

*DREAMING
POSSIBILITIES*



A NEW BEGINNING

Every day is a new beginning
For me to start over
To see things I've never seen
To hear what I've never heard
To taste things I've never tasted
To feel what I've never felt
To be who I never was
To explore the world that wasn't explored
To have what I never had.

~ Vicki Addy

CHOICES

My name is Sereice, and I am twenty-five years old. I have two handsome boys who are six and four. I had to make a change from the streets. I had to change a whole lot. I had to do it on my own.

I started off in "da hood," then moved out, and had to change the way that I am. I had to realize that I am a mother, not a child.

Throughout the past years I had to change the things that I've learned to make a better life for myself. I had to learn to do everything that a mother needs to know. I tried to get a job and go to school. Between the two of them I'm all tied up. I want my children to know that their mother is trying. My children are also in school, and that makes me feel good.

I keep on continuing to do what I am supposed to do—go to school, try to work, and watch my children grow. I don't have custody of my children because I wanted to have someone from the streets next to me. But no matter what I went through, I didn't let that stop me from keeping myself in control. I am still trying to help my family. I'm still looking for a job, but I haven't found one yet. I want a better living with my two children.

I know that I am doing the right thing because I've made a lot of changes. Not finding the right job, no income, a mother with two children...it is tough. But along the way of my ups and downs, I've learned to keep on going. Don't let anyone pull you down. No matter what, there will always be something out there good for you. I've gotten a lot of help from many people, and they helped me get through my thick and thins until the very end. I know that I can do it, no matter how light or how heavy it is.

I had a home with my two children, but I let it go. I had to, or I wouldn't be where I am right now. My children are both safe. One is living with his father; the other one is with my mother. I am still fighting my way to get ahead, get back right. I am starting to find my way to the top. So no matter what you do, always listen to those who are giving the correct advice to you. Say, "I can do it!" If I can do it, then you can too! Keep on striving, and don't give up!

~ Sereice C. Harris

OVERCOMING

I feel as though I must climb a mountain,
Just to reach a rope.
Is there hope? Will I choke,
or was life created just for a joke?
Maybe so, maybe no,
But for now I must go.

P.S. if I reach some stairs
I will face my fears.
Even with dripping tears,
I will dodge the spears.

~ Jesse Altman

DETERMINATION

Determination is an amazing thing.
It drives us up mountains
And built this great country from only dreams

I believe determination is held in examples
Both large and small
The greatest of beings,
Those that society simply deems "null."

It's all around the armies of soldiers fighting in our defense.
It's the flag that flew high despite the attack.
It's the new World Trade Center built back from the floor.
It carries the single mother who refuses to be poor.
I see it in Armstrong down the Tour De France.

Determination can take many forms: family,
children, or the desire to simply open all of life's doors.
One thing is certain and always will be—
We couldn't have much if it wasn't for determination
Held within you and me.

~ Caleb Robertson

DREAMS VS. REALITY

I don't remember exactly what kind of visions I had of living in the United States, but living here has changed my life completely. After years of hard work and depression, I finally met my current husband and came with him to Cleveland—a challenge as well as a chance to better my life. I had to quit my job and leave everything in Germany. I don't remember what I was thinking and hoping but I was excited about this fresh start in the United States. It would be the first time in my life that I didn't have to work for a living. And although I had to leave my family and my friends, I felt confident and hopeful.

In the first year here, we tried to get used to the American way of life, which I hadn't imagined would be so different. From a European perspective, everything here is hidden. How could anyone know that "Heinen's" was a grocery or Beachwood Place a mall? And how do Americans clean the floor? Where could I buy real bread? I was very busy finding out about all those things and learning English.

The second year began very dramatically. Twice I had emergency surgery. I learned a lot about American hospitals and how to handle illness. It was a shock. When you are sick you really feel the loneliness of not being in your own country.

After one and a half years, I met an English woman who introduced me to a German group and an international women's group. Being in contact with people from all over the world is very interesting, and I think I have learned a lot. In the United States, I feel closer to European people, although we don't speak the same language. And I have learned to see my own country differently. I was never aware of the beauty of Germany before I lived in another country. I also have learned to admire the friendliness and

open mindedness of many Americans and how they make you feel comfortable.

This September I started a yoga teacher training class. I did it to deepen my knowledge of yoga, but in the training I learned a lot about myself. I learned that the search for something more than money and comfortable living is the same all over the world. This desire to seek a more spiritual life is what unites us.

Maybe those dreams of a better life in the United States were a bit of a fantasy. One thing I have learned for sure is that even if you change the continent where you live, you always have to live with yourself. If you are not happy with yourself, you will be unhappy everywhere.

~ Caroline von Westernhagen

GHETTO CHRISTMAS

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the hood
Not a creature was stirring, only a drug dealer collecting on his goods.

The hood was all quiet, not 'cause they was asleep
Some had no 'lectricity, some wit no heat

The houses was dark, windows draped wit stained sheets
Garbage and trash lay in the streets

There was soiled pampers all on the curb
One smelled of piss; it had two tiny turds

No decorations were hung, no colorful lights
You could see snow everywhere, all the hood was white

There was frost in the windows from the weather being so cold
You didn't see anyone, not one poor soul

All of a sudden we could hear someone's teeth chatter
We stepped outside to see what was the matter

It was the nasty crack-head neighborhood pimp
He rocked from side to side with a funky old limp

He was big and ugly, and he was fat
He was 'bout nothing, just an old hood rat

He was slipping and sliding, couldn't even walk straight
He was so big and fat he broke down one of the hood
momma's gates

Boggling some old junk he had found on the way

We wondered what he had, it was 'bout to be Christmas day

We knew it was broken up toys in the big red bag
The way he treated the hood mommas, it was so sad

Yelling out loud and grinning from ear to ear,
"Come one, come all, pimp Santa is here"

A big fat blunt he held between his teeth
His only one ring was a Christmas wreath

Going round and round on his head was a spinning top
He tried pushing the button, but it wouldn't stop

All the hood kids were jumping with glee
Hoping for a real Santa and a green Christmas tree

One hood momma said, "Pimp Santa, you gotta be joking,
Coming round here in front of our kids smoking"

A hood momma said, "We ain't see you po ass in bout fo days"
Another said, "We hate you and yo dirty ways"

When he opened his mouth, out came a bad smell
The little hair he had was slicked down with gel

His teeth was all shiny but not wit gold,
They had this hard substance like a buttery mold

He said, "Come on baby girl, you know I'm doing my best"
She whistled real loud and out came the rest

One stood six feet tall; she had real big breasts
Her weave was all matted; she had crusty lips and a hairy chest

Pimp Santa thought he was going for a sleigh ride

Out came one more hood momma, she was short, fat, and
real wide

None of them wanted to hear what he had to say
Pimp Santa was going down on that cold winter's day

Hood momma grabbed pimp Santa and tossed him. His fat
ass hit the ground
All you could hear was a loud grunting sound

They beat pimp Santa until he threw up and passed gas
He had all kinds of shit coming from his ass

As a tall momma got up, then she stood
She said, "No more pimping in this neighborhood!"

A little old lady came out of nowhere
She had big pop eyes and thin gray hair

Grandma spoke stern with a very soft voice
What she was 'bout to do, he left her no choice

She said, "I am a senior citizen, I deserve a little respect
You wit yo old ass, pimpin' through the hood and still trying
to have sex"

"You know you can't do shit, you look like an infested
disease"
"Hell, you blow six farts each time you sneeze"

She told that fat pimp that his days were done
She reached in her tiny little bosom and pulled out a gun

It was one of the biggest I had ever seen
Little old grandma let out a real loud scream

She then said to him, "Now you looky here
This is our neighborhood! We will not fear!"

She said, "You are a dirty old man with your nasty self
Believe me when I tell you this is your last breath"

Just as she raised the gun and was 'bout to pull the trigger
A nasty looking hood momma ran up and said, "Hey, that's
my nigga"

Right away they began to exchange hateful words
Little old grandma said, "Listen bitch, save that shit for the
birds"

She told Grandma, "That's my man, and he's all I got"
Grandma pointed to the ground and she fired two shots

She said, "You nasty ass tramp, you got twelve kids
Everybody in the neighborhood know ain't none of 'em his"

"He pimped you ass and you had a baby each time
he kept all the money and never gave you a dime"

"After he used yo dumb ass all up, then he got 'em another
dumb hoe
this nasty cruddy ass pimp has to go!"

Grandma said, "Now I'm bout to do my thang, don't you
interfere"
All the crowd from the neighborhood began to cheer

"This is you last chance to give pimp daddy a hug
You don't scare me; twenty years ago I shot and killed a
judge"

"They locked me up and I served my time
They gave me only fifteen to twenty-five"

"Get the hell out my way, cause I'll shoot you too
I back down from no one, bitch, I thought you knew"

Pimp Santa was cold, shaking, and scared

There were frozen ice balls clinging to his beard

The great big woman that stood six feet
Took pimp Santa's hoe and tossed her to the street

Then grabbed pimp Santa by his only one ball
Shook him, then slammed his face into a brick wall

Then rammed her size twelve boot up his butt hole
Some old guy yelled, "Damn hood momma, now that was cold!"

Now that will put pimp Santa to a stop
He died instantly of a foot treatment shock

One hood momma yelled, "Now we got one more to get
It's that po ass drug dealer who ain't never got shit"

Just as she was done saying what she had to say
He walked up to them and said, "How you hood moms
doing today?"

One hood mom said "What the hell you want?
You got anything to say? We prefer that yo don't"

They grabbed him, then threw him down
One said, "You are done dealing in this part of town"

They beat him so bad he wished he was dead
While laying there visions of crack cocaine danced through
his head

He said, "Now it didn't take all ya'll to beat my ass
My body is aching, and my heart's beating real fast"

Grandma said, "No more dealing in this part of the hood
You are corrupt and you ain't no good!"

"Now I do believe you know what I'm talking about

Mess with another hood mom, and I will take your ass out!"

As he was getting up he said "Thank ya'll for sparing my life
But lucky for you hood moms, I wasn't carrying my knife"

In all that snow the drug dealer got up and got on his bike
As he rode off you could see 'bout fifty red flashing lights
He said "Good night to all and to all a good night"

~ Gloria Neely Tucker

MY STORY

What can I say? God is good. He is good all the time.
I have gone through the wind and the storm.
It's not the norm when you go through the storm.
It's hard and tough, sometimes rough,
But Jesus is on the main line; tell Him what you want.

Be faithful, be strong. You can't go wrong with God.
The Bible says, "He will never leave you or forsake you,"
So that's what I depend on.

The ups and downs in life are just that...
ups and downs.
Faith—that's it...hoping in things unseen,
And knowing that prayers will be answered.

My story is like any other...
ups, downs, and turn-a-rounds.
Wind storms blowing everywhere.
But there is one thing that I'm sure of,
And it's that I believe the one in control will handle it.
I have faith in knowing that God is in control.
He can change it, fix it, and turn it around.
How do I know? Because He told me so.

~ Rhonda D. Ware

EDUCATION

Extraordinary outcomes

Doors open and dreams come true

Unlimited opportunities

College is a real possibility

Awakens your potential

Tactics to reach goal

Intelligence and independence

Opportunity to succeed

Never too late to get started

Live Oaks ABLE Class knows that education is the key to success! You have to have it to succeed in life and fulfill all your hopes and dreams. It is a lifelong journey. Seek your future!

*~ Live Oaks ABLE
Rebecca Baker
Rose M. Buckner
Tiffany Coleman
Curtis Johnson
San Pol
Caleb Robertson
Coreal Lynn Wilson*

LOOKING FOR YOU, LORD

I am gone down that road
feeling blue... Lord, Lord-
and I am looking for you.

Yes, I am goin' down that road...
feeling blue Lord... looking for you.

I know what I'm going to do
I am going to get down on my knees and pray
And hope you can hear me.

Yes, I am going to
get down on my knees, Lord,
and hope you hear me.

I am goin' down the road
And if I stumble and fall
I know you will pick me up.

I can go on down that road
and when I get to the end
I know you will be there
to see me through.

I know you will take
me away from these blues
and show me all of your love.

The road above will be smooth.
There will be no more blues.

~ Stephanie Cole

DREAM VS. REALITY

When I received the visa to America, I was so thrilled. All my friends congratulated me and told me I was lucky because I was going to live in the most sophisticated country in the world and would enjoy a western life style every day.

My husband is a thoughtful guy. He worried that I wouldn't adjust to American life, so the first week he took me to many restaurants. We ate steak, pizza, spaghetti, and Mexican dishes. I don't know why, but the dishes which I had been interested in trying when I lived in China could not satisfy me now. By the second week, I began to miss Chinese food.

I have never been separated from my parents. Every day in China, after I came back home from school or my workplace, my mother had already prepared dinner for me. I didn't know how to cook and had never even tried. But the Chinese restaurants in Cleveland did not cook in the traditional Chinese style, and they also were very expensive.

So the first reality I faced was that I needed to learn how to cook. I often called my mother and followed her directions as to how to cook. I visited friends who were older than me and good at cooking, to watch how they cooked. I also searched for recipes on the Internet. After all these efforts, I cooked my first meal. The fact that it was so salty that my husband almost couldn't eat it, made me feel upset. But my mother told me that the first time that she had cooked, the pork was even still half-raw. She told me that cooking and learning English have the same trick-practice. And that practice makes perfect!

Now I can use all the supplies in my fridge to make a wonderful dish, even Japanese and Korean dishes. I always cook for my friends, and they always say that the dishes are so delicious and even look appealing.

Although life in America is very different from my expectation, it has made me grow up fast and become a woman and good wife. I really appreciate that.

Dear friends, when you can't change reality, please change yourself. Don't just wait for your dreams to come true.

~ Wenyuan Hou

MY LIFE IN AMERICA

My husband's friend told us that the day we arrived in Cleveland was the coldest day in the past five years. As I left the airport and stood waiting in the street, I felt totally chilled, not only because of the bad weather, but also because I suddenly realized that I was far away from my families and friends.

On our second day here, my husband and I went to a supermarket. Looking at the prices, I felt a sense of desperation. Everything here was expensive when compared with the prices in China. I looked around and saw blue eyes and turned up noses everywhere. There were no faces I could identify with. On top of that, I couldn't understand a word of what people were saying. As we walked home, I saw only slushy snow, withered trees, and grey sky. There were few people on the sidewalk, and at that moment, I asked myself, why had I agreed to come to the United States?

For the whole first month, I refused to leave the house. I moped around thinking only about my mother, my friends, and all the good times we had spent together. I dreamed about all kinds of delicious Chinese food.

But soon I realized that what I was doing would not help make things better. I had to adapt to my new life. My husband's friend told me that Case offered free English classes, and I soon found the registration office and enrolled. Besides improving my English, I learned a lot about American culture and customs. The best part was that I met many new friends. Joining the class was the best decision I had made since coming to America.

If winter comes, can spring be far behind? No. The cold winds stopped blowing, and the snow melted. The leaves turned green, the sky was a clear blue, squirrels

jumped on the grassy lawns looking for food, and people smiled at each other when passing on the sidewalk. Then summer came. I went to Lake Erie, joined a fitness center, and learned how to make sushi. I borrowed books from the public library and got my driver's license. Autumn arrived. I was astonished by the beauty of this season. I liked sitting near the window looking out at the people jogging or walking their dogs; I saw families riding bicycles. It seemed that all around me people were sharing love and happiness. I enjoyed driving down the city streets looking at the colorful leaves. I had only known this from seeing it in pictures.

Time flies. Each season in America brought new experiences. Now I am entering my second winter here. I still remember that second morning a year ago, when I had just come to America. I told my husband that I hated America. A year later, every morning when I open my eyes, the first thing I want to do is to tell everyone how happy I am to be here.

~ Wei Wei

DREAMS AND REALITY

In Romania, many people dream of living in America. I never had this desire; I was a successful professor of Romanian, French, and Russian literature. I was content. I came to America for the first time in 1995, one year after my son got married to an American. After that, my husband and I visited this country five times.

Then in 2003, we came here for a surgical procedure for my husband. My dream was to see him well, not to realize something extraordinary in America. We realized it was too late for us—the United States government would not recognize our degrees and we were too old to begin again. We lived in my son's house for awhile, and after that we rented a house, close to my son's family, and a new period in our life began.

We got green cards and permanent residence. Very soon we got jobs—totally different from our education. We felt disoriented in this new culture with so many difficulties, beginning with learning a new language, (we spoke four languages but not English), bills, customs, traditions, and life style. Slowly we adjusted to everything, even though each step in our American life was a challenge. My husband and I have done pretty well. In addition, we have the joy of being with my son and his family. I have good friends among the Cleveland Romanian community and even some American people. This means so much in my life, because I'm a very social person, and I like to spend time with them. I have come to see that America is a wonderful country, and for us it offers a unique experience of life.

~ Maria Bulucea

DREAM VS. REALITY

I came to America quite by accident. I had had a peaceful life in China. I graduated from the university, got a good paying job as a teacher, met an old friend from elementary school, fell in love with him, and got married. Everything was going smoothly. I remembered that on my wedding day, I imagined that soon after my marriage, I would get pregnant, have a baby, buy a new car, and stay at home caring for my beloved ones. We would travel during the holidays and life would be quite enjoyable with my family, friends, and my students. It was like a fairy tale. I would live happily ever after...

But before this could all happen, my husband was on a plane heading for America. I was shaken out of my idyllic life to open my eyes to a much harsher reality. I was miserable without my husband and therefore I decided to follow him to America where he was doing research. I tearfully said goodbye to my family, to my familiar world, and set out for the unknown.

When I was reunited with my husband after the long flight, I remember sitting on the mattress in the apartment and looking at him through the dim light. I saw a man who had become thin and pale and my joy in seeing him was overtaken by a deep fear of the strangeness of my new surroundings. The next day, my fear was increased as I watched the news on TV of the school shooting in Cleveland. My whole body was tense and I sat alone in the room, thinking any moment something dreadful would occur. Even the rustling of the wind outside the window would make my heart shudder. When my husband came home, all my tension poured out on him. I lost my temper and quarreled with him for no reason. I cried for a long time. I felt angry that we had come to America and left a life of contentment in China. This was not what I dreamed about for my married life.

I complained about my terrible life to my mother over the phone. She only laughed and told me that all I needed was time. I was doubtful about her words. One day my husband brought home a lamp to replace the old one. After his work, I turned on the light, and I saw my husband smiling under the bright lamplight. It was so sweet.

I was determined to build a life here. I joined a Bible study group. The class was a totally new experience for me. In the class, I made some friends. Then I registered for an ESL class at Case. At registration, I received praise for my English skills. This meant a lot to me and helped to bring me out from my state of depression. I also began to invest time in improving my cooking skills. I wanted to help my husband to succeed, and I knew that good meals would be a start. I saw him gain some weight back, and I felt pleased. I even began to cook some American dishes. I remember the first time I made pizza, my husband joked pointing out that I never would have attempted to do this had I stayed in China. I began to see that I would develop myself here in ways that I could not do in China.

I remember that before I got married, my husband had promised me a holiday in Europe, I now believe that this will happen someday but not for now. We are on a different holiday—building a new life here in Cleveland. It is a challenge but one that will make us both grow stronger together.

~ Ye Zheng

THE DRAGON WITHIN

It is every person's right to cultivate their mind, wisdom, and the intelligence that they possess. In doing so, they learn how to be more productive.

When you can't read and write, it is hard to be as self-confident as you possibly can in society.

At this point in time I'm being tutored to become literate. I feel I have a lot of wisdom to share. My goal is to write a book on experiences that I have undergone through life by being illiterate. People who read the book will recognize difficulties in others and be able to assist those who have trouble with reading and writing. I hope to be a better person, for my own peace of mind, and in doing so, it will help me help others.

Reading and writing will profoundly change my outlook on life after 61 years.

Metaphorically speaking, my pen is my sword, and illiteracy is the dragon. As I learn to read and write, I defeat the dragon within.

~ Ronald W. Fugate

MY JOURNEY

I begin my *Vivaldi Concerto in A Minor* a bit hesitantly, nervously glancing around the dark auditorium of people watching me. My violin shakes as my trembling fingers fly to play the familiar notes. My hands take over the piece as my mind wanders.

I find myself reflecting how, at the age of six, I received my first violin, a half-sized instrument well used and aged. I recall the feeling of pure elation as I squeaked out my first song, music I myself had made. I concentrate again as I come to a difficult passage in my concerto. Breathing an internal sigh of relief, I make it through my dreaded high D run.

As my hands once again take over the song, I begin to think of another difficult occurrence I overcame, the experience of finding a new teacher. Little did I know at that time, a time when I was resistant to change, that my new teacher would not only guide me through my next seven years of playing, but would also become an amazing role model, someone I would look up to as I grew well into my teenage years.

I recall how fortunate I was to have had the amazing experience of attending music camp at the age of 16. As a sponge sucks in water, I drew in every word my mentors and instructors taught me those two short weeks.

As I steal a glance around, I see the smiling faces of those in my orchestra watching and listening intently as I finish my piece. Their now-familiar faces remind me of my first practice with them and how I struggled to keep up with the group. I smile in excitement and amazement thinking of how my long journey has brought me here, from being a child barely able to get a note out, to a young violinist, a featured soloist at this concert of my orchestra. As I strike

my final note, the crowd burst into applause. Knowing my journey has not yet ended but is only beginning, I smile brightly and take my bow.

~ Ann Holbrook