

Author Biographies

Mahar Alwishah – p. 47

Victor Ankiambom – p. 102

I was born in Africa. There was only one school in my area, and it was not complete. Because of this, I did not have the opportunity to get a good education. I decided to come to GED classes because I wanted to improve my life.

Angela Bonner – p. 174

I am a 29-year-old loving mother of a beautiful daughter who believes that education is the best gift that you can give yourself and your loved ones. I am planning on a nursing career after earning my GED.

Tyeasha Bradford – p. 114

I passed the GED test in March and will graduate from the Canton City Schools Even Start Family Literacy Program in June of 2007. I have enrolled in Stark State College of Technology where I will be majoring in Emergency Medical Services. I have a two-year-old son, Travis, and another child due in June.

Lianna Bramer – p. 128

I am the proud mother of two sons. I received my GED in December of 2006 and am currently enrolled at the University of Cincinnati in their Paralegal program.

Rose Buckner – p. 3, 11, 106, 107

I am seventy-six years old and graduated from Milford Public High School in 1948. When I started tutoring elementary school children, I felt the need to refresh my education, so I joined a Live Oaks ABLE class in 2000. I am now fondly known as the “Welcome Wagon Lady” in our morning

classroom. The ABLE experience has been therapy for me: helping with my computer skills, keeping my memory sharp, and allowing me to interact with the younger students. I am honored to have my writings published and wish to thank my teachers at Live Oaks for their support!

Donald Bunch – p. 96

I am a husband of 34 years to the love of my life, and we have three precious children, one boy and two girls. My wife and I also have nine granddaughters. I have been an assistant pastor of a church for the last 8 – 10 years and have been saved now for 23 years.

Gary Bunch – p. 93

I am a single father of three beautiful daughters, Hannah, Hayley, and Hope. My poem is about how I would like to be remembered – as a loving father to my three girls. I am very proud of my daughters and would do anything for them. I have enjoyed attending classes at Live Oaks with my father.

Nora Burger – p. 73

I progressed through the 4th grade in my native Honduras and came to the United States as a child. I worked hard through the years. I am a U.S. citizen and a past matron of my local Eastern Star chapter. I drive 60 miles roundtrip to attend English classes at Live Oaks. I encourage other students to do their part.

Claudia Cabell – p. 139

I am from Colombia, and my husband is from Cincinnati. We have two children and a nephew living with us. My story is about the difficult time people have when a loved one is ill and you are far away.

Kilcha Canfield – p. 162

I was born in South Korea. I have 2 beautiful sons and a very supportive husband. I have attended Scarlet Oaks and will be

taking the GED Test soon. I enjoy the classes, especially those on writing.

Donna Caplinger – p. 92

After staying at home, raising my four children, and ending up an empty nester, I decided to obtain my GED so that I could get the job I always wanted, driving an elementary school bus. At age 46, I started, and with the support of my husband, I achieved both of my dreams. I have been writing poems for many years about a variety of subjects to help to recall good times with families and to get through some of the not so good times.

Brenda Carroll – p. 82

I have been coming to ABLE classes since 2004. I really enjoy coming to my classes. I have learned so much more, especially in math. Also, I enjoy writing short stories and poems. I really want to thank my Mother who gave me knowledge and the push to write, as well as my teachers who have helped me tremendously with my writing. Thank you.

Christine Carter – p. 176

I attend classes at Diamond Oaks.

Carmen Cotto – p. 74

I have been married for 27 years to a wonderful man, Jose, and we have two beautiful sons in their twenties. I have lived in the U.S. for 20 years and became a citizen in 1996. I have been employed at Pierre Foods since 1989, and I enjoy my job as a box maker. I am glad that this company has a Learning Center to help people learn and improve their futures.

Sein Han Cozad – p. 60, 113

My main goal in attending the Live Oaks ABLE class was to improve my English. Not only have I improved my English skills, but also my Math and Writing skills. I am from

Cambodia and came to the United States after marrying my American husband 5 years ago. I work as a nail technician at a salon in Loveland, Ohio. I have enjoyed learning new things and getting to know my classmates.

Curtis E. Davis Sr. – p. 108

Marie Davis – p. 107, 137

I am the proud mother of two wonderful children and grandmother of four beautiful grandchildren. I am studying for my GED at Live Oaks Career Development Center in Milford, Ohio. My hobbies include bowling, working in the church nursery, and gardening. I wrote the poem “Snow” with my granddaughter.

Afi Abi DeSouza – p. 39

I came to the U.S. from Togo, Africa. I am married and have handsome twin boys. I am an employee of Pierre Foods and attend the Learning Center there to improve my Math & English skills. I am happy to be living in the land of opportunity.

Brenda Dicus – p. 31

I attend classes at Diamond Oaks to improve my life.

Michael Drozdovsky – p. 63

Timothy Edwards – p. 169

Timothy was an inmate as well as student at the Lake County Jail at the time of his writing.

Misty Dawn Gannon – p. 193

I am a mother of one son, Antonio. My dream is to become a successful doctor one day!

Cuiyu Geng – p. 54

I was born in the Hebei Province of China. I studied physics in China and received my PhD in Material Science. I am now attending Advanced English Second Language classes at Case Western Reserve University in order to improve my English.

Michaela Gill – p. 106**Brandi A. Gilmer – p. 157**

I am 29 years old with two girls and am getting my GED to provide a better life for them. I don't want them to ever be without. I want to be proud of who I am and what I've become.

Sue Glover – p. 135

I live with my family in the lower eastside of Campbell, Ohio. I have been attending the ABLE program for about six years in order to receive my GED. When I am not at school, I enjoy baking and caring for my animals.

Ram Gupta – p. 65

I am from India. After my three children left there, my wife, Raj, and I decided to move to the United States. Both of us earned engineering degrees in India.

Joe Hammet – p. 14

I'm 32 years young. I was adopted from El Salvador and have lived in the USA for my entire life. I enjoy art, music, and bodybuilding. I have two boys, ages five and six, and have a little girl on the way. For me, writing is a gift from God. It's not easy when I write because things come out that are so real to me. I thank you all for reading and writing. Never stop, even when it is a challenge, for as we write and read, we create a balance in our lives. Once in a while, the spotlight stays on. Like a cat in the sun, absorb it and share it. In life, our best work is to relate. That's why we write: to hear, to sing, but most of all, to listen.

Olga Heasley – p. 41**Chauntea Henry – p. 179**

I am a student at Project Learn of Summit County. I began the program May of 2006 and am well on my way to receiving my GED. In my free time, I love to write poetry and dream about having it published someday.

Doris Molina Hernandez – p. 94, 142

I was born in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, and I went to José Allamano High School. I got a degree in International Business in Cooperativa Integral Advanera. I am married, have two children, and work at the Marriott Hotel North in West Chester, Ohio. Now I am studying English (ESL) at Great Oaks.

Yldigar R. Villatoro Herrera – Cover art

This is the first time that I drew for a *Beginnings* publication. I am glad it was accepted.

Veronica Highfield – p. 138

I am 32 years old and have been married for 12 years. I have two wonderful children, Gary and Simone. I am attending classes to get my GED, so that I can be a good role model for my children. I also would like to open my own day care center someday.

Donna Hines – p. 78

I'm sixty years old, a mother of three, and grandmother of twelve. I love the outdoors—I have worked with plants and flowers most of my life—and enjoy doing crafts and sewing. I attend G.E.D. class in Lancaster, Ohio, where I live. I wrote this story because I have traveled with my husband and children across the United States and back three times, and I have seen lots of beautiful country. I was very surprised when my story got picked for publication.

Ragiye Ibragimova – p. 119

I was born in the Ukraine and taught biology in medical school in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. I came to America 12 years ago with my husband, my daughter, and my granddaughter. I am a student at the English Center in Youngstown and am very proud to have become an American citizen.

Hayfa Ilayan – p. 59

I was born in Palestine. I have four sons. I finished high school in Palestine. I came to America one and a half years ago. I am studying English at The English Center in Youngstown.

Yolanda Ivy – p. 175

I am 35 years old, and am attending ABLE classes to get my GED, so that I may attend college in the upcoming year. I want to show other people that they can do anything that they put their mind to. I want to be a role-model to someone else.

Mahalia Jackson – p. 156

I have had a long history with poetry. I first discovered it through my oldest brother, Jesse Benson, who is also a poet and writer. Then, in 7th grade, my teacher asked the class to write a poem on any subject. I wrote a poem named “Black Butterfly” about perceiving one’s self image. Now at age 24, I continue to perfect my God-given gift of writing and creating poetry. My future plans include working with children to help them become aware of their self-worth and value.

Carolyn Sue Jones – p. 87**Melissa Jones – p. 113**

Obtaining my GED is my main priority at this time, aside from family. I have been working very hard for many years to achieve this goal. I have passed everything but the Math section, and it has been quite a challenge since I didn’t have a

lot of Math in school. It means the world to me to continue to work towards this goal, because it would make my father and my family very proud.

Aaron Keffer – p. 132

I am 19 years old and after much hard work, I received my diploma in June 2005. I am a rapper/writer and plan to continue pursuing this. I also have training in different construction trades in case my music career does not turn out as planned. I would like to thank my mother for doing all that she did to help me graduate, Mrs. Nancy of Life Skills, and YouthBuild Mahoning County.

Angela Keller – p. 120

My life is like a volcano erupting in the middle of spring because I have just recently divorced, and for me, being an individual parent gets very complicated. I restarted my life and it is slowly getting better. I have three teenagers who can be a handful. My first girl is sixteen years old, and she can be herself sometimes. My second girl is fourteen years old, and she can be helpful in many ways. My third girl is thirteen years old, and she can be hilarious. I also have a wonderful dog named Pebbles. She is twelve years old and loves to walk up to the pond watching the ducks swim around. As I said, my life is getting better with my three girls by my side. I like to write poems and I like to read all kinds of poems, too. I love to draw pictures of nature scenery, but all I have time for is working at my job and remodeling our home.

Kelley Kerper – p. 28

I have three sons, ages 14, 12, and 8. I raised my sons on my own with help from my parents for 11 years. I am currently married to John Kerper, who is now helping raise my sons. I would like to go to college to study counseling after I get my GED. I want to help others overcome obstacles similar to those I faced when I was in school. I would like to thank my

parents, John and Cathy Mussell, for all of their help and support.

Juan Mejia Lopez – p. 34

I was born in Aguacatan, Guatemala. I finished my high school over there. Now I'm studying English at Scarlet Oaks. I have many goals to reach in my life. I already got one of them, which is to be a winner in the Ohio Writers' Conference #10. I dedicate my winning to my mother. She is not here, but she is here in the spirit. I also dedicate it to my teacher, Sameera, for her encouragement.

Melissa Martin – p. 26

I am 25 years old and have two kids. Alex is three, and Alysha is six weeks. They're my pride and joy and will probably be as ornery as I am.

Art Massengill – p. 6

Art Massengill was a student at Live Oaks ABLE and has been published in several of the *Beginnings* publications. He received his GED in February of 2006, and his death in November 2006 has spurred members of his class to write tributes in memory of him. One of his previously published stories has been reprinted in this edition of *Beginnings*.

Geraldine McQuitty – p. 77

I am a 51-year-old mother of two, grandmother of six. I love to read and write and am trying to get my GED. If I could, I'd tell all young men and women to STAY IN SCHOOL because young minds work better than old ones.

Althea Mitchem – p. 105

I live in Youngstown, Ohio. I have been attending GED classes since September 2006. My goal is to receive my GED by September 2007. This has been one of the most challenging experiences in my life, but also one of the most

exciting, almost as exciting as becoming a grandmother for the first time.

Alexander Morris – p. 71

Craig Morris – p. 159

Scott Myers – p. 188

I am 33 years old and am married with five kids. Health problems forced me to change my career, and I have to go back to using my brain to make a living. I recently earned my GED and am now pursuing college classes. I will not go back to working 60-80-hour weeks, because I have learned how much I enjoy spending time with my family.

Angela R. Nicoson – p. 125

I am married and have two wonderful children. I am enrolled in the Real Estate course at Lakeland Community College, beginning in May.

Emily Nutter – p. 165

We have all had experiences in our past that are painful to remember. After I wrote this story about something that happened in my life, I felt better. It helped me realize that even though bad things happen, we have to overcome them.

Jasmin Palasz – p. 52, 111

I am from Germany and have been working as an au pair in Maineville, Ohio. While it has been very hard to be away from my family, I have enjoyed my classes at Live Oaks and Scarlet Oaks. It also has been fun traveling the United States and experiencing new places.

Pankaj Patel – p. 106

I joined the Live Oaks ABLE class to improve my skills in order to pass Reading, Science, and Citizenship for the Ohio

Proficiency Test. I am 20 years old and was born in India. I currently work at my family's convenience store.

Blake Phillips – p. 102

I am a 21-year-old student at Scarlet Oaks. My mother and sister are both college graduates. I think it is time for me to get my GED and go on to college.

Meghan Marie Piatt – p. 178

I am 19 years old and am currently still working on getting my GED. Afterwards, I would like to attend college or at least take some college classes. This poem was written from the way I was feeling inside at the time. It means a lot to me that my poem was chosen, and I would like to say thank you.

Pierre Learning Center – p. 19

Our class meets on Mondays, and our teacher is Marty Lopinto. We are busy studying all kinds of things. Some of us are studying math so that they can get a promotion in the Pierre company. Others are studying their English, writing, computer skills—all of the basics. We enjoy coming to class before work, break time, and/or after work. We'd like to thank Pierre Foods for offering a Learning Center to us! We have accomplished one of our goals—getting published! That's quite an accomplishment!

Geeoun Post – p. 141

I am married to a generous man, James, and I am very proud of my son, Kenny. I work at Pierre Foods and enjoy learning new things at the Learning Center. I have lived my life with lots of love, and I am very happy. I became a citizen of the US in 2003.

Valerie Puckett – p. 27

Guadalupe Ramos – p. 190

I am the proud mother of a beautiful 15-year-old daughter, the joy of my life. I have lived in this country for about 19 years and truly enjoy it. I started attending ABLE classes at Live Oaks to improve my language skills. My future plans are to move to Florida and open my own business. I believe that mastering the language of this country is important because I feel privileged to live here.

Rebecca A. Ramos – p. 48

I was brought up with certain beliefs and superstitions because of my Hispanic and Southwest Texan background. When I write about these superstitions, I write about my culture. Some of these things were started long ago and are still continued today. Whether these things are true or not is a personal choice. I still believe in some of these superstitions. When I drop a fork or spoon, I still do a little ritual just in case!

Melissa Randolph – p. 102

I am a mother of five children and am very busy with my family. I would like to become a nurse because I like helping people. The ABLE classes will help me prepare for the entrance test to nursing school.

Charlene Rhodes – p. 24

I was born in 1947 in Zanesville, Ohio, where I attended school until the tenth grade. Married at 16, my husband and I raised six children. After 24 years, my husband had a heart attack and passed away. My children and my 18 grandchildren are very close to me. They are my life. In 2002, I met a good man. We started going to church together, and in 2005, we got married. I thought I would never be happy again, and I am so glad God put him in my life.

Joanne Roach – p. 91

My name is Joanne, but people call me “Nicky.” I am a 24-year-old mother of five. I enjoy reading, writing, and playing with my children.

Kathy Romans – p. 102

I am a high school graduate who has returned to Scarlet Oaks to prepare for the Licensed Practical Nurse entrance test. I would like to become a nurse and continue in school to get my degree.

Carol R. Rudder – p. 17, 101, 141

I have two children, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. I have worked at Pierre Foods for twenty years. I just retired in March.

Jamiean Ruffin – p. 122

I am 30 years old. I started GED classes at Diamond Oaks because I wanted to have a better life. I currently live in Cincinnati and work two jobs, a shipping and handling clerk and a maintenance man.

Luciana Salaverry – p. 67

I am an advanced ESOL student. I recently returned with my family to my home in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I plan to attend a university and study genetics.

Najia Salmi – p. 102

I was born in Morocco and studied International Law and Islamic Law there. I have been in the United States for three years. I have learned a lot in my ABLE classes.

Reggie Sanders – p. 115

I’m a single father from the city of Youngstown, Ohio. I’m 25 years of age and love my life as it is now. Through the ABLE program, I was able to achieve my diploma. I will be

attending Cleveland State University in the fall of 2007 as a Business Administration major with a Marketing minor.

Heather L. Schrull – p. 149

I'm a 21-year-old mother of two beautiful girls. The inspiration for everything in my life is my children. Even though I had them when I was young, I still can't imagine life without them. I'm working toward a college education. Although I'm not sure exactly what I want to be yet, I'm sure I'll figure it out soon.

Debora Sellers – p. 103

I'm a 45-year-old college student now. I was on welfare at the time of the writing. It was a response to some narrow-minded folks in a training class who were asked, "Do you think people on welfare are lazy?" I got my GED with the help of welfare, and this is a glimpse of my life. I'm a busy mother of four, two still at home. I'm recuperating from a second back fusion surgery, got my GED and CASA, and plan on a career in Human Services/Criminology.

Linda Seymour – p. 172

I have been coming to GED classes for three years, and I have enjoyed every minute of them. My other interests are listening to music and taking long walks. I am a person that loves animals and talking with people. I especially love talking to my Mom; she is my best friend and the biggest influence in my life. I love her with all of my heart.

Dusty Shriner – p. 23

I work for J&L Poured Walls, pouring concrete footers. I am a hard-working young man. Despite life's ups and downs, I have found that I am a goal-oriented, determined, and strong-willed person. With a positive outlook on life and a peaceful attitude, I strive to make the world a better place for myself and others.

Debra Smith – p. 107

I am the mother of 4 children. I started attending Live Oaks ABLÉ classes last year to work towards obtaining my GED. Due to a back injury, I have not been able to attend classes as often as I would like. Once I get back on my feet, I plan to attend more regularly.

Delores Smith – p. 102

I was born in Jamaica. I finished the ninth grade, married, and had four children. I then moved to the United States. I realize that in order to have a better life, I need to get my GED.

Karen Smith-Flick – p. 183

I have worked at Pierre for several years in the Quality Control Department. I have had my writing published in previous *Beginnings* books. I enjoy writing and am proud of my accomplishments.

Ivette Soto – p. 97

I am an enthusiastic student who is also the 40-year-old wife of Robert Soto, the mother of three children, and the grandmother of one grandchild. I am looking forward to entering the field of nursing after earning my GED.

Theresa Stone – p. 88

I reside in Lancaster, Ohio, and have four grown girls. Last February, I went to Ohio Wesleyan University to hear Ted Kooser, former poet laureate, speak. Ted's poetry really inspired me to read and write more poetry. Having my poem published was a great honor, and I look forward to celebrating with fellow authors.

Roukhi Sylla – p. 102

I am 21 years old and live with my family. I was born in West Africa and did not complete my education before moving to

the United States. I would like to get my GED and go on to college.

Ethan Thomas – p. 5, 85, 145

I took the GED at Live Oaks in 2007. Now, I plan to go to college to get a degree in religious education. After I graduate, I plan to become a priest. I've struggled a lot in my life as I talked about in my story, From "Pain To Triumph," but it did nothing but make me strong. I hope that as a priest I can help people strengthen their relationship with God.

Carmen Visalden – p. 81

I was born in Morrovis, Puerto Rico, and moved to New York ten years ago. After five years there, I decided to come to Lorain, Ohio, with my husband and five children. I enjoy attending ESOL class and am working hard to improve my English.

Liyong Wang – p. 57

I studied Polymer Chemical Engineering and Chemical Technology in China. I moved to the United States in 2005. I now live in Cleveland.

Jennifer Warren – p. 136

Donna E. Williams – p. 152

I live in Lorain, Ohio. I am a mother of four. I have three boys ages 13, 12, and 8 and a 4-year-old little girl. I was inspired to get my GED, because I can not enforce education upon them without being educated myself. Having gone through a lot in life, I now realize that life is too short. I have learned to take each day in stride and follow my dreams. That is the key to my success!

Kim Wilson – p. 130

I have worked at Pierre Foods for 6 1/2 years. I recently got a promotion as a Line Coordinator. I have attended the

Learning Center at Pierre for 3 years—improving my math, writing, and computer skills. I enjoy writing because it is a way to express my feelings on paper. I would like to thank my mom and my two sisters for being such great role models!

Antawanna Burt Witherspoon – p. 170

I am a diverse writer who strives at becoming a well-known poet and someday an author of my own novel. I am known to be a motivator and a self-taught professional. I take pride in being the mother of my one-year-old son Elijah'Bleu. I dedicate "Dear Son" to Elijah'Bleu in hopes that he has a full understanding of my love for him.

Lindsey Wittmeyer – p. 86

Bella Yang – p. 49

I was born on November 9, 1983, in China. I received an associate degree in Republic Relations from Jiangxi Normal University in 2002. After graduating from college, I worked for a trade company for about three years. I met my wonderful husband in that company in 2004, immigrated to the United States on April 23, 2006, and married on June 15, 2006. At the present time, I am starting classes at Sinclair Community College. My dream is to be a pharmacist someday.

Rawan Zarour – p. 102

I am 24 years old. I was born in Jerusalem and have been in the United States for five years. I am married and have children.

Chengfang (Sharon) Zhao – p. 69

Shannon Zimmerman – p. 98

My piece was written while in Logan County Jail. I am now moving forward with my life by attending rehab in Lima.

