

THE GREAT XMAS

XIV



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(INK WILLIAMS)
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Selpa

Beginnings

XIV

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

Foreword

All along in our writing lives there has been a parent, teacher or friend sparking our interest and encouraging our efforts. Early on it was ma reading bedtime fairy tales, or dad telling fish stories, or an uncle's absurd parables, or grandma reciting bible verses, or the old man in front of his world-of-books century home chopping wood while quoting Thoreau's 'you warm yourself twice' between ax falls, or your government teacher reminding you of Machiavelli's adage, *books rule the world*, or the folk singer in the high school gym who answered your question of how he got started by laughing and singing another song, or that first lit prof at college recommending you read Isaac Singer who said *to become a writer one must do what's always been done, read the classics and write everyday*. Such were the people who informed and aided my own undertakings. I would not be the poet I am today without the love of language they passed on to me.

Through this anthology we celebrate not only these fledgling writers and their fresh and unique ways of seeing and saying, but also those who by example or advice have helped them along the difficult and wondrous path of the word. For we are walking the talk of endless other poets, adding our footfalls to ancient rhythms, dropping our own beats and rhymes into the big mix. We are all drinking from the mouth of the muse. Sometimes it is sweet and other times bitter. Imaginative writing is that strange, magical elixir that makes us sing out in joy and moan in sorrow. And a poem is not finished until it is heard out loud, lingering on air, disappearing, an ephemeral epiphany able to be repeated across time and space yet shared here and now.

The creative writings here which you are about to read represent the range of themes a writer plumbs—from personal statements to family relations, from social statements to the inevitable writer's block and how to overcome it:

I'm Ready to Quit

Frustration comes over me like a pile of bricks

I think I'm ready to quit

My peers are so far ahead of me

I'm stuck looking out this window

I think I'm ready to quit

Failure consumes me

$Z - 4 \frac{3}{8} = 16 \frac{1}{4}$

I'm just not getting it

I know I'm ready to quit

...

When I'm down and out I look at that angelic smile

...She's saying

"Mommy, you're not ready to quit!"

-Tiffany Tillison

Poems and other creative writings do not have much value as a commodity in our society. But it goes without saying how spiritually impoverished our lives would be without the wisdom that writing imparts. These beginning writers are learning life lessons and the mysteries thereof. And they are teaching us as well. Grandma used to say we have two ears and one mouth so we should listen twice as much as we talk. Listen to these efforts. "Give and it shall be given unto you is still the truth about life," D.H. Lawrence says. Enjoy the gifts of these voices. Pass them on. It is how we do it.

Ray McNiece

Acknowledgements

There is no typical way to write. Within this book you'll find many different genres and styles of writing, with unique stories, perspectives, memories, and hopes for the future. Poetry, short stories, personal histories, anecdotes, and observations of the world around us are delivered in a multitude of ways.

There is also no typical writer. As you read the author biographies at the end of the book, you'll see that *Beginnings* authors are as diverse as the writing they created. All of the *Beginnings XIV* authors share a common bond: they wrote what was in their hearts and chose to share it with the world.

This year more than 350 Adult Basic and Literacy Education students chose to share their writing with the world by submitting writing for consideration for *Beginnings XIV*. Each author deserves to be celebrated, and they are all acknowledged within these pages.

We give great thanks to the teachers and tutors who work in ABLE classrooms across the state. Their dedication to learning can be seen through the lens of their students' writing.

We sincerely appreciate the continued support of the Ohio Board of Regents' Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program. Without their ongoing generosity, *Beginnings* and the Writers' Conference would not be possible.

Special thanks to this year's keynote speaker who is none other than the Writers' Conference's own resident storyteller, Lyn Ford.

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The piano keys represent the beginning of music. You must learn the keys and their function before you can actually create a musical piece. Each white key represents a note in the scale. The scale begins with Middle C through G, and picking up A and B at the end of the scale. The black keys make the white keys “sharp” and “flat.” This is how melody and harmony are created through music. We use all the keys together in many arrangements to create beautiful sound.

The Cincinnati Skyline is represented as seen from the “cut in the Hill” in Kentucky. As you come around the bend on I-75/I-71, you are greeted with the glorious city skyline of Cincinnati. It is truly the beginning of Cincinnati as the rest of the city spreads north from the Ohio River, which separates Ohio and Kentucky.

Beginnings “Blues”

The lyrics of this piece were written by participants at the 2010 Ohio Writers’ Conference. Lyn Ford, the keynote speaker for the 2011 Ohio Writers’ Conference, compiled each participant’s lyrics to create the “Beginnings Blues.”

This is the blues, the beginning of a better day blues,
This is the blues, the beginning of a better day blues,
Life is a story,
The beginnings of a better day blues!

O’ little girl, O’ little girl. Don’t have no more fears,
O’ little girl, O’ little girl. Don’t have no more fears,
Your hopes and dreams shall come true, so don’t shed no more
tears.

O’ little girl, just smile, raise your eyes up to the sky.
O’ little girl, just smile, raise your eyes up to the sky.
You will overcome, all you have to do is try.

An ear of corn, just an ear of corn,
An ear of corn, just an ear of corn,
Just like Little Boy Blue, oh, how I wanted to blow that horn.

I got weeds in my garden,
I got stones in my shoes,
I got pruners that need sharpenin’, I got the gardener blues.

Life is a road,
sometimes smooth, sometimes bumpy,
But the scenery enlightens,
The Good Lord don’t make nothin’ frumpy!

I don’t got no cat,
I don’t got no shoes,
But I can walk around singin’,
singin’ the Beginnings blues.

I'm moving all the time, can't seem to sit still.
I'm growing all the time, must be my own will.
I'm moving and growing, can't stop... until...

Wish I could go back, go back and replace,
Go to a simple time and a simple place.
Sick and tired of this fast-paced human race.

Worked very hard, to travel this far,
Worked very hard, to travel this far,
Who would have guessed I could reach this star?

Wolves slink across the night, making sure they're not seen,
Wolves slink across the night, making sure they're not seen,
Just waiting for the chance to ambush you and me.

She left me standing in the rain, pain in this heart of mine,
Filled full of pain, this poor heart of mine.
This bad sad love of mine, left me feeling not so fine.

Anime faces,
so many different ways of looking.
So silly, so funny,
But we're all still good-lookin'!

Eyes pop out of heads,
mouths drop to the floor,
But we're still movin' and growin',
What do we have to feel badly for?

I'll shed no tears for you now that you are gone.
I'll shed no tears for you now that you are gone.
I know you're with God now, so I can rejoice and go on.

Some days are sunny, some days are blue.
Some days are sunny, some days are blue.
But still I will love you, all the day through.

Hey, isn't loneliness enough of a curse,
Now I got a case of the blues, could it get any worse,
The Cavs, Lebron, how could you lose?

Drivin' in my car, not too fast or too far,
Driver beside me gave that dude a pop in his car,
All this startin' and stoppin', I got the Columbus Rush Hour Blues.

Along my journey of success, there were obstacles in my way.
Along my journey of success, there were obstacles in my way.
I overcame those obstacles, and got to where I am today.

Life is a gift,
so precious and so great,
love and care, sing and dance,
live. Don't wait!

Happiness each day
Is what life should be about,
Sing and dance, everyday,
Let the goodness of life make you shout!

Woke up this mornin', tripped over my shoes,
Yes, I woke up this mornin', tripped over my shoes,
But I realized I have no right to sing the blues.

I had a great week, busy as can be.
I had a great week, busy as can be.
Both of my kids graduated, how proud can I be?

Long days come, and the long days go,
Long days come, and the long days go,
But my passion for learning will never go.

Well, together, we are on this road,
Yes, together, we are on this road,
Seeking knowledge, sharing stories told.

Times have been hard, but don't let life pass you by,
You can laugh, and play, and do anything you try,
So live with joy, just like when you were a boy.

That was the blues, the beginnings of a better day blues,
That was the blues, the beginnings of a better day blues,
Life is a story,
The beginnings of a better day blues!

Fertile Soil

A Tossing and Twisting Letters Game

Since I have lived more than two months in Cincinnati and am still waiting to adjust to the U.S., my husband and I looked for an activity that we could do together for fun as well as for improving my English. We came to this point because I need to increase my English vocabulary in order for me to socialize and become accustomed with American daily life. After some searching, finally we decided to buy and play Scrabble.

I was already used to playing Scrabble, so we had no problems when we started playing it. We made a rule that anytime we play we should be finished in one hour and a half, so we would be forced to make moves quickly. But my skill level in playing Scrabble was very average, so I always got low scores. Meanwhile, my husband smartly could make two words by putting down letters, whether horizontally or vertically, and he mostly got high scores! Sometimes my low scores made me feel discouraged, but basically I was proud any time I could make a cool word using my letters.

As we continued to play, gradually I was challenged to improve my skills. I did not want to use my background of being a person who came from a country that does not use English as its first language as an excuse for my low scores. So I forced myself to think faster but thoughtfully before I put my letters on the board. When we were not playing Scrabble, I spent more time reading my English dictionary. After a period of time, I received some rewards. My score was increasing even though it was still lower than my husband's. I learned some new words, slang and formal, so now I am able to make new words from a root word; for example, from the word "axe" I made "axes" and then "faxes" or "taxes." Then we also tried not to "kill" a word that could not be expanded to make new words. Instead, we worked on it until one of us could get the biggest number from the word.

One day, we were surprised because we could put all the letters down on the board. We were so excited because we usually had some unused letters left at the end of the game. During

one game, my husband got a “bingo” because he used all of the seven letters he had in one move! It was fantastic; he got 50 extra points! Maybe it was his fortune, but it has challenged me to work to get a “bingo” someday or even on the next game.

We have faith that we will not get bored playing Scrabble because it always supplies us with something fun and challenging, as well as nurturing our brains. So we have decided to keep playing Scrabble, tossing and twisting letters every day.

~Yunita Damenar Phillips

Learning

Long Days

Practice**e** makes perfect
Study **a**ll the time
Never**r** give up
Often**n** entertaining
Important for your future
Pay att**e**n**t**ion
And **g**ood luck!

~ *Jorge Munoz Chamizo*

I'm Ready to Quit

Frustration comes over me like a pile of bricks
I think I'm ready to quit

My peers are so far ahead of me
I'm stuck looking out this window
I think I'm ready to quit

Failure consumes me
 $Z - 4 \frac{3}{8} = 16 \frac{1}{4}$
I'm just not getting it
I know I'm ready to quit

I look at those beautiful brown eyes
that seem to glimmer with innocence and hope
I'm no longer ready to quit

When I'm down and out, I look at that angelic smile.
I'll tell you what I see—she's saying,
"Mommy, you're not ready to quit!"

~ *Tiffany Tillison*

GED = OMG!!!

The morning of the day that I was to take my GED test, I was a wreck. I was nervous, my stomach was in knots, and my thoughts were racing. This was not a good foot to start my day off on, but nevertheless it was the foot I clumsily put forward. I had been home schooled for all of my educational life and never had I taken a test like I was about to take. I had taken the pretests that my teachers, Cindy and Heidi, had given me, and I had passed them. I still didn't feel like I knew what to expect though.

I had been scheduled to take my test at a local career center, and when I arrived there at 7:45 AM, I was unaware that the building also housed a police training facility on the opposite end. So, I was just a bit alarmed to see over a dozen patrol cars sitting out in the parking lot. I tried to push to the back of my mind the slight alarm that the sight had caused me as I made my way into the building. Once inside I looked around and took in my surroundings. There were gray dividers up everywhere creating separate rooms within this large space and not all the lights were on in the building. These two things together made me feel rather like a rat that had been asked to locate the cheese. In my mind ran the thought, "Find the cheese and be set free," as I made my way through this maze.

Once I located the room where I was to take the test, I signed in along with the rest of my group of eleven, and we were led, one at a time, to our seats. I felt like I was being placed in front of a firing squad for some wrong that I had done! My test was being administered by two instructors, a man and a woman. The man stood by quietly as the woman began to lay down the law. Without a smile, without a joke, she informed us of the rules. She also informed us that if we marked our test books we would be charged \$200 for the book. In my anxious state I thought that she said we would be charged \$200 for each of the five books that we would be using. I panicked at the thought of paying \$1,000 that I didn't have. She then told us what to do in the event that she were to have a heart attack! All the while, there was no smile on her face.

Now it was time to test. My first test was math, after which I was excused to wait in the hall. I listened to chatter around me and overheard a rather large, harsh-looking man boast with colorful language that he had just been released from prison on parole. Flash back to the patrol cars out front. "HE'S IN HERE, OFFICERS!" I thought with wide eyes as profanity continued to fly from his mouth. I was one of three females in the group. In a haze of fear, I managed to make it through the rest of the day, in and out of the hallway of terror I went, one test after the next I took, until finally, I was released. Never in my life was I so happy to see a day end, and never in my life was I so happy to pass a test. I learned one important lesson that day though: GED equals OMG!

~ Justina L. Luther

Writing

Wide open to almost anyone

Relaxing, reliving, refreshing

Inspiring, interesting

Trains people's minds; therapy for disturbed hearts; testimonial of human history

Informative, influential, sometimes infuriating

News, nourishing

Grace and gladsome activity.

~ *Yunita Damemar Phillips*

Graduation

Waiting in anticipation
Gowns rustling, tassels swaying
Feet marching, hearts pounding
Cameras flashing, music beating
Crowds cheering, eyes tearing
Accomplishing one goal, focusing on another
Heads held high
As they say good-bye

*~ Great Oaks Group Project:
Nathan Jackson
Pheck Kim Oeng
Sachi Parker
Preston Skinner
Miaoyan Tan*

The Importance of Taking English Classes in the U.S.

When I came to the U.S., I never thought seriously about going to school and learning how to write and speak English. I got a job and passed my driving test. When I talked to people, they understood me. I didn't know how important it was to be able to write English for me or for anyone who lives in the U.S.

But on December 12, 2007, my feelings about learning English changed completely. It was snowing one Sunday morning. I woke up early because I had to pick up a friend of mine from the Cincinnati airport. He was supposed to arrive at 7 a.m. from New York City. I wasn't familiar with snow at this time because I came to the U.S. from West Africa. It was my first experience driving on top of snow. I was driving on I-75 South. The road was covered with a lot of snow. Suddenly, a big truck passed me and blew snow up onto my front windshield. I couldn't see anything, and I lost control of the vehicle. My car hit the fence that bordered the highway, and I had an accident! Luckily, I wasn't hurt, but my hood and bumper were broken.

I called 911 for help and gave them my location. The police arrived in less than 15 minutes after my call. I explained to the police officer what had happened; gave him all the documents he required, and answered his questions. He handed me a pen, a piece of paper, and a clipboard and told me to write down what had happened. I was in a pickle and shocked because I couldn't write one sentence. I then realized that I should have learned how to write English a long time ago. The police officer finally wrote the report for me, and I signed it.

I learned that day how important it is to know how to write in English. My insurance company or the B.M.V. might need to know how the accident happened; they might need a report from me, a note, an e-mail or a text message. The importance of learning English in the U.S. is unlimited. I promised myself that day that I would find a school and take English classes, and I did it. "Better late than never," I said to myself.

~ Salif Sy

**Ten Commandments of Success
in the ABLÉ Class**

Thou shall have achievable goals!

Thou shall have faith in yourself!

Thou shall have things in order!

Thou shall stay positive!

Thou shall stay determined!

Thou shall not judge yourself against the
accomplishments of others!

Thou shall be patient!

Thou shall pay attention to the teacher!

Thou shall have self confidence!

Thou shall be kind to everyone!

Thus, thou will graduate and be successful!

*~ Live Oaks Group Project:
Hannah Allen
Suellen Lyle
Mike Parlier
Stephen Tyler Simpson*

Learning to Drive

For many years I lived in a big European city, Kiev. It is the capital of Ukraine. More than three million people live in Kiev, and about one million visitors come every year. Most people use public transportation such as bus, trolleybus, tram, subway, train or taxi. Before I came to the U.S., I didn't ever drive a car and did not even think about it. In the beginning, my friends and my daughter helped me by picking me up and dropping me off.

But I felt uncomfortable when I had to ask: "Help me, please." I began to understand that driving a car in the U.S. is a necessity.

I took a driving test three times and finally got a driver's license. I was very happy. "Freedom, Freedom. I can do it!" I sang like Piglet from the popular movie "Charlotte's Web." I was 55 years old—not the best age for beginning.

I repeated all the mistakes I had heard about. One time I did not see the stop sign; once I drove through a red light; once I stopped the car in the middle of an intersection while turning left, because the green arrow had disappeared and then I didn't know if I could move.

The most interesting was my first experience at a gas station. The first three tries, I stopped my car on the wrong side. A couple times my car was too far from the pump or too near, and I couldn't open the door. When I finally got it right, the other drivers who were at the gas station applauded me.

On the small narrow roads I collected dissatisfied drivers, who honked and showed me obscene gestures. For a long time, I didn't understand my car, and I was afraid of it. I did not feel distance or speed.

The time goes so fast. Now I have six years of driving experience and enjoy driving. When I drive on a small road, the big trees and branches cover the sky and look like a fantastic green tunnel. I like to drive on the road along the river; or I race on the expressway. Now I am independent. It is wonderful. It was very difficult to decide to change something in my life, to get over uncertainty, to fight down fear, to be stronger. But I did it.

~ Luda Chayka

Live Oak ESOL

There once was a student from Live Oak
Every breakfast she drank a Coke
She used a straw to slurp
Then followed with a loud burp
That crazy student from Live Oak

There once was a volunteer from Live Oak
Who always made up a silly joke
He gave us advice
Because he tried to be nice
But the teacher he tried to provoke

There once was a teacher from Live Oak
Who taught slang whenever she spoke
She was always on time
With a poem to rhyme
Yet the grammar rules she never broke

There once was a class from Live Oak
Who were intelligent, international folk
They never gave up hope
And rarely did they mope
Fluent, accented English they spoke

*Martha Munoz Ayala
Claudi Beltran
Melissa Bonilla
Jorge Munoz Chamizo
Luda Chayka
Maria Giuliberti
Hava Gul Kocer
Yuan Hua Li
Mary Lopez
Nancy Lopez*

~ ESOL Class, Live Oaks:

*Hoda Motaghed
Maria Luz Munoz
Rosa Munoz
Pilar Nahman
Dan Yu Qiu
Sarah Romanoff
Adriana Tristan
Shinyoung Welch
QianRu Ye
Joanna Zieba*

Luxurious

Settle in,
 settle down.
Get ready,
 get comfy.
Turn off the noise,
 turn on a light.
Let your thoughts wander,
 let your mind imagine.
Open a book,
 open your life!

~ *Kelly Harrison*

I Won't Forget My First IRONMAN

Do you know about “Ironman” or “Ironwoman”? It refers to a male or female triathlete of remarkable endurance or durability. Many people think a triathlon is one of the hardest sports in the world. It is a sports competition in which contestants participate in a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and 26.2-mile run all in one day. I competed in it ten times and finished each time. Everybody asks me why I compete in the Ironman triathlon races. I always tell them that I like it, and I feel pleasure after I finish it, so I continue to try again and again.

I will never forget about one of my challenges from my first Ironman race 10 years ago in Germany. I still remember what happened. I was distressed, shocked, excited, and impressed.

I registered for a German Ironman race seven months before the race day. After my application, my husband made a training plan for me, and I started to train. I wanted to achieve 18 miles of swimming, 500 miles of biking, and 125 miles of running per month. In order to attain this distance, I had to work out almost every day. On one of my bike training days, I climbed a hill on my bike. I sensed something was wrong with my leg, but I thought I was imagining things, so I continued to ride. I continued to train according to my plan, although I had a sore leg.

After one week, my leg was very sore, and I couldn't walk smoothly. I went to the doctor, and he told me I over-trained, so I had to stop training for two weeks. I couldn't believe what he said, but I thought that I should follow his advice because I couldn't run, or even walk as usual. However, I regret that I continued to work out, despite that I felt sore, and I didn't listen to their advice.

Every day for one month until the race day, I wished the pain away when I got up every morning. But I still had the sore leg. My husband suggested to me I had enough training for 6 months, so I only needed to rest to get ready for race. As a result, I couldn't change his mind, and I wasn't impatient about training anymore.

On the race day, I could stand on the start line although I still had the pain in my leg a little. I persuaded myself that I could finish, so I had to forget the pain. A starter said, "ten, nine, eight..." and the shot went off. Two thousand competitors started to swim together in a lake at seven in the morning. After swimming, I started to ride for 112 miles. Many spectators cheered us on, so I could forget about the pain temporarily. When I rode the second loop, I picked up a banana at an aid station. Then, I ate it when I rode down a hill. Unfortunately, I was thrown off balance, so I fell down and bruised my head. I passed out, and 30 minutes later I became conscious. One of the spectators asked me if I could continue to compete in the race. Also, he repaired my bike and said, "I expect you to go on with your goal." I was encouraged by his speech, so I decided to continue and aim for the goal.

I was impressed when I could finish 112 miles riding. Before I started to run, the medical staff had asked me if I needed to be treated. I didn't understand why she asked me, and I said, "No thanks." Then I started to run. Many spectators also cheered for me, but sometimes they looked at me, and said, "Oh my goodness! Good luck!" After 13 miles, I began to have a pain in my left leg. I really wanted to walk, but I knew I couldn't finish if I began to walk. I planned to run to the next aid station. When I reached the aid station, I didn't stop and walk while I was taking a drink. I was taken with a pain again, so I wanted to give up. I talked myself into not stopping, and I just continued to run.

Within one mile of the goal, I could see my husband who had already finished and cheered for me. I was assured of my goal as I kept back my tears.

When I arrived at the goal gate, many people were pleased at my finish. I was so excited, and I could cross the goal line after twelve hours from starting. He, who helped when I passed out, waited for me and said, "Congratulations." I was surprised that he didn't forget about me.

The next day, I felt sore all over when I got up. Also, I sustained a terrible injury on the left side of my body. However, I was

able to finish the Ironman race because many people helped and encouraged me. If my husband, friends, and many spectators hadn't encouraged me, I would have given up. As a result, I learned many things from them, and I experienced the pleasure of the Ironman. I still have scars, so it will remain in my memory.

~Noriko Ueda

I Wonder

What?!? A civil thought??
Where did that come from?
I wonder...

What?!? Drifting into peacefulness?
Not this mind.
I wonder...

This is truly strange.
No turmoil, no chaos,
No crazy, no deranged thoughts.
I wonder...

Peace and tranquility, I love it!
Don't fight it, flow with it!
Let it go and relax.
It's strange but good.

Good for me,
Good for you.
Don't wonder about it.
Go for it!
Embrace it!
Love it!

I feel God's hand
Covering my mind, saying
"Child, let it go and flow."

Nothing you can say will
Break my peace
In my mind.

Why?!? It feels good
Where?!? Inside me,
I wonder...

~ Charise H. Simmons

Am I a Dummy in Your Eyes? Let's See

Am I the dummy? I was a poor little nappy haired black girl
Sitting at school when I came up to you,
I tried, I tried to read, you see,
All the teachers they really didn't like me.
When I came to ask them for help,
They would just laugh, giggle, and chuckle at me.
And say, "She's a dummy I bet."
So I ran and cried all through the night
Because I knew this just wasn't right.
The kids would laugh at me every day
So bad I wanted to die just to get away.
I tried, I tried to read you see,
But the teachers they didn't care about me.
I still went to school every day,
And didn't even get to go out and play.
All because my spelling was bad,
Then they laughed and said that was so sad.
I did graduate as you see,
But I didn't learn anything indeed.
If there was something I could have done to find a teacher that
wouldn't run.
I went to college, and there was Ms. Bell.
I asked her for help, and she didn't even yell.
She asked me to write a poem, I looked at her and I couldn't spell.
She didn't laugh at me all day.
So I sat and wrote it anyway.
Now I ask you one more time,
If I had a \$1,000,000 bucks, will you have the time?
You can teach someone like me,
But first you have to stop saying you're a dummy, and you can't
read.
Now I'm glad there are classes like the GED.
One day I will make that \$1,000,000 for you and me.
So I wrote this poem just to see who's the dummy,
You or me?

~Selina Williams

Life's Struggles

When I was young, I always struggled in school. I worked very hard to prepare for my OPT (Ohio Proficiency Test).

In my senior year of high school, one month before graduation, my principal called my home to give the bad news: I wasn't going to graduate. I didn't pass the OPT. I was devastated. When my mom came home from work she saw me crying and asked, "Why are you crying?" I choked up and told her that I wasn't going to graduate.

All she did was look at me and tell me with a straight face, "Well, you should have tried harder." That hurt so much that I went to my room and cried even more. Graduating meant everything to me. Having my mom see me with my cap and gown was my dream. It still hurts deeply to this day.

A couple years down the line I got pregnant with my first daughter Elizabeth. The day she was born, 1-14-2007, I realized that I didn't want her to struggle and go through all the hard times I went through. I knew then that I needed my GED. I didn't want to be like my mom and push my kids away because I couldn't help them. I want them to feel like they can come to me for help, and I want to feel useful and support them in every way I can.

When Liz was about 2 months old, I enrolled myself in a GED class. I was looking forward to going every day. At that time my relationship with her dad suffered, so I had obstacles to overcome. The relationship ended and then I found someone new. When Liz was about 6 months old, I was in the Moms Program, and I returned to school. It was the best thing I had done. I'm back in the game, and I am still studying hard to achieve my goals.

I have taken the GED test two times. I passed two tests the first time. The second time around I passed one more and the other scores went up too. I was thrilled and disappointed at the same time. I just wanted to get it done.

I now have two beautiful girls. Elizabeth is 4 and Layla is 2 ½, and I am still going strong. It's now 2011, 4 years later and I will be taking the GED again on January 26th & 27th. This is a big accomplishment for me. I have come a long way, and I am very proud of myself, even if my mom isn't. I tell her how excited I am about taking the test and about wanting to go to college for baking and pastry. She acts like she doesn't care; she doesn't encourage me to move forward. That hurts because all children look at their parents for support and love. My mom shows that she couldn't care less if I reach my goals or not, and that's disappointing. I don't want to be like her at all.

I am proud that I have come this far. I know that I will have the knowledge to be able to help my girls with their school work, and I will not push them away. I will pass the GED test, and when I do, it will be one of the happiest days of my life. I will be able to have a career and make something out of myself. I will have a brighter future for me and my girls. It can be done with a lot of hard work, but only if you stick with it.

~Ana Maris Valentin

Deep Roots

Only Child

Sometimes I wish I had been raised as an only child. Only children get all the attention and all the wealth. Singletons also never need fear that awful discord between siblings.

Only children get all the attention from their parents and grandparents. All the “I love you’s” and “How clever you are” are all for you. When cousins or family friends come over for a play date, they play with you. You’re the only one.

There is no sibling rivalry in a single child home as there are no siblings. Only children get to enjoy a peaceful home life with no “I’m telling Mom what you did” or “Come here so I can pinch you.” On vacation, you can have the back seat all to yourself or the window seat on a plane. If you don’t have a sister, she can’t steal your best friend.

Then there’s the money – at Christmastime, all the gifts under the tree are for you. College is a given. And when your folks pass, you get it all.

Yes, sometimes I really wish it had been just me; all that praise and money; all those people focusing on just me. I wonder how my two brothers and three sisters feel about me being an only child!

~Mary Shumard

Olivia

Olivia my only child
Little girl of five years old
Indomitable curly blonde hair
Voluptuous hazel eyes
Indefinable smile
Angel or demon, she's my princess.

~ Sabine Fresno

A Mother's Prayer

A mother is a precious thing.
A mother endures most anything.
A mother loves, a mother sighs,
But you will never see her cry.

She leads you in the way that's right.
She leads you to the righteous light.
She's on her knees all night long.
Her prayers are firm; her prayers are strong.

Because she knows the one who cares
Will always hear her every prayer.
A mother's prayer, a mother's prayer--
Who loves you with such tender care?
She never lets the devil win.
She will fight to the end.

~ Cinda L. Looney

If You Were Here

When I was little, you took care of me.

When you got sick, I took care of you.

I know your spirit is here!

I have to do this for me.

I also will do it for you.

I know you are still here!

I can't see you, but you can see me.

So when I take that walk and I'm handed my GED,

I know in my heart you will be smiling.

You will be so proud of me.

For I did not give up.

So this is for you, Mom.

I miss you!

~ Linda Schuler

Family Reunion

A reunion is a time for family to reunite again. It is delightful when we all gather at the park. Everyone brings food and drinks. We all look forward to sharing the dishes everyone cooked up.

When one cousin attends, he shares so many memories about the years when we were younger. He is always just himself as he tells stories that make us laugh so hard or bring tears to our eyes.

Family gatherings allow us to see the cousins and their children we have not seen for awhile. We catch up and find out how life is treating all of us. I am always so glad they come to be with family. I enjoy watching the little ones having fun playing on the playground laughing, falling down, and being carefree. The teens talk and sit around enjoying the food, second helpings, desserts, and going fishing.

Reunions are about being with your loved ones and missing those who are not there anymore. It is so great to see how our family has grown so large and how we are such a terrific family. Taking pictures of all of us together is great fun, especially the part where we are all crowded together so everyone can fit in the picture.

It is always a great time for a reunion and I always remember the good times everyone had. They are cherished memories. That is a family reunion.

~ Brenda K. Carroll

Hard Working Mother

See the red robin
collecting food for her young?

Hard working mother

~ Jack McClure

Memories

When I was a little girl, I used to wonder what it would feel like to see my mother, for she didn't raise me. She did keep me for the first few years of my life though. My mom started using drugs really badly when my brothers and sisters and I were little. She had five kids altogether: my half brother Steven, and my two half sisters, Chrissy and Rhonda. Then there were my real brother, Wayne, and me. Wayne and I went to live with my dad and his wife, Sheila. We moved to Rockcastle County, Kentucky. It's a very small town, and everyone knew you in no time. People there are very friendly.

My mom was very sick. When I say sick, I don't mean she was physically sick; I mean she had a very big drug problem. Her main choice for her drugs was crack. It became her life, and she ended up losing all of her children, although she never stopped loving and caring for us. She had to grow up and make her life right to understand it and where it led her. She had to take control of her sickness. She used to try to send us gifts on our birthdays and on Christmas. I was never allowed to get the gifts. My dad thought it would hurt me more and make me miss her more than I already did. After a few years she stopped trying to give us presents because she knew we weren't getting them. I was constantly thinking of her, though, throughout my childhood.

I would lay in bed at night and cry myself to sleep thinking of her. I missed her so very much. She was always on my mind, from the time I was six until I was seventeen. That's how long I was apart from her. The years slowly went by, and I was getting older with each one. My brother Steven found me and my brother Wayne years later. He was older than we were; he looked us up. He had told us he knew where my mom was if we wanted to see her. I had gotten married at age sixteen, so I didn't live at home anymore. We happened to be visiting my family in Ohio at the time, and that's where my mom lived. When I did get to see her, it was the best gift ever in my life, besides my own children. I had only visions in my head of what she looked like. I wondered, did I look like her? Was she a sweet person? And, most of all, did she miss me?

Those questions were answered in time. It was one of the greatest things ever to happen in my life when I did see her. I remember the first knock at her door. My heart was racing. Her husband, Allen, came to the door and let me, Wayne, and Steven in. He introduced himself to us, then my mom came in the room. We were standing in her living room. She didn't know us at first, then she burst out crying. "Ernie!" she called out (that's my nickname for Ernestine), "and Wayne!" It was very emotional, but yet a very happy day for me. From that day forward, she remained in my life, and I was able to see her and have talks with her. No one could ever come between us ever again and keep us apart from each other. I never hated her for doing the things she did. I knew she had a sickness from her addiction. It never stopped me from wanting her in my life. I love her so very much, and it's an unconditional love.

She was in my life for the next fifteen years. She watched me grow and become a mother myself to three beautiful kids. Their names are Chelsey, Destiney, and Brandon. They are my world. My reason for writing this story is that my mom passed away August 27 last year. Her name was Vickie Clark; she meant the world to me. I loved her more than you could ever imagine. Not a day goes by that I don't think of her. I wish she was still here, but God must have needed another angel; that's what I tell myself anyway, when my heart starts to feel so much pain from missing her.

You never realize what you have until you don't have it anymore. I would rather have loved her for a while instead of not having loved her at all. People make mistakes in their lives, but we don't have to hate them for not being perfect.

~ Ernestine Bretz

My Life Is Forever Changed

The moment I felt you move
Kissed your sweet cheek
Held you in my arms
My life is forever changed

Moving me to do things I never would
Holding you in my arms, wanting you to have
the best life I can give
Inspiring you to the same by working harder than ever
My life is forever changed

The moment you said "Mom"
Crawled on all fours
Took your first step
So proud
My life is forever changed

Falling but getting back up
So hard to do
Remain confident it will get easier
Promise
Just keep working harder than ever
My life is forever changed

The moment I felt you move
Kissed your sweet cheek
Held you in my arms
My life is forever changed

~ Brittany Barkman

The Bean Patch

My name is Joshua and when I was five years old, I stayed with my grandparents while my mom worked. Papaw bought ten acres of land in the country and was going to build Mamaw a dream house. I was so excited; I couldn't wait to see it. You should have heard my grandparents talk about it. I knew it had to be a great place! I was finally going to see it early one morning. We packed a plow, hoes and chairs. Papaw was even bringing my bike. I asked him, "Why my bike?" He just smiled at me and said, "You never know, Joshua; you may get bored." I thought, "Whatever, Papaw!"

When I got there, it didn't take me long to figure out that the land needed a house; it was all flat farmland. I got bored and even the bike didn't entertain me. I wished upon a star that night that I would never have to go back there until Papaw built a house.

The next weekend I saw the same items being loaded as before. My mom was at work so I knew where I was going. I didn't want to go, so I started begging Mamaw not to make me go. She told me I could bring some toys, so I carried as many toys as I could lift, including a small TV, from my room. My Papaw took one look at everything I wanted to bring and shook his head no. "You can't bring all of that, especially not the TV," he grumbled. That's what I wanted the most! I was heartbroken.

It wasn't long until plants started to grow in Papaw's garden. There were beans everywhere. That's how my grandpa's land became known as "The Bean Patch." I would beg, "No Papaw! No Mamaw! I don't want to go to 'The Bean Patch'! Please don't make me go! Please! Please! I don't want to go!"

The next summer my Papaw bought a tractor. I was allowed to ride on the tractor with Mamaw while my uncles helped Papaw build a barn. After that day, I loved going to "The Bean Patch." I thought riding on the tractor was the coolest thing in the world!

That was the last summer I went to “The Bean Patch.” My Mamaw passed away and my Papaw stopped going there.

Many years have passed, and now I’m grown. My Papaw recently passed away. To my surprise, I just found out that Papaw still owns “The Bean Patch.” My family went there to visit it one last time this fall before it went up for sale. When we got there I couldn’t believe my eyes. As we got closer, we noticed an eagle sitting on top of the barn. We saw two deer running through the grass. There were butterflies flying everywhere. It was beautiful; nature had taken that vacant land and made it their home.

We went inside the barn and that was the most amazing moment yet! There in the barn was my Papaw’s tractor that he and Mamaw used to give rides. There was the plow, my bike, the hoes, the chairs, and the ladder they had used to build the barn. I stood there looking at everything. It was like a scene from my life, frozen in time. I felt I could direct a play and I could be the main character. The rest of my family would know just how to play the other parts. I could have stood there all day and taken in that sight. It was a truly memorable moment I will cherish always.

Some of my family took souvenirs with them. If I could have kept anything I wanted, I would have kept “The Bean Patch” and I would plant beans there every year. I’m sure whoever buys it will build a big fancy house and they probably won’t even put a garden there, but it doesn’t matter, I’ll always remember Papaw’s land as “The Bean Patch”!

Inspired by my Nephew Joshua Merrill

~ Karen Flick

The Perfect Couple

I saw an old couple yesterday.
They acted like they were just married.

I turned around to ask my husband if we would still love each other when we are old like them.

He answered, "I am just like that old man, but you are not like that old lady. I will always love you. Just be yourself and continue to let me love you."

Then I realized I do not have to envy another couple because I am already part of a perfect one.

~ Rui Wei

Pondering

There is a chair sitting out in the middle of a field. Why is it there?
Who put it there?

I sat in the chair and pondered about these questions. It raised
other thoughts.

Why couldn't I read and write? As I went through life and it was
passing me up, opportunities were going on by.

I will need an answer before I die.

I should not let my past define me as a person.

Why are we put upon this earth? Are we here to suffer? We all
have challenges in our lives.

When we get old everything seems to fall apart. Is this what life is
all about?

Your loved ones die off, and at times your children abandon you.

When you are older, you have to make decisions that have dire
consequences, at times.

My son was on a ventilator keeping his organs alive. A family
member had to make a decision to let him live as a vegetable or
to unplug him. So I, as his father, made the call.

I chose to bear the burden.

Well, my son is no longer with us.

My other children abandoned me for the devastating decision I
made.

The decisions we make in our lives are those we have to live with.

Not a day goes by that I don't think of my son.

His spirit lives on in me.

He is in a better place than I.

~ Ronald W. Fugate

The Cadillac Tricycle

I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was a very sunny Saturday morning. I had been super excited all week long. My dad and I were going shopping to get my bike, not a hand-me-down, but all mine – one I didn't have to share – just mine. As we walked hand in hand the four blocks to the hardware store, I remember wanting to run, but wanting to savor the time with just the two of us.

When we finally arrived, I remember feeling the whoosh of the cool air as we entered. I had goose bumps more from anticipation than from the cool air. We walked past the lawn mowers and into the paint section. I ran ahead to the back of the store. There, all the bicycles and tricycles were all lined up against the back wall. There it was – it was a sight to behold. She was all shiny with silver fenders covering the black glistening tires. The prettiest baby blue you ever saw. A real leather beige seat. If I close my eyes, I can see it all over again. She had blue and silver streamers that were so full they looked more like pom poms. It had the ultimate – it had a bell shaped like a star. It had to be mine! It was the only bike I could see. My dad looked at the price and encouraged me to look at all the red shiny ones. No way, I was sold; no other one could do. He knew he had lost the battle. There was no room for further discussion. As I rode my new Cadillac out the door, I was singing. My dad patiently helped me navigate the four blocks home.

I never noticed the worried look on my dad's face as he strolled behind me. Later that day my dad sat at the kitchen table patiently cutting out cardboard. When I asked what he was doing, he told me he was making decoration for his shoes. I sat and watched him put the cutouts inside his shoes. Little did I know or care that he was covering up the holes in his shoes as he had spent his new shoe money on my very expensive tricycle.

The sacrifices a parent makes for the love of a child. Thanks, Dad!

~ Suellen Lyle

Baby Girl

A baby girl was born, too early in the world.
From her mother's womb she was hurled.
Six weeks premature, and small as she could be,
that baby girl was me.
At three days old my heart rate spikes.
This is not what the Doctor likes.
"She's sick," he says, "she's very ill."
There was a bleed in my brain that meant to kill.
At best I'd be a shell of what a girl is meant to be.
At worst long life was not meant for me.
But God had other plans, as you can surely see,
for here I sit writing a poem about me.
At ten days old they operated.
"A miracle took place," they stated.
Many years have passed, and I'm still alive.
God is good; he makes me thrive.
Because of him, I am alive!

~ Justina L. Luther

Growing Up

Little angel, hair of white,
seems you've grown up overnight!
Seems like yesterday you were three
and wanted to stay close to me.
Then came kindergarten and first grade—
just remember all the new friends you made.

Then came the next stage, all arms and legs,
you wanted to take in everything to raise!
Dogs and cats, hamsters and birds,
“PLEASE! Mom please! Mom” were your words.

Then thirteen a magical year,
at least from everyone is what you hear.
But it wasn't as easy as you thought,
a new kind of problem is what it brought.
What to wear? How's my hair?
“Hey mom, how do you use this Nair?”

Then sixteen you were ready,
to learn to drive and go steady.
But I wasn't ready; I wanted to hold on,
I didn't want my little girl to be gone!

I tried to teach you wrong from right
and why you couldn't stay all night!
Sometimes we argued, sometimes not,
Sometimes we even fought,
But through it all, we grew a lot!

And, Amy, I wouldn't trade a minute of these years,
And I know I'll have to hold back tears.
Now eighteen, graduation at hand,
I guess that's how God has it planned.

So I'll say a very special prayer for you.
Amy, hold onto your dreams.
I am so proud of YOU!

Love,
Mom

~ Joyce Dincler

It Is What It Is

Hello! My name is Erika. I am 30 years old. I was born and raised in Franklin, Ohio, home of the "Wildcats."

My most memorable year of my childhood goes back to when I was in third grade; I was eight years old when I began cheerleading. Cheerleading, cheers, cartwheels, and dancing were the loves of my life. Oddly, I was the biggest tomboy in the whole elementary of Anthony Wayne. I was very active in sports, very energetic. I would have played football if my parents would have let "their precious daughter" play. But they wouldn't take any chances of me getting hurt. They were and are still protective of me. For many reasons, too... I was the only child until I was nine. After I was born my mom was told she couldn't have any more children, but they were wrong. That is when my brother came along; and at twelve, another brother. Yeah! You heard it right, I got stuck with two little brothers, Brandon and Bryan, my two sidekicks for the rest of my childhood, teenage years, well the rest of my life!

Moving on to the "zit" stage, or the teenage life, I was still very active in sports. But I gave up on cheerleading and moved on to softball. I had big dreams for myself to get a scholarship for college because I was confident and did very well as a first baseman. I was a home run hitter as well. I had earned the nickname, "Grunter." I would hit the ball so hard, I would grunt! About 16 is when my tomboy attitude left me. I moved onto make up, fashion, and did I mention boys? The girly girl was there to stay!

So with all that said, during the next few years I began to change. I quit playing softball and all other sports. I met a boy who is my husband of eleven years now. We fell in love. How do you stop love? He was three years older so he had already graduated. I was still in high school. We did all the couple things, such as going to football games, homecoming, prom and parties together. Then the next thing you know, we were having a child together. God has different plans for everyone and he definitely had one for us! I had my senior year left to finish but didn't.

“First comes love, second comes marriage, and then comes a baby in the baby carriage.” Well, we messed up that tradition! I got married to Jason at 19 and our baby girl was already about a year old. When we married, we had our own place. We worked hard to make sure we could provide for our child and ourselves. Two and a half years later, we had our son and became a family of four, and for me, my life had just begun.

So now I am the happiest woman in the world. And through my years growing up, I look back and see why I loved cheerleading and dancing...to teach my daughter all that I know – my love and ambition for softball and striving to become a college student. I now offer all my advice and my talent to my kids. I am making sure they will make the right decisions in life. Because now they are “wildcats.” Once a wildcat, always a wildcat!

~ Erika L. Wright

Don't Worry

"Get up for school!" I yell at you.
"But mom, there's more important things to do,
We're going to the beach, we're going to party.
It doesn't matter if I'm a little tardy."

You're on the run; you're in a hurry,
And all you say is, "Mom, don't worry!"
Jeff, for this world you must prepare,
All you worry about is your hair!

Did I teach you well enough?
Do you know all the important stuff?
"Jeff, be careful in that car!"
"But mom, I'm not going very far."

"Clean your room up, don't make a mess!"
"Always remember to do your best."
"Mom, I promise I will, I've got to go—
I'm taking my girl to the show."

Now the time has come to go away.
There isn't much more that I can say.
On your own, you say at last!
My, but the time has gone so fast!

You've given me joy throughout the years.
It's very hard to hold back the tears.
"Mom, I'm a man now, can't you see?
Just try and have a little faith in me."

I know the time for me has come
To say, "I'm proud that you're my son."
"Mom, I know you are. I understand.
I know that you are my biggest fan."

“I have to go now. I’m in a hurry.
I’ll be fine mom, don’t you worry!”

Love,
Mom

~ Joyce Dincer

Pollination

My Experience in the U.S.A.

When you leave your country for a long time to learn other languages, cultures, and places, you should understand that it won't be easy. My name is Jorge and I'm 19 years old from Madrid, Spain. I am one of those people who left everything behind to learn something very important, English!

I am fortunate to be learning this language out of my country and in a place like Cincinnati, Ohio. When I first told my friends where I was going in the U.S. to live, they immediately said, "What? Where is that?" They expected me to say something like Chicago, New York, or Miami. In my country, not many people have heard of the Ohio, let alone Cincinnati. Because of my experiences here, Cincinnati is now more famous in Madrid. I talk about Cincinnati and Ohio things like the Bengals, The Ohio State Buckeyes, and the Cincinnati Reds.

I have lived here since September, and I have to admit that the first three months were not easy. It's not what I was expecting because I had no friends, no plans, and no parties to go to on the weekends. Even though those situations were difficult, the biggest obstacle was not being able to speak the language.

Things are getting better in every aspect of my life, and I hope that continues. My English is still not perfect but I attend ESOL class everyday to help improve it. The only other language I know is my native language, Spanish. I believe it's difficult for me to learn English because it's my first time learning a second language. I know that with a lot of hard work I will be able to do this and hopefully learn many different languages in my future. I think learning English is a good place to start. Nothing is impossible, and like we say in Spain, "If you want something you must give something." I have given a lot, and I hope the payoff is great.

~ Jorge Munoz Chamizo

What Is the Answer?

It was the day that I came to the U.S. from Turkey, 03/08/2010. I'll never forget this date. I felt so shy and lonely. While I was flying across the world, I cried during the 11 hours because it was the first time I had left my family, my friends, and my country. Yet, America was my dream. I had always imagined it, but now it was real. I was flying. I didn't know what kind of life awaited me. That's why I was worried about everything. I was leaving Turkey, and now I had to write the rest of the story. I felt like I had to compete with time. I wanted to do everything in one year. I wanted to improve my English, learn a different culture, and get to know new people before I went back to my country.

Now I'm settled here, and time is moving too fast for me. My job is as an au pair, and sometimes it's difficult to live with a new family. I miss my family, my friends, and everything about my country, but there are still many good days. This past fall, I met a guy. I've never known anyone like him before. He is an American guy. He has a different culture and a different life from mine. I'm having fun with him. He is my type! Everything is OK. But I shouldn't forget about my family. I promised them that I would be back in one year. However, I can't stop thinking about how much I like it here. What is the most important thing for me? The choice to stay or leave is getting hard. My heart is telling me I should stay here, not leave my love, and experience different things. I'm not sure if I can leave this love!

The other problem is my life is in Turkey, and I can't imagine living without my family. If I choose to stay, who is going to support me? I'm not used to living without family. But life seems to be so happy here. Most of the people are easy-going; they always want to help. How could I leave such a beautiful country? I need to decide soon. What would you do if you were me? Would you go back to your country, or would you stay here with your love?

I'm looking for the answer...

~ Fulden Ozkaynak

My Journey to the “Land of Opportunity”

One morning when I was preparing for my final exam at the University of Peshawar, in Pakistan, a fascinating article caught my attention: America is the Land of Opportunity but not the Land of Guarantee.

This article was about the success and failure of Pakistanis who live in America. The basic idea was that, in America, one could flourish and achieve his or her dreams by working hard and respecting the law.

In Pakistan, fewer than 25% of women are literate and only 2% complete their university education. I was fortunate to have been born into a family that knew the importance of education, especially for women. I feel privileged to have progressed to the completion of graduate school.

In the male-dominated society of Pakistan, there is very little expectation for women to do anything except to get married and raise their families.

My graduate degree was in political science. I also received training to teach high school, but was not sure of what I wanted to do. In the meantime, I became engaged to be married. My fiancé was selected for a Fulbright scholarship to study for his Ph.D. in the United States of America.

In 2007, we got married and came to the U.S. In the beginning, I was very nervous and homesick. I was barely able to understand and speak American English.

That same year, I gave birth to my first child, a son. I was very impressed by the quality of American doctors and other medical staff.

I was amazed to see great differences between our two societies. In America, I feel real independence and protection

of my rights as a woman. I learned that, in America, basic human rights are acknowledged. Individuals may expect to be protected by the law. Nobody here should be discriminated against because of color, religion, or race.

Everyone has the right to go to school and achieve his or her goals. Now, I understand the meaning of “land of opportunity.” Equal opportunities for people to flourish have made America the land of opportunity.

But, what does “not the land of guarantee” mean? Opportunity alone is no guarantee of success. We must work hard to achieve our dreams. If we squander our opportunities or disregard the law we could end up in jail or never become a part of the mainstream.

My message to young Americans, especially young women, is that America is really a beautiful country that supports everyone who wants to realize their destiny, work hard and follow his or her dreams. He or she must make a personal choice to achieve a greater goal, to become a productive citizen, and to accomplish success through hard work and respect for the law.

~Naheed Akhtar

Buy a New Daddy at the Dollar Store

My dream to come to the U.S. was to have a second degree. My first degree is in human resources. It is the same degree my father has. After I came to America I quickly married an American man. After marriage, I was verbally abused. Because I did not have family, my husband made me afraid to leave him.

I became pregnant, and he was nice and took care of me. My baby was born at six and a half months and he had to stay two weeks in the hospital. I never left the hospital. They gave me a room so I could take care of my son. In all this time my husband was with me. I was happy but sad because I could not hold my baby because he was so little.

The same day that we took my baby to our home my husband became verbally abusive again. He always said terrible things to me. Since the baby was premature, he needed a lot of care and extra attention. I could not leave my baby with other people and go to work. I could not leave my husband because I needed the economic support.

The first year after my son was born he was sick a lot and was often in the hospital. My husband left me in the hospital for days at a time. Sometimes he would come for only thirty minutes and hand me a can of soup. I would eat the soup cold a lot of the time because he never wanted to be alone with the baby so I could heat the soup. During the times my son was in the hospital I was cold and hungry. I could not leave him alone to go to the cafeteria. I took care of my son alone until he was three years old.

I was isolated at home. I did not have any friends because my husband did not like the people I met. Then I decided to divorce, go back to school, and go to work. I was determined not to be afraid anymore. Now I'm single with a seven-year-old son. Taking care of my son is a challenge every day because I do not have family support. When my son gets sick I cannot go to school or work.

I'm going part time to Youngstown State University and will graduate next semester in social work. I work at an office in the university and attend The English Center.

Every day I hug my son in the morning before we get ready for school and I tell him how important he is to me and how I love him. I do this because one day we are going to have a house with a yard and a dog. Last year, he talked to me about a new daddy or a boyfriend for me. He asked me to buy another father at the Dollar Store. I have a lot of challenges in my life, but I know God is always with me.

~ *Milagros Biggart*

From Belarus to America

Today is a very beautiful day, isn't it? I like every day in my life now. Even if this day is a hard one, I will like it, too. It will give me new experiences. I am new here, and my life is new too.

I was born in Belarus, a small country in Eastern Europe. I grew up in a great family. My mom is a very kind and beautiful woman. She is a teacher. My dad is a very intelligent and wonderful man. He is a doctor. I remember my lovely grandparents, who have already passed away; I enjoy the memories of them. I have one grandmother who is waiting for me. If I could go back to my past life, I would be very happy to be there.

During my childhood I liked playing a piano and attending a music school; it was my hobby, but I chose a different field for my career. After my high school graduation, I went to study at the Medical University. My studies were interesting and very difficult; I followed them up with a successful internship as a doctor neurologist. That is where I got my first job at the hospital.

I remember when I had my first patient. It was exciting and somewhat worrisome, because I did not want to make any mistakes. It is a very important part of the doctor's job. When my patients get better, it brings smiles to their faces and makes me feel better too. It really upsets me if a patient has a bad prognosis. My job was my home.

My life in Belarus was successful! I had my family, my friends, and my job. I was happy and independent, and knew what I had to do.

On one fine day, my destiny gave me a surprise. I met my future husband, who lived in the United States. My family's friend introduced me to him. We knew each other for two years before I immigrated to America.

My life changed. I love my husband and his family, but the first years were very hard years in my life. I did not speak and understand people because I did not know English. It was terrible: I felt like I had lost my personality. I missed everything and everybody in my life. I was homesick for Belarus. Also I deeply missed my job. I could not work at the hospital in the United States because I did not have my foreign doctor's license, and my attempts to obtain it have failed so far. I was depressed for a long time and even wanted to go back to my country. I did not like or care about anything at that point. My days were dark, the sky was gray, and my world inside was gloomy. I felt that I had lost myself.

One day, by accident, I met an older gentleman in the park; and during a conversation, he told me the following words which changed my life: "Believe in God. Believe in your dream. Believe in yourself more than anyone else." I never met or saw him again.

It was hard for me to get going, but I kept myself on task once I started. I found more friends, took an English class, and studied very hard. My life returned. Every morning I wake up with this words: "Don't give up. The best is yet to come. Nothing will get in the way of my desire to succeed. Keep at it!"

I am grateful for all the wonderful people in my life, my husband, my son, in-laws, my family, my teachers, the volunteers at the ESOL class, my friends and the unknown gentleman, who I met in the park. God Bless them all!

Today is a very bright and beautiful day. I am new here, and my new life is beautiful too!

~ Inesa Zelepuhin

My Dreams Came True!

I was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, on December 8, 1949. I am the oldest of fourteen children; we are seven boys and seven girls. Also, I am a proud mother of four beautiful children.

I was a girl with dreams and worries. I wanted to be a career woman, but my father said no. I settled to become a secretary so that I could help my mom economically. When I was 17 years old, I came to the U.S. in the company of my father.

My aunt helped me search for a job. At first I worked part-time in a factory where I made sandals for women. There, I met people who told me how I could study in the U. S. Since I was a minor, I would have the opportunity to work and to study. If I made good grades I could also have a scholarship and loans to finance my studies. But, again my father said no, and he sent me back to Mexico.

In my town I worked for seven years for my mom and brothers. I was always dreaming and thinking about how I could make it so that when my children came into the world they could study.

I thought, thought, and thought! I decided that when I got married I would go with my husband to the U.S. There my children would be able to study and have a career. I had a boyfriend who proposed to me. Then I told him my idea about immigrating to the U.S. but he did not accept the plan, so we ended our relationship. It was sad for me, but I was young and thought I would meet other men.

Years later, I met Jose'. He was a strong and handsome man. Before we got married, I talked with him about immigrating to the U.S. He accepted the plan, and we made plans to get married. We were married three years after we met.

My husband went to the U. S. three months after we married and two months later I came to be with him. We lived in San Diego, California, where my first daughter, Raquel, was born. It was there that we fought to get legal residence in this country. We wanted to work and grow with our children.

Later we went to San Fernando, California, where our other three children were born-- my son, Romeo, and my daughters, Rocio and Ruth. I always talked to my children about the hopes that I had to have a career but that my father did not permit this. I would dream for them to study and have a career they liked, and I hoped that they would be able to help many people.

When my children started to go to school, I started to learn how to be a good mother and teacher. I remember their first list of words. I asked myself how I could help. I bought an English-Spanish dictionary. It was hard to help my children do their homework, but I worked with them with much love.

Now it is with great satisfaction to me to know that each of my children has a degree and a job as I dreamed. Thanks be to God!

Now I am 61 years old. I am a widow, but my children are taking care of me. They call me once a day and help me. But what is most important to me is when they say, "Thanks, Mom, for your care."

Also, they encouraged me to keep learning. That is why I am in this ESOL class at The English Center in Youngstown, Ohio. I thank my teacher, Leslie, who has patience and knowledge and encourages me to improve my English.

I now live with my daughter Rocio in Boardman, Ohio. I am a fortunate woman, and I have kind and cheerful people surrounding me.

~ *Maria Concepcion Rosales*

Second Country

When my family settled in Cleveland, I was entered into the middle school to learn and listen to the English language. It was hard for me in the beginning to learn English. It was difficult to talk with my classmates because I was afraid to talk in English. My teacher assigned me to a group to work in a science lab. I was nervous and shy. All my classmates looked at me like at an alien, and I didn't know what to do and did not understand any of the science words. I tried to remember and defined each of the words on the index cards.

Now I have found that listening is an important skill in dealing with my peers. I am confident that this skill continues to help me interact with others as I move on to another phase of my life. I did not know anything about the English language when I was in my native country. Since I have been in the United States for fifteen years, I can speak, read, write, understand, and I am very excited to learn the new things.

When I was a freshman, I loved chemistry because I liked to solve the problems and to figure out the molecules. Then I decided to learn about medications to help others understand about them. Now, I know about medications, treatments, interaction, etc. I enrolled in college for pharmacy school. I did not have to pay for my schooling because I had a scholarship. After I finished school, I took the pharmacy test, and I have now worked for Kaiser Permanente for 5 years. I am happy and proud of myself to be successful in my second country.

In Vietnam, my family was poor, and I didn't have any opportunity or money to buy school materials. The government did not support or help any student who had good grades or a low income like in America. We had to pay out of our pocket, and if we didn't have money, we had to drop out of school.

Last year, 2010, I went back to my country to marry. He was a doctor and moved to the U.S. We had one kid. Luckily, I have

everything I need in America, and we are living in freedom. Thank you to America for bringing my family here to live. We will do the best we can to support a better society.

~ Hahn N. Nguyen

My Life

Life is full of changes, as you know. I never felt this more than when I came to the United States. Before then I had never visualized myself ever leaving China or my family. When I stepped off the plane onto American soil, I knew my destiny had changed.

This change was very difficult for me. A different language, culture, and food caused me to miss my family all the time. I didn't have any friends here so I was lonely. I cried every night.

However, I knew I needed time to process all the differences. I began to learn English while working at a Chinese restaurant. The boring work over many years numbed me.

My life changed again when I met my husband. We married and had two beautiful children. We opened our own business. Everything looked very good. I decided I must become a better American and improve my English. I began taking ESOL classes this fall. I enjoy them very much.

Unfortunately, life is impermanent. Just when I started to feel happy in my new country something happened. Two months ago an armed man robbed our business – three times in one month! I was there each time. I had never seen a real gun before. Since then, I have experienced nightmares. I feel unsafe. I've seen a doctor so I thought I would feel better by now. But the bad thoughts still come into my mind. I'm afraid of every person who has their hands in their pockets. I'm worried that my children are not safe in school. I keep hoping the nightmares will pass.

I don't know if coming to the U.S. was right or wrong. I don't know what the future holds. What I do know is that this is my life, and I must face it. My wish is that my family will have a good future here.

God bless the USA. God bless us.

~ Duan Lin

Buds to Blossoms

Jessica's Dilemma

Jessica, I know what you are going through. It is very hard to take care of two kids on your own with assistance but it is possible. I did it for years.

The first thing you need to do is change your way of thinking. You are still trying to live by the same standards as you did when you were married. You have to change that. You are living on a single person's income now. Take some time to write out a budget plan and follow it closely.

Eliminate your credit cards altogether. Cut back on your spending and open a checking and savings account. Don't touch the savings account. Your bills and your extras should be paid out of your checking account. This will help you to save the money to move into your own place.

You need to talk with your kids and explain the situation to them. Let them know you won't be able to go to the movies and out to eat every week. Instead stay in on Friday nights and make your own pizzas. Let the kids choose the kind of pizza they want and let them help make it. You will be surprised at how much fun the kids will have. Get some ideas from the kids of some fun activities.

Here are some other ways you can save money. You can go the grocery store and buy groceries once a month and restock every pay period. If your kids don't qualify for free lunch, they can bring their lunch from home, and you should do the same. You should only buy clothes when needed and bargain shop. You can always find nice things on sale and since you're an impulsive shopper, I would advise you to leave your credit card at home. Make a list of the things you need and take only enough money to buy what's on your list.

You can eliminate the health club by power walking and exercising at home. It's one of the things my kids and I did for

fun. As a librarian, I'm sure you know that you can check out CDs, DVDs, and magazines. Why not use that resource? You could read the newspaper for free at work. You may want to contact Habitat for Humanity to try and have a house built. You would qualify with your income. You could try to find free activities that the kids would be able to participate in.

I would like to use myself as an example. I lived on less than \$1,000.00 a month. I paid \$400.00 a month for rent. I paid utilities and bought \$100.00 worth of groceries every month. I brought clothing mostly off clearance and bargain racks. I often shopped at Goodwill. Sometimes I found nice, up-to-date, name-brand clothes for my kids at reasonable prices.

I entertained my kids at home. Friday was pizza and movie night. Saturday was tacos, arts, crafts, and board games. Sunday, after church, we visited family, or we packed a lunch and went to the park. It wasn't always easy, but I put God first in everything I did, and I survived.

You see, Jessica, living on a budget is not as difficult as you think. It can be done. I did it and survived!

~ Rose Thomas

What Can You Do With Hamburger?

Everyone knows that hamburger is a staple of the average American household. There are probably thousands upon thousands of recipes for preparing hamburger. Some can be very simple; others can be more complicated. So here are some simple ways I prepare hamburger meals in my house without the help of "Hamburger Helper."

Since my sons are not picky eaters, I can make a meal made with hamburger at least once or twice a week. The ones I like the most are the ones that expand into leftovers for lunch, or even a second day's meal. The easiest of these is meatloaf. My sons can have enough to get full stomachs, and we can have the leftovers for lunch the next day.

I also enjoy making lasagna because it is a little more detailed than meatloaf. This is a meal that my sons do not mind eating for two days in a row. I usually have enough left for us to finish off on day three. It also makes a good pot-luck dish to bring to the office when called upon.

Chili is dish I make in the winter time for comfort food in my house. It is easy to make, and my sons can season their own bowls to taste. The leftovers, put in a freezer bag, can last for months at a time. Defrosting is easy. Leftover chili can always be used when you just do not have time to cook.

For a change of pace, I occasionally make spaghetti and meatballs. It is not difficult to make, but it does take a little more time than normal to prepare it with the side dishes that I make for this meal. There usually are no leftovers of this meal, and clean up sometimes is cause for disagreement amongst the boys. But they do enjoy it when I get around to making it.

Instead of giving into the temptation of cooking with boxed meals, I prepare a special dish called "Dirty Rice With Hamburger." The recipe comes from New Orleans, and the boys cannot seem

to get enough of it. It goes especially well in the summer time with B.B.Q. ribs, but it also can be substitute "Comfort Food."

Some other meals are really simple to prepare: "Taco Salad," "Sloppy Joes," and "Chili Hot Dogs." Surprisingly, my food budget for hamburger on a monthly basis is not as much as you think. But for the price, it can be an economical alternative to beef. What can you do with hamburger? More than you think for less than you might think.

~ *Rachelle Bryant*

Living Life to My Fullest!

I was raised in a family of 15, and we were very close to each other. We had times when we didn't always get along, although we would always make up again. I think this had a lot to do with my mother influencing us to keep the peace.

In my Amish heritage, we had no choice but to obey and respect the Bishop. Whatever he said, that's how you had to do it, or else you had consequences to pay, such as confess to the church that you've done wrong and ask them for forgiveness.

I think my parents did the very best they could to keep us in the order of the church. This was how they were taught growing up so, therefore, that's the only life they knew. They were taught to stay with the faith you were brought up in.

In my teen years, I started being a little a little naughty. I wore make-up and perfume. One instance, as I was sitting in church, I heard the bishop say to the congregation that it had been told to him that somebody had a perfume bottle in her black bonnet, left out in the laundry room with the rest of the women's bonnets. I was in total shock and fearful of getting in trouble. He added, "Whoever that is should know better than to have perfume," hoping it wasn't any of the members.

At home, my other siblings and I would share head phones, a small TV, and a camera with pictures. We would hide these things in places where we thought my parents wouldn't find them, such as out in the barn under some hay, or in the house up in the attic where there was an opening under the floor with insulation.

My dad would always warn us that if we were hiding something he would find out, and he sure did most every time. He figured out that we had a camera, because the night before he happened to be outside and saw a flash that came from my bedroom window.

The next morning, he started questioning me, and I wouldn't answer him. So he said he would ask my boyfriend. As I walked away I fainted! Talk about a lot of fear that had a toll on my life.

It ended up that one of my sisters told him that we had a camera. So we gave him the camera so he could get rid of it. We didn't want him to get the film and develop it. We were afraid he might find more evidence. So we took the film out, showed it to him, and just dropped it in a heated stove before he could get to it.

At age 21, I decided to leave that faith, so I could freely do these things without having to answer to anybody. Four of my siblings also left that faith, which I believe influenced me to leave too. I left my boyfriend, my family, and my friends in the community. I've had some very lonely moments, because I really missed everybody especially family, but over the years I began to adjust to this new world.

To make a long story short, I'm now married to that old boyfriend, who left the faith about a year later. We now have 3 beautiful children. Trevor is now 8 years old, Crystal 5, and Bianca 2. I now have a complete family of my own, and they mean the world to me.

Since I only went to 8th grade in the Private school, I have been working hard on furthering my education. I just passed my GED as of last year. I am now looking into going to college for business. I hope to have my own business someday.

I would encourage anyone to dare to dream big and live life to your fullest. Don't let anyone, or any obstacles, keep you from following your dreams! I don't regret what I went through in life, because it taught me to be stronger and made me shine brighter. Through all the fears I have had, I feel like God had been holding my hand all this while saying, "It's okay," even in moments when it didn't feel like He was there. Live life to the fullest!

~ Lena J. Hershberger

Organization

Organization is something we should all learn to do. It is very important to stay organized in our daily life and especially in our work. Being organized makes everything run more smoothly, from finding what we need to getting a job done.

How often have we lost something important due to clutter or a messy room? We can lose keys, a wallet, an ID, or even documents, just to mention a few.

Many of us have gotten so busy in our lives that we forget to take the time to simplify our lives by organizing our space and belongings. I believe by keeping things neat and orderly, you will live a less stressful life.

Life as an adult can and will be hard physically and emotionally. Work, kids, home, a car, and paying bills surround us on a daily basis. Knowing where important everyday items are will help ease your mind and then you may focus on daily activities.

Organization can help improve our lives in many ways. It is crucial we all learn to do this. Simplifying the little things can and will make a big difference. Organization is the key.

~ Mark Weaver

Wormholes

The alarm clock's ringing broke the stillness of the night and cut through the shroud of a deep yet dreamless sleep. Left unattended, this chronograph's alarm escalated in volume from whispered tinkling to belligerent clamor in a short time. Seeking to spare his freshly wakened nerves an overload of sound, the cowboy rolled toward the clock and hit the off button before the alarm reached mid volume.

The cowboy dressed then padded out to the kitchen in his socked feet to start the coffee brewing, glad he had set the machine the prior evening. It was a drip coffee maker, and he poured a cupful long before the brewing was complete, eager for the feel of the caffeine kick. What the alarm clock started, the coffee completed, and he was soon wide-awake.

At the front door, the cowboy pulled on his boots after first making sure no spiders or scorpions had homesteaded in them. He opened the door and slipped out into the darkness of the pre-dawn desert heading for the barn to feed his four-legged partners. His horses nickered to him as he approached; he returned the equine greeting with a human "howdy." As he portioned out the morning ration, he cut the amount of hay by a third and increased the amount of grain by a quarter, eight pounds hay and four quarts grain. His horses would need more carbohydrates and less bulk for this day's work.

Horses love to eat. The best part of a horse's day is feed time. Knowing this, the cowboy let his horses eat undisturbed, and by flashlight, checked to make sure the truck and trailer were ready for hauling. He would saddle the horses after their breakfast. Still hours before dawn, he headed to the house to rustle up some grub for himself. When he was finished with his breakfast, he knew the horses would be done with theirs and accept the saddling without fuss.

Still dark after breakfast, the cowboy saddled his horses more by feel than sight and loaded them in the trailer. He started

the truck engine and eased down the long dirt road towards the Target Pasture, located twelve miles southeast of ranch headquarters. Target Pasture was a practice bombing range the Army Air Corp used prior to World War II, and here or there could still be found practice bombs made of concrete. The cowboy could not help but wonder if fighter pilots had aimed at the cattle that foraged the pasture in those days.

The hint of a sunrise made visible the steel water tank and drinker of the west trap in Target Pasture. Four more miles to the east fence and the cowboy would meet up with his day hands. He arrived at the meeting site alone but was soon joined by the first of two truckloads of day hands and their horses. The sun had yet to break the horizon when all hands and the cowboy were checking saddle cinches before mounting their horses. This gather was about to start.

As the sun broke the eastern skyline, the troop of horses and riders lined out in single file at a long trot with the cowboy in front of the column. He started spreading the riders out according to plan, least experienced deployed first so the boundary fence would help guide him to the west trap, and he wouldn't end up lost in the vast expanse of Target Pasture. On the column trotted, dropping a horse and rider every mile, give or take, until the group was spread along the east fence with a green hand at south boundary, seasoned hands, the cowboy, seasoned hands then a green hand at north boundary. With horses and riders in place, the gather began.

All the riders moved west in a large serpentine pattern with each rider pushing cows and calves out of their section. These cattle were a bit on the wild side and would take off running at the first sight of horse and rider, so there wasn't much pushing to it. The presence of the cowboy and his horse moves the cattle forward. This pattern continued, each rider crisscrossing his section making visual contact with the riders to his left and then to his right, the cattle moving westward away from them.

The solitude and quiet allowed the cowboy's thoughts to wander from the task at hand, and as usual, they wandered from

present to past. “Wormholes,” he thought to himself. He considered Albert Einstein’s theory of time and space folding like fabric and the pathways between the two dimensions. Wormholes, they were called, he had read somewhere. He was no physicist to be sure, but he fancied his own personal time and space folded with conduits connecting the here-and-now, with the then-and-there. “Wormholes in my reality,” he thought to himself. He knew most folks called them memories. He used to hate them, these wormholes, for they would take him back to times of great pain and sorrow, of shame and guilt, of loss and regret. Countless times he was drawn inextricably into these portals to the past, reliving again and again the crashing end of his self-medicated exile from social norms. Through these wormholes, he relived the release from confinement and the early days of recovery, those first tentative steps from being taker to giver.

The cowboy was grateful now, for recovery had given him tools to remove shame and guilt from his past and lessen the debilitating grip of regret. Oh sure, there would always be some regret for opportunity lost and time wasted but he was no longer held hostage by that. He knew that everyone shares some measure of pain, sorrow, and loss; he had learned the liberating truth in forgiving others and finally himself. He no longer hated the wormholes; in fact, he used them to remind himself of what was and could be and stay on course to what is and will be.

He made the journey forward from his past, back to the New Mexico desert grasslands, back to the day of hands and their horses gathering the herd of cattle moving westward through the dust and heat. He realized that this moment too was but a fold in the fabric of his life, a memory, a wormhole. He journeyed on to the present, to the here-and-now.

The cowboy opened the door of the house, and the crisp Ohio air nipped his cheeks. Soon he would be at school, in class with his fellow students. He is grateful. He is happy. He is hopeful, and he smiles thinking of life’s possibilities.

~ Birch Cooper

She Gave Me Life

There's a special young woman in my life; she did something for me that was hard for others to do. She gave me life, with no questions asked; that's why I love that special person. Back in 2005 this person gave me a kidney. This special person is my daughter, Natisha Ward McLin.

In 1997 I went to Marysville Correctional Institution. At this point I found out that I had serious health issues. While I was at Marysville, I was mostly in the infirmary or at Ohio State Medical Center for tests. Finally, I was told that I was in kidney failure. When I got out of Marysville, I went into drug and alcohol treatment and I followed up with my health.

In 2003 I started on dialysis. That's when my daughter went into the field of dialysis to learn more about what I was going through, and I thank her for that. My daughter and I went to Cleveland Clinic hospital to get tested to see if she could give me a kidney. The doctor said that our cells were fighting against each other, and that a transplant was out of the question.

One day I took my Mom to see her nephrologist because she had a spot on her kidney. I told her doctor my story, and this doctor suggested that I get on the worldwide transplant list. Later, at my dialysis, I talked to Denise, the head nurse, and she put me on the transplant list at Ohio State, as well.

About two weeks later Ohio State Hospitals called to make an appointment for my daughter and me to come to Columbus to be tested for a possible transplant. God is good because after they did a lot of testing, the doctors at Ohio State decided that she could give me a kidney. On July 8, 2005, at Ohio State Medical Center, my daughter gave me a kidney. She saved my life.

In conclusion, this special person loved me unconditionally and looked past my faults. Because of my daughter, I have life; it

has been five years and four months since that day, and I feel fine.
I love that special person because God gave her to me.

~ Janet D. Warren

Strong Gales

Remorse

I cast my soul to the lake of fire,
the heat of the flames, only take me higher.
As I finally find my resting place,
all you can see is my blistered face.
I can no longer feel this twisted hunger,
because now I lay six feet under.
I cannot see a bright light,
all I can do is try to fight.
As the creatures of the dark devour my corpse,
all I can feel is the pain of remorse.
I can start to feel the devil drag me under,
soon I will feel his wretched thunder.
Now I am burning in the depths of hell,
all because I decided to kill.

~ Justin Hollingsworth

He Gave Me a Gift

He gave me a gift – a beautiful ring in a pretty, shiny box.
And he told me he loved me.
He gave me earrings like you have never seen.
And he told me he loved me.
He gave me a necklace, a bracelet, a dinner.
And he told me he loved me.
Then he said he had a surprise gift
That would make me his for all time.
I couldn't wait to see it.
My heart was racing.
My palms were sweaty.
I was shaking like a leaf.
He told me it was gift you cannot see,
cannot unwrap, cannot take back.
It will forever be with me.
He gave me a disease that will cause me pain, self-pity, and anger.
He couldn't wait to share his pain.
This gift that you cannot see, cannot unwrap, cannot take back.
And he told me he loved me.

~ Randi Betz

Troubled Youth

Troubled youth have been such a major part of the environment that I've grown up in. As far back as I can remember, there has been trouble with our youth. I'm going to show you a few ways youth become troubled. I will share with you a few of their realities. I want to put you inside some of our troubled youths' minds.

Imagine you're 7 years old. You are lying in bed night after night hearing your mom being beaten. Imagine you get enough courage one night to help her, and you end up getting the same thing done to you. Imagine playing kickball and the ball rolls over by your parents' bedroom window. You look in and see them and their friends sticking themselves with hospital needles. Imagine going to bed starving every night, not being able to wait for school the next day, so you can eat breakfast. I remember things from my youth so vividly and clearly – like it was yesterday. Let me share a few of my realities with you. I remember my friend's mother lying on the ground lifeless outside their apartment. She had just been pushed out her second-story window by her boyfriend. I remember thinking to myself how lucky I was that my mom's boyfriend just beats her all the time. I remember seeing someone get shot to death for the first time. That was also the first time I had seen someone get run over by a car, too. I remember shaking a lot of my close friends' hands for the last time, and when I say a lot, I mean over ten.

Also, I remember the thought processes of my friends and me back then. It was so twisted by the negative energy that surrounded us. So many of us couldn't wait to get bigger and stronger so we could protect our moms and our loved ones. We felt that we would no longer be the ones taking the beating. We would be the ones giving it. We had no clear direction in life, no real dreams or goals.

We also felt that we would no longer be hungry when we got older. This meant we needed to do what we saw the older

guys doing to eat. Sell crack! Like I said, no dreams or goals. We had no expectations in life. I mean why would we? We had no positive people to rub shoulders with. No one had pulled us to the side and tried to make us see a different reality. We didn't even expect to make it to 21. If we were lucky enough to do so, we always felt we would be in jail for the rest of our lives. So that made it pretty easy for us to overlook our tomorrows.

I would love to be one of a few who can stand in front of our youth and tell them I made it through, and they can, too. That is one of the main reasons I'm going to get my G.E.D. I want to do something to help our youth.

~ *Damon West*

How Many ...?

How many rivers of hope must
I cross to sink in pain?
How many walls of pain will I
Run into just to find one door
Of hope to walk through?
How many obstacles of dark
Will I overcome until I fall into the light?
How many times will I go when
My head says "no" and
Then stop when
When my heart says "yes"?

~ Juan Wooten

Hurt

Hurt is when you are placed in a foster home.

Hurt is when your foster parent abused you.

Hurt is when you see kids getting abused.

Hurt is when you see animals getting abused.

Hurt is when you see homeless people out in the street.

Hurt is when you see a person going through the trash to get
food to eat.

Hurt is when you see a father out looking for a job to feed his
family.

Hurt is when you're a single parent raising your kids on your own.

Hurt is when you have a disability, and you don't ask for it.

This is hurt.

~ Edna Goodwin

Child Abuse

There are four major cases of child abuse: neglect, physical, psychological/emotional and sexual. In America, child abuse is one of the most common causes of death. Statistics say that most abuse cases happen in the child's home.

Neglect is where the responsible adult fails to provide for their children's various needs. Failure to provide food, clothing, and hygiene is the most common form of neglect. There are many different kinds of neglect; it doesn't have to be just not feeding or bathing your children. It could be something as simple as leaving your children unsupervised around unclosed medicine cabinets or cabinets with cleaning supplies. Your children should always be under adult supervision because lack of supervision is a form of neglect.

Physical abuse is the most common type of child abuse. Physical abuse can involve such things as punching, kicking, stabbing, burning, bruising, or shaking a child. Shaking a child or infant can cause shaken baby syndrome. This kind of abuse can lead to pressure and swelling of the brain and oxygen deprivation. Disciplining a child and abusing a child are often poorly defined. Any kind of force or trauma used as a disciplinary action is illegal in 24 countries around the world but is socially accepted in many others.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is when the child is abused for sexual stimulation by an adult. Some types of CSA include such things as asking or peer pressuring a child to perform sexual activities, making one's self expose their private areas under peer pressure, showing sexual activities being done to a child, performing sexual activities to a child, and asking a child to pose in the nude or taking pictures to be displayed as a form of child pornography.

Psychological and emotional abuse are the hardest to define. This kind of abuse happens everyday. Name calling, ridicule, deg-

radation, destruction of personal belongings, torture, and destruction of a pet are some examples of emotional abuse.

Some people deal with this kind of abuse on a daily basis! Nobody should have to deal with any kind of abuse. There are many other ways of dealing with things other than hitting or calling one another names. If you or anyone else you know is going through any kind of abuse, please call your local police or someone you know that can help stop the abuse.

~ Dawn M. Marcello

The Tears

The heavens are crying; now listen really closely.
They are trying to tell us a story.
It's sad but has so much meaning to it.
For why a loved one goes so young, we will never know.
You hear a silent breath telling you
It's hard for now, but it will be okay.
For we are your angels now and forever.
Just hold out your hand and you'll feel us.
For we are right there by your side.
The warmth in the air, the cool breeze
Against your face
For it will be us kissing you.

~ Kathleen Gordon

My Cocoon

Raped and abused, drugged and confused.

This is my cocoon!

All these things that get in the way,

I often wonder will I ever escape.

This is my cocoon!

Wait, something is going on,

I feel a change taking place, is this?

The presence of God's good grace!

This is my cocoon!

I feel different--not so confused and not so abused!

I think I will escape!

That was my cocoon, stay tuned!

~ Beverly Ann Woods

I Found the Exit!

I wasn't strong enough to write this story before. I'm ready now.

I was so happy when I got married. I thought my husband was a good man in every way. But later he became a terrible real dream for me and my daughter.

I took good care of my husband. I made sure he took his heart medication every day. I used to wake up at 3:00 a.m. every morning to cook his breakfast and pack his lunch. I worked hard in the house. We had five pets, and I liked to keep everything clean. I was my husband's clock and his maid.

He changed quickly when we moved to Ohio. I began having to listen to his bad words, and I saw his bad behavior. The first time he hit me was at night when we were watching T.V. He wanted me to scratch his back. I was sleeping on the couch. I told him, "I am tired. I don't want to right now." He immediately began to kick me off the couch. That woke me up! I told him, "You are a monster! I got married to a monster! What happened to you?"

I was crying as I ran to my daughter's bedroom and locked the door. After a few minutes he knocked on the door, saying to us, "Open the door. I want to talk with you!" We waited to open the door for a little time because we were scared! Even though he told me he was sorry, we were still scared.

My husband was also selfish; he had to be first, second, and final in everything.

I didn't drive at this time. I always felt like an animal in a cage. If the three of us went out, we usually spent our time at the fly field. My husband was obsessed with flying his remote control and gasoline airplanes. He bought many expensive airplanes, which he kept in our house. I had to put down cloths so the oil from the airplanes didn't destroy our carpet.

My husband taught me how to drive, but he was always rude. He constantly yelled at me, and I cried a lot. One day he hit me on my left arm while I was driving. He bruised my arm so badly that I had marks on it for two months. I showed his family my bruises when they came to visit, but they didn't say a word to him.

As time passed, my husband began to hit me more frequently. He also continued to yell at me and push me. I had so much pain in my heart too. I felt terrible. What could I do without any family in Ohio? I could only pray that he would change his behavior toward me and my daughter. We never had any peace, but only a lot of stress. He told me several times, "If you don't want to obey, the door is there!" He tried to strangle me twice. The last time, he left eighteen marks and a lot of pain in my throat.

My family didn't understand the intensity of that violence that we were suffering. But then my mom came to visit, and she was shocked at the way my husband treated us, and how terrible was our reality. She discovered our bad dream, and spent a few evenings crying in my daughter's bedroom.

When I started my first job in America, we decided that the money I earned I would save to pay for the test I needed to take to get my medical license in this country. But during my second week of work, he changed his mind and told me that I would have to use all my salary to buy food instead. I felt I was working only to buy him more airplanes.

In my ESOL classes, I had the honor to know my first angel – my teacher who helped me look for an escape. I was scared to call the police, because we don't have any family in America. Where would we go? Then I learned about the group called "Choice." This group helped me find a solution to our problem.

My advice to somebody who is suffering from domestic violence is not to be scared. Go look for help. Talk to friends. Call the police. Don't be quiet, because if a man hits the first time, no matter why, he will continue doing the same, and may even do

something worse. We need to stop this behavior! It is not just!
We are human and have the right to be respected.

Thanks to God I finally got my divorce through the help
of Legal Aid. I appreciate a lot of people who helped me find an
escape. Now my bad dream book has been closed!

~Tania Montalban

Mixed Bouquet

My Bedroom

There's this one place that will always make me feel I'm at home and relaxed. My bedroom is one of my favorite places to go when I'm sad, happy, or just want some alone time. If you think about it, it's a sanctuary; quiet, peaceful, and relaxing! I can always experience comfort whether I'm sleeping or just wanting some alone time.

First of all, I picked my room because it's always comfortable – all the bed sheets made perfectly, a cozy comforter, and pillows stacked up as high as the sky. When I'm in that place, I want it to be known not to bother me when I'm on cloud nine reading my favorite book! The only sounds that come between me and my room is the sound of "Dinner's ready!"

Secondly, my bedroom has so many windows, I feel like I could just as well be outside on a nice fall day. With the windows cracked and the breeze swift through the screens, the only other thing I'd rather be doing is daydreaming. If you know you will be relaxed and at ease, going to my special place is always something new.

At last, it finally gets better as night falls. Honestly, nighttime in my room is the best time of the day! As the sun sets, the trees start to sway back and forth giving me the assurance it's bedtime. I release the sheets that are tucked so tightly under the mattress, fall back in all my pillows, and before you know it, I'm in a dead sleep with all the thoughts I'd been dreaming about all day.

Even though everyone has their own special place, I think most would agree that your bedroom can always be a peaceful, quiet, and relaxing place after a long day. Also, a bedroom should be very well planned out. In some studies I've read, if your room can meet your needs at home and work, then relax and know everything will be a lot more stress free! All in all, you will end up there every night, whether it's your favorite place or not.

~ Kim Wehrman

I Am From

I am from candles that smell of cinnamon
and picture frames of grandchildren.

I am from angels that sit in a grandfather's clock.

I am from a swimming pool in the back,
which reflects in the sun like a tear drop.

I am from the rose bush that grabs your leg
every time you walk past it.

I am from the little pond in the front, that is as green as can be.

I am from sugar cookies and fried chicken.

I am from red heads and glasses.

I am from freckles used to connect the dots.

I am from the challenged.

I am from the intelligent, who sometimes are unwilling to show it.

I am from the sit back and shut ups, that always seem to talk.

I am from computers and cell phones,
that don't always seem to work.

I am from many, many cousins.

I am from strong cigarette smell in the morning,
to the light smell of coffee in the evening.

I am from grandfather's music, and grandmother's beauty.

I am from the blue-eyed light-skinned people.

I am from memories rolling out of the closet.

I am from divorced parents and step-siblings.

I am from my Aunt Lynda's smirky smile.

I am from the little girls who run around with pigtails in their hair.

I am from the swing in the back, that squeaks when you play on it.

I am from a shed that holds more memories than it does space.

I am from the odd balls who love me the most.

~ Ashley Nicole Lancaster

Plot to Separate

It's an event
that has taken place
since
the dawn of time.
Beyond our minds
we don't
take the time
to look,
listen and be
below skin deep.
Shallows
what we all proceed
to accomplish,
can we not
stop the nonsense,
instead of
following along
like zombies?
Portraying what we see
we're all
placed here for a purpose,
before the bombs
were dispersed.
To desecrate
a whole race

or nation,
we've established
harassment
to White, Indians, and Asians.
Can't forget about
the African Americans
and Haitians,
we've all embraced
this.
What's wrong
With this planet?
I can't stand it,
seems we're never
able to manage.
World peace,
due to the actions
of self greed.
"No mercy"
seems to be everyone's theme.
Everyone's for themselves,
even though
we were all
made from the same cell.

~ Michael P.Adams

Peace on Earth

Put down your weapons
Embrace your neighbor
Acept each other
Consider all your options
Educate the masses

Originate new solutions
Negotiate your conflicts

Embrace diversity
Acknowledge individuality
Respect your differences
Talk to one another
Heal the wounds of war

~ Scarlet Oaks Group Project::

Nathan Jackson

Pheck Kim Oeng

Sachi Parker

Preston Skinner

Miaoyan Tan

Derby Day

I was out and about with no particular place to go. I had seen a sign that said "Auction," so I stopped in to see if I could find a bargain or two. I thought that they might have something I couldn't live without – "gotta have it, need it, want it." As I sat and waited for a bargain, a large box of women's hats from the 20s and 30s came up for sale. No one bid on them – so I did. Everybody at the auction was laughing. What was I going to do with all those hats?

I concluded that little ladies would look good in these hats, so I dropped them off at the local nursing home.

That evening, one of those ladies was playing in a card tournament with me and she was wearing one of the hats. I commented, "What a beautiful hat you have on!" She replied, "Thank you! Someone left hats at the nursing home in the cafeteria." She said, "I would like to thank the person that left the hats, but they did it anonymously." I just looked at her and smiled.

She cheerfully commented that the ladies had tried them on and laughed. One lady in her 90s said, "These hats remind me of my hay days when I could dance and cut a rug!" They were thrilled to have hats that took them back in time.

The Kentucky Derby Day was coming up. Now all of those ladies will have hats for Derby Day. So, as you see, hats can warm your head and warm your heart, and even take you back in time.

~ Ronald W. Fugate

In Memory Of:

In memory of:

Our grandparents
For love shared
For their old stories
For time spent with us

In memory of:

Our moms
For encouragement
For leadership
For their hard work and effort

In memory of:

Our children
For their first smile
For the first hug
For their growth into responsible adults

In memory of:

Our soldiers
For honor
For respect
For our freedom

In memory of:

Our Father above
Love your neighbor, love your enemy as yourself
Knock and it shall be opened
Ask and you shall receive
Seek and you shall find

In memory of:

Our dreams
That they be fulfilled
Our thoughts, needs,
Hopes, wants, desires

In memory of:

Our Faith

May we advance forward as
We learn from our mischief?
That led us to our mistakes.

~ Job Fairchild

Colors of Nature

Summer

Summer
Sunny, hot
Swimming, relaxing, partying
Sunshine, swimming pools, snow, ice
Freezing, shivering, sleeping
Cloudy, cold
Winter

~ Simone Rehberg

Snow Storm

Snowflakes falling all around,
some of them don't hit the ground.
Here I stand in this winter scene.
The world around me has been wiped clean.
Not a trace of sorrow,
and no thoughts of tomorrow
as I look around me now.
As my eyes wander, I wonder how?
How is the world made new
by this frozen falling dew?
All of our sin is beneath the snow.
All of our past the world has let go.
Every night as we sleep and dream,
a snow storm comes to wipe our slate clean.
When we awake in the morning our canvas is blank.
For this we have God to thank.
He sent his Son so pure and clean,
the ultimate in a snow storm scene.
Because of him, we are wiped clean.

~ Justina L. Luther

Dreamscape

The scene before me was so bucolic
I couldn't look away.
Colors changing at a glance,
leaves falling to the ground.
Deer eating nearby, birds chirping
high up in the boughs.
A stream, a stone's throw away,
schools of fish off the hook.
Sunlight coming from up above,
beauty and quiet all around.
In my mind, or really there,
there's no place I'd rather be.

~ Kelly Harrison

Good Morning Music

Yawn! Good morning to my love, my life
I dreamed about you all night
I wake up to the beat of my heart
The rhythm of my movement...
Pure art

Happy for my choir of fingers and toes
Dressed in all the same clothes...
My skin

What a wonderful way to make the day begin
Music, such a beautiful bliss
I wake up to music every day just like this

~ Jamar Woods

The Little Tree

A little tree stood all alone.
He tried to be so brave and strong
Because he knew they'd come real soon
And chop him down at his roots.
His friends betrayed him and left him for dead,
But all he could think of was what lie ahead.

His friends all stood bewildered that day
As they watched them strip him away.
They left him all rugged and rough
All tied together with nails and stuff.
They nailed him here, they nailed him there
Before he knew it he was up in the air.

Then all of a sudden the darkness came.
He felt the cold, He felt his pain.
He heard his cry; he saw his shame.
Tell me now, who's to blame?
As he stood there strong and tall,
He held the Savior with his all.

With his all, with his all,
Standing there so strong and tall,
He became that old rugged cross.
Standing there so strong and tall,
Holding the Savior through it all.

~ Cinda L. Looney

Do You Feel Free?

Do you feel free when you awake
To a nice cool breeze upon
Your face as the sun comes up?
As you look to the sky so blue
And birds soaring in air.

When flowers open their petals
Ever so softly and the wind blows
Through the trees and the sweet
Smell of tulips and fresh cut grass
Do you feel free?

As rain drops softly to the ground
And dries to the sun's warm and
Soft rays.
As you listen to the birds singing
In the treetops and caring for
Their young or butterflies fluttering
Through the air to and fro.
Do you feel free? Do you feel free?

Ahh yes. Feel free my friend
Feel free.

~Wanda L. Babb

Seeds

Seeds
Tiny, dark
Growing, developing, changing
Need sunshine and rain to become
Dazzling, smelling, decorating
Beautiful, colorful
Flowers

~ Sandie Catherine

Falling Star

A person's life is like a falling star.
Sometimes you will feel like a star.
Next you find yourself falling
Like a small piece of rock.

Problems get so hot, they burn you out.
You think your life is over, until the light of hope
Makes you realize that you are bigger and brighter,
Even if you are falling in the dark.

~ Blanca Lopez

Nibbles

A cool breeze blows through my hair on a warm summer morning as I twist and pluck the weeds from my flower bed. Tiny little holes throughout the mulch-covered bed show signs of birds searching for their morning breakfast. While enjoying the different shades of dew-covered foliage with flowers bright and bursting with color, I notice a hummingbird hovering. Uncomfortable with my presence around its succulent feeder and butterfly bush, I decided it was time for a break.

While making a creamy hot cup of coffee to top off my calm and peaceful morning, I notice our half Shiatsu, half Chihuahua puppy Gizmo, and smoky grey and black-tiger striped cat Tyler, watching something ever so closely through the glass door leading to the flower bed. Curious, I look, finding a little chipmunk scurrying about. Dashing from one end of the bed to the next, stopping in the middle for a nut he'd found. Then, he quickly vanished, into a tiny hole beside a step leading to my front porch. Excited, I waited to see him again, but nothing.

The next morning, I wanted to get a good look at him, so I grabbed a small handful of peanuts from my pantry and placed them on my front door step. I waited patiently; then as fast as he'd disappeared the day before, he appeared. Approaching cautiously at first, he couldn't resist the peanuts as he arranged them one by one, packing each cheek full. Then, once again he disappeared into his little burrow.

Watching him play and run through my garden each and every morning, I decided, he needed a name. Nibbles? Yes, Nibbles seemed appropriate as I watched him flip and nibble on a peanut while sitting on a rock in my garden.

~ Corinna Rowland

Summer

Hearing birds early
Sunshine through windows so bright
Waking mood: just great.

Singing songs aloud
Wearing a cute summer dress
Walking mood: just great.

Strolling through green parks
The sun tickles nicely warm
Daily mood: just great.

Meeting friends outside
Winds blow soft and fresh
Talking mood: just great.

Grilling at the beach
Sunset colorful and calm
Playing mood: just great.

Coming home at dusk
Hearing happy crickets chirp
Sleeping mood: just great.

~ Mareile Bohms

Distant Gardens

In the Name of Iran

Once upon a time there was an Akhond* who really wanted to be a king. He thought and thought, and then he found a plan. He waited and waited until a good time. Bingo! It was the right time. He used the most powerful weapon; people. He told them: People wake up! Your king** is stealing your oil! He is ruining your minds! He thinks he is better than you!

Well, somehow he was right. So they woke up! (Most of them.) But they didn't know what his plan was, and that is how the Islamic Revolution of Iran happened.

Now, after 30 years of Islamic pressure, while the people were sleeping, the young generation woke up. However, this time nobody woke them up; everything was obvious. The new successor is now stealing the oil. He is killing young people; he is the enemy of the world!

Now, the children of Iran are awake!
 I stand in front of his soldiers.
 I speak for many when I say:
 I don't want your Islam anymore!
 I want my freedom back!
 My human rights!
 My brothers who are in prison!
 A funeral for my sister***!
 The holy name of my country,
 which is now the name of the enemy of the world!
 And I won't give up!
 I am fighting until I can taste the sweet flavor of FREEDOM.

*Akhond: the Islamic leader

**Shah

***Neda Aghasoltan

~ Atousa Rad

The West African Hunter

The West African traditional hunter is called a Dozo, a name which means “entering the home of the mind and knowledge.” The Dozo learns the art of hunting, mystical powers such as metamorphosis, invulnerability to weapons, and adherence to a strict code of conduct. All of these skills are crucial to the success of a hunter. Because he is also a healer, the Dozo learns about natural medicine, including the pharmacological properties of plants.

One of the hallmarks of the Dozo hunter is his dress. His clothing is a total camouflage. The hunter’s outfit consists of a hat, a shirt, and special pants that are wide at the top and narrow at the ankles. These pieces are made of cotton. They are predominantly green and yellow and are colored entirely with natural dyes. The clothing is also decorated with small cords and pieces of glass or mirrors. All these ornaments serve as protection against potential enemies and evil spirits that haunt the bush. It is strictly forbidden to wash these clothes.

The Dozo carries a gun and the tail of a slaughtered animal. He uses the tail to protect himself from flies, if necessary.

For the Dozo, animals in the bush belong to spirits. Before the Dozo hunts, he makes a ritual sacrifice to the animal spirits to guarantee his protection and a successful hunt. The sacrifice allows him to reconcile with or dominate these supernatural beings that inhabit the bush. If some prey are easily shot, others must be killed carefully. Otherwise, the hunter will die or go crazy. After a successful hunt, the Dozo performs a dance, imitating the animal he has just killed.

The Dozo is an integral part of West African culture. His story deserves to be shared in order to foster mutual understanding among people.

~ Mamadou Ba

The Lesson

Our family in Laos lived and worked at a nursery. Growing and selling flowers was the way we earned our living. When our little boy Jiaming was nine years old, he came to live at the nursery too.

Jiaming watched everything the adults did. After school and on the weekends, he went out into the field with us. While we worked, he asked us many questions. "How did the plants get here?" "What is water made of?" "What are the bugs, and what do they do?" "Why do the birds sing?"

I said to my mom, "We must do something about all these questions. We can't spend all our time continually answering little Jiaming's questions. Some of the questions are hard to answer! We don't want to give him wrong information. We must do something!"

"I agree," said Mom. "We'll let little Jiaming learn through experience. Experience is a good teacher."

So my mother brought Jiaming into the field with us. I showed him the many rows of plants that would someday have beautiful flowers.

"Do you know what these are?" said Mom as she pointed to the small plants. "Yes," said Jiaming. "Plants. They are valuable!"

My mother said, "You know that one day these plants will have flowers. We sell the flowers to get money to buy food."

Jiaming nodded. "Yes," he said. "I know that."

"All right," Mom said. "I am going to give you six rows of pompons. They are yours. You own them now. Take care of them. You must make them grow and make beautiful flowers."

Little Jiaming looked proud and happy. "Do you really want me to do that?"

"You can begin right away," replied my mom. "But first let me tell you something. You cannot quit once you start. These six rows of flowers are all yours. You must not let them die. You must help them to grow and have flowers."

"Okay," little Jiaming said.

"There is a lot of work to do," said Mom. "Every day you must take care of your plants. School is closed now for summer, but you'll have to take care of the plants even after school opens. You'll have to take care of them rain or shine."

"All right," Jiaming said. "I'll do it. You'll see."

Jiaming began to work on his six rows of pompons, and we were able to do our work without being bothered by him.

Once in a while, though, little Jiaming would run excitedly to his mother.

"Mother, come with me," he said. "There are bugs on my plants. They're big green bugs with black dots. What shall I do?"

"They are bad bugs," Mother said. "You must spray them."

"But I don't have any spray."

"All right, I will spray them today," Mother said. "Tomorrow I will get you some spray. Then you must spray your own plants."

That night the whole family sat at the table and ate. They talked about what kind of year it had been. They talked about little Jiaming's work, how well he had done, and what he could do in the future.

~ *Khaisy Maokhamphiou*

The Most Beautiful Image of Trust

This is one of the numerous real stories that happen every single day in Tehran.

Tehran, the capital of Iran, is one of the biggest cities in the world. You can find it amongst metropolitan, crowded, and beautiful cities. You can encounter a vast variety of people with different economic states and variable levels of etiquette. You can face rich people who drive deluxe cars on one side of the street and on the other side, the poor children who have to get their food through the garbage. So you'll be wondering how these two paradoxical worlds exist so close to each other, and nobody does anything about it.

This is Tehran, the capital city of the country, which is famous in the world because of oil, gas, petroleum, Persian rugs, caviar, pistachios, saffron, turquoise and other mineral resources of considerable value.

Yes, this is Tehran, the capital city of one of the richest countries in the world.

All this is true, as I remember that cold winter evening, 3 years ago, in Tehran.

I remember that freezing sunset. I was walking from work to home in the Tehran old famous square. I can still hear the voices of kids with pitiful clothes that were running behind me, begging me to buy a package of gummy.

I thought I should skip from them, but I also wished I had never encountered this situation, because I couldn't keep control of myself. I wanted to help them, but I knew that those poor little children were just a cover for adult drug users who hired the children to beg for money, on their behalf.

I was walking faster and faster, when I saw a beautiful little girl who had been seated on the icy ground, and she was writing her homework. In front of her there were few packages of socks for sale. I hesitated; I thought, "What should I do?"

Finally, I made my decision; there was a food court center in the corner of square. I got a sandwich from a fast food place, and I put it in her hand. I was looking to see a special reaction on her face, but my expected smile never appeared, and it discouraged me. So I walked away from her, while I thought about what was wrong with me.

After three steps, suddenly I heard a hushed voice, "hey aunti...aunti..." I was surprised, and I quickly turned back. It was her voice. I stared into her eyes, and at that moment, we connected. I saw something different in her eyes; it seemed to me she was reading my mind too. Then she asked, "Please look over my notebook and check my homework, I need to be sure I haven't any mistakes in my answers." I was crushed, and while I was trying to hide my tears from her, I watched the most beautiful portrayal of trust, which I have ever seen in my life. She was enough of a genius to teach me what her real request was. She found out intelligently I wished to help her, but I didn't know what she was really looking for.

Today I know what this poor little girl really needed. It is not money! It is not clothes! It's not even a roof!! The most important thing that she really needs is somebody whom she can rely on, someone she can trust.

I still think back on that evening. She taught me a wonderful lesson.

~ Raha

The Picnic

When I first learned the word “picnic” in English, I thought that it would be a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. When I moved to the U.S., I found out that picnics are very common and easier than in my own country of China. Here, a picnic is when people pack a meal like sandwiches, salad, fruit and drink etc. then take it to eat outdoors, especially on the countryside. But in my hometown, a picnic means cooking outside, instead of packing food just like camping, (but not sleeping outside). I have had many picnics in the past. I don’t remember them all, but I remember the first time and the last time.

I had my first picnic in the second grade. First graders were too young to have a picnic. Actually, second graders didn’t know a lot about cooking either. But we were really excited. We divided into several groups. Every group decided what they were going to cook and what they were going to buy at the market. At that time, most of the people lived in the countryside, and they grew all kinds of vegetables, which they could bring from home. Some people brought firewood; some people brought pots and pans; some brought seasoning, rice oil, etc. Everybody was really excited about it. We talked about it on our way home from school.

Everything was ready. We were looking forward to the day. I couldn’t get a good sleep at night before that day. But you’d never believe what happened the next day. In the morning, when I got up, it was raining outside. The ground was wet, and it didn’t seem it was going to stop. A rainy day was sure to cancel the outdoor activity. The worst part was that we were notified that we had to go back to school. Kids always like a “no school” day. How disappointed we were! So, the picnic was postponed until the next week.

Luckily, it was a wonderful day. Everybody got excited again. We prepared everything and started off. We walked to our destination – a nice bamboo forest. It was by the mountain and waters. We carried a lot of stuff. It took us about an hour to get there,

but nobody complained. We sang, we talked, and we laughed loudly while we were walking. When we got there, every group found the right place, the shade of a tree, which was a suitable place for a fire pit. Before we got started cooking, we had a “climb the mountain” competition. First, the teacher climbed to the top of the hill. He planted a flag there. We selected five students from each class. Who got the flag first was the winner. Also, they could get prizes. The match was fought closely. We were all exhausted, but it was worth it. We had a really good time.

Then it was time to cook. Everybody got their parts: some carried water from the river; some made a fire in the pit; some washed the vegetables; some cut meat; some cooked. The teachers checked every group and helped. Actually, since we were just 8 or 9 years old, we didn’t know a lot about cooking, so we got into different types of trouble. Vegetables were overcooked; the rice burned; somebody didn’t have enough oil; someone got his finger burnt; our monitor’s face was running with sweat...even our soup was too salty. The food was not really tasty. We made tons of messes, but we didn’t mind; we were having our meal. Can you believe that after over 30 years, I still remember our first picnic so well? What a great day!

My last picnic was few years ago. When I was in the adult English class, we were planning to do something to celebrate the New Year coming. Some suggested going to the bar to drink and dance; some suggested having a barbeque; some suggested doing Karaoke. Someone said, “Why don’t we go on a picnic? We can make a meal for ourselves. That would be fun.” What a brilliant idea! Everybody loved it. We began to get ready for it. First, we had two big groups. We decided how much money we were going to spend, and collect. Then, we talked about the menu. That was the big difference from the first time. We were grown-up this time; we didn’t have a tight budget; we knew how to create our dishes; we knew how to cook well. We had cars, so we didn’t carry so much stuff, and we brought bottled waters. You know, 30 years ago we didn’t have bottled water. The things we still needed to prepare were the cooking wares and firewood. It was a lovely day. We stopped half way up the mountain. We saw the water

stream down from the top of the mountain. I brought my son with me, and so did others.

It was clear and cold. There were lots of rocks there, so it was easy to make fire pit. Everybody had their parts – washing, cutting, cooking. We had situations here and there. Someone remembered the chopping board but not a kitchen knife; someone forgot to bring a spatula. We sent someone to his friend's home to get them.

The kids soon became friends. There was a tiny pond, and they tried to catch tiny fish; they picked up small stones; they played in the wet sand. My son's pants got all wet. I had to take them off and put them on the rock to dry. My son was wearing his underwear and hiding behind a big rock. I took some pictures about that and kept them at home.

Our big meal was almost ready. We sure had delicious soup, salty whole chicken; steamed shrimp; ginger fry crab; soy sauce steamed fish; scrambled eggs with roast pork; roast duck; coca-cola chicken wings; eel's meat with rice; stewed lotus root; all kinds of vegetables, etc. Thinking about that, my mouth is watering. We were eating; we were laughing; we were enjoying it. What a wonderful day!

I miss that delicious food; I miss all my friends; I miss those good ol' times. Now, I am in the U.S. I work hard. I want to save money, so I can go back to China and visit my family and friends. I hope I will go on a picnic again someday in China, or I can go on a picnic with my American friends – American style.

~Yuan Hua Li

Collective Survival

World leaders sometimes meet to talk about climate change and to look for ways to protect our environment. But I wonder if they think about what's happening many miles away, where people commit acts that help to bring about these changes. In Africa, where I'm from, the desert is growing because thousands of forests are burned each year in brush fires.

As you'll read in the following text about a hunting party, forests may be burned for less than a dollar.

Moyaby and Alex are two students from poor families who have trouble finding money for their daily needs. To help their parents, these two teenagers decided to hunt and then sell the meat. Here is the way it happened when they were in the bush:

Moyaby: "There is a rat!"

Alex: "Where?"

Moyaby: "Over there. It is about to escape."

They both run toward the rat.

Alex: "Oh, it entered the bush."

Moyaby: "I should set a fire in this bush to scare out the rat. But I don't have a lighter."

Alex: "I have one."

Then they set fire to the bush.

Moyaby: "I saw another rat entering here. Set a fire over there too!"

Alex: "O.K. The other fire's going now too."

The two friends run after the rats and kill them with their hunting sticks.

Alex: "You got them!"

Moyaby: "Yes, I'm skillful."

Alex: "Let me see them. Oh, they are so big! We'll make some money with these! We can sell them for at least a dollar each."

The hunting party ended that day. But what the two teenagers didn't know was that the little fires they set burned a large amount of forest.

After an investigation, though, everyone realized that the boys weren't solely responsible for this destruction. Many people in society enjoy eating meat. Even forest managers like eating animals and sometimes encourage hunting animals in the bush.

Everybody in this world should help to prevent this kind of behavior. No one should let a passenger make a hole in the ship whenever he wants just because he has paid for a ride on the boat. When it comes to collective survival, we must always mind someone else's business and help protect our environment.

~ Mamadou Ba

Saved by a Hair

When I think about my younger years, this story comes to mind. This is a true story that happened to me. A long time ago in 1995, when I was just 20 years old, I lived with my parents in Laos. At the time, we had seven people in our house, including two nephews.

One day, after I had finished helping my mom with the housecleaning, I asked her to let me visit my friend who lived next door. To get to her house, I had to pass by a well. (In my country we use well water for everything.) As I walked by the well, I heard a noise that sounded like a dog swimming. As I got closer, I noticed that the well cover was open. I looked inside and saw a little boy paddling in the water and struggling to catch a breath. I was astonished! I didn't know what to do. My heart was beating hard and fast. As I sat there, the only thing I could do was to yell, "Help!"

Both of my parents heard me scream and rushed over to see what was wrong. They were astounded! The boy's father had come too, and when he saw the problem, he ran back to get a tool that would help rescue his son. Meanwhile, the boy was descending further and further, and he would drown soon without help.

I realized that the little boy was my three-year-old nephew. The only thing on my mind was to save his life. I quickly bent down and grabbed him by his hair and pulled him up. I was not thinking about how much his head was going to hurt. After getting him to a safe, dry place, he began coughing up water and crying. After some hours he began to talk. He complained that his head was hurting because I had pulled his hair!

His parents were thankful that their son had been saved. Today that little boy has grown into an 18-year-old man. He has graduated from high school and plans to attend college next year. To this day he still remembers what happened to him when he was a little boy, and the day he almost drowned.

~ *Khounkham Khamvongsa*

Author Biographies

Michael P. Adams - p. 98

Naheed Akhtar - p. 51

My name is Naheed. I am an ESOL student. English is our official language in Pakistan, but our national language (common street language) is Urdu. That is why I want to improve my speaking skills. I am so happy to be in such a nice environment in my class.

Hannah Allen - p. 12

After being laid off from work, I began attending Live Oaks morning class on a regular basis to work on my GED. I really enjoy the teachers and the students. I am the proud mom of two boys. I know if I work hard I can achieve my goal. I AM UNSTOPPABLE!

Martha Munoz Ayala - p. 14

Mamadou Ba - p. 118, 126

I'm Mamadou Ba. I was born in 1977 in the Ivory Coast in West Africa. I have a bachelor's degree in Philosophy. My goal is to be a teacher and a writer. I thank my teachers, Ms. Charlotte Putt and Ms. Houleye Diallo, who have helped me and are still helping me to achieve my American dream.

Wanda L. Babb - p. 110

My name is Wanda Lucille Babb. I am 57 years of age and a homemaker. I am currently studying for the GED. Once I've earned my degree, I would like to take a class in electronics. I enjoy fishing, movies and board games.

Brittany Barkman - p. 33

Claudia Beltran - p. 14

Randi Betz - p. 80

Milagros Biggart - p. 53

My name is Milagros Biggart from Peru. I'm a single mother going to school and working.

Mareile Bohms - p. 114

I am from Germany. I'm here in the United States to care for two lovely children. Taking an English class is part of a governmental requirement, but I also enjoy learning at school. I think it is a good opportunity to improve my English skills since I'd love to study in English when I go back to Germany. My aim is to study international and European law. During my whole life I've loved to write poems and short stories. I still do it today when I have time for it!

Melissa Bonilla - p. 14**Ernestine Bretz - p. 31**

Ernestine Bretz is a student with the Great Oaks Career Campuses program, studying in the ABLE/GED classes at Rex Ralph School in Mt. Healthy near Cincinnati. Originally from Kentucky, Ernestine is the mother of three children. After completing her GED, Ernestine wants to study to become a nurse.

Rachelle Bryant - p. 67**Brenda K. Carroll - p. 29****Angie H. Castillo - back cover art****Sandie Catherine - p. 111**

Sandie is a native of France.

Jorge Munoz Chamizo - p. 5, 14, 49

My name is Jorge Munoz Chamizo and I am from Madrid, Spain. I am 19 years old and came to the USA strictly to learn English and the American culture. I attend ESOL class at Live Oaks Vocational School and my English is improving each day. When I'm not in class, I work part-time at a packaging company.

Luda Chayka - p. 13, 14

Birch Cooper - p. 72

Born to a military family, I lived my formative years on the rural central coast of California farming and ranching. I also lived and worked in Montana, Wyoming and New Mexico. Now, making my home in Maineville, Ohio, I plan to further my education and develop my writing skills. I am the father of two children and it is with their love and encouragement that I write from personal experience.

Joyce Dincler - p. 41, 45**Job Fairchild - p. 101****Karen Flick - p. 34**

My life was full of changes in 2011. I gained my first grandchild and I lost my father. That's what my writing is about this year. Special thanks to Joshua for being the vocal boy he was so I could write happy memories about my parents. Thanks to Ken and Angelica for supporting me.

Sabine Fresno - p. 26**Ronald W. Fugate - p. 37, 100****Maria Giuliberti - p. 14****Edna Goodwin - p. 84**

Edna Goodwin's piece "Hurt" has been previously published by ProLiteracy. She submitted it for possible publication in *Beginnings XIV*. It is printed with her permission.

Kathleen Gordon - p. 87

I am working on my GED at Live Oaks ABLE. I have four children that I am very proud of.

Kelly Harrison - p. 15, 107

Kelly Harrison has enjoyed writing all her life and has found poetry especially to be an effective and cathartic way in which to express her feelings. Writing poems is something she enjoys doing when

she has time to herself, away from work and other responsibilities. Kelly has been a model GED student, attending class regularly and always looking for ways to help out. She recently took the test and earned her GED certificate with scores in the 'flying colors' range!

Lena J. Hershberger - p. 69

Justin Hollingsworth - p. 79

Nathan Jackson - p. 10, 99

Nathan is a loving father of two children. He wants to provide a good life for his children. He enjoys working with his hands. He is studying in ABLE to prepare for a full-time training program at Scarlet Oaks.

Khounkham Khamvongsa - p. 128

My name is Khounkham. I'm from Laos. I have lived in Ohio for 12 years. I study in a bridging class at Eastland Career Center in Groveport. I enjoy being in this class and am thankful to my teacher for helping me learn how to read and write in English. I have a good time every time I come to this class.

Hava Gul Kocer - p. 14

Ashley Nicole Lancaster - p. 96

Ashley Lancaster was raised in a small town called Woodsfield, Ohio. She has an amazing three-year-old son named Christian Anthony. Ms. Lancaster wants to go to college to be an RN. That is her goal by the time she is 30. She recently moved to Marietta, Ohio, where she and her fiancé Anthony plan to raise their child.

Hugo Lara - art on p. viii

My name is Hugo Lara and I was born in Guyaquil, Ecuador, South America. I came here to the US as many others have come before me. I waited for seven long years to be accepted as a permanent resident of the US. I love my family and this country. I am thankful to my teachers for their knowledge and assistance in helping me to achieve my goals. I will make them all proud.

Yuan Hua Li - p. 14, 123**Duan Lin - p. 61**

Duan works hard raising her children and working in the family restaurant. Someday, she hopes to attend college and pursue other goals.

Cinda L. Looney - p. 27, 109

My name is Cinda Looney. I am a mother of three grown children and eight grandchildren. When I was in school, I hated it because I had a hard time retaining what I was learning no matter how hard I studied. I quit school at seventeen and got married. At 59, I came across the posting for ABLE/adult classes. It took me three days to get the courage to just call the ABLE office! I thank each one of my teachers for their dedication to me and for going above and beyond to help me achieve my goals. I would also like to thank my loving husband, Harold, and my two daughters, Ronda and Sheri, who also supported me and encouraged me not to give up. With all their support, I was able to earn my GED!

Blanca Lopez - p. 112

Blanca Lopez is from Mexico and attends ESOL classes with her daughter Martha in Toledo. She is 51 years old. She has three daughters and seven grandchildren – two girls and five boys.

Mary Lopez - p. 14**Nancy Lopez - p. 14****Justina L. Luther - p. 7, 40, 106**

My name is Justina Luther and I'm 19 years old. I got my GED on November 17, 2010, after being home-schooled. I've always loved writing and I am currently working towards a degree in writing as well as working on my own novel. I believe that words are the most powerful tools that people have. Words can make or break the spirit, and I always want my words to make the lives of those around me better than they were before.

Suellen Lyle - p. 12, 39

I am one of the oldest in my GED Class, but I am one of the most determined. I have been married 44 years, all to the same man. We have three children and three grandchildren. I feel very blessed. I wish I had taken my GED years ago. I always wanted to be a nurse. Writing has always been enjoyable for me. [Suellen did get her GED this winter and is now a teacher's aid in a local school district.]

Khaisy Maokhamphiou - p. 119

My name is Khaisy. My birthday is on November 8, 1972. I have three kids. I've been in the United States since December 17, 1989. In 1994, I graduated from high school at South High School. I still have a high school diploma. In 1995, I had a daughter. After that I felt bad because I didn't have time to go to school because I had to take care of my family.

Dawn M. Marcello - p. 85**Jack McClure - p. 30**

My name is Jack McClure. I feel like a person in a world full of knowledge trying to find his way. I am hoping to get there before I retire.

Tania Montalban - p. 89

My name is Tania Montalban. I'm from Nicaragua. I have been living in Ohio for six years. My past has not been completely happy, but I'm fighting for a better future for my daughter and me.

Hoda Motaghed - p. 14**Maria Luz Munoz - p. 14****Rosa Munoz - p. 14****Pilar Nahman - p. 14****Hahn N. Ngueyen - p. 59**

Pheck Kim Oeng - p. 10, 99

Pheck Kim Oeng was born in Cambodia and came with her family to the United States. She attends Scarlet Oaks to improve her English and reading skills. She plans on attending college and majoring in Information Technology.

Fulden Ozkaynak - p. 50

My name is Fulden Ozkaynak. I'm from Turkey, and I'm 23 years old. I work as an au pair. I attend ESOL classes at Live Oaks in Ohio. I'm improving my English and I love to be here. But I've decided to go back home. I'll be happier with my family. I want to give special thanks to my father, my teachers at Live Oaks, and all of my friends. Thank you so much for all of your support.

Sachi Parker - p. 10, 99

Sachi Parker was born in Japan and moved here with her American husband to the United States many years ago. Even though she has lived here a long time, she is still improving her English and working on her computer skills.

Mike Parlier - p. 12

Being out of school for many years, I have enjoyed learning again at Live Oaks. I have been involved in many careers in my lifetime, from haircutting to grass cutting. My true love is photography (and yes, I do have a business in that), and I'd like to continue on to college to study it more in depth.

Yunita Damemar Phillips - p. 3, 9

My home country is Indonesia. I came to the US in October, 2010. I decided to study English in ESOL classes because I want to improve my English, both orally and written, so I can communicate well with other people in the community here. In addition to that, I like ESOL classes because I can learn about American lives and customs/cultures. I like to write stories or poems because this activity encourages me to express my feelings and thoughts in proper and right words. I also enjoy listening to the sounds of the words/language. My hope is that I can speak English fluently and write English with correct grammar so I can use it in my work. I enjoy reading, listening to music, and writing.

Dan Yu Qiu - p. 14**Atousa Rad - p. 117**

My name is Atousa Rad. I am 24 years old. I grew up in Iran and received a degree in Business Administration. I'm living in the US now. My goal is to enter an American university to earn my MBA.

Raha - p. 121**Simone Rehberg - p. 105****Sarah Romanoff - p. 14****Maria Concepcion Rosales - p. 57**

My name is Maria Concepcion Rosales. I am from Mexico. I came to the USA in 1975, but only began studying English last year in Carbondale, Illinois. I didn't have the opportunity to take English classes for many different reasons. Now it's my turn. I am attending English Classes at The English Center in Youngstown, Ohio. I am a proud mom of four professional children and live with my daughter Rocio.

Corinna Rowland - p. 113

I was born and raised in the little town of Lebanon, Ohio. This is my first short story and I've enjoyed putting it on paper. Thankful I'm in a position to try new things, writing is definitely something I now have a strong interest in.

Linda Schuler - p. 28

My name is Linda Schuler. I am a mother of four and a grandmother of nine. I'm back in school to improve myself.

Mary Shumard - p. 25

I attended ABLE classes at Live Oaks after being out of school for 30 years. My experience was so motivating and so inspiring. I passed my GED test and now attend UC studying to be a respiratory therapist. I want to make a difference just like Marty, Donna, and Scottye do. I will always be grateful that our paths crossed.

Charise H. Simmons - p. 19**Stephen Tyler Simpson - p. 12**

I have been attending school at Live Oaks with my dad. We are both working on our GEDs, and both of us are close to taking the test. It has been fun attending school together.

Preston Skinner - p. 10, 99

Preston Skinner considers family to be very important. They encouraged him to get his GED. He is interested in getting a truck driving position and eventually starting his own business.

Salif Sy - p. 11

My home country is Mauritania (Africa). I love the news and politics. Taking English classes has made my life easier in the US and has helped me to get promoted to a better position at work.

Miaoyan Tan - p. 10, 99

Miaoyan Tan was born in China and moved to the United States three years ago. She came to Scarlet Oaks to improve her reading and English skills. She would like to study Dental Hygiene in college.

Rose Thomas - p. 65**Tiffany Tillison - p. 6**

I am 22 and have a one-year-old daughter named Torai. After earning my GED, I would like to go to college. I'm not sure what my major will be, but I would like to do something that will help people.

Adriana Tristan - p. 14**Noriko Ueda - p. 16**

My name is Noriko Ueda and I'm from Japan. My first language is Japanese, although I also learned French and English. I've been in the US since 2005 and I enjoy taking ESOL classes at Live Oaks.

Ana Maris Valentin - p. 21

My name is Ana. I am the mom of two beautiful girls. Life has been hard for me in school and in the love department. Life has its struggles. I hope my story gives you a little insight in having love and having to lose it forever.

Janet D. Warren - p. 75

Hello! My name is Janet D. Warren. I'm 49 years old. I'm a happily married woman of eleven years, a mother of four children, a step-parent of four children, and a grandmother of seven grandchildren. I attend the Church of the Living God where my pastor is Mareeta Fowler. I also support my two younger sons and my three grandsons in basketball, football, and wrestling while attending Cuyahoga Community College's Mt. Zion ABLE/GED class under the best teacher ever, Ms. Maureen Daly.

Mark Weaver - p. 71**Kim Wehrman - p. 95**

I attended ABLE classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, and got my GED in October 2010. I plan to go into the nursing field.

Rui Wei - p. 36**Shinyoung Welch - p. 14****Damon West - p. 81**

Damon would like to complete his GED and then work with youth.

Jason Williams - cover art

Life is beautiful and like all life we have a new beginning everyday!

Selina Williams - p. 20

I grew up in Texas and was the next to the youngest of eight children. I currently live in central Ohio and have three children and seven grandchildren.

Beverly Ann Woods - p. 88

My name is Beverly Woods, and I am a single mother of two daughters and four sons! I love all six of my children and I wouldn't change anything! I resided in Cleveland, Ohio, for almost 26 years until things happened. I didn't finish high school and I became a mother at the age of 18! I moved to Orrville at 16. I started thinking about what I was going to do after the kids, and I knew that I wanted to go to college and obtain a degree in something I like to do. I have to get my GED before I can advance! I attend ABLE classes here in Orrville! Better late than never!

Jamar Woods - p. 108**Juan Wooten - p. 83****Erika L. Wright - p. 43****QianRu Ye - p. 14****Inesa Zelepuhin - p. 55**

Inesa has been learning English for the past three years.

Joanna Zieba - p. 14

Honorable Mention

Alaa Abouaboalla	Doris J. Burton
Jose Acevedo	Martha Estela Bustamante
Carol A Adams	Hong Yan Cai
Yvtonda Adams	Flor Carchipulla
Francisca M Aguillón	Beatriz Cardenas
Olga Aguirre	Maria I Castillo
Joyce Aguon	Dorina Cicarlan
Mosammat Rahana Akther	Vasile Cicarlan
Wanda Allen	John Clarkson
Kornel Almazan	Billy Cole
Faisal Alnajada	Mariana Confalonieri
Anabel Alonzo	DuVal R Conner
Pat Baker	Lakresha S. Cooper
Randah Bassa	Elizabeth M Copley
Abasse Bassoum	Laura Costillo
Sophie Beaufour	John Covic
Kandy Beckler	Samson R. Cox
Donna Bell	Ana Lee Crespo
Georges Bien-Aime	Omar Croom
Tyler Binegar	Yeni Carolina Cruz
Ionela Biolan	Danuta Czyzycka
Debbie Bishop	Haddad Daoud
Diane Blackson	Charolette Davis
Beatriz Blanco	Ashley L Dingey
Brenda Blankenship	Tho Doan
Gary W Boley	Tuyen Doan
Evelyn Booth	Maria Dominguez
Jose Botello	Daniel Duban
Ricky Brewer	Dung Dinh Duong
Darlene S. Brown	Alicia I Duvall
Jonathan Lee Brown	Kylee B Eaton
Rachel Buckland	Lesley A Eblin
Lidia K. Burger	Corne Eksteen
Clint Burke	Ahmed El fathi
Karen Burkey	Chafik El fathi
Roxanna Burney	Becky I Estep

Debra Lynn Estep	Yuko Ishino
Dina Ewais	Nyanja T.D. Jemison
Graciela Eyzaguirre	Kennedy Jennifer
Mindy Faulkner	Zoila Jijon
Gabriel Figueroa	Lamontia Jones-White
Irena Firmanty	Jean Jreije
Terra N Fraley	John Finn Kavanagh
David Fryberger	Sofiko Kavtaradze
Sergio Garcia	Rika Kelley
Larisa Gavrilá	Lisa Kelvin
Elhadji Gaye	Makara Keng
Molly Giffin	Rana Khatab
Ludvin Gomez	Yuko Kinugasa
Maria Sabrina Gonzalez	Sanja Kraic
Martha L. Gonzalez	Masako Kuehmstedt
Muhsine Grant	Halyna Kuziv
Rebecca Gregory	Valerie Langevin
Said Grini	Maria Lanz
Sahar Haddad	George Lelutiu
Adam Hajbane	Victoria E. Leonardelli
Latosha S Hall	Larry Liming
Teresa Hall	Myorena Loyola
Tiffany Harman	Alma Luna
Melinda Harriel	Rick Mackey
Antwan D Harris	Aklhas Mahdy
Aaron Harter	Charlotte Makhanga
Shanna Harvey	Armelle Mandaroux
David Hazelwood	Rocky Manivanh
Domingo Hernandez	Joel E Marroquin
Selma Herring	Edna Martin
Sheila Hightower	Ruth Martinez
Derek A. Hill	Miyuki Matsuo
T.J. Hixson	Kazumi Matsuoka
Mary Hogan	Tosha McClendon
Mattie Hornsby	Annette McCoy
Su Qin Huang	Jan McCulley
Dan Iordanescu	Gena McDonald
Virginia Iordanescu	Sandra McDonald
Ulises Isais	Janette Merced

Rene' Merk	James Rose
Elfigo Miranda	Mervat Roufail
Nazeer Mohammed	Elizabeth Rueda
Maria A Mohosky	Elizabeth Sacksith
Jennifer Monhollen	Bassam M. Salha
Sharon Montgomery	Khalid Salman
Fani Mor	Amantina Santiago
Jacinta Morrhaye	Lidia Sas
Eriko Murakami	Rabia Saylam
Mayumi Nagata	Brittany Schlegler
Megumi Nakajima	Effat Seraj
Laura Nelson	Smita J Shah
Kanha Ngan	Ruth Ann Shetler
Hau Nhan	Brandon Simpson
Cheryl Nichols	Alexey Sinelnikov
Kumi Nishikimi	Amritpal Singh
Brandii Nyameri	Tony Sinito
Maria E. Occhino	Helen Sleshi
Heather Ortego	Pamela Smith-Gray
Shanette Pate	Sereyrothna Sor
Ashley Peeples	Juanita Spradling
Carlos Perez	Darcell Strawder
Yolando Perez	Pattariya Summart
Mary Petrich	Izumi Takahashi
Michele L. Pfingsten	Keiko Takeuchi
Fernando Pichardo	Lye Ming Tang
Verona Poindexter	Katie Tatman
Brian Powell	Cherita Taylor
Tatyana Prediy	Scott Taylor
Samantha E Ralston	Nabil Tazi
Tatiana Ramirez	Miora Adriana Techere
Dusan Ratic	Eduardo Tejada
Bozidar Relic	Va Rel Es Thach
Percy Reliford	Dina Toderut
Sonja Richards	Maylan A. Toney
Velia Ripperger	Michelle Torpy
Hyangsook Rodenburg	Ramon Ayala Torres
Raquel Rodriguez	Mary Uller
Maria Romero	Darlene Underwood

Pedro J.Vazquez
Linda J Veliz
Joyce Wade
Billy Wagner
Josh Wagner
Lori Wagner
Lyndsey D Wallace
Tiladogo Xavier Waongo
Ruben Warren
Doris Watson
Tabitha D Way
Shayna Werring
Sarah White
Roger L Whitehead
Abby E Wigal
Alex Wiliams
Jason J.Williams
Shelaine May Wills
Tyler Wireman
Afi Wozufia
Galina Yakovenko
Eun Ju Yun
Fatimah Zahra
Morcos Zaki
Maria Zamora
Beatriz Zapata
Maria Zeffer
Darryl Zornes



Angie H
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