



# MOVING FORWARD

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

# **Moving Forward**

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

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



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

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## ***Preface***

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

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

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# My Experience in Adult Education

## My ESOL Experience

My decision to register in an English as a Second Language program was the right thing to do. Learning the language of the country in which you live is essential. Your wellbeing depends on your ability to communicate and understand the people around you. For me, this was not my first experience with an ESOL course, and that is precisely why I know that this program is a life changing experience.

Since my enrollment last year, my communication skills have improved a lot. Now when I am speaking, I feel more confident in myself and the people that I talk to understand me much better. I have also improved my writing skills; it was very hard for me to write in English. Now my vocabulary is more extensive, I learned many new words that I did not know before. The ESOL Future Lessons are designed to give you the whole day to day life experience; that is very helpful because you use them every day when you go to the bank, to a parent- teacher meeting, to get food from the market, or to renew your driver's license.

The Burlington English computer program is also an excellent tool to improve your writing, reading, and communication skills. Once again, the scenarios utilized in the modules are very useful in our daily activities. It is a great way to learn new words and improve your pronunciation and spelling. The conversational dialogues give you the opportunity to record yourself and listen to your own recording in order to improve your pronunciation. The program also has a lot of books for improving your reading skills. These lessons are the real deal, something that you are going to use in your daily activities. For me, that computer program is the key to success. They also have an outstanding professional staff that knows how to effectively use those tools for the benefit of the students. These people have the experience, knowledge and determination to improve your English language skills. They are always willing to help you in any way then can. I will always be grateful for all their hard work.

*Maria Velazquez is studying in the ESOL Program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City with Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*



## **My Best Journey Learning English**

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow.

Learn as if you were to live forever.”

-Mahatma Gandhi

Since I was at school in my native country, English was very difficult for me. For that, my parents enrolled me in the CBA, Centro Boliviano Americano is the abbreviation in Spanish. I felt happy to have the opportunity to receive help to overcome my weakness, but the next month of class, I was surprised when I learned that we would have a new teacher. He would be teaching us English pronunciation. One day, the teacher made me repeat words for practicing pronunciation, and when I was repeating the words, he laughed at me with some of my classmates. As a result, I felt embarrassed and gave up immediately.

Many years later, I came to the United State to visit family. Years later, when I came to live here, I had found myself face-to-face with my English fears and went through a different kind of negative feelings. To overcome the difficulties, I decided to start studying English anyway.

I knew a friend of my friend was taking English class at LWTC. She gave me the address and I went there, but unfortunately, I could not register because I didn't know enough English yet.

One day, I met again this same lady and she gave me the phone number of the tutor office, so the next day I called and went to the office. They had English class every Saturday from 9 to 12 pm and they placed my name on the waitlist for a tutor.

I started going to English class every Saturday. Not a long time after, I got an interview with the tutor, which they assigned to me. Next, I met with her at the library two days a week. She was really an amazing teacher. She taught me English from the lower level. She had the best patience teaching me listening, reading, and pronunciation. Sometimes, she read a book aloud and explained to me what she was reading so I could understand little by little, more and more. That was a marvelous time in my long journey to learning English.

Additionally, on my days off, I went to the tutor office for some hours for practicing English on the computer system. While I was writing this narrative, I remembered the ELLIS Program, the first English computer program I used.

Years later, I went to Hodges University to study English and completed the First Level. After two years, I could come to the LWTC and finally, I could continue learning English here. Recently I can tell everybody I am waking up from the fears and insecurity. Now I sometimes still feel nervous; however, I will continue studying to be successful on my journey to learning English.

*Maria Justiniano loves to live in this paradise. She is feeling thankful to her parents, and she wants everybody to be happy!*

## **My Experience in Adult Education**

My journey started in adult education more than five years ago after I decided to complete my high school diploma since I have a certificate of completion. There were many avenues that I could have taken to achieve this goal, but I knew that it would be challenging due to my learning disability. I was not sure which direction to take since I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). All I knew was that I needed a high school credential that would be accepted in higher education.

I decided to try for my GED at Jupiter High School in Jupiter, Florida. I showed up the first night, but it was not what I expecting. It was an independent learning atmosphere that I knew I could not be successful in. The room was huge and set up with computers all around. I was instructed to sit and work on a program called FCAT Explorer. We worked at our own pace with no help or teaching explanations. This was not suitable for someone like me with ADD, but people with learning difficulties can achieve their goal if they are in the right learning environment.

I looked for another school that would have more teacher support. I found a school in West Palm Beach called The Adult Education Center. Here, it felt more like a traditional high school. I signed up in the guidance office for the TABE test that would

help individualize my program based on my scores. Once I started class, the teacher gave a lesson on what was expected of me. Also, learning during the day was easier than trying to concentrate at night. I felt much more comfortable, but still needed to make my learning style known.

For years I did not say anything to my teachers about my ADD. The material went over my head. Even though I tried to pay as close attention as I could, I knew if I did not speak up I was not going to achieve my goal. It wasn't until I came into my reading class that my teacher actually handed us a form asking if we had any challenges she should know about. This time I decided to answer honestly, and this teacher took notice of my forthrightness.

To this day my teacher, Ms. Sandra Caruso, has been very influential and supportive in understanding my educational needs. I feel very fortunate to be in the Adult Education Center. Ms. Caruso has helped me to learn in a way that I could understand. Currently, I have completed two of the four requirements needed to get my GED. She also gave me the courage to tell my other teachers about my ADD if I have a problem in their class. I learned that instead of sitting back and just letting the material pass me by, I would take control of my own educational destiny.

*Veronica Kogan is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County.*

### **Path to an Education**

No matter how old are you, it's never too late to continue education. I went back to school when I came to this country. I thought that school was done for me because I had to work in order to support my family back in Guatemala. One day, I met a friend at work who started telling me about opportunities for higher education. I was surprised because he was already sixty years old. I thought to myself, "why he would be pursuing an education?" As our conversation went on I was motivated to go back to school while I was working. I was excited to go to school during the nights to work toward earning my GED.

I remembered how many people do not have the opportunity offered to me here in the USA. In my country education is not free.

We were very poor; my father couldn't afford a whole semester in school. We only went to school for four years, which was until 4th grade. Even though we couldn't go to school, we had the dream and ambition to one day go to school in the United States where there are many opportunities. I am excited that I am now able to accomplish my dream of reaching my goals through my education.

At first, I was worried that I could not do both work and school. I thought to myself, I needed to better my education in order to have more opportunity and financial stability. Finally, I made the decision to back to school. I signed up at a literacy school nearby and started to learn English. Thanks to a new friend, I was on my way to learning the language of the country I was now living in, in order to meet a goal of earning a higher education.

Adult education has helped me for so many reasons. I have learned more English which allows me to better communicate. I am able to order my own food, do homework, and help my 2 year old daughter pronounce words in English. I am blessed to have this opportunity to continue my education.

*Rigoberto Sebastian is a student in Christine Shore's class in the Lee County Adult Education program.*

## **Adult Education**

When I went to Mariner High School, I had a few teachers that didn't teach me how to read or do math. Now, 20 years later, I decided to go back to school and took the TABE test. I didn't do well on it and thought I would fail. So in order to get my score up, I had to go to adult education class. Now that I've been here, I've learned math except for those fractions, but I will get them. It is all thanks to Mrs. Dee who took the time to teach me.

Adult education has an open door for me where I can learn math, reading, and writing. The teachers here are nice and make sure I understand what they are teaching. I just want to say thank you to the teachers and adult education for changing my life, and I will get my CNA soon because of these classes.

*Angel Holscher is a student at Ft. Myers Technical College. Her teacher is Dee Gorsline.*

## **Now I Know It's All Worth My Effort**

I'm Clementina Martinez. I was born on November 25, 1976 in Estelí, Nicaragua. I speak Spanish. I have one son. His name is Kevin Antonio. I'm a single mother and I have been here in the United States for 11 years. I started to study English 3 years ago at Immokalee Technical College (ITECH). My experience in adult education has been the best way to improve my communication with different people in this country.

My native language is Spanish and I do not speak another language. For many years since arriving in the U.S.A. I thought it was impossible to learn English. When I went to different places where people only spoke English I did not understand what the people said. Pronunciation of some words was the most difficult problem to communicate. I could not understand what they said or explain my answers if someone asked a question. Many times, I felt ashamed and sad.

For those reasons, I decided to come to school and change my mind, trying to learn new things. Over time, I continued to come to school to learn new words and practice to improve the pronunciation of new words. Now, I feel more comfortable talking in front of other people and have more courage to follow and advance levels in my studies. Now I can speak and understand better than last year.

For the same reasons, I ask God for strength to continue learning and to be able to move forward and achieve my ESL. I will be proud of myself and continue to learn during my time at school and practice speaking more with people in my community.

I thank Ms. Katie Mominee for her time, and thank Ms. Helene Cusack for her advice when I need it. I thank the Lord for giving me wisdom to continue to learn step by step. Also I thank my mother for taking care of me from the sky.

*Clementina Martinez is a student at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.*

## **Personal Success**

“Success is a journey, not a destination. There are sacrifices one has to overcome in order to succeed in any endeavor.”

-Hubert Jean

When I first arrived at Lindsey Hopkins one year ago, it was excruciatingly difficult for me. I had trouble speaking English, understanding people, and I lacked vocabulary. I went on by smiling and nodding my head, and pretending as if I understood what people were saying to me. I hastily realized that I needed to do more than schoolwork; I realized that I needed to improve myself. I studied restlessly, day in and day out, not giving up because I knew that I could and I would better myself. I would finish my schoolwork, then I would spend hours teaching and instructing myself. I have to say, it promptly paid off. I began to understand better, and speak to people confidently; I knew that I was on the right track. During the beginning of my second semester, I kept cultivating myself. I had studied so much, that now I was able to hold a conversation effortlessly.

Honestly, I wasn't able to do this on my own. I had many people to support me, my counselor Ms. Hach, and two of the coolest teachers I've ever had the chance to deal with, Ms. Brownlow and Dr. Martinez. Special thanks go to my department administrator, Ms. Montenegro, and my department head, Mr. Depablo, for believing in me. The staff in this school is dedicated to helping students succeed and move forward! My friends and schoolmates supported me as well, making my school a phenomenal environment for me to evolve in. I write this story as a current GED graduate!

Some people have said to me that my journey was short...how did I do so well so quickly? Let me just say this, reaching goals is not about time, but I believe it depends more on how much effort is put in. For those who thought I did it quickly, I really wanted it, I craved it, I dreamt about it, and then I accomplished it!

I can't tell you how long you have to wait for something you really want; it depends on how much YOU want it. Only you can determine that. So, from this day forward, I encourage each and every one of you to take the first step in determining your futures.

Moving Forward

Find what motivates you, find something that is strong enough to keep you going, and hold on to your hunger for success. I promise, you will achieve everything.

*Hubert Jean received his GED while enrolled in Ms. Brownlow's Class at Lindsey. He survived the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. He would like to be a physician.*

## **My New Experience in My New Life**

Why adult education? Some people decide to take adult education in their life. They understand it is good to learn a second language because it is important for their daily life. It could help them to communicate with other people in different places, work, and countries.

I moved to the United States on June 26, 2016 with many goals in my mind. My greatest motivation to move was so I could learn more English. My major problem was that I could not speak with other people without being frightened. Some people spoke to me about the English class at West Area Adult School. One day, I decided to visit this school to research information about the English class.

The first day of orientation in West Area Adult School gave us the opportunity to write about a topic, and then we were given a little interview with the teachers. On another day, they gave us a test to prove our knowledge of listening and reading. The school offers the Burlington program, giving the opportunity to students to practice listening, speaking, writing, and reading through different lessons. Also, West Area Adult School offers Conversation Club to help students speak with other people about different topics.

Another thing that I like about the school is the teacher. I like to attend class because the teacher realizes that different activities reinforce our knowledge in English. One thing that the teacher does in class is put a question on the board for us to answer in our journal notebooks to practice writing. Another thing is that she puts us in little groups to practice speaking. She also has volunteers that work with us on our reading fluency twice a week.

She gives us tactics for listening. Now I put the radio, music, TV, and movies on in English so I can learn English quicker. It is helping me to better communicate with people.

Why adult education? My answer is that it can help me in my personal life to communicate fluently with people in different places. Also, adult education can help me when I have the opportunity to work in any area and apply for a job. It can help me when I decide to take the CPA exam in the future. Finally, I recommend Adult Education to learn English.

*Lizmarie Santa Sanabria is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **Thank You**

My name is Dimas Juarez. I am from Honduras. I work as an electrician. My purpose of joining the Adult Education class is to learn English. I am happy to be learning this language from a certified and experienced teacher. She understands the nature of her students who are made up of immigrants from several countries. Her teaching methods are very practical. She facilitates relevant lessons and activities to help us with the understanding of the subjects and to get her point across to the students in the most efficient manner. I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to learn reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English the proper way. I want to express my gratitude to my teacher for helping all of us in this class.

*Dimas Juarez is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Keep On Trying**

My name is Djems Menserou. I am from Haiti. I will not forget the first day I was in the Adult Education class. I just did not know what to expect. My teacher does not speak Creole and I cannot speak English. Please be mindful that I know some English but I just do not know what to say. So, I told myself, "Don't be



afraid. You need to try.” That was what I did, I kept trying to learn English. The teacher started with the alphabets and numbers. She asked me to write them on a piece of paper. Then she corrected my mistakes. From there, she introduced to me the “th” sound. I started to move my lips and repeat the words as I learn it on YouTube. After that, she made me listen and learn the American English alphabet pronunciation, syllables, short and long vowels, prefixes and suffixes, and word stress. I kept on coming to class and followed her teaching. Slowly, I discovered that I am able to speak English with the students and people around me. At the end of the first term, she made us compile our notes and turned it into a book titled, My First English Book. Now, I am very happy. I have a job and I am still attending class because I want to be fluent in English.

*Djems Menserou is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **I Am Glad I Found West Area**

Everyone in the world has a dream. We all want our dream to come true. It is easy but at the same time it is difficult. You just have to believe in yourself. I have been in America for a few months and I have learned a lot. When I came from Haiti, it was very difficult for me. I could not talk or do anything by myself without a translator. When I went on a job interview I could barely speak English.

One day I went to Keiser University to see if they had an English class. They referred me to West Area Adult School. The next day I visited West Area to get more information about the ESOL classes. I thought it was going to be expensive to pay for the classes, but it was not. I thanked God for that!

I am glad I found West Area to teach me English. I think it is a good school to learn English because the school is really organized. The break rooms, classrooms, and restrooms are always clean. The teachers are certified and helpful. Once my English is better, I am going to college to become an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). I will continue to work during the night and go to school

during the day. I want to be a very successful man for my wife and my family.

In conclusion, everyone has a dream. It is not easy to achieve a dream, but for me West Area Adult School has helped me start reaching my dream. After learning English, I will be able to make my life more complete.

*Fritzton Landrin is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **How to Speak a New Language**

On March 15th, 2014, I came to the United States. It was a beautiful experience. I was so excited to get to know new people. The first days it seemed to be good because I had my family around me. But after a couple of weeks, everything got normal for everybody else because they all have jobs. When I got to the point that I was trying to do things by myself, I found out I had to learn how to speak the local language because I didn't know how to speak even a word in English. Everything was hard for me. I had no friends and if I wanted to make some, I did not know how to communicate. I was not even able to go to the grocery store by myself; I always had to take somebody with me.

I tried to enroll in high school but I was already 17 years old, so they told me I was too old for it. I even told them I was not interested in taking regular classes because I already had an equivalent high school diploma from back home. All I wanted was to learn how to speak English. I started to learn on my own. I downloaded many different apps on my cellphone and bought a couple of books. I learned a few words, but it was not enough. I couldn't put them together to make sentences. I thought it was going to be a very long process to learn.

One day, a friend told me about The Adult Education Center. He said that it was a very good place to learn English. I didn't think twice about it, so I enrolled immediately. Because I had learned a few words, when I took the placement test, I started classes at level three. After three months, my English got a lot better but I still had a little trouble. I was able to read and understand only if I saw

the words written. When people used to speak to me, it was hard for me to understand and also to speak. It was like when I tried to say a couple of words, they didn't want to come out of my mouth.

In September of the same year, I started to work in a company. It required me to work extra hours so I stopped coming to school. I thought it was going to stop my process of learning English, but it did not because all of my coworkers spoke English. It helped me a lot. Everything I had learned at school started to be useful. After five months, I came back to school. I skipped level four and I went to level five and six. I earned a diploma from ESOL and after that I was able to hold any conversation with anybody. But I'm the type of person who always aims for more. I knew my English was not perfect, so that's why I decided to enroll in the GED Program to improve my English skills and be prepared to go to college.

After many complications, I finally learned, and I'm happy about it. Everything we want or decide to learn can be accomplished only if we work hard for it.

*Clisman Perez Escobar is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County.*

## **My Experience in Adult Education**

I'm learning a lot of information and building my GED skills at the Adult Education Center. I really need to develop my skills, not only for passing the GED Test, but also for life and work. There is so much to learn and so very little time. I want to learn from my mistakes, so I try and keep on trying. I love going to the Adult Education Center because I believe that with the right help, I can achieve these skills. I have a growth mindset, and I can achieve anything I want.

I love the Adult Education Center because it helps me grow as a student and as a person. All of my teachers are very knowledgeable, helpful and kind. They want to see me pass the GED test and go on to college to study computer science. I especially love my math class, and the teacher, Ms. Sosa, said that I'm almost ready to take the GED math test. Once I pass the math test, I'm going to focus and practice until I pass the other tests: science, social studies

and the RLA. Coming to the Adult Education Center has changed my life.

I want to become a person of interest and with the help of God and my wonderful teachers, I want to achieve my goals and dreams.

*Corretta Woodstock is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County.*

### **Never Too Late to Get an Education**

I never thought I would be in a classroom as an older student. Many people told me it was too late to go back to school. Sometimes I believed this was true, but now I know this is not true. As an older student, I have realized the importance of an education, the friends and teachers that I have met, and the importance of becoming more fluent in English.

On my first day of school I was very nervous. It was important for me to come to school to read, write, and communicate in English. However, in my class I did not understand anything. I was lost most of the semester. Every morning my husband encouraged me to keep going to school. He said, "If you don't go to school, you will have to go to work." Learning English became easier as I started to meet other students.

I have made friends with other students, especially from other countries. When I did not understand something I would ask the other students. They would help me and I enjoyed working together with them. I made good friends with some of them. I also liked working with my teachers because they were patient and kind. The teachers worked hard to help the students learn English.

My goal is to speak and write fluently in English and be more confident when speaking in public. Before I started coming to school, I could not speak English at the store or bank. Now I feel more confident speaking when I go to the bank or go shopping. I do not get as nervous. I also understand more conversations. I am writing better and I enjoy reading in English.

In conclusion, I know that you can never be too old to go back to school. I have realized the importance of an education and of becoming more fluent in English. I have met great friends and teachers along the way. I will never be too old to learn.

*Maria Avelar is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **My Journey to the GED**

When I decided to go back to school, I had many doubts. My main reason was, do I speak, read, and write English well enough? Am I too old to even try? Will I be treated different because I have a disability? Many ifs and worries for too long. I finally signed up at the Adult Education Center, with my daughter. I was joking with the secretary in the office, "Put me in the kindergarten class. I will not do well."

We all needed to finish a pretest. Surprisingly, I felt it was not very hard even after 20 years of no schooling. When I started my first day, I was as nervous as any student attending a new school. Nobody knew I couldn't hear. I chose not to mention it. Many still do not know. But it never stopped me from being a kind person. Within no time, I made new friends. We were inspired together to finish our goals.

I started my first class, mathematics, which was the easiest subject for me, as I always was good at numbers. My teacher noticed fast that I was bored and needed more, so he showed me programs that helped me progress faster.

My social studies teacher also believed in me and told me it wouldn't take much for me to finish if I believed in myself.

Language was my hardest subject that in the end became one of my easiest subjects, thanks to a teacher who guided me to many programs that I inhaled with no problems.

The first week we met our career manager who asked us when we would expect to get our diplomas. I said I hoped to within a year. At that time I was still very concerned about my English

writing. A couple weeks went by, and our teachers encouraged us to take the pre-GED tests. How bad could it be? I finished them all within a week and was very surprised by the numbers. They showed how well I had learned in just a couple of weeks.

So I decided to take the real GED test within four weeks. While I was involved with hosting a big cultural event, I managed to pass them all in my first semester of school! The first time I graduated in Germany with a secondary degree was in 1994. I finally received my GED Diploma and graduated December 1, 2016.

Thank you to my teachers, each of them in their own way, my principal, and many other kind people around me who encouraged me to be the best I could be.

*Heidi Wodtke received her GED diploma while attending Dunbar Community School. Her teachers were Anna Franta, Judy Peck, and Andy Hill.*

## **My Days in School**

My name is Araceli Romero. I'm from Mexico and I want to share my experience at school and how it changed my mind about the importance of education. In my case I began attending English class for new opportunities for my family and me, and to work on my future.

I like to come to school because every day I learn something new. For example, this year I learned a lot about Early and Modern American History. It is very interesting, such as how America's Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution of the United States, and separated the powers into three branches. In my classroom all of the students share their opinions about slavery, the presidential election, and duties of government officials.

Ms. Katie, my teacher, is a great, intelligent person. She teaches me that I can do different activities or ways to work together with classmates in small group. She has a vocation, and she inspires me because she is a woman like me. I forgot for a long time what I wanted when I was young. I wanted to study a career.

Changing my mind to focus on my studies created an opportunity to prove that my family is strong. Some people think that immigrants are inferior, and that makes me feel sad because I know that is false. Immigrants are very important. I support my children in their homework to maintain good grades and prepare for college. Through learning English, we can be part of the U.S.A. tradition and culture without forgetting our Mexican roots.

In conclusion I know that I made my best decision in my life and for my family. It is not easy but I am glad. I keep working for my future daily toward my goals, and always my family is with me.

*Araceli Romero is a student of the ELL program at Immokalee ITECH. She is from Mexico. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.*

## **The Will Power**

When I first came to the U.S., I was so excited to start a new experience in a different part of the world. I've set many goals and I still believe that if someone wants something really bad, nothing can stop them.

So, to start with I thought that my speaking English was quite enough to at least talk with people and do all things by myself. But I was wrong. The English I learned in my country wasn't enough at all. I found myself stuck. I could barely keep a conversation with anyone and that was my first struggle. Then I had to make a plan and make it work.

So my husband and I looked to find a school or center where I could learn English and found ESOL classes. I enrolled and it all started from there! I started the experience by going to school, seeing my friends and my lovely teachers, and most important learning more English. Step by step I started to feel myself more comfortable and more confident when someone talked to me, even people outside the school. I can't describe how happy I was that I could achieve something I needed so much.

In conclusion, what matters is that if we want to achieve, we should have the proper willpower to carry out our plans. Because

standing in one place and wishing for success isn't a great plan. Without determination we will not be putting in enough strength to make our plans a success. A person who lacks determination will get down-hearted and detour from his/her plans if he/she fails. But a man with enough willpower goes on until he succeeds.

Willpower is the key to the greatest of achievements. The more we are determined to win, the more we are on the road to success.

*Mariem Limam is studying in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teachers are Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*



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

### **Between North and South: A Difficult Decision**

My son and I came to the United States from a beautiful city, full of color, the aroma of coffee, and wonderful people. It is located in the continent of South America and its name is Medellin, Colombia.

Fourteen years ago I came with my son, to the “city that never sleeps:” the big and majestic city of New York. We arrived just in time for winter. I couldn’t believe the little snowflakes coming out of the sky made the trees and houses so beautiful. It was like a fairy tale. But the beautiful snow lost its magic the next day when the streets were cleared. The little white flakes became big, brown mountains.

When my son tasted hamburgers and pizza, he became addicted and didn’t want “mama food” anymore. The trains and buses were so modern. The language was so difficult. I didn’t understand anything.

My son and I were living in a dark and cold basement with only one window. For two long months, I was crying often each day, and one night I decided to return to my country. When I told my son, he looked at me with his tender face and said, “Mama, please don’t go back to Colombia. I love this country and want to stay here.”

I came here looking for a better future for him. Now, after all these years, my son showed me that when you want something you can make it come true. He decided to serve his new country and join the Air Force, but he would have to work very hard to lose seventy pounds before they would accept him. With hard work and dedication he was able to lose the weight and enlist in the Air Force.

My son has had many promotions and achievements so far in four years. He has worked in different countries, and next year he will be in Korea. The most important thing is that he is a good man and is happy.

After many years of struggle and sacrifice, I am the proud mother of a man who loves and risks his life for our new country. Staying in the north was my best decision.

*Marta Miley is from Colombia and has lived in Dunedin, Florida for 14 years. She has one son, of whom she is very proud. Her tutor is Linda Grimshaw at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.*

### **A New Chapter in My Life**

I am a married woman, I have two daughters and their ages are fourteen and nine. But now I want to share the turning point in my life. It is about the change that my family and I made.

In October 2015, my husband had a job offer in Tampa. It was the moment where everything changed, since we had to make the decision to leave our country and start a new story in a new place. It was a very difficult decision for both of us and for our daughters, since our whole family lives in Puerto Rico. My husband came first to the United States and then in May 2016, our daughters and I arrived in Tampa, Florida. In the beginning, it was a bit difficult to adapt. It is a learning experience and a different place where we now live.

Gradually over time we have managed to get more attached to our new lifestyle. Sometimes it's a bit difficult, because we miss our parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles a lot. At the same time, I feel satisfied for all the changes we made and benefits for our family.

*Zehira Sierra Ramos is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Ed. Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

### **An Unexpected Journey**

I moved to the United States eleven years ago, when I was eighteen, with my mother, Gloria. When she and I came to this country, we didn't know we were going to stay for so long. I was

supposed to stay for one year, find a job, save money, and go back to Mexico to continue studying. But after living in the United States for one year, I changed my mind and decided to stay permanently.

There are many reasons that made me make that decision, but the most important are safety and the job opportunities. My mother and I had a difficult time in Mexico. We experienced a lot of abuse and violence from my father, but here in the United States we feel more secure and have never had a problem finding a job. If I stayed in Mexico, I could have gone back to school, started a career, and still not made enough money to have a decent life because the economy in Mexico is so bad. We may not have a lot of money, but we have a place to live and food on the table. We feel safe and protected by the laws here, and the government has many programs that protect women from abuse.

Making the decision to stay in the United States was the best decision I've ever made. I have an amazing group of friends who love, care for, and support us; they are here for us with whatever we need. I have an incredible boyfriend. His name is Dominic; I plan to marry him one day and have a beautiful family with him. Everything in life just seems to have fallen into place. With all this being said, I want to pass a message on to the person reading this. Take chances; go and make a bold move. You never know what can happen or what to expect. I never imagined that my life was going to turn out this way if I didn't take that chance.

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

## **My Mistakes**

My whole life I was a person who was interested in science. Math, geometry, biology, computers were my obsession. When I was a child, I didn't spend time with my mom in a kitchen; I didn't like dolls and girly things. My playground was in my father's workshop. I was a daddy's girl, making furniture, fences, and dog houses. I enjoyed seeing the final project, especially when you know that your hands made it. That was something that made my day. So it was easy for me to decide what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Architecture and design are my passion. I couldn't explain how happy I was when I started to study at the University of Architecture and urban planning. When you like what you are doing, it isn't difficult to make a great project and have high grades. That was the best four years of my education. New computer programs, projects, presentations, researching, team work, new friends, new challenges, a lot of fun and no night's sleep.

After my fourth year of studying I decided to come to America and try to find my dream job, here in the Promised Land. But I made one big mistake. During my education I didn't pay attention to languages, especially English, although I had English, French, Latin, Russian, German subjects at school. I wasn't interested in them. So when I came to America, I had a huge problem.

The first month and a half I couldn't find a job. My friend wrote down typical interview questions and answers, and if somebody asked me some question which wasn't on that list, that was a problem. I couldn't understand what people wanted to tell me. I had a feeling like I was suffocating. I started to lose my confidence; I felt helpless. It was very embarrassing for me, a person who is highly educated, who literally can't make a basic conversation.

Instead of starting to make friendships with Americans, I became a hermit and totally did the opposite thing. I started to escape from Americans, and continued to spend time with my Serbian friends. Time was passing, and my English stayed on the same level. When I figured out what I was doing, I made a little progress. I started to speak in English, but only when I was alone with that person. Hands and legs were my tools for conversation.

Today, after more than two years I can see huge progress, but still not good enough to start looking for my dream job. That's why I decided to start with this school. When I saw that I'm in the 7th level I was positively surprised. This is definitely wind at my back and a new challenge.

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

## **Being Different can be a Challenge**

Growing up being different wasn't always easy. As a young child I was attacked by two dogs. Being attacked changed the outcome of my life because I had to live in and out of hospitals. I faced many challenges, and it changed the course of my life.

Being a child and spending many days and weeks in the hospital had its obstacles. I spent 14 hours in my initial surgery. I ended up having over 2,000 stitches, spending two days in a coma and three weeks in the P.I.C.U. When I was finally sent home, I continued with home care. After my parents went back to work, I was sent to a private school, where nurses taught the program. Since I was attacked at just three years old, this one incident caused me to lose school time, vacations, and normal childhood fun. Throughout the years, I continued with surgeries and doctors' appointments.

Going through my childhood I faced many challenges! One thing I feared the most was wondering what others thought of me. People assumed I was handicapped. As a young child, I remembered people telling my mom that I should not be brought into public. Kids bullied me and never wanted to be around me. They saw me and always got scared. I had to learn how to cope with the way I looked, and being different will always be a challenge for me.

Even though being different wasn't all that easy, it taught me a valuable lesson: never judge a book by its cover. I never allowed the way people talk about me to bring me down. I used that to push myself to be a better person, and to exceed what others expected of me. Going through the past 20 years I learned how to accept myself and help others to accept themselves.

My family never looked at me differently; they accepted me for who I am. The organization I want to thank the most is the Shriners' Children's Hospital. The Shriners' Hospitals for Children is a network of 22 non-profit medical facilities across North America. Children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, and cleft lip and palate are eligible for care and receive all services in a family-centered environment. They taught me to see myself for who I am on the inside. They made things easier with living in and out of the hospital and facing many physical

and social challenges. I sometimes give speeches at the Shriners' Children's Hospital to let other children know that it's ok to be different. I am thankful that this incident happened, because it changed the course of my life!

*Stephanie Hembree is a 23-year-old market manager for Voortman, but wants to be a paramedic. Her GED instructor at East Lee County High School is Ariana DiRenzo.*

## **Looking Back and Moving Forward**

Everyone has that time in life when no one can tell them anything. Well let me tell you a story that turned my life completely around. Growing up in Belle Glade there wasn't much to do besides play ball. When I became a teenager, I started hanging around the wrong people. But at that time I wasn't thinking. I started hanging out late, getting into fights and getting shot at.

One night my friend and I were sitting outside playing dominoes when we noticed two people running through the alley with guns. We all began to run. A couple of shots were fire. I figured everyone got away safe until we looked around. We didn't see Willie. As we were walking back the same route we had ran, we noticed that he was lying in the grass. He was dead! That was a huge turning point in my life. After that, I started to question myself. "Is this worth living?" I lost a close friend. Seeing his mom cry hurt me because I wouldn't want my mom to feel her pain. That night still haunts me to this day. When I see young boys that are going down the same path I ask some of them "would you rather your family see your picture on a shirt or in person?"

Now that I'm older, I look at life differently and I approach life differently. I choose my friends carefully. A real friend would want you to succeed in life; not throw your life away. Looking back, I regret doing some of things I did, and that is why I changed.

*Raymond Colbert is a GED student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. His teacher is Rosa Vazquez.*

## **Opportunities Missed**

My name is Ms. Letitia Whitaker. I'm 41 years old, an African American female with one 26-year-old son and 2 grandsons. This is my fourth stay in the Department of Corrections; I've never had the chance for work-release or rehabilitation throughout the years of my criminal behavior or drug addiction.

My criminal behavior since the age of 18 has been white collar: banks, checks and credit cards, etc. However my criminal behavior has been my stinkin' thinking and poor choices in life that has constantly caused me, my son, my family and significant other heartache and pain.

Throughout my years of drugging and entertaining my criminal behavior, I never once stopped to think that maybe I was hurting or affecting anyone other than myself. I was the one doing the time and I was the one filling my body with all those different man-made drugs, not realizing I could have died at any moment or lost my mind like most acquaintances of mine.

I've been shot and almost died. I had to carry a colostomy bag for one month due to the fact the bullet corrupted my intestines. The bullet is still lodged by my spinal cord; if the doctor would have removed it, I would have been paralyzed for life. During my years running rampant, I could have been dead or had life in prison. I've taken the police on high speed chases. One of those times that I wrecked, I ran into a church with my truck. I jumped out and ran while on drugs, which was ecstasy: a pill called green monkeys. I had at least eight of them in my system. When the police were chasing me I just stopped running and lay down. I had to be rushed to the hospital that night because I had an asthma attack and my heartbeat was irregular due to the drugs.

During my third stay in prison I was at Hernando CF. There I re-directed my life to God. Only this time I was so serious about my salvation, I began to talk to God -- really talk to Him. I cried out from deep within my soul because I was finally "TIRED!" God began to open up doors in my life that I thought were closed, and He began to restore relationships that I had damaged.

It simply took God allowing me to feel where in the past I was numb. He allowed me to really live instead of merely existing,

to know that throughout all my mess He'd blessed me with life, health, peace of mind and a family that loves me deeply. That became the turning point in my life.

*Letitia Whitaker is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She loves to read and write, aspiring to be a published author one day. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class being taught by Ms. Brenda Johnson.*

## **My Changes**

I can't believe I'm writing this, but I feel something good inside of me while I'm doing this. I feel that I need to blow it out and this is the right moment to proceed with my feelings. I finally realize who I am. "I am Ruby Mae Williams." I am somebody and I always have been. It took jail and prison to help me find "Ruby." I have been drug free for 21 months. Until now it's been 33 years since I been clean. I'm crying because this has brought up so many memories. I do thank Jesus.

Marijuana was my drug of choice, but I also have been on other drugs throughout the years. When I entered Lowell, the Women's Reception Center, I felt useless due to my outside life. I had my mind set on getting out, living that life. Then I realized that I wasn't going anywhere, until the time came for me to go home.

I went to my classification interview on 05/06/2016; it was on a Friday. I decided that I would try to get my GED certificate. Well, that was the best decision I ever made. Then I thought that maybe I was too old for school, but no, I'm not. You are never too old to learn. I'm hoping that once I get my GED, I can help others. I also want to be able to help my grandchildren and even my great-grandchildren. I'm so happy that God has guided me to do better for myself. He took all of the negative thoughts away from me.

When I got transferred to Gadsden Prison, I finally found myself. I started school, and I learned so many new things that I'd never known in my entire life. Well, I owe thanks to one of the most "awesome females" in the whole facility, Ms. Pugh. She is one of the most outstanding and understanding teachers that I have ever met. Ms. Pugh is an energizer, she never gives



up, she explains over and over until you get it. If you don't get it, then that's because you're not listening. Sometimes we feel that she works us too hard, but it's for a reason. I have learned my division, multiplication, fractions, geometry, algebra and still learning more. I don't like it that I had to come to prison to better myself. But if I would have stayed on the outside, I would never have reached a turning point in my life.

I'm not angry anymore. I know there is a reason for everything. I have no CCs and no DRs and I also have a nice classification officer. But most of all I thank God for everything, especially for Ms. Pugh in my life. I would like to say "thank you Ms. Pugh" for helping me with "A Turning Point in my Life."

*Ruby Williams is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a mother of 4, with home being Labelle, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

### **My Turning Point**

My name is Amana, I am 21 years old and I am from Bangladesh. When I was 18 years old, my family arranged my marriage to a man who I had never met and that I knew nothing about. I faced many problems because of this arrangement.

After only 3 months of being married, my husband left me with his family to return to his job in the United States. That was a very difficult time for me and I had to slowly adjust to life with my husband's family. I continued with my studies and also took care of my in-laws. When my studies were complete, my husband arranged for me to get an immigration visa to the United States. I was so excited, and on October 23, 2016 I finally received my visa. I was sad the day that I had to leave my family and I cried a lot.

It had been 3 years since I had seen my husband last. November 1st is our anniversary and we were finally able to celebrate it together. We have no children yet.

*Amana Juma is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL class at JIEC/ East Pasco Adult Education Center in Dade City, Florida.*

## Once You Move

Our lives are full of changes. Many things are going on every day, and you have to keep up with them. Sometimes changes happen so fast that you have to run to stay in the same place like Alice did in the famous book.

Usually, you're used to all this stuff, but once something happens that turns your life upside down, you decide to move to another country. As long as you do it, your life is filled with a variety of compromises.

**Compromise #1:** The country you choose uses another alphabet, so you have to adjust to the fact that nobody pronounces your name properly. The only thing that left for you to do is to choose a new one.

**Compromise #2:** Responding to the simple question, "Where are you from?" you name not only the country, but another five countries around it.

**Compromise #3:** You see your family and friends once a year. A good part is they love you harder because the less you are seen, the more you are loved. A bad part is you miss them like never before.

**Compromise #4:** Half of your life's knowledge is useless. You grew up with other customs, read other books, listened to other music, etc. That's why you don't understand some jokes.

**Compromise #5:** You adjust to the fact that everything is big in your new country. You buy a big car and drive it on big roads to big stores. You eat out at big restaurants that serve big portions. You always ask for a box to go and eat this food for the next two days.

At the same time, you enjoy the unique experience that most people in the world will hardly ever have. You live the second life inside your first one. You practice your English every day and start not only speaking, but even thinking in it. You make new friends from all over the world. You learn a lot about different countries and cultures and tell about yours. Your new friends are surprised when you say that most people haven't ever tried tacos because there are not any Mexican restaurants in the country

you're from, or there're only seven McDonald's restaurants in the whole country, or the people celebrate two Christmases on two different days – Catholic and Orthodox.

You compromise a lot, and you're challenged with a new way of life every day. Of course, sometimes you ask yourself if you made the right decision to move here, but you know you love challenges, and you like to overcome them successfully. So you know the answer, don't you?

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

## **Becoming a Mother**

My life has changed completely. As I age, I have had much experience and gained more knowledge in this life. When I was single, I was thinking about school, a job, and having a good time. I had no responsibilities at all. As the years passed and I became mature. I decided to become mother. This was the best thing in my life and totally changed my life. Becoming a mother was the turning point in my life.

Many people think that being a mother is not an easy thing and I think that way too. Motherhood is a strong responsibility that one has and must know how to do. We eventually learn only by trial and error. My daughter taught me so much. She indirectly taught me to become more patient with other people, to have confidence in what I need and want, and to make the best decisions based on the circumstances I was in.

Last year I came to live in the United States with my eight-year-old daughter. For us it was something different, something new, something exciting, and something very fearful too. We had to learn the different language, customs and ways to live in the USA. Everything was different around us and we had to have the confidence to learn these different things.

In this country my daughter and I will have opportunities that will benefit us in the not too distant future. I thank God he helped

me with the changes I am going through. But more so, I thank my daughter for teaching me to bring out my confidence I need to do it. Motherhood is the turning point in my life.

*Alicia Lainez is a single mother and a new member of the Parent Power Alliance Program at Forest Hill Elementary school. Her learning mentor is Trish Rowland.*

## **A Better Me**

Have you ever looked at someone and thought, “I wonder what he/she has been through?” Well, I am here to share some personal experiences that have happened in my life and how they have made me who I am today.

Growing up I never had a father, my mother was a single parent raising two kids. As a child, life was hard for my family and me. We had many a birthday and Christmas that came and went without much fanfare. I always had people doubt me and say that I would not account for anything in life and would fail miserably. Growing up wasn't too fair to me, but I can't complain because I am alive and healthy.

Ironically, academically I was always a good student. I always made good grades, but I had a horrible attitude and was a self-proclaimed troublemaker. I knew it would foreshadow much worse in the future if I kept it up... unfortunately, I did. I loved to fight. Thankfully, I pursued it by becoming an amateur boxer. I was incredible at it until I injured my rotator cuff and had to have surgery. Without an outlet to release my anger, my behavior got worse over the years. I was out of control. By the time I was 10, I had smoked marijuana for the first time.

By the age of 15, I became a deviant. I not only smoked marijuana daily; I did so several times a day. I stole from stores, and burglarized people homes, cars, etc. I became someone who was a “savage.” I did not think; I just did whatever came to mind without hesitation. Once I turned 17, I had already experienced firing a gun, street fighting, drug dealing, and even homelessness.

From the ages of 18-20, something began to change in me. I can now say, I have matured enough to say no to drugs, the streets,

gangbanging, stealing, and everything else that could potentially put my life in jeopardy. My mother was my catalyst to change. She has always been there for me. I realized that I was hurting my own flesh and blood. I decided then to move away and start fresh. I began setting goals for myself. The gym and basketball has helped to keep me on the right track. I tried pursuing boxing again, but my rotator cuff is still recovering. I now repeat my new mantra every day, "Patience and dedication; then success will follow."

*Anthony Romero is a student at Miami Dade College North Campus, where his teacher is Cassandre Jean-Pierre.*

## **Loving Me**

In life, different people have different situations. In my life, I have endured many things. Life can be, as they say, what you make of it. Well, I chose to make it hard in the beginning. My life started taking a turning point when I was in middle school. I began to skip class and do things that I was ashamed of. Being a young woman comes with many responsibilities. I felt ashamed of myself because I did not know how to handle myself appropriately.

When I went to the 9th grade, I did not think my life could get any worse, but it did. Schoolwork started getting harder for me. My self-esteem started to plummet. I remember looking at everyone else and saying, "I wish I was like her." Little did I know, being like someone else was worse than wanting to be like myself.

I always felt like I was on the outside looking in. Constantly wanting to do the things I thought were cool. Things would look so good as an outsider that I started to forget what was important. Throughout my four years in high school, I was like a descending score. After my 12th grade year, I did not graduate because I wanted to be like everyone else. Every day of my life, I had to think about not graduating from school. I eventually started smoking weed and doing hard drugs. I found myself looking in the mirror and not being happy with myself. I started to think I was too far-gone. So much so that I almost gave up on myself.

Crying became my daily habit. I did not even want to get out of bed in the mornings. If I did, it was to harm myself. I had lost sight

of what was important - me. Being happy meant the world to me, but I just could not find out how to put that into play. Things took a toll on me. Being trapped in my own mind made me my own worst enemy. Then one day, I began to focus on what I could do to make ME happy and love ME. When I put that into effect, my life started to change. From then on, I started to look for solutions to my problems. I now see my life as a very beautiful flower that has blossomed in all the right ways. I am beginning to love myself and do things that I thought were not possible like going back to school. Today I stand before you, not only tear free, but loving life.

*Latesha Rivers is a student at Miami Dade College North Campus.*

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

A turning point in my life is when I came to realize that I needed to be a better person, father, and role model. I want to be a better provider for my family. I've also set higher goals for myself and want to pursue my education and go as far as I can go. In order to do so, I learned that I must break away from my past, change my environment, and turn the page in my life. I had to put my pride aside to find myself and what I want to do in life. I thought I had the answer to life and what I wanted but after job seeking and soul searching, I've once again realized that without an education, I would be forever chasing my dreams. I want to be an example to my children and show them that no matter what obstacles one faces in life, you can achieve your dreams by believing in yourself and that hard work does pay off.

I realized that achieving your dreams requires hard work and dedication. I believe that in order to see a change, one has to make a change within one's self. I had to break away from the patterns of my past and build a better life for myself and those around me. In striving for success, I am determined to succeed. I learned that one has to put in as much effort as they can and take a step forward in life. Taking the extra step, going the extra mile, means bettering yourself so that you may have a future. Nothing in life comes free.

In chasing my dreams, following my heart, and believing in myself, I took the initiative to enroll in adult education classes.

Moving Forward

I intend to graduate the summer of 2017 and pursue my college education. I really don't know exactly what I want to study. This is why I enrolled in Career Pathways, to find out what career is suitable for me. They say that "success is in the eye of the beholder," so I'm going to take hold of my success. The key to success is knowledge and knowledge is power. My future is ahead of me, and I can't wait to get started.

*Carlos Santa is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County.*

### **Positive Changes**

We all have turning points in life, right? Well I'll give you mine all the way from "A to Z." "A to Z" seems like a lot, but I'll shorten it for you. Three key parts should do. So let's begin. Where was I? What was the time, mind frame, and whereabouts?

The year was 2003 during some month or another. It was a time when I thought I was a "thug." The mind frame then was robbing, fighting, sex and even selling drugs. I was sixteen and running the streets of Broward County. You couldn't tell me too much of anything. This is the start to it all, believe it or not. There have to be some things that started the change. For me, it seemed that trouble would find me when living the lifestyle of a "thug." Trouble is like your best friend. The worst was getting in trouble for others. That was the killer. Can you believe people think that it's "G", good, "gravy" or "golden," when you're not the one who got caught? It was this that was the turning point for me. I had to really look at my life and ask, "Is this what I really wanted?" Thugs don't live that long and that was my biggest concern.

By now I was having kids. Was that the way I wanted them to see me? No, it was not. I never once looked at my father as a "thug." He was always a hard working man. That's what I wanted my kids to see when they looked at me. Now in truth, it wasn't always fun. I knew what I wanted to be. It was this thought that kept me moving forward. Believe it or not I got more comfortable with who I had become. Hearing the positive feedback has been my reward.

*Hiawatha Thomas, Jr. is an Adult Education Student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Rosa Vazquez is his teacher.*

## **Turning to Success**

The day I reached a turning point in my life was two years ago. After trying one GED program and applying numerous times to a job without a diploma, I knew I couldn't start a career and had no source of income. Not being able to get a job is depressing.

I started going back to school two years ago on December 17, 2015. I started my GED class and the next night I started taking a trades class. I really enjoyed it. I even succeed in both classes. I was doing better than others who started before me. I passed the Social Studies section of the GED, putting me one step closer to getting my GED.

Recently, I returned to the same program. This time I decided to take an electrical class. I really like it. I love learning new things and I'm a quick learner. My main focus is the other three sections of the GED. I am motivated to pass the test and I believe anything is possible.

After graduating from school, I plan to achieve other goals like having my own business, where I can be the boss. I want a good life for myself and family. I want to show all of the people who thought I couldn't succeed that I did in fact succeed. My stepping stones are laid out. I have to stay focused and walk by faith through it all so I can have the life I want.

*Elquandra Butler is a GED student at West Tech Educational Center in Belle Glade, FL. Rosa Vazquez is her teacher.*

## **How Prison Changed My Life**

Prison has changed my life. I have never been to prison before but since I have been here, I have seen so, so much that I now know that this is a place that I never want to come back to. Corrections officers here tell you when to eat, when to sleep, and what you can or can't do. I like my freedom, and I love my family too much to ever, ever come back to this place again. In my mind, this place would change anyone.



This place has taught me that I will never write a bad check ever again or ever use any drugs ever again. I would rather be at home with my family and have my freedom. And also the things that you see here are just not normal to me. One thing I can say is that I sure have learned my lesson. The food they give you is nasty and most of the guards are nasty but I know they have to be so you don't come back to prison. I just know that I love my freedom and family too much.

On June 08, 2017, I can put this nightmare behind me and say that this was a real learning experience.

*Christy Pribble is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She loves dogs and cats, and she also loves to help other people. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Joy Brown.*

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

My life has changed a lot since I left Bolivia. First, I got married, and I had three children. Second, my routine and my priorities have changed.

When I lived in Bolivia, I finished my Bachelor's degree and I started to work immediately. My last job was at a telecommunications company. I was single, so my priorities were to help my parents and to take care of my niece. I had time to go to the gym and meet with my friends in our favorite cafe or restaurant. I loved to dance, so every time I could, I went with my friends to the discotheque. My birthdays were very special because my friends and my family made sure they did so many things I loved for me. They were very thoughtful.

Now I am living in the United States. I got married 12 years ago and had three children. I do not work regular hours because my husband and I agreed that our priority was to take care of our children. I have my own export company. I mostly spend my time with my children and help them with their homework. I stay home and play with them or look for something fun to do. I want to improve my English, so I enrolled in an English class.

I miss my life in Bolivia, but I enjoy being with my children and my husband in this country. Now they are my priorities and I love it!

*Claudia Ogando is a student in Zuly Rosello's ESOL class at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus.*

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

Life was starting to get better. I wasn't concerned about a thing in the world. I was excited to see my sister, Crystal. But Crystal's eyes looked full of despair and worry when she came into see me.

Crystal and my brother-in-law, Cleve, stared at me with grief in their eyes. Then all of a sudden these bitter, ear piercing words came out of Crystal's mouth. "Celine, Mom is dead."

In that moment, nothing seemed real. Sharp pains rushed up my spine, and I felt like I no longer existed. There are no shortcuts or ways to escape the explosions of feelings that paralyze your mind and body at a moment like this. At that moment, it was a turning point in my life. I knew I would never be able to turn back. It is life-changing. It is painful, heart-wrenching, and devastating to lose your mother. It doesn't make sense.

Having to say goodbye to your mother is an unbearable pain we must all face head-on one day. I was 15. You will try to fill a void that can never be filled because there is no other type of love in this world like your mother's. It is like having a heart transplant, just without that heart. A heart that no longer beats.

The crazy thing is that every time you think about your mother as a memory and not as a loved one you've lost, all the moments you two had shared together, laughing, crying, and loving every single moment, will rush through your mind. These vivid memories will be the only things left to connect you to your mother.

Despite all the hardships you'll face in life after this tragic turning point, one thing I can advise is don't give up or become an angry person. All that bitterness is just going to set you back and make you full of regrets. Learning how to cope and grieve

after losing your mother is going to be a lifelong wound, but it may make you grow into a stronger person.

Take everything you go through from this experience and grow into a better person. Don't let the loss of your mother make you miss your purpose in life. Rebuild and try to grow from this traumatic event. Look at this as a way to figure out who you really are. Make sure you hold onto that warm smile and hug you got from your mother. It's a feeling that will last forever.

It's okay to grieve and feel the way you do. Just don't let it overtake you!

*Celine Heflin is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

### **My Daughter, My Hero**

Everyone has a turning point in his or her life. You may not have come to that point in your life yet; however, I did two years ago when I delivered my daughter Ayla. On November 12th, 2014, my heart immediately filled with happiness because I was blessed to deliver a healthy baby girl. She weighed 8 lbs., 12oz and was 21 inches long. Little did I know, she would make me more responsible and give me strength and joy.

I didn't know how hard it was to be a parent until the day God brought her into my world. For instance, managing my money was hard because it was my obligation to get her things prior to my necessities. The lack of sleep one gets is also unbelievably draining. Regardless of the challenges I faced, the responsibilities of being a new mother made me more responsible.

Ayla is small, but so powerful to give me strength without saying a word. The reason why I get up everyday and go to work and school is because of her. Being a single mother is tough work, so the goal in my life is to assemble a brighter future for her. Because I strive to give Ayla the best life, she makes me stronger. If she observes my lifestyle, maybe one day she will understand that all of the choices and sacrifices that I have made were for her.

The hardest thing that I have had to deal with in my life so far is losing a family member. Seeing Ayla smile everyday puts some of the joy that I lost back into my heart. Sometimes it is hard to pick myself up and be optimistic, but then I remember that the life that I am living isn't just for me anymore; it's for her too. Even in the worst of times, Ayla is my reminder to live life to the fullest and make as many memories as you can because tomorrow isn't always promised to us.

My life changed two years ago when God put my daughter, Ayla, into my world. Ayla has made me more responsible, she has made me stronger, and she gives me joy. For one person to make you sacrifice things without even thinking twice is the most amazing feeling one will probably ever experience. To be the one that changes her world is such a blessing because it gives me the opportunity to change my life for the better.

*Brittany Boyd is a student at ACE Ft. Myers Technical College, where her teacher is Darlene Carrillo.*

## **Never Too Late**

It wasn't until a couple of days before my 20th birthday that I knew there would be a turning point in my life. I knew I wanted better for myself. I wanted to be able to wake up in the morning, knowing there's always a purpose of living. I was only fourteen years old when I became an adult. I made many mistakes when I was younger, but that's because I didn't have my parents by my side to guide me through a lot of things. I am not blaming my parents for my faults, but I know my life would've been completely different if I had the support and love every kid at that age need. I felt lonely, living in this kind of world with no guidance, all alone. It was like swimming in an ocean full of sharks.

Even though I faced many obstacles at such a young age, I overcame them. I fought, I stayed positive and I remained patient. One major mistake I made was not finishing high school on time. For three years I suffered major depression because I felt like without my diploma I could not possibly do anything in life. As the years went by, I had this crazy mindset, thinking it was already too late. "It's never too late" my best friend uttered out,

as I cried to her, explaining my issues and difficulties. I started to think more of going back to school.

One day my father reached out to me because he had finally come to the United States. He told me he got married and he wanted me to move in with him. I explained to him all the problems and difficulties I faced throughout those years of him and my mother not being a part of my life. I was a little bit sad about moving all the way from New York to Florida, but eventually I made the move. I made the move because I wanted better for myself and for my future. As I am writing this, I am currently in school, working on getting my high school diploma, working on myself in general. I'm working on everything I have missed the past couple of years, enjoying life a little more and remaining happy with all the support and love I am getting.

*Marie Prophete is a student at Dunbar Community School, where her teacher is Gabriela L. Pesantes-Ortega. She is from Haiti.*

### **My Turning Point**

My turning point happened when I began going to Seven X 7 monthly community wide call to prayer to win souls for Christ. I had been going with my church but they moved to Atlanta and that left me without a pastor. I continued going to Seven X 7 where I asked Pastor Murphy Sr. what they were going to do with me since my church left me. He said I could still continue to come. He took me in and let me stay. I became part of them. I am very happy to be there because I love God and people. As time went on I grew to admire Pastor Murphy for being there for me. He is a good Pastor, he just can't sing. He is easy to put up with, he depends on God, and he is easy to understand. He lets God use him to speak, whether you like it or not. He is a very strong Pastor and he knows how to love. To God be the glory for the things He has done.

I thank God for giving me this chance to continue going to school. I thank the Florida Literacy Coalition for the opportunity to write this story.

*Mary Lyles is a Literacy Council of St. Petersburg student. Mary is present twice a week, working with her tutor, Amy. She typed this story herself on the computer.*

## **Being a Stranger**

I never imagined that my life would turn 360 degrees. I did not think about how difficult it would be to get used to a different way of life. The language truly was a challenge because people speak English at work, in stores, in shopping malls, and everywhere. I felt like a complete stranger. When someone wanted to chat I could not follow the conversation. I soon realized that in the United States it is a necessity to know how to speak English.

I received help from my tutor. Now I do not feel like a stranger. I miss my friends and family. Adapting to another culture was not easy.

*Dehibi (David) Bonilla is from Honduras and is a student at Manatee Reads! in Bradenton, FL. His tutor is Roger Boos.*

## **My Pathway**

I really love to run: run large roads, run very fast. But the most important and large road of my life has been my academic career. This is not a fast race, but an endurance one.

I began my studies when I was 5 years old. Since the first moment I stepped into school, I loved to learn and even cried when for some reason I could not go. I used to love to do homework, research projects and other extra-curricular activities. After 13 years of primary, secondary and pre-university education, I needed to decide what to study in the university. It was an important decision because it was not only about studying, but also choosing a profession for life. I chose Nuclear Physics! This is a totally weird field, in a good way; a mix of math and physics. So I accomplished my profession and became a nuclear physicist. Now, what to do? What to offer to the world? What to do to make me feel that I am contributing to society? And then, a postgraduate schooling pathway came to me.

Mexico offered to me the opportunity to do what I wanted to do in that moment: a Medical Physics Master's Degree. It was an amazing personal, professional and academic experience. I loved to do science for people's health, but without being a doctor. I

adored every moment. I enjoyed all the knowledge that I acquired and after I graduated, I was ready to do many things. I was completely ready to work.

Right now my life changed and brought me to this magnificent country, the United States. Many things are different here. The language is the first barrier, and other regulations in the field that I am involved in are important too. So, I ask myself again: what is the pathway I must follow to do that I love to do?

Certainly, I am not finished yet... the race continues...

*Alianna Gomez Facenda is in Mrs. Gabriela L. Pesantes-Ortega's GED class at Dunbar Community School. She is from Cuba.*

### **My First Time Off of My Island**

On September 10, 2008 Jeffrey, my husband, told me some news. "We are leaving Puerto Rico and moving to Washington, D.C." For me, the news caused a lot of pain. I didn't want to leave my dad, mom, and brothers behind. I knew that Washington, D.C. was a good place, but I was scared because I didn't know what to expect. Also, it was my first time off the island.

The "big day" arrived on June 2, 2009. My husband, our two children, and I left the island. After a few months here in America, I began to adapt to Virginia. After six months, we saw that everything was different. Different cultures and people were new to me, but I accepted change. Even now however, I still miss Puerto Rico and all its festivities.

*Marisol Charriez is a student in Margo Scranton and Lori Savoy's Adult ESL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

### **Experience the Love of God**

When my congregation sent me to the United States to proclaim the word of God, I felt very fortunate. I had the opportunity to open myself to a culture different from mine. The first and great

challenge that I faced was the different cultures that exist in this country, and something very important was the language. At first I worked in Arcadia, a Florida parish of the diocese of Venice. The Hispanic ministry was a beautiful experience, very rich in cultures at that time. I did not experience the need to speak English because one of the sisters with whom I worked knew and spoke it very well. It was not for long because as missionaries we move from one place to another.

My next place to work was Dade City, and that is when I realized the need to study English. The first thing I did when arriving here was to find a local Adult Education school where I could attend and learn the English language. It has been a very nice experience with classmates and the teacher. The teacher is very kind and patient, and she gives you that confidence to be able to follow and learn. I would like to learn the language well enough so I can contribute to all the people who come to me -- not only those that speak Spanish, but also those who speak English, and that is very important. Because I am in a foreign country, our duty as missionaries is to learn to communicate with everyone, to know their culture, and that in turn will help me to know everyone who comes. Thank God in this country, I have been given the opportunity to have traveled outside Florida and I have seen many beautiful places that remind me of the wonderful love that God does here on earth.

I have seen the different kinds of lives that people lead in the U.S. Thank God they are given the opportunities to be able to take their families forward, which they cannot do sadly in their own countries of origin. They see themselves in need of immigrating to this country, or some other.

Working through the Church, I am also given this opportunity to evangelize our brothers and sisters of any race or nation: to know each other better, to help each other, and to make known the love of God. I can say that my life here has been one of great beautiful experiences; challenges that have helped me grow more spiritually and as a person, by the grace of God. I have only to thank God for this opportunity that He has given me to be here and give the best of myself for the Kingdom of Christ.

*Sister Yuri Pena Ramos is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, Florida.*



## **The Magic Moment that Changed My Life**

“When I saw you I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew.” - William Shakespeare.

To be a mom is one wish of many women. After I got married, I really wanted to build a beautiful family and have kids. I had a lot of problems getting pregnant and it was very difficult for me to conceive. It was necessary to visit the doctor. It is very important to know what was happening in my body and why it was difficult for me to conceive a baby.

After five long years trying with a special treatment, I got pregnant and it was so wonderful to me because I had not just one baby, I had two babies growing inside of me. Nine months later, finally I could hold my twin sons in my arms; that day, my life changed completely. I think this moment was a turning point in my life. I felt huge emotion in my whole body when the doctor gave me the babies and I saw their faces looking at me. I smelled their sweet smell, touched their soft skin, hugged them and kissed them. It was a magical moment that I never could forget. From that moment, my life changed. I spent my time taking care of them, teaching them and seeing them grow up. I feel very happy and blessed to have my twin sons.

Sometime you are very busy and exhausted because children are so active all the time. Nevertheless, it is wonderful to see them playing and making something funny. Although my twins are not identical, one time, after I finished feeding one baby, I went to take another milk bottle and I forgot what baby was next because I liked to dress them the same. Someone might think it was too hard to do it, but the time runs so fast, sooner than you can imagine. Now, my twins are twelve years old and also I have a little princess who is six years old. Being a mother of my three children has been a wonderful experience in my life.

I wanted to write about my experience because I know there are many women suffering the same situation. I want to give my support and motivation to never stop trying to reach your dreams. God and prayers always help you and make it easier.

*Maria Gadea is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. She is from Venezuela and has lived in Naples with her family since 2014.*

## **Tuesday, January 12, 2010**

It was seven years ago! It was just a day like any other in Haiti; the sun in the sky was very bright; everybody was taking care of their own business; all the students were in class; many cars were rushing all over the city. That day, I didn't go to school because I had a terrible fever. So far, the day was running smoothly and when it was 4:00 PM everything turned strange; nobody was aware of what was going to happen a few minutes later.

At 5:10 PM, a few minutes after the tragedy, everyone was crying and looked totally sad. Many buildings were destroyed; more than 300,000 people lost their lives, thousands of others were never found; many kids died at school; it was a ghastly and awful scene and everyone around the world was very upset to hear that something like that could happen. Actually, it was an earthquake which unfortunately destroyed my country; almost every school, store, house and every place I used to go to, was destroyed.

Meanwhile, I was looking for my family, especially my mother who wasn't around because she had gone to the store. I started crying because rumors were that almost everyone had died in the tragedy. And then I thought to myself that my entire life had faded and all my dreams gone. If my family had disappeared, what was I going to do for a living? Was it the end of the world? It was totally insane to fathom such things.

But, a few hours later I saw my mother coming up the street. She was alive, but crying and looking for her children. It was the first time I saw my mother depressed and demoralized; it was truly sad to see her, but then she saw me in the neighborhood and hugged me strongly in her arms bathing me in her tears.

Unfortunately, a few months later my precious mother died. I couldn't afford to follow my career because my mother was my best friend and her memory was still fresh in my heart. But my father encouraged me and my sisters by telling us that "life goes on" and that was what life offered us now: a life without a mother's protection and love, leaving my father to do the rest of the job.

Tuesday, January, 12, 2010, the day of the earthquake, was a day of many deaths, tears, and even some joy for those who found their family and friends. Haiti made the news around the world. We appreciated

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the help received from every country, especially the United States that was the first one to respond. We still have Haiti and we continue working hard to reach our purpose, and are grateful to God for saving these families and keeping my country strong after all.

*Gedeus Guervison is a student in Silvia Giovanardi's ESOL level 6 (Advanced) class at the Adult Education Center, West Palm Beach.*

## **An Encounter That Changed My Life**

### **The Worst Traumatic Experience I Ever Had**

The worst traumatic experience I ever had was being kidnapped and held against my will. Now, being that I was homeless, I was sitting at a bus stop in the dead of night waiting for someone to come and get me or help me out. As I waited, a stranger came from behind and attacked me. Something was put over my mouth to subdue me, which it did, making me unconscious almost immediately.

It was very traumatic because I woke up in nothing but darkness. I started feeling around and it felt like I was in a metal coffin. I started screaming for help and the trunk opened. There, standing in front of me was a tall slim man with a dark, blank stare. Being that I'd never seen the man before, I started pleading with him, hoping that he would let me go and just drive away. Instead, he beat and tortured me for three days.

This experience affected my life in a very negative way! I was hospitalized for two weeks. I also had abrasions and bruises from being beaten with a pipe. I had to learn how to walk again and also how to withstand being in the dark alone. I didn't trust men, not even my doctor. High pressure situations made me nervous.

The lessons I learned from this very traumatizing experience is to always be alert. Also, always carry a cell phone or pepper spray. It's also not safe to be alone late at night in a dark, hidden place. You should stay in the light and around other people. This experience taught me how to be strong, but it also taught me that my life is worthwhile.

So, the worst traumatic experience I ever had, was being kidnapped, beaten, and held against my will. I've learned how to be brave and more cautious. Hopefully this won't happen to another woman. I suffered a great deal, but I am alive today. I'm thankful that I have another day to teach women how to be safe.

*Monique Branham is a student in Shelletta Baker's class at the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL.*

## **An Encounter that Changed My Life**

I had not one, but three encounters that change my life. The first encounter that changed my life was my oldest daughter, Maja, when she was born in 2002. I didn't know what to expect and it was a wonderful experience. She was born in less than fifty minutes and without any complications. She was placed on my chest and I felt boundless happiness. She had so much hair and smelled so nice that I will never forget that scent. She had the most amazing voice with the healthiest cry I've ever heard. Maja made sure her voice was heard during checkups and bath time. This encounter has changed my life because I knew from that moment on, I am a "MOM."

The second encounter was with my daughter Inez. She was born in 2006. I was in the hospital for a regular checkup, when the doctor told me she was on her way into this world. She was born in less than 20 minutes, which the doctor said was a world record. She used her eyes as if she could see and always respond to my voice when I talked to her. This encounter has changed my life because I had even bigger responsibilities as a "MOM."

The third encounter was with our youngest daughter Liza. She was born in 2009. She came so unexpectedly, I almost gave birth in the car on the way to the hospital. My doctor told me, "You make me run so fast every time you give birth and I don't need more exercise." Liza was just as beautiful as Maja and Inez with her black hair and strong voice. As a newborn baby, she was very responsive to my voice. I was always able to make her calm down with it. This encounter has changed my life because I've become the "MOM" to the three most beautiful girls in the world.

*Rozalia Meszarosne is a student in Lori Savoy and Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin/East Pasco Adult Education Center located in Dade City, Florida.*

## **Overcoming Obstacles**

On June 1, 1989, I was born at Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers, Florida. I was born at twenty-six weeks which classified me as premature. I weighed in at three pounds. I struggled with many complications, one being that I was born with only one kidney.

The first weeks of my life were difficult. I was transferred to Tampa General Hospital due to the severity of the kidney issues. I stayed in the hospital for fifty-seven days so that I could be monitored and ensure it was safe for my family to take me home. I often hear my family speak of a Doctor Campos. I am appreciative of this kidney doctor and the care he provided me while I was in the hospital during my first weeks of life.

The first years of my life consisted of many doctor appointments. I took medications each morning to help ensure the health of my kidney. Then at the age of sixteen blood work showed that my kidney was beginning to fail. My older sister Amy's blood type and kidney were a perfect match for me. Amy was twenty five years old and a single mother of my two beautiful nieces. My sister's kidney donation was a selfless act. Amy sacrificed her kidney for me, saving my life. My sister is my hero; I love her with all my heart.

The complications I encountered with my kidney changed my life. I see Dr. Campos every six months to ensure my continued health of my kidney. Although my kidney affected my life I thank God, Amy, and Dr. Campos that it turned out great.

*Megan Christman is a student in Christine Shore's class at Lee County School District's GED program.*

## **News that Changed My Life**

In life, we all have many special days full of emotions or situations, good or not good. But some of those days can change your life forever. Mine was when I knew I was going to be a mom.

Everything started in December 2012. When I was in a medical appointment, the nurse told me that I needed to take a pregnancy test because I did not take pills, and I wanted to get pregnant. My surprise was that I was pregnant. I couldn't believe how this news changed my life forever. In this moment, I began my process through this magical adventure. For 40 weeks, my body was going to change of course with 20 pounds more, nausea, cravings, mood swings, crazy hormones, and a mixture of feelings of anguish and happiness.

Supposedly, I was prepared for everything until the 25 hours of labor and the feared epidural, but suddenly between my breathing and pushing, I heard a cry, and the doctor put in my arms a little baby with big black eyes. At that moment, I understood that my life would not be the same, and that my love and commitment for that little person would grow every day. You can sometimes have bad days, but with love and much patience, it can improve.

Of something, I'm sure. I had never felt that love for someone until another baby came, and that love multiplied. The truth is that it has not been easy, but my kids make my life better.

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

### **An Encounter That Changed My Life**

When I lived back in my country, Venezuela, I can say my life was good. This is a lot to say when you consider the social, political and economic situation there at this moment. I used to have a normal life, but that changed one day when my family and I had an unwelcomed encounter.

It was Thursday, and my brother and I were coming back from the University. When we arrived home we were surprised by some thieves. My mom and dad had already been tied up in their bedroom. They did the same thing to my brother and me.

The thieves stole every valuable thing we owned, and when they left we untied ourselves. I remember that the days that followed were the scariest days of my life. We could not live in that house anymore. Therefore, my parents decided to move to the United States.

This "encounter" changed my life drastically, forever. It changed the way I think about life. It made me reevaluate which things are important and which things are not. It made me realize that there is nothing more valuable than your own life.

*Ximena Azevedo is a student in Zuly Rosello's ESOL class at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus.*

## **A Fresh Start**

An encounter that changed my life was the day I met my girlfriend. Before I met her, I was struggling with life decisions. I was making choices that were leading me to a darker side. It was the day I met her that I got my life on track and started to see the positive things about my future.

I grew up in Texas. I made tough choices and I began drinking and smoking cigarettes at the age of eighteen. I followed bad habits that led me to the streets. Then one night at a friend's party, I saw a beautiful girl. She immediately caught my attention. We exchanged numbers and became friends. She lived in Florida so it was difficult to see each other, but we constantly communicated by phone and tried to travel to see each other as much as possible. I realized that I was starting to fall for her. There was one problem: I realized she wasn't going to agree with the choices I was making for my life. Therefore, I made a decision to change all my bad habits and pursue a life that would assure us a bright future together.

After a few months, I decided to move to Florida. This was a fresh start, a new beginning. It was the happiest moment for me because I found love and I was able to change the direction my life was going. I am now focused on getting my GED for a better life. My encounter with this woman has changed my life forever.

*Javier Ruiz is a student at Lee County Adult Education.*

## **The Importance of English**

I just want to say thank you to all who make everything possible for people who do not speak English, so they can learn. Thanks Literacy Council and the tutors. I would like to thank every one of you and my tutor Carol for all the support that you have given to me.

Living in this country requires you to learn the language. Not knowing this language has stopped me from going outside and speaking.



Now I can say English changed my life. Learning how to speak English has opened many doors for me. English helps you communicate with people from around the world. For me it has changed my daily routine, because now I can speak with everybody. Now I have a driver's license, a car, and a better job.

In November 2015, it was a little difficult. Thanksgiving was coming. Three days before that, we went to the store to buy groceries for dinner. My daughter told me that Christmas was coming and she wanted to put up a tree. She wanted to decorate it because they were on break. We said, "Not yet—after Thanksgiving."

But plans change very quickly. When we returned from the store, we had a surprise! The street had firemen and police. We talked to each other and thought it was a car accident. But when we got to our house, we had a surprise. There was a fire at our home!

This day was very sad. I do not know what happened to the house. Three hours before we left, it was good. Our neighbors came to us to offer help. All of our neighbors were very good, and we were able to talk and understand them. When we talked to the police officers, I was not afraid to speak in English. They were very friendly and I really appreciate their work.

I am very glad and blessed, because we only had material loss. We are all ok and safe, thanks to God.

*Dorotea Chavez is from Mexico, and she has lived in Clearwater, FL for seven years. She is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas, where her tutor is Carol Kennedy. Dorotea wants to become an American citizen.*

### **An Encounter that Changed My Life**

In 2007, my mother was diagnosed with Pseudotumor cerebri, a condition that occurs when pressure inside the skull increases for no obvious reason. The day the doctors diagnosed my mother with Pseudotumor cerebri, my life would change drastically. I was only nine years old when I was told this. From that moment on, I would have to take care of my mother. My mom spent long days at the hospital suffering from this condition.

My mother's condition kept getting worse within time. Every month she would get hospitalized. There was a time she stayed at the hospital twenty-one days. Twenty-one days of seeing my mother suffering in pain. The doctors decided to do surgery. They placed a shunt on the top right side of her head. A shunt is a small passage which allows movement of fluid from one part of the body to another.

My mother's life changed and so did mine. I had to miss school in order to take care of her. Emotionally, it was not easy for me. At school I would spend most of the time sad because my mother was not able to be healthy at home. I took on the responsibilities that my mother was not able to do. I had to learn how to cook, clean, and take care of myself at a very young age. I talked with doctors, spent hours at emergency rooms, stayed nights at the hospital. You could say that I didn't have a very normal childhood.

Thanks to this encounter, I have become who I am today; a strong, independent woman. I am experienced and prepared to handle any issues or problems I will encounter in my future.

*Karoneill Angueira is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **Passport for Myself**

Sometimes we try to meet incredible people, people that we want to show off to the world. We try to find people on social networks, Facebook, Twitter, the internet, traveling or socializing. Sometimes, we enter into groups where we don't fit. We beg for relationships and we want to be accepted by those people because we think they are creations of the perfect universe.

A year ago, I started a trip outside of my country. I wanted to know new types of people in the world. Leaving behind family and friends, I wanted to learn things from other countries, learn things that are not mine, believing that everything is better there than where I came from. I met unforgettable people from different cultures. Some people were from Thailand, India, Czech Republic, Brazil, Italy, Argentina, Cataluña, and America among others. Each one of them taught me different things about their country: their ways of cooking meals, ways of thinking, and different ways

of having fun. I undoubtedly had incredible moments with each of these people.

I spent the year of getting to know and adding people in my life. Until one day when I was looking for new faces, I had a meeting with a person who changed my life. This person gave me new eyes and a more positive perspective on happiness. This was the best thing that has happened to me; everything started when I opened my mind. Someone once said to me, ‘If you open your mind, it is the same when you open a window, there is new and fresh air that can enter.’

I learned to dream awake, to be brave and to know internal magical places. Thanks to this person, I keep learning, remembering what I know and hoping to help others. I would face my fears and this person was surprising me day by day.

But not everything was so nice or easy the first time we met. It had taken 24 years. At first, I did not think that this person was among the most incredible people that I already knew. At the beginning of our relationship, I never gave her the attention that she deserved. We only had fights, misunderstandings, dislikes and always ended every night with chaotic talks in my head. Most of the time I ignored her or didn’t ask what I needed or liked. Being sincere, I was never good friend or companion.

The weirdest thing about this story is that this person was always with me, and I never realized how lucky I was to have her with me. This encounter that changed my life was to meet myself. Stop comparing yourself with others and focus on you!

*Brenda Ramirez-Ramos is a student in Margo Scranton’s Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education.*

## **Gladly Blessed**

Throughout several years of my life, I’ve had a very important experience that has made me who I am now. All of these things so good or bad have transformed my life and made me the person who I am today. When I was a teenager, I would rather earn money than go to school. It was hard for me to have everything that I needed to

reach a career and get a better job in my country, so when I talked with my family and friends I changed my mind. That was one of reasons I came to The United States. Everyone knows we must work hard if we want to have a good lifestyle. For several years I had worked different kinds of jobs that required skill; one of these jobs was helping a driller on the road and underground, working all day under the blazing sun. Imagine this in the sunshine state; it was terrible. At the same time, I had a chance to find a job indoors; it was construction.

A few years ago, unfortunately I had a tragic accident that I never thought could happen in my life. On that day, I went to work as I had done daily, without thinking that day would change my life forever. I almost finished my job, when suddenly something was wrong. I was in the hospital but I had no memory of what was going on, least what had happened, who I was and why I was there. A few months later, an unforgettable day, the first person who I could recognized was my wife. I cried a lot at the moment but with the love and help of my family and friends, I have known a lot of things that had happened and how much I had suffered. A few years later I came back to my home to be with my family all the time again. I wonder how I was able to recover, and I won't ever get tired of saying: Thanks God for everything you've given me back. Now I motivate myself to keep going.

Throughout my new life, I began going to school. Being there helped me to learn and understand many more things that I hadn't known before. There are people who helped me along the way, but for the most part, it is in my mind. I have pushed myself to do better and learn as much as I could. Now I have been able to advance and improve my English, it is my main goal. We know the first language in this country is English, so I must speak it. It is very important to communicate with everybody with different ethnicities.

In conclusion, after everything I have lived, I have had a great opportunity. Near where I live is ITECH College. Even though there were many setbacks in the last couple of years, I have been able to surpass these obstacles. With the encouragement of my family, my teacher and friends, my determination is to succeed and never stop learning until I am dead. The sky is the limit.

*N.O. is a student at Immokalee Technical College, where his teacher is Katie Mominee.*

### **An Encounter that Changed My Life**

My name is Zoila Poveda and this is the event that changed my life. For me, this is one special day, because it changed my life forever. That day is September 13, 2011, when I first saw the face of my son. I felt that my life was full of meaning completely. I know that for all mothers there is one special day, but for me it meant that I have left years of solitude. When my son was born, I was born too. I love my son.

*Zoila Poveda moved to the United States from Nicaragua. She is currently a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She studies in Mrs. Vicki McDonald's ESOL 5 class.*

# My Goals and Ambitions

## Challenges

Challenges are something needing great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully, for example: goals, wishes, and dreams.

Everybody goes through challenges. I want to talk to you about my challenges. But first, I'm going to introduce myself. My name is Monica, I'm 18 years old, I am from Venezuela, and I'm an ESOL student at Lee County's Adult Education.

My life changed in an instant. I took on a hard challenge because I moved to the U.S.A. That means a new culture, a new language. A new life. I think that people who come to the United States face many challenges that aren't very easy, but that is the reason why we need to fight for them.

My main challenge right now is to learn English. It has not been easy for me because this language is not my first one. My first language is Spanish, and it is very different than English. When I was a child, I never liked to study it. Learning this language has been very tough for me, but I know that I can do it because I'm working hard to reach my goal. Now, I'm very impressed because I have improved, when I came here the only word I could to say was, "Hello." Now look at me, I am writing to you in English. However, that does not mean I've completely learned this language.

That is not my only challenge. I want to go to college to be a professional and fulfill "The American Dream". Little by little it will become less difficult, but with the help of God, I know I will do it. God never will give you a challenge you can't overcome. He takes care of all of us, so don't worry, you can do it. If you are going through a tough challenge, just trust and believe that you will get through it. Think of challenges every day and work on them. Think big because the sky is the limit. If you want something, go get it and do the best you can.

*Monica Rondon is an ESOL student in the Lee County ACE program. Her teacher is Frances Pace.*

## **Career Goals**

Career goals are sometimes hard to figure out. Many people change their mind within months. Well, to be honest, I have changed my mind about what career I'd like to have. At first, I wanted to be an actress; then, an accountant. But my main career goal has always been teaching.

Teaching has always been in the back of my mind when it comes to thinking about what career I would like. Ever since I was little, my teachers would pick me to help the students that didn't understand. As I grew older, when I had a job, my manager would ask me to train the new employees. Training is a lot like teaching. Now that I am about to start college, I would like to study teaching because it's always good to go with what you've always thought about.

In conclusion, my main career goal is to become a teacher. I have given it a lot of thought, and I believe that it will go well and I will be happy.

*Rachel Gonzalez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where her teacher is Marie Thompson.*

## **My Saudade (What I miss most)**

“If you can dream it, you can do it.” - Walt Disney

Everybody has a dream: to be a doctor, buy a house, get married, have children or whatever your dream is. I am not different, but sometimes to achieve a dream you need to walk along a hard path. However, it is a great chance to grow.

I always wanted to know another culture, another country and learn a new language. Since I came here I have had the chance to know great places I have never imagined and to know people from all over the world, and I'm growing so much because it is an amazing experience for me. But it is also hard and sometimes I feel lonely for being thousands miles away from home for a long time now.

Sometimes I feel a tightness in the heart, and this makes me wonder what exactly I'm still doing here so far from the things I miss most. There is a word in Portuguese that has no translation, it is "saudade." This is a word you use to describe the feeling when you miss someone or something really bad.

Being here, so far from my home causes me "saudade" and hurts sometimes. I miss my family and my friends and it hurts when I'm sick and my mom is not around to take care of me, hurts when it is my father's birthday and I'm not home.

I miss my mom's cooking, the smell of the meatballs she makes for me because she knows it's my favorite thing, my long talks with my dad, the bark of my dogs, my brother playing guitar, the taste of my grandmother's candies, going out with my friends and having fun.

Saudade hurts, and it hurts a lot sometimes, but when you have a dream you need to be strong and face your fears. You need to know that it's worth it, and when you are done you'll be filled with joy and happiness. You will be proud of yourself for having learned and grown so much while you're chasing your dreams.

*Viviane Lelis Rocha is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, where her teacher is Ms. Betten-Jutasi*

## **Fight for your Dreams**

Do you think just because you're living in the USA, you are going to have success and have a good life? Many people from different countries think that when they arrive in America they will already have everything, but it isn't like that. In order to have everything new immigrants want, they need to have a goal or dream, because that will help them to continue to work hard and never fail. I think some of us have the same goal or maybe not, but everybody should have one. In my case, I have many goals.

My name is Maritza Jose, I'm from Mexico. I have been in this country 2 years. I live with my parents and my brothers. Also, I have a sister who still lives in Mexico. When I moved here I got very upset. I didn't want to come here because I would miss my



friends, school, and also all of my Mexican family. Well, finally the day arrived, and I had to say goodbye to all. It was very difficult for me. When I arrived here I tried to get into a high school but I couldn't enter, supposedly because it was about to finish for the semester and also because I was 17 years old. But I never gave up and I started thinking about my goal.

The first thing that I wanted was to start with the ESOL class to learn English. However, it wasn't easy for me, because I didn't know anything and my family only speaks Spanish. On my first day it was so hard for me, I was frustrated and nervous to talk. I was scared to make mistakes and couldn't understand what the teacher was talking about.

Well months later I got into the ELCATE class, and on my first day again I was very nervous. I sat alone in a corner and I looked around the room to see if there was someone I knew, but I didn't see anyone. I immediately took out my notebook, pencil and pen that I would need. After hours of classes I got to know my classmates, and so I made new friends. Two or three months later I got in GED class, but when I started there I was more comfortable because I entered at the same time with two of my friends. Those were my goals that I have achieved so far.

Now I would like to improve my English, so I can understand, speak fluently, write and read quickly. Next I will graduate from the ELCATE class, pass all my GED tests and earn my GED diploma.

Now I understand more that education is a passport or the password to achieve your goal.

*Maritza K. Jose Bautista is 19 years old and is from Mexico. She is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, and she likes to listen to music, watch TV, and go out with friends or family.*

### **All the Things I'd Like to Be**

In 1985, at 3 years old, I left my beautiful island of Haiti and was brought to the United States to live with my aunt and grandmother leaving behind my biological parents. We lived in Jamaica Queens

in a private house. I really didn't speak English until I started school. While in school I was teased a lot because I was Haitian. It was difficult, but I fought my way through this hard time both physically and mentally. Drawing became a passion of mine at the young age of 7, and I used my art and creativity as a better way to let out my frustrations by putting my energy into something more positive. Around high school, I began to miss my biological parents, but my passion for art helped me through this difficult time. My aunt and grandmother became my parents and raised me as their own. Both women worked very hard, and I respected and looked up to both of them. My grandmother came to the US only understanding French. She worked hard and made a life here so that I and other members of our family could come to this country. If it wasn't for her, I would have never come to America. So when I dropped out of high school in 11th grade I knew this was a great disappointment for both my aunt and grandmother. I struggled because of my choices, not because of my upbringing.

However, in 2012, I was able to become a home health care aid just like my grandmother. Even though I faced many obstacles, I pushed through knowing that being able to help someone who might not be able to help themselves is a blessing. While working in the healthcare field, I kept going back to art and fashion, which I believe is my true calling.

After moving to Florida, I decided to work on getting my high school diploma by preparing for the GED. I would like to become a phlebotomist to make some more money which I can save to live out my dream as a fashion designer and have my own boutique. I still would help people but by making them look and feel beautiful through my creativity. Having a new job would give me additional money as my goal is to bring my family and my biological parents to America. Most of all, my grandmother, who is still working even at the age of 88, is my inspiration to keep going. She never gave up, and she taught me to keep fighting and stay strong. I will push through to meet my goals no matter what. I live by the quote "It doesn't matter how many times you fall, but rather how many times you get up."

*Sophia Louis is a dedicated student working to earn her high school diploma in order to dress the world in her creative fashions. Her teacher is Lisa Gumm.*

## **A Challenge to Be Met**

When I had to leave my country, Haiti, to come to the United States, I knew that it was necessary for me to speak English. Before staying permanently, I used to come to the United States almost every year. I realized that it's very different when you live in a country than when you are a visitor. It's not really the same thing.

First of all, I made the decision to learn English at school. The learning of another language which is not your mother tongue is not easy, especially when you had studied during all your time at school in French. At that time, it was the only official language of my country. Therefore, if you are not familiar with the correct words, there may be some confusion when you want to communicate. The fear of making mistakes in speaking is a block for me. When I say something in English that I don't know how to say, often I think in French what I want to say in English, and I try to translate it. I have a lot of problems keeping up a conversation.

One of my goals is to speak English very well. I like to communicate, to exchange or to share ideas, to make new friends. When I arrived at the Adult Education Center in October 2015, I saw many people from different countries who came for the same reason as me, to learn English. At this school, I have the opportunity to learn English effectively from all aspects: speaking, reading, writing, listening, grammar, and pronunciation. The teachers are qualified professionals, and they create a positive learning atmosphere to help you improve your English. Honestly, the hardest parts for me are listening and speaking.

I knew from the beginning that going to school would be very challenging. The support I got from my teachers kept me motivated and confident to know what direction to take to achieve my goal. I am not afraid anymore of my mistakes because I can learn from them to go ahead. According to one of my teachers, "It's not easy, but you can do it." I have learned that no matter how difficult a situation is, I should never give up. I stay motivated, and for sure, a day will come when I will speak English very well.

*Yolene Pierre-Clerdora 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**

I am so glad to be in the United States. Living in this country gives me the opportunity to pursue and try to achieve my goals and ambitions. Some of my goals I have already achieved; they are simple but very important and rewarding things like getting a driver's license, buying a car, having a bank account. Others are coming in the short time as my employment authorization card and my permanent residence becomes official.

Of course having my own house and a good car are part of my ambitions. But to achieve them, first I must meet the goals of personal growth. This allows me to reach the so-called "American Dream." Increasing the level of my English is extremely important; getting to communicate fluently and understand perfectly what people tell me will be the basis of many successes I can achieve. To find a job in the field that I want, dedicate myself to it with the possibility of continuing to develop and study the new technologies that are emerging, is very important step for me.

It is not something for tomorrow, it will take some time, dedication and will. But I believe that if there is a country I can achieve this in, it is America, where we can find the giants of our time like Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs. These figures, in the recent past, have changed the world we live today. They are an inspiration for me (although of course not to the extent that they did) to do the same. I feel like everyone can contribute a grain of "sand" to the world, to achieve a better future.

Today, people like Elon Musk, founder of companies like of SpaceX, Tesla Inc. and SolarCity, continue to emerge. He used his time, will and resources to increase the reliability and performance of the new technologies so that among other things, we can leave our children a better planet; a planet where energy expenditure is not sustained in the burning of fossil fuel and instead in the use of renewable energies without the planet suffering because of our way of life. This is an ideology with which I identify and for which I would like to work as soon as possible. I want to help to build a world where energy is clean, cheap and unlimited, and there is no better place to start than in America.

*Nelson Mitjans Gonzalez is in Mrs. Gabriela L. Pesantes-Ortega's GED class at Dunbar Community School. He is from Cuba.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

Do you have goals? I'm sure you do. What are they? How far will you go to achieve them? Well, I have many goals and ambitions I'd like to accomplish as well. Many of my goals include personal achievements such as learning and experiencing new things. Nevertheless, some things that I am passionate about are more important than others. My goals include things such as getting a college degree, finding a career I enjoy and living life to its fullest potential.

Firstly, one of my goals is to exceed my own expectations by hard work and devoting myself to continual focus and success one step at a time. I aim to attend college and study engineering. I want to achieve a bachelor's degree in my college expedition. This is an ambition I am mostly passionate about.

Another one of my goals includes finding a career in the engineering industry that I can enjoy and be proud of myself about. I want to find a line of work where I can contribute to the company and most importantly be happy, and also where the people have morals, integrity, and pride for their work. I want to know that the career I choose is for me as I am for them and that I have a stable position in my company.

Finally, most importantly I want to have a full and satisfying life where I can be content and happy with what I have and what I've done to achieve satisfaction and fullness in my life. I want to be able to enjoy my life to its fullest potential, traveling the world, visiting historical sites, and just enjoying new experiences and doing things I've never done before.

My goals and ambitions are very plain and quite similar to the majority of people, but to sum things up, I strive to get a bachelor's degree and enter into the engineering industry. After that is achieved I want to live my life to the fullest enjoying all I've accomplished.

*Trafori Bailey is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **A Change In My Goals and Ambitions**

I'm Steeve Charles and I am 23 years old. I'm Haitian. I have been in the U.S. one year and a few months. I'm lucky because many people don't have a chance to live with their family when they first come to the United States. But me, I have my family.

My goals are to speak, read and understand this language called "English." I already have my high school diploma which I need to have translated. When I was in Haiti I wanted to study engineering but now I want to study in medical school because my big ambition is to be a doctor.

I hope you are satisfied with my essay. I was happy to write. It is always a pleasure to talk and write in English about all the things I want with you!

*Steeve Charles is a student in ESOL 5 at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. He has become a very motivated student in Vicki McDonald's class since he decided on a career path.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

When I look at myself in the mirror, I see who I am and who I want to become. I start thinking about all the necessary actions I am currently doing to achieve my goals and become the person I want to be. I can't help but think; am I doing enough? We all have dreams and desires, things we want to do or have in this life but there's always something like an excuse that can hold us back from achieving those desires. We all have big potential within us. Things we could do which we can never imagine ourselves achieving. Why do we fail? Why do we never meet our goals, or dreams? Why don't we ever even try?

For instance, I dream about becoming a financially independent successful multilingual and physically fit gentleman. I want to make six figures before I turn the age of 30. Also, I want to travel a lot in my twenties, meet new people and expose myself to new ideas, new cultures, and new lifestyles. I lived in America my whole life and I have these desires to see what the rest of the world looks like. Before I can even think about doing all those things I must come back to reality and remember to set goals for myself.

Little by little, work towards those goals. That's our problem I think. Most people don't have goals or we just don't commit to one. When I say goals I actually mean things we do every day little by little to achieve what we most desire. Working now to be rewarded in the future. We do not have a growth mindset and we do not believe in ourselves. Procrastination is something people are used to so they don't make it much of a big deal. Furthermore, we have no vision we can't see ourselves achieving what we want because of our current circumstances. The people who understand the importance of having a vision are the people who are most likely to succeed in whatever their goal is.

I believe everyone should find happiness in their lives. Nobody is perfect and we all have problems. One thing we all have is a choice. This choice is made every day! Whoever you are, wherever you come from you are not alone. You deserve success as much as anyone else... My questions to you is; Are you doing enough, are you doing all that you can, do you have a growth mindset or a fixed one? Only you know the answers! To keep it simple always ask yourself this question: Am I better than the person I was yesterday?

*Marven Cesar is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

### **My Existential Crisis**

It is very scary to think about my goals and ambitions, because sometimes, they're not clear enough and they keep changing or disappearing. In fact, I may not even know what my ambitions are. I used to think I knew it, but with time everything changes and you learn new thing or you just lose the interest in others.

One of my goals is going to the university, but if I think about it I don't even know what to study. It's scary sometimes to even think about that. Will I get accepted? Am I good enough? Should I do it? Or even, what to do? It's just stressing for me. Everyone has different abilities. There are some people who are good at math, for instance, others are good at building things, but what happens when you are just a regular student? The only ability I have is speaking English, but I won't get to university just because I speak English. Nowadays some people think that if you don't know math

you are dumb; an artist won't need as much math in his/her life! That gets me so frustrated; you know what's worst? I'm thinking of studying to be an engineer which I'm not good at all. This idea is because if I study something else, I may not have work.

My other goal is to travel around the world or maybe not all around, but I'd love to go to Japan, Korea, and other Asian countries in general. I think their culture is fascinating and way different from ours. I love learning about it. I've been studying this culture for years and I'd love to see it in person.

My plans are to work in an Asian country while I'm on summer vacation for 2 or 3 months to learn the language and culture. I feel like that would be a great experience to learn all I can.

My next ambition is to study languages in general. I'd love to learn as many languages as I can. I'm trying to learn Korean and Japanese and speak them fluently. I have a scholarship to learn Mandarin Chinese and I study a lot about the Chinese culture. I feel really good about learning different cultures.

I feel that with all the pressure that is upon me, I don't see my future very clearly. I know a lot of people feel this way, but what I do whenever I have an "existential crisis" is to relax and don't think of anything and then I'll "see the light."

Not everything needs to be right away, sometimes not everything you want will be easy, but if that's what you want, then you have to search for it as many times as required.

*Ana Galvez is studying in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teacher is Mrs. Lori Savoy.*

## **My American Dream**

How can an American Dream change your life? As a single mother raising a daughter, Julianna Elizabeth, I'm working two jobs, and going to school to get my GED. I'm doing all this because, it's so important to me to have a better life. I've struggled in life too long and I'm done; ready to take action and move forward. I want this for myself and mostly for my daughter. I want a career that I will enjoy and love to do every day, living a better, happier



life in a beautiful home, and having an opportunity to travel the world with my daughter.

First and foremost my education has become very important to me, because it is the vehicle to achieve my American Dream. Striving to finish my GED is challenging and often frustrating, but my determination is bigger than that. Between my two jobs, my daughter, and attending classes, there's not much time for me to study, other than during my lunchbreak. I take full advantage of that free time to review my notes and complete my assignments. Through the Career Pathways class I discovered that I have a natural aptitude in becoming a radiologist or a sonographer. My next step will be going to college and pursue my Bachelor's Degree.

In addition I fantasize of owning my dream home. I often daydream of living in a beautiful bungalow, with a two car garage, an open backyard, and of course, a swimming pool, swing set and playground where my daughter can play in a gated piece of property. I want a two bedroom and two and half bathroom and an office, where we can live comfortably. I would have security surround system with video cameras. I would have two big dogs that live with us. That would be the ultimate dream for me and hoping it come true.

Above all I would be most happy to travel the world and experience new things with Julianna. I want to expose my daughter to different cultures, and learn different languages that will open new horizons for her. It's also important that Julianna learns about her Jamaican and Italian background. Having the opportunity to explore fabulous countries and be entertained by different lifestyles. I want my daughter to do bigger and better thing than I was able to do. I want to give her the world, not to have to worry about how she's going to pay the next bill.

Generally speaking my American Dream is to finish getting my GED, go to college to get my Bachelor's Degree in radiology, own my home, and travel the world. At last, living the American Dream is not having materialistic things it's about taking on your challenges with a smile and keeping your head held high, with new journeys.

*Amanda Peruzzi is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **My Goals in Life**

It is okay to fail but it's not okay to give up. Everyone has goals in life. Some people are set to it some are just not. I'm in the race to win, so I can achieve and succeed. I'm not giving up. I want to get my high school diploma, go to college and get started in my career. I also want to have my own car and house. Over all, I just want to be independent.

Although at times I do feel like giving up, I take a seat back and think on how my high school diploma will put me on the road to success. I passed my Math GED Test and that was a big push for me. It opened up my eyes and showed me that I can do anything if I put my mind to it. I have three more tests to take to finish round one, and I'll be running first place in round two. I was always scared of change but now I face it head on.

Meanwhile, I made a lot of changes throughout my life and, I'm ready to make a bigger change. I want to go to college and study for a career in the medical field. I want to make a change in this world. I want to be another helping hand. I believe without a career you can't do these things. I know I'll make everyone in my family proud because I'll be the only one in my family to go to college. My brother got his high school diploma but did nothing with it. I didn't come all this way just for a high school diploma. I want to keep going, keep pushing and keep learning new things. People say college is the place, so I'm going for it!

I can't wait to be independent with my dream car and house. I want a 2017 Cadillac ATS and I also want a three bedroom, two and a half bathroom home with a pool in the back. I believe for me to achieve all this, I will need to win the race meaning, get a high school diploma, go to college, and have my career in the medical field.

Overall, I'm not giving up. I may fail at times, but I'll get right back up and do it again until I get it right. Everyone learns from their mistakes. I just want to win the race to achieve and succeed in life.

*Alicia Soliz is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

One of the wisest kings to ever grace planet earth was also one of the wealthiest kings. During his reign over the nation of Israel, King Solomon made a very profound statement in proverbs 21:5. He said, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty." These words of wisdom are the engine to my goals and ambitions: GED, business administration degree, child care business and philanthropist mission work for my dear homeland country of Saint Lucia!

Education is the key to unlocking the treasures of success that lie within us all. As a child growing up in the poor country of Saint Lucia, education was not free as it is to everyone in America. In fact, we had to pay large sums of money just to attend regular school. I was a very shy and a timid student who found it very difficult to comprehend the information. As a result, I dropped out of school at the tender age of sixteen. This is why obtaining a GED is my primary goal to accomplish by the summer of 2017. I have a husband, two children, and I work two jobs but my internal fire drives me to attend school 3-4 times a week to accomplish my first goal of attaining my high school diploma.

Moreover, my second goal is to study business administration and child care at Palm Beach State College. I plan to enroll in the fall of 2017 in effort to pursue my dream. I currently work as a chef in the day and provide child care at night for infants and small children. My husband is a school teacher in the Palm Beach County School District, and our ultimate goal is to create and own a child care and educational facility, The Treasure House Academy will accommodate children from infant to 12th grade.

My third goal and ambition is to give back to my native country, Saint Lucia, in a variety of ways. I went home this past Christmas to spend some time with my parents and family. As I walked the streets of Saint Lucia, I could not help but to notice the immense amount of poverty and economic hardship. I was heartbroken to look into the children's eyes and see that same desperation of lack of hope that I had as a child! I found myself giving food and money to poor mothers in despair. Once I returned home, I told my husband that we must use our church to help my kinsmen in Saint Lucia. We are now planning our first Crusade of Hope in April 2017! We have partnered with two organizations to provide

food, clothing, home building projects, and most importantly the gospel of Jesus Christ, the hope of glory.

*Lena Johnson is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **Moving Forward**

Laurence Peter, known as “Yogi Berra,” one of the greatest major league baseball players of all times, once said: “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you are going because you might not get there.” This statement, even though used in the sports field, is also valid for all other aspects of life.

As far as I can remember, becoming a doctor has always been my purpose, a dream to fulfill and also a goal to achieve. Helping others get better gave me peace of mind and I’ve always had my mind made up on this ultimate objective.

With great effort and discipline, I completed six years at college, one of internship, one of social service at a public hospital, and three years of specialization. My dream finally came true ten years ago. The path was long and difficult but the goals I had set helped me keep my ambitions alive. Now, I am a medical doctor, an internist to be precise, with ten years of experience.

Unfortunately, my family and I had to make the decision to leave our country and move to the United States. Starting over is never easy, especially for a foreign doctor in the USA. It feels like being on an assignment, knowing all the answers but not understanding the questions.

You cannot just move forward and enter the system just like that. You need to pass the three steps of the board exam and then wait for a hospital to accept you for an internship, which is really challenging. Life will not stop and wait for you. The kids are still there. You still have responsibilities. So the challenge now is managing priorities, time, and of course, setting new goals.

This is how I’ll proceed: First, I will consider what I want to achieve and how. Then, I will set reasonable, specific, measurable,

and attainable goals. And finally, plan the different steps to accomplish my goals.

In about one year's time, after completing my ESOL classes, I will do the TOEFL exam. After that, I will take a series of classes for foreign doctors at FIU in order to get a diploma as a registered nurse practitioner, and start working at a hospital for a couple of years. Meanwhile, I will be completing the three-step Board exam and hope to finally enter a hospital for my internship and get the full license to practice medicine here in USA around the year 2020.

I really think that those goals are realistic and I know that I will make all the efforts possible to achieve them. I am convinced I will do my best to succeed. I have already started moving forward.

*Dr. Julienne J. Baptiste, M.D., is an ESOL level 6 (Advanced) student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, FL. His teacher is Ms. Silvia Giovanardi.*

### **“Can You Please Page Nurse Jean?”**

Different people have different ambitions. Some people want to be rich. Some people wish to become leaders. Some people desire to be great teachers. Some people are simply led by a spirit of adventure. Then there are others, whose sole purpose is to earn as much money as they can by any means necessary. Yet, there are others who regrettably never find their way.

Thankfully, my future has never been one of obscurity. My goal in life is not that of power or of social status. My goals and ambitions are simple enough. They all can be surmised into a single statement. My purpose in life is to service the poor and the downtrodden through the field of healthcare. As a nurse, I will do my best to serve the community in which I work and live.

What a joy it is to think that I will be able to change someone's life. To work for others, truly gives me peace of mind. So much so, that I have decided to spend the rest of my life in the field of servicing suffering people. I intend to go into private practice, in which I will charge only reasonable prices for the medicine

supplied to my patients. I do not want to make myself wealthy from the misfortune of those in need. I will keep only what I must to acquire the bare necessities. I will have a good practice. I will work hard for it. I will earn the reputation of being a good and well-rounded nurse.

It should be quite evident that servicing humanity will be my precept. I shall not run after riches. I will always help the poor and the needy. With God by my side, it will only be a matter of time before my dreams become a reality. When I hear those words, “Can you please page, Nurse Jean?” With pride, I will respond, “Here I am!”

*Ludonie Jean is a student at Miami Dade College North Campus.*

## **My Future Self**

Goals and ambitions can be numerous and they vary during a lifetime. One of my goals was to move to the United States, but I had to make certain changes in my personal and professional life. For this reason, I decided to organize my new goals and ambitions in order of my priorities. My priorities are my personal life goals and my professional goals and ambitions. These goals help me to visualize my future self.

Now that I am living in the United States, my priority is to learn more English. I need to learn more vocabulary, to read and write correctly, to understand when people speak to me, to know how to express myself, to speak with more fluency, and to lose the fear I have to speak English. I especially need to learn more English to pass the ultrasound accreditation. To make this possible, I had to find a school that taught English. On the internet, I found the ESOL program at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida, which I am currently attending. Another priority is taking care of my children. I want to teach them good values, set a good example for them, and give them a good education. I would like to give them a better life to help them have a good future.

To help my children have a better future, I need to improve my health. A personal goal that I have is to improve my diet. I would

like to eat healthy, drink more water, and drink less coffee during the day. I want to go to the gym in the morning to have good physical health. My relationship with God is very important for me, too, for my emotional and spiritual health.

Although I have many personal goals to achieve, I also have many professional goals. The most important is to pass the ultrasound accreditation. When I get my license, I will be able to find a good job. When I get a job, I want to aspire to get a better position or promotion in my job. I would like a supervisory position in a private clinic. With a better position, I could have a better salary and be able to achieve other goals like a big house, better car, or pursue a bachelor's degree in diagnostic imaging.

In conclusion, goals and ambitions can be numerous and vary throughout a lifetime. When we want to improve our life, it is important to prioritize what we want. When we realize and achieve our goals, we feel great about ourselves. We know that nothing is impossible. Any dream, goal, or ambition that we have is possible to reach. We just have to propose, organize, and think positive to fight to reach our goals for our future self.

*Ileana Ortiz is an ESOL student at the West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

## **My Goals and Ambition**

Everyone in life has goals and ambitions. Most people's goals are to get married, have kids or even buy their own house. One of my immediate personal goals is to finish one thing that I was supposed to finish a long time ago.

I was not able to do it in the past, but now I have the time to do it. I am doing it for myself; that thing is to finish the GED. Yes! I have to get it done so I can start my career.

One of my goals in life is to become a famous reporter or journalist. I love talking in front cameras, and I love to write long stories about life.

But let me tell you, in life you have to do a lot of things to get those things done! Obviously, I want to attend school and

finish my Bachelor's degree in Broadcasting, Journalism and Communications. As soon as I obtain my Bachelor's degree, I would love to get married and have kids! Yes! Of course! Who doesn't love kids? I see myself as being successful in my career, owning my own house, and owning a restaurant. As a child, I always dreamed of owning my own restaurant to help my family. In conclusion, I have many goals, but for now, the most important one is to pass the GED.

*Irving Anariva is a student at the Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. His teacher is Mrs. Thompson.*

### **A Secret Goal**

I was 12 when I was in my room, hearing a beautiful song making noise in my ears. I didn't understand the lyrics because I didn't understand the language. That made me sad!

I didn't pay attention and never figured the importance of English classes. Nevertheless, I brought up one phrase in my brain, "One day I will be a fluent English speaker."

With my secret goal in my mind, I enrolled in online free classes. I started, but then nothing happened. I quit so many times. My inbox filled with emails that I didn't delete because I wanted to read them one day. That day never came, and I had more emails to read than time to read them. No wonder I transferred them to the trash, and deleted, one more time, my dream to speak English fluently.

Two years ago, I moved to Florida, and after one year dating a monolingual American, I married him. Now, we are working like a team for our dreams and our life. Speaking English is my reality, my life, my obsession; for improving my relationship, for finding a good job, for understanding my new life.

Sometimes, I am scared and I think, if I'm at home, and my son speaks to me in Spanish, how can I do it? If I'm in a store, and the cashier sees my look, and she guesses I am Hispanic, and starts speaking to me in Spanish, how can I do it? If I'm at home when I turn on the TV, and I don't understand what is happening, how can I do it?



And the answer is, my son needs to understand that when I was his age, I was in a different place growing up to one day be his mother. Now, I have more years, more wrinkles on my face, less fresh neurons than him, but more passion to be a better person for us, and I need his help.

To the cashier, if she is more patient, and tries to put me on my feet, she can help me, but in English please.

And to myself, nobody said it would be easy, but I can do it. I am one lucky person that found a beautiful country, beautiful people, a beautiful environment, a beautiful family, and a beautiful school.

It's never too late to start over. If you weren't happy with yesterday, try something different today. Don't stay stuck. Do better.

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

## **My Professional and Personal Goals**

When we speak of goals and ambitions, we speak of things that we'll want to do in the future, or we dream of something that we want. Sometimes we think that some dreams will not be accomplished, but we don't know that until we make it.

First of all, I have many goals but some are more important than others. One of them is to learn English and to learn reading and writing. I want to feel secure when I talk with somebody. This goal is essential for me because I live in a country where the native language is English, so it is necessary for me to learn.

Secondly, my other goal is to go to college and study something about the computers. I don't know exactly, but I feel that it's very interesting for the future and also, I have good computer skills. Sometimes, I see that the business is what moves the world.

My third goal is to help my family. I think everybody wants to help their family and not just economically, but also to know new places and new cultures.

When we put these goals in our mind, we just think that this can change our life or this can make us feel good. Sometimes, the goals are not easy, but we need work hard to get what we want and not stop our dreams.

*Juan Naranjo is a student at Delray Full Service School.*

### **Leading by Example**

My goals and ambitions in life are to be successful by having a good job and being able to provide a good home for my family.

In order to be successful, I have to get my GED. That is the main thing that I have to do in order to achieve the rest of my goals. By obtaining my GED, I could apply for a better paying job. I would like to be a mechanic. This is my dream job. By having a good job I would be able to afford a good home and to provide for my family. I could ensure that my family would have everything that they needed such as a good education for my son. I want to make sure he has everything he needs to be successful in life. That's why I want to get my GED. I want to show him the importance of an education so that he will follow my example and also achieve his goals.

*Juan Rodriguez-Luna is a GED Student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Rosa Vazquez is his teacher.*

### **LiYanGao**

Life is like sailing through the rapids. It is bound to be hard. Efforts and striving is the only way to achieve your goals and ambitions. Striving to have a full life comes with conditions. A life without striving is like diamonds that lose their luster; like fireflies that make light, but do not glow. I am striving to make my life more valuable and also to make myself become more confident.

I have two goals. First, I think my health is the most important thing to me. If I lose my health, I am not only unable to do what

I want to do but also it brings negative economic pressure on my spirit. So, I would like to say, don't hurt yourself trying to make money.

Secondly, I desire to make my second language, English, as fluent as my first language, Chinese. In that case, there would be no problem speaking with anyone. I'm in Adult ESOL classes with the most humorous and helpful teachers. I think one day my English will be much better. So only with great effort, I will strive to find the fruit and reach my goals and ambitions.

*Li Yan Gao is a student in Margo Scranton and Lori Savoy's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **Make Yourself What You Want To Be**

Can I do this, or can I reach my goal? That is the question people often ask themselves. Opportunities are with us. How can we manage all settings like time, goals, vision, aptitude, money and sometimes even family and friends?

Since when I was a teen, my main goal was to have a great professional career in my life. First of all, I wanted to be a doctor, but after my high school graduation I realized that would not be achievable. It was like catching the moon with my teeth. I didn't want to waste my time. As I was not too bad in math, I decided to choose Economic Sciences.

It was like a bitter pill to swallow, but I began with the end in mind. When I had money in my pocket, I couldn't enjoy good times with friends because I chose to buy books, make copies, pay for internet services, and to have my research done. Spending money to build my knowledge was my priority. There were sometimes onerous tasks, but I thought my perseverance would help me to achieve my goal.

I used to have time after school to play soccer with my friends and go see my family. By the time I started, because of my concentration on my studies, I couldn't do the same. I must stay on my computer doing homework and research, although many

times it was a lemon. Worn out, I want to take a break and my books said to me “go get fresh air and a cool drink then come back. I am with you until you reach your goal.” Every week teachers go with us to do fieldwork so that we acquire experiences.

I did my best to complete my courses. I want to achieve my goal. I keep working on it because I’m not satisfied yet. With one year in USA, I feel everything is above me. That motivation brought me to enlist at Lorenzo Walker Technical College to improve my English, pass my TABE test and go to college to continue my career or switch to find the greatest opportunity. Many kind teachers work hard every day to help us. Now I have the possibility to understand English much better.

I think I can, I am not yellow-bellied in that case. I am working hard to have a better life. I believe in my motivation. My sun will shine in the sight of everyone. America is the land of opportunity and I am optimistic about reaching my goal. One day review I’ll review my past. I will be proud of the great success, living my good life helping people in need.

*Frednel Etienne is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He’s in the ELCATE class and his teacher is Mrs. J. he came from Haiti 10 months ago.*

### **Special Goals for Me**

I am Karthika and I am from India. I have been in the United States for 12 years. When I first came to the USA, I couldn’t go to work. I was here on an H4 visa, so I couldn’t do anything here. I was always sitting at home watching TV, listening to music and cooking. I felt sick of these everyday routines.

Then my husband told me to do something useful and set some small goals.

I love reading books. In fact, I can’t sleep without reading a book. One day I got a book from the library. Its title is “Dying to Be Me,” by Anita Moorjani. In this book the author explains her “journey from cancer and near death to true healing.”

This book created a great impact on me. Then I decided to translate this book, which is in English, to Tamil (my language). Here is my goal. After I set my goal, I came to Dunbar Community School to improve my English.

*Karthika Venkitasamy is improving her English every day at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She is in Vicki McDonald's ESOL 5 class.*

## **Staying Focused**

We all have goals in life but not everyone is determined to accomplish their goals. I have three big goals. One is to pass the GED exam and get my GED. Another one of my biggest goals is to enroll in medical school and become a pediatrician. My third goal is to be able to buy a house. I believe that I have the determination to accomplish the goals that I have set for myself.

I had many obstacles while in high school. So much happened in my personal life which caused me not to graduate. Sometimes as young adults we are unaware of the consequences we have to face for making poor choices. In this society, having a GED or high school diploma is very important. Statistics show more than 60% of job opportunities in the skilled labor force require a high school diploma. There are also a number of employers who will not even consider hiring a candidate that did not graduate. Receiving my GED will enable me to pursue higher education. Although I didn't graduate from high school, it hasn't stopped me from striving to pursue my education, which is why I'm determined to get my GED.

My second goal in life is to be able to enroll in medical school and become a pediatrician. My dream is to be a pediatrician because I love children, and I want to keep them healthy. I want to teach children the importance of healthy habits as well as their parents. I want to help the needy and poor children from other countries. My ambition to become a pediatrician is not just an economic goal but a desire to help children in need. The joy of helping someone in need is the best feeling.

Last, but not least, I want to buy my own house. To me, it is very important to have my own house not just for myself but for my children. I'm very thankful for all of the blessings that we

have received from God, but I know that having my own house will make a big difference in raising my family. Currently, we are renting a mobile home where the space is not the best for my children. That is why I motivate myself every single day to do better in life and so I can have a better future.

In conclusion, my advice is to embrace your goals. I'm doing my best by attending my GED classes every day. Even if I'm late, I try my best to go to class. I know that getting my GED will open many doors for me.

*Brenda Martinez is a GED student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Her teacher is Rosa Vazquez.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

My goals are like a soccer game. Here is how I play. First, I was granted the best coaches to make me the best player; that would be my teachers for my GED classes. Education is the key to success. Therefore, having a drive and a thirst for knowledge encourages me to go to practice every day. When at home, I keep revising and practicing what I have learned well. Practice makes you perfect, does it not? Having friends who I can share my knowledge with is like playing with teammates.

The next key is sharing thoughts or debating on different topics. This is the way I learn how to advance in a subject. It's like passing the ball on the soccer field to score a goal. I take a practice test to know if I'm ready to take the real exam, just like I take shots at the goal during a practice match. That's how I will learn how to angle my foot on the ground to make a perfect goal.

I'm currently working towards college, or in soccer terms, the play off. It's like having a rushing adrenaline, wondering what it's like having my mind set on the prize. Becoming a computer engineer is my prize. Technology is the wave of the future and that's how you're able to watch the big soccer game at home. Having a praying mother with aunts and uncles and a father who keeps pushing me, I have no choice but to be a successful player. They are my fan base who keeps cheering

me on; not to mention the great coaches that have entered my life. I am destined for greatness.

Becoming a team captain and to be known as being on a great international team is the ultimate dream for me. My other dreams are to live happy, start a family, which comes with a lot of responsibility and having a nice house in Jamaica. I want to make it possible for my mommy to live a stress free life after all she tried her best to make my dreams a reality.

My high expectations and being motivated by loved ones around me is my ultimate drive to achieve my goals: achieve my high school diploma, and a Bachelor's in Computer Science. Then, I will be able to enjoy the fruits of my labor in my beautiful home in Jamaica. Soccer is a nice game to watch, but remember: being a player you have to put in hard work and be determined to come out as the best player.

*Lorenzo Morgan is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where his teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

### **Keep Following your Dreams**

One time, someone told me “the sky is just the beginning” and these words gave me encouragement to keep following my goals.

I came to this country with many goals to achieve. Countless people have arrived in this country with the idea of having a better life and becoming a success but sometimes people forget their goals and why are they here. What they need is someone to tell them that they can reach whatever goals they want. To illustrate this, before that person told me “the sky is just the beginning,” I was feeling as if I would not achieve my goals. Frustrated because I could not go to high school here in the U.S. last year because my age 17 years old, I felt discouraged.

However, after hearing that quote, I became motivated and now here I am. I am improving my English skills and taking a course for my GED so I will be able to go to college. Then, I will finally reach my long-term goal, which is to become a pilot. I know that by working hard and going step by step, I will make it. If you

want to reach something, you can do it. Do not forget that you have to work hard and be dedicated to it. The goal maybe difficult but not impossible.

*Brandon Herrera studies at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He enjoys going to the gym and he likes to play basketball. He is 17 years old and he is working toward earning a GED.*

### **I Need a Miracle**

My name is Jean Feguens Cenat. I am from Haiti. My ambition is to become a lawyer. This is a long term goal. It is going to take a long time and a lot of very hard work because I do not see it to be that easy to achieve. I am so behind with learning because first, I do not have a high school diploma. Second, I am still trying to learn English. Though I understand better when someone speaks, I need to improve my writing and reading. But, I believe in miracles. It is going to take a miracle to happen for me to become a lawyer. Meanwhile, I am going to study as much as I can to get closer to my goal.

*Jean Feguens Cenat is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **My Personal Goal**

My name is Sabrina. I am 38 years old. I have been married for 17 years and I have two children: one daughter and one son. I love my family.

When I got married, I came to the U.S. in 2000 because of my husband's work. My son was born in the U.S. on December 21, 2000. This was my first experience as a mother and the best part of my life.

I was in the U.S. for two years and then returned to Brazil. I returned to college to study physical education. I graduated in 2003. After that I started working at a job I love.

In June 2005, my second child was born.



I was in Brazil for 14 years but I had a great desire to give my children a better chance at life in the U.S. Today I am here in the U.S. again, studying English so that I can get work as a personal trainer. My husband is working here again in the U.S. We are happy here and studying hard because we know that studying is the best way to realize my dreams.

*Sabrina Tinoco is from Brazil, but is now living happily in Lee County, Florida and attending Dunbar Community School. She is working diligently in Vicki McDonald's Level 5 ESOL course.*

### **Preparing For My Future**

I would like to share my main goals and ambitions. First, I want to improve my English day by day. After I complete the ELL program, I would like to start a career in cosmetology, and have my own hair salon.

I really need to understand English when I am reading and listening because I live in the United States where English is the official language. Therefore, it is very important for me to speak and have conversations with my children and friends in English. I want to be a role model for my children to demonstrate why it is very important to study. I want them to love books and learning.

Although working in a packinghouse, I want to find a better job that pays more money per hour so I can open a savings account to save for my career education. I have decided on cosmetology because it is interesting to me. I want to know how to mix the colors, how to use the scissors; I would like to know how to use makeup. Another reason that I have chosen cosmetology is that it is not too expensive and does not take too long to get the license.

My ambition is to have my own hair salon and have many customers to make money. I would like to have a special day each month for free haircuts and makeup for the people of my community. I love to help people, because I feel happy when I do something good for others.

*Adriana Antonio Lopez is from Oaxaca, Mexico. She is currently in the ELL program at Immokalee Technical College. She feels blessed because she can type with her own letters. Her teacher is Katie Mominee.*

## **Pursuit of Happiness**

There are many goals in life I want to pursue. Obtaining a GED is one of the biggest goals that will fuel my ambitions for my future.

I have always had the desire to work toward my GED diploma. When I came to America in 2006, I knew that I would one day go back to school. Sadly, life circumstance has prevented me from achieving this goal. However, three weeks ago something finally changed. I received notification from my employer that I would have a new work schedule. The off season in my field of work allowed for different hours. This change in work schedule permitted me the opportunity to attend evening GED classes twice a week. I could finally pursue the chance to find happiness by reaching my educational goals.

The opportunity to earn my GED will give me a chance for further advancement in my career. It will also allow me the chance to follow my dream of earning a college degree in accounting. This opportunity provides me with the confidence to ensure a positive future and happiness. I look forward to working hard toward a bright future.

In short, to accomplish my goals and pursue my ambitions, I must set goals. I must have the confidence to know I can do it. I remember when I came to the United States it was not easy. I did not know English, but I worked hard to learn the language. Every day, I worked at speaking so I could communicate in the new country in which I lived. Although I struggle sometimes, I am now a fluent English speaker. I often use this experience and the joy it brings me to stay focused and remember that goals are achievable. I have come this far and I am not going to stop here.

I feel blessed being an American citizen and having the privilege of living in America. Here, I can freely dream and follow through with actions to make my dreams a reality. I truly appreciate the community I live in, my teachers, and school staff who have provided me great opportunities to gain an education, knowledge, and help me reach the goals I set for my future.

*Anonymous*

## **I Want to Have a Better Life**

My name is Natacha Thevenin. I am from Haiti. My only goal is to have a better life. People say that you can be what you want in America. Really?

I do not see this is true unless, first, I know how to speak English correctly. Second, I need a college degree. I would like to be a nurse. The final thing I want in my life is to bring my daughter to this country so that she can have a better life with me. It is not impossible. It is going to take time, patience, effort, money, and follow the immigration procedures. It will happen some day.

*Natacha Thevenin is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Not So Far From Now**

When I started playing baseball at the age of 3, I fell in love with this sport. For me, baseball is the best sport ever. At the beginning, I played it as a hobby and because my parents wanted me to be away from the bad things on the streets. For that I'll always be thankful to them, for all the support they gave me and are still giving me.

Six years ago I started to consider the sport more seriously as something that I wanted to do my whole life. I had to make a decision between my studies or to take the step to start working to get signed to pro ball. It was hard because my parents did not like the idea of me leaving my studies, but they told me: "anything you decide, we will always support you," and that was all I wanted to hear at that moment because I really wanted to become a baseball player. I started working so hard to achieve my first goal and to make my parents proud every day, always with a purpose, and that was how I got signed with the Houston Astros on July 2nd of 2013 when I was 16 years old. That day I realized that anything you propose to yourself, you can do if you stay close to God, have the support of your family, and put all the discipline and hard work in it.

I have been with the Astros since that day, and I've had many ups and downs, but I never put my head down because I have people around me that support me a lot, who are the same people that I will make proud when I get to the big leagues. That is my goal. The road to the big leagues is not easy, but it is not impossible. I sometimes cry when things aren't going well or just because I want to have my family watching me play during the season, an opportunity that I haven't had yet. But every time that happens, I understand that things do not come in the time we desire, but in God's time. I will play in the big leagues someday not so far from now, and I'll look back to these days and realize that all the hard work and all the sacrifices paid off. I will make my family proud of me, and I will always thank God for the talent and the opportunity he gave me to be part of this beautiful sport. I would like someday to help the young guys achieve their goals, sharing with them my personal and professional experiences. If you dream it, you can do it, but you have to be close to God, work hard, and keep your goals in mind as your motivation.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Psalm 23

*Jonathan Matute is a prospect from Caracas, Venezuela signed with the Houston Astros. He is a student in their language and literacy program. His teacher in FL is Doris Gonzalez.*

## **My Favorite Day**

### **Gardening: My Favorite Kind of Day**

Just waking up, of course, makes every day an awesome day. However, my favorite kind of day is waking up knowing I'm going to get my hands dirty today! I'm going to be pulling out all my gardening supplies and getting my hands in the soil.

The first step I'm going to take is to get outside and see what condition my plants are in. I'll be checking to see which ones are producing or getting overly crowded. Many of them are such giving plants that I often have to gather seeds, rotate the pots, pull out weeds, remove the spent blooms and transplant some of them. Those are actually some of the best activities that make up a day in the garden for me.

Once I have seen what each of my little plant friends is presenting me that day, making new arrangements is what really thrills me. It's a delight seeing what I can grow together. I may place flowers with foliage, or hens and chicks with sedum. Grouping different varieties of plants in pots is very relaxing to me. Finding the right placements for each individual plant requires making sure that all are going to grow well together. I get a lot of pleasure and joy from seeing a happy and thriving plant arrangement.

The final part of a great day in the garden is giving some plants away. Sharing the gifts from my garden is a huge part of being a grower. Having someone to share with brings on a whole new experience. I find it makes my heart feel light and cheerful. The feeling of making someone else's day by blessing them with one of my plants is all too awesome.

So, from sunrise to sunset, a wonderful day for me includes lots of time outside in my garden among my little plant friends. They have gifts for me which I discover, collect, and rearrange in the lovely pots of dirt. Then I double the joy by sharing a plant gift with a friend. Now that is my favorite kind of day!

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

## **A Day of Peace**

Everyone has a favorite day in their lives. Yet thinking about war in the world, makes it difficult for me to think about my favorite day. Thinking about poor people, people living in harsh geographic conditions, and governments and other advanced countries taking advantage of the poor prevents me from thinking about a world of peace.

There are so many poor countries that do not have the basic needs for their daily lives, such as proper restrooms and showers. Some of these people do not even have enough food to eat. Some of the countries are located in harsh geographic locations, such as in the mountains. I can only imagine with the harsh climate and cold weather in winter, how so many people suffer. Unfortunately, many of these people live in countries that have good sources of natural minerals and wealth, but the governing leaders are not helpful to their people.

Other nations with more power make civil war and try to get money for themselves. That is one of the reasons we always see war in the third world countries. These countries, unlike more advanced countries, suffer from unfairness and war. I can only wish for a day of peace for all people in the world and a fair share of a good life for everyone.

For instance, in a peaceful world there would be no wars between countries. Also, children could safely go to school. Moreover, instead of spending money for war, money would go to creating good jobs for everyone. Since there would be no wars, people would not have the stress of worrying about food, jobs, health, and life.

Everyone has a favorite day in their lives. However, mine is not a day of the week or a holiday, but rather a day in the future in which every day is a day of peace.

*Reza Tajiani is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

## **Let Every Day be Sunday**

My name is Zidor Cedieu. I am from Haiti. My favorite day is Sunday. On Sundays, my mom always makes me a big breakfast. Then I take my dog, Jeff, to the park. For lunch, my family and I go out to eat at our favorite restaurant. After that, dad takes us for a long drive in the countryside. In the evening, we all watch movies together. I cannot wait for Sunday to come again. It is a great day to spend special time with my dear mom, dad, and family.

*Zidor Cedieu is studying English at Career/Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Traditional Christmas**

When I was a little girl, I enjoyed Christmas Day because my mother, sister, brother and I went to my grandparent's house. We cooked a big dinner and drank punch with tequila. Everyone was very happy. Christmas is my favorite day because I think about God, spend time with my family, and have a celebration.

During Christmas Day I go to mass with my family, and I pray the rosary to give thanks to God for Jesus. When I was younger, my parents took me and my siblings to church. Now my husband and I go to church with my children. We feel it is important that we teach them about our faith and traditions.

Another tradition that I remember when I was younger was visiting my grandparents with my brothers and sisters. My grandparents and aunts prepared a big dinner for us to eat. We would break the piñata and grab the candy and mandarin oranges. Now after mass, my family visits my friends and then I cook a dinner of tamales, champurrado, bunuelos, and punch.

After dinner we continue to celebrate by playing mariachi records, singing, dancing, and drinking more punch. The younger children receive gifts of dolls, trucks, clothes, or jewelry. The celebration lasts until 2 A.M. Everyone goes home to sleep, while I clean up the house.

In conclusion, Christmas is my favorite day because I think about God, spend time with my family, and have a celebration.

I am now an adult, but I still love Christmas because of my traditions.

*Rosa Aguirre is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **Fire, Crackle, and Pop!**

This summer, I spent the Fourth of July at Gibson Park with my family. My grandpa, who lives several states away, came to visit and celebrate the holiday with us. Since I don't get to see him very often, it made the holiday even more special.

Once we arrived at the park, we needed to find a place to sit. There were more people there than grains of sand on the beach. We walked endlessly through a maze of blankets, picnic baskets, and smells of various Fourth of July feasts. Finally, we spotted a patch of grass in the sea of people. My brother and I quickly claimed the spot by unfolding our lawn chairs and spreading out our own blanket.

The smell of everyone else's food made my stomach rumble, which let me know that it was time to eat. I helped my grandpa make his super delicious cheeseburgers on a small grill that we brought with us. While the burgers were sizzling on the well-seasoned grill, Grandpa told me funny stories about when my dad was little. We laughed so hard that we both forgot about the cheeseburgers, which ended up with crispy-burnt edges.

Once the fireworks started, my eyes focused on the sky. The bright colors lit the dark night like a sunny afternoon. The patterns reminded me of sprinkles on top of a birthday cake. When I noticed the reflection in the lake, it was like I was seeing two fireworks shows, one in the sky and one right below.

After the fireworks finale, I swiped the blades of grass away as I helped my family fold the blankets and lawn chairs. I was not looking forward to the long trek home, but the time passed faster than I expected. With the fireworks and spending time with my grandpa, it was surely a stupendous Fourth of July.

*Robidjy Fils-aime is a student at Miami Dade College North Campus, where his teacher is Cassandre Jean-Pierre.*



## **Christmas, My Favorite Day**

“Christmas is not a season, it’s a feeling,” said Edna Ferber. Christmas is my favorite day. This day is very special for me and for all people. This day is different from the other days of the year for me. It is a day to remember the true meaning of Christmas, Jesus Christ’s birthday. This day is also to get together all the family because this day for me is the only day where everyone can get together and enjoy.

I like Christmas Day because I feel excited when that day comes. First we go to buy the tree at the store and then together we decorate it. We put colored lights around the tree and they sparkle like colorful stars. Around the house we also put up lights with my brothers. I like to see the house full of the lights because it looks beautiful.

My family makes tamales and punch and we hear Christmas music. My family is very happy and then we eat tamales all gathered at the table and then the children break the piñata. We enjoy that day we had a great time. I love Christmas day enjoying time with my family together.

*Adan Grave is from Guatemala he has been living Naples FL. United States for eleven months. He works in a restaurant making salad. He loves his job.*

## **Together on Sunday**

Joseph Addison said, “Sunday clears away the rust of the whole week.” This is my favorite day, it’s very special. Although some people may be working on Sundays, this day is usually the time for most of us to rest from work.

Sunday is my favorite day because this day is dedicated to prayer and worship of the Lord for his power and his mercy for us. I get up early, I take a shower, and then I get dressed to get to church. I pass a good time there in the prayer. After that, I come back home so that I do my chores. First, I clean my bedroom and fix all my things. Secondly, I help my mother in different activities such as cleaning the house, cleaning dishes and so on. Thirdly, I read some

interesting books, I do my homework and I watch the news. Sunday is also a fun day for me to relax, to hang out with friends, spend times with my family and share our opinion about the future.

Usually on this day, my family and I go to a bar restaurant. Each member of the family has his favorite meal. Mine is rice with beans, chicken and salad. It's very delicious, I enjoy this meal. I feel pretty good, I have no stress, no pressure, I feel comfortable. At the bar restaurant they play music, we dance together and we are very happy and joyful. We spend good moments together. Sometimes, when we finish eating we go to a movie. My favorite movie is Romantic Love, I enjoy this movie because I'm a romantic man.

I feel excited because I spend my time with my family. We share together our experiences about the last week and see what we can reject and what we can upgrade to become better. I feel love because my great sister doesn't go to work and she cleans my nails for me. Also, sometimes she irons my clothes. Other times, some of my friends come to visit me, we share jokes and we are very joyful.

Finally, Sunday is the best day of the week according to me. For several people it's a free day, there is no work. It's a day of happiness to relax, to spend times with your family, with people you love. For me Sunday represents a comfort, love, happiness, excitement, and everything good. Would you like to spend a Sunday like that?

*Alexandre Max Elder Didley is a student in level 5 and in GED in the afternoon at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. He's from Haiti, and living here for 4 months. He likes to play soccer and basketball.*

### **My Favorite Day**

One day I fell in love with a wonderful, respectful, caring, and honest man. When I first met him in Florida, we had a beautiful and unforgettable time. After our first date, we continued talking, going out and getting to know each other more deeply until the unexpected day arrived. The wonderful man proposed to me and, since then, my life changed instantly.

We discussed our plans to get married and decided on the date of our wedding to be held in Puerto Rico. The days were spent

with anxiety by the time of the wedding. As the days went by, I spent the time looking at the bridal gowns, the flowers, the center pieces, etc. We chose the ladies as maid of honor and bridesmaids; the gentlemen as best man and groomsmen; the ring bearer; the florist; the godparents; and, of course, a limo driver.

After all that dialogue with my fiancé choosing those to be in our wedding, I expressed how exciting, overwhelming, and exhausting it is to plan a wedding. Then in March, I had to travel to Puerto Rico to continue with the plans and preparations for the wedding. Upon my arrival, I was excited and super happy. My parents, brothers and family were happy to hear the news that I was getting married.

As the days passed, my fiancé traveled to Puerto Rico and I became more nervous of the upcoming event. When I was sleeping, I found myself thinking that my future husband was going to leave me flat at the altar. I had couple of nights without sleep, but it was all about my nerves.

The most awaited day, our wedding, and the nerves came out through my pores. The stylist arrives, combs through my hair, and prepares my face with make-up. Increasingly, emotions came to be as my mother and I put on the beautiful white gown that flared with a long fishtail. The photographer arrived to take pictures, then we were ushered into the limo to arrive within minutes at the front steps of the church.

In my mind, I said, “the time has come.” As my mother and father escorted me to the alter, I arrive where my future husband is standing. The pastor takes us in prayer before God, in short, my fiancée agrees to marry me and I agree to marry him. With so many emotions, there were a lot of tears of joy. We celebrated our marriage with our relatives and friends. We thank God that our marriage is still firm with the good and the bad. We are a happily married couple. This was my favorite day in my life.

*Carol Hernandez is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Ed. Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## Thanksgiving Holiday

Thanksgiving is one of the traditional American holidays. It's a good way for family members to meet together. Also it can mean different things for different people. My first Thanksgiving holiday was memorable because I spent the time with my family, I visited my friend's house in Apopka and I went to the movies.

First, my family and I had a delicious dinner. We ate turkey, salad, rice and beans, fried plantains and so on. Also we gave thanks to God for the joy of life. We talked about their recent activities and enjoyed a great dinner together.

Secondly, my friend came to pick up me to visit his house at Apopka. He let me drive from my house to Apopka. Before I got his house, we went to supermarket, we brought some food, wine, and water. When we got home we drank some wine. We also talked about the presidential election results in Haiti and then he introduced me his fiancé. It was a great day for me.

Lastly, the day was very crazy for us because my friend and I planned to see a movie. When we arrived at the theater, we changed our plan after watching the movie posters. My friend suggested we should drive around in the city more and I agreed. Therefore, we drove around and saw some beautiful places. At the end of the day, my friend asked me if I enjoyed the day. I responded that it's my first Thanksgiving holiday in the U.S.A. and it's a wonderful day in my life.

Thanksgiving is a meaningful holiday to reunite with family and friends from far away. I am grateful to get together with important people in my life. I truly enjoyed the day and it was a wonderful moment for me. I can't wait for another one.

*Dawindy Vallon is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College Orlando Campus. He is Haitian and previously studied medicine for 5 years in the Dominican Republic. He wants to be a surgical assistant in the future.*

## **A Month Long Christmas**

Christmas is a festivity that is the most important time of the year. It is when the birth of the child Jesus is celebrated. In Puerto Rico, it is celebrated all the month of December until the beginning of January with music, *parrandas*, food, and drinks. Unlike the United States that celebrates Christmas only on the 25th of December, Puerto Rico's celebration lasts a month.

Christmas in Puerto Rico is a time to reflect, be with the family, to make special meals, and to celebrate with music. In my country, this is a time of joy, giving thanks, and meditating on God, and joyfully spending time with family. Also, Christmas means loving other people and visiting each other.

This festivity is celebrated in a big way in Puerto Rico because it is when we prepare our traditional meals and drinks of arroz con gandules, lechon y pasteles, arroz con dulce, flan, and coquito. When night comes, it is time to celebrate with music with our *parrandas*. We go house to house singing, dancing and playing instruments until midnight. This is how we celebrate Christmas in my beautiful Puerto Rico.

In conclusion, Christmas is the most beautiful time of the year. It is when we can thank God who gave his life for us. This is why the time is so special and the reason why we celebrate the whole month of December with much love and pride. It is a time for family reunions to give thanks to God for everything we have and to enjoy a beautiful Christmas.

*Iraima Torres Leon is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

## **Best Birthday Ever**

My name is Eder Charles. I am from Haiti. One of the exciting days of my life was an unplanned surprised birthday party. It was my 26th birthday. I was member of a musical band (SMS Kreyol). We had a gig on this day in the house of the Consul of the Embassy of United States in Haiti. It was a party for a group of people who worked at the Embassy. Before the party ended,

I saw some ladies coming with gifts and a big cake leading the song “Happy Birthday Eder.” Then everybody started to join in the singing, followed by my band playing this Happy Birthday song, and ending with a grand finale drum solo by me. It was an arousing and powerful performance. I felt it in every fiber of my soul. I felt exalted because I did not expect something like this. It was my first birthday party with prestigious people. I felt grateful. I took some pictures to remember this special day.

*Eder Charles is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **My Daughter’s Birthday**

My name is Edicson Rey. My favorite day is June 2nd. On this day, we celebrate my daughter’s birthday. My whole family meets at my house. We dance, play, and eat cake together. We share and reminisce sweet memories of my daughter’s life. We look at the various interesting and unforgettable pictures in the photo albums. It is such a joy to see my daughter get excited and she is very happy to be with her grandparents as she opens her gifts and plays with them at that moment.

*Edicson Rey is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Family Time**

My favorite day is Friday. This is the last day of the week and I get to spend time with my family. I can fix up the house after the kids play, and it is the day to spend my work money. I feel very happy when Friday comes. I do everything in my house and go to the beach in the afternoon with my family. These are the reasons why Friday is my favorite day.

*Platiny Etienne is a student in the Adult Education program at Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach. His teacher is Kristina Bowman.*

## **Saturday is Coming Soon**

My favorite day is Saturday. I have been in the United States for two years. I was living in Mexico with my daughter, but she fell in love and got married and went to live in Florida. For this reason I changed my life. Now I am living with my daughter in her home. We spend time every Saturday together. On Saturday, I spend time with my family, time outside, and time for myself.

After a long week of studying English, I look forward to spending time with my family on Saturday. We stay at home and I cook a big Mexican lunch of carne asada, pastor, and longaniza. We eat together and listen to popular Mexican music.

Usually, after lunch we go outside or go to the park. I like to play with my three-year-old grandson. He is very lively and at times stubborn. Even though he tells me “no,” I still love him. When we are finished at the park, we go home because we are exhausted.

Although I enjoy spending time with my family, I also need time for myself. On Saturday morning, I wake up late. I go to the salon to get a pedicure. I relax in the massage chair while the woman makes my feet beautiful. Afterwards, I go shopping to buy shoes that will boast my pretty toes. Later, I will treat myself to a vanilla ice cream. When my day off is over, I am ready to go home.

To conclude, I am very happy living with my family. My favorite day of the week is when I can spend time with them, especially outside, and have time for myself. When I am in class studying English, I tell myself, “Saturday is coming soon!” This motivates me to get through the week.

*Cristina Garibay is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

## **My Favorite Place**

### **Wonderful and Unforgettable Memories**

I am from Mexico and grew up in a small town called Izamal in the state of Yucatan. The most beautiful memories of my childhood are visits to the ranch of my beloved maternal grandparents. We visited them twice a year during school holidays. My joy began from the moment my mother announced that we would visit our grandparents, whom we affectionately call “Papi and Mami.” They lived on a farm far from the city of Izamal where we lived.

The night before the trip my sisters and I prepared our little luggage. We got up 6 a.m. to catch a bus to Kantunil. We boarded another bus that would take us to the small town called Cancakchen. Here we begin our three mile walk to our grandparents’ farm. The road was beautiful with interlocking trees. I could smell the grass, my eyes enchanted with the colorful flowers that adorned both sides of the road. It was wonderful to hear the birds sing like a symphony. The most wonderful moment was when we arrived at the entrance of the farm to shout “Mommy, Mommy, we’re here!” In my mind and heart I kept the image of seeing her appear full of joy, tears in her eyes as we ran to embrace her and kiss her. She immediately cooked breakfast: rich eggs, omelets, and delicious chocolate. Everything was prepared with firewood which gave it a special flavor. For lunch Mom and Grandmother cooked chicken broth, made with one of the best hens on the farm, while we played happily among the fruit trees of oranges, mangoes, and lemons.

At night, it was a spectacle to see when grandfather brought the cattle to the corral. His helpers were the dogs that would not allow any cattle to stray from their path. It allowed us to touch the cows and the horses and feed them oranges. When we fed them, their rough tongues touched our hands, and then we would quickly withdraw our hands. Without electricity at night, we would lie in our sunlit hammocks. He would tell us about beautiful legends and interesting experiences on the farm. For example, he said: “The elves (mythical characters of the Mayan culture) were the owners and guardians of the forests.” When



we listened to their stories, it was like watching a spectacular movie. Today our grandparents look at us from Heaven; His memory is a precious treasure that we keep in our hearts.

*Sister Norma Cime'Chan is a student in Margo Scranton and Lori Savoy's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **A Magical Town**

“One of the most beautiful colonial villages in Colombia, Villa de Leyva, is a city frozen in time. Declared a national monument in 1954, the photogenic village has been preserved in its entirety with cobblestone roads and whitewashed buildings.” Apparently, Lonely Planet and I agree about this destination in my homeland.

Villa de Leyva was founded in 1572 by the New Kingdom of Granada. It is a small town located in the magnificent green mountains of Colombia, at 7,051 ft. If you aren't use to this altitude, you may pack a dizziness pill to avoid complications. Don't worry, you'll be fine.

This place is fascinating. Being there is to have a lesson of history; a fun one. Millions of years ago it was an ocean, so the current desert areas are full of what was once ocean sand, where anthropologists and scientists keep finding evidence of dinosaur fossils. You can even find them on the side of the road while you rest from a four wheeling adventure or while you contemplate the astonishing blue ponds of water.

The colonial architecture is what really brings you back in time. The urban planning department is very serious about the respect for the original design. All the walls must be painted in white, wood elements such as window frames or doors should be displayed in their natural color or a specific shade of green. Additionally, Spanish tiles on the roofs and buildings cannot have more than two stories. Streets are made of stone and it is such a pleasure to hear the horses' shoes against the cobblestone, “clink, clink.”

The main plaza has the government facilities facing Spain, our motherland. There is also the Catholic Church, and lots of

restaurants. There is one spot that I never miss when I go there: it is the French bakery, famous for those succulent almond croissants. They are flawless, and for me, one is never enough! I still don't know any other bakery that makes them as good as they do. It is mandatory to eat as much as I can and even buy more to go.

This plaza is crowded on weekends and holidays, on Kites Festival in August and Candles night in December. Is the perfect place for romantic couples, European and American tourists, backpackers, families who want a break from the big cities, and there are always groups of friends camping at the outskirts of town. It is the getaway destination for everyone.

Villa de Leyva enchanted me from the very first sight. It is a magical town, full of culture and amazing landscapes. There is no way to run away from its attraction and charismatic essence. If I had to pick a place to spend my senior days, this could be the one. Certainly, it is one of my favorite places in the world.

*Sara Gomez Primero is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, where her teacher is Ms. Betten-Jutasi.*

### **Odessa, Ukraine - My Sweet Home**

Odessa is not just a city; it is a second home for anyone. In Odessa, you can feel warmth. I'll tell you about some of my favorite places there.

The heart of the city is Derybasivska Street. Most of it is only for pedestrians. The road is lined with stone blocks. Around it are stunning architectural buildings. There are many monuments, such as the one honoring Leonid Utiosov, a famous artist. He is seated on an open workbench. The seat next to him is empty. Therefore anyone may take pictures together with him.

Nearby there is the cozy City Garden with a beautiful musical fountain. On both sides, there are statues of a lion and lioness with cubs. At the top of Derybasivska Street is a monument to de Ribas, the founder of the city.

Along this street is a variety of cafes to suit any taste. In the summer, downtown is dotted with an array of beautiful flowers!

## Moving Forward

Another favorite place is the Odessa National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. This is a magnificent building in the style of the new Viennese Baroque. The auditorium has stylized architecture of the late French Rococo. This theater has an amazing story. You should definitely visit it!

Next is Prymorskyi Boulevard, which is very beautiful from beginning to end. It is surrounded by century-old sycamore, chestnut and linden trees. At any time, it is a pleasure to walk here. On charming benches you can relax, read a book, talk with your friends, or listen to music which oftentimes is performed by creative people.

On one side, there are gorgeous architectural buildings. On the other is the boundless Black Sea, and the main seaport of the country. Along this boulevard are many historic monuments, such as the Statue of the Duc de Richelieu, Potemkin Stairs, and Vorontsov Palace.

My most favorite place in Odessa is the lovely Luzanovka Beach. It is not downtown, but you should visit. This is a huge, wide and long beach. From here is a staggering view of the Black Sea. During summers, early in the morning, I loved to run along the shore of the beach, and then swim in the sea. Here I rejuvenate with positive energy, ready to move mountains.

At this beach there is a lot of fun and entertainment for both children and adults. There are a variety of cafes, restaurants, disco clubs, and hotels.

This city will find a special place in your heart. You certainly will remember good, warm memories of this special city of Odessa!

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

## **The Beach Is My Happy Place**

There are millions of people all around the world that have their favorite place to go. My favorite place to go just happens to be the beach. Going to the beach is always guaranteed to be a good time.

First, I love going to the beach due to the beauty. For example, the water is so beautiful. The way the sun shines on the water and makes it glisten is so relaxing. Also, I love to listen to the sound of the waves crashing together. My favorite part of enjoying the beauty and the scenery is when the sun sets. It is so stunning that it brings me peace of mind.

Second, I enjoy going to the beach due to the fun actions that come along with it. For example, building sand castles, walking along the shore searching for sea shells. I love running to the water and scooping whatever I can find into a net. It is always a mystery to see what I will end up with in my net. If I am really lucky, I can spot dolphins as they jump and swim in the surf. Most of all I enjoy swimming in the water until the sun starts to set.

Last but not least are the emotions I get from being at the beach. It is definitely a mood change in a great way. I just love the feeling of the sunshine as it hits my face and body! The sensation I get instantly lifts up my spirits. I start to feel a sense of happiness. Plus the steady rhythm of the waves as they pound onto the shore soothes me. Most of all, it makes me realize nature's true beauty which brings me a sense of calm.

For all of these reasons the beach is my happy place. I love the beauty. I love the emotions it brings out in me. I love how many different activities there are to do. Every time I go, I find something new and exciting about it. It is always guaranteed to be a great time when I'm at the beach!

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

## **Uncle Ashley's House**

My favorite place is my Uncle Ashley's house. His house is my favorite place to go for a few reasons. I get to play with Jax the dog, go kayaking on the river, and my uncle lets me do whatever I want while I am there.

First of all, Uncle Ashley has a big, loveable goofball of a dog named Jax. He is a lot of fun to play with while I am at their home. Jax likes to play fetch with this old, nasty, chewed up tennis ball. I toss the ball across the yard, and he brings it right back to me.

Secondly, at the back of Uncle Ashley's property is a river. Being on the river helps me relax a lot. So it is really great that when I am there I am allowed to take the kayak out by myself onto the river. I really enjoy being by myself on the water.

Finally, Uncle Ashley's house is my all-time favorite place to go because while I am there, he lets me do whatever I want! I really like the feeling of freedom to choose what I want to do, when I feel like doing it.

So, if you ask me, there is just no place on earth that is better than my Uncle Ashley's place. Jax the dog, the kayak on the river, and having freedom make it so great!

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

## **My Special Place is the Beach**

Walk across very blazing sand. Listen for good sounds in the seashells, and then take a scintillating swim.

Even though the sand is blazing hot, my feet don't care because I want to get rid of all the problems that I've been thinking about, and walking on sand does help.

When there is a chance, I go to the beach. Not only do I love to walk on hot sand and swim in the water, where I get myself all wet, but I also like to listen for all the different sounds in a seashell and give my ear a tingling sensation.

After eating my hot dogs, pizza, and all my salty pretzels, then I take an hour and a half of rest. At the same time, I dream of Jennifer Lopez. After all the eating and resting I do, it is time for me to take a long swim at the beach then dry myself off until I'm nice and dry.

People like to walk on the boardwalk and go shopping at the gift shop, so I give it a try. First I take a scintillating walk on the boardwalk and then I get trigger happy when my eyes see the gift store. I shop for posters of famous people, keychains, a beautiful picture of my ex-wife Lisa, and a beach house.

Take the day off from work, go to the beach, and relax.

*Pierre Thomas is a student at Adult & Community Education. He is one cool cat who is smart, bright, and loves to read a lot.*

### **Home Is Where the Heart Is**

My favorite place is in my Country Haiti, somewhere in the country side. It is called Port-Salut. I only went there once and I'm in love with this place. It was for a journey with my school staff due to homework about the natural sites of our country. We picked this place and I never knew that it was so beautiful. We went to a specific area in Port-Salut. It was a beach, the sand and the sea with their beauty make you feel like you were in a magical place. There were many restaurants serving all kinds of seafood and natural drinks, especially coconut water. They served it in the coconut with a straw just to give you the impression that it is local.

By the sea, there was a hotel. This is the place we spent the night, and the room was perfect as everything in it was made with wood, bamboo and palm leaves. We had dinner at the hotel's restaurant. It was nice listening to soft music of the 90's, there were some couples dancing, having fun, and the food was excellent. I can still feel the taste in my mouth. They also have good customer service; it was the first time for me to be treated like I was in another country while I was in my own country, the service was great and amazing.

Going back to the rooms, on the balcony I could see how wonderful the view was, this feeling thrilled me. When I was looking at the pool, there was no difference between it and the sea. It was like they were merged together, I don't know how they did it. What I mean is that you can swim in the sea while you are in the pool. I guess all the area was made with care and beauty.

I wish the government would give more attention to this place, so in the future I could bring some foreigners to visit it. It can be a good way to attract more tourists and with the money collected they could make it more beautiful.

*Natacha Dervil is 26 years old and from Haiti. She has lived in the U.S. for 4 months. Her teacher is Alan Rosheim.*

### **Colombia: A Great Place**

Colombia, in South America, is a place where you can see lovely and interesting places everywhere.

Around the country you will enjoy big and beautiful landscapes with majestic mountains, valleys, plains and coasts. We border two oceans – the North Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This favorable situation makes it very rich in all kinds and varieties of vegetables, fruits, fish, and meat. The colors and quality of food are great. For this reason, the people who go there feel happy enjoying the typical and international food made with our natural products and wonderful flavors.

This is a place with fantastic people: funny, smiling and doing their best for others, and all feel comfortable and fine and at home.

Our people are happy and take time to enjoy family, friends, and everybody who wants to share doing things like: going to parties, having a cup of coffee, traveling to different places and looking at the nice landscapes. Colombia has music everywhere and there is always a reason to feel it, sing it, and dance to it.

Colombia is the culture of suffering and forgiveness, but it is always trying to do its best and is always looking ahead.

Colombian people use the expression, “With faith and free will, everything can happen.” You only need “A please, a smile, and the impossible will be possible.”

In Colombia you can enjoy everything, especially the small and simple things.

Colombia is Love and Life. Colombia is her people.

*Patricia Granada is from Colombia where she worked as a paralegal. She is studying English at Jupiter Community High School. Patricia is in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class.*

### **No Place Like Home**

My favorite place is Home. Home is where I get to enjoy the best moments with my family. I don't get to see them often, so I really enjoy spending quality time with the people I love and who have been there for me since day one. They have supported me throughout my entire career and have been there for me at my most difficult times. They have worked very hard for me to be where I am today and I am very grateful for that.

Home is where I feel at peace. My mind rests as I have everyone I have ever cared about close to me. It is where I wake up happy knowing I am safe and surrounded by the people who care about me the most.

It doesn't matter if I'm in the big leagues or if one day I make it to the hall of fame. It doesn't matter if I am hundreds of miles away. Home will always be my favorite place.

*Teoscar Hernandez is a professional major league outfielder for the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a recent graduate of their language and literacy program. He is from Cotui, Dominican Republic. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.*



## **The Beach Is Special to Me**

My favorite place in the whole world is the beach. Being at the beach helps me to relax my mind. It is also the place where I can forget all the stress of my life and refresh my mind. That is why the beach is my favorite place to go.

First of all, I like to see the beauty of the beach. There you will see the blue sky and sparkling blue water. You will feel the wind blowing and see the birds flying. While you are on the beach, you will see other people relaxing on the shore. All of my senses take in the beauty of the beach.

Secondly, I like the beach for the way it makes me feel. While I am on the beach, I gaze upon the wide open ocean. This makes me feel like there is nothing to worry about. This is so opposite the feelings of worry and conflict with people and the many concerns they seem to express. Problems of dealing with people makes me feel so small and closed off. So, when I have the delight of going to the beach, the wide open ocean and broad sandy shore help open my heart up to feel peaceful again.

My own garden, where I watch natural plants grow is a great place to be. Also I enjoy traveling to many different places for a visit. However, going to the beach and seeing the ocean is definitely my most enjoyable destination.

*“Ping” Hua Hu-Carny is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.*

## **Alaska: a Great Place**

February 2015 my wife and I went to Alaska. For me it was one of the most amazing trips I have gone on. Alaska is so exciting! The reality of the land is so different to other states. For example, we saw a moose calf in someone’s yard and the resident yelled out before we got out of the car, “Stay in your car, the mother is nearby and will charge you.”

I was planning the trip for a couple of months; the routes, the distance in miles between one city to another, how much time we

would spend in that city, where to lodge, what to see and do. Plus, in case of an emergency we needed to know because some of the roads are lonesome and the winter is heavy with a lot of snow making it difficult to drive. We put together an emergency and survival package in case something did happen along our journey. Also, in some areas the cell phone would lose signal because of bad weather and mountains.

Our first destination was Fairbanks, Alaska. The distance between Fairbanks and Anchorage is almost a full day of driving; however, weather conditions are a major concern.

Then from Fairbanks we went to the Polar Artic Circle through the Dalton Highway with a tour guide. Our guide explained to us how dangerous the highway is. It took us 14 hours to get there and back. We kept trying to see the Northern Lights during the travel and temperatures were 23 degrees below zero.

We drove over 2,400 miles around the Alaska roads including little towns on the coast. We visited glaciers, which is an unforgotten experience. We drove through winter storms, saw caribous roaming the mountains, and so many panoramic views of Alaska. Life in Alaska is not about physical strength, it's about mental and positive attitudes to deal with everyday challenges. Alaska's weather conditions can change so drastically, you should always be ready and prepared.

*Aliro Jose Vidal is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **My Fortress**

My name is Robertho S. Assouman. I'm 17 years old. My favorite place is my room because it is isolated in a house in Golden Gate Estates, Naples, Florida. It is in front of the bathroom and between my aunt's room and that of my cousins. My bedroom is a large and rectangular space.

Hooked on the door, there is my jacket and a photo of an imaginary city. The landscape is so fantastic, there is a boat near a

coconut tree. This place is so dark, the sun illuminates the sky, the river flows so fresh, which gives the desire to take a bath so long.

The color of the walls in my room are cream and the ceiling is white; on the ground there is a long cream carpet. When I open the door, I see in the left corner my cupboard and a little work desk, on the right I see a nice kite butterfly like a statue close to a TV table.

I love my room because it looks like everything I dream about, and there is a positive energy and current that passes. Nevertheless, what I prefer is the view from my window of the sky. It's like a big board which is changing according to the hours and the seasons.

I feel good here. I'm calm and relaxed. No noise at all, except the sound of music. My room is always clean; well, sometimes. I feel like a king; I do what I want. I am in my kingdom. My bed is my servant and truly loyal, it listens to me, and never complains.

My room is my luxury of thought and gives me good ideas, however; it is also my weak point. If someone were to move a thing in my room without warning me, it is like hurting me. It's my private castle residence. Every day I feel madness for my kingdom, it's like seeing something so precious for the first time.

I would write more, but my room is calling me.

*Robertho Assouman is only 17 years old, and he is from Haiti. He is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, where he is learning English. He is in the level 5 class. He never wants to talk about his goal, because it's so complicated.*

## **The Overview of City Moles Saint Nicolas**

All people in the world who visit Haiti, should visit the city of Moles Saint Nicolas located in Northwest Haiti. This is a magnificent city of the world because of its history and qualities.

Moles Saint Nicolas is a historical city because during the first voyage to the Americas, Christopher Columbus landed there first.

The history of the new world began in this Haitian city; Christopher called it Hispaniola. It is a tropical city, the temperature is not too cold and not too hot. The city has multiple colonial forts. This protected environment made it valuable to the world. The beach is very beautiful with white sand and nearby a range of mountains. The ocean smells like lemongrass.

When someone goes there, he or she eats fresh fried fish and fried plantain. The people who live in Moles Saint Nicolas work more at the farms. They plant: corn, different kinds of beans, sweet potatoes, plantain, cassava, and yams. All those kinds of plantations help the people pay for school for their children. It has others kinds of work too, like work at hospitals, schools, police department, markets, hotels or others business. One very important thing that makes Mole Saint Nicolas remarkable, it is that it is a familial city, and everyone lives together. They share everything they have, mostly when somebody has trouble, dies or takes sick.

Finally, I invite all the people of the world to come visit Moles Saint Nicolas. That visit will be a good experience in your life and you will see the truth I said of the historic city. Welcome to the city of Mole Saint Nicolas. Enjoy...

*Macule Dorcelly, is a Native Haitian. He has lived in Naples since August 2013, and he is student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College.*

## **A Place You Will Never Forget**

I have visited many places during my lifetime, but nothing can compare to the Dominican Republic.

The Dominican Republic is one of God's best kept secrets. The white beaches and amazing people make this unique island a place that you must visit at least once in your life. Another reason to love this island is the food, which is my favorite part. You will find all kinds of different foods with very rich tastes. The diversity of our food is related to the history of our culture. Although Taino Natives were residents first, they were invaded by European colonists that brought African slaves. With the influence of Haiti, and the mixture of the entire culture brought to our country, Dominican food is some of the best around the Caribbean.

Dominicans are very welcoming people. We will welcome you to our home like family, even if we just met you. The tradition is somewhat similar to the Southern culture of the United States in that we welcome you with open arms and are always trying to feed you. So while you are planning your next vacation, keep in mind that the Dominican Republic is just a plane ride away. We will make sure that your visit is the best and that you are welcome to our island like it was your home away from home.

*Lucy Nova is a scholar in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program, and is currently attending Tallahassee Community College. She is from the Dominican Republic. Her tutor is David McNutt.*

### **Cold Chicago Breeze**

Even though I am a Puerto Rican, I have lived in Florida for two years and I am still not used to the heat. That is why I miss my favorite place of Chicago. It has cool weather and fantastic places to visit.

Although I have lived in warm weather most of my life, I love the cold weather of Chicago. The cold weather in Chicago is like being in a freezer, but I like it. I started living in Chicago in 2006, and experienced my first cold winter. When I felt that breeze on my face, I felt as if it was cutting my face. However, over time I got used to it and I loved that cold breeze.

When I saw snow for the first time, I was like a little girl that had never seen it before. I started to run and play in it. It was fantastic. At that time, I had no children and I was the little girl playing in the snow. When my first child arrived, I was excited when he started walking so I could play with him in the snow. That moment was magical. I repeated the same thing again when my daughter was born and we were now three children playing in the snow.

In 2014, all that emotion was over. It was a freezing cold month of January. My windows were broken. At that time, it was difficult since I had to put up with the broken windows until the summer because the apartment manager could not fix them. There was too much snow accumulated on the windows for him to work on them. My kids got to the point that they no longer wanted to live

in Chicago because it was difficult to go to school and they did not find it pleasant to walk under that strong, cold snow. However, I have not lost the hope of someday living there again.

In conclusion, I could tell you even more of all the things that I enjoyed about Chicago. I loved the restaurants, watching the monkeys at the zoo, and riding on the public transportation. I could write a book about the cool weather and the fun places to visit. I hope to one day feel the cold breeze on my face again.

*Jacklyn Rivera is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **Liancourt, Haiti - My Favorite Place**

My favorite place in the world is Liancourt, Haiti. Liancourt is a beautiful place in Haiti that I was born in. I have three reasons why you will fall for this place.

First reason: the scenery. The scenery is beautiful. As you enter Liancourt, you will see a big cathedral, then when you walk on the main street you will see vendors selling on the street. You will see big mountains with all kinds of flowers as you walk more inland.

Second reason: the people. The people are great! You will not want to leave once you get there. The food is delicious and you'll bite your fingers. People work hard in the fields and bring fruits and rice to the market.

Third reason: the culture. The culture in Liancourt, Haiti is the most beautiful culture on the whole island. In July, all the Haitian Diaspora goes to Liancourt to witness the greatest culture the world has to offer. The celebration lasts for two days. During that time they have a big ceremony where some people walk on fire. It's amazing to see and there are beautiful waterfalls. It's a very fresh area with beautiful trees.

Overall Liancourt is the best place to be. We have all the scenery, culture and people. I hope you plan your next trip to Liancourt, Haiti.

*Erzelie Novera Francois is a student of Daisy Shah at the Delray Full Service School.*

## **In the Kitchen**

My favorite place I like is the kitchen. I like to see the food, the green vegetables, the meats, the black beans and the brown rice. I like to peel the eggplant, clean the spinach and the water cress, and cut the tomatoes and the potatoes. I like to hear when the food boils and the sound of the fried meat. I like to smell the mixed vegetables, and then I love when I eat the delicious food. My kitchen is the most special place for me.

*Gertha Louis is a student in the level 5 class of the Literacy Coalition of Palm Beach County's Village Readers Family Education program in Delray Beach. Her instructor is Miss Siena Mayers.*

## **My Favorite Place**

It is a pleasure for me to tell my teacher and my classmates about my favorite place.

My favorite place is Leogame, a city in the state province Ouest in Haiti. It is approximately 43 miles from the capital of Haiti, Port au Prince. When I am in Leogame, all the people know me. I walk down the street when I want.

There are beautiful parks and beautiful beaches like Obama Beach and Boucaneer Resort and Hotel. In Leogame, everybody knows me as a good computer technician. I was also a field soccer coach. In Leogame, I walk on foot, ride a bicycle, ride a motorcycle and drive a car whenever I want.

I can't wait to return to Leogame. I miss my city.

*Changlais Pierre is in Vicki McDonald's Level 5 ESOL class at Dunbar Community School (Fort Myers). Changlais is originally from Haiti.*

## **Crazy and Beautiful: Buenos Aires**

Crazy and beautiful summarize the characteristics of my city. It's dark but bright, gray but colorful, enthusiastic but sophisticated, quirky but normal. It's old fashioned but modern, and magical but real.

I love Buenos Aires and, above all, the people who live there. The locals are called "porteños." According to visitors, we are conceited and complainers, but also lovers, seducers and brutally honest. Although this can be true, at heart, we are kind and friendly; in fact, people kiss each other all the time.

For me, the best way to enjoy the city is by foot. I recommend that you lose yourself walking through the pedestrian streets in the Historic Centre to visit cultural monuments, ancient churches and majestic palaces. It is worth stopping at one of the cafés for a quick coffee and a medialuna (the Argentinian version of the croissant), read the paper or simply look through the window at people coming and going in the chaotic traffic.

Every day in Buenos Aires is an adventure. There's always something to do, day or night: a show, a festival, a museum, a concert, an exhibition, a fair. It's a city that never sleeps. The downtown is messy and noisy, but the magical streets still maintain their old charm with theaters, bookstores, and a lot of cultural activities.

The weekend is the perfect time to explore the green areas by bike; you can pick one up for free at any of the public stations. There are more than sixty miles of bike paths throughout the city, and we can enjoy all the outdoor attractions while we drink our typical mate, which is not only a drink to share with family or friends, but a ritual that implies knowledge and tradition.

On Sundays, the city can become paralyzed so it can watch an international football (soccer) match of our national team or the "Clasico" Boca Juniors vs. River Plate, the two biggest football teams in Argentina. For ninety minutes, we forget our worries and nothing is important except the game. Football is like a religion, a passion difficult to explain.

Three million people live in Buenos Aires but three and one-half million more enter the city every day. Some of them come to work



early in the morning and return to their homes at the end of the day while others come for study, tourism, entertainment, business or just looking for opportunities. As the old Argentinian adage goes, “God is everywhere but can assist you only in Buenos Aires.”

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

## **The Citadel Laferriere**

The Citadel Laferriere is one of my favorite places in Haiti because it is a historic place in my country, which helped us conquer some battles during our independence. The Citadel Laferriere is located on top of a large mountain. Its name is Bonnet at L'èveque. It is a small city in northern Haiti. It is approximately 108,000 square feet. It is 27 km south of the city of Cap Haitian and 8 km uphill from the town of Milot. King Henry Christophe built the Citadel in 1820 to protect Haiti against any possible foreign attack. It has a beautiful view, so it attracts a lot of tourists. I have visited it myself on many occasions. I recommend it to everyone to have a great unforgettable experience. There are many guides down the hill at Milot to lead everyone who visits the Citadel Laferriere. Everyone can walk or rent a horse to get to the top of this mountain. In my experience, I had a great guide and an amazing horse that knew the exact spots to stop. I was sweating, so I drank a lot of water to hydrate my body. There are some people selling souvenirs and food at the foot of the mountain, for example coconut juice directly from the tree. There are some kids playing the National Anthem and rara music for visitors. I had a chance to take pictures. I bought souvenirs, and I rode the horse when I got to the entrance of the Citadel.

It is an enormous fortress, and it is one of the first monuments built in Haiti. It has a beautiful view, both interior and exterior. The interior is made up of a number of staircases to the roof. The workers used a mixture of quicklime, molasses, and blood from cows. The design is an impenetrable stone wall. The interior has the quarters, and pictures of Henry Christophe's family. I explored outside of the fortress by looking at the entire site. The Citadel sits on top of the mountain. There are more than 300 cannons still

sitting at the entrance today. There are different types of guns used in the past. It remains a symbol of the liberty of the Haitian people.

Today the Citadel Laferriere is one the most popular tourist attractions in Haiti. Every year, people from everywhere in the world travel to Haiti. The Citadel Laferriere is one of my favorite historic places in my country. I recommend to everyone who visits Haiti not to miss the opportunity to see the marvelous Citadel Laferriere.

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

### **Relaxing in My Living Room**

After a long day of English classes, I like to go home and relax in my living room. I live in a big house with nine rooms, but my favorite room is my living room. My living room is where I entertain family, relax, and play with my grandchildren and pets.

My living room is comfortable because it has a sofa, coffee table, collapsible desk for doing homework, and many pictures of Thailand. When my husband's family comes to visit on Christmas, we celebrate together in my living room.

Another thing I like about my living room is that I can relax. I like this because I can take a nap after school or I can just sit on the couch. Also, I can listen to music and watch TV with my husband. I can watch a movie with him while we eat some snacks.

Finally, I like to stay at home because I can play with my pets. Sometimes I play with my grandchildren when they come to visit me. When I am not busy with my pets and grandchildren, I read books and newspapers on weekend mornings while I drink coffee. In the afternoon, I will sometimes do my homework in my living room.

In conclusion, I have a beautiful house, but, as one can see, my favorite room is my living room because it is pleasant and

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comfortable. It is where I entertain family, relax, and spend time with my grandchildren and pets. It is my favorite place in the world.

*Kanya Juanusheske is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

### **My Special Place**

My special place is the beach. It's seen as a place of relaxation, because it's normally quiet and peaceful there. I like to go there to get away from all my troubles and anything that bothers me. I can smell the fresh air, and I can hear the birds sing and the waves crashing. I touch the warm sand with my hand and it's the best place for me to focus and read books!

*Anonymous*

### **El Avila National Park**

El Avila National Park, also known as Waraira Repano, is the highest and largest mountain range in Caracas, Venezuela. This amazing place is not a common mountain because it has beautiful trees, flowers and wildlife and it also offers many options to enjoy.

This is my favorite place because I can enjoy the nature, exercise by walking through one of its multiple trails, using the cable car to reach one of its tops and the most important reason is because I can see it from anywhere I am in the city.

The highest point of the mountain range is Pico Naiguata, at 9,072 ft. above sea level. Its vast variety of vegetation, beautiful plants that grow close to the different waterfalls, and its climate are the perfect combinations for the development of animal life. El Avila is synonymous with purity. Every time I am there I can breathe fresh air, and this is one of the reasons why so many people call El Avila "the natural lung" of the city. There is a point where hiking or using cableway feels like you can touch the clouds. You are so high that the mist covers your whole view.

In addition to its wonderful nature, the park offers many options to enjoy. There are three main ways to visit the park. The first and also the cheapest option is hiking or walking through one of its multiple trails. The most common trail used, and also my favorite one, is the Sabas Nieves route. The complete tour takes me about an hour to walk, but there are some other people who are more trained than me and can do it in less than thirty minutes. The best part of choosing Sabas Nieves route is that once you reach the top, you can delight in a delicious handmade fruit ice cream, while you contemplate the breathtaking view of the whole city.

The second option is riding in a 4x4 off-road vehicle from Caracas. While you are driving by a beautiful path surrounded by big trees and lots of birds and butterflies, you might be lucky enough to see some deer. This ride will take approximately fifty minutes until you reach the village of Galipan. From here you will be able to see the city of Caracas on one side and the magnificence of the Caribbean Sea on the other.

The last option is to take the cableway. You can't be afraid of heights. The journey on the cableway is high above the tree tops. It only takes twenty minutes to reach the station. People love this option, not just for the reason that you can taste delicious desserts, or share a hot chocolate with your loved ones. Finally when you reach the top this is the only way to visit the amazingly beautiful Humboldt Hotel.

*Elvira Martinez is a student at Jupiter High School ACE, where her teacher is Michelle Jeffrey.*

# **Why Voting is Important to Me**

## **The Importance of Voting**

In every single country, the right to vote is an important issue that deserves much reflection. This is why I am going to talk about the importance of voting, such as preserving our rights, the opportunity to elect who we want, changing our future, and keeping a strong education system.

Men and women equally are able to cast the ballot to preserve their freedom, such as freedom of speech, religious freedom and freedom of assembly. Having the opportunity to enjoy our civil rights should not be a selfish act. We should vote to protect and defend those who cannot vote in order to prevent their rights from being violated, for example, children, mentally ill people and convicted felons. They, too, are human beings!

Voting really matters because it gives us the opportunity to choose our leaders. So go the leaders, so go the country. This means if we have bad leaders, we will have a bad country. We cannot have a great country without a good commander in chief. We are not able to be led by useful and equal laws without efficient and dedicated lawmakers. When we vote, we should make sure that we elect qualified leaders who have the capacity to improve the economy. For example, create more jobs. We can have the job and wage we deserve. So, the way we vote and the candidates we choose will have repercussions on many aspects of our lives.

Life is full of decisions that can affect our future such as voting. People who vote can make a huge difference in our daily life. Furthermore, to live in health we must go out to vote for trustworthy people who can fight against global warming, drought and protect our forests and environment. We cannot live in good health and in peace without a healthy environment. This is why it is more important than ever to vote for someone who has a good environmental policy.

Some say “Education is key.” Nobody can plan a better future without education. Education is the key to improve our lives and that of our descendants. For this reason, it is much more

important to vote for people who care about our education system and have a clear and accurate education policy.

After all, we must all understand the importance of voting. We have seen that voting seriously impacts our daily life. Therefore, we have to pay attention to each candidate that we would like to vote for. Voting is not a game, it is a serious issue!

*Vladimy Saint Louis is the second child of his family of eight. He lives in Immokalee, FL. He is an ESOL student and his lovely teacher's name is Ms. Katie Mominee.*

### **Why Voting is Important to Us**

Years ago, blacks did not have rights. We were property and not seen as humans; but we are humans. We deserved to have the right to vote just like everyone else. Our parents and grandparents fought so we can be free to eat where we want, drink from the fountain of our choice, sit in the front, and eat at any restaurant of our choosing. Most of all, they fought for voting rights so we can be heard.

In 1965 the Voting Act was passed and we finally felt respected. The Voting Act was great, but it came with a price. Many blacks were either bribed by whites to vote on certain issues and for certain people, or beaten if they did not vote the way they were told to vote.

As the years passed, the bribery and beatings for votes stopped. Today we can vote on matters that influence our lives and the lives of our children. We vote on education, laws, and people who hold our quality of life in their hands. We have more and can do more because we can vote.

*Pearlie Cray, Jerry Butler, Belinda Cliatt and Estelle Sealy are students at Orlando Technical College, where their teacher is Andrea Hogan.*

## **Democracy - The Right to Vote**

A few months ago in this country, we had the best way of exercising democracy. Voting is very important for the choice of your future and your family. The participation of ordinary people in political life is very important in order to create better living conditions for themselves.

People need to choose with responsibility, and to seriously analyze the work and the proposals of each candidate. Then, if your representative was elected, you must follow what he is doing for your city, state or country, and see if his attitudes are good for you, your family and your community.

In my country (Brazil), the vote is mandatory, but here in the United States voting is optional. They are different models, but both are models of democracy.

Democracy is a political system where all eligible citizens participate equally, either directly or through the choice of a representative. The term democracy emerged in the tenth century BC in the Greek cities and mainly in the city of Athens with a model a little different from what we see today. Democracy must address all the conditions of a citizen: social, economic and cultural.

In this way, all citizens must exercise their right to vote and the right to democracy.

*Joao Paulo is a lawyer from Brazil. He lives in Jupiter with his wife and son. He is studying English in Susan Mitchell's ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.*

## **Vote, It's Your Right!**

My name is Cilia Andrix. I am from Colombia. Voting is undoubtedly one of the most important rights that we have as legal citizens of a country. It is important to me because I own the right to make my choice on who I would like to see in office to represent and help the people of the country. Before choosing candidates, getting to know more about the candidates and what they believe, value, and plan to do are very important. Each vote

matters because we are the voice of the people and for the people. So, go out and vote!

*Cilia Andrix is studying English at the Career/Adult Education Center in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Vote! It Is Your Duty!**

My name is Ramiro Saenz. Voting is very important because when we vote, we are using our right as citizens. It helps to get the most suitable person elected for an important job in the office. If we do not vote, we are letting the opponent party to win with no effort at all. The recent election in United States is really very challenging. I am very shocked at the election results. Though I do not have the right to vote in this country, the result affects my life and my family. No matter what is the outcome, when we go out and vote, we do not feel guilty when the other party wins.

*Ramiro Saenz is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Your Vote Counts**

My name is Tanya Pichardo. I am from Mexico. I believe in democracy even though many countries do not respect it. I think voting is a big responsibility for all citizens and a good way for them to be heard. We have to teach our children the importance of voting because voting is the only chance for a political party to win or lose. We have to analyze every candidate's plans in order to support them or not. Also as parents we have to think about our kids' future. They are watching everything we do, so we have to be good citizens.

There are many political parties and you have to choose one of them. Be wise about their proposals and make your best decision. I am preparing to become a U.S. citizen. For me, it is a big step in my life because I have to give up loyalty to my country of origin that I love and transfer my loyalty to this country that has given me a family. I will be pleased to be a citizen of the United States so



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I can teach my kids the right and responsibility to vote, because everyone's vote counts.

*Tanya Pichardo is studying Citizenship at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

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

### **My Transformation from Colombia to the United States**

When people ask me where am I from, I feel so proud to say I am Colombian, and I am so happy to be here in the United States of America building my future. Even though my country has a great diversity of people, races, and cultures, sadly I must say there are no opportunities for everybody to achieve a brilliant future.

Due to the violence and social differences, my family had to leave Colombia. Leaving our family and a great part of our culture behind was very difficult for us. However, my parents and I sacrificed all those memories to have a better future.

United States of America is the dream place to almost every single person in the world. It is the country that has adopted so many people from unimaginable places. It is the place where you can make your dreams come true, if you work and learn how to make the right decisions. And yes, there is violence in the United States too. Drugs and dangerous things exist everywhere. But, here in the United States, you can feel free to express what you like or what you don't like. You are free to make your life decisions to build your brilliant future.

As a proud Colombian, I am here to make a positive contribution to the United States. I want to make my family proud, and at the same time, never forget where I came from.

*Wendy Torres is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where her instructor is Marie Thompson.*

### **Life in Guatemala and the U.S.**

I left my beautiful home in Guatemala, known as the country of eternal spring, when I was seventeen years old. It was the biggest decision I made in my life because I thought I could

not survive as a young girl without goodnight hugs from my parents. But between the poverty and violence there was no other option. I began to wonder if an American dream could fill the void of leaving my family.

Before I came to the U.S. my life in Guatemala was a difficult situation. My father had an accident where he lost his arm. That day my life changed. I had to leave school because he could not support us financially. I did not know what to do. My brother was working in Mexico, so I decided to go with him to find a job and save money to come to the U.S. After two years, finally I arrived in America.

Life here in the U.S. is very different from life in Guatemala, in many ways. Throughout the time I had lived in Guatemala I could see that it was impossible to reach my dreams as a student because of how costly the study was for me, and I could not afford it. My father has a small plantation where we grow our vegetable, fruits, and coffee to sell. However, that was not enough to pay for our school, health and other desires, because in Guatemala we cannot receive any help from the government. On the other hand, the U.S. government is always present in the education of young students and adults; everyone has the same opportunity no matter who you are.

In Guatemala there are many uneducated people, especially in the poor towns where there are no schools and wages are very low. Only those people with money have the right to do absolutely everything, even if they are corrupt. However, in the U.S. these things do not happen because the law is better than in Guatemala.

But not everything is better in the U.S. In Guatemala, they really know how to enjoy the simple things in life even if you have no money. Here in the U.S. people take too much care of many vain things and are materialistic. I remember my simple days in Guatemala. I loved it because I could eat well; all the food there was organic and fresh. We enjoyed every Sunday and we used to gather at the table.

I am thankful to God because now I can economically support my family in Guatemala. Although both countries are extremely different to me, both are in my heart because

I learned magnificent things from them. Each day is a new beginning. Yesterday is gone, never to return. Only the good memories are left.

*Victorina Martin is from Guatemala, and a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL, where her teacher is Mrs. Betten-Jutasi.*

### **Better Choices**

My name is Verônica Vilela. I was born in Brazil and lived in Rio de Janeiro. I'm married and I have 2 children, a daughter and a son. I love my country and my city, but unfortunately, they are very dangerous places. For example, we have problems regarding security and police corruption.

I moved to the USA with my family a short time ago, but already I feel safe here. I'm very happy for the opportunity offered to my kids for a better life.

The main problems in Brazil, in my opinion, are safety and security, police corruption, health, and education. One thing affects another thing. The government does not invest in education. Today in Rio de Janeiro, for example, many kids and adolescents live in a criminal world. I think if our kids would remain in school for enough time to get an education as well as some social education and sports, we would have a better chance to reduce the criminal activity in Brazil. I had a chance to visit other countries like Dubai, and it is clear to me that once we invest in education we are also investing to reduce the crime.

I hope that Brazil will improve as soon as possible.

*Veronica Vilela was a teacher in Brazil. She is a serious student of English and is studying at Jupiter Community High School in the ESOL program. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.*

## **Lifestyles**

The United States gained their independence in 1776 and Haiti in 1804. In the intercontinental context Haiti fought alongside the U.S. in 1779 in Savannah against the England for U.S. independence. In such a short time, the United States has had a considerable economic boom and became an attractive place, where the world converges their eyes. So, Haiti played an important part in this. In the context of how life in my home country differs from life in the U.S., consider three elements: namely, transportation, education and quality of life.

In Haiti the public transportation is done in precarious conditions. In the sector, the states' is almost non-existent. To go to work or school, the private sector provides a bus, but some people use their cars. Almost every day there are deaths and injuries in traffic accidents because the roads are mostly in bad condition. In the U.S. everywhere the public transportation is organized very well. In some states we use bus or trains to go to work. The states are connected with highways. In addition, traffic signs and traffic lights are placed everywhere to avoid accidents.

According to the Haitian constitution the government must send all children to school. Due to a disastrous economic situation sometimes characterized by thieving and wasting money, the government pays only for 20 percent of children. The majority of the population is poor and cannot pay for school and therefore do not go. In addition, schools are not computerized. Wealthy families often sent their children to study in foreign countries. Here in the U.S., it is the state and the federal department of education that organize the education. They send all children to both primary and secondary schools. All schools are computerized and all children receive the same education.

The economic situation of Haiti is very difficult. More than 80 percent of the population lives in poverty. The great majority cannot eat and many live in slums. Due to this situation, many people leave their countries in search of a better life. In the U.S. the economy is healthy. The rate of unemployment is very low. Each person can have a little car and a house to live. Even for those who do not work, the state puts structure in place to help.

All things considered, this small analysis around these three elements, namely transportation, education and quality of life allow us to see lifestyle difference between the United States and Haiti. For Haiti there remains much to do to reach the standard of living of the United States.

*Jean Laguerre came from Haiti. He has lived in the United States for one year and six months. He is a student of the ELL program at Immokalee Technical College. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.*

### **More Rights, Possibilities, and Opportunities**

My name is Betina Charles. I am from Haiti. My home country differs from America because there are more women here. Also, women in America are becoming more superior than men. Haitian women are not expected to have high education. Many women do not even finish high school. The women in Haiti are just meant to be housewives. All they are required and supposed to do are know how to cook, clean, bare kids, and take care of their husbands. I do not want to be remembered as one of the many Haitian housewives. I do not want to just be doing those things. I want to be way more and do something important. I want to make something of myself and I have a better chance to be successful in America than in Haiti.

The reason I choose to come to America is because of the freedom. There are more advantages here. There are more rights, possibilities, and opportunities to be someone who could bring change to my home country. Also, I want to be remembered as one of the many women who did something important in her life.

*Betina Charles is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **One Man with Two Countries**

I was born in Mexico and came to the United States when I was thirty years old. I noticed several differences between these two countries immediately. The first time I walked into a supermarket

in the United States, I was amazed at how large it was and the amount of quality food the store sold. In the city of Morelos, Mexico, where I lived, there were no such stores. The stores there were very small and did not have air conditioning or the selection of food and household items you would see in the United States.

There is obviously a vast difference in the economies of both countries. In my home town of Morelos, there were not many opportunities for employment. Wages were very small and the opportunity to better yourself was nearly impossible. There is much more of an opportunity to work in the United States. I appreciate that if you work hard and are an honest good citizen, good things can happen to you. This did not exist in Mexico. My experience of finding work in Mexico was difficult because the wages could not support a family with the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. Housing is another aspect that is so different in each country. Most people in Morelos did not have indoor plumbing or air conditioning. Most of the homes had dirt floors. Houses were very small and not built with quality materials. I am thankful that here in the United States, I have air conditioning and a clean indoor bathroom.

The education in the United States is far superior to Mexico. It is hard to imagine that I was never in a library until coming here. In Mexico, schools are small and students usually do not have enough books and supplies for a good education.

The technology is far better in the United States. Here, students are given the opportunity to better themselves. The best example I know of is the Palm Beach Adult Education System. I feel great to have a resource to better my education and future here.

Writing and thinking about the differences in Mexico and the United States made me aware of how far my life has evolved. I truly believe I am able to fully appreciate life more now because I have lived the journey in both countries. I would have never been able to fully understand what the United States was all about if I never lived in Mexico. I am thankful for all of my life experiences and will embrace my future here with hard work and determination.

*Leo Ocampo is a student in Palm Beach. His teacher is Gary Fradkin.*

## **Puerto Rico**

Hello, my name is Linda Morales, and I am from Puerto Rico. I grew up in Puerto Rico until three years ago, living my whole life in my country. I had my studies, friends, and family, got married and had two children. All my relatives and friends are living in their world of Puerto Rico. However, one day everything changed, and we had to move to the United States.

Moving here for me was and still is stressful. Since moving to Wesley Chapel, Florida, I do not know anyone. I came to the U.S. not speaking English. The worst thing with the English language is that I have a daughter who goes to school and I cannot help her.

That is why I decided to start studying English, to get ahead. Plus, I am meeting new friends and helping others with English.

*Linda Morales is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **A Tale of Two Lives**

I was born in the beautiful St. Lucia, but I moved to the United States 12 years ago. The move here was exciting and different. While growing up in the United States, I have noticed there is a big difference between life on the island of St. Lucia and America. The differences between the two locations are: the environment, the people, education, and cost of living.

The best thing about my island, St. Lucia, is waking up to the fresh morning breeze, roosters crowing, the beautiful turquoise beaches, waves crashing, and the blazing sun. Climate changes are rare and island life is simply fresh, relaxing and fun. However, in the United States there are a lot of sirens, highways, tall buildings, hurried life and fast food everywhere. With these environmental differences, I have noticed the effect it has on the people.

In St. Lucia, people are warm and friendly to everyone. They are like family; especially in the village where I lived for the first 16 years of my life. They sit and visit with others, help others even



if they do not know the person, and are hard workers. Americans on the other hand, tend not to take the time to acknowledge others. I have found they are this way because they have busy schedules. I can say I have noticed that the people in St. Lucia and America have one thing in common, they are both hard working people who value education.

As a child growing up on the island, education was a vital necessity. The requirements for education were challenging, but every student was willing and eager to learn. In school we wore uniforms from pre-k to college. Uniforms in school taught us discipline. There was a difference between the teacher and the students. In the United States, everyone looks the same which is the reason why I believe the students do not have respect for teachers. I feel the disrespect of the teachers interferes with student learning so they are not progressing as they should. An education will help you get a good job that can express yourself. A job can keep you financially stable and help you afford the cost of living. The cost of living in St. Lucia is high. Our currency is about \$2 more than the United States dollar. The cost of clothes and food is much cheaper in America.

In sum, the United States of America has many more opportunities to become whatever you aspire to be. This country has many different types of people, religions, cultures and occasions to broaden your horizons. However, I am longing for the day when I can go back to St. Lucia and enjoy the turquoise waters, hide my toes in the sun and not have a worry in the world.

*Estelle Sealy is a single mother of three children. Her goal is to get a GED. She attends Orlando Technical College in Orlando and her teacher is Dr. Andréa Hogan.*

### **Secured Life and Brighter Future**

My name is Edwens Saint Germain. I am from Haiti. My country is very poor. In many areas, there is no electricity, technology, or factories to help people get jobs or buy something that they want. At times there are no teachers at the schools because they cannot get paid regularly. In addition, we have a lack of security and transportation. The government has not done much to create

jobs. Most people who are over 27 years old have no jobs. Can you imagine the life I lived in my country?

In the United States, people can go and learn whatever they want for a better future. There are so many opportunities here to achieve personal goals. Also, everyone can walk anywhere without being scared because there are good laws and security. Transportation is available 24 hours a day. Everyone can have a better job and a better life in the United States. I like living here. My life and my future are secured and brighter.

*Edwens Saint Germain is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **From One Day to Another**

I look back and many memories come to me. Then I look at how things are now. Many things have changed since that day when I received the news. Never did I imagine that my life would change so much. That day was confusing. When I had to come and meet the new life which was waiting for me; there wasn't another option. Can you imagine making a decision in one day to come here? It was difficult to predict the new things that would come in this new chapter of my life.

I came to this country because my father was living here in the United States, and his dream was to have his family live with him. He didn't want his family alone and living in another country while he lived here. My father was determined to request our permission to come to the United States. Shortly after, my entire family surprisingly received our green cards and we moved.

When I arrived in Naples, Florida, I struggled because life in the U.S. is so different from life in Mexico. The language is different from my country. It was very difficult for me to adapt and understand the new language. Every time I went out, it was tough to comprehend what people said. Therefore, I didn't like to go outside because I felt afraid. I was shy because I didn't know how to respond to the English questions.

There are also differences between United States and Mexico's education. For example, in Mexico, I had to pay to catch the public bus to get to school every day. Also every six months, I had to pay for my education. When I came to Naples, I didn't have to worry about money for school. The school bus took me to school every day without charge, and I also received free lunch.

One other difference that I see in this large country is that my family has a better job. In Mexico it is very difficult to find a good job. The pay here in U.S. is fair. On the other hand, in Mexico the pay is barely enough to live on. Also we can live here safely without having to worry about the delinquency that occurs outside.

Finally, I am thankful for everything that God has offered me until this moment. I'm grateful with everyone for giving me all the support that I have and allowing me to live a life without many worries so I can continue my education and improve my future. Now I understand that here in the U.S., there are many opportunities to reach one's goals regardless of who you are or where you came from.

*Cynthia Ascencio is from Mexico. She is a student is in ESOL class at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, Florida. Her instructor is Mrs. Betten Jutasi.*

## **The United States: My New Hometown**

I was born in a small parish in Jamaica called Hanover. Growing up in Jamaica was very difficult in my early years. I grew up with a single parent, my beloved Father. My Mom was with us for three years. Then, I did not see my Mother for about ten years between the ages of three and thirteen. She basically just left our household. My Dad was a hardworking man. He was hardly at home when I was little. Those days were very hard for me, growing up without my Mom in my life.

I felt so left out in life. I did not feel loved and was mostly at home by myself. In those days, I often asked myself why I had to grow this way. I did not start any form of school until age five. It was very hard growing up and seeing my other peers going to school as I was at home watching them going by. I wanted a normal life, just like them.

When I finally started school, it was one of the greatest feelings in my life. After going to school, it opened my eyes to the whole world. I began to learn things from my classmates and heard wonderful stories about life in the United States of America. I spoke to many people, and I have learned much from them by the way they speak and the way they think.

I realized that travelling can change my life. So at that point in my life, my intention was to travel and see the whole world. I wanted to fit into society and see what I could become in life. After leaving high school in Jamaica, my first job was at a hotel. I really enjoyed that job. I met so many guests in the resort who really loved the way I performed my job. I can remember one guest, named Mike, offered me a job in the United States. However, my timing was bad as I did not get the work visa when I applied for it.

I never gave up and continued to work hard to gain all the experience I could get because I knew experience goes a long way. Then one day, my opportunity finally occurred. In November 2014, I came to the United States to work. I now saw two sides of life. The United States has changed my life so much. I am able to take better care of my family, so much better than before.

My goal is to pass my GED test and become a firefighter. I want to help people to keep their families safe. Many people have helped me in my life, and now it is my turn to give back to the community. I have traveled long and far to reach the United States, and I believe a new chapter of my life is about to begin.

*Cornette Bucknor is studying for the GED. Her teacher is Gary Fradkin.*

### **Sister, Could You Give Me Some Advice?**

Almost four years ago, my husband and I decided to come to live in the United States. Many of my family were disappointed with that news. I remember what my brother said, “Why do you want to go to live in USA? Here, both of you have great jobs, a beautiful new house, cars, and you don’t have financial needs.” But the decision to immigrate and live so far from the family, our most appreciated treasure, is not only about money and having a lot of material things.

Since we have been living here, we are always in contact with my brother and his family. I always talk to them about the USA and how life is different here. I talk about the beach; parks; the big and beautiful public schools; libraries; the education of the people; and the good manners of drivers. My sister-in-law and my cousins always seem interested in coming to the USA for a vacation to see all the places that I talk about but not my brother.

After a lot of pressure from my cousins, my brother finally decided to come. Last year, we were happy to have him and his family visit for the Christmas and New Year's Eve season. Since the first day, they enjoyed their vacation, especially my brother. He was so surprised every place that we went. He was surprised by how people drive and how they obey the traffic signals, the good condition of the clean streets, and the fantastic libraries with all the books and services that they have. He was impressed with a lot of the public places for recreation with fantastic infrastructure. We explained to him how some systems work, such as public education and taxes, and he liked that. One day before they left, my brother asked me, "Sister, could you give some advice? Do you know what kind of work I could do in this country?" I felt so good because now I'm sure that my brother understands why we made the decision to immigrate.

You know I love my country. I was born there, grew up there, studied there, and all my family lives there but many things are not good. For example, most of the people have to study in private schools because the public system of education is not good. No matter whether you strive to be a good citizen paying your taxes, you have dirty cities, streets with a lot of holes, terrible traffic, etc. So if you have the opportunity to give to your family the best quality of life, why would you not give it a try?

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

## **Proudly Colombian**

Everything started a year ago when I first got to the U.S. to begin my adventure as an exchange student. One of the most popular questions you get from new people in this multicultural country is, “Where are you from?”

At first, I used to answer, “I’m from Colombia,” just a simple answer to a simple question. Now, a year later, my answer is different.

It has been an amazing year for me, traveling all over, having new experiences, meeting people from all over the world and getting to know the North American culture; I’ve enjoyed every single day of my life as a foreign student but every single day I keep thinking that there’s nothing like Colombia.

Columbia has been named the “Happiest Country in the World” twice by the WIN/Gallup International Association (2012, 2015) and won second place in 2014. The results of the last poll show that of the 66,040 people from 68 countries surveyed across the globe between September 2015 and December 2015, Colombians are the happiest people on earth with an average happiness of 87%; that is 20 points above the global average! I know it is a surprising fact. I was astonished too but after a year far from home, I can surely explain why our happiness is way above other countries.

Although Colombia is still a country with great social inequality, without the best economy or security, and lots of corruption that will not allow it to develop to its full potential, we know how to appreciate and value all that we have. Our amazing location in South America gives us the pleasure of having the warm tropical weather of both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, beautiful imposing views and any climate you want to pick. There are savannas, rainforests, deserts, and mountain climates.

We also have the best coffee in the world and delicious regional foods; we are in love with football (soccer) and our Selección Colombia, which gives us many reasons to celebrate. Speaking of celebrations, Colombia has the second highest number of national holidays in the world, and the second biggest carnival in the world. Our December festivities are full of food and parties with family and friends, leaving materialism on the side, and just

enjoying company. The beautiful women and the warmth and kindness of people is also an important part of our happiness.

So now, a year later, when people ask me that same question, I have a different answer. Although I constantly have to deal with people misspelling the name of my country and having a wrong vision of us, when people ask me, “Where are you from?” I answer with a big smile on my face and words full of love and melancholy. Thinking of my family, my “parceros,” and remembering those little things that make me happy, I proudly answer, “I’m Colombian.”

*Carolina Gomez Franco is an exchange student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Mrs. Kris Betten-Jutasi.*

### **From Guatemala to the USA**

My name is Sammy Santiago. I am from Guatemala. I grew up with my parents and we had a nice family. When I was a child, every morning my mother made me a delicious breakfast before I went to school. I had many friends. We played together and had fun. My favorite sports were basketball and soccer. After class I worked helping my father in the farms. My father’s work was agriculture, and I loved nature. It is so beautiful; the rivers and big mountains are so amazing.

Then I grew up and time passed. I graduated from high school and got my diploma. But my parents didn’t have money, so I couldn’t continue my education. At that time I was 16 years old, and I decided to come to the United States for a better life and to help my parents.

Well, I was nervous because I had to travel by bus and it was a long way. I traveled all of Mexico and thank God I did well. I came to Jupiter, Florida because I had three brothers here. I lived with them and they helped me for a couple of months, then they told me, “you have to work.” I was okay with that because I didn’t have anything, and everything was so different, especially in the language. Most of the people spoke English. I didn’t understand anything. I was so nervous. I missed all my family, especially my mother because she took care of me when I was in Guatemala. But now I had to be responsible for myself. I had to cook, wash

my clothes and clean my room. Then I started looking for a job and my first job was in a garden. They paid so little - like \$120 dollars for five days. Can you believe that? But I never forgot that because I remember when I started that job I said, "This is just the beginning. I can do it."

Then I started going to school to learn English and make a better life.

Now I have been here in the USA for six years. Today I have a better job, I am satisfied with my paycheck, and my English is better. I have new dreams. One of my dreams is to get my citizenship. Of course, now I just have my work permit and a driver's license. I have opportunities to do something more, and have success in my future. I am very happy to be in this country and I love this country. My goal is to have my own business in landscaping. So in this life everything is possible if you never ever give up!

*Sammy Santiago is from Guatemala. He is studying English at Jupiter Community High School. Sammy is a conscientious student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class.*

## **My Jamaica and My United States of America**

The differences between Jamaica, my home country and the United States of America, my adopted country are:

1. The United States is much bigger than Jamaica; therefore, there is more tourism here in the U. S. than in Jamaica.
2. There are more job opportunities in the U. S. than in Jamaica.
3. The U. S. currency value is more than Jamaica's.

I am going to Jamaica in the summer to visit my family. In the Jamaican port towns of Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, there are mineral springs where people take baths. Many people say that they benefit from the baths, as they are good for aches and pains in the body.



I love to visit friends and family in Jamaica, but for me, the U.S. is better, because when I was working, finding a job here in the U.S. was easier; this allowed me to take care of my family. Now that I am retired, my family takes care of me.

With all the differences between these two countries, I still prefer living in the United States, land of the free.

*Ms. Agatha Morgan is an adult learner of Project LEAD in Miami. Her tutor is Diane Charles. Ms. Morgan has two children, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.*

### **A New Beginning**

In 1996, I came to the United of America for the first time. I was twelve years old. I asked my dad, “Why are we going to another country?” He said, “To make a better living.” I didn’t understand what my dad meant. It was very hard for my brother and I to get used to my new home. It was very different from my town in Mexico.

Here in the United States I had to get used to the different languages, cultures and races. In Mexico, everyone speaks the same language. My town is so small that everyone knows each other. The climate is much cooler than it is here. Also, I wasn’t used to see seeing so many stores. In Mexico, our parents harvested our food, such as corn, beans, and all kinds of fruits and vegetables. Here we didn’t have our own garden to pick our fruits and vegetables. Everything here is bought at a store.

I quickly learned that we had to work hard to survive. To pay the bills we were working from early morning to late at night. This was new to me. We also learned to adapt to different cultures and languages. To be able to communicate at school and everywhere I went, I had to learn English, which was pretty hard.

This journey was all a new beginning for my family and me. It was difficult but we made it. It’s all a matter time and patience. I’m thankful for all of the opportunities this country has given me.

*Armando Vazquez is an Adult Education student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. His teacher is Rosa Vazquez.*

## **Someone or Something I Admire**

### **The Most Influential Person in My Life**

People may influence our lives in many ways. It might be in a positive or negative way. The person who has most influenced who I am is the man of my life: My beloved father.

Even in my first childhood memories, that strong man was the most loving father; a hardworking and brilliant man. He always tried his best to provide for my mother, my brother, and me all that we needed. He used to say: "Family is first." That is the most important thing that I learned from him.

I remember him focused on goals and ambitions. At the same time, he taught us that a lot of things are not important. He taught us to feed our souls and try to live in harmony. He taught us to love ourselves in order to be happy.

He was kind and patient when teaching us values; trust was an essential part of our education. He taught us in a very subtle way that we have to make the right decisions. I never heard him raise his voice. His amazing personality is what made him exceptionally special.

He passed away 6 years ago, and I was shocked when at his funeral, there were a lot of people whom I had never met. They brought flowers, prayed and cried for him. That's when I realized that he had not only touched my life, but the lives of more people. For all these reasons I can say that he was, and still is, the greatest man I have ever met.

*Zoe Carbajal is a student at Piper Community School in Broward County, where her teacher is Debbie Gitlan.*

### **Sister, Sister**

Do you admire anyone? I know I do. I admire my sister, Yosselly Lopez, and I look up to her because she is the hardest working person I know. Her journey began a few years back when

she found her love to help others. First she had to work on herself, she showed me that it's ok to be alone, but work towards building yourself up. She would always tell me, "You need to love yourself before you can love and help others."

One day when she was at work her co-worker invited her to a free spa day at a fancy hotel in South Beach. As she was walking down the lobby in the hotel, she saw a big sign that read, "FIND YOUR INNER PEACE, Sign up today." When she walked into the class she was greeted by a friendly lady wearing yoga pants. "Welcome to my class, my name is Jennifer Grace and I'm a life coach," she said. Yosselly signed up and fell so in love with the class that she wanted to teach the class herself! She discovered that this was her calling, to graduate and become a teacher. She would have to teach and certify ten students before she could get her credential. She asked me to be one of the ten. So, every Wednesday nine other people and I would meet up to learn from her. I was amazed at how well she talked in front of people. She talked with so much confidence. She had always been a go getter. I learned so much from her and her class. That class changed my life! It helped me become a more positive person. Yosselly also graduated from high school; even though she struggled she never gave up. She would work over 12 hour shifts and still come home and do homework. I asked her one day while I watched her struggle with the homework, "Why do you push yourself so much?" She took her eyes off her homework and looked up at me with a half-smile "I do it for you, silly. I'm going to run the extra mile so you don't have to." A few years later, because of her dedication, she became a home owner at the age of 23. She showed me that anything is possible, you just have to run that extra mile.

*Nelly Lopez is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

### **Someone Who I Admire**

The person I admire the most in this world was born on April 2nd, 1994. Her name is Kristina Deane Dorrity. She was raised by her mother and even though her parents divorced, she was also raised by her paternal grandmother, Myra.

In 2010 tragedy struck Kristina at the tender age of 16. She was in a devastating car accident. When the air bag deployed it crashed and mangled her left arm. Even with all of that, at an age so crucial and fraught with peer pressure and social demands, she kept her head up. She stayed with her schooling, focused on her goals, never wavering or turning to a party life.

Kristina met her fiance in eleventh grade and they both graduated with honors. Now at 23 she is in her third year at Georgia State, soon to be a pre-school teacher. Fiance Matthew teaches high school football and is in his third year as well, soon to be a math teacher. They have a son, Cooper Mason, born August 15, 2016, who is the joy of their life. Kristina watches him during the day with school at night and Matthew watches him at night with school during the day.

Baby and all, they are set to graduate next year. I admire her strength to persevere through everything that has come her way. In a world of pressures and stresses, she has shined through pure and as bright as her future. Her mother couldn't be more proud. I should know; she's my daughter.

*Tina King-Roberts is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. Her beautiful daughter is in college and is so smart! She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class being facilitated by Peer Offender Tina Mitchell.*

## **My Dad**

My dad taught me everything I know about life. He taught me how to act and think in day to day situations. My father has been the most important person, and the greatest influence in my life.

My dad taught me that everything in life is possible if you have passion and dedication. I grew up by his side and I saw not only a dad, but also a person who really loves his son. He has done all he can to provide the best education and all the opportunities to grow up in the best way.

He offered me the experience to travel to many countries (USA, Canada, Switzerland, and Italy) and to learn about other

cultures. He also taught me to be an entrepreneur. He showed me how to have success in life and to never give up in difficult situations because even in difficult situations, there are ways to move forward. He always tells me that if I want to be successful, I have to do what is important to me and what I enjoy doing.

Thanks to my dad, I will someday be a successful entrepreneur like he is, and influence my children the way he did me.

*Oliver Olivo is a student at Piper Community School in Broward County, where his teacher is Debbie Gitlan.*

### **A Day in the Life of a Cowgirl**

Rosa grew up on a farm. She was practically born on the back of a horse. As you are aware, being raised by cowgirls and cowboys there comes a time that comes with certain responsibilities. Rosa had to learn to clean stalls, water buckets, feed horses as well as ride and compete and train horses. One of Rosa's least favorite chores was to clean the stalls. Some of the horses could be very messy in a stall, while others could be very neat. She loved the neat horses.

Rosa had a mare that she raised from a baby. Her name was Twilight. Rosa loved Twilight very much. They did everything together. She was the best horse in Rosa's mind. Rosa's parents told her that if she did not keep up her grades she would not be allowed to show and compete on her beloved horse or spend time with Twilight. To keep up her grades she went and hired a tutor to help her with math. Math was her least favorite subject.

Rosa wanted nothing more than to become a horse trainer. Her parents wanted her to become a Doctor. So she compromise with her parents. She agreed to go to school and learn to become a doctor and if she still wanted to become a horse trainer her parents would not object. Her parents would also let her go to Texas and train with natural horsemanship trainer Clinton Anderson. She wanted to learn everything she could from him. She went to school and became a doctor, even got a good job and was making lots of money, but still wanted to be a horse trainer so she gave a leave of absence to her work and packed her bags for her trip to

Texas. Clinton was a renowned horse trainer and had a knack for teaching people to train horses.

So her journey began. She worked first hand with Clinton and even tried his method with her horse, Twilight. To Rosa's surprise it made her horse very respectful. She started learning the method and made lots of money as a clinician with Clinton Anderson. She got to travel all over the world and train problem horses, colt starting, and green horses. It was like a dream come true. When Clinton put on his clinic, Rosa was his right hand.

She got to meet a lot of different people with different cultures. Most of all, Rosa had finally found her calling. So she quit her doctor's job and started to work for Clinton full time. Her horse, Twilight, stayed with her free of charge if Rosa would work with his two two year olds for a year. So Rosa agreed and became very wealthy, very fast, just from having Clinton backing her 100%. She loved the farm and everything she learned to do with Clinton. It was like a dream come true.

*Sophia Samet is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **Father Figure**

I admired my dad a lot. Growing up with my dad, I remember he was the kind of man that was strict. He would only talk to you one time when you misbehaved. My dad was a caring man. He always cared for other people's children in his home that were less fortunate. He treated everyone like his own. For a man who had fourteen children of his own, you would think he wouldn't want to be bothered with other people's children. My dad lived to be 101 years old. Oftentimes I wish he was still alive because there is still advice that he could give me. My dad left an impression on the neighborhood where he lived all of his life. He was loved by everybody. They always had something good to say about him. I love my dad, so I try to follow in his footsteps by treating everyone as well as he did.

*Winford Thomas is an Adult Education student at West Tech Education Center in Belle Glade, FL. Rosa Vazquez is his teacher.*

## **The First Person Who Influenced My Life**

Roy T. Bennett said: “One of the best ways to influence people is to make them feel important.” My remarkable secondary school instructor Professor Dominique made me feel valuable, and he helped create the person I am today.

Professor Dominique was the first person who believed in me and taught me self esteem. Before I met him, I didn’t believe in myself. I met my teacher when I was fourteen and in high school. He was my literature teacher, and he was an excellent teacher and a wonderful friend.

When he taught his subject, he spoke a lot to make sure that we understood what was said. One of the best things in his class was the diversity of the subject. I was impressed by the way he understood life and saw people. He had a lot of respect for everyone. He always encouraged us to stay focused on our education because it is one of the best way to become successful.

My teacher could talk to anyone, and reach everyone. As a result I have wished to be like him. He wasn’t rich, but morally and intellectually he was amazing. His mother was poor but he treated her like a queen, and I was impressed by that. He taught me nothing material is more important than our character, our value as a human being. Dominique opened my eyes and my mind to many things, like never take pleasure when something bad happened to somebody, don’t judge a book by its cover, keep fighting for your dreams, don’t be generalist, don’t think you are better than anyone, etc. He taught me to love books, and I consider that as one of the best things he did for me. He always said, “life’s secrets are in the books.”

Great teachers like Professor Dominique are able to change the lives of their students in many ways. They teach the life lessons that will help students succeed. I appreciate him for what he has done for me and I am forever grateful for who I have become because of him.

*Alex Joseph is a student at Piper Community School. His teacher is Debbie Gitlan.*

## **A Special Person in My Life**

In my life there are several persons in my family who have helped me grow up well. My father's contribution is the greatest and biggest. He is the person whom I love most in the world and he is a perfect human being with his strong sense of responsibility, hard work and honesty.

My dad and I had a happy meeting when I was born. Since then I have grown up with his love and fondness. He taught me about people, the colorful world and values.

My father always wants to make the best things for me and my siblings. When I was a child, I saw my father work very hard. Early in the morning, he would go to the beach to fish and then water the farm. After the harvest, he would sell the produce in the market to take care of his family.

As the bookkeeper in our church, my father was always honest. He took care of the books and knew what the right things to do were. Everyone always respected his exemplary behavior and I am proud of him for that.

In conclusion, I just want to say that my father is the best person in the world. To me, he is an ideal person whom I often mimic and consider in my life. Because of my parent's devotion and dedication, I will try to study and work hard so they can enjoy their retirement with peace and happiness.

*Hien Thi Le is a student of Debbie Gitlan at Piper Community School.*

## **Pay it Forward**

The people I most admire in my life are my parents. My parents are living in Guatemala. I'm very thankful to them for giving me the life I am living right now. They have taken care of me since I was born, and made me the person I am now. I'm really proud of them. I know they are extremely proud of me. They made it possible for me to seek prosperity in the United States. I'm very thankful to them for being such wonderful and very responsible parents. They worked very hard to pay for our clothes, food and



other expenses for me and my four brothers. They wanted my brothers and I to be very successful in life. They were especially adamant about achieving a good education, so we could have a good job and a better life.

I feel that they gave me a great work ethic. They taught me to work hard for what I want, and never give up trying to achieve my goals. They taught me to always do the right thing. I would achieve this by always being nice and respectful to other people that I meet or talk to. They also told me to always stay away from negative influences or bad habits. They never wanted me to get involved in criminal activity or addictions of any kind.

My parents have been great role models for our family because they worked so hard for us to become better people. Most of the time, they worked eight to ten hour days. Working all those hours gave us everything that we needed and we desired for a better life. I'm really appreciative for everything I have and everything that I am.

My mom and dad were always fair when it came to me and my four brothers. They shared everything equally among us. This was an everyday occurrence. It was especially evident at Christmas time and birthdays. They never wanted to make one child feel more loved than another. I love them dearly and will never forget what they have done to make me such a successful and good person. I hope someday to pass these wonderful qualities that I learned from my parents to my children.

*Horacio Cabrera is a GED student. His teacher is Joanne Kutney.*

### **The Road to the Olympic Games**

I would like to talk to you about my son. Why? Because he accomplished something big and it wasn't easy. Through hard work, perseverance and mental strength, he managed all that and became an Olympic athlete.

Here is his story. My son was born on September 7, 1989. At the age of 9 years old, he decided to practice table tennis. He began to practice two hours a week. After his first year, he took part in the

Canadian championships tournament, and he finished second in his category.

During his junior career, he was on several occasions the Canadian champion and the North American champion. But nothing was easy. The first problem was the money. Always, the money for their trips was the first worry. So often, the hotel and the food wasn't all the best. Second was the competition. You are alone, and you play internationally, so you always play against the best players of the country. It is a lot of pressure.

From 16 until 24 years old, he was part of the Canadian senior team. He participated in several world championships, Commonwealth Games, Pan-Am games, etc.

Finally, at the age of 24, in February 2012, the qualification for the Olympics in London arrived. For three days, you have a competition every day and the winner of the day goes to the Olympics.

The first day, my son was in the finals, but the other player played the best game of his life, so he won easily. The second day, my son was again in the finals. My son played against the best player of the USA. You had to win 4 sets of 7 for the victory. It was 2-2 in the set and 9-9 at the fifth set. My son served, he missed his service, 9-10, he served again. His opponent returned the ball, touched the net, and my son couldn't do anything. 9-11. Now it's 2-3 in the set. My son won the next, 1-8.

We were at the seventh set, and the winner would go to the Olympics. The set was intense, and the score was 8-7. Three more points and the dream came true. I saw in his look that he didn't want to let go of this opportunity. He felt intense, focused and confident. He made the next 2 points. Now 10-7.

One more point, and it was done. After a good exchange, 10-8, my son served, and his opponent missed his return. Game was over, 11-8. What joy and relief for him. Finally, after years of training and efforts, his dream came true. London was expecting you. Congratulations my son, I love you. - Dad.

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

## **My Father – A Legacy**

What are the greatest legacies someone could leave to you? I believe the main legacies are honesty, respect, and love of family. So, I'm sure my father left this for me and my brothers. He always set an example as a father, a businessman and a husband.

In business, he was a visionary and a vanguard man. He started one of the first travel agencies of São Paulo's state, forty-eight years ago. He traveled throughout Brazil and many other countries and he left for us this desire to discover the world and to be a citizen of the world. He was very respected by everyone – employees, suppliers, customers and members of tourism associations. He knew practically everything about the business. Certainly, he was a good, honest and complete businessman.

I believe he was also a great husband. He always treated my mom with much respect and affection. He was a gentleman. Of course, they had bad days, like all couples, but they never discussed their problems in front of us. They were married for forty-one years.

As a father, I'm sure me and my brothers are grateful. He and my mom always taught us good principles. He wasn't always present, because he needed to travel a lot, but whenever he could, he joined us. He supported, taught and loved his family.

Unfortunately, he left us fourteen years ago, from pancreatic cancer. The whole family was at his side at the time. Wherever he is now, he is watching over his family. Obviously, he was a man with both virtues and flaws, and I want to be the same good man, father and husband, he was. I know this is one the greatest legacies I can leave for my daughter and my son.

*Eduardo Matera is a student at Piper Community School in Broward County, where his teacher is Debbie Gitlan.*

## **Someone I Admire**

My grandfather was born in 1932 and died when I was 15 years old. As a young man, he was a peasant, but he did not like working

in the fields. He preferred to work as a carpenter and to build wooden objects, furniture and even houses.

I admire him because he had a great character. He never lost his temper. He was also very determined. He always tried to fulfill his dreams, even when all odds were against him.

His determination has taught me that it is not worth worrying about difficulties. Instead, difficulties are to be seen as hurdles to overcome. He inspired me to believe that when you have a dream or a goal you should never stop trying to get it, until you have achieved it.

*Lara Lopez is a student in Zuly Rosello's ESOL class at Miami Dade College – Hialeah Campus*

### **A Small Woman with a Bigger Heart**

I want to talk about a woman of strong character, my grandmother, Bacilia Sontay. It's an honor for me share what my grandmother means to me. She was a faithful Christian and a warrior. Her life was not easy because she grew up orphaned, and she got married at the early age of 12.

She is my role model because she was a leader. She taught me go to the Christian church and to serve God because all problems can be solved through prayer and hard work. When we did not have money to buy clothes or shoes, my grandmother got up early on Sundays and cut what she found in the field to the sell in the market. I learned from her that as hard as life is, I should never give up on the situation. She disciplined me very hard when I did bad things, but I know she did it for my sake, out of love. She took care of me like a daughter when I got sick because she loved me.

Always, I will love her as my mother. Today, I only have memories of time spent together; when we walked to church, to the market, and shepherded the many multi-colored sheep that she loved. She nicknamed me Chana after her mother, who she said I look like, and this caused a mutual, special love. After each dinner, she told us stories about her childhood around the wood fire, making us laugh or cry. They were the best stories I've

ever heard. Even today, black beans with spicy peppers remind me of her.

Finally, our hard farewell came in 2003 when I decided to come to the U.S.A. It was difficult for me to say that last goodbye to my grandmother. When I gave her the last hug, I felt my heart wrenching in two because I did not know if I would see her again. At the same time, I felt excited about the trip to the United States with my brothers and my nephews. When I came on my way, I asked God to take care of her and for the opportunity to see her again. I knew that we had to separate but I never thought that separation would be forever. In 2016, I received the heart wrenching news that she had died. Again, my heart was tearing. It was our final goodbye, forever. Even today, I still miss her.

I just wanted to say thanks to God for blessing me with a wonderful grandmother; thanks for her love, her care, her advice, and for everything she taught me. She will always live in my heart.

*Claudia Tzaraxis from Guatemala is a student of Immokalee Technical College. She has a beautiful teacher named Katherine Mominee.*

## **My Mother**

In my life, there are many people who influence me. Some are good influences and some are bad influences. But the one person who has influenced my life the most would be my Mother. She sacrificed a lot in her lifetime to make her children's lives better.

My mother is the eldest one in her family. She has two sisters and one brother. While my grandfather and grandmother worked, she had to take care of her siblings. After she got married to my father, she gave birth to my five siblings. My father had to work out of our countryside to get more money to balance family expenses. My mother had to do everything she could do, no matter how hard. She was going to face life.

When I was a young girl, we did not have enough money to buy things. My mother fed chickens and ducks, grew vegetables and planted rice to provide food. She worked from dawn to dark, she was as busy as a bee at times. When I went to school, she worked

harder because we had to pay the expensive tuition fees. Since finishing high school, I have been working. She still works hard for us since coming to the USA. She maintains the habit of thrift.

I admire and respect my mother. I believe there are no excuses in life to make you just give up and be lazy.

*Xiaoqing Chen is a student in Debbie Gitlan's class at Piper Community School in Broward County.*

### **My Parents' Sacrifice**

My father and my mother are the two people I admire most. They have shown me their love in many ways. My parents brought me to the United States to give me a better life. My life here is safer than in my country and I have more opportunities to get a better education.

I admire my parents because they take care of me, teach me, and give me an example of how to respect others. For example, they have always taken care of me by making me feel safe and loved. All my life they have fed me, given me a safe home, and worried about me because they love me. Moreover, my mother and father have taught me many things like respecting other people. They have shown me the correct way to live and have taught me to take care of myself. I know that I will succeed because of them. My mother and father have also sacrificed a lot for me. For instance, they made the hard decision to come to the United States for me and my brother and sister to get a better future. They sacrificed for us by selling things they cared about in order to feed us. They left the country they loved to give us a safe life.

If I had stayed in my country, I would never be in West Area Adult School learning English and getting my GED. I will repay my parents and show my love for them by working hard in school to meet my goal of speaking and understanding English. I will strive to set a good example for my brother and my sister both at home and in school.

*Derick Sierra is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.*

## **My Hero**

The person who I admire the most is my mother. I can talk to her about anything. I am able to discuss all of my problems with her any time of the day or night. This draws us closer together. When I talk to her, she listens. Then we cry together.

She gives me good advice. I take her advice and use it to help me find solutions to my problems.

By writing this letter, I want to show her how much I appreciate her. I care that she is my mother and love her very much.

So Mom, I just wanted to let you know that I cherish everything that you have done for me. You are my best friend and my mom.

Thank you for always being there when I need you the most!

*Bonnie Fugate is an adult student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. Her teacher is Dr. Michael McCoy*

# What the American Dream Means to Me

## Dreams Come True

I've always believed that dreams can come true. Ever since I was young, I've wanted to move to the United States. I am fortunate enough to be currently living my dream. It all started by watching TV shows and falling in love with the language.

My journey started when I finished high school and considered attending a university to study English as my second language. However, at the time my father was planning on paying for my education. When I told my father about my interests, he was not supportive because he believed English was unnecessary.

During my second semester in college, I majored in marine biology. I traveled to Bogota, Colombia in an attempt to gain my visa but was denied due to my young age. I tried two more times but I was not able to get a visa. I put my dreams on hold.

When I completed college, I started working on a big farm in Los Llanos Orientales. I worked in the production of two tons of fish every Thursday. I used to fly to my city, Medellin, every month to spend time with my family and friends. It was then that I fell in love with the father of my son and believed I had the perfect relationship. After realizing it wasn't the perfect relationship, I spent eight years as a single mother.

When my father passed away, I immediately knew my life would change drastically. I was very attached to my father because he always wanted my son and me near him. I took my father's place at home and took care of my mother and the house.

Four years after my father passed away, I met on the internet a man who lived in the United States. He was a good friend of my cousin and he wanted to get to know me because she was always talking about me. After eight months of meeting him online every night, he finally came to Medellin to meet me. The second time he came, he asked me if I wanted to get married. I flew to the U.S. with my son, married, and I have been here 10 years.



Fortunately, I met the most excellent man, had the blessing to marry him, and now I am here...living my dreams.

*Maria Barrucci is from Medellin, Colombia. She has been living in Florida since 2006 and has worked as a CNA at Brookdale Assisted Living for 8 years. She is an adult learner at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas, where her tutor is Linda Grimshaw.*

## **My American Dream**

Everyone has their own dreams just like different people have different personalities and lifestyles. But I believe that there is a common dream for many human beings and that dream is called The American Dream.

The founders of the United States wrote in the Declaration of Independence: “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. I believe this is the core essence of the American Dream which was perfectly defined by the Fathers of this nation.

The American Dream represents the core value for American citizens. You do not only have the equal rights to live, study and get a job, no matter who you are, where you were born, which group you belong to, where you come from, but you also have the duty to serve the country, the community, and the people.

The American Dream inspires me to face the challenges with courage and confidence, just like my religious faith constitutes my value system and judges my daily behaviors. It also helps me to set a goal and the right way to achieve that goal.

The American Dream means I live in an open and free society with fairness and justice. I have equal opportunities to succeed without fearing autocracy, serfdom and inequity. The American Dream also means I have the inherent right to pursue my personal happiness by abiding by the law, by being hard working and creating fortune.

Moreover, because we Americans have the same dream and value based on this certainty of common ground of the American Dream, I have confidence that my own life and my children and grandchildren's lives will be ensured and blessed. This has been fully proved by the history of the United States.

However, the American Dream is not just the dream and visions we have every day. It doesn't mean I can succeed and achieve my goals without hard work. It requires me to fight for it rather than take it for granted. It is worth to struggle and even sacrifice for it because it is not only my personal dream but that of all Americans; it is not only the dream of my generation but also the next and next generations' dream.

Therefore, the American Dream is for me about the universal value which together with my religious faith, become the two pillars supporting my spiritual word.

*Oizhi Luo is a student in Ms. Silvia Giovanardi's ESOL level 6 (Advanced) class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **The Reality of the American Dream**

When I was a little boy I saw many people leave our community and leave our country, and the saddest thing was leaving their family and everything for a dream – to have a better life. But many who imagined coming to make lots of money never thought that it would be difficult to achieve. And that's because many came back with good things and a lot of money.

Then one day, like many others, I abandoned everything. I was excited but without any idea that on the trip I would have to endure so much hunger, cold, and the worst, possibly losing my life. I never turned back. It was then that I realized that nothing was like roses.

Thank God everything dangerous was over, and having set foot in the United States meant a lot of happiness for me, at least at that moment.

Adjusting to the reality of living in the United States means to work to have bread everyday on your table. Only that way can

you get ahead to make life more productive and easy. At first I tried and worked very hard, but not only does it take personal development, it also takes learning to live alone, because my people and my family are far away.

That's why I came to a conclusion. Living in the United States is not that "Great American Dream" that everyone is talking about. For me, it's a synonym for hard work and solitude.

*Pedro E. Martin Jimenez is a dreamer from Guatemala. He is a conscientious student who is studying English in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.*

### **Make Your American Dream Come True**

We know that the United States is a world power. It is a blessed land that gives many opportunities to different cultures. Not only is there economic solvency, but also a quality of life which draws the attention of the rest of the world and makes other people want to come here. Therefore, many people emigrate from different sides of the world. They migrate in search of the so-called "American Dream." But why do they leave their country? Most of the time they leave because they do not have a job that helps them to take care of their families. The heavy cost of labor, violence, and wars are too many factors that cause people to come to the United States.

Every person who comes to the United States has a dream to achieve, and they all can achieve it by working hard and not losing heart in the attempt. I believe that the American Dream is something individual that every person wants to achieve, not just American citizens. It's also the dream of all those people who come from different parts of the world to the United States with different ethnic backgrounds and different religious beliefs. It's why I love to live in the United States, a place that accepts you regardless of your origin and opens the door to a better future, not only for its citizens but for non-citizens. The way to realize this dream will not be easy but not impossible either. Every time a dream becomes reality not only the heart of that person rejoices, but also that this beautiful country grows.

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

## **What the American Dream Means to Me**

This phrase has a great meaning for me, and I summarize it with the word freedom. It is a dream for which many years I struggled, and it finally began a few months ago.

I am a Cuban and I am very proud of my roots and my culture. Since I was a girl, I was responsible and liked to earn good grades at school. I was considerate that my parents gave a good education and instilled in me the desire to overcome any challenge. During my student life, I developed a special interest in numbers and a few years later began studying for an accounting career. I liked it from the first moment and enjoyed it until I graduated in 2015. A few months later, I started working and finishing my social service. Then I knew I wanted to work with numbers as professional.

In my country, the young people are deprived of the rights of expressing and, in many occasions, of overcoming challenges. Years ago, I started my curiosity about the American Dream. It was not until 8 years later that I managed to reach this country. My American Dream began when a Cuban Sonora landed at Miami International Airport with many goals and dreams to fulfill.

The beginning has been very difficult. First because of the language barriers and cultural differences. In my early days, the U.S. government provided me and my daughter with economic help and helped me to make the right decisions regarding education and my professional development.

A few months ago, I got information about a tax class that was offered by a company named H&R Block. Without thinking, I enrolled and passed my class a few months later with the highest grade obtained in the class. It was a challenge for me since all the material and classes were in English. Later, the company called me for an interview and offered me a job. I am grateful to know that every day I can help clients and make them happy with the best professional attention.

Undoubtedly in a short time, I have achieved with effort a part of my dream. As a professional, I have a lot to learn and grow but at the same time I am proud of everything I have been able to achieve in such short time.

These days, I am a totally free person in all aspects. With effort and perseverance, I hope to achieve all my goals and be one more of so many people that finally reach their American dream.

*Laura Arguelles Alonso is a student at the Parent Academy of St. Lucie County.*

## **The American Dream in My Perspective**

Statistics show that over 400,000 people migrate to the United States of America each year. Many of these people come to America to live the “American Dream.”

America is a place with many things to do and many careers to pursue. People with high paying jobs get the reward of living the “American Dream.” They purchase multiple mansions, fast cars and they enjoy the party lifestyle and have few worries. However, this doesn’t happen easily; it takes hard work and dedication to achieve this luxury lifestyle.

Part of living the “American Dream” is being an active parent to your children. This helps them to grow up and live a successful life. As a parent, one has to listen to their child, help them with homework, cheer them up and provide them with a good life. When your child graduates from high school, you also get the joy of paying for their college.

Going to college is another part of living the “American Dream.” America is currently ranked 14th best education system in the world. So if you came to America for education, you are in the right place. In an American college, there are many subjects one can choose as a major. This will help you find a job.

While living the “American Dream,” you should participate in politics. This is a good way to have a say so in the government. Participating in events like food drives, voting, helping around the community and charity are important. When people get wealthy, it’s always ideal that they give back because the celebrities who were once poor know that having nothing is a horrible feeling. So most of them give back, so that our generation doesn’t have to feel that way.

The “American Dream” can only be lived by a select few. Fast cars, multiple mansions, clubs, and parties may be in your future.

*Howard Barrett is an ABE student. His teacher is Joanne Kutney.*

## **Courage and Desire**

There are different meanings to the idea of the American Dream. The American Dream refers to the equality of opportunities and freedom that allows the population of the United States to achieve their goals in life with effort and dedication.

My meaning behind it is the result that you get from hard work, effort, and determination. Years ago, many Americans were racist and closed-minded. They did not accept people of different races, which was traumatic for many immigrants who were already here trying to fulfill their dreams. Nowadays, little by little, the immigrants have gained the respect and understanding of many by their efficiency and productivity.

Many people migrated to the U.S.A. because they had to flee from their countries of origin, because their governments were not stable, inflation was high, or simply because of delinquency. When they arrive here, they realize that it is a totally different place, where the first barrier is the language. They have to work, study, pay bills and try to send money to their relatives.

My experience about the American dream has been very accommodating. I came here two years ago, and at the beginning, it was a very extreme change because as I said before, the language is very important. Everything was improving, little by little. I went to school to learn English. I got ready to get my license as a C.N.A., and now I’m working in that field. It’s something that takes time, but now I can say that I achieved one of my goals.

Many people overcome the barriers and achieve their goal, which is to accomplish the American Dream. To achieve this, you need to have courage and the desire to excel. The person who fights and works for what they want, gets it. It’s not easy, but it’s not impossible.

*Jessica Pina is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Thoughts on Cultural Diversity**

I was born in this country, in New York City, from a different cultural background. I have seen how the people from different ethnic groups left their countries for many reasons, just like people in history that came to this country did with the hope of keeping customs and values while adapting to the new way of life.

In this country, there is diversity of culture. Some people from these cultures are friendly, and others are less friendly, but it doesn't matter because everybody here has to survive and work because nothing is free. There are obligations that everyone has to comply with and deal with, like laws and taxes. However, contributions and influences from other groups that make this country rich in cultural diversity are sometimes ignored by others who previously got here first. There is prejudice against minorities, related to color, race, sex, religion. I understand the issue because so many people in this country do not know their own history since its foundation.

This is a great country, rich in cultural diversity influenced by all these immigrants, but the big question is: why does everybody want to come to this country? Why? Why not go to another? Years ago, I had a work supervisor that left his country because his country became a very dangerous place to live, and he moved here with his family. I told him, "This is the land of opportunities." His answer was, "You're right, this is the land of opportunities for those who know how to take advantage of the opportunities."

During my time in the military service, I had the privilege to meet, work and share with persons from different states with different backgrounds. It's hard to say, but some of them didn't like each other and worked together because they had to. In the service, you have to obey and follow orders, like it or not, to get the same goal. Those differences and prejudices between the people that I met during the years, in my personal opinion, was about education and values that you learn in your home when you grow up.

During my service time, I had the chance to visit different countries, especially Central and South America, due to my language skills, and I noticed that every culture has a different way to educate, but the values are the same. Those countries were very different from the Middle East and Middle Asia, where I was

in my last years in the service. Maybe I'm not the right person to express my personal opinion about cultural diversity, but if you come to this country and want to be part of it, take advantage of the opportunities that others don't have. Contribute and be grateful; it's a privilege to live in this country.

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

## **Life in America**

I have lived in the United States for ten months. The United States has many opportunities for overcoming hardship and having a better future for myself and family. I came from Cuba with so many American Dreams. Some people have been coming here looking for American Dreams. My American Dream happened quickly. One day I was in Cuba and the next America.

When we arrived, I thought everyone had thoughts like mine. So many people are thinking the same, but the harsh reality is different as my family and I are Spanish speakers. We had to overcome hard moments. For example, my parents didn't have jobs or had a bad experience in finding them. In one job where they told that they were going to pay then didn't pay anything. The question my parents asked our family was, where is our American Dream?

Over time things started to get better for my dad and mom because they found a good job. Also, I have continued school and made great friends. Equally important, I have begun to make dreams of having a career and want to be someone. I am pursuing my American Dreams.

I have learned that life can be difficult and that things can be achieved little by little. Some Latinos are giving up and returning to their countries. However, today I can say I have American Dreams again. My American Dream means sacrifice, patience and never giving up.

*Erick is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College, where his teacher is Mrs. Betten-Jutasi.*



## **What the American Dream Means to Me**

My name is Darlin Rapulo, and I am from Honduras. I have been in the United States for 11 years. I came to the United States to realize my dream: The American Dream.

When I arrived in the United States, I suffered very much because I slept in a garage since I did not have money to rent a house. I worked a lot to get money to eat. I was only here two months when I discovered I was pregnant. It was very difficult, but I needed to work to help my mother in Honduras.

Today I can say that I realized my dream because right now I have my house, my car, my driver's license, and my green card. My daughter is big and studying in a good school.

*Darlin Rapulo is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She is studying in Mrs. Vicki McDonald's ESOL 5 class, and she is very motivated and ambitious.*

## Personal Stories

### **Have You Ever Wondered What Your Favorite Animal Is?**

For me cats are very special animals. There are a few reasons why I said cats are special: they are intelligent, they can be well behaved and they are very independent.

First and foremost, cats are intelligent because they are capable of doing so many things even though they are very small animals. They can clean, and cats are naturally good predators. For example, if you have cats in your house you will not have any problems with mice or rats. Cats would hunt all night to exterminate them, but they would never eat them. Hunting is like a game for them; they can hunt all day and not get tired. I personally have some experience with my cat, Stefy. He is only 4 years old. Stefy is very smart and capable of doing so many things without me training him. Stefy uses the litter box, eats from his bowl and sleeps on his own little mat. Cats are also very clean and rarely need a bath. They use their tongues to clean their bodies. They do not smell bad like dogs do sometimes. One would not feel like one needs to wash one's hands or shower after petting a cat.

Secondly, cats can be well behaved, depending on the kind of training their owners provide them. Training cats would require a lot of love and patience because they are not capable of learning fast as dogs do. Unlike dogs, cats training can be relied heavily upon reward of food. On the other hand, dogs would be happy if you just touch their stomach or say "good dog." It could be very challenging to change a cat's behavior or train it in a new behavior; that is why it is required to train cats at an early age, as early as 0 to 4 weeks old. For example, at that age one can start training a cat not to walk on tables, scratch furniture, bite people's hands or eat other animals' food. Stopping cats from doing these kinds of things can be very hard especially if they are already adults, because these bad behaviors can turn out to be the normal things they do.

Finally, cats are very independent animals; they can be left by themselves for a couple of hours. If one needs to go out, one does not need to put the cats on leashes or go with them. They can be left

alone to roam freely in the home. You would never have to worry about your neighbor being annoyed by a cat because their noises are not loud enough to cause any problems. All cats would need is enough food and water to last them for the moments one is not home with them. Always remember to leave cats' litter boxes in the same place where they can see them; otherwise it would be difficult for them to do their toileting needs.

In conclusion, cats are very special because they are clean, intelligent and independent. Personally, I am not a big fan of cats but I can see the value of having them, especially when you have them as a pet in the home.

*Stephanie Moi-Meme is a student of Gabriela Pesantes in Lee County.*

### **My Story**

I grew up in a small village. We were only about ten people living in that place. I have four brothers, and the oldest one died twenty three years ago. My mom had to work very hard to feed us. It was so hard for us that sometimes we did not have anything to eat. Sometimes we just ate potato shells, because my mom had no money to buy us food. That was the year 1982. The guerrillas were very hard in that time. One day the guerrillas' chief came to me and told me "hey you, you want to join us?" I told him "no," he said "you will have everything with us." After that I went with them. I was trained on how to make traps to catch the enemies. I was in the guerrillas for three and a half years.

Then they sent me back to my village. It was hard for me being with them. After that I went to school until sixth grade. It still was so difficult those days with my family, so I went to Mexico by myself and found myself a job in the corn fields. I stayed there for four years and came back to my village. In that time I decided to join the army when the poverty still was hard. There, the first thing they had me do was making bread for the soldiers. I was trained for three months in the jungles of Poptun in the department (state) of Peten. In the training I had to run with a bag full of rocks, shoot at the target, eat some dirty food, drink nasty water and even eat dead animals like dogs, rabbits, and birds.

After that they sent me to see my family for last time in case I would die in a battle. When I came back, the brigade asked me if

I was ready, and I said that I was ready. So the brigade sent me to other place. It was in Zacapa, another state, to join a platoon for going to the mountains where they thought there were guerrillas. One day I was in some kind of battle, fighting with a guerrilla man. I did not want to shoot him, I just yelled to him, "Hey my friend, don't shoot. I don't want to fight," and he told me, "I do not want to fight either."

So we made arrangements not to fight each other. He came closer and closer until we saw each other's faces. We talked for five minutes. He told me he did not wanted to shoot because he was a Christian and a told him that I was a Christian too. Then he told me to go to his church, and I never went there, but I went to my church and decided to leave the army. I went back to Mexico because the army was looking for me to see what happened to me. For maybe four months they were looking for me and they quit doing it. Now I was back to see my family and stay with them.

*Steven Mendoza is a student Jupiter High School Adult Education, where his teacher is Michelle Jeffrey.*

### **A Day I Will Not Forget**

My name is Pierre Richard Jerissaint. I am from Haiti. In 2002, when I was a child, something awful happened to me. It was a normal day and I went to play soccer with my friends. While we were playing, somehow, one of the players from the opposing team broke my ankle. I think it was accidental. I was taken to the hospital. After five hours of examination, the doctor decided that he needed to insert a metal piece in my foot. However, I did not agree with his decision. So, I left the hospital after nine hours. He also said that I would not be able to walk and play soccer again.

The biggest problem was that my dear mother was not aware about this accident. Of course, my mom was all in tears. Many people came to see me almost every day because I could not walk. It took one and a half years for me to be fully recovered. I could walk and play soccer once again. Everybody was very happy to see me regain my health and have a normal life.

*Pierre Richard Jerissaint is studying English at Career/Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **An Unexpected Gift for Christmas**

One evening about a month before Christmas, my cousin kept calling and texting me. I could not answer her because I could not hear the phone ring. I was busy putting up the Christmas tree in the living room. Also, I had the music on.

When I called her back she told me that she has included me in the 'gift exchange' for Christmas Eve. "There will be no excuse for you not to be with us. I want this Christmas to be something special," she said.

After I hung up the phone, I went to her house to pick up a piece of paper that they had in a bowl with a name of a person written in it. It took me a few days to think about what to buy. There were eight of us in the 'gift exchange' group, and luckily I knew all of them.

Four days before Christmas, my cousin's ex-boyfriend, who is my friend and I sometimes see him at the gym, called me and asked me for the direction to the store where I got my skateboard because his was broken. While he was at the store, he called me again asking me what I would recommend him; I suggested to him to get one that is a medium size with wheels that are not too big and not too small. Then, he sent me a picture of two skateboards. I replied, "I would pick the one on your left." His response was, "Thanks again for your help, buddy." I said, "No problem."

It's Christmas Eve, yeah! I was excited because we were going to do something we have never done before. When that moment arrived, we gathered in the dining room. We shared a few thoughts and then had dinner. The food was delicious. My cousin and her friends made tamales (a traditional meal in my native country, Guatemala, and it is usually made on Christmas Eve), and they also served fruit punch. We ate and enjoyed the meal.

After dinner, we started to exchange gifts. I started first, and then on and on. When everyone had finished, we all decided to open our gifts. It looked like we were a little bit nervous to open our gifts. When I opened mine, wow! I can't believe it! "This was what I picked over the phone to help someone without even knowing that the gift was going to be mine!" I was really happy and impressed that evening. I don't think I would ever forget that night.

*Roberto Gabriel is studying English at Career/Adult Education in Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Journey to the United States**

I'm Ofelia Contreras. I was born and grew up in a small village located in Jalisco, Mexico. In my country, there were economic deficiencies, hard times, and heavy fieldwork, but nothing made me ever think about moving away from my little paradise. Everything stopped me: my home, my people, my roots; nothing made me want to leave there, nothing.

At the age of 15, this all changed. The circumstances made my mother make the decision to get away from our ranch and explore the city. She wanted to take us away from a future like her own. She could hardly read and write. My brothers and I worked alongside of our mother, without neglecting the smaller children, so we could all get ahead and succeed.

Studying and working became a habit, but a good habit. It felt that every small step we took was important.

Years later the same story was repeated. Now we left our country, our world, to go to an uncertain place, an unknown place with a different language. It was all new, but we were in search of a better world for our children. We are always looking for a better future for those we love.

Love, grow and educate your children. See them fly and continue to support them without forgetting our mothers. After that...there are always dreams to pursue, no matter your age. I'm 50 years old and I feel the same need to learn something new, same as when I was a girl. There are no obstacles when you feel hungry to learn. The obstacles are only within us.

In the end, life is a constant struggle against adversity and when you do it with love for yourself and those around you, everything is rewarding.

*Ofelia Contreras is studying in the ESOL Program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL with Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*

## **This Life Belongs to You**

My name is Marcy Prave, and I am 30 yr old. I am happily married with two amazing little boys. My life started out like most little girls do: I had dreams of being something big one day. Those dreams quickly faded away as I watch my mother struggle with addiction and jail. I couldn't understand why she always left me, or why she didn't love me. That was the beginning of a rough road ahead for me. My grandmother and grandfather were able to get custody of me at age 9, but that didn't change the pain and the battle that was going on within me. I dropped out of school in the 7th grade, feeling as if I didn't belong and that I was supposed be like my mother. Years went by so fast before I knew it I was a mother myself at age 20. I looked into my son's eyes and at that moment I understood that I don't have to be like my mom, that this was my life and I could just sit back and do nothing or I could turn my pain, hurt and weaknesses into something beautiful. I worked hard to support my son but not having my high school diploma really made it hard to get good jobs. It wasn't until 2016 that I finally took the leap and jumped back into school. My husband and now both of my sons were there cheering me on. It took me only 4 months to complete the GED program. I had some amazing teachers, friends, and family believing in me. When I wanted to give up, they wouldn't let me. Here I stand today with my high school diploma getting ready to take the next step and go to college in August. I say "college" and I still find it so hard to believe that I, a daughter of a drug addict, am going to college. See, it doesn't matter where or who we come from, we are all in control of our own destiny! Be better; use your pain and hurt to fuel your strength.

*Marcy Prave is a student at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, FL, where her teachers are Karen Hagerty and Pamela Seely.*

## **Difficult Decisions**

Skating means a lot to me. I have practiced it almost all of my life. Skating for me is like knowing how to fly; it is an adventure. There is only one thing though, if you don't know how to stop, it is very painful when you fall. I competed for few years. I received medals, but only practicing speed skating was fascinating to me.

When I decided to have my daughter, I decided that she should also learn to skate, and when she was four years old she had to learn. I was very happy that she liked it and she practiced speed skating until she was nine years old.

Then one day she told me that she didn't want to skate anymore. She wanted to play basketball. I didn't know what to do at first. I didn't believe it. I wanted her to love skating as much as I do. I tried for two years to get her back into speed skating. She played basketball, and one day I took her to a hockey practice. To my surprise, she loved it. I never liked hockey that much; it may sound contradictory, but I thought that hockey was boring and the mere thought of the clothing worn by the players made it very difficult for me to play with her.

My daughter practiced hockey for three years before coming to the United States. When we got to the United States, I immediately started looking for a place for her to practice hockey. On her first day of practice, a player came to me and asked if I wanted to play hockey. I told her no, because I didn't know how to play and I've never played before. My daughter insisted and I finally gave in and joined the women's league. We played for almost one year, and I had so much fun. I never thought that I would end up liking this sport.

Last year my daughter told me that she wanted to play ice hockey now, so I enrolled her in a Hockey 101 class at Brandon Ice Sports Forum. Since then she's been taking skill classes at XtraIce Rink. A new rink has opened in Wesley Chapel, and she is going to be playing in a recreational league. The tryouts are this week and we are both very excited.

My daughter may not like speed skating as much as I do, but the important thing is that she found a sport that she is passionate about. That is all that matters; as long as she is happy, I am happy.

*Maggie Reyes is studying in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teachers are Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*



## **The Joy of Reading**

On my seventh birthday, my big present from my mother was a book. The cover spoke for itself. It was beautiful and striking. I was invited to submerge into the pages. I still remember my emotions, my joy when reading about the characters. The title of the book was Little Women. Still today, after forty-five years, I remember that instead of lullabies, I wanted to be read to.

That is how I've travelled the world. I have tasted the most delicious meals; I know from writers, kings, and brave women. I have cried with stormy summits and cold.

Today, I want to read all those books again in their original language.

I love books and I would like everyone to tell their children the importance of reading. When you have a book in your hands, it is as if you have a world of knowledge.

I close my eyes and feel their kisses, enjoy beautiful landscapes, and weep in their eternal nights of sadness. I have also suffered and waited with anguish for the letters that never came after so many years.

I know that the best gift is a book. They smell of wisdom and after experiencing the knowledge, I think that technology would never replace a book.

Books will stay after we find one we really like. The books last forever...they forever will be our best friends, and give us the best advice. Every book is an adventure and a challenge.

We travel centuries through their pages and we get lost in the horizon of their worlds. We feel the light of the sun and the cold of winter. I fought in battles and hated the enemy. I have felt fear and hope in every page. I have traveled to the future and I have seen the beginning of the world. I have tasted wine with the most illustrious land I have fought for a loaf of bread. I have lived the births and deaths and infidelities and hope. I know the Black Sea, the Chinese Wall and the Alps. I have slept in the middle of the sea with wild beasts.

For all I have learned and lived today, I want to tell you all give a book and receive a book, and read a book. Feel its fragrance and lose yourself in a full world of knowledge. You will travel, you will cry, and you will laugh through your pages.

Thank you mother.

*Nadia Cadavid is studying in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teacher is Mrs. Lori Savoy.*

## **Challenges**

My name is Maria Casillas. I was born and lived in a small town called Tamazula Jalisco, which is in the country of Mexico. I have always liked learning new things and dreaming big. I was unable to receive enough education to go into the medical field in my country. This was mainly due to a lack of finances my family and I required to pursue my dream. I made the decision to come to the United States in the year 2000.

I found that there were major differences in available opportunities, the languages, and the cultures. I welcomed the range of opportunities I found waiting for me and our children. I can now go back to school and complete my education. Each day presents new challenges, but I won't give up.

My children were born and raised here in the United States and can take advantage of free education. As they learn, they can also succeed just as I have. In Mexico, the availability of jobs and a sufficient education are very limited. The United States has now allowed a brighter future for our family.

Understanding English is very important to effectively communicate day to day. Having to learn it has been very difficult and tiring, but I have found that it is worth the struggle. Spanish is also common language in the United States, so it is important that I never forget my beautiful language. The cultures of the two countries have similarities, but also many differences. For example, in Mexico, Christmas is celebrated in our family by attending festivals and neighborhood events. A wide variety of foods are made available such as soft tamales, pozole, tacos, and

much more. The traditional music is also different in Mexico. Songs are performed on guitars and cellos, and sung by mariachi.

I have learned a lot of American customs since I have been here. There is very large diversity in American culture, its food, music, and holidays. What I like the most is the many opportunities that The United States has provided me and our family.

*Maria Casillas is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin/East Pasco Adult Education Center located in Dade City, Florida.*

### **A Cell Phone Addicted Time**

Currently, we live in a society where priorities have changed. In the past, the first thing that we did when we woke up was to eat breakfast or take a shower. Now, the first thing we do when we open our eyes is check our mobile devices. The new technologies and increased use of innovative cell phones gives us 24/7 access to social networks, text messages, cameras, video games, etc. These multiple functions for most people have become essential, like clothing that we cannot do without. We have become so dependent on these devices that we feel the need to post everything that happens in our daily lives, such as meetings, dates, dawn, sunset, and I could continue to write an endless list of things which, according to our inclinations, make us more interesting or fun. Consequently, we feel acceptance among other people with whom we share in our virtual environment.

These intelligent devices have multiple advantages that make our lives much easier, but they also modify our behavior. For example, forgetting a cell phone at home can turn a nice day into one of chaos and stress. Moreover, it affects our social relations with our family, lovers, and co-workers. People seem to prefer spending time on their cell phones learning the latest trends, taking a selfie, posting a comment on a social network, or looking at friends or their favorite artist. If you think about it, they are people who do not know you, but you feel the need to be informed of the latest events in their lives. Even when we put our mobile devices aside, conversations usually center around what was posted on Facebook, the funny YouTube video or the Instagram

photo that got so many “likes.” Maybe we have become crazy with our virtual world because it’s fun, it’s entertaining, and it’s a way to stay connected.

So, we need to create awareness, as young people and as old people, about the use of cell phones, and try to put our cell phones aside during the day for a few hours. We do not need to rely on technology all the time. Perhaps we can start enjoying simple things such as our environment, walking, visiting places that you do not know, learning something different, enjoying your family and people that love you. In other words, we are alive, and we have a wonderful world outside. Let us remember we only have one life, and we must live it in the best way, always seeking the best of other people. So, enjoy spending time doing something, anything, and then you can post it on your social network! Remember, the best virtual reality comes from reality.

*Yusbelith Farias a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

### **My Kid with Special Needs**

My name is Marie-Alix, and I have a cute boy named Jay-Nathan. He’s 4 years old. He’s my little miracle. He was born here in Florida at 31 weeks (I had preeclampsia while I was on vacation) which made him a big preemie with a health condition so fragile. However, even if he gets sick often, he is an active and happy little boy with a strong personality. He’s the joy of my life.

First of all, let’s start at the beginning. I am a young Haitian woman, a professional in the Human Resources Field with more than 14 years of experience. In my last job, I was the Human Resources Director for one of the biggest companies in Haiti, Gb Group / Lafito Global. I had a good salary with great benefits that allowed me to meet all my needs.

Then his father and I realized that our child was developing differently from other children of the same age. Among other things, he did not like the company of other children and preferred to play alone in his corner. He was always very agitated and never

tired of skipping. He refused to brush his teeth or hair and could not stand the sound of the vacuum cleaner or lawn mower. But the scariest thing was that he still did not speak when he was 3 years old. So, as he is an American citizen, we've decided to come here to get him evaluated. Then BOOM!!! The diagnosis fell as a sentence: he is AUTISTIC (a serious developmental disorder that impairs the ability to communicate and interact.) The sky had suddenly fallen on my head. Then my whole life changed.

I had to choose between staying with him in the States, looking for help to guarantee him better treatment or going back to Haiti where I belong and convince myself he'll be okay. And of course as a good mom, I've stayed. At the beginning it was so hard. In Haiti, I didn't use to stay home taking care of him because he had a nanny. Now, I've got to prepare his food, change his diapers, bathe him, clean his clothes, make sure that his place is safe and always have my eyes on him to avoid troubles because he's not aware of danger. The hardest part is trying to guess his needs as he is nonverbal. It wasn't easy to find help, and I spent all my savings. I've cried a lot, almost every day. Then I realized that the tears wouldn't help so I made up my mind and started fighting. I went to Child Find, so he got evaluated and placed in Dwight D. Eisenhower School.

Now he's going to a special class where they give him some therapy. He hasn't made any progress yet, but I keep hoping and I am sure with love and patience, I will help him get the best in life.

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

## **How My Dreams Came True**

A turning point in my life happened when I decided to come to this country from the Dominican Republic. I had to leave behind my family, friends, and the beautiful island where I was born. I knew there was a whole new world beyond the beaches in my country. I was curious to go to the United States because I already had family there, and I knew that a new life was waiting for me.

Arriving in New York City was quite a change! I was astounded by the tall buildings and the Statue of Liberty. This was very different from my country. In the Dominican we didn't have taxis everywhere, there were no subway trains, and we had very few busses.

My aunts and uncles had already been here for quite a while. They kept telling me that this was the land of opportunities, and we would be free from dictatorship and an oppressive government. America allowed freedom of expression that I was never experienced in my home country.

My mother and brother stayed behind in Santo Domingo. I worked as a nursing assistant so I could earn money and send a little back to them from time to time. I worked hard and studied English because I felt strongly that I needed to know the language of the country I was now living in, and I wanted to get better jobs to advance myself.

After a few years here, I decided to become an American citizen. I wanted to make my family back home proud of my accomplishments in my new country. I studied the Constitution and the laws. Finally, on April 18, 1977, while living in Hawaii, I became naturalized. I then had the privilege to vote. I personally believe it is important to know the language and customs of a country before being given the right to vote. For that reason, I continue to study and better myself to achieve my dreams in America, the land of opportunities.

*Miriam Frisbie is an active woman who enjoys spending time with her husband and preparing to earn her high school diploma. Her teacher is Lisa Gumm.*

## **Cocaine**

Hello, my name is Mesha Ford and I'm 44 years of age. I'd like to share a little bit of my story. I married who I thought was my soul-mate, not knowing I would become the product of his environment of abuse and drugs. We had three children over the years. The abuse grew and so did his habit.

Have you ever heard “if you can’t beat them, join them?” That was me. The influence he had over me was greater than my strength. Why? Because I was introduced to Cocaine.

Cocaine was the answer for if all. The pain he caused was numbed when I used. Life began to spiral out of control ever more. My kids began to recognize unusual behavior. I’d had enough. After using for 2 years, I stopped, and moved on without my husband and the cocaine. It was hard at first, but I fought every temptation. I no longer would ever disappoint myself by allowing a use of drugs to control me. What I hadn’t realized was the reality of living, so I began to sell weed. I was busted in 2016, sentenced to 24 months in state prison. These life events have taught me:

If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything. The paths we choose aren’t always gonna be smooth, it’s how we handle them. I’ve been clean 9 years no COCAINE. Nothing is IMPOSSIBLE, the word itself explains it I’M POSSIBLE.

*Mesha Ford is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a mother of five kids. She has changed her life from being a cocaine user. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Joy Brown.*

## **End of the Honeymoon in Florida**

I was born in Bogotá, Colombia. I have always been sociable and very friendly. When I was 21 years old, I got my dentistry degree. It was the best stage of my life: economic independence, walks, parties, family meetings, social events.

Then I decided to start my postgraduate studies. During one of those days, I fell in love. Actually not all was wonderful. There was a small problem. He was living in Florida, and I in Colombia.

We decided to continue with our relationship. Four years later we decided to get married, but I needed to finish my studies, and he couldn’t leave his work, so we remained distanced.

When I got my master’s degree, we understood that it was time to get together, so I moved to where I started my second honeymoon and my new home, Florida.

At first everything was light, harmony, feelings of freedom, beach, breeze, sea, walks, and different places. At this moment, I continued studying. I had to study to learn to communicate with my friends and to achieve goals and projects. I had to learn to speak like I did 32 years ago. At that time, my only concern was to understand my mom about where my milk bottle was.

In our country we mistakenly think that by living in the U.S., you learn perfect English in less than a year, and that you easily get a very well paid job in a short time. The reality is different, especially when you are a psychologist, lawyer or dentist, as it is my case.

After a year and a half, I began to have health problems, so I had to visit the doctor. The doctor said, "This honeymoon is finished in Florida." I had high blood pressure, insomnia, headache, weight gain, irritability, etc. The diagnosis was depression. I said in a low voice, "This doctor is crazy." Anyone who knows me would think that this is impossible to happen to me, and I thought the same thing.

This is a very common reality which happens to many professionals who come to this country with an expectation, and little by little come to know the truth. You have left your family, friends, your company, your achievements, and your independence behind you, to restart from nothing and regain your stability. This leads to stress, and your head becomes another obstacle because it doesn't work.

I learned only the fatigue remains. I learned that we will achieve the goal step by step. I learned that many problems start in your mind, and every day has its worries, but we must enjoy our beautiful life like it is.

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



## **Rising from Below**

My name is Mirian Henriquez and this is my story. I was born into poverty in Honduras on April 9, 1965. Even though I was poor I remember my childhood still being very beautiful. We used to play without having toys. We would use random objects that we would find such as a doll made out of corn leaves, and we would play “landa,” or tag. We never held the fact that we didn’t have toys over our parents, for we knew that they were struggling to put food on our table.

Once I finished my high school education I started to work so I could help my parents provide a higher education for the rest of my siblings. Not too long after, I dated a wonderful man and got pregnant with his child. I married him six months into my pregnancy.

I knew my life had changed forever with a baby on the way. I remember my husband and I working non-stop to provide for our small family but we were barely making ends meet in Honduras. It was then when we decided to leave Honduras and come to the United States of America.

Many people against undocumented immigrants do not like to see our reality, we try to come in legally and get rejected or sometimes getting documentation is too expensive. We are leaving our country for a better future. People also do not know how dangerous crossing the border is. From drug wars, human traffickers, the blazing hot days, the raging river and the wild life, it is a complicated journey not to even mention ICE. Somehow God was with us and we finally crossed. Upon arrival we had hardships but I rose from the ground, and today I can say I’ve done great things for my family and myself.

My current goal is to educate myself in the English language as I want to open more doors for myself in this great country. My family is my greatest inspiration. It is because of them why I came to this country and got my documents settled so I’d build a future here and it is for them that I will finish this course successfully. I wish to obtain a career after I’m done with this course.

My children have been taught to work hard since they could comprehend. I’ve taught them that you are your own limit and

to reach those goals you must play the game. I'm proud of what I have accomplished so far and although I've yet to become a skyscraper my ambition will take me up until I reach the sky.

*Mirian Henriquez is a student at Immokalee Technical College, where her teacher is Katie Mominee.*

### **Everyone Can Use an Inspiration**

This is the story of my life, not complete of course but an important part of it: my childhood. I grew up in a happy family, surrounded by love. I was the smallest of three sisters and my younger brother was not yet born.

It all started when I was little, at a very early age of six I revealed an affinity for dance. I saw on the TV a woman who danced on a huge stage all dressed in the typical costume design for dancer: the tutu, making amazing movements with her legs and arms as out of fairy tale. Her name was Alicia Alonso, our Cuban prima ballerina absoluta and choreographer. In that moment I was fascinated, in love with the dance and in front of the TV I started imitating her movements as if I were she, a real dancer raised on the tip of my feet. Everything started there. My passion for the ballet and my desire is to become a great ballerina one day.

Following my wishes my mom took me to the Provincial School of Ballet to do some aptitude tests to see if I could study there and to her surprise I passed all the exams, flexibility, musicality and rhythm among others.

Between rehearsals, ballet classes, painting, music, piano and French I spent the happiest years of my childhood. I keep good memories of my friends from school, the opening of the ballet festivals, the performance in theaters for children, everyday activities, the walks, the games and even fights.

You cannot change the history that has been lived, but you can decorate the memories to keep the best in a special corner of thought, to return to visit us when sadness invades our lives.

I did not become a dancer. Some of my friends succeeded, others like me found new challenges and new passions. I discovered that the important thing in life is to go ahead and never stop dreaming.

*Nadiasda Mantrana Exposito is from Cuba, and is 47 years old. She is the mother of two sons. She came to the USA a few months ago, and her teacher is Alan Rosheim.*

### **A Personal Story**

I would like to share a personal story of mine that proves God has a sense of humor. I was a single parent, and money was tight. We attended church regularly. In church, it was normal for a basket to be sent around the room so that donations were collected to help others in need.

I remember one Sunday, my children wanted to put monies in the collection basket. My son was 5 years old, and my daughter was 4 years old; they loved to help. Naturally they wanted to put the money in the basket, and I knew it would have to be an even amount since they also were so close in age. I pulled out one dollar and four quarters and handed it to the children. My son was unhappy with the loose change and started making a fuss not understanding the bill versus change ratio. He asked me for the other bill in my wallet. I looked down, and realized he was referring to a twenty that I had put aside with my food shopping list. Too tired to explain, I gave in to his request.

After church, we drove to the store. I did not have enough money for all that I needed since I was short the twenty dollars. I put back a few things, including a loaf of Italian bread. When we arrived at our home, I asked the children to play out front on the play set while I unloaded the car and put the groceries away. I remember looking up to the Lord, saying out loud, "You know, if they passed around bread in the basket instead of asking for money, I would've had what I needed to make my meatballs!" At that moment, I had an overwhelming feeling that God just laughed with me! Then I started to laugh and shook my head. I said, "You know I'm funny, and I feel you laughing, God."

With only minutes passing, I quickly ran to the front door to call the children in from the front yard. I opened the door and

a middle-aged man dressed in an uniform stood there with two loaves of bread, a round loaf of Italian bread and long loaf of French bread, and a bewildered look on his face. He said to me, "Hi! I work for a bread company. While I was driving home, I got an urgent feeling that someone here needed bread and that I should stop." Then he stretched out his arms holding two types of bread. He asked me if I needed bread. Speechless and unable to move because I was so shocked, I couldn't believe what was right in front of my eyes. God sent me bread, and He had a sense of humor doing so. I could hear him in my head saying, "Did you really mean Italian bread, or did you mean French bread?" (People who don't know me would not know that I refer to French bread as Italian bread.) All I could say was "thank you," and I graciously accepted the bread. As I turned away, I quickly turned back around to explain to the nice man what had happened. He was gone, and there was not a bread truck in sight.

I held that bread tight as my eyes started tearing up.

*Karen Fitzwater is a student in the Fort Myers Technical College ACE program, where her teacher is Darlene Carrillo.*

## **Just Another Life**

When I was a child, my father use to beat my mom. When I got a little older, he started on me. He was a heavy drinker, and was very angry with the world. I hide that from the world, never spoke of this until now. After many years, beating after beating and going to school with black-n-blue stitches, I stood up for my mom and I told my father he would never lay a finger on us again. We moved out and my father was left to live with my brother.

On March 22, 2012, my life changed. My husband took sick, and we went to the hospital. He crashed and was put on life support, went through two open heart surgeries, collapsed lungs, stroke and ended up paralyzed. Fighting every day to stay alive.

My son and I watched his father slowly begin to die.

Shortly after putting my husband to rest, things got worse. I didn't think that was possible. I had sunk to my lowest point in

my life. I didn't want to think about what I had lost. Then one day, I started putting a needle in my arm. Feeling nothing was better than feeling what was real. I wanted to get high and higher every day. Soon it was hard to support my habit. I became very sick without the needle every day.

I was arrested and put in jail. I didn't think too much of it.

Jesus listened to me that night, and I believed he saved me, or I would have died. My son would have lost both parents that year, now fifteen months later, I sit in prison a clear minded, healthy, strong drug-free woman. I've been given a second chance in life.

My son has stayed in touch with me through my ups and downs. He is married and is expecting his first child.

I'm going home in 2018 to start a new journey in my life. The world is hard, and shows no mercy. It won't be easy, there will always be drugs, bad people, the devil tempting me. I will always remember to just look up. I am never alone. I have Jesus in my heart, and on my side. I'm taking one day at a time, and I keep moving forward. I have survived my nightmare and creating a new dream.

*Anne Adams is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class being taught by Ms. Irene Henderson.*

### **The Best is Yet to Come**

Hello my name is Carlos Augusto Balazarte Fermin, I'm 27 years old, my native country is Venezuela, state Zulia, City Maracaibo (the city of the beloved sun). The official language is Spanish. My family is formed by my mother Nancy Fermin, my father Augusto Balazarte, and my sisters are Astrid Balazarte and Adriana Balazarte, of course my dog. I select this topic because I love my life and want to share it.

I started my studies at the I.E Cantaclaro in my city hometown. I loved playing soccer with my friends every day and all time. My favorite soccer team is the F.C Real Madrid. I had played

soccer in the team soccer called ASOPROLIVOS FC, we won 4 championships, I played as a defend player. On July, 2006 I graduated from my studies as the best academic average, for which I enter the medical school at the state University L.U.Z, faculty of medicine.

On January 2007, I started at the medical school, in the first year I learned anatomy, neuroanatomy, histology, embryology, biology. In that year I met my best friend Mariale in my anatomy class, we studied every day, in the morning and at night, we ate together every day and we shared good moments. We studied medicine for 6 years. On July 2013 we graduated as medical surgeons.

My best friends traveled to continue her medical studies. I worked at the university hospital of Maracaibo for 2 years, I worked 24 hour guards every 5 days in the emergency. On December 2016, I traveled to Caracas, capital from my country and I worked in the Caracas hospital for seven months. On July 2016, I came to this country to continue my medical studies and get my license. However, first I need learn English in this school (Delray Full Service School). Now, I live with my family in Delray Beach, Florida.

This is my personal story; my family is the most important thing for me. I love my family! I am here to help them. My motto, as the title suggest is ‘The best is yet to come’.

*Carlos Balazarte is a student at Delray Full Service School, where his teacher is Daisy Shah.*

## **My Life**

My name is Algalite Fils Jean. I am from Haiti and live here in Fort Pierce, Florida. I am done with school and I have my high school diploma.

I have a 2 year degree in Culinary Arts. I was a teacher in my country for 5 years. I taught kindergarten for 2 years and elementary for two more years. Later I taught middle school for one year.

Moving Forward

I also did 2 years as an accountant working in money management. I worked as a bank teller for 3 years.

I am Christian, I believe in God. I have been married for 18 years. I have 2 children A boy and a girl. He is 26 years old and she is 17 years old. My daughter goes to Fort Pierce Westwood High School in Fort Pierce, FL. She is in the eleventh grade and will graduate in one more year. She is a beautiful girl, very polite and very smart. I love her from the bottom of my heart.

My son has a high school diploma. He also has 2 years of college. He was studying anesthesiology but did not finish. He is currently in the United States Marine Corps stationed in Japan. He will be coming home soon and plans to move in with us. When he returns, he wants to go to college and finish his degree.

I have been in the United States for six years. I have been attending Parent Academy for 3 years. I love my school, I like all the students. I love all my teachers, especially Hector Ramirez, my ESL teacher.

*Algalite Fils-Jean is an ESOL student at the Parent Academy of St. Lucie County, where her teacher is Hector Ramirez.*

## **My Life Story**

Well my name is Adrian Green I was born in Jacksonville. I have 3 kids, 3 stepkids, and 3 grandbabies. I am married to my husband named Barnard. We have been together 6 years. I met this man when I got out of a bad relationship with my kids' father. Before he went to jail he was on drugs really bad and drank really bad and he always came home and beat me in front of my kids.

When they were little, my oldest daughter saw it all happening to her mother. She was 14 years old. She always talked to me and went into in my room. She used to get her sister and brother and take them in the room until he went somewhere and then they would come in and say mom are you ok? I said "yes I am ok," and my daughter said, "mom why can't we go to our granddaddy's house to get away from him?" When it was time to go he did something to my car so I couldn't go anywhere. I stayed with

him for 15 years. He took from me money to pay my bills like my rent and light bill and car payment. I would have to put money somewhere he couldn't find it. He always said "I am not going to put my hand on you no more," so I stayed there because I loved him.

On January 28, 2010 I was in my bed sleeping when he came home at 2:00 AM. I had just taken my pill to go to sleep when he hit me in the back of my head with a gun and I turned over. Then he beat me with a gin bottle, hitting me in my face over and over again. I was out cold but I could hear my kids say, mom please get up. So my daughter called 911 and they asked me my name but I couldn't answer, my mouth was wired up my nose was broken. I had a cut on the back of my head and I was in the hospital for 2 months before I could come home. I did want to come home and did not want to come out and talk to no one because my face was messed up. I had a cousin come and stay at my house so I could get well. So one night she said let's go to a block party and I said no because I don't like my face. So she did my face with makeup and took me to get my hair done and I looked like a new person and I felt good about myself. We got in my car and went to the party where I met my husband.

We were talking for some months until he moved in with me. I told him "you have to meet my kids because of what happened to me." He said "give me a week and your kids will love me." So when I took them to his mom, my kids said, "Mom, he is funny." So he took all of us to the movies and the next day we went to the mall for the weekend and he got my kids and his kids something. We took the kids home and had time to ourselves.

On February 14, 2012, he asked me to marry him and I said yes. It was the happiest day of my life and until this day I am still happy. We are both in prison and we go home May 04, 2019 and I will be the happiest women in the world when I can hold and kiss him again. He is the love of my life. We will be back with our kids and our 2 grandkids and I can go to the cemetery to see our grandbaby. She died October 24, 2016 and I miss her and one day I will be in Heaven with her. Well, this is my story. The end.

*Adrian Green is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She has 3 kids, 3 stepkids and 3 grandbabies. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Joy Brown.*



## **My Life**

My name is Alba Ibarra. I am from Mexico and have lived here in Fort Pierce, Florida for 12 years.

I am happily married to Jose. I have 3 children. They are Jose, Aylin and Daniel. They attend school at Weatherbee Elementary in Fort Pierce. Jose is 11 years old, Aylin is 9 years old and Daniel is 7 years old. My husband is a wonderful man, very loving and respectful. He is an excellent father. I am very proud of him. He works in construction of roads and lakes. He is a hardworking man. I am very grateful to God for the family I have.

I attend Parent Academy to learn English as Second Language. If I learn English, I can attend my children conferences at school and understand what is going on with them at school. Or when I go to the stores and I need something I can ask without feeling embarrassed.

I want to progress and help my husband to build a better future for us as a family. I want us to have better opportunities in life.

I love Parent Academy and my teacher Hector. He is a good teacher. I like him very much. One day I will have a conversation with him only in English.

*Alba Ibarra is a student at Parent Academy of St. Lucie County, where her teacher is Hector Ramirez.*

## **A Challenging Time**

My name is Blanca Montes de Oca. My family and I are from Mexico. We are here in the United States because of my husband who is on a special job mission with the U.S. government. It has been a year and six months since we have been living in Key West, Florida. It has certainly been an unparallel experience.

We have 3 children. My children are of ages 21, 16, and eight. They have a very challenging time in school in this country. For example, we my oldest daughter who tried to study English for 4 months did not feel the benefit of it and rather return to Mexico to

finish her degree. However, my middle son who is in high school feels very happy and calm. He has friends with whom he does homework and goes to the movies. As for my youngest daughter, at first she did not feel happy with the school, but now she is slowly changing and liking it. She also has a difficult time socializing with her classmates and teachers. She missed her friends from Mexico and did not want anyone here to speak to her in English. After a while, she grew out of it and now has some new friends. Recently, I am impressed to listen to her talking in English as she plays with her dolls. I am overjoyed to see my children grow, mature and above all they have been enriched with this new experience.

This venture is also such an opportunity which is positive for me and my husband. We both are studying English. This helps us to understand and communicate with the community and be comfortable with our surroundings. We have met people from other countries and learned a little about their culture. I will treasure the great memories and especially friendships that were created. I hope when we move back to Mexico in June 2017, the friendship will follow us home through social media.

*Blanca Montes de Oca studies English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

### **Change your Leaves but Never Lose Your Roots**

When I first came to the United States, I was a different person. I used to think in a different way about this country and its lifestyle. I'm from Colombia, the most beautiful place in the world, but I had to travel far away from my home to realize that.

My mother decided to come to the United States to start a new life in an economical way, because in our home country nowadays the job opportunities are hard to obtain. So, I finished my high school, and I came here to meet with my mom in West Palm Beach. I remember my expectations when I first came. They were to go to College, learn English, and study my dream career. But, it wasn't as easy as I thought, being far away from my family, friends, and my old life. I felt hopeless, but fortunately my family supported me every single day.

I went to Portland, Oregon. What a lovely place! Immediately I fell in love with the people, weather, and everything; It was amazing! I was living with my siblings, going to an ESL school, learning about new cultures, experiencing my very first job, traveling around the state, visiting my family, and learning about new places. Also, I had the opportunity to talk about my country and encourage people to go to visit it. In June, I moved to West Palm Beach. I realized that life here is different and not easy. During that time, I became accustomed to living with my mom again, not having a job, the rest of my family, or even friends. It was the most difficult time of my life, getting accustomed to a different lifestyle and everything. Those were the things that made me realize that in my country we have everything and enough.

Colombia is a wonderful country, which has many cultural places, natural paradises, touristic adventures, and the kindest people on earth. If you have ever known a Colombian, you know that after a week you will be drinking juice at their house and tasting the typical Colombian food. We help each other, and we worry for the wellness of the ones we love. That's our culture and how our parents taught us to be.

I feel proud of who I am and where I came from. That's why I love to travel, because every time I go to a new place, I have the opportunity to know new cultures and talk about mine and my country. No matter how many places I visit, or fall in love with, I will always go back to my country, and I will feel grateful for being born in the best place in the world, COLOMBIA!

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

### **When She Was Born**

I remember when I was younger, I used to say that there would never be a woman who could get my all my attention. There would be no one who could change my life, who could be what I live for. But eventually I came to regret what I said.

It was a regular Wednesday. My wife and I were coming back from work when she said: “For a few days I have felt strange, I think that we are pregnant.” Many thoughts came into my mind, but all of them around the wish that the new baby would be a little girl. My son was 4 years old which meant that we were going to start again the hard work that comes with a brand-new baby. I knew about the long nights with no sleep that would come again.

Yes, the brand new baby was a girl. When she was born, on September 14th, I fell in love and immediately I had to swallow my own words, the woman who would change my life had been born. I had never imagined that one day I would sing “Let It Go” loudly while driving, and one day I would play with Barbie dolls or even one day I would be playing “little princess.”

I know that I have two kids. When she was born my first son was 4 years old as I said before. I love both of them with all my heart, but I think there are two different feelings and emotions. My son is my pal, my best friend, my right hand, and I know there will be a time in his life when he won't need me anymore; but my daughter is different (at least that is how I feel it). I think that I have to stay alive in order to protect her.

Becoming a father is the best thing that could happen to a man, but becoming a father of a girl is definitely the best thing ever.

*Andres Romy is a student at Piper Community School, where his teacher is Debbie Gitlan.*

## **Torture**

It's Saturday and I'm being tortured. My torturer had me lie on my stomach on a vinyl-covered adjustable chair, my right arm twisted in an unnatural position, the better for him to get at my lower arm, so he can jab me over and over with a hollow, motorized needle filled with ink. My mother is sitting there watching me being tortured, just like she has the last, oh, ten times I've done this. She's paying for it, so...

This is not the worst time in the tattoo artist's chair I've experienced. There's a tie between the time the artist, a different

one than the one I've got now, jabbed my lower left leg, and the time yet another did my collarbone (that was a cover-up, to be fair). I squirmed so badly during that one that the man jabbing me said that if I didn't quit moving around he'd stop (that torture session took two trips to finish, thank heavens.)

What's worse is that his apprentice is watching and asking questions about ink mixing and realism, annoying my mother to no end, questioning why the young man is there. Just when I think it's over, he changes needles and colors. "We'll be done soon," he promises. Yeah right, I thought. Wisely, the apprentice isn't in the way. Smart man.

Finally the torture is finished. The tattoo artist takes a picture of my new brass key tattoo for his portfolio, puts a bandage over it, and gives me the standard recitation about tattoo after-care (no pools, no tanning, no hot tubs, don't pick at it, etc.)The skin around my arm is swollen, and I know my lower arm will be hurting for some time. The area will be scabbed over, and twice a day for two weeks, I will be cleaning it with antibacterial soap and applying lotion to it.

I have to admit, the torture was worth it. It always is.

*Anne Simon is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## **My Personal Story**

My name is Leidiane Rosa Araujo, but my friends and family call me Lady. I am 29 years old. I'm married, and we have three beautiful children, one boy and two girls. It is a wonderful family.

I was a teenager with very bad behavior, and I was very angry. I really didn't like to study, but my life had a big surprise for me. When I was 16 years old, I had my little boy and through this situation, God changed my life. Starting from that moment, my new life, I noticed the importance of school.

I went to college to study law, and I realized much studying was needed and I really loved it!

Now I am studying English in the U.S. It is a big challenge for me, and I like it. It is just the first step.

We always have a lot to learn!

*Leidiane Araujo is a lawyer in her country of Brazil and is now studying English at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She is in Vicki McDonald's ESOL 5 class.*

### **Bricky and Art Class**

I had the opportunity to enjoy an art class with my mother-in-law. Her name is Ordella, but her friends called her Bricky. I think she was called Bricky was for her red hair when she was a child. For more than twenty years, Bricky was in her art class each Tuesday morning. The art class is in the fire station at Shell Point in Crawfordville, Florida, which is a very nice place for that class. Bricky invited me and gave me materials for my first class: paper, paintbrush, pencil, and other supplies. She talked with the teacher, Nell, about me. When I came to art class, I drew and painted a bird. Nell was very happy because she liked my painting. Other students were old women and men, no more than fifteen people. I liked my first art class. That week Kevin, my husband, Bricky and I went to the art store, and Bricky bought me materials for my class. Each Tuesday, Bricky came to pick me up and take me to art class. One day, Bricky was sick and for more than one year, I did not go to art class. Unfortunately, she died. I did not go back to art class until November 2016. By then, we had no teacher, only the students, but we still came to the same place to paint and enjoy our time together. And I still go.

*Carmenza Perez Arroyave is from Columbia. She is a student at the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program and her teacher is Greta Reed.*

### **My Keys**

Almost 2,000 years ago, families were located by the Roman Empire in a distant place named Hispania. It was called Sephardi

by new residents. These people continued their lives normally only out of their native hometown. After nearly 1,500 years, they were unable to return and had to make peace with living in their new home.

Too many changes happened. The Roman Empire ended and new governments were installed and, eventually, these people were part of a new nation, a new king ruled their lives.

In 1492, the people received an order that changed their lives forever. They had to choose between changing their religion and leaving their home, lives, and property. They were not able to return by penalty of death.

Many people decided to leave the country but many others decided to stay and, yes, change their religion; but they never abandoned their beliefs. Most of them had to move to other places in the kingdom and restart their lives in Andacocia.

When these people left their homes, they took with them the Mezuzah, the front door keys. Hopefully, these nightmares would be finished and they could return to their lives, their god and their home. This never happened! The descendants of these people eventually moved to Latin America and these keys in many cases stayed with them throughout the generations, even though their hearts were in Spain.

Latin America is a beautiful place with so many traditions. The people are warm, happy and brave but they struggle against the dictatorships and corruption that in many cases push them out to other countries.

The United States of America is the better place to live because people are respected with freedom and the laws. Corruption is not welcome. In this moment, we keep our keys from the past but not to return to the other places. We now have our keys to open the doors of our new home here in America.

*Carlos Cano is studying in the ESOL Program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL with Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*

## **Life is Taking One Step at a Time**

My name is Carlos Daniel Lopez y Lopez. I am from Guatemala. I just live in United States for five months. Life is not easy here because my parents are not with me. Before I came here, I was happy. I had my friends and my family. I can still remember when I was going to school with my friends, we always picked on the girls and made them annoyed. It was a lot of fun. Now it is so different. I miss my friends so much. They are my best friends. I miss playing soccer with them. What a big sacrifice I have to make to be here for the sake of my future, my family's future and my brother's future. The odd thing is that I come here with no money, but I know deep in my heart that I will be all right. Now I have a job. I am learning English so that I can get a better job. So, things are getting a little better. Life is taking one step at a time.

*Carlos Daniel Lopez y Lopez is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Advice for a Healthy Life**

Health is a very important aspect in our lives. There are many ways to improve health, such as eating healthy food, getting enough sleep, walking in fresh air, doing exercises and playing sports.

My favorite way to get more exercise is to spend more time outdoors, away from society. The beach or the park is ideally suited for this.

Outdoor exercise significantly raises your vitality and helps to overcome various ailments such as insomnia, depression, and fatigue. Also, walking outdoors normalizes blood pressure. For adults, you should spend one or two hours a day in the fresh air. For children, it is important to spend more than two hours a day. If you are at home, just opening the window is not enough. The amount of air can be the same as on the street, but the quality is not good.

The best time for walking outdoors is the morning. Of course, it is desirable to engage with some sport or physical exercises, but it can be ok just taking a simple walk.



Since I moved to a new apartment, I began to spend more time outside. It sounds weird, but the truth is that my bedroom window is arranged in such a way that you can watch as the sun rises. It is the perfect time of the day when all nature awakens. And that's when the sun's long rays look into my bedroom window and the sun's heat begins to tickle me; I cannot stay in bed. I get up, I put on sportswear, sneakers, and hurry outside. Since the beach is not very far away, I head towards the beach. This is my perfect time to enjoy nature. I prefer to run for about 20 minutes and then just sit and watch the ocean. I believe that my morning walks fill me with energy and a good mood for the whole day.

Contact with nature helps me to live in a big city, where there is so much stress. I need my walks in the fresh air as they have so much tranquility, beauty, power, and energy, without which it would be difficult to cope with modern, fast life in the city.

I advise people who live in the city to pay attention to how much time a day they are spending in nature because the contact with nature is so important to physical and psychological health.

I wish everyone a healthy life!!!

*Daria Nazarova is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness Class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **Direction**

*“Dear Scotty, in those moments when you're choking despair when you think you've got nothing happens and that nothing can be done here know, dear Scotty: only in such moments, you really go forward.”*

-F. Scott Fitzgerald (from correspondence with his daughter).

Who can predict the future? Actions and behavior? In what way life can change? You are running around on a children's slide with your friends or jumping from a garage into pile of sand, all dirty and barefooted but infinitely happy like in novel about Tom Sawyer. And now here you are: an adult with a bunch of responsibilities. Just rolling forward, you cannot even find

out what you want. But you still can push your rolling stone in another direction; a better direction.

I was born and lived in Ukraine. We are totally different people; mentally, we grow under hard conditions. Historically, there had been territorial wars in my native land every 100 years, whether the people wanted it or not: Ukraine was always place of interest for other countries. And this strongly influenced people's psychological view of the country throughout generations. The educational system in my country was strong. We had good teachers but old shabby study books; often these books were not enough for all the students in class. There always have been smart pupils that became professors, doctors, or scientists.

When I got to the university, I started learning languages more in-depth, especially English. This opened for me new horizons. I knew that eventually English would help me in my path. Years had passed, and I found a job in a different direction that wasn't connected with language and this was sheer frustration. Unfortunately, our educational system with regards to languages is weak. So many students graduate and can't find a job relating to their specialization. This feels like one's education was a waste of time.

When I first came to Florida, thanks to my friend, I was amazed about how happy people are living here. I was reading it from their smiles, from their "hellos." Every newcomer can say that. It was a new start, like resetting all my systems. I got to know a different style of education. I got to know different lifestyles, in general. Being successful, was proportional to the efforts people made in order to achieve. It impresses me. Everything that you do or are going to do is not a waste of time but a movement forward.

*Liubov Odnoroh is a student at Dunbar Community School, where his teacher is Gabriela Pesantes.*

## **Grandmother**

My story is something that was very exciting. In 2011, I met my partner, my husband with whom I have spent many wonderful moments and have enjoyed visiting places of our beautiful Island

Moving Forward

of Puerto Rico. Places such as Cabo Rojo, Ponce in the Guanche, and in Mar Chiquita in Manati.

In 2011, my son, Jesliany, gave me the best news ever. “Mother, you are going to be a grandmother for the first time, with twins,” he told me. This was my biggest pride of blessing that God had sent me. When I first saw the grandbabies, it was something special; one girl and one boy. Now I am enjoying the grandmother stage, and it is the best experience of my life.

In the year 2012, my son Yandriel gave me news that I was going to be a grandmother again. My grandson, Jordan, and I thank God for that beautiful gift.

In the year 2013, my husband had the idea that he wanted to move to the United States. We made the decision to live in the State of Florida. I love it, and I have had the privilege going to several places like Clearwater. I liked going to the beaches to see the dolphins.

In the year 2014, I went to visit my grandmother, who lives in Puerto Rico, because she was sick. While there, I was able to see my four grandchildren and found out that I was going to become a grandmother for a fifth time. My little girl Mia who I love with all my heart.

Finally, in 2016, I had the privilege of being a grandmother for the last time. Two more beautiful granddaughters. I have enjoyed my best moments as a grandmother.

*Lisedia Aguilar is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin/East Pasco Adult Education Center located in Dade City, Florida.*

### **Size Does Not Matter**

I, Larisa, was born in Moscow. Moscow is the capital of the Russian Empire where you can fly on a plane for hours and hours and you still don't see the end of the land. Moscow is also a big city, probably the biggest in Europe. It has a lot of parks, theaters, museums, and very nice subways that have huge underground halls with a lot of light.

I am a six foot, four-inch woman. When I married my microscopic man, we moved to Wesley Chapel, Florida in June 2016. However, I didn't find any museums, theaters, and subway systems here. But I started to live in an area of land that is of real nature near a small lake. Every day I see ducks, geese, hawks, eagles, turtles, armadillos, and other wild animals.

I thought there were only rats and cockroaches that lived on earth – this is all I could see in Moscow. Now I don't mind seeing all this life instead of all those urbanistic things. I prefer the healthy environment and like very much the place where we live.

*Larisa Chekalina is a student in Margo Scranton and Lori Savoy's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Ed. Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **White Snow**

Since I was a kid, I always loved the idea of playing in the snow and wearing warm coats, making snowmen, feeling the cold breeze in my face and, of course, having a delicious hot cocoa afterwards. Unfortunately in my country, we don't have this kind of weather. Actually that's exactly why it's called "Guatemala, the Country of the Eternal Spring." It gets cold in some areas but not enough to have snow.

We came to the U.S.A. back in October 2002. Since then, my family and I have only lived in Florida. Obviously, we have never seen snow in this amazing state.

By the end of 2015, some family members came to visit me for a couple of weeks. One of them was my sister Michelle. She asked me, "Charly, what do you think about taking a trip up north?" "How far north," I asked. "Very far. All the way to the roof of this country," she says. "Well, if that's the case, we are leaving tonight," I answered.

By the afternoon of December 23, we were on our way out of the city of West Palm Beach. Five hours later we found a hotel in the beautiful city of St. Augustine. The next morning, we were back on the road again. We stopped that night when we reached Atlanta, Georgia.

Really early the next morning, we were driving again and late that night we reached Charlotte, North Carolina. It was just a short visit to this city because the next morning we were driving again. We stopped to take pictures at several beautiful places until we reached the city of Charleston, West Virginia. That was a week of traveling already, and Buffalo, our final destination, was still nine hours from us. My sister told me, "I believe it's time to go back. Maybe we'll see snow another time."

Right at that moment, my older son came to my room with his phone in his hand, and he showed it to me. The weather channel said, "We will see the first snow of this year in Buffalo tonight." I looked at him and told him, "We are still nine hours away from there, and we are so far away from home." He told me, "You're right, but we're just nine hours away from our dream coming true, and anyways we have to come back home one of these days. Come on, Dad, just nine hours more!" I gave him a big hug and nine hours later, we finally were playing in the snow! What a beautiful experience.

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

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

My home country is Vietnam. I was born and grew up there in a very poor family. I had to leave my country and home for a better life in the United States. A country with more hopes and dreams. When I came to the U.S., I got married and we had two children: a girl and a boy. Later, I had got a divorce.

I became a single mother, working and raising two kids. As time went on, my life got better and better. My kids are now able to do things on their own. I don't have to constantly be there. My eldest daughter is now in high school and my son is in middle school.

For a year, I have been studying English in adult education classes and have met many new friends. I have more confidence now when speaking in English.

After my kids graduate from school, my goals are to travel the world and enjoy life.

*Lindsey Xa is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESL classes at James Irvin Education Center/East Pasco Adult Education in Dade City, Florida.*

## **My Struggles**

My name is Lucila Contreras. I was born in 1962 in Tamazula, a beautiful town in Mexico.

Even though I went through a lot, money-wise, I love my country. At the age of fifteen, I decided to come to the United States. I was illegal when I crossed the border. I tried to cross the border twice. Both times were very difficult. I started farm work with my oldest brothers and sister. It was very hard, but thank God we survived.

Here in the United States, I met the man who is now my husband. After thirteen years, he asked me to marry him. We have three beautiful children. This is my reason to live. I needed to be a strong mother. I am proud of my children, my husband, my parents, and my brothers. I would not change my family for anything in the world.

Eventually, I became a permanent resident in the United States.

I never thought that it was important for me to speak or learn English, because I always had someone to help me. Now I am fifty-three years old and I understand the need to speak English.

After all these years, I now have the opportunity to attend school to learn more. I do go to school now. I have beautiful friends that encourage me daily and a lovely teacher to help me. I enjoy going to learn each day.

I pray and hope that my girls work hard in school and get a good education. I want them to have a better life than what I had.

*Lucila Contreras is in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teacher is Mrs. Lori Savoy.*

## **One of the Best Travels of My Life!**

We woke up at 3:00 in the morning on that very important day in our lives. My sons, Juan Martin and Jose Manuel, and I were going to undertake one of our most memorable trips climbing the 5,300-meter snow-capped Tolima Mountain. We wanted to see the snow for the first time, although we knew it was not going to be an easy enterprise.

We left early for Salento, a town in Colombia next to the great mountain. Eight hours later, we arrived at our starting point where we rested, and very early the next day we were on our way. We passed the Cocora Valley, crossed the river ten times by very weak wooden bridges, and then climbed for four hours up to camp “Estrella de Agua.” We continued to climb in the rain, along a muddy road, up to the moor. It was very cold, but we continued walking for another six hours until the evening when we reached “La Primavera,” a farm where a neighbor had just died. We were so exhausted that we did not mind sleeping in the room next to where the corpse was. When we saw the lifeless body, we realized that life is very fragile and that we can lose it at any time.

The next day, we woke up to freezing weather and after breakfast we started climbing the mountain again. We saw “Laguna del Encanto,” a beautiful lake where we stopped for lunch and, with the powerful view of the snowed mountain, we rested for a few minutes. After six hours of climbing the mountain, we felt tired but suddenly, we began to see small snowflakes. We were finally in the snow! We hugged each other tightly and learned that step by step everything in life can be attained. We were ecstatic but could not stop because we were freezing. So we started to descend the mountain to “La Primavera,” where we spent the night again, but this time the man’s body had already been removed.

The next day, we went down the mountain through beautiful landscapes and rivers, and in the afternoon we reached “Cocora Valley.” We had reached our goal and this was an experience that will never be erased from our minds, because what is achieved with effort is always cherished. I was very proud of my children’s mental and physical strength!

Finally, four days later we arrived in Bogota and although our feet were covered with blisters and wounds, our souls were full of wonderful memories and life lessons!

I hope that in the future my children will remember me and do the same with my grandchildren. I ask God to give me the strength to continue offering my children such wonderful life experiences.

*Javier Vanegas Jurado is an ESOL level 6 (Advanced) student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Silvia Giovanardi.*

### **We All Do At Least One Thing Very Well**

We all do at least one thing very well. I am a great receptionist at Miami Institute for Joint Reconstruction. My main duties are: to check insurance benefits, answer the telephone, and request for authorization.

Checking for one's insurance is never easy. I have to talk with a representative, and they take time to answer the phone. Most of the time, I have to call again, because the call failed or the person hung up.

Answering a phone is the hardest part of my job. Patients call to confirm or change their appointment. Representatives call from Workers Compensation to check if the worker came to the visit, or to speak with the Physical Therapy Assistant for the weekly report.

Requesting authorization is easy, because you just have to fill a form and send it to the insurance company. After that, I wait twenty-four hours to call the insurance company and confirm that they received the request. Sometimes, the approval takes up to fourteen days.

Although my job is complicated, I do it very well. The best part is that I get to help patients and that gives me a great deal of satisfaction.

*Lorena Perez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus.*



## Happy Together

I was born in Turkey. My father was a soldier, but he is retired now. The army, once every three or four years, sent us to another place. When I got used to the school where we lived, we had to go. It was not bad because I love change. My mother worked in a bank and she is retired too. I have a sister whose name is Gokce. She is 2 years older than me. When we were kids, we always had arguments, but now we love each other very much. She is married, and she has three children. They are nine and fourteen years old. Two of the children are twins.

When my father was retired, I was beginning at the university. I attended university in Adana, which is the fourth biggest city in Turkey. I studied agricultural engineering. It took 4 years. After I finished university, I began to work at a drug company, and 3 years later I transferred to a Swedish company named Roche. Then I transferred again to an American company named Abbott.

I wrote before that I love change, so I wanted to go another city in Turkey. My company that I worked for sent me to Istanbul, which is the biggest and most crowded city in Turkey. After 3 months, I met my future husband, Deniz. We fell in love, and we decided to get married. Three years after our marriage, we had a baby a boy, and his name is Poyraz. After that, I decided to attend university again. I wanted to study about kids, so I studied to be a kindergarten teacher. I owned a kindergarten for five years, so my son grew up in that school.

One day, we decided to move to the United States. I have been living in the US for five months. We have a restaurant that is a franchise. Our restaurant's name is Quizno's. My son is in a kindergarten. We are happy because we are together.

*Itir Yigit is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## Unforget

There is an effort in all of us to create an image about an idea, a fear or a desire. This effort obeys a constant in which the impulse

is the central axis so as not to let it escape. Without a doubt, we all fear losing everything that defines us. In this case, I am afraid of losing the perception of my image, of what I am.

Therefore, questioning my own image has always been present. Constantly I wonder about my image in time; what did I look like? What did my image look like? I am interested in understanding how others saw me, and the perceptions of what I remember from my blurred image of the past. But these thoughts are alienating because they create and leave a void, where any possible identification that emerges will appear false, simulated, unreal and intangible.

The image that I see in front of the mirror appears as a disfigured character who only moves away from herself, her image, her being, creating chaos and clumsiness within any attempt at representation, becoming an unstable subject alienated by her feelings.

So in search of identifications, the only thing I felt was noise. There was nothing more than the deep black of a forgotten memory, where my body was fragmented because there was no clear definition of my being, my self, my image.

But then, I met Him and it was there that I understood that I was no longer I, now it is Him. And that blurred image was no longer blurred. It started to be clear, to be completed. In that moment, I did not understand as well as I do now. I did not know why he was representing me and why his image was my image.

And I had understood it when I found him, my grandfather. The encounter with his image was particular. I was at my grandfather's house, visiting him, shortly after I had moved there. We were both having lunch. We were face to face; we said nothing, silence flooded the space.

Suddenly, my grandfather calls my attention by saying my name, "Juanita" and this question followed, "Do you remember when you were little and asked me, Hey! Where did you meet my dad?"

From that moment on, all the unstable feelings had a little stability. Right at the moment when I met him, I came across

not only my grandfather's image, but my own. Everything from my past began to make sense. I had found a way to recover my identity, and all the pieces of the puzzle were together. I was no longer lost.

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

### **When I Feel Free**

There are many escape tunnels or exits to someone's happiness or point of feeling free. For me, when I feel free the most is when I am with my friends. When I am with my friends the world feels still, almost like time is non-existent; almost like there is not a world beyond me. Here are some reasons why.

When I am out from my house I gain a sense of relief, just as if all my at-home responsibilities fade as I get further and further away from my home. Once I see my friends I am suddenly happy again. I can finally be myself and open up, how not many people may know me by, and breathe. I can talk about whatever, do whatever, or be whomever. I can just be free. For instance when I am home alone, bored, with nothing to do, or even when I do have chores I have to do, I still feel caged. But as soon as I step foot outside my door, I feel free. There are no true words to explain or describe the feeling I gain, but it is when I feel happiest. To me, my friends are like a second family.

There is a second factor to making me happy. Music is great for me. I like most genres and only a few I do not like at all. When listening to music it feels almost like I can alter a situation that is going on beyond me. Music can take my mind off of dramatic situations. It can also set my mind free and imagine a second life.

While there are multiple ways to someone's freedom at heart, mine will remain to be friends and music. I am almost like a hippie but I wouldn't like to be considered as one. Trying to find an alternative to set myself free is difficult, because nothing truly makes me happier than being free. Friends and music can do that for me.

*John Alan Jacob is a student at Dunbar Community School.*

## **My Future**

Every single person in this world has a different way of seeing their future. For some, it is being wealthy and owning a big house. For others, it is traveling the world, and for many others it is raising a large family in a small farm. Even though they are each different, they each have a beautiful paradise in their own minds.

Personally, I cannot say I see my future is clear now. I do not know where I will be or what I will be ten years from now. Although I cannot determine my future, I can set goals. One of my major goals is to get a taste of as many paradises as I can, like people envision, and as I mention above.

Each of us have a different paradise. Living these paradises will help us see the world differently and have us do things we never thought we could. For example, many people dream of their future living somewhere in the Caribbean, such as Haiti. I thought life there might be quite dangerous, since I had never been there, but I did not know. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit, and as of now, I share the same dream!

Tasting each paradise will not only help us become better people but also help us respect each person's point of view in life and support one another.

*Juliette Otero is a student at Dunbar Community School.*

## **Don't Quit**

My name is Luz Quintero. I am from Colombia. I arrived in Key West in 2012 and got married on this island of paradise. My husband speaks English very well, but I did not understand this language at all during my early days here. So, I went to school and enrolled in the English class. I was so frustrated because I could not understand a thing, so I left the class.

After a while, I found out about another English class offered by the Adult Education Center. I decided to give myself a second chance. I started attending this class. Slowly, I began to learn this language. Watching television and listening to music in English are some ways that have helped me a lot.

My advice to everyone who is like me is to stay focused and learn a little bit every day. As I have overcome my lack of reading comprehension, you will, too. Now, every time I read, I feel better. I am happy and thankful to my teacher who has helped me in various ways.

*Luz Quintero is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Personal History**

I'm Ernesto Espinosa and I from Cuba. In my life I had several challenges and goals. I have completed some of them, and I'm trying to achieve others.

My big first goal was to learn to become a hair stylist. I started to learn how to cut hair because haircuts with great style caught my attention. I liked to see the razor blade passing through the hair because the cut is cleaner and makes people look nice. I got my barber diploma in Cuba in 2016. However, I did not complete my high school education in Cuba and now I am trying to finish it in a different language. It is hard, but with hard work and focus, I'll do it. I'm studying English in the morning and taking GED class in the afternoon. I work part-time in a barber shop.

In the future I want to earn my GED diploma and open my own business. I also want to have a degree in computer science. Yes, I like the barbershop, but I also want to have my diploma, and practice this career too.

I hope in the future to be able to fulfill all my dreams, my goals, and my wishes. I want to be a professional one day. That is my dream, and I'm going to make it real.

*Ernesto Espinosa is a Lorenzo Walker Technical College student. He likes sports and hair styling. He also like to spend time with his friends.*

## Crying For an Opportunity

When I was little, I always got high scores from school. I was able to be one of the smartest students of my class and I was happy to make my parents proud of me every day. I am the oldest of four sisters. They are super smart. In effect, one of them is a lawyer, and the others two are studying to be a dentist and a doctor. They always think I am smarter than them but I think they are also brilliant. I am so proud of them, and I want them to get everything that they deserve.

When I came to the U.S., I felt so excited and had a bunch of dreams. But then, I felt embarrassed and frustrated because I was not able to communicate with others. I thought learning English would be easy, like learning math, but it was not. I did not feel smart anymore.

For me, learning English has been hard, and also sometimes I can't handle my feelings and I just want to go back home. In America, for the most part, people are kind and friendly. There are also some bad people. Not too many, but these people exist.

When I found the opportunity to work in my current job, I was so happy, but I was also nervous because I had to go to an interview. That interview was an entire mess. I couldn't say one word, my body was shaking and I don't know how I got the job. I remember that day like it was yesterday. I was happy and I felt like there was nothing that I couldn't do, but then I had another challenge on my first day working there. I remember that day. My coworker asked me something, but I didn't get it. I felt like an alien. I was tracking the time all day long. The time kept going slowly and it finally came the time to go home. I cried all my way back home and I didn't want to go to work the next day, but I had to.

That is still happening to me after eight months working there, but I realize I have to improve my English and I am getting better every day. I just need to be patient. It's a matter of time. I know I'm going to speak English fluently and confidently soon and all the effort that I'm putting in is going to be worth it. My family is going to have a bilingual member soon.

*Kristall Diaz is 26 years old and from Venezuela. She has lived in the U.S. for 1 year and 10 months, and her teacher is Alan Rosheim.*

## Personal Story

How do you think about your life? Well for me I think about my life as a roller coaster. I've been through "dark moments," "depression," "bullying," and much more. I've been told that I'm not "good enough." Okay! Okay! I can stop there, you understand the point. I have been through hell and back basically. I can honestly say that there were times when I wanted to end my life more than once. But I got help for it and I no longer have those thoughts.

My name is Khalil Gamble. I'm twenty years old and I currently live in West Palm Beach, Florida. I moved here in October of 2015 from Jacksonville, Florida. I was living in Jacksonville with my grandma, who is now no longer with me. She raised me since I was 6 years old. She rescued me from living with my mom. I was being abused physically, emotionally, and mentally. My grandma saved me from the negative environment I was living in.

Since moving to West Palm Beach, Florida, I started working part time at a catering business called "Christafaro's Catering." I work in the warehouse with my co-worker "Derek." We pack parties, wash coolers, set up parties, and work parties as well. I really enjoy working there. I was so happy to have my first ever job. When I got my first paycheck, I opened a bank account at Wells Fargo and deposited my check. Since opening my bank account I've been saving my money and not purchasing useless things. Since I have a job, I started paying bills: my phone bill, gas, food, car maintenance and much more. Earning my own money gives me a sense of pride and a form of independence.

I've joined a great school and a great church and am even in the choir. Since joining these, I've met some positive people and made great friends. Life is awesome since I've made a big difference in my life. School and church are my happy places; gaining an education and praising God are my 2 favorite things to do.

My life hasn't been the greatest, and yes I have tried to end it, but I'm glad I didn't. I have a lot of great things happening for me here in south Florida and I am looking forward to a better future. I have friends to turn to. I have a job that I enjoy doing. I am happy and blessed and God is taking care of the rest.

*Khalil Gamble is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where his teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

## Lost in the System

Why do people bring children into the world that they don't want? This my story of how people bring children into the world without being prepared to be parents. My name is Kenesha. I was born in Jamaica and my mother and father had me at a young age. My parents had four more children after me, and then they separated. Dad left and went to America, and left my mom with the kids. What he really didn't know is that he was really leaving the children with me, not my mom.

I was only eight years old taking care of four kids. I was a child myself. My mom would leave me every night to go run the streets. One night my new born baby brother was crying for a bottle because he was hungry. I put the bottle on the stove to warm the milk up. I walked to the room to pick him up and on the way back to the kitchen, I noticed that there was a fire. I grabbed all the kids and ran straight to my grandmother's house. My grandmother called my father to tell him what happened. Two weeks later my dad sent his girlfriend to come get me. The next thing I knew, I was going to America.

My dad promised me that things would get better. Well, according to what he said, yes, "Life was a lot different from Jamaica." Two years later, my dad got himself into some trouble, which landed him in prison for 22 years. With us not having any family here, I was left alone again. My dad had to sign his rights over to the government, which led to me being placed into foster care. They ended up placing me into a nice foster home. I was there for a few years. My foster family wanted to adopt me, but a few days before the adoption was final, my foster mom passed away. That's when I realized that I can't win for nothing. I would always remain in the system.

It is so unfair that children have to suffer for their parents decisions in life. All my trials and tribulations have prepared me to be stronger in life, and make me a better parent who can make stable decisions for my family, especially my children.

*Kenesha Lynch is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*



## **My Experience Coming to America**

My name is Cristian Figueroa. I am from El Salvador. I have been living in United States for nine months. My experience coming to America was a very risky one. I was only 17 years old. It is a matter of life or death. It was a very dangerous time to cross the border of Mexico. I never knew if I would be alive the next minute. I am one of the lucky ones who survived the unbelievable trip to America. No one should be going through this life-threatening condition. If you are born in United States, be grateful. Do what you can for your country and help the immigrants like me.

*Cristian Figueroa is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **My Grandfather**

My Grandfather was one of my best friends. We had a great relationship throughout my life. He and I would have a daily ritual which was sitting together at the kitchen table eating breakfast. While eating, we would talk about different topics. He was a very affectionate man. He would hug me and kiss me all the time. When my Mother tried to discipline me for doing something wrong, he would always be there to protect and love me. We were living in the same house which was located in the city of Les Cayes, which is located in southern Haiti.

After several years, my favorite friend started to be sick. My Grandfather showed signs of forgetting things that we were just talking about. I found out later that he had the signs of dementia. Six months later, the disease progressed and was very bad. My Mom and other family members decided to move him to my Uncle Renol's house in Port au Prince. This city is the capital of Haiti. We made this decision because we wanted him to have access to good doctors and hospitals. After a couple of days, my Mom told me that the disease is known as Alzheimer's, which meant that it had become very, very bad. I didn't know how bad the disease was.

After three months, my Mom and I decided to go to Port au Prince to visit my Grandfather. After three hours of traveling

by bus, we got to the city and arrived at my Uncle's house. After saying hello to some family members, I went to my Grandfather's bedroom. When I first walked in, I saw him lying in his bed. I used to call him "Papa" because he was more like my Father than my Grandfather. Upon entering the room, I said, "Hello Papa, how are you?" He did not say anything. I was very surprised by his response. My Mom told me that the disease made it hard for him to recognize people. After talking to him for a few minutes, he finally knew who I was. I was very happy when I listened to him pronounce my name. A couple minutes later, I asked, "Papa how are you feeling?" He said, "WHO ARE YOU?" I started to cry because at that time I realized how bad the disease had affected him. That day was one of the worst days of my life. I will never forget it throughout my life. After one month, my best friend died, He was one of the best friends that I ever had.

*Carl Museau is taking classes to earn his GED. His teacher is Joanne Kutney.*

## **My Life**

My name is Consuelo Salter.

I was born and raised in Belle Glade, FL. I lived there with my parents, and I have two brothers. My mother and father worked as farm workers all of their lives. My brothers and I went to school at Lake Shore Middle School and to Glades Central High School. When they graduated, they went their own way. When I got out on my own, I started partying with the wrong friends and then got introduced to drugs.

I did everything and anything to get drugs. I started taking things from people, family members and friends. This was a very hard road to travel, and I found friends that were ready to do anything to help get it. So one day, I went down the wrong road and got into big trouble and that is when I knew that it was over for me. I would be gone for a long time, and the whole time I was gone, no one would send me anything. No friends ... no one was there but my mother who still did not turn her back on me. She was there through it all.

When I got sentenced to prison, I knew that I had to make a change. I started saying to myself, “I am a beautiful black female. Why does my body look like this? Why should I take my mother through the stress?”

I know God still had his hands on me and showed me there is a better way. God has forgiven me, and I don't feel bad about my lifestyle anymore. Prison has made me strong, and I can tell myself, “love yourself and there is a better life out there for you. You can do this. Just put your mind to it and be all you can because it don't look good to see a beautiful women on the streets. Look good for yourself, and make it.” And that is half of my life.

*Consuelo Salter is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She views her life as changed from the way she once lived it. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Joy Brown.*

### **My Personal Story**

It was a night that we had all been anticipating. We spend most of our time in school or work and, not to mention, we all have different schedules. First, we all gathered gear and cash for a night camping out on a small island. Our transportation to this island was on separate kayaks and canoes. There were at least eight of us, including myself. As we arrived to the island, we realized that there was a man-made platform where we could set camp, which was perfect to tie-off the kayaks and canoes.

The stars out that night were the most magnificent sight that I've seen in a while, with a clear view of the open ocean and moon rise. Once we started the fire, we decided to have some Dominican Rum and Patron Tequila; to celebrate the night over a deep conversation based on philosophy, life's theory, psychology, and history. We reached deep personal levels that most people avoid bringing up in our culture. Some of us would debate down to a mutual respect for each other as friends. As the topics continued onto the night, we also had a barbeque set out for us to enjoy, knowing that it is not healthy to drink alcohol on an empty stomach. We had many laughs, and it was an amazing time.

Just as we were about to call it a night, one of my friends called me saying he wanted to join us I told him not to join us because it was late and dark, and the tides were also rising. The travel from land to the island on a canoe or kayak was risky. However, he did not listen. The tides were rising. This caused trouble. We did not realize how strong the currents were. We waited and waited for my friend, which raised our concern. After a while, 15 minutes turned to an hour, and an hour turned to two hours. We were waiting in worry! We saw blinking lights!

Finally, right at that moment, we heard a siren at the side of the island. It was the coast guard rescuing my friend. Thank God he had a radio to call them in. It all just goes to show that everyone should be prepared when it comes to nature. It was a great night. All that truly mattered was that my friend was ok and safe and that made my night!

*Cheney Rodriguez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where his teacher is Marie Thompson.*

### **My Personal Story**

The story of my life began when I was eight years old. My parents separated because they had problems. My brother and I were left behind with my Dad because my Mother did not want us in the house.

My Father could not take care of me and sent me to live with my Grandmother, where my new life began. My father could not take care of my brother and sent him to my Uncle, so he could take care of him.

I stayed with my Grandmother, another uncle, and cousins. In total, we had 12 people in one house. My grandmother beat me. She sent me to sell items so we would have money for food. I got up at 5:00 in the morning to get food. This happened for four years.

When I turned 12, I left the house because a lot of people mistreated me. At 12, I started smoking, drinking beer, and other things. This went on until I was 15, and I got pregnant.

Moving Forward

Then, another stage of my life began. I did not do well because the father of my children was not good to me. He went out with other women, and I had to work to feed my children. And I still do to this day.

My goals and ambitions are to learn English, study nursing and become a better person in life.

*Clara Galicia is a student in Vicki McDonald's Level 5 ESOL at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She came here from El Salvador, her birthplace.*

## **Acceptance**

My name is Pierre Louis Mathelus. I am from Haiti. I have been living in America for one year. I left my country after a bad experience in the political arena. I was a political leader and I used to criticize the actions of the people in power. So, I became their target. They attacked me several times. Knowing that my life was threatened, I was forced to leave my country to come to the United States.

Here in America, I do not feel that it is really my place. I often get nostalgic because I miss my country, my family, my friends, and my activities very much. Somehow, I have to accept this is my life and I should keep on living it no matter what.

*Pierre Louis Mathelus is studying English at the Career/Adult Education, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.*

## **Never Let the Fear Take the Power**

I thought that school life would be an unforgettable experience; full of magic, like when a princess becomes a queen. All changed when I entered fifth grade; it was the worst year in my entire life.

It all began with four girls and a ball. I was going to my classroom with my lunch, and I didn't notice a step in front of me so I fell down. Then four girls arrived and started laughing at me. They took my food and ran away. I was shocked. All I wanted was

to run after them, but the fear took power. There was no possibility to win; they were bigger and stronger than me. I told my teacher what happened, but she didn't believe me. She said that it wasn't possible that in a Catholic school were girls doing such a thing, so I promised myself to tell nobody about what happened that day, especially my parents.

Unfortunately they kept going, this time with words like, "You are nobody," "You can't do anything," and the one I will never forget, "Look at you. You are weak. You don't even trust yourself." I tried not to care about what they were saying, but I knew that in one way or another those words would hurt me.

All the days were the same. Most of the time I was sad, but I didn't want to ruin the idea about the school, that magic castle. The following year I was scared. I didn't want to go to the school, but lucky me, when I arrived, I noticed that those girls weren't there anymore. I asked my friend, "What happened to them?" She said that they got in trouble, so they wouldn't be accepted in the school anymore. I was so happy to hear that. Finally I would be able to do whatever I wanted, without fear. I felt free.

In some way I thank those girls. Because of them, I am now who I want to be, a girl who trusts in herself, someone who has no limits. I gave up one time, but I won't give up twice. I learned that no one should care about what people think. You are the only person who decides to hear it or not. Something I will always keep in mind is that everyone has the opportunity to decide how to spend one's time and live one's life.

*Maria Fernanda Rueda Chaves is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

## **My Life**

My name is Rosa Castillo. When I was little, my mom and my grandmother took me and my brother to the field and the river.

When the school year began my mom took me to kindergarten. She said "this is the classroom you will attend every morning."

The time passed and the year ended. After summer vacation, it was time to come back to school. The time was so short. After school I went to work with my mother and my grandmother.

As the years passed, a friend of mine introduced me to a friend. We talked for months and after a year we got married. Two months later we came to the United States. We got a job picking apples and packing tomatoes.

After a while my first child was born. When he was fifteen months old, we traveled to South Florida. For six months, we worked picking oranges. We worked for three years until my child started school, and then I began working in a metal factory. There we met many people from different countries. We became friends with a lovely lady from Vietnam. We always tried to talk to her, but neither one of us could understand each other.

Time passed again and we had our second baby. I went back to work again for two more years and then had my third baby. When I finally went back to work, my partner was very happy, but soon I could not work anymore because of illness.

My sister-in-law told me that my friend, Mrs. Tam, returned to Vietnam for one month. Then a strange thing happened. A day before her vacation, she died in an accident in the factory. Four years before, her mother passed away in the same way.

I was working again and five years later I began dialysis. Three years later I received a kidney transplant.

For me this is a second chance and I enrolled in ESOL classes for adults. I attend classes every day and we have a good teacher. When it comes to class, I feel like a book with blank pages, but with the teacher's help, I can fill the book with history to tell.

Thank you for your time and dedication that you and all the teachers of the world, especially you.

*Rosa Castillo is studying in the ESOL program at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, FL. Her teachers are Mrs. Lori Savoy and Ms. Margo Scranton.*

## Original Poetry

### BLACK

Deep from within the hole  
Darkening our outer image that protects our soul  
Black is the untold  
That grows behind the blindfolds  
That shimmers to sinners  
Led on by the winners  
Unseen by beginners

Temptation disguising the real us  
Being sucked in and seduced by the lust  
That was damaged from the rust  
By the same people that we chose to trust  
Black has the strength  
To camouflage and blend  
Through every other color within  
To stand out or fit in  
For an enemy or a friend  
To resurface or bring to an end  
Black is the dividend  
Between the lines that don't bend  
From the misfortunes that comprehend  
Black was the color  
That was here before any other  
Black lures in the curious eyes  
Black spreads much envy  
Black hides the lies  
And gives birth to the surprise  
Black is humanity

*Raquel Welch is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletta Baker.*



### **Inconvenience**

This situation was unexpected  
Who knew it would come this far  
Trapped for months; feeling neglected  
To go any further; it would be war  
Your presence I cannot tolerate  
I wish you'd leave me alone  
Find someone else or hibernate  
I'm moving on from the chaos you've shown  
It would be childish to exaggerate  
Turning a new page; we're both grown  
No longer wanting you on my plate  
I am more pleased to be on my own  
In my life, you won't participate  
Don't visit my home or call my phone

*Raquel Welch is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletta Baker.*

### **Dream**

A struggle can last forever  
A good time can be over quick  
The unexpected can arrive whenever  
It's your life, take your pick

It's not wrong to want more  
Just grasp the concept  
Reach beyond your inner core

It's your will to protect  
You're somebody, rich or poor  
This will only reflect

Your dream is what you put in store  
Expect and accept

*Raquel Welch is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletta Baker.*

## To My Firstborn

I carried you for nine months, my beautiful son, then came December 29th, finally you made it. Throughout the contractions, weight gain, and mood swings I had to go through, it was all worth it because if I had not endured all of those things, I would not have you today.

Laying down on the surgery table until the nurse and doctor finally took you out, the relief I felt when they said "He's here," I wanted to shout. 7lbs, 10oz, but to me you were so light. I wouldn't ask God for anything more, you were my little angel and you shined so bright.

After hearing you cry, I couldn't help but to shed a tear. I knew right then that you wouldn't have to worry about a thing, because mommy's going to be right here. Being a first time mother is so rewarding, and it's you I love with all my heart. As I looked deeply into your eyes I saw it from the start.

In the hospital holding you every night, laying you close to my heart, I couldn't let you go, you could have asked for a million things, my beautiful son, and mommy couldn't bear to tell you no.

Waking up in the middle of the night didn't bother me at all, plus I held you in my arms day and night, so there was no fear in my heart that you would dare fall.

When you started to crawl, then walk as a toddler, you were so busy, you could do whatever you wanted because you were right here with me.

As I watched you grow into a little man, I used to think to myself, and just laugh, thinking what a miracle and heartwarming gift that I have. I would kiss you all over so that you know mommy's love, playing patty cakes with you, laughing, crying, and giving you big hugs.

I never thought I could love like this, not until you came into my life. I knew then that everything would be alright. You made me become a better person and learn that I had to change, and because of you that's something that I must maintain.

Moving Forward

You're my baby, no matter how big you get, just know mommy will always love you, through your ups and downs you can call me when you feel that you've lost faith.

I'll be there to hold your hand when you fall, to pick you back up, and say try again that's not enough. You're my other half, no, you're my heart, my one and only, my pride and joy I will love you forever Lawrence Moore Jr. my mini me, my baby boy.

“Love mommy”

*Navajia La'shay Horne is a student at the Adult Education Center in Palm Beach County, where her teacher is Sandra Caruso.*

### **Doing Time**

phone home.

i love you, i miss you.

“you have one minute remaining,”  
i'll call again soon.

i wish they'd take that  
clock off the wall.

it only seems to make  
time crawl.

staring off into space  
trying not to picture that place.  
that place is home.

where my precious family awaits.  
still living my life behind  
these gates.

*Summer Golson is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is originally from Pensacola, FL. She is a student in the GED class taught by Ms. Tamara Dawkins.*

## **Not Your Fault**

Startled and shaking also bruised and breaking.  
Going home to a house that was rudely awakened.

They would get all mad when he walked in the door,  
stomping down the stairs, as he tried to ignore.  
Louder and louder the stomping grew,  
then face to face, what do you do?

So confused about the whole situation,  
if you look hard you can see it in your imagination.  
Imagine dealing with problems at school,  
then coming home to abusive parents that rule.

Did you think that suicide was the answer?  
Neither did the kids that were at the same school,  
riding the same bus, or the ones acting a fool.

They regret the abuse they did to him,  
after he took his own life you see...  
So be careful and watch what you say.  
To the ones getting abused, tomorrow's another day.  
Seek help in a trusted adult  
and always remember:  
It's NOT your FAULT.

*Lisa Ray is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She describes herself as a young, creative freelance writer from the Florida Panhandle, with dreams of being a columnist for a major magazine corporation. She is a student in the GED class being facilitated by Peer Offenders E. Cook and R. Panchoo.*

## **Beauty & the Beast**

A bud in bloom  
Becomes beautiful as it grows  
With time comes change  
Soon a seed transforms into a rose

The beauty you see is not as it once was  
Tragedy has since been overcome  
Beauty can hide the ugliest pain  
Yesterday has faded  
Yet, today remains

Leave the past behind you  
The present is a gift  
Tomorrow isn't promised  
Cherish each moment

With time comes change  
And all wounds heal  
Listen before you speak  
And trust how you feel

Use your mind  
When you follow your heart  
Never give up  
Always finish what you start

Sunshine alone is not enough  
For a rose to flourish requires rain  
Sometimes growth requires pain

*Samone Yoder is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN program  
in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletha Baker.*

### **Someone I Admire**

My mother is the most beautiful woman I ever saw,  
She is a strong woman,  
I know being a mother is an attitude,  
Not a biological relation.

Ever since I was a little boy, she showed me right from wrong;  
Inspired me with her courage, and put me to bed with a song.

When I was a child my mother took good care of me,  
The only love that I really believe in is a mother's love.  
I love you every day,

And now I will miss you every day,  
The best place to cry is on my mother's arms  
When I said mama, she rushed to come to see what happened.  
She never let me see her tears, encouraged me to be strong.

All in all, it seems as though, I owe my life to my mama.  
Mother, I'm grateful  
for all these things that you do  
And on this special Mother's Day  
I'd like you to know how much I love you.

*Nehemy Antoine is a student at LWTC, and he is from Haiti. He has been living in the United States for 1 year. He loves to play saxophone and flute.*

### **I Am**

I am ambitious and sweet  
I wonder if I'm going to be a powerful woman like my mom  
I hear that diploma calling me  
I see myself as a richly rich billionaire  
I want a better future for myself and my lovely daughter  
I am independent and beautiful  
I pretend to be shy and sour  
I feel weak at times  
I touch the sky  
I worry if I'm strong enough to take care of my baby  
I cry when I'm in pain  
I am outspoken and brilliant  
I understand life comes with a lot of up and downs  
I say thank you lord for another day everyday  
I dream of being a traveling nurse  
I try my best to make it to school on time  
I hope this year will be better than last year  
I am truly blessed and responsible

*Rodricka Troupe is a bright, intelligent, and dedicated student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida. She is almost a mother.*

### **If I Were Invisible for Just One Single Day**

If I were invisible for just one single day,  
I would go back home and watch my children laugh and play.  
Smiling at them,  
behaving with their friends.  
Making each other laugh,  
making each other grin.

I'd go for a walk with them and listen about their day.  
I'd go back to the moment that made their grin fade away.

I'd go back to the moment when they heard the news  
that told them that their mommy left much too soon.

I'd go back to the moment when their world felt so cold,  
I would tell them that I love them and that everything's ok.  
I'd catch all their tears and wipe them all away.  
I'd go back to that day and trade it right away.

If I were invisible for just one single day,  
I'd go back to that moment and pray for me to stay.  
To re-do that single day, the day I let slip away.  
I'd pray for God to listen and wash away that pain.  
In my heart He whispers, It will all be ok.  
For I will never leave them, nor ever go astray.  
My guardian angels are with them each and every day.

For if I was invisible, for just one single day,  
I'd go back to the moment to watch my children laugh and play.  
Thank you for that moment each and every day.

*Tiffany Harris is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class being taught by Ms. Brenda Johnson.*

### **Just a Dream**

I have a dream to get these kids off the street  
They don't have anywhere to go  
Mom, dad, aunt, uncle, cousins...where are you

Doing only god knows what  
Not thinking about these kids  
Or what they have to go through  
That's why it is easy for them to kill, steal, and rob  
Sell their bodies on the street  
Shoot another child in the head  
Man, the child is dead  
Adjudicated as an adult  
No way out  
Not knowing if he or she can cope  
Can't grasp the situation that's real  
Can't shed a tear  
Hey can't even cry  
Now do you wonder how life could have passed them by  
Just a dream

*Belinda Cliatt is the mother of four and at the age of 50, she's getting her GED. She attends Orlando Technical College in Orlando and Andréa Hogan is her teacher.*

## **Gone Girl**

Gone girl  
Foolish girl  
Come back!  
"Wait for me, I won't be long girl"  
Runaway liar!  
Coward  
Gone girl  
But how far gone?

Surely you're still within a distance where cries of reason still  
penetrate the drum of your ear.  
And if you'd just stopped running  
If you'd just stood still...  
Then surely, SURELY you could hear  
Because you're never too far gone girl  
You're just too full of fear  
Fear of what you know and fear of what you don't  
Fear of places that you'll go and places you won't  
Fear of the world you live in – is painted different colors than your  
dreams



Moving Forward

Denial has clouded your vision  
And fear of falling has clipped your wings  
You cannot see and you cannot fly  
Gone girl!

Watch her run and wave goodbye  
But don't you see what you could be only if you would try?  
Stop girl!

Ask yourself why you're running and then ask yourself why?  
Such things are necessary if you wish to heal  
And know that's its ok to feel  
It's ok to cry  
Gone girl

*Amber Lee is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program,  
where her teacher is Shelletta Baker.*

### **Follow Me**

God said "Follow me, and I'll shield you from defeat."  
But the serpent coiled round my feet,  
Showed me all that glitters on the streets.  
He hissed, "There's no such thing as saints. You've been deceived.  
All of you, sinners playing in the Garden of Eden."

Oh so many times I've picked the fruit from the forbidden tree!  
And now I ask "Is it too late – for someone to save me?"

I had begun to think it might be.  
Hopelessness, despite me  
And all my efforts to choose a better life.  
And so today, I find myself on my knees praying that late is better  
than never.

Because I CAN'T believe  
I WON'T believe,  
That struggle lasts forever.

*Amber Lee is a student in the Richard A. McKissick DAWN Program,  
where her teacher is Shelletta Baker.*

## Wait

Desperately, helplessly, longingly, I cried... Quietly, patiently, lovingly, he replied... I pleaded, and I wept for a clue to my fate. And the Lord, so gently said, "My child you must wait."

"Wait? You sat wait?" My indignant reply.

"Lord, I need answers, I need to know why, or what's going to happen? Is your hand shortened? Or have you not heard my prayers? By faith I have asked, and I'm claiming your word.

"My future, and all I relate hangs in the balance, and you tell me wait." I'm needing a "yes", or a go ahead sign, or even a "No", in which I can resign.

And Lord, you have promised that if we believe, we need not but ask, and we shall receive.

Oh Lord, I've been asking and this is my cry. "I'm weary of asking, I need a reply!"

Then quietly, softly, I learned of my fate as the Lord once again replied, "my child you must wait." So I slumped in my chair; defeated and taut. I grumbled to God, I'm waiting for what?

He seemed then to kneel and his eyes met with mine, and he tenderly said, I could give you a sign. I could shake the heavens, darken the sun, raise the dead, cause the mountains to run.

"All you ask I could give, and pleased you would be".

You would have what you want, but you wouldn't know me.

You would not know the depth of my love, for each and every saint. You would not know the power I give to the faint,

You would never experience the fullness of love as the peace of my spirit descends like a dove.

You would not know that I give, and I save, for a start and, you would not know the depth of the beat of my heart.

"The glow of my comfort late in the night." The faith that I give when you walk without sight: The depth that's beyond getting just what you ask.

Moving Forward

From an infinite God who makes what you have last, and never would you know should your pain quickly flee, what it means that my “grace is sufficient for thee.”

Yes, your dreams for that loved one overnight could come true,  
But the loss! If you lost what I’m doing in you!

“So be silent, my child, and in time you will see.  
That the greatest of gifts is to get to know me.  
And though often may my answers seem terribly late,  
My most precious answer of all...is still “wait.”

*Amber Money is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is 39 years old, serving a third prison sentence. She has a beautiful daughter and will become a grandma in a few months. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.*

### **Have Hope**

Cease the negativity  
You can do it  
Dream to live to infinity  
You’ll get through it  
It takes time to reach your goals  
Don’t ever think you blew it  
The feeling of success will set you free  
But you got to “Have Hope”  
That’s the key!

*Anne Samedy is a student at Dunbar Community School, where her teacher is Gabriela Pesantes.*

### **Black and White**

You think you have a clean soul, but it’s not like that...  
When you long for the wealth of others with envy, when you lie  
When you hurt your loved ones with attitudes or words spoken without love,  
When you are not the example to follow for your children,

Even when you stop helping others,  
You are coloring your soul with spots.  
You are born with a white soul, but as time passes you will color  
it in black...  
This is not about skin colors, it is about soul colors, that is what  
really matters.  
It is time to stop because you have the power to do it  
And to erase all those spots that are in your soul with good  
actions.  
Help those who need it.  
Be an example in your community  
Make this world better, and above all,  
Do not think that you are better than others.  
Do not let your soul continue to be stained from this very moment  
Stop and do something!  
Start to erase your spots and  
Return to have your soul and conscience as He gave it to you.

*Javier Vanegas Jurado is a civil engineer from Colombia. He is married with three children. Javier is currently a student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.*

### **Passion of Love**

Do you see the passion that I see?  
Do you see the mind that I seek?  
Do you hear me when I say I love you?  
Well guess what? Only my god knows what I seek  
I see lights  
I see you I can't stop loving you  
Where is the passion of love when I need it?  
Where is the bundle of love I shared with you?  
2015 was the last time I seen you  
I need the passion of love  
I see your pictures but you're not there  
I wonder why  
I find the love to seek but where are you?  
Somebody please tell me where is the passion of love when I  
need it  
I see your face  
I hear your voice

Moving Forward

Where are you when I need you?  
I cry every night because I loved you  
Getting that phone call was a nightmare  
Telling me you're dead  
I cried and cried  
Thinking of the time we shared  
Where is the passion of love when I need it?

*Jamiah Mosley is a very smart girl who wants to live her life and make her mom proud. She attends Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida.*

### **Myself**

The heart is the last line of defense  
When demons come searching at our souls.  
Most times we have no control  
And fall victim to their ways.

So much is to be said about me and the way I faced my demons.  
In the beginning, I fell victim to them time after time.

I was used to doing the same thing and having the same results.  
Until I just gave up.  
It took a while to get to the point of me wanting to find out who  
the REAL me was.

Now, I have taken the time to get to know myself. I know that I  
am worth so much more than I give myself credit for.  
I am on the road to being an independent, self-fulfilled, happy,  
and joyous person. I'm still working on myself...you can call me  
a work in progress.

Getting to know Jennifer has taught me that I must think of me  
and not what others think of me.  
Stand-alone... instead of in a crowd.  
Do what's best for me and my well-being.

While being in the DAWN Program I've learned how to really  
live life. Striving to be the best I can be.  
Finally, being able to say... I truly love me!

*Jennifer White is a student at Richard A. McKissick Memorial DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletta Baker.*

## **What is Success?**

If success were a person  
He could be a female or male  
He could be a girl or boy  
Success could be born in a great or a poor country  
He could be born in the north or south  
Success could be black or white or yellow  
Success could be a kid or an adult  
He could be handicapped or blind  
He could be an immigrant or a citizen  
If success were a girl her name would be Michaelle Jean  
If success were an adult his name would be Barack Obama  
If success were white his name would be Mark Zuckerberg  
Success doesn't have a nationality or race  
You can be successful if you believe in God  
Stay humble  
Work quietly

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

## **Trust**

Lord, please be with me now as I struggle through this trial.  
I don't understand why it is happening or what the point is, but  
I'm trying to Trust that you have a purpose.

It may not be clear, I may not hear, I must simply Trust  
Truthfully though, I'm frightened about how everything is  
going to work out. My only recourse is to cling to you and keep  
reminding myself that you are watching over me, even now.

Guide me to follow your ways Lord,  
So that even if the trial is not of my own doing, I will rely on  
you for strength to understand the battering waves. May you  
use this time as part of your greater plan, and make me a light  
to others through my actions and understanding.

I simply must Trust.

*Jennifer White is a student at Richard A. McKissick Memorial DAWN Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her instructor is Shelletta Baker.*

## God's Hotel

I had to check you in again last night my child; it hurt me so bad to see you out there running wild. You looked in the mirror, but still couldn't see that you'll be another number among the dead from disease. Marks and scars cover you with confusion and hurt in your eyes and mind. Oh child, why do you have to be so blind? I know jail isn't the place you want to be, but at the time I call it my Hotel, a vacation from misery you see. You weren't just arrested, you were rescued. I had to bring you here to put your drug use on a shelf and work yourself, before I let you walk free now. Don't be like a mule that's led by a bit. Just listen to my words, I can help you quit. This can be your last time visiting this place. See your inner beauty and listen to your creator as tears fall down your face.

*Felicia Diaz is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a mother of three, one daughter and two sons. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class taught by Ms. Brenda Johnson.*

## I Am Poem

I am agreeable and sweet  
I wonder about poems and stories  
I hear voices and imagination  
I see my little cousin look at me and my boyfriend too  
I want to get my GED this year and get another apartment  
I am an amazing person and brilliant  
I pretend be a strong person and weak  
I feel like a great person to help others learn other things  
I am smart and lovely person  
I say I never thought I would make it this far in my life  
I dream to get my GED and someday get married  
to the love of my life  
I try hard to read and write stories  
I am funny and friendly

*Courtney Robinson is a student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida. Her age is 28. She moved to Tallahassee in 2013. She likes to write poems and stories.*

## Blue Eyes

Blue Eyes:

I promise you that I will do my best  
I promise you that I will follow my heart  
I promise you that I will keep on walking by faith  
I promise you that I will see the best in me  
I promise you that I will see the best in people  
I promise you that I will see their hearts first  
I promise you that I will keep you in a special place in my heart  
...sing to my heart once again  
...sing a new melody that never ends  
...the wind whispers your name  
...the sky reminds me of your beautiful eyes  
...the moon continues looking for you  
...the sun wonders where you are  
...heaven shines by having you there  
...Blue eyes you are a beautiful angel now

*Carol Walker is a student at the Lake County Literacy Program. This poem is dedicated to her deceased husband.*

## Greatest Gift

Love is the greatest gift of all.  
And though we may fall, we can still stand tall,  
For love is the greatest gift of all.  
No matter how far or how close we are,  
Love is the greatest gift of all.  
No matter the highs and the lows.  
Whether it's fast or slow,  
Love is the greatest gift of all.  
For all the years to come, there is only one,  
GOD's Love is the greatest gift of all.

*Carrie Wick is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is married and her home is Panama City Beach. She loves to fish, ski and cruise around in her boat. She is a student in the GED class being facilitated by Peer Offenders E. Cook and R. Panchoo.*



## Twilight

We have lost even this twilight.  
No one saw us this evening hand in hand  
while the blue night dropped on the world.

I have seen from my window  
the fiesta of sunset in the distant  
mountain tops.

Sometimes a piece of sun burned like a  
coin between my hands.

I remember you with my soul clenched  
in that sadness of mine that you know.

Where were you then?  
Who else was there?  
Saying what?

Why will the whole of love come on me suddenly?  
When I am sad and feel you are far away?

The book fell that is always turned to at twilight  
and my cape rolled like a hurt dog at my feet.

Always always you recede through the  
evening towards where the twilight goes  
erasing statutes.

*Cassandra Dawson is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She likes to read books, with her favorite book being Twilight. She is a student in the GED class being facilitated by Peer Offenders E. Cook and R. Panchoo.*

## Beautiful Flower

When you were sprouted  
With anxiousness you were expected  
The exact day you were born  
Big day!

You were full of life  
Beautiful as daybreak  
Day after day you've grown  
Always very well taken care of!

Always very beautiful  
Enchanting everyone  
With your perfume and beauty  
How beautiful my flower!

*Natalia Bonfim is a student at the Lee County Public Schools Adult Career Education program.*

### **Fly**

Buzz, Buzz around the windowsill  
Whack! But missed again.  
Open the window.  
Maybe it will go out.  
No, a smell of food prevails  
Over powers of the  
Present danger of the  
Fly swatter just in arms reach.  
A second attempt - not seeing it.  
Too busy buzzing  
Around the plate.  
Swap downward to the floor.  
Stomp, stomp, lights out.  
Just darkness for the lonely fly that  
Sat on the windowsill.

*Patrice Powe is student in the GED program at Miami Dade College.  
Serena Lurie is her teacher.*

## Inspiration

A second grade class had an assignment to write an essay on Friendship. One seven year old decided to write a poem. That seven year old was me forty years ago, and this is what I wrote...

Friendship to me,  
As you can see,  
is having fun  
with everyone.  
Friend is you,  
And everyone else too,  
So go out and get  
the best friend yet.

...Ever since then I've followed my passion and I'm still writing today. I have been chosen to be in books and on greeting cards. I have written songs. Writing poetry for me is a way to express myself and it makes me feel alive and proud.

If you have a dream or a goal, reach for it; achieve it. Even if you think that it won't go anywhere, believe me, it will. You will touch the hearts of many in whatever it is you do. Just be yourself.

*Sandra Duda is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL. She is a student in the GED class being facilitated by Peer Offenders E. Cook and R. Panchoo.*

## Wheel of Life

From the day we arrive  
Till the day we die,  
Never stopping, always moving  
Days go by like clouds in the sky

Like a flower that starts with a seed,  
To be a tree that grows fruit  
I am constantly filled with a need  
To be more than I possibly can be

Where is the time for me to grow?  
Wasn't I just 5 years old?

There are so many things I need to know  
Wait, how can I be old and so cold?

My wheel of life started many years ago  
People were always laughing, having fun  
In my bed I lay as those coming to and fro  
Then darkness comes and all is silent.

*Kela Burnham is in the GED Program at East Lee County High School.*



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