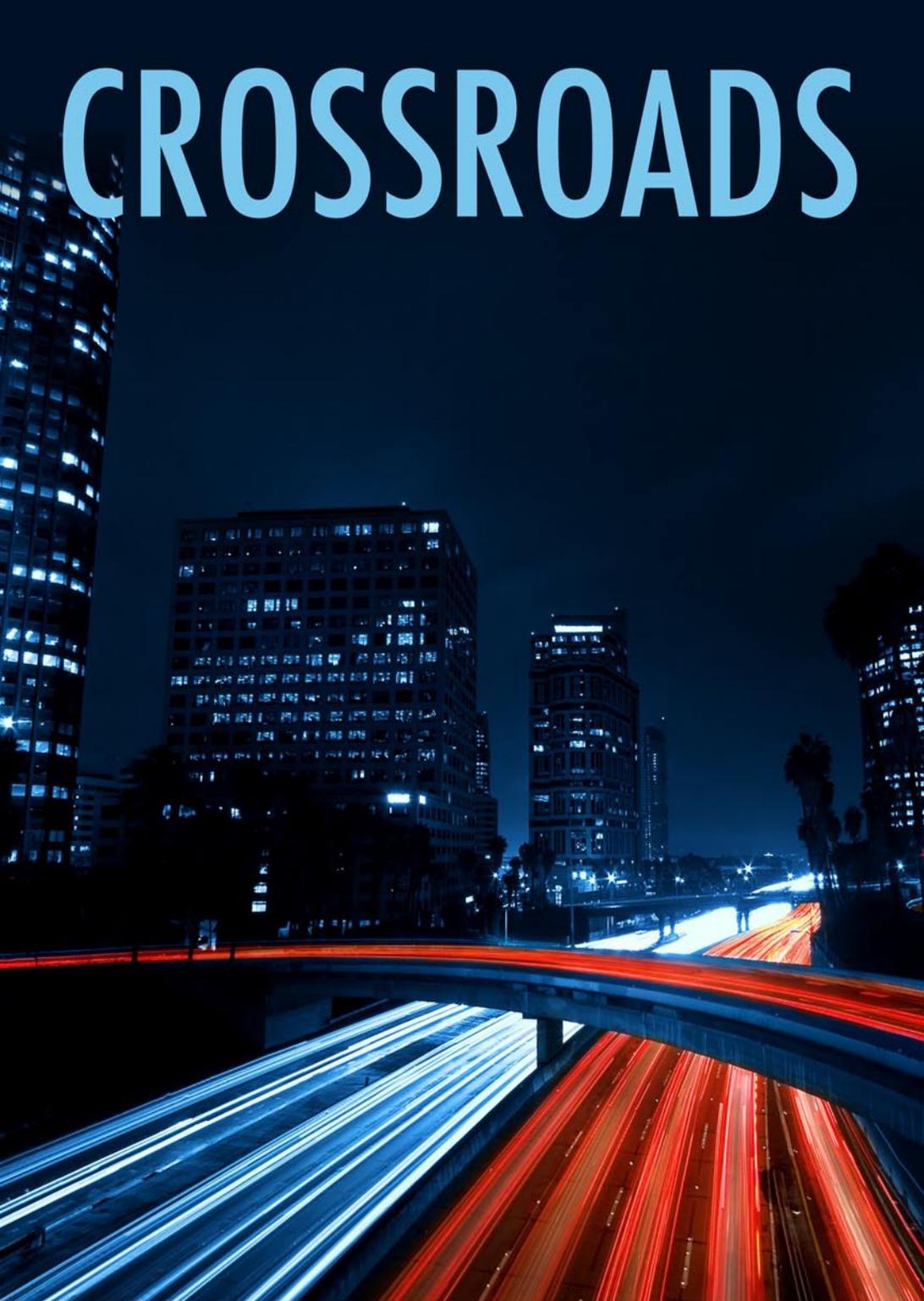


CROSSROADS

A long-exposure photograph of a city at night. The foreground is dominated by a highway with multiple lanes, showing vibrant light trails from cars. The trails are primarily red and white, indicating taillights and headlights respectively. The highway curves into the distance. In the background, several tall buildings are illuminated, their windows glowing with light. The sky is dark, and the overall scene conveys a sense of urban activity and movement.

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

Crossroads

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and those of Florida's Adult and Family 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 organizations with their training and 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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Making a Difference



Preface

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

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

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A Turning Point in My Life

Reflections

As I get older I find myself reflecting on my life. I shared the beginning of my life with my twin sister. We were a tribe of six; three older siblings and a younger brother. We were a very diverse bunch. While my sister, younger brother, and I were born in Idaho, my oldest sister was born in Florida. My oldest brother was born in Maine and my remaining brother was born in Japan. You may have guessed by now that my father was in the military.

My childhood was a continuous series of moves, changing schools, and constantly trying to make new friends. If there was one good thing that came from this, it is that I became very close to my siblings. No matter how many times we moved or left behind friends, we always had each other.

Our travels took us from Idaho to Florida to Michigan then back to Pensacola, Florida where my father retired from the Air Force. I thought we had finally put down roots and had found a place to call home. Unfortunately, that was not the case. We packed up and moved again. We moved to Bonifay, Florida, where I started high school. When I wasn't in school, I was working odd jobs, loading watermelons, picking up pecans, anything to make a few dollars. It wasn't long before I decided making money was more important than my education. I quit high school in my junior year and went to work full time with a local plumbing company. Plumbing was hard work, but I didn't mind because I was young and had a strong back.

Ten years later my family moved to Milton, Florida. It only seemed natural that I move with them; even though by then I was a grown man. The older I got the harder plumbing got on my older back. I worked at many different jobs, yet mastered none of them. Like many people from my generation, I was a jack of all trades, but master of none.

Finally, it is 2012 and I, as millions like me, find myself unemployed, under-educated, and unable to find a decent paying job. Reflecting on my life, I realize I have never really finished anything. This is what brought me to Santa Rosa Adult School's Adult Learning Center. I am now determined to complete my education. I am looking forward to having a great feeling of self-satisfaction and accomplishment.

Tim Goodyear is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Just Do It

“The best is yet to come!” My best friend told me almost two years ago. I took his advice to heart. It was the “magic phrase” that threw away all my hesitations. There is no worse thing than regretting the choices I’ve made and the changes that I didn’t make because of a fear in taking a risk. I didn’t know what was going to happen. But I felt so good!

So, I moved forward to start a new chapter in my life...I moved to a new Continent, a thousand miles away from my homeland, in the USA!!! Everything was new and a polar opposite from my previous life. There is the political system, the medical system, and different laws and rules for every state. For example in some states, the law requires drivers to not use cell phones but other states don’t. So bizarre! American culture and customs were new to me and I was eager to learn about them. Furthermore, the weather really surprised me because of the warm winters and rainy summers with a possibility of a hurricane.

I never thought that I would go back at school. But the universe is full of surprises! Learning a new language is always challenging, but in my case was an absolute

necessity. I've gained a lot benefits being at school, such as having an active social life with people with similar backgrounds and developing lasting friendships. Focusing on my English, one day, will enable me to start a new career.

Relocating is never an easy thing, no matter how old we are. We left behind family, friends and everything that is familiar to us. I've had mixed feelings during my stay in the U.S. Sometimes I feel homesick or nostalgic and all the experiences have had an impact my soul.

The global financial crisis had a big effect on my country, so I feel safer and more secure here and I will be able to support my kin in an emergency situation. Always I have a positive attitude and plans for the future.

Maybe you've found a dilemma like this in your own life. Perhaps you are scared of the idea of moving and taking on a big new challenge. But anything can be a miracle, a blessing, an opportunity if you choose to see it that way. I did. As the poet Robert Frost offered in his poem "The Road Not Taken": "I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference".

Mary Papasynefaki is from Greece and studies in Camille Lackey's ESOL class in Oldsmar. She dedicates this story to the memory of her father Nikolaos.

The Decision!

My name is Maria Luisa and I am Mexican. I have been married eleven years to a man of God who is the love of my life! God has blessed us with three wonderful and smart kids. By God's grace we are in this country. We came in 2000. Our plan was to stay for two years, but our first child was born and our plans changed. For eleven years I dedicated my life to my family and I am very happy to have done it. I was a stay at home mom and never took an English class. I taught myself at home. I constantly studied by reading books, watching English DVDs, and using English computer programs.

Now, I feel that my children have learned many values and good examples to help them in their journey through life. I love the idea that they will go to college, but, for that to happen, they need our help and this is where we see how important it is to speak and understand English.

I promised myself this year would be different. I have begun to study English in this amazing Parent Power (Family Literacy Academy of Palm Beach County) program S.B. Idea has created. I am very proud of myself because I really feel that I have taken a huge step forward. It is wonderful to be here and I thank all the people involved in this program for giving us this opportunity. I thank God for the gift of my family and friends and I am thankful to my husband for always supporting me unconditionally. I am determined to continue to study English so my children will have a confident and educated mother who can help them go to college and achieve their own personal goals.

Maria Luisa Rosales is a student in Phebe Wiggins' class at S.B. Idea in Delray Beach.

Slaves of Taste

How many times do we stop to think about what we eat? We are slaves of taste!

I ate a lot of bad foods in my life, such as pizza, soda, fried foods; tasty, but lacking nutrition. I hated any legumes and consumed small amounts of vegetables and fruits. For instance, my breakfast included coffee, white bread with butter and some cheese. I was one of those people who didn't care about the relationship between food and health.

As I became older I started to get ill. After I had a miscarriage, I realized that my eating habits had to change. My goal was to be healthy and better prepared for a future pregnancy.

I can still remember how I began. It was so difficult that I can't even explain. It took a lot of effort. I went as far as to forcing myself to eat legumes, instead of eating meats or chicken daily. I slowly turned to eat fish for dinner. I also

had more work. I had to think about what to buy, what to eat and what to cook.

Today I am vegetarian. As a family, we made the decision to support each other. Throughout the change I have received many benefits from it. Some people have told me that I even look better! My health condition has greatly improved. My energy levels have increased and I'm happy now!

It is sad that our nation is in crisis. We have many sicknesses, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, as well as cancer and childhood obesity.

Wake up! Think about what you put into your mouth. Take a journey to plan your meals daily! Don't be scared! It is not impossible; everybody can change his/her life to a healthier way. Hang it up! Make decision! Don't be a slave of taste!

Ksenia Sofronova is originally from Russia, she is a student at GROWS Family Literacy Academy of Apopka. She is married, and is the mother of a three year old child. Her teacher is Damaris Rivera.

When I Got Cancer

When I first got diagnosed with cancer, it was very devastating and frustrating. The first thing that came into my mind was "why me?" But then I realized that I was not alone, that there were other people with the same disease as mine. The type of cancer that I had was treatable. According to my doctor, I had a seventy-five percent chance of survival. I would have to submit myself to a rigorous and harsh treatment in order to get cured and get rid of it for good. The treatment would consist of a combination of two types of therapies: radiation and chemotherapy.

Later, I had to prepare myself physically and mentally in order to start the fight against this deadly disease. One thing that I had to do was to eat a lot of food to gain a lot of weight, so that I could be prepared for the treatment -- being aware that I was going to lose a lot of weight while on these kinds of therapies. Also, the doctor would have to implant a

A Turning Point in My Life

catheter in my chest, close to my heart, so that they would be able to administer the medication necessary to fight this terrible disease. Furthermore, they also implanted a device in my belly that went through my stomach that enabled me to get the necessary nutrients to survive. I knew I was not going to be able to eat any kind of food through my mouth once the treatment started.

I spent three months in treatment. They were the most horrible and unpleasant days of my life. I had to undergo radiation therapy every day from Monday to Friday for three months, and every Friday of every week I had to sit for eight hours and take chemo medication through the catheter that I had in my chest. When I started the treatment, I weighed two hundred and four pounds. When I finished it, I weighed one hundred and thirty pounds. I looked and felt horrible. I looked much older and felt like I was floating in the air.

The following months were for recuperation. It took me quite some time to get back on my feet again. I cannot say that I am completely recuperated after all these years, in the sense that these days I still experience residual side effects that affect my daily living. Although I am still able to cope with them, it is not an easy task. I can also say that to this day I am a cancer-free survivor living with the hope that it will never come back again.

In conclusion, even though I had a very rough time combating this cancer, in the end, I can emphatically say that I beat this monster!

Rolando Rivero is a dedicated, hard-working student with TLC Online at The English Center.

The Adventure of Marriage

I still have vivid memories of that big day. Almost every detail of it --the bright sun, the beautiful blue sky, the happy expressions on the faces of family and friends. It was a very pleasant, blessed, and joyous moment.

Then the honeymoon came, full of emotions, the first intimate moments with the person I had chosen to be one, with whom I would be spending the rest of my life. Although it was short, I really enjoyed it. It was full of honey, witnessed by the full moon.

I was about to experience the turning point in my life. As time passed, I started to understand the commitment that went with my marriage vows: it was not all about me. It was about the will of two people in love becoming one. I began to experience what I used to see in movies and soap operas; life stories that I thought were fantasies were beginning to become a part of my real life. On this new road, everything individual became a covenant of two people learning to give and receive love.

This new role had helped me fulfill an important aspect of human life, discovering each other so we might deeply share our soul, body, and spirit. This made me realize that this is the way we had been made by the Lord, that we are tridimensional people. Therefore, I could not fail in the fulfillment of my spirit, soul, and body. By so doing, I had become complete, enjoying my role as a lover, best friend, and parent.

As we travelled this sacred road, my life experiences became richer with the arrival of my kids. I started seeing myself through them, realizing how short life could be. Watching them grow gave me the opportunity to enjoy more of the mystery and greatness of life. The rewards for my sacrifices and denial of pleasures had been worth it.

The blessed road was long and bumpy, and there were days when I felt things weren't right. However, I was convinced that the blessings I had received were far greater than the vows I made at my wedding and the challenges I encountered. I thank God for having given me the opportunity to live out all these experiences through the adventure of marriage.

Alba Franco is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

A Turning Point in My Life

At one point in my life it felt as though I would never make it off of the streets. In an effort to survive the streets, I began making decisions I would soon regret.

On my eighteenth birthday a decision changed my life forever. I chose to help some so called friends break into a car. That mistake cost me everything: my girlfriend, my job and my freedom. I wound up in jail.

In jail I found myself writing poetry and drawing just to pass the time. I began to notice that a lot of my poems would work as rap songs. One in particular, called *Do You Know Pain?*, my cellmate heard me reciting. He said, "Homie, spit that out loud!" So, I did, and the next thing I know I'm in the courtyard joining rap battles.

Eleven months and 15 days later, I was released from jail with two notebooks full of rhyme and poetry. Eager to get to work on something, I got my hands on a beat making program for computer called E-Jay Hip Hop 2.5. I began work on my first CD entitled *Personality Disorder*. This seven song album was only printed one hundred times and was very well received. People loved it, so I felt I had found my calling in life.

Currently, I've worked hard to get my own studio equipment and record label built. I also have taken on other artists that I produce and record. Upon getting my GED, I'd like to enroll in college for music production. This will bring my life full circle with no more trouble for me. I am giving a concentrated effort on getting more music written and recorded.

Michael Theodorovich is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

My Education

My name is Brent Gross. I went through life with very little reading and spelling skills. I can remember going to my dad for help with my homework. He would send me to my mom. Since then I have taught myself the skills I have

today. I love to learn about anything from astronomy to politics. I had many jobs in my life from coal mining to house building to underground utilities to owning my own business. Going through life with little reading and spelling skills is very hard. I realized working for someone in the construction field, I could only go so far in life, but owning a business I could achieve much more.

Owning my own business gives me much more freedom to further my education and spend time with my kids. I am 44 years old and have two kids now. I would like to be able to help them with their school work and not send them to their mother. In 2002, I started a small business in Orlando, Florida, as a handy man with construction skills of 25 years. In time, I discovered I was very good at what I did and so did my customers. I was doing well until 2008, when big, corporate America got us into this mess with the economy.

My business field was hit very hard of course since my field is building homes and remodeling. I have to reinvent myself like most Americans and having more education helps. It is very difficult looking for something else to get into. It takes time to start something else, but at the same time, bills keep coming in and work doesn't.

Brent is a student in Denise Baldwin's class, Lee County Adult Education at Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My New Life in Arcadia

When I arrived in Florida, I was 16 years old. It was very hard for me because I didn't have a car. I didn't speak English. I was always looking for someone to interpret for me. Sometimes I even paid a person to help me.

I met a lady. She said that I was very young. She said, "You should go to school". I said, "But I have three children". She told me not to worry that the Family Service Center has a program for children and adults called Learning Together. The next day I went there. I told them that I would like to go to school, and I started the following day.

A Turning Point in My Life

My first lesson was learning the alphabet. Also I learned the numbers and colors in English. Now I can read, write, spell, speak, and understand English.

In the future, I will get my GED thanks to all my teachers at the Family Service Center.

Marina Gomez is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia.

A Turning Point in My Life

My life in this country has been difficult. I came from Mexico 10 years ago. From the time I came here, I have been working.

This year I decided to change my routine. I made the choice to go to school because I would like to have a different job.

Now I am working hard, but I am getting older. I am going to need another kind of job. I would like to get my GED diploma as soon as possible to continue my education.

The next step for me will be to get a college degree in elementary education. I love kids.

The reason for this change in my life is my two children. I want them to be proud of me. Then we can have a better life. I know it is going to be difficult, but I believe dreams can come true.

Florinda Padilla is a student at The Family Service Center in Arcadia, FL.

A Change in My Life

Literacy Tutoring has improved my life. It changed it completely and has opened many opportunities for me.

Ever since I came to this country, eight years ago, the necessity to speak and understand English was a huge barrier closing many job opportunities for me.

Through my friends, I was informed about English tutoring classes being taught at the library, which is close to my house. I worked things out so I could work on the

afternoon shifts, that way I could attend class in the morning because I really needed them.

Finally, I arranged everything together and started my classes with Charles not knowing what to expect. But once we started, it wasn't very long until I began to loosen up on my pronunciation and let go of the fear of trying to say things right. My life began to take a different route. It was very noticeable how I started to be comfortable with having someone speak to me, and how I found myself in situations where I put myself out there for people to talk with me.

The biggest thing that has happened to me is the way these tutoring classes have helped me learn about United States history. By doing this I prepared myself to take the U.S. citizenship test and pass it. Now I can call myself a United States Citizen! Knowing that brings a smile to my face because this was one of my major goals ever since I came from Colombia.

My family is really proud of all the achievements I have accomplished with the help of Charles in our classes. I am really thankful for everything he does for me and the help he has given me. I still continue with the same interest to keep going on and get better each time. There is no stopping now.

Ana Algarra is a student in the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas English tutoring program and meets with her tutor Charles Butterworth at the Dunedin Public Library.

A Turning Point in My Life

I grew up in a neighborhood where all the people knew each other. We lived like a family; however, because of the economic situation in our country, Haiti, most of the youths were jobless and some of them dropped out of school early. This may be the reason that even though I had a profession, I did not really push myself. I did not have any challenges until I came to the United States in December 2011. That was a turning point in my life. I had never lived in a foreign country; I did not really know what an industrial country looked like. Since I arrived here, I have learned a lot. I have

learned that I need to fight for a good living. If I want to reach my goal, I have to do my best. Every single day, I try to learn something. It could be a new word, how to pronounce it and in what context to use it. It could be how the American people live and the opportunities they have to educate themselves. Even though I miss Haiti sometimes, I have no regret being here. I have more possibilities now to reach my goal, which is to become a computer engineer, and to have a good job. It does not matter if I am far from my country. As the French writer Voltaire said, “An educated person does not have borders.”

Johnson Paul Augustin is an Advanced ESOL student with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach.

Don't Give Up!

I had a hard childhood growing up, so I turned to drugs. At first it was only smoking pot. Then that was not enough so I moved on to pills. By the time I was 16 years old I dropped out of school and moved out of my parents' home. My life was consumed with drugs - that was what I thought I needed to get through the day. I never thought I had a problem. So I kept going down the same path. “Who cares?” is how I looked at life. I went on using and not having a care in the world. After years of using, life hit me and it hit me hard. I was pregnant. What was I going to do? I had no idea how to care for a baby.

I was scared, but I wanted this baby to have what I didn't and that was a family who cared. So I did what I had to do. First was to get clean, which I did. Nine months later I gave birth to a healthy little girl. A year later I had a slip and that was all it took. I went back to using and life was hard. I felt I was alone and failing as a parent. All the hopes and dreams I had for Layla were gone because life was not going how I wanted it to. But I knew I wanted more out of life and for Layla. So I got help. I started attending classes at the Phoenix Program and meet a man named Bruce, who taught me a lot and that I was not alone. I had taken the biggest step: admitting I had a problem. I attended class two days a week for three hours. After a year of being clean, I

knew I would struggle with my addiction for the rest my life, but it was my choice now not to use. The disease was not going to run my life anymore. I had a brighter future ahead.

Now three years clean and going strong, my life is where I want it to be. I'm going back to school at the Even Start program to get my GED. I'm surrounded by staff who knows I can do it and they tell me on a daily basis, which helps. Now with my past in the past, all I have to look forward to is my future for Layla and me. I hope to share my struggles with her one day to let her know that I do care and she doesn't have to go through life alone. Life is hard but if you put the effort into it you can get whatever you want out of it. Just don't give up.

My name is Sarah Wolford. I'm 25 years old and the mother to Layla who is 3. I live in Crystal River, Fla.

The Turning Point in My Life

The turning point in my life as of right now is that I'm going back to school for my GED. I got with a really great guy named Josh who has helped me turn my life around, and my son Mason keeps me motivated to be a better person. My life has definitely turned around for the better.

When I was seventeen I dropped out of high school. It was the biggest mistake I have ever made. I found out I was six and a half weeks pregnant, and I saw this flyer at the Health Department for this GED program at Even Start. I called Even Start and talked to them and started the class four months after my son was born. My son is eleven months old and I'm almost finished with my schooling. This has been a huge turning point in my life.

I met this guy Josh who is the love of my life and the father of our eleven month old son Mason. When we first got together my life was a complete mess but he has helped me turn my life around in the right direction. He helped me get a car so I could get a job, which I got, and have been there for almost two years now. He has kept me motivated

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in getting my schooling done. I could not ask for a better man. I love and appreciate him so much.

My son Mason is such a blessing. Every day I look at him, it makes me want to better my life to provide a better future for him. Mason is my life and my world and I would do anything for him. He gives me the motivation to keep going.

The turning point in my life is a start in success. I'm proud of myself for going to school to get my GED, getting with a really great guy, and having my son Mason, who keeps me on the right path to motivate myself to get things done. My turning point has definitely been for the better. Thank you to everyone who has helped me get to where I am today.

My name is Brittany Williams. I live with my future husband and our son, Mason, in Crystal River. I am currently employed and attending Even Start.

I Have Been Changed

My name is Antonio Lopez. I am from Guatemala. A turning point in my life was in June 2009 when I stepped onto American soil. I was faced with many new challenges: culture, people, and language. Most people spoke English while I could only speak Spanish. I felt confused and desperate. Every day at my workplace I worked in fear. This thought always haunted me: no one understands me. On several occasions I asked my Spanish speaking colleagues for help. But they do not seem to care. To them everything is normal. As for me, I could feel the change was coming especially when I had to speak English.

Finally, that day came when I personally went to enroll in the English class at the Adult and Career Education Center. I could hardly speak any English. By and by, I gradually began to speak some. Today, I feel happy because I am not what I used to be. I can look for a better job to fulfill my responsibilities. Also, I need more income because I want to have my own business and provide

financial support for my family in Guatemala. Being in the U.S. forced me to change my life for the better.

Antonio is a student at Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Becoming a Mother

I've had many turning points in my life, but the biggest one yet was when I became a mother to a little boy. Three reasons why that was a turning point in my life are because it forced me to be responsible, it made me open my eyes and look at life in a new perspective, and it motivated me to finish my education.

First, becoming a mother forced me to be responsible. It made me grow up faster because I had to wake up early to take care of him and his needs. I could no longer sleep in all day as I pleased.

Second, becoming a mother was a turning point in my life because it made me open my eyes and look at life in a new perspective. It was no longer just about me; it was also about him.

Third, becoming a mother was the biggest turning point in my life because it motivated me to finish my education. I will be able to help my child with his school work, and I will be extremely happy to have him look up to me one day and be proud of my accomplishments.

In conclusion, becoming a mother was a turning point in my life because it forced me to be responsible, it made me open my eyes and look at life in a new perspective, and it motivated me to return to school.

Francheska Ramirez is a single mother of one child. She attends Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

A New Life in the USA

My name is Jackson Dor. I am from Haiti. The turning point in my life was on October 7, 2011. It was my first day in United States. I came here by myself. When I arrived in this country, I was very nervous because I don't have any

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friends and family here. I am sharing a room with someone I don't even know. I think about my country every day. I speak very little English. The culture is very different. After two months, I started to look for a place to learn English. I am very happy that I am learning how to write and speak proper English at the Adult Education center in Key West. Also, I am beginning to learn about American culture. My terrific teacher is very polite to me. I am studying very hard to master my English skills. Then I would like to take the GED test. My goal is to go to college and study computing. My ambition is to be a computer programmer.

Jackson is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Improved Life

I worked for twenty five years in aeronautical maintenance. I'd like to continue using my knowledge in this country. I know of a company in aviation that I want to work for, but first, I need to learn English.

For this reason it is necessary to study hard and to discipline myself to study English. I decided to achieve this challenge because I want to be successful and to develop programs to help other people to progress in this area.

Vitelio Valderrama is married, has two teen daughters, is from Colombia, was in the military, and is now attending Dunbar community School, ESOL Level 5, Judy Peck Teacher.

My Brother and Parsley

When I first came to the United States, my brother was working in a cafeteria for a company. He wanted me to work there with him. It was interesting to work in the cafeteria. There was a variety of foods, but I didn't know the names of the foods in English. When the other coworkers called me to bring parsley, I had to ask my brother, what is parsley? What does it mean in French?

That is when I decided to go to school to learn all the kinds of food in English. My brother helped me work in the cafeteria. It was nice and I appreciated him for that. I am

also appreciative for parsley, because not knowing the name made me want to go to school.

Lou Sainval is married and the father of 3 children. He has lived here 35 years and want to be a LPN. He is Attending Dunbar Community School, ESOL Level 5. Judy Peck is his teacher.

My Way Back

After all these years I feel that this is the time to challenge myself. I really would love to find out whether or not I have the potential to achieve and finish my GED at my age. Sure at my age I can still work, because my God Jesus Christ has blessed me to continue.

At this time I have reconciled my differences with the world, and I am ecstatic about getting started on my challenges. I am a born again Christian. Knowing that God is on my side, I cannot fail, but be persistent in all my endeavors in life.

My education is very important to me. My first grandchild, from my first child, has graduated from Dunbar High School in the year 2011. That is what gets me going, and encourages me. I will challenge myself every day the rest of my life to accomplish this goal, before it is too late.

I would love to get to a level of education where I can improve myself financially. Then, I would not have to depend on disability for support. Now that I have a charge to keep, I will be assertive in my quest to better myself and have the presence not to let failure be an option. Now, I am currently enrolled in GED classes, but I don't feel accomplished yet. I want to continue college to pursue a career. I have a lot of potential in decorating.

Walter Benjamin is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

A New Start to Life

I was born in Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico. I came to the USA at the age of 13 with my mother and brother for a better life and future. My mother started working right away. She was working between 12 to 16 hours a day, every

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day, so my brother and I had to stay alone in the house most of the time. It was only for a few hours that I was able to see my mother. During that time I couldn't understand why she was not there with us.

At the age of 16 I got pregnant and that made me change my life. I was so scared and sad at the same time because I thought that all my future was gone. When I gave birth to my baby boy, I couldn't explain the joy he gave me. In that moment I understood that my future wasn't done, it was only the start of life.

Two years later I had my second baby, a beautiful girl. Having my two kids has changed my life forever. Now I understand why my mother wasn't with us during that time because now I'm working 10 to 12 hours a day, every day. I'm doing all this hard work for my children because I want them to have a better life and a better future. My two children are my life and I would do everything in this world for them.

Becoming a mother was a big turning point to my life. I think that now I have made a big turn towards success. I look to my future differently because my two kids have encouraged me to be someone better.

Maryli Hernandez is studying English for a better future. She is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

Improvements in My Life

I came to United States in 1969 with my parents. We had left our home and relatives in Medellin, Colombia. We were like all immigrants looking for the American dream, a better way of life. It has been a very difficult journey.

I set some major goals for myself. It has been worth all my hard work to achieve them. The most important goal for me was first to learn to speak English. Also, it was necessary to find a good job and a comfortable place to live.

There were so many problems and decisions to make. Fortunately in the United States there are so many opportunities, and I was willing to work hard to find the right ones for me. My parents and I decided to establish our home in the state of New Jersey. We rented a small apartment in the town of Englewood, our first home in the U.S.A. I gave my mother and father a lot of support.

I began to study at the Spanish American Institute in New York City. In the evenings I worked at a textile factory in Northwood, New Jersey. I got married in 1976, seven years after I arrived here. My wife and I had three children. In my second marriage to Nena, my present wife, we had a beautiful daughter. All of the children are grown now and they have their independent lives.

In 1988 we moved to Safety Harbor, Florida. With Nena's encouragement I have decided to study English again. Now that I work only part-time I am able to be a student in the literacy tutoring program. It is held in the town of Dunedin.

This program is teaching me how to write and read English and also to improve my pronunciation. That is important to me. I have the help of my personal tutor.

Already my language is much better than the poor English that I learned on the streets of New York City where I first worked as a parking attendant.

With the help of my tutor I am increasing my vocabulary. I just finished reading my first book in English, and I have started to read a second one. This makes me very proud.

I feel confident and I don't worry so much about making mistakes. People understand I'm trying hard to learn.

Now I can speak for myself. I do not have to rely on other people to translate for me or fill out forms. I can stand on my own two feet.

I am very thankful for the language program and my tutor.

A Turning Point in My Life

Hector Carvajal is a student of Sandy Metcalf's at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas in Dunedin.

It's Never Too Late to Change

When I was a young man, about 20 years old, I lived in Ft. Lauderdale. I started smoking pot and going with the wrong people. I started drinking with them, too. I saw they had a white powder and got curious. They let me try it and I liked it. I also used crack and spent all my money to buy drugs. I had to move every few months because I could not pay my rent. My brother tried to stop me but I wasn't ready to stop.

One night after I got high I was very depressed about my life and asked God to help me change. After that things slowly began to change. I talked to a friend in Tallahassee who I knew in high school. She said she could drive me here and that helped me get away from the people who did drugs.

In Tallahassee I still used drugs sometimes but I didn't want them so much anymore. I joined a good church and the Bible says you aren't to put bad things in your body. The more I learned from the Bible, the guiltier I felt. Finally I couldn't drink or do drugs anymore. That was about 9 years ago.

Now I have a good life with a wife, family, friends and a job. I am learning to read and write better so I can read the Bible and get a better job. So it is never too late to change.

Andrew Williams is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. His tutor is Kathie George.

A Turning Point in My Life

Almost everyone in the world had a turning point in their life. For example, my mother told me that her turning point in her life was when she left her children in Nicaragua in order to travel to Untied State for economic reasons. Back then, she cried and felt devastated; however, with time she overcame that difficult moment. Like my mother, my turning point was leaving my country, except I did not have

children. Leaving my country is my critical point in my life because I have been forced to learn a new language, which is not easy.

Being forced to learn a new language has been difficult for me. One example is that I do not understand when people speak English to me. Therefore, I cannot answer back. Since I cannot express myself, I have felt extremely disappointed, and embarrassed. Another example of my difficulty with the language has been finding a job. Every time I apply for a salesclerk job, the interviewer tells me that I must improve my English. He told me “Sorry, come back when your English improves. When you are more prepared.” Can you imagine how frustrated and disappointed I felt in those moments? Oh my goodness! I would question myself, “What am I doing here? Why did I leave my country? Should I return to my previous life?” Nevertheless, I decided to stay here in the United States and to learn the English language. Therefore, I enrolled at Miami High Senior Adult, where I have been studying for a year and a half. Over time, I have felt much better with myself due to the fact that I have acquired more knowledge about English language. Although being forced to learn a language that is not my own is an arduous journey, I am determined to give my best to conquer.

In conclusion, leaving my country and being forced to learn a new language has been my critical point in my life. It is a point that has been very difficult for me, yet I will survive.

Haysel Palacio is an Elcate student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. Miami Dade County Public Schools. She is currently attending a class with Mr. Jorge Euseda.

A Turning Point in My Life

I was 18 years old when I came to the USA. This was an important turning point in my life, because at that time my father was very seriously ill. He had cancer and lost his memory. He called my mother and his sister. All his siblings and friends were busy. The second day we saw the doctor. The doctor said he must perform an operation. Thankfully I

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can take care of my father. We work hard to make money to take him home to get better. My family lives together and has a happy life now.

Lin En Guang is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Kathryn Coxwell.

A Turning Point in My Life

The turning point in my life was when I came to the United States.

Before that I lived with my family, who didn't like the daughters to study or to work. Only the boys needed to study and have a social life. The girls only had to do chores.

When I came here I started to do different things and I felt that my world expanded. I had to plan how to start my new life. I was too shy and I had to get up my courage. I started to work and I learned a lot of things that I didn't know and developed myself.

I started to transfer all my degrees and started to study at the university while continuing to work. I studied at the university four years and six months. Then I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in General Nursing Science and another Bachelor's degree in Psychology with honors, magna cum laude.

I give thanks to God and this country that helped me to realize all my potential. I say, again, "Thank you, United States of America."

Dora Montes is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Kathryn Coxwell.

Four Years

Hello, my name is Callan James Hannert. I was born and raised in St. Clair, Michigan. People may look at me and wonder why I am all the way down in Florida. Well I'm going to tell you why. When I was living in Michigan, I stop going to school when I was 17 years of age. There was a lot of stuff happening in my life. My parents split up, and I had five very close people to me die, my Uncle Harry, Grandma

Susan, and also three of my friends that I used to race Motocross with died in a car crash. At that point, I didn't want to do anything anymore.

After helping my mother move down to Florida, I went back to Michigan. I started to sell drugs in Detroit. Soon after that I got caught, not by the cops, but by my father. My father said that I had to move to my mother's home. Here I am now, after 4 years of moving around, back in school ready to better myself.

I lived in Key West with my brother for almost 2 years. I was going to school and working. However, work caught up with me. I started to work at a new job and my hours didn't stay in tune with my schooling. Again, I stopped going to school. Here I am, now, back living at my mother's home in North Fort Myers, FL. Now, I am trying to get my GED so I can better myself and hopefully join the Navy soon after I graduate.

Many of my family members are in the Navy. It seems as if I have been thinking about this since high school. I've talked to Navy recruiters and it's something I want to do for myself. Plus, I can go to college while I am in the Navy. So as soon as I finish my GED, I'm going to join the Navy.

Some family members do not want me to join the Navy. I tell them everything will be all right. I have got to do some time in the Navy, so I can become eligible for college tuition and make a career in mechanics in the Navy. Hopefully, while in the Navy, I can get to work on airplanes as a mechanic and train to become a pilot one day.

This is a part of my life story. Hope you enjoyed my story as much as I like telling it.

Callan James Hannert is a student in Ms. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My New Life in the United States

Twenty five years ago I came here to the United States and left my home in Costa Rica. I planned to only stay here

for a year, but as time passed that idea no longer seemed possible therefore I stayed; as many immigrants do.

At first it was very difficult to adjust to this country, because I left everything behind in order to pursue a better life. I missed so many special moments with my family such as Mother's and Father's Day, birthdays and watching my nieces and nephews grow up. I felt guilty for deserting my family, but I realized that in America I could achieve so much more.

Years later, I got married, had my daughters and with that my priorities changed. In this country I have the opportunity to give my daughters what I never had. At the same time, I was able to achieve the "American Dream" by becoming a U. S. citizen and owning my own house.

Now, I am focused on getting a GED and with that, hopefully, I will be able to fulfill my dreams and become a successful person. In spite of all the trying moments, I had to endure. I managed to keep moving forward. I am glad to be where I am today.

Mayra Delgado is a GED Student with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

God Will Always Use Our Hurt

Life for me hasn't always been easy; it had it's share of ups and downs. Many times I've struggled, but this time I know a true turning point has taken place.

In my early years, I was in a severe car accident, as some friends and I traveled to Panama City, Florida. We stopped at a store and my friend who was sitting up front offered to trade places with me; so we switched. A few miles down the road we crashed and my friend was killed and I survived. This incident was a turning point in my life.

Time moved on, yet life stood still until I learned I'd given birth to a baby boy. When I saw him I knew that life had been good to me and that God's face was smiling down on me. I welcomed my son into this world, another turning point in my life.

Then in 2008, I rededicated my life to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ while in prison. This is when I knew a real change had taken place and my life would never be the same. Today I am walking with the Lord letting Him lead and guide me, and this is a good turning point in my life.

So you see, even when life has its share of troubles, pains, and sorrows, God will always use our hurts and pains to draw us back to Him from car wrecks, to the birth of my son, and the reuniting with my lord. Being able to now understand that all these turning points in my life is what shaped me into the beautiful woman that I am.

Juanita Evins is in R. Barkley's GED Language Arts class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

I Changed My Attitude

My name is Angel Glenn. I realized a major turning point in my life was when I got arrested in 2006. That year, I bonded out of jail and remained home while my case and charges were pending. When I was released, I became a better mother to my son, and I obtained a great job. I love to work and surround myself around a positive atmosphere.

During my early stages of motherhood, I concentrated on spending as much quality time with my son as possible. These moments are precious and I cherish them, because once they're gone you can never get them back. My son and I would play games, put together puzzles, and do school work. We would even dance together. Every night he would pick out a book so I could read to him before he went to bed.

As I began to reestablish myself, I obtained a wonderful job at a franchise store. Mocha Delites is a small cafe' that caters to business events, weddings, engagements, and birthday parties, etc. I eventually became the manager of this cafe' and progressed on my work abilities and earned raises. The owner and I became good friends.

The day I went home on bond, I changed my attitude and the negativity I was once a part of. I try to associate with a

better variety of people who make good decisions for themselves. Individuals who are making wise choices for themselves and their families, help inspire me to be better. Being around positive people has a strong influence on me and helps me to conduct myself in a much better and mature manner.

Being away from my son was the worst experience. I truly am thankful for getting to know him and learning how to be a great mother. Working at Mocha Delites cafe' and doing caterings was a wonderful, exciting work experience. Keeping positive people in my life and doing positive things will help me go far and succeed in my goals.

Angel Glenn is in R. Barkley's GED Language Arts class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

Family Comes First

One improvement I want to make in life is to spend more time with my family. In doing so, I would like to be there for my family more, be able to see my little brother and sister participate in their sporting events, and fix my relationship with my dad.

I would like to be there for my family more because the past couple of years I haven't been in their lives. I used to choose my friends over my family and got into a lot of trouble with the law. This distanced me from my family. Also, I realized that my family has always been there for me even though I had let them down.

I want to be able to help my brother and sister improve their skills in their sporting events. I missed so many of my brother's football games and my sister's cheerleading competitions. I am supposed to be there to help them in their sports, so they can be their best.

Finally, I would like to fix my dad's and my relationship because I've hurt him so much and he's never given up on me. I am his first son and all he wants from me is to be a good person and more successful in life than he was. Also

he wants the best for me even though I may not see it that way.

In conclusion, spending more time with my family, being there for brother, sister, and family is something that I missed out on. Therefore I realize my family is very important, so I will be more diligent on working harder to get closer to my family.

Daniel Ramos is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

I've Learned...

A turning point in my life was when I came to prison. Since my stay here I've learned not to take my freedom for granted. I've changed my attitude, and I'm no longer scared to express my love.

First and foremost, since my stay here I've learned to never take my freedom for granted. Normally when a person thinks of the word freedom, slavery comes to mind. However in my case, I think of the free world. I guess it's true when they say "ain't no feeling like being". Because of my prison sentence, having my independence is no longer taken for granted.

Next, prison has changed my attitude in a very optimistic way. I also watch what I say to others. When an officer speaks to me in a unseemly way, I make sure to give my point of view in a respectable manner. Also, my frame of mind now is to be more understanding, whereas before it was always "I don't care".

Last but not least, I've learned to express my love. Before prison I was scared to express my love. Before prison I was scared to express my love for a person, because I had a fear of being hurt. Now since I've been doing my time, I got love all over me. I've also learned that you can express your love for another person by something as simple as a card.

In conclusion, I've explained to you when a turning point in my live came. I've learned not to take my freedom

A Turning Point in My Life

for granted. I've changed my attitude and I'm no longer scared to express my love.

Ferin Bellamy is a student in Catherine Toole's class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

My First Born

A turning point in my life was when I had my first baby. From that moment my life was no longer the same. It was an incredible experience. I could not imagine how a little baby could change my life. I had to stop working to be a full time mom. I had to give up going to parties with my friends. I did not have a full night sleep because I had to get up and find out what my baby needed. That was a very interesting time in my life. Four years later, I had another baby. I was not so surprised anymore. Anyway, they are the center of my life. My goal is to give them a good education and a bright future.

Iracema Dominguez is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

For a Better Future

As I sat contemplating and looking out the window of the plane, enjoying the sight of the sheet of white clouds hiding the beautiful aqua sea and the bright sun, it finally hit home that I was about to begin a new chapter in my life. When I saw the shore, followed by modern skyscrapers and a handful of lakes, I knew that this adventure of mine had just begun.

It was around March 2011. At that time, I had just gotten my residence for the U.S. Since I had this opportunity, I decided to come after my high school graduation. It was a tough thing to do since I had to leave my family and friends behind and come to a whole new country where I barely knew anyone.

I realized I was going to miss a lot of things in my country, like the people, the food, and its landscape. The people are really nice and warm, always willing to give you a hand when you need it. The food is so delicious that you

would always crave it despite having tasted new American dishes. The landscape is one that people would enjoy. On one side, you see some beautiful mountains and when you turn around, you have a warm beach with beautiful white sand and crystal clear water.

Help from my father had eased the pain of leaving my beloved country, the Dominican Republic, and adapting to life here. He helped me find a school, bought me a car so I can transport myself anywhere, and basically did much to help me settle down. At the moment, I work as an administrative assistant; at the same time, I am taking English and ballet classes.

Now I have infinite opportunities in life that I would have never had if I had stayed in my country. I am starting to see the rewards for my sacrifices. I'm making progress in my English, and now I feel more confident about going to college and pursuing a career.

On some days, though, I wake up with no motivation whatsoever, with a feeling of loneliness and sadness from the absence of family and friends, the longing for the get-togethers we once had, creating countless wonderful memories. However, a sense of relief and gladness invades me when I look back and see how things have turned out to be. This was definitely a great turning point in my life... a turn for the better.

Anonymous

Life After the Earthquake: Pain, Fear, and Hope

Married to a wonderful man, mother of two lovely kids, having held a responsible position at a bank, having owned a house with two maids at our beck and call, and surrounded by loyal friends, I could say, "I had a good life."

The earthquake on January 12, 2010 that changed the landscape in Haiti altered much of my life. Questions lingered after the disaster. "When are schools going to reopen? How quickly will the clean-up and rebuilding take

place?” Several months later, the cholera epidemic broke out, making the questions moot.

Concerned about the safety of our family, a decision was made for my children and me to leave Haiti and move to the United States where we would have a relatively normal and better life. Offer the kids a better life in the United States? Yes, it sounded reasonable. No kidnapping - something that happens often in Haiti. They would go to school in a safe environment with me providing them the care a mother could give. Soon, I packed and left my home country along with my two kids.

This major change had been the turning point in my life. I learned a lot from this experience. I learned to be self-reliant, to take care of my children and cook, tasks I did not have to do before. I also took the challenge to enroll in an English course, hoping to find a job in the future.

In spite of the benefits I have obtained from living here, some questions linger in my mind. Should I sacrifice my dreams for my kids? Why do I have to stay in Florida, jobless and far away from my family, instead of returning to Haiti where I can find a job and be with them? On the other hand, will I realize my dreams if I return to Haiti? Will I be ready to accept the disappointment and meet the challenges of moving back to my devastated country?

I'm at a point in my life where only time can bring some answers. However, God gave me a great husband who gives me strength at this time of uncertainty. When I feel lost, empty, and frustrated, he reminds me that my sacrifice has a purpose, which is to give my kids better opportunities. My faith in God and my husband's support have helped me a lot in this process of change. I eagerly await the day when Herby and I are reunited as I look forward to finding answers to my lingering questions.

Anonymous

The Challenges and Rewards of Motherhood

It was nine years ago. I went to see my doctor because I wasn't feeling well at all. Finally, after I had gone through all kinds of tests, the doctor came up with the results. He had made the day special when he said, "You will become a mother."

The great news was a surprise for my husband and me. We were very happy and excited, but at the same time a little scared. Parenting wasn't familiar to us. Many questions came to our minds such as: Is the baby going to be a girl or a boy? What name should we give? What should we do if the baby cries all night long? What school should we choose for them? More questions were asked, and they filled our sleepless nights during the forty weeks of pregnancy.

I was exhausted from all the symptoms of pregnancy. At the same time, the anticipation was killing me. Weeks went by fast. Days and nights were spent imagining what our baby would look like.

The most anticipated day arrived! My beautiful baby girl was born. She was the most precious baby I had ever seen. Well, after a year we decided to have another baby, and we waited for her with the same excitement we had felt for our first-born.

The arrival of my children has changed my life completely. I have learned to be responsible, more organized, and patient. It has turned me into a different person. Before, it was just I, me, and myself. Now I have two daughters who depend on me and whom I consider every time a decision is to be made. I have to be a positive role model to them.

Motherhood carries a lot of responsibilities, but I enjoy it a lot as it is very rewarding. When my children bring me A's on their report cards or get compliments for showing good manners, I feel I'm doing a good job as a mother.

A Turning Point in My Life

I'm very proud to be a mother, and I'm happy for the family my husband and I have raised. I know the challenges are not over yet, but I'm confident I can take on the responsibilities of motherhood, solving new problems and learning from them.

There are thousands of books that can teach us how to be a parent, but a mother's love is all that a child needs.

Arley Torres is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Mirarmar Community School in Miramar.

My Goals and Ambitions

Getting Closer to My Dream

My name is Miguenson Trezalus. I am from Haiti. I have been in U.S. since May 27, 2011. I live in Key West. On this beautiful warm day I just cannot express how delightful I feel being in the U.S. I want not only to study English but most importantly to realize my goal. I believe that education is the gateway to a bright future. My ambition is to become a doctor. Before I came to United State, I was a freshman in the university in Haiti.

Unfortunately on January 12, 2010 there was a terrible earthquake that destroyed many universities. This is when my education was put on hold. Though we have a lot to do to rebuild Haiti, our dreams are not lost. Certainly, mine included. I am pressing forward toward achieving my ambition. Without a doubt, I am in a better place now to reach my dream. Resources are plentiful here. Though America is in a slump, economically, it is not as bad as my country. I have a job but the pay is low; at least I am getting some work experience. Also, it helps me to communicate in English with other people. Gradually, I should be able to look for a better job as my English skill improves. I have already noticed a lot of changes in me: my speech, my attitude, my walk, my vision, and my daily life. I shall always be grateful.

Miguenson is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals

What are some of your goals? One of my goals is to pass my GED and to receive my diploma. The reasons are as follows: to feel better about myself, to let the world know it's never too late to learn, and I want to show younger children who are still in school, my fourteen year old son and my 11 year old daughter, that I can pass my GED.

My first reason is to feel better about myself. If I pass my GED, I will have more confidence in getting a job. The knowledge that I gain in mathematics and reading comprehension would help me in the work field because you need to comprehend what you're doing. When applying for a job, or going for an interview, it always looks more professional if you have a GED than not having any schooling.

My next reason is because I want to tell the world that it is never too late to learn. There are so many wise people in the world that are still learning and continuing their education. So, just because you completed high school does not mean **you** have to stop learning. Learning is a wonderful gift we all have, so we have to go and conquer the world with our knowledge.

Another reason is to show my children that I can pass my GED and receive my high school diploma. It has been a while since I have attended school; however, it is never too late to accomplish anything in life. Life has many challenges, so don't get discouraged like I once was. As I grew older and wiser, I started attending school and realized how important it is. Conquering my GED and getting my diploma is a challenge. Life is filled with many challenges, some being small, while others may seem impossible. But nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it and stick with it.

I would like to thank all the people who are helping me with this important essay and obtaining by GED: my husband, my children (Daniel, CeCe, and Patrick), and my teacher, Anna Franta. Thanks.

Mary Baricelli is married and the mother of 3 children. She attends Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Goals and Ambitions

In my life I have always had ambitions to fulfill and goals to achieve. I lived in my country Colombia for 34 years where it was not possible to achieve some of my goals. That was the reason why I moved to another city in Colombia called, Barranquilla, looking for a better future. There, I was lucky and I made contacts with an American shipping company, and they gave me an opportunity—an employment contract with a shipping company.

Then I worked in the United States for four years. Later on I got a better offer from another company, due to the experience that I had acquired with the first company. It was very easy to get another marine related job.

One thing that helped me was that I always think positively in achieving the goals that I proposed for myself. I returned to Miami where I have been living for 20 years, working, studying English and studying a technical career. Obstacles I have had but I will overcome them and I think that everything is possible when one wants to be successful.

Thanks to our teachers we have learned a little bit more every day. And thank you for giving us this great opportunity.

Arturo Alirio Lasso is an Elcate 1 student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. He currently attends a class with Dr. Millard E. Lightburn.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was 19 years old I made a choice to come to this great country. But I had to continue studying and learning at the Upper Institute of Medical Sciences in Cuba. Later I had to stop studying because it could interfere with my travel plans to come to this country. Ten years passed and my dream had to wait.

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My life was going on and I became a man and I started a family. In those ten years my travel dreams were put on hold because of unfortunate circumstances. Since I had to wait, I decided to start a family and now I have two small, but beautiful children. I have never had something so precious in my life. I got my hands on my travel dreams and once again I had to make up my mind to leave my family in Cuba or come to this country alone. These have been the most difficult decisions I have had to make: leaving my studies at the college, and then leaving my most precious treasures of all, my children.

Today I do not regret being here and I have made new dreams and new plans. I want to learn English with dedication and to go back to college. I am going to put in maximum effort.

I will conquer and overcome the dreams of those who lived. and Over time, I will bring my children and I will offer them the opportunity to live in a democracy and I will lead them in the right direction. I hope that in the not too distant future, they can also fulfill their dreams and goals.

By that time, I will have fulfilled all the dreams of my life and I will be done as a human being, grateful for life and the world of possibilities offered to me by this great country.

Yoanny Elias is an Elcate 1 student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. He currently attends a class with Dr. Millard E. Lightburn.

I Have a Dream

Have you ever wanted to make improvements in your life? Generally speaking I am a woman with impregnable thoughts of making improvements. Some improvements I wanted to make in my life are: Getting a better education, Being a better mom to my son, and being independent.

Getting a better education is important to me. Therefore, I can pursue my dream of becoming a crime scene investigator. Furthermore, in this field of work, I can be around positive people who share a special camaraderie.

Also, I can enjoy the finer things in life. Besides, I once heard a man say these words, “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”.

Equally important is being a better mom to my son. With no problem, I can show him I care what he thinks and how he feels. Most of all, having a haven where he can turn to when life seems rough is very important. Certainly, I must teach him right from wrong. With that being said, I promise not to only make this improvement for him but for us.

I want to be independent. Speaking from the heart, I never wanted to depend on anyone for help. I would rather be that woman who can stand on her own. Also, this might give my son a picture of what it’s like to be independent as a man.

In retrospect, everyone should want to make improvements in his/her life. Getting a better education, Being a better mother, and being independent are the most important improvements I want to make in my life.

Laquandra Denson is a student in Mrs. Hick-Wiley’s class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My Goals

My present goal is getting my GED and then possibly taking some college courses. My ambitions are to actually get it done and become successful.

First of all, everyone sets goals for themselves. The challenge is having the drive and will to accomplish them. Getting my GED will absolutely be a big accomplishment for me. It will open many opportunities for me as I am ready to get my life back on track. I'm ready to move on and become something.

Next, what I would like to do after I get my GED is to take up some college courses. There are so many things I would like to explore and so many things I would like to master. Whatever it may be, I'm hoping it's something I will

My Goals and Ambitions

enjoy. I'm really looking into going to school for cosmetology because I love doing hair and make-up!

Last, once I figure out what I would like to study and major in, I'm hoping I will do excellent in whatever my interests are. Hopefully, what I choose will be my ultimate calling and become my main career. As I think about it now, being able to have a job that I can enjoy every day and do my best at, makes me want to get this GED so much more.

So, the outcome of my succeeding in getting my GED can result in many opportunities. It also can lead to a better life, and my accomplishing my goals. My ultimate goal is to succeed and finally feel proud of myself.

Linh Recendiz is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Mrs. Rhonda Currier.

My Future Goals

My goal for my GED is that I pass with flying colors. I have gone two years without trying to get my GED. When I was young I still wanted to have fun and go out to clubs, but now that I am 21, I need to focus on my future and really think about the things that I want when I get older. I want to be able to provide for my wife and kids and not just for them but for myself also. I want to prove to myself that if something is done right and you work hard, you can have whatever you really want in life.

When I get my GED I am going to go straight into the police academy because that's what I have always wanted to do since I was a little boy. I think that if I work hard at what I want to do in life, I can make it. So I will buckle down for the ride! I can and will do whatever it takes to protect my country and the people that live in it. I am ready!

Manuel Diaz is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

Improving My Skills

During this difficult economic time, many people have chosen to go back to school to study and try to find a better job. That is exactly my position at this time. I am currently

working for the Lee County School District in food services. My current position involves preparing a variety of foods, setting up food serving lines, recording transactions, maintaining accountability of sales and much more. I signed up for this class to improve my reading and writing skills to be able to pass the TABE test. I like my job, but I want to be a manager. One of the requirements for the manager position is to pass the TABE test.

I recently spent four weeks at the school's clinic helping the nurse and my goal has expanded. Not only do I want to pass the TABE test to be a food service manager, I would like to have the option of enrolling in the LPN program at North Tech. Becoming a Licensed Practical Nurse means a better paying job. As a LPN I will have more job opportunities.

I want a better life for me and my family. Everyone has different opinions about education. For me, education means to move forward. The sky is the limit. It is never too late to go back to school. I want my kids to be proud of their mother. They are too young to understand the reason I am attending classes, but I know it will benefit our family. Please never give up on yourself.

Mercedes Guerrero is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My Future Plans

I want to pass the GED exam because I need it. I went to high school, but I couldn't pass the reading part of the FCAT so I didn't get my high school diploma. I did not stop because I want to continue my studies and follow my dreams. My goal after I pass the GED is to go to college to pursue my career. I want to study radiology and be a surgical technician. If I don't go to college, my other option is to go to High Tech North. Continuing my studies is my future .That's why I want to learn more and more each day.

Another reason that I want my diploma is because if I am going to apply for a job I need it. This country is technologically advanced and if you don't have your high

My Goals and Ambitions

school or college diploma you are nothing. I want to improve every day.

My goal after the GED is to get a good job and start my life. I want to bring my mom and brother over from Cuba, but if don't have a lot of money, I can't do that. That's why I need to improve myself. I want to bring them here because my brother is seven years old. I can give him a good life in this country. I want to try to give them a good future. I miss them a lot. I want to be with my family. These are the plans for my future.

Surgical technician is a good occupation. I like it because I can help other people who need my help. I love medicine and, in my opinion, that career is really important and interesting. The part that I really like is when I can be there in surgery. I want to see and help the doctor try to save the person that is in the bed.

The GED for me is going to be the best gift that life can give me. The first thing that I am going to do when I get my diploma is go on a vacation to Cuba. I haven't seen my mom, brother, family and friends for three years. I miss them a lot. When I left Cuba, I left my memories and laughs. I changed from a little girl to a woman. I want to live again all of my beautiful memories.

Dulce Peña is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My Future Plans

First of all, I am proud of myself for being here starting my education again. My goal for this year is to pass the GED test. That way my family can be proud of me also. I want to pass it so I can have a better future for myself and future family. I want to start a career for myself and become a male nurse, because I love helping people. I want a career that I can look back and say I did it.

Nursing is a career that I would love to do because caring for others is one of my passions. I want to work in a hospital that cares about others the way I do. When my

father died I felt like no one took care of him the way he deserved. That is why I have decided to care for people the way I would have wanted for my father. God bless him where ever he is.

I know that by going to college for a nursing degree I am going to further my education and be able to take care of those in need. My father would be proud of me if I get to accomplish what I want for my life. My mother has so much faith in me, that she told me, “You can do anything you set your mind to.” My brothers and older sister didn’t have the opportunity I have at this moment to finish what I have my mind set on. I want to show them that it is never too late to accomplish any goals you have in life.

Knowing that I haven’t accomplished much in life is one of my regrets. That’s why I have decided to do something I’m proud of like finishing my GED and starting a new career. Once I’m done with school, I am going to thank my girlfriend who motivated me to do this. She opened my eyes and made me realize that a better education is a good future.

Jose Rodriguez is a student in Denise Baldwin’s class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My Goals and Ambitions

3. 2. 1. Happy New Year!!!! It’s the start of a new year, and you know what that means? Yes, a set of new goals. I must say I completed most of my last year’s goals and found the time to accomplish some new goals. This year’s goals consist of finishing high school, having a family, and getting a successful job /career. In this story, I’m going to tell you in detail about my goals and how I’m going to accomplish them.

First of all, one of my goals is to graduate from high school because I want to continue my studies and attend college in order to get a good job. Furthering my education will increase my chances of becoming a bank teller; I need a high school diploma and one year in college to become a bank teller.

My Goals and Ambitions

Secondly, another goal of mine is to have a family. Ever since I was a little girl, my dream was to have a big family with a good man. I need the perfect man. In my eyes, my ideal vision of a perfect husband is one who is intelligent, handsome, very respectful, and big-hearted. With that in mind, I want a house filled with little “rugrats” running around. A house is a start of a family because a house that you buy is just not any little house – it’s a home. It doesn’t matter if the house is old or new because it will still be filled with memories that you never forget.

Last, but not least, my final goal is to have a successful job or career. To have a good life style I need a successful job; for example, I can’t provide for me and my family, making ends meet, unless I find a good job. I want to enjoy life with my family. A good job will pay a decent income so I can have peace of mind and not worry about money. In addition, a decent job will enable me to help out my mother and father who struggle every day just to make ends meet.

All in all, that is what my goals are for this year. I know they are big goals to achieve, but if I pour my mind and my heart into it -- along with a little determination, I know I can accomplish it. Like a wise man once told me, "All it takes is one little step at a time, and soon enough you can complete your goals." So, my steps to complete my goals are to finish high school, to have a wonderful family, and, lastly, to get a successful career or job.

Born in Nicaragua, Mariam Flores is a hard-working and very dedicated student with TLC Online at The English Center. Mariam loves to learn new things.

Achievements

My goals and ambitions are to get my GED, go to college, get a job and start a family.

The beginning of the journey maybe difficult but nothing I can’t accomplish. I believe that God puts you through a lot of things so in the end you’ll be at your best.

First, let me say school was not my favorite. Growing up where I'm from, education is not a priority, it's an option. But since my incarceration I have a better look on life, and without my GED education I cannot strive for success. My GED means a lot and will carry me to the next level.

Speaking of the next level, I would love to go to college. College can teach me much more than books. It will allow me to learn responsibility, organization, priority and so much more to be prepared for the real world of opportunity. The people I will meet and get to know in college will carry me far and support my elevation to achievement!

On my ladder of achievement would be to have a job that not only will support the life I want to live but one that I love. My job will be based on my experience, interests, and care for the company. I will work hard to rise to the top. I will no longer have to cheat the system. The job I have will be legal and my family will be proud.

Finally, family, what God blesses us with is very important. They understand you, they love you, and most of all when times are rough they will help you. I want to be smart, successful, and family oriented. I will care for my family through thick and thin and support them how my family supported me.

In conclusion, to accomplish my goals I will have a high ambition. This is nothing that can or will stop me from getting my GED, going to college, getting a job and starting a family because with God and my faith all things are possible.

Chazatee Moore is an ABE student in Catherine Toole's class at Gadsden Correction Facility in Quincy.

Goals and Ambitions

I'm still not sure what exactly I want to do with my whole life. However, I know some essential things I want to accomplish and I have a general idea about how to proceed to reach what I want to accomplish.

My Goals and Ambitions

I would like to leave my touch on the politics of my country. As I am an immigrant in the United States of America, the first thing to do is to learn English, which I'm in the process of doing now. After that, I plan to go to college to get a Bachelor's degree in political science, and afterwards a Master's. Eventually, that will open the possibility for me to have a good job, build my career, and develop my personality. Finally, I plan to go back to my country to try to make some allies so that I can put my hands to work helping to rebuild the political system in order to give it another face because right now it is in chaos.

There is a story of two mice that fell in a bucket of cream. The first one quickly gave up and drowned; the second wouldn't quit. It struggled so hard that eventually it turned that cream into butter and crawled out. The point of the story is that if you have courage and faith, you can accomplish great things, even a mouse. I know it will not be easy, but it is better to try than not.

Audrey Blaise is from Haiti and is now learning English at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. His teacher is Nancy Gardner.

My Immediate Goal

My immediate goal is to learn English in a competitive way, but it has been difficult for me to do so. Being able to speak in a fluent manner is my desire because I'm sure that if I reach this goal, I will find a better job and, in the future, become independent so that I can have my own fashion business.

In order to succeed in this area, I'm studying at Dave Thomas East, where I can find all the tools I need to learn English in a joyful, simple and easy going way. Right now, I am in the advanced class. I am thankful for my teacher who gives me the confidence and strength to get rid of my fear when it's time to express myself in this language.

I don't spend all my time at school, so in my leisure time I read good books about self-improvement and use a dictionary which gives me a hand in those moments when I don't know a word. At the present, I am reading an

interesting book, *The Law of Attraction*, by Ester and Jerry Hicks.

Furthermore, I train my ear by listening to American television news because the pronunciation is very clear. Besides this, I find out the latest news about this country and around the world. I also talk more with American people to facilitate my fluency in speaking and understanding their idioms. I learn how to say what I want to say in different ways in order to distinguish Americans who express themselves differently according to their origin.

Sometimes, I also try to get involved in various daily interactions with the people in different fields, such as going to the mechanic or visiting a hospital. By doing this, I enrich my vocabulary and learn different jargon.

If I acquire English as a second language and learn about the opportunities that the United States can offer me, I will be able to transform my dreams into my present reality.

Alexandra Gomez studies ESOL at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach in Broward County. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

Striving For Success

In Haiti, when I was young, my goal was to graduate from high school. But that was not the case. Now, I live in America, I should be able to do it. When I first got here, I did not know what I was supposed to do. It was a difficult time for me. I had to work two jobs and still made very little money. This was not right. After one year I went to school to learn English. I need to better my English. I need to get my high school diploma. I know I am capable of doing this. Education is the key. So, this is what I am doing now. Besides work, I make time to go to school. It takes a lot of discipline, motivation, and hard work. I must be patient and do what I need to do. Eventually, I will get there. My ambition is to be a nurse.

Jean Ernso Louis is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KHSW site, in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Plans for My Future

I have many various plans for my future, but I want to talk about the serious ones.

The very first thing I want to do is finish my GED class. Then I want to take the GED test and ace it 100%. My parents will be so proud of me and what I have accomplished for myself.

After completing my high school education, I will be joining the military, most likely the Navy or the Coast Guard. Either way, I will be involved in something that is important to me so that I can stay out of trouble. I figure the military is the best thing for me to do because I won't ever need to worry again about having a good job.

Last but not least, I want to get married to someone that I really, truly love. I hope to have a beautiful family and give my children everything they want.

Brandon Stott is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

In Pursuit of My Destiny

My name is Serdar. I am from Moru Turlmenistan. When I was a young boy I saw myself as professional boxer. In fact my father and my younger brother are boxers, too. I started boxing when I was nine years old. At the age of fifteen, I became a champion in boxing. Then I got injured. My dream shattered into pieces. Now, I see myself involved in other areas in the future. I am very interested in foreign policy because my major is in international relations. I also like to be multi-lingual. I can speak Russian, Turkmen, Turkish, and Kyrgyz. I am learning to speak English fluently, now. I want to be a businessman, too. Ideally, I would like to be an active multi-task international business executive. I want to have homes in both here and Russia. I enjoy travelling. I am open to anything to reach my destiny.

Serdar Mammetnazarov is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson

My Goals

When I came to the United States from Haiti, I tried to attend high school, but I was already twenty years old so I started looking for a job. I worked as a housekeeper, and in 1999, I moved from Orlando, Florida, to Fort Myers, Florida.

In 2000, I decided to go to school to become a nursing assistant. I currently work in that field. I would like to have my GED to continue my education and become a nurse. After that I might take a Bible course because I want to get to know God better. How great my God is! I know that I will benefit from my faith in Him when I let other people know the love of God. I feel that I can do that through nursing.

After my GED classes, I would like to continue my education at High Tech North or Edison State College. I want to go where ever it is easier for me to learn and accomplish my dreams.

Monique Debe is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My Future Goals

My goal is to get my GED so I can join Sunset Beauty School and get my barber's license. After I receive my license, I would like to move to New York and open my own barbershop/salon. I want to establish myself by renting an apartment in downtown New York because the lights are so bright and colorful. If things go as planned, I will be successful with the help of my family and friends. Even though it is challenging to have success in a crowded area with so many barbers to compete with, I am confident that my work will be elite among others.

I plan on getting married soon, and we want to travel and explore the world. After we have enjoyed traveling and having fun, I want to settle down and start a family with my wife. I want to be able to provide for my kids. I know that my spouse is interested in dancing so I will do my best to

My Goals and Ambitions

support her in her future plans. Maybe we can start a dancing school or just teach kids the basics about dancing.

I personally like basketball. I've been playing the sport since I was a young kid. I'm pretty good at it. I've always wanted to be a gym teacher at a middle school because I like sports. Being a gym teacher is my backup plan if being a barber does not work out.

Ricardo Orengo is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker, in Fort Myers.

My Goals

I have three goals. I want to be the best mother to my child, get a tremendous career, and to be an outstanding role model.

First, I want to be the best mother I can be because I want my child to be successful. Teaching is one of the most important ways to help my child learn to make better decisions in life. Time spent with my child means the world to me.

Second, having a tremendous career is what I need to provide for my family. I want to be a hard worker in all that I do in my career. I am always striving to be successful.

Third, I would like to be a role model. Showing others how to do the right things and how to make their lives better is always awesome. You never know how you can help someone change their life by being a great role model.

In conclusion, my goals are to be the best mother to my child, have a tremendous career, and to be a role model.

Loreal Walls is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

I Know I Can Become Successful

I have many goals and ambitions to improve the quality and well being of my life. Until now, I never wanted it. I want to be a productive member of society, role model for my daughter, as well as start schooling to have a successful career.

In the past I've never been a productive citizen to society. I want to show myself as well as others that I can do it. How I can start is getting involved in the community by volunteering at the local shelter. I can also go to church on Sundays and get myself involved with positive people.

How I can start being a good role model for my daughter is to help her with her schooling. Do more mother and daughter activities. Get more involved in her life because I haven't been there for her much in the past. Letting her know that I'm here for her and not leaving will help her trust me a lot more.

To start a career I understand I need the right schooling for what profession I want to take up. I can go to a community college and apply for grants and student loans.

If I put forth the effort, I know I can become a successful member to the society. Most importantly is to build that bond back with my daughter first. Then get actively involved in the community, and go to school. Not if, but when I do accomplish these goals, I will set bigger goals to achieve.

Stephanie Greer is an ABE student in Catherine Toole's class at Gadsden Correction Facility in Quincy.

Getting Goals

One day our teacher asked us something. “What are your goals and dreams?” And then, only a few of us raised our hands and talked about it with simple words or just a short paragraph.

In fact, she was trying to get our comments or stories, because she knows how important it is to at least have a plan.

Well, that made me think about it and then I wondered about one fact, and it was that before we do anything, even something simple like taking one step to go anywhere, our first action is a THOUGHT.

The theme is that you have to have a plan for your future and your life.

How can you believe that you will reach an important goal, if you are not following your plan, even with the most simplest of things?

Sometimes we can't reach our goals, because we are not doing things the right way and never think deeply about our decisions. There are many important things in our life that we must plan for. If you don't set goals and plan for the future you will continue at the same place where you began.

Somebody said something one day “How do you expect to see different results, if you are always doing the same things?”

Well, every time you want to do anything, first think about it. That's what I did. That's what I'm constantly doing. That's the way.

Jose Ramos is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. His teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Favorite Place

Puerto Rico

My favorite place is the U. S. territory in which I was born, Puerto Rico. There are many reasons why I like this place, but there are three main reasons why it is my favorite place. The reasons are the food, sightseeing, and being with my family that I have there.

First, Puerto Rico is my favorite place because of the food. The food is delicious, especially when made by the hands of my grandmother. The main ingredients of Puerto Rican food are rice, gandules peas, and chicken or pork. My opinion is there is no other place that has better food than Puerto Rico.

Secondly, I love traveling the island of Puerto Rico. There are beautiful beaches, waterfalls, and many other places in the area where you can have bundles of fun. Lago Caonillas in Utuado is an amazing, huge, man-made lake that is used for fishing, swimming, and canoeing.

Thirdly, I like seeing the substantial Rivera family in Puerto Rico. My grandmother had twenty-eight children. I have approximately a hundred cousins. When I am with my large family we have a marvelous time.

In conclusion, Puerto Rico is my favorite place. I would go anytime. It is my favorite place because of the food, sightseeing, and because I get to spend time with my family.

Maria Segura is a student in Anna Franta's class at Dunbar Community School, Fort Myers.

The Alhambra

My favorite place in the world to visit is The Alhambra, a palace located in the city of Granada, Andalucía, Spain. This is a majestic place where the Moors and the Christians once lived together. Moorish poets described it as “a pearl set in emeralds.” The Alhambra is a place where artists and intellectuals took refuge during the Reconquista when Spanish Christians won victories over Andalusia. In addition, The Alhambra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, an inspiration for many songs and stories.

My trip with my husband began in Madrid which is in central Spain. We headed south to Toledo, majestically located on a granite hill, to visit the Santa Maria La Blanca Synagogue, one of the oldest synagogue buildings in Europe. Next, we traveled south through the rugged landscapes of Don Quixote’s La Mancha with its characteristic white windmills; we continued to the Andalucía city of Cordoba. Cordoba, situated in the fertile valley of the River Guadalquivir, has an extensive group of architectural monuments built by the Romans, the Moors, and early Christians. Then we traveled on through Andalucía, where the olive groves seemed endless on our way to Moorish hilltop in Granada. Granada had the most spectacular view of the surrounding Sierra Nevada Mountains and the towering hilltops covered with snow.

When you visit to the famed Alhambra Palace, you enter an Arabian Night’s dream! There was water running in a fountain, a fantasy of “lace in stone.” Moreover, the palace was surrounded by arabesque gardens and many fountains. The sound of running water from several fountains and cascades made you feel like you were in a “paradise on earth.”

In the interior is the Park Alameda de la Alhambra, which is overgrown with wildflowers and grass in the spring. You can find columns and chambers with the interiors decorated with arabesques and calligraphy. The arabesques of the interior are ascribed to, among other Sultans: Yusuf I, Mohammed V, and Ismail I, Sultan of

Granada. Additionally, there is a Byzantine influence in the architecture, creating a new style that was further developed during the Nasrid Dynasty.

We enjoyed the Alhambra's superb views of the Old Quarter with its stone-covered, narrow streets. There were lots of balconies and terraces filled with gorgeous flowering plants. How could I forget the Sacromonte, a mountain occupied by Gypsy cave dwellers?

Pages and pages could be written about this place, but if you visit Spain, you should go to The Alhambra. My husband and I highly recommend it!

LourdesFernandez is a motivated and diligent student with TLC Online at The English Center.

Summer

Once a year when summer rolls in and the weather changes, everyone looks forward to enjoying the beauty of the season. The season that I enjoy most is the summer because of the feeling I get being out side. I like the activities and the excitement of the upcoming holidays.

By the time summer gets here it is pure excitement. The streets of New York get busier than usual. Everybody comes outside to play, literally, from adults to little kids. You can hear the water shooting out really loud across the street from the fire hydrant. The best part is looking around and seeing families come together and spending time together.

The ice cream trucks' little song goes off almost every 10 seconds. All you see is little kids running behind it screaming "Ice cream! Ice cream!" Also, the young teens are hanging outside, just chilling or washing cars, with their music blasting. Once you hear all the commotions going on, you definitely know its summer time!

In the hot summers of New York, we have lots of holidays, well not holidays - but carnivals, for me they are like holidays. The carnivals are in the middle of the streets and people from the churches come together to build floats and people from different choirs come together to sing

songs. It is really a nice experience for the community. It gets our minds off the hot sun.

To sum it all up, I enjoy all of the activities we get to do, for example, getting wet with the fire hydrant, going to the New York water parks, which I have to say are the best. I think it is sort of a tradition to go every weekend to the beach and just relax and soak up the sun. So now you tell me, what is your favorite season of the year and why do you enjoy it so much?

Stephanie Ramos is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

The Beauty of Ecuador

This is the place where I was born: Ecuador. Heartbroken, I had to leave my home many years ago. I wish it had never happened, but someday I will return to regain the opportunity to enjoy its beauty. There are myriad things to see and relish.

When I visit, I usually try to drive to different places like the mountainous region where I can view the towering mountains, with the beautiful waterfalls flowing down the rocks, and the narrow roads lined by green landscape with its rich scent of eucalyptus. As I approach the volcanoes, I see their peaks covered with white snow. As I continue my trip, my eyes catch the magnificent scenery of sparkling lakes, the patchwork-covered hills, and precious colonial churches. Then as I cross the bridges, I spot the clear water current below flowing by. The diners along the road are so inviting that I pull over to savor some of Ecuador's most typical dishes.

While I continue with my journey, I can't help but see the communities that live in the highlands and think of their purity and simplicity. They maintain their indigenous culture as manifested in their clothing, language (Qechua) and festivities. The people are hardworking and artistic. Closely knit families work together, and then sell their craft such as tapestry, rugs and artwork at the Indian market fair. They live a simple life not made complicated by the

Internet, iPod, TV, and iPhone, which probably explains their close-knit families. Their family solidarity is a lesson urban people can learn from.

Ecuador is an irreplaceable place because it gives me a special unique feeling when I'm there. Its natural beauty is so inviting. It makes me feel safe and comfortable. It is so welcoming. It brings back nostalgic memories, those very special moments of my childhood where I had great experiences. It allows me the opportunity to experience the beauty of nature and appreciate the lessons that can be learned from its indigenous people.

Anonymous

The Land of the Loving Sunshine

The bright sun shines every day, warming its citizens. The beautiful sunshine illuminates every corner of the city. For this reason, Maracaibo has earned the name, "Land of the Loving Sunshine". Maracaibo's scenery is hot every day, and its people are always in a rush, trying to do everything as fast as they possibly can. One might think this hot weather adversely affects the mood of the "maracuchos" (people who live in Maracaibo). On the contrary, they have a magnificent sense of humor...they laugh as much as they can and as much as their lungs allow.

One of the places that I used to visit is La Vereda del Lago, translated in English as the "Sidewalk of the Lake". For me, it is the best park on earth. My loved ones and I used to go to this park. It brings me a lot of sweet memories. If I close my eyes, I can bring to my mind heavenly melodies from the cheerful birds perched on top of the robust trees, restless squirrels running around the bushes, and colorful butterflies taking turns flying over my head.

The view is marvelous. I can see the sun rise in a blue-purple-orange sky, and the reflection of the sunshine over the lake, over the earth. I can feel the breeze and hear the sounds of the waves. At that moment, everything turns

clear... everything turns so alive, so colorful, and I become speechless!

Even though I am away, Maracaibo is at the back of my mind, and my people at the center of my heart. As its climate is similar to that of my city, and the Venezuelans flock to this state, Florida is like home to me. However, these are not enough reasons for me not to long for my first home, Maracaibo. No other place can make my heart beat so strongly and make me cry and laugh at the same time as Maracaibo does. No other city can replace those beautiful sights, the melodious sounds, and the human touch that I find in Maracaibo.

Nathalye Leung is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

The Splendor of Margarita

There are a lot of places around the world that anyone could claim to be their favorite place, but for me it is the sea, the beach, the sun and the friendly people you can find in Margarita.

An island located in the Caribbean Sea, Margarita is a city in Venezuela. It can be reached by plane, cruise, or boat. An exotic and beautiful place, it is home to almost everything, from wild life , mountains, beaches, and shopping malls in the day to casinos, dog races, and night clubs, with an exciting night life. Located above sea level, the climate is pleasant all year round.

The scenery provides a beautiful setting for a leisurely walk. The sea is as blue as the sky. In the afternoon, nature lovers like me sit in the sand and watch the sun seemingly going down onto the ocean. From a short distance, boats floating on the shallow water on the beach provide an amazing sight. I still remember hearing the deafening sound of the waves and the warm and salty smell of the wind gently touching my cheeks.

This place makes me feel like heaven, plenty of positive energy, as if the clock stops clicking, and everything

reminds me of all summer vacations I used to spend at my grandmother's home. A house made of wood and mud walls, with dry palm leaves on top of the roof, it is walking distance from the beach. I vividly recall those times when I joined friends and family in taking off our shoes so we could run on the wet sand and feel the water pushing and pulling at the beach.

In the afternoon, the beach is quiet and still. Crabs crawl on the white sand, and as they look so inviting, they can't escape our salivating mouth. As our palates are enjoying these poor creatures, my father reminds us to always respect nature.

Nowadays, I still remember his advice.

These days have gone by, but those memories usually come to mind when I visit a beach, whatever part of this wide world it is located. One can say that all islands are the same, but for me, Margarita is the One.

Carolina Acevedo is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

My Favorite Place

There are so many beautiful places in this world that you never can see, but you can always choose a few of them to visit. I took my trip to France and this country didn't leave me indifferent. France is the largest country in western Europe. Geographically one of the most diverse and certainly among the most beautiful. This is the country of Alexandre Duma, Victor Hugo, Napoleon, the Great French Revolution, Catherine Medici, Joan of Arc, Miadame Popadur, Charles de Col, Chanel, and Dior.

When you talk about France, your first thought is about Paris – the elegant capital of this historical Country. It would take months to explore all of Paris. The most important sights are the Louvre Museum, Tuileris Garden, and the Cathedral notre-dame. The oldest parts of Paris are the Arch of Triumph and of course the Eiffel Tower, which French people called with a smile “our old gray lady”. From

the height of 324 m at the top of the Eiffel Tower, you can see Paris from horizon to horizon.

Many visitors take water taxis on the Seine to view the city and enjoy the river. More than 20 bridges criss-cross the Seine. In the evenings, the banks of the river are full of people who are strolling, sitting, and listening to the music, dancing, and singing. Dusk is the beginning of the night life in the city. It is time to dance the can-can in the Moulin Rouge famous cabaret. But if you went to France and only visited Paris you would only see a very small part of this country.

France also has villages surrounded by vineyards, wineries, and fields. I saw beautiful places on forested hills, thousand year old churches, and forts. Most famous of them is Mont Sant Michel which is surrounded by the sea at high tide. The tide comes in at up to 60 miles per hour. There are so many parts of France I haven't seen yet. I think my next visit will be the French Riviera on the South of France. For me it is the country I have always wanted to go back to. This country exhilarates you, leaves you speechless with wonder, but it won't leave you cold.

Svetlana Grassel is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

The Leon County Library

My favorite place is the library. It has 3 floors, stairs and an elevator. There are a lot of windows.

There are many people in the library – especially on the first and second floors. People use computers, read books and newspapers.

I try to talk English, get books, read books. I have a library card. Sometimes I check out books and CDs.

My friend and my husband give me a ride three days a week. Two days reading and doing grammar with Teacher Catherine, the other day reading and writing, and using the computer with Teacher Karen.

There is a library in Haiti, but it is only for university students. I did not go there. In Tallahassee it is different at the library. If you need help – maybe you need a book – they will help you.

I like the library. It is my favorite place.

Antonine Joseph is a student in the LVLC ESOL program.

My Country

If I have to choose my favorite place in the world, I think about my country (Thailand) because we have a good King. He works very hard to help Thai people to survive and goes to different places in the country to help his people. He started to be the King when he was very young. He has been the King of Thailand for over 65 years.

Thailand has many beautiful places and many good things. We have beautiful seas, waterfalls and mountains.

We have plenty of food to live on and people call my country “The Land of Smiles”. Thai people are very friendly.

In Thailand we have 4 regions: north, northeast, central, and south. North, northeast, and central have 3 seasons. They are rainy, summer, and winter seasons. The south of Thailand has only 2 seasons, rainy and summer.

We have different language dialects in each region and we have beautiful traditions, culture, and a long history. We are proud of our independence as one country that has never been a colony.

Siwattra Banzer and Morn Schou are students in Wendy Chapman's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker; in Cape Coral.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Soroa, it is located in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. Its nature is impressive. It has a rich flora with many species of trees, orchids, shrubs, and ferns. Its fauna include one of the smallest frogs in the world, and more than seventy species of birds, whose songs can be heard at dawn.

Soroa has been dubbed “The Rainbow of Cuba” because when it rains, beautiful rainbows reflect themselves over the rivers and waterfalls. That scenery is marvelous.

Onlookers enthusiastically enjoy admiring flowers in the Orchid Garden, which is the world’s second largest, with more than seven hundred species. You can relax watching the beautiful colors of those flowers and learn about exotic species.

If you want to improve your health, Soroa is a good place because the environment is free of pollution and there are natural baths. The most famous of them is called “Love Pool”. You can take baths and swim in the crystal clear water rivers too.

In the mountainous area of Soroa, you will find stunning little mountains called “mogotes”, because of their round tops; those are typical of Sierra del Rosario, to which Soroa belongs, that is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

At the highest hill of Soroa there is a castle called “Castle Clouds”, which was built by Don Pedro, Andalusian from Spain. At the entrance of the castle there is an original castle table. The table was made in 1842 and it is considered a piece of art because in spite of the fact it was made from four parts of ebony wood, it looks like it was made from one piece.

I love Soroa because in the same place, you can enjoy the wonders of nature, unique sceneries, exotic fauna and flora, pieces of arts, practice sports, relax your mind, improve your health, and get an unforgettable experience.

Ileana Marquez Perez is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Sea Journey

One of my favorite places to go during the summer is Sea World in Orlando, Florida.

There is so much to do and see. My kids love the Stingray Encounter where you can feed and even touch a stingray. A lot of people call them the “Birds of the Ocean” because of the way they appear to fly through the water and flap their wings. You would think that they would be slimy but, “No” it’s more like touching wet velvet.

Around the corner is Happy Harbor where you can climb through a maze of rope nets in a three story fort complete with slides and tunnels. You can take command of a pirate ship with water powered cannons and let your imagination carry you across the sea.

Just up the way you will find Pets Ahoy where you can see a whole show performed almost solely by animals; with very little human interaction.

Across the way is Shamu Rocks!, a place where good music meets epic tricks performed by over 20 whales! You will see back flips, front flips, high jumps and if you get too close you’ll probably be leaving soaking wet.

Then we come to Kraken, a heart pounding thrill ride complete with a 119-foot-tall vertical loop, a 101-foot-diving loop and a zero gravity roll. It’s all built over a waterway called Serpent’s Lagoon. There is also a place under the attraction where you can view live eels.

Last, but certainly not least, there is the adult stuff with over 22 shops including, Gulf Breeze Traders, Friends of the Wild, Allora’s Treasure Trove and the Waterfront Market Place. There you can find great Shamu and Sea World souvenirs as well as Florida inspired apparel and accessories to help you remember your day. You are sure to find fun around every corner.

Well, that about wraps it up. Oh, one more thing Ahh, I will tell you when I get back. I'm off to see the tiger sharks.

Matthew Deskins is a student in the Pre-GED literacy program in Tavares, Fl. His teacher is Lynne Tyler. His goal is to become better educated for the prosperity of his family.

Mexico

My favorite place is Mexico. There are 3 reasons I like Mexico. I like the food, the market, and visiting my family.

The first reason I like Mexico is the excellent food. Mole chicken is my favorite Mexican food. Mole is sweet gravy made with chocolate and flour. You eat it with Mexican rice that has lots of seasoning and vegetables: carrots, peas, corn, green beans, and onions. I love mangoes because they are sweet. Mangoes are the size of oranges, so I cut the mangoes into slices. They look like peaches because they are same color and the same texture.

The second reason I like Mexico is the market. The market is outdoors. You can buy fruit and vegetables, and also you can get souvenirs like sombreros and maracas. Sombreros have large brims and colorful designs. Maracas are rattles made from gourds. You can shake them to make music.

The third reason I like Mexico is visiting my family. My Aunt Clara has a store, and she sells wedding dresses. My grandfather, I call him Abuelo, is very old. I have aunts and cousins who cook delicious food.

In conclusion, my favorite place is Mexico because of the food, the market, and visiting my family.

Manuel Pao is 20 years old. He is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Anna Franta.

School Is My Favorite Place

There is no way I would stop learning. School is my first friend and it will also be my last. For me, going to school is where I can get freedom, love, compassion, and meeting different kinds of people. It is like when you are thirsty you need water. I am happy when somebody tells me, "Let's go to school." I have been doing this since I was young. I am not tired yet because school is my favorite place. I have to thank my dear Lord, my mother, my teachers who push me and never give up on me. They mould me into a person who can understand different things and speak almost four languages. They also make me understand that one doesn't need a big muscle to have power but one needs education. Education is something that no one can take away from me. The best education is received when you go to school. This is my opinion.

Jean Lourdy Brevil is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Beach

I am from Morocco. It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean in the east and the Mediterranean Sea in the north. In my country, the beach is an important part of life because we spend all our summer time there even if we do not swim. Also, in winter we just take a walk on the beach. Well, now I am here in Key West, it is not bad because the weather is nice and I feel comfortable. Though this island is surrounded by water there is not much sand on the beach. The best beach here is at Fort Zachary.

Here or there, the beach is still my favorite place because it does not look the same every day. I mean there are different people at the beach and the water never looks the same. It is fun to see people doing various activities such as playing volleyball, water sports, boating, surfing, body boarding and parasailing. Of course, the natural sport is swimming.

Another reason why I like the beach is because it relaxes me. If I am tired, I can take a nap. I don't have to worry

whether people are watching me. I can just close my eyes and hear the sound of water, waves, and people walking. It is an interesting sound when you put your ears close to the ground. It is a good feeling, too. You have to experience it yourself to understand what I mean.

Rachid Lansari is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Beach, The Beauty of Nature

One of the beauties of nature is the beach. If you wonder about its creation, it is impossible to imagine. If you are going to the beach, please take me with you. I love the beach. I could spend many days there. I enjoy the majestic scenery close up and from a distance. It is a funny feeling when stepping into the sand. I feel like I am sinking into the ground. I love the sound of the water when the wind blows. The presence of the flying birds, the rustling waves, the moving sailboats, and the sight of various people on the beach make me feel very relaxed. It looks like everybody is having fun. There is no worry. Above all, I will enjoy more if I am on the beach with a companion, someone I can share the beauty of nature. When I was small, I was taught to love nature. I carry this with me until today.

Antonia Lopez Cala is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Free As a Bird

I like the beach because it is there that my grandson and I enjoy our moments together. We like walking on the soft, wet sand. As we walk on the beach, we will pick up all kinds of shells. Sometimes, we pick up some sponges, too. Other times, we would step into somebody's sand castles on purpose, especially my grandson. He is a little mischievous. Apart from enjoying the beach with my grandson, I personally like the beach because I love watching people having a great time there: the children trying to build sand castles, the adults soaking the sun, the boys watching the girls, the girls lying on the sand, the boats sailing on the water, and the birds flying all above us. At the beach, no one

stops you from making so much noise. You can feel free like the birds. It is even a better feeling when the wind blows, you can feel the cool breeze and you won't feel the heat from the sun. And when you get home, you will find out that you look like a red lobster.

Ramiro Saenz is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Beautiful Southern California

I was nine years old when my family escaped from Cuba on a 21' boat to Florida. My father's best friend, Mr. Zusula, sent airplane tickets for my parents, my brother, and me to go to Los Angeles, California, where I lived for 32 years.

At first, school was very difficult because the classes were in English and I only spoke Spanish. I enjoyed making new friends and going to the movies. Most weekends we had parties at our houses. We were very close friends and we loved to sing songs and dance in the basement. At that time, all we had to eat at our parties were potato chips and sodas.

During our summer vacations, my family went camping in the mountains at Point McGoo in Malibu. We slept outside in tents. We walked on a path under a bridge to swim at the beach. The waves were big and the water was cool, no matter what how hot the weather was then.

When I was 21 years old, my friends and I went to Las Vegas after work. My friends would sleep while I was driving and then we would change drivers and I would sleep. We visited wonderful places. The Grand Canyon is beautiful with all the different colors and the mountains. We also visited Yosemite National Park and Yellowstone National Park. There are no words to describe the beauty, the colors and the rivers of the national parks. They are out of this world.

I was married for six years and had two daughters. My husband and I divorced and I became a single parent. I took my daughters to daycare while I worked. My favorite job

was at the Bank of California and I worked there for ten years. I started on the third shift and learned a lot, but after three years, I got tired of working from midnight to seven o'clock in the morning. I waited for a position to open and transferred to daytime and the lock box department. I made deposits for big companies and customers and then called them about their deposits.

I miss the four seasons. I loved the spring because you can see all the plants bloom. The summers were mostly spent at the beach sunbathing and enjoying the nature. In fall, you see all the leaves changing colors, some green, some red, and some yellow. Winters were chilly. The snow on top of the mountains was white and very pretty. With all the nature, you feel like you are in heaven. Southern California has it all.

Gisela Villar works at Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation and has learned a lot in the past two years from the Project LEAD program. Her tutor is Barbara Papademetriou.

Alabama

My favorite place is Alabama. There are three reasons Alabama is my favorite place. It is my favorite place because it's an excellent place to raise children, it has great weather, and it has a low crime rate.

First, Alabama is a great place to raise children. It has caring neighbors who will watch your home when someone is not there. It's quiet with no loud music, no arguing, and no rowdiness.

Second, Alabama is my favorite place because of the great weather. It is not too cold for me to go outside. It doesn't rain much, so I can go out and hang out clothes on the clothesline to dry in the sun.

Third, I like Alabama because of the ubiquitous low crime rates. The crime rates are low because there are few shootings and homicides and not many robberies.

In conclusion, Alabama is my favorite place. It's my favorite place because it's an excellent place to raise children, the weather is great, and the rate of crime is low.

Marilyn Brooks is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Haiti

One of my favorite places is Cap Haitien. I was born and grew up on the north side of Haiti. There are four reasons why I like Haiti: the mountains, weather, beaches, and the people.

The first reason I like Haiti is the mountains. One of the highest mountains in Haiti is Pic Macaya. It's located on the south side. People come from everywhere to admire the incredible form. You can walk almost seven hours to reach the mountain's peak. Pic Macaya is one of the most interesting mountains in Haiti. It's smoking all the time. It's amazing to see.

The second reason I like Haiti is the weather. Haiti is a tropical country. It's hot every day. You can wear very light clothing and sandals all the time. You can walk out with no shirt on. You don't have to carry a heavy jacket to go to work or to go to school. Everywhere there are trees. People can hang out to get some gorgeous air.

The third reason I like Haiti is the beaches. The beaches are so fantastic. One of my favorite beaches is Labadie. It is one of the most sophisticated beaches on the north side. People gather everywhere to enjoy themselves. You can walk for miles without wearing sandals, and the sea is colorful like a rainbow. It's not really deep, so you can swim for miles before reaching the deep sea. It's fun when you go swimming at Labadie.

Finally, the fourth reason I like Haiti is the people. Haitian people are supportive, loving, and also very friendly. For example, when they cook out, everybody gets together as a family to eat. This is part of our tradition. They also like going to movies, soccer, tennis, and the park, too.

In conclusion, I like Haiti because of the mountains, weather, beaches, and the people.

Jude Desronvil is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

Perfect Place to Go

When my daughter was young, my favorite place to go was the park. I loved to see my daughter running around playing on the big tree. I also loved to see the sun coming down on the park, so we went under the trees where there is lots of shade. We also loved the smell of fried chicken for our snack on the wooden tables. The park with my daughter was definitely a great place to go.

My daughter and I love to go to Lake Ella. I remember going there when she was little. My wonderful daughter loved to run around and have fun. She loved to feed the ducks. We loved to watch the waterfall in the gazebo. My daughter climbed the big tree. We also walked around the lake.

The sun comes down on the park, so we went under the trees for lots of shade. The breeze felt cool and brisk. The branches moved with the wind and made playing in the park fun.

We loved to bring food and eat lunch at the park. We loved to bring fried chicken and potato salad. It tasted good after running with my daughter. We ate on the wooden picnic tables. This made me feel full after a day of fun.

Going to the park with my daughter is something I enjoyed. As she got older we still go to Lake Ella. Even today when my daughter is sixteen, we still love to go to the park. She is a fun daughter. I have always loved Lake Ella and still go there today.

Kathrine Martin is a student at Adult and Community Education. Her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl. She plans to go into cosmetology at Lively in the fall. She is very creative and loves to do things with her hands.

Happy Dog

I am from La Conave, Haiti. The name of my country means “mountainous earth.” In Haiti, the mountains are very important. First of all, they protect the country from tornadoes, lightning and hurricanes. In addition, a lot of them have beautiful rivers that irrigate the fields around them. My favorite mountain is named Chien Contend, which means “Happy Dog” in English. On the top of this mountain is an antenna that supplies Haiti with electricity, television and radio. The first time I visited this mountain with my fiancé, it was very difficult to get to the top. My fiancé told me that it wasn’t far, but it was. We climbed almost four hours. When I got tired, he would say, “Take your time. We are almost there.” I was suspicious though. I thought we were walking in circles. I was running out of patience, climbing and climbing. We even slid from time to time. When we finally got to the top, it was so amazing to admire the beautiful island of Haiti and to breathe the cool fresh air. If you want to be happy, try visiting Chien Contend, and then you can tell me how you feel.

Marie Frenette Oleus In Pierre was a beloved teacher of young children in Haiti. She now studies Advanced ESOL with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach.

There is No Place Like a School

Everyone has a favorite thing to do or a favorite place to go. A place is an area where everyone goes to do different activities. While some people go to movies or park to relax and to refresh their minds, others go to the library to increase their knowledge. My favorite place is school.

I like going to different places and doing different things but school is my favorite place. People say that you can learn anywhere you are but school is the best place to learn and to get knowledge. School is an institution that provides the best education necessary for a brighter future. Not only you can learn at school, you can also meet different people from all over the world and learn new things from them.

In conclusion, personally, there is no better place to prepare for a better future than school. That's the reason why school is my favorite place and that's where I have the best opportunity to learn and to make new friends.

Vanessa Jean is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is where my heart feels good. I like America. Milton, Florida has been my home for 20 years. The first 7 years were vacation weeks twice a year. I won the lottery for immigration in 1998.

My husband retired in October 1998 and we would have come over forever, but fate was not good. In 1998 my mother-in-law passed away. In August a good friend of ours passed away. In October my uncle, the last person of my mother's family, passed away, and in November my husband.

In May I went to the American embassy in Frankfurt. I got the papers to permanently live here.

Milton is a nice place to live. The first time I wanted a special dress, shoes, etc. we went to Pensacola. Then the Garcon Point Bridge was built. Walmart Super Center, Target, Publix, and TJ Maxx came to Milton. Today I buy my stuff in Milton.

I like the beach a lot. Milton has interesting places and old traditions: a lumber mill and cotton-weaving mill. The treasures are hidden in different places: Bear Lake in Munson, Blackwater River, Coldwater River canoeing, farmland in the north, the beach in the south. I have all the things I like.

I travel to Germany, but my hometown is Milton.

Ute Feuerbach is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Kathryn Coxwell.

Water Sports Lake

Where is my favorite place to go? My favorite place to go is called Water Sports Lake. Water Sports Lake is an amazing, safe, family-oriented place that welcomes all ages and animals. My dog, Buddy, and I both concur that Water Sports Lake is an ideal place for fun in the Florida sun. Water Sports Lake can also be cost efficient and takes little preparation. Water Sports Lake also offers a copious amount of activities for the entire family.

First, my dog, Buddy, and I both concur that Water Sports Lake is an ideal place for fun in the Florida sun. My dog, Buddy, enjoys Water Sports Lake so much because there are other dogs for Buddy to run aimlessly around with and go swimming with when he starts to overheat. Buddy and I also enjoy going for rides on the wave runner. Although he is a little unstable on it, he can maintain slow speeds. Our favorite place at Water Sports Lake is the massive open field where Buddy can exert his energy and flaunt his intrepid attitude.

Second, Water Sports Lake can also be cost efficient and takes little preparation. It can be cost efficient because there is no entrance fee, food is cheap, and parking is only one dollar. Things I pack when I go to Water Sports Lake may be: gas for the wave runner, a cooler for food and drinks, towels, dog food, and life jackets for both my dog and me.

Third, Water Sports Lake offers a copious amount of activities for the entire family. They offer trails to go hiking, rope swings, water slides, water games, award winning contests, and much more. Water Sports Lake has four blocked off sections that are all used for different recreational purposes. They have man-made beaches to relax on. They also have a rental shack where you can rent a variety of different water crafts such as: wave runners, water tricycles, water tubes, knee boards, and wake boards.

In conclusion, Water Sports Lake is my favorite place because my dog, Buddy, and I both think it's an ideal place for fun in the Florida sun. Water Sports Lake is cost

efficient and takes little preparation. Water Sports Lake also offers a copious amount of activities for the entire family. Those three reasons make Water Sports Lake my favorite place!

Jonathan Gagliardi was born in Fort Myers, Florida. He is attending Dunbar Community School to receive his G.E.D. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

Time on My Hands

After 25 years of active military service, I retired from the U. S. Navy. I spent 18 of those years on ships running all over the world and having a marvelous time. I retired in Saint Petersburg, Florida and went into the construction business.

I started out working for several construction companies, building bridges in the Saint Petersburg area. I guess you could say I helped to build most of the large bridges in this area: the Sunshine Skyway, the Gandy, the Howard Franklin, the Seminole and Bay bridge. I performed various tasks while working on the bridges. I helped with the pile driving, setting the footers, framing and pouring caps and columns. Last of all, we would set the girders and watch the bridge come together. I enjoyed working on all the bridges and learned a lot of great know-how about the construction business.

When the bridge building jobs came to an end, I worked for several other construction companies in the commercial building business. I kept on improving my personal skills and, after several years, I started a small handyman business. I was doing well for myself, but when the economy went bad, I had a lot of free time on my hands.

So I decided to go back to school to improve my reading and writing skills. I have always been pretty good at figuring out things, rather than reading the instructions, I

have a need to improve my vocabulary and comprehension skills. Also, I need to work on spelling and punctuation.

Since enrolling in Tomlinson Adult Learning Center, I have had the privilege of working with some of the most outstanding teachers and tutors in Pinellas County. I have worked on a vast amount of material, improving on my reading and writing skills in many ways. Things I have worked on are the pronunciation of words – using the dictionary pronunciation key to pronounce words using long and short vowels. I also learned the use of suffixes and the rules governing them, such as adding ‘-ing’, ‘-ed’ and the many suffixes and prefixes you can add to words. We also study about punctuation marks and how to place them in sentences.

I have only mentioned a small portion of the many skills we are taught in class. I could go on and talk about the many other skills we have been learning. In order to encourage anyone having problems with reading and writing deficiencies, I urge you to join up and see for yourself what a joy it is to learn in a fellowship type of environment with teachers and tutors. I have enjoyed and truly benefited from my journey.

Spureal Williams, Jr. is a student in Hugh Tulloch’s class at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg.

English – It Isn’t Difficult After All

My name is Roberto. I am twenty five years old. In my opinion, learning a new language is not easy. My experience with adult education began a couple years ago. I went to an English class at a community college. On my first day in class I was nervous and shy. I met a lot of students from different countries and the teacher was nice and strict. She always said, “Only English in my class.” Sometimes when she asked me simple questions, I answered her in Spanish. She looked at me and said “No Spanish, please.” Everybody in that class was friendly. We always helped each other, spoke to one other although sometimes we didn’t understand. But it was fun because we laughed after that.

My teacher always gave us advice. There was advice that I really took seriously from her and I'm still doing it until this very day. She said, "Watch T.V. in English and with subtitles because that will help you to read, watch, hear and even practice." Everything seemed difficult for me, but after a while I learned and knew that I could speak some English. I try to move on to learn grammar, spelling, writing, and reading. Now, when I try to speak English, I speak with confidence.

Today, I'm studying English in Ms. Josephson's class. She is really nice, too. I think it will be more fun here. I am certain that I would learn a lot in her class.

Roberto Gabriel is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center , KWHs site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Who Says It Is Easy?

My name is Gerald. I was born in Haiti. I have been in United States since October 2009. I am happy to be in America. Today I want to share with you my experience in Adult Education class. At first, I could not speak English. I do not understand what someone said either. Can you imagine being in a place that you don't understand anything? Well, I told myself that I needed a fresh start. So, I pushed myself to go to class. With the help of my teacher, family, and friends, I gradually learned how to speak proper English.

There are many people from all over world in my class. They are just like me. I mean they are here to learn English, as well. Some students have the same difficulty. Others who can speak better help the ones who cannot. I like that. My teacher gives me a lot of motivation. She never gives up on me. She is always pounding my head to stay alert and watch her lips when she talks. She wants me to do it right. Now, I know and understand more. My desire is to acquire the English skill. Then, I want to take the GED test. Finally, I want to go to college. Nothing comes easy. It might look easy but it is not as easy as it looks.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

Gerald Jean is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

To me education is the most important thing. Without education there's no life. You need education to do everything in life.

First, if you need to go look for a job, you have to know how to fill out an application. You need to know how to read. If you have never been in school, how are you going to know how to read a job application?

Second, you need an education in order to help your children. They need help with their homework and with their reading.

Third, a good education gives you a good place in society. You get respect from people in your community.

In conclusion, to me education is the most important thing in life.

Claire Desronvil is a student at Dunbar Community School. She is married and the mother of 4 children. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Ambition

I'm 31 years old and I'm from Mexico. My education is basic but I'm learning English. Education is very important; it is the key to success in life. However, when I was young I didn't think that education was important. But now I'm learning that English is important to me because I want to get my GED diploma and go to college. These are some of my dreams in my life that I want to make a reality.

When I came to the USA it was difficult to understand another language. I like this country because there are many opportunities in education. Here education is public until high school and the government helps to provide loan money for the university. In my country we do not have that opportunity. When I arrived in this country I felt angry at myself for not speaking and understanding English, but now

I like to learn. I work at a restaurant five days a week and I go to school twice a week.

Antonia Padre studies English at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

Learning English as a Second Language:

My First Year in Miami.

Since arriving in Miami 10 months ago, I understood that a very important goal of mine was to learn English in order to accomplish my goal of gaining employment and involving myself fully in the American culture. As a 69 year old Spanish speaking person living in Miami, it has been a challenge to learn a new language. English is very important for every aspect of my everyday life such as finding a good job, being able to read a menu and order a meal at a restaurant, or enjoying a new movie. Therefore, I am committed to attain proficiency in English in order to accomplish my new goals for the future.

As a young person, I learned very quickly and Mathematics, Chemistry and History were easy subjects for me. Due to my advancing age and the novelty of learning a new language, I have discovered that I need to focus more attention in order to be successful. Although it is difficult, at times, to study, I have made learning English a priority. My first step in accomplishing this task was to look for a school with an adult education training department close to my home. After taking the preliminary placement test at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center (MSAEC), I began my studies in the beginner intermediate level in June 2011 and completed the requirements in December of the same year. As a result of my hard work, I was gratified and encouraged to receive an award certificate and a new English dictionary for my first place showing in the class.

Soon after my arrival in Miami, I discovered that in the part of the city where I live, almost everyone speaks Spanish. Although this was comfortable for me in the beginning, I soon realized that it was more difficult to learn

English since I had fewer opportunities to practice what I had learned at school. Speaking Spanish for my everyday needs was convenient but not conducive to accomplishing my goal of learning the language. Since I found it difficult to practice my English outside the school, I followed the advice of my teacher who suggested that I watch instructive documentaries on English channel PBS, read the newspaper and practice my grammar on the computer for at least one hour. In addition, I am able to speak with my daughter's fiancée, a native English language speaker.

In closing, I am very thankful for the opportunity to learn English in MSAEC and appreciate the special dedication of my instructor and all the employees. The supportive and encouraging atmosphere at the school has helped me to learn culturally based social etiquette skills in addition to improving my English language proficiency which is of great assistance to me in acculturating to my new country.

Cecilio Valle is a committed student at Miami Senior Adult, Miami Dade County Public Schools. He is a chemical engineer from Cuba, and attends an ESOL class with Mrs. Carol Brady.

My Experience in Adult Education at Miami Senior Adult

My experience in adult education is very gratifying. I have had the opportunity to learn English, which is a good experience for me. I arrived in the United States with a grand dream for learning English. I know that learning two languages is worth more than one.

Tomorrow success begins today. Life in my country differs greatly from life in the United States I want to understand, speak, read and write English very well. I am living in the United States of America and English is the official language of this country.

The American dream is that I wish for a better life for me and of course for my family too. I try to learn something new every day. Time is precious let's not waste it. If our

aspirations are our possibilities we won't succeed if we don't begin right away. You need to have the courage to be yourself if you learn more you can earn more. Say I can and believe you can. An expert at something was once a beginner who didn't rest until he achieved success.

There is always room at the top to develop a winning attitude. You never know what you can do until you try. Don't lose time because time can never be recovered again. Don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today. You are not finished when you lose you are finished when you quit.

Francisca Cristina Hernandez is an Elcate 1 student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. He currently attends a class with Dr. Millard E. Lightburn.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

I have had extensive experience in adult education school; I could see how I am learning the language of this country. One of my main goals is to have a good job and ensure my future and that of my family, that's the America Dream of every Latino, who comes to this country.

This country has changed our lives because we have achieved our goals, this wouldn't have been possible to achieve in our countries.

This is a country that offers us many opportunities to study, no matter how old we are; it is a democratic country since there is freedom of expression. In my country there is none.

Here there are two political parties, the Democratic and Republican, and hence it is importance to vote, because depending on who wins may help the country get out of economic crisis or not; help the poor and middle class or rich, and there will be more jobs or unemployment.

What I admire most about the United States is that there are possibilities for everyone who wants to become a professional, so help yourself by getting an education and you will be helping this great nation.

Emelina Richardson is an Elcate 1 student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. He currently attends a class with Dr. Millard E. Lightburn.

Living in America

When I came to United States in 2003, I felt really happy and excited to start my new life. The transition wasn't easy. I went through a lot changes. Everything was new and different, the food, the people and most importantly the language.

One of the most difficult things that I had to go through was being so far from my family. I didn't have a sister or my mom to cheer me up when I need it, but that helped me to grow up and learn the meaning of responsibility.

I waited about a year to get my permanent residence. As I was waiting to be processed I had to adjust to the food. It was hard to find the ingredients and products that I used for cooking. Also, what I find really interesting is meeting people from other countries and learning about their cultures.

Once I got my driver license, I enrolled in Dunbar Community School to get my GED. I started at the level 3 ESOL and advanced to level 5. I have met the most wonderful people and professional teachers, teachers who really care about the students. They are dedicated to teaching and learning.

Right now I'm taking the GED classes. I want to get my diploma so I can go to a vocational school. My teachers are helping me to accomplish my goal. The environment at Dunbar Community School is like being at home. They treat me like family and that give me confidence.

Now I know there are no limits I can go as far as I want. Somebody told me, "opportunities are knocking at your door all the time", and you know this is true. Believe in yourself and never give up.

Lizbeth Puebla is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My Adult Education Journey

My experience in adult education has been some journey, to say the least. It has taken me a long time to realize how important my education really is. However, the adventure in between then and now I treasure. Finally, through all my trespasses, I've gotten my priorities straightened out, and I feel I will accomplish my goals with getting my GED.

There's no real reason why I rambled for so long; it just felt like what I needed to do. Perhaps it was laziness, drugs, women, or music. More than likely all of them had an effect on me. Regardless of why, it was still an experience I'm glad I was able to have. I've been able to see and do a lot. I've traveled and seen many places from the most northern part of the Americas to the southernmost. I even made my way to Germany for a bit, and now I find myself back in the southern part of America, still with something missing: my education.

At last, I've gotten my priorities straight. I still enjoy playing guitar, but as far as rambling from town to town, I'm here to stay at least until I graduate. After I accomplish my goal with my GED, I'm sure I'll continue with my travels.

In conclusion, my time and experience in Mrs. Currier's adult education and literacy class has been some journey, but I finally feel ready to buckle down and accomplish my education.

Mike Magazzeni is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

The English Conversation Café

When I first saw the ad for the English Conversation Café at Miramar Library, I thought: this is what I need.

I started taking classes in this Library and after a short time I could see my progress.

My interest in these classes increased so much, I decided to go to Southwest Regional Library for the same purpose.

I found, in both places, wonderful teachers. In Miramar the classes are taught by Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz and at Southwest Regional the teacher is Ann Kearney.

The best part of this story is they are not only my teachers, they are my friends too. What I have learned from them, besides learning English, is humility. No matter how much you know there is always something to learn from other people.

I learned that I can find friendship everywhere if I am open to other people.

They taught me the importance of becoming a volunteer, because they do their job, just for love. Love for their country, love for people, love for themselves.

Thank you so much to the teachers for all they give me and thank you to this country for giving me these classes.

My name is Susana Bigo. I am a student at English Conversation Café at Miramar Library. My teachers are Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz. I am a mother of three wonderful daughters and I have the best partner that you can imagine: my husband.

Learning New Words

I have a hard time understanding some words that I've never seen or heard before, and weren't in my speaking vocabulary.

I just didn't read it or say it; I would put another word in its place that made sense to me so that I could read the paper or a book.

One day, my girlfriend asked me what I was trying to say because it didn't sound right to her. She said, "What was that? That's not how you pronounce it; spell it to me." I started spelling the words –first gregarious, then euthanasia – and she explained to me what they were talking about.

Later on that week, Aly said to me that she found a place that would help me with a lot of the words I was having problems with. She said I should go check out the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center to see what they have there to help me out.

At the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center, the first day I went into the school, we were all introduced to some of the teachers and tutors in the class room.

Mrs. Mary Putnam and Mrs. Vicky Greer are the teachers in my class room; later I met my tutor, Mr. Hugh Tulloch. We all talked about vowel sounds, punctuation and parts of speech which helped me to understand lots of words.

I want to thank all the teachers and tutors for all the help and patience.

Thomas Facyson III is a student in Hugh Tulloch's class at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg.

The Importance of Education

Probably everyone will very much agree with the statement that learning is painful. Our education starts at the age when our heads are full of dreams about other and much better activities than to cram math, languages, geography and other "life important" subjects as we are persuaded by our parents and teachers. Here starts the permanent fight: student vs. teacher. Soon after, as the student realizes that he/she doesn't study for his/her parents or teachers but only for himself/herself, he/she has won! From that exact moment, it will be clearly smooth sailing and the chance that he or she will finish their academic studies successfully increases considerably.

The number of successful students is one side of the coin. The other is their quality. That can be ensured only by experienced and educated teachers.

Every nation adores its educated daughters and sons because only they can guarantee the future development and blossoming of the nation. On the other hand, the same

nation should pay attention to the needs of teachers on all levels, and help them in their everyday tedious work.

As Albert Einstein said, “every human being should be educated since the moment he opens his eyes for the first time till he shuts them for the last”. We should regret every free time spent uselessly and not devoted to our self-education, because education can be considered a never-ending process.

You can get into a difficult financial situation from one day to the other but you’ll always be wealthy because with your knowledge, sooner or later, you will have the necessary power to start again.

Dalibor Nemeč is a student in Gabriela Pesante’s class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

Learning English at the English Center

My experience in adult education and literacy was necessary, painful and exciting. When I arrived in the United States I realized that I was really illiterate although I had a bachelor’s degree from Cuba. I had to learn a new culture, a new language, and how the world was different outside of my native country.

When I went to my daughter’s school’s meeting the first time, I realized the importance of learning English. All the official documents, the, advertisements and everything around me were in English. I had to learn English to be a teacher again. Studying was my priority and my first place to visit was The English Center, the school where even my grandaunt went to study a long time ago.

My first day of class at the English Center was the beginning of my journey. It has been four years of hard work with the help of all my teachers and family. Sometimes I felt the pain of misunderstanding. People couldn’t understand me and I couldn’t understand anyone. I felt that my goal was far, but each day I took one more step. I think I will be at the top of the mountain very soon, but

after that, I will reach the sky, and I will never stop studying.

Learning English has been very exciting. Every new word, new site on the Internet to practice English, new public channel on TV for listening, and every new thing was a discovery. Teaching again has also been a learning process and I have learned a lot from my students. Now I am part of this world because I can understand.

My experience as an adult student has been a mixture of feelings. The necessity of progress, the pain of misunderstanding, and the excitement of learning, pushed me to continue ahead.

Lisset Marichal is forty-two years old and was born in Cuba. She has been living in United States for four years and six months. She has a bachelor's degree in Music Education and almost twenty-two years of experience as a teacher. Her goal is to become certified as a music teacher.

Jorge and English: A Love Story

This is a story about my relationship with English. It has been a relationship of love and heartbreak. We first met and fell in love when I was a teen but now I am an adult and we are still lovers. Like all relationships, ours tends to have ups and downs. What are the secrets that have allowed us to have a long-lasting relationship? The secret has been dedication, discipline, methodology, and love. I have never devoted as much time as I should to learning English's secrets and, as a result, we have had serious troubles and even breakups. When I began our romance I was highly motivated, but after English got tough and complicated, I abandoned the consistency of my effort. One day I broke off my relationship with English. Despite the love we shared, I had to say goodbye. English and I didn't talk for many years. I lived in Mexico and spoke Spanish. When someone asked about English, I just said "I do not speak with English." It was not until 2007 that I re-encountered English. It was casual. One summer night, I attended a Jazz concert on the campus of Miami Dade College when I hear

an old song by Nat King Cole called “L.O.V.E.” and that's when I finally understood what English wanted.

I realized that learning English is just like losing weight. If you make a plan or routine and keep doing it then you will succeed. English introduced me to her four best friends, "L", "C" "R", and "W". With “L” I Listen to the radio in English. With “C” I take English Classes. The other friend, "R", reminds me to Read magazines or newspapers. The last, my friend "W", helps me to Write in a journal every day using the English words I know. For many years I was afraid of English and sometimes hated it. But now it is what I know I like. I hope my relationship with English lasts for a very long time.

Jorge Herrera-Monroy is a student in Susana Marquez-Paz's class at TLC Online at The English Center in Miami.

Challenging, Exciting, and Rewarding

My experience in Adult Education has been challenging and exciting with many rewards. I never thought I really wanted to complete my education until coming to prison.

Here are some examples of things I've dealt with along this journey. The challenges I've come up against are learning and understanding math, struggling to raise my TABE scores and staying focused.

The exciting aspect of this learning process is achieving goals that have been set. Such as passing the Pre-GED, getting my GED and walking the Stage of Completion.

I plan to continue my education further because it's rewarding after all. I desire more school and working toward my next goal and this would be entering a vocational class next. I'm blessed to receive a second chance to continue my education and become that successful woman I suppose to be.

Miranda Ortiz is a student in Catherine Toole's ABE class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

Learning a Language

It is difficult to learn a different language. The pronunciation is very different. The dialect is very different. It's very hard to learn a different language.

It is difficult to learn a different language because the pronunciation is different for vowels. For example, if you speak Spanish the “i” sounds like an “e” in English. Another example is that an “a” in Spanish sounds like “ah” in English.

The dialects are different. For example, there are two different English accents, the British one and the American one. Another example is that there are two different French dialects, the Canadian and the French one.

In a nutshell, it is hard to learn a different language. The dialect is different. The pronunciation is different. It's difficult to learn a different language.

Sulay Berges is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Personal Stories

What Going to College Means to Me

In January I started art classes at Chipola College in Marianna. Thanks to my teacher Becky from the library and her tenacity, I'm learning sculpture from the faculty. This is a very interesting direction and I like that. In my course there are ten students of a young age. I'm in retirement but I feel I'm on an equal footing with them. I still do not feel the age difference. It's very nice.

The teacher is also young and a very nice woman. She tries to help me understand the subject, because the lecture is in English and I'm still weak in English. I'm Polish-American and in America I have lived four years. I'm fluent in Polish and Russian, and now I will learn English. Today my English is elementary and accordingly I do not understand everything.

My first works were the implementation of a face with wire, animal masks and carnival masks, and objects with cardboard. My works pleased everybody very much. This is an inspiration for me for my next work. I'm very happy and encouraged. My husband is so proud of me even though I have a polytechnic diploma and my profession is an environmental engineer. Right now I'm not working, I'm in retirement. I never thought that in retirement I would return to college and study. It will be relaxing to me and very enjoyable.

Inka Bobryk-Bartkowiak has been an English student at the Jackson County Public Library Learning Center for 4 years. She and her husband are retired in Marianna, FL. She became a United States citizen in April, 2011.

My Chance to Get Ahead

I never thought that I would be able to get an education. I was labeled as a special education student when I was in elementary school. That meant that I had a special class one hour a day and then the rest of the day I sat in the back of the regular classroom and could do pretty much whatever I wanted to. I could draw, color, look at books. I was the “go to” person for the teacher. I ran errands, went to the office, and got supplies. The only subjects that I could be part of were PE, art and music.

After a while that got pretty boring. I was being bullied on the bus and I am not even sure why. We moved every 2 years so I didn’t have many friends. My mother knew that I was not going to graduate to 7th grade so she decided to homeschool me. That never really happened. I helped clean around the house, cook, and take care of the animals. My older sister decided to move out on her own and finally took me with her.

I knew that I needed to learn to read if I was ever going to be anything. So we went to the Belleview Library to see what was available. Marion County Literacy Council had an advertisement. I took the test, signed up and hoped to get a tutor. It was over a year before they found a tutor that lived in my area and could help me when I was not working.

My sister was working at a restaurant and got me a job. I clean the floors and wash dishes. I have been there for 5 years and work between two jobs for over 50 hours a week. At one job I have been the “Employee of the Month” twice. But I am not going anywhere with a career.

Being able to read will give me more opportunities. I will be able to be a cook at a restaurant, get my driver’s license, do my own banking and be more independent.

Since I have been learning to read my mind has changed. I think better and am learning how to solve problems. I think that I read better also.

The most difficult part is finding time to be tutored and not always feeling rushed. I get tutored two days a week, once between my shifts and once at 7 AM. I am tired from working two jobs and have to really rush to fit in time to do my homework.

My manager at my one job met with my tutor and they are working together so I can read enough words to become a grill cook. That would be so wonderful. This could be my chance to get ahead.

Christian Lundy is a 20 year old that is well liked by all his coworkers. His managers appreciate how hard he works and hope that he can succeed in reading so he can get promoted.

Living for Today

I am a person who thinks a lot about the future, but I have started living for today. This New Year, I do not want to spend half my life thinking about the past and thinking about what to expect in the future. I feel that I missed many moments sharing good times with my family and having a person who is with me - someone who loves me for who I am as a person.

Personally, I am an individual who likes to make friends and learn about new cultures: how they behave, what they eat, and how they think. I always learn the best things from each one of them. I like to laugh, jump, play, travel, cry, talk, learn, teach, love, dream, etc. In sum, I'm a very positive person and always give my best smile to the world.

Luis Ramirez studies with TLC Online at The English Center. Luis is a positive person and great student who is always there to lend a helping hand.

Cooking: My Favorite Activity

I enjoy cooking, especially when I have to make a dessert or when I have a party during the holidays. That passion for food started in my childhood when I would go to visit my grandparents. My grandmother on my father's side was a good cook; she even had a small restaurant. My grandfather, my mother's dad, was also a great cook; he

worked as a chef on a ship. I could spend hours, and, in some cases, days preparing a good meal or dessert depending on the amount of people or the kind of food. I feel a lot of gratification when I see the look on people's faces when they are enjoying the meals or desserts. That is the connection that I made as to why I love and enjoy cooking.

Martha Garay is an enthusiastic student with TLC Online at The English Center who always strives to do her best. She bakes the most artistic and scrumptious cupcakes imaginable

Breaking the Silence - Why I Wanted to Learn English

When I came to Cape Coral, the only person I knew was my husband, and we both spoke Polish. I have always been a very outgoing person, so I wanted to learn English so that I could meet other people. We went to a Polish Deli in Ft. Myers, in hopes of finding some information about tutors, or schools that would help me learn English. They suggested a school in Ft. Myers, which had English classes in the evenings. When we went there to register we found that the same program had classes at the Ida Baker School in Cape Coral. This worked out perfectly for us, as we live about 10 minutes away.

This has not been easy for me, as I am not as young as I used to be and learning a new language is much more difficult when you get older. When I was growing up in Poland, under the communist government, your life was controlled by what the government wanted. They tried to break your free will by denying you the chance to expand your horizons. Once you started working, there was little chance of taking any class to learn something new. The standard response was always "maybe later." I am breaking my silence now with the help of Sonia Robinson. Thank you very much, Sonia!

This is Elzbieta Ciara Polska's first semester in the ESL program at Ida Baker High School. Her teacher's name is Sonia Robinson.

The Fight

Who doesn't like to win? To win you have to get involved in a competition, a game, or a fight. Fight! I hate this word. It sounds like violence, blood, hurt, victims. Nevertheless, to win, you have to fight.

Life itself is a constant struggle. I always tell my children their life is a competition. Life doesn't give you anything if you don't fight for it. Some people have to fight every day to get up and live. Some people have to fight to keep going amid very difficult situations. Some people have to fight themselves to love, to forgive, to accept other people. Some people have to fight life itself, because sometimes, life is not fair.

From experience, I have come to realize that you can fight any waves that are coming your way; you can fight against the current if you set your mind to it. Nothing is just "take and go". Most of the time you have to go an extra mile and fight numerous evils that stand in your way: weakness, laziness, despair, low self-esteem, hatred, diseases, and – the biggest one of all – death.

Everyone can win if we prepare ourselves for the fight. We can be all winners if we don't give up. We can all win if we accept to go an extra mile and decide to fight until our eyes close. The winner is not the one who is decorated. The winner is the one who fights until the end.

Don't say you are too old; you are not. Don't say you can't do it; I did it. Don't say you are too sick; I am sicker. Don't say you are too tired; I work, go to school, and raise a family. Don't say you are stupid; I thought so as well.

Don't say I will never get there. Set a goal for yourself. Don't think about gigantic steps. Take one step at a time. Arm yourself with the strength that God gave you.

Your biggest enemy is discouragement. Decide what you want and believe in those God has placed to help you. The fact that you are willing to try is a victory. Take the adventurous journey with your hope as a weapon, your

determination as ammunition, and your willingness as strength.

The fight is on. I will use anything in my power to say at the end of the day, “I fought down to the last drop of my blood.” Whether I live or die during my battles, whether I become incapacitated or healthy, I will never be a loser. I know I have tried. Because I never gave up, I am a winner.

Marie-Pierre J.B. Regis was born and raised in Haiti. Despite battling illness, she managed to raise 5 children and work full time. Today, she still fights and thrives as a dedicated student at Manatee Technical Institute.

Life

When you think of the word life, what do you think of? To be honest, when I think of the word life, I think of how I wish I was living the life of the rich and famous. I bet a lot of people think the same, but that’s no life. Life happens in those small moments that define who we are, being grateful for what we have, and accepting our failures and accomplishments. So many people overlook life and what it really means.

It took me 26 years to realize I have had a great life. I used to hate my life and then it hit me one morning that life is defined by those small moments. It means EVERY moment that happens in our life happens for a reason, and makes us who we are today. Have you ever noticed why people never have the same outcome in life? It shapes us and makes us one of a kind. In our brain, we define who we are by our failures and accomplishments, when in reality we are greater than we give ourselves credit for. We have accomplished more than we know. We were all born failures, but as a baby we don’t know to fail or give up. We weren’t successful the first time we tried to crawl, sit up, walk or talk, but we pushed ourselves to accomplish it and were so happy when we did. If we all use that kind of motivation there is nothing we can’t accomplish.

We should always be grateful for what we have. Too many times we say we hate our life and question why it

can't be better. Although we all question ourselves at some point, we should be asking instead, "What we are grateful for?" I have my vision and hearing to be thankful for, and the use my arms, and the ability to walk. There are people that do not have the opportunity to see and hear as I do, and those that struggle everyday with missing limbs. Life is not promised, and at any moment we could lose it. Every day I wake up and take that first breath, I realize I survived death. Every moment we spend with our family is another opportunity to be grateful, because at any moment it could be our last.

If I am able to change one person's life and help them realize what life is truly about, I have fulfilled my purpose in this writing. To sum this up, we live our whole life to leave our legacy behind and to show a story of our life, including our failures and our accomplishments. When we're gone, that's all that's left! So ask yourself, "What is life?" and "How do you want to be remembered?"

Jay Norenberg is currently pursuing his GED at Columbia County Career and Adult Education and plans to attend college upon receiving his diploma.

I Will See You

Today I decided I should just observe life rather than try to make it happen:

The butterfly gently flutters its speckled wings as it alights on a perfectly formed brilliant sunflower. Bumblebees arrive in velvet black and yellow stripes, busily gathering pollen from the lavender mums and deep purple flowers, not having the time or nearly the interest in me as I do them. As my dragonfly friends dash by as if to say hello, I felt such an inner peace realizing that nothing at all really matters. We all have a purpose, a useful function in this world. Some of us are designed to touch the heart and soul of others; while some give unconditional soulful love that the average person just cannot comprehend or begin to grasp how I have reached that emotional state. Those, so busy wanting what they don't have only to acquire it, to

want even more, a higher level of desire and perfection never satisfied. People such as me either appear to be too complex or too unfathomably real to believe. Of course others think this happy unconditional acceptance of life condition is just crazy. So as I walk this lonely trail of life, believing only what I know to be true, my arms are wide open to you. If it were to last a day, a month, a year, or forever, I would be eternally grateful for the happiness and joy that you added to my life. Not knowing where the true beginning is and when the end will abruptly arrive. If only I could truly embrace you when you are down and gently kiss away your sorrows and hurt, surely I would. In fact I would trade a thousand tomorrows to make you have one completely joyous peaceful happy day. That is how unconditional my soulful love is for you.

So as the dragonflies delicately land here and there, kissing the innocence out of the swaying flowers in the breeze, with each beat of my heart, it is as though a time clock is clicking away the days of my life, afraid to go to sleep because there may be something so beautiful or important that I'll miss.

Yet, sleep finally wins the battle over my excitement of living and into dreams I go. I'm sure then, I will see you again, my love.

Donna Burlison is in R. Barkley's GED Language Arts class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

The Last Four Years

I was 19 years old four years ago. There were a lot of things I could do then, but there were a lot of things I couldn't do. Here are three of them: I couldn't go to or be around my grandfather without him thinking I would steal from him, I did not know how to drive, and last, I really didn't understand what it was to be a mom. I have learned a lot in the past four years.

When I was nineteen, I was on drugs really bad. My grandfather did not trust me at all because I would steal from him to get what I needed. He would not leave me

alone in his house. Now that I'm older and more mature, I have earned back his trust. Over time, doing the right things is really rewarding. Our relationship is so much better now that we have trust back.

Whenever I think about driving, I remember just four short years ago I didn't know how. There's something about getting behind the wheel that just freaks me out. Everyone used to tell me that it is so easy to drive once you get the hang of it. I wasn't scared of what I would do; I was scared of the other cars on the road. Sara, my best friend, would tell me all the time it would be okay; therefore, one day I got in and drove. From that day on, I have been driving, even though I still get nervous at times. Driving is a part of everyday life, and I am so happy to be part of that.

Being a mom is a very important job. Just four years ago, I did not understand what it was to be a mom. I have definitely learned how important the task is. You can't just have a baby and think of yourself as a great mom, yet some of it does come naturally. Four years ago I had one baby, and I thought I knew everything. Now I see I really didn't know anything. As I got older, I came to realize that parenting is not as easy as I thought it would be, but I am definitely learning as I go. Being a mom is knowing how to understand, to nurture, to love, and care for your children, but also be firm when the situation arises. Children need a parent; they do not need a friend. Being a mom makes you responsible for how that child grows up to make their own choices in life. When I think about my children, I feel I'm on the right path.

The last four years I have learned a lot. I have learned that trust is very easy to lose, but very hard to gain back. I learned how to drive a car and feel part of everyday life. The most important thing I have learned is how to be a wonderful mother. I'm very glad that I have grown and matured. Often times I sit back and think, WOW! I have come so far.

Sherie Grossman is in R. Barkley's GED Language Arts class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

Everything Does Happen for a Reason

Hi, my name is Amber McCray, I am 27 years old. I am currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correctional Facility. I am a mother of two children. My Son, Ayden, is 8 years old and daughter Alissa 4 years old. I will be leaving here ready to take on the world with all of my newfound knowledge. I look at life now as an open door to explore new horizons. There are many factors that played into my transformation, but my children are my number one motivation.

A lot of people speak about a miracle that I could only dream about, a turning point in their lives. Well, that dream has become a reality to me. A series of unfortunate events have led to this final breakthrough, which are the loss of my children, a drug addiction, and being held captive behind these prison gates. We all have to give in at some point and realize that our time here is limited, and we have to figure out what it is that's truly important and change ourselves completely.

I was basically a single mother trying to survive in the world. Employment was even harder than putting food on the table. My quick thinking took my entire world from beneath my feet. I made the choice to break the law, break my dignity, and my pride in order to gain financial stability. In that instant, both of my children became a ward of the state. I was heartbroken.

My focus then turned to using the same drugs that I had been polluting other peoples' lives with. Snorting pills quickly went to the numb feeling that heroin gave me as it rushed through my veins. Chasing an endless defater's search for nothing but cold emptiness, a bad habit, and being further off my path for righteousness than when I had first started. Feeling even more incomplete, I wanted to end my very existence.

Eventually I would learn that where my past has brought me is only the start to a new beginning. Being in prison has not only freed me from all of life's scares, but it has opened me up in ways I never could have imagined. I am a new

person and I am on a bright path. Every day I strive to improve my educational level, to become a better woman all the way around, and continue to embark on my spiritual journey. God has placed a newfound love in my heart, and I know what I must do to succeed, and I know exactly what I need to do to get there.

Last of all, I would like to say that all of my past events have molded me into the person that I am today. Nor am I embarrassed or ashamed of the mistakes I have made. Everything does happen for a reason, and my future will be filled with so much joy. Now I am living a clean sober lifestyle, setting my expectations higher for a promising career, and welcoming my children back into my life as a permanent and positive role model. Life is what you make it. I for one will be living mine re-dignified, redeemed, and reunified. I see my future as very positive and with a lot of possibilities. This would have never happened had I not hit that turning point in my life.

Amber McCray is in R. Barkley's GED Language Arts class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

Wearing Another's Moccasins

It is human nature to attach a judgment on everything from how a certain food tastes to the feeling we experience when we hear a certain song playing on the radio. It is impossible to go through this life without judging; it is the way we were designed. The problem with judgment is that once that judgment has been formed, we allow it to block so many avenues that could act as educational devices; we allow it to take precedence over rationale and logic. The judgments we form of ourselves and others are what perpetually keep us perpetually bound.

Unless you have walked in another's moccasins on the roads they have traveled and experienced the myriad emotions their bodies have felt, you can never know their pain or their joy. We tend to assume that since we may have gone through something similar to another's experience that we are now an authority on how *they* should feel and how

quickly *they* should recover from it. We chastise and scold and sneer and act as catalysts that further keep others hampered by their own life experience. We act as demolition teams where we wield words as sledgehammers and we tear people down. Our judgments of others are deadly.

The judgments we place on ourselves are just as unkind and just as harmful. We hold ourselves to expectations that may never be reached. We allow others' judgments of us to be the mark we try to reach no matter how impossible that task may be. For years, these judgments sit in our pores and overtake us. They communicate silently and then attempt an overthrow of the system. They assault us *and* our aspirations. Before you know it, the throne has been commandeered and a new allegiance is being mandated. We disregard our own abilities and believe others are better, faster, stronger, smarter, prettier, richer, and have everything we wish we could have to achieve the things we now believe are out of our reach. We are no longer ourselves. We are nothing more than a body on autopilot – making our way through the world by the grace of God and nothing more. But this can be changed.

We need to make a conscious effort to not judge as harshly as we have grown accustomed, to not take others' judgments as gospel, to not continue to break an already broken person. Judging is human nature, but it does not have to be what defines us. It does not have to be malicious and cruel or negative and condescending. It does not have to be the only thing we say in crowds at another's expense. We could all learn what it is to walk another's path in their moccasins and in their time. If you let me borrow your moccasins then I'll let you borrow mine.

Jordyn Cahill is in J. Drymon's class at Gadsden Corrections Facility in Quincy, Florida.

Life in the United States: Challenges and Rewards

Like many people who came to the United States to start a new life, my family and I decided to move to this country knowing that this new chapter in our life wouldn't be easy. We relied on our faith in ourselves and hoped for a brighter future.

Our daughters, who were 12 and 5 years old at that time, were posed with the challenge of adapting to a new system, culture, friends, weather, food, and countless others. At first, they were confused and wondered what they were going to find in the new land. As time went by, they assimilated into the new environment and soon found friends and loving teachers. They loved their school and had the feeling of accomplishment as they received good grades and awards.

We learned this country offered many educational opportunities. We found this helpful, as our finances were limited because we were living off our savings. We couldn't afford some luxuries such as birthday parties, vacation trips, and shopping. We had to deny ourselves these pleasures.

My husband thought that the best way to start a new life would be for him to study for an MBA degree. After two years of hard work, he completed his degree at Thunderbird University in Arizona. The next challenge was finding a job, which was made difficult by the September 11 terrorist attack. However, we did not give up. Finally he found a job in Florida, but it meant a temporary separation from the family. We had to split the family as my daughters and I had to stay in Arizona until the end of school year, as my husband started to work in Florida.

After some time, we joined my husband in Florida, and my daughters started high school and elementary school. The move was harder for my older daughter because as she was adjusting to a new environment, her high school courses were difficult and competition to qualify for good colleges was stiff. Finally, she completed high school and later obtained her bachelor's degree at Emory University. My younger daughter is finishing high school.

After years of spending time and providing support to my husband and my children, I have decided to take English classes in order to understand and speak the language fluently. Regular attendance in class is a challenge because of the demanding lifestyle we have here and the multiple obligations I have to shoulder for my family. However, I truly believe in the value of education and will continue working hard to accomplish my goals.

In conclusion, our stay in the U.S. has taught me that taking risks and working hard are the best ways to be successful. We have set our goals and succeeded throughout the years despite the obstacles.

Julia de la Cruz is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

Flying Kites

When I was little, my family went out to look for hints of spring in the outskirts of town. One day we caught a bus to a hilly field. As soon as we reached the flat top of a small hill, we smelled a mixture of mud and new grass. What a fresh and joyful landscape! We already saw many kites floating in the sky. I was so eager to fly my kite in the sky. My grandfather, who had a poised personality and always prepared everything beforehand, stopped me.

“Don’t rush,” he said. “Pay close attention to how you tie the kite.” Then he showed me a secure way to fasten the kite and gave off a short distance of string. After that, I held the thread reel and tried to fly again.

“Wait, wait,” he smiled. “Be patient. The winds have not come yet. Now we can find a good direction to run and a spot to fly it.”

I nodded my head and went after him. Suddenly, the wind blew. He said, “Run against the wind.” I ran quickly, with one hand holding up the kite.

He said, “Give off more string!” I followed his instructions, but it was too late. The wind was too strong. The kite turned over and fell on the ground.

He smiled again, “OK, wait again for one more try. See, it is not so easy, right?”

I said, “Yes, I think I only like to fly the kite when it is already in the sky.”

“It will not be in the sky by itself,” he added. “The base work is the most important, without which you will never succeed.”

I tried and tried. As soon as the wind blew a little stronger, I pulled up the kite. The wings of the kite were stretched wide by the wind. I had to hold tight, use more strength to pull the string, and give out the string inch by inch. Finally the kite flew steady in the sky. The more string I gave off, the higher it flew. My grandmother cheered and clapped like a child. She said, “Look how high it is!” She turned to me and said, “Honey, I hope one day you can fly as the kite, high in the sky. We will all be proud of you.” Still now I can clearly remember that exciting day, just like it is engraved in my memory.

Dee Shi is a learner in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program. She is from China. Her tutor is Tricia Shireman.

Cielito

I was drawing on a board that my girlfriend Cielo had in her kitchen. With the green marker I drew two palm trees and I hung a hammock from them. I'm not good at drawing, but with this board surface and markers you can easily fix mistakes I felt motivated to keep drawing. The hammock looked so inviting, that I painted myself in it, taking a nap. I added a bright sun and some far away clouds.

Cielo came to the refrigerator to get a drink without noticing what I was doing. Seeing her gave me the idea to include her in my painting. I drew my girlfriend coming from a cabana and bringing me a tray with fresh lemonade and goodies.

I left the kitchen and went outside for a while. When I came back I noticed that Cielito had disappeared from the painting and a fat alligator had been drawn, not too far from

the hammock. By the shape of the alligator it wasn't hard to imagine who had painted it as we were the only two people at home. Where was Cielito?

I decided to look for her, so I added to the drawing a post with her photo; “missing girl “and my phone number.

From the hammock, and still resting from the party the night before, I dialed Cielito's phone and to my surprise I heard the sound of an unattended phone ringing from the belly of the alligator who was also taking a siesta under the palm tree's shade.

Carlos E. Rodriguez is a student in Mary Jo Anderson's Advanced Conversation Class at the Clay County Literacy Coalition. He was born in Bogota, Colombia and came to the U.S. in 2005

My Personal Story

After my family and friends, one of the most beautiful things in my life has been to come live in Key West for the past thirteen months. I have enjoyed all of the nice things here and learned from everybody.

I have learned to be more integrated with the community with each passing day. The group of people who do not speak English take the initiative to come study in a school for adults. In school, I learned a language that has opened a door to understanding a different culture. And everyday I enjoy and learn from wonderful people, like the teacher and an excellent group of classmates.

We are striving every day to become integrated into American society. I hope the Key West school continues to support and expand its school for adults. It's important because it allows many foreigners to not only learn a language but also know a different culture.

Edelmira Gonzalez is an ESOL student in the Adult and Career Education program in Key West, Florida. Her teacher is Natalia Duke.

My Little Personal Story

Since I was 15 years old, I have dreamed about coming to this country. For me, it was more than a dream; it was my ultimate goal. After waiting for more than 16 years for an opportunity to come to the United States of America, I was finally granted a visa last year. Once here, this wonderful country has given me the opportunity to be born again. Here, I feel I can do anything and reach all my dreams. For me it is like a new hope in my life, it is something I would have never imagined could have happened to me. I am excited about learning new things every day, and use this new knowledge to help others reach their goals too.

It is with great satisfaction that I can say that this country has given me an opportunity to come back to school after so many years without studying. I feel extremely young and full of energy again. I'm currently taking a childcare class at Miami Senior Adult, where I have found many wonderful people, including my teacher, who is always willing to help us in one way or another. Also, I'm thankful that the Florida Literacy Coalition has given all of us this opportunity to write about ourselves. I enjoy sharing a little part of my life with people that might be interested in who I am and what I have to say. Thank you.

Maria Elena Reyes is a student at Miami Senior Adult, Miami Dade County Public Schools. She is currently attending a childcare training class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

My Story

Back in 2001, my father, who was already living in this country, applied to bring my children and me to the United States of America. But it wasn't until August 2010 that we finally got our visas to come here. I had lost all hope to come by then; I had waited for so many years already.

It wasn't easy to leave my country, my mother, my aunts and uncles, and the rest of my family in Cuba. It was only the hope of a better opportunity for my children that brought me here. I'm thankful to this country that has welcomed us to stay. I know I have to work very hard for me and my

children, but God willing, we will overcome all the obstacles as they appear. As of today, we are all learning English at school, and I'm about to finish with my 45 hours of childcare training. I am confident that little by little I will be able to reach my goals.

I pray every day for my family and for this country. I pray to have an opportunity to help others the same way I've been helped since I came here.

Teresa Garcia is a student at Miami Senior Adult, Miami Dade County Public Schools. She is currently attending a class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

Living My Dream

My name is Diego Patricio. I was born in Mexico City. I have three sons and a daughter. They live in Mexico with their grandmother. I have been living in Key West for about two years. Before I came to Key West, I lived in Chicago and Tampa. Here in Key West, people call it paradise. I believe so because it is not busy like in the main cities. You can ride your bicycle to almost everywhere. It is a beautiful island.

Here, I spend a lot of my time going to work and attending my English class. My teacher is very firm. She helps me learn more every day. She teaches me to speak proper English. She gives me many tips about how to learn English. The beauty of my class is that we stand together. We are like one big family. It does not matter where everyone is from and who we are. We all have one goal that is to learn English. My desire is to bring my children to this country one day. My personal dream is to live in this country, and I am already here.

Diego is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Thank You America

My country of origin is Haiti. It is a poor country. I live with my mother, two sisters, and a brother. From Monday until Friday I walked three miles from my house to school. Almost every day I have nothing to eat before I go to school. On my return from school, I do not have any hope. Compared to some people, my life is better because I have the possibility to go to school. To me, there has to be more in life than this.

In January 2007, my mother went to the U.S. Embassy to request for a visa to enter into United States. She was approved for a three-month visa. As a result, I was able to come to America, as well. I will not forget that day, November 16, 1999, I was on American land. I was in a country that I did not know anything. I mean, I did not know what a paycheck was. I did not have any money. Slowly, I learned a few things. It takes a lot of patience and persistence to live in this country. Rome is not built in one day. Well, now I have a job to take care of myself and my family. Thank you so much America for this transformation. I am thankful and will always be grateful.

Edouard Jean is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Go and Learn Some English

My name is Roman Das. I am from Bangladesh. Like some of the students in my class, when I first came to America, I spoke very little English. So, my life was very difficult here. I could not find a job and I could not go out with friends. Therefore, I was jobless and home alone. After a few weeks, I realized that I had to learn English. I did not have any idea there was a place to learn English here. One day a friend told me where to go. Without wasting any more time, I went to the school. I began to learn the language. After a few weeks, I feel like I am ready to look for a job. I go to class every day. I have a good teacher. She takes care of every student. Nobody told me it is easy.

I want you to know that without English you are going to have a hard time in America. So, go and learn some English. It is good for you and your future. I am definitely doing my part. You should, too.

Roman is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

English, a Gateway For a Brighter Future

On my first day at work, I could not communicate with the people. I wanted to say something but I couldn't. Then I had a problem and I could not defend myself. So, I decided to go to class to learn English.

I was very excited. My teacher motivates me every day. It is very nice. She tries to get the best out of me. She gives me many ways to better myself. I like the English computer program. It helps me a lot. Reading English books has helped me too. I really need to practice my speech with those who speak English. But at my workplace, many workers speak my native language.

The atmosphere in my class is very interesting and fun. My classmates are from various countries. They have many stories and cultures to share. Through many explanations and exercises, I am able to understand and speak more English now. I am not nervous anymore. I am thankful to my teacher who is patient with everyone. Knowing how to speak English is a gateway to getting a better job and a brighter future.

Sandra Dominguez is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Daily Activity

I am a Buddhist monk, I came from Laos. I have been in the United States since 2007. Now I am living in North Fort Myers. I usually get up at 6:30 and go to study English at the Dunbar Community School on Monday – Friday from 8:30 am to 11:00 am. Now I am studying in level 5. My teacher's name is Mrs. Judy Peck.

Specifically, on Wednesday afternoon at 2:00 pm I am going to study English at the library for one hour per week. My tutor volunteer is Mrs. Betty Hopkins. On Saturday and Sunday I stay at my temple for praying and relaxing. Every day I pray to Buddha from 6:00-7:00 pm.

In our temple we will hold a ceremony about Laos' cultures and Buddhist religion. We do this one time per month. During this ceremony we have many people coming to join us, some are Buddhist and some are visitors just interested in knowing more about our Buddhist Religion.

The main purpose is for the ceremony is also to bring the foods, cookies, fruits, or money, etc as offerings to the Buddhist monks (it's up to the individual and what they believe in offering). The monk's will give prayers or a blessing to them. In our Buddhist religion, the belief is that if someone is doing good things, offering foods, cookies, fruits, money, or whatever to the Buddhist monks of donating to the poor, that person will have good luck for everything and they will be happy in their life.

Sonexay Phaengsynouan came to the US from Laos four years ago. He is a Buddhist Monk and hopes to one day be a USA Citizen. He is attending Dunbar Community School, ESOL Level 5. Judy Peck is his teacher.

My Father

When I was twelve years old, I remember a special time. My father and I went to a soccer game and during the half time he asked me, "Ezechias, did you really like playing on my team?" I said, "No Dad". At that time I had had a different opinion than my dad about a lot of things.

Ten years after that, I decided to join the team. My Dad said, "It is too late Dude, think about doing something else." Then I realized I lost so many things in my life. My Dad passed away ten years later, and I missed my friends, my partners on the soccer team.

Now I'm very excited. I have a new team with my fellow students and my teacher. They are very important to me and may God bless ever one of them. I miss my father

because he did so much for me and because of him, I'm doing well today.

Ezechias Toussaint is from Haiti and wants to be a nurse. He is attending Dunbar Community School, ESOL Level 5, and Judy Peck is his teacher.

The Earthquake

Tuesday, January 12, 2010 was a terrible day for Haiti and in particular for me. I always heard my parents talk about earthquakes, but I never lived through one before in my life.

On that day, I sat in a chair in the middle of my room reading my bible. Suddenly, I heard a loud sound behind the house, at the same time I felt shaking, and the house fell down on me.

At this time, I could do nothing. I cried out, "Oh God, help me." I tried to shake my body but I couldn't. So I prayed to God again, to do something for me. Abruptly, I was able to move more freely and I crawled out of the rubble. I saw that I was in the yard beside what was left of our house. I said, "Praise the Lord." Although I broke my hand and my leg, I felt so blessed by God.

Efeta Tiresias has lived in the US for one year with her husband. She is a student at Dunbar Community School in Level 5 and Judy Peck is her teacher.

Paula's Dream

My oldest daughter loves to play volleyball. In Colombia she played for three years on the school team and the city team. It is her life, it is her passion. She wants to be a professional player. She doesn't have a specific team she wants to play on yet.

When we came to the United States, she was very sad. She felt frustrated, but when she started school the physical education teacher said that in high school she could play volleyball.

She is only thirteen years old, and she does not have to worry that she will not be able to play. She is young but she

has a future that can include volleyball. At this time, she is very happy and I will do all that is possible to help to make her dream come true.

Arali Ruiz is from Colombia, married , has two teen daughters. She attends Dunbar Community School, ESOL level 5, with Judy Peck as her teacher.

Beautiful Changes to My Life

Years ago, my husband and I talked about our future and our goals. The first one was that I would move from Peru to the United States. At that time we had four years together, but I was studying in my country. Our second goal was our plan to marry and then buy a house or have a ranch. To live in the country sounded so good.

Last year our dream came true, because I moved to the United States, we married in May and soon bought a new house. Everything was good, but the real story is just beginning.

One day my husband said, “I think our home will look better with two or three more animals”. Obviously, I thought about two or three dogs, because at this time we had five horses in the barn. But two days later, like a gift, two baby cows appeared at my front door. I was very happy because I never had had one before, but I never thought how much work they would be.

We don’t have children yet, but we have many tasks to do every day, just like having a child. We have to feed the baby cows, to clean everywhere, and the most difficult is to wake up very early every day. We never know what will happen and we wonder all day as to what surprises we will find.

Now the baby cows are eating all of my plants, no matter what kind they are. They broke the fence and now they have learned to eat the horse’s food too. I love having this ranch, but sometimes I miss “the city life”.

Pamela Albinagorta is from Limb Peru and moved to the US one year ago. She attends Dunbar Community School, ESOL Level 5, and Judy Peck is her teacher.

My Dog Missy

Missy was a black Lab. I got her when I was visiting our daughter in Florida. Heidi's Lab just had puppies. One of the puppies would keep following me, so my daughter asked me if I would like to have her. I said yes right away. When we named her, I liked a song that Lou Rawls sang called "Lady Love", so I named her Miss Lady Love. We called her Missy.

I remember one time Missy went off for a walk by herself and the kids tried to find her for a couple hours. When they came back, Missy was sitting on the deck waiting for them. She looked so happy to see them, I bet she was thinking it was fun she got home first.

When it came time for me to retire, we talked about moving to Florida. I drove down with Missy to check out areas to see where we wanted to live. She loved to ride in my truck and look at the cars go by. Missy would sit like a person next to me. I wondered if cars going by would look at her thinking that she was a person. When she got tired she would lay down, put her head on my lap and sleep. When we were in Florida, we stayed at Heidi's house with Missy's brothers and sisters. It was like they all knew they were related the way they played and shared their toys.

We eventually moved to Florida. Missy loved the sun, but when we got storms, she didn't like them at all. She would follow us and stay right by us. I remember one time our son came home with a little bunny and Missy thought it was for her to take care of. The bunny would sleep with Missy and follow her around.

When my wife was in our kitchen making meals, Missy was always underfoot, to the point that we had to make a wide circle around her. This became quite aggravating to the cook.

Missy was so black that she sometimes looked blue. We tried many times to get a good picture of Missy, but it was hard to get a good outline of her facial features. I miss not having pictures of my good friend. I learned from Missy that our pets give us unconditional love and all they want back is our love.

Bob Andreas is married to his wife Jackie of 44 years. He has six adult children and eight grandchildren. He works with literacy tutor Deborah Nosewicz and says it is fun learning new reading and writing skills.

Little Girl

When I was a little girl, I was very pretty and happy. Everybody in my family liked me, even my neighbors. I used to laugh all the time. My mother used to tell me stories about her childhood. Many things changed after my mother's death.

I was twelve years old at the time. I didn't laugh anymore. I didn't feel pretty, and I wasn't very happy. My life became totally different. It took me a long time to put myself together, and realize I had to let her go.

I am not a little girl now. I am an adult with three children. I have a successful life. I am inspired by my mother, but she is still in my memory forever.

Moselene Belizaire is from Haiti, has lived here for several years, and wants to be an RN. She attends Dunbar Community School and her teacher is Judy Peck.

Timing is Everything

My morning began with a loud robust ringing. I determined the origin to be my alarm clock. The persistent ringing gave way to a reminder of the challenge ahead. I had landed a job interview with what was thought to be an impregnable fortune 500 company.

First, I researched the company online. Second step was to update my resume. Next, I chose a grey suit and blue blouse. From my research, I was ecstatic to learn they were the company colors. Finally, I made sure I was half an hour early.

My persistence was welcomed. The interviewer stated they were looking for a diligent, acute and audacious associate to be a team member. I was told that with my knowledge of tax havens, I had the potential for management.

All my fears diverged when I met the other team members. I found out my former employee had been their biggest competitor. However, they have reconciled their differences. On the drive home, I thanked God for my fortuitous day. All my doubts evaporated. I decided to buy lunch with my first check to show my gratitude.

Sheila Cooper is a student in Mrs Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

Furthering My Education

As a child, I was a very bright student. I use to love school. I even loved my teachers. When it came to spelling, I was impregnable. Math became my weakness. It was probably when all my problems started. My home wasn't a great haven for a child.

I dropped out of school at a very early age. School had become a big challenge for me. All my problems originated at home. After that, I became pregnant. I was so young, it had me devastated. Even more, I thought my chances of having a bright future had gone down the drain. For a very long time I believed I was a failure. Now, I have bigger problems and even more problems. Having kids early was one problem, and not having an education was the second problem. I had an acute moment in my life.

After fifteen years, I am still not ecstatic for having children so young, or not furthering my education. Something inside of me made me feel robust. All my bad memories seemed to evaporate. Fortuitously, my mind opened to the different possibilities. It made me more eager to further my education than ever before.

Now, I am currently enrolled in G.E.D. classes. I don't feel accomplished, yet. I want to continue college to pursue

a career in Interior Design. I have a lot of potential in decorating.

Life has thrown so many challenges and obstacles my way. After everything I went through, one of the most important lessons I have in this life is that there is nothing better in life than a good education. You can't go far without an education. Therefore, I have become very diligent in pursuing my education.

Yadira Ventura is a student in Mrs Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My Favorite Activities

I think it is very important for everybody to have some hobby he or she can enjoy. My two activities I really enjoy are skiing and biking.

I started skiing when I was three years old. I like most of the sports, but in winter time, I prefer skiing. I leave the town for weekends, and go to the nearest mountains. Every year I go to different places. As a kid, I used to race. Loving adrenaline and speed is a part of it. I love the chill on my face when I ski (down) the slopes. It also gives me freedom.

When summer comes, I really enjoy biking. Either mountain bike or road bike, because I have both at home. I do not mind any type of weather, besides a storm. For short trips, I take a mountain bike. For thirty miles and up, I have my road bike ready. I love being outside and exploring new places. It is great exercise, not only for your body, but your spirit as well.

As I mentioned before, and this was scientifically proven, sports are a great way to make you feel good. Sports can enhance your life in many positive ways.

Lucian Capliar is an ESOL/ABE student at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

Some of My Favorite Activities

I would like to tell you about my favorite activities. I always try to be an active and creative person. I enjoy seeing new places and preserving my precious memories by taking pictures of the most impressive things.

One of my favorite activities is traveling. I adore discovering new countries, experiencing different cultures, learning the history and traditions of other people, tasting delicious food and meeting new, interesting people. I also like visiting new cities, finding places I have never been before, and exploring. It is so exciting to see the most popular attractions and to get amazing photo opportunities. I had been living in the Ukraine for a long time, so the first time I went abroad was in 2006. I had a wonderful trip to Hungary as a tourist. It was a very pleasant journey, which inspired me to travel more in the future. I have been traveling to the Western European countries during the last five years. I spent my summer vacation in a new country every year. I visited Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, France and Holland (Netherlands). All of my travels were impressive, so I have never forgotten them.

Another favorite activity is taking pictures. I always carry my small digital camera everywhere I go. Thanks to my camera, I look at different things more closely and notice intimate details that I would not notice without a camera. It also helps me to preserve important moments and happy events in my life. I enjoy taking pictures of natural scenes: amusing clouds, colorful sunsets, picturesque landscapes, and beautiful flowers. Taking pictures with animals and birds is great fun for me as well. I always try to find something unusual and touching. I like to take pictures from different angles and capture some interesting moments. The pictures with my family and friends are precious for me. It is so exciting to put the most beautiful pictures in the photo album and view them from time to time. Taking pictures helps me to express my mood, impressions and emotions. It is important for me to share my photo memories with my family and friends.

My favorite activities have become a special part of my life. Now, I cannot imagine my life without traveling and taking pictures.

Natalya Kleiser studied English as a Second Language at NW Florida State College in FWB.

Activities I Enjoy

These are some of the activities that I enjoy doing. My days are active, but I usually spend time on certain activities. One of my favorites is playing golf. Working out is an important part of my life.

When I started golf, in summer 2006, I bought a driver range key. I liked to practice hitting the ball a lot. Every single day I surprised myself. It was very hard. I felt sharp pains all over my body. I wanted to stop. No more golf! But, I did not stop because it is now my favorite sport.

I am trying to have a better golf game. What should I do? That is not easy; every shot is different. I need an accurate swing and shot. I know practice makes perfect. Sometimes I am “Wow!” Many times I do not. Well, I need to keep practicing so I will make a better game. Never give up. I am a good golfer. I have fought every day in my head. I have grown into a serious golfer. Everyone should learn to play golf – the sooner, the better.

Working out is an important part of my life while I am playing golf. Every single day it is very important to take care of myself. Working out has many different kinds of activities. What do I need? I have chosen those exercises that will help my golf game. I want power to make long distance shots. I spend a lot of time doing weight exercises. I also run. I need strong legs to make a more powerful golf game. I spend time working out a couple of times each week. I want better health to help my golf game.

I tried, so I must do it. I must do my best to succeed in sports. Playing golf and working out are a big part of my life. These are my favorite activities and sports. I love to do it. I have wanted to do these, no matter what, my entire life.

If somebody wants to try my favorite activities, I will teach them a lesson...any time.

Kay Sheehan is an ESOL student at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.

My School Day on 9/11

I would like to share my personal experience. When I came to United States eleven years ago, I didn't speak any English. I couldn't do anything without someone's help. Everything was difficult for me. I decided to take English classes so that I could function more easily in the U.S.

The day of September 11, 2001, I went to my English class at FCCJ. First we had our normal class. Most of the students didn't speak English. Our teacher used picture books to explain words to us. After an hour, we took a break. The students stayed near the classroom, the teacher went to her office. When we returned from the break, everything was different. The teacher had news for us! First she explained to us in English, but nobody understood. She said it all again and again. Then she tried to draw the Twin Towers and the airplane that hit the building, I still didn't understand, was this history or a new event? Finally, I went home and I saw the news in my own language and I understood what my teacher had tried to explain to us.

The difficulty of September 11 encouraged me to learn the English language.

Anonymous

The Bird That Thrills My Heart

It was a very quiet, peaceful and sunny afternoon as I stood by my window, watching the wind blowing the leaves across the lawn. I heard the sound of a bird. Oh, such lovely music. It sounded heavenly, so calm that I wondered what kind of bird could be singing such a lovely sound.

Then I saw it. It was one of God's creations. It was such a lovely little thing, with brown and gray feathers sitting on

a dry tree branch. Although the wind was blowing; it did not disturb the little creature.

My heart was filled with joy and peace to know that a little bird could give me such comfort. So I said to myself “I must go on each day to fight life’s challenges although the winds may blow, and my dreams at times seems to be blowing like the wind; just like that little bird I will not be disturbed.” And, oh! That little bird was the nightingale.

My name is Agnes Burke. I presently work at the New Hope Learning Center as a Pre-K 3 Teacher. This is a job that I enjoy very much. My desire is to become more qualified. This is why I am attending the Lauderhill G.E.D/A.B.E class.

Who I Am

I strongly believe that it is not easy for some people to say who he or she is. Without any doubt, I am a mother, first of all, then friend and wife. These things are very important to me.

It is so interesting how life changes after a woman gives birth. The center of the world becomes the child, at least for the first time. So anything I do or think, or make plans about, I make sure to match with the important part of myself, which is being a mother. I am always busy taking care of my son. Not just making sure that his laundry is done, and that he is not hungry, but that his food is healthy. For instance, I also do not forget about his development and other important things, like if he spends enough time outside every day, he takes a bath every day, he is clean, and he can do things that he is supposed to do at his age.

In Russia, we say “It is better to have a hundred friends than a hundred rubles”. I value my friends very much, even though I do not have a hundred of them. I treat my friends as my family, and it is always a pleasure for me to help them or to share something good or bad with them.

Being a wife is something different, strange and interesting for me. If you have a question raising a child, you can read a book or just Google it. It is hard to find anything to read if you have a question about being a wife.

That is not a parental instinct that almost every woman has. Wives can clean well, cook delicious meals and so on, but at the same time, husbands sometimes leave them. What is the reason? Are the women too good of wives? These questions attract my attention.

Our life is fast. Sometimes it seems like people do not have time for things that are important for them. That is why I have to keep in mind who I am, and to put other things in the second place. Keeping in mind that I am a Mother, a friend and a wife helps me to organize my life not to waste my time on something or someone less important.

Ioulia Skripalshchikova is studying English as a Second Language at NW Florida State College.

Favorite Activities at Home

Every day when I finish English class, my favorite activities at home are two things; I practice English in the afternoon, and then I relax by doing scrapbooking.

Practicing English is important for me because my native language is Thai, and the English language is a second language. In Thailand, the English language is important for work, so I want to improve my skill of using the English language. Examples of my studies are doing grammar exercises, watching video English grammar from YouTube and watching English channels and English movies.

Doing scrapbooking is a new thing for me. The first time that I knew about scrapbooking, my sister bought a scrapbook kit for me for my birthday. After I traveled to New York, I bought a tool to do scrapbooking at an AC Moore shop; they have many tools for scrapbooking. When I work on my scrapbook, I feel very relaxed, and I love it. Scrapbooking is helping me to keep memories

My favorite activities are useful for my free time. My practice in English is helping me to improve my skill in the English language. I hope my English is getting better. Doing

scrapbooking makes me very happy, and I enjoy doing it. I really love these activities.

Suttiwan Tantajanya is studying ESOL at NW Florida State College.

Activities I Love to Do

I would like to tell you about the activities that I love to do, especially now that I have a lot of free time. Walking my dogs and traveling around the country or the world are two of the many activities that I find very interesting.

I am living in a condominium. I do not have too much space, and I have two dogs. They need a lot of exercise, so one of my favorite activities is to walk my dogs. It is a lot of fun because I can go out and enjoy the view and weather at the same time that I am doing exercise. My dogs are very cute, so people always stop me to ask about them. This helps me to practice my English, and especially to meet new friends. I love my dogs.

My other favorite activity is to travel. I love it because I get to see new places and discover people and their cultures: how they live, what they like, what they eat, how they dress. Also, because I can spend time with and have fun with my family discovering these things.

To walk my dogs and travel around the world and learn about different cultures and people makes me to be a better person. I really love doing these activities because they make my life very pleasant.

Claudia Paez is an ABE student at NW Florida State College in FWB, Florida.

My Favorite Activities

My everyday life is busy, but I find the time to do the fun things I enjoy – gardening and exercise. These are my favorite activities. If I can, I will spend all of my spare time gardening and exercising.

My first activity is gardening. I can go outside in the fresh air. I like doing natural things: cutting, digging, moving plants around or working with the flowers. Then I

remove the weeds; they grow like crazy. I often kill the fire ants. My friends call me the Terminator.

My other activity is exercise. It makes me healthy. I enjoy swimming and walking on the treadmill. I swim every day for 40 minutes, and walk on the treadmill for 1 mile each day. Swimming is my passion. When I swim, I forget my problems, and stress just swims out of me. That makes me healthier and younger looking. I am so proud of the way I look at my age. When I exercise every day, I am healthy, happy and energized.

As you have read, you can tell that I enjoy gardening and exercising.

CheChe Polek is studying ESOL at NW Florida State College.

Who I Am

Let me tell you who I am. My name is Marlene Viherek. I am from the Philippines. I am a mother and a student.

I am a mother of two great children. I love them very much. I take good care of them and their needs. As a good mother, I am always reminding them to use their good discipline and their good manners. I tell them that it is crucial to learn this now rather than later. I tell my kids that was how I was brought up: with good discipline and good manners. I said, "It is a great tradition, and we will keep it in the family."

I am also a student. I persuaded myself to go back to study because I want to expand my knowledge. I realize that I need to study the proper English grammar. That way, I can help my kids with their homework. And so they can also understand me better, and I can understand them. This will help me greatly because I am often alone with my kids. That is why I really need to learn to speak proper English, and also to understand more words.

As a Filipino woman, I am proud to be the mother of two great children. I am grateful to be able to share with them some of my childhood values. Returning to school is

helping me to develop my skills in English, which helps me as a parent.

Marlene Viherek is an ABE student at NW Florida State College in FWB, Florida.

My Life - Dreaming About Better Opportunities

In Mexico when I was a girl, I had many dreams. I have three sisters and one brother. My parents wanted us to go to school to have more opportunities, but my parents did not have much money to send us to school. However, with many sacrifices we were all able to attend school. One sister studied Nursing, the second sister studied Information Science, the third studied Administration, and my brother is currently studying to be a Veterinarian. I studied Computer Science in college for two years and received a technical diploma.

In Mexico, I looked for a job, but I was 23 years old and I needed to have experience. I felt discouraged, especially because my father had an accident and he couldn't work. I finally began to work in an electronics store. I disliked this because I did not study electricity and the salary was too little to support my family. I decided to go to the U.S.A. for two years to work to help my family, save money, and return back to Mexico to continue to study.

I arrived in Washington, Indiana and life there was difficult because of the language. Time passed and my idea to go back to Mexico changed, as well as my dreams. On December 31, 2005 I had my first daughter. In November, 2006 we moved to Florida because my husband could not find a job in Indiana. On February 22, 2008 I had my second daughter. On June 23, 2009 I lost my son and this was very sad for me. Although I carried pain in my heart, I continued my life. Now I am pregnant again and my dreams have changed: my dream is that my children have a career so they have a better future.

Now I don't work and I want to learn more English. In the future, I would like to receive my GED diploma to help my children with their homework and to have more

opportunities in my life. I think that to speak English, it is easier to communicate with other people. I am trying to get ahead here in the U.S.A. because the truth is that I do not know when we can return to my country (Mexico). I would like to return one day to see my family again, so my children can get to know their grandparents, aunts and uncles. I hope to God that one day this wish can be realized. Now I only live in the present; I am studying English, helping my children with their studies and I hope to reach my dream of learning English well.

Araceli Ventura is married to Moises Vaquero with three children: Arlette, Mayte, Moises, and they are expecting another child. Her teacher at Clearwater Adult Education - HighPoint YMCA is Ms. Gahr.

Free Time

Free time. I love those words, but in order to really enjoy free time, I have to finish my housekeeping. After that, I am ready for my three favorite activities that I do in my free time. Free time for me is to relax, read and bake.

My relaxation time is outdoors in my backyard. I have a big hammock, and in my backyard, there are two big trees that provide good shade and temperature. My relaxation time is lying in my hammock enjoying the swing, the breeze and the sound of the birds.

My reading time can be anywhere. I always have a book with me. Almost always I carry a biography. I love biographies. It is very interesting to me to read how people overcome tough situations, or about people who truly believe in their own ideas. I always feel good when I read biographies. My mind travels, I learn and I feel grateful.

My baking time is at night. I love the smell when I bake. All over the house smells great! Sometimes I try new recipes. At the same time, I bake what I know for sure is good just in case the new recipe does not taste good. That way, I have a plan so my belly will not be missing some good cake. If plan A tastes good, I have some cake to share!

Having free time and knowing what to do with it is a real treat.

Lizbeth Alvarez was an ESOL/ABE student at NW Florida State College in FWB.

My Story

I came to this country in 2000, and my life here was very hard because when I came I did not know anyone. I didn't have friends or family here and I didn't know how to speak English.

This country is wonderful because it offered me a better life and education for my daughter who is 10 years old. I want her to study and I want to give her opportunities that I never had. I miss my family and my friends, but I'm staying here for her. Now, my dream is studying English to help my daughter and to find better work.

Maria Moreno is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

This is My Life Experience

I was born in Hidalgo, Mexico. When I was little, I went to school. After school I had to work hard with my parents to help plant tomatoes, tomatillos, and green pepper. When I was 14 years old I finished middle school and went to Mexico City to work and help my family. I was surprised when I saw the biggest city I had ever seen in my life- it was beautiful! At first I felt nervous and shy because I lived and worked for a Jewish family and I didn't have experience working with people from a different religion and culture. I missed my family and felt sad. I was working in Mexico City for three years and saved money to come to the U.S.A.

I learned that education is one of the important things in my life because it could help me have a good future. My dream was to work in the U.S.A., save more money and return back to Mexico to finish high school and college, but I met my husband and we had kids so my dreams became

stuck. However, my goals now are to learn English and also get my GED. I also want to help my kids with their homework and advise and motivate them that education can help them to reach their goals and dreams in the future, and get a better job. I am thankful to this country for giving me the opportunity to stay here and may God keep blessing this country.

Ana Cortes studies at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr. Ana hopes that her story will help others.

My Life's Experiences and Opportunities

I was born in Callao-Peru and lived in my country for 60 years. I studied at the Federico Villarreal University in Lima and received a degree in nursing. I worked in the "Hospital Central de Aeronautica" for 25 years taking care of patients. This was a very important part of my life.

I have two daughters who live in Peru. My husband and I came to the United States three years ago. We work together in his printing business. In 2009, I studied at the International training Career to become a Nursing Assistant, but I was unable to find work.

In the evenings, I study English. I am learning to speak, read and write. I feel it is important for my work so that I can communicate with other people and customers. I would like to become an American Citizen. This is a country of opportunity where we can study with persistence and work with honesty.

Elsa Ortega is a student at Miami Senior Adult, Miami Dade County Public Schools. She is from Peru, and attends an ESOL class with Mrs. Carol Brady.

My Personal Story

My name is Amarilis. I'm from Cuba and I have been living in the United States of America since March 2010. I came to this country because my family has been living here for a long time and we wanted to be together again. My

daughter could not come with me, but I hope she will be able to come soon so that we can all be happy.

I'm an architect, but I am not working now. The economic situation is very hard for me and my family. My dream is to work again as an architect because I truly love my profession and because I will be able to have enough money to cover our needs.

Now, I'm studying to become a child care worker and I'm also learning English. I think early childhood education is a beautiful profession.

I really want to work and help this wonderful country that opened its doors for us. The United States is a wonderful country, a country of immigrants. It is great to meet people from all over the world. I have met really nice people and made good friends. I will not surrender. I will continue standing and helping everyone who might need me.

Amarilis Valdes is a dedicated student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. She currently attends a child care vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

My Family History

I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I lived there until the age of fifteen. After Brooklyn, my parents moved to North Carolina. My family decided to settle down in Florida. I have seven brothers and two sisters. Growing up with my sibling was fun. There were always games to play, and something to see.

My parents now have 27 grandchildren. My grandmother on my mother's side of the family has 18 children. Now, there are only 6 males and 5 females. Six of my uncles died due to cancer, accidents and illnesses. One of my aunts died at birth.

My grandma has 153 grandchildren from all of her children. She is the great, great, grandmother of twelve. I don't have a personal relationship with all, but I know most. The funny part of it, when we have family reunions, the

girls are always afraid to say, “Who is that cute guy?” because most of the time, the cute guy ends up being an uncle or a cousin.

Family is very important because it lets us know who we are, what to overcome, and who we want to be. I want to thank my Grandparents and parents for loving us enough to make this family large and still growing, not only in numbers but in love.

Keila Lee is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley’s class at Dunbar Community School, in Fort Myers.

What Would A Perfect Day Be Like For Me?

A perfect day, which is a correct and complete day in every way, of the best possible type without fault – unfortunately –is not possible. Everybody cannot have a perfect day because they cannot rid themselves of their miseries.

First, I used to say, “I would like to get up one day, then see all my dreams come true,” which is to finish school, get a higher-level education, have a good job, a nice house, a nice car, and a gorgeous woman. But when I was thinking about others, I said other things. Today there are a lot of people suffering, especially the kids who are starving every day. They can’t go to school; most of them are acting like nuts around the streets. They are involved in bad-doing, smoking a lot, getting themselves into problems, and affecting other people. Cancer, HIV, having sex like crazy—those actions are taking away a lot of peoples’ lives.

I hope and pray that my perfect day would be that I could see all those bad treatments and sicknesses disappear around the world, so that the lives of all beings may, in some way, be protected. It is not possible in today’s world, but it could be tomorrow.

As long as we are part of human society, it is very important to be kind, warm-hearted persons.

Senatus Jean Colbert came from Port-Au-Prince, Haiti in July 2011. He is in Ms. Will’s ABE class.

A Fun Day at the Zoo

I love my daughter Jasmina. We try to do active things together.

Jasmina stays with me on some weekends. On one Saturday before school started again, we were not sure where we would like to go to have some fun, so we decided to go to the Jacksonville Zoo. The Jacksonville Zoo is a long way from where we live. It took about two and a half hours to get there.

When we arrived at the zoo, Jasmina was excited about being on the trip. The first thing she wanted to see was the bird exhibit. There were a variety of birds. After seeing the birds, we went on to see the rest of the animals in the zoo. Jasmina liked all the animals we visited. There were zebras, chimpanzees, gorillas, and lions. There was a flower garden and many other things to see, but it started to rain, so we started back to the front gate. Then we stopped at the gift shop to buy something to bring home.

I am happy that Jasmina enjoyed her visit to the zoo. She loves animals. She would like to be a veterinarian, and I would like to see her fulfill her dream of working with animals.

James Smoakes is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. His tutor is Jenny Abdelnour.

In Memory of My Son

My son was born on September 14, 2006. He was born at Balboa Hospital in California. He was 6 pounds and 20 ounces at birth. However, after just 2 years and 8 months, I had to say goodbye forever.

My pretty little angel never understood the reason why God takes people that you love out of your life. That morning God took away my baby, he took a piece of my heart. I would've never thought that David was on God's list to join him.

After 3 years I still think, smile and laugh over the memories of what we shared together. If he were still here with us today, we would probably be laughing and doing things together. Sometimes as I lay in bed, all of a sudden, I smile out of the blue. I know it's him saying, "It's me, David. I'm right here with you, smiling right along with you."

I have some days that I want to cry, but his spirit won't let me.

He wants me to be happy and move on, letting me know he's with me every step of the way.

In this way, he guides me throughout life, removing all obstacles away from me.

Oubone Sokpoli is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier

My Fishing Trip

I was very busy at work this particular week, and I thought it would be very good to reward myself during that upcoming weekend by going fishing.

After work on Friday, in the latter part of the evening, I left home and went to the marina and bought some squid for bait. I packed a medium sized lunch box, a six pack of bottled water, a plastic five gallon container and my fishing gear and went off fishing at a pier nearby.

I added bait to my fishing hook and line and my fishing venture was well on the way. The sound of the waves splashing against rocks on the shoreline was very relaxing while I was snacking from my lunch box. After three and a half to four hours and four fish weighing about two pounds each, I was nearly ready to go. I decided to rebait my line and make one final throw.

Within approximately twenty minutes I felt a big pull on my fishing line. After some good back and forth efforts, I finally brought the fish onto the pier. It was a good sized red fish, weighing about three and half pounds.

Personal Stories

I felt that was as much fishing as I could take and was also well rewarded. I put my fishing gear and my catch of the day together and headed back home. I cleaned the fish and my gear and was ready to relax. I cooked two of the smaller fish with some Caribbean rice and had a lovely dinner.

Last but not least, I did brag a bit to some friends on the phone throughout the rest of the weekend.

Derrick Roberts is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Reading

I like reading my bible. Reading helps me to think more. It encourages me and makes me feel better. Reading makes me want to learn more and study. It is hard to get started reading, but once I start I want to keep on going. Like in the book Sounder, I didn't want to stop because I wanted to find out what was going to happen.

I really like reading my bible. I like to work hard to understand what I am reading. Reading interests me. The more I read the more I want to learn. I read the book Helen Keller. Helen Keller lets nothing stop her from getting the help she needed. With the help of her teacher, Helen did a lot of amazing things. She let nothing get in her way. I want to be like Helen Keller and keep moving forward no matter what.

Frances Rhymes is a student in the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg and attends classes faithfully every week at the Lakewood Community School location. Her tutor is Robin Friedman.

Living a New Life

My family is from Haiti, a little island in the Caribbean. It has a population of 16 million people. Most of the families in Haiti are hardworking people. Things were not bad in Haiti before; however, politics, economics and a quality of life were daily challenges and it was getting difficult to make a living.

My mother is one of the people who had the opportunity to visit the United States of America. Because of the political problems, things began to get worst for the people of Haiti. My mother decided to move to the United States twenty years ago. She planned to come to United States to stay.

When she arrived to this country, it wasn't easy to start her new life. She had to learn a new language and meet new people. She had to find a way to get the necessary papers in order to get a job. A job was needed to provide for the family. However, my mother never forgot her culture. She prepared the same meals she used to have in Haiti, she celebrated all the holidays we had in Haiti.

The quality of life became much better for her and her family. She had a better salary, she bought a car and a new house, and finally all her children are living with her in the United States of America. They are all living successful and independent lives. Now she does not have to worry about her family.

It wasn't a bad decision for my mother to move to the United States of America. All of our dreams became a reality. It is a good experience.

Martine Bonhomme is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

My Favorite Foods

Everyone has favorite things they like to eat. Mine are macaroni and cheese, lima beans and rice and anything that's made of chocolate.

Cheese started way back when. It began with rag cloth cheese. That was the best cheese I ever tasted. Then they started making different kinds of cheese like cheddar, Swiss, and Monterey. Then they started putting cheese in macaroni. It became macaroni and cheese, that's when I fell in love with macaroni and cheese. My oldest daughter makes the best cheesy macaroni I have ever eaten. I love it because she put her own little touch to it.

I can cook the best lima beans and rice you ever tasted. It was not always that way. I remember when I first started cooking, the rice was hard and the beans were harder. I was younger then. I learned very quickly. Now I turn the fire down on low and I add all of my seasons like Miss Dash, salt, black pepper and a little margarine, so my juices can thicken.

My taste buds love anything that is chocolate. I can go from chocolate candy to chocolate cake, and anything in between. I don't know which one was my favorite. I also like the white chocolate. I just like the stuff. I can eat a whole chocolate cake by myself. I know it is a shame.

The conclusion to all of this is I like macaroni and cheese, lima beans, rice and chocolate. These are my favorite foods. When I go to an all you can eat place this is what you will see me eating. All I can eat!

Gloria Haywood is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

More Time with My Family

My family is very important to me. I have a daughter, Aaliyah Davis, who is one year old. She is energetic, smart, and extremely stubborn. I gave birth to her on June 21, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. at Gulf Hospital. She means the world to me and I would like to spend more time with her.

While we ride the Lee Tran., all she can do is sit and look out of the window. When we arrive at our stop, we get off the bus and she runs off to explore the world. She looks around and sprints off to a nearby vending machine with all sorts of snacks. She, then, points to what she wants. She's very energetic. She keeps going and going. This is the reason why I say Aaliyah is always energetic.

Aaliyah is very smart individual who loves to sing. I love the way she knows where her ears, mouth, teeth, lips, hair, arms, legs, feet, and eyes are at one year old. She is very smart when it comes to cleaning. She grabs the mop and cleans up her mess. She also tries to wipe the table with

wash cloth. I love when she tries to put on her own shoes and puts them on backwards. The way she sings her ABC's makes me wonder is she really one year old!! Smart, is what she is.

She likes things to go her way the majority of the time. When her father comes around, she just sits there, waits for him to come to her and says "come on". I would describe some of her actions as stubborn towards certain things, such as, not having what she wants. She'll just go into her room and ignore me all day. She likes it her way or no way.

I would love to spend more time with my daughter, so I can experience more of her. I'm going to begin this when I leave school today. I'm going to spend more time with her by taking her to the park, or either something fun that both of us would enjoy. Family is very important to me. I want to keep the relationship between my daughter and me impregnable.

Alberta Davis is a student in Mrs. Hicks-Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.

Please and Thank You

When I first came to America, I missed my family. I used to cry every day. It was the first time I had ever left my family. After three weeks, I started school in America. I started learning English. I had a good teacher.

She always told us, if you know how to say good morning, please and thank you, you are speaking English. I learned from my teacher. One day I went to fill out an application. I said, "good morning. May I have an application please?" The manager told me, you speak good English. I said, "Yes!"

My first job was as a cashier at KFC. I was happy, because I'm working and I have some money. I sent money to my family. It was a good experience for me. Thank God for America.

Guilaine Henry has two children and has lived in Ft. Myers for nine years. He is a student in Judy Peck's class at Dunbar Community School.

Misunderstood Angel

Hello. Let me introduce myself. I'm an angel. Not your typical angel that you would expect, adorned with wings and dressed in pure white. I am dark – I am the Angel of Death.

Don't be afraid, as I may visit you several times in your life - not necessarily for you - but for a friend or a loved one. Yes, one day I will be here for you as well.

Just because I'm dark and the Angel of Death, does not mean I'm evil. I have many names. The Hindus know me as Yama, the Chinese as Yanluo, and Roman Catholics as Michael the Archangel of Death. I am so misunderstood for what I must do, and for that no one likes me – I am unloved. I am alone.

People, please do not hate me. I may take your friends or loved ones away, but please understand – everyone has to go sometime. Some sooner than others.

The only guarantee in life is that one day you will die. I will be there for you. I will make it as easy as possible. I will help to get to the other side. So please, don't fear the Reaper.

After several years traveling the country as a truck driver, Ron Haring has returned to school at Manatee Technical Institute to get his G.E.D.

Hello, My Friends

I would like to introduce myself to you. I am Tammy Lin Patterson from Taiwan (some people called it Formosa). I speak and write Chinese. I am from the southern part of Taiwan; it is called Kaoshiung City. It is one of the largest cities in Taiwan.

I met my husband in 1970 when he was stationed in Taiwan. He was in the U.S. Air Force. In 1973, we got married, came to the United States, and settled down in Fort Walton Beach. This is a great country and Florida is a great state to live in. The weather is nice the whole year around.

The people in Florida are friendly, so I cannot ask for a better place to live.

I enjoy being a wife and mother. My life is very active. I am a mother of two children, one daughter and one son. They speak very little Chinese, but they like to learn about the Chinese culture. They are the center of my life. I have been married to a wonderful husband for 38 years, and I am looking forward to another 38 years.

My husband says I am constantly active. I am hardly ever still. I was in martial arts for eight years of mortal combat. Then I changed to aerobics for the next eight years. I enjoy cooking and eating meals with my family. I love all different kinds of food from different countries.

As you can see, I enjoy an active life. A special goal for me is to be the best wife and mother I can be. I am very grateful to be in this ESOL class to further my education and to continue on to college.

Tammy Patterson is enrolled in an ESOL class at NW Florida State College in FWB, Florida.

Nonagenarian

My name is Augustus H. Cox and I was born on Saturday, May 8, 1915. My father, Reverend Raliegh Rose Cox, was the son of a Cherokee Indian and my mother, Nora Evelyn Roundtree Cox, was a slave master's daughter. I graduated in 1930 from R.J.E. Grad School as Valedictorian. In 1927, I joined Palm Grove Baptist church in Sarasota, Florida. I later relocated to Jacksonville, Florida and joined Zion Hope Baptist Church in 1936, where I served as secretary for the Board of Trustees for 19 years. I am a member of the NAACP. Also, I am presently a member of several Lodges and have held leadership positions such as, Past Grand Master of Florida, Past High Priest, Past Grand Thrice Illustrious Master, Past Grand Eminent Commander and Past Most Eminent Grand Master Knight Templar of the United States.

I have always believed that staying involved in education is a lifelong process. I enrolled in the class offered at Longbranch Senior Center in 1997 and I have continued to stay active. I am currently enrolled in the Learning for Living Program class sponsored by Florida State College at Jacksonville. My instructor, Mrs. Juanita Wyatt, goes beyond her call of duty to see that we are aware of and understand current health issues, state laws, consumer rights, and other issues that mainly affect the elderly by engaging the class in comprehensive reading, public speaking, spelling and math. This is a great program for seniors to have another chance to continue to learn and to refresh their academic skills. I look forward to continue learning when I become a centenarian.

Augustus is a student in Mrs. Wyatt's class at Florida State College at Jacksonville's Learning for Living Program.

The Four

There are many people in my life who made me who I am today, but there are four people who will live in my heart forever, my four parents. To start, I was brought up by my grandparents and I was supported by my biological parents. I always felt like the luckiest person in the world because I was blessed with both of them. I remember my parents came to the U.S.A. when I was a little girl. They left me with my grandparents. My grandparents had a big farm. They had tomatoes, corn, and many types of fruit. We would pick the fruit together, and sell them. We would go to the river and swim. My grandmother always told me fairytales. We would look at the moon and talk for hours. When my first tooth came out, my grandfather told me to put my tooth under my pillow and a mouse would bring me some money, and it did! I was such a happy little girl, until my biological parents told me I had to come to the U.S.A. to live. My heart was broken. I did not know what to say because I loved both of them the same. After a few months I decided that I wanted to come to the U.S.A. My grandmother cried when I told her what I had decided. I couldn't say no because I knew it would break my mother's

heart. When it was time to leave my grandmother didn't want to take me to the airport because she said she was not going to let me go because I was like a daughter to her. My grandfather took me to the airport and gave me a hug I will never forget! In the airplane I wanted to get out and stay, but something in my heart told me that I had to keep going. I cried.

When I got to the United States I did not know what to do. I felt butterflies in my stomach. When the plane landed, I realized I didn't know how to use the coke machine, or the payphone. Finally, someone helped me find my mother. We hugged and cried. My dad hugged me too. I was so happy to see my parents again! We then went to a restaurant and I never saw so much food! I was in shock because the food never ran out! We went shopping together and then we went home. I was so happy and my mom and I talked all night sharing our experiences!

The days passed quickly, school started, and I made many friends. I married, became a mother, and after all the changes I had to go through in my life I am really happy, and I wouldn't change a thing! I know how fortunate I was to be so loved!

Irma Robledo is a student in Cristina Abelenda's class at S.B. Idea in Delray Beach.

Follow Your Heart

When I was young, if somebody told me what was going to happen in my future, I would have said that person is crazy! That's how unbelievable my story is!

Coming to the United States was not in my plans, but on January 18, 1993, I was flying from Honduras to Miami. The flight was only three hours, but it was incredible that my life was going to change so quickly. I wanted to go back home to my country the same day I arrived here. I was crying because I missed my family. My heart was broken.

It took a long time for me to accept my new life here. I was living with my aunt. After only two days of living with

her, I saw some envelopes on the table from American men addressed to me. What a shock and surprise that was! I asked my aunt why they were writing to me. I didn't have any idea what was going on. I didn't know these men. "Well," she said, "I was pretending that I was you, and I was sending letters to them." She told me that she did this because she wanted me to get married to an American man so I could get my Green Card. Two weeks later, one of the men came from Wisconsin with a ring. He said he wanted to marry me. He had been talking on the phone with my aunt who was pretending to be me! He was angry when he finally learned the truth, and as insane as this sounds, he still wanted to get married to me. But, I refused to get married to someone I didn't even know, and certainly didn't love!

I started to go to school to learn English, and I got a job to take care of myself. Now I have three beautiful daughters. When my first daughter was a baby, I was crazy about her. I can't explain how emotionally attached we were. Suddenly, my baby's behavior started to change. When she was two and a half years old, she was diagnosed with Autism. My heart was broken and I was pregnant at the time. She needed speech and occupational therapies. Every day, everything we tried to teach her, was a challenge. My other two girls complete my happiness. They love each other. They are smart and they care for and love their special sister.

My life is complicated, but God is in our hearts. He has always provided for us. I have wonderful friends, and a loving family.

I have learned that life can be very tough. But, I was strong and determined to do what was right for me in my heart. If you follow your heart and your own instincts, you two will have a happy life!

Vilma Sosa is a student in Cristina Abelenda's class at S.B. Idea in Delray Beach.

Memories

I married an American to get out of Thailand. I left Thailand in March 1986. We went to Egypt for one week for our honeymoon. We flew from there to the United States on April 4th 1986. It was my first time on an airplane. We had to come through New York to get my green card. When I got off the airplane, I was so excited! I felt very happy inside my heart. I stood and raised my hand and shouted, "I love you America!" People looked at me, but I looked at my husband. I could see his embarrassment. He told them "She is new in America." They said "No that is a compliment. We thought she would say 'I love New York!'". I said to my husband, "I am Sorry." He told me it was okay.

We had to change planes to fly to Miami and then go to Ft. Lauderdale. I lived there three months. Then I went to school.

After eleven months in school, my husband said, "It is time for you to go visit your family," so I went to Thailand. I spent one week in Bangkok. This was the first time I was alone in my country. From there I had to take a bus to my home.

My family and friends told me what had happened to my dad. He got mad at my mom. They said "Your father is crazier than we thought. "I will go to live with my daughter who lives in America." Everyone asked him "How will you get over there?" He said "I will walk." I said "Dad, you can't walk because there is an ocean between. All you have to do is dig, dig and dig. You will dig until you get to America. When you see all the lights, that is America. It's just under Thailand." My dad said "Really?" I said, "Yes really!" My dad said "Well that's too much to dig and a long way to dig. I give up."

My name is Pranom Pantell. I was born Prakhocha, Burriram, Thailand. I came to the United States with my husband in 1986. My education was limited to a few years while I lived In Thailand. My tutor is Mrs. Martha McConagle and my teacher is Dr. Mary Virginia Peaslee.

A Personal Story

My name is Carmen Risco Sosa. I am 48 years old and I was born in the Province of Ciego de Avila in Cuba. I am married and I have 2 children. In my country, I studied accounting and finance. On May 25, 1991 my life changed. My mother traveled to the U.S.A with my grandmother on a temporary visit, but a family tragedy occurred and my grandmother suffered a stroke. My mother decided to stay in Cuba to care of her mother. Five years after my grandmother died, in 1999, my mother came back to Cuba. I was already married and she had a three years old grandson. I was always a quiet woman. I never resigned our separation, even though we were very close. In 2008 she decided to claim me and my family, by family reunification. Living apart from her for 21 years was not easy. Sometimes she visited Cuba every 2 or 3 years.

On November 2, 2011, after living 21 years apart from her, everything was back to how it was supposed to be. My nightmare finally ended, and my entire family was reunited again; my mother, my children, my husband, my brother, and I reached our biggest dream, we arrived to this beautiful country.

This year, in February, 2012, my mother started having health problems and she was detected with cancer. She went under surgery on February 3rd, and here I am, waiting for her to recover from it. According to the doctors, the cancer was completely eliminated. I will always be thankful to God that my mother is alive and I have come to this country on time to give her and my brother all my support.

As you see, my life keeps bringing me challenges, but I will keep fighting for my dreams. I know I have to try my hardest; I need to study English and I need to pass my childcare training. I am here, with my family, exactly where I want to be; and I am very optimistic about it. This is my story.

Carmen Risco Sosa is a student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. Miami Dade County Public Schools. She attends a childcare training class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

My True Life

I grew up in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. In my country the weather is warm like Cape Coral. At first, it was hard because I didn't speak English and couldn't talk to people. I missed my food, my family and my friends. Everything was hard because I was the new person in town with no friends, no work, nowhere to go, and no transportation. One day I was at the soccer field and my life changed for the better. Then I started working, speaking a little English, and making new friends. Now, 18 years later, I have a family, a beautiful wife, and a handsome son. They are from the US. They are my life .They are everything to me. And now I have a car to go anywhere I need to be!

Pablo Gomez is a student in Barbara Winitzer's class, Lee County Adult Education at Ida Baker in Fort Myers.

My Childhood

I have five brothers and one sister. I am the third born. However, even with so many of us, I only got along with two.

Looking back at my childhood, I remember now that my parents were always protective of me. Then, at the same time, they allowed me and my brothers and sister to be ourselves. We had our grandma who always spoiled us, and defended us, even when we were wrong. She was like our attorney! My mother called her "alcagueta", because we got away with EVERYTHING!

On the street we lived on, there was a big tree. We called it "El Pirul". There, my brothers and I would spend endless hours playing and having a good time. We called it our "secret place". We felt invisible there. Although we felt it was a good hiding place; my parents always managed to find us.

Now, I think back at all the tears and laughs we shared; and I feel it couldn't have been better than it was. I had a magical childhood!

Jaqueline Mata is a student at GROWS Family Literacy Academy of Apopka. She is married and attends the program with her four-year-old child. Her teacher is Damaris Rivera.

The Importance of Voting

In the past, not everyone who lived in the United States was allowed to vote. Only white men who owned land, and free men could vote at that time. A few years after the Civil War, the 15th Amendment was added to the Constitution allowing black men to vote. The 19th Amendment guaranteed women the right to vote in 1920. In 1924, Native Americans were recognized of citizens and were allowed to vote. Nevertheless, literacy tests and poll taxes still restricted many people in the South from voting. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed these restrictions.

Every vote is important not only to help the country move forward, but also to honor those who struggled to establish and protect voting rights for all. Now, all citizens 18 years and older have the right to vote and raise their voices for what they want. It is an important civic duty. It is for our future. When everyone votes, the country has a better chance of making progress.

Smantha Raphael is an ESOL student in Nancy Gardner's class at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. She has been a proud U.S. voter for four years.

Voting: An Act of Good Citizenship

In a nutshell voting is an act of good citizenship. That is to say that if you live in a country, it is your duty to vote. If you are at the right age and reside in that country, you have the right to vote. The reason why it is important to vote is because you know the candidate has good qualities and is very knowledgeable. He can help the community on vital issues. So, you do not want to lose the opportunity of choosing him to be your representative. You should go out and vote on Election Day whether it rains or shines and

whether you have transportation or not. Mark your calendar and go out and vote. It is your right and your duty.

Steevenson Steeve is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

If I Had A Hundred-Thousand Dollars

What would I do if I had a hundred-thousand dollars? I would spend it on three most important things. First, I would enroll in to Lively Tech for four years. Second, I would take a vacation trip to England and Australia. Lastly, it would be awesome if I could fly inside a space shuttle getting ready to blast off into space.

Enrolling into Lively Tech is my dream. Someday I will be accepted in to college for four years. What I dream about my college career is being a Computer Programmer and Analyst. My strength is in math and computers, but not in English and reading.

I've always wondered what life is like in Australia and England. I always wanted to explore the world and get out of my country for awhile. Australia and England are the only two countries that speak the same language as us, English.

Science has always been interesting to me, especially outer space, I always dream of flying in a space shuttle into space. I think it's beautiful, peaceful, and quiet. I'd also like to explore the moon and collect a souvenir from there. Collecting space rocks, snapping close pictures of each planet, and looking at our satellite would be fascinating.

Ryan Abernathy is a current student at Adult and Community Education (ACE), working on his reading comprehension skills to pass the State of Florida Reading test. He is planning to attend Lively Tech School in Tallahassee, Florida.

Gumbo

My favorite food is oyster and shrimp gumbo. The salty, fiery flavor of the gumbo is what I like the most. There are many mouth watering ingredients in this Cajun dish that will make your taste buds pop. The crunchy peppers, the

soft oysters, and the buttery shrimp are key ingredients for this dish. My favorite time to eat this dish is when it's cold or when I'm on the boat. The gumbo is cooked in a big metal pot. It's cooked slow to perfection, but it's worth the wait. Hot sauce is not needed because the spices and peppers are hot enough.

Kevin is a seventeen year old student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee FL. He plans to be a firefighter after he receives his diploma.

When I Got Hungry

When I was five or six years old, Mama would cook chicken and biscuits. Before supper I would go in the back door and get the chicken and biscuits. When it was supertime I was not hungry. I got a whipping.

One time when I went to school I picked up a sucker. It had ants on it. I ate it anyway. My sisters would not walk with me to school.

Lola "Kitty" Wilson is a student in the Learn to Read of Northwest Florida program.

The Day My Defibrillator Went Off

I would like to tell you about my defibrillator. My defibrillator went off and I had a shock that I felt not only in my shoulder and chest, but also in my mouth and both my eyes. I saw a flashing blue and yellow light. I began to scream. When I screamed, my husband ran toward me and he called the ambulance. I could hear the ambulance driver on the phone telling him to calm me down. They rushed me to the hospital. My husband, daughter, grandchildren, family and friends supported me through it all.

Patricia Robinson is a student in the Learn to Read of Northwest Florida program.

Lost in the Cane Patch

My mother and I were in the house. She was sewing my bag to pick cotton in. I told her, "I'm going to walk down to the field where Daddy is." Well, I got down there and got in the middle of the cane patch, looking for them on the other

side. I got a big mouth and I hollered, “John! John! Flo! John.” Flo got John to get me. He got me through the cane patch.

Martha Fortune is a student in the Learn to Read of Northwest Florida program.

My Trip to China

On my last trip, I went to China. I flew Korean Airlines non-stop to Hong Kong. The flight was enjoyable.

I met my husband’s family. Then we went to a nice restaurant, and we ordered duck. It was so good that I ate too much.

I was there about three weeks. I enjoyed shopping in the many interesting stores. Someday I would like to go again.

Okhui Chong lives in Pensacola and is a student of Learn to Read of Northwest Florida.

My First Days in the USA

Since I was a child, I dreamed of living in the United States of America. I knew all along that one day my dream was going to come true because my parents moved here shortly after I was born. In Haiti, however, I was always asking my father why it was taking so long for me to come to the United States. But, he didn’t seem to mind how I felt. I wanted to be with my parents. Finally, he came up with a great solution to my problem, and he started to work hard to make things happen so that I could come here. I finally arrived in this country in January 2010 by airplane. I brought only my suitcase. When I got into the airplane terminal, I felt lost and began to see everything in fast forward. Fortunately, I had a friend with me who said, “I know. I bet you’re surprised about what you’re seeing now. It’s all real, but everything will be all right once you get home.”

Shortly after that, my father came to pick me up and drive me home. At that time, I was really surprised about the highways and cars. I was also afraid of going over the

drawbridges. Suddenly the weather became very cold. I had never felt anything like that in Haiti. A few days after I arrived, I told my mom that I felt like going back to Haiti. She asked me why. I replied that I didn't like the cold weather. She looked at me and said, "Don't worry. Everything's going to be OK for you, Son." I was really bored too because I didn't have any friends to hang out with. My daily routine was to go to bed, wake up, and watch TV. I was often confused by the kinds of food my family ate. It wasn't the same as the food in Haiti. Now two years later, I am starting to enjoy life in the United States. At last, I understand I have been living in the best country in the world. I am so proud about that. I am living the dream that everyone outside this country wants to live: to be in the United States of America one day.

Wilguens Israel studies Advanced ESOL with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach, Broward County.

My Life Story

My favorite place is Arcadia, Florida. I have lived here all of my life. I had a large family. My mother and father had 13 children. All of us were very happy, and we had lots of fun together. My father and mother did their best to take care of us.

I have seen some good times and some hard ones. During my early years, we didn't even have running water. Sometimes it would be so hot. We had to pump water by hand.

The road was sand. Before that we just had a path to our house. We didn't have electricity either. We also had oil lamps. Still, it wasn't so bad. We had lots of food but not many clothes. However, we did have a roof over our heads.

Down through the years Arcadia changed a lot. I remember growing up that things were different in many ways. We had to respect our elders, but people now don't care about other people. My sisters, brothers, and I used to go fishing every day. But now everything is posted Keep Out. We used to leave our house wide open when we went

anywhere. But now you have to lock up everything, and someone will still break in.

I dropped out of school at an early age. Back then you didn't have to have much education. As long as you could read and fill out an application, you got a job. Now you need a good education even to clean bathrooms. For anyone who wants an education, Arcadia is the best place. It doesn't matter what age you are, old or young. My family is here. I raised my two daughters in Arcadia. I love Arcadia. I won't ever leave.

That's why I love Arcadia. The kids can go outside and play. God takes care of us.

Arcadia made me to be a respectable person because I put God first in my life. If it had not been for the Lord on my side, I don't know where I would be right now.

Gertrude Blandin is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia

About Myself

My name is Jean Dupuy Dervil. I am from Haiti. I was born on April 5 in 1989. I have five brothers and two sisters. I did not finish high school in Haiti. I have many friends in school. I like to play soccer *and* basketball. I like to sing and listen to music. My dream is to be a singer. I am happy to be in U.S. but I miss family in Haiti. I am learning English at the Adult Education Center at Key West High School. My classmates are very good in the class. My teacher is very nice to me. I don't have a job now. I like Key West very much. My dream is to find a good paying job so that I can help my family in Haiti. I have to help my family because it is my responsibility.

Jean Dupuy Dercil is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Hard Work Will Someday Be Rewarded

I'm Jean Ermilio Prince. I have been in Key West for 5 months. I like to go to school to study English. When I am in school, I am serious because I mean business. I don't mix play with education. To me, English is very important. It has been a long time that I have wanted to learn how to speak English fluently. It is expensive in my country to go to a private school to study a foreign language.

However, now that I am here in U.S. I have no choice but to learn English. I am very happy to be here. There are no more obstacles to prevent me from going to school to better myself, academically. I am ready to learn more than English. My goal is to take the G.E.D exam and then go to college. My ambition is to major in electronics.

Thank you, Ms. Josephson, for being there for me. Thank you, Adult Education, for your existence in Key West.

Jean Ermilio is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

It Was Hard but I Did It

I am from Panama. I met my husband in Panama. He is an American. We moved to the United States because my husband has good job as a ship captain. I have a daughter and my husband has a son prior to our marriage. We have a son together.

When I came to United States, I did not know how to drive a car. I never drove a car in Panama and my family never had a car. My husband told me I had to learn how to drive. He taught me how and I was scared. I think my husband was more scared. I practiced and studied every day. I went to take my driving test. I was nervous. I did not stop at the first stop sign. The woman told me to go home and practice more. I was very sad.

I went home and practiced again. Then I went to take the test for the second time. I was still nervous. After the test, we went back to the office. This time she told me to come in

so that she can snap a picture for my license. I was very happy and I cried. Now I drive to school every day.

Doris Frankel is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Where There is Life There is Hope

After the earthquake in Haiti, the U.S. Embassy allowed all qualified residents to bring their children into United States to their parents who reside in America. My daughter and I were among the lucky ones. Immediately, I reported to the U.S. Embassy in Haiti. A one month visa was issued to me. On January 21st we travelled to Santo-Domingo. The next day we got into a military airplane which took us to Homestead Air base, Florida. When we landed at the airport, the immigration officer added 6 more months to my visa. Then I called my daughter's dad to come and get us. He came and drove us to Key West. It was a happy reunion.

Marie Miloda Faneur is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Sacrificial Dream

When I was a young, I wanted to be a great athlete. I put in a lot of effort to go all my practices and trainings because I wanted to be the best in my group. I needed both moral and economic support from my parents. Though I received those from them, I still had to struggle for the financial means because they could not afford the training. Without feeling hopeless, I went to find an afternoon job during my high school years. In my free time, I went to my practices. Finally, one day I participated in a youth sports event. I was not surprised that I was among the top ten winners. Due to the bad economic situation in my country, I did not pursue my dream to be a great athlete. Instead, I migrated to the United States. Now, I play soccer for recreational and social purposes. In my opinion, it is not as important for me to achieve my ambition but it is much more important to help my children achieve theirs.

Jotan Quiche Lopez is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Hardship Does Not Last Forever

When I was 5 years old, I remember playing with my father. My father died when I was 8 years old. I went to school for 4 years. Then, I started to work to help my mom and my 5 brothers. I am grateful to all the people who have helped my brothers to complete their studies and find jobs for them. Though I sacrificed my youth for my mom and my brothers, I have no regrets. I am happy for them. I am glad that I am healthy and hope I live long enough to see all their children well taken care of. Now, it is my turn to study and have a good future. Life is how you make it.

Cristobal Barrios is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

High Hopes for My Future

I am from Nicaragua. I was an auto mechanic in my country. The first time I was in the U.S. was in 1988 with my son, Bismarck. I enrolled him into the high school, stayed for 3 months and went back to my country. I came back in 2001. I worked at the Toppino Construction Company for 5 years. Then I worked for Novus builder. Unfortunately, I had an accident at work. I was electrocuted. Part of my body was burnt. In April of 2010, I lost my left leg and all of the toes in my right foot were removed. Now, I am unemployed. Though I am jobless, my goal is to learn English in the meantime. My dream is to have my own auto mechanic business. I know I can do this someday.

I want to thank my teacher and others who have helped me in my life.

Jose Navarrete is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Never Thought It Could Happen To Me

On Friday, February 18, 2011 at approximately 11:30 p.m. for the first time in my life I had a convulsion. When I woke up, I was in the hospital. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor that changed my life. I had brain surgery twice. When I woke up this time, half of my body was paralyzed. I

thought I would never be the same person again. I was unable to walk, play with my nieces, play sports, or continue my daily routine. I felt that I would be dependent on machines or would need the assistance others to help me with my life.

During the 28 days of my stay in the hospital and 3 months of disability while in recovery, I began to appreciate the true meaning of life and how life could change at a twinkle of an eye. Personally, I feel that there are tribulations in life that make us mature physically, intellectually, and emotionally. It opened my eyes that one should reach one's goal without hurting anyone. I think we should go to school, fulfill our dreams, and wake up early in the morning to do some exercise. Believe it or not, I am trying to reach my goal now. I am studying English and enjoying my life as well in paradise, Key West.

Betty Artunduaga is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Hope for My Daughter

My name is Osniel Bello. I am from Cuba. I am a simple and humble person. I have lived in America for 7 years. I am grateful for I have been blessed to be in the company of my parents and friends. While living in America, I am able to help my daughter in Cuba more than I could if I had lived there with her. My hope is that when I can speak better in English I will end up with a good job. Then, I could give my daughter a brighter future. It is my goal that someday she will be able to come to America. We will be united and live happily together here.

Osniel is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

All Things Are Possible

My name is Yader Castellon. I am from Nicaragua. On October 30, 1998, my life changed completely due to a tragedy at my small hometown on the Pacific side of Nicaragua called, Posoltega, Chinandega. This mishap was caused by Hurricane Mitch. Thank God I survived. But for

some of my family members it wasn't the same. I lost two sisters. This accident was caused by a mudslide that took away my hometown and killed most of the population. I was carried for about 1,000 meters by the mudslide. My left knee was broken in the process. I had to go to a couple of hospitals in Nicaragua for my broken knee surgery. This tragedy really affected me physically and psychologically.

After being in hospitals in Nicaragua, the doctors realized that my knee still was broken. After a couple of months they made the decision to amputate my knee. At that moment in a hospital at Managua City, I received the biggest blessing of my life when a gentleman by the name of Agustin Alfaro visited me. He lives in New Orleans, Louisiana. When he heard about what happened in Nicaragua, he went there personally to offer his help. He found me at the hospital. Immediately, he started to compile my documents and brought me to the United States for another surgery.

Immediately, I started my medical treatment in a clinic where I stayed for a long period of time. Thanks to my good Lord I am healed. I can walk, work, and have a normal life, now.

Yader is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Panes Rellenos

Each Christmas, I love to eat the best chicken sandwich that my mom makes. We call the sandwich "panes rellenos." My mom made them since I was little.

My mom cooks the best chicken sandwich I ever tasted. She bakes chicken to fill it and she adds very colorful seasoning. When she is cooking, the smell can go miles away.

Everybody wants to come to my house to enjoy whatever she is doing. She cuts the bread in to 6-inch pieces. To each piece, she also adds mayo and yellow mustard. She cuts cucumbers, radishes, lettuce and

watercress into small pieces. She puts everything inside of the bread. Oh my, it is good!

The vegetables look fresh and green between the orange-red chicken. You hear the crunchy noise when you're devouring the chicken sandwich. It just melts in your mouth. That is just irresistible.

I really cannot wait for my next Christmas to go to my mom's house. Her entire households fills up with that amazing smell of those awesome "panes relleños".

Marleny Orellana Is a student in Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, FL. Her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl. She loves to join her class at ACE because she is preparing herself to be a nursing assistant. She is 40 years old, married for 16 years with four beautiful children between the ages of 14 and 3 years old. Also, she has the best husband in the world. Her goal is to get her high school diploma and help others.

A True Friend is Not Just Anyone

Some people usually see a person who looks cool, and immediately say to themselves, "Yes, this guy is my friend," just because of the fact that he or she seems to be cool. In my opinion, that's a big mistake. There are plenty of other characteristics that determine if somebody is your friend, and that's why I think that a true one is not just anyone.

"Friend" is a broad term, and there are different kinds of them. There are some of them who are there when you are experiencing a great moment to celebrate with you, to make a toast, to laugh. But those friends are far away when you are going through a bad moment. There are others who don't even say a simple word to you in a normal situation, but when they are in trouble, they immediately run right to you. All those kinds of persons I mentioned before do exist, and some people call them friends. I don't.

For me, a friend is a special person. He or she is someone who is there in your glorious moments, but does not leave you alone in bad times. Furthermore, you must trust and be able to tell him or her anything in the moment you need. A true friend is somebody you can ask for a favor, and he or she doesn't expect anything in return, someone

who worries about you and your family and helps you in every way he or she can. That person, in some ways, enriches your life. Some weeks ago, I was not in a good situation, and I felt a little sad; I just needed someone to talk to. I found a true friend who listened to me, and that conversation really helped me. Therefore, I think that a true friend is so important in many different ways.

A true friend is not just anyone, and that's the truth. That's why I think that we have to be careful at the time we choose our friends because a false friend can really harm you, but a true one can change your life forever.

David Valdes is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

It's Up to Me to Be Drug Free

We make decisions every day. Everything we say and do whether we make it consciously or not is a result of a decision. At times, I end up feeling sorry for making poor decisions but one thing I know for sure, being drug free is one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life.

There are many benefits to being drug free. Most of which are very evident. First of all, you will be physically and mentally fit. You will have a longer, healthier, and a better quality of life.

Secondly, it is very important to have a positive outlook in life in which you feel good about yourself. It is not only you who will benefit from being drug free but also your family, friends, and community. You will think of your family's best interests and the people around you.

Lastly, if you decide to be drug free, you become responsible and in control of your life. For example, if you're a student, you will do better in class. And if you're applying for a job, you don't have to worry about failing a pre-employment drug screening. You will have a better future ahead by preventing yourself from having a criminal record.

In every choice we make, whether big or small, there is no easy formula in making the right decision. It will always be a difficult thing to do, but you can never be wrong if you choose to be drug free.

Melody A. Gutierrez is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

Love Is the Key

What is love? Love is not something you smell, taste, touch, or see, but rather, a feeling. For as long as mankind has been able to feel love, it reminds us of our beauty. And I ask myself, how can any living being be unable to feel love? Their realities must be dull and miserable. So, what is love? What are we? What is reality? Everything is made up of energy, from the air you breathe to the ground you stand on. We are creatures made up of energy. So, love is another form of energy, just like negative and positive energies.

Love is the base of the fundamentals of creation. Take a look at the night sky for example, infinite and bright with stars. How can such beauty be created from anything that is not love? How can so many wonderful creatures and sensations come from anything else? Our spirits are nothing, and everything. Our spirit is the universe, infinite and loving. Humans have strayed from their true path, their nature, their spirituality. Some forget about love, and what beautiful beings we are. But not all humans have forgotten to stop thinking too much and start “feeling” again.

We are living in interesting times, considering there is a revolution happening. All of the world's hate, greed, envy, lust, and pain are starting to “awaken” people that we are living without the fundamentals of love.

Maybe one day, one day soon, everyone will awaken, and that day, maybe we can open our hearts to love's full potential again. Then we will live in a world where love, peace, and ideas can spread further than bombs and guns and armies. Then, we will go further than we have ever dreamt of going. In the end, love is the key to evolution, and eternal bliss.

Julian Miglino is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

Admiring the Beauty of Nature

I am a very romantic woman. I love observing nature, listening to classical music, looking at beautiful things, and watching romantic movies. I try to keep my eyes away from evils. There is a good saying: "Beauty will save the world!" My most favorite place is the beach and the ocean, especially when it is sunset time. Have you ever watched the sunset? At that time the sun goes down very slowly, heavenly colors become radiant, and the ocean reflects the amazing colors.

A sailing boat would be visible in a distance and above this boat the birds would be flying. I can watch the sunset for a long time until the sun disappears from sight. I will remember this moment throughout my life.

In order for our children to see this beautiful nature, we have to do everything to save it. We should not pollute the earth and we have to educate them about the importance of nature. Let's do this difficult but noble work today!

Gulzat Matkurbanova is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHs site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

English, You Must Learn to Speak It

My name is Lourdes Maldonado. I was born in Guatemala. I decided to come to United States for a better future and to help my family in Guatemala. I've been here for about four years. When I first got here I worked as a housekeeper for three years, but now I'm working in a restaurant.

Two years ago, I enrolled in an English class at Adult Education Center to learn how to communicate with other people in English. Since then I have learned a lot. I try to attend class regularly. If I have to work in the afternoon, I will go to the morning class. Sometimes I cannot attend class because I feel very tired after a day at work.

Now, I am very happy because everywhere I go I can communicate better with other people in English. Before, I could not do this. I am and I will continue to study English so that one day I can get a better job. I know many foreigners who have lived in the United States who still cannot speak English. I hope they will follow in my footsteps. Go to class and don't give up. It is difficult at first, but it will get better later on. It is not only for your own good but also for your children, for the community in your city, and all the countries globally.

Lourdes is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

One New Opportunity

I am Carolina. I was born in Quito, Ecuador. I am 21 years old. I have a younger brother. My mother is a doctor and my father is a Navy Officer. Meanwhile, he is stationed in Key West for one and half years. On this account, my mother, brother, and I are privileged to be here with him. I am glad that I have the opportunity to study English in U.S. My brother and I attend classes at the adult education and community college. I get extra help from the LVA, as well.

Personally, I like learning other languages. In doing so, it opens the door to new heights, friends, jobs, experiences, and places. As a matter of fact, it is a blessing to know at least two languages because it makes it easier to be among other people. My goal is to learn English during my stay in U.S. I hope to find a job soon because it will help me to speak English fluently. When I am at work with those who converse only in English, I have no excuse not to do it.

Carolina Toscano is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Best Friend

Amelia was born in Dominican Republic in the province of Santiago. She is the youngest of three sisters. She was heartbroken when her parents got separated. Her father and grandmother took care of her. Later on her father married a young woman and together they had five children.

One afternoon the girls found their grandmother dead. Since that day things began to change in the house. Amelia's stepmother and two older sisters did not stop fighting and arguing. Amelia was very affected by the departure of her grandmother. She felt very hurt.

It was an annual tradition that the family went to the countryside for their summer vacation without their father. Each daughter took turns to help their father at home. Then it was Amelia's turn to stay home. She received instructions on how to take care of her father. She was very happy for this opportunity to help the man who had given her life. Unfortunately, a misfortune happened to her. She was a victim of rape.

One day in the presence of her father and stepmother, Amelia expressed her desire to visit her mother for a few days. Her stepmother thought it was a good idea. She allowed her to be away for only a short time because she needed help with her five younger children. Once Amelia was at her mother's house she asked her if she could stay with her. Her mother agreed on one condition that Amelia had to find work. Amelia agreed. She worked overtime to save enough money and traveled to the capital city. There, she studied music at the institute of fine arts where she also met the love of her life. After she has completed her study she got married and had a beautiful family.

Elizabeth Alcantara is a student at Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Dream

I wake up every night with cold sweats. It feels like every time I close my eyes to go back to sleep, someone has their cold lifeless hands wrapped around my neck. I wake once again. It's my Self that is squeezing the life from me.

I fight myself to let go. He finally realizes that I'm not going without a fight, so he stops squeezing and asks me with a sinister smile, "Are you ready? Are you ready to go on an adventure? The car is right outside, and I brought a

few friends with us: Drugs and Liquor. Our friend Irresponsible is driving, so hurry up!”

My Self throws me a jacket and says, “Not enough room for you to sit in the front, so you can sit in the back with Sex and Lust.” Now Sex and Lust really never got along with me because they always brought along two other annoying friends: Pregnant and S.T.D. I get in the car and ask Irresponsible, “What’s going on tonight?” He says, “Big house party at Fun’s house. Fun’s parents are going to be out town for the weekend. Keep it down when you get there because it seems every time you get around Irresponsible and Anger, you start fighting and screaming.”

Right then I got a phone call from Responsibility. She says, “Common Sense wants to talk to you, and she sounds ticked!” Common Sense gets on the phone yelling and screaming, “You’re making bad decisions! What are you thinking!?”

All of a sudden my alarm clock wakes me up. Thank God I was only dreaming. Never let yourself give in to the negatives, but always succumb to the positives.

Anonymous

Take My Advice

My name is Pedro. I am from Haiti. I have been here for five years. I used to want many things in my life but now I know that is not possible. My short term goal is to learn English. My long term goal is to be a construction engineer. In my free time, I like to help people. I am attending school to learn English, now. Five years ago, my English was very bad. Today, I am very happy because I can speak better. I am also happy because I have a new job. My advice to you is if you don’t know English, you should go to class and learn it. After a few months, you will be surprised how much you can speak. Believe me.

Pedro Casseus is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Coming to America

My Chinese name is Huiqun Liu. I moved to America from China two years ago. My English name is Jane. I love this beautiful and free country! Coming to America was my dream, and I am happy that I got it.

A new life is beginning for me. I am so excited about everything even though when I go places, I can't understand what people are talking about. I always need help. I feel that my English is still poor, but it has improved over the two years that I have been here.

When I first got off the airplane at the American airport, I was taken into an office where a very nice woman said to me, "How are you doing today?" I answered her with, "I'm tired. I flew about 15 hours, blah, blah, blah." I told her my whole life story. Then later, my American friend told me that when someone asks me how I am, I should just answer, "I am fine." That's it. The culture is different in China.

Another learning curve for me was when my American neighbor took me to McDonalds on a Thursday. On the way she said, "Let's get a sundae." I was very confused. I reminded her that the day was Thursday. She said, "I know." I didn't know what was going on so I just waited. When she brought me a sundae, I realized what she was talking about.

American people say, "What's up?" When I first heard this question, I looked up at the sky and answered, "I don't see anything." I still laugh about that.

I like this country. I hope when I watch TV, I can eventually understand everything they are talking about. I hope I can have good conversations in English with friends. I came back to school to study English. I received my high school diploma in China, but my English was very bad. I feel I cannot find a good job without improving my English. I am taking GED classes at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida so I can feel more confident and independent.

Huiqun Liu is a student in Denise Baldwin's class, Lee County Adult Education at Ida Baker High School in Fort Myers.

My Purpose in Life

I have been through some tough trials in my life, but I know in order to keep a positive outlook on life and to be able to change my way of thinking when I get down on myself, I must make a conscious decision to be positive and remain focused on my goals. This is not always easy to do, but if I am dedicated to reaching my goals and trust in God, I know I will be able to face my fears head-on and overcome them. Sometimes life can make me feel inferior, but in order to be superior, I have to really want to be and I have to have a well made-up mind. With faith and God's help, I know I can make it and you can too!

Georgette Philpot attends classes at Columbia Career and Adult Education and is also involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program. She is an active volunteer in her son Jacquez's elementary school.

A Better Future

The moment I took down the first picture frame from the wall of my apartment, I realized that I was leaving everything behind-- familiar faces, climate, culture. Then it hit me: my life would be completely different.

I remember the day when my husband and I decided to come to the United States. I had lost my job, and even though my husband was employed, we weren't financially stable. Our son was three years old, and I had recently discovered I was pregnant.

I wanted a better life for my children, but a strange country and a different culture were pulling me back. I wasn't fluent in English. I had no idea what to expect in my new life. The unknown scared me.

Chicago gave us a taste of life in the U.S. It was a harsh winter. The dark sky and snow-covered streets were all unfamiliar to me. Staring out the window everyday just made me feel more lost in that strange and unknown place. My loneliness became deeper when my husband got a job as a flight attendant, which meant his frequent trips and unavailability during my pregnancy. As I was having

problems with my pregnancy, we moved to Colorado to my parents-in-law.

A few months later, my husband was stationed in Miami. I felt glad to see that Florida was similar to my Caribbean island, the Dominican Republic. The climate and beaches are very much alike. Additionally, I could visit my family often it is only a two -hour flight to travel back home.

Despite the similarities between the two countries and their proximity to each other, I still thought my world had changed. I needed to adapt to a new society, understand my kids, and be able to participate in their school activities. This meant learning the language and the system in the U.S. I felt the challenge was daunting at times. But I know my stay here had a purpose, and it was in search of progress in the land of opportunity. My love for my kids and my goal to give them a fair chance at a better life has given me the strength to meet all the challenges that came with the change.

Every day I am learning something new about the language, culture, and life in my new home, the U.S. It has been an enriching experience for me, and now, I am a stronger person because of it. I realize that I can do anything I put my mind into. From my experiences, I have learned how important it is to stay focused on our dreams and goals, and never give up on them although difficulties come our way.

Isabel Bonilla is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

The Face of Wealth and Poverty

We had three weeks off, and would not miss this opportunity to have a grand vacation. So my husband and I decided to go on a trip to the southeast of the Mexican Republic.

We left Mexico City at dawn, hoping to see the sun rise as we drive. We made a quick stop in the city of "Isobar de Matamoros", where we had a delicious breakfast. We

continued our journey and, within hours, reached the city of "Huajuapán de León", where we treated ourselves to cold soda. We drove until we reached "Oaxaca", a city proud of its many tourist attractions, which include historical and ancient architectural sites.

Our next stop was the state of Chiapas. It is home to the most complex natural diversities in the country. It has mountain ranges, rivers, volcanoes, plains, canyons, waterfalls, lakes, forests, coasts, and savannahs. Much of its territory is considered a nature reserve. Its attractions include archaeological sites, colonial cities, native communities, and beaches. As we resumed our journey, the landscape turned into brightly colored vegetation and endless walking trails which children take on their way to school. Our first destination was its capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, a beautiful city with very warm people willing to help tourists and make them feel happy being there. Its centerpiece is a beautiful white cathedral.

The next day, we started our journey to San Cristóbal de las Casas. We passed a very dangerous, narrow, and windy road called "La Ventosa". The wind was so strong that it overturned big trucks. We were very fortunate to have passed that segment of our trip unharmed driving in a compact car.

San Cristóbal was our next stop, one of the first colonial cities in Mexico with a great history. We explored beautiful sights like the "Motobello" lagoons, the "San Andrés" caves, and the towns of Comitán and Teopisca, where we enjoyed the most delicious foods. We also visited historical sites where we reminisced the city's past. They were spectacular!

The city of San Cristóbal, like most cities in the southeast Mexican Republic, is surrounded by villages which have one common denominator: poverty. Women, as well as children who walk long distances from home to school, trek barefoot. The main occupations in these communities are agriculture, hunting, and fishing. Wells and rivers are the sources of drinking water for the villagers.

The level of education among the natives is low. Villagers speak only their dialect, which is different from Spanish. They are governed by their own laws and customs. Women have no say in the government and can't vote. People don't realize the backward state they are in.

As we concluded our journey, I felt the pain of leaving a place of contradictions: the sight of wealth side by side with poverty.

Micaela Becerril is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

Letter to My Grandfather

Dear Grandfather,

All my life you were always there lending a hand. You shared stories about journeys to us all and you always did what needed to be done. Even though you were tired on the way, the Lord gave you strength to get through each and every day.

You never gave up - got mad sometimes, but not a lot. You would laugh and would help us all. You were there for me when I needed you and you were there for Dad when he needed you, too. You were by Grandma's side all the way. Now it's our turn to be there for you.

Remember us smiling and telling you that we love you. My kids love you and miss you a lot every day, but I tell them to remember the good times and know that you're watching over them today. Although Grandma's heart is breaking, we are all here to help her. We now know you are not in pain, that you are the one that God wanted.

Though it is hard, we all need to all know God will be back to come call for His own and He has a place for us all to go. He says, "Come with me and I have a place which is home from evil and hurt" and all which is in mind; a place that is greater each and every time and place, where we all hope to be one day with our loved ones—together forever with you and the family. God has his reasons why he chose you.

Grandpa, you mean the world to us all and we miss you so much. I want you to know that even though I was not there to say my goodbyes, I do still care. I want you to know I called every day and the girls and I would pray each day for you to have comfort and peace although you were sick and in need. We want you to know how much you are missed, but know we love you and we will see you again. Just always know you're my Grandpa and my friend.

Grandpa, I love you and want you to know that I'll always remember the stories you told. I teach my girls to learn everything and to never give up for the one day can do the same. I want to be wise like you taught us and for us to stay strong. May your wisdom and your heart be with them all. I have you in mine and I love you so much for all that you taught. I want you to know you mean a lot to my girls and me.

Lisa Gould-Kinney attends classes at Columbia County Career and Adult Education and plans to attend Florida Gateway College upon earning her GED. She is the proud mother of two gorgeous girls!

Sea Story

This story happened a long time ago when Russia was a Soviet Socialist Republic.

Everybody knows that all merchant ships have two anchors. Anchors are made of steel and weigh about 1.5 metric tons each. It is impossible to moor and/or anchor without one. An anchor is a very important part of the ship; however during a heavy storm one of them was lost.

The boatswain got scared that he could go to prison for losing socialist property and he made a new anchor out of wood.

There was a crew change in the port. Nobody noticed that original anchor was replaced and the ship was running for a few weeks.

People said that the new crew intended to drop anchor in the next port, but unfortunately, the anchor floated. Everybody was shocked. The captain got a gray hair.

I have heard that the boatswain who made the wooden anchor embarked on board later on and never signed off till the ship was sent to the scrap yard.

Sergey Katunin is an ESOL student in Barbara Winitzer's class at Lee County Adult Education, Ida Baker.

Anna Mae Honey Biscuits

“Go to sleep, little baby, go to sleep, little baby, your mama gone away and your daddy gone stay, didn’t leave no body but the baby”. Great, old Alabama. I was born here. My roots run deep here. My name is Shirley Mabel Simmons. I’m thirty years old. I live in Montgomery, Alabama. It’s 1965. Alabama’s always been known for its southern hospitality. Well, at least the good parts, anyway. If you’re in need of a church, you’ll find one. If you’re hungry, there’s plenty places to eat. Mama always said “The key to a man’s heart is through his stomach”. Like a plate of soul food: fried chicken, collard greens, cornbread, macaroni and cheese and the biscuits bring it home, that warm, soft, baked delight. There’s a sense of pride passed down generation to generation through family traditions. I would learn how important that quote is. “Shirley, you never have to worry about a man leaving you”, mama said, “‘cause if he left he’d starve to death! Men just don’t cook. How do you think I kept your daddy?” My Grandmother Anna Mae Simmons’ honey biscuits recipe seemed to be the trick. Mama would wake up in the morning when she was younger to make breakfast. Went out and got eggs, flour, milk, tried to make those biscuits. Anna Mae came down stairs and asked “Child what are you doing?” “Making breakfast”, mama said. It looked like she was burning down the kitchen from Anna Mae’s point of view.

Anna Mae told mama “You can’t make my biscuits with a spoon, child. You have to use your hands.” They are the most important instruments you can have, and the main key was putting soul into it. “Put soul into everything that you make.” I learned that well from mama. After they would bake the biscuits they would get the honey and drizzle it on nice and slow. Anna Mae made sure that it wasn’t regular

old honey. She told mama the honey had to be fresh. She would go to an old oak tree down by the river where there was a bee hive, wearing her long, white house dress, boots, lace, and big hat for protection. “You can’t just go out there and grab it”, Anna Mae said. “You have to listen them sing. They’ll tell you when.” With a scraper, she took the honey and put it into a jar with a piece of the honey comb. That is the sweet part, tastes so good it would wake you up in the morning. I understand what mama was trying to say by telling me this story. It’s not really about keeping a man, but going into the kitchen and being around family, learning new things and growing while you’re at it. You’ll always have Anna Mae honey biscuits.

My name is Samantha Parris. I’m an ABE student at Lauderhill Mall community school. My teacher is Ralston Davis. I’m inspiring to become an actress and screenwriter.

Someone or Something I Admire

The People I Admire the Most

There are many people I admire, look up to and I am proud to have them as my role models. I know a lot of people that have been a huge influence in my life. Some of them I know personally and others are musicians.

One of the persons I know personally is my brother. He has made a huge influence in my life. He is my little brother, but he acts and looks like my older brother. My brother, Robert, is very sweet, caring and full of love like me. Sometimes I feel like he is my twin. He has taught me that it is ok to enjoy life to the fullest. He also has taught me to let go of people that are hurting me in our family, for example, our two sisters and our own mother. My beautiful brother is a huge role model for me. It goes to show that age is only a number. The most important things to me are wisdom and love from people.

The other people I admire are the guys in my favorite rock band, Rush, from Toronto, Canada. They are three great friends that believe in real friendship, love, and wisdom. They are true and devoted musicians. They are also very devoted to their fans, and they have been together for forty years.

And last but not least, I admire another artist and great human being named Shakira. With most of the money she makes with her music, she opened about two foundations to help the poor children in Colombia, provide them with schools and help them with their needs.

Cynthia Velasquez is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

Admiration

Today, I want to share with you something about my first son's life. Wittgens Albessard Simphat was born in Haiti in 1991. He is a model of dedication, perseverance, and honesty. He spent his primary school years in my hometown of Trou-du-Nord. After that, he moved to the city of Cap-Haitien to go to college because, in a small town such as Trou-du-Nord, it is difficult to find a good high school. There he lived with his father, stepmother, and their three sons. He was not treated well, but he went with the objective to get his high school diploma, go to college, and become a doctor. He had no choice but to live with his father's family. My son faced all kinds of difficulties, but he hid his sorrow from me. He knew he could not come home because he would not be able to pursue his dreams.

One weekend, Wittgens came home to visit me. After talking for a couple of minutes, he fell unconscious. We took him to the hospital. After diagnosing him, the doctor said, "This young boy has been suffering for a long time from starvation. He has a chronic anemia." That night my son told me all he had withstood. It was his last year in high school, and he said to me, "Mom, I am almost done, and I have to finish if God wants me to." The seven years my son spent out of my home, nobody had complained about him. That made me very proud.

Finally, he went to Port-au-Prince to go to college. On January 12, 2010, the city was hit by an earthquake, and the college where he was studying was knocked down. Fortunately, God saved his life. It was terrible for him. Despite it all, he was still very focused on his studies and never gave up. Now, he is in the Dominican Republic studying medicine in the university. I admire my son for what he has endured and accomplished. I know he still has a long journey ahead, but he will succeed. Nothing can stop my son from reaching his goal. I am very proud of him.

Alcina Dolceus studies ESOL with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her goals are to get a GED and then study nursing.

Life Vignettes...Two Unforgettable Characters

Juan

Bent by the burden of his years, I saw him emerging from inside the rosebushes. In one hand, the inseparable pruning shears, in the other a long-stemmed rose, a masterpiece of nature and of his never ending care.

“Good morning, Mrs.,” he said as he handed me the flower. “I just saw a nest of bluebirds by the ravine. We’ll have them fluttering around here before long.”

“Good morning, Juan”, I said, as I quickly thought about his longevity. It was, without a doubt, the result of the simple life pleasures he seemed to find so easily in his surroundings.

“Look”, he added, “I have built a feeder. I will hang it from one of the trees in the garden so the little birds will not drift too far away. They will stay the whole summer painting the air for us with a touch of blue.”

“Painting the air for us with a touch of blue...” I repeated to myself. “You are even a poet, Juan”, I whispered as I felt my respect for the old gardener, with the rough hands and the golden heart, rise to new heights. It humbled me.

Remedios

I used to visit her every time my mother judged that it was time to don a new dress. Her modest corner house embraced her sewing shop, where in addition to her perpetually moving sewing machine, she also kept fabrics, threads, and buttons of a thousand colors.

Remedios was a good seamstress. Even in her final years, with her back bent and evidently tired, her creations continued to have the quality they had always had.

One day however, we found the little shop closed. “Her sons”, somebody told us, “decided it was time for their mother to get some rest.” Since that time, looking out the

window with her restless and industrious hands now folded, Remedios began to waste away.

“What’s happening to you, Remedios?” I asked her with the innocence of my scant years as I passed by her house one morning. She looked at me sweetly, and a melancholy smile was her only answer.

Only years later did I understand. The immense emptiness of her unbearably pointless days was yanking out her life, little by little.

Rose Nieto taught elementary school in her native Colombia and in the Dominican Republic. She is an advanced conversation student with Clay County Literacy Coalition in Orange Park. Her tutor is Bobbi Moore.

Someone I Admire

The person who I truly admire is my niece, Jessica. I am going to tell you why. She came to America when she was just a little girl. She was four years old. When she started school, it was like a nightmare for her instead of a nice dream. Her classmates did not want to play with her because she did not speak English. Besides that, there were some kids calling her names because of her skin color and the way her mother combed her hair. She came home almost every day with tears in her eyes, telling her mother not to send her to school again.

Time passed and now she is a beautiful and intelligent 25 year old person. She has accomplished so much for her young age. She graduated from Early Childcare Education. She is working now in a Day Care Center in New York, and she is taking Psychology at the same time. She is the oldest sister of four. She is a good role model for her younger sister and for anybody. I am very proud of her. She is my inspiration every day. I love you, Jessica.

Berta Juarez is 45 year old student from Promise Village in Crystal River, FL.

Someone I Admire and Look Up To

I admire my brother Richard. He had a rough childhood growing up, but still managed to stay focused and get himself through school. I am very impressed by and very proud of him. He is also a very caring and loving individual. I hope I can complete my GED and follow in his footsteps and become successful like him.

My name is Renee Surber and I am a 33 year old mother of Andrew and Abigail. I am a student at Promise Village, trying to complete my GED.

Rosa Parks

The story I have written is about an amazing woman in history. Her name is Rosa Parks. On February 4, 1913, Rosa McCauley was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. Rosa first went to school in Pine Level, Alabama. It was hard for black kids to go to school in those days. Because of the segregation Rosa wasn't an ordinary child. She had a "spunky" attitude. One day when she was about ten she met a little white boy named Franklin on the road. He was about her size, maybe a little bit larger. He said something to her and threatened to hit her. He balled his fist up as if to throw a punch. She picked up a brick and dared him to hit her. He thought better of the idea and went away.

Rosa was married to Raymond Parks. They had a lot of things in common. They both grew up without a father and they both had a hard childhood. But Rosa said she loved his positive personality. He was a respectable young man around her mother. He asked her mother for permission to marry. She said yes. He asked her on August of 1932. They got married in December of 1932 in her home in Pine Level. It was not a big wedding, just family and close friends. Rose said that was the happiest day of her life.

Rosa knew and worked with many famous people, like Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John Dingle and Mr. Nixon. She talked about how working with these people changed her life and how much she learned. She said she had some great moments with these people and she missed them dearly.

Rosa was a member of many organizations, like the NAACP, right to vote, Montgomery bus boycott, and the public civil-rights movement. But I think the most important thing she did was she didn't give up her seat on the bus because she was standing up for her rights.

Rosa Parks was a very strong woman. She survived through all of life's difficult tasks and for that reason she is my role model. Her book inspires me to do more with my life.

Anquette William is a student in Mary Stull's class at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg.

Water: An Admirable Compound

Something I really admire in this world is water. Water is one of the sources of life for all living things on earth. If the earth did not have valleys and mountains, water would not cover this entire planet. The human body contains about 55% to 78% water. It is known that if a human being loses more than 10% to 30% of their water, this can lead to death. Without food we can deal for a number of weeks, but without water for no more than three days we will experience problems.

I admire water because people need water more than food. For example, water is the most expensive resource and in Saudi Arabia one gallon of water is equal to ten gallons of gasoline. Water also means rain. I love the sound that rain makes. To me, there is no better music than music made by the rain. I admire water's simplicity. It does not have color, odor, flavor, but its application is very widespread across the globe.

We know that America was discovered by Columbus who loved to travel in the ocean.

Water is used for drinking, cooking, firefighting and for cleaning. Water is used in almost everything and a person's life is not an exception. A lot of sports are conducted on the water. We can use water even when it is in its icy state, in medicine, and in drinks. The uniqueness of water is that it

can be in any of three states: solid, liquid or gaseous. Only a few substances can be so easily flexible like water. The most important thing to remember is water can exist without us, but we cannot exist without water.

Shoira Matkurbanova is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHS site, in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Dad, My Leader

I agree when some say that a daughter is closer to her father than her mother. It doesn't mean that I don't love my mother, but my father has a special part in my heart and in my life. It is more than sharing secrets. Everybody has a leader and mine is my father. The question is, why?

First of all, I admire the fact that he built himself up without any help and became someone admirable in society. Since his childhood he knew the importance of the individual's social or professional standing in society. He fought everyday by studying and working hard. He never ever gave up until he achieved his goals. To start from nothing and to end up with everything – this is what I call “A Dreamer’s Success”. From that I realize the importance of never giving up until I achieve what I start, no matter what the barriers are.

The second thing is despite his high status, he never forgets his origin and his values. He does his best to help people and make them feel happy. He spends his free time as a volunteer for charitable actions. From that I learned the importance of helping each other and the value of money. I believe that you can judge a book by its cover. Additionally, he induced in me the power to be modest and humble even if you have high education. Respect and modesty is the courtesy of kings.

He gave me everything that I need, the best education, the best values, and most of all the best love that a father can give to her daughter. The only thing that he expects from me is to be successful in my life and to be proud of my comrades' victories. Also, to be aware when setting one stone, you are building a world. Thank you daddy for

helping me to become what I am.

Salwa Ait Bouazza is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KHWS site, in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Car

My name is Ernst Cidelus. I am from Haiti. I have been here for one and a half years. Today, I want you to know that I admire my car. My car is white. It is made in 1999. I admire my car because it is one of the important things in my life. I need it as a means of transportation. I drive my car to work, church, school, the store, and my friend's house. Sometimes, my sister asks me for a ride.

My car has air conditioning. I get angry when the air conditioner breaks down. I do not like the heat. It makes me sweat. My car also has a CD player. I like to listen to my CD and radio when I drive. My car is a place that I keep to myself. I make sure that my car is clean and maintained. My car is like my second home.

Ernst is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KHWS, site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Person

My friend's name is Tay. He is 25 years old and a very generous and special young man. He is friendly and he likes to keep the peace. He grew up with his mother which means he is very well behaved.

He enjoys being funny and he tries to make jokes he knows I will laugh about all the time. When I was down, weak and sad, he pulled me up. I can see now because of him, and I keep my head high now because of him.

He always makes me feel like there is nothing to worry about and I feel comforted when he is around me. He is my true friend and the one I will depend on and lean on all my life. I love him for that.

Latisha Williams is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. Her tutor is Pam Levine.

Someone I Admire

Everyone has someone they admire. Who do you admire? I admire my grandmother. Her name is Sue Dinges. She is seventy-four years old.

All of her life she has been a hard worker. She raised three children on her own. She would work any job just to get by, so she could feed herself and her children.

Even when times were hard, she never gave up. Searching for job after job, finally she found a job working as a secretary. For the next several years she worked in that position very diligently.

Then one day that job was no longer available. Once again she was out searching for work. Luckily she found a position working in a bank. She continued to work there until she had to have open heart surgery.

I admire her because she has never given up, no matter how hard things seemed. Even at seventy-four years old and after open heart surgery, she still works just as hard. Despite everything she has been through, I hope to follow in her footsteps.

Amber Alday is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

More Than a Friend

Everyone has something or someone they admire, and the person I admire is Jasmine Hatfield. She is a wonderful, beautiful, smart, loving, caring person. She is very open-minded, a good mother, and a very strong person. She doesn't let anything get her down. She is a good friend and is understanding! I never knew what having a friend really meant until Jasmine and I became friends. She taught me about life, and that I can do anything if I put my mind to it, and that I am a good person! If I lost Jasmine, I would be lost. I love her so much, and she's like a sister to me! To see her go to school, get her GED, and have three kids, means a lot to me and shows me that if she can do it, I can too!

I love going out to do things with her, even at the house, because she's a good person to be around, and she's funny. When I need a friend to talk to and help me understand things, she helps me understand. When I feel like giving up, she tells me, "No, you can do it, and I'm not letting you give up!" I just want to let other people know that if you don't have a good friend, you need to find one. It means so much to have a person you can talk to, trust, and love.

My name is Diamond McCain. I am 17 years old, and I have a one year old. I'm in the Even Start program at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Ms. Ashley Barfield is my teacher.

My Inspirational Dad

The reason my dad is the most important person in my life is because he understands me more than anyone else.

The first reason that my dad is the most important person in my life is because he is all I have in my life. I have always also considered my dad as my mom because she's not around anymore.

The second reason that I love and admire my dad is because he understands me more than anybody ever could. We talk about everything. We never have secrets from each other. I love that about my Dad. I can tell him anything and he's not going to judge me. He's simply going to tell me what to do and what is going to be best for me.

My third and final reason that I admire my dad is he has a good heart. He is a very loving person. My dad taught me how to become a better person in life, to be strong, and respectful of others. The reason I said my dad shows me how to be strong is because when I was 18 years old I watched my dad go through a very bitter divorce. But he came out stronger than ever. If anyone asks me why I admire my dad, it is because he's the strongest person I have ever known in my life, and I hope one day I can be half as strong as he is.

Marie Registe is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Mom and My Dad

I admire my mom and my dad very much. They are the closest people I have in this world. My dad is a very responsible person. He will do anything for me. When my dad left Haiti to come to America, I was very sad because he was not there when I needed him. My mom is a very hardworking woman. She is always doing something: cooking, cleaning, studying, etc. She never seemed to be tired. My brother, my mom and I came to America in 2009. My mom and dad work very hard so that they can take care of us. They want us to have a good education. Their main advice to both my brother and me is to go to school, stay away from bad people, and to be thankful for everything that we have. As a matter of fact, my mom is presently studying English. Soon, my father will be studying English, too. Even though we are not rich, we are one happy family because we have each other.

Rosemitha Joseph is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site, in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Enjoyable Activities

There are some activities that I will admire forever. I will never give up these activities because only a few people do them. One of them is figure skating. This is the most amazing experience I have had. The other amazing experience I enjoyed was high-speed go-cart racing. But the most challenging and rewarding of my experiences is ballroom dancing.

I went to an amusement park called Boomers after work on Sunday. That afternoon it had rained and the soil was wet. It was really funny. Some people crashed into each other but I didn't crash into anyone. I could feel the speed and it reminded me of riding the carousel in my country. At first I felt afraid, but when I began to accelerate I was the fastest one on the track! I admire people who engage in those kinds of sports. They need a lot of courage!

The other activity that I admire is figure skating. That is the most beautiful sport that I know. I went to the Arena

Skating Academy in Kendall. The Arena has a basic program and will help a person to learn all the fundamentals of figure skating or ice hockey. We rented the skates and I began to glide. I fell one time and then another time. I felt frustrated because it had always been my dream to be able to skate. I never imagined that there was a place to ice skate in Miami. I admire people who practice this sport because figure skating is not for everybody. It is only for those who want to do something different.

Last year, just before Christmas, I visited the Gold Coast Ballroom in Coconut Creek. I listened to the music and watched the people dance around the lounge. The lights and the Christmas decorations made the atmosphere seem magical. My friend began to teach me but I felt shy because I had never practiced that kind of dancing. We danced the Viennese Waltz, Swing, West Coast Swing, the Cha-Cha, and some Latin dances. After we danced all night, he introduced me to his friends. I received compliments about my dress from the ladies and they invited me to come again.

Now I like to go ballroom dancing often. My dream of learning to dance has come true thanks to my friend. He likes something I like and we have a lot in common. Now I know that dancing is not just for Dancing with the Stars but for anyone who wants to do it. I want to continue to practice but I also want to keep studying and achieve my educational goals.

Caridad Capote is a GED Student with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The Person I Most Admire: My Mom

My name is Claudia Icabalzeta. I was born in Managua, Nicaragua on August 23rd, 1978. Nicaragua was at war at that time. My mother had to run to the hospital in the middle of the shooting. When she arrived at the hospital, there were no doctors to help her. There were only a few nurses. Finally a doctor arrived and helped my Mom give birth to me.

While she was still in the hospital there was a group of

nuns from Spain who were asking people if they wanted to give their newborns for adoption because our country was in such bad shape. They asked my mom but she refused to give me up for adoption. Every time she tells me this story I get a lot of courage from it. I can't imagine being adopted and not knowing who my mom is.

When I was five years old, my mom had to leave Nicaragua to come to the United States. She was a business woman but our economy was broken. The communist government would stop anyone who had any type of business. I stayed behind in Nicaragua with my older brother, my grandmother, and aunts. After five years we were reunited with my mom here in the U.S. I was ten years old when I came to the U.S. and now I am a United States citizen.

I thank God that my mother was a strong person and had a family to support her. Ever since I can remember, my mom has always fought for me. This is the person that I will always remember until the end of time.

Claudia Icabalzeta is a GED Student with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

My Brave Mother

My name is Mackenson Sylvain. I was born in Haiti, December 21, 1986. When I was three years old my father left and I had only my mother to take care of me. My mother helped me go to school and showed me how to write and read at the age of four. She was a courageous woman. She never gave up on me because she loved me. To raise me without a father at that time wasn't easy for her. She always gave up things for herself so she could do things for me. There were a lot of difficult circumstances that came her way, but she didn't become discouraged by them because she knew in her heart there would be payback from God. Now, I'm 25 years old and living in the U.S. I thank God for her and I will always love her with all my heart because she took such good care of me. Finally, at the age of 14, my father started acting like I was alive and started sending

money to my mother. If my mother hadn't taken care of me all of those years I would not have been able to come to U.S. At this time, I know a lot of women struggle the same way my mother did. I want to encourage all of them: if my mother overcame it, you can do it too. I know what it means to raise children without a father. The one thing you must keep in your mind is to never give up because your rewards will be coming soon. Have faith and keep believing. Remember, you are not by yourself. God is with you and he will always be there for you.

Mackenson Sylvain is a GED Student with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Vanetta Cooper, My Sister

I admire my younger sister Vannetta Cooper because she is a responsible single parent who's trustworthy and the most compassionate person I know. She has always been the backbone of the family. She's the third oldest child but you would think she's the oldest. Before she became a parent two years ago she always held a full time job and also attended college full time. By the age of 23 she had her Associates and Bachelor's degrees. At the age of 25 two things happened that change her life. First, she gave birth to a beautiful daughter. Second, she almost lost her life to liver failure when her child was only 2 months old. To this day they still don't know why her liver failed; being that she didn't smoke or drink. She is being used as a case study because of it. Even that didn't stop her. My sister decided to go back to school and pursue her Master's Degree. She is so determined, and through it all she always been here for me and that's why I admire and love my sister so much.

Starlette Cooper is a student in C. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

Ms. Alice Walker

The person I admired the most is Ms. Alice Walker, because she has risen above many obstacles. She is an ambitious, magnificent and extraordinary human being. Ms. Walker is strong, intelligent and has a diligent character. She

is the youngest of five children. Her parents were sharecroppers. She was raised in a shed, on a plantation in Alabama.

During the height of racism, the family faced many challenges. Ms. Walker's first job was helping her father pick cotton. She had many hurdles: poverty, been an African American and a woman. The odds were against her, but she remained inspired, determined and encouraged.

Ms. Walker lost the use of one eye when she was eight years old. She was accidentally shot while playing in her backyard. Her disability and disfigurement has not stopped her. She indulged herself by reading literature. In school she was a writer. She has written many articles for the newspaper. Her articles received excellent reviews and she won a scholarship.

Ms. Walker was the first person in her family to attend college. She graduated with honors from Bethune Cookman. She studied creative writing and art. She later attended New York University. Ms. Walker became a Civil Right Activist; she marched alongside Mr. Martin Luther King. She is a brilliant and successful author.

Pauline Wilson is a student in Catherine Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

Something I Admire: Patriotism

Why have wars occurred during human history? Do people need to love their home countries? Everyone has a home country, and most of them, not all, like their home countries. Governments try to teach patriotism to their peoples, because patriotic peoples are the essential basis of governments. I believe that patriotism is the same as the love of family. People, who really love their families, can love their communities and societies, because the healthy community can support the healthy family. Under unfair and unhappy societies, fair and happy families seldom occur. The love of community is expanded to the love of country and patriotism.

Patriotism is not a selfish love of only my country. It is the respect for the people who live with me and support my family and community. They are my extended family. Patriotism can be transferred to the love of the world as well, since patriotism is based on the respect for the patriotism of others. Patriotism does not require competition with or defeat of other countries. Patriotism does not pursue bigger land size or a more developed economy, but is based upon the happiness of my family, our neighbors, and other contemporary people.

Some people may be hurt by their countries. Their governments may destroy their family and communities, or they cannot accept the policies and traditions of their countries. Therefore, they can change their citizenship to the country where that they prefer to live and follow its policies and traditions. Patriotism is not limited to the country of birth, but it is for the countries that we are likely to love. We must also honor the patriotism of others. Patriotism is not a “win-lose”, but a “win-win” game.

A person who chooses to move to another country is not a betrayer of his native country. Betrayer is not the opposite word of patriotism. Betrayal can mean apathy. No one has an obligation to love their birth countries, but if someone loves another country, then that country should become the object of his or her patriotism. The people who say “We don’t love our birth country” are not betrayers. The true betrayer pretends to love his/her country, but he/she really is not interested in the country. Let’s love our families, societies, and countries and work to make them better.

Hyongsik Lee is a student in the LVLC ESOL program. His tutor is BJ Free.

My Role Model is My Little Brother

My little brother came to the U.S. when he was 11 years old. He always did a good job at school, getting the best grades, medals, and honors for his great work. When he graduated, he joined the Marine Corps. Our whole family was so proud of him. He went to the Marine Corps and

stayed two years in North Carolina and four years in Japan. When he came back he started to work with a security company and at the same time he went to the Police Academy. In 2008 he began to work at the Cape Coral Police Department. He was working hard at night for two years. Later he relocated to California to get a new job as a detective. Now he is working and is going to college to get a master's degree because he wants to be a university professor. This is the reason he is my role model. He is so smart and has used all the opportunities the U.S. has given to us. He is my inspiration for coming to learn English. My goal is to be a Social Worker.

Claudia Chica is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

Jenny Zchang is my niece and my role model. After she graduated with her bachelor's and worked for a couple of years she decided to come to the United States from Taipei, Taiwan in 2003. She would work during the daytime and went to college at night for her master's degree. When she first came to the U.S she lived with me for a year and she took English classes. She has worked very hard and passed the exam to be able to study for her master's degree. Then she went to Los Angeles to go to a University there. While studying in California she met a guy and now she is married with a good job and just had a baby a few days ago. I am very proud and happy for her.

Wendy Chou is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Mother

My role model is my mother. My mother was a good mother. Her parents didn't send her to school because they didn't have money. My mom has four children. She's sent all four children to school and they graduated from college and the university. They all have had a good education.

Now I can help myself and my children too. My mother is everything for me in my life.

Islande Henry is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

Ana Lopez is my wife and my role model. I can learn a lot from her. My wife had her first son when she was 17 years old. She married me in 2000. She likes to study, and got her LPN in 2001.

Her second goal was to be a Registered Nurse and she achieved that goal in 2004. Her third goal was to get a Bachelor's degree and she got it in 2007. Now she's taking classes for a Master's degree. She has done all this while raising four kids. I really admire my wife.

Luis Lopez is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. His teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

My mother is my role model. She is the most important person in my life. She made me a better person. My mother has many good qualities and values. She is a strong woman and she has such a good personality.

My mother is the strongest person I've seen. She has 7 children. She worked very hard throughout her life and was able to provide for my family. She never complained about her life. Even when she was tired from work she still made time for her family and made sure that we had done our homework. I learned from my mother that if I work hard I will get what I want. If I have to make big decisions I always asked my mother for advice because she has the best experience and I know I will get the best advice. I have learned from my mother to be honest. She always taught me to treat people the way I treat myself.

I'm very proud of my mother. She is an important part in my life. She not only instilled in me the ability to work

hard. She taught me to have self respect and courage. “I love my mother”

Debbie Nguyen is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Who I Admire

Smart, funny, remarkable, and one of the best people I know. I of course am talking about Liliam Rosado. This is the one person I truly admire the most, my mother. I admire her because of how she is with everyone including myself. She has worked really hard over the past eight years. When my mom came from Cuba she had worked in factories. After a couple of years she worked really hard to achieve her goal to get a diploma in Billing and Coding. Now she is an excellent office manager and a wonderful woman and mother.

Sunay Rivas is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

Adrinne Dorville is my sister and my role model. I can learn a lot from her example. Mrs. Dorville came to the U.S. from Haiti in 1992. At that time she was married and had four kids. Her family was the most important part of her life, but she wanted to do other things for her life, too. Her first goal was to learn English. So she took English classes at night. In 1998 she went to a Vocational Training Center to become a nurse assistant. After that, she started to work at the Hospital. Her next goal was to get an Associate’s degree in Nursing. She began her studies in 2000 and graduated in 2003. By then her two children were in college to be lawyers and the other two were in middle school. During the day she got a job in a nursing home as an L.P.N. She was also busy taking care of her family. She went back to school for her Bachelor’s degree in nursing in 2008 and graduated in 2010. Mrs. Dorville is now forty years old. Her children are in college and she is too. She is taking classes

for a Master's degree. I really admire Mrs. Dorville. She sets goals and works to reach them. I want to be a life-long learner just like her.

Nadege Das is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Someone I Admire

Many people have someone they admire. My brother Leslie, for example, admires Pope John Paul II. He has read all of his biographies and some books written by him. He says "I admire John Paul II for his nobility and great faith in God". It is fascinating that my brother admires the Pope. Unlike my brother though, I admire my grandmother Mercedes. She is a woman with great fortitude.

To begin with, my grandmother has great fortitude. She has lived through many difficult moments in her life. For example, she was a single mother of five children, and she worked pretty hard to raise her family. Unfortunately, the father of her children had many other children and women. Therefore, he helped her very little to raise their children. As a result, my grandmother had to work long hours as a seamstress in order to provide food, school supplies, medicine and clothes that her children needed, many times working from 8:00 am to 5:00 am, without rest or sleep. That meant she worked twenty one hours non-stop! Not many people could do that. That is fortitude! I wish I could be like her. Also, despite her poverty and all her hardships, she managed, with all her strength, to put all her children through college. Today all of them are professionals and responsibly married. Presently, my grandmother is 102 years old, and she enjoys seeing that all her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren have had the opportunity of fulfilling a better life that she could have dreamed. This could have never been possible if she had not had fortitude that God endowed her with.

In conclusion, my grandmother's deep fortitude and determination to raise her family single-handedly give me

envy, admiration, and a desire to emulate and follow in her footsteps.

Sandra Treminio is an Elcate student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. She attends a class with Mr. Jorge Euseda.

My Mom, Maricia

Hello, my name is Paul Saint Louis. The one that I admire is Maricia, my mom.

First, I admire her because she gave me birth. She helps me with my education. Second, I admire her because she did everything she could to give me new clothes whenever I asked her. Third, I admire her because before I came to this country she taught me everything about life. That's why I don't want to let her down. I will do everything I can to work hard and pass the GED.

In conclusion, she's the one that I should admire no matter what. I hope God gives me motivation and gives me intelligence to make her happy by becoming something in my life. THANK YOU!!!!

Paul Berby Saint Louis is a student at Dunbar Community School. He was born in Haiti. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My Mother

The person that I admire the most is Teresa De Leon, my mom. She is the bravest, strongest, and the hardest working person I know. She is always willing to help others and expects nothing in return. Her fortitude is so great that regardless of life's difficulties, she continues to be the pillar of the family. She has been able to overcome the death of her mother when she was only twenty-three years old, and she took on the responsibility of her six siblings. As if things were not hard enough, my mother had to overcome my father's heart attack while facing the possibility of losing her husband. When her father was seventy years old he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. He came to live with her and she took care of him. Near the end the effects of the disease were terrible. He couldn't use the bathroom by himself, forgot everything, and it was an overall horrible

situation. But, she took care of him anyway, with kindness, patience, and love. I never once heard her complain!

My mother continues to amaze me. Even now, she takes care of her two grandchildren. Teresa De Leon is indeed admired not only by me, but by anyone who has been fortunate enough to know her!

Cristina Espejo is a student in Phebe Wiggins class at S.B. Idea's Family Literacy Academy in Delray Beach.

Mrs. Julia Shaw

I admire Mrs. Julia Shaw because of her determination, self confidence and faithfulness.

Mrs. Shaw's determination proved that she was strong. She never gave up on becoming the woman of God He created her to be. She has proven that determination was the key to reach success in her life and in the life of others.

Another incredible quality in her life was her self-confidence. Mrs. Shaw saw something within herself that nobody else could see but her and God. She pushed forward with confidence knowing that she could do all things through Christ who strengthens her.

Mrs. Shaw's faithfulness has also been a tremendous quality that has had an impact on her life's success. She has been so faithful to a lot of us ladies here at Gadsden CI by coming here, sharing the love of Jesus and the Word of God. Her faithfulness has blessed me in many ways.

Mrs. Shaw is a role model that I will always admire. Her determination proved that she was strong. Her self-confidence always pushed her forward because she believed in herself. Being faithful blessed her and mainly me in many ways. I will always admire her for who she is: the one and only Mrs. Julia Shaw.

Bridgette Steele is a student in Catherine Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

My Role Model

My mother is my role model for many reasons. The first reason is because she spent so much time and energy caring, teaching, and instilling good values in our lives. She always gave to us a good example by working hard. This has always been my father's dream, however. His dream was that his daughters would study hard to be independent in life. My parents also taught us to face the problems of life with good moods and always look on the bright side of things. Even though we continue learning so much from her, my mother is my role model.

Yamiling Cedeno is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Who I Admire

I admire policemen and firemen (male or female) that put their own lives in danger to protect others. They never know what to expect each day on the job. They deal with violence, drugs, accidents, and even protect us from terrorism. That reminds me of the horrible tragedy of 9/11 in New York City that most people aren't able to forget. Each day they leave their homes and families to go to work not knowing if they will be able to see their loved ones again. It's something we should admire and appreciate what they do. Wives with little children have lost husbands, mothers that lose sons or daughters, brothers or sisters. They are very brave men and women while they make their living protecting all of us.

Lydia Garcia is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

My role model is my mother. I can learn a lot from her. For example, my mother is very intelligent. Everything she learns, she perfects: nothing in between. She is so secure about herself. She is also a very happy person. When a problem comes up she resolves it immediately. Nothing is a

problem for her. She loves to read books. The one thing I admire most about her is when I ask for advice about something she tells me what I have to do and that everything is going to be perfect. She is very sweet, loving, and caring. The way she looks at life is very enthusiastic and practical. I love my mother. I learn very important things from her.

Dinorah Parada is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Angel Sister

I have 3 older sisters and 1 younger sister, but my oldest sister is the most important woman in my life besides my mom. Although she died over a year ago at 36 years old, everyone still misses her and loves her. According to me she was always a wonderful sister.

To help my parents to take care of us, she dropped out of school in 7th grade. Then she got married at 17 years old. It wasn't easy to convince her husband's family. She had to learn how to cook, had to work at the farm, and more. She did very well at everything.

When she was 20 years old, she and her husband started a business with a small amount of money. They traded rough rice. She and he worked very hard. Eventually they were successful. She was trustworthy, wise, and kind. So everyone liked to work with her. She also helped many people if she could. She was the youngest one at the job and everyone respected her.

Her life wasn't always easy. Beside her small family, she still had 4 little sisters she needed to take care since we were just in school. She took care of us with great care. She was a big help to my parents.

She didn't let my parents worry about her. When she was 24 years old, my parents got sick and couldn't work much. Our life became more difficult. Then she led the family. She worked harder to help my family survive. With no worries,

Someone or Something I Admire

we still lived as one big happy family. She was always behind us to encourage us if something happened to us. She spent most of her time working. However, family was the most important to her. She taught us the right things, like how to move ahead to the future with confidence. She was concerned about everyone in my family until the last day of her life. She always told us “Life is hard sometimes. Don’t let that stop us from keeping our family happy all the time.” Her life helped shape the future for us. I know she was very tired but she was happy to do that.

Now I believe she always looks after us from afar. We followed her to become good people and to go the right way. She would be happy because we can take good care of our parents. I promised her I would take care of her children and teach them as well as she did with us. Her dream will come true. Her son will be a doctor in the next 5 years. I’m proud of her when I talk about her. I feel more confident to live here by myself because I know my “Angel Sister” always will protect me.

Thanh Thuy Thi Phan is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Role Model

My role model is my brother. We are from Ukraine. He is 25 years of age. He is very smart and ambitious. When he was 16 years old, he finished high school with an “A” diploma. During the next 5 years, he finished 2 colleges. He has 2 diplomas; in engineering and law. He came to the U.S. 2 years ago, and we started our own little business. He is my role model because he never stops, he reads a lot, and he is very good in sports. I am very happy because I have a brother like that. I have a dream that my son would be just like my brother, and as for my goal, I want this to happen.

Kateryna Romanenico is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Original Poetry

Grandma's Hands

Wake up my people! Look around you and see,
This world is confused and it's all about you and me.
If we come together and make a plea
To stop the violence and drugs and the spread of HIV,
Then our minds would be free
And the rest will come naturally.
Remember Grandma's hands,
And the things she told you.
Remember? Just free your mind
And think of those precious days.
I can still see Grandma enlighten my way.
So follow those memories and her spiritual ways.
Let go of the present. Let your mind be free
Of this confused and troubled world.
Let's all go back in time when family and friends
Meant so much to you and me.
Let's live in that time today and you will see
Grandma's hands reaching out so lovingly and peacefully.
If we come together, I know we can rebuild a legacy
That has been torn down by hate and greed.
Come with me.
Let's plant our seeds.
Go back to the Negro Spiritual
That's buried deep down inside of you and me.
It costs nothing and we all love things that are free.
So let's look deep down in our souls
Swallow your pride, face your fears,
Let hate fall on deaf ears.
Keep searching for Grandma's hands, she's very near.
Can you feel her spirit in your heart?
She is there if you search deep down in your soul,

Because Grandma came from a very special one-kind of
mold,
And we all got it, but it's buried so deep.
So bring it to the surface and everyone will see.
We can change this world, just you and me.

Linda Square is a student in the Learn to Read of Northwest Florida program.

I Am From a Little Town Called Kingston

I am from a little town called Kingston.
I am from perfumed air.
I am from a people who speak patois and dress in bright
colors that represent different things.
I am from a country that loves track-and-field and soccer
and cricket.
I am from growing up in a small town with my very patient,
spiritual, music-loving, hardworking, and fun-loving Aunt
Lorna Brown who enjoyed reading the Sunday paper and
cooking curried chicken with peas and rice. I am from
boiled pig tails and rice, oven-cooked fish, and flavorful
steamed goat and vegetables—with a dash of spice.
I am from Vauxhall High School, where books were scarce
and we wrote on the big chalkboard. I am from sitting on
hard, broken benches. I am from having little to no
computers to learn on. It wasn't easy, but they tried to do
the best they could do.
I am from a town that did not respect me when I was
younger.
I am from love. I am from an Aunt who loved me and made
me feel special. I am from being taught how to be respectful
to my elders in spite of my town who didn't like people who
were different. I am from an Aunt who taught me how to
cook and clean and do what's right for me.
I am from a family that gave me choices. I am from making
choices—some right, some wrong.
I am from learning from my mistakes.

Siqueen McLean is a student in Lourdes Arriete's ABE class at The English Center in Miami.

My Everything

Her bright, brown eyes
never cease to amaze me.
Her soft, tan skin always
seems so smooth across my skin.
Her light, brown hair
so silky and shiny.
Her tiny little fingers
and toes too, won't be tiny much longer.
Her cute round cheeks and
her beautiful smile always
shed light on my world.
Where ever she goes, she's
always welcome with her sweet laugh.
There's nothing more
precious than hearing the words
"I love you, Mommy"
come from her small pink lips.
You are my everything!
I love you!

My name is Kristina Hatfield; I live in Homosassa, FL with my daughter Brooklynne and her father. I am currently attending Even Start in Crystal River FL. Thank you Even Start staff!

Torn

I can feel the emotions build inside me,
all the memories rush back.
All I want to do is flee,
but everything starts going black.
So I stand my ground,
and prepare to fight.
You are waiting for me to cross the bound.
He brought me to light,
and saved me from my fears.
When I look into your eyes,
I know my decision is made,
as I remember all your lies,
everything starts to fade.
Then I hear him calling my name.

Your eyes take aim,
as my eyes fill with tears,
and he falls to the ground.

Anna Rogers attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program with her two year old son, David.

Oh, Sister

Oh Sister, what will happen to me? Oh, Sister, oh sister
what will it be?
You always calm the fear in me.
With eyes, skin, and hair like mine, there was a time when
they'd mistake you for me.
The comfort that only comes from a sister's love can never
be beat; all see it, those we meet.
Memories we share; good and bad, we never fail to keep, all
piled up in a heap.
Daily you keep in touch for fear of me breaking my neck,
thinking I'm that little sister who is still three.
Friends we have become and stayed since my eighteenth
birth day. Stories we could tell, but we keep between
ourselves.
Never fighting from day to day like some sisters still do to
this day.
So different in many ways, but seeing how we are the same
can only bring us closer each day.
You always have a smile for me, when I am feeling really
gloomy.
Oh, Sister what will happen to me? Oh, Sister, oh, Sister
what will it be?
Tears and laughter fill the telephone lines, as asphalt
between us keeps us apart.
You let me know just how smart I am. I really can't
remember when that came to a start.
Oh Sister, oh Sister, the older we get, we draw each other
near; not knowing how much time we have; it is never
really clear.
You're forever fun to be around, keeping everyone on time,
so we can get everything done.

The happiness you bring my children brings me to tears.
Without you they would never see just how dear a sibling
can be.

Oh Sister, what will happen to me? Oh Sister, oh Sister
what will it be?

Having a sister like thee makes me want to be a better
person, when life can be a little testy.
No matter where I go, you're in my heart, never really being
that far apart.

Oh, Sister, oh Sister you're forever with me.

*Melissa Morales is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton,
Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

Guardian Angel

Whose house? Oh, I think I know.
Her house is in the country, though.
They will not see the angel stopping here
To check on them and watch her family live and grow.
Then off she will go in her beautiful robe,
The angel that she is.
No more will she suffer or want for anything,
Because at God's house she will be waiting,
For she knows they will all be together.
Until then, she will watch over her sweet family and small
town,
For she has become the guardian angel of them all.

*Tammy Jordan-Vadergriff is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in
Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

Seeing the Invisible

What does the mind look like?

I was alone with my tricycle in the park. Then I found her.
She was warm and soft, and I felt I was not by myself in
this world.

She changes a lot. When the spring comes to our island, she
dances all around and blows cherry blossom petals
away...Like snow in the spring.

During summer, she sometimes gets upset with the high temperature and becomes violent. Then, she destroys many parts of the island...Like a wild animal.

That was the first day I realized I could control her. When I call her, she comes. When I say goodbye, she leaves. We even danced together. She likes blowing leaves and making circles.

When I was born one spring day, she was there with a beautiful smile under cherry blossom trees in full bloom. A year later, my mom planted a cherry blossom tree in the yard.

We could see our life history through the growing tree. One day I realized I no longer had control over her. Just like her, we had to move on and leave the tree behind.

Now I'm in a new world, but I can still feel her. When I rake the leaves, she helps me with her gusts. When I want some advice, she writes me back.

Both have always been there by my side, even when I didn't notice their love. It is like the night sky without the sun's light, even though the sun never stops shining.

When I was a kid, I believed my mom was fearless, like a superwoman, who I could always count on, but I was wrong. When I was 20, I told her "Thank you".

That was the first day I saw her mind.

Chika Ozuna is from Japan and is in Camille Lackey's ESOL class at Palm Harbor Community School in Oldsmar.

Tomorrow May Never Come

I'm locked behind bars, and it feels like I'll never get out. My mind is trying to keep positive, but my heart is full of nothing, but doubt.

I miss the sun on my face and I wish the rain would go
away.
All the wonderful memories I've cherished are starting to
fade.

I woke up this morning and realized nothing has changed.
I woke up this morning to find out my release date is no
longer the same.

"This too shall pass," is what I keep saying in my mind.
I'm moving on and I'm leaving this broken road behind.

To all the wasted, sinful years it's time to say goodbye.
I'm ready to wipe all the tears away that I've had to cry.

Tomorrow may never come, today is almost over, and
yesterday is already gone,
But before tomorrow comes, God please forgive me for all
the things that I've done wrong.

*Aubrey Bennett is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton,
Florida. Her teacher is Ray Gentry.*

The Storms In Your Life

The Storms in your Life sometimes make you feel sad.
The Storms in your Life can also make you feel pretty bad.
The Storms in your Life can also make you feel glad.
The Storms in your Life can make you feel special
The Storms in your Life can also make you feel helpful. Just
be careful
who you are helpful to, and watch their attitude towards
you.
The storms in your Life can also make you feel blue,
but keep your head held high,
cause the Lord will help you get through.
Sometimes there may be struggles you are going through,
and believe me it is true, cause what I am saying to you,
I had already been through and still dealing with it, but I
still pursue,
to move on with my Life and get through the pain I went
through.

So don't let the Storms in your Life get you down.
Cause the best secret that I have found
keep a smile on our face, never a frown,
and you will never have another bad storm that will be
hanging around.

Eric Hicken is a student in the Learning for Living Program class sponsored by Florida State College at Jacksonville. His instructor is Mrs. Lawanda Brooks.

What Do You Say?

What do you say to someone, who thinks he has nothing to
lose?

What do you say to a suffered life or the pains of the
struggle?

What do you say to someone who watched their mom
smoke dope on the bathroom floor?

What do you say to someone who's been plagued with drug
addiction themselves?

What do you say to crack, powder and pills that have
seemingly done you?

What do you say to a shattered family?

A mom who left their child at age 12?

What do you say to the feelings of hate, the misunderstood
emotions of a young man?

What do you say to a black man who sees through the eyes
of darkness?

What do you say to the face of death, a person who sees no
change and could care less?

What do you say to a crime of desperation or a prison
sentence of 30 years by the age of 17?

What do you say...

To someone like me?

My name is Dennis Curry, I'm 23 yrs old. I'm from Panama City, FL. I'm currently enrolled in Jefferson Correctional Institution's GED class. My teacher is Ms. Henderson.

Gravity

Imagine a world, with no gravity at all;
things would go upward
that normally fall.
And just like a bird
that loves to fly,
simply jump right up and touch the sky.

You could camp out on the moon
and gaze at the stars.
Roller skate around Saturn
have lunch on Mars.
Spin around, round, and never fall
only if the world
had no gravity at all.

Angel Tears

Rain is nothing but angel tears,
Falling to earth so crystal clear.
Sometimes it sprinkles,
Sometimes it pours,
Filling up oceans from
Shore to shore.
So when the air is humid,
And the land is dry,
The angels get together,
And begin to cry.

Marcel Thomas is a student in Angela Henderson's class at Jefferson Correctional Institution in Monticello.

Could You?

If someone could hear me,
And write what I have inside.
Because I couldn't

If someone could,
I would wish in that
Very moment to say...

If someone could,
If someone could be so sincere
And careful with *this* being,
Who fragile and so pure,
So hard and terrible
If someone could...

If someone could embrace
And say...
“Don’t worry, all is well”
“I’m here with you”
If someone could
If someone could hug me
And *know*, to do it well.

Hopefully,
...I will have that glorious
And marvelous fortune

*Juan Arturo Ortega Gonzalez is a student in Gabriela Pesante’s
Advanced ESOL class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers.*

I Am From...

I am from my grandmother’s warm home cooking.
I am from my childhood backyard that taught me to stop
and take time to smell the flowers.
I am from the beautiful watercolors that splashed on the
white paper and brought it to life.
I am from the vivid imagination which introduced me to my
magical rainbows and unicorns dream world.
I am from the worthwhile struggles and sweat that made me
who I am today.
I am from the bright yellow sun that always kept me
looking up and made me remember the light when
everything seemed dark.
I am from my family’s never-ending unity, love, and
strength.
I am from the illuminating twinkle of my grandmother’s
eyes.
I am from my amazing pets that always put a smile on my
face and made me know true love and innocence.

I am from my fluffy teddy bears that always comforted me
when I was afraid.

I am from the angelic clouds in the baby blue sky that made
me feel like I was floating on them as I closed my eyes and
lay on my bed.

I am from the fresh smell of nature that brought me serenity
as I walked along the park.

I am from my sparkly hula-hoop that made me dance with
joy and forget about everything else.

I am from the ever-mesmerizing night lights in my city that
turned it into a more colorful place.

I am from my ballet class that introduced me to my passion
for *The Arts*.

I am from the music that brought my world to life and
turned it into a melody.

*Vanessa Blanco is a very bright and positive student with TLC Online at
The English Center. She loves to watch movies and has a great sense of
humor.*

I Am From...

I am from a paradise in the Caribbean.

I am from the island shaped like a long gator.

I am from a big yellow house with brown doors
and windows with brown trim.

I am from a small town where everybody was family.

I am from a close family – my brother, sister, grandmother,
parents,
aunts, uncles, and cousins celebrate holidays and birthdays
together.

I am from a small town near the white sandy beach where I
would eat
mangoes, guava, and mamey.

I am from going to beach three times a day with my cousins
and getting spanked for going too much and messing up my
hair.

I am from corn-fed chicken, my grandmother Caridad fed
them herself.

I am from hot chicken soup made fresh.

I am from rice and beans, yucca, pork, and maduros.

I am from Tita and Nina – my blonde-haired dolls.

I am from a bike with training wheels that my father put on
so I wouldn't
fall off when I was little.

I am from love of family, Cuban roots, and freedom.

Yarisleivy Silva is a student with TLC Online at The English Center. She is very studious and dedicated to her education.

I Am From...

I am from the earth...fresh-smelling, misty... nature.

I am from the place where the river sounds rush past every
mountain.

I am from the richness of the people's spirit and the people
who are always happy.

I am from the part of heaven on earth where you can find
the most beautiful angels on earth.

I am from the part of the planet where you can drink the
most delicious coffee in the world.

I am from the place of nature where you can find a diversity
of animals and forests.

I am from a unique land and every person in this part of the
world is proud to be a part of it.

I am from Colombia!

Juan Tello is an ambitious, dedicated student with TLC Online at The English Center. Juan has one son whom he adores.

The Big Tree

I remember the big tree
with green leaves
and yellow flowers
in the middle of
the park.

I went there to play
with cousins and friends
every day after school.

Whenever I see a tree
and kids playing around it
in the middle of a park,

My mind takes me back
to the time of my happy
childhood.

Ninoska Espinosa is goal-oriented, positive, and full of energy. She is a student with TLC Online at The English Center.

The Power of Kindness

Why do people do the
mean things that they do?
Can't they see that they're really
hurting the ones that they're doing it too?

Should the ones being hurt
just turn their backs?
Or should they instead
give them back a slap?

No.

I think that they should
turn them around, and give them a hug,
Maybe this is what they lack.
You know we can all use that.

Instead of being mean,
put your hand out and make a friend.
Maybe then the world would be filled
with a hope that has no end.

Silas Richardson is a GED student at the Lee County Adult Education Center. He is in Mrs. Neal's class.

Samantha

You changed my world with a blink of an eye.
That is something that I cannot deny.
You put my soul from worst to best,
That is why I treasure you my dearest, Samantha.

You just don't know what you have done for me.
You've pushed me to the best that I can be.

You really are an angel sent from above,
To take care of an shower me with love.

When I'm with you I do not cry even a single tear.
And your touch has chased away all of my fear.
You have given me a life that I could live worthwhile,
And it gets even better every time you smile.

It's so magical those things you've made,
To bring back my faith that did almost fade.
Now my life is a dream come true,
It all began when I was loved by you.

Now I have found what I am looking for,
It's you and your love and nothing more.
Because you have given me this feeling of contentment,
In my life something I've never felt.

I wish I could talk 'til the end of day,
But now I'm running out of things to say.
So I'll end by the line you already know,
"I LIKE YOU" more than what I could show.

*Austin Pichardo is a GED student in Mrs. Neal's class at the Lee County
Adult Education Center.*

I Am From: The Land That I Love

I am from a small country in Central America.
I am from a land where it is winter from May to October
and summer runs from November to April.

I am from a mountainous land with a narrow coastal belt
known as: The Land of Volcanoes,

where destructive earthquakes shake the beaches and lakes
into whimsical new shapes.

I am from a humble and kind people who go to work every
morning to put food on their tables.

I come from a poor country which always triumphs over
every calamity.

I come from a land where culture is not lost,
Where the scent of ‘pupusas’, ‘yuca with chicharon’, and
tamales fill the air.

I come from Santa Ana Cathedral,
Where no one is discriminated for their race or religion.
I come from a nice place named El Salvador.

*Yesenia Peralta is a student in Lourdes Arrite’s ABE class at The English
Center in Miami.*

Burning

If you ask me how I feel,
I would tell you honestly that I don’t know.
So many things have happened;
I feel trapped inside my own mind;
knowing the things that I know.
Being in my own head is like a prison cell;
once you enter my mind,
there is no way...out.
It’s like I’m being set on fire;
it scares me to death.
So many things have transpired that if you just only knew...
Burning...
Burning...
Burning...
Burning inside me...
I’m trying to figure out why am I here?
Why do things that I touch leave me?
Why does the pain in my heart hurt so much?
Why is it trying to consume me?
Why does it feel so unreal, so supernatural?

*Yasmine Gunter is currently pursuing her GED at Columbia County
Career and Adult Education and plans to attend college.*

My American Dream

What is my American dream?
A dream where everyone can be,
anything that they can see.
A place where happiness
is as broad as space.
A smile on a face that's full of grace.
Where no one's judgmental or even mean,
where all who care let it be seen.

Where we're brother and sister,
working together to fulfill a dream,
not holding back, but headed full-steam,
like a bull-headed salmon who reaches upstream,
fighting until death to reach a dream.

A dream full of children,
a future unseen,
yet full of determination to completion.

Of the dream they're reaching,
spawned of deep will.
Continuously reaching, reaching,
for that which it will.
Never ceasing until its dream is fulfilled.

Yet we struggle,
and yet we toil,
sometimes shifting like unstable soil,
angry at times, like a festering boil.
Fighting like a sapling,
to break through the layers of oppressing darkness,
seeking the light.
Struggling through many years to reach unspeakable
heights,
a life full of turmoil, mistakes and failures,
the agonies of defeats never ending.

Yet we continue on,

never relenting, but pressing on,
on to the tune, to our own song.
A song of liberty, of freedom I see.
For all who want it,
oh come seek with me.
To make my American dream a reality,
It's not just for you, or even for me,
but for all who follow after...
their American Dream.

Tavareous Williams is a single father of three currently incarcerated at Suwannee Correctional Institution. He is a Volunteer Literacy Student in Mrs. Cox's class.

Lock Down

Steel toilet, single up-top, no spoon, no bowl, no plastic
cup.

Count time, eight times a day,
It sucks but there is nothing you can say.
Watch yourself or you could die,
It is hard to do with one eye.
Fence, wire, and locked doors,
Bunks, walls, and concrete floors.

Fences, walls, shackles, cups,
In the beginning it was real tough.
In the beginning I was full of hope,
"Can I go home soon?"
And the Judge said "Nope."

Minutes, seconds, hours, days
Crawl by.
Sometimes
I feel like I could die.

Self defense and lack of fear,
That's what got
Me stuck here.
Fences, walls, shackles, cups.

Jerry Lee Stevens is an incarcerated student in Mrs. Cox's class at Suwannee Correctional Institution.

Forgive Me

If you would have asked me if I ever thought my life would
 have turned out this way,
Living life in prison because of a stupid mistake,
 I could only tell you I wish this were fake.
A portion of my life wasted inside these gates.
 It's something I despise, matter of fact I hate.
 God gave me chance after chance.
This all could have been different if I would have opened
 my eyes and took a glance.
 Every sign as clear as can be,
 But my mind was taken over by pure stupidity.
Away from my family and the people who truly care,
 To be surrounded by people who are just merely there.
 Some of us have nothing to lose.
We lost the chance of the free life the day our judge handed
 down the news.
 Consumed my words of negativity,
 I ask you my God just please forgive me!!!

*Margaret McGuirk is a student in Judy Drymon's class at Gadsden
Correctional Facility in Quincy.*

Oops

I walked on the clouds, jumped over the sun, got burnt by
 the moon.
 Picked the grass and stepped in flowers,
 Swam in the yard and ran on the water.
Watched the birds flutter, listened to the butterflies chirping,
 Played hopscotch in the sun,
 Built a castle on the sidewalk.
 Having a mixed up kinda tomorrow,
 Looking forward to yesterday.
Ate breakfast last night and dinner this morning,
 Watered the sand and put dirt in the bird bath.
 Played rocks and threw marbles,
 Fished with a kite and flew a fishing pole.
Put the trash away and threw out the groceries,
 Wow, what a day.

Has this time shown you I've always been your fate.
I loved you then, I'll love you now ,
And you'll be better, God told me how.
He said you needed help, he said that you were sick,
So he had to send you on a little trip,
You're sober now, is it clear,
That everything you always needed has been right here.
Mommy do you hear me, I love you oh so much.
Mommy do you see me, having me was just your luck.
I'll be right here when you get home,
Then finally I'll have a Mommy that's all my own.

*Aubria Greno is a student in Judy Drymon's class at Gadsden
Correctional Facility in Quincy.*

Free

Yes, I'm locked down, but I'm finally free.
This is where I had to come so I can find me.
All my life I've been hiding from myself,
Always being selfish, thinking of no one else.
Yes, God gives, but he also takes away,
I never could of imagined seeing this day.
Separated from family and feeling so alone,
My days of freedom is so far gone.
What am I to do? Mope around all day?
No, I think I'd rather get on my knees and pray.
Thank God for saving me from myself.
No ones to blame so I blame myself.
I had to go away to get a piece of mind,
Looking in the wrong direction, it's me I had to find.
What was I thinking? Or was I thinking at all?
While God kept me up the devil waited for my fall.
The moment I fell, the devil had me in his hands,
Because I didn't follow all of God's commands.
Yes, I'm locked down, but I'm finally free.
This is where I had to come so I can find me.
Where have I been for all these years?
Hiding behind a face full of tears.
Feeling sorry for myself and hiding the pain,
While almost driving myself insane.
I'm responsible for how my life turned out,

I'm so full of anger I just want to shout.
I wanna scream so loud so I can be heard,
I'm crying from inside there are no words.
Yes, I'm locked down, but I'm finally free.
Oh, I'm so happy I finally found me.

Rosalyn Williams is a student in Judy Drymon's class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

Friends

We've been friends forever...I'm just hoping you know, I
never take that for granted.

Almost every day there's some reason for me to feel
thankful that you're in my
life.

When something really good happens, I know you'll want
to hear about it.

When something really rotten happens, you're there to help
me through it.

We know how to make each other laugh, sometimes with
nothing more than a look.

We know how to give each other good advice.

An even more important, when not to.

By now we can almost finish each other sentences.

Best of all we can just be ourselves together, and that's a
rare feeling in anybody's life.

We manage to stay close because when you have a
friendship as precious as ours, you hang on for dear life.

I never forgot how lucky I am to have you!

Colleen Tillotson is a student in Catherine Toole's class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

True Love Is...

True love is like a parachute. Jump! It is a risk you take to
feel the glory of love.

True love is to look into your eyes and see myself.

True love is to walk with you, not behind, not opposite you,
it is to walk at your side holding your hand.

True love is to love the uncertainty of destiny.

True love is the light in blind eyes.
True love is the wind screaming your name through the sky.
True love is the whisper of your voice every morning in my
ears.

True love is like our souls dancing in the moonlight.
True love is just like you.

Jasmine Gozzi is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is never having to say goodbye.
True love is not having to forgive.
True love is not having to explain.
True love is to never stop smiling
True love is understood without a word.
True love is giving without attempting to receive.
True love is to share the bad and the good with positive
attitude.
True love is to enjoy each other.

Maria Teresa Cardoso is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is like the wind, unstoppable, powerful, and
strong.
True love is the fire which grows in your heart and you
cannot stop it. It is like the phoenix bird, even when you
think it is dead, it comes back from its ashes to live again
forever.
True love is the strongest tree that cannot be cut down, that
cannot be razed by a storm, that cannot be harmed.

Sheila Saiz is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is like the summer, you feel and see brightness all
the time.
True love is like the sea, sometimes you feel very calm and
sometimes you feel very excited.

True love is like a rainbow, after many problems, the love
always comes back again.

Margarita Romero is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is like an old tree; it will grow old but never
disappears.

True love is like a feeling that many people feel whether for
a family member or for a lover, is unexplainable.

True love is like drinking a hot chocolate with
marshmallows, it is warm and tasty.

Jessica Areas is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is like the butterfly.

It flies against the wind no matter the highs and lows.

It makes you feel alive with so many beautiful colors inside
and out.

Elizabeth Diaz is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is sweet because it makes you feel good. True
love is innocent because it makes you believe, forgive,
share, and accept each other, just the way you are.

Love is the most powerful thing in our planet and in the
universe. Because of love, we are alive, and because of
love, we have the hope to get ahead in life.

Desire Cabrera is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

True Love Is . . .

True love is like wishing the best for the other person.

True love is like giving without asking anything in return.

True love is like finding pleasure in everything you do.

True love is a soul that gets into you to keep you alive.

True love is the water of the ocean that bathes your soul.

True love is the strength that makes you live.

Zenel Jimenez is a student in Elena Jakubowicz's class at The English Center in Miami.

Tug Of War

In his office anxiously awaiting my results.

Trying so very hard inside not to even sulk.

‘Cause I already knew what he was going to say.

“Your tests came back positive I must tell you today.”

“I’m not saying you’ve cancer and are going to die.”

“But it is a life sentence and it’s okay to cry.”

Every day since has been a quite difficult struggle.

I fight my disease in this misunderstood bubble.

It has tried to get me down with all of its strong might.

Sometimes I want to give in, but I know I must fight.

“I’ll be a painful reminder every single day.”

“You’ll have meds to slow me, but I’ll never go away.”

“But I keep telling you - you do not even exist.”

“That I am rather okay and in near perfect bliss.”

“Through all the crippling sorrow and consummate pain.”

“I’ll continue to be positive. From this I’ll gain.”

“You can try to slow me down every inch of the way.”

“But just you remember, I will never go away.”

“And when you think you are the person you’ve always
been.”

“I will be there destroying your body from within.”

“You can continue to take over - to cause me strife.”

“But you cannot have the love, the support, or my life!”

From this I gain power to overcome my disease.

This disease – yeah I have it – but it doesn’t own me!

After moving to Florida to begin anew, Danielle Schweitzer enrolled at Manatee Technical Institute to get her GED. She plans on being a vet tech, incorporating her love of animals into her career.

Childhood Memories: I Am From...

I am from a big and beautiful city where the morning tastes
of chocolate milkshakes.

I am from hearing my small dog, Coffee, barking.

I am from watching different programs, yet my favorite was
Telefantacia.

I am from feeling the hot sand burning my feet

Where the smell of coconut brought a smile to my face as
my mom cooked 'sopa de caracol'.

I am from walking to school and the teacher welcomed us
by singing "Buenos dias, como estas?"

I am from visiting my aunt in the afternoons and eating
delicious tacos as night fell.

I am from playing all day long with my friends.

I am from Honduras.

*Barbara Castellanos is a student in Lourdes Arriete's ABE class at The
English Center in Miami.*

The Sound Of Life

Music is everywhere.

It gives us

a very special and beautiful harmony.

"Listen to the sounds of life".

- When we hear the alarm clock.

- When waking up, if we pay attention
To *life*

- The birds sing.

-- The air running through your being.

- Get in your car,
and turn it on and hear the engine in sync.
Turn on the radio and hear that too.

- Listening to people talk, is also music,
of course, it's if one screams.
If you see a movie you find music,

"Music is everywhere."
It makes you think, dance, wakes you up,
That in each, you can sing, you get excited,
Passionate and gives a thousand emotions.

Music is a beautiful thing,
It is something magical
Music is my dream,
it's my passion,
it's my everything.

*Juan Arturo Ortega Gonzalez is student in Gabriela Pesante's class at Lee
County Adult Education, Ida Baker High School in Fort Myers.*

Carnival of Life

An amusement park
Following a route.
Miraculous attractions, beholden there,
Watch the world with unilateral eyes.

Enclosed sheep in a world of dark boxes;
Believing in what makes them free,
Freely following the others.
Path just drawn by someone else
Cannot be claimed as yours.

The marionette spectacle;
Puppets with a soul
Dancing with the master, the game of life.
The master changes,
The puppets remain the same.

Glass buildings in a society of rocks.
No balance is presented, neither required.
Complaining is an option,
Acting is the solution.

Admitting the conclusion solves the problem
Say the clowns,
The ones that speak with the truth.
Dregs of the carnival;
Never listened, nor recognized.

A dusky carousel spinning and spinning,
Always in the same place.
Different figures practice the duet;
Never moving, never changing.

Every object, every show,
Works in conjunction with each other
And therefore, by its own.
Constantly running in a desolated,
Crowded sphere.

Attractions rumble and arise.
The silhouette of a congregation
Eternally present, continues its display.
There, beholds,
Dancing throughout the night,
The Carnival of Life.

"Never give up on your dream, and your dream will never give up on you." Melissa Aguilera is a student of the ELCATE program, Naples. Her teacher is Graciela Somoza.

Untitled

I'm like a bird whose song in the early morning is in your
ear, the loving rose you'll see when you awake.
When you are feeling blue, I'll be the teddy bear to cry on,
the new born child that brings you joy again.
And when there is no one to talk too, I am the one that will
hear you, when you have something to say.

I will listen to you when you have raining eyes and a heart
broken like glass.
I'm the light of the world in your darkest hour.

*Ben Caldwell is a GED student attending the Lee County Adult
Education Center.*

U Could Be My Lady

Could it be you,
I might be falling for,
Off of just one glance?
If so,
Just give me a chance.
And in case this might be true,
A novice relationship could form
between me and you.
But only can this happen,
If God allows it to be,
Because you should know,
I'm always free!

*Rodney Brenor is a GED student at Lee County Public Education Center
and is in Mrs. Barrett's class.*

When I See, What I Hear

When I see worry...I hear hope.
When I see world hunger...I hear, "Let's feed them."
When I see that the hot water has run out in the shower...I
hear, "Let's dance."
When I see a family broken...I hear, "Let's pray for
restoration."
When I see the lights go out during a storm...I hear, "Think
about all the light in my life."
When I see codependency or addiction...I hear, "Say no."
When I see a dusty bible...I hear, "Read me and pray."
When I see an abused person...I hear, "I am a survivor."
When I see relapse after the 12th step...I hear, "Go back to
the 1st."
When I see a family praying...I hear, "Let's keep it
together."

When I see a handicapped person...I hear, "Let's dance backwards."
When I see our soldiers returning...I hear, "I still have war within."
When I see a church...I hear, "You are welcomed here."
When I see a rainbow...I hear blue birds fly.
When I see a child laughing...I hear, "I am somebody."
When I see Alzheimer's...I hear, "Love my child within."
When I see Christmas lights...I hear, "Jesus Christ is born."
When I see anger...I hear the fear of loss of control, love, and self respect.
When I see a box of chocolate...I hear Forrest Gump say, "Life is like a box of chocolate, we never know what we'll get."
When I see a smile on someone's face whose heart is hard...I hear my spirit singing songs of victory.
When I see stars...I hear make a wish.
When I see myself in the mirror...I hear, "Listen to how you feel and act accordingly."
When I see...I listen.

Andrea Philuippus is a student in Judy Drymon's Life Skills class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy.

Life

Life carries good things and bad things. Sometimes we are confronted with such. However, decide whether to be brave or fearful in dealing with the situation that life throws our way.

Life comes with trouble. What people don't know is how to deal with the trouble and survive the moment.

Life brings happiness, sadness, and surprises. Life gives us reasons to appreciate it. Each one of us needs to give thanks to God for the life we have.

Irene is the mother of three boys, she attends the GROWS Family Literacy Academy with her youngest child. Her teacher is Damaris Rivera.

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

It Is Better Here Than There

I am from Haiti. Haiti is a very poor country. We do not have enough food to eat nor security for our people. If we get sick and do not have money, there will be no medical service. The sick people will surely die.

Now that I am in America, I can see a lot of differences here. There is more safety. This country is more organized and the technology is good. Though the U.S. is in bad economic condition, there are still jobs available. Medical help is provided. If you overpay your taxes to IRS, you will get a refund. I like to see the roads and bridges while I travel. They look very strong and well built. I enjoy many things here. I am thankful for being able to live in America. Above all, I am so glad that my family is here with me.

Berline Jean Charles is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

It is Different Here, So What?

My name is Fatima Gurgel. I am 42 years old. I am married and I have two sons. I am from Brazil and I have been living in the U.S. for five months. I will stay here until July, 2013. My husband is a military man from the Navy in Brazil. He is commanded to come to Key West for a special mission. It is great for his military career.

In comparison, I notice many things here are different from my country. First, are the eating habits. In Brazil, lunch is a big meal. We eat rice, beans, fish, chicken, meat

and vegetables. In U.S. lunch is fast food. My sons face this challenge because they eat lunch at school and sometimes they are still hungry.

Second, in the U.S. some people are not very friendly. The neighbors do not know each other. They tend to spend a lot of time inside their houses. In my country, the neighbors live together. We meet, eat, dance, chat and do things together. We say hello with kisses and hugs, often a big hug. A couple walks hand in hand.

Third, the language is difficult because the Americans speak very fast. They do not seem to worry if foreigners understand what they say. It is impossible for me to carry on a conversation on the phone. In my country, we are very patient and we show interest in the foreigners.

Despite all the difficulties and feeling homesick, I am sure that this experience will be very enriching and challenging for my family. There is so much to learn here and meanwhile we will be patient and enjoy our stay in Key West, an interesting place for us.

Fatima is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Be Alert

My name is Elias Emmanuel. I am Haitian. I love my country very much. Now, I live in America. What I notice while being here is that we must pay our bills. One might think that one can get away with not paying the bill, but he/she is wrong. If you don't pay your bill, you will face the consequences. Your electricity, water, or cable service will be cut off. You will be asked to leave the house. It is not easy to pay bills if you don't have the money. Therefore, you need to have a job. Low paying jobs are very easy to get but high paying jobs are not. So, you better know English if you want a good job. Be aware of things around you when you live in a new country. Then, you will enjoy your stay there.

Elias is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KHWS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Haiti Is Different From America

My name is Jean Roudy Louis. I am from Haiti. I am thankful for this opportunity to live in America. So, I have some ideas how different it is compared to my country. In Haiti, many people do not have jobs. We do not have a lot of bills to pay. Food is not expensive. Many children live with their parents because it is not easy to live by ourselves. We have problems with security. Young people do not have a place to sleep. Nevertheless, we have a lot of pleasure as well.

On the contrary, in America most people have jobs. There are a lot of bills to pay. Food is plentiful. Some food is very expensive. After a certain age, the children find another place to live. They do not live with their parents forever. The security is good. You do not find young people sleeping on the street. There are a lot of fun activities. Many people think that America is a powerful country.

Jean Roudy is a student at the Adult and Career education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

America: A Better Life and Better Future

Life is most important in this world. It gives us the opportunity to live. While I am still alive, I am going to make the best of it. My name is Marie Molaine Pierre. I am from Haiti. I have this privilege to live in America. Now, I can make a comparison between living in Haiti and America.

There are so many things to do here, more than in my country. I can go get more knowledge, learn another language, new skills, and anything that you can think of, whereas in my country the resources are very limited. Also, here I can get better jobs with good pay. I can have my own apartment, but in Haiti I live with my sisters in the same room. We have a small house but a big family. We cannot find jobs that will pay us good money.

It is a good idea to live in America. I learn so many things. I am more knowledgeable and I have a better life

here. If I were to be in my country now, I would not have been what I am.

Marie Molaine is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Want to Be Free

My name is Martine. I am from Haiti. In my country, my life is very simple. I enjoy it very much. As a young girl, my job was to go to school, eat my meals, take a shower, and go to bed. When I had a cell phone, I did not have to pay my phone bill. I can build my own house. I don't have to pay any mortgages or taxes. However, the school is very expensive. Sometimes there is no electricity and safety. Nevertheless, the weather is nice, sunny and hot. It is like paradise.

Then I come to America. My life is not so simple anymore. I have to go to school to study English. I have to get a job. Worst of all, I have to work hard because I have to pay so many bills. I dislike bills. I wish someday I will be so rich that paying bills is no longer a pain. Is there a place that I can live where everything is free? Now, this is paradise.

Martine Pierrilus is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Two Countries

I have lived in the United States for 6 years, since I was 14 years old. It is a big beautiful country known for Disney World. I live in the state of Florida, which has the most beautiful beaches. I love this country.

Of course, there are similarities to my country Colombia. Both the American and Colombian people are nice and friendly. Additionally, Colombia is as beautiful as the United States and also has tourists. In Colombia, like in the United States, English is used as the universal language for international business. Also, both have an excellent president and delicious food.

On the other hand, there are differences between the two countries. Basically, the different ways of life is evident in the culture, education and technology. For example, there are big differences in the technology advancements in medicine. The United States is more advanced than Colombia.

In conclusion, the two countries have similarities and differences. I prefer the United States because in this country I have more opportunities to find a job and make a better life.

Johanna Colmenares studies ESOL with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas, Pompano Beach. She graduated from Northeast High School and plans to attend Atlantic Technical to study to become a dental assistant.

Education Reform Needed!

I'm a student, originally from Haiti, and during the time that I've been living in the United States, specifically in Pompano Beach, Florida, I've observed many things about the US system of education that differ from the system in Haiti. I think it's important to talk about how the education system in my country differs from the one in the United States.

When it comes to education in Haiti, most people recognize how hard Haitian students struggle for education. Its level is low; the literacy rate is about 50 %. The educational supplies, technology, and qualified teachers are very limited over there. Nowadays, the majority of Haitian schools are private rather than public schools. The Ministry of Education has no control over the education provided by universities, public and private institutions. It is really difficult for the Haitian students to learn normally; however, they do their very best to get some knowledge. In my opinion, Haitian students have to try harder to learn things and to make more sacrifices to succeed than those in the United States.

Talking about the US system of education is talking about the institution of peace and freedom, in other words,

an institution of opportunities. The education in the United States is mainly provided by the public sector with good control. The departments of education of each state oversee every aspect that is included in the system. Generally, they provide all kinds of technology and the most qualified teachers to teach the students in order to help them learn quickly.

In comparison to the structures that have been established in the education system of the other countries, especially in the United States, the Ministry of Education in Haiti has a lot to do in order to improve the system. In other words, an education reform is really needed in Haiti. All I can say is that, thanks to the technology used in US system of education, the US system is one of the best systems that I've ever known.

Pecorce Celestin studies in Nancy Gardner's Advanced ESOL class at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach.

Why Do You Prefer To Stay In The United States?

In my case I have more than one reason to stay in the United States.

In Latin America countries a women of thirty-five or more years old is too old to get a job. My last job in Peru was as a Human Resources Coordinator, I worked in that company for twenty-three years. That company was an overseas company and they closed the Peru Office.

I had some interviews for jobs but I was too old to get one. I need to work because my daughter was in a private university and my son was in a private high school.

I came to the United States and I got a job almost immediately because in this country there is no discrimination, not for age, race, or religion. I want to thank this country very much because at last my children finished their university studies earning BA degrees.

Silvia Quiroz is an ESL student at Broward County Libraries' Miramar Branch.

Haiti Differs From the U.S.A.

Life in my home country, Haiti, differs from life in the U.S.A. Life in my home country differs from life in the U.S.A. for three reasons. In my country education is limited, we don't have electricity twenty-four hours a day, and we have an irresponsible government.

First, in my home country, Haiti, education is limited for children because many parents have to pay school tuition. The reason is we have more private schools than public schools. That's why it is an obligation for most of the parents to pay tuition for their children. If they don't pay, then their children can't go to school. That's why parents in Haiti have to fight for their children's education if they want the best for them.

Second, we don't have electricity twenty-four hours a day, so that causes a lot of troubles. As we know, electricity is a source of energy in the world. Since we don't have it, we are unable to do certain things. Electricity is so important, without it, it is impossible for Haiti to develop. Even though we have the potential to produce or create huge items, without electricity there are a lot of things we can't do.

Third, the government is irresponsible because they don't care for the country's children or elderly, and they only care for themselves. But in the U.S.A., where I'm living, they do care, and they are responsible. The government maintains this country very well and does a lot for the people. For example, the government offers free schools and fixes roads.

In conclusion, life in my home country differs from life in the U.S.A. In my country education is limited, we don't have electricity twenty-four hours a day, and the government is irresponsible.

Zico Lafontant is from Haiti and has been living here for several years. He is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. He is taking G.E.D. classes. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My New Life in the USA

I grew up in Cuba. I came from Las Martinas, Pinar Del Rio. It was a small and quiet town in western Cuba, 10 miles from the Caribbean Sea. I would fish year around and visit the beautiful beaches. The weather was always tropical.

I was a teacher and I loved the Cuban food. My transportation was the public transportation. I lived in the same town with all my family nearby.

Now I live in Cape Coral, Florida where the weather is also tropical and I still enjoy fishing. I also love to go out to dinner to different local restaurants and like to work out at the gym. My transportation now is my brand new car, my Sonata.

I'm far away from my family and I miss them very much, especially my sweet daughter, Yoly.

Yoel Santovenia is a student in Barbara Winitzer's ESOL class at Lee County Adult Education at Ida Baker High School in Fort Myers.

My Country

My name is Thu Nguyen. I'm from Vietnam. This is a small country in South East Asia. Vietnam is a land of challenging myths and appealing scenic beauty. It is also the land of smiles, warm hospitality, and generosity. Legends say that Vietnam has a history of four thousand years and that Vietnamese are descendants of a Dragon King and Fairy Queen.

Nature has blessed Vietnam with the beauty of mountains, major rivers, spectacular caves, and large rice fields. Vietnam has a hot tropical climate in the south and a monsoon climate in the north. The hot, rainy season lasts from May to September and the warm, dry season is from October to March.

About Vietnamese food: northern cuisine is often not bold and spicy compared with other regions. Southern cuisine is influenced much by Chinese food, Cambodia, and

Thailand and is characterized more often by the use of sugar and coconut milk. The Central cuisine is often spicy and salty, more than food to the north and south, the colors blending richly. All kinds of ingredients are used diversely to create many different dishes.

Vietnam celebrates many holidays, including traditional holidays which have been celebrated in Vietnam for thousands of years, along with modern holidays imported from Western countries. Among the traditional holidays, the two most important and widely celebrated are the Lunar New Year and the mid- autumn lantern festival.

I hope this basic information about Vietnam can help you better understand my country.

Thu Nguyen is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral, Florida. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

The American Dream

America: The Land of The Free

My name is Jose Martinez. I am from Cuba. The American dream means freedom to me. I come from a country where there is no freedom of expression. I don't like that. Not that I would cause any problems, I just want to enjoy my rights and liberty. The day that I will not forget is April 8, 1999. On this day I won the visa lottery that allowed me to come to America. I came to this country with my wife and my daughter. We are very happy here. Also, we are all American citizens, now. Every day we salute you, America.

Jose is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Odyssey

I got married in 1958 at the age of 25. I did not go to college because I was the oldest son. In those times, in our culture in Columbia, it was very common for the oldest son to work with the father to help take care of the family. My two little brothers graduated from law school. In 1961, my first daughter was born. I talked to my father and told him that I wanted to be free to go build my life with my family. My parents were very sad, but in the end, they agreed. My father's business was to buy and sell coffee farms. He told me, "Be patient; we are going to look for a good coffee farm for your future." By 1962, I bought my own coffee farm that had a great yearly production.

One day months later, three men from the government came to my farm to ask me for permission to install a police

precinct in the area. They said my place was perfect for this project. They told me, “Mr. Diaz, you are a great citizen. You have a big empty house and other facilities and we need your co-operation with the government.”

I said, “Ok.” The reason I said ok was for the people of the area. Usually, people had to walk one hour or ride a horse to go to the town when they needed to file a complaint with the police. They had to lose one day of work. Now, it would take only an hour to do it all.

Everything was good; everybody was happy. The farmers were cooperating with the police officers. They brought fruit, milk, cheese, eggs, etc. There were 16 policemen and 16 horses, all living on my property.

Three months later, the guerillas left me a message under my door. They demanded that I make the police pull out. They gave me 30 days; but only 25 days after, the guerillas attacked the precinct, blowing up and burning the house.

After that day, I never was allowed to go to my farm. The guerillas looked for me everywhere to kill me. I moved my family to another state, and I came to the USA looking for a safe place for my family and me.

One year later, I brought my family to the USA to start from scratch. The first three years were very hard. I worked 2 and 3 jobs. My wife worked one full time and another part time job. We were able to open our own jewelry business. When I look back, I realize how much I gave up. I could be a successful and wealthy coffee farmer in my country. But, my family and I love the USA. It is the land of hope, safety, progress, justice, and liberty for all. God Bless the USA.

Abelardo Diaz is a student with Linda Ashley at United Methodist Christian Ministries at Pasadena Community Church in Largo.

Coming to America

I was born in Poland at the end of World War II, so I don't remember too much about the war. My first memory after the war ended was the military sweeping the fields for land mines. Before the detonations, my family was warned

to go away. Very early the next morning, all our family ran as fast as possible to a safe distance. The explosions were so loud, we had to cover our ears. I was so scared of these noises, happening one after the other. I thought there would be no end of this.

When we returned home, our house had been completely destroyed. We had to move to my grandfather's house in another town. There were four children in my family. We didn't have any toys, only ones we made ourselves. My mother made most of our clothes. I was the second oldest daughter, and I always wore the clothing that got too small for my older sister.

In spite of this, I had a wonderful childhood because we could play outside with many children. There was a lake close by where we went swimming. We felt safe and no adult was watching us. But we not only played and swam; we helped with a lot of tasks around the house: cleaning and bringing in firewood and water.

In 1949, I started elementary school and later, I was lucky to get to go to high school since there was only one available for many students. We had to take a very hard test to be admitted. After I finished high school, I met my husband on vacation where I had gone on a school trip. We married about one year later and continued our education, both of us working and going to college. I got my financial degree.

In 1965, I had a son whose life was much better than I had. We had our own apartment with a bathroom. Living conditions were much better.

In 1981, the Polish people were against communism. That's when "Solidarity" started. Because of many fights, martial law was declared and the army took control of the country. I was lucky again because my father was an American citizen. In the same year on November 12, my husband, son and I moved to New York City. My first job there was as a housekeeper. Later I got a job working in an

The American Dream

office as an assistant to a maxillas and oral surgeon where I worked until I retired and moved to Florida.

My early life was hard but happy, but my life in the U.S was easier. It was a better place for my son.

Anastasia Zambrzycka is a student with Linda Ashley at United Methodist Christian Ministries at Pasadena Community Church in Largo.

The American Dream

The American dream is a phenomenon that binds hearts, souls, thoughts, customs, religions and races in only one ambition, only one vision, which is to improve one's lifestyle and to see this dream come true.

The United States is that vision and it is this dream. While in this world, many people suffer from this disease called slavery, hunger, and misery because of their government, and America, as many will say, is an example of freedom, better life and human rights. The word democracy in many Latin America countries, for example, has an erroneous meaning given by their leaders. They have desecrated the full sense of this word and have been using it as false testimony. Many of the inhabitants of these countries live a life of false democracies because of their false leaders. Although we live on the same continent, we really do not get to travel to the most powerful country, which is an example of freedom and where you can fulfill the American dream, which also means freedom, prosperity, and human rights.

From the very beginning, the United States of America has established a goal to be an example for other nations. Their early struggle for independence and total freedom from the British Empire during the 18th century is well embodied in its constitution, with all rights and laws being placed above all things and the name of God as a shield.

After many years of struggle, many countries in America still do not know what the meaning of full freedom is. First they were under the yoke of Spain or any other nation of the old continent and then, with their own flag and anthem,

power hungry dictators ignore the worries and needs of their people. Their people have chosen to rise against their governments risking the most precious part of a human being; their LIVES, in their attempt to seek the nearest example of democracy. In seeking a life change, that search becomes an inevitable immigration and with it the suffering, and pain to leave their lands, families, friends, and everything behind and bring their roots with them spiritually. This change of life is what everyone call the American dream. As I said in the beginning it is a phenomenon, a political-socio-cultural phenomenon for the better.

The American dream is a dream of change, no matter if you are Latin America, or from wherever you are. The American dream is to improve the way you are living your life, not only as a dream, but a dream that can come true.

Guillermo Cornelio is an Elcate 1 student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. He currently attends a class with Dr. Millard E. Lightburn.

Why Do You Plan to Make the United States Your Home?

I came from Europe. I studied and I heard many things about the United States. In the school, I tried to imagine what this country where people can live in freedom is like.

It was difficult to imagine for me because our country was part of the Soviet Bloc then.

Everybody wished to live separate from Soviet Union. When our country became free, I was a mom with two children by then.

My family moved here and we are so happy to live in U.S. I'm studying English so hard because I'd like to speak in a perfect way.

My name is Irene Harazin. My profession is economist and journalist. I have two children. I'm married. I go to the English Café at Miramar Library with teachers Gloria Jackerson and Sandy Horowitz because I'd like to improve my English skills.

The American Dream Is a Myth

I have so many things to say, express, and communicate that I could write a complete book. After a lot of thinking I decided to write this...I always heard many people in my country express their desires of the "American Dream" and I asked myself, how good it would be or how difficult it would be to get it. Many of them returned disappointed and unable to achieve that dream. I was curious, but I was not ready to take the risk because in my country I felt very comfortable. However, today I am in the United States, not because I wanted to achieve the "American Dream". Instead I am here because my dreams were snatched in my own country because of the way I thought.

When I arrived to this country, I felt comfortable because most people spoke Spanish. The problem came after, when I finally had the opportunity to start looking for a job. I spent months looking and I was unable to find not even one. Why? I did not speak the English language. I started to feel very frustrated because, despite the fact that I had a college degree from my country, it was worthless in this country just because of the language.

I said to myself, the language is not going to take away my dreams! I found out about the SAVES Program, and... here I am! Learning how to read, speak, and write English. With perseverance and effort, sooner rather than later, I will succeed.

America is one huge continent; from North to South Pole and all who live in the American continent are Americans. Today I think that what I heard about the "American Dream"... is a myth. In this country things are as easy or difficult than in our native countries: we have to work hard to achieve our dreams. The "American Dream" is within each of us, regardless of the country of America where we are. If you want, you can!

Circumstances in my life brought me to this country; my goal now is to learn all about the language and culture of the United States. I want to pursue my interrupted dreams; the

only difference is that now they will be reached in another country in the American continent and in a different language.

I am grateful to this country for welcoming my son and me, for supporting and protecting us, for giving us the opportunity to keep looking for our dreams. I hope one day we can return to this country what it gave us. The "American Dream" is in us: put your maximum effort to achieve it. If not, the dream can become into a nightmare. Dream big! My big dreams are to be recognized as a journalist and, why not, have my own publication.

Brizeida Barreto is an ESOL High Beginning student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center, Miami Dade County Public Schools. She attends Ms. Rosana M. Longo's class.

America, Here I Come

My name is Selene Saynes. I am from Mexico. It was my dream to come to America. I was very anxious. Some of my friends said that I didn't stand a chance to come to America because I couldn't drive a car. To them, America is a very big country and I will not be able to move around if I don't drive.

What they said did not stop me from coming to America. I needed to leave my country because it is very poor. I had this thought that if I can live in America, I will find a job and a school to learn English. I will be earning a lot more money and at the same time I will learn to speak English fluently. Because of the better income, I will be able to send some money home to my country to help my family.

Five years and eight months ago, I moved to America. I have a job and I am learning English, now. I don't need a car because the place that I live in is very small. I ride my tricycle everywhere. I am very happy here.

Selene is a student at the Adult and Career Education, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

America: The Land Of Opportunity

My name is Magalie Remercy. I am from Haiti. To me, an American dream is when my wish to be in America came true. I have always wished to live in America. I hear people talk good things about this country. I want to be here because I know that it will be a better place for me and my family. Currently, I have lived here for about 3 years. I have twins: a son and a daughter. My husband and I work very hard because we want a good future for our children. America has a lot to offer for me and my family. Thank you America, for this opportunity.

Magalie is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, KWHS site in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Coming to America

My name is Blackendy Charles. I come from Haiti. I came to America on November 31, 2010, after the devastating earthquake in January 2010. Since I was twelve years old, I remember my mom asking me what I wanted to do when I finished high school. I always told her that I wanted to become a police officer. The reason why I said that is because I knew she hated that kind of thing. I always laughed and said, "I want to be a doctor. That's my dream." So now every time we're talking in the house I say the same thing. She gives me the same reaction every time. It is so funny.

In November when I moved to America, I didn't speak English as properly as I do now. I was so shy. Now I realize if you have a dream you have to make it come true. I'm working hard to pass the GED to make myself, mom, dad, and the rest of my family proud of me. I moved to America with my dad and grandma. I live with them, but I'm not used to them because when I was in Haiti I lived with my mom. Now I'm trying to be more comfortable with them.

I have aspirations to become a doctor because I think a doctor can help a lot of people in the world. After the earthquake in Haiti, I saw a lot of broken legs and arms and

people on the ground that needed help. I think that's the only way I can help people who need it.

I advise anyone that does not have their high school diploma to go and take the GED classes. It will help you obtain your goals. Who you want to be tomorrow will help a lot of people.

I believe in good education. Having a good education can help you have a better life with your family.

Blackendy is a student in Denise Baldwin's class at Lee County Adult Education at Ida Baker in Fort Myers.

What the American Dream Means to Me

To me the American Dream means freedom. It means knowing that I can express myself without fear of being thrown in jail. It means freedom to choose a profession that I like and knowing that I have the opportunity to do well according to my own efforts. It means having the freedom to practice the religion I choose.

It is being free to do what I want to do. It is knowing that I can reach my expectations to succeed and progress. I am grateful to this great country that gave us the opportunity to grow with our own efforts and create a better way of life for myself and my family.

I am very proud of all I have accomplished in this country thanks to the courage of my mother who came here with my sister and me without a penny and never asked for financial assistance; instead we all went to work to earn a living.

Thanks to her we have a better life here, where we made our own family. We are living happily and we're grateful to this great nation for the opportunity of achieving the American Dream.

Fanny Naranjo is a GED Student with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Dreaming is for Free

Unlike Niagara Falls, the Golden Gate or Route 66, the American Dream is not a physical entity. It can't be touched or tasted or given as a birthday present. You will never see it inside a striped box, gracefully laid at the foot of the Christmas' tree. No way! The American dream is a concept, an involuntary vision, always present and always evanescent. Nevertheless, it remains in everybody's mind, sparking all desires, all goals, and all feelings.

This powerful idea didn't come out of the blue. Certain conditions had to be present for this concept to flourish. First, this country is blessed with a magnificent geography: virtually unlimited land and water, good climate and plenty of resources. Second, it has political and social institutions that ensure free transit, safety, health, and education accessible to everyone. Last, its people believe in the free exchange of ideas and have faith in individual achievement.

Although other countries had similar conditions, no other had created such a great concept. The American Dream had been the leitmotif of this country since its birth. Wars were fought to defend it: the American Revolution, the Civil War. Many people had suffered and died for it: the Native Americans, the Pilgrims, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, to name a few. From then till now, this magnetic attraction has become the forever source of inspiration, the adhesive substance that quilts many different races, religions, values, or beliefs.

That strong idea could not have been kept in secret for long. Dreaming is for free. For Americans and later immigrants, the meaning of the dream is the same: hope, a sense of belonging, and quality of life. The American Dream is one and only. It's part of our culture, like the Blues, Hotdogs and the Super Bowl. Everybody loves it, and more importantly, nobody can be blamed for looking forward to it.

Martin Gil is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

I Did It!

What is the American dream? We hear about it all the time, but how is it really defined?

“Life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement”. This is the definition of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams in 1931.

I believe this definition captures the concept of the American Dream. I would say that the American Dream is the personal dream of each immigrant who comes to the USA to achieve happiness. It is the opportunity to make personal choices without political and economic limitations. However, it assumes the dreamer sets his or her goals and ambitions and is committed to realizing them.

Many people come to this country to achieve liberty and prosperity, to have a better life, to find secure jobs, and benefit from educational opportunities. Many of them make it; others don't and return to their countries. Hard work, tenacity, and faith in oneself separate those who make it from those who don't.

I have been following the American Dream since I was in my country, Venezuela. To come to the United States was my personal American Dream, and I did it! Then I realized it was just the first step in fulfilling my Dream. I had to figure out what I wanted to do, what I wanted to be, and what the next step should be. With no English at all and no legal documents to work, I started to find the right direction in my life in the USA. It took me years, a lot of effort, and money! Next year, I will be joining millions of American Dreamers waving the tiny US flag ready to pursue their Dream. I did it once again! I thank God for this.

Owning a home is a major part of the American dream. After a lot of hard work and headache, my husband and I decided to purchase a house. It was an amazing feeling to receive the keys to the house and to be declared the official owner of it. I did it for the third time!

The American Dream

I have committed myself to doing my best each day of my life and to working toward improving the quality of life of my family. I will continue to pursue the American Dream as long as I live.

Alba Rodriguez is a student in Rose Gorospe's class at Miramar Community School in Miramar.

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