

Beginnings 15

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

Foreword

I was introduced to the work of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center at Kent State University and the annual Ohio Writers' Conference by Lyn Ford. In the fall of 2010 Lyn invited me to join her in telling stories at the 2011 conference. I was delighted and honored to share the stage with such an accomplished storyteller and advocate for literacy.

Lyn described the conference as a celebration, and she lent me several copies of a book titled *Beginnings*. Lyn explained that each year students enrolled in adult and family literacy programs throughout the state submitted writings to the annual journal for publication. I read the books and I was amazed by the stories and poems that spanned an incredible variety of human experiences. Some of these writers had immigrated to Ohio from countries across the globe. Others were survivors of personal hardships, illnesses and addictions. The individual passions, hopes and ambitions that I discovered in the pages of *Beginnings* touched me and humbled me with respect for each writer's courage.

I was now honored to be a part of a conference that celebrated the accomplishments of men and woman who seek to develop themselves and improve their lives.

Lyn also told me that the writers attending the conference were encouraged to share their published poems or stories in an oral presentation that culminates the day's events. There was no way to anticipate the impact of these live readings. At the end of our day of sharing stories, reflective writing and congregations, the audience of family, friends and teachers listened as these adult students filled the air with their words. Poems of longing, tales of frustration, stories of grief and triumph captured our hearts.

I remember a man from Africa who described a car accident he experienced during a blizzard. When he tried to fill out

the accident report, he realized that he couldn't write enough English to file an insurance claim. In that moment he decided to become a writer of his new language. A middle-aged woman, raised in Kentucky, shared a life story that began with a child's heart-breaking separation from her beloved mother. A young lady, about to enter college, described her painful struggles with a serious childhood illness that prevented her from attending school with her peers. The audience and I shed their tears, shared their laughter and watched as each writer grew more confident and animated. I have never witnessed an oral presentation so honest and personally moving. It was a true celebration of the human spirit.

My hat is off to the staff, teachers and supporters of Ohio's statewide literacy programs that make this learning possible for adults and their families. These students are transformed by the knowledge that they gain in these programs and I felt their hopes for success in the future. *Beginnings* is a wondrous book; it tells the story of everyday people whose lives really matter. I am grateful to Lyn for the opportunity to be involved and I'll always cherish my memories of the writers' powerful presentations.

Michelle Cornell
Storyteller and Teaching Artist

Beginnings require thought, choices, and action. Beginnings constitute change, a progression from one way of thinking and doing and being to a new process, and a new persona. Age, culture, beliefs, familial background, experience, all may map out some of the walk through life, but, at some point, we take our own steps on a path we create, or discover. All personal growth and development is a willingness to begin something new, to take a chance, to grow from who and where we are to the place and person of our spirit and heart.

Those who contribute to the pages of each edition of this appropriately-titled book walk a path of their own choosing. Each step, small or gigantic, encourages them to take more steps toward their own goals and wellbeing. As they move forward, their publication in *Beginnings* acts as a mile-marker on the journey called "life", reminding them, and those who read their words, of the lessons from their past, the efforts in their present moment, and the promises of their future.

In 2011, fellow storyteller and friend Michelle Cornell and I were honored to share from the oral tradition as a part of the recognition of authorship and achievement that is the annual Ohio Writers' Conference. Over the years, these conferences, and the annual publication of effectively written works, have touched my heart. It is a mile-marker for me to simply be with the authors, editors, mentors, and supporters of *Beginnings* and its celebratory event. May all those who are the substance of *Beginnings* continue to walk their path, and enjoy and share their adventures.

Lyn Ford
Storyteller and Teaching Artist

In Memory

Jean Stephens
Former Director, Ohio Literacy Resource Center
1994 - 1999

Acknowledgements

This book marks fifteen years of celebrating ABLE student authors and honoring their accomplishments. The first *Beginnings* book was published in 1998, and the world has changed in so many ways since then. Leaders have been elected; technology has changed the way we interact with others; wars have been fought; and nature has reshaped landscapes.

When the first Writers' Conference was held, some of this year's authors were just toddlers learning about their world and others were holding their children or grandchildren for the first time. Still others were starting careers, moving to a new country, and making decisions that would affect the course of their lives.

While the world has changed in so many ways since 1998, the spirit and determination of ABLE students have remained constant. They continue to take on the challenge of continuing their education; to learn and grow; and to become role models to those who will come into ABLE programs in the future. Starting with the first *Beginnings* book and persisting through to this year's *Beginnings 15*, ABLE authors continue to write and share what they've written with others.

We celebrate each ABLE student who submitted writing for consideration for *Beginnings 15*. More than 400 writers are acknowledged within this book, and we pay tribute to their courage to share their words with others and urge each of them to continue writing.

We honor and thank ABLE teachers and tutors who work with students every day and provide not only instruction, but also guidance and support as students continue on their unique life journeys.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the Ohio Board of Regents' Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program. Their fifteen

years of support of *Beginnings* and the Writers' Conference have allowed many ABLÉ students to become published authors and public speakers.

We welcome our 2012 keynote speaker, author Katie Daley, to this year's Writers' Conference, and we're pleased to have Lyn Ford and David Hassler participating again.

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Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Enhancing Adult Literacy

Research 1 - 1100 Summit St., P.O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001
Phone: (330) 672-2007 or (800) 765-2897 Fax: (330) 672-4841

<http://literacy.kent.edu>

Can

1. to be **able** to; have the ability, power, or skill
2. to know how to
3. to have the power or means to
4. to have the right or qualifications to

You can't do that, you just ain't that smart
And I took it to heart
You can't think that way, you're just a girl
And it tore a hole in my world
You can't go there, because your skin is too dark
And that sure hit its mark
You can't do that kind of job, because they don't hire your kind
And I pretended that I didn't mind

But inside I couldn't get rid of all of that shame
And I kept trying to find someone or something to blame
Inside I kept feeling this blazing fire burn
And it kept telling me to go out and learn
Inside I kept hearing this voice
And it kept saying you do have a choice

So I went out into the world to make a new start
But those fears and doubts kept cropping up
I was the boy who wasn't smart
I was the girl who couldn't think
I was the boy with skin too dark
I was the girl who was the wrong kind

And you know what?
I found that I *did* mind.

So I got out my chisel, my hammer, my bare hands
And I began to chip away at those walls
Some built by others, and some I made on my own
And I swear I had never felt so alone

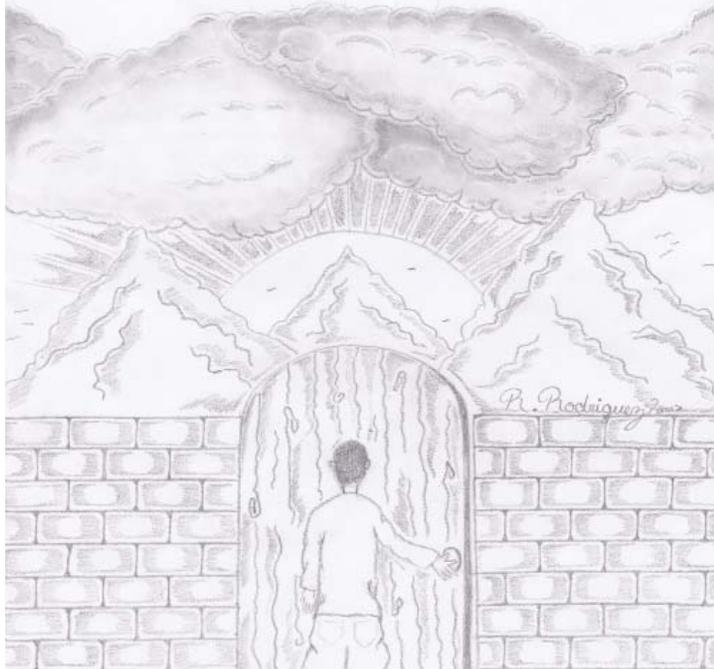
But then something happened
I found others just like me
Adrift on that wide open sea

Working toward a common goal
I felt a power deep within my soul
And we all said, "I can"
And we could
And we did
And we stood
And we stand

And I am. And I can.

~ by Heidi Bauer
GED Scholar
MAT Graduate, Kent State University

Amiable



Good Friends Always Help Their Friends

In the morning hours, I go to the temple near my home every day. I see many cats. They run around outside the temple. They are very hungry. Most of the cats run away when they see me because they are afraid of me.

One of them is smart. She came close to me and said, "meow, meow, meow!" It looked like she needed help or was asking for food. I felt sorry for her. I said, "Wait here. I have some food for you." After that, I went inside the temple to get food for all the cats. One smart cat came close to me and said, "meow, meow, meow," again. I said, "Here's your food." You know what? She didn't eat the food that I gave her until she said thank you to me. She came close to me and let her body slide softly back and forth on my legs. It seems like she wanted to say, "I love you and I thank you for the food." I said, "I love you too."

After that, she started eating her food and all of the cats came to share food with her. This story is true and I wanted to share it with all of you because it is not only the animal that gets hungry, but people out there are hungry too!

~ Elizabeth Sacksith

An Angel Sent by God

It was December 6, 2010, at 4:30 pm. when I arrived to the United States for the first time. I was 22 years old and I was alone in the Atlanta airport.

The first thing that passed through my mind was that I was not sure about my English skills. I was afraid to talk or to ask anything. But I was sure of something; I needed to act quickly if I did not want to miss my next flight to New York. So I saw a lady who was wearing a uniform, and I decided to ask her for help. She was patient and gave me some instructions. I understood them. My English was not bad at all, and I was very happy with that. I was supposed to take a train to go to Concourse A. I saw the train but I wasn't sure exactly what I needed to do. I asked another lady, and fortunately she was going to the same place I was. I followed her until we arrived to Concourse A, but she had a different flight than I had.

I needed to go to Gate 12, so I was happy when I saw my gate. I ran to ask what time the flight would leave. It was a big surprise when I heard that my flight had left 20 minutes ago! I already had missed it. Oh my gosh! What was I supposed to do then? A gentleman tried to explain to me what I needed to do, but I was so mad and nervous that I couldn't think straight. My mind was blocked from comprehension. I was crying and I could not understand what he was saying, and he couldn't understand what I was saying either.

But God was with me! A lady appeared next to me and spoke to me, "Hola! Como estas? Estoy aqui para ayudarte! Me puede decir que ha pasado?" (Hello! How are you? I am here to help you! Can you tell me what has happened?) I answered that I had missed my flight, and I could not understand what the gentleman told me. I did not know what I needed to do. So she told me that there was nothing to be scared about, she had everything under control. She left and I waited.

When she came back, she told me, "I got the next flight for you, and you do not have to move from here. It is at 12:30 am. Now tell me do you need to call somebody?"

"Yes," I said. "I need to call my program, Cultural Care Au Pair. They need to know that I missed my flight, and I am going to be late to New York." She also helped me make the call, and I was feeling better.

While I was waiting for my next flight, the lady came to me again and said, "I am done with my job for today, and I'm going to New York too. Is there any problem if I sit with you and we wait together? I want to make sure that you can get the correct flight this time."

And I replied, "It is my pleasure, thanks a lot!"

She invited me to have hot chocolate and some bread, while she told me some of her experiences working for Delta Airlines. We shared a few things from our lives. The most interesting thing was that she was from Colombia, just like I was.

We talked for a long time. She gave me some advice, and I still remember much of it. For example, she said, "Eat candies that can give you energy and also keep you in good humor." The time passed quickly. Eventually, we went to take our seats. I was in the economy seats, and she was in first class, but it didn't matter to her or me. She gave me some blankets and some snacks. I was sitting comfortably, and I think I slept all the way to New York.

Finally, we arrived at the New York airport. When I was walking through the airplane gate, I saw her; she was standing at the outside door waiting for me. We went together to look for my luggage, because she already had hers. We were there with the rest of the people, and we could see how everybody was taking their suitcases one by one, but I could not see mine. Almost everybody was gone; only the lady and I were waiting. Eventually, one guy with a Cultural Care Au Pair pink paper arrived, looking for me. Finally I

connected with him and my luggage. I thanked the lady for all her help, and we said goodbye.

I did not ask her name, and she didn't tell me her name. I don't know what would have become of me if she had not helped me. I am sure she was an angel sent from God. I know that someday in my life, I will be presented with a similar opportunity to help someone. Maybe it will be in an airport, who knows? But her kindness is something I will never forget. The world needs more people like her, and I am inspired to pay it forward!

~ Raquel Rodriguez

Kindness Is . . .

Opening the door for a mother with a baby stroller
Being polite to one another
Cleaning up without being asked
Cheering up someone with a phone call
Helping a new co-worker on the job
Offering an elderly neighbor a ride
Inviting someone who's lonely to lunch
Taking the time to really listen to a friend
Accepting differences
Smiling and speaking respectfully
Rewarding, appreciated, and contagious

~ Pearl Gayle

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

The gift that keeps on giving is a true story. This winter, just before Christmas, my house was broken into and my space was violated. I was at work at the time of the break-in and quite upset when I returned home to find what had happened to my house.

The next day when I went to work, I told my boss of the situation and to make sure he locked his house, so it would not happen to him. We started talking about all the things that were going on in the news that day. There was a lady whose house had been set on fire by her daughter's boyfriend and they lost everything just before Christmas.

Later that week, I went to work, and my boss and coworkers gave me \$900 cash for the bad luck I had. I was very grateful and surprised that they would give at that time of year. They probably needed the money for the holidays for themselves. So, I remembered about the lady on the news that lost her home and asked everyone to give the money to someone a little worse off than me. I felt at least I had a job and insurance. It would get better for me, so I gave an additional \$100. We contacted the news to find the family to donate the money to her so she would be able to get some essentials. I hope the gift that keeps on giving made a difference for her and her daughter.

~ Jerome Hailey

Memorable

My Grandfather's Story

It was a sunny day in Rabat, Morocco, when my grandfather's story began. In 1941, when he was twenty years old, the French Army sent him a thick letter telling him that he must join the battle against the German army.

At first, his friends were more uncomfortable than my grandfather about fighting on the side of the French colonizers and risking their lives. He discussed the advantage of fighting for the French. In my grandfather's opinion, everything in life has an affordable price.

First of all, according to my grandfather, the French colonizers were better than the alternative of the Vichy regime. Also, the Moroccan King Mohammed V had a good relationship with the United States government. Therefore, there was a chance that the two countries could start negotiations on our quest for independence after the war.

My grandfather's friends responded, however, that this would be the best time to fight the French because they are powerless and desperate. My grandfather mentioned that there was a big chance that the Axis Powers will lose like in World War I. In addition, we would get experience from our participation in the war which we could use against the French later if necessary.

In fact, my grandfather was right because in January 1943, President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Free French commander General Charles De Gaulle met for four days in the Casablanca suburb of Anfa to discuss the war. Roosevelt also conferred privately with King Mohammed V to assure him that the United States would support Morocco's quest for independence.

A few years after that, my grandfather had the great opportunity to meet the king and get an honor for his bravery during

the wartime. He wasn't that happy because he lost three of his best friends during the war and missed his parents' funeral.

Finally Morocco gained independence on March 2, 1956.

Always when I open my grandfather's photo album and see the remarkable photos of him and his brave friends in World War II, vivid memories come to my mind. I wonder how young men could make the decision to leave their families for an unknown destiny. I start pondering about how easy my life is now compared to theirs.

~ *Issam Boukabou*

An Unfinished Life

I was raised in an average American household. I have wonderful parents and grew up with two younger brothers. My dad was a chemical engineer with Union Carbide. My mom was a stay-at-home mother. My parents are from Philadelphia, PA. My dad started working for Union Carbide in Bound Brook, NJ. He was transferred to Marietta in 1970, when I was going into the 9th grade.

That was a turning point for me. I was so upset with my dad for making me leave everything I knew. I was mad at him for a year. I was awful. I realize now that growing up here was a much better environment than what we left in New Jersey. I wouldn't have my beautiful sons and grandchildren if I had stayed there.

I often wonder if living here in this valley contributed to the death of my youngest brother. His name was Frederick S. Scott, Jr. It was kind of funny that he was named after our dad, even though he was the youngest. The weird thing about it was that he grew up to be built just like him. They walked exactly alike. He was quiet like our dad, too. They had their own "space" around them, never "touchy-feely" people. I got a hug twice a year, Thanksgiving and Christmas, and I had to initiate the hugs.

Freddy was always a shy, private loner. He preferred working alone. That way he wouldn't have to get upset with someone not doing a job the right way. He worked in an auto body shop when he was in high school. He had a good eye and did beautiful work on vehicles. They looked brand new when he was finished with them. He continued to do this as a hobby, even after he took a job with UPS. That was the most stressful phase of his life because of a jerk for a boss. He had "small man syndrome." Fred didn't get married and have three children until he was 30 years old. He took a job with a heating and air conditioning company. He was their sheet metal man. He figured dimensions and formed the duct work.

In 2007 he got sick with what he thought was the flu. He went to the emergency room when he had trouble breathing. He actually had septic pneumonia and was in a coma for two weeks. That was the most horrendous experience for all of us. His body was shutting down. The wonderful lung specialists at St. Joseph Hospital at that time saved his life. He came home after 49 days in the hospital. He never worked again. Three months later they found a tumor in his lung.

I learned more than I ever wanted to know about lungs, cancer, and cancer treatment. Freddy fought his way back that first year and looked like his old self. He had another year with us, even though there were periodic hospital stays with pneumonia. He died suddenly at home when his airway finally collapsed. This was one of the issues the specialist warned us about. Our nightmare came true.

I learned a lot about the environment he worked in and the air he breathed every day. He went into some nasty places to install duct work. That only added to the fact that we live in this air polluted valley. He also smoked. He smoked more than I ever realized. Nobody will ever convince me that he got cancer from smoking. It just isn't in our genes. Both of our grandfathers smoked and lived into their 80's. I am not buying that story. He was in excellent health his entire life.

He was 49 years old. He left behind his wife and three children, his parents, and his brother and sister. I wake up every day trying to come to terms with the fact that he is really gone from this world.

I keep telling myself that he is no longer dealing with pain and medical procedures, and he is healthy, happy and enjoying the peace that he deserved.

He had a lot more life to live. He had so much left to do. So many things left unfinished.

~ Debra Scott

My Mom, My Hero

My mom is my hero because she sacrificed her life to give birth to five daughters and one son. My mom gave herself, time, and love to my siblings and me. She was the best mom any one could ever ask for. She loved from her heart. There was never a time when I needed her to come to my rescue that she wasn't there. My mother was a God-fearing woman with wisdom and integrity; she taught me about Jesus at an early age. The knowledge she gave me was priceless, and I'll carry it in my heart everywhere I go. There was no limit to the things she did to display her unconditional love on a daily basis. I grew up in a loving home with rules, morals, and respect from my mom. She taught her children many valuable lessons that will last a lifetime.

My mother sacrificed her life and time to care for her family, and she did a great job, I might add. I remember the times when she would go hungry so there would be enough food for her children to eat. She was always there to wipe a tear, soothe a cough, rub a bellyache, and give lots of hugs and kisses. We didn't have a lot of money so she became a seamstress. She made all of our clothes, and I will say we had fabulous wardrobes. My mother always went without just so we could have the things we needed.

My mom was a very wise and knowledgeable woman; she taught us how to live in a world that was cold and uncaring. I was blessed to have a mom to teach me the rules of life, how to cook, have respect for myself and others, and always do the right thing. She taught me how to pray and trust in the Lord with my whole heart, and always do my best at whatever I do. My mother taught me how to love and care for my three children and seven grandchildren. She left her legacy with her children and grandchildren, and I will pass them down to my children and grandchildren.

The impact my mother had on my life has blessed me in so many ways. She molded me and prepared me for life's hard knocks and storms. I will forever be thankful to God for blessing me with a mom that loved the Lord and loved her family. My

mom instilled in me that failure was not an option and never to give up on myself. Through her prayers over my life, I feel like I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I have always looked up to my mom, and she has always been my hero.

In conclusion, my mother has gone to be with the Lord to receive her crown. I will forever carry her in my spirit and take the gifts and wisdom my mom left me, and grow closer to God. I will pass the lessons I've learned in life to my family and the world. If I could be half the woman and mother she was to me, I would be a hero to my children. My mother was my best friend, confidant, teacher, judge, and juror. But most of all she is my hero.

~ Treva Britten-Ensley

My Brother Larry

He served the Lord most of his life, but he stayed away for a while, and lived his life just a little on the wild side.

He was a good hearted man; if he thought you were in need, he would help you and not expect anything back in return.

He was a trusting man, but he trusted the wrong man because that man betrayed his friendship and took away his life.

He was one of a kind, and there will never be another man who can replace him in my life.

He never got a chance to marry and have children, because all of his hopes and dreams lay in a puddle of blood.

He was one of my best friends, and he also was my brother, and I'll miss him forever.

He's gone from this life, but I've spoken to him; he told me that he's in a beautiful place and he's happier now than he was on earth.

He will live on in my heart, but I will keep his memory alive always; he was a wonderful person.

He lives with the Lord now in heaven and when my time comes to die, I'll give him a hug and a kiss and tell him I love him.

He always missed Mom when she died; that's when he stayed away from the Lord, but now he's with Mom, Dad, and the rest of our loved ones.

Rest in Peace Brother Larry

~ Karen Flick

The Promise

I have had a difficult life, but I have continued in stride.
 When my father passed away, I did not care if I died.
 He died six years ago, August 3, 2005.
 His passing nearly destroyed my life.
 I will always be "Daddy's Little Girl"
 Even if he is no longer in this world.
 He wanted me to graduate, something he had not done.
 But I made bad choices, and now he is gone.

I had promised him that I would have a high school graduation.
 However, I found myself in a different situation.
 Now, I am attending GED class,
 Because of the mistakes that I made in my past.
 I still need to fulfill the promise that I made in 2004
 So that I can move forward and mourn no more.
 I let him down and did not finish high school
 like I told him I would.
 It weighs on my shoulders, but I'm finally doing what I should.
 I think that he is watching from Heaven just to see
 If I can start another life and become what I can be.

I am thankful for the people in my life who have helped me.
 Staying positive has always been the key.
 I am thankful I have had encouraging peers
 Who have given me advice and helped me through the years.
 Listening to music inspires me to continue chasing my dreams.
 I hear my dad's words, "Don't give up!
 No matter how difficult life seems!"
 I'm leaving behind my bitterness and strife
 Working each day toward a new, better life.

~ Amanda Whitlatch

Feelings of Emptiness Within a Full Box

"It doesn't look good. We don't think he'll make it through the night," a low-toned voice that hit like a million needles, said slowly so I'd understand.

Not an hour before, I lay there on an operating table having him cut out of me, repeating over and over again, I'm only 28 weeks pregnant.

Now out of surgery and in pain, I was told he wasn't there with me. They'd rushed him to a better equipped hospital for premie babies. I was scared, lost, and only wanted to see my son. I knew if I was there holding his hand, him hearing my voice, that he and I could prove the doctors wrong.

While being transferred to the hospital, it felt like the ambulance was only going 5 miles per hour. Why don't they hurry? Do they not see that he needs me?

As I finally make my way into the room, Caleb, my precious son, was in tunnel vision, and he was all I could see. My heart broke at all the wires, cords, and needles hanging from him.

"Give mommy your hand, Caleb. Mommy is here," I said softly, but loud enough so he could hear my voice. My pointer finger fit perfectly in his little hand. "You can do this, baby," I cried, tears streaming down my face. Everyone stood in silence. I looked for answers.

"We can't explain it. Extraordinary measures were taken, but there was nothing more we could do."

All the nurses around his incubator said, "His stats are better now. He's breathing better now; he's such a fighter." They were telling me what I already knew.

Days went by, and things were getting better. There would be problems, I knew that. He was born at 28 weeks.

My life in the next two weeks was a blur. Home with the girls in the day; at the hospital at night.

I watched him fight so hard. Every night when I left, I'd always tell him, "Just hang on baby. You're Mommy's little fighter," and the next day, he'd still be there.

April 5, 2009, was the worst day of my life. My son couldn't fight anymore; he'd grown weak and tired. Saying goodbye to him was the hardest thing I will ever have to do in my life, but I sat and held him as he slipped away – my world crumbling. At the end of the day as we left the hospital, a woman handed me a box. It was full of pictures, all his belongings, letters I'd written him and all his hospital stuff. Walking to the car, my only thoughts holding a box full of stuff instead of a child, was that there was so much emptiness held within his full box of memories.

~ *Tabatha Moore*

Gone but Not Forgotten

You were my brother, my friend, my confidante
I always looked up to you
For the years of encouragement
The words of such truth
The times of much laughter
My gratitude is never ending
I'll continue to hear your voice in my head
Your spirit lives on as I feel your presence around me
I will always remember you
Feeling your life was cut short
Gone but not forgotten

~ *Angela Satterwhite*

Life Is Short

Life is too short, so live, love, and laugh. About 23 years ago I had a baby girl. Her name was Heather. She only got to be with us for a short time before she got sick. I don't know why, but in that short time, we did a lot. We got to go to the Great Smokey Mountains. She and her sisters got to see some black bears.

She loved to go to school and spend time with her friends. She got tired quickly, but she loved school so I would take her. The class was on the third floor, so I would carry her up the stairs; she loved it. At the end of the day I would go and help her back down the stairs to go home. I know seeing her sisters made her happy. We miss her so much.

The school has a mural with her picture on it. I can see it from the road when I go by the school. My advice to you is to spend all the time you can with your children and the ones you love because life is too short!

~ *Carrie Jean Sanders*

Respectable

My Brother's Keeper

Before I go on, I am dedicating this to my little brother, Devon.

Ain't enough rhymes to describe the love I feel inside.
Pictures a thousand words I try to paint mine in this song.
Keep your mind right, be strong, forget jail, my people's dead,
and they was 'bout the same stuff you trying to be on.
Little brother, tho I love ya just like your father.
Don't let the streets be the reason you get caught up.
Their loyalty flips quick as a light switch when you're caught up.
The world is crazy baby, don't be lazy, keep your guard up.
Don't be hypnotized with what you see with your eyes.
The news feeding you blues.
Government feeding you lies.
Destiny is yours; time to be your own man now.
Sit on that throne brother, hold that crown.
You ain't got to be me to succeed in your life.
To succeed, identity is the key.
Hold that down.

~ Devon Talley

Respect Is Worth It

Respect comes from the heart.
 Respecting others is the place to start.
 Respect is earned; it's not demanded.
 Now I'm channeling all my respect into anger management.
 I'm handling how to cope, without beer and dope.
 I'm supposed to show respect to those who show respect to me.
 There's hope!

And no, I won't disrespect others again because
 I don't want others to disrespect me.
 I'm a grown man!
 So keep your friends close and your enemies closer.
 Show trust and be the best you can be,
 Because in the end it will show.
 So you like disrespecting others?
 No!

Even though I was brought up being a lover
 I never had respect growing up.
 I lived in the slums, what rich folks would call the dump.
 But I got over that hump--
 Sawed those trees and got over the stumps.
 Now I am free!
 Destined to be the best
 With my heart on my sleeve
 And an "S" on my chest
 I'm me!

And thankfully, I was raised to be respectful
 To those who have been respectful to me.
 See, I give respect to get respect.
 And when I don't get it, I get upset.
 I've been the type to forgive, but never forget,
 To express in depth these feelings of respect.
 My thoughts were not clear
 My heart was a mess

Till I brushed my shoulders off, and now I'm feeling fresh.
 And everything I do, I do it to my best.
 I don't expect anything less!

I know I hurt people, disrespected them in fact.
 That I can not take back
 Because some things are left intact.
 As a matter of fact, I'm here to spit this rap.
 This is coming from the heart; do not throw this in the trash.
 I want this to stick with you like a horrible rash.
 And I admit I was off track, I no longer live in the past.
 This world is my prop, and I'm its only cast.
 I grew up without a dad, now respect is all I have.
 Yeah!

I respect my elders, the older, the wiser.
 Even though my life has been surrounded by lies,
 I strive to survive in a world that's full of sin.
 And I'm not the losing type; I'm always striving to win.
 I'll even go out on a limb and lose one for a friend
 Because respect is number one.
 Yeah!

And I will say that once again.
 Respect is number one and should stay true to the end.
 And this is not a fact;
 No it's not another trend.
 You see I was raised poor, but that didn't even matter.
 I even watched my loved ones disappear
 As my dreams were being shattered.
 But I stood up as a man and did what I loved--
 Picked up a pen and pad and found a new type of drug.
 Now I'm spilling my lungs, while I spit out my heart,
 And I hope you understand I won't stop till I reach number one.
 Yeah!

I recollect when you respected me.
 Now open your eyes and see the intellect in me.
 There's still hope for me

to respect others the way they respect me.
 And no I won't damage any hearts.
 I'm willing to make amends and go beyond with no ---.
 I'm willing to start peeling this ego from my chest and stop stealing
 To stop disrespecting others.
 I'm feeling like I'm brand new, I'm chilling.
 Yeah!

I had my heart broken,
 Ripped and stomped on while I was choking on my own spit,
 Hoping to God she was joking.
 But no she wasn't joking,
 So I had to move past the fact she was gone.
 I sealed my scars that were once opened.
 I live on, I gave respect.
 That flame was hot, and I got burned.
 But I've learned a lesson, and now the tables have turned.
 I'm doing my best keeping a firm grip on not disrespecting her.
 Yeah!

I know what you are thinking, that I am good.
 And I admit that I got a way with words.
 And sometimes my pen is like a knife and cuts nerves.
 But these people don't deserve all this hate through words.
 I respect those that show me respect in full.
 So don't try to play me because I wasn't born in April;
 I am not a fool; I'll help those that want my help.
 Yeah!

I used to hurt people just to hurt them.
 I was another burden in life--
 Drinking, driving, and swerving.
 Not caring for others or myself,
 Even though I was hurting.
 Deep down inside, I cried last night.
 Then something hit me, and I started learning.
 Yeah!

Do unto others as you want done to you.
 I picked up a Bible and opened it up.
 Changed my ways and I now face the truth.
 And these feelings I now express onto you.
 If I had money, the poor would be rich.
 I'd get the homeless houses, cars, and jobs.
 I'd even give waitresses ten thousand dollars in tips
 Just to watch them do flips
 And that is as good as it gets.
 Yeah!

Respect is great, believe me I know.
 But I once traveled down the wrong side of the road
 While it was icy and cold.
 I had no place to call my home because I chose to be alone,
 But here I am now writing a song about respect.
 And man it feels so great to do all I can.
 Yeah!

To help out others who don't fully understand what respect is,
 To lend a hand to all the lost kids
 And lead them through this land that's His.
 And I hope you are proud of me now, mom.
 I did all I can.
 And yeah, I stand my ground
 And respect all the people who do not respect me.
 Because I'm now a grown man.
 Yeah!

~ Cory Hull

Love Is a Brand New Shoe

Love is like a brand new shoe.
 If the shoe is too loose,
 You know it's no use.
 If it fits too tight,
 You know it's not right.
 If it fits just so,
 Then you will know
 It is for you.

The color of the shoe
 Has to be right too.
 If it's red like a rose,
 It's hot and warm.
 If it's pink like a peach,
 It's just too sweet.
 If it's blue like the moon,
 Then you know it's been used.
 If it's white like the snow,
 Then you know it's just new.

So when you go out to find the right shoe
 Look at everything
 So you know it's for you.

~ Donna S. Lynch

Closure

I think the importance of closure is to give yourself peace of mind. In fact, without it, your life will feel incomplete. All those unanswered questions and built up mixed emotions will consume you, leaving you feeling confused, frustrated, and very angry.

Closure, for me, has been impossible but very much needed. Often, I think back into my childhood. Growing up in my household was a very dramatic experience for me. My parents got divorced while we were still very young. We were snatched from the only stable environment we'd ever known. My sister and I were very close; it didn't seem to matter that we were five years apart in age.

For instance, I took my sister everywhere I went. I prepared her meals, I did her hair, and I made sure she got to and from school every day. We were inseparable. Throughout the years, our relationship began to change. The change started after she graduated from college. I started noticing a very selfish side to her. For example, I have always gone out of my way for her: birthdays, holidays, it didn't matter. I made sure it was special for her. Well, let's just say that my birthday came and went without so much as a phone call. I was so confused; I wondered to myself how she could not know that her behavior was inexcusable.

Another instance I remember was when my sister and I had planned to go to Miami for one week. The trip was planned months in advance when she, all of a sudden, decided to invite one of her friends. Without notifying me, they bought their plane tickets and left for Miami within the next two days. Sadly, I never made it to Miami. I was livid!

I felt so betrayed and left out. I couldn't understand why my sister would treat me like I was a non-factor in her life. I was so angry; I didn't want to sit down with her at the time to figure out what her problem was. I just distanced myself from her; how-

ever, I never got the closure I needed to heal. It's like I'm stuck; I can't move forward until I'm able to address our issues.

Closure is a big part of a person's healing process. Without it, life will feel incomplete. Trust me; I'm living proof of that. Closure is necessary for people like me who never addressed their issues when they first surfaced. The best advice I can give is to always speak up; speak your mind. Ask questions. A resolution to this problem is to say what you mean and mean what you say.

~ Tamiko Longmire

Knowledgeable

One Hurdle Down

My journey started a year ago. I walked into Live Oaks School for a placement test to study for my GED. After taking the test, I learned that I needed help in all the subjects, but my worst subject was reading. I didn't think I did very well on the test since the last grade I completed in high school was ninth grade, and that was over 40 years ago!

The next day I attended my first class. The teacher introduced herself (Marty Lopinto) and the next few days introduced a team of volunteers: Scottye, Mr. Ed, Barb, Susan, Linda, Donna, and Diane. Each day we would start a lesson in math. Marty taught the lesson and would ask the volunteers to go around and help the people who were having trouble. If a student didn't understand, Marty would go over it until they did.

Class time was split into two parts: math, the first part and language arts, writing, and reading the second half. After three months of study, I felt I was ready to take the GED test, so I went to Marty and asked her. She recommended that I wait a bit before taking it, but I said, "No!" I felt I was ready, but I wasn't. I didn't pass the pretest. It actually took me 4 times to pass the GED, but each time my scores improved. I continued to come to school everyday and worked hard, never giving up.

Marty would NEVER, NEVER look at the negative; she always looked at the positive. That is how she wanted her students to look at it. Marty would not let me get down on myself. She always pointed out how far I had come and how well I was doing.

Marty, THANK YOU for all you do. The best thing about your class is that each day, I learned something new, and I felt good about myself. Also, thanks to all the wonderful volunteers at Live Oaks. Once again: THANK YOU!!!

P.S. My mom will be watching from the heavens, but my dad will be seeing it first hand as I take that walk down the aisle to receive my GED in May. Woo! Hoo!

~ Linda Schuler

Quest to Success

What's wrong with that guy's hair?
Am I going to be the oldest guy there?

How long is this going to take?
Will I get a lunch break?

Will I do it this time?
Is that diploma going to be mine?

Will I feel smarter than this?
How many questions will I miss?

Will the math be really hard?
Will I learn to measure in yards?

When will I take this test?
Can I do my best?

Am I going to pass?
Will the intelligence last?

Am I going to pass the GED?
You will see; I will succeed!!!

~ Live Oaks ABLE Group Project:

Jason Brown
Amanda Cronin
Deborah Eydel
Laura Hodge
Jack McClure
Tabatha Moore
Dawn Owens

Homework Frustration

Time to do some homework.
Go away cat!

Leave me alone.
Got to do my homework.

NO, scat!

Don't eat my pencil.
I need that!

Have to learn this math.
NO! Get off my paper.
You're gonna feel my wrath!

Spoiled brat. SCAT!

No! Not my eraser.
Now I'll have to chase her.

I give up. Let's go play.

~ Lisa Chupp

My Proud Moment

My middle school was a boarding school. There were eight girls in my dormitory and we were all friends.

Every day, before we went to our evening class, we liked to jog on the playground, and sometimes we went to the nearby restroom when we finished. There was a wall between the men's and the ladies' restrooms. The upper part of the wall was frosted glass; the lower part of the wall was cement.

One day, we went to the restroom again. This time I saw a piece of white material with small black dots through a small hole in the frosted glass. I knew someone was stealing a glance into the ladies' room. When I told my friends, they became scared and cried out. Soon after, I heard a sound from the men's room. I thought the strange man was trying to escape. I ran out and stood at the men's room door, and my friends followed me. We yelled, "Come out!" But it was quiet, and nobody answered. We continued to yell. Finally, a teacher heard us and asked, "What happened?" We told him and asked him to go into the men's room and catch the peeping Tom.

Within minutes the teacher had caught a man in the men's room. He cried, "I'm not the man. I'm innocent."

The teacher said, "Shut up. You were the only one in the men's room."

I looked at him and said, "He is innocent. I believe there is another man in there."

"How do you know?" the teacher and my friends asked me.

"This man is in white and is wearing leather shoes, but I'm sure the peeping Tom is in white with small black dots and is wearing sport shoes," I replied.

“Yes, she is right. I know there is another man in there,” the first man said. “Did you check the last stall?” he continued.

The teacher ran into the men’s room again and caught a boy. He was in white with small black dots and was wearing sport shoes. I couldn’t believe it! He was my classmate, Dai! I responded shocked, “Yes, he is the peeping Tom.”

“How did you know?” the teacher asked me.

“First of all, I saw his shirt through a small hole in the frosted glass, so I knew what color he was wearing. Second, I figured he must have been standing on a high place to steal a glance at the ladies’ room because I heard the sound he made when he jumped to the ground after we saw him and cried out. The sounds are different between leather shoes hitting the ground and sport shoes hitting the ground,” I explained.

After that, I was a heroine at the school, but just in the girl’s group. The peeping Tom was also a hero at the school, but just in the boy’s group. Dai and I have never talked to each other since the event happened.

~ Huizhen Zhang

Foreign

From other countries and cultures,
Outsiders gathering to learn English,
Reading and writing, speaking and listening
English for speakers of other languages.
Interested in learning idioms, slang, history, and customs.
Getting a better life and embracing the American culture.
Now you can speak two languages.

~ Morning ESOL Class
 Warren County Vocational School:
 Claudia Agudelo
 Arjana Kurti
 Adriana Silveira
 Mizuko Yamagishi

My Schooling

I only started learning to read at age 60. In school they just passed me along with E's, so I dropped out in 10th grade.

In 2009 I went to GED classes, and one teacher taught me my sounds. I am learning to spell. I am learning to fill in the blanks with a word in a sentence.

I'm proud of myself for coming to class. I'm trying to learn to read better. I have finished four or five books. I come to ABLE GED classes, and my tutor helps me read. I try to come every class. I have had perfect attendance for many months.

~ Lee Sullivan

Seeds

There in the city on an old busy street
Is a place called "Seeds."

I see people coming, I see people going
Looking for something, only they know
A piece they had been missing from long ago.

What are they looking for? I ask myself,
What can it be? Must be something hard to see.
Still going, day after day, week after week,
I see the same faces in the same routine.

On a spring day, I finally arrived.
"Welcome to Seeds" a voice exclaimed.
"Grab yourself a chair and get ready to start."

I found myself a place and soon I could see
There were many people sitting just like me.
Someone came in and sat by my side
Giving me the knowledge, they offer in "Seeds."

I finally discovered the place, where in early spring, I tried to go.
I'm sure I will share with others the seeds I received.

~ Stella M. Thomas

The Poem That Wasn't ...

No way!
 You are joking!
 What is a poem?
 Poems are hard to start.
 We don't have the recipe.
 Our brains don't have creativity or rhyme.
 Rhyming poems are difficult.
 We can't rhyme because we don't have the time.
 We have no artistic sense.
 Sharing our ideas with others is intimidating.
 We lost our pencils.
 No more time? Oh no!
 We only have excuses!
 What? You love our poem?
 We can't believe it! Really?
 Thank you!
 What? You can't be serious?
 Write another one?
 Maybe we are poets after all...

~ Live Oaks ESOL Class Poem:

<i>Theara Angschwein</i>	<i>Rosa Munoz</i>
<i>Ana Bilanuba</i>	<i>Walter Munoz</i>
<i>Beatriz Blanco</i>	<i>Cesar Osegueda</i>
<i>Emma Chavez</i>	<i>Desislav Pavlov</i>
<i>Anne Devlin</i>	<i>Dan Yu Qin</i>
<i>Maria Dominguez</i>	<i>Raquel Rodriguez</i>
<i>Karina Erique</i>	<i>Imelda Ruiz</i>
<i>Thibaud Freret</i>	<i>Jenny Sasson</i>
<i>Elisabeth Froehlich</i>	<i>Adriana Tristan</i>
<i>Karima Jabrah</i>	<i>Patricia Vargas</i>
<i>Maria Luz Munoz</i>	<i>Bing Yu</i>
<i>Martha Ayala Munoz</i>	<i>Anna Zhao</i>

wRAP Your Arms Around Success

"Got my pencil to my right, my paper to my left. I'm going to keep doing this stuff to my very last breath. Like I said...I'll try my best. I do it only for one reason...that's success. So wrap your arms around it and give it your best. It don't ask for much; it just puts you to the test."

"Welcome to this place, welcome to this place, welcome to this place and have a nice day."

"Welcome to this place that we call GED class. Taking the tests and hoping we pass. New kids coming in and out; please talk silent, there's no need to shout. We got Miss Sue, she's cool as can be and you don't have to pay nothing; it's totally free. We learn math, science, and history, too; everyday we come we learn something new. We got sent here 'cause we dropped out of school, but it's ok cause we're still looking cool. We practice for the test, we wanna be the best. Get a good paying job and just leave the rest. We don't play with guns, we don't play with knives, we're sent here to learn and live our lives. Now this is done 'cause there's nothing left to say, but goodbye GED and have a nice day."

DAFLORIDABOY and Beat Master Alec

~ William Travis Harris Jr. and Alec R. Hamler

The Twelve Days of Classes

December 9, 2011

On the first day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Some info about the GED.

On the second day of Classes,
my teacher gave to me
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the third day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the fourth day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Four sheets of paper,
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the fifth day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Five sparkling pencils,
Four sheets of paper,
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the sixth day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Six hard problems,
Five sparkling pencils,
Four sheets of paper,
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the seventh day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Seven new people,
Six hard problems,
Five sparkling pencils,
Four sheets of paper,
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the eighth day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Eight grammar papers,
Seven new people,
Six hard problems,
Five sparkling pencils,
Four sheets of paper,
Three TABE tests,
Two math tests,
And some info about the GED.

On the ninth day of Classes,
My teacher gave to me
Nine math problems,
Eight grammar papers,
Seven new people,
Six hard problems,

Five sparkling pencils,
 Four sheets of paper,
 Three TABE tests,
 Two math tests,
 And some info about the GED.

On the tenth day of Classes,
 My teacher gave to me
 Ten homework assignments,
 Nine math problems,
 Eight grammar papers,
 Seven new people,
 Six hard problems,
 Five sparkling pencils,
 Four sheets of paper,
 Three TABE tests,
 Two math tests,
 And some info about the GED.

On the eleventh day of Classes,
 My teacher gave to me
 Eleven science experiments,
 Ten homework assignments,
 Nine math problems,
 Eight grammar papers,
 Seven new people,
 Six hard problems,
 Five sparkling pencils,
 Four sheets of paper,
 Three TABE tests,
 Two math tests,
 And some info about the GED.

On the twelfth day of Classes,
 My teacher gave to me
 Twelve final tests,

Eleven science experiments,
 Ten homework assignments,
 Nine math problems,
 Eight grammar papers,
 Seven new people,
 Six hard problems,
 Five sparkling pencils,
 Four sheets of paper,
 Three TABE tests,
 Two math tests,
 And some info about the GED.

~ Amanda Green

Breakable

Beautiful Queen

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

You beautiful queen,
Don't let them take your self esteem.
Don't be afraid,
Lift your head,
Open your eyes.
They're just insecure about their own lives.
They beat you with words,
So you'll lose your sense of worth.
They beat you with their hands,
So they'll feel more like a man.
I know every emotion, every feeling, every bruise
Pray hard and the devil will lose.
I'm not just talking, but I've been abused
And I thank God that demon let me loose.
You beautiful queen,
Don't let them take your self esteem.

~ Danielle Lawson

Little Girl Lost

There was a little girl that I once knew.
Life for her was hard.
The things that happened behind closed doors
Forever left her scarred.

No one seemed to want her,
No one would take her home.
The love she saw others get
For her was never shown.

She would sit in a dark corner
Wishing she could hide.
Every night it happened
A part of her would die.

There was no one to protect her
The night her innocence was stolen away;
The memory will haunt her until her dying day.

I know so much about her.
The little girl, you see,
The reason why that is...
The little girl was me.

~ *Melissa Hodge*

My Life

My name is Rahem. I was born in 1971 and raised in a small village located in southern Iraq.

In 1987, I became a champion runner in the 100 and 200 meter events. Saddam's secret police arrested me in 1989 and accused me of not being loyal to the Bath party. They kept me in a local jail for three days. They eventually let me out, but I couldn't go back to school because I was not a member of the Bath party.

A year later I was drafted into Saddam's army and was present when Saddam invaded Kuwait in August of that year. Four months later, I deserted from the Army and hid with many people in the countryside. Normally, it was very hard to stay alive there for more than one or two weeks, but we survived for two months because we really didn't want to get killed fighting Saddam's war.

Two months later, Saddam granted general amnesty for deserted soldiers so I and about 150 young men turned ourselves in. After we returned, they took us back to Kuwait to fight. Then in January 1991 Operation Desert Storm started. It was a nightmare. About 1 million Iraqi soldiers were killed.

After Saddam's Secret Police lost control of most of the remaining troops in Kuwait, we turned against the regime. We named ourselves the freedom fighters. We fought Saddam's people for 27 days. We lost the battle because we didn't get any help from the United Nations.

On April 13, 1991, we went to the American side and asked them if they could take us as POWs. They did take us and put us in a refugee camp in between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq. We stayed in that refugee camp from April 1991 to August 1998. It was no fun at all. However, in 1998, I experienced a happy ending. I came to the land of freedom – the USA.

I worked for the Marines for three and a half years in Iraq. Then, in 2006, I switched and worked for the Navy Seals Special Forces for 6 months. In 2008, I met my wife in Baghdad during a Marines Sniper mission.

In 2010, we went to Lebanon to get married. After that, I submitted her application for a visa to the United States. Thank God and this country for helping to make my dream come true: the dream of having my own family and living without worry or fears.

~ *Rahem al Hazami*

Slavery in Mauritania

I am Salif Sy, and I am from Mauritania. I am writing about this topic for the people of Mauritania who are victims of discrimination in my country. These people deserve the respect of human rights.

Slavery has been a part of the Mauritanian society for centuries. Over 800 years ago, Arab and Berber tribes came from the Mediterranean and launched raids against the native African population. They abducted women and children and used them as slaves.

Those slaves were converted to Islam and were raised to believe that their religious duty was to serve their masters faithfully. Slaves believed that if they did not obey their masters, they would not go to heaven. They were raised in a system that reinforced this idea every day. In this society slaves needed a master to protect them, to bring them to the medical center, and to represent them in court. Slaves needed a protector in Mauritanian society.

Today in Mauritania, the Arabs and Berbers run the government, the military, the courts and the schools. Slaves cannot revolt because they will lose everything. They can only hope for justice and legal protection if they have a master. The relationship between master and slave that began 800 years ago continues to this day. Thousands of families continue to be owned as inheritable property by masters. The right of a master to own a slave is still granted by Mauritania's Islamic courts.

In 1981 slavery was officially abolished by presidential decree. On August 8, 2007, Mauritania's parliament passed legislation making the practice of slavery punishable by up to 10 years in jail. Under the new law, anyone found guilty of promoting slavery could face being put in jail for up to 2 years.

However, some slaves feel that they cannot leave their masters. They look at it and think, "If I lose my relationship with this family, what am I going to do?" They do not have an education, and the opportunity to go off and do something else is just not provided for them. Men can generally get work as porters, shepherds, dock workers, or night watchmen; women can only work as domestics or in sex work.

It is not only the slave who questions what he might do without slavery in existence. Masters are also enslaved by the mentality of slavery. They are completely dependent on the system of slavery. They have no idea how to work or care for themselves.

Today the system continues. It will take time for change, but I hope one day that the right of human beings will take over in Mauritanian society. I hope that all people will be treated with the same opportunities and have the same rights.

~ Salif Sy

Coming to the United States

I came to the United States because my country was at war. There was little security and not much safety in Cambodia. My mother was in the United States and wanted me to live with her. My cousin, sister and brother came to the United States in 1982. I arrived in the United States on October 2000. I got an immigrant visa by marrying my husband. We wanted to live in the United States forever, because since 1975, my country was at war with the Khmer Rouge.

During the war, the Pol Pot killed more than three million people. In the Khmer Rouge war, I lost my father, brother, four aunts, and four uncles. I feel so sad and hurt for my family and everybody that was killed.

I don't want to go back home, but my family misses our country and other family members. Someday we want to vacation by going back to visit my family in Cambodia. My family in America wants to stay here because the United States has freedom, safety, law and order. People like to come to the United States because the United States has freedom and safety. There are no wars in the United States today.

~ Thoeun Cham-Yann

Unstoppable

Finding Strengths in Overcoming Weaknesses

As far back as I can remember, getting stronger from my weaknesses is how I seem to operate. I am the oldest child in my family, and my mother preferred for me to be seen and not heard. As a result I became very good at sneaking around in the middle of the night to eat sweets. This was a fool-proof plan until my mother found out. I didn't dare get out of bed again.

When I became old enough to start school, the girls at my bus stop would call me names because they thought I was a snob (I was quiet) until they got to know me. On the playground I always wanted to participate in whatever the boys were playing. Unfortunately, more times than not, they did not want a girl playing with them. As a result, I never had more than just a few friends at a time. I learned to stick to what I enjoyed doing no matter what everyone else thought about it.

After I became a little older, I began to realize that I could catch people's attention because I was different. Usually, I gained respect along with it. I soon realized that so many things were changing from middle school to high school, that it was becoming more difficult to maintain my confidence. I had begun a descent into loneliness. My self-talk was more questionable and less desirable. I was sad all of the time even though I wasn't aware of it yet.

Even after I graduated high school and began culinary school, I still questioned my place. I gained what I thought were great friends, but as I look back now they weren't. I recognize now who my real friends were, but that time has long passed. If I knew then what I know now, I could have established some great, lifelong friendships.

As a young adult, I was clearly depressed, and it became hard to stay strong. Through the ups and downs of my 20s (mainly very low downs), I fought for what I believed to be right, but it was as though I was stuck in quicksand. This was a very ugly time in my

life, but I really believe it was needed. Sometimes it is necessary to struggle through low times in order to find strength to shine.

Now that I am half way through my 30s, I have gained an inside look at my strengths and weaknesses and have finally begun to shift myself into gear. My self-talk has always had a lot to do with my decision making. Although I didn't always make good decisions, they wore heavily on my mind. Now I definitely feel better about the direction my life is heading. Overall, I have learned quite a lot about my weaknesses and have discovered how to focus on my strengths.

It has been a long road, with lessons learned. Now that I am a mother I can share some of my experiences with my children, so they can profit from my mistakes. They may have a better developed relationship with their self-talk and, having studied my examples well, they would be much better prepared to pursue their goals in life. These stepping stones, properly placed before them, may be just what they need to grow and succeed.

~ Nicole LaCroix

A Tumor

I am a physician from Syria. I'm presently attending Live Oaks School to improve my English, so that I can practice medicine here in the U.S. Learning medical vocabulary has been a challenge. Recently in class, my classmates and I wrote about health care problems of our own.

I had been complaining about chronic pain in my left leg for many years. The pain was intermittent in the beginning, relieved by medication and sometimes ignored. However, it got worse gradually, and a limp developed until the problem began to affect my life and productivity in work.

At this point, I went to a hospital to see the orthopedic specialist. She thought my case was "Acute Rheumatic Arthritis" in my left knee, because I had a severe pain and swelling in the knee, claudication in my left leg, and difficulty in movement. The doctor ordered an x-ray for my left knee.

The radiologist made a diagnosis of a benign tumor in my left femur. I went back to my doctor after reading the report. She was a little bit surprised and showed me a prominence in the x-ray, localized in the lower part of my left femur laterally next to the knee. She called this case "osteoma" and strongly recommended that I have this tumor removed by surgery. A surgical procedure would get rid of symptoms and avoid a very disturbing situation called "osteoarthritis," she explained to me.

She didn't forget to mention that there is a very small relapse after surgery, and I was admitted to the hospital. While on the surgical floor, the physician ordered a complementary testing called "CT Computerized Tomography Scan" in order to determine exactly the location of the tumor and how close it was to the adjacent structures.

On the day of surgery, I was a little bit anxious. The nurses gave me medication to relax, and they took me to the OR

(the operating room). As I came in, I felt worried and a weird feeling prevailed. The OR has a special environment: overhead lights, the clothes of the surgical staff, surgical instruments, and the odor of antiseptics. But the smile on the face of the anesthetist relieved me. He explained to me about the technique of anesthesia he was going to use. It was called “semi-anesthesia,” and this technique really was amazing. It helped me to remain completely conscious during the surgery.

The recovery time was slow. After surgery, I suffered severe pain in the surgical section region and was unable to move my leg without assistance. On the surgical ward while still in my room, my friends visited me to calm me down and support me. My room was full of a variety of different color bouquets. I was discharged from the hospital four days later. I was restored to health after a couple of weeks, and I was thankful to return to my life.

~ Wasel Aldalli

Good Enough

In my younger years
I saw a lot of tears.
I couldn't do anything right,
Imperfect in any light.

I couldn't please my mother,
Myself, or any other.
Never good enough for my father.
Tell me now, why did I even bother?

I need to be strong for me
So everyone else can see.
Pulling myself together
Piece-by-piece takes forever.

I'll prove them wrong –
I've had it in me all along.
Day by day I'm getting closer.
Soon enough it will all be over.

I'll be someone you can love.
Someday I'll be good enough.

~ Carrie L. Prentice

My Job in America

I got my first job a month after I came to the USA. I didn't speak much English. I had no work experience in the USA, no education, and no car. I applied for a few jobs, but nobody called me back. It was really hard to find a job being a new immigrant. I finally got a job at a motel as a housekeeper. I really appreciated my manager for giving me the chance to work there. My supervisor taught me how to get my job done. Sometimes, I didn't understand what she meant, but she'd show me how to do it, or she would help me out.

Housekeeping was not an easy job for me. I had to push a heavy cart full of cleaning supplies from one room to the other. In fact, I had to walk back and forth from each room to the laundry room. I also had to push the cart up and down along the hill to the garbage outside. We had to finish three rooms in an hour. If I had a nasty room to clean, it would take me over an hour to clean it. Then, I had to work faster and faster to catch up to finish the rest of the rooms. It made me very nervous.

Most of my coworkers were nice to me. They taught me a lot. They helped me fill out forms, read documents, and explained American customs. They also taught me how to cook American food. The one person who gave me trouble was the temporary supervisor. She discriminated against me because of my race. She would give me more double rooms than the other housekeepers, and she was picky about what I did. I would say "Hello" to her in the morning, but she wouldn't answer me. She was rude to me. She never talked to me unless she needed me to do something. For example, she wanted to go home early one day. She told me to take out all the garbage from the cart so she could lock the door. I had to drag eight big bags of garbage to the dumpster on the other side of the building, in the pouring rain. I wouldn't have gotten soaked if I could have used the car. I felt so wronged. I cried in the rain while I was doing my work. She was so mean. After she got promoted one month later, she got fired because she didn't do a good job.

I worked at the motel for over one year. I went through all the seasons. It was okay when the weather was nice, but in the winter on snowing days, it was hard to push the heavy cart through six inches of snow. Snow would drop onto my shoes and melt, and at the end of the day, my feet were frozen. When there was too much snow to push the cart, I had to carry everything. In one hand, I carried trash bags, rags, towels, linens, and three bottles of cleaners. In the other hand I carried a 30-pound vacuum machine that was killing me. If it was raining, I had to keep all linens clean and dry, but not me.

In the summer, the business was good. I had at least 30 rooms to clean every day. It was nice when I could stay in the room, but when I had to go outside in 90 degree weather, it was bad. I had to go back and forth to the laundry room to get clean sheets and towels. It was easy for me to get a bad headache when I would get back into the really cool room. I also had to clean the parking lot and carry heavy loads under the hot sun. The sun made it hard to breathe. As a result, I had really dark skin, my back hurt, and my joints ached. Sometimes I couldn't sleep at night. I complained a lot.

Last July 4th, my husband was off work. He came to the motel and helped me out at the end of the day. After that, he said, "That's too heavy for me to carry, so it's too much for you. You don't have to put up with that to support the family. Just quit." It's not easy to find another job. I didn't want to quit if I didn't have to. Finally, I quit one month later because my arms hurt so badly. Luckily, I found another job four days later. God closes the door, but it opens the window for you. I cherish my waitressing job now.

~Yuan Li

Musical Perseverance

I am a musician. I play the *gayageum*, the Korean traditional instrument. In 2002, I arrived in the United States. It was for my husband's college studies. I thought that I could play my instrument here, but it was not easy. I needed to learn how to speak English. I stayed home when my husband went to school. I couldn't even answer the phone. It made me very sad; it was hopeless. I was very homesick and just wanted to go back to Korea.

After a few months, a friend told me about ESL classes. I realized that I needed to learn English for my music career here. So, finally I could learn English. I began to understand and speak English. In addition, I had a chance to play the *gayageum*. It made me feel better.

My dream was to have a *gayageum* recital on stage. I shared my dream with my husband, and he was very supportive. He encouraged me to follow my heart.

Finally, I got my own recital! I was very excited. However, it was not easy with little kids. It was really hard to get my own time to practice music, but I was determined. I practiced from midnight to early morning. Even though I had a short time to sleep, I did not feel tired at all. I was busy practicing with other instrumental players and by myself. During that time I felt I was really alive. I was living! Otherwise, I was nervous about being on stage. A long time had passed since my last performance in Korea, but my family, friends and God gave me the courage.

There was an American percussionist on stage as well. During practice with the percussionist I was afraid. What if I couldn't understand him? How would I express my feelings, my concerns? Those weren't problems at all because we could understand the language of music. I realized that I didn't need to be perfect. I just needed to try and do my best.

My dream came true! I played the *gayageum* on stage and spoke English while explaining the music. The Americans in the audience understood me. I did it! It was a wonderful experience. I was extremely happy. My husband's faith in me gave me the confidence to perform in the United States. I am thankful for having this wonderful husband. Now I am dreaming of praising the Lord and letting the world feel God's love through my music.

~Junghwa Lee

Shyness

I've been shy all my life, especially as a child. I remember always hiding behind my mom whenever we were out shopping and she ran into someone she knew. I was even shy around babies. Every time I held one, it would cry. Then I would feel bad and wonder, "Why?" But now I know it was my shyness, and babies could sense that.

Shyness held me back in school also. I was afraid to talk to other students and wished I didn't have to be there. I remember my first day of kindergarten. I was terrified! School only reinforced my shyness because I never really fit in with all the other students. I felt embarrassed when people would tease me about being a red head.

Things didn't get any better in junior high either. I started to have a weight problem and was judged on that and had very few friends. Even a gym teacher singled me out and always treated me with a demeaning attitude because I wasn't as athletic as the other students. I just kept to myself the best I could to get through each day.

When I started in high school, I didn't like school any better. The teasing got so unbearable that I started going to the Career Center for what they called O.W.E. I went to school half a day, then work or the lab. I eventually ended up dropping out. I felt the teacher only paid attention to the smarter students and didn't help me with math. So, of course, I missed out on proms. Even today that still makes me sad, even though I feel like I probably wouldn't have gotten asked anyway.

As I got older, I didn't want to go anywhere if I had to go by myself, even if it was something fun like the fair. As I entered into adulthood, I started to overcome my shyness. I could go to stores by myself, but still could not look people in the eyes and wouldn't talk much.

I got my first job when I was 18, doing office and factory cleaning, and still had trouble with shyness. I didn't like to work when there were people in the offices. I always tried to do my work without being noticed.

When I met my husband, it took me awhile to feel comfortable around his family, but eventually I did. We were married in 1998. His aunt, who is a cake decorator, made our wedding cake. I was so impressed and curious that I wanted to learn to decorate cakes myself. I bravely signed up for some Wilton Cake Decorating classes and found that I am talented and did very well in classes. My teacher was impressed also. She and the whole class commented on how I made my cakes look just like the ones in our books. That made me feel proud. It felt really good to be complimented!

I think that was a big part of me breaking out of my shyness and seeing what else I could do in life. Since I never finished school, for many years I thought about getting my GED. I was always too shy to go by myself. Then I found out that ABLE was going to have classes in my hometown, and I talked myself into signing up.

I am very glad that I did. It has given me some much needed confidence in myself and continues to help me overcome my shyness. I have met some nice people, two awesome tutors, and a teacher who have been so patiently working with me. They encourage me that I can do it! I am so very thankful for them and the ABLE program.

This past September, I drove myself to the fair, went in, and walked around by MYSELF. It felt GREAT!

~ Lisa Chupp

Numerology

Divided by addiction and stress.
Subtract the addiction,
Now I'm on a mission greater than pi,
Round as the sky,
Christ in me,
Now who am I?
Take away the stress
Put to the test;
I am multiplied by the speed of light.
Mathematically correct with no defects
Less than none is greater than one.
In God's only Son,
I've already won.
If you think that was a great gift,
Make no mistake,
Take a look back,
Round the track.
I can't be beat; accept no defeat!
Take a look back
And start with that,
In God we trust has value in us!

~ David Teegarden

Attainable

Language Lessons and Life's Returns

Life gives you returns on almost all your attitudes. Here is something that happened to me. I was looking for help in order to understand my pet birds, and I used the wrong words to describe the situation. I was tired of being flicked to bleeding by my lovely birds, so I decided to find help on the internet. I found a place that rescues exotic animals and provides help for pet owners. I sent an email explaining that my birds were biting me and that to educate them I was beating them on the back.

An associate of the rescue animal's organization sent me back an email asking for my address and for me to stop beating the back of my birds. This person explained that they could die, and by doing this, they will not have love or obey me but will hate me.

When I read the email I was shocked. I asked myself, "What is this lady is talking about?" See flicking the beak is an old way to try to educate birds with bad behavior that I learned in books and on internet sites for bird owners. I studied the email that I sent and checked the words that I used in my dictionary. I realized that I wrote the words like they are pronounced and not spelled. This cost me a morning of explanation about how I treat my pets.

What I learned is that not all that sounds right is right. If you are not sure, check. Never send words to another person that can be misunderstood. The wrong word in the wrong place can give you several explanations. The shortest way to finish a topic does not work all the time, especially if you are dealing with people you do not know.

Good and healthy communication makes a difference between what you are, what you know, and where you would like to arrive. The right conversation opens doors and makes you feel happy. Also, you will feel like you belong to the place

where you have chosen to live. Speaking right is so important just like doing a good job or being a good citizen.

~ *Solange Busarello*

Being an Au Pair

My name is Yudith Escobar Leon; I'm from Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Last year, I was a student in the Language Department of Gabriel Rene Moreno University, but now I'm finishing my first year as an American family's au pair. I take care of one handsome two-year-old boy. I decided to extend my stay one year more because this year I had a great learning experience. The three main values that I learned this year were to be patient, expressive, and self-sufficient. These three values have helped me to develop one of the most important roles of my life, which is helping my host mom raise a child.

Patience is the key of a successful au pair. As an au pair, I had a period of adjustment to the country, the weather, the family, the culture, and even the language. At the beginning, everything looked so different for me. It was hard to get the baby's confidence, but being patient, I received the most rewarding experience of my life. I enjoy the cultural differences, the new language, my host family, and the best of all, spending time with the little boy who makes me feel so happy when I hear him saying that he loves me and that I'm his best friend.

Expressing my ideas wasn't a problem for me in my own language, but in a new one, it was a struggle, and I felt frustrated. Eventually, I got accustomed to talking and thinking in English, which is a great satisfaction for me. At the same time, I understand that my behavior and the way I share my feelings is an important part of human communication. For example, being nice, grateful, and polite worked most of the time to make the little boy obey me. It is unbelievable how a hug can get him to calm down when he is having a hard time.

In Bolivia, my mother used to be overprotective and sometimes she spoiled me. She did my laundry, cleaned my bedroom, and cooked my food. Everything changed my first day in the USA. I started to be self-sufficient in Miami International Airport. That day, I had to face many challenges by myself, such as finding

the gate for the next flight to San Francisco, where the Agent Au Pair agency was. When I was in San Francisco International Airport, no one from the agency was waiting for me, so I had to take a super shuttle at 1:00 AM to get to the hotel. I faced all of that again to get to Ohio.

I don't know exactly how many miles I traveled to be here, but I would do everything again to live this wonderful experience. Aaron, the little boy I care for, will be an unforgettable passage in my life. I know that he is only two years old, but I hope to play an important role in his life. This little boy is teaching me how to be a better person and that makes me have great expectations for the next year. I cannot wait to know what other important values I'm going to learn and apply from now to the time I go back to Bolivia and the rest of my life.

~ *Yudith Escobar*

Brownies

When I came to live in Mason, Ohio, I thought it was going to be easy because I was married to an American, but it wasn't. The first problem I had was speaking English. Nobody understood me, especially at the drive-thru. The second problem was understanding the customs in America. Let me tell you a funny story.

When my oldest daughter was in first grade, she would tell me on her way home from the bus stop, that her friends were having brownies. Then I'd say, "Oh, Taylor don't worry, tomorrow I will bake some brownies for you." "No mommy, not your brownies," she responded.

Next week, it happened again. I couldn't understand why she did not want me to bake brownies for her, so I tried baking some chocolate muffins instead. I thought she did not want to eat too much chocolate.

The same situation happened again and again! One day she told me, "Mommy, they are called Brownies, the little girls in Girl Scouts. They meet and do activities together, and sell cookies. I would like to be a Brownie."

Then I realized that I have a lot to learn about American customs. My husband may not teach me, but my daughters will.

~ *Carolina McClintock*

Much More Than I Expected

I thought my trip to the USA would have one main purpose: to improve my English and be fluent. But it has been much more than that.

Being a medical student in Brazil and niece of a physician who practices here in the U.S., I had an opportunity to see how physicians practice medicine in this country. In addition to that, my aunt provided me the chance to follow the residents of her family practice. I started to follow the residents before I found the English classes.

So, my adventure starts here...

Four days after I arrived here, I was at the hospital, surrounded by physicians that I had never seen before. They were doing what they are used to doing – seeing patients. Even though I have some familiarity with medical practice, this situation seemed totally different to me. Wasn't that weird?

In the first week, I spent all day at the hospital. And in between each patient, everybody wanted to talk to me. During these few minutes many thoughts flew around in my mind at the same time. I wondered, "Are they trying to make me feel comfortable? It's not working!!" That was a typical embarrassing situation for me. I could understand almost everything they said, but speaking was more complicated.

So, can you imagine how tired I was at the end of the day? I found an image to describe it: my brain seemed like Jello. The only thing I wanted when I arrived home was to hear someone speaking my language: Portuguese!

But, it was OK....after a night of dreams, in the morning my brain was refreshed and ready to "become Jello" again.

The most interesting thing is that I got used to the situation before I thought I would. Three weeks later, I was able to understand different accents. One of the things that really helped me was starting English classes at Live Oaks in Milford. When I met other people in the same types of situations, it made me feel more confident. It's amazing how being in another country and spending some time with new people can make some changes in us.

My Brazilian summer vacation, spent in the U.S., taught me much more than the language and how to face challenges. This experience made me grow in so many different ways that I can't find words to describe. And one thing I am sure of: the person who came to U.S. is not the same person who will soon return to Brazil. I am carrying part of each person that I met here not only in my thoughts, but also in my heart.

~ Lara Miranda

My Story in Wal-Mart

October 26, 2011, is my one-year anniversary at Wal-Mart. Recalling my experience of this year at Wal-Mart is very interesting. I was voted 2nd Shift Associate of the Month 2011. I have learned so much from Wal-Mart that I feel like a child who is growing up in the Wal-Mart family. I would like to write down my experiences and let my associates share my happiness of growing up in Wal-Mart. And through this writing I want to explain my appreciation to all my associates and my customers who gave me a lot of help.

More than a year ago, when I got my driver's license and could understand just a few English words. I was still confused about the pronunciation of words such as "kitchen" and "chicken," but I decided to apply for a job at Wal-Mart. My family was very worried for me when I made this decision.

"You cannot do this job. You cannot understand English. You will mess up everything, and people will be angry at you," my husband said. Yes, I am a "Wenmang" (in China if you cannot read any words you will be called Wenmang, meaning blind). My speaking and listening in English are worse than reading, and I am not a young person any more. It is difficult for me, but they could not stop me. I wanted to try!

One day, I used the Google translator and started to apply for a job on the Wal-Mart website. The application had many questions I had to answer on the website. The questions were not easy for me to understand, and I did not pass these questions the first time. I was not discouraged by this and I thought I should try again! At last, I passed my job application! It was a happy day for me.

My husband helped me to hear the phone message left from Wal-Mart # 1595. I was on time for my interview and very nervous. Three managers were together for my interview. One of them would ask me a question that began like: "Could you de-

scribe a situation..." These questions were very long, and I did not understand most of the words. I thought to myself, "What's the meaning of 'describe,' 'task,' etc.?" I knew these were basic words, and I did not recognize them. I repeated these words in my mind quickly and wanted to understand them, but still there were many very basic words that I could not understand. The manager read the sentences again and again. Finally, very lucky for me, I could understand a few words in these sentences, such as "co-workers," "finish," "customer," and "work." I guessed at the meaning of the questions they asked. Then I asked them back, "Did you ask me ...?" or "Your meaning is...?" When the manager answered "Yes," then I started to answer the questions slowly with my poor English. I did not know whether the managers could understand my answers in my Chinese English, but I felt they were friendly to me.

I got the job at Wal-Mart! This was an important day in my life. I am very happy to have this job.

I finished the work training (47 modules) aided by an electronic translator. I learned a common word used at work in my first work day: "straighten." Co-worker Sheila taught me this first word; then she taught me the second work words: "over stock." In the next days, Lawn & Garden Department manager Tony taught me another work word: "zone." He told me, "'zone' means putting products on shelves neatly." Later, co-worker Sue explained "code sunshine" to me. I understand now that the meanings of the words "zone" and "straighten" are similar to the word "code sunshine." Sue also explained to me the meaning of the word "freight." Tony and Sue also told me how to get the returns from the service desk and put back on the shelves, how to write claims for broken products, and how to use the Telxon in freighting. They taught me many product and tool names, such as skid, jack, telxon, etc.

Cindy Sheldon in Personnel taught me a lot about Wal-Mart culture and explained many words to me. For example, she taught me that "integrity" is basic in the Wal-Mart culture. Mark taught me how to spell the word "missing" on the claim paper; zone manager Deana told me where to charge a battery and how

to change a battery for the Telxon; an assistant manager taught me how to use a jack; shift manager Linda taught me how to scoop fish out of the tanks for customers.

When I did not understand how to do a project, Sue, Tony, Deana, and other managers always showed me how to do it first. A pleasant sound, "Hello, Chun," from manager Jim and his team made me feel better at work. Also many co-workers give me a lot of help in Wal-Mart: Shelly, Tyler, Mary, Katrina, Corey, Pj, Linda, Joan, Tom, Nancy, Kenny, Herb.... I could continue with more names. Working in Wal-Mart #1595, on your birthday you will get a "Happy Birthday" card from Jim's team mailed from the post office. My mother-in-law passed away this year; I got a vase of flowers from Jim's team too. I agree with my husband, who said that Wal-Mart is a warm company.

Wal-Mart has a lot of nice customers. I got a lot of help from them last year. I learned a first word from a customer: "tree stand." I could not understand the word and wanted to find a co-worker to help this customer. When we walked by a shelf with many tree stands, the customer said, "I see them now." Then he said, "Thank you" to me and taught me how to say "tree stand." Normally, when I cannot understand a question, I can say, "I am sorry; my English is not very good. Could you wait a minute? Let me find my co-workers to help you." Then the customers are always patient and kind to me. Sometimes, I am confused about product names, for instance wreath hanger and wreath holder. When I am confused, I say, "I am sorry about this," but they say to me, "You are fine."

Each time, when customers are close to me, I always ask, "May I help you with anything?" even though I know that most times I cannot understand their questions very well. But, they are kind customers; this gives me the courage to ask them. I am very happy when I understand the customers' questions and can show them the products they need. Some customers can explain their questions with their body language; that way helps me a lot. I appreciate these customers. I would like to learn many things

from Wal-Mart and would like to use my ability to help Wal-Mart customers save money and live better.

I would like to thank my English teacher Viviane Bushong so much for correcting my faults in English grammar and some words; also I thank my friend Cindy Sheldon so much for proof reading for me. I appreciate them!

~ Chun Qin

Comparable

A Comparison Between France and the USA

When I arrived in America, I found noticeable differences from the French world I was used to. The main ones were the significance of God and religion, and the different cultural habits or food. I was also surprised by the relationships between young adults, the lack of public transportation, and the importance of television. Finally, I had to face different measurements.

First of all, religion. Although in both countries, France and the USA, church and state are and remain separate, religion is much more present in America. I often see stickers on cars or people wearing shirts during the day that say something like "In God we trust." We would never do that in France; we don't express our beliefs in public because wearing religious symbols is prohibited in schools and public places.

I would also say that Americans are much more independent than French people. In their careers, Americans want to be proud of succeeding by themselves. You even have the expression "self-made man," whereas in France, we are just proud to succeed, with or without someone's help. Also, young French people want to work as soon as possible so they can afford to go out more, have more fun, or go to the clubs. They are unlike young American people who work to become independent and to stop depending on their parents' financial help. Plus, French people are quiet about their opinions and beliefs. Criticizing is considered improper, whereas the Americans use their "Freedom of Speech" and don't hesitate to speak out loud!

One of the first questions your friends and family from your home country ask you once you get in America is: did they give you a hug when you got there? Haha! Now, after 17 months in the USA, it doesn't really feel strange to me anymore to hug somebody to say "hi." I admit that it was very uncommon, quite weird, in the beginning. In my country, we usually kiss cheeks – one kiss on each cheek in my area but up to three on each cheek in some other areas like the North of France, near Germany.

There are also many differences when you are invited to someone's place for lunch or dinner. In France, it's better if you arrive about 10 to 15 minutes late so you can give your host some extra time to get everything ready. In the USA, they expect you to be right on time or a few minutes early.

Let's now talk about the food: "bread and butter" is not an appetizer! In France, it's for breakfast with jam and coffee! Haha! I was so surprised to see that in most restaurants here! French people are very proud of their cuisine and all the specialties the country offers like cheese and wine, whereas it's difficult to name a typical American dish. We like to take our time to eat and enjoy our food. Meals can last for hours, whereas I've seen a lot of Americans eating in their cars or going to the "drive-thru" to not waste a single minute of their time just to eat. Moreover, in France, we consider breakfast as the main meal of the day and lunch and dinner are also very important, even if we usually eat less at dinner than at lunch. In America, you usually have a good breakfast, a small lunch (just a sandwich or a salad), and a quite filling dinner.

About the relations between young men and women, I would say Americans follow strange rules! Before dating somebody, a guy will take you to dinner and spend time with you, but that won't mean he's dating you! He can still see other women while he spends a lot of time with you. You would be dating only from the day when he asks, "Do you want to go on a date?" or "Do you want us to be officially together?" In France, you wouldn't spend so much time with somebody without dating, and you don't ask the woman if she wants to date you. All the time you spend together, without being in a group of friends, clearly means that you are dating. Just hanging out often leads to more serious relationships.

I also noticed another difference between France and the USA concerning relationships between men and women: the wedding. In France, the marriage isn't seen as something so important anymore. A French couple can be together and live together for years without being married, even, sometimes, until they die. Here

in the USA, I've met a lot of young women of my age (23 years old) who were already engaged or married and who were ready to have babies. Some actually already had babies. French people want to take their time and see if their relationship is going to work out before making the big decision and getting married; obviously it's not the same in America! That's maybe why the number of divorces and second or third marriages are so prevalent here.

There's also another difference I have to talk about: the television. Why are there so many commercials? Here you are, watching the series, and these commercials appear every five minutes! Some people think it's a good thing because you are able to watch more than one series or shows at the same time, but I just can't do that. When I watch something I'm so in it that I just hate when these commercials break all the action. I also heard, once, that it was good to have so many breaks and commercials because you have the time to get many snacks while you are watching television without missing any part of the show. I just laughed when I heard that! In France, we do have commercials, of course, but it happens only once during series, it lasts about 5 minutes and that's it; it's like an interlude.

Public transportation is another big difference. In France, the public transportation system is well developed. Some of my friends back home even decided not to take the driving test because, in many cities, you don't even need a car as you can get a bus, a train, or the subway from anywhere. Here, in the USA, if you don't have your driver's license and a private car, you are lost. You have to just stay home. You even need to open your eyes wide if you want to find a bus stop! I was so shocked! Many European people say that's why you usually gain weight when you go to the USA because you need a car and can go everywhere and do everything with it. Thanks to all the "drive-thru," you can never really walk to go somewhere.

Talking about cars, the main difference between the French rules of the road and the American rules is that, in the USA, you can turn right even if the light is red. When my host mom told me I was allowed to do that, the first time I really

thought she was joking! Then, I took the driving test and realized it was not a joke at all. Sometimes, I still forget that I can and I stop at the red light, waiting for it to turn green. I hope I won't turn right on a red light in France, or I'm going to be in trouble, haha!

I've also noticed that Americans are very respectful of the rules of the road and above all the speed limits. In France, if you are in the left lane on a highway, that often means you are in a hurry and you will surely go over the speed limit. Here, I have sometimes been stuck behind a car that was in the left lane but wouldn't go even 1 mph over the speed limit. That's why you often see cars passing other cars or trucks on the right side here, whereas it's totally forbidden in France.

I would also like to talk about the problem I face every-day since I have been here: all the different measurements! I can't cook, check the temperature, drive, or weigh myself without needing to convert it into my metric system, the international one! In the USA, they call it the imperial system, which sounds strange to me. Sometimes, when I get on the scale, I scare myself thinking I put on almost 100 kgs, until I calm down and realize these are not kilos but pounds, haha!

I could talk about the differences between France and the USA for hours because there are so many, but that's probably what makes this country so attractive to me. God bless America!

~ Nelly Dulin

Being Different

I am 24 years old and I have had my share of ups and downs because I am different than most of the people in my area. I live in rural Ohio where 90% of my neighbors are either Amish or Mennonite. They are two very strict religions.

I grew up living with my grandparents in a very small town called Mt. Eaton where everyone knows everyone. It was not much fun. My childhood was good, but growing up I knew there was something different about me. When I was young, I had all kinds of hobbies like going camping, riding four wheelers, fast cars, and big trucks. I also liked spending time with family and friends.

When I was a young child, I grew up going to a Mennonite church and always felt out of place and confused about religion. But I stayed involved with the youth group and was having fun. The Mennonite religion is very strict in the sense of wanting you to be the person they think you should be. Some of the church members were the most judgmental people I have ever met. I did not enjoy that part of it. I always stood my ground. I continued attending church until I was about 16.

A few years earlier, my dad had been in a car accident and was paralyzed from the neck down. I did not really know my dad growing up (he and my mom were never married), but after his accident I got to know him better. I went to see him at least three times a week in the nursing home, and we talked about everything and anything. A few years later my dad died from double pneumonia which is caused from not being able to move. Still trying to figure out who I was and losing my dad was not very easy. This is when I quit going to church.

I did not know how to deal with my feelings. I thought I had no one and was in the dark. Being a freshman in high school and trying to fit in was not easy either. All I wanted was acceptance. I found a group of friends and some would say they were

not the best choice, but they were at least there for me. We liked to smoke pot and drink beer. Just becoming part of the drug world, I started snorting meth and cocaine. I used to be so scared of what people thought of me, but doing this, I did not care. It was a dark time in my life, and I was very confused. When I got busted and sent to jail, I realized I needed to change my life.

When I turned 18, I dropped out of high school and tried to get my life on track. I came out to my family and told them I was gay. My family was not thrilled. Some of them put me down and others stood by my side, but most of them told me I was wrong for feeling this way. After I heard that a million times, I told them to either accept me for me, or I would move out and never come back. They changed their attitude about me real quick.

All this figuring out and growing up was not an easy task. I never saw so many one-track minds in my life. I still live in this rural area, but my life has made a huge turn around. I have a full time job in a nursing home in the dietary department. I also have most of my family on my side and a wonderful guy in my life. We have been together since July 26, 2011. We are building a life together and everything is great. I am very happy with where I am. Now I am working on my education and GED. I can move on to the next step of my life. I feel like my journey is just beginning, and I'm excited to see what happens down the road.

~ Shayne Mast

Love and Hate

Love
 Happiness red
 Hugging, kissing, talking
 Wedding heaven. Divorce hell
 Fighting, hurting, ignoring
 Sadness black
 Hate

~ Group Poem
 Columbus Public Schools:
 Issam Boukabou and Latifa Douha

What Do You Learn from Being an Au Pair in America?

While being an au pair in America, I have learned differences in raising children between Thailand and the United States. These differences can also cause different results. The Thai family has more discipline than an American family. American children give less respect to their parents than Thai children. American children have a lot of celebration days and toys, but Thai children don't celebrate many holidays, and they don't get a lot of gifts.

When children don't follow their parents' directions, their parents will discipline them. American parents will discipline their children by giving them "time out." They want their children to spend time alone and think about what they did wrong. Some children may understand but not all. On the other hand, Thai parents will discipline their children by warning or hitting them. Encouraging and showing the right way to follow the directions are good ways to discipline children.

Thai children are taught to respect adults, not only their parents but everyone who is older than they are. American children have a close relationship with their parents or even grandparents. Sometimes they play, talk, and act like they are siblings or friends. They don't give much respect to adults because of the culture. When American children turn age 18, they leave their houses for colleges and universities, while Thai teenagers still live with their parents in big families.

Celebrations in America are a time to give gifts, especially for children. Parents give lots of toys on Christmas and birthday celebrations. American children can learn a lot of things from school, educational programs on TV, learning places, museums, parks, and playgrounds. Thai children in rural areas don't have many educational TV programs, museums, or even learning places. They spend their time playing outside and also riding bikes with other children around the neighborhood.

I have learned lots of things from being an au pair in America, especially the differences about raising children and living lifestyle. I will apply everything I've learned to improve my skill in teaching children. I would like to share my experience with families with whom I am going to work in the future.

~ Pattariya Summart

Vulnerable

As I Sit in This Cell

As I sit in this cell, so lonely, so cold,
My mind turned to dust, my emotions to mold.
Is there still a chance, any hope at all?
Who do I turn to? Who do I call?
I feel like a failure, a real loser deep down.
I get sick to my stomach; I feel like a clown.
I try to pick myself up; try to pull it together,
But each day it gets worse, more under the weather.

As I sit in this cell, so lonely, so cold,
I look at my life and what I was once told.
“Stop getting high, Daniel. This just isn’t you.”
But look at my life and what I’ve been through.
If I could go back and change the past,
I would jump in the time machine so very fast!
But I can’t, it doesn’t work that way.
It seems my life only gets worse day by day.

As I sit in this cell, so lonely, so cold,
Like a bad poker hand, I just want to fold.
Will my life ever get better or just stay the same?
They say the choice is mine: am I a winner or a lame?
But the damage is done. I hope it’s not too late,
To turn this life around, and be something great!

~ Daniel Skodny

Toughen Up

Rolling out of bed
 Facing the dawn
 Looking for the clothes
 She doesn't want to put on.
 "Toughen up soldier!"
 She tells herself each day.
 Eight more hours to go
 Need the money, anyway.
 Brush across the eyeshadow
 Wipe away the tears.
 Cover all the scars
 Collected through the years.
 Put on that happy face,
 Forget every word.
 You've gone this long in silence –
 You never will be heard.
 No one cares what's wrong
 No one wonders why.
 Trust me, girl, they'd like you less
 If they ever saw you cry.

~ *Carrie Prentice*

My Life

My name is Brittany Martin, and I did not have the best life, so I'm going to tell you a little about it. Well, it all started when I was twelve years old. First my mom was hooked on drugs, and my dad drank all the time. Well, I used to be at home a lot by myself. I would have to cook for myself. Pretty much, I had to grow up really fast.

I started getting headaches really bad. I would say something to my mom, and she would give me Darvoset and it would take it away. I never ever thought anything about it. Then I told one of my best friends about it, and then I thought it was cool. So every day I would tell my mom that I had a headache. She would give me a pain pill, and I would give my friend half of it. It went from Darvocet to Vicodin.

Then before I knew it, I was hooked on the pain pills. I started hanging out with older people. I tried weed and liked it. I started smoking weed all the time. Then I met this boy and I really liked him a lot. He and I started dating. I was only fourteen years old and he was two years older, but it was all good. When I was fifteen, I found out I was going to have a baby. I had to stop smoking weed and taking pills.

I had my baby when I was sixteen years old. I had to grow up really fast. After that, my mom and dad let my baby's dad move in. I was sixteen years old, my boyfriend lived with me, and I had a baby. On my son's first birthday, I found out I was having another baby. Nine months later I had my little girl. Then we had a really bad flood, and I had to move to an apartment. Then I found out that my mom was leaving my dad. That was not a good thing to find out.

Two and a half months later, I had just put my little boy and girl to sleep. My boyfriend's cousin called me and said something was wrong with my dad. She lived next door to him. My boyfriend's cousin's boyfriend came to take me to my dad's house. The police were there. My mom had heard about it and came, too.

I went to my mom and asked what was wrong with my dad. She told me she was not sure. Next thing I know, the cop came outside and asked for me and my mom. The cop said he had bad news and told us that my dad was gone, that he had passed away. I fell to the ground and started crying. I told my mom that it was her fault. I have never really talked to her again.

When we went to my dad's service, someone gave me some Xanax and I took them. After that, I started taking pills and smoking weed all over again. When I found out my uncle killed my dad, I started getting into harder drugs. I started shooting up and lost all control over myself. I did not think I was that bad, but I went to jail for hitting my boyfriend. I was with him for ten years. Needless to say, we broke up, and he took my kids from me. Then I just got on drugs even worse. I overdosed two times. I started hanging out with the wrong people. I got on bath salts, and that stuff made me feel like I was Superwoman. I never really thought about my three kids. I was never really there for them.

I was so messed up. All I cared about was boys and drugs. I was staying in Parkersburg with three guys, and I was shooting up bath salts. One of the guys was my really good friend. I saw his girlfriend hit him, so I beat her up really bad. We took off and were on our way to Marietta and got pulled over. The State Highway Patrol found needles and bath salts in my purse, so I was put in jail. I got out on bail and just went on smoking weed. I went right to my kids when I got out. I was trying to let them know how sorry I was. I went to court and got my kids every weekend and six weeks in the summer. I started being there for my kids, but behind everyone's back, I was still using.

I fell in love with a guy who got me off the needle. That was a good thing, but I was still taking pills and smoking weed. I started shoplifting to make money. Every time I would shoplift, I would be on pills and my boyfriend would be with me. It was close to Christmas and I did not have a job. I would take Xanax and go to Walmart to get my kids stuff for Christmas. One day I was really messed up on Xanax and got the smart idea to go to Walmart. We got caught, and both of us went to jail.

I have been here for almost seventy days. I was here for Christmas, and that really messed with my kids a lot. My youngest boy is four years old. He always asks my mom if she is going to get mommy out of jail. She says no, and he tells her he is mad at her and walks away. My little girl is really hurt from this. She is acting out and doing stuff that she has never done before. My oldest son is so mad at me that he will not even talk to me. It took me coming to jail to wake up and see how bad of a person and mom I was being.

Now I have asked God to enter my life. I have written to my kids and my mom to tell them that I am sorry and ask them for another chance to show them that I am going to be a different person. Now my kids are writing to me. I talk to them on the phone. They can't wait until I go home and see them. My goals are to be the mom that the kids need me to be, to stay off drugs, and to get new friends.

~ Brittany Martin

I Am Worn Out

I am worn out
 I wonder how it feels to be rested
 I hear the silence that I heard in "Death Valley"
 I see a vast arid land
 I want to stay
 I am worn out

I pretend to understand life
 I feel stale
 I touch above my heart
 I worry that I'm not in control
 I cry to myself
 I am worn out

I understand nothing can be perfect
 I say a prayer
 I dream of days not here
 I try to calm my jitters
 I hope for perfection
 I am worn out

~ Haley Rapoport

I Got the Bug

My eyes are red,
 And my nose is runny.
 The words that I say
 Sound a little bit funny.
 My ears are plugged up, and
 My throat's kind of scratchy.
 The skin on my cheeks looks
 All reddish and patchy.
 My forehead is hot,
 But I feel kind of cold.
 I am really a pitiful sight to behold.
 No big deal, you are thinking,
 It's only the flu.
 Just a few days in bed and you'll
 Be good as new.
 Most times I'd agree,
 But this time no way.
 This is not my idea of a Happy Birthday!!

~ Charlie Dondiego

Truth Hurts

I am who I am.
Just let me be.
I have pain, hurt, and insecurities.
I don't cause trouble.
I stay to myself
Like the boy in the bubble.

I tell you I'm depressed.
You look at me strange.
Then my feelings turn into rage.
I tell you I need help, and
That you ignore.
So I tell you once more.
This feeling is strong, and
It scares me to death.
Will it cause me to take
My very last breath?

I don't need your sympathy.
I need your support.
I am only human and struggling
With my worth.
It keeps me awake at night.
I know what I am feeling
Is not right.

I am telling you what I feel.
All I ask is for you
To keep it real.
I tried once to make it leave.
The blood on my sleeve
Was a cruel reminder
That the Truth Hurts
Once, but a lie
Hurts every time
I remember.

The Story of My Life

I was born into a pain-filled family. When my mother was eight months pregnant, my father pushed her out of a moving car because she refused to give him her welfare check. Consequently, I look at myself as both a blessing and a curse. As I look back over my life, I tend to feel a cringe in the pit of my stomach from the drugs and the alcohol to the rape and the abuse. I even remember my mom being beaten by my father while he urinated on her. Sometimes I really felt as if I weren't meant to be here.

Growing up was very hard for me; being the ugly, dirty kid in school without friends didn't make the road any easier. My father used to beat me and say, "You're gonna be a hoe just like yo mama!" Soon I began smoking marijuana and prostituting when I was 12 years old; I guess I must have thought Daddy was right. I got tired of being poor, and Mama couldn't afford the extras. Yet I hated my life and believed everything about me was wrong. I even wanted to die.

Looking back, I should have died a long time ago. One severe incident occurred when I was only 13. I was raped in an alley during my prostitution days, and I kept this horrible secret for years, believing I was already worthless. My mom still doesn't know.

When I was 14, I met a guy who I thought would brighten my life. Let's just say he did in his own way. He was the first man to call me sexy; unfortunately, I was bought just that easily. When I got pregnant by that man, I was 14 and he was 23. I didn't find out until child support sent me a letter including his real name. Again, I didn't have the wisdom to make healthy choices.

I knew I had to make some changes, but how would I begin? Here I was a drop-out, no money, too young for welfare, but the mother of a beautiful baby boy. God, why me? How did I make these choices and end up where I was?

As time passed, I realized my son would be the best thing in my life. He would be the reason I had to do better. Now I am 23 years old trying to manage two children, an apartment, a truck, a GED class, and college classes. I have to make myself happy by filling in all the gaps that have existed in my life. Going to school makes me feel significant. I'm turning my life around, and I'm not looking back. The story of my life may have begun horribly, but I am determined to make this story end happily.

~ Tassionette Perryman

Life Isn't Fair

When you lose your job
Life isn't fair

When you can't afford Christmas presents for the ones you love
Life isn't fair

When you can't feed your family
Life isn't fair

When you experience discrimination
Life isn't fair

When you are seriously ill
Life isn't fair

When you have no one to turn to for help
Life isn't fair

But no matter what happens, life is still worth living even if
Life isn't fair

~ Scarlet Oaks ABLE Group Project:

Germaine Campbell

Robin Harris

Nathan Jackson

Nathaniel Roy

Kathy Runyan

Angela Satterwhite

Viktoriiia Wilburn

Times of Depression

When the stock market crashed
 And brought prosperity to a halt
 When banks failed and businesses collapsed
 When the United States entered
 An economic crisis, it was the
 Times of Depression.

People were out of work and lost their homes.
 They stood in breadlines and slept in parks.
 People rode cattle cars, huddled
 in railroad yards. It was the
 Times of Depression.

People lived in tin shacks or junked cars.
 Children scoured city dumps for food to eat.
 Jobless men or hobos took to the roads.
 They shivered in tents and cooked
 over wood fires. It was the
 Times of Depression.

Make-shift communities of boxes and
 tin shacks became known as Hooverilles.
 An empty pocket turned outward was a Hoover flag.
 A newspaper covering a sleeping hobo was
 a Hoover blanket. It was the
 Times of Depression.

Farmers dumped milk on the highways
 in California.
 Others burned corn for warmth in
 Nebraska.
 Farmers were forced to abandon their
 land. It was the
 Times of Depression.

When the United States entered an economic crisis,
 When banks failed and businesses and
 companies collapsed,
 When people are out of work and
 losing their homes,
 This is a Time of Recession.

~Wanda L. Babb

Just Another Day

Just another day in the county
All I now see is brick walls
I no longer get my phone calls
I look forward to mail
By the way, I have no bail.

Our meal times are...
6, 11, 4
I'm so ready to hit the door
When you fall on the floor
Get back up
Even when life seems rough
You gotta stay tough
Just another day
There's gotta be a better way!

~ Stephanie Lockhart

Lovable

Most Loved

Dear Most Loved:

Expressing my love for you can be hard for me because of all the emotions I feel at one time. I just wanted to take some time and unlock my heart to you. When we first met, you took my breath away. Nothing in the world could take my eyes off of you. Holding your hand melted my heart. It didn't take long to realize how empty my life was without you. I still need you like a flower needs rain. With all the new feelings, it is really hard to contain myself. The only tears I have shed are of joy and happiness.

Each passing year, our relationship grows. I will never forget the times hanging out, watching a movie, sitting down for dinner, laughing and talking, sharing a heart-shaped cookie, and just being together. I can't wait to wake up every morning and see your smile. I love your surprise hugs and kisses. There is nothing in the world I would not do for you. You are the reason I open my eyes and breathe. I love you more than anything in the universe.

Love,
Mommy

~ Laura Hodge

A Mother's Role

A mother plays many roles in life.
 From day one, she becomes a temple.
 When the baby is born, she becomes a shepherd.
 As the baby turns one, she becomes a teacher.
 When the child turns five, a mother has to be an encourager.
 When the child turns ten, she has to be a motivator.
 When the child turns sixteen, Oh my God!!
 She has to be all of those AND a fashion designer.
 When her child turns eighteen, she has to be a shoulder to cry on.
 When the child becomes grown, now she can become a friend, as well as an advisor.
 When all that is said and done, she is still a MOTHER!

~ Ericka Allen-Wooten

My Children

Defining what I feel for you is easy. It's love. The greatest love that I ever felt for anything or anyone. This love can be delivered all in one kiss.

After seeing you, I knew everything would be O.K. My life will be better now because I have you. With a look, you make me feel loved, and your smile improves my day every day.

Never will you be alone. My love, my heart, and my blessings are with you wherever you go. Whatever path you choose, I hope you will always remember the importance of love before anything else.

I do the best for you. Nothing is more important for me than to make you as happy as you make me because you are the center of my life. You make me want to get up in the morning and work hard and smile at adversity.

Every moment from your birth until today is in my mind. Your first smile, your first word, and so many things that make me wish that you wouldn't grow up anymore. I thank God for every moment we share.

Life is different now. It is busier, and there is more laundry, but it is better. For my effort to get breakfast, dinner, clothes, and household chores, I have a reward of many kisses and a "Te quiero, Mami" that pays for that and much more.

And

Sweet little girl and sweet little boy. They are different but are one; one complements the other, and both complement me. Everything I feel for Daniel, I feel for you.

Hope your lives are full with love and joyful. I hope you grow up healthy and become good people, kind and grateful to the world.

Every day looks different, sometimes full of chaos, sometimes filled with laughter. But I need every cry, every smile because everything makes me learn how to be a better mom, a better person, a better woman.

Lovely kids doing funny things, always learning, discovering, growing, enjoying even the simplest things, showing me that everything is important and necessary.

Smiles, many smiles I have in my life when I see you dancing, playing, or sleeping. Peace fills my soul, and I can see how lucky I am to be your mother because I cannot imagine a better life than this living with you.

You two, Daniel and Shelsy, both are my love; both are in my heart and my prayers every night. Thank you both for the joy that you give to my life.

~ Maribel Gallegos

Mom

Mom, I put you through
Hell the last 3 to 4 years.

I put you through a lot
of pain and suffering.

I made a lot of stupid choices
in my life
that you didn't agree with.

Now that you are sitting out
there in pain and suffering
from the cancer that you now have.

I am sitting in jail,
wishing I could
take everything back.

~ George Carpenter

Young Mother

I was nineteen years old when I had my daughter “Lexis.” She was the highlight of my life; I was very over protective of her when she was first born. I made sure when it came to holding her that the hygiene of others around was very clean. There was absolutely no smoking near her or even in the home. To me she was so fragile and breakable. I did not want anything to happen to her.

The older we both got, the more I learned about being a mother. It got easier to multitask with a child. I could do the laundry while holding her. I could vacuum the floor and bounce her at the same time. It was just the two of us. She got my 100% attention, all day everyday. Every night I laid her to sleep. I said a prayer in her ear; “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Then I kissed her and told her, “Mommy loves you always and forever.”

When I turned twenty-two I had my son “Junior.” It was like learning how to be a mom all over again. This time it was having two small children. It was difficult to learn how to divide my time between them, to make sure they got all the attention they needed. Babies are very expensive, and when they need something you have to be able to provide for them. Adjusting from one child to two, the finances were very stressful.

As the years went by, we learned how to work well as a family. I am now twenty-four years old. My children are now four and fifteen months. I would not want anymore children in the near future; I love my children with all my heart. By being a young mother you lose out on a lot of your growing up years, and you sacrifice a lot of things to take care of what’s yours. My schooling, my friends, and family have seen how bad I struggled to make it. If I could do it all over, I would have taken precautions to avoid becoming a teenage mother. I would still have had my children, but I would have done it all differently. Now it is time to work on me and bettering myself to be the best mother I can be for my kids.

If I could give advice to young women about being a young mother, I would tell them to make sure you are leading a stable and comfortable life before bringing a child into this world. Having a support system is more important than you think. Doing it all by yourself is more challenging and stressful than you can imagine. In the end, to see what you have created and raised is well worth it, but if you’re not ready please take precautions to have safe sex. It only takes one time to make a baby, but it takes a lifetime to raise your child.

~ Tamatha Kisner

Commendable

Beautiful Gift

I don't know if it was
a difficult or easy decision to make,
but it doesn't matter now,
because it is already done,
and I already have it.

For some people,
it can be the most insignificant thing,
or they may not even care about it at all.
But for me, it is gorgeous,
wonderful, and peaceful.

I just don't have words to describe how happy I am about it.
I am pretty sure that my parents who gave it to me
don't know how lucky I feel about it either.

So, I would like to say in this poem
that there is not another way that I would want it.

One of the most important reasons
for why I feel this way
is because this gift came from my mom's name,
my name RAQUEL.

Thank you for such a beautiful gift!

I love it,
and I will never,
ever change it!!

~ Raquel Rodriguez

American Adventure

On October 10th, 2011, I arrived.
 In New York City, I was trained.
 And in Cincinnati, Ohio, I settled down.

Au pair, I am.
 French girl, I am.
 And so happy, I am.

USA, crazy you are.
 Welcoming and friendly, always people are.
 And endless, roads are.

Friends, here I made.
 Lots of fun together, we will have.
 But sweet France, my country, I miss.

New landscapes, I discovered.
 So amazing, life here is.
 I feel like in my hands, the world I have.

If you read this, happiness I wish for you.
 So short, our lives are.
 Your dreams, you have to realize.
 Nothing is stupid.
 Adventures will never stop.

~ Charline Figureau

My Name Means . . .

Xiao-jing
 It means credible, bright, kindhearted.
 It is the number 9.
 It is like the rainbow.
 It is the good news of my sister getting her letter of admissions.
 It is the memory of my mother,
 Who taught me to be honest and kind-hearted,
 When she patiently corrected my mistakes.
 My name is Xiao-jing.
 It means I believe that the world is full of love.

~ Xiao-jing Sun

I Am Jason

I am Jason Brown, King of my Destiny.
I wonder if I will be successful in my life.
I hear good things are hard to come by.
I see hard work pays off.
I want to make my family proud.
I am Jason Brown, King of my Destiny.

I pretend I'm on top of the world.
I feel like I just got off the bottom.
I touch every person's heart in my life.
I worry about my future.
I cry about my mother's death.
I am Jason Brown, King of my Destiny.

I understand you must work for the finer things in life.
I say live, love, laugh, and cry later.
I dream of stars and quasars.
I try my best to stay out of trouble.
I hope everything I've learned will give me success
on the GED test.
I am Jason Brown, King of my Destiny.

~ Jason Brown

Unshakable

Confidence

Calming and yet storming

Overwhelming joy

Never giving up

Fulfilling goals

Intelligence

Driven to win

Energetic and empowering

Noble accomplishment

Conquering fears

Everlasting success

~ Live Oaks ABLE Group Project:

Jason Brown

Mike Cook

Pat Hickman

Elizabeth Mechlem

Dawn Owens

Haley Rapoport

Linda Schuler

Self Motivation

Initiative to undertake or continue a task or activity
 without another's prodding or supervision.
 The ability to be righteous as well as careless,
 To have the knowledge to be fearless,
 A drive to handle and maintain,
 Keeping hope alive through struggle and strife
 when it seems like great strain,
 Having faith that you will gain,
 No matter the situation or the pain,
 When in doubt, filled with frustration,
 Not even stress can break your concentration,
 Converting your weakness into strength to keep from giving up,
 And relying on the support and love of those around
 when time is rough,
 When you can stand and outfight defeat with determination,
 This is what I define as self motivation.

~ Nickole Wyatt

Everybody Is a Star

"Everybody is a star. I can feel it when you shine on me."
 A song by Sly and the Family Stone speaks of the power that radiates from each one of us. Each individual is as important as the other. Our presence can contribute to someone's life or cause a void in any situation. Ever been told you were missed? I believe what is being missed is the radiant force that shapes our form that shines out upon those we know and love. Our presence can make a huge difference in someone's day and how they experience it.

Allowing our light to shine will help us to see brightness in the midst of darkness, to do right when others are doing wrong. It will cause others to have a curious wonder as to what it is that seems to radiate you. See the differences in others as not actually being different, but in how they shine their light.

No matter what the circumstances of our being born are, we are all here on purpose. Every time a woman gives birth, a star is born. Allow others to be who they are, a "star" here to illuminate our universe and bring their own creative quality to such a level that even the thought of them will leave an everlasting brightness.

The Sly and the Family Stone song continues: "Ever catch a falling star? There's no stopping it until it hits the ground." Or maybe not....

~ Rhonda Hudson-Williams

Operations of Life

Life is like mathematics.
When we use the wrong operation, both can be tough.
Add friends,
Subtract enemies,
Multiply happiness,
Divide sorrow.

~ Rashmi Binjawadagi

Hard Times Don't Last

Hard times don't last
Always stressing
Regretting the past
Depressed

Time to think
Improve my life
Make changes for the future
Eliminate negativity
Stay focused on positive things

Don't make the same mistakes
Overcome your past
Never give up on anything
Take control of your life

Learn from your mistakes
Always keep God in your life
Stay humble
Take life seriously

~ Darren Jones

Transportable

My Country

My country is one of several large countries located in Asia. The land stretches from the Yellow Sea's coast to the Himalayan Mountain Ranges and from Hong Kong through the Tropic of Cancer to the Yangtze River and the Yellow River next to Russia. She has existed for 5,000 years. She has the oldest empire with many beautiful stories surrounding her ancient history. Her name is China.

According to Chinese legend, our ancestor was a dragon who transformed himself into a human. His name was Yellow Emperor. He had yellow skin, black eyes, and black hair. He became the leader of the country many thousands of years ago when he fought the Yen Emperor's people and won. His descendants settled along the Yellow River Valley. Later, they spread north and south all over the length and breadth of the land. Today, the Han people consider themselves ancestors of the Yellow Emperor.

Within China, there are 56 different nationalities, of which 95% of the people are Han. They built the Great Wall to protect our country. It has been standing over 2,000 years and extends thousands of miles. It tells the disasters of war and the great stories of the motherland. It sings hymns of honor and disgrace, rise and decline. The Great Wall represents how isolated China used to be and how weak it was economically.

During the Cultural Revolution (1958-1978), the economic system was almost destroyed. The problem was the planned economic system. Land, factories, and businesses belonged to the country. The government made plans for everything. They planned how much food should be produced for each person. People couldn't sell anything on their own. They wanted to work more, but it was not allowed. At this point in time, the economic market was in danger.

Now, many changes have taken place. The most important one has been the government's focus on economic recovery.

The economic system has switched from a planned economy to a free market one. The government has opened Economic Development Zones in different areas and given tax benefits to overseas companies that use Chinese workers. They have given financial support to Chinese companies developing high technology and allowed free enterprise to flourish. Farmers can own their own land; people can have their own businesses and can sell whatever they want with minimal government interference. Finally, after twenty years, our GDP is fourth in the world. Hard work has made the difference.

Unfortunately, since the 1980s, as the economy has opened up to world markets, China's society has changed. It has caused an increasingly intense market competition. "Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten" has become the law of the marketplace. In facing this change, some people have forgotten their religion, their tradition, and who they are. They are busy working in the marketplace; they believe that money is what they need. Is this true? Is this all that life is about? Some Chinese say: "They are poor, they have only money!" Despite their spiritual poverty, it has allowed China to continue to be successful.

China has opened her gate to the world at last. The sleeping dragon is awake. He is no longer silent and isolated. The world awaits the coming red storm that is China and her people, the descendants of the Yellow Emperor who still stand on the land of Asia.

~ Li Yang

A View from the Smokies

One of the best things about traveling is the unique experiences in every place you go. Something I'll never forget is seeing a bird flying below me! I went to the Smoky Mountains with my best friend Michelle for a week in October. At that time, the fall foliage was at its peak. The bird's eye views on the mountaintops were unforgettable, especially at Grandfather Mountain.

On one side of the mountain is a silhouette of a giant face that looks like an old man. That's how Grandfather Mountain got its name. A short way is a nature preserve, gift shop, and restaurant. From there, we took two dark green converted school buses farther up the mountain. Our huge tour bus couldn't have made the turns on that road. Now I know what hairpin turns look like. It felt like we were always going in circles, like coming off an exit ramp.

We walked across the Mile High Swinging Bridge. It isn't actually a mile high, but if you're on the middle of the bridge and look down, the ground looks like it's a mile away! Walking across the bridge was exhilarating because it felt like I was walking in mid-air. The bridge led to a smaller peak, but it was still a good climb.

Some of us girls went to the top. I saw a couple standing at the edge with their backs turned posing for pictures. The backdrop was nothing but sky. It looked thrilling and heart stopping at the same time. I would have been afraid I would fall backwards off the mountain before I knew what was happening. We went as close to the edge as we dared. Standing at the top, we saw huge open spaces all around. The view was absolutely breathtaking. I could see for miles. Down below, the trees looked like toys, while above was the endless sky.

Crows aren't high on my list of favorite birds, but those were the only birds I saw on the mountain top. One was perched at the very edge of the peak, preening its feathers, while another

was gliding in circles. The amazing part was that it was hovering below me! I've never looked down on a bird like that before. Seeing that was so relaxing. I felt like I had no cares in the world. There was only the present moment to enjoy this sight of God's incredible creation!

The trip down the mountain was as thrilling as the view on the mountain top, but in a totally different way. I could see the turns in front of us shaped like skinny U's. I kept my eyes on the road, watching our bus make these roller coaster twists and turns. To top it all off, we were right beside the drop-off at times. There were no guard rails to keep us from rolling down the side of the mountain. Looking out the window, I couldn't see the road, only the sheer drop-off beside me. At times, I was holding my breath and waiting to see if we could stay on the black top, but I was never really scared. I like rides that make my heart pound because that makes me feel alive.

Between seeing awesome fall scenery and going on daring rides, there wasn't a dull moment on this trip! I'm looking forward to a return trip to the Smoky Mountains and another memorable adventure.

~ Susan B. Hostetler

The Foods of Africa

Most people in the world do not know the reality about Africa, especially when it comes to the diversity of food. The picture that people have of Africa is mainly of a handful of people who are victims of a calamity such as sickness, war, dryness in certain parts of the land, and corrupted government officials.

I am African. I come from the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.), located in the center of Africa. That is why it is called the heart of Africa.

Congo is rich in agriculture and has many mineral resources. The Congolese food comes from big plantations. The principal foods in the country are rice, beans, plantains, maize, many types of peanuts, and a lot of vegetables.

Eastern Congo produces coffee which is sold in and out of the country. You can find farms with a lot of beef cattle, too.

At the center of the country we have many plantations of palms. Even in the forest, there are palms and very nice grasses. They produce palm oil, maize, cassava, igname (which is like a sweet potato, but not sweet!), and other vegetables. There are also eggplants. The eggplants are different than those in America. The eggplants in America are black outside and big, but in my country the eggplants are the same light color inside and out, and they are small in size. We eat the eggplant to stabilize high blood pressure.

The southern Congo is rich in fish. We have many kinds of fish: smoked, dry, and fresh. We also eat goat, lamb, and other kinds of animals.

In conclusion, we have many native fruits and vegetables in the gardens and farms. We have a diversity of foods and everyone can eat whatever he or she wants.

~ Agnes Bijika

You're Welcome Here

Nestled in the valley in the foothills of Ohio is a very small, charming little village. The buildings speak of yesteryear and look like tasty little gingerbread houses. The Ohio River splashes against the rocks of the shore as the paddlewheel boats go down the river. Off in a distance, you hear the faint tunes of the calliope playing.

The people who live in this small, sleepy, Victorian style community are warm and caring. They know their neighbors and are there for them in times of trouble. This is what America is all about and was meant to be about – a quiet, hard-working people, who defend their way of life and beliefs.

In Marietta, no one is a stranger. So if you get tired of all the hustle and bustle and need a break, step back in time with us to this misty little Victorian community. Here you can lie restfully on the deck of the paddlewheel boat as it sails the Ohio and lulls your weary bones, having not a care in the world. Friend, here you are welcome.

~ Karen Oyler

Gardening Is Fun

Springtime is fun. That's when I get the itch to visit all the garden stores. Selecting my plants very carefully, putting them in threes or fours of the same color, trying to imagine my color scheme in my mind. So going to the nursery is an all-day event.

It's fun to design your own flower beds, figuring out the shape of your bed, and preparing the soil for planting. I have more shade than sun in my back yard, so the choice of plants is limited, but I can still have a colorful garden from spring until fall. The way to have color throughout your bed is to add annuals. Impatiens and begonias are wonderful plants; the choices of colors are great.

Who said you shouldn't put a shrub in that bed! Hydrangeas are a great shrub for your flower bed, and they bloom all summer. If you have woods in your back yard as I do, hostas work well. There are so many varieties of hostas, from a variegated leaf, yellow, and yes, blue-leafed hostas. If you have a lot of sun in your backyard, there are so many varieties to choose from, like cone flowers, black-eyed Susans, and daisies. This is just a short list. All of these plants are perennials, they come up every year.

So, if you like to get your hands dirty, I think we are ready to get started. Remember, put a little curve in that bed and give it personality. As for good fertilizer, nothing beats good old cow manure, and top it off with mulch. To add a little extra color, nestle a couple of flower pots in between your plants, to complement your existing blooms.

Now, sit back in that lawn chair with that tall glass of ice tea, and watch those flowers grow and bloom. You will enjoy them all summer long.

See, I told you. Gardening is fun.

~ Pat Hickman

The Best Experience of My Young Life

Two years ago I was fortunate to be selected to take part in the International Air Cadet Exchange. I was among the twenty young French pilots sent all around the world for three weeks of discovery, friendship, and aviation.

Before we all dispersed to our different destinations, the other nineteen French pilots and I met in Paris for an amazing weekend to visit the Air France headquarters, the Air France flying school, and the Charles de Gaulle Airport control tower. We had already met the others during the selection process, which was a stressful time. However, this time we would share our experiences in aviation in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Another French girl (Laura) and I had been chosen to go to Hong Kong. We were with fifty other young pilots from all over the world: USA, UK, Israel, Netherlands, Canada, Korea, China, Japan, Turkey, and France. During the flight to Hong Kong, we were invited to the cockpit, and we had the chance to talk to the pilots. The crew members were very pleasant and showed us all the switches!

When we landed in Hong Kong, three Chinese cadets were waiting for us. I wanted to show some interest in their language and culture, so I had previously learned a couple of words in Mandarin so I could communicate. Unfortunately in Hong Kong, I discovered that people speak Cantonese instead of Mandarin, so we all laughed at our vain attempt. It was so humid and hot, and there was a big smell of fish! After a long drive, we arrived at the hotel where all the cadets were staying. There was no time to unpack as we had to get ready for the welcoming dinner. All the cadets were wearing their official uniforms. There was no time to be shy! Everyone was talking to each other about their lives, their countries, and aviation, of course. Then we took lots of pictures with the other cadets and exchanged patches, pins, and wings. The atmosphere among all of us was just amazing, being with so many people from different backgrounds, countries, and cultures. Sharing

the same passion for aviation was so interesting. The main language used during the exchange was English. Some accents were harder to understand than others, particularly the Turkish and Korean. However, with smiles and hand movements, we could still understand each other pretty well.

The day after, we were all invited to our different consulates for a courtesy visit. I was expecting something very formal, but the French consul was very personable and laid back. He was very interested in aviation too!

Every night, the team leaders met to see what the schedule would be for the next day. Meanwhile, all the cadets were having fun, sharing gifts, food, stories, and clothes from our different countries. We were having such a good time! We had very formal meetings, for instance, visiting the different consulates, airport headquarters, and control towers. We attended fancy dinners with leaders of the Communist party and different kind of receptions. During one of the fancy dinners, we had to eat pork feet, tendon soup, and chicken feet. We all looked at each other and started laughing without being able to stop.

It was also the season of typhoons in Hong Kong. We all were stunned to see the strength of a huge storm. I never saw such a big rain and such an immense amount of water dropping from the sky. We also had fun outings like riding the sky lift on Hong Kong Bay, riding the Puma helicopter, and going to museums. We were also introduced to kung fu as well as a lion dance. It was just amazing! If you don't try, you can't imagine how hot it is under the lion costume. It's crazy how people can stay in the lion costume for so many hours.

We all became like family, but after three weeks, the exchange eventually came to an end. It was sad, because we had experienced so much together, and we had to go back to our own countries. Before we returned home, we were invited to a farewell dinner in the Hong Kong police headquarters where all the delegations gave speeches. It was very moving. After the dinner, the officers gave us our flight times. Laura and I were the first to

leave early in the morning. When we woke up, all the cadets were waiting for us in the hallway of the hotel, still in pajamas! After a lot of hugs and tears, we were finally going home.

I learned so much during these couple of weeks about the different cultures, different languages, customs, and aviation around the world. I wish everyone could have the chance to experience what I enjoyed there. It helped me to understand why people do certain things according to the country they are from. We all know that we have many places still left to visit around the world. Two years later, I still have contact with most of them, and we are thinking about meeting up again within a few years.

This experience strengthened my will to become a commercial pilot, and I hope that one day I will fly with some of the pilots I met in Hong Kong. It also strengthened my curiosity to continue to discover new countries and new cultures. The adventure in China led me to pursue and accept a job as an au pair in the United States. I'm presently living in Ohio, and I am happy to have the opportunity to improve my English, so that I can share this story. Experiencing new and different cultures is fascinating to me!

~ *Thibaud Freret*

Unbelievable

Dreams

Dreams are made of sweet, salty water pushing
against a sandy shore,
Rippling waves of happiness we come to adore,
A cool spill of water between your toes.

Dreams of a light breeze on a warm summer's day,
Like a beautiful kite, drifting away.
A vision of angels with long, flowing wings,
Graceful, soft, as they step in the dream.

Dreams – When you're off to sleep your spirit becomes free –
Free as a bird, free from all who cause you to weep.

Weeping, weeping, weeping, I say
For someone you have once loved who has passed away.
A boo-boo when you bump your head,
A child lost from a mother's arms, how sad!

Dreams – know that dreams are colorful and bright.
Let angels of multi-colored wings guide the night.

Dreams of heaven with beamed up light,
Also the stars that shine so white.
Dreams – let God enter your dreams tonight,
He will ensure a peaceful night.

Dream, Dream, Dream

~ Andretta Owens

How I Met My Husband

I was a widow, having lost my husband to illness in January, 2004. I worked two jobs to help me get through my grief and my obligations. On this particular day, August 2, 2008, I received a call from my assistant, who worked with me in the book store at church. She said she wouldn't be able to fill in for me Sunday, August, 3, 2008. She had to go out of town. I was scheduled to work my second job at May's on that day, and I had to call in to take off to take care of the book store.

I was a little late getting to church that day, and there was hardly any place to sit. As I stood in the aisle looking for a place to sit, I saw a seat in the rear of the church under the balcony. I moved into the pew, asking members to excuse my movement. I sat down and began to get involved in the service. As I took a pause, I noticed I had seen the gentleman sitting to my right before. I had met his wife some time ago. I nudged him and said, "How is your wife? I have not seen her for a long time." He said, "She passed away some months ago." I offered my condolences, and he said, "Thank you." He said he sat in the rear of the church this day because he couldn't take people continuing to offer their condolence and help. He said he was trying to move on with the rest of his life and work his way through grieving.

As church was about to get out, I leaned over and said, "I know how you feel. I lost my husband a few years ago. If you need someone to talk to here is my number." Then I said good-bye and went to open the book store. Church let out. I was setting up a clothes rack in the vestibule, and for some reason I looked toward the door. For a brief moment, he was there, turned around, looked in my direction, and then left.

After a couple of weeks, my husband to be (unbeknownst to me then) got the nerve to call my home phone. I was not there; I was at work. He said he made the call because on various nights when he sat on his bed reading his Bible (28 Psalms), the program where I wrote my phone number kept falling out of the

Bible cover. It seemed like a sign that God himself was directing his thoughts.

On another night he called my cell phone while I was at work. Being busy waiting on customers, I answered, quickly said, "I'll call you back," and hung up. Later on, he told me that he didn't know how I knew who was calling. He didn't know the number stayed on my phone.

When I got home, I checked my messages. I was somewhat curious about one phone number, as it was not familiar. So I called to find out who it was. When he answered the phone, I asked who was calling. He asked if I remembered the guy at church. I was surprised; we talked for a while that night.

That was the beginning of a relationship that I would never have dreamed of having! We talked for several weeks, becoming more and more comfortable with each other. Finally, we were able to get to church on the same day and at the same time – the 8 a.m. service. After service, he asked if I had to work that day, and I said yes. He asked if I had time for a quick breakfast, and I said yes. We each drove our cars to the Cracker Barrel restaurant. It was most enjoyable. It was only our first date.

In the days that came after that, we grew closer together. It was like God was directing our thoughts and conversation. We soon found out that some women at church had ideas about him that he was totally unaware of. They would not speak to us, and there were a lot of whispers and pointing of fingers.

We continued our romance, and eventually we got married. We honeymooned in Jamaica, which was a big surprise of sorts. He didn't tell me about where we would honeymoon until about a week prior to the wedding. I am from Jamaica and had not been back for over 30 years. It was wonderful. I am happy to say that feelings have subsided at church, and the parishioners now embrace us. We constantly hear remarks like, "You look so happy together." We are very happy and supportive of each other in all that we do!

When you meet the person that is the one, you can be sure that God is the director of the play!

~ *Maurine McCowan*

Famous Person

I was born with a good dose of wander lust. I've always wondered what's over the next hill. One person I would like to talk to would be Meriwether Lewis of Lewis and Clark. I would like to know whose idea it was for all the men who could write to keep journals so the story could be told from many eyes. They had heard stories of the great bears—their size and great ferocity. What was it like to see one up close, standing ten feet or more and coming at them? What were their thoughts when they first saw the Rocky Mountains, so tall and covered in snow? I would also like to know, if deep in their heart of hearts, if at anytime Lewis thought “this is it. We're done. We can go no further”? You can read the books, and there are many, but to talk to the man who was there would be something to remember.

~ *Jon S. Bellevue*

Inside Myself

Looking deep inside myself
 Many times I wonder
 If this is really me
 Or just a glimpse of images
 I hope to be one day.

Everyday I toil
 In what direction to go.
 Will someone show
 Me the way
 Or will I need
 God's divine intervention?

No matter where my life leads,
 It's what decisions
 I make now
 That will forever
 Shape who and what
 I will finally be.

~ *Kenneth Watkins*

Patrasche

Paty was a little girl. On a rainy day, she found a little dog near her house. She fell for the dog and brought it home. She asked her mom to keep the dog. Her mom hesitated, but Paty insisted. She named the dog Patrasche, and she treasured and loved it very much. Paty and Patrasche not only spent all their time together, they grew up together.

After 10 years, one rainy day, Patrasche died suddenly. Paty held Patrasche in her arms and cried all night. The next morning, Paty and her parents buried Patrasche in their yard.

She missed Patrasche. She felt sad and lonely for a while. Her parents suggested another dog, but Paty refused. After several years Paty became a beautiful woman. She met a man and decided to get married. The night before her wedding day, Paty had a strange dream. Patrasche appeared in her dream and told her, "I appreciated your kindness and affection. You buried me in your yard and I have watched over you. Though today is your last day at this home, please remember me. If you decide to have another dog, please name it Patrasche. It will be my reincarnation. I'm coming soon. We'll meet again." When Paty awoke, she cried for joy.

At the wedding ceremony, steps were heard approaching the bride through the middle of the church aisle. A dog ran toward Paty. She immediately recognized the little dog. It was Patrasche.

~ *Michi Suda*

Nature Lights

Snowflakes fall briskly
As wild rabbits
Make their impressions
On the cold, white ground.

Branches hit my window
As if to tell me
I am seeing nature
In its own elements.
For that I smile
As these sights are rare.

~ *Kenneth Watkins*

Space Vacation

He couldn't believe what he saw. All the mountains had green carpets with different colored decorations on them. All three yellow suns were high up in the blue sky, and they melted all the snow from the mountains into a big blue-green sea. Amazingly, everything was the opposite of the picture that he had in his head since his last visit to Kepler-801d.

He saw the mountains and the caves, but also a big blue-green sea and lots of strange butterflies, small insects, and pink lady bugs. There were also all kinds of flowers; for example, orange flowers with big eyes in the middle. It was so unbelievable. He had to stop and look at a flower more closely. The flower opened his big eye and scared Tommy so bad that he had to step away.

He felt something on his back and he turned. He found himself eye to eye with some kind of animal or plant. He was not sure what it was, but it was so weird. A plant or an insect, he was not able to decide. It looked like a plant. It had a green body, but it also had something – a yellow flower on the top of its “body” that looked like a head. That head had a big mouth. When Tommy had turned his head back, the plant-animal changed its flower color into a dark blue, and the mouth opened to grab Tommy's head. In a second, Tommy's mom grabbed him and pulled him away from that plant-animal. Instead of Tommy's head, that thing grabbed some flying insect. “It was very scary, Mom!” said Tommy. “I can see now what you mean when you told me Kepler-801d had changed!”

They kept exploring and discovered flora and fauna on Kepler-801d. They were surprised with all the discovered things. They were similar to plants, insects, and animals on Earth, but everything was genetically improved. These things were at least 10 million generations ahead of life on earth. Probably they had the future look of our flora and fauna.

“Hey Tommy, can you tell me where are you right now?” asked Tommy's teacher a couple of times.

"I ... mmm... I was thinking about space and the galaxy and a new planet. I am very sorry. I did not hear your question!" said Tommy.

"You were again imagining, weren't you? And now it was about today's lesson. Am I right?" asked Mrs. Bushong with a smile.

"Yes, you are right. I was thinking about a new planet, and I was there with my parents on vacation, and..." Tommy stopped for a second.

"And?" asked Mrs. Bushong with curiosity. Tommy started telling about his fantasy about a new planet and things he had seen there. All the class knew that he would not stop speaking about his adventures, so they let him talk because it was entertainment for everybody.

When Tommy had an inspiration, they usually called that "entertainment for the class" or "Tommy is the teacher of the class." Really, he is just a kid. He has an excellent imagination with all these TV shows about spaceships and galaxies.

~ *Milana Mihic*

Au-Pair

A suitcase that cannot weigh more than 50 pounds.

Imagine –
 putting your whole life in it.
 How would you do it?
 Is that even possible?

Saying good-bye.
 Imagine –
 leaving all your beloved friends and
 your family for a whole year.
 Is that even possible?

New life.
 Imagine –
 going to a different country with a
 different culture and a new language.
 Impossible?

Not for me.
 Imagine –
 gaining new experiences, getting to know new people and
 spending an unforgettable year.
 Now – that – sounds possible!

~ *Linda Jonczyk*

If I Were Another Person

If I were another person,
 Would I hate myself this much?
 Would I find myself to be pretty?
 Would I fear my own sweet touch?

If I were another person,
 Would I comfort myself at all?
 Would I be jealous of myself?
 Would I warn me not to fall?

If I were another person,
 Would I be my own best friend?
 Would I talk bad about myself?
 Would I let my life suddenly end?

If I were another person,
 Would I still care for him like this?
 Would I be worth him being faithful?
 Would I be the one he stays with?

~ Carrie Prentice

A Famous Person

A famous person I would like to meet is Barbara Walters. I admire her as an intelligent woman and news reporter. She has worked very hard to get where she is today. She broke into television journalism years ago when women weren't even considered for that particular job. I admire her skill in interviewing foreign heads of countries on her special programs. They try to avoid answering her questions directly by skirting around the answer, but she gets her answer indirectly. I also enjoy her program *The View*. She has very interesting and diverse topics and people on the show. All of her programs are excellent and informative. This makes me want to meet Barbara Walters.

~ Mary Picone

Afraid . . . to Want

I am afraid of extremely hot temperatures in the summer.
 I am afraid of cold wind in the winter.
 I am afraid of flowers fading away.
 I am afraid that grassland will wither.
 I am afraid I might lose my self confidence.
 I am afraid of being ignorant.
 I am afraid of a disaster.
 I am afraid of hostility between people.
 I am afraid that people won't like each other.
 I am afraid of war and death.

I want wind in the summer.
 I want a beautiful garden.
 I want soft grass.
 I even want every day to be a holiday.
 I want a friend.
 I want love.
 I want wisdom.
 I want courage.

But what I want most of all, is peace throughout the world!
 Most of all.

~ Biao Anna Zhao

Author Biographies

Claudia Agudelo - p. 41

I am Claudia Agudelo. I am Colombian and have lived in the USA for 8 years with my husband and my two children (Tomas 11, Santiago 8). Some of my hobbies are crafting, painting and doing things with my hands. I have been going to ESOL classes for about three years and it has helped me to learn English and understand American culture and traditions. Thanks so much to my English teacher and the volunteers for the time that they spend with us.

Rahem al Hazami - p. 55

Rahem enjoys going to the gym, swimming, kickboxing, and listening to jazz. He's very proud of his U.S. citizenship which he received in 2009.

Wasel Aldalli - p. 65

Ericka Allen-Wooten - p. 120

Ericka Allen-Wooten is a student at Mt. Healthy, TLC (Trinity Lutheran Church) near Cincinnati, Ohio, and is in the ABLE/GED program with Great Oaks. She is a proud mother of six children and has four grandchildren. When her youngest child started school, she decided to go back to school to get her GED. She wanted to show her children that anything is possible in life if you try hard enough.

Theara Angschwein - p. 44

Wanda L. Babb - p. 114

Jon S. Bellevue - p. 159

I was born in Maine and ended up in Cleveland 35 years ago. I was laid off from my job of 32 years. I started my GED seven months ago and passed on the first try! I am an outdoors man and hope one day to retire to the country.

Agnes Bijika - p. 147

Agnes Bijika is from the Democratic Republic of Congo in central Africa. She now lives in the United States. One of her goals is to earn her GED and then go on to college to become a psychologist. She currently attends ABLE classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, OH.

Ana Bilanuba - p. 44**Rashmi Binjawadagi - p. 138**

I am currently living in Wooster, Ohio. I am from the city of Dharwad, located in Karnataka State, India. I have been living here in the United States for the past ten months. My husband is doing research in the Food and Animal Health Research Program at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Developmental Center (OARDC) in Wooster. I hold a Masters Degree in Analytical Chemistry from India. My undergraduate majors were in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. I have a three-year-old son.

Beatriz Blanco - p. 44**Issam Boukabou - p. 11, 97**

Issam Boukabou, from Morocco, is an ESL student in Columbus looking forward to furthering his education.

Treva Britten-Ensley - p. 15

Treva is the mother of two wonderful daughters, and a great son. She is also a grandmother of five handsome grandsons, and two beautiful granddaughters. She is family oriented, and in her spare time, she loves to cook for her family. She loves to communicate with God through letters of hope, struggles, and victories. She became a teenage mother in the ninth grade and shortly after, she dropped out of high school, and that broke her mother's heart. In 2011, Treva returned to school determined to rectify her mistake. Her goals are to obtain a GED, and pursue a career in Information Technology. She also plans to become an author of multiple best-selling inspirational books. She wants to show her grandchildren by example that it is cool to stay in school, and strive only for the

best. Her family is very proud of her, they give her unconditional and unlimited love, support, and encouragement that she needs to achieve her goals. Ultimately, her deceased family members, especially her mother, are the inspiration for this determination.

Jason Brown - p. 37, 132, 135

My name is Jason Brown. I am from Chicago. I was born in October of 1984 and raised in Chicago. I've moved back and forth from Chicago to Cincinnati my whole life. I now live in Milford, Ohio. I attend GED classes at the Live Oaks ABLE program to obtain my GED and start an automotive trade.

Barry Bullard - artwork p. 185**Solange Busarello - p. 77**

Solange Busarello is an ESL student in Columbus, Ohio. She is from Brazil and proud to have her American citizenship.

Germaine Campbell - p. 113

Germaine Campbell will be taking her GED test this spring after months of attending classes faithfully. She is employed at Children's Hospital in Cincinnati and would like to advance in her career by obtaining her GED.

George Carpenter - p. 123

My name is George Dean Carpenter Jr. My birthday is October 21, 1990. I am single at this time and have no kids. I am determined to get my GED. I was born and raised in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and attend classes in Marietta, Ohio.

Thoeun Cham-Yann - p. 59

Thoeun Cham is from Cambodia. She has recently become a United States citizen. She is a dedicated student who helps others in her ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class. Thoeun wants to attend GED classes and continue in higher education.

Emma Chavez - p. 44

Lisa Chupp - p. 38, 72

I live in Fredericksburg, OH. I enjoy going to the lake on my brother's pontoon boat, vacationing with my husband and his family, and watching the birds eat from my feeder. I was inspired to write about my teacher.

Michael Cook - p. 135

My name is Michael Cook. One of my most favorite things to do is spend time with my Grandpa. He has taught me a lot! I am attending Live Oaks and enjoy all that I am learning.

Amanda Cronin - p. 37

My name is Amanda Cronin. I enjoy playing the guitar. I believe that people have the power to put positive energy into their surroundings and to take negative energy away. I have just aced the pre-GED and plan to pass the GED this spring!

Anne Devlin - p. 44**Maria Dominguez - p. 44****Charlie Dondiego - p. 109**

I am the mother of two beautiful children. I am working hard on getting my GED.

Latifa Douha - p. 97

Latifa is hard at work writing in the ESL program in Columbus.

Nelly Dulin - p. 91**Karina Eriquer - p. 44****Yudith Escobar - p. 79**

My name is Yudith Escobar. I'm from Santa Cruz-Bolivia. I'm 24 years old and I'm in America as an au pair. I have already finished English as a second language in my country, and now I would love to get my GED to prove to myself that I'm good enough to do it.

Deborah Eydel - p. 37

My name is Deborah. I have three wonderful children and eight beautiful grandbabies; they are my world. I have had a lot going on in my life for the last few months, but things are getting better because I have a new person in my life who is helping me through.

Charline Figureau - p. 130**Karen Flick - p. 17**

I am the mother of two girls, Cynthia and Angelica. I have a grandson, Eric. I am married to a wonderful man who supports me fully.

Thibaud Freret - p. 44, 150**Elisabeth Froehlich - p. 44****Maribel A. Gallegos - p. 121**

Maribel was born in Durango, Mexico in 1982. She, her husband, and two children left Mexico because of the violence in that country. She arrived in the USA in 2006. She attends the GED class to improve her English and life for her family.

Pearl Gayle - p. 7

Pearline Gayle is originally from Kingston, Jamaica. She lived in Connecticut for 38 years. She and her husband relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2010. She is a mother of four children and three grandsons. She attends Scarlet Oaks and is in the ABLE/GED program.

Amanda Green - p. 46

My name is Amanda J. Green. I am 21 years old. I was home schooled all my life. I baby-sit for a one year old and a three year old. I house-sit and dog-sit to earn money. I want my GED so the government will recognize it.

Jerome Hailey - p. 8**Alec R. Hamler - p. 45**

Robin Harris - p. 113

Robin Harris is a GED student who wants to complete her education and be a role model for her children. She enjoys drawing, and sketching is her passion. She would like to pursue a career in that field.

William Travis Harris Jr. - p. 45

My name is William Harris, Jr. I am twenty-three years old and currently reside in Baltimore, Ohio, with my wife Jennifer and our three daughters. Bethani is nine, Brenna is six, and Amira is seventeen months. The two oldest girls are from my wife's first marriage. Yes, she is a little bit older than I am. I was born in Bradenton, Florida, and spent most of my life there until about three and half years ago. I am very interested in anything and everything to do with technology. It has always been something that just comes naturally to me. I have recently attained my G.E.D. and immediately started the enrollment process with Phoenix. I want to be able to give my children what I was unable to have as a child. I feel that starting with Phoenix will be a great way to boost my career and facilitate my ever-growing knowledge base.

Pat Hickman - p. 135, 149

I was born in Chillicothe, Ohio, and am the youngest of seven. I'm married with two daughters and five grandchildren. Of the jobs that I've had over the years, the most interesting was being an optician for 19 years. I love to garden and pencil sketch old farm houses and barns. I reside in a small town on a quiet cul-de-sac with my husband Don. And Eleanor the cat.

Laura Hodge - p. 37, 119

My name is Laura Hodge and I have a daughter who is just a great kid all around. She is why I work so hard to get my G.E.D. Attending Live Oaks is one of the best things I have done. I realized I can complete my goal. Having God and Amber on my side means I can do it all.

Melissa Hodge - p. 54**Susan B. Hostetler - p. 145**

My name is Susan Hostetler. I work at Lem's Pizza in Fredericksburg, which is also my hometown. Going on new adventures is something I really enjoy about traveling to different places.

Rhonda Hudson-Williams - p. 137**Cory Hull - p. 26**

My name is Cory Hull. I am 23 years old. I live in the Lima, Ohio, area. I've been writing poems and songs for eleven years. I discovered my talent one day when I was writing a poem for my mother on Mother's Day. Ever since then, I can't put down a pen.

Karima Jabrah - p. 44**Nathan Jackson - p. 113**

Nathan Jackson is working on improving his academic skills so that he can begin a full-time program in Auto Body Repair at Scarlet Oaks. The most important things in his life are his two children whom he wants to provide for.

Linda Jonczyk - p. 165

My name is Linda Jonczyk. I'm 19 years old and come from Germany. Since last September, I have lived in the U.S. and worked as an Au - Pair. After about 7 months of living here, I can already say that this is a great opportunity to improve my language skills, get to know a new culture and get to be more independent. Also, you have the chance to learn about a new country, travel a lot and meet new people. All that makes your life here so special. Although I miss home, I'm glad and thankful to have the opportunity to spend a whole year in a foreign country and gain experiences that may help me in my future life. I will never regret my decision to come here.

Darren Jones - p. 139

Kori Kelley - p. 110

I was born in Youngstown, Ohio, and am the mother of four. I like to read, cook, and watch movies. Once I obtain my GED, I would like to attend Youngstown State University for Forensic Science.

Tamatha Kisner - p. 124**Arjana Kurti - p. 41**

Arjana Kurti was a teacher in Albania. She had a great life there and felt happy. She always followed her dreams. Her first years in the U.S. were difficult for her, but now she is rebuilding her life.

Nicole LaCroix - p. 63

I am a 34-year-old mother of three. I have enrolled back in college to better the life of my family. The ABL program has made this possible for me.

Danielle M. Lawson - p. 53**Junghwa Lee - p. 70**

Junghwa Lee, born in Seoul, Korea, is a musician, *gayageum* player. She was a member of Kyounggi Korean Music Orchestra and performed at various recitals and concerts. She moved to the United States to introduce her music to the Western world as well as to experiment with combining *gayageum* with western music. She has performed in several events around Arizona, Ohio and New York.

Yuan Li - p. 68

My name is Yuan Li. I came from China. I attended ESOL classes for two years. I tested out of that class and into the ABL class this year. I love both classes. I am thankful I have a chance to study here.

Stephanie Lockhart - p. 116

My name is Stephanie Lockhart and I am 22 years old. I was born and raised in Shelby, Ohio. I have one older brother, Anthony Lockhart and one younger sister, Faith Stone. When I write poems, they come from the heart. I write my feelings down about

a certain subject or someone and then give the poem a name. I have three beautiful kids, one daughter and two sons. My daughter, Mercedes, is seven years old. My middle son, Dakota, is four years old and my youngest son, Tyson, is a year old. I know for me to only be 22 years old, I had three kids at young ages. In a way I'm glad I had to grow up fast because I love my three children with all of my heart.

Tamiko Longmire - p. 31

Tamiko Longmire lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. She obtained her GED through the ABL program at TLC, Mt. Healthy, a site of Scarlet Oaks/Great Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is currently pursuing her secondary education at Raymond Walters College, a branch of the University of Cincinnati and is currently enrolled in the Administrative Management Technology Program. Getting her GED was a lot of hard work with regular attendance that paid off in the end. She is looking forward to reaching new levels in her educational pursuits.

Donna S. Lynch - p. 30

Donna is a mother of three little girls and is working on her GED. She equates shoes to love because it is something most women can relate to.

Brittany Martin - p. 105

My name is Brittany Martin. My birthday is September 19, 1985. I have three kids, two boys and one girl. I live in Marietta, Ohio. I started going to GED classes to better my life so I can be something for my kids. I have always wanted to be a massage therapist so my goal is to get my GED and go to college. I would like to thank Julie Stoffel because if it was not for her, I would not be able to do it.

Shayne Mast - p. 95**Carolina McClintock - p. 81**

Jack McClure - p. 37

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.

Maurine McCowan - p. 156

My name is Maurine J. McCowan. I am from Jamaica. I am happily married and have five children and nine grandchildren. I live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am currently attending ABLE classes at Scarlet Oaks to get my GED.

Elizabeth Mechlem - p. 135

My name is Elizabeth. I am a mother of two daughters, and I am attending Live Oaks/ABLE class. I am working towards getting my GED, so that I can achieve my goals in life.

Milana Mihic - p. 163

My name is Milana Mihic. I was born May 12, 1986 in Karlovac, Croatia. I came here in December 2010 to be an Au Pair in a Serbian-American family here, in Delaware, Ohio, and to learn as much as I can about American history, tradition, living and to improve my English.

Lara Miranda - p. 82**Tabatha Moore - p. 19, 37**

My name is Tabatha Moore. I am 27 years old. Born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. Daughter of Tony Moore, sister to Toni Jackson, Terry Jackson and Travis Jackson. I have three beautiful, wonderful children. Jenna 9, Brie 11, and Kelsee 6. I am married to the greatest man, Richard Dipietrantio, without him I'd be lost. He has become my strength, my rock and my best friend. I wrote this story based on my life experiences. Life has thrown me so many curve balls, yet as I've written in my stories, each experience has made me stronger. It has also made me who I am today. I've learned that with loss comes pain, but it's pain that either makes or breaks you. With me it's made me a stronger, wiser, and better person.

Maria Luz Munoz - p. 44**Martha Ayala Munoz - p. 44****Rosa Munoz - p. 44****Walter Munoz - p. 44****Cesar Osegueda - p. 44****Andretta Owens - p. 155**

Andretta Allen-Owens is currently a student at Mt. Healthy, TLC (Trinity Lutheran Church) near Cincinnati, Ohio, and is in the ABLE/GED Program with Great Oaks. She has been many things in this life: a wife, a mother of two daughters, a grandmother, and a homeowner. The last five years have been hard for Andretta because, without a GED, you lack the education you need. She would like to thank her teachers and volunteers. "With God, my family, and friends, this can happen for me, it's something I need and want."

Dawn Owens - p. 37, 135

My name is Dawn Owens. I have four wonderful children. I currently attend Live Oaks, working to get my GED. My goal is to go to school and study to be a dental assistant. I want to make a better life for my children.

Karen Oyler - p. 148

I am a person that believes that one must grow and expand their horizons to truly have a fulfilling life. I believe giving up is the only true failure in life, and I am very passionate about my beliefs.

Desislav Pavlov - p. 44**Tassionette Perryman - p. 111****Mary Picone - p. 167**

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1930. I had a wonderful childhood even though my father died when I was four years old. I met my husband when I was 13. He went into the army in World War II. We were married when he returned home. We had a beautiful

daughter. She is married and has three children. Our marriage lasted 60 years and then my husband passed away. It was a wonderful marriage; I miss him a lot.

Carrie L. Prentice - p. 67, 104, 166

Chun Qin - p. 84

Dan Yu Qin - p. 44

Haley Rapoport - p. 108, 135

I'm an adult who has gone back to school. I'm hoping to go to college. My husband and I have three children. In my spare time I read, quilt, and take bicycle rides with our daughter.

Raquel Rodriguez - p. 4, 44, 129

Rueben Raul Rodriguez - artwork p. xii

My name is Rueben Raul Rodriguez. I am from Ottawa, Ohio. I've made some bad choices in my life which I have had to deal with. I must admit that I have learned a lot from my consequences that were given to me. I have turned my life around. I obtained my GED just recently. This was very important to me. I have always liked to draw to relax. With the goals I have set for myself, I will need more education.

Nathaniel Roy - p. 113

Nathaniel Roy is pursuing his GED so he can go into the law enforcement program at Scarlet Oaks. He has always wanted a career in this field. He would like to be able to provide his daughter with a secure future.

Imelda Ruiz - p. 44

Kathy Runyan - p. 113

Kathy Runyan will be taking her GED test this spring. Her goal is to prove to herself that she can obtain her GED. She loves learning and would like to advance in her job.

Elizabeth Sacksith - p. 3

Elizabeth Sacksith is from Laos. She is a United States citizen and likes living in Columbus. She is a Buddhist and attends her temple regularly for religious guidance and celebrations. Liz wants to continue to improve in English writing and speaking.

Carrie Jean Sanders - p. 22

I am a 55-year-old housewife and mother. I love to sew and spend time with family. It has been 17 years since my daughter's death. She is in my thoughts always. My goal is to get my GED and see my grandchildren grow up.

Jenny Sasson - p. 44

Angela Satterwhite - p. 21, 113

Angela Satterwhite would like to get her GED so she can obtain a better job. Her dream is to own her own home so that her children and grandchildren can enjoy it with her. She has had some setbacks in her education but is determined to persevere.

Linda Schuler - p. 35, 135

My name is Linda Schuler and I am the proud mother of four and grandmother of nine. I am proud to say that this past January, I finally got my GED! I worked hard and NEVER gave up. A new world is open to me. I am not sure what I will do next. I hope to get a job and maybe I will pursue college. I feel empowered!!

Debra Scott - p. 13

My name is Debra Scott. I am a fifty-six year old mother of two sons. My oldest has four children, and the youngest has one child. I have worked my entire adult life. I am looking for another job. I am not meant to be a full-time grandmother. I love them all, but I need to work.

Adriana Silveira - p. 41

My name is Adriana Silveira. I'm 21 years old and I'm from Caracas, Venezuela. I graduated from Culinary School in Caracas. I live in Dayton, OH, where I work as an au pair taking care of three boys. I'm an ESOL student and I love the classes!

Daniel Skodny - p. 103

My name is Daniel Skodny. I was born in Norwalk, Ohio, and I'm 28 years old. I have two wonderful children, but because of choices I have made, I have been away from them. I am working hard to turn my life around for myself and my children. I feel it is never too late to make changes. I have not written many poems, but when I do, I express my feelings on paper. I work with my father in his motorcycle shop and hope someday my daughters can work with me at this shop.

Michi Suda - p. 161**Lee Sullivan - p. 42**

My name is Lee Sullivan. I am 66 years old. I came to GED classes to learn to read. I like to hunt and fish. I want my FFC licenses.

Pattariya Summart - p. 98

My name is Pattariya Summart. I am an au pair in America. I'm from Thailand, and I've been here since May 2010. I love reading, singing, smiling and being in nature. Also, I love learning English and hope to teach English one day. I am so thankful that Scarlet Oaks gives me the opportunity to study there which helped me achieve my goal of getting my GED.

Xiao-jing Sun - p. 131**Salif Sy - p. 57**

Salif Sy is from Mauritania. He now lives and works in the United States. He is attending classes so he can earn his GED. His goal is to one day own his own business.

Devon Talley - p. 25**David Teegarden - p. 74****Stella M. Thomas - p. 43**

Stella is a student at Seeds of Literacy in Cleveland, and has written poetry for the student newsletter.

Jesika Tomblin - artwork front cover

My name is Jesika Tomblin and I am 20 years old. School was always extremely difficult for me from Kindergarten through 8th grade because I was bullied by other students and even some teachers for various reasons. It was hard to get up for school every day, knowing that my day would be hard to bear. High school was the same, but I was so emotionally drained by low self-esteem and it affected my grades so badly that dropping out of school was my only option due to a low GPA and low credits. I decided that earning my GED would be the best way to build myself back up from ground zero and eventually earn a college degree in art. Until then, I'll be an activist against teen bullying and being the best person that I know how to be!

Adriana Tristan - p. 44**Patricia Vargas - p. 44****Kenneth Watkins - p. 160, 162**

My name is Kenneth Watkins and I am a part-time writer. I am getting my GED to help further my writing career. I also wanted to show my three kids that you should never give up on your goals.

Amanda Whitlatch - p. 18

I have been homeless since 2005 when my father died and my life fell apart. I struggled temptations and challenges. This year I have found support in the home of some caring people and I have finally begun to get my life back on track. My G.E.D. teachers have encouraged and nurtured me. I will forever be grateful for the support I have received this year. My dream is to finish my education and help others.

Viktoriiia Wilburn - p. 113

Viktoriiia Wilburn was born in the Ukraine and came to the United States nine years ago. She plans on taking her GED test this summer and then pursue a career in Dental Hygiene.

Nickole Wyatt - p. 136

Mizuko Yamagishi - p. 41

I'm Mizuko Yamagishi. I came from Japan. My husband and I have been living in Ohio since last May. We like to travel and hope to visit many places upon retirement.

Li Yang - p. 143

I have been in the U.S. since 2003. I'm a mother and a homemaker. My family likes ice skating and living in a free nation. We have a happy life here.

Bing Yu - p. 44**Huizhen Zhang - p. 39**

I am from China. When I first arrived in America I was bored. I felt nervous whenever I went outside because my English was very poor. Then my landlady told me about a school. I've been attending ESOL classes at Canton City Schools for seven months. Now I have confidence to go to my daughter's school for the parent-teacher's conference. I enjoy learning English. My goals are to speak English well and to make more friends.

Biao Anna Zhao - p. 44, 168

Honorable Mention

Izdehar A.	Tori Cain
Stephanie Abbatiello	Darlene Calton
Naheed Akhtar	Awilda Caraballo
Falah Alsalih	Carmen Caraballo
Nate Alvord	Brenda Carroll
Angela Amerson	William Carter Sr.
Chawone C.Ardrey	Charbel Chahine
Abeer Awad	Daovadi Morear Chen
Melissa L.Ayers	Thomas Christman
Pat Badalamante	Joseph Ciarallo
Marcus J. Barganier Jr	David Coker
Samanthe Barrometti	Ed Compton
Bohdan Barytsky	Ada Cortada
Randah Bassa	Alice L. Couch
Wendy Y. Bautista	John Covic
Jo Ann Begley	Courtney Cox
Rita Belo	Cui Cui
Priscilla R. Bennett	Danuta Czyzycka
Ewa Weglarz Biesiada	Stanislaw Czyzycka
Oksana Blokha	Jennifer Davenport
Frederick Boone	Tarinda Davis
Vannak Boyce	Lacey Dawes
Betty Bragg	Xiaohong Deng
RaeAnn Braun	Leroy Dickson
Joy Brown	Angela Dingess
Juliet N. Brown	Ashley Lyn Dingey
Monica Brown	Tho Doan
Phillip Brown	Acaena Dominguez
Ramond Brown	Melissa Dray
Sandra Brown	Mary Dressler
Rosa Burchett	Humberto Duarte
Lidia Burger Kotwica	Lisa DuPont
Halimah Burnett	Sian Dye
Pamela S. Burton	Davis Edison
Kristina Butcher	Donald D. Evans

Sajeda Faruque
 Mindy Faulkner
 Irena Firmanty
 Danielle M. Foronda
 Keyana Frenay
 David Fryberger
 Abraham Gadji
 Mark Gain
 Delano Gaskins
 Hovhannes Gasparyan
 Elizabeth Gladman
 Angela N. Glassburn
 Jimmy Go
 Sherry Godsey
 Alexandra E. Goins
 Flavia S. Gomes
 Ludvin Gomez
 Melissa Gray
 Brenda K. Green-Taborn
 W. Jeannine Gregory
 John Hall
 Josh Hall
 Jenny Han
 Nicole Hanlon
 Iryna Hapyak
 Angela Harper
 April Harper
 James Harris
 Jamie Harris
 Pok Hai Harris
 Tiffany Harrison
 Dwayne Hasan
 Roger Hayes
 Marina Hernandez
 John Herron
 Sheila Hightower
 Ying Zhi Huang
 Kaoutar Layss
 Casey Isabella
 Ulises Isais
 Daiyrdek Ismanaliv
 Ahlam Jaber
 Martina Jackson
 Nathan Jackson
 Lolaunda Jamar
 Richard James
 Rony Jannan
 Angel Jansn
 Mynique` Jeff
 Hasina Jenan
 Ryan Jones
 Tonia Jones
 Yolanda J. Jones
 Tracey Lynn Kearns
 Blake Keel
 Joanna M. Keim
 Makara Keng
 Frederick Kennedy
 Akila Khalfoun
 Angela M. Kidd
 Lorenzo King
 DeShaun Knott
 Betty Krimmer
 Hidemi Kuroda
 Hosam Lahoud
 Cheyra Laufer
 Leconte Law
 Carol Lawhun
 Angel Lee
 Jinhee Lee
 Pam Lehman
 James L. Leiendecker
 Grace Lewandowski
 Mirel Lico
 Betty Litteral
 Bobby Litteral
 Tim Livingston
 Dinoralys Lopez

Arnetta Love
 Elena Luna
 Ngoc Kim Luong
 Kimberly Lyons
 Fatihah Majid
 Geralyn Manning
 Khaisy Maokhamphiou
 Erica Marrero
 Amy Mason
 Marta Mateo
 Toni Mays
 Evan T. Maze
 Marilyn McCoy
 Rob McKinney
 Clarissa Miller
 Jo Miller
 Jonathan B. Miller
 Karen Miller
 Kristen N. Miller
 Lizzie Miller
 Ny Mollika
 Brenda Moore
 Tricia Moore
 Matthew Morris
 Crystal Morrow
 Rosa Elva Munoz Mata
 Faith Murphy
 Mildred Myles
 Fadima Nageye
 Raymone Nelsony
 Hau Nhan
 Alex Nyarko
 Sevim Okumus
 Ilyas Omar
 Cynthia R. O'Neal
 Marcos A. Orellana
 Melanie Orosz
 Iman Orra
 Megan Sky Orzechowski
 Sheila Pacheco
 Ana Padilla
 Evelyn Parker
 Andrea Patton
 Josette Maria Paz Rivera
 Ayse Perihan
 Fernando Pichardo
 Cosset Pineda
 Markisha Pinkard
 Cathy Poppell
 Jazmin Powell
 Meranda K. Pruett
 Siran Qin
 Basilio Quinones
 Michelle Ransby
 Sara Mos Rawahneh
 Donald L. Rayburn
 Stephanie Rayburn
 Tashara A. Reese
 Harold Reeves
 Chico Reiter
 Bozidar Relic
 Huaxiang Ren
 Kathy Richardson
 Naren Ritchie
 Sharon Robinson
 Migdalia Rodriguez
 Geovanni Rodriguez-Marsh
 William Rogers
 Laura Romero
 Amal Roueihb
 Isis Roufail
 Mervat G. Roufail
 Dequenna Saddler
 JaNeyce Sanders
 Tamara Saraney
 Rafila Sarbu
 Cynthia Savage
 Mira Savic

Doug Schamer
Laurene Schrock
Caroline Scoggins
Edmund Serafin
Lateefah S. Shabazz
Kimberly Sharp
Samir Shehala
Archana S. Shirbahadurkar
Melody Shlyk
Cindy Shockey
Pamela Shumway
Dana Simpson
LaShaundra Sims
Anthony Sinito
April A. Smith
Bonnie Smith
Michelle Smith
Ny Som
Southeast GED Class
Teresa Sowinska
Crystal Sprague
Derek Allen Stevens
Radojka Stojanovic
Jonathan Stone
Floyd Stover
Malgorzate Szpakut
Sachi Taira
Lucy Talley
Yan Ping Tan
Lye Ming Tang
Fannie Taylor
Michael Taylor
Patrick Terbrack
Val Rel Es Thach
Lamere Thomas
Rose Thomas
Tara Thomas
Pauline Thompson
Kassandra Thorn

Aaron Tipton
Lesbia Treminio
BuuDinh Truong Pan
Stacy Tucker
Petro Tvigun
Mary Uller
Yanilu Valtierra Sanchez
Kayleigh Lynn VanHoughton
Belen Vasquez
Gloria Villanueva
Michiko Wakiya
Clarence Walker
Ewa Warchol
Miraslaw Warchol
Warrensville AM GED Class
Warrensville PM GED Class
James Watson
Janyce Weaver
Nichole Weber
Laura Wengerd
Andre L.White
Courtney Willett
James Williams
Kenyetta S. Williams
Roseann Wilson
Afi Wozufia
Junior Yoder
Maria Zeffer
Inesa Zelepuhin
Jing Zhang
Joanna Zieba
Mariola Zimnoch
Dijana Zivic
Bridgette Zurfluh