goals. However, I must support everyone I can so they can live a great life and achieve their goals and dreams.

Joshua McCaslin is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

My Future Career

I came to the U.S.A from Haiti 18 months ago with my dream of earning my GED and getting a better job. I go to school because I want to go to college. I don't have an accomplished feeling now because I have not earned my GED yet. I help myself but my mother and teachers try to help me too. I want to finish my GED in December, 2019.

Now I'm learning more English and studying reading. When I earn my GED, I will be very proud and have a party with my family and friends. I never quit going to school because I want to improve my English. I need good behavior and respect for everybody in my life.

After my education, I will buy a house and get married to build a great family. I have to get the rest of my family in Haiti to come to the USA. That's very important for me and therefore, I put it in my brain. This motivation makes me serious in school

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because I have a lot things to do.

The USA gives opportunities for everyone. If I finish high school and I don't have money to go to college they can lend me money. After I get a better job, I will return the money back to them. I appreciate the help.

Jeanwoodner Philippe likes go to school, because he needs a career in his future. He studies English in Naples, Florida at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.

Do You Really Trust that Your Goals and Ambitions are On Target?

I don't. Let me explain why.

Five years ago, I was sitting in my office, believing that my goals were well defined to reach my professional and personal ambitions. Everything was perfectly on track.

Suddenly my life changed and so did my goals. My husband's company transferred him to the USA, a good opportunity we couldn't refuse. But such a decision especially changed my life. I had to leave my beloved family, my own company, my friends, my house and my city. Can you imagine how you feel when a rug has been pulled out from under you? Having a small child and being pregnant, I didn't have any other choice than to stand up and face every fragment of my broken dreams and ambitions. Then I realized that the puzzle didn't fit in my new life, it was just debris that I had to be strong enough to cast away. I needed to find new ambitions and goals and that wasn't going to be easy when my previous ones were so perfect for me.

We all need to feel motivated by having objectives, big or small, short or long term, ambitious or unassuming - we need them to wake up every morning. Even cooking lunch can be our simple daily goal. That's how you can start from zero, setting every day your new tasks, step by step, until you know your new life's direction.

Once you find your new life, you must consider your new

ambitions and how to set your main objectives. We need to be careful with our long-term goals, they need special attention as they are usually too big which is usually a synonym of unreachable and unrealistic, leading you to failure. My advice to avoid this problem is to split sizable targets into ten little goals, and every one of those little goals into ten more, doing this successively. That way you will set more realistic and measurable tasks, making your objectives more achievable.

This is how I set my new goals, but I feel that they are not as stable as the old ones. My new life comes with less stability. My objectives and situation have taught me how to become adaptable to changes. Surprisingly, your targets can disappear, change, or new unexpected ones can suddenly appear.

Although this instability can be challenging if you know how to manage it, I confess that it can be sometimes exhausting. I am still waiting for that moment when I can fix my goals and be able to sit down in my office again and check off every single achieved goal, knowing that the culmination of my ambition is a bit closer.

Nevertheless, I will always be aware, thinking...will these ambitions and goals be here tomorrow?

Judith Sendra is an adult ESOL learner in UMCM Suncoast's Family Literacy Program. She is from Spain (Catalonia). Her teacher is Therese Martin.

My Future in the US

I came to the USA in March, 2017. When I arrived I enrolled in school at Lorenzo Walker Technical College to think about my life. I studied hard because I wanted to finish my GED. I have met many wonderful teachers and directors in the program. Mr. Lazaro is one of the people who always pushed me to do my best when he saw me outside and not in class. He told me to keep doing well in class. He asked me what I wanted to do with my life. I told him I want to be a dentist. That's been the only career on my mind since I was a little child. It makes me excited, energetic, full of life, and passionate to think about what I will be able to achieve when I complete my English studies.

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Some of my favorite memories of living in the USA are centered around school. I enjoyed going to the zoo with my class. In the beginning we had gym class every Monday and Friday. In my first class Mrs. Lindita taught me pronunciation. She's an excellent teacher. If you don't know something, she is ready to give you help. I passed from level 1 to level 5 in less than a year. I am very proud of my work.

Kervens Omega is a dedicated student from Haiti. He is working towards his GED so he can attend college to become a dentist.

Make it Different...

When every year begins, we start thinking about our New Year's Resolutions and what we would like to achieve during the year, including our goals and ambitions. Most people think about losing weight, getting healthier, and getting a better job or something that will be good for themselves.

I started to think about this at the beginning of this year and I would like to do something different. I realized how blessed I am. I have a family, I'm healthy, I have my home, some friends. So, I decided to start thinking in a different way: I would like to do something better for other people.

When we think about helping another person we always think about money. But it's possible to donate more than this, it's possible to donate your time talking with an old person who is alone, saying good morning to your neighbors, visiting kids that are in the hospital and spending fun time with them. There are a lot of possibilities to make a better world with less money. Things can connect you with another person, at least for a moment and can improve the life of others, at least for a little time. Teach something that you know to someone that would like to learn, send a nice email even to your friends who you haven't seen for a long time and tell them how important they are.

Be kind, always. The world needs kind people who worry about others that help to improve society. I can write a big list from where we should start, but we have to begin. Start in your house, be nice with your family and be patient with them. Love.

Find a way to express your love to others, to your parents, to your husband or wife, to your children, co-workers, friends...just show them your kindness and love. Be friendly, it will not cost you anything, but it all matters more than you know.

Don't forget about yourself, you have to be good to yourself to help others, but we can start doing something better for us and for the world that we are building for our children. In the end, smile! A nice smile is the best way to create the most beautiful connection between you and the world.

Livia Macedo is an ESOL student at Adult Education of Melbourne and moved to the United States from Brazil one year ago.

My Future in the U.S.

The future, my future, it was the only thing I could think of. I was not aware of the falls, the dangers and the challenges that I would encounter along the way. However, my mind was set on just one and only goal: to make it to the U.S. Once in this blessed country, I discovered that I had to build my own future, because paradise was not easy to conquer. I knew I needed a plan to prepare solid knowledge foundations, to follow a plan, and to achieve my goals.

First of all, I encounter a very big barrier in this country: to find a job. I attended several job interviews, but my English was very limited. I felt so disappointed every time that I realized I was not going to be chosen for something, or a position that I was qualified for; but in every negative experience, there is always a positive outcome; I have to admit that was the main reason to join Continuing Education at Miami Dade College.

Today, I'm still taking English classes at MDC, and I hope to finish my English course before the end of this year. My plan also includes going back to University to study some Engineering, I have not decided yet in which field. I will have to consult the advisors to lead me on the right way. I will also apply for financial aid since my income is not the one I wish.

There is still a very long way for me to go to achieve my goals.

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I might not fulfill my goals, but I am too optimistic to think that way. I know I will succeed. There will be nights without sleeping. Maybe the family will grow and I will have more responsibilities, but I am not afraid to face my future, just very afraid of failing in my journey to achieve what I want in my life.

Those days in which I imagined my future in the U.S are in the past. My future continues being ahead of me. I have overcome all the obstacles I have found on my way. However, my future is my decision, my choice, my endeavor to achieve whatever I desire by creating a meaningful life for me, and I am aware that it takes time, effort, and commitment.

Leidy Suarez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Leonardo Leyva.

My Stepping Stones

When we came to the USA, I spoke only a few English words. At the beginning it was difficult time for me. Pointing and hand gestures were almost universally understood. Shopping was easy because everything was on the shelves. I paid by cash or by check, because I didn't have a credit card yet. It took time to write a check because I didn't know the numbers. Sometimes I had a problem understanding how much I had to pay. I looked at the numbers on the screen and that helped me.

That was my first stepping stone. I started to learn English. I had a few English books and I could read them. The books helped a lot and I started to watch TV.

I borrowed a few English cassettes from the library and I started listening. I knew I needed to improve my English.

I worked nights and there wasn't much time to learn. I started to communicate a little bit with people. That was my next stepping stone. I read many children's books and it helped me to understand. I knew I must spend more time to learn English. It's most important to practice. Sometimes I felt overwhelmed and frustrated. The English language is the most widespread in the world. English has 26 letters. The spelling and pronunciation

are difficult. I need to use English correctly and clearly. It was my dream. I was working full time and didn't have much time to learn. Sometimes my friend at work translated for me when we had weekly meetings with the boss.

That was my next stepping stone. After I retired, I started to go to the library for Conversation Class. I spent more time learning. I watched more TV because I could understand better. The library of Palm Harbor has tutors, who are teaching adults to learn English as a second language. I'm one of those adults. I have a very good tutor. She is friendly, patient and gives me encouragement. The lessons are very interesting and helpful. I do a lot of homework using books from the library.

That is my next stepping stone. I use an iPad to translate to find the meaning of English words. In addition to that, I use another on-line self-study English course with a free on-line program.

I also use an Audio-recorder. I record and then listen to the speaker's voice and my voice. This helps me to improve my pronunciation. Learning to speak English is a long process. I need to practice pronunciation and minimize my accent. Very helpful were the "Read Along" classes by SPC Professor Jeanna Ojeda.

I attended classes every other Saturday from January-to May. All the students listened to *The Wonderful Wizard of OZ* and read it aloud. I will continue to learn English. That is my next big stepping stone.

Lila Voigt is a student at Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library.

Humans and Ambitions

As humans, we all have something in common. We have goals and ambitions that we want to achieve throughout our life although people differ when talking about their own goals and how they will achieve them. For me, goals can be as simple as making a change in your daily routine, to move from your comfort zone and to fight for them because they are not easy

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to achieve. Not everyone from your social circle will have your back. It's better if you lean on your closest family members because they will always be there for you.

To achieve goals, it will take time. You have to be patient and never give up because the longer it takes, the better the outcome will be.

My goals and objectives are so many that I wouldn't have the space to write them all; however, I still have my primary goals which I try to work on every day. The first one is to make my parents and relatives proud with every step I take in life. My second goal is to give back everything my parents sacrificed for me and my sister. My third goal is to set a good example for all my family members.

Therefore, it doesn't matter how many goals you have or how hard they are to achieve, you should never give up on them. Whenever you feel like quitting, think about the reason that you want to complete them.

Daniella Morales is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A New Life

When I came to Naples, Florida everything changed for me. Naples taught me how different the world is from my native country. I realized there were many beautiful places to go and new things to discover and learn. Without knowing any English it would be more difficult for me to take in all that the USA had to offer.

I started going to school at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. There are a lot of reasons to study English: I can get my high school diploma, start a career and get a great job. I have more opportunities to become a doctor or choose another career, whatever I would like to be.

The first day of school, I was very nervous and excited to meet with my new teacher and new people in my class. I sat down on

a chair, then some classmates sat at the same table. One of them greeted me, we introduced ourselves. His name was Wilber. Then I started to talk with him. After a few weeks of school I met another new student named Heber. He and I became best friends.

Every day we are learning new words or concepts in English class. It's good to have friends at school because they can help me comprehend ideas that I don't understand or work with them as a team. When I have friends, I have fun working in groups and sharing ideas.

Now I continue to study English. I understand and I can speak better than when I came to Naples. I want to earn my high school diploma and have a career in a wonderful job I enjoy. I have the opportunity to study, I must continue if I want to achieve important goals in my life.

Misael San Juan is from Mexico. He is 18 years and is a student in Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL. He is studying English and then will earn his GED to have better opportunities.

My Ambition to Join the Navy Seals

My name is Oscar. I am from El Salvador and I plan to join the Navy Seals.

When I came to the United States, I started school at Lorenzo Walker to earn my GED. After I get my GED, I will try go to get into the Marines so I can become a Navy Seal. Joining the service of the United States is one of my biggest dreams I want to achieve.

Now that I am in another country, my second language is English which for many people and even me is hard to learn, but I know with hard work anything is possible.

I want to join the Navy because this country is now my new home. I enjoy making new relationships, but a lot people come to this country and they do not feel at home. However, for me this country gave me a new opportunity to develop my skills, brain,

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attitude, discipline and courage at the moment.

I am planning to earn my GED in a year. I would like to continue because I want to feel proud of myself, and give my best to this country. I will achieve my goal by believing in my heart and giving my thanks to Americans. Thank you America for giving new opportunities to people like me.

This anonymous author studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He is going to earn his GED and achieve his dream of entering the Navy.

An Unexpected Inspiration

My name is Aliana. I am 20 years old, and I was born in Venezuela. I have a sister named Alexandra, a brother named Alexander, and wonderful parents. At the age of 17, I finished high school in Venezuela and, immediately, I started college. I remember that before finishing high school, I had to choose which career I wanted to study. I thought a lot about making that decision and finding something in which I could find my passion. I discovered my passion for medicine. It was because I got very sick, and I went to the doctor a lot. I really liked seeing doctors as superheroes. People believed in them, and they helped many people.

In 2015, I was leaving church when I felt like I could not breathe. I was with my cousin Stefany. When she saw the way I was, she called my dad and immediately took me to the doctor. My doctor, Patricia, told me that I had chronic sinusitis and needed an operation the next week. I was very scared. I did not want to have that operation, but I started to get worse, so I had to arm myself with courage and do it.

The long-awaited week arrived. I was scared and many things were going through my mind. I had two nurses and my doctor. They treated me with so much love. I entered the operating room and everything seemed very normal. The very friendly anesthesiologist caressed my cheeks saying, "Do not worry; everything will be fine." While saying those words, my eyes slowly closed.

A few hours later, I began to hear voices in the distance. Opening my eyes, the first person I saw was my doctor, Patricia. She very kindly held my hand smiling and saying, "You see, everything went well; you did a good job." Those words filled me so much and made me love medicine a lot. Then she very quietly asked me if I was thirsty. I said yes! She told me that I could have a drink after half an hour. For me, it was so long to wait 30 minutes. Then my doctor appeared with a juice in hand. She had bought it for me. I was very surprised and smiled saying thank you. The nurses took very good care of me while my doctor was in another surgery.

Later, I saw my doctor, and she gave me advice. I will never forget her words and the humility, love, dedication, and care towards me that made me love the medical career and want to study it.

Aliana Philippe is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was a little kid I dreamed of having a great job in order to help my family, because they deserve it. The dream came true when I was 16 years old. I signed a professional baseball contract and I received a bonus which I invested and now I can support my family economically. But the dream does not end there. My main goal is to become a major league baseball player to not only help my family, but also the people in my town who need it. I have other goals. For example, I want to have a family. A large family. That is why I am ambitious. That is why I want to achieve a good economic situation. When my children ask me to give them something, I want to have the means to give it to them, because when I was a child I did not have what I wanted. My life and my family's life has been a good life, but I don't want a good life. I want the best life for my family. I want the best for them. I want my children to have a better life than the life that I had.

Ronaldo Urdaneta is a first baseman and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros. He is a great student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from Maracaibo, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

My Bumps in the Road

It was October 2006, when I decided to go to the University Technologies de Santiago (UTESA). I began my career in Pharmacy, but I didn't have an opportunity to continue my studies because I became sick. I had two surgeries in the same year. Now, I need my dream to become true.

I want to continue to learn more English. I have always wanted to pursue my career and after that, I would like to be a pharmacist. I know that pharmacists play an important role in peoples' lives. People think that a pharmacist only handles prescriptions, however, they do more than just give medicine.

It makes me happy when I educate patients about the importance of taking medication. I naturally care about people's wellbeing, I would like to make people comfortable by talking to them about their health and medical issues. This is why I want to be a pharmacist.

Rodna Honore is from Haiti. She currently attends Advanced ESOL classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

This Story is About Me

All my life I wanted to be a lawyer, but something happened so that I could not reach that goal. I had it hard growing up. In middle school, students were sorted into 5 groups. I was placed in group 5 and called a slow learner. I was good at math, science, history, social studies, cooking and sewing classes. I wish that I could have gone to a Catholic school, so I could have learned about religion and Jesus Christ the Lord who protects us and watches over his children. I didn't graduate from high school but I would like to get my GED and then go to college.

I am doing well on my lessons. I have a tutor to teach me reading and math. I need to do better at math and work harder at studying. I also need to improve my spelling. I am working on the computer and I am learning about things I never knew. I am very glad to be learning.

There are many things I would like to do. I would love to be an inventor of new things for the next generation of children. I would like to work with children in middle and high school and teach drawing, painting, pottery and paper-mache. I would also like to make my community better for people who need a place to sleep and good food to eat. I would like to do something that makes me happy.

If I can graduate from college and get a good job, I will have the money to buy a cabinet for my apartment and a hot tub. I would like to have an orchard with fruit trees like oranges, pears, apples and grapefruit and a garden for vegetables like artichokes, avocados, broccoli, cabbage, carrots and more. I would also like to have a car and a boat. I would also like to travel to new places like Miami, Georgia, North Carolina and Washington D.C.

I am a hard worker and keep my apartment and my clothes clean. It is easy for me to learn a new job and I like to teach older people new things. I love to cook and learn about new ingredients for my recipes. I like all kinds of sports, card games and puzzles.

I hope to live a good long life and make it to 85 years old. I am a nice person and I do nice things for others, but if I was a billionaire I could do all the things I want to do in my life.

Renee Webb is a student at Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. Her tutor is Charyl Mahoney.

My Biggest Dream

My dream was supposed to come true!

In 2005, when I was in Haiti, I was only 11 years old. I was in elementary school. I had a terrible fever and then I went to the hospital. The doctor took care of me and gave me some medication. After one week, I felt much better and went back home. After this experience, I said, "My dream is to be a doctor when I finish my high school!"

In the beginning, I started my dream with completing high school in 2009, and even back then I was interested in the

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human body. I always stayed focused and studied my lessons and received great scores.

Later, after completing high school I looked into attending university, but I didn't go because if you want to become a doctor in my country you have to study in another country. In the meantime, I preferred to learn English for 2 years, knowing that this will help me to achieve my goals.

After one more year, I left my country to live in the U.S.A. This country offers a lot of opportunity. I continued with ESOL classes and now I am supposed to give all of myself to achieve my goals. I am in the best country to fulfill my dreams.

Finally, my dream is on the way to realization.

Shenayder D. Occius is from Haiti. He currently attends ESOL classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe in Fort Lauderdale. He lives in Broward County with his family.

Ambition of My Country

To have a good country, you need a good leader, a good governor. When I arrived in the United States, I observed that this country works wonderfully. When there are problems, the Democrats and Republicans come together to find the result.

As a matter of fact, my biggest ambition is to see my country develop like the United States and

others. For me, the number one issue that made my country the way it is today is the economy. The leaders use the young, homeless people to do bad things. For example, they give them money to shut down the private businesses. The young people burn the stores, and they damage the cars. They block the streets for two or three days. They do not teach young people to respect their country.

Looking at the United States, I have another vision for my country; I want to work very hard to give the youth living in the street the opportunity to go to school and build houses for them.

Certainly, I know I need a lot of money to make my ambition become true. Now, I try to find people who have the same ambition as me so we can come together and find a way to do it. I hope that the result will be that one day there will be more schools and less jails. I am convinced that my goal will become a reality.

Marie Myrtho Valcourt is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Art, Identity and Solidarity from a Venezuelan Painter

My name is Víctor López. The first time I held a brush was in 2010, when I was going through a difficult situation with my health. I was really limited, and I started painting because I always wanted to do it and I needed an activity to distract myself. My art is based on abstraction of objects, situations or geometry. I always tried to use textures with different techniques to enhance what I want to project. Color is one aspect that is important to me to express what I'm thinking. I use my brushes when I feel inspired or when I have an idea in my head.

In 2017 in Venezuela, as most of the world knows, there were many manifestations. During the protests in Venezuela a lot of homeless kids used to approach me and ask for some food. That situation made me ask myself "what can I do about it?" - something bigger than give part of my own food to one or two kids. Then I started painting about my feelings about my country. My paintings are based on the map of Venezuela. I'm mixing different techniques and I'm expressing what I see or what I feel about the situation. Sometimes I paint about whatever my country is struggling with or what I want for my country in the future and in other cases the paintings are about the Venezuelan identity.

My maps of Venezuela sometimes are protesting art and sometimes I found inspiration in the best things that we have in our country and how people can be connected.

The main idea of the promotion of my maps is to collect funds to make food for homeless kids in Venezuela. I started by myself, and then when I started selling my paintings, I was able to make

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more journeys of food distribution. The name of my campaign is #decomeraunniño which in English means “#tofeedachild” or “#somethingtoeatforakid” and all the information about it is in the Instagram account @vart.paint. More than 400 children have died in Venezuelan hospitals because of malnutrition. There are more deaths not registered and unfortunately this situation has worsened after 2017. More than 200 homeless children in Venezuela have benefited from my campaign and my purpose is to continue helping the youth of my country that will be affected in their future by malnutrition. An unbalanced diet limits brain development and contributes to a hopeless generation. Malnutrition will create obstacles for these generations that are growing in this situation. People have to take care of this particular situation because these kids deserves big dreams for their futures, and the regime already cut the wings of these little angels.

Victor López is a Level 6 ESOL student at Miami Dade College.

My Goals

Since I felt the need to leave my country, Cuba, I knew that I was going to face many challenges. I was going to live in a country and city where the culture was completely different than mine, but most importantly I was going to live in a city where I did not have a total command of the language.

Language is one of the most important things in life. We need it to communicate with each other, to express our points of view and feelings, and to assert our rights. I was going to need all this to adapt better to the new environment; this was going to give me security. When people move to a new city where its language is different than the one they speak, they must try to speak it and know it. They need to make this language part of their life, but not only to achieve professional goals, which is the main motivation for most people. This is beyond that. Knowing and learning the language of the city where we live is very important since it will open many doors in our life. If we do not know the language where we live, we are going to feel frustrated because we are not going to be able to do basic things like handle a conversation with locals, order in restaurants, and stand up for ourselves. We should not have limitations or fear when expressing what we want, need or feel.

Nowadays we have multiple resources to learn and study languages. We have educational institutes, applications, software, teachers and many more. These won't be enough if each one of us do not put any effort into learning the language. If our goal is to learn and speak a second language, we need to do extra work to fulfill this goal.

Yadira Calero is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where her teacher is Sayed Moghani.

Reality of My Life

When I was younger I always dreamed of being a doctor. I really love to save lives and take care of people. I love to help others. I value my health above everything else in my life. When someone is sick or injured, his or her normal way of life is disrupted and doctors have the incredible opportunity to restore these people's lives to normalcy and even save some from death itself. Therefore, being a doctor is extremely rewarding. Medicine covers diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease, and many other aspects of health. It is fascinating. As a result of becoming a doctor, I will be learning everything about the human body.

When I was twenty one, I became pregnant, so I had to get married and my dream of becoming a doctor was placed on hold. Meanwhile, having a family transformed me into another person. I have to take care of my family, so I couldn't follow my dream anymore. To study medicine is so expensive and I would have to spend many years to become a doctor. With that said, I now have chosen to become a nurse which still exposes me to the medical field. Moving to the USA makes it a little difficult with the language, but I'm working so very hard to follow my dream.

Even though I have to work to make some money to help at home, I still study a lot to improve my English. Maybe in the future, after becoming a nurse and obtaining a good job, I will be able to follow my true dream. I like medicine so much, I don't think I will be able to give it up.

Yvelore Jean Noel is a student at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe. She studies English with Ms. Johnson and is diligently working towards her dream.

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My Favorite Place

My Favorite Place!

I have been in many places in my life and honestly my favorite place in the world is the first stadium I went to. That stadium is where my baseball career started. When I was 4 years old, I was walking into my old house a little bit tired because it was my first day in Kindergarten, and my mother came to me with a big plate of pasta and said “Son, after you have lunch, get dressed and be ready to go”. After that I ate right away and then I went to my bedroom and I put on my favorite baseball shirt. 30 minutes later my mom drove me to the closest baseball field.

There I was, in the middle of the field, running around, feeling like the happiest kid in the world and suddenly the coach called me and said “Congratulations buddy, you’re part of the new kids’ team.” I was really happy to hear the good news. From that day on, I started to go to that field from Mondays to Fridays to practice and play my favorite game, baseball.

That field where I practically grew up on, was not a place just for baseball games, but also a place to spend time with friends and family. For example, after every game the family of the players came together to a specific part of the field. They set up tables and chairs and talked for a while letting the kids play and run around the field. Sometimes dads roasted meat to feed everyone. Sundays were very special. All fathers played softball. Every father in each family would bring his own baseball equipment to play. At the same time moms would cook for everyone. I really loved being there on Sundays.

I remember a day that I was catching balls and my friend hit my forehead. Unfortunately, my mom wasn’t there and I started to run around looking for help because I started to bleed. Some of the people there helped me out. They put a bandage and ice on my forehead. This experience was important to me because I learned a good lesson in life: Always help people in hard times, no matter their skin color, who they are, or what social class they belong to. That is the right thing to do.

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That field is special to me, I spent most of my childhood on that dirty field. It is the place where I learned many things, not just baseball. Right now I feel so lucky to have grown up in a place like that! I learned a lot of values on that field, that I put in to practice every single day of my life, such as friendship, teamwork, respect, honesty and loyalty. That's why that field is my favorite place!

Angel Macuare is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is graduating this year. He is from Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Beach Time

The beach: it's an amazing place for any scenario. You could enjoy nice tranquil mornings as the sun rises watching the waves slowly wash ashore, or have a spectacular evening watching the sun go down with your family or friends. Personally, I have to say it's my favorite place because all the wonderful aspects about it. There's nothing better than going to the beach after a long day and taking a swim, catching a tan as well. Something about those little things create such a wonderful sensation and very therapeutic experience.

Don't you agree? Where else can you find such natural beauty, it's like an all in one package. You could bring a board and have a variety to pick from such as boogie, skim and surf. I personally love bringing a skim board to the beach. It is really fun to practice and the thrill you get when you catch that right wave and ride it back ashore, it's one of those things you have to experience for yourself. If you don't feel like getting wet you could bring some sort of ball or a Frisbee to play with, some rather fish and cast their nets out with live bait. If you don't feel like doing sports on the beach you can also set up a bonfire and bring an instrument to play and enjoy some quality time with others, maybe pull out a bag of marshmallows and roast them while enjoying a nice cold beverage.

Let's not forget about the exquisite scenery and wildlife you get to see firsthand. It's almost breathtaking watching baby sea

turtles hatch and race towards the water. Of course you want to be there just to ensure all the babies make it safely and don't get swept up by a seagull. Not only is there sea turtles but if you really look there is a decent variety of animals you can find depending on where you are. For instance, my favorite species to see are crabs, jellyfish and the different type of fish you could find in the water. Let's not forget about the sharks too, you would be surprised but sometimes you will spot them preying on schools of fishes.

All these great things you can do and experience by yourself or with people. From sports to relaxing, your choices never really end which make it such a special time and definitely my favorite place. On top of everything there is no cost to go to the beach which makes it even better. There are also scientific studies that show the beach is very beneficial for your brain. I have to agree because I realized the beach helps me a lot physically and mentally after a draining day. In conclusion the beach is my favorite place and something you definitely should go to often.

Angelo Grabarczyk is a student in Alyssah Joseph's class at Miami Beach Adult Education Center.

Buff Creek: My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Buff Creek in Louisa County, Iowa. Buff Creek is about two miles away from my family home. As a child I found out that if I cut through the corn/soybean fields, I could find my way to the creek. There is an old trailer that someone had placed across the banks of the creek like a bridge. When I felt sad or alone, my dogs and I would walk down to the creek.

The best part of being at Buff Creek was when you finally got there and sat down to rest after your long walk, you could hear the sounds of the wind blowing through the trees and the water rushing around the rocks. There is nothing more magical than sitting out in the middle of nowhere watching nature dance around you.

Once, when I was about seven, I saw an otter playing in the water, so I got down into the water. The sweet little otter

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swam right up to me and was so curious and sweet. While I was swimming with the otter, I ended up finding a geode that was as big as my two hands put together. It was purple and white blended together so beautifully, so I brought it home to keep.

Describing in words the wonder and beauty of this place will never do it justice. But if ever you find yourself in Iowa, take a car ride to Buff Creek and just sit and listen to nature. You will find yourself relaxed and calm and feeling at one afterwards. Well, I feel that way. If I could return there again one day, I would be overjoyed.

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

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is my country Nicaragua, which means, “here united with the water.” It is a sovereign state whose people love freedom and independence. Nicaragua is a small but beautiful country in Central America. It has twenty-four volcanoes and countless lakes, rivers, and lagoons. Nicaragua is known as the “Land of Lakes and Volcanoes.” The main language is Spanish. Indigenous tribes on the Mosquito Coast speak their own languages and English.

I was born in Managua which is the capital of Nicaragua. I was raised by my aunt and uncle; I loved spending time with my brothers and cousins after school. On vacations, we used to travel out of the city. I enjoyed going to the beach and playing with my cousins. I really miss those days.

But the thing I miss the most from my country is the food. There are a lot of traditional Nicaraguan dishes. One of them is Gallo Pinto, most people in Nicaragua eat this almost every day and it is considered a national symbol. It is composed of a mixture of fried rice with onion and sweet pepper, red beans boiled with garlic. They are mixed and fried all together. I cannot wait to visit my country again.

This is a country that has spent decades rebuilding itself into a peaceful country. It takes a lot of effort and time for a nation to

create this identity for itself. I feel so proud to be part of such a brave country that is, even now, fighting for freedom.

Douglas Batres is a student at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus. Douglas is in Zuly Rosello’s ESOL Level 6 class.

Family...Every Sunday

When I was small, I liked the color blue and the smell of the sea. I liked the sound of the waves and appreciated the landscape of the beach. I love looking at and playing with my kids in the sand creating their towers on this beach. My family in summer visited this place every Sunday. It is the most beautiful place to relax and rest.

This favorite place is called Flamingo Beach and is found in Puerto Rico on the Tropical Island. Flamingo Beach and Seven Seas are the best beaches in Puerto Rico. I love visiting this island. I miss my beautiful Puerto Rico.

Linette Diaz, from Puerto Rico, is a student at Brevard Adult Education ESOL in Melbourne, Florida. Her teacher is Christopher “Kit” Adams.

Sabana del Medio

We all have a favorite place. Mine is a farm called Sabana del Medio. It was a cattle ranch for over 100 years, which they divided and sold in small plots of land of 2.2 acres. This is my favorite place for two reasons. First, it reminds me of my roots, and second, it is the most beautiful and peaceful place I have even seen.

Sabana del Medio reminds me where I come from. The generations that preceded me were peasants: my paternal grandfather was a Spanish immigrant in Cuba. He was a doctor and he always lived in the countryside. Like most of the poor people of that time. He had seven children, all farm workers. My maternal grandfather was born in Gran Canaria. He emigrated

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to Cuba when he was very young. There he bought several lots of land, to achieve a great farm. He had nine children, but none finished elementary school because they had to work on the farm. In addition, my parents with their immigrant genes got married and a year after my birth, they decided to emigrate to Venezuela. We arrived at the Yaracuy State, where there was a sugar mill. There my father worked in the cane fields. Apparently, we were destined to be surrounded by countryside and agriculture.

I went to study at the University in Valencia, Industrial City of Venezuela, where I married and settled. A day of walking with my husband and our two children, 30 minutes from our house in Valencia, we arrived at an “hacienda”, Sabana del Medio, a charming place, which captivated us all. That same day we chose the land lot called “J6”, from that moment I returned to my roots and both my husband and my children accompanied me gladly to have two lives: the city from Monday to Friday, the peasant life Saturday - Sunday and most vacations.

Sabana del Medio is a place of extreme natural beauty. There you can enjoy auroras and twilights of beautiful colors. On dark nights, several constellations shine; the house is high, supported by metal columns and in the center of the roof has an immense sliding dome, which we open at night to appreciate the moon, staying inside the house. When there is a full moon it is quite a spectacle, since from our room you can see the shadows projected by the avocado trees, which were planted with the help of our children. These shadows amaze our friends when they stay over.

Sabana del Medio is my favorite place on earth because it reminds me of my roots and ancestors, and because its beauty is out of this world. This place will always live in my heart.

Maximiana Navarro is a student at North Tech Indian Pines in Palm Beach County.

My Unique Happy Place

Among all the places on earth, the house is a favorite place for someone to stay. For me it is the best place in the world to live. Mine is quite large with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, one

large kitchen, one living room, and a huge beautiful garden. My favorite place is home there are two parts that I like the most my bedroom and my kitchen. For many reasons. My bedroom is the only place in the world I can find peace and true love. My kitchen is where I spend safe and enjoyable time with my family.

When I am in my bedroom I can do a lot of things. For instance, my lover and I spend time together. It is there that we discuss about our future as a couple and our kids. It is the place of intimacy and privacy. It is also the most quiet, spacious, and cleanest place in the house. There is a television which we use to watch movie series. As soon I go there I can relax or find some alone time. It is very special and unique. Even late at night, I can read books quietly.

Secondly, I enjoy my kitchen, because cooking is one of my passions especially when we are with family. I am good at preparing vegetable soup, rice and beans, and macaroni. I am always right there any time during the day. When I cook I feel free especially during the holiday season when everybody sits at the table eating together. It is a fantastic thing when we laugh around the table and joke together while we eat. Plus, in my kitchen you can find whatever food you want there. Sometimes my family asks me why I am always there eating or cooking. I just laugh and say it is worth it because I enjoy food!

Finally, my house is the best place in the world I can live peacefully and get true love. My bedroom and my kitchen are the two specific rooms in my house that I enjoy the most. In them I feel protected because my family relationships are good. It is a real pleasure for me to be at home.

Mislaine Paniague is from Haiti. She is a student in the ESOL program at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

The Forest

It is a sunny day in the forest. I am walking with my friends and girlfriend enjoying the fresh air and the shadows of the trees. The noise of the trees and wind is all around us. I really want to explore and learn about nature while taking some time

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and reflecting a little on life. It is something amazing that I was taught by my parents, and I think that everyone should do it at least once in their life.

For me the forest is my favorite place to do many things in my free time or on a special date. I always try to share this feeling with the people who are close to me. I admire all the people who try to take care of the remaining natural places in our world like the forests, oceans, and animals which are all beautiful.

Misael Ramirez is from Honduras. He's going to earn a GED at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He is eighteen years old and came to the United States two years ago.

In the Presence of the Lord

My favorite place is in the presence of the Lord. I have so much peace when I am in his presence. I tune out the world around me. He listens to me, I can talk to him about anything. I can reveal with him and tell him how I really feel. I talk to him about things that I am going through. I know that he really listens, and I know without a shadow of a doubt that he cares. I love the fact that he takes me with all of my flaws, I don't have to worry about him condemning me. No matter how many times I fall, he picks me up, he is faithful, even when I am not. I've searched for love like this in drugs, men, and all kinds of worldly things, but nothing compares to the love I feel when I am in God's presence. I am in prison, but I have peace. When I feel down, I go in his presence. When I feel like giving up, I go in his presence. When I feel like no one cares, I go in his presence and he reassures me that he will never leave me, nor forsake me. That is why the presence of the Lord is my favorite place.

Ms. Patricia Ross is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Lake City, FL. She is the mother to two beautiful daughters. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class taught by Ms. Cynthia Phillips.

My First Vacation in U.S.

In July 2016, I decided to go on vacation by car with my husband, son, and Pancho, my little dog. I realized that I had never seen any of the United States, except for Florida.

When my husband asked me to go, I was not sure because I knew it would be a long trip. When he showed me all the beautiful places that we would be visiting, my thoughts changed. I really knew that we were going to have fun. Five days later, we were on our way.

The first stop was in Georgia for one night. In the morning, I remember stopping at a small cute store where we bought some donuts. These were the best I had ever tasted in my life. We also bought some delicious peaches. Now our direction was towards downtown Atlanta.

The next day we took MARTA, the metropolitan rapid transit, to The World of Coca-Cola. It was my first time on this kind transportation. It was fun! The museum, located in Atlanta, showcased the history of this big company. Kendall, my son, loved it even more when he drank all the sodas he wanted.

Two days later, we traveled to Nantahala lake, located in Macon County, North Carolina. We rented a cabin on the shore of the majestic lake. As we waded in the water, people passed by in their boats and kindly greeted us with a wave of their hands. Hours later, we were contemplating a beautiful sunset with hot dogs and hamburgers cooked on the grill. What a day!

The next day, we were packing up to go towards the Blue Ridge Mountains. They are noted for having a bluish color when seen from a distance. In the Blue Ridge province, there are two major national parks, the Shenandoah in the northern section and the Great Smoky Mountains in the southern section. Great Smoky was the last place we had the opportunity to visit. We did some activities like hiking and horseback riding. Along the trails we contemplated a wonderful view with beautiful, immense trees and above all the pure air that we breathed. Our vacation was over, and it was time to go home. We could not believe how the days flew by.

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When we returned home, I could only think how blessed I am to be in this amazing country and how we had so much fun together. My desire is to travel all over the U.S, to know the big cities, as well as small towns, beaches and mountains. I wish to continue accumulating beautiful memories of traveling with my family.

Steffani Cordoba is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Joan Van Zandt.

My Favorite Place

When I think of my favorite place, I close my eyes and I remember my grandparents' house. It is in San Jose de las Matas (Sajoma). We spent every weekend and every vacation with them.

They lived 45 minutes from my city, Santiago, in Dominican Republic. In order to get to their house, we would have to drive through one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen. I remember looking at the mountains and cliffs, and feeling the fresh air touching my face and seeing the air tossing my hair around.

Their house was built on top of a small mountain. There were no houses close by. The view was amazing. It was like the mountain could touch the sky and one could see very far. When we would finally arrive, there was always a strong smell of coffee and we were always welcomed with a huge hug. My grandmother would always cook for the family.

Early morning used to be a very busy time in my grandparents' house. The sounds of roosters, cows and chickens woke us up. My grandmother would sit in a special small wood chair next to the cow and would start to milk the cow. It was fascinating to see her hands move. It was like a dance, they moved up and down to get the milk from the cow.

During the day, we used to run down to the bottom of the mountain to play and swim in a creek. This creek used to have a small natural swimming pool. Around it, there were a lot of sweet and delicious mango trees that covered it like a ceiling.

This made the water feel cool, just the perfect temperature for swimming.

At sunset, my grandparents used to sit on the porch and talk with a hot cup of coffee in their hands. They used to look at the mountains, as if they were the most beautiful and colorful scenery ever painted. After that, we had dinner and drank hot chocolate. Later on, we would go to sleep with the hope that we would have the same or a better experience the next day.

Today, as an adult, when I travel to my country, Dominican Republic, I take time to visit my grandparents' house. They are no longer with us, but I always visit their house, where my family history began. It fills me with beautiful memories. At sunset, when I sit on the porch with the smell of coffee in my cup, I close my eyes and I know how blessed I am. I am in my favorite place. I am home.

Celeste Urena is a student at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus. Celeste is in Zuly Rosello's Level 6 ESOL class.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is where I can be myself. It is where I can find the tranquility and peace necessary to feel safe and be happy. It is a place where there is no room for bad moments, bad vibes or bad company.

At the beginning of my adulthood I was always alone. I had many friends, but I enjoyed being alone rather than accompanied. Although it was my preference to be alone, I still understood that it was a good thing to be surrounded by good company. When you are surrounded by good company, the place always becomes more pleasant.

It is when I understood this, that my visits to many beautiful places became more about their culture, their people and their beautiful landscapes and not about what luxuries they could offer. Luxury is only a perception and not what is important. The curious thing about these places is that it did not matter how beautiful they were or what they offered, but rather how I

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felt about being there. I finally understood that it was not about the beauty of the places or the lack thereof, it was me and my attitude that made the place and the moment special.

It also made me understand that my favorite place can be anywhere. It is where I am now because it was chosen by me and it is what makes me feel safe, tranquil, at peace and above all happy.

Albert Yorro is a student at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus. Albert is in Zuly Rosello's Level 6 ESOL class.

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the US

The American Way of Life

My name is Ana Luiza. I'm from Brazil and I'm 34 years old. I moved to the U.S in September 2018. I came because my husband is an engineer at Embraer and was transferred to Melbourne for three years.

I really like it here, mainly because it's so different from Brazil. I think the biggest difference is security. In my country, walls, railings, and even electric fences surround the houses and most of them are in private communities that you cannot enter unless you are invited by someone. The house owner needs to give you permission by phone and you present your I.D to a concierge who opens the gate.

In Brazil, we can't leave any door open, because you might be robbed. It's not safe to leave your car outside of the garage and even on the streets when you are doing something. Violence is huge in Brazil, especially in big cities. It's estimated to be around 70,000 homicides per year in the whole country. That's why most people live in gated apartments.

Another thing I consider so different is the price of things you buy in Brazil. There are a lot less options and the prices are so high! The taxes we pay for each product can vary between 30% to 80%.

Things here are so practical and ready to do. The houses have a central air conditioning system that keeps the interior a suitable temperature. Because of this, the doors and windows can stay closed, so the dust doesn't come inside. Cleaning the house is so easy because of that, and the products are much better. In two hours, you can have your house cleaned, while in Brazil you probably spend all day!

Another big difference between the two countries is that in Brazil we have a lot of help at home. Most of the people have a

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housekeeper at least once a week or even every day. They make your food, clean the house, wash and steam your clothes and can watch your children too. Labor is cheaper and we have a lot of work at home, so that's why we have more help.

There are so many differences between Brazil and the U.S and I could write a real book, but one thing I can say is that the "American way of life" is a practical and good way of living!

Ana Sa is an ESOL student and her teacher is Katherine Juergensen.

Putting Aside Our Differences

There are those who say that Mexico is not a safe country, but insecurity is everywhere.

Firstly, Mexico is a country with good things, too. Secondly, it is full of traditions, full of colorful decorations, an immense culture, and a varied gastronomy recognized worldwide.

In my opinion, Mexico is different from the United States because of traditions and food. Mexico also has good people.

I disagree with the President of the United States, who says that we are criminals, because we are people who look for opportunities to work and give our children a better future.

In conclusion, Mexico and the United States are two beautiful countries in different ways.

Blanca Santana is from Mexico and is a quiet and conscientious student. This essay allowed her to express herself more richly. Her teacher is Mr. Barnie from Scotland.

My Life in Cuba and U.S.

When I left Cuba, I had no idea how much my life would change. I was full of dreams, and very excited about my future. Lots of changes were coming my way, and I did not know how difficult some of them would be for me to sort out.

When I lived in Cuba, I used to work as an engineer in a big company. Once here, I had to perform a variety of jobs, which I was overqualified for, but I needed to survive. For that reason, I perform duties I never thought I would. However, anywhere you go, working is necessary for a living. My position as an engineer in Cuba did not pay as well as those jobs I had here upon arrival.

Being a professional, and not being able to perform as such in this country is a bit frustrating, but I am a very positive person. In Cuba I went to University for five years and got a degree in Engineering. This country is a new horizon for me, full of opportunities, so I decided to go back to school and learn English first, then I am thinking to study a bit more to be able to work as an engineer in this great country. I did not pay for my studies in Cuba, but here it is going to be expensive.

In my home country I was surrounded by family and friends. Although I have made friends here, it is difficult to be away from your roots and your culture, but I have already made this country my own, and here, the sky's the limit! I love everything about this country, specifically about this city. It is very cosmopolitan, with its festivals, its beaches and the sun.

Since I arrived here, my life has improved for the better. I am very happy, and I feel very privileged to have the blessing of living in such a great country. My life standards have improved, and I am able to help my beloved ones in Cuba. Cuba is, and will ever be in my heart, but God bless America!

Edel Morales is a student at Miami-Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where his teacher is Leonardo Leyva.

Law and Order

I am from Colombia and I am 45 years old. In the past, I have visited America for either vacation or work, but never more than 30 days each visit. Currently, I am living here for one year, I have never been to Key West before now. This is a different place than the ones that I was assigned to before.

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Colombia is a beautiful country with different climate, great biodiversity, and indescribable landscapes. The people are friendly, cheerful, and cooperative. However, we have some internal problems that do not allow us to live in peace. On the other hand, the United States does not have this kind of problem, and you can live here comfortably without feeling fearful.

After some days on this island, one big difference I notice is food. In the U.S. you can find colorful fruits and vegetables with exquisite flavors, but they do not taste the same as you think. Similarly, it happens with beef, fish, chicken and other things, whereby sometimes the foods do not have a good taste according to your taste buds. In Colombia, we have special seasonings we use to spice up the food. That is the reason why the flavor of food in U.S. and my country is really different.

United States is a country with many opportunities, and it is quiet, safe and multicultural. I can list many differences between countries, but I think the most important is law and order. In Colombia we have many laws, but they are too difficult to apply. People in America respect the law because it is strictly enforced. If you break the law, you will suffer the consequences.

Both countries have their pros and cons. I enjoy being in both places, but when I'm in the U.S., I miss Colombia - especially my family and friends. Likewise, when I'm in Colombia, I miss the U.S. too - mainly the quietness, safety, and the kindness and civility of its people.

Frederico Balcazar is on a special mission in Key West, Florida. He takes this opportunity to study English at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Challenges vs. Accomplishments

Here, in the United States, I have experienced some similarities with my home country of Haiti. However, the differences between the two countries are what surprise me the most. I will share some of the differences relating to political leaders, the economy, educational system and everyday life.

Politics is and has always have been a corrupt system in every country. There are laws that are set in place to stop certain individuals from doing things their own way; unfortunately, this is not the case in Haiti. Incompetent leaders who do not follow laws and regulations give outsiders the wrong impression about the beautiful island. In the United States things are more structured and like the constitution says, “No one is above the law.” In Haiti, leaders and the wealthy think they are exempt from the laws.

The economy in my country is poor. Although Haiti is a small country with a much smaller population in comparison, the Haitian government still finds it hard to meet the basic needs of the citizens. Poor economy generated by unqualified leaders makes it hard for the majority of the population to afford necessary needs.

The educational system is not accessible for everyone as compared to the United States because most institutions are private. It is hard for parents to send their children to school when they are struggling to afford a simple meal. The United States provides education which also includes transportation and free or reduced meals for low income families. In Haiti most students walk for miles to get to school, even with extreme weather conditions.

The everyday life of my people is what I am very proud of. Regardless of the challenges they face on a daily basis they smile, they care, they respect and they have dignity. They are some of the most resilient people on the planet. They are grateful for the minimal gestures or opportunities given to them. I find that too many people in the United States are rude, ungrateful and have little dignity. Children in my country show a lot of respect to their teachers, elders and parents, this is not true in the United States. Also, I do not see a fun childhood in America. In my country we build our own toys (cars, slingshots, little castles, etc.) and we are much more creative than children in the United States.

With all that being said, I admire my new life in the United States and I enjoy the variety of cultures we have here. It is different from my home country. The differences come as a surprise to most people giving the location and the distance

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between the two countries, but being close neighbors has little to do with culture and the way of life of the citizens. I must admit I enjoy my adventurous life in both countries.

Faby Isaac is a student at Atlantic Technical College in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She studies English with Ms. Johnson while working diligently towards her career in modeling.

New Country, New Culture, New Lifestyle

Living in another country means you are taking adventures of emotional happiness, nervousness, excitement, and loneliness. You should prepare well for the differences, including languages, cultures and lifestyle.

The English language is not easy to study, especially for a Vietnamese person like me. My native language has no final sound, and the sound is made from the throat, while English sounds came from teeth and tongue. Vietnamese is a tonal language with a large number of vowels and no consonant clusters. Each word has only one syllable, and its meaning and pronunciation is based on the tone (e.g. á, à, â, ã, â, ă, ạ). English has multiple syllables in one word, so it is a real challenge to study. However, there are many organizations and schools to help new immigrants to study English, like churches or English schools for adults. I did not know how to speak English when I came, but now I can communicate in English after a one-year study.

Language is not the only barrier; culture is another matter too. In my country, people usually ask about someone's age to start a conversation, because Vietnamese uses different pronouns for different ages. For example, I call someone younger than my father "Chú," and someone older than my father "Bác." So asking people's ages is very common. I did not know it was different in the United States. When I first met an American, I asked her about her age. She got angry and walked away. I did not know what I had done wrong. Another difference is in the eating. Making sounds during a meal shows the enjoyment of food in my country. However, I realized that making noises during meals was not very polite in the United States. Another difference is that bargaining is widespread in

my country. When I went to the farmer's market in Lakeland, I also did some bargaining, but no one accepted my offer.

There are many differences to living in another country. A person is faced with many barriers like the language, culture, and lifestyle, which can be very difficult to learn. However, if you want to learn, you will find it interesting. If you have a good attitude, it does not matter. With me, I really enjoy making new friends and learning new things in a new country. It will enrich your experience.

Hoan Vu is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

As Ready As I Can Be

I am Lucia Apuzzo. I have lived in Key West for almost one month. My life in the U.S. is so different from the one in my country. Here, I am living with so many people. There are four of us occupying the same house.

Also, the food and the people are different here - but that is not a problem for me because I have learned so much about the lifestyle, so I am able to adapt. For example, every day for breakfast now I have eggs instead of just toast with "dulce de leche." The people are so nice with me but here they have different customs. I enjoy learning English in the U.S. and the culture.

I get around the city by bike. I ride my bike to work and to the supermarket. The beach is so close by and I like it. When I have a break, I enjoy going to the beach. I play music while I drink "Mate" (tea). That is the custom of my country. We drink so much "Mate" with friends or family. I think here, people like to drink coffee.

I miss my country very much every day. But when I am working those thoughts go away momentarily because I feel good around my coworkers at my workplace. They make my days so happy and they always help me whenever I need something. So, I am ready to start a new life here.

Lucia Apuzzo is a student at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Adapting

My name is Marie Evelyne. I was born in Haiti. I moved from my country to United States two years ago. I had a lot of changes in my life. I would like to talk about how life in my home country is different from life in the United States.

The differences between Haiti and the United States are vast. They have different languages; American people speak English, and me, Creole. The food is almost the same, but the preparations are different. About the weather, I can say Haiti is the best because we have two seasons: the hot season (not too hot), and the cool season. Our skin color is black. We have different customs, different dances, and different music. In my country the beaches are very beautiful, the water is clear and clean. The people are very friendly and helpful in both Haiti and in America too.

On the other hand, America is better. It gives me opportunities to have a job, to go to school, to get a car, to get health insurance, and to take care of my family. However, the laws are different and justice is better in the U.S.A. I prefer education from my country because there is more freedom and privacy for the youth than in America. In everything there are advantages and disadvantages.

In conclusion, I can say despite our differences, we can live together and we try to adapt to everything.

Marie Evelyne is a very intelligent and conscientious student who has gone from the intermediate class to advanced ESOL class in just a year. Her current teacher is Mr Barnie.

How Life in Our Home Country Differs from Life in the US

Our lives in Haiti differ from our lives in the United States in many ways. We all wanted to live better, so we came to America. We love Haiti and enjoy life in the United States, but the two countries differ in five ways: jobs, food, personal transportation, housing and education.

In Haiti, there is little work. The jobs that are available are day jobs. In the United States there are day and night jobs. The people in the United States work a lot and they do not have enough time to rest. In Haiti we had time to rest, go to the beach, and visit with family and friends while eating good food.

The food in Haiti is so good and does not cost as much as the food in the United States. The food in Haiti is grown without chemicals. Some of us grew our own food in Haiti. We had plenty of fresh meat, fruit, and vegetables. In the United States they use too many chemicals on the food that make people sick and we cannot afford to buy enough healthy foods.

In Haiti we walked everywhere. In the US we use cars and buses to go places. Having our own transportation makes it easier for us to go to work, school, church, and back home.

Homes in Haiti are cheaper than in the US, but the homes in Haiti did not have electricity and running water. In America, we live in apartments or houses with electricity and running water. The rent is high, but we survive.

Part of surviving in the United States is getting an education that will help us get better paying jobs. In Haiti, education is different from the United States in that students show more respect to teachers, but we are grateful for our education. We try very hard to learn so we can live better lives here in the United States and help our families back home in Haiti.

All authors, Gerdraine Belizaire, Jourlouse Belizaire, Guito Civil, Yolaine Deguerre, Telesphore Etienne, Solange Hipolite, Marc Sony Jacquet, Anne Marie Joseph, Marie Leroy, Anne Sylvain, and Yves Valcourt; attend Orlando Technical College Orlando Campus ACE site, Christ Sanctified Church. They are in Dr. Andréa Hogan's ESOL class.

Golden Cage or the Promised Land

Have you ever heard of this beautiful country called the Golden Cage? Within the Hispanic community, this expression is very common. Many people can enter this country but if they do not get their residency or citizenship, they cannot return if they leave.

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What do you call this blessed country? This is a question I ask people who, like me, had to give up their home, their parents, their friends, and their roots to immigrate to an unknown country that has a different culture and language. They start building a new life, far away from their real family who they hugged and said goodbye to, without knowing if one day they would see them again.

In my case, unfortunately, it was like this. After twelve years without being able to return to my country, my parents died, and I would never again have the opportunity to see them and embrace them for the last time. I had to give up all that in order to offer my children a better life. For me it has been a great blessing to come to this beautiful country. Every day I thank God for giving me the opportunity to be here. This country has given me what I never imagined to have and be able to achieve in my country. Now I can provide everything for my family.

On the other hand, there are things that I cannot give them, such as the experience of playing outside alone without being lost or kidnapped. That does not happen in the place where I was born because all the neighbors are family. Here, I can take my children to the zoo but I cannot give them the experience of running after a hen or dog or horse. I can buy the best story books but not the opportunity to sit every night around the table while the grandparents tell the adventures they had as children. I can take my kids to a pool but they cannot go swimming in the river after school; or hide in a cornfield; or ride in the rain; or fly kites in the afternoons; or listen to jokes at night with their cousins, uncles, and friends under the light of the moon. They do not have the opportunity to see a real shooting star.

All those experiences I could not buy. I do not know, my reader friend, with what words I can use to define this country. For me, it is the land where milk and honey flow. It is the Promised Land. If I could turn back the clock, I would renounce everything again in order to offer my children a better future here in the U.S.

Alba Reyes is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

Someone I Admire

My Admiration For My Best Friend

I didn't believe in best friends until I met one. I admire my best friend Lilibeth Martinez. We met in high school in El Salvador when I showed her the bathroom. Ever since that day six years ago, we have been friends. She is someone who cares about my days, is always true and honest to herself, and has a huge, creative heart.

One reason I admire Lilibeth is because she is caring. She always stays in rough situations because she knows that I'm not always positive. For example, in high school I liked a boy and every day I told her about him. When we broke up I was obviously hurt and she patiently supported me. She shows that she cares by being a good advisor. Even though she knows I'm not going to follow her advice, she gives it anyway. In fact, she patiently says "I told you, but you never listen to me." I feel relieved when I tell her about my problems. She is like a little therapist for me because she knows how to help me feel better.

I also admire her because she is honest and true to herself. Since I met her, she has never changed her lifestyle. Specifically, with her mom she has an immense trust and is not scared. She knows that if she is honest, everything will be fine. When people say something about her style, she does not care. She says "everyone is living their own life." Before I met her, I pretended to be someone else with another style, strictly for approval of others. However, she supports me to be true to myself. She says "If you are honest to yourself you will be more delighted." She is right, I feel excellent when I am myself!

Another reason I admire Lilibeth is because she has a huge heart with a lot of creativity. She can make exceptional handmade presents and she never expects anything in return. She can make wonderful posters. She puts a lot of love into little things too. For example, one time she gave me a roll of papers with a lot of pictures, hearts, and different colored words. It was an awesome letter that made me feel special. Thanks to her, now I can be more creative when I'm making something for someone else.

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In conclusion, I am lucky to have found someone like Lili who cares about me and my days. She offers when I ask her for advice and has a lot of patience with me. She can be honest and true. She shows me who I should be and teaches me how to be more creative through her example. After all, true best friends do exist. I'm honored to have her in my life!

Beatriz Segovia is a student of the English Class at Immokalee Technical College in Immokalee, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

Success

Success means different things to different people. For me, to be a successful person, one does not have to be a famous personality or a millionaire. Being successful occurs when one starts life from zero in a new country after having had a good life previously. When one sacrifices everything to build a new life, fighting all the obstacles and improving steadily. My uncle, whom I am very proud of and grateful to have in my life, embodies this.

My uncle grew up in large, poor family. Though he liked and was good at sports, he understood the importance of education. He graduated college with a degree in political science. Because his dreams were big, he left his country, Algeria, and decided to finish his doctorate in France. He obtained a Ph.D. in economics from one of the best universities in Europe. He also met his wife in France. She is an American. When she invited him to move to her country, he agreed.

When he arrived in the U.S. many years ago, he spoke Arabic, French and Spanish but he did not speak one word of English. Since he came to America with less than \$200 in his pocket and knew no one else besides his wife, he soon enrolled in English classes and took part-time jobs to help with bills. He understood English was the key to any opportunity, so he spent most of his time reading anything he found in English. His main focus was to learn English well and quickly, which he did. After 11 months in America, he enrolled in a school to study computer science. Later, he graduated and started a new career as a Computer Science instructor. He still wanted to grow;

therefore, he began his software engineering career, eventually working as a computer programmer, systems analyst, database administrator, and in many other roles. After learning the details of the business, he founded his own software company and became an IT consultant for several well-known companies. He retired early from his career to take care of his wife who was diagnosed with advanced cancer. For over nine years, he labored full-time every single day to care for his wife until she passed away. For a while, he was lost without his wife. Now, he is rebuilding his life again after his tremendous loss.

I hold him as a model of dedication and perseverance in life and I will follow his example whenever possible. My uncle lived the American dream. He worked harder and smarter and built a successful life. No matter what the challenge was, he faced it. Of course, he encountered many difficulties in his life, but he endured. My uncle is my role model. He inspires me to be a better person and find my own success in life.

Henia Becharef is a student in K. H. Niedbalec's College & Career Readiness course at Brewster Technical College.

My Guide

I have always admired my grandfather, José Echevarría, for his great character. He taught all his grandchildren that first it is God and the family that we should love and that there is nothing more rewarding than helping others without expecting anything in return.

My grandfather was born in Revilla, Spain, in the year 1920. There he dedicated his life to working in the maintenance of railway networks and his free time occupied him in serving the church. He was an active member of the Spanish Military Service during the Civil War. Due to the triumph of the coup led by General Francisco Franco in 1936 against the Democratic Government of Spain and the subsequent Second World War, he was forced to immigrate to Venezuela in 1945.

In Venezuela, he settled in a small town and dedicated himself to working on an animal farm; however, it was

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not a very attractive job for him. At that time, he met my grandmother. After a while, they formed a large family. Then, he decided to open a bookstore. For my grandfather, education was very important; studying and training were fundamental virtues for him.

My grandfather was a wise man. He was disciplined, punctual, organized, hardworking, noble, and always happy. He spent the day singing Spanish and Christian songs, filling us with advice and phrases that we did not always understand. We always listened to him and nodded as a sign of respect. Among the many phrases collected from the lips of my grandfather, I can quote, “Nobility, simplicity, and readiness for work are virtues that distinguish men of good will.” Thus, we grew up working and studying, always united as a family.

Until today, it never occurred to me to ask him if he missed living in his country. I only know that he was happy with the family he had formed in Venezuela. My grandfather, despite being Spanish and having deeply rooted European customs, came to love Venezuela as if he had been born there. He came to love Venezuelans as his brothers. He was known, loved, and respected in that little town because of his big heart and his interest in helping everyone who needed him. I am grateful and blessed to have received his love, his education and his advice. Today it is my turn to be an immigrant like he was back then. I feel that gives me the strength to move forward and make his example my guide in this beautiful journey called life.

Lucimar Bianco is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Helping Her Community

Maria Luisa is the Founder of The Worldwide Foundation, I respect her because she is a person that puts everyone else first. She is a kind and intelligent woman and in my opinion she is the best person in the world. Her organization provides a helping hand to people worldwide. She helps the needy through the implementation of quality education programs at all levels. This organization also provides humanitarian assistance in a

timely manner to improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations: one way they do this is by constructing schools, sending teams of health professionals to areas in need and run construction projects to improve housing.

One of the programs aims is to improve education. They provide training to prepare people for their profession, they provide scholarships and build schools in remote cities. They also focus on helping people with disabilities by providing education and helping them start their own business. When this organization arrives to an area they try to bring everything the people of the area may need; they will bring a group of cosmetologist to train local people and provide haircuts to the local community. They even bring entertainment for the children and elderly people. Of course they also provide more urgent necessities like clothes, food and medicine, especially to areas affected by natural disasters. I believe that the founder of The Worldwide Foundation is a wonderful person that provides help to everyone she encounters.

This anonymous student is in the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her instructor is Ms. Melanie Blake.

One in a Million

PERFECTION! This is the one word that I would use to describe the person I admire the most. Her life demonstrates her worth and character to her children and community. She is one of the most industrious, honest, kind, loyal, thrifty, and giving people in existence these days. She uses her God-given resources wisely. She has strength and dignity and has been a mentor to many. She provided a stable environment for me and my siblings to grow from children to into adulthood. She is a positive force in the community.

I not only have the privilege of knowing this rare and precious creature, but I also have the privilege of calling her “Mom.” My mom raised me to have morals, standards and to have a healthy fear and respect for God. Although she was strict, she always allowed me to live my own life and make my own decisions. Even when I’ve made poor decisions, she’s

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always there to help me pick up the pieces and give me hope that things will get better. There have been many occurrences where ordinary people would have just walked away, but she's always in my corner to help balance the situation. Not many things have been consistent in my life other than getting into trouble, but she has been a permanent asset to me.

On more than one occasion she has been responsible for taking care of a lot of people. I've never seen her get into an argument with anyone. I would classify her as an "angel" living among us. Not only is she beautiful, funny, and smart, but she has a heart of gold. If I ever decide to drop my bachelor status (hee hee!) and get married, I would prefer all of my candidates have the same or most of the characteristics that my mom has. In the 42 years that I've been on earth, I've faced many calamities that I might not have gotten through without my mom being there by my side to help me weather the storm.

My mom is the "traffic signal" in my life. She's there for my correction, protection, and direction as I travel the highway of life. She red-lights me when I'm headed in a bad direction. She yellow-lights (cautions) me to slow down or hit the brakes, or else risk having a serious accident. She green-lights me when I use good judgement, and take positive steps toward being a better person and father.

I've heard stories of mothers abandoning their kids, and these stories make me cherish my relationship with my mom and thank God for the blessing He gave me in the form of my mother. My prayer is that everyone can experience a love like the love that I feel for and from my mom. I love you Mom!

Bobby Moore is a student of Ms. Brenda G. Johnson's Adult Education GED Prep class sponsored by Tallahassee Community College.

Someone I Admire the Most

Someone that I admire the most is my mother. I admire her for many different reasons. I admire her because she raised four kids on her own, including me, two girls and two boys. I have never known for mom to not have a job. She always taught

us if we wanted to have nice things, then we had to work for it. The first couple of years of my life I was raised in the projects in Sanford, Florida. There were always gunfights, people dying, and every month we would have no lights. She stayed strong for us though. I can remember her going without eating to make sure we had food in our bellies. I admire her for never giving up on us and for never giving us to Child Protective Service. I'm not the only one that admires her. People in the community look up to her because she made it out. She always said, when things get rough, don't give up. My mom got her high school diploma, passed the state board for (MA) which is Medical Assistant, and (PAT) Patient Care Tech. She is a security officer and she also teaches at Southern Technical College, where she graduated. She motivated a lot of people to stay in school and not give up just because they were from a poor part of town.

The reason that I mostly admire her is because when I got pregnant and quit school, she was there to encourage me to go back and get my education. She even attended school with me. Plenty of days I wanted to give up, but she made me keep going. She tutored me and helped me. She made me want to be the kind of mother to my son, that she was to me. I want to get an education because of her. I know that will make my son want his. She always said that if she could do it with four babies, then I can do it with one. I look up to her because her days of raising kids are long over. Her kids are grown and have kids of their own. My mom raised me the right way; to have manners, respect for my elders, and she disciplined me well. But here I am, sitting in prison for some bad choice I made on my own. Yes, she is still here for me, takes good care of my son, attends school and still works. I admire my mom because she has taught me a lot but most importantly, she taught me that no matter what I'm going through in life, never give up. She's my hero, my best friend, my role model. She is someone that I admire most, my mommy.

Ms. Chriskesa Pierce is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class taught by Ms. Cynthia Phillips.

My Grandmother

I am the eldest son of my father who is also the eldest son of my grandfather. In our culture, I am an important grandchild and that is why I got so much love from my grandmother. I admire her. She is the strongest woman I have ever known.

Although she passed away six years ago, in my mind, my grandmother is still an amazing woman. She had two children who were my father and my uncle. She raised them by herself when she was twenty years old because my grandfather died in war. Despite being a widow when she was still very young, she never thought of getting married again because she wanted to focus on taking care of her children and her parents.

She has six grandchildren. She taught us to always strive to do our best in everything, and she taught us through her experience. For example, she never went to school but she tried to learn how to write with the help of my cousin because she wanted to write a letter to her friends that she had not seen in many years. At that time, she was over sixty-five years old. That story followed me through my graduation and helped me if I ever had any problems studying.

She was a strict mom, but she was quite easy with her grandchildren as she thought we were disciplined enough by our parents. She always remembered our favorite things, especially mine. She always cooked my favorite meal when I came back home from college which was far away from our home.

My grandmother had an important influence on me. She not only taught me the way to be a good person but also showed me how to have a beautiful family. I hope that she can smile from above while watching me become successful.

Huy Lan Cao is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Special Person

Someone I admire is my mother-in-law. Her name is Ms. Lifaite Thoedule. Her maiden name is Rose Clelie Desir. I love her so much. She is my wife's mother. Now she is living in the USA with my sister-in-law in West-Palm Beach. Sometimes she comes for vacation with my family in Immokalee, Fl. The reasons I admire her are she is a good person, helpful, good adviser, and good-hearted.

The first reason I admire her is because she is a good person. I remember when I first met my mother-in-law. When I was a teenager, I saw her daughter and I was deeply impressed by this young lady. Rose did not repel me, instead she sat down with me. She talked to me about my life to prepare me for my future before I met my wife. When I graduated with a career, then I could get married and have a family. As you can see, my mother-in-law is a good person.

Another reason I admire her is because she is financially helpful. She helped when my first daughter, Rose, was sick. She gave me the money for the hospital fee. She saved my daughter's life. Also, I remember when my daughter came to school for the first time. My mother-in-law helped me with the money I needed for my daughter to enter school. She is always available to help me.

I also admire her because she is a good advisor to me. Rose always advised me when I was unemployed. She never despaired me. My mother-in-law talked to me when I had problems. I got over these problems with her advice. She talked to me about my life, my future, and about the good things and bad things in life.

Another reason I admire her is because she has a good heart. My mother-in-law is a landlord. In Haiti, people pay rent every six months or once a year. Sometimes people are late to pay the rent, but she is always patient with them for a month or two. Sometimes when people cannot pay, she gives them 6 months free based on the circumstances of the person. She has a good heart.

Thank God my mother-in-law changed my life. She helped me to solve my problems per her financial support. She is

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always available for me with her advice and her goodness. I am thankful so much for Rose. It is God's blessing.

Evens Blanc is from Haiti. He is a married, father of three children, two girls and one boy, Cassandra, Giuseppe, and Alisha. He is a student of Immokalee Technical College. His teacher is Ms. Katherine Mominee.

You Never Know

My mother's name is Barbara, but I usually call her Baby Lay. I don't why but one day this name just showed up in my head, and it will stay forever. She even calls herself by this name. It's really funny because she loves it. She is the strongest person that I know. She lost her mother when she was sixteen years old and, in that moment, she had to take care of her brother, little sister, and father. She had bad moments because she had to do her mom's duties and hers; she bit off more than she could chew. To study and to work at the same time is hard, but this situation never stopped my mom.

After her first marriage failed, she fell in love with my dad and together they made our beautiful family. When the economic situation in Cuba worsened, my father decided to come here to the United State of America. Nobody knows the time that we passed through. We missed him a lot, and life wasn't easy, but my mom did it again. She took care of me like mother and father at the same time.

One day she received a phone call from my dad. He was breaking up with her because he spent a bad time alone and, at that time, he had found another woman who made him feel better. That was the reason. What a reason! I just couldn't believe it, but it was true. My mom surrendered, and she didn't want to live anymore. My life became a disaster. I spent my entire life keeping my eyes watching her; she was crazy at that moment, and I was too because of her. You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only option.

Fortunately, time healed the wound and after two years, here she is, stronger than ever. We were able to come to the United

States from Cuba. She forgave her man, and we are the most beautiful and happy family in the whole world again. Thank God.

Daisy Gonzalez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Someone I Admire

My name is Jovana Romero and I am from Venezuela. I have a son named Santiago. We have lived in this country full of opportunities for three years. On the way, we have been presented with some obstacles. Because of those obstacles, I am studying English. A year ago we met a wonderful person who has been like a mother to us, and I am grateful to God for having put her in our path. Her name is Flor Elena and she serves as an excellent example for us to follow. It is an honor to publish her name out of my respect for such a kind person. Thanks to her, today I have the opportunity to study. Her help has been very valuable for both my son Santiago and I, and we have the privilege of having a second mom whom we love and respect very much.

Jovana Romero is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus.

You Mean So Much to Me

I am Lilianne Dossous Lauranvil. I was born in Haiti in 1960. I am married and I have three children - one girl and two boys. I was a teacher in Haiti. Now, I am living in Key West. I like this city because it so quiet and the weather is mostly sunny.

Previously, I spent three years in Delran, New Jersey. Things were difficult in New Jersey. Finding a job was easy, but finding a better job was difficult for me because I do not speak English well. I felt overwhelmed. I was looking for a school that offered English courses, but could not find one. In April 2018, I made the decision to leave Delran and go somewhere things are easier. With the help of a friend, I moved to Key West in September 2018.

In Key West, I have found someone for whom I have a lot of admiration. In Delran, I had lost hope; I felt I was never going to find an English class. But with my new teacher, I overcame my lack of confidence in myself. In spite of my age, I can learn, and I would like to teach in United States.

This woman helps me a lot. She is very patient. She never tires of teaching me even when sometimes it is hard for me to understand something. I am grateful. She never gives up on us. She encourages us everyday not to give up. At every effort we make, she blesses us. Because of the way she shows support, I now have someone whom I believe in and I will not let go. She cares for every student. She knows the shortcomings in each one of us, and she helps us to understand what we do not understand. She would like us to learn from our mistakes and avoid repeating them. She is helpful and she has a lot of knowledge. Thank you for all of your help, Miss Josephson.

Lilianne Dossous attends the English class at Monroe County School District Adult Education in Key West. She loves learning English. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Father

Since I was a kid my father has always been the person I most admire in my life, and the person I most love too. I remember when I was a kid he always went to the United States to play professional baseball and he used to take us to the place he was in that moment because he loved to be with his children and his wife. I never forgot those moments. Another thing I admire about him is that he played in a lot of different leagues like Major League, Mexican League, Asian Baseball, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. He earned a lot of money and yet that never changed his way of being. He was still a humble person and an incredible father, friend and a person in who you can trust at any moment.

My father was born in Bani in 1971. In his childhood he was very poor. He lived in a place where there was no light at night and no technology until he was 9 years old. He always remembers those moments and tells me about how difficult

those times were. After that they moved to the capital, Buenos Aires of Herrera, still being very poor. Since then, my father and his brothers worked in many ways to at least feed themselves.

At that time things were not only difficult economically but also with his father who was very strict. But today he appreciates the education he had, no matter what he went through.

In his childhood, he never showed an interest in studying. He liked to play baseball. He was punished a lot because when his parents thought he was going to school he took another way to go to the stadium to practice, and although it seems wrong because it is important to study, from the moment he told me that story, I admired him completely because regardless of the obstacles, he fell more and more in love with the game. Another thing that I admire a lot was his great poverty. He had to play in sandals and many people bullied him for that. They told him that he would not accomplish anything and yet, he never lowered his head. On the contrary, that motivated him to overcome. After all, he got the opportunity that he was looking for; To become a professional player. From there, the rest is history. He only spent 3 years in the minors to reach the big leagues in 1996, and he spent 23 years playing professional baseball. I admire his story because it motivates me not to give so much importance to the obstacles or the distractions that come my way. I must always push forward without hesitating and never stop until I get what I want so much.

Nerio Rodriguez is a catcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is graduating this year. He is from Dominican Republic. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

The Strength of a Dream

When you really want something, you can make it come true. That is the story of my grandfather, Dr. Francisco Solano Nava. He came from a family with many disadvantages. This was at a time when a boy was not seen in a good light by society when his father left the family. Although it was a small family, all in all, it was the best family that he could have. His family was his

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mother, two siblings and him. He learned responsibility, love for each other, and he wanted to help others. He wished to be a doctor when he grew up.

First, he got married to my grandmother, and they had ten children. He had to work so hard to maintain that big family. During this time, he decided to look for a job at night to begin to study medicine. So, he had to work during the night as a safety guard for the oil companies in Venezuela and went to medical school in the morning.

Many professors were worried about him because he looked like a drug addict because of his red eyes. When the professors asked him, he explained to them that the red eyes were because he worked at night. But he didn't wish to just study medicine. He wanted to be the best in his class.

My grandmother told me that he took an exam once and thought he failed it, so he did not return to that class. The next semester, the professor asked him why he did not return, and he said because I failed the exam. The professor told him that he got 17-out-of-20 and passed that exam, but he could not give my grandfather the credit for the subject because he never came back. That shows how strict he was with himself.

In the end, he graduated as a doctor. He was a great doctor. He was even the founder of the nutritional career at the Zulia University. He was also a radio announcer. All of these things he did without leaving his family aside.

At the same time, he participated in the raising of his children. All his children grew up, and they all have a university degree. He has a doctor, a bio-analyst, two engineers, a veterinarian, a livestock veterinarian, a teacher, an administrator, an agronomist, and a metallurgical technician.

He is the person that I most admire, and he is my inspiration to continue working on my goals. Now I know if I really want something, I only need to be responsible and persistent to reach my goals. Thank you Grandpa wherever you are now.

Maria Nava is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Someone I Admire

From when I was very small, I had admirations for characters, whether they be on T.V., movies or some comics. But with the passage of time, I was growing and through reading, and religious beliefs, I admire Jesus Christ a lot. It's until now that I admire him so much because he gave his life for the salvation of the world.

In his long pilgrimage, he made miles of miracles from healing people's bodies to raising the dead. According to the Bible, he is a supernatural person different from us. His life, passions, death and resurrection make him a supreme being. He was chosen by God to be his representative here on earth.

I lack paper and pencil to describe all his greatness in his stay here on earth. This makes him a superior being to all of us. People come to praise him all over the earth.

Carlos Pardo is from Ecuador. He studies English at Manatee Literacy Council in Bradenton, FL with his tutor, Roger Boos.

The Wisest Woman Ever

My grandmother Myrtle E. Miller was born 1918 in Avery County, North Carolina. She lived a long life and died at the age of 92. She was born during World War I.

She was full of wisdom and courage. She had so much inspiration that helped many people. She would always give us advice. Often we didn't listen. Everything she had told us was true.

She moved to Johnson City, Tennessee at the age of 17 on a horse and wagon. It was a journey for her and her husband, traveling across the mountains. She met many other families along the way. They were coming from the mountains to the city for jobs.

She had lived during the Great Depression. She recalled, "It was the greatest crisis ever." People from those areas grew their own food and lived off the land. She said they still struggled

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during those times. She would always tell me about events in history that she lived through.

In her days, they really didn't have education. She taught herself to read by reading the Bible. Her advice was to always get your education. Looking back now, I wish I would have listened to her. Education is the most important choice to make. You need an education to accomplish life.

She would always try to get me to make the right choices. I thought I knew it all. Little did I know, I didn't know everything. She had said it would come to pass. Warning does come before destruction. Life is full of choices, good and bad. We have to make right choices to succeed in life. She had given me the wisest advice. I have never known anyone with the wisdom she had.

In conclusion, I want to be like my grandmother. I want to be the strong woman she was, with the courage and wisdom she had. I want to help others as she did.

Ms. Sandy Bulla is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Johnson City, TN. She dedicates this creative piece to her grandmother. She is a student in the GED FastTrack class facilitated by Aide Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Our Ambition Is Heaven

These are the words of His Royal Highness, Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud. He was born August 31, 1985, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Deputy Prime Minister, in addition to being the Minister of Defense.

Prince Mohammed is a popular figure in the society and when he took office, he brought about a great change in the kingdom. One of the most important changes is that women are allowed to drive cars. He set up an entertainment and anti-corruption body where princes, ministers, businessmen and citizens work together for the creation of 2030; this will evolve to be the renaissance of Saudi Arabia.

Among the most prominent words of the Crown Prince will be history and he will become an icon for the Saudis to talk about regarding ambition and hope: “Our ambition is heaven” and also “Only death will stop me.”

Crown Prince Mohammed ben Salman also said, “We are only going back to what we were.” As he said, too, “There is no place in Nium except for the dreamers.”

Crown Prince Mohammed ben Salman has vowed to eradicate extremism by saying that history will be perpetuated by deeds, “We will not waste another 30 years with extremists. We will eliminate them.” The Crown Prince is someone I admire.

Sattam Bani Alhajri, from Saudi Arabia, is a student at Brevard Adult Education ESOL, Melbourne, Florida. His teacher is Christopher “Kit” Adams.

My Admirable Friend, Josie

Sometimes, the good habits of a close friend can influence your life and will serve as a light in the midst of darkness. We all need to learn good things from others. They can be the reason a person is able to make the right decision in a bad situation. It is why it’s important to have friendship with people that can influence your life in a good way. I don’t regret that I met Josie, and I found myself in her.

Josie came to the United States in 2015. She knew that moving to a new country wasn’t something very easy. After two months, she had someone take her to register at an English school in Broward County. On the day of testing, she had to take the bus to get there for the first time. It was not easy at all, and she got lost. “I worked up the nerve for three days and finally I seized the moment on that Monday, my testing day. I said to myself, even though I would lose my way, I’ll do it once, and I’ll never be lost again.” The most important part of that day was her courage, and I admired that in her. She said to me once, “In America, if you don’t dare death, you’ll not be able to reach your goal.”

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She moved to West Palm Beach, and registered at a new school. She arrived every morning on time to school until her mom had to spend time in her home country. Josie had to take care of her little brother by herself. At school, she felt that she had to catch up with the other students even though she passed the quizzes. She arranged with someone to pick up her brother so she could arrive to school on time. She said to herself, "One day, I'll have my own car, and I won't need to ride the bus. Getting a car is not like a hungry mad man lying below an orange tree with his mouth open waiting in vain for oranges to fall in his mouth. With enough hard work, I'll be able to buy a car and have a better life." She tried many ways to improve her English. She had very good results. She finished her English class. She went to college, and got a good job and her own car.

I think Josie is a very brave young woman. She is not only a good example for me. Her courage can influence everybody around her.

Jose Claire Emile Simeon is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

My Role Model

I would like to introduce the person I admire the most, my mom. Her name is Nerlande. My mom is valuable and a very important person for me. She is an advisor, a caring, and a hard worker.

One reason I admire my mother is because she is a teacher and advisor. She teaches me a lot of things. For example, she shows me how to match colors, cook, do my hair, and do my laundry. She also gives me good advice to achieve in life. For instance, she always tells me "Sonoria, you should be nice to people and respect everyone, even if they are older. That is very important because you do not know who you are going to be in the future. You could be a president, a doctor, or a leader. For that reason, you need to be a good example for the people you are going to lead."

Another reason I admire my mother is because she is a caring person. For example, she is always taking good care of our family. She likes to do laundry for us because we really mean a lot to her. Also she likes helping people solve their problems. Even if you are not her friend, she would help you if you ask for it. Specifically, many friends call to ask for advice about their marriage or how to be a better spouse or mom. Some people also come to her house to talk about their first baby. They also talk about stressful situations like economic problem. Since she had a lot of experience, people consider her like a counselor.

I also admire my mom because she is a hard worker. To illustrate, even when she is tired after work she still cooks dinner for the family, washes her dirty clothes, and keeps the house clean and fresh. The most important and incredible thing about my mom is that she can do three or four different thing at the same time. She even does them well and quick too! When I can not help her, I talk to her while she is working or tell her funny stories about my dad or the family.

To conclude, my mom is a gift from God. She is my reason to be happy. I try to thank her for her advice, care, and her hard work by offering her gifts, respect, and loving words. This is the reason why I have to make her proud. I hope God protects my mom to see many years. I love you mom!

Sonorita Saint Louis is a student Immokalee Technical College. She is in ESOL program. Her teacher's name is Katie Mominee.

My Pretty Mommy

Today I want to talk about someone I admire. This person is my mom. Who is she? What did she do to make me love her like that? Why do I choose to talk about her like someone I admire? In the lines below I will tell you everything about her and you will be able to answer those questions for yourself.

Her name is Emie Boyer, as everybody says she is nice, beautiful and a friendly person. She likes to make people happy, especially her kids, and she likes to share everything

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she has. She loves everyone, even if she does not know you she will be there to help you, and to me, she is the friendliest person in her town.

I love her because she shows me how to care for myself, she helps me to grow up. Even though she knows that I am an adult, she still tries to protect me from terrible danger that can happen in my life. She doesn't want me to make mistakes in my life, but she wants me to realize my dreams and to become a big person on the earth. Even if I do something wrong she forgives me, and she tells me to learn from my mistake. She encourages me not to turn back, to please try to move up. I love when she talks to me because she helps me to be the person I am.

I choose to talk about my mom because she is someone special in my life. If I can be here at school to learn and try to get a career, I think this is so important for her because she wants her son still going to school to learn and get a career. Even if she only has 5 dollars, she does not care and will give it her kids. She shows her kids how to love people around us, she teaches us to help someone who needs help, and she tells us to share whatever we have. For this reason I love her.

Did you know even if a person is a good person he still has some faults too? Even though my mom is cool, friendly, and nice, she has one fault: she likes to talk too much.

Finally, my mom is the best person on the earth because she still makes me happy every day, she teaches me about life, and she protects me from terrible danger by explaining the consequences that can happen to me from my actions. I don't have enough time to talk about her because she inspires me so much, and I am proud for her.

Walkens Saint-Hubert is a 21 year old from Haiti. He studies English with Ms. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe while he diligently pursues his career goal as a web designer.

An Awesome Mom

All the pleasure is mine to tell you about someone I admire. My mom is the most important person for me in this world. No

one on this earth can compare to my mother. There are many reasons that I admire my mother. She is caring, helpful, and represents love for me.

She gave me birth and takes care of me. For example, I remember when I was a child and went to school. She woke me up early every morning to make breakfast for me. Then, she accompanied me to school. When I arrived home, she would say "Welcome home, I made you your favorite dish!" I was very happy and kissed her many times. She also wants me to be happy.

She is always available to help me and advise me. She is respectful. She is also there for other people who need advice or help. Everybody loves her. She always has a good influence on them.

She is always there to support me, love me, and protect me. I love my mom with all my heart. She is a good example for me. She always motivates me to be positive. Her courage and her sense of responsibility make me stronger to work harder for a better future. She makes me proud of her and I want her to be proud of me in return. Even though sometimes I make her angry and disappointed she always keeps loving me.

In conclusion, my mother is caring for me. She can give me the best advice, help me when I don't know what to do, she always supports me and gives me her love. I feel lucky to have a mom also wonderful.

Taicha Chertoute is a student at Immokalee Technical College. She is from Haiti. Her teacher is Ms. Katie.

My Parents

I am writing this essay for my parents, and I am honored that I have a chance to do this for them. My parents are living in China now. I am very thankful to them for giving me life. When I was born, they took care of me and made me into the person I am now. I am really proud of them.

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My mother is a cheerful, chatty perfectionist who can talk for hours about how to make good food. She is never afraid to speak her mind, and she can be very convincing when she wants to be. Sometimes, she gets upset a bit too easily, but she is just as quick to forgive and forget. She taught me never to lose hope even in the direst of moments, and she showed me how to look for happiness in the small things.

My mother is the oldest one in her family. She has two sisters and no brothers. Because my grandfather and grandmother died early, she had to take care of her siblings. After she got married to my father, she gave birth to my three siblings.

When I was a young girl, we did not have enough money to buy things. My father had to work very hard from dawn to dark. He was as busy as a bee at times. My father is quiet, patient, and calm. He never gets angry, and he is always polite, friendly, and nice to everyone. If I asked any person who knows our family about the type of person my father is, they would definitely say that he is kind and hard-working.

When I went to school, they worked harder and harder because they had to pay the expensive school fees. Although my father did not receive much education, he is a man of wisdom. He ensured we could afford a good education and have a wonderful childhood. He taught me that you cannot have it all in life but with hard work, you can have what matters most to you.

In my childhood, my parents would always have my back. When I would have problems with friends or I was having a hard time with something and needed to pour my heart out, they would listen and talk to me.

I could write about so many other things. They are the greatest people that I know. I love and respect my parents. I hope they stay healthy and happy.

Xuiping Zhan is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Personal Stories

Thanksgiving Day

My name is Amanda Ortiz and I want to tell you my personal story of how I lost my eight-month old son, Julian Joseph Valdez to a “Monster,” someone who I thought was my friend. To someone whom I could trust with my kids. It was the worst pain I ever had to go through in my life.

It happened on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 2016. The day I will never forget is the day I got a phone call and the officer told me that my son stopped breathing and they were rushing him to Gulf Coast Hospital. At that moment I didn't know what to think or feel. All I wanted to do was go to sleep and wake up to a dream.

My friend Debbie immediately rushed me to the hospital and that's when I sat there and closed my eyes, crying and praying that my baby boy was okay, but when I arrived at the hospital it was too late. By the time I ran inside and begged the nurse to let me see my son, not even five minutes later the nurse came out and told me that my son didn't make it and they did everything they could to save him.

I could feel my heart begin to sink and my knees get weak! I was screaming and crying, telling the nurse, “please tell me it's not real, that my son isn't really gone.” I didn't know what to feel. My body felt completely numb. Everybody tried calming me down and talking to me but I didn't want to hear it. All I wanted was my mom and my kids.

I never thought in a million years I would lose my son, until the day finally came and I had to say goodbye to my baby boy. Seeing him lay there in that casket was the worst feeling in the world. Just knowing that I couldn't take him home with me and I had to leave him there tore me apart! I just didn't want to accept the fact that he was really gone.

God knows I wasn't ready to let my son go. It's been very hard for me, my kids, and my family during the past two years,

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especially with going through all the court dates and trial. Just having to relive that moment and face him in court was hard. But after two years, my son finally got justice! Everybody says it gets easier, but it doesn't. It just gets harder. It's like a nightmare that I wish I could wake up from. Losing a child is any mother's nightmare. R.I.P Julian Joseph Valdez, Mommy's little guardian angel.

Ms. Amanda Ortiz is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Fort Myers, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.

Disastrous Blessings

My name is Abrianna Miller. I go by a few other names, but the one I love the most is "Mommy."

I'm 29 and have 5 beautiful daughters, and 4 handsome sons. Since May 26, 2017, only 3 of my 4 boys are still living on this earth with us. My handsome faced Lanard McDowell, aka "Baby Nard," made it through the gates of heaven at age 2 after being hit and killed by a car. Since August 31, 2017, I lost my freedom for 3 years due to my baby boy's death. While the man who killed my son is still living his life freely, my children and I have been torn from each other.

This day was one of many tragic days I've been through. My blessed life has had many wrong turns. Since the age of 12, I've had to fend for myself. My parents were there at times, but mostly were too busy working, spending time with their mates, or giving my siblings more attention. I easily fell victim to the streets. I fell in love with them. I was infatuated with fine, black American thug boys - the ones with a mouth full of gold, money, and drops. Yep, the ones who gave me whatever I wanted or needed. In the hood, we call them bosses! I became addicted to sex, my coins, weed, beans, fighting, and enjoying life.

At 14, I conceived my first baby girl. She slowed me down a lot. I was a teen mom, and with a few family members' help, I became a young lady with morals, standards, and big

responsibilities. June 18, 2004 was the day I found out what real, unconditional love was. After being physically, mentally, and emotionally abused for years, I still stand strong – not only for myself, but for my children. Once released from prison, I'm going to be a better mother to my babies, give them the life they deserve, and become an amazing business woman.

Within the next 3 to 5 years, I'll be opening up a few businesses. I'm going to start by getting my degrees in business, culinary, massage therapy, and 'cosmo'. Next, I'll find resources that can help me find good buildings that I can reconstruct and make into beautiful, peaceful, trustworthy, affordable, loving businesses. People can enjoy many mouth-watering, hot meals and treats while 'glamming' themselves up. They will be able to get the best massages that will have you in heaven, and take your mind off everything.

No matter what you've been through, what you're going through, or what you're afraid of – keep faith, put God first, never give up, and push through every obstacle possible. Till next time, y'all be blessed, pray daily, and stay safe. I love y'all.

Truly yours,

Abrianna Miller

Ms. Abrianna Miller is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Riviera Beach, FL. She is the 29-year old mother to nine children. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Myra Williams.

Reminiscences

Hugging myself tightly, swaying back and forth as I sat on the edge of the bed, hot tears flowed freely down my cheeks and my box of Kleenex almost depleted. Oh, the pain in my heart! As if someone had plunged a blunt, hard instrument into my chest-cavity, twisting it into my heart!

Grace sat next to me, she had no more assurances to offer except her stare of sympathy. She had held me tightly as I tried

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to bang my head against the wall, shouting, “God! Take me instead!” It is a bad nightmare that would end soon. I struggled to wake up, but my effort was futile. It appears morning would never come.

At the first sight of the sun’s rays, I thought it would end, but shaken into reality as I got dressed to join the rest of my family, I realized this was not a dream.

It was only one week since we celebrated your 26th birthday. My only brother, closest sibling, the family’s favorite. You were so young, full of life and laughter. The future waited for you, your life-goals were still dreams.

March 28, 1993 is etched into my brain eternally. For it was that day I received the heartbreaking news; my brother was a victim of a tragic motor vehicle accident. Why didn’t someone prepare me for such tragedy in life? My will to live subsided, I was neither thirsty nor hungry. I felt nothing.

After that first night I refused to believe he was gone, reasoning, it must have been a mistake in identity. The tears of others around me communicates the reality again and again. I reasoned with God, why did he have to die? If only I could trade places with my brother, mother’s grief would be less. On the day of the funeral, I projected all the anger I could muster at God but there was only silence. After that I sunk into a deep depression that affected my health.

Five years went by before I could talk about my brother’s death without fresh tears springing up in my eyes. Five years seems like a long time, but the wound in my heart after the death of my brother was refreshed two months later when I lost my step-father quite suddenly too. As if that was not enough, before the year ended, I lost my maternal grandmother also. What could be so horrifying as the “icy hands” of death?

I was angry, yes, angry at God, but eventually I turned to Him, just like a child, running back into the arms of a loving father who had just reprimanded her, and there I found comfort.

Audrey Warren is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her teacher is Cheryl Viola.

This is My Story

My name is Almene P. Alce, I was born in Haiti. I have three sisters and one brother. I am widowed and I have one son; his name is John.

I arrived from Haiti in 2009. I couldn't go to school because the school was already full. The director told me that he would call me but he never actually called me. So, I didn't attend school.

After a few months I became pregnant so school was out of the question once again. After I delivered my son I couldn't go to school because I didn't have a babysitter. I cared for him for 18 months and finally at that point, I went to school. I was so happy!

Three months later my husband became very sick and I had to stop my studies. Soon after, my husband died and therefore it was more difficult for me to return to school. I was very sad. I knew how good school was for me and my future and I knew I had to return as soon as possible.

I tried to return to school but it was very difficult for me to concentrate and stay focused. I liked to go to school and learn but I still have difficulty understanding, though I hope to get better. I have been back to school for over a month now and I am feeling good. I know I am where I need to be!

Almene Pierre Alce studies English with Ms. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She loves to learn.

I Belong Here

My name is Angel de Leon. I was born in Key West, USA. My parents are from Guatemala. They lived in the USA with me until I was six years old. One day my parents decided that we should all return to Guatemala because they were already tired of being here, but in reality they never thought about my future. We went to Guatemala when I was still six years old. In Guatemala, I felt like I was being born again. All my English

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that I knew diminished because I did not have anyone to talk English with. My parents knew some but they did not communicate with me in English. Instead, they reverted to Spanish.

I started working with my father when I was ten years old and I learned how difficult it was to earn money. When I turned 16, my father told me that Guatemala was not the right place for me. He knew that if my life were to continue like this, I would never have the opportunity to excel in my life. As we worked so hard, my father and I became desperate. Sometimes, we did not earn enough money to meet our expenses.

When I heard my father say that I should go back to the United States, I was happy because this gave new hope for me to be successful. My parents bought the plane ticket and I waited patiently for the day of the flight. I knew that things were not going to be the same without my parents. My uncle accepted me with a big hug when I got here. This made me feel good.

I worked hard for 12 months. My focus was on making money. But then I decided that I wanted to study more, instead of working so hard and for such low wages. I tried to enroll in high school but I was not accepted because the administrator thought that I will not be able to graduate for lack of English skills. They did not give me a chance to prove myself that I could succeed. They told me to go to Adult Education.

I am now at the advanced level in the English class. When I finish the English class, I will move onto the GED class. I look forward to completing the GED class and then going to college. I will remain positive and work myself through the steps I need to take for a better life that awaits for me in this country.

Angel De Leon is anxiously waiting to graduate from the English class. He is a student at Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Change for A Chance

My name is Angelica. I am 17 years old and I am from Nicaragua. I came to United States just last year, and not

because I wanted to, it was because I had to. Since the situation in my country is not good, little by little the big countries are turning their back to my country. Hence, I do not believe it will get any better for my motherland anytime soon. A lot of death and sorrow was seen last year for us, even my older sister's cousin was shot by the policemen. My country is not safe anymore. So, I got out of there while I could. Making this decision was not easy for me because I had to leave behind all that I worked so hard for - my family, friends, and my school, too. I was just starting my attendance in the university, but looking back at it, it was for my own benefit. So, I came here.

At first, I didn't feel like it was a hard change because I had visited this country before. But the first day I started attending Adult Education ESOL classes the reality hit me: "Oh, so this is going to be my everyday now on." I shed some tears because I realized my old life was not coming back and I had to start from zero again. Sometimes we have to leave our amenities for our family or our wellbeing. At the beginning, it was not easy because even though I had been here before, I was not very familiar with my aunts and uncles because I did not grow up with them. But they are really loving and caring, which helps me a lot to go through this change in my short life.

It has been less than a year but thankfully, I have now adapted to my new home and lifestyle. There are still a lot of things that I want to achieve while I am still young. I want to get a job and go to college and study pharmacy. I know it will be hard and this path will have a many obstacles but it is not impossible. I will work very hard until I reach my goals. If you have a dream, do not be afraid and go for it. I know it is not easy but this life is full of risks that have to be taken to have great results!

Angelica Zeledon taught herself English by watching Disney movies on the television. She attends the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Best Friend

One day in May 2002, I was in my house when my neighbor came to visit me with a newborn Dalmatian dog and asked me

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if I could take care of him until the next day. I always have loved dogs. I have had two dogs, one for eleven years and the other one for fourteen years. They died of natural causes. I, of course, said yes. When the day was over, she didn't come back to pick him up. The days went by, and she still didn't come back to my house. I understood that the dog was mine. Later, she told me that her purpose was to give him to me as a gift. Day by day, I loved him more and more.

I named him Yako. He was my inseparable friend and little son for thirteen years. Our connection was immediate, and it was so until the day I came to the United States. Yako was the most important reason I did not want to come here. I couldn't bring Yako because I was going to live in my son's apartment, and there was not room for him. He stayed in my old house with the new homeowners who adopted him. I always kept in touch with them to know about how Yako was doing. They even sent me pictures of him for three months. After that, I didn't hear from them anymore. I felt that something was wrong, so I contacted a friend of mine and asked him to check on Yako. He went to the house, and he got the worst news. Yako had died. It was the worst news I heard since I've been here.

I understood through the days that his disappearance was only physical because spiritually, he remains connected to me. If it is true, that someone is reunited with their loved ones after death, we will be together again someday.

Zulay Bevacqua is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

About My Life

I am a 19-year-old African-American young man, and I'm currently incarcerated at the Gadsden County Jail, studying to obtain my GED. I'm writing this essay on my life because my sister and I were raised by The Department of Children and Families. Why weren't we raised by our parents? That's a question I have always asked myself, and I continue to ask it to this day. Sometimes I look in the mirror at myself and say,

“What did you do to deserve going through that much pain as a kid.” Well let me explain to you how everything came about in my life.

When I was five years old my father was arrested and incarcerated in the Gadsden County Jail. A year later, a friend of my mother’s called DCF and gave them an allusion of how she was treating her kids, the lies that her friend told to DCF hurt my mother. Although my mother wasn’t the best of mothers, she did the best she could to take care of us, provide for us, and place a roof over our heads.

Growing up in foster care, people tended to bully my sister and me, because we didn’t live with our parent(s) like they did. I was such a small, scrawny little boy, people thought it would be easy to bully and pick on me. Well it wasn’t – actually it was very hard! Even though I was small, their plans always backfired. Why is that, you might ask? Well for one, I had the heart of a lion, and the attitude of a raging bull. Second, any time someone would fix their mouth to say something to me about being in foster care, I would punch them directly in the jaw. My sister Lacey was a different story. She wasn’t as easy to provoke as I was, but she would definitely curse you out with a piece of her mind.

Lastly, people always made backbiting remarks about my family and about me. But did that stop me? No, it didn’t. I wasn’t afraid to tell people that I was in foster care, or that I didn’t live with my parents. After six months of living in foster care, it became easy for me to let someone know that I was in foster care. There was a camaraderie between my sister, myself and the other kids. So we weren’t the only ones that didn’t live with their parents. To this day, my sister and I have a wonderful brother-sister bond. Whenever she needs someone to talk to, cry to, or anything, she calls me. Come to find out my mother never abandoned us, she was always there for us. Even now that we are home and all grown up, my mother still treats us as if we were still little kids.

Cody is 19 years old and is incarcerated at the Gadsden County Jail, enrolled in the Adult Education GED Prep class. He is the father of a handsome one year old son. Ms. Brenda Johnson is his instructor.

A Personal Story

When I was a little kid my parents took me to a professional baseball stadium in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. There is where my passion and love for baseball started, when I heard the crowd cheering, jumping and moving around because they were so excited. In that moment I started to pay attention to that beautiful game. I was amused by how the players ran, hit the ball, threw, slide and caught balls. Everything in that stadium was awesome!

I remember when the game finished. I said to my mom and dad “I like this game. Can I play with them?” My mom told me “you can play but not with them. They are professionals. You can play with a small team around our house,” and I said “okay, but I will be a professional too.”

The next week I began to play in a small team and I practiced with little kids like me. I loved going to that small, old field to play baseball with my teammates. I felt so excited when I was there. I enjoyed everything on the field. I played all the positions, but the one I liked the most was catcher. When I got home I turned on the tv and searched for baseball channels to watch any baseball game. That was not common for a ten-year-old kid.

I was a really good student. But I remember once I went to school to take a test and I failed it. When I got home, my mom said “show me the test.” When she saw my grade she got furious and told me “you will not go to baseball practice for a week!” From that moment on I had two goals, “to be a professional baseball player and pass all my tests at school”.

A couple of years later I started to play at a baseball academy and they sent me to Dominican Republic, where I woke up early, worked really hard and missed my family. I finally got a professional baseball contract with the Houston Astros. I was able to see my dream of being a professional baseball player come true. From that moment on I had a new challenge, to become a major league player. I had to demonstrate I had talent to play the game and to be consistent. Today, I am working really hard every day to be better on and off the field.

I know English is important. When I signed with the team I did not speak English at all. Others had to translate everything for me. Now I understand a lot and I can communicate with my teammates. I am helping all my family and I am on the right track to make it to the big leagues. With God's help I will do it soon!

Carlos Canelon is a catcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from Barquisimeto, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

The Gig

The gig has always been something I have wanted to do. The life of a singer has always been in my dreams. To ride from town to town, meeting different people, and seeing different venues and singing old and new songs. My first real Gig was in my 30's at a place called Wiley's in Haines City, Florida. To prepare, I would load up my 2005 Navy blue Jeep Liberty with speakers, cord bags, guitars, amplifiers, mics, and mic stands. After loading the car, I would then hit the road as I always dreamed. While unloading the equipment, people would come up to me and ask me questions about myself. They were still curious to know where I was from, and what kind of music I sang. I would respond the same way, Bartow, Florida; singing since I was about four years old; and that I loved to sing R & B. My mom's friends would ask her, "Donna, where is that singing boy of yours?" Then I would come into the kitchen and sing for them. I would sing songs like, Mary Had a Little Lamb, and You Send Me.

Different songs have always moved my emotions. The songs make people feel happy, sad, and sometimes mad. When I would take a break from the gig, some people would come up to me and ask if I had any brothers and sisters and did any of them sing. I tell them I have three brothers and five sisters, and only one of my sister's sing. Some people have never forgotten my performances. When I'm out around town in stores, people I don't know tell me, "I don't remember your name, but I know you can sing." Some people even say, "Hey! Sir, you are a great

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singer! We remember you singing and the way you sang ‘Me and Mrs. Jones.’ You sang that song better than the real artist!” I sing these kinds of songs because my mother used to sing and dance to them. I loved hearing her sing and watching her dance.

The songs that inspired me are: “Darling, You Send Me” by Sam Cook, “Mustang Sally” by Wilson Pickett, These are the songs that move my soul, remembering my mother enjoying them in the kitchen, and swaying to their sweet sounds. I have been singing since I was four years old and playing guitar since nineteen. Wrapping up the gig during those times, the people come up again complimenting me and letting me know that they enjoyed the music, especially my voice. That never gets old. They say: “Will you come to our house and sing for a party? We will pay!” The gig has been everything I have always hoped for and more. Music is what feeling sounds like.

Christopher Manning is a student at South Florida State College ABE/GED Program, and his teacher is Luci Latina.

My Personal Story

My name is Oscar Campos. I’m going to talk a little bit about my life. I come from a beautiful small place in Venezuela called Santa Barbara. I never imagined I would be a professional baseball player. This was always my dream but I never imagined I would get it, so God blessed me.

God gave me a beautiful family. My parents always tried to give me the best education they could because we are a humble family. We don’t have much money. Sometimes I wanted things but I could not have them. I was not sad for this reason because God gave us something more beautiful, the love and union of our family.

On November 7, 2017, I was with my parents and my mother got sick. After two days, my mother died. I never imagined something like that would happen and my life changed 100%. I never imagined myself living without my mother. That is and will always be a painful part of my life. After this, everything has been hard in my house; hard because our family was always united.

Everything was so quiet on December 8. That is my birthday. This year was my first birthday without my mother. I did not want that day to come because I knew it would be very hard for me. It was the same with Christmas. It knew it would be hard. When the year finished, my heart was broken because every Jan 1st , my first hug was always hers and I knew that would not happen again. I could not stop crying.

The following year, 2018, I felt sad because I used to be with both of them but now it was only my father. I left with my heart broken but, again, God blessed me. He put angels in my life, beautiful people and friends that help me a lot. They motivate me to continue to work hard. I am thankful to be with them. God bless them for being good to me. Also, on August 27, God gave me the privilege and blessing of becoming the father of my beautiful Camila Campos, another reason to work hard. She and my father are my reasons to continue to work hard. I know that my beautiful mother is proud of me, her Guaricho, as she liked to call me.

I love you Mom, wherever you are...and that you God for all my blessings.

Oscar Campos is a catcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is from Maturin, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

A New Start

Seven years ago, Rosa came to the United States to visit, and she never went back to her beautiful Cuba, leaving behind her parents, grandfather and her sister.

She thinks that here everything is different. Here she can make many dreams come true and have more opportunities that in her country of birth she would never receive. Without losing any time she began to study English, adapting to a new culture and making new friends.

Thanks to her effort and strength, she has achieved a better job and bachelor's degree. She believes that thanks to the

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government's opportunities in education for young people and adults, everyone has the same rights no matter which country you arrive from.

Rosa considers herself a dreamer without limits and is certain that she is in the right place. All she wants is to improve herself and create the conditions that allow her to be with her family again, and create a beneficial future.

Dainee Barban is a student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus.

My Childhood Memories

Most people forget childhood memories whether pleasant or painful, but I still remember my childhood very much. I remember my school memories and what I learned from them.

I was born in Mole-Saint-Nicolas, Haiti. When I was six years old, I moved to Port-de-Paix to grow up and go to school. In class, I was very shy because when my teacher asked me questions. Everybody looked at me and laughed for no reason. This made me feel fearful of my classmates and teacher. Although, I always came to class, I didn't participate, talk, or ask questions during class to avoid embarrassment. I always remained quiet because I was afraid of my teacher and I thought that she was mean to me. As a result, I failed second grade, even though I already knew the material. I was very embarrassed when my classmates left me in that class. I made a friend on vacation and that friend really helped me a lot. The next year, I was able to ask questions and speak in class. I was motivated in class and passed all of my tests. Through this experience, I learned to be confident in class in order to improve my grades.

When I was 19 years old in 11th grade, I always participated in class. I asked my teacher for help when I needed it. Sometimes I did not do my homework, but that didn't affect my grade too much. They only counted my grades every semester when I took a quiz. Sometimes I did not answer questions when my teacher asked me. That probably affected my grade, but regardless I passed 11th grade.

When I began 12th grade, I started very well and had a great score my first semester. However, my grades went down when I began applying for a VISA to come to the USA. I didn't go to school for a long time because I had to travel to Port-au-Prince for immigration purposes. When I was done with my immigration paperwork, I went back to school, but I still missed a lot of class. Even though I got the class notes, I left school before the final exam. I didn't have the chance to graduate because I moved to the USA. That doesn't make me feel bad at all because I was excited to live with my father in the USA.

Nowadays, I am still going to school. My dreams are to finish my high school diploma and go to college. Ultimately my dream is to be an electrician and get a great job and live the life I want to live. These school memories, taught me that I will never give up on my goal to have a better future.

Denove Forgue is from Haiti. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

My Personal Story

When I was six years old, I dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player. I started to play in my countryside, El Limon, Samana. When I was seven years old I started playing short stop. I played five seasons. I won two most valuable player awards.

Then when I really realized that I wanted to be a professional baseball player, I moved to La Romana. It was one of the hardest moments in my life because it was my first time that I was without my family at a different place- same language but different rules than I had in my house, but I wanted to help my family.

At that time, I had an offer of the Kansas City Royals but I did not sign because my agent wanted more money. I just wanted to sign. I did not care about the bonus. Three months later I decided to come to the Astros academy with another person. On the way from La Romana to San Antonio Guerra, where the academy is, I told the people who came with me, "I just want sign, it does not matter how much they want to give me. I know who I am. I just want the opportunity to play professional."

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I did a really good job in the tryout. I faced four hitters and the four were struck out. They called the person who was with me and they told him “we’re gonna give you ten thousand dollars.” He told them, “ok.” Immediately he called me with a happy voice and told me “you’re going to sign with the Houston Astros organization.” It was one of the best moments in my life. He didn’t tell me for how much I was signed and I didn’t ask because I just wanted to sign.

I remember that I called my mother. When I told her that I signed with the Houston Astros she was crying of happiness. Then I called my father. When I gave him the news he told me “now is when you have to work hard, you know how to do that.”

Then I came to the Houston Astros academy. Here it was when I realized for how much I had signed. I was praying every night because I wanted to buy my mother a house. When I got the money on December 2nd, I called my mom. I said “mom tomorrow I’m going to buy you a house.” She asked, “seriously?” crying. I told her “Yes, I want to help you because you are the most important person in my life.” The next day I bought the house.

Two weeks later the secretary called me and told me, “I need your passport. You are going to travel without playing in Dominican summer league.” God blessed me for what I did with my family.

Enoli Paredes is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a great student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from Samana, Dominican Republic. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Follow Your Heart

There are lots of things I have done in my twenty-seven years of life: some are good, some are bad, some crazy, and some sad. I must say there are many things in my life that have helped mold me into the woman I am today. These things are

big mile stones in my life that changed me for the better in many ways. Before I begin spilling my guts to you about this bumpy road I would love to start by saying “life is short and the road is never straight, so follow your heart and it will lead you to be great.”

One of the first things in my life I had to experience was hard but necessary: my parents getting a divorce. They were the best parents you could ever ask for, but when they split it was nasty. They both took turns for the worse. One turned to drugs, the other alcohol. They both stopped being much of parents at all. These events lead me to make many bad decisions like dropping out of school and doing drugs. When I was seventeen I got pregnant. I decided to keep my baby. I am now a happy mom of soon to be three kids. My babies changed me so much. I quit doing drugs, started caring about life, and became a great mom. My kids are my world and without them I'm not me. I love being a mom.

Another thing that was life changing and made me a better person was learning to live my life without my mom. She was a great friend, one of the best. Although she did drugs, she still was mentally here for me and always knew what to say. Not having her in my life made me cherish all the good times we had, but the experience also helped me say no to drugs even more.

The most recent thing that has helped me be me is my fiancé. He is smart and teaches me something new every day. He makes me feel amazing in every way. He encourages me to be better and do better. I have been on many emotional roller coasters that led me to being the woman I am today.

At the end of the day, no matter what I go through, good, bad, or ugly, all were necessary steps in my life that make me who I am today. Without the struggles in my life I would not be the strong woman I am today. I am thankful for the crazy turn of events I experienced in my life because I love who I am: crazy, funny, strong, loving, and a fighter. I also always try to stay positive even at my worst.

Elsie Hudson is a mom of 2 soon to be 3 and is enrolled in the Hernando County School's Adult Education Program (GED). Elsie would like to go to college and earn her R.N degree. Her teacher is Carrie LaBarge.

Dream Come True

When I was 16 years old, I had dreamed to come to the USA to make my vision a reality. One year ago, I came to beautiful Naples, Florida with my mother. I started to learn English, but my first day at school was terrible because I was very shy and had no friends. That night before I went to bed, I was thinking about my life and how I needed to be brave and have passion that could help me become a great person tomorrow.

Now I just focus on my school because that is very important in my life. I feel so proud to have the motivation to learn English. Today I am still learning English because I want to speak well and go to college to study in the nursing program. After graduation, I will make more money and have a better life.

I not only practice English at school, I also speak at my job. I'm working to save money when I'm done with school, then I will have money to pay my college. Also, I'm working so hard for my family and I miss them so much because we are not living in the same country. I believe in myself, and I can make my dreams come true.

Francesca Desir is 18 years old, and studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL.

Sweet and Salty Years

Have you ever wondered why things that we do not like happen to us? I have asked myself that question many times. I came to the conclusion that everything happens for a reason.

In March of 2005, I was six months pregnant. Everything looked sweet. A week later, I had a miscarriage and everything turned salty in my life. At that time, my older son was 5 years old. When all around me was dark, I tried to be stronger for my husband and my son. Something inside of me was salty, but my son made me be so strong. Every night when everyone was asleep I cried for my loss. Then, one night I had a dream that God allowed me to see my baby girl, and the following nights I never cried for her.

As the days went by, my life was still between salty and sweet. Two years passed and, surprise, I was pregnant! The truth was not thrilling. Three months passed and, again, I had another miscarriage. I never knew if it was a girl or boy. My heart had another new wound. Again, I got up with more strength for my son and my husband. Months passed, and I continued my life so normally. In 2008, I was praying that God would allow me to have another baby. The months went by, and God answered my prayer through a prophet. The prophet told me, “God will let you have another baby, but in God’s time.”

The years continued, but I knew there was a promise from God for my life. In June of 2013, I learned that I was pregnant, and I was very excited. I remember the promise of God for my life. My husband and I dedicated our son to God from his first months of life in my belly. My son was born in February of 2014 and is called Josiah Daniel Cifuentes. This February, he is turning 5 years old. My salty days have left. Now they are so sweet with my two sons and my husband. In June of 2018, my grandson Noah was born, but that is another sweet experience in our lives. I have a lot to thank God for.

Sonia Garcia is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

I’m a New Me

August 12, 2016, I was involved in a very tragic accident. I am not even sure how I was able to endure the pain that I endured. I don’t think most people could have handled what I had to handle. I got into a grease fire in my apartment. My stove blew up while I was cooking with grease. I was trying to remove the pot of grease when it fell off the stove, and the hot grease got on my foot, both of my thighs, my left arm and hand, and splashed on my face.

When the ambulance arrived, I was in total shock. They rushed me to Sacred Heart. They could not do much for me there, so they rushed me to The University of Alabama Burn Center in Mobile, Alabama. The first second I arrived there

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they pumped me with meds, so they could remove some of the burned skin. The rest of the skin was just too badly damaged. Later that night, I found out that I had third degree burns over 50% of my body.

The first couple days I was there, they were trying to plan my surgery. They had to decide where they were going to put pig skin grafts on me. They went on my arm from my hand almost to my armpit and on my left and right thighs. My foot required a special combination of pig skin as well as a skin graft that they cut from my upper left thigh. This was able to save my foot, which was the worst injured. At that point, I had been in the hospital for eight days. I was going to physical therapy and to wound care. After two days, I was on my way home when they discovered they had to REMOVE the pig skin! Then, on day 14, I was finally leaving the hospital.

Getting home, though, was probably the worst part for me. My mother literally had to help me like I was a newborn! I had a four-year-old child of my own at the time. Thankfully, they never left my side during the whole fourteen days since the accident. I had to return to the hospital weekly for wound care and for physical therapy for a month. My foot was swollen for months. I was walking with a crutch and a limp. I had to exercise my foot from it being so stiff. That lasted seven months. So, then I was having to wear Aveeno lotion, sunscreen, and a medical sock with meds in it everyday to make the skin smoother.

This is the worst experience I have ever had. It's still a struggle to get used to having these burn scars on my body, but that's who I am now. I'm a new me!

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

An Angry Father

Growing up living with an abusive father was rough. The first ten years were traumatic. My father was an abusive man. Abusive to his kids and his wife.

I can recall one afternoon in our two-bedroom trailer, my mother was cooking dinner. I was playing with my baby sister on the couch. My father said “don’t make your sister cry”. I said, “yes sir.” My sister started crying a few minutes after he had warned me. He assumed that I made her cry. I was six at the time and hearing her cry had washed over me. I began to get scared. I saw my father as he turned toward me with a dreadful look in his eyes.

I started to dart toward the hallway of our tiny trailer but he caught me. It angered my father more when I tried to run. I tried to escape under my baby sisters mechanical swing. I was a tiny little girl; I could fit anywhere.

My father could no longer spank me, so he started swinging punches. Now my mother was morbidly afraid for her daughter. She had seen how badly the situation escalated and started screaming at my father. My father had snapped by then. The smallest things would make him angry. My mother ran to the scene from across the room. She started fighting with him, then she felt my dad hot on her heels. As I sat there sobbing on the floor, recuperating from what just happened, I could hear war going on outside with my mother and father.

It was time to go into hiding. I grabbed up my baby sister and ran to my room where we had bunk beds. I laid my sister on my bed and prayed the only prayer I knew how to pray, “now I lay me down to sleep.” There was never any supper that night.

My mother finally divorced my father after 13 years of living in fear and abuse. My father serves a prison sentence for all the malicious things he’s done. It taught me to be stronger, and only because of God and faith, I’m still here today. I may be in prison as well, but I’m free because I came to know God through tragic life events that thankfully led me down the road to righteousness. I did forgive my father, because I learned to let go of all things he’s done.

Ms. Jessica Beal is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Anniston, AL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.

My Journey to Christ

My name is Joseph Jillson. I didn't grow up in a religious household. My father was an atheist, my mother a protestant who never discussed her faith. The schools didn't teach religion. The only thing I knew about Christianity was from TV. In my younger years, I didn't think about faith much until high school.

I started reading a Bible I borrowed. From what I read, God wasn't a very good person. So, I began looking into alternatives, like religions that were off the beaten path. The things I gravitated to went down the darker path of the occult.

I started studying Wicca, which was alright, but still didn't speak to me. Then I got into LaVeyan Satanism because it was all about self-gratification, but that didn't last. I began to call myself an agnostic atheist until I delved down an even darker hole. I found out about spiritual Satanism, theistic Satanism, and Luciferianism.

They teach that you can become a living god on earth by using witchcraft, demons, and making pacts with the devil. Thankfully, I got so busy with my life that I didn't have enough time to delve into it all. My parents both got ill and then passed away. I eventually had the time to ponder over the greater questions of life again.

I looked to science for answers about life. I found it interesting that a lot of scientists, who were atheists, were changing to theists, and I wanted to know why. According to science the probability of our universe forming in all the ways it has, is so great that it should have been impossible. If you look at things on a molecular level, everything looks as if it was created by someone. For me, that was the proof I needed for God's existence. So, my next question was, which God is he?

With so many people having near death experiences, I started looking there. All of them seemed to be of a Christian background, so I decided that must be the right one. However, I didn't know what to do with that knowledge, so I just went on with life as usual. Then, one Sunday morning when I was riding my bike past a church, something told me to go inside. So, I did. It was a Spanish speaking church, and I don't speak Spanish.

Their Pastor was kind enough to point me to an English speaking church. I began to study the Bible and really learn about God and Jesus. Now, two years later, I've been baptized, and I identify as a Christian.

I still have questions for God that the Bible doesn't answer, but I know I'll get the answers in time, either in this world or the next.

Joseph Jillson is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

Finding My Voice

When I began school in Mexico, I was six years old. There were four children in my family who went to school. My father took two pencils and broke them in half. He gave one half to each child. If I lost my pencil, I didn't have a tool to do my homework. I went to the place where my father made charcoal and I tried to make a point like a pencil to do my work. It was hard to write with the charcoal. I saw other students who had a whole pencil and I felt they were lucky.

My school had one room for three grades. I had two books. I liked to be at school. I was hungry to learn. At the end of third grade, my father said that was enough school for me because I was female. I didn't say anything, but, I felt bad because I wanted to learn. I felt responsible to help my family so, I went to the town to sell vegetables from my family's farm.

When I came to the United States, I started work as a maid, but I didn't speak any English. I pointed to things, I couldn't read notes, and I couldn't read signs. I felt scared because I couldn't communicate.

When I had my children several years later, I knew that learning English was very important. I had to pay translators every time I went to see a doctor. I didn't know where to go to learn English. After several years, I found the Literacy Council. I have learned to speak, make sentences, have conversations, read books, and write. I'm so thankful for the volunteers in this program who offer their time to help us. This program has

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helped me encourage my children to work hard, and I am able to help them when they struggle.

From a little girl who didn't have a voice or a pencil to do her homework, I have become a butterfly able to fly. I have confidence to go anywhere and have conversations with people. I have power to make decisions. I have the ability to help people who speak Spanish and need a translator. I feel like I fit in this country. But I have never forgotten where I came from.

Juana Lopez is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Susanne Carter.

A Dream About to Come True

My parents were divorced when I was three years old. For as long as I can remember, I always liked school. Although I received a scholarship to a very expensive private school, the school was too far away, and I couldn't go. I always knew I wanted more.

I came to The United States at 16 years old, looking for my father who was a formal resident of this country. I contacted him and explained to him that I was looking forward to schooling and better opportunities. However, life got in the way, and for many reasons I couldn't get into school. I had to know how to take care of myself.

I started working and put my education aside, but I always dreamed in one way or another, that I would go back to school. When I was 18 years old, I married my husband. By 22 I was a mother of two kids and a housewife putting my family in first place and putting my dream away.

We moved to Florida in 2004, starting a new life. By 30, I had another child and thought that I would never go back to school. My family is my life. Now my kids are grown, and I finally have the opportunity to go back to school. I'm 41 years old now, and I've heard many people say that it is never too late to start again and that age is only a number. I believe that is true. I really think that everything that happened was for a reason.

Now I enjoy being in a GED program and knowing that the sky is the limit and is full of stars. Now I have GED Ready Scores in Social Studies and Reasoning through Language Arts, and my math is strong. I would say that finally my dream is about to come true.

Karla Reyes is originally from Mexico and currently enrolled in GED classes at Seminole State College.

My Experience in the World Cup

Last year I was playing in Quad Cities. At about three o'clock in the afternoon David Brito, the scout who signed me, called me to ask if I wanted to play in the world cup representing my beautiful country Venezuela. At that moment I felt good because it was a wonderful opportunity to show how much I love my country. Of course I said yes, and later I called my mom and told her about my participation. She congratulated me. I joined the national team in October and started. Unfortunately, I hurt one of my fingers on the first day of training. I was lucky nothing bad happened to me.

On October 19, we traveled to Colombia where the cup was going to be played. Our first game was against Australia. We won the game and the next four ones. We made it to the playoffs. In the playoffs, we played against Mexico, Japan, Korea and China. We lost the first two games. The opportunity of being in the finals were small. We won the remaining games. I was so happy to win third place. This was a great experience for me. If I had the choice to represent my country one more time I would definitely not hesitate doing it again.

Luis Garcia a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros. He is a great student in their language, acculturation and literacy program. He is from Bolivar, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

The Sun Will Come Up, The Seasons Will Change

I had lived my whole childhood and part of my adolescence in Nicaragua. This past year has been a rollercoaster full of changes for me and for many Nicaraguans. Here is my side of the story. I hope we meet again in a free country.

In the beginning of last April, things got really tough in Nicaragua. The natural reserve Indio Maiz, located at the border of Costa Rica was burning in flames. Environmental marches were run by students on the streets of Managua because the government was not trying to stop the fire. Several days later, the fire was stopped, but that was not the end of it. The president had signed an authorization to make some reforms to the social insurance. They were going to apply a deduction of 5% of the amount of their very reduced pensions to finance the medical care they receive. Basically, they would extract hundreds of millions of córdobas annually. Pensions would adjust 5% annually, and if the cost of living increased more than the percentage, they would see their purchasing power reduced. This reform was abolished but not before all the chaos that came with it. Now adults and elders were protesting too, but the government fought back, hitting all of them. Everything went out of control. Each peaceful march ended in massacre. The people in the street no longer protested the reforms, the people wanted their justice and wanted the president out. They were looting, students from public universities like the one that I was in were forced to go to pro-government marches, journalists and everyone that was against the government were persecuted and imprisoned. Today the list of deaths is almost 600 people and another 750 are in prison.

When I left and saw everything getting worse, I drowned in a sea of emotions. I felt guilty about being here while my family and friends were risking their lives and also leaving everything behind as I did. I entered into a hole of uncertainty. The question: "what am I going to do with my life?" kept repeating itself over and over in my head. I did not want to stay but I could not go back either. But just like Pandora's box, all of the chaos and sadness was followed by the hope. I am lucky to have this opportunity at this program and to be able to follow my dreams in this country. I am lucky to have my mother with me because I know that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for all her

support and love. Life is uncertain and sometimes strange, but one thing I've learned is that it won't stay the same. Even in the darkness you will be okay. The sun will come up, the seasons will change.

Lidy Guzman is a student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus.

My Crazy Vacation

I remember coming to the United States four years ago. I was eight months pregnant and came on vacation to relax and relieve stress from my country. However, something very funny happened while I was shopping shortly after Christmas. I started having contractions at the outlet mall in Orlando. My husband said "No! You can't have the baby here, you are only 8 months along. We must go back to Venezuela."

My husband nervously drove me to the hospital. The doctor said that I needed a caesarian right away. I replied "No! I must go home! It's too expensive here." He said, "Relax. The most important thing is the baby's life."

One of my happiest days was when I first saw my son. I gazed at the little face of that tiny person who grew inside of me. Without me knowing him, I loved him so much. I do not know how to explain such a feeling. When he was able to travel, we returned to our home country.

Since the turmoil in Venezuela had gotten worse, we decided to return to the United States. I had been a dentist in my country, but now I needed to learn English before I could start my career. Currently, I feel safe and calm living in the United States despite the drastic changes in my life. I thank this country for its protection and for the people showing me patience as I try to learn English. I thank God for the crazy vacation that brought me to be safe with my family in the USA.

Linda Miranda is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

To Whom It May Concern

To Whom It May Concern,

There are some things that I must confess: My life before now was such a mess. It is going to be really hard for me to do, but this is what it's gonna to take to get me through.

I was only six when my brother started having his way with me. I hated him for it up until his dying day. I never told anyone, not one person knew. My dad was a drunk so he didn't have a clue. My mom was too busy for me, always at work. I wish she had known her son was such a jerk! She spoiled him, giving him everything he wanted, so I couldn't tell her, she'd be so disappointed.

When I was ten, it came to an end; That's when I thought my childhood would finally begin. But when I was twelve I started smoking weed. I think that's what probably planted the seed.

It was my dad who got me started, that's when me and my soul slowly parted. It wasn't long before I was drinking every day. All of sudden there was no time to play. It was my mom who gave me my first drink. It's crazy how things get started, don't you think? I moved out at fifteen even though my mom begged me to stay, but I knew I couldn't I had to get away!

A few months later I went to school for the last time. I ended up with two jobs because my house was on the line. Eleven years later, I started smoking crack. That's when my life really got outta whack! Before I knew it, I lost my kids, job, and everything I had. And it was all due to the dope game, isn't that sad? When I was twenty-seven I ended up in jail. It's probably a good thing I didn't have bail!

While I was there my brother overdosed and died. I couldn't cry no matter how hard I tried. The judge let me out long enough to see my brother buried. The pain in my mom's eyes was something I've always carried. That's when it all hit me like a brick, I knew it was the end and I had to quit. I wish I could take the pain this all has caused my mom to feel but, no one can change the cards that God decides to deal.

To Whom It May Concern,

When I go home I'll continue to be sober. If not, like my brother, my life could soon be over. I never told my mom what happened, even though my brother's dead, because sometimes some things are better left unsaid.

Ms. Melisa Strong is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Inverness, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.

I Found Life

Be who you are no matter what. Sometimes we lose ourselves in different things. My name is Mattie Harrison, and I lost myself to life. What do I mean by life? I mean I lost myself to selling drugs, taking drugs and to sex. I forgot my purpose in life, which is that every day your goal should be to be a better you.

Sometimes I find myself wondering how did I lose my way in life. I was raised in a Baptist church, and my grandmother raised me well. I was never around drugs or drinking. So how did I start taking drugs or drinking? How did I forget all about the man up above that made each day possible? I forgot because I stopped loving myself.

I remember my first time taking drugs. My auntie used to say, "You're gonna be just like your father – nothing." I remember the kids at school talking about how Weed and Xanax make you numb. As I said earlier, I was raised well, so I started saving the money I got every week. My grandmother used to drop me off at my auntie's house every weekend. It was easy to buy anything you wanted at her house. At 14 I had a nice body – a mature body, so I flirted with a young drug dealer, and bought weed and Xanax without him telling.

Right before I turned 15 I was raped. I let that one situation break me. The one 'blunt' turned into four in an hour before and after school. That one Xanax turned to three. I lost myself, and forgot my purpose. I didn't care who I took from. I didn't

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care about anyone's feelings. Whatever male I met, I would play him just for something to pass the time.

Then I fell in love. I stopped doing Xanax and smoking weed. I was 15, and felt like the world was mine. I was still lost, still selling drugs, and taking from people.

After all those years, and 5 kids later, I am still in love with the same person that I fell in love with many years ago. With 2 years in prison, I'm just now finding out who I am. I am Mattie Harrison. I love God, my kids, my boyfriend, and myself. I am not my situation. I found myself, and I thank God that I have another chance to be the best me that I can be.

Ms. Mattie Harrison is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Pensacola, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Myra Williams.

If I Can Do It, You Can Do It Too!

I would like to share a bit of my life as a motivation for someone who reads it. My name is Mario Escobar. I'm from Guatemala, and I have been in the United States for approximately six years. When I came here, I was just fifteen years old. My first job when I got here was as a landscaper for almost two months. Then I decided to look for something better for me and my future. I worked at the Southernmost Beach Cafe as a dishwasher for almost six months. But I know I came here for something better than that, so I attended English classes. With English skills, I can apply for better jobs. I only studied for about one year.

I quit the class because I wanted to learn how to cook different kinds of food. My shift was from 6:00 am to 4:00 pm. I was not shy to ask the chef how to cook and information about food. After a couple of months, I started working in the morning cooking breakfast and continued washing dishes during night shift.

As time goes by, I have become more and more interested about how to make different kinds of food. Now, I can proudly

say that I know how to cook many things. I love to cook and serve people. I like to see everybody happy with what they are eating. If they like it, I'm happy, too. Every single dish I make, I make it with love and passion.

I have been working and studying very hard so that I can reach everything I want. Nothing is easy in United States, but nothing is impossible. The secret is you must look in the right place what you want and what you like to do. The principal thing that I want to tell everyone who reads this essay is if I could do it, you can do it, too! Have trust in yourself and set a clear goal. Don't listen to negative people; there are a lot of people who are going to say you cannot do it. They are not important. Believe in yourself - in what you can do. Remember, never do something you don't like. You must feel satisfied with what you do for a living. Never give up on your goal. I hope this story can help everybody. God bless everyone, everywhere, and every time!

Mario Escobar has big dreams for his life in America. He wants to improve his English skills and pursue his path to college and a good career. He is student at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Story of a Girl

A girl lived with her family. The father was disabled. The mother was father and mother together to her children. She was responsible for four children.

The girl loved mirrors and loved looking at her shape and her body. When she asked her mother questions about becoming a woman her mother said, "When you grow up". The girl loved short clothes and makeup, but the mother refused permission and said to her, "When you are married". When the girl went out of her home and her mother could not see her, she shortened her clothes and bit her lips to make them red.

The girl finished high school and moved to the university in another city. She visited her family two days during the week. When the girl was at the university she saw lots of clothes and

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shoes and she dreamed of having them. But it was okay. It was just a dream. She had enough.

The girl wishes she could have the freedom boys have to come and go. The boys are independent and free. The mother never told the girl as she grew up about the changes that happen as you grow. The mother only said, "Take care of yourself", but she did not explain to the girl what that meant.

So the young woman at the university was afraid to sit next to a boy. One day some boys were printing books and needed her help. She asked her mother for permission and her mother said, "You may help with the books. That is all". The girl asked herself, "How do I talk to boys? What do I do?" Step by step, little by little, she learned. She did it! Soon a boy came to her who said, "I love you". The girl did not feel anything because she did not know what love was and what being in love meant. The girl loved watching a man kiss a woman on TV. She dreamed only of a man putting his hand on her cheek.

She then spoke to a boy on the phone. The girl had known the boy when she was a child. The boy said to the girl, "You used to wear big, thick glasses like the bottom of a Coke bottle." The girl said to the boy, "If you saw me now you would admire me very much". She was confident she would win him over and it happened. The day came that the girl met the boy and they talked for a very long time. She talked to the boy without being ashamed and he answered every question she had. The next day the boy bought the girl a letter "R" charm and she hugged him. His name begins with the letter "R".

The boy and the girl got married. They have been married for fifteen years and have two girls. The girl, who is now a woman, asks God to take her years and give them to her husband.

The girl is me!

Marsil Masoud is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

Being Home

When I was a child, I learned that home is the place where you have your family and the ones you love most united. Through the years and with a few international experiences, I realized that home is a word that describes something much bigger than just a place. I grew up thinking that every family is close and full of love. I have now met people to whom family is not important at all. However, they became family to me even when I am thousands of miles away from home.

A few years ago, I went to a foreign country to work with kids and to meet new people. In just a couple of months that country stole a little part of my heart and taught me a little bit more about that magic word that fills the heart like no other. Three years later, I took the risk of traveling to a new country one more time. At the beginning, it was not easy; I missed my family all the time and, sometimes, I just felt that I would not fit anywhere. I learned to love this new place and all those things that I had hated. In both, Brazil and the USA, I met people that made me feel like home and that filled my heart and my life with amazing and unforgettable things. The biggest lesson of my trips was not the language or the culture but how diverse and sincere the love for others can be when you really let them into your life.

Being home used to mean arriving at my house, playing with my brothers, kissing my parents and saying “I love you” to all of them but now being home is much more than that. A phone call, a message, a smile, a friendly word, a hug or a meal can make me feel at home. Throughout history people are used to saying, “there is no place like home.” They are right, there is not but home can be bigger than all of us can even imagine. For sure, I have no answer for the real meaning of home yet. Nevertheless, I am sure that home can be a person, a place, a feeling or even a thing. Now I know that home is where my heart is, even if every little piece of it is sprinkled around the world.

Maria Paula Lopez Moreno is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

An Unexpected Day

It was a sunny day. My brother and I were playing guitar and having fun inside of the house, and suddenly he fainted in my bed. I was so terrified and immediately told my mom what happened. Then we went to a specialty hospital, but I felt bad vibes after we saw the doctor who cared for my brother. The information he shared with us broke my heart.

The doctor told my parents that my brother was sick in his kidney and if we did not act soon my brother would die. The doctor said, “We can save him but the surgery had a success rate of 30% and we need blood for him.” I felt very terrified; suddenly I felt cold and my father was so depressed. The hallways were very isolated and the time was going very slowly, so I went out of the hospital and I took a breath.

Afterward, my parents made the decision to carry out the surgery, but there was a problem; my father couldn’t donate blood because he had too much sugar in his blood. So my father decided I had to share blood with my brother. I didn’t think twice and I said, “Let’s do this! I want to save my brother.”

My mom and I went to a little room. We both were very insecure because it was very lonely. Then a nurse came to the room and she looked apprehensive, but I thought to myself, my brother needs my help. Next the nurse took a very large syringe, and withdrew two liters of blood from us and saved in a transfusion bag.

A few hours later, the doctors carried out the surgery on my brother. The time was frozen for me, I felt cold and extremely nervous until the doctor arrived and told us that the surgery was a success and we could visit him now.

I jumped for happiness and we went to see my brother. He looked very tired and he said, “I’m so proud of you brother.” After that, we let him rest and went back to the waiting room.

Now my brother is very healthy and we are very optimistic about all the gifts of life. I’m very proud of myself about what happened. One never knows when the opportunity to make a difference will arise.

Michael Montes studies in Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He is 17 years old, from Mexico, and he is going to earn his GED as soon as possible.

Traveling to the USA

At the age of twelve, I joined a priest boarding school in India. Because of the many chapters to study, the vacation was 4 weeks for a year. I studied there for 10 years. I never thought to travel abroad. Mostly, graduated engineers and doctors traveled to the USA for a job or further studies. Getting a priest job is more respectful because I do represent my country as well as my culture. My friend, Subramanya, helped me to get a job. We both studied together in India. I had seen the USA only on television. A new destination that includes new culture and language and numerous things were vibrating in my mind. Finally, the day came when I booked my air ticket. I purchased new clothes and a large travel bag. I kept \$100, which a friend had given me for emergency needs. I visited my relatives, friends, and teachers. They wished me well and blessed me. They also shared their experiences and thoughts with me. Leaving my parents and my sister was not hard for me. To ensure financial stability for myself, as well as my family, I felt it necessary to travel to the USA. I also thought it will be my new discovery where God has his own plan. It was my first experience traveling by air. My flight was from Bangalore to Frankfurt and Frankfurt to Orlando. After a 22 hour-long journey, I safely landed in Orlando on May 21st, 2011.

It's been 8 years since then. Whenever I travel to India and India to the USA, these matters come to mind.

Now I am working as a priest in Shirdi Sai Florida Center in Inverness, Florida with my friend Subramanya.

I also got my GED in 2016 and I'm thinking of going to college.

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

Magic Box

In the later part of the 1970s, when I was seven or eight, we did not have a television like most of the families in my country. There was a TV in our more affluent neighbors' houses.

They called it television; I called it "magic box," an enchanted world imaged in a tiny box. There was only one state-controlled TV channel. Broadcasting started at 7 o'clock on weeknights and 6 o'clock on weekends.

I am the second of four children. I loved watching cartoons, movies, and documentaries on TV and would wait the whole evening, extremely impatient, until they came on. Sometimes my younger brother and I would go to one of our neighbor's house to watch TV. My younger brother and I, with the neighbor's family, would sit in front of the TV and wait for the broadcast to begin. We went to different neighbors because the same ones wouldn't accept us every day. Sometimes, in spite of the sounds we heard coming from inside, they would tell us, "We aren't watching TV tonight." We went home sad and resentful.

One time, my little brother fell asleep on my knees while we were watching TV. Suddenly, I felt warm wetness. Oh, no! My brother had urinated on their rug! I was so embarrassed and didn't know what to do. We left without saying anything. The next day, our neighbor told Mom what happened. The neighbor never let us in their home to watch TV again.

My mother was finally fed up and tired of the constant humiliation of her children. We had more important needs, but she purchased a TV. I couldn't believe it, a TV. "I'm dreaming, right? If so, please don't wake me up," I thought.

I couldn't understand how those people fit in that tiny box. I looked behind the TV to see if there was a door there. Sometimes I would be scared. If I can see them, can they see me and watch me, too? Didn't that one woman die last week?

I thought everything on TV was real and didn't know the

people were acting. I didn't understand what was real and what was fake. I didn't know anything about broadcasting technology and had never gone to a movie theater. I didn't have any idea how to create a cartoon like Tom and Jerry.

As I grew older, I began to understand. There were people creating and broadcasting the programs. I should be one of them. For that reason, I graduated from the radio-TV vocational school. Our teachers were among the leaders in the TV broadcasting, cinema, and advertising sectors. After I finished school, I started to work on the channel that I watched as a child. I realized the "magic" was created by editors. Later, I became the first female video editor in my country.

Nevin Direk is a student at Orange Technical College (OTC) – Winter Park Campus, Winter Park, FL. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

The Day I Received My Mother's Diploma

When I knew I was pregnant, my first decision was to accept life, since my inner world would collapse. I worked, and I thought that my boyfriend would be with me in that period. I was happy and thought his love was forever. Even though we got married and created a new family, nothing was as I had imagined it because I was not prepared for that challenge and, least of all, to give up my dreams. I stopped studying; I lost my goals; I became a wife; I lost my freedom and his time with me. I wanted to protect my baby, but I hated being at home. I worked a lot, and I stopped dreaming about my future.

Because I did not have a clear purpose and a life project, my second baby arrived without preparing for it. I hated being a mother, but I didn't have other options. Then I put aside my "I want" and started my career as a mother. My second decision was to accept that I was a mother, and I wanted to learn how to be a mother. Every day my babies taught me something new, and every day I learned how to do things and also how not to do them.

I read many books on how to be a mother; I learned songs and games appropriate for their age; I learned to read

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children's stories and to make homemade toys. My subjects in the maternal university went through psychology, verbal and non-verbal language development, nursing skills, interpretation of medical formulas, economy, history, arts, general culture, interior decoration, personal appearance, public relations, fear management, sports coach, nutritionist, crafts, and strategies for conflict management.

Finally, when my daughters gave me my diploma through their words, "Thanks mom for being the Best Mom in the World," I wanted more time to dance, play with, and enjoy my girls. I understood that I had done a lot for them and that I wanted to do more, but they were not girls anymore. I understood that being a mother was the most wonderful thing that could happen to me in life and that I will be a mother forever until my death and that there is no retirement. I understood that being a mother requires a preparation like any profession and that our society needs a good and conscious education, not improvisation. Our children are the most precious gift that nature gives us, and I cry for taking so long to understand it.

Olga Cecilia Florez is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

A Perfect Meal

In order to welcome me back to China after I had been in America for a year, I was invited with great honor to a turtle hot pot dinner party by my closest classmates last month. The wonderful dinner party was held in a restaurant named Private Kitchen.

We eight classmates have been best friends for more than 30 years since we were 15 years old in middle school. During the last 30 years, we traveled to the mountains, to the seashores, to the ancient towns and had fun times together. We always say we are not family but we are more intimate than family members.

The restaurant named Private Kitchen was really like its name. It was not open to the outside public, but running as a club only for private friends. An appointment is always

necessary. Being the exact right size, not too big, not too small, it was decorated in traditional Chinese style. Two floors separated the functions. Different kinds of famous teas were sold on the first floor; you could smell the aroma of the teas just like a rose does when you just step in a room. Only two rooms were located on the second floor for treating friends. The décor showed the owner was well educated, especially in Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese ink paintings added more elegance. When you looked at the meaningful paintings, you could not help smiling.

We sat at a round dining table. ROUND in Chinese also means UNION. This was the exact meaning we pursued. A hot pot was located in the middle of the table. Different from other normal hot pots, we had small turtles besides lamb, beef, mushrooms and all kinds of vegetables. All the meats were cut into small pieces; turtles were cooked in the shell. Different kinds of foods were put in separate dishes. They were arranged on the dining table around the hot pot waiting to be cooked.

I could finally use chopsticks instead of forks and knives! The most novel feature was that an electric lift was installed in the middle of the pot! When we finished cooking, the lift rose from the hot pot so we could put the food on our own dishes and enjoy. The vegetables were so fresh, meats were so tender, turtles were so delicious, foods were so colorful, wines were so amazing! We cheered and talked and wished the time would not stop.

I don't know when we will have a meal together next time, I must wait until I go back again. But when? I cannot tell. The pictures we took in the Private Kitchen captured the moments when we enjoyed the great time together and recorded our intimate relationship.

The turtle hot pot remains as a perfect meal, as well as an unforgettable memory in my life.

Who will accompany with you till the end of life? Only families and friends. They are the greatest wealth in your life.

Pei Yuan is a student of Hugh Mills' Advanced Vocabulary class; Teege Braune's and Vince Scalise's Conversation classes; and Marty Murray's Creative Writing Workshop. She is a very busy student!

The Gift

My father Tito was born, got married, and lived as the head of his family and a public accountant, in Gracias, The Republic of Honduras. He was the only child of my grandparents, Simonita and Justo.

After his basic studies, Tito moved to a neighboring town, Santa Barbara, to continue his studies. Sadly, in the final year of his studies, his beloved mother passed away. Immediately he left for Gracias. Suffering this terrible blow, Tito found refuge in the prayers and books that his mother had given him.

When the prayers of Nine Days terminated, Tito decided not to return to Santa Barbara; the loss of his mother was more than he could stand. It would be better to take care of his father, and together, mitigate their immense sorrow.

One morning, two gentlemen — Alberto and Eleuterio Galeano — visited the house. Father and son greeted them with fraternal embraces. Alberto was a teacher, Eleuterio, a member of the National Congress. Shortly, Alberto asked, "...and you, young man, what are your plans now? What do you intend to do with this drastic change in your life?" Tito responded, "I will not return to Santa Barbara. I'll stay here with my father, and we'll take care of each other. This is my best option. I'm lost without my mother. The pain of losing her is always here," he said, touching his heart.

A profound silence followed. After this endless moment, Alberto said, "Would you like to do something very special for your mother? Something that would make her very happy?" Tito responded, "Yes, I would like to make her happy. But there is nothing I can do." Alberto continued, "The greatest gift for your mother would be for you to return immediately to school and finish your studies." Euterio added, "This is the most important thing for your mother. Your father will support you and he will take care of himself."

Young Tito bowed his head, hiding his tears. With the promise that he would think about their proposal, the visitors departed.

The next morning, Justo said goodbye to his son. He blessed him in the name of his mother and himself. Tito mounted a strong animal and left his father. He graduated with the highest grades and recognition of his teachers and fellow students.

As a professional, Tito was very successful, and married one of the most fragrant flowers from among the finest young ladies of Gracias. He was honest, dignified, and compassionate; people trusted him. He was mayor of Gracias for two terms and said that “public service was a great responsibility and opportunity, to help the community move forward.” He and my mother were always busy, initiating community projects or supporting others.

Tito passed away at the age of 93, holding the hand of the woman he loved his entire life.

Rosario Losk is a student at West Regional Library English Cafe in Broward County.

Love at First Sight

Do you believe in love at first sight? I always believed that you have to know a person to get involved in a sentimental relationship. I could not believe that with a first look, you could know that a person was the love of your life, much less want to leave everything to start a new life in another country with a different language and culture.

I lived in Puerto Rico all my life, and I came to the United States when I was 62 years old and my daughter was having a baby. Even though I told her that I would stay to take care of the baby, I was not sure about doing it. I had lived my whole life in Puerto Rico, in my own house, with most of my family, friends, and my church. Even more, in my country, we studied English from elementary school through college, but in our daily lives, we only speak Spanish. Finally, the cultural customs, the food, the people, and the weather were very different from my hometown. What was a difficult decision to make!

It was 3:00 in the morning on July 3, 2012, and my heart was pounding because I had waited for nine months to see his face. I saw him coming through the hall in an incubator crib, with his open eyes and a beautiful face. I looked at him, and my heart fell in love with him immediately. That day, my life was marked by a different love than I had ever felt. For two days, I could not carry him in my arms, but my eyes were filled with love every time I looked at him. It was time to decide to stay and overcome my nostalgia for everything I had left behind. My grandson, my love at first sight, my eternal love!

In the years to come, my lifestyle took a 360-degree turn. The first three years, I took care of him all the time; it was a learning process for both. With him, I learned a different kind of love: to be more patient, to laugh and to be happy regardless of the circumstances. He gave me the strength to overcome barriers that limited my new lifestyle. He has been my inspiration to write biblical reflections that have ministered to lives on many occasions. I hope that one day I will write a book about it.

My grandson is now in elementary school. I study at the Adult Education Center to improve my English. Through time, our bonds of love have strengthened more, and we always have a happy life together. “Grandchildren are the crowning glory of the aged.” Proverb 17:16.

Sonia Rosado is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Failure Is Only The Opportunity To Begin Again

When I was 15 years old, I dreamed of becoming a professional soccer player. I aced my first soccer test and applied for a regional team in 2012. I played many games including department-regional tournament and won many trophies.

Then in 2014 I moved to Bogota. I played for a club but I did not like it very much. In comparison, my first team was better than this one. I had moved there to play because one of my best friends was there. While I was playing in one of the matches,

a scout saw my performance and became interested in me. He told my trainer that he wanted me to play for his team. I was overjoyed because I felt that I was getting closer to my dream. A few months later, I decided to leave the team, because they did not want me there, and I started to search for other teams. I found several of them, but the one I like most is FairPlay.

So, I moved to join FairPlay. I was very excited because from this team, Radamel Falcao, “el Tigre”, became a professional soccer player. I managed to overcome every major obstacle placed before me. I trained with the club often. Every free minute I had after school, I was playing soccer in the club.

My team trainer was happy with me because I scored goals in every game. He told me that I was getting closer to become a professional football player. He always reminded me that I should not play outside the club in order to avoid an injury, because if I got injured I could lose the contract.

One day after school, my physical education teacher asked me for help. He also coached the high school team and wanted to win a game in a tournament. I wanted to help him, and I wanted to develop my ability, so I agreed to play for him. In the game, I injured my right knee. I broke my anterior cruciate ligament. As a result, I lost my contract and my dream because I was being irresponsible.

In brief, I gave my best on the soccer field, in the matches and off the field. I trained every day; I was very careful with my health. I did what I love, I gave my best, and I lost everything on account of my own bad decision. From that moment, I learned to follow the advice and orders of my elders because they are wise and have more experience.

Santiago Balcazar attends the English class at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Thank You, My Father

When I was young, I was so lonely even though I had a big family. My parents have four daughters, and I am the second

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one. I was an ordinary girl like others, but my other sisters were not. So pretty, so gifted, so smart. One of my sisters was always top in her school from elementary to university and another was so pretty and gifted with art. The other one also was very pretty and a good singer. My parents were so busy being proud of my sisters' strengths.

At that moment, my only hope and wish was to get attention from my parents. I tried to study hard like my sister and finally got the top in the school. But I couldn't buy their interest, so I gave up studying. Even though I made a lot of friends, I was so eager to get their love and praise.

One day I tried to commit suicide to make them regret ignoring me. How stupid, I know now. But at that time, I was so serious. Anyway, I could not succeed that time. Finally, I gave up seeking their favor, and I was looking for God. I did my best for God to get his favor. I loved to go to church and worked so hard for the church and church members. I became a Sunday school teacher, choir member, worship member, group leader, etc.

Then, suddenly, I was tired with everything. One day, I prayed to God to take my life because I thought I could go to heaven at once. At that moment, from somewhere inside, I heard a voice. "Soyoung, I can take you to heaven right now, but I can't give you any reward." I asked, "What? Why not? In my life, I did everything for you. I tried really hard." The voice from inside said, "I know all your effort, but you did everything for yourself, for your satisfaction, not for me. I was and am always with you. You do not need to be a perfect person. I love you the way you are."

I cried and cried. After that, I felt so comfortable. I felt like that big, heavy rock on my shoulder went away. Even though I am not perfect, pretty, or smart enough, I am still accepted by God because of Jesus's sacrifice. That means everything to me now. That is enough. My job changed. I was an environmental engineer, but I am a pastoral counselor now.

Thank you, my Father, my Lord. I want to live for you. Also, I want to help your other children.

Soyoung Sellari is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness Class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Dear Live-in Nanny

The life of my dear live-in nanny is a great love story. She was 9 years old when her father brought her from the village to my grandma's house. She lived as a member of my family. She helped with the housework and took care of the kids. When I was born, she was 25 years old and took care of seven siblings and five cousins about the same age. My parents, two uncles and three aunts lived with my grandma in a big house. We had a very happy life. We had a large bathroom with three ponds. She gave all the children a bath together three times a week. The whole process lasted two hours. We looked forward to bathing day. My father insisted she marry and at last when she was 30, she married and went to her village. We were all sad and our house was silent.

After two years, she came back. She had a small bag in her hand and was crying. She told my father that she couldn't live without the kids. Then we became older and she told us stories about faith, telling the truth, not to lie, to trust, and about angels. In fact, she was an angel. She lived with us for the rest of her life and when she was 65, she died. That day was one of the worst days of our lives. Now whenever we come together — "The third generation" — we remember those days. It brings warmth and happiness. When we lose something, we pray to her and afterwards, we find what we lost. It is our belief!

Shahin Raoofisani is a student at West Regional Library English Cafe in Broward County.

Life

Life may be a simple four-letter word, but it represents a complex web of situations. Today I stopped to smell some roses. I remembered the saying, "stop and smell the roses," so I did. I did not know that those roses were protected by fire ants, so I was bitten all over my feet and hands. That situation ended much differently than I planned. Life has a way of changing.

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Life can be loving, caring, and a blessing, but in each gift, there can be a sorrow. Our job is to enjoy every reward in life and endure the sorrows and pain. Life is pushing us to love, enjoy, and overcome our ups and downs. In life there is both physical and mental growth. Life maybe overwhelming, but we must endure it with patience and grace. The sun shines when we least expect it even though the clouds may rain on us. Grace is granted when we stand tall.

Boldly we rise every morning and walk in the shadows of the unknown. Goodness and mercy will overshadow us in love. Life may throw us many punches and can sting, like those fire ants, but faith is on our side. Life does not give us a road map to follow or the correct answers to our questions, but we have to be taught by the elders at church, family, or wise people who have experienced life. It has been said when life gives you lemons you make lemonade, but to make lemon meringue pie is even sweeter.

The smallest things in life can bring the greatest joys and memories. Finding a balance between the good and bad times will bring your best life. Life presents itself in experiences, some positive and some negative and it is up to us to weather the storm. I use prayer and inner strength to grow. In life, big moments will arise. Enjoy them and be happy. It is your time to embrace joy. Find out what makes you happy. Enjoy you! As long as you are tasteful, it is ok to focus on you. It is important to find out your personal likes and dislikes. Bring yourself a gift by loving you and spoiling yourself. In a marriage woman treat their husbands or kids, but remember that me time is important. Enjoy the good moments in life.

Life is good when no devilish person is around. If that happens, feel confident in being you. Some people may be jealous or uncertain with themselves. They may not be able to stand the glory that is given to you. Remember you are a life radiating a shining light that blooms God's love in every step you take. Do not darken yourself with their senseless words. They wish they sparkled too.

Sincerria Reed is a mother of four and a student at West Area Adult School and Read Lakeland, Inc. tutoring program in Lakeland. Her tutor is Jennifer Eischen.

A New Look On Life

Growing up, my life was bitter-sweet! One would think that I had it made! The school that I attended was an hour drive each way. Because I was an only child and my mom spoiled me, she drove me every day to make me happy. She knew that was the school that I wanted to attend because all of my friends were there and so I wanted to be there too. We had home cooked meals every day, it wasn't rare for my family to eat filet mignon and baked potatoes twice a week. But truth be told, I had it rough. Being an only child, I had no one to talk to when my days went wrong.

When I was 12 years old, my mom became addicted to heroin, and started to blame me for everything, saying the stress I caused her was the reason she put a needle in her arm. By the time I was 15 years of age, it only got worse. I had a boyfriend who my mom let live with me. I became pregnant and gave birth to a 5 lb. 5 oz. little girl named Nevaeh. Remind you the only one that was in the hospital with me during the neither delivery was her father (Matt). Her dad was my best friend. He was the one I trusted with my life, not my mom or my father they were never around either. My dad got remarried and told me I was a marital problem so with that being said I wasn't going to beg my dad for his love.

Shortly after having my beautiful baby girl I got caught up in what you may call the criminal life and went to prison for armed robbery. During my incarceration Matt overdosed on heroin and died on Dec. 11th 2010. I then had to give my mom temporary custody of Nevaeh and after about a year my mom got caught up in her addiction and got my precious baby taken. That was my breaking point in my life. When I got out of prison on May 9th 2015, I had a whole new outlook on life. I met a man whom I'm with now. We have two beautiful children. I now know where my mom went wrong in raising me and I will be sure to give my babies the life and the love I never had.

Life is bitter-sweet, I'm working hard to taste the sweet savory of life once again and to shower my babies with all the SWEETNESS I CAN GIVE!

Shawna Stuller is the mother of three and once released, plans to attend veterinary school. Ms. Brenda G. Johnson is her teacher.

Give Me Five!

You know that moment when you meet someone, and you feel that person is going to be important in your life, so you start a relationship? In the beginning, you tell them something about your past, your life, your future, your dreams — the important question! How many children do you want? We all think of a number we have in our minds. When I met my husband, he said five! I said only two.

We married and quickly had a boy and a girl. The two days when my children were born were the best moments in my life. Those days were magical for me. I was quiet, relaxed, and in the hands of my doctor and midwife, and, of course, God. During these days, you pass through all the emotions possible from the first contraction to the moment your water breaks.

It was morning when my son was born. I saw the midwife and she said that it was a possible day for giving birth but we would have to wait some more time. That day my mom called me and said she wanted to see me. Moms always know us. I thought, OK, today is The Day!

The three of us went to eat: my husband, my mom, and me. I never told them that while I ate had contractions. I wanted to enjoy my last lunch in peace! I knew that was not going to happen in the future. We finished eating, and I told my husband the news. He did not understand anything. However, we were all prepared and ran to the hospital. That day was perfect. You feel such love that it is hard to explain how big it is. You feel strong; you feel that after going through that you can conquer all. With my second kid, thank God, the magic was repeated. Later other difficulties started, but I'll leave that for another essay!

I can say that being a parent is not easy; however, it is worth it. This is a love that you have never felt before, and it helps everything make sense. I always thought in that moment, when they were born, that I would have ten! So remember, when you meet someone, ask the important questions such as 'how many children do you want?' I hope you both match or you can reach an agreement. The road is winding, but it's wonderful.

Yanina Tenenbaum is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

My Amazing Trip

My husband and I like to travel. Overall, we have had success and pleasure in the course of these journeys, but one trip was so incredible and bizarre that I have decided to write about it.

We bought a cruise around Europe for two weeks. We were scheduled to see many towns in Italy, Spain, Greece, Israel, and Turkey. However, two weeks before our trip, I watched the TV news and saw that our cruise ship, the Costa Concordia, had wrecked off the coast in a collision with a submerged rock. The ship capsized hours later and was subsequently declared a total loss.

We were in shock, but we decided to buy a new trip with the same route for other days. Three days before the cruise, we flew to Rome to see this wonderful city. When we arrived there, somebody stole our bag with our passports. At that time, we lived in Russia. I had only a Russian passport, and my husband had a Russian and an American passport. We went to the Russian consulate for new passports. The first words that we heard from the Russian employees were, “you can forget about the cruise.” Also, we needed to provide them with two people who knew us. We asked, “Where do we find them?” They said, “There are a lot of Russian tourists; they will help you.” We found two unfamiliar Russian women and asked them to help us. They agreed, and we received two simple papers for homecoming. The next day, my husband went to the American consulate and received his new American passport easily and quickly!

As a result, without my Russian passport, we did not get to cruise and bought a new trip by train around the cities of Italy for two weeks. We were in Venice, Florence, Pisa, and Perugia. We saw the Tower of Pisa and Uffizi Gallery in Florence. We were at the Venice festival. In Rome we saw the Colosseum, the Spanish Steps, the Vatican, the Trevi Fountain, the Pantheon, and the Roman Forum.

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Italy is a beautiful country but sometimes we regret missing our cruise. Bo Sanchez said, "Closed doors simply mean God is protecting us from having not the best." Maybe it is true. Now I have an American passport too, and I have independence from my native consulate.

Oksana Tenman is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

Helping a Friend

I met Andres when I was in a baseball academy in Maracaibo. I was looking to sign with a professional baseball team. There we became friends and we both had the same goal.

We were in that baseball academy about two and a half years. It was two and a half years of continuous work and dedication in order to achieve that goal that we both wanted. However, I achieved my goal and he did not. That was very hard for him and he felt that the world came down on him. He did not know what to do. He had prepared all his life for that and he could not achieve it.

A year passed and he went to Colombia trying to follow his goal again. But the reality was not as he expected and he had to work to live there. He and I never lost contact and I knew everything that he was going through and I decided to help him.

At first I helped Andres with motivational words so he would not give up. I said that everything that happened to him was a test for him to be strong and overcome more than what he had already done. He said he wanted to go live in the United States and I supported him and told him that it was a good idea. He said being in the United States he could have a better life for him and his family. After he told me that, I told him that I wanted to help him with some money so that he could get the American visa and be able to move to the United States. He very humbly replied that he was not going to accept my money because he knew and understood that I had earned it. I insisted by saying that he did not need to worry. He had been with me always. He was more

than a friend to me. I wanted to do it because I wanted him to get to the US and become an excellent person.

After he got his papers and managed to get his visa, he traveled to the United States. He managed to enter without any problems. He is now an excellent person with a good job. He can help his family and every day he thanks me for all the help that I contributed, either emotional or monetary. He thanks me because I was always there with him. I helped him and I supported him at all times. This was a small story that I wanted to tell you because you should always help your friends or people in need.

Wilyer Abreu is an outfielder and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program. He is from Maracaibo, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

The Lady with Sad Eyes

Who doesn't know the feeling of loneliness? The feeling of sadness and unhappiness that sometimes makes you want die. I want to tell you about the lady with sad eyes: a 70-year-old Native American woman, she was a retired literature teacher with diabetes. I met her in a nursing home in Chattanooga, Tennessee eight years ago.

I met her on a cold November morning. It was my first day of work as a nurse's aide, and she was in a wheelchair at the end of a long corridor. She captured my attention with her colorful purple and red coat and her long grey hair. I called her the lady with sad eyes because I don't remember her name, but I will never forget her face, her eyes, and her smile.

During the first meeting she was indifferent. She did not want to talk to me, but over the course of time I got closer to her. They were short conversations at the beginning due to my low level of English. Later our conversations became longer and more educational for me because I was improving my English. After all, she was a teacher and she enjoyed teaching.

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One day she called me. She had tears in her eyes and I asked her, what happened? She told me that her children had visited her for the last time. They told the social worker that she was to be cremated when she died and that they did not need to call them. I tried to convince her that she had heard them wrong, but sadly it was true: her children would not visit her anymore. They lived far away and did not have the resources for her funeral.

Years have passed since I last saw her. A short time later I was transferred to another nursing home. I never saw her again. I learned that two weeks later she passed away. I will always remember her, and her sad lonely eyes.

Yolanda Esquivel is an Advanced ESOL student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Ms. Blake.

My Favorite Day

My Favorite Day is When I Don't Have to Work

My favorite day is the day when I don't have to work. Every day I am at work, it is the same routine. The days I have off are special days for me and my family. When I am off, I don't pay attention to my alarms in the morning because sometimes I forget to turn it off, but I can't hear anything because in my mind I am off. My husband laughs because I have four alarms. On my day off, I can sleep and stay more time in my bed with my little baby, she is very happy when I stay in the house, because I can make breakfast for her and we can pray together and we say thank you God for the food and for everything. On my day off, I can go to the school and pick up my children. I can see everybody is happy because I make delicious food. On my day off, everybody can smell delicious quesadillas because they are the favorite food for my family.

Consuelo Sanchez is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Tomorrow

For some people, their favorite day is Friday because it starts the weekend where you will have the opportunity to rest and have fun. For others it is Sunday, when you have already rested and are ready to start the new week of work. Each person has their favorite day. My favorite day is tomorrow and I'll explain why I think that way.

First and foremost, I think my favorite day is tomorrow because every sunrise means to me new opportunities to do something different than on the last day. I have faith that better days will always come and may happen at any time. Sometimes it seems that life becomes unbearably difficult, and that nothing is going to work, but we must keep our hopes high and never give up because tomorrow can change many things!

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Nothing lasts forever, and difficult moments will also come to an end. Each step we take forward means that the difficulties are falling behind and better days are approaching. We must keep being hopeful, persistent and never give up fighting for our dreams!

That is why my favorite day is tomorrow. Doing something new every day means learning more skills that will be used in the future. Be always ready for a challenge that tomorrow has to offer you and face new situations so that you have the opportunity to do your best.

Claudia Araujo attends class regularly at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Tuck Tuck Tuck

When I learned I was pregnant with my first son, I was really happy because that was big news for me. I remember the doctor giving me a paper dress. I thought, “What is this for?” He said to put on the paper dress and lay down on the bed. I’m really nervous because I never had that before. When he put Vaseline on my stomach and connected some things to the computer, I could hear a noise like, “tuck tuck tuck.” It was the sound of my baby’s heart. This moment was “grandioso” for me. I said “Thank you, God” for giving me the big opportunity. That day, my mind and my life changed. I went to see the doctors every 8 weeks. Nine months later, my son came and everybody was happy. I couldn’t sleep for three weeks. After that, I still didn’t sleep well but it was worth it!

Gladis Cabeles is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. She has two kids. She likes to play tennis and cook. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Just a Piece of Cake

My “Favorite Day” was my last birthday because I was happier than I’ve ever been before. It materialized the 5th of

September. It was a Wednesday morning when autumn leaves were falling and apples were plentiful. It was a joy to be outside. However, I had chosen to be inside at my literacy center.

At the end of my class Ms. C. said, "I'll be back". I thought no more about it. Naturally, I got off guard. First, friends gathered, and then Ms. C., a true blue friend, presented me a delicious cake. While giving out the plates and forks I started thinking to myself that my first birthday cake was 13 years ago. That cake and this one were similar in some ways. With both cakes I was surprised, gratified, and deeply moved. The cakes were also different in ways. The first cake, I was at a disco just mingling and having fun. But this cake, I was in the right place at the right time, and doing the right thing. Things were falling into place and having a tutor was the 'Icing on the Cake'.

Ms. C. started lighting up the candles. My first thought was a candle that reminded me of the 'Bright Morning Star'. The candle flames symbolized a lamp to read, and my tutor's blue eyes, and my literacy center as a beacon of hope. It has given me a sense of direction for a brighter future. I strongly believed in these centers. I knew I was blessed.

Before I blew out the candles I made a wish that all students would excel in their classes. God bless those who are affiliated with any literacy center. It's incredible how much my center has done for me!

As Ms. C took the candles from the cake, I thought this gift symbolized God's glory. It meant sweetness and that we should love one another.

Next, Ms. C. started slicing a corner of the cake. I kept thinking to myself that this celebration was a new me, and a new beginning. I was free. I recognized that my hard work in class had made a tremendous difference. I have come to understand that education will truly open many doors. It hadn't been easy, but learning how to read, write, and speak fluently is essential. It's especially better if you can speak 2 or 3 languages. It's awesome!

Education is power. Some had told me, "It's a waste of time," but it doesn't worry me. I must strive above the nonsense. I

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hope that the students won't quit, either. There is hope. What A Mighty God We Serve! Pass me a piece of cake, please.

Gail Hartfield began working on reading and writing at DePorres Place in October of 2012. In 2014, she was selected to participate in a Literacy Ambassador Program Workshop sponsored by the Florida Literacy Coalition. The workshop culminated in each student giving a speech about their life and how their literacy program has helped them. Gail's speech inspired her to write and deliver another speech that year, at the DePorres Place Annual Luncheon for Literacy in North Palm Beach. Gail was also featured in a video produced by FLC and available on YouTube.

When My Daughter Was Born

The date was November 16, 2015. I remember, I started feeling pain in my belly around 3am and with every moment, the pain got worse. I was getting up every ten or five minutes because I wasn't comfortable in bed. I was like this until 5am. Then my husband asked me, "Do you want to go to the hospital?" And I said "Yes!"

I was so nervous. I guess every woman feels like me with her first baby. We arrived to the hospital and I checked in. Then the nurse began to ask me some questions and started to check me. Minutes later the nurse told me that we have to go to the delivery room. Oh! I felt so excited! Because almost my baby would be with me!

In the delivery room a nurse examined me and she told something to the other nurses. I heard the baby was coming the wrong way and I felt so sad. I didn't understand what that meant.

But after they explained to me what was happening. My baby was ready to be born but with her body opposite. I was worried and absolutely afraid.

So they told me, "we need to do a cesarean." I felt so scared and I was crying but my husband and my mom were there supporting me. The nurses started preparing everything for the surgery. It was 6am in the morning. That moment was so hard

for me. I was so afraid and nervous, but also the waiting time was almost finished before seeing my little heart.

After one hour, about 7am, my daughter was born. My husband took her to me and I touched her cheek with mine. I was so happy, so emotional and just wanted to hold her but I couldn't do it in that moment. She was so little, she looked very fragile. Later they moved me to another room. There, I held my little beautiful girl for the first time. She looked like a baby doll. Her skin was pink. She was so sweet and cute.

Even though it was painful, this is my favorite day because I got to meet the most special little person in my life.

Irais Rosales is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program. She likes relaxing at the beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

The Day I First Arrived

My favorite day was when I came to the United States for the first time on Monday, December 26th, 2011. It was a very big day for me.

I was very happy and sad because when I left, my daughter was 13 years old and my son was 3 years old. But it was the beginning of a new and better life. The day began with a very special new experience. It was my first time in an airplane. I took the airplane for 1 hour and 45 minutes to the United States. When flying in an airplane, it feels like a different world as if that world was only formed with the other people riding with you.

On that first day, I could already sleep better. The level of insecurity in the United States compared to Haiti is way different because Haiti is more dangerous. Even though the United States is not perfect, you can live with no fear that someone would hate you for having a car or owning a house because it is pretty much basic.

I thought when I arrived in the United States it was more fantastic than in my country. Everything here is big. You have a

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lot of streets. In Haiti, at night there are no lights. Here in the United States, you can find everything easy for you. You work, you get money. In Haiti everything is difficult.

At first, every day and every second when my family would talk about me I had a buzzing in my right ear. I missed them a lot. But in 2016 my daughter came to live with me. Next year, my son will come to the United States with me too. This really is a fantastic country.

The day I came to the United States was my favorite day because of all the experiences that I have made and all the new feelings I had about starting my new life when I came here.

Mr. Jean Edy Vilia has two kids. He likes God. He is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Best Time

Everyone has a favorite day in their life. My favorite day is the day when I came to the United States. I was excited because I was going to live with my mom and my sisters in Naples, Florida.

It was the first of January 2018. I left my country to come to the USA. I had to tell my friends and family in Haiti that I was leaving. Even though I was happy to leave for the USA, I still left Haiti with much sadness in my heart because I knew I would miss everyone there.

When I arrived at the airport in Port Au Prince with my dad, I was really happy that I was going to live with my family. I was going to fly to the USA. When I arrived in Miami, I experienced strange things because it was my first time in America: reading and hearing the new language, seeing many lakes and stores at the same place. It was also different how people were driving and respecting the country's law.

When I arrived at home, my sisters screamed and I saw my mom cooking my favorite foods. I was surprised and when I went to my mom's room I saw my present and welcome

balloons. When I opened the present, I saw an IPHONE in there and I was so shocked! I literally screamed and started hugging my mom like crazy, and that was the BEST TIME EVER!

We started talking, dancing and singing. Then my family started talking about my trip, going from Haiti to Miami to my home. Afterwards, I started to unpack my luggage and take a shower. We started eating and when I was finished I went to sleep, and that was when the party ended.

Milla lives with her mom and father at Naples, FL. she's studying at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Milla is from Haiti, and she is 18 years old.

My Favorite Day

Have you ever had a day that was so perfect it was unforgettable? I have had some very good days and I have also had some very bad days; most days are just average. There is one day in particular that I'm going to tell you about: my favorite day.

My boyfriend and I started dating in March of 2016. We met at school, where we were both studying to get our GED. We hit it off from the start. Throughout the time we've been dating, my boyfriend finished his GED, graduated, and started working . . . a lot! So needless to say, we didn't get to spend much time together. There were times I felt we weren't even a couple. When I would get really stressed about us not spending enough time together, he would remind me of how much he loves me and that he is working very hard now to provide for our future. That made me feel better, and I also understood.

So the two-year mark of our relationship was fast approaching. My boyfriend wanted to do something special for me. He was planning a day for us to spend together. The day finally arrived: March 1, 2018.

My favorite day started out by my boyfriend and I going to the beach, which is one of my favorite places. We live in Florida, so it was a beautiful sunny day, cool and breezy. We swam, body

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surfing, played catch with the football, played volleyball, and had a picnic lunch. We were there all day and had a great time.

We left the beach at almost dinner time; we went to Olive Garden and had a special dinner. On the way to dinner, he surprised me with a very beautiful necklace with matching earrings as an anniversary gift. We had a very good dinner. I had the chicken scampi, and we even got a free dessert. Once we finished dinner, we weren't ready for the day to end, so we decided to do one more thing--go to the movies. We watched *The Black Panther* and enjoyed popcorn and candy.

It was a very special day for both of us. We are now coming up on our third-year anniversary of dating and are planning a wedding towards the end of this year. I know when that day comes it will be even better and at the top of my list of favorite days.

Miranda is a student at SJR State Adult Education Program in Palatka, FL. Her instructor is Marcia R. Sanders. She is interested in attending Florida School of the Arts.

Mi Quinceañera

When I was a young girl, all I could think of was my quinceañera. This is the day all little girls in Mexico wait and dream for. Girls dream about the big and beautiful dress, the party and the music. I was waiting for many years and finally, that day came—my fifteenth birthday.

The night before the party, I couldn't sleep because my stomach hurt. I felt excited. I thought about my party, and how I would look with my dress. Will my friends will come? That morning I got up and I took a shower because a lady was coming to do my makeup and my hair. That lady was my sister. When she finished, she told me to look in the mirror and I said I look like a princess. Now it was the time to wear my beautiful dress and my shoes.

My friends arrived, my family was there and the music for my special entrance started and I went out to the patio. I was very excited because all the people I invited were there for

my special day. I walked around to the little space designated for my party, I said “hi!” to my friends with my hand and I smiled, like when the princess says hi to the people. I felt like a princess with my dress, my shoes and my makeup. I felt happy. My friends came to me and they said “Feliz cumpleaños!”

Now it was time to eat. My sisters and sisters-in-law had fixed up the big table. (I had one big table only. My parents didn’t have much money to prepare a big party for me but, I didn’t care. For me, it was a most big and beautiful party.) We went to the big and beautiful table and ate delicious “mole” and “tamales” that my mother and her friends had prepared. The music continued and my friends started dancing. One hour later my sister gave me a special bracelet for my quinceañera. I never forgot that present. My sister-in-law arrived with a big, big cake. The cake was fabulous and tasted delicious. We were dancing, we laughed, I felt very happy because all my friends and family were there on my important day.

My party was not big, but for me it was the biggest in the world because my parents did it for me, and they stayed with me. This is why, I said thank you Lord, because my parents they are not rich but I’m rich to have them. This was also a special day because my family and my friends and I went our different ways and we live in different countries now.

Maria Garcia is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. She is a busy mother of three kids. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Favorite Day is Saturday

My favorite day is Saturday because I’m a Seventh Day Adventist. I have many reasons why I consider this day as my favorite day. So I’m going to somehow explain some of those reasons.

First; I have the opportunity on Saturday to go to church to worship God the creator, to thank him for everything. I also have more time to read my Bible and pray.

I have the privilege of getting more sleep, because I never work on this day. So I get to wake up a little bit later in the

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morning. I have breakfast, take my shower, do my hair, then I get dressed to go to church. When I arrive at the church, I feel very excited because I have the chance again to meet my church friends. We have fun, we rejoice, we enjoy the day together.

On this day I also have the opportunity to spend more time with my family because some of us go to work every day, some of us go to school, and we never have time to be together. Fortunately, Saturday is our special day, so we have the chance to meet together to eat the special food we prepare, to talk, to have fun. It's a very particular day for me and my family, we like it so much.

Every week when Saturday comes, I feel very excited, because I'm always busy on the other days. I go to work every day and when I come back home, I go to school. I never have time to enjoy them the same way. So that's why I like Saturday and it is my favorite day.

Michcarne Jean is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach FL..She has a beautiful family of 3 children. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Favorite Day

A wonderful and amazing experience that I never forget, was when I listened to the National Anthem from Venezuela in the World Cup U23 last year.

When I heard the National Anthem, everything came to my mind. A lot of memories of my country came to life. I felt something weird in my stomach, like butterflies, because it was a special rain of feelings. When I saw the three colors and the 8 stars of Venezuela's flag move in the wind, tears fell from my face because I remembered in this moment everything happening in Venezuela.

The people are divided in political colors but all Venezuelans sing the same national anthem. I was excited when the umpire said "play ball!" Before that all players had tears in their eyes. The Venezuelan team was home club and I was the starting

pitcher against Korea. I felt a little nervous in the first inning, because if we won we would get the 3rd place in the World Cup.

When I threw the first pitch, I felt relieved. The game was fast in the first part. In the 6th inning, Korea tied the game. In the 8th we scored 2 runs and we won the game. When it was the last out, all players went out in the middle of the field with a lot of emotions to celebrate. Every player was so excited. The feeling is inexplicable.

It was a special day because I'm sure all Venezuelans, no matter where they were, would be proud of us. The night started and every player was ready to go to the World Cup award ceremony. All players were in the lobby of the hotel ready to go to the stadium to get the award. A couple of minutes later the bus was in front of the hotel. We got on the bus and left to the stadium. When we were in the stadium we had to wait for the last game to finish. When the last game finished, the Mexico team won. After that, the award ceremony started with a singer from the Barranquilla City.

It was my first time that I played for my country. I thought that I could never feel so many emotions like nostalgia, happiness, excitement, even sadness crashing in my heart and my mind because of everything happening in Venezuela, the country that I LOVE.

Nivaldo Rodriguez is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a top student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from Naguanagua, Venezuela. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

My Favorite Day

I am Araimar Ruiz, and I am a student at Indian Pines Elementary. My favorite day is Christmas. I like Christmas because I get to share it with my family and friends. On Christmas, we prepare delicious food, We exchange gifts and celebrate the end of the year all together. My son enjoys it a lot with the toys that Santa brought him and that makes me very happy.

This anonymous author is an ESOL student in Palm Beach, FL. Her teacher is Annie Stubbs.

My Two Favorite Days

My favorite days are Christmas and New Year. Everybody has a favorite day in the word. Specifically, mine are Christmas and New Year's Day.

My first favorite day is Christmas. To illustrate, when I was a child, I used to receive gifts on Christmas day from Santa Clause. I always wondered which parent bought my gifts and used Santa's name. Christmas means fun, joy, happiness and bringing family together. I learned how it was celebrated on December 25th once a year, also it's the Birth of Jesus. It is also my favorite day because I like the ambience inside my home. It is very joyful as soon as you can see the tree decorated and colorful lights on the house. It is beautiful. Moreover, the way the community decorates the streets and stores looks wonderful. They put up reindeer, angels, Christmas lights, and Santa displays. On Christmas day every store closes and there is no school. Every street smells of baking. Some family and friends travel to get together for dinner and sharing love and gifts. Everyone wishes each other Merry Christmas and hugs with smiling faces. The music is right and pleasant, this is a wonderful day to always remember. In fact, I wish every day was Christmas.

My second favorite day is New Years Day. It's also an extra special day because it is Independence Day in Haiti. On January 1, 1804, Haiti made history by becoming the first black country to gain its independence. Therefore, it is the most important celebration for Haitians in the year. On this day, people wake up very early. My great grandmother always made hot chocolate in the morning before making the special traditional dish called pumpkin soup, or soup joumou in Haitian Creole. It is made from pumpkin, beef, carrot, potatoes, macaroni, garbage and shallots. No matter where Haitian people are on January 1st we always eat this soup. In short, this tradition of celebration is a very important event for Haitian people. It remains an important family get together. For example, people visit relatives and wish each other good health, long life and good years.

To summarize, I like Christmas and New Years Day because these are my favorite days. It is very exciting and fun. Family and friends get together for dinner and share love.

Solene Accime is from Haiti, she is a student in ESOL at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

Beautiful Days of the Past

My favorite day is Nowruz. Nowruz is the traditional Iranian festival of spring, which starts at the exact moment of the vernal equinox, announcing the start of spring. It is also considered as the start of the New Year among Iranians along with some other ethno-linguistic groups. The name comes from Avestan, meaning “new day or daylight.” It has been celebrated for over 3,000 years in Iran and other parts of central and western Asia. It marks the first day of the first month (Farvardin) of the Iranian calendar.

Two weeks before Nowruz, we began “to shake” our home. This is a concept among Iranians that means that we will completely clean our house. In the cleaning of the house, we should also do plenty of New Year’s shopping, such as buying fruits, sweets, nuts and new clothes. One or two days before Nowruz, all the work of home cleaning and shopping is finished, and we are ready to start the New Year. We have the Haft Seen on our table. Haft Seen is a traditional custom in the Persian New Year. There is a table setting with seven different items which all began with the letter “seen.” Every item in Haft Seen is a symbol from Regeneration, Abundance, Wealth, and all good things.

On Nowruz, we wear new clothes and with lips full of laughter, wait for the start of New Year. When I was in Iran, I loved the moment that everyone was waiting for the start of the New Year with beautiful new dresses and eyes full of light and joy. My parents, my brother and I kissed and congratulated each other, and my dad gave us the money as Eidi (gift). After a few hours from the start of the New Year, we went to see our uncle and aunt and celebrated the New Year with them.

On the occasion of the New Year, our schools were closed for two weeks. During that time, we went to visit our relatives and friends. My brother and I played games with the other children and ate lots of sweets, fruit and nuts. Sometimes, we traveled to

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another city. One day before opening the schools, we went back home to prepare ourselves for another year.

Many years have passed since then. One corner of my mind belongs to Nowruz and, right now, I really miss those beautiful times.

Nika Safarzadeh is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Leslie McBride-Salmon is her teacher.

End of Year for My Family - December 31st

I will talk a little about how we celebrate the end of the year in my family. This has been a tradition for many years.

I am the youngest brother of a humble family composed of three siblings (2 men and a woman) and a mother. When I was five years old, my father died in an accident at work. Thank God because he gave me a mother who works hard and has advanced us. For my siblings and me, she is our best gift of life.

In our family, at the end of the year we spend time together. In the morning, we talk about the year; the good, the bad, and the funny times that happened during it. It is one of my favorite moments because it is a happy moment, and we laugh while talking about our stories.

During the day, we watch movies and national programs called "Toros alá Tica" and "El Chinamo." My mother prepares a special lunch: a mixed rice, snail salad, turkey, tamales and a delicious ice cream with fruit and cake. At night, we have a barbecue with ribs, sausages and a special fish that is accompanied by patacones.

At the end of it all, we thank God for allowing us to be together for another year. We are a very close family. We do many things together. We provide a lot of support for each other. Moments like this in our house are always present.

Bryan Solano is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is from Limon, Costa Rica. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Sunday – The Day My Son Was Born

Whenever anyone thinks of a fun day, Sunday probably is the first day that comes to mind. When I was a child, I've always considered Sunday as a wonderful day. Every Sunday I always feel happiness inside of me. That continued the day when my son was born.

I remember that day in great detail. I had a lot of pain. The fact I had just brought a small human being into the world overwhelmed me with an indescribably delightful feeling.

After, the doctor told me his weight of 10 pounds. Having held him in my arms for 20 minutes, I knew what I was going to name him. I chose the name Hans because that was my grandfather's name, my now second favorite person in the world.

My husband was very happy because he really wanted a son. With tears of joy rolling down his cheeks, he looked at me and said "Thank you Viviane." I will never forget his words. That night I closed my eyes and prayed for 40 minutes. I thanked God for this blessing He had given me. I also thanked him for great health and my exceptionally kind and lovable husband.

I got sent home two days later. I was happier than I've ever been. That is why Sunday is my favorite day.

Viviane Petit Frere is an ESOL student at Village Readers in Delray Beach. She wants to learn English because she'd like to continue her former profession as a nurse in Haiti in the U.S. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Favorite Season

My favorite season is summer. I enjoy this season because I can spend more time together, as a family and with my son. For example, we can go on vacation, relax, go to the beach or river, and enjoy the boat. We like to fish and go camping too. I think summer is the best time because it is a great time to enjoy family, the weather is beautiful, and my son is on vacation from school.

During the summer, we go to Panama on vacation. I get so

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excited, so much so, I pack my bags two weeks before we are supposed to go. When we arrive, my niece is waiting for me with flowers at the airport. It is my first joy when I arrive. After that, we go to visit family and friends. It's quite an adventure because we come as a surprise and we enjoy every moment together. We cook, go dancing, visit places on the Panama Canal, and go to malls and restaurants. We also visit the old cities of Panama, beautiful beaches, and big islands. We are so busy but we even make time to go snorkeling. I think Panama is a beautiful place to visit for vacation.

Another reason summer is my favorite season is our time spent on the water. We go to the beach, the river, and spend time on our boat. It is the best part for all of my family because everyone enjoys being together. We have a lot of family who come to visit us from Chicago, Wisconsin, and Indiana. We take them on our airboat in Nocatee, Florida and we will stop and have lunch at the Navigator. We love to buy souvenir shirts and listen to live music there. Sometimes we have a barbeque on the boat and enjoy the areas of Siesta Key and Bradenton.

For me, enjoying family and friends is the most important thing. Whether we are on the beach, on the river, or on vacation in Panama, the summer is my favorite season. The best part is all of my family in Panama and the United States.

Yenibeth Bigott attends the ABE (ESOL Transition) class at the Family Service Center. She is in Dawn Randolph's class. Yenibeth is employed at McDonald's. She is married and has one son. She enjoys life and lives it to the fullest. She is from Puerto Armuelles, Panama.

When My Son Came

The best day of my life was when I was pregnant. My life also changed forever in many ways but the best reasons are because I quit work to become a stay at home mom and my life purpose changed.

My favorite day falls on April 12, 2000. This was the day my son Weurslyndz Brutus was born and I became a mother. That was the best gift God save me. Seeing that little face and holding the little creature that was in my belly for nine months

was a super experience! I felt that he arrived at the right moment; I will never forget that day because it gave me a lot of emotions! My oldest brother, my mom, and my son's godmother were with me. They brought me to the hospital and drove me and my little son home. They were very helpful to take care of us on that special day take care my food.

After his birth, I quit work to became a stay at home mom. Being a stay at home mom was a big change from what I was used to. I was a cocktail waitress and also was lucky enough to pose for calendars and bill boards. Now, I traded it in for changing dirty diapers and washing bottles. I liked my new job God gave me! I felt proud because of this immense blessing.

After his birth, my life changed. There was a purpose to who I am. When I opened my eyes, I wondered how having a child would change my life in a positive way. I'm now a mother, friend, and confidante. I am especially responsible to see him grow as a good person, a creature that God gave me as the most precious gift. That was my best day for me!

His birth made me understand that he wasn't the only one that had been born on that days. I was also born like a new woman. That was a big day for me, now I am a new mother having to start fighting with more energy and set a good example. The years have passed and for me he will forever be that little prince that will always count on me. Even 18 years later, I never stop hugging him and reminding him that in my hands he will always be safe. He knows that I'm here to spend life with him, guide him in the good direction.

Yva Brutus, she is from Cap –Haitian, Haiti. She is a student of the English Class at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie.

A Special Day with a Special Person

In 2015, it was my first year in America. I clearly remember February 14, that special Valentine's Day with the special person. I'll just call that special person No.1.

It was a sunny day on Saturday, in February. After breakfast, No.1 and I thought we should do something special on

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Valentine's Day. We decided to go to Clearwater Beach. I drove and we were talking and singing in the car. When we got to the beach, we looked at the blue sky, the blue ocean, and the white beach. We were so excited. This was the first time that both of us had even seen a beach such as Clearwater Beach — so beautiful. No.1 was running on the white sand to play with the sea gulls. I was sitting on the beach looking at him. I had never felt comfortable like this.

At lunchtime, I found a restaurant by the beach. We ordered seafood. I remember the food was so fresh, delicious, and a good price. In my country, if the restaurant is by the beach, it is so expensive. After eating, No.1 said, "I'll treat you today." I replied, "Really? Where did you get your money from?" He smiled and brought out some cash to pay the bill and leave a tip. The money was given to him as a gift from his grandma. No. 1 didn't know how to pay the tip, so I helped him understand how much to pay. The waitress smiled at us. She wanted to take a picture of us. We posed for the picture. After lunch, we were walking on the beach, had some dessert and tasty ice cream, then we drove back home. We both had a great time on the special Valentine's Day.

Do you know who No.1 is? Yes, he is my son Zack. He was 6 years old in 2015. On that day, I also taught him some rules of etiquette, like ladies first, open the door for the ladies, pull the chair out for others, etc. After this day, I hope he will be a gentleman. I will never forget that special Valentine's Day with him in my life!

Yuan Gao is a student at OTC – Winter Park Campus, Winter Park, FL. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

My Favorite Day is a Night

Halloween night is the one time of the year when all the ghosts, ghouls and monsters come out to play and give us all a little fright. You're probably wondering why the most terrifying night of the year is also my favorite. Well, there are a few reasons.

The fall weather is one reason I love Halloween. I know a lot of people say they can't stand the cold, but I don't mind it. Personally, I would rather put up with freezing cold than unbearable heat.

Another thing I love about Halloween is the dressing up. On Halloween you can see all kinds of weird and creepy costumes. Some people might dress up as a princess, super hero, or maybe a character from their favorite movie, tv show or video game. And others might dress as a ghost, demon or other creepy monster. You never know what you will see. The more scary or creepy the costume is, the more I like it!

A third reason I enjoy Halloween night is haunted houses. Haunted houses are always good, if you're looking to go on a spooky little adventure. I like wandering around inside seeing all the spooky decorations, such as skeletons, giant spiders and jack-o-lanterns. It's great not knowing what's waiting for you around the next corner or when something or someone will just randomly jump out at you. Maybe you like to be the one scaring other people by hiding and waiting ready to jump out and scare the life out of someone. I know I do.

Halloween night can also be celebrated by staying home. If you don't feel like going out, or if you're just lazy like me, you can still make Halloween a fun night. You can watch some horror movies or tell some scary stories and give out candy to the trick or treaters. For all of these reasons, my favorite day is Halloween night!

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

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Original Poetry

Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog

Wanderer above the sea of fog,
In my sight for moments at a time, and then gone.

You have stolen my spirit, you can have my heart,
Take it with you as you go again, and if you please,
Drown it in the roiling sea during hours dark and lost.

I watch as you soak in the smell of the rain and listen to the
roaring ocean sing its praises,
The contentedness in your stance as the tide recedes and still
again as it raises.

I know you must adore this sort of quiet, though your mind
surely does not know what quiet is,
An intrinsic piece of me seems to know this, though I have yet
to see a word pass through your lips.

And I think to myself as my dress dances with the wind, that
I could offer you my hand,
Because I think few people understand you, just as nobody
understands me.

But I already know the twists and turns of you, I can read
them so clearly when I see you on this beach,
Your back always turned away, but never hunched against the
wind,
We would fit together, with a connection not thinned by
pettiness or sin.

If only we could dance between the waves as they dip and
swell, we would take the prize all by ourselves,
The beach's sand kicking up around our ankles in the space we
left between, dusting over shells.

Maybe our love wouldn't even be love as such, but a pairing
of two souls meant to be united in time,

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Like two stars existing on either side of a skyline, in such close orbit but never meant to align.

You use that driftwood walking stick at your side to point out towards the water, as if you're tracking something just out of reach, something which only you can see; a fantasy I want to pluck from the ocean and place at your feet, like an offering in exchange for your desire.

I suppose you've left much to be inquired, my Wanderer,

Because, though you so ravenously eye the harbor, your gaze never has gone far enough,
To meet with mine.

I am in love with a man and I don't know the color of his eyes,
Or if he has a crooked tooth within his smile,
The love he might have for a mother or child,
And I cannot love him, for I do not even know his name,
I think if I did know his name, I would only ever call him my Wanderer, anyway.

It is a shame, such a shame, that I cannot bring myself to approach my love, to see his face,
For even if my heart and soul and being will only ever belong to him,
His are not mine to take.

Alyssa Cappasso is an 18-year-old GED student at St. Johns River State College in Palatka, Florida. Her teachers are Marcia Sanders and Detrick Lockhart.

Freedom

You don't know the importance of a moment until it becomes a memory.

It's exhilarating to finally be free

Freedom is an irresistible sight, like the pale pink in a summer sky.

Not another wasted minute will pass me by.

It's such a musical sound, like a bird singing in the wind.

I am at peace, my broken heart beginning to mend.

I used to race against time, hoping against fate that I'd win.

I didn't know how to be forgiven for my sin.

Somehow in this storm I call life, I lost my way.

Then one day, a little voice inside told me to pray.

Taking a leap of faith, I got down on bended knees.

I asked the Lord up above to please save me.

With your arms wide open, guide my feet and hold me tight.

I need ten thousand angels watching over me tonight.

I never knew it was possible to believe in the unseen so completely.

But then, I found Jesus and I am free.

I'm now an island of calm in an ocean of chaos.

I'm colored with emotion; I'm no longer lost.

Praying and believing has given me the love I've always sought.

Finally feeling the peaceful freedom I've chased, but never caught.

I'm one door away from heaven, nothing can stand in my way.

I have a new sense of freedom every time I pray.

Ms. Ashley Clayton is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Fort Myers, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class taught by Ms. Cynthia Phillips.

Wondrous Land

Such wondrous land between two oceans,
With sun, palm trees, and sand,
Cooling breeze roiling with surf's motion
Blowing heavy thoughts away.

Animals everywhere,
In bushes, brush, and trees,
Seem all so many times
In untouchable dreams.

It is crowded where
Travelers from all the world,
Enjoying museums, sanctuaries
Or dancing till sunlight dims to the dawn.

Of course you may not trust me,
My dear, honorable friend,
If my syllables seem pompous,
Please wait with me till the end.

Near the finish line I dare
The veil of secrecy to lift,
After all, the name of course,
Which every land supposedly has.

This paradise which I describe here
Florida was named before,
Do you want to experience it or
Miss this place which I adore?

*Anatoliy Bitkov is a College & Career Readiness student at Brewster
Technical College.*

Angels in Disguise

Angels
Angels in disguise
hidden behind the face of the neighbor who gave you a ride
hidden in the smile of the teacher who taught you when no
one else could
hidden in the fluid-filled eyes of the nurse who held you
while your mother died
Angels in disguise
Influential pull, a calling on your life, doors open, and things
align
always follow the voice in your heart
listen to your guide, stay the course, and don't doubt
all things will be made beautiful in their time.
give attention to the divine; He has a purpose for all
He has left angels behind.

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

Where I'm From

I am from green tea,
From dark chocolate
And all kinds of vegetables

I am from the freshness of my garden
I am from my colorful plants
From classic dance
And from my family's laughter

I am from the scent of jasmine
The intense formation of vanilla roses
I'm from Sunday family gatherings
And 7 members and 2 pets, from Re-Medina
And great-grandmother Queta

I'm from the passion for art
And cooking as a hobby
From my close and distant friends
And my trips alone and with companions

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I'm from the guardian angels
My feelings and thoughts
I'm from my family generations of paintings
From university careers and alfajor santafesino dessert
And Asado anywhere
From the United family
I am from my desire to fly where the wind blows

Brenda Re attends the English class at Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

HEARTS

The red passion hearts, the purple noble hearts and the pink sweet hearts are called

The sweet perfume of love

The garden of love

The innocence of the hearts

The joy of love.

In the wild forest

Love remains

Unstoppable and unshakable

At the top of the mountain

Snows fall, the snowflakes touch the ground, the winter flowers colors blossom, rosettes of green leaves inspire beauty, raindrops fall slowly upon my face and the flames of love burn so intense that the hearts melt.

In the deep ocean

An abundant life waits

Your heart is your essence, is who you are, and the meaning of life flows in your heart.

Author Carol Walker says "I wrote this poem is dedicated to my deceased mother who believed I can do everything that is in my heart."

A Dog Named Sadie

I have a cute dog named Sadie
I love her like she's my baby
She is brown and white
With a little spike
And sometimes she'll play bite me

I have a fun dog named Sadie
But she's a little bit lazy
Her favorite food
Biscuits and gravy
And she can drive me almost crazy

I have this sweet dog named Sadie
Though she can act rather shady
She's still a lady
Who likes a dog named "Brady"
And she'll love me until I'm eighty!

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

My Beautiful Mother

Each of us has a mother so precious and irreplaceable in our hearts

My mother is the most important to me
She has the brilliance of a blue sky
With unending grandiose love seen with felicity

My mother has the heart of a lion
Sensitive with her children

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Like a hard working ant
She gives me the food and clothing I need to survive

Protecting me like a hen and her chick
She covers me in the cold
Her voice like a nightingale
Talks to me in the morning

She shines like a diamond
She is bright every day to my eyes
Her words are so sweet as honey
I like when she gives me advice

My mom is a brave and struggling woman
With a heart like a fountain water, the water flows
Her kiss on the forehead.
Forgives all offenses and mistake

Jurielle S. Joseph is from Haiti. Her teacher is Ms. Katie.

STRUGGLE

Struggle
Crumbs learning
Fire Extinguisher
Put out knowledge
The harder you go
Next time what will it be
Hindering me
Is it me or is it time, life?

Jesus Holland attends EMPOWERED, a Reading Literacy Class hosted by Grace Family Church - Temple Terrace. He discovered his gift of poetry writing while working with tutors Gladys Miranda & Elizabeth Brooks.

The Funny and Charming Tiger

Whose tiger is that?
I think I know its owner is quite happy though.
Full of joy like a vivid rainbow,
I watch her laugh
I cry hello
She gives her tiger a shake and laughs until her belly aches.
The only other sounds
The break of distant waves and birds awake.
The tiger is funny, charming and deep, but she has promises
to keep
After cake and lots of sleep, sweet dreams come to her cheap,
She rises from her bed with thoughts of teddy bears in her
head,
She eats her jam with lots of bread.
Ready for the day ahead.

*Jennifer Valdez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican
Campus. Her teacher is Howard Camner.*

Personal Responsibility

My name is Linsey Cristofaro
I am 22 years old
I am the reason my best friend is dead
I do not believe in forgiveness
My soul is lost, I am drowning in drugs
I believe in Angels and demons
...and fighting between the two
I am not a good person
But it's out of my control

My name is Linsey Cristofaro
I am 23 years old
I saw God today
My soul has hope, and I am clean – for now
I can stand to look myself in the mirror
I believe in Angels and demons
...and fighting between the two
I want to be a good person
But I have no control

Actually, I Can

My name is Linsey Cristofaro
I am 24 years old
I have a favorite color, it's teal
I am beautiful and head-strong
I believe in God, True Love and second chances
I am a good mother
I believe in Angels and demons
...and I am done fighting between the two
I am a good person
People can change
I have changed
...I have control...

Ms. Linsey Cristofaro is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Lake Wells, FL with one adult son. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Myra Williams.

A Penny for Your Thoughts

The Lies That I Bought
I made you rich...you made me poor...
Poor me. Treated me poorly
I made you rich...drop of a dime
How fast I took you back each and every time
I made you rich...a dozen times a dime a dozen
The times I forgave you and it happens all of a sudden
I made you rich...what did you make me?
Made me only a quarter of your priority
I made you rich...you only gave me your heart
Quarters at a time
You stole my heart and I was your partner in crime
I made you rich...you robbed me blind...stole
My loyalty...messed with my mind
A penny for your thoughts
I made you rich
With all the lies that I bought.

Ms. Nanley Ramirez is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown Miami, FL. She is a student in the GED FastTrack class facilitated by Aide Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Life

Life is short
Life is long
Life is good,
But?!
Life is a challenge.
Live your life.
Making mistakes
Changes your life
For good or
For bad.
Life is good.
Life is short.
Live your life
As much you can!

Neura Torres Takacs is a student in the ABE/GED program at Crystal Lake Middle Community School.

The Powerful Word

With one word you give me joy; with one word you give me love.

With one word I feel safe, but at the same time you raise all my fears.

With one word I feel invincible, but at the same time you make me feel the most vulnerable being on earth.

With one word you make me cry, but I assure you that they are tears of joy.

With one word I feel that nothing is missing and that everything else simply remains.

With one word you inspire me.

With one word you fill me with hope.

Actually, I Can

With one word you give me strength, but you weaken me at the same time.

With one word you make me king, but you also make me jester.

With one word you fill my ears with music, but my mind with silence.

With one word I care about everything, and I do not care about anything at the same time.

That powerful word is . . .

. . . Dad!

Marco Osorio is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

In Due Time

If we could recognize
The atmosphere changing
Before the storm
Grow and learn if we take
The narrow path
Everything will fall into place
Like leaves falling from
A tree
We will return to our roots
Difficult situations
Lead to beautiful destinations

Ms. Tiphonie Whigham is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown Ocala, FL. She is a student in the GED FastTrack class facilitated by Aide Tina Mitchell and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Run

I am from Nicaragua. I worked as a Journalist on several media sources in my country, such as T.V, Radio, and newspapers for many years. I arrived to the United States in August, 2018. My hope is to be able to work as a journalist in the U.S. in the future. My passion is reading and writing.

Run, run, run
Young people
Run, run, run
For your life
The depredator that follows you
Hungers for your liberty
With a wanton for your life
As eagle after its prey
Empty your body and soul
And fill you with his evil way
Run, run, run
My insides feel your anguish
I want to shelter you with my body
Shield you from its murderous plague
But you must run and never look back again
Run, run, run

Valeria Gonzalez-Paniagua is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, and the teacher is Regla Requena Cuellar.

The Ocean

The ocean is powerful
Gives us enjoyment
That's wonderful

The ocean is therapy
When sad, go there
It will make you happy

The ocean is magic
A place for fun, swim, sun
All these are fantastic

Actually, I Can

The ocean is energy
Despite the weather
It welcomes everybody

Wladimir Paternina is from Colombia. He attends the English class at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What the American Dream Means to Me

An Old Parrot Learns to Talk

Do you know the saying, “An old parrot cannot learn to talk?” Well, this adage can influence us in such a negative way that we might think ourselves incapable of adapting to a new society or learning a new language.

Wrongly, people believe that the country to which we emigrate should adapt to us rather than us adapting to our new country. Our true purpose must be to respect the new laws, share the cultural richness, learn new languages and obviously work to improve our quality of life.

Along the traveled road of language acquisition, you will find individuals who can speak, read or write better than you, but don't falter, do not get frustrated, keep going. We are united by a common need: to learn to write and speak English and to prove that an old parrot indeed can learn to talk.

Let us remember the words of the Catalonian songwriter Joan Manuel Serrat: “Walker, there is no path to follow, the path is made by walking.”

Ana Rosa Gomez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Pat Bauer.

Land of Opportunity – Don't Miss It!

To me, the American Dream means the set of ideals - liberty, opportunity, and equality. It is a land where it is possible to dream of a better life. Better life to me means the ability to work, to study, and to have my own home. It means having a life with rights, security, and prosperity, and the ability to contribute in a positive and constructive way with the nation.

I have always heard that the United States is the country of opportunity, and indeed, it is! Whenever I come to this country

Actually, I Can

to travel and study, I have the opportunity to meet and talk with people from different regions (American and foreign) and in these conversations I have been able to confirm that this is really the country of prosperity.

The United States is a welcoming nation, which gives opportunity to millions of people. Here you have chance to study in good schools and quality universities. You have easy access to culture and technology.

Enjoy the freedom that the United States provides you to choose the way you will live!

Bianca Figueira enjoys being in the United States. She attends the English class at the Adult Education in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

American Dream or Nightmare?

I was born in Mexico. I grew up in a big family with a beautiful childhood. My parents taught us to go to school and work. Unfortunately, I started to work at twelve years old because I wanted to help my family, and also have my own money. At this point, I left school. Then I married at the age of twenty. We had four kids, and we were happy. Then, my husband and I wanted more for our family.

We decided to move to America, the place that most people think is the best place to live and raise their families. We started our own “American Dream.” However, moving our family was not so easy. The language was a barrier for me because the more I became independent and learned to drive, my husband started to drink heavily. I think he was feeling like he lost control over me. He turned our American dream into a nightmare, so we divorced. I had to work harder to support my kids by myself.

Then good fortune smiled again because I found my second husband, an American guy. He and my kids are my inspiration to return to school. Initially, I just wanted to be able to speak English, but I discovered that there was a bigger opportunity

that my husband was giving me. I had the opportunity to actually complete my education that I had left at 12 years old.

I have special gratitude to my teachers, Mrs. Stacey Ludwig, who taught me English and Mrs. Rhonda Currier who is actually helping me to get my GED diploma. They are very patient and kind. I am grateful to my husband who takes excellent care of me and my kids which allows me the opportunity to go back to school and to finish my education. Thank you, Jesse Cornell, my lovely husband and the Santa Rosa Adult School.

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

When Changes Happen in Your Life, Face Them and Keep Going

When people come to America we are pursuing a dream. Why do we need to come to America to fulfil that dream? The USA is one of the most important countries in the world. It has advanced technology, safety, a strong economy, a good education system, strong ethics and values, and the government takes care of poor people and tries to help them. My country is very different than America. The economy is bad, there isn't enough technology, the school system is poor and when you finish your education, it's difficult to find a job. Furthermore, the government doesn't care about the people, the politicians just worry about themselves; there is corruption, they steal people's money, and the laws exist just to protect important people.

People give up and they search for an easy way out; rob and hurt people, sell drugs and the kids grow up seeing these examples. We don't want to live in such an unsafe place! We want a secure place for our families! We want to work hard and have our rights respected.

When I came to USA, it was difficult. When I was in my country, I was a student and suddenly I came to the United States and I didn't have the most basic skill that I needed:

Actually, I Can

the language. I could not understand anybody. I decided to join an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages class). I've felt more confident since I've started. I'm learning more day by day. It has been a good experience. I have really good English teachers and I've gotten to know people from many other countries: China, Russia, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, Ecuador, and Peru, it's an amazing experience.

I'm studying in the Advanced ESOL class and my goal is to get my GED certificate and start a health program at South Florida State College. I know that I'm starting from the beginning again, but for me education is very important. I want a stable life and to provide a good example for my children.

The American dream for me means that I'm lucky to be in a country that provides many opportunities. I want to reach my goals no matter what, even if I have to start from scratch. I want to be a productive person and help other people. Remember that it's never too late to start.

This anonymous student is in the Advanced ESOL class at South Florida State College.

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