

Beginnings xvii

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER



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Foreword

I flunked out of high school in 1986. In 1987, I earned my GED and started college. In that sense, my journey is perhaps similar to that of many of the authors represented in this book. Like them, I had no shortage of writing talent. Like them, I overcame my failure to graduate high school and became a writer. Unlike them, it took me years of detours and wrong turns to get to my destination.

I got two college degrees and did soulless corporate jobs for years. Later, I opened a remodeling company and worked with my hands doing carpentry. When my company went belly-up, I sold carpet and wine; I sorted packages in the middle of the night. Finally, I landed back in the career I'd begun in sixth grade—writing.

The first novel I wrote didn't sell because it sucked. In fact, it was so bad that of the three literary agents who read it, two quit the business forever.

Next, I wrote *ASHFALL*, which was named one of the top 5 young adult novels of 2011 by National Public Radio, a Kirkus Reviews Best Teen Books winner, and a New Voices Selection by the American Booksellers Association. As a result of the success of *ASHFALL*, it was my honor to speak to the authors of *Beginnings XVI* in 2013.

I shared with those authors what I immodestly call my three and a half stupid rules for writers. They're simple. First, you have to read a lot. Second, write a lot. And third, show your work to people who will give you tough, serious feedback. The half rule? Marry someone with great health insurance. (It's tough to get good health insurance when you're self-employed.)

Did you notice what I didn't mention in those three and a half rules? Talent. Every single one of the authors published in this volume is brimming with talent. But talent counts for next to nothing in writing or in life. Talent didn't help these authors earn their GEDs. Talent didn't force them to sit in their chairs and bleed the words onto the page even when every word felt impossibly painful, felt like ripping out a dark piece of their soul and mashing it buglike onto the white paper. Talent had nothing to do with the courage it took to take a blind risk, leaping with their writing into the void, casting their words out to be read and judged.

That took guts, not talent. Determination.

And that is why I'm confident that you hold an extraordinary book in your hands. A book with a perfect title: *Beginnings*. You have the rare privilege of reading these authors at the very beginning of their careers.

Not all of them will continue as authors. Not all who strive to publish more of their work will succeed. But for those few among them, the most determined among them, this book is just a start, just a step along the path to greater things.

You and I will have the pleasure of saying we knew them when

Enjoy!

Mike Mullin
2013 Writers' Conference Keynote Speaker

Acknowledgements

Each year since 1997, the Ohio Literacy Resource Center celebrates ABLE student authors and honors their accomplishments at the Ohio Writers' Conference. Close to 300 pieces of writing were received for review and possible publication in *Beginnings XVII*. Seventy-two pieces were chosen for this edition. We are proud to publish the 17th volume of exceptional writing by Ohio's ABLE authors and commend these writers for their courage to share their stories.

We also honor and thank ABLE teachers and tutors who dedicate their time to encourage students and provide instruction and guidance. We applaud each instructor for their passion and creativity to motivate ABLE students throughout their writing journeys.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the Ohio Board of Regents' Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program. Their seventeen years of support for *Beginnings* and the Writers' Conference have allowed many ABLE students to become published authors and public speakers.

We welcome our 2014 keynote speaker, author James Renner, to this year's Writers' Conference, and we're pleased to have our resident storyteller Lyn Ford participating again this year.

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“Breaking Free, New Beginnings”

~ by Andrew Rodriguez

The following pieces were written by Writers' Conference 2012 participants during the interactive workshop conducted by Author, David Hassler.

**Confident
The Joy of This Day**

The excitement, the many
Different faces, the pleasure
Of being recognized, The feeling
of ruling the moment
Knowing we are special
And everything around us
Is special, to enjoy the
Wonders of life, the
Wonderful smiles and the
Great feeling of freedom.

~ Angela Satterwhite
& Carrie J. Sanders

A Letter to Nerves

You, the butterfly inside,
I need to think to be.
Settle softly now!
I don't know where to sit because of you.
I run a red light because of you.
I mispronounce my name because of you.
I offer my left hand to shake because of you.
Settle softly now!
As the day comes to an end
And the cool night approaches,
Relaxation takes over.
The gentle night breeze soothes.
Settle softly now.

~ Nicole LaCroix
Patricia Hughes-Fitzgerald
Nancy Seyfried

Letter to Time

You are a tyrant. You demand so much
and are so unbending. You never give
enough of yourself. If I don't kill you,
you'll kill me.

~ *Patricia Dolezal*

Letter to Blossoming

Death is not death, after death we see life
Blossoming brings out a bright color and sweet fragrance
The bright colors of all nations.

~ *Anonymous*

Letter to Confidence

You are self assured
You have a "can do" attitude about life
You are proud as a peacock
You are my strength in need and indeed
You are transformed into beauty
Your words are truthful with grace
You are like a rose bud blooming
Your head is held high. Confidence.

~ *Andretta Owens*
Danielle Lawson
Dana Sumner
Mary Blankenship
Sameera Mohammad
Debbie Meyer
Lois Borisch

Rose Garden

A Special Place

Everyone out there has that special place, important to them in one way or another. It could be your birthplace, a place in your head, or maybe just somewhere you like to visit. I would like to tell you about mine – Brooklyn, New York, a place I often visit.

One reason I enjoy the visit to Brooklyn is the welcome to skateboarders. You can almost always see someone skating, be it in the street, at the park, or on stairs and ledges. I really enjoy this atmosphere. People at the skate parks will greet you, hang out, and bang their boards on the ground in approval of that trick you finally made happen. It is not tough making friends in this area at all. I still have people I call when I am heading there for a visit.

Nothing seems too far out of reach here. Restaurants, bars, groceries, bowling alleys, etc., are all in walking distance. Very rarely do I even use anything but a taxi. The train system helps as well, and a short ride gets you from Brooklyn to Manhattan in a matter of minutes. If I'm ever lost, I just remember, it's all connected, like a square in a block.

The last thing I'll leave you with is venues. Art shows, dance, music – it's all here, and it's all moving. There is so much originality and creativity. It is truly a place of inspiration. Everyone is doing their own thing, all in one place. It's unlike any other place I've visited. It's just Brooklyn.

So, if you ever get the chance to check out New York, there is plenty for you to see and do. Just take a walk. Everything is lined down the block, with expression on all fronts – art, music, parties, skateboarding, walking, fitness, and more. It's truly a unique experience every time I head up.

~ Anthony Ayers

My America

I remember one day watching an American movie, “City of Angels.” Seeing beautiful women, handsome men, tall houses, and modern cars – everything that young people in my country want. My dream was to someday see it all with my own eyes.

During this time all things in my county were gray: houses, streets, cars, and even the trees and people who seemed sad and tired – not the same as in American movies.

I knew as a young girl that one day, I would see the Statue of Liberty, Niagara Falls, and the high waves of the Atlantic Ocean. I knew I would drive on Route 66. I feel that if we believe, our dreams come true.

Even though I spent many years in my country, I could feel many things changing. I felt the changes in the economical system, stores, shining gay colors, and people smiling. The borders were open, and the people visited other countries. They spent fall and winter in the warm climates. Life began to take colors during these times. I forgot about my “American dream.”

When after many years I got a chance to start a new life in America, I wasn’t so excited. I didn’t know what awaited me across the ocean. In my country I had a good job; I had all my family and friends. I thought it was not a good time to leave. I tried to postpone my trip, but one day with my daughter and only two suitcases, I landed at the airport in Pittsburgh! I thought maybe my dream had come true. “Don’t be afraid...” I said to myself.

I realized that here everything would be different: my house, stores, friends, and the language – especially the language. I believed if I really wanted something, it could definitely come true. Everything was great! Even the times when I had to shop, go to the bank, go to the teacher-parents conference, or answer the phone. Always the first feeling was the fear. Then I understood that if I want to live in America, I must learn the language.

My husband found the English Center where I now study language. It is not easy for people my age, but I passed the driver's test in English, passed the state test in nursing school and now I'm looking for a job. Last year my daughter finished high school and now studies at Youngstown State University.

I know maybe I'm not living on a beautiful beach, and I don't drive on Route 66, but I did see the Statue of Liberty and Niagara Falls. I have found my place on this strange continent that I now love and plan to spend my life here.

~ Agata Wajda

Memories of a Special Place

One place that is special to me is my grandparents' house. My grandparents' house holds many memories. Family means a lot to me, and this is where everyone would come. I was raised in my grandparents' house. I also watched my family expand from the same place, like my aunts and uncles having kids and getting married.

The memories in my grandparents' house are irreplaceable. We have had Thanksgivings for many years, where my father's side of the family would come together. Thanksgiving since then has shrunk because my aunts and uncles have started to cook at home. My daughter and I will keep going to my grandma and grandpa's until they are unable to have it any more. I want my daughter to spend as much time with my family as possible.

Since I was raised by my grandparents, their house is home for me. My father lived there with me before he passed. I found him nearly dead in the basement when I was seven. My father and I had both good and bad times. He was very sick towards the end, though. He passed away Dec. 7, 2001, in hospice. I remember sitting in a recreation room they had set up with crafts for kids. I wrote him a letter, and he passed away right after my mom read it to him. Later, I took over his place in the basement and knew he was always watching over me.

Last, but not least, the house wouldn't be there or complete without my grandparents. My grandparents are wonderful people and have put up with so much stuff. I was a very difficult child to say the least. They never gave up on me and just continued to guide me to the right path. They had raised me from the age of three, and I couldn't be any more grateful now. Who knows where I would be now, if it wasn't for them!

My grandparents' house is very memorable for me for so many reasons. Recently, they decided to move, so it's hard for me to imagine not being able to walk into that house anymore. My

grandparents told me that it's all part of growing up, though. I just hope that the next occupants make just as many fond memories in that house. Hopefully, they will even feel the good aura the house seems to give off!

~ Jamee Peck

My Special Place

If asked about a place that is special to me, I'd say that place is my friend's farm in Tennessee. Four hundred and eighty-three acres of heaven. It is a gathering place for those who love traditional archery. It is also the place where I killed my first deer with a bow.

As you turn onto his drive, you wind your way through lush woods that open up into the holler. The first thing you see is his workshop and a cabin built by his family nearly a hundred years ago. Then, the open field he calls his front yard, and I call heaven.

Mark's farm is home to the Tennessee Classic. This event attracts people from around the world and our country. For nine days in the spring, you can learn from some of the finest bowyers around. We camp, tell stories, and boy, do we eat. It isn't just a bow shoot, it's a family reunion.

I was able to take my first deer with a bow at this magical place. My friend, Mark, and I went out in the afternoon, and hunted a set that he calls "The Honey Hole." We climbed into our stands and were able to see one another. About an hour passed, and I heard a noise behind me and then to my side. Seconds later, Mark bleated, and then I could see the doe that had stopped after hearing the sound. However, I had no shot. It moved again about three feet, and again, Mark bleated and the sound stopped the doe. I raised my bow and picked my shot. I released the arrow, and the deer turned and ran under Mark's stand and out of my sight. I looked up at Mark and saw him smile and give me a thumbs-up. She was down. A magical hunt, a great friend, at a special place.

So, if asked where my special place is, I'd say it is in Middle Tennessee, at my friend's farm that attracts those who want to learn and teach traditional archery. But it is much more to me. It is a magical place. Every time I go back, I feel like I'm home and back with family.

~Keven Graham

My Story

In the year 1997, we immigrated to America from Taiwan. It was exciting for my family, especially for my sons. My good friend suggested to come to Cincinnati. She said, "If you want your sons to learn English and get a good education, here is a good place. Beautiful, quiet, simple, and easy to live in." So, we moved to Cincinnati. On May 28, 1997, we arrived in Los Angeles. My brother-in-law picked us up at the airport. He took us to Disney Land, Universal Studios, and Sea World. Happy days always pass fast. Then we moved to Cincinnati.

When I started my new life, I knew I must get a driver's license. After I road tested twice, I finally got it. A driver's license was very important. I could go anywhere if I wanted, but I still was a blind and deaf-mute person because I couldn't communicate with people. English was the only path to understanding each other. My friend brought me to a church to learn English. In the class I learned a lot of daily life words and solved some problems. The teacher was always my best friend. I wasn't ashamed or afraid; she encouraged me to speak out and express my feelings. However, I still couldn't join my sons' school activities. It made me depressed. For a long time, when my sons went to school every day, I felt so lonely and helpless. I awoke myself. I couldn't live like a frog sitting in the bottom of the well looking at the sky. The view is very narrow. I needed to go outside to see the world and be a good example for my sons.

I was a single parent for a while because my husband stayed in Taiwan taking care of business. After applying for a job at Thriftway, I started to work. It was hard. So much to learn, but I was not regretful. During my working time, I always made mistakes in English. Once there was a chance to be transferred to another department. Before I left I wanted to show my gratitude to my co-worker. I said "Thank you touch me in this half year." I tried to use, teach, past tense taught, but my pronunciation was wrong. He was so surprised. Looking at me he asked, "Where?" I answered, "Anywhere." He was so mad. "Go away," he said. I was

confused. Why was he so mad? Finally I found that the pronunciations for taught and touched are different. No wonder he misunderstood and went away. I felt so embarrassed.

In 1999, before the sunrise, we encountered a great tornado. It happened at 4:00 am. We heard a warning, but we didn't know what it was. The wind became stronger, the sky was flashing and lightning. There were red, blue and green colors, and after a while the sky changed to all red. The wind and lightning was extremely loud. I felt our house shaking and suddenly something crashed into my house. In front of my house, the big tree and all the window broke and scattered all over my bedroom and living room. I quickly hid in the bathroom and escaped danger. However, my son's finger was cut by glass. All the cars' alarms were beeping. It was loud. After 4-5 minutes, someone yelled, "Anybody hurt?" The kids cried, and adults discussed; we had no electricity. We felt terrible and waited in the dark until dawn. Helicopters, police, and fire trucks came too.

We would never forget this experience. Time goes so fast.

In my family I insisted on Chinese culture rules: to be honest and to respect your elders. To obey parents. No drinking, no smoking. My two sons grew. They had a great education. Now they have jobs. About six years ago, my husband retired. We plan to enjoy our golden years and keep on learning. We are never too old to keep on learning.

In Chinese we have a saying: "Leaves fall to return to their roots." It may mean that we will return and settle in our native place.

~ Kuo Chao

Roots

A Letter to My Grandmother, Mae Jones

Dear Grandma Mae,

I don't know how to thank you enough, Mae. I can't believe how far we have come together. It's hard to look back when I was younger because of how hard things were for us.

You didn't turn your back on me when I was in foster care. You came to my court hearings and tried your best to get me back. I know you were working full time and sacrificed work for me. I enjoyed you coming to visit me, but I hated to watch you leave. I cried and cried, begging to go home with you, but I couldn't. You never gave up on me, and that's why I had to write you this letter to let you know how I feel. You gave to me what my mom never would –time, love, and patience. I believe you were my second chance of having a mother who truly cares.

I did things in the past to hurt you, like stealing your car and money. I am sorry with all my heart, and I promise that I will never do anything to hurt you ever again. You could hold grudges against me, but you don't. You have been through a lot. You are the definition of strong, and that is what makes you so special to me.

I get sad sometimes because I know that you are getting older, and I may not have much more time to spend with you. Mae, you and my children are the most important things in my life. You were with me every step of the way for their births, and I am glad that my children get to know you.

Mae, you are great-hearted and have a great personality. You taught me to be determined, brave, and forgiving. This journey has been very long, Mae. But it has been beautiful to have you in my life. I don't tell you this enough, but thank you, Mae. I love you.

From your loving granddaughter,
Po

~ Porcshé Jones

My Life Story

My name is Maryellie Santiago. I was born in North Philly, PA, in the year of 1990. As a child I lived with my mother, 3 brothers, 2 sisters, and my dad. My mom and dad would always fight, and my dad would put his hands on my mother in front of all of us. We would be crying and my dad would leave the house. Mother would cry in her room as she cleaned up the mess that dad made when they were fighting. My brothers and sisters and I would be so sad and mad at our father for always making our mom cry.

It all started after my dad started cheating on my mom. It all went downhill from there. He would not come home for days at a time. He wouldn't give my mom money for bills anymore. She didn't work, and she had a drinking problem of her own. So eventually everything got cut off; we lived with no lights, no gas. It was the worst. My dad packed all his things and left us there without anything. Being so young, I remember how I used to cry to my sisters about why we had to live like this. Why couldn't we be like the other kids? Why did we have to go without? By then my big sister left my mother's house and moved in with a friend of hers. My mom didn't care because she couldn't afford to take care of all six of us.

I remember how I hated the smell in that cold house. Every time you would walk in it smelled like a basement. My brothers and sisters and I would always take cold baths and have to go other places to eat. My mother eventually called my grandmother who lived in Cleveland, Ohio. She asked her if we could move in with her because she didn't want us to keep living without.

My grandmother, being the wonderful person she is, welcomed all of us into her home and paid for us to move to Cleveland in 1997. When we finally moved in with my grandmother, we all had to sleep in one room. Some slept on the bed and some slept on the floor; but that didn't matter to me. I was happy we had lights and gas; we could take warm baths and eat hot meals. My mom had the best cooking. My grandmother helped my mom

put us all in school. My mom went looking for jobs. She would still drink, but my grandmother would be on top of her.

Years went by, and we still lived with my grandmother. My brothers were older, so they were in the street and always in and out of trouble. The boys eventually moved out on their own. My sister left at the age of 16. And then eventually I left my grandmother's house too at the age of 14. My mom by then was living with a new boyfriend. She didn't care much about us. I took it as, since we were all getting older, we could take care of ourselves. I dropped out of school in the 7th grade. I thought it was cool to live with friends. It was hard from time to time thinking where I was going to stay next.

Then one day I met this boy named Nathan. He was so cute to me. We dated for about a year before I moved in with him and his mother. I was only 15. We moved out of his mother's house about two years after. We had a two-bedroom apartment for just us. I ended up pregnant with daughter at the age of 17, 4 months before my 18th birthday. I was very scared to have a baby. But my daughter came so fast. She was the best thing that happened to me. When I looked in her little eyes, I told her, "I'm your mom and you will never have the life I lived. Mom is going to make sure of that." I didn't want my kid to go through anything that I did. I tried my best to be a good mother for Janiah Layiani Caraballo.

By the time my daughter was 17 months, I got pregnant with my son Nathan Junior. Nathan, our two kids, and I moved to Allentown, PA, for about a year and a half. It was nice out there, but I didn't like it. I was always in the house. I didn't know any one. So by now Janiah was going on 3 years old, Nathan Jr. was 1 1/2, and Jeremiah came along. He was my last baby boy. I was so young with 3 kids, I would drive myself crazy. But I loved them all. Jeremiah was still a baby when we decided to move back to Cleveland, Ohio. And now I have a wonderful partner by my side and 3 beautiful kids I live for everyday. I thank God all the time for giving me hope for a better life for my family and me.

My Son Darrin

Dreaming while you sleep
Amazed by what you see
Running and jumping
Racing and dancing with Pooh
Interested in everything around you
Never wanting to wake up

~Tiffany Rose Rittenour

Someone I Would Like to Meet

My Grandma Starling is someone that I would have liked to have met. She passed away from cancer five years before I was born. My father always tells me stories about her. She raised five boys including my father. She loved to cook, garden, and even kept the dirt (where there was supposed to be grass) swept nice and neat. One day, I know I'll meet her. Just wish it was here on earth.

~ Candice Starling

My Father

My father was a typical traditional Taiwanese man. He loved his family. He worked hard, and he enjoyed making money, eating, and smoking. He graduated from business high school and then worked as a clerk at a Japanese shipping company.

In 1945, the Japanese surrendered and the nationalist Chinese took over Taiwan. My father's company moved back to Japan. My father lost his job, so he had to start his own business. He opened a retail store to sell paper and later had two to three small paper mills.

When he had money, he saved it, and then invested on paper mills. He only spent money on food and our education. He didn't like taking a loan. He thought if he didn't borrow money, he would save a lot of money on paying interest. When he was thirty-some years old, he lost most of his money on a paper mill. Then, he started to work on buying straw for a big paper mill. In Taiwan, they used straw to make paper. Making money gave him confidence to start another investment in a paper mill.

My father had good teeth and a good appetite. He loved food. His favorite food was sugar cane. He used his teeth to peel, bite off, and chew a sugar cane. I remember when I was young. I broke one upper right side baby tooth while I was biting off a sugar cane. After that incident, I never used my teeth to bite off sugar canes. Our family ate well at home. When we went to Taipei, my father would take us to a restaurant to eat something delicious. During every festival, he would like us to be home to eat. When he was on a business trip to the south of Taiwan, he would send home a basket of mangoes. When he went to the east of Taiwan, he would buy the local delicacies and bring them home. He bought me a peach from Japan. It was the most delicious peach I had ever eaten.

My father and my mother worked all the time, so it was boring to be at home. We liked to go to my cousin Yuan-Zhen's

home to play. At her home, we saw her relatives playing 4 color cards. They were interesting. Soon we played them all the time. Then, my father found out that we were gambling. He was very mad. He told us to kneel on the floor and raise our hands up and said, "Gambling is a sin. You are forbidden to gamble. Gambling will make people poor. It will make people become useless." This was the only time that my father got mad at me. After that day, I never gambled again.

~ *Lin Wang*

“Don’t Let Your Baby Cling to You!”

Recently, someone said to me, “Don’t let your baby cling to you!” I thought to myself, “Why don’t you say that to Mother Nature?” She placed my baby boy close to my heart for nine months, nine months breathing at the same rate as me, nine months listening to only my voice.

Mother Nature had him cling to me. She smartly filled my breasts with milk to allow us to continue being connected. Mother Nature let him smile at me even when I felt ugly; he reached out and offered me his arms, crazy in love, and asked to be in my arms.

After all, he will soon learn to walk and that will be a beautiful moment. I will look back and think of when he was a baby and I held him in my arms.

Someone said that I’m doing a bad job when I hold him in my arms all the time. He doesn’t ask me for a new toy or a fancy car. Instead, he just wants me and all of my kisses. I can’t say no when he asks to be in my arms, because if I say no, I’m saying no to his pure, unconditional love.

So, Mother Nature is smarter than many. Some things that people think are not good for our kids, Mother Nature calls “a mother’s love.” Even trees hold on to their small fruits. They let them go when they are ready.

This is the most natural thing I have ever seen.

~ Martha Maria Gajón

My Heroes

In life we are raised to believe we have the best parents, although this is not always true. However, my parents were exceptional. My mother and father endured many hardships in their lives. They are my heroes.

My father came to this country from Greece in 1940. He was 47 years old when he "jumped ship" in New York City. A few years later he met my mother and they married, believing that his first wife had died. My mother and father had two daughters, Dianna and Maria.

When my sister and I were seven and five years of age, the U.S. government informed my father that his wife in Greece, who had been declared dead seven years earlier, was indeed alive. They said my father was going to be deported for a big army.

My mother came to my father's rescue. She immediately filed for divorce to keep him from being deported. My mother, my sister, and I took the train to Washington D.C. where my mother testified before the judge for immigration on my dad's behalf. My mother put my father's and my two sisters' needs ahead of her own. She knew my dad was a good man, and she came to his rescue. She was the hero.

My mother eventually remarried and had another child. Her second husband was struggling with alcohol, so my mother left him. She asked my father for help. My father not only took in my mother and his two daughters, but also my step-dad and his new baby boy. He helped him to get off alcohol and get a job. All of us lived together for four months. My father would not take one cent from my stepfather, not even for groceries. He never thought of his own needs and put all of us first. He was the hero.

In 1963 my father returned to Greece, had a heart attack, and passed away. His first wife buried him. She sent pictures of my dad in his coffin. I asked my mother to write a letter to help her

get dad's Social Security, and that was successful. She was once again my hero. Both parents have passed away, but my sister and I were lucky to have such dedicated parents. They always thought of others before themselves. That is why my mother and father are my heroes.

~ *Dianna Hallahan*

Moto

Moto was my fraternal grandmother, who lived with us. She was large and bony. Sometimes she asked me to massage her shoulders and thanked me saying, "Oh, I feel good."

I remember her working at the home garden in the backyard when I was little. Every spring she broke ground with a spade and grew vegetables for the family.

She was the main caregiver and my best friend when I was little because my mother had a part-time job. She was with me when I was hospitalized. She took me to doctors' appointments. She was the one who walked with me to kindergarten. When the class was over, she was there waiting for me to walk home. I was happy when she asked me to go to the store nearby for two sweets. She always gave me one.

When I entered elementary school, I became busy playing with my new friends. All I remember is her sitting in front of the family altar praying every morning. I wish I had spent some more time with her.

I don't remember if she had ever been sick in bed until she had a stroke. Then she passed away when I was away at college. She looked so tiny when I saw her face with eyes closed in the futon beddings.

~ Masako Garskie

These Moments That Make Up Who I Am

I don't remember my childhood, but that's not to say it wasn't important. In fact, it is just the opposite. Much of who I am today comes from those young and tender ages when I was still a stranger to this world. And I can't help but thank those people who cared enough to show a lost and confused boy how to become a strong and capable man.

I have but one brother and four sisters, and though I can't tell you the stories myself, they remember and can tell many. Some of my most cherished ones are those that speak of ordinary or commonly occurring events, such as that of my mother reading aloud to me every night just outside my door, so that the cold and gloomy darkness could be set at bay by the soft light coming through the crack of the door. The demons of the night that dwelled in the place called dreams were instead called away by a caring and loving voice acting as a beacon to a place where laughter and mirth abide.

I hear of my father and the dedication he showed every day to me, my brother, and all of us. How he worked countless hours in order to provide for his family. And for over twenty years, he provided a life that made us as children want for little, or nothing, in life. This I've seen, but the fact that I have never seen him complain, or even hint to such, is something to be recognized. But even more than that, I've seen it in sickness to the point that he could barely walk, with sweat pouring down his face and a temperature that would make most people weak with just the thought of it. With such health, I've seen my dad get out of bed, walk to the door, and head straight to work. This is the type of man my father is. With an unfathomable dedication to his family, and with a love I have never seen elsewhere, he gives much of himself that most dare not.

This is what I grew up with. These are the many acts of love that still have an impact on the person I am today. The peace and guidance of a mother, the strong dedication of a father – this,

and so much more, made it possible for me to look to a brighter and fuller future. Years later, I still carry that same peace, still live off the example my father gave, and still take with me the many more wonderful and life-changing moments of my childhood days.

~ *Cloude A. Banks*

My Other Family

I consider myself blessed for the family I have.
Immigrating to America meant leaving my blood family behind.
At the time I didn't know it,
but it also meant I would get a new one.
First strangers, later friends that shared not only their homes,
But milestones, holidays and so much more.
They became shoulders to cry on and hands to hold.
It didn't matter the language or what country I am from.
Then my children arrived to a family of grandparents,
uncles, and aunts,
Not family by blood but one formed through love and laughs.
We keep on sharing birthdays, graduations, christenings, and more.
It feels like I have two families, one in Ohio and one back home.
I know my family from Mexico is a treasure like no other,
And I thank God for this family of "strangers"
that I have now discovered.

~ Karen A. Cuevas Landero

My Son Brunden

Bull-headed like me

Radiant smile

Undeniable love

Noise maker

Daring

Egalitarian

Notorious mess maker

~ Jason Holbert

Thanks to My Husband!

I became engaged with my husband 10 years ago. And after two weeks of marriage we decided to come to this country. It was hard, really, really hard, because to me it was like a new world. Different people, different language, different culture. Since my husband already spoke English, I thought that I didn't need to learn it. So it came to pass that I relied on him to do everything.

Then one day, we had a discussion. It wasn't really a discussion, it was an argument! He told me something that I will never forget. He said, "What kind of person are you? You don't work, you don't drive, you do not even speak English." That was something that really hit me. I didn't say any words because he was right. But after that, I decided that I was going to do everything – drive, study the language, and get a job. And I did. After two weeks, I was driving my car. I enrolled myself in an ESOL class through Ohio ABLE. It was really hard because of the language. It's hard to learn English. But I didn't give up. I got a certificate from that class and they moved me to the GED class.

Even though I still need to improve my English skills, I have a new goal, to get my GED and continue my education. Sometimes I still feel powerless because I haven't reached my goal to get my GED, but I'm going to get it because I'm not going to give up. My husband is very proud of me and that makes me feel good about myself. He thinks I speak better English than he does!

Perhaps I took his intentions the wrong way that day. But now, when I see everything that I have learned, I thank my husband for those words he told me a few years ago.

~ Laura Romero

My Father's Last Threshold

When I was younger, my father would sit on the balcony of our house and say, "God does not punish. You punish yourself." Where my father pulled these thoughts, since he never went to church, I wondered. I felt that the punishment of God could always come at any time.

He lived as quietly as he could. He delighted in his grandchildren. They were his greatest happiness. He was a loving and protecting grandfather. He took care of his six grandchildren, maybe because he did not have that support when he was a little boy. He came from a family of nine children, with a tough father and a mother who was always sick. She died of asthma when he was 14.

He signed up with the Army for the Second World War only to learn how to drive large trucks. Do you know? He went to the Army only to obtain his license to drive trucks! He knew this was the only way he could achieve this license. He was very proud of that. But in his stay in the Army, he also learned English and some German.

He was terrified of snakes. When he was in military training, he had to crawl below a dead snake, so the enemy would not kill him. He could not do that training. He jumped over the snake and ran away from it.

Later, sitting on the balcony and when he was hot, he chanted to the Universe: "San Lorenzo tied the dog loose and loose the wind; San Lorenzo tied the dog loose and loose the wind." And I don't know why, but the wind began to blow. His grandchildren were dying of laughter.

It was a hard life for him, without water, without light, without a hand that wanted him to be better or help him go ahead. He always had to work hard for the things he wanted. But he always did very wisely. When night arrived, he was terrified. I

could not understand how a man who was so strong could be afraid. He protected me when I was afraid, watched over me all the time. He remembered everything I had to do. Now he cried not to leave him alone.

Even at the age of 87 years, he did not want to smile or laugh, or to leave home. He had a stroke and was hospitalized in the Veteran's Hospital.

At the hospital, he continued telling stories. And in his vision, he saw the children playing in the river, with spectacular flowers, birds singing and special music around him, inviting him to pass that last threshold of his life. He did not know what to do, whether to stay, whether to leave. But I saw his body no longer resisted.

"I know I'm in the VA hospital," he said," but look, there I see a waterfall and my friends are there and that light is so beautiful." I could not see what he saw, because he was seeing his last threshold. The worst was now behind him. He conquered all previous challenges.

This is my first experience with death, but I think not the last. I know he passed through the gate for a new beginning, rich in experiences that could give him a new and better life. He already knew he was in the hands of his unknown God.

Remembering him now, I know I have his love, his wisdom, his courage. Those are the gifts he left me. At the age of 87, my father had his last breath.

~ Sara Velazquez

Cultivate

Beginner

In the beginning was the beginner
in English
learning about new words
trying to build full sentences
making mistakes most of the time
smiling to hide the nervousness
and not able to express oneself.
Oh, how awful!
Awful, but not dreadful!

In the middle of the road is the beginner
in English
reading intermediate texts
saying complete sentences
improving the listening
fighting to lose the accent
and praying to be understood.
Oh, how arduous!
Arduous, but not impossible!

In the end will be the beginner
in English
thinking in a second language
getting a new diploma in a foreign country
helping other ESL colleagues
working and volunteering
increasing the chances to find new friends.
Oh, it will be so good!
I know that it will be very good!

I feel blessed because I'm a beginner
in English.
I'm seeing that cultures are different
and all of us are equal as beings.
Yes, I'm still a beginner
but I have no fear.

Beginners are happy!
Being a beginner
is a great way to start!

~ Ana A. Gay

My First Problem in the USA

Everyone is different, and everyone has unique experiences that no one else can claim. That is why every person has a story to tell, and it is why we can learn from every single person. We share our stories. We listen to others' stories to discover what we have missed. My story took place in Canton, Ohio, six months after I arrived from Morocco.

One day at noon I went to the store with my husband. When we arrived at ALDI, my husband stepped out of the car and told me to wait because he would be back quickly. However, I forgot to tell him that I needed some yogurt. So I closed the car door thinking that he had taken the keys with him and followed him into the store.

When I saw him, I explained why I had come in and he asked, "Did you lock the car? Where are the car keys?" I was shocked.

I answered, "I don't have them." Suddenly, he became very mad and left the store to figure out how we were going to open the car because our car key and cellular phones were inside.

While I waited for him in the parking lot, two older women came towards me and asked me if I had a problem and if I needed help. I told them what had happened and they said, "The police can help you." I answered, "No, thanks. I don't need the police because my husband will probably find a solution and come back soon." They disagreed with me and encouraged me to call the police because the area was dangerous and my husband might be back late. They ended up calling the police for me, and to my surprise the police came quickly. The policeman started asking me what happened so I told him my problem.

He explained to the women that he couldn't do anything for me except suggest that I wait for my husband in a secure place

like Subway and to write a message on a little paper and stick it under the wiper.

Before leaving, he told me, "If your husband is not back before 5 pm, call me and I will drive you to your house."

The women gave me a hug and left. That was a nice gesture from these ladies – the American people are very helpful.

Finally, my husband came back at one thirty and brought the spare car keys. When I asked him how he retrieved the keys, he told me, "I ran to my brother's house because it is near the store, and he drove me to our house to pick up the keys." I'm lucky my husband is athletic.

The moral of the story is that before closing the car door you must always check to see where the keys are.

~Hafida Choukri

Marathon

For years I have been running...
I have been running from myself.
I have been running from my marriage.
I have been running from my education.
I have been running from who I could be.

Now I have to keep running...
I have to run to myself.
I have to run to my marriage.
I have to run to my education.
I have to run to who I can be.

Running is always a possibility for me...

~ Marshall Golden

El Cid: The Story Behind the Title

In the eleventh century Spain was a country of civil unrest. The kings were fighting to protect their land from the Moorish invasion. Both sides had fought for many years. The Spanish needed a hero to give them courage...Roderigo Diaz was born in Bivar, Spain. He became the head of his family after he saved the family's honor. When he became a soldier he quickly gained respect for his courage and strength. How did he earn the title El Cid (the Lord)? He had defeated the Moors and taken several Imers (Moor Kings) to Burgos as prisoners. He then received orders to kill them. Realizing that following orders would only make things worse he made them swear an oath of loyalty to the King and let them go.

One of the freed Imers said, "Among our people we have a name for a warrior with the vision to be just and the courage to be merciful. We call such a man El Cid" (Mann, Anthony. (Director) 1961. *El Cid*. United States, Meriam). And that was how he got the title. Once, some of his jealous rivals planned to shame him before his King. They wrote a letter and then unknowingly sent it to the loyal Moors. The Moors then gave the letter to Roderigo, who gave it to the King. This saved his honor and his life. He was loyal to his country his whole life. Respected by many, his life was a noble one. El Cid will always be a hero in Spain and a great example of true nobility. I think he is a wonderful example of honesty, honor, and integrity.

~Victoria S. Joneikis

The Date That Went Sour

Randy and Tiffany walked into the restaurant and waited to be seated at their table. Tiffany was happy about being out with someone other than her kids. Randy looked around and observed the restaurant's interior. He'd never been to the restaurant.

"This is a nice place," Randy said.

"Yes, it's been a long time since I've been anywhere like this," Tiffany said. "I heard they have good food here."

"Hello, my name is Kathy and I'll be your waitress tonight. Welcome to Xavier's," Kathy said with a friendly smile.

"Kathy, huh?" Randy asked, as he looked at the waitress with his eyes practically hanging out of his head. "That's a nice name. How long have you worked here?"

"Not long but the food is amazing," Kathy replied. "Do you know what you'd like to drink?"

Tiffany noticed that Randy was flirting with Kathy. She said, "I think I picked the wrong place to bring you on a first date."

"Why-why-why would you say that?" Randy asked, remembering that he was on a date with Tiffany. "I would not have met Kathy if you didn't bring me here."

Tiffany was angry. And she was hurt. She liked Randy and didn't think she'd have to compete with another woman while she was with him, especially not their waitress!

Tiffany spoke low and slow when she replied, "What do you mean Kathy? You are the one being rude to me, and I don't appreciate the way you have been flirting with her! So if you feel that

way, you can have dinner with Kathy. Don't call me again. Don't text me. Don't come over to my house. You can have her. I'll let her know on my way out."

~ Regina Dunbar

The Night with the New Car

I have been living in the U.S.A. since November 2012 because my husband got a job here. My family moved from Korea, and we bought a big house which meant we had to buy a lot of furniture. We also purchased two cars. However, we had spent so much money that my husband could not buy the car he really wanted.

Six months later, my mom and sister came to visit from Korea, so my husband and I planned a wonderful trip with them. We needed to rent a car, but it was too expensive. Therefore, my husband decided to buy the big car that he had wanted a few months before. Finally, he bought the car and sold the old car to a car dealership. He was very excited, but when we arrived home, we realized that we had left the garage door key with the old car. The day was already getting dark and the car dealership was closed. We tried to stay at a motel, but there were no rooms available or they were too expensive. Consequently, my family spent all night in the new car. Fortunately, it was warm outside. My husband was silent all night.

Sometimes when I think about what happened, I laugh all over again.

~ Kyoung Hee Kim

Bloom

Riding the Storm Out

Feeling lost. I've spent so long walking in the rain.
The wind blows, chills to the bone; all I know is pain.

Thunder makes me shake in fear, as lightning splits the sky.
A raindrop hides a lonely tear that's falling from my eye.

I've come too far and cannot go back the way I came.
With every step I feel the downpour wash away my shame.

I trip and fall for every wrong I've ever done or said.
Forward onward through the fog, I get back up again.

Hailstones threaten, as they sting, to rip my flesh apart
But they could never cut as deep as the scars upon my heart.

A force starts flowing through my veins. It makes my blood run warm.
A hope that builds inside of me; I feel it taking form.

I wrap myself in His sweet grace with determination in my stride.
The light of dawn will splash my face when I reach the other side.

The battle is not yet lost, and I am ready for the war.
I'll be a better man, despite the cost, for weathering the storm.

~ Seth Stephenson

Time

One minute, one day, one week – this is how people measure time. “What time is it?”, “Would you like to spend your time with me tomorrow?”, “Time is money.”— we hear phrases like this every day. It’s so common in our lives. Sometimes we feel busy, sometimes we feel that we can’t manage our time, then we say: “I don’t have enough time....” To solve this problem, people set priorities and plan every move. So then you think you are too busy to add anything else to your schedule. Besides you have your priorities and you need to reach your goals, but time can also show you how wrong all your priorities were.

When I studied at my medical college in Russia, I had a very busy lifestyle. I took classes, worked at my job in the hospital and constantly had to work on different college projects. I had never had such a busy period of my life before. During my first year of study, I was very alone. I also did not talk much with anyone. Before that I had lived in a small village with my mom; consequently, it was very difficult for me to adapt to my new lifestyle in a big city and in a new environment. I felt older than my peers. I did not have any mutual interests with them, and that is why most of my conversations were with my professors. Eventually, I began talking to a great woman, my teacher of pharmacology. We decided to attend a comedy together; we shared our life stories. She was also alone, and we became best friends. Whenever we called each other we would talk for one or two hours. She was the greatest person I had ever met!

After one year I passed my exams and returned to my village to visit my mom for summer vacation. My professor and I continued to talk by phone. In the fall, I came back to college, started my job again, and also worked on a few projects for college. My friend and I met a couple of times, but it was only for a few minutes. I decided to visit her for New Years and to prepare a surprise for her. I remember that I was very excited to give her a blue necklace as a present, because blue was her favorite color. A couple weeks before our meeting somebody called me and said

that my friend had died. She had never told me she had cancer. The illness caused her to die very quickly.

Time put my best friend into my heart forever. I used to think that people manage time, but it is time that manages people. People think they are busy and do not have enough time. Are they? I regret that my busy life caused me to put off my relationship with my friend. If I had to do it over, I would make our friendship the priority.

~ *Marta Eelen*

Freedom from Drugs #2

It's me again talking about freedom from you, my enemy.
It's been 2 years now since I've broken the chains of addiction
and escaped the dark you held me in.
It's been a journey, a journey you haven't made easy,
but yet a journey I would never take back.
You try in so many different ways to come back into my life.
You play games with my head trying to make me feel
like I'm going crazy.
I find myself fighting and fighting my thoughts trying to get you out
in any way that I can.
Remember when you had me believing that I couldn't do it
without you?
Well, I'm here today to say, I'm stronger than I've ever been before.
And it's all because I'm no longer trapped in your lies.
I know now why you play these games that you do.
It makes you weak knowing that I'm getting stronger
each and every day that I make it without you.
I have a higher power in my life today,
and the best thing about that is that it's not you.
I have fallen out of love with you. I no longer need you.
I no longer crave you.
Most of all I no longer have that want for you.

~ Nichole L. Keene

Family Secrets and Christmas Miracles

It's Christmas Eve and as usual, John Terry spends that day with his family, which includes his mother, father and 14-year-old sister. John is 24 years old and a family man, but on this day, John will question a lot about his family.

The day started smoothly until his mother asked him to do her a favor by returning a few library books while she was preparing the food for dinner. John, with no hesitation, said yes and headed out the door. When John entered the library, he immediately spotted a librarian behind the counter that kind of favored him. John grew up coming to this library but hadn't seen this man before. John looked the man in his eyes as he approached the counter and he saw himself, from the hazel eyes to the pointy nose. But he hesitated to say anything so he just returned his books and went back to his car. When John went outside, he realized that he was being followed. It was the man from the library! He asked John his age and when John said "24," the man said, "Cynthia. You're Cynthia's son." John turned white. After 10 seconds of not breathing, he managed to ask the man if he had relations with his mother and the man replied, "Yes." John told the man to get in the car, and John sped home.

When John and the man arrived, John's mother, Cynthia was shocked to see the uninvited dinner guest. John demanded the truth with the man he thought was his father present as well. They decided to discuss it over dinner! The man from the library was revealed as "Mr. Robinson." John was so hungry for answers that he lost his appetite for the meal and quickly said, "Let's just get to the bottom of this. Who are these men, mom? Should I call you Cynthia? Who am I?"

There was an awkward moment of silence. Finally, Cynthia spoke up. "Well, John... Your biological father, Mr. Robinson, abandoned you as a baby, but not too long after that, I met your father, my husband, who was always there for you."

“I’m sorry John,” Mr. Robinson said. “I was irresponsible. If I could take back everything, I would.”

“Years down the line, Mr. Robinson tried to get back into your life, but your dad wouldn’t let him because we didn’t want to confuse you at such a young age,” Cynthia continued.

By the end of the night, John forgave Mr. Robinson because he explained the drug problems he battled when he was younger. He also thanked his dad, Mr. Terry, for being there and showing him how to be a man. John surprised everyone when he announced that he was ready to bond with his biological father.

John now tries to split his time between his father and his dad. He feels even more loved and doesn’t resent either.

~ Shaquille Reynolds

If

If I could start all over, I'd do it all again
I wouldn't change a whole lot, just a few things now and then
I'd take back all the times I ever hurt the ones I love
I'd spend a lot more time getting to know the Man above
I'd pay more attention to the things I should have heard
I'd stay and say I'm sorry when I left without a word
I'd go to work a little late to hold you when you cried
I'd stay home that night I crashed the car and almost died
I'd thank God every day for my family and my friends
If I could start all over, I'd do it all again.

~ *Seth Stephenson*

Flawed Is Flawless

I remember vaguely standing on a balcony once.

I remember seeing how beautiful and very peaceful everything looked from such a great height.

When you look down from that distance, you rarely see any flaws.

“FLAW”

The word has burrowed itself deep into my subconscious and still to this day haunts my every move and thought...

There was a time when I stood in front of my mirror

Completely vulnerable dressed in only my bare skin. I stared deeply into my own empty eyes.

The hollow smile was plastered on my face as my fingers plucked the hairs from my scalp.

The word “flaw” weighed heavily on my heart acting as a cyanide draining the life from me.

I tore myself to bits by cursing myself and whispering not-so-pretty compliments over and over.

I then thought to myself,

“If you were walking in a deep forest and saw a swan whose wings were dirty, would you find it flawed? How about a flower with wilted petals... is that flawed? A tree trunk that had fallen over with its insides rotting away?” I find it hard to believe anyone would.

But this is what we are all based on.

Flaws. *Flawed*. **FLAW**.

I plucked more and more, yanking handfuls of hair, as this word, this one simple word ever so violently tore its way into my heart...

I thought to myself again, "*Aren't we all flawed?*"

Slowly I traced the spot where the hair had been plucked so roughly from my head with my fingertips, silently I promised myself, "No More."

Almost weeping out of joy, all of the insults and apparent flaws began disintegrating, fading, vanishing into the night.

And I finally learned to love myself.

~ *Brandi Stevens*

Following My Cold Feet to Ohio

To reach my goals, I need to be motivated. My motivation is my family and the opportunity that God gave me to be here to learn to do something new and different. I am learning something new and different every day. I am glad to be here every day.

Everything began in April, 2008, when my husband was selected for an Ohio State University scholarship to study for his Ph.D. This same year I was studying for my bachelor's degree in Mexico. I had a difficult decision to make, but it was good for everyone. It was a difficult moment for the two of us to separate, because we are a close-knit couple, especially since we already had a son. A year later my son and I decided to meet with my husband in the United States. At the beginning of our stay, I was happy, but at the same time I was a little nervous and felt nostalgia because I am a person who likes to be very close to my family.

We arrived in Wooster at the beginning of the winter. It was wonderful to see and feel the snow for the very first time and above all to go outside and play with my son. The months passed, and I started to feel depressed. I used to call my mother daily to make myself feel better. I sometimes thought of returning to my home country. One day I decided to enroll in ESOL classes. I was very determined to learn English, but at the same time I was afraid of learning another language because it was another culture. I never forgot the first day at school. I met very good people there, who gave me confidence. I was very happy in the ESOL program because they had preschool and my son could go to learn English and socialize as well.

Little by little my English improved, and I started gaining confidence in myself. I also began to make many friends. ESOL classes are a good opportunity to socialize and learn about other cultures, including American culture. My former group of ESOL classes included classmates from different countries, including Asia, South America, Europe and Central America. In this group we learned more about the different cultures and especially to re-

spect each one of them. We even had international parties where we had the opportunity to share representative food from every country.

ESOL is a program that helped me personally. I am happy because my English has improved. I can now communicate with other people in the community here. Now I am taking ABLE classes three days a week. Every morning I wake up excited to go to ABLE classes to learn something new. My English is still not perfect. I hope that someday I can speak fluently and write correct English.

In my home country I had never driven a car. Therefore, my husband helped me by taking me to and picking me up from ABLE classes. However, I was uncomfortable because he was busy, and I needed more independence. I realized that driving a car in the United States is important. Thus, the next goal was to learn how to drive. When I was learning how to drive, I had very funny things happen to me that I'll never forget. Thanks to my husband for his patience, I learned to drive and took my driving test three times and finally got a driver's license. I was very happy because I accomplished another challenge. Now I can go everywhere without a translator or driver. I like driving everywhere. I especially enjoy taking my children to sports, going shopping, and going out with my friends.

I'm very proud of myself for all the things I have achieved so far in the United States. My next goal is to go back to school and finish my bachelor degree. This is America; you can do whatever you want.

~ Brenda J. Sanchez

**I Was but Now
I Am**

I was the silence that
Was never spoken of
The ghost rarely seen.
The pain always felt
And the tears always gathered.

I was the darkness
Always hidden in
The shadow cast away.
The howling wind shut-out
And the cursed cold.

I was the ground you walked on
The branches you snapped
I was the puddle you disturbed.

I was here today but
Gone tomorrow.
I was

But now I am.

I am the laughter you hear
The birds you see.

I am the raging waves
And the endless sea.
I am the clouds above
And the grass below.

I am the rays of sun
And the blossomed flower
I am the streams that run.
I am welcomed showers in April
And sleeping flowers at night
I am the beautiful ruin
And endless voice.

I am the warm embrace
And blanket to
Cover you.

I was
But now
I AM.

~ *Jamie McAllister*

Like a Newborn Step by Step My New Childhood

I feel like a little girl again because in coming to the USA, I had to start over.

One day, I had a great opportunity to come to the USA.

Like a mother waiting nine months for her baby's arrival, my family and I spent a lot of time preparing for my life in the USA and waiting for the visa to come that I had won through the green card lottery.

I left for America...

When I left for America it was *like the day a new baby comes into the world*. Everyone has gathered around all excited about the new arrival, but in this case it was my departure.

Just like a mother initially experiences pain, but then joy at the baby's birth, my family felt pain at losing me, but joy that I was fulfilling my dreams.

... and I went on an adventure. I started a new life.

I had confidence my new life would work out well because of the name I had been given.

Like the day after the birth when the parents give their child a wonderful name, which will help him all his life, my parents gave me the name ENATO. It means "God will do all good things for you before you even think about it." I believe I have the right name and I trust it.

A new life involves new experiences, almost like an apprenticeship.

Like a baby, I am trying to learn and to adapt to my new life. However, I have more experiences than a baby. I am learning about all kinds of new things which seem unimportant to Americans. I observe my surroundings and try to understand this new culture. I am learning things that are very different from what I knew before.

Like a baby's first time drinking her mother's milk, I taste new foods and wonder what they are. Sometimes, the foods I rarely ate before, I now eat.

Like a baby that just reacts sometimes without reason, I cry, smile, laugh or feel strange at odd moments and I cannot explain why.

Like a child learning how to speak, I am learning a new language. I try to talk, but I am afraid and my tongue seems stiff and my mind cannot find the right words. My poor head!

Like a child, I am learning many new things. For example, how cold the weather can be. I realize I miss Africa – my big oven. I am learning about a different system of measurement. I remember the first time a physician asked me my height and weight and I answered in centimeters. He looked at me very strange before laughing a couple of minutes.

Like a baby teething, learning to walk, falling and trying again, I have had many new experiences which seem funnier now than they were in the past. Some happened in the process of changing planes and trying to find the correct terminal when dealing with jet lag and customs formalities. Other experiences happened because all airports are different and I had trouble asking for directions with my poor English. I also had a misadventure with my suitcase which got lost and then returned three days later.

I remember too, my experience with the bus when I tried to find which bus was right, where and when I must pull the stop request and my constant fear of getting lost.

Like a baby, I have made new friends and played new games. I have played in the snow making snowballs and snow angels and gone sledding. Inside, I have played pool, Sorry, dominoes, Speed, Scrabble and puzzles. These experiences caused to me grow.

Like a baby, I found my favorite toy, which is my mobile phone.

And I found hope as I recognized the love others have for me and I grew in my faith in God.

Like a little baby, I like to stay in my bed under the blanket where it is warm and dream about my future. I really like that because it is the time I spend with my creator God. He renews his promises in

my life as expressed in Psalm 23: “*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want ...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” He reminds me of all he has given and how he has sent an angel to protect me and many kinds of people to help me and to give their love to me.

Like a baby I feel vulnerable, too, but I have a wonderful family who manages to encourage me. They tell me all the time: **Go! Run! Go! You can!**

Just like a baby grows up and must face real life, I now must face my new real life ahead of me and learn in the school of life. I am born again. I am excited and impatient to see where I will end up and how God will provide. It is my big challenge, and I want to make everyone proud of me.

“Be not afraid, only believe.” (Mark 5:36)

~ Lydie Enato Guedegbe

Thorns

Chasing the Dragon

My name is Shannon Scott Hines. I just want to write a little bit about how much my life has changed over the past few years. I'm 25 years old now, almost 26, and I'm on my way to my first and hopefully only prison sentence. I'm going to take you back to the beginning before the madness all started.

I was a very bright student, actually, all through my elementary, middle, and high school years. I got to high school though and started running into rough patches quite early. Even though I got pretty good grades, I started getting into trouble in class for sleeping, wandering the halls, wearing hats, et cetera. Next thing you know, I was hanging out with the wrong people; but wouldn't you know it, at the time, I didn't know it.

I joined O.W.E. class which is where you work half of a day and go to school half a day. So I went to school only until 11 then I was out the rest of the day. Let me tell you that was a big mistake! The plus side was four credits every year all three years I was in it; the downside was all the spare time I had to get in trouble.

I started partying all the time with my friends and stopped caring so much about school. Instead I cared more about my next party or plan. So before I knew it, I had twenty-one credits at the end of my junior year, but I no longer cared about school. I started doing drugs. The next thing I knew, I was dropping out of high school. Just so everybody knows, I had it made though before my dive into the deep dark hole.

I had a beautiful girlfriend. She was 18 and I was 19. She dropped out with me as well. We got our own place and tried to start a life together. I started hanging out with an even worse crowd of people. I had surgery and was prescribed prescription pain pills for 5 months. From then on, my life has been a roller coaster downhill.

I continued using prescription drugs even after the doctors took me off them. After a while, you get immune to certain drugs. They're not strong enough and don't get you high anymore. So little ol' me moved on to bigger and better things. The so-called better things in my book, the dragon, AKA heroin. After that point, I started losing everything like dominoes.

I lost my girlfriend, my family, all kinds of money. I started doing whatever it took to get my next fix, and I started catching charges. Now I'm in here going to prison. I've fought this monster of an addiction for eight long years and I'm tired of it winning. It's my turn. I'm going to gain my life and everything I've lost back and start fresh. No more dragon.

~ Shannon Scott Hines

January

There is nowhere in this cold, cold world
For a little suffering girl
There was nowhere for her to go
So she laid down in the January snow

And nobody in this cold world did care
If this little girl died lying there
“Please let me die here in the snow.
Nobody cares if I do go.”

But an angel heard that little girl’s cry,
And she said “Sweetheart, you don’t deserve to die.”
And that angel sent down a January rain
To wash away that little girl’s pain

The January rain is falling now
Pitter-patter on the icy ground
No longer does this child know the world’s pain
We are dancing in the rain

~ *Phyllis Jayne Baldwin*

The Shortest Two Months

Walking down the aisle with the man of my dreams was one of the happiest days of my life. He had two teenage children who I knew did not care for me. I tried everything in my power to build a relationship with them but they just did not care for me. They tried everything to mess up the relationship between me and their dad. So, when they would come to visit, I would always leave the house to go shopping or visit a friend until they left, and then I would return home.

It seemed like after every visit, we had a fight about the kids. After about two fights, the kids visited and as usual, I left the house for about three hours. When I returned, my house was empty. Everything was gone! Nothing was left but my personal belongings, including my clothes, a chair in the living room, one glass, a plate, a spoon and a bed in the spare bedroom. As I entered the bedroom, I noticed a small note on the bare mattress. It read: "I couldn't do this in person but the marriage is over. Sorry."

It's been three years and I haven't heard from him since.

~ *Clarice Murray*

Why Me?

Why me?
Why can't I see?
Why can't I touch, why can't I breathe?
If it was one thing I wish I could do
It would be right there holding you.

Why me?
Why can't I laugh?
Why can't I smile, why can't I be glad?
This has changed since this has happened to me
I can't move a bone. I guess it was bound to be.

Why me?
Why didn't I listen?
It was very unwise for me
Not to pay attention.

Why Me?
Why this way?
Why this day when it could have happened any other day?
I realize that this was meant to be because of me
I just didn't open my eyes to see.

Why Me?
Why did I drink?
Why do I always make decisions that make me sink?
Look at me now zipped and bagged
On my way to looking nice while my friends and family look sad.

If I had one wish to bring this day back
I would have stopped myself
If I knew it would be my last!

~ Percy James Huffman

Locked in a Box

For the first time in many years, I'm looking forward to what comes next. It wasn't always that way though. For the longest time, I lived behind four walls of a room. I never left this self-made prison of loss, manipulation, mental anguish, anger, and pure Hell. These feelings started slowly and then suddenly escalated with the death of my mother. I was eight years old without a clue of what suicide was or why someone would do it. It didn't take long to know the what and the why of it. Depression is where it all begins.

Depression can last forever if you don't know things can get better. For me, it started two years after my mother's death. I missed her so much I wanted to die. I wanted to be with her again. I was ten years old, and I wanted to die. These feelings were not what normal kids were feeling.

This was the start of a long battle with depression. I started messing up a lot in school. Before my mother died, I was good in school, always making the honor roll and never receiving a detention. After her death, all I ever received were detentions and suspensions. I also never received many grades above an F.

My home life wasn't much better after my mother died. My dad became an alcoholic. Eventually he stopped drinking, only to become a drug addict. He always brought me down. He was both physically and mentally abusive. To this day, every broken bone I ever had came from him. He was so mentally abusive that he told me I had killed my mother, something that no child should hear. This is the time when my room became the only place I felt safe. It was a place to tune out the world and all that hurt me.

Life only seemed to get worse as I went into my teen years. I always tried to get out of going to school. I didn't feel comfortable around people anymore. I felt this way because nobody knew what I was going through. People would tell me their tale of woe; mine was always worse. I couldn't relate to anyone, it seemed. This made me more depressed. I felt all alone in the

world. Eventually I refused to go to school. I didn't care how many beatings I had to take.

It was at this time that I started getting help. My father was afraid of going to jail because of all the school I missed. To avoid it, he started taking me to a doctor to get my absences excused. The doctor could clearly see something was wrong with me. He sent me to quite a few psychologists. They all concluded I had post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety disorder, and also was clinically depressed. I couldn't believe that I wasn't even sixteen yet, and I had all this wrong with me. It was shortly after this time that my dad allowed me to drop out of school.

My condition started to improve with different medicines and therapy. I started working out and ended up losing eighty pounds. I began educating myself on a plethora of different subjects. It wasn't until I was 18 or 19 that my progress diminished. The medicine that had made me feel better turned on me. I felt more depressed than ever. My emotions and thoughts became erratic. I really thought I was losing my mind. I was so tired, but I couldn't sleep. I was so sad but couldn't quit laughing. I would feel happy but couldn't quit crying. I wanted all this madness to end.

I decided to end my life at nineteen years old. I laid out twelve or more different types of pills I was taking. I opened up a can of Pepsi and started taking one bottle at a time. In less than twenty minutes, I had consumed probably a few hundred pills. I was so full I couldn't take any more. I hallucinated for a while, and then fell asleep. I woke up a few days later in a hospital. My heart had stopped twice. I was given at maximum a twenty percent chance to live. If I did live, I would be in a vegetative state for the rest of my life. I overcame the odds though, and survived with only a few complications. I was released from the hospital three weeks later.

I went back to being locked in a box. Only this time it was to recover. It took a few years without medications to fully get over everything.

I was tested later with the death of my dad. I stood tall and took on all of it by myself. My father's death was a pivotal time for me. I realized so many things about myself. I was strong, smart, and free to do anything. I didn't have someone tearing me down all the time. I started believing in myself. I saw how big the world is. It's much bigger than the box I locked myself into. It's also filled with more possibilities than one person can fathom. You just have to be patient and keep going.

~ *John Leadman*

Lonely Corpse

This evening as I woke from my grave, I dusted my stone, of course with my cloak for my fingers consisting only of bone. I took a rest by this stone thinking for a time, of a time. A time when I could watch the sunset. A time when beauty could be seen, and the flesh I once had could caress another.

Instead my eyes since have turned to moosh, leaving only deep dark holes of loneliness in my skull. I no longer see any beauty, no sunrise, no sunset, no beauty of another, not even a lover. The soft flesh I used to possess can no longer caress. My flesh, non-existent, only loved by maggots that fester with me in my rest.

Now in my empty thoughts and to my surprise, a bouquet on my grave for my demise. Now like I said I have no eyes, so I pretend and humor my lies. If it were flowers what would it matter, because I haven't a nose it would only make me madder. No smell, no touch, no sight, no light. Please hold my corpse oh so tight, I'm extra lonely on this dark night.

~ Kayla Adair Dillon

Depression

Sometimes I awaken in a frigid, dark room
I feel like I'm behind bars
Or left alone on Mars
With no one to share my thoughts.

With all those things that run through my
mainframe, I question myself
to see if I'm sane.

Just don't judge by the cover.
Take a second look.

Believe what they say and
Open this book.
Depression you'll find
If you take a good look.

~ Derrick Burnett

Climbing

New Beginnings List

All of us say, "Next year, I will..."

I say, I will be in Phoenix, Arizona next month.

In two weeks I will move out of Canton to Cleveland.

I am going to do this today: move!

I am going to get a new job.

I am going to get paid \$12.00 an hour.

I am going to get my GED in June.

I am going to be an auto mechanic.

I am going to take refresher courses about brakes and suspension systems.

I am going to be the "go-to guy" in the auto mechanics business

Just like the doctor is to the sick patient,

The architect is to the builder,

The stockbroker is to the investor.

I am going to be the mathematical specialist in algebra and geometry.

I am going to take courses in advanced mathematics.

I am going to be an example to others like me.

Not sometime, but this time, I will do these things for me.

~ Frank Frasier

Someone I Would Like to Meet

There are many people that I would like to meet in my lifetime. Someone I would really like to meet is Mary Picone from Cleveland, Ohio. She was one of the oldest people who ever took the GED class and exam. She was 82 years old when she took her exam. When I heard about her, it gave me the courage to continue studying. Although I don't know her, she is my motivator. I would like to meet her and let her know how much her perseverance and courage has changed my life.

~ *Sonia Campbell*

The Demolition Derby

I like to compete in the Demolition Derby. I have not done it in a while though. It used to be a big thing for my family – my dad, my brother, my uncles, and my cousins. They all have won trophies at one time or another! This is what inspired me to do it.

I watched them do it from the time I was five years of age, until I turned twenty-five. That is when I decided to compete in the Demolition Derby.

The first thing I had to do was find a car to buy to compete in the competition. One of my good friends had a Volvo station wagon that he was not driving any more, and he wanted to sell it. I offered him fifty dollars for it, and he accepted my offer.

The second thing I had to do was prepare the car for the Demolition Derby. There are rules provided by the Derby officials that you have to go by. The rules say that you have to remove all of the windows from the car. You also must remove all lights and signals from the car. You have to remove all the interior parts, down to the bare metal, except the driver seat. You are also required to remove the fuel tank and mount your own fuel cell inside the car behind the driver seat, in the center of the car.

The third thing I had to do was paint my derby number on the driver side and passenger door of the car. I also had to paint my name on the top of the driver side door. If you have sponsors, you can put them just about anywhere you want to on the car.

I completed all of these steps, and now I am ready for inspection. You must pass inspection to participate in the derby. So I took my car to the Highland Co. Fair, which was where I was competing. I passed inspection. Then I secured the doors shut using number nine wire. That was done; now it was show time.

There were four heats, and the last four cars still hitting other cars went to the feature for the prize. The amount of the prize depends on how many people enter the derby. The entry fee is fifty dollars, and a percentage goes to the prize. First and second place receive a trophy and some cash, and third place you only get cash.

I was selected to compete in the second heat. I was a little nervous at first. The officials counted from ten, then waved the green flag, and then it was time to hit the other cars. I was still nervous until another car hit my car real hard; then it was on. I started slamming into the other cars as fast and hard as I could. Before I realized it, the official was waving the red flag. My heat was over, and I was one of the last four cars still going. I made it to the feature and got my car ready for it. So I competed in the feature and won third place. I won thirty dollars, which wasn't much, but it was one of the most fun things I have ever done.

~ Joshua A. Fowler

My Greatest Inspiration

My greatest inspiration was the birth of my first child. The date was Oct. 12, 1988. I told myself I was going to be the father I never had. All through my growing up and playing sports, my father never came and supported me. It is now 2014. I have six children, and I have never missed an event they participated in or missed any of their birthdays. I have been coaching for twenty-five years, and I love it. While I miss not having had a supportive father, that experience made me the father I am today. I also thank my grandmother and mother for leading by example and nurturing me the right way.

~ David Mathis

My Story

From the time I was a small boy, I enjoyed reading books, drawing pictures, and writing short stories. As time passed, I began writing about some of the fictional characters that grew out of my childhood memories. The first book that I published was a book about my family genealogy on my maternal grandfather's side. It took me about two years of research and hard work to write the book and get it published. I spent many days at the Stark County District Library mining the genealogy department for information about my ancestors.

My next challenge was to write a children's book called *One, Two, Three*. I illustrated the book and tried to make sure it would appeal to all ages. My purpose was to give readers a fun way to practice their letters. About four months later, I began to write another book called *I Can Count to Ten* which focuses on learning numbers.

I love writing, but I soon discovered that I also love reading my books to parents and children. What a rewarding experience it was to read my books aloud to the parents and preschoolers at the library! So far, I have written six books, and I have had six books published. I hope that everyone will have a chance to read at least one of my books.

My readers have no idea how much I have struggled to achieve this new beginning for my life. At age twelve, I suffered a severe head injury and the debilitating seizures that followed. Doctors said that I might not survive, let alone live a normal, productive life. After years of medication, special education classes, twenty-one years of personal determination and the heartaches of life, I am proof that anything is possible.

I will continue to improve my writing skills through GED classes. When I walk across the stage in my cap and gown, I know that I will have only begun to achieve another step toward fulfilling my destiny.

~ Lawrence Pastor

Volunteering

Volunteering with the organization touching little lives.

Opportunity to give something back.

Love to play with kids.

Understanding the needs of people.

Not letting people suffer.

To spend time helping and making a difference.

Enjoying each other's company.

Every experience can be different.

Remembering everything we did

I feel like I am doing important work.

Nice people wanting to help.

Getting to learn about other people's lives.

~ Jariya Cicchetti

Klingon Spoken Here

The driving examiner for the Ohio Department of Motor Vehicles sat in the passenger seat of the car. He held a clipboard in his hands. He turned to me and said something. I did not understand him, but I guessed that he wanted me to start the car and drive.

I drove.

He said something else. I had no idea what. I guessed he wanted me to move to the curb. I put on my turn signal and moved to the curb. Then I stopped.

He frowned. “ÇfVØb/Æ¶ SmYZZ^B€q Pmrzygog Schmenedritt,” he said.

It sounded like Klingon (you know, the alien language spoken on “Star Trek”). I did not know what to do.

I spoke a little English (I mean a LITTLE). But I had no clue what he was saying. The rest of the exam went downhill from there. At the end, the examiner said, “I’m sorry.” The rest was in Klingon. But I understood. I had flunked.

I easily passed the written part. That was in Spanish. But I realized that I must somehow improve my English comprehension if I hoped to receive a driver’s license from the State of Ohio.

My father-in-law came to my rescue. He is a native-born American. He set up a driving course in a parking lot, using 2-liter soda bottles as markers. Every evening for about two weeks, we went through our paces. He taught me all the vocabulary I would need for my exam. Finally, I felt ready to take the driver’s test again.

This time, the results were very different.

“Pull into the right lane,” the examiner said.

No problem.

“Now I want you to turn left,” he said.

A piece of cake.

“Back up.” “Do a three-point turn.” “Pull up to the curb.”

I understood it all. I had become an expert on car terminology. Clutch; spark plugs; fan belt. Ask me anything.

But the most important lesson I learned from my experience is that people were right all along. “If you are going to live in the United States, you have to drive a car,” many people told me.

I thought getting a green card was the biggest step in becoming part of American society. Now I realize that is just the beginning.

Getting a driver’s license is the REAL first step. It’s like a passport. It moves you from one place to another. No one can stop you.

In your car, moving along the open road, it feels like flying. It feels like freedom. There is no end to the horizon. There is no end to what you can dream.

~ *Gabriela Martinez*

Heirloom

Shadows of the Past

It was my chance to shine singing in the spring concert. I had been given a solo part, and my heart had been pounding for weeks as the date neared. It was the first time in my eight years of attending school that I was going to be somebody.

I had spent those years trying to make myself invisible. I had been teased about my hand-me-down clothes and just about everything else since I began grade school. I really believed this concert would make things better. I just knew I would be accepted from that day forth, but it wasn't meant to be.

It was a cool, crisp evening as the wind blew across the porch of the three-bedroom bungalow where I lived with my parents and eight brothers and sisters. It wasn't unusual for me to be alone with the children this time of day, as I was the oldest and babysitting was expected of me. I would feed my siblings the dinner my mother had prepared while I was at school. After cleaning up the kitchen, I would help the children get ready for bed before settling in myself.

This day was to be different. After getting them ready for bed, I began to get dressed in the first new dress I could ever remember having. My mother bought the dress and a pair of new shoes because I was going to sing in the concert that night. I had a solo.

I had never been able to join any extra-curricular activities at school because my mother worked the graveyard shift and depended on me to take over responsibility for the children after school. She needed to sleep before her 10 p.m. shift. My father worked the afternoon shift.

Today was Thursday, which was pay day for both my parents. They always had Thursdays off. This was the day they did all the shopping. They would always stop at the local pub for a few drinks with friends before coming home. I knew my mother

sometimes had trouble getting my father out of the pub, but she had promised me they would be home in plenty of time for me to get to the concert.

I was completely dressed and pacing the floor by 7:00 p.m. The spring concert was to start at 8:00 p.m., and we were all supposed to be there by 7:30 p.m. I began to move between the kitchen window and the front porch watching for any sign of our old car making its way down our dead-end street. I was sure my mother was having trouble getting my father to leave his friends. By 7:45 p.m. I began to panic. I was already late. How was I going to make it on time? I knew my father wouldn't drive me to school, and my mother didn't have a license.

It was 7:55 p.m. when I heard a car door slam. I ran to the porch and saw my parents unloading the trunk of the car. I leaped off the porch not touching a single step. I ran down the sidewalk while yelling over my shoulder that all was well in the house.

On a normal day it took me about ten minutes to walk to school, but in my mind, I was sure I could make it in the three minutes I had left before the concert started. I ran as fast as I could.

I couldn't believe how quiet it was as I entered the front door of the school and made my way to the auditorium. Then I heard it. The music was echoing through the building. Someone else was singing my song, my solo. I felt as though time was standing still. I had to make myself take a breath. It was as if I didn't want to go on breathing.

I began to back down the hall. I don't remember exiting the school. I began to run, not toward home but in the other direction. The night was still, and my feet seemed to find their way even as my mind paid no attention. When I could run no more, I found myself in the park and gratefully slid on to a nearby bench.

Again, it seemed time stood still. I became aware of tears falling and a cold breeze moving across my face. Thoughts were flying through my mind. How would I ever be able to return to

school? I now would surely be the brunt of others' jokes. What would I tell my mother? I knew she would blame herself.

After sitting there for what seemed like forever, I walked back toward the school. I could hear the voices of families talking and laughing as they promised treats at the local Isaly's for a job well done. I moved past them quickly and made my way home.

The kitchen light was shining enough to light up the driveway as I approached the back door. I knew that even if someone in the family was still up, I wouldn't need to worry about explaining what had happened. No one would ask.

My parents have been gone for many years. To this day, I have never told anyone how my heart was broken. I forgave my parents long ago for that night, but I will never be able to erase the shadows of the past.

~ Dorothy S. Harvey

Those Were the Days

As a child I remember the smell; it smelled like fresh watermelon and sunflower seeds. I woke up in the morning to birds singing and the old lady next door mowing the lawn. Those were the days.

Up to do the chores, ready to go out and play. Watching "Hey Arnold" until it's time to go outside, so beautiful and clean, watching the kids play, wishing it was me. Almost time to go out and, here I come, ready and bright!

Now I'm out, oh yeah, oh me! We're out to the park to climb some trees. Let's run up the hill and tumble down, oh me! Oh, it's so hot, let me get a drink, sit down, relax, and reminisce on what a day I've had.

The sun is going down. Mosquitoes are coming out, birds are going to bed, and it's time to say good night. As I sit on the porch to take a deep breath, I smell the fresh watermelon air go past. I remember those days. Those were the days.

~ Jessica Gary

Pride

Sometimes pride can be overwhelming. Pride can destroy you if you let it.

I'm a mother of three children, two sons and a daughter. My daughter was in the tenth grade when she came to me to tell me she was pregnant. At that moment her world changed, although she didn't realize it at the time.

We had a lot to do. My first priority was to get her to the doctor to confirm that she was pregnant. The test came back positive.

Telling her father would be a challenge. He is a proud man, and I knew it would be difficult. I made sure she wasn't around when I told him. It didn't go well. The words he used were so hurtful. I knew we had to leave for awhile to give him time to cool down. We went to my oldest son's home and stayed for a couple of weeks.

When we came home, my husband said nothing to us. He really didn't say much to either one of us for the next seven months. My daughter didn't want her father to get upset so she wore clothes so no one could tell she was pregnant.

Life changed when my daughter went into labor. I called my husband so he could let my son know his sister was at the hospital. That's the time when her dad became concerned. He began calling constantly to check on her. After a few hours, he came to the hospital, finally realizing that family outweighs pride. Our daughter gave birth to a little girl. That little girl has brightened my husband's life and mine.

My daughter graduated high school with her class. She continued her education and became a nurse. She later married and now also has a son.

My granddaughter is now a college student.

Life is good.

~ *Mary Moore*

Life

Life is like a puzzle for some people. It is full of suspense and problems to solve. Many people struggle to survive. Both wealthy and poor people face many struggles. This text is dedicated to my parents who had a very rough patch and are still struggling. My family has faced many problems. They have had to make many decisions and solve many problems.

I have heard stories of many wealthy people who face hardship even if they are privileged. Some people have very serious health issues, while some others are bothered by problems with children or marital relationship issues. Money doesn't solve all the problems people face. Money can't buy happiness.

My parents told me so many stories of their childhoods that have shocked me. Their life wasn't easy like mine. First, my mom was raised in a poor family; she had eight brothers and sisters. My mom's family was able to arrange only simple food for everyone. She barely got good clothes, healthy and nutritious food, or nice toys. The most disgusting thing that happened in her life was that she lost her father at the age of three. I couldn't imagine how hard it was for my maternal grandmother to raise nine children in that poverty. Somehow they managed, and all my uncles and aunts got married.

On the other hand, my dad's childhood wasn't that easy either. He started working at a very early age. He could have become a teacher, an athlete, a bank manager or any person who works in a comfortable office environment. Unfortunately, he was overwhelmed with family responsibilities. He had to quit his studies after 11th grade so that he could help my grandfather and his brothers earn money. My father told me that he used to ride a bicycle to travel from one place to another. Traveling on a bicycle for several miles was tiring.

My parents got married in 1984. They both were working really hard to fulfill their basic needs of life. After a few years

of marriage they gave birth to a son who became a victim of polio only 2 days after his birth. His name is Sonu. He is unable to walk and can't perform his routine activities by himself. All his work is done by my parents and my grandmother. They feed, bathe, and clean him. This is a struggle in my parents' life. In India, the life of a daughter-in-law was not easy at that time. We had joint families, and the women had many laborious home chores like cooking, cleaning, and laundry. All that work was done manually. Above all they had to take care of their kids. My mom had to finish all these jobs in one day along with taking care of her physically challenged son. Sometimes, she used to cry because it was too much for her.

If I compare my childhood and my life with my parents, I feel embarrassed. My family has suffered a lot in their past and are still struggling to survive. I am lucky. I have many advantages and all the basic needs of my life. My parents are no longer poor, but there are many problems in their life which bother them a lot.

Both wealthy and poor people struggle for their survival. Life is suspense. We never know what is going to happen in the next moment. I have heard that beautiful and great things happen if some person is working really hard. I just want to show my respect and love toward my parents through this writing. I love you dear mom and dad. You are great personalities. You faced every challenge of life with a smiling face, and I truly admire you. I just want my parents to have a more beautiful life.

~Vandana Bansal

The Gift of Life

Hi, my name is Ana, and I want to share a little about my life. I was born on August 14th, 1972 in Queretaro, Qro., Mexico, at 26 weeks of gestation. My weight was 1.500 Kg (3 lbs.) and 40 Cm (15.6”).

At that time, science was not so advanced. So doctors put me in an incubator, but I didn't use an artificial respirator, tubes or anything else except the incubator, which kept me warm.

My parents visited me in the hospital often. My mom didn't want to part with me for one minute, but she also had to take care of my older sisters, Graciela 4, and Adriana 3. Then on August 30, the doctor told my mom that no one could take care of me better than my mother. My parents made the decision to take me home.

I want to thank my mom for the care that she took of me during her pregnancy since she had to be resting in bed all the time. Then from the moment she took me home, she had to take special care of me. For example, she fed me every two hours with a dropper. She bought an electric cushion to keep me warm and was by my side day and night checking me all the time. Thanks mom for your love!

Now I'm the mom of two children. I can imagine the hard time that she had taking care of me. And also now that I'm a mom, I can understand how wonderful it is to give life.

Unfortunately, two of my sisters who were born in the same conditions as me did not make it. Sabrina was born a year before me, and she lived only one day. And Veronica, who was born two years after me, only lived a few hours.

So every day that passes, I thank God for allowing me to survive, for letting me be part of this wonderful world, for my husband and my children, and for the joy of living.

Finally, I want to say to all pregnant women who are experiencing a difficult time not to give up. Fight for the life inside and give your child "The Gift of Life."

~ Ana I. Maldonado

Back on Track

I was twelve years old and remember the day that would change the way I live for the rest of my life. I was living life like a normal twelve-year-old girl would – sleepovers, birthday parties and staying up all night. I never expected for all of that to change so early in my life. I was sitting in Dr. Gilbert’s office at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital waiting for him to come in and talk to my mom, my dad, and me. He soon walked in and said, “After all of the EEGs and Digitraces, I believe you have epilepsy.” I hadn’t ever heard of epilepsy; it sounded foreign to me. He prescribed me a medication and told me that I had to take it twice a day and that I should be fine. I agreed and went along with everything thinking everything was fine.

It was not until a few months later I would find out that I could not live the same life as I always thought I could. I didn’t research it or anything; I just took the medicine and went on. One morning before going to school I woke up feeling really out of it. All I can remember is waking up on the floor with the paramedics over me telling me to stay calm and not to move. They asked me questions. Later they took me to the hospital and gave me medication through an IV. They told me I had a seizure that morning. My head was hurting so bad because I hit it on the kitchen wall and I bit my tongue. I had a new MRI and the doctor adjusted my medication hoping that I would never have a seizure again, but he was wrong.

During 7th, 8th, and 9th grade I kept having seizures and went through 7 medications until finally I got a new doctor, still at Children’s Hospital. The medication that he prescribed worked. In addition to the medication, I had to change a few things in my life. I learned that I couldn’t stay up late, that I was sensitive around lights, and that stress was also a trigger. I went through high school seizure-free with no issues. I kept good grades, worked hard, and graduated. I still was not allowed to drive yet, but I was not really concerned about driving at the time, and neither were my mom and dad. At the age of 19 I had my first job, first serious boyfriend, and was driving for the first time. I thought the seizures were over

and that I didn't have to worry anymore. Then, without warning at 21, my seizures started happening again, and my world crashed. I had to stop driving, give up riding my horse and taking vacations with friends; even taking a shower was a risk. It was the hardest time in my life because I finally had felt a sense of normalness and that had been yanked away, again. My parents had just bought me a new car, and I was finally driving and in a way feeling free. I was looking into school for the first time, I had a good job, and I was happy with my life.

It was time to find a new neurologist as soon as possible. My doctor at Children's Hospital recommended me to a neurologist at U.C. My mom made an appointment; the doctor prescribed a new medication and immediately had me go through more testing. The tests were awful; I prayed every time that this time the results would come out normal and that no silent seizures were happening. I hated the call from the doctor each time because it was never good news, and I would have to do the test again. I knew it was all for the good, but I never thought it was going to end.

After one of my tests I received a call from my doctor saying there was no seizure activity on the charts. She called the Ohio BMV to say it was safe for me to drive again! I felt life was starting to get better and started focusing on the future again at age 22. Now three years later my life is back on track. I am happy and more than ready to move on. I'm enrolled in an ABLE program to refresh my skills so I can be a successful student at Sinclair Community College. I want to go to mortuary school and become a funeral director and licensed embalmer. I have always had great support from my family and friends; now they are so proud of me for focusing on my future and going back to school.

I've had teachers in the past who have told me I would never make it through school and I should just work. I want to prove them wrong and show them that I can do what I want. I just hope that others like me will have the courage and strength to do what I am determined to do and know that they can do whatever they want too.

~ Emily Runions

Never Forget, Never Again

This story takes place in 1936, when the world was full of prejudice, hatred, and heartaches. This was when blacks had to sit in the back of trains or buses, and only whites could sit in the front, and where restaurants had two different areas to eat in – one for blacks, one for whites.

This is the story of my mother, Katherine D. Allen, who at the time was 11 years old, a young black African girl, last in a world of color.

Katherine's step-mother wanted to go and visit her family in South Carolina, and Katherine's dad wanted Katherine to ride to South Carolina, then transfer to a bus that would take her to Alabama, so she could visit her aunt.

When the train stopped in South Carolina, Katherine's step-mom helped her purchase her bus ticket to Alabama, and she went on to visit with her family. Katherine didn't have very far to go. Once on the bus, it was only the bus driver and Katherine at first. After a few minutes, some military men came on; they were loud and smelled of liquor.

One yelled to the other, "Hey, are you going to sit next to that black nigger?"

She was frightened and shivering in her seat. She was trying not to cry, hoping nothing bad would happen. They all started shouting, "Nigger lover!"

Soon after, a white couple got on the bus. The man was also in the military. They spoke up for her and asked the guys not to bother her. The wife assured Katherine that everything would be okay.

By the time she had made it to her stop in Alabama, she'd wet her pants right down to her feet!

This was a ride she would never forget, and she never again rode a train or bus out of town until she was in her 50s.

~ Andretta Allen-Owens

Child Memories

My first memories are of Asunción, Paraguay. I remember the red soil and the vegetation, especially the tree with beautiful yellow flowers. They hung in bunches; therefore, it is called “lluvia de oro” (gold rain).

When I was six years old my family moved to Argentina. I was born there, but until this moment, this was the only relevant happening that I did there. I was very curious about the new life.

At that time my hobby was cutting pictures from newspapers and magazines and pasting them everywhere. I pasted them on the table, on the walls, and on the doors. One of these pictures was a photo of a man with a moustache. My uncle told me, “This man is your president now, his name is Alfonsín.” This happened in 1983, and the military dictatorship had just finished in Argentina.

We were not fugitives of this system. It was a coincidence that we were in Paraguay between 1977 and 1983, during this most violent stage of recent history in my country. Later, we knew how hard these years were. In addition, Argentina had a war against England because of Islas Malvinas, best known as Falkland Islands. In our history Argentina has almost no experience at wars.

I said goodbye to my friends, probably in Guaraní, because I went to kindergarten and there I was learning it (Guaraní and Spanish are both official languages in Paraguay). When we left no one spoke to me in Guaraní again. Later, I forgot it.

In Argentina, it was strange to see many old people cycling. Later, I understood why. In Paraguay the topography was not as flat as in the area of Argentina. Until this time I thought cycling was just for fun and for children.

I wanted to adapt as quickly as possible, and in my understanding as a six year old, an essential requirement to be Argentinian was to cheer for a soccer team. I had to choose between the two most popular teams: Boca and River. The Boca's flag has three horizontal stripes; blue, yellow, blue. The River's flag is white with a diagonal red strip. I choose Boca. Why? Because I knew about soccer and they played better? Of course not! The decision was because the flag looks more like the Argentinean flag. As I said, I wanted to adapt.

We lived some years in a medium size city called Formosa. Later, my mother found a better job in a small town 720 miles away, and we moved again.

Our new town was called San Martin No2, "San Martin number two." It can sound funny, but it's real. Some miles more is San Martin No1, and the number we can differentiate.

I remember everything that we had to do to get there, and I can hardly believe it. Half of the way was not blacktop. We needed two busses to get there. With the first bus we arrived at the last town with blacktop. Then we had to wait some hours for the next bus. The bus that went on the dirt route came once per day. This was very slow. We left early in the morning, and we arrived almost in the night. The worst part of the traveling was the rainy days. The bus just didn't go when the driver saw rain coming. We had to drive in the middle of the road because the mud made it impossible to follow the road.

I slept two nights on the way, once in a bus and on another occasion in the car. We wanted to spend Christmas with our relatives in the city. My mother worked until December 22nd; we left on 23rd. It rained during the trip, and we could not escape. The night of December 23rd we couldn't decide if fighting the mosquitoes or bearing the heat was better (to open or not open the windows). We asked ourselves if we had to spend Christmas in the car half way to our family. We were lucky. During the morning of December 24th the sun shone, the route dried enough for us to travel, and we arrived on time!

In 1987, San Martin No2 had one elementary school and one high school. We had a police station, gendarmerie, township, and a catholic church; every house had a water tank. Electric energy was available just twelve hours per day. At 6 pm, the power plant that fed the town turned off. In summer often the people slept outside with nets.

Most of the time the weather was hot and dry. The north wind blew frequently. When the wind came from the south, it was a signal that rain was coming, so we would prepare to store some water and try to postpone trips.

I walked to the school, and many days it was difficult. The school was not far away, maybe a half mile, but the sun shone strongly. On some windy days, I walked through clouds of dust. The vegetation was low, and the soil had a bright color. This combination with the sun, wind, and dust forced me to squint.

In that remote place with the little foreign influence, we listened to folk music. The priest put speakers at the top of the church, and every Sunday early everybody in the town could listen to folk music. Between one song and the next, he encouraged the people to stand up and go to mass. "Good morning, good morning; it's time to get up..., the Mass starts at 9."

In 1988, a man from Ecuador arrived. He was a strange man with curly hair, beads, and bracelets. He became friends with some teachers and later taught guitar to make his living. It is still a mystery to me why a globetrotter like him arrived in this small town. I took guitar lessons from him. I still remember his accent. I remember how I enjoyed listening to his cheerful songs from Central America.

In this year a new elementary school was opened. It was a very, very small school. This was built with wood and adobe (a mixture of straw and mud) and had just two rooms. To this school went children that lived in the forests or far from civilization. Maybe fifteen poor children walked without shoes to the school.

At the end of year party, the students of the Ecuadorian teacher played and sang two songs (this was the top of my artistic career, I always say as a joke). Shortly thereafter, he was gone. Maybe he again took to his wandering life.

For listening to radio or watching TV, we needed antennas, but on some days these were not sufficient. The bad weather made it difficult for signals to get there. The newspaper arrived by bus, usually at night.

In that distant place, where we rarely received news, I dreamed of interesting travels, meeting different people, and learning about the world. Now I think I have done this. Now I see every place as interesting...here or that hidden small town!

~ *Marcela Diaz*

The Little Boy's Love of Trains

This little boy's love of trains started in the mid- to late 1960's when he lived on Charles St. in Xenia, Ohio. The train tracks ran right down the middle of the street about 15 to 20 feet away from the front door of his house. He used to sit on the front porch, and whenever a train would come by, he was amazed by the sound and size of the big train.

His mother would not let him go near the train, but she could not stop him from running outside every time he heard that train whistle blow. He was out the door like a streak of lightning.

He would be on the porch before the engine reached the house so he could stick his arm up and pull his fist up and down, so that the guy in the train would blow the whistle for him. He loved the sound of that whistle. He also loved the way the sound of that train shook the whole house as it got closer and closer.

Then in 1974 the tornado hit and tore down his house, and he thought that he had lost that feeling forever. Three or four months later he moved to Hill St. about 3 or 4 blocks away. All his happiness was back because there were four sets of train tracks right behind his new house.

So then every time he would hear a train, he would run out the back door of his house straight to the train tracks and just sit there and watch the big old trains go by. This little boy was back in heaven all over again.

And I know this story to be true because I was that little boy.

~Bobby J. Abling

Fragrant

The Magical Flute

Two beautiful sisters were playing in the woods one day with their toys. They were having fun. An ugly girl walked by and wanted to play with them. They said, "No!" and were mean to her. The next day they were playing and heard laughter, so they followed the sound. The sisters spied the ugly girl. She had a magical flute. When she played it, her toys began talking and dancing by themselves.

The two sisters made a pact that they would come back and sneak into the girl's cottage to steal the flute. The next day the two sisters left their mom's cottage early in the morning. They went deep into the woods where they saw the girl singing and playing the flute.

The sisters watched as the ugly girl left with a basket. When she was out of sight, they sneaked into her cottage and stole the flute. They ran further into the forest with the flute, and away from the ugly girl's cottage. Then they tried to play the flute, but their toys were not dancing or singing. They thought they had been tricked.

When they went to return the flute, they were caught by the ugly girl. The ugly girl said, "Why did you steal my flute? There will be consequences."

The sisters ran home quickly, crying. When the sisters opened the door and yelled for their mother, the mother yelled at them saying, "Leave. I don't know you!"

The sisters found a mirror near the door and saw their reflections. They saw that they looked like old women. The sisters left crying and crying. They ran back to the ugly girl's cottage and begged that she would make them young again. The girl replied, "Have you two learned your lesson to be kind to others and not to steal?"

They replied, “Yes, yes, we promise!” The girl picked up her flute and began to play a different set of notes than had made her toys come alive. The two sisters looked in the mirror again and saw that they were young again.

~ *Susanne Knotts*

Where I'm From

I am from the early mornings,
Grandma's French-toast brewing and the weather channel blaring.
I am from the late-night sitcoms,
Laughing uncontrollably and falling asleep with my glasses on.
I am from hot summer days and cold summer nights,
Playing baseball in the yard,
Football on the street.
Stopping was never an option,
When you could no longer see what was directly in front of your
face,
streetlights guided you to the back porch – we'd race.
I am from begging to stay the night,
Rock, paper, scissors decides who would ask for permission.
Crystal and I would always fight,
Growing up we've become stronger.
I am now the little brother who protects her like I'm actually
older.
I am from my struggles and fears,
Watching everything around me like a hall of mirrors,
Soaking it all in, staying away from the beers,
A family crutch I will make disappear.
I am from my mother, not my society-named dad,
The woman who is so strong but doesn't know it,
Whom I love but I don't always show it.
I am from the love I give and the love I receive,
From the beautiful girl I can't wait to see,
She loves me for me.
I am exactly the man I've always wanted to be.

~ Brandon Bane
Inspired by George Ella Lyon "Where I'm From"

Thank You

Thank you for my teacher,
She always teaches English happily.
Thank you for my classmates,
I am happy learning with them.

Thank you for my friends in the U.S.,
They give me comfort and help me to relax.
Thank you for my friends in Japan,
They support me from a distance.

Thank you for my neighbors
They help me when I am in trouble.
Thank you Cincinnati,
For being a wonderful place.

Thank you for the USA
We can have a great experience.
Thank you for English classes
It helps me to communicate.

Thank you for my family
I am happy with them.
I want to make their lives less stressful.
I want to support them
And wish for their success.

~ Keiko Akita

Morning's Rest

Morning lies above the night
Sleeping like a dream,
A cloudy pillow for its head
And the moonlight soft in its face.

It is tucked away safe for the night
And sleeps in heavenly peace
Until the arm of dawn reaches up
And pulls it down,
Very quietly without a sound,
And the stars fade out of sight,
Flickering out of light.

Morning gets out of bed
And raises its sleepy head.
It outshines the dark
And presses its way
Through the turning of a new day.

~ Lisa Williams

My Horse

Apollo is big and powerful.
Fast and free he goes.
Automatically he knows what to do.
He is an image of myself.
A better friend I have never had.
Happiness is when I am with him.
Apollo brings me peace within.

~ Elizabeth Nora Willard

Our Favorite Things

After listening to Julie Andrews sing “My Favorite Things,” our ESL class created Power Points of their own favorite things. The following is a sample of our creation. Think Sound of Music and hum “My Favorite Things” as you read.

Skiing down mountains and swimming in the Black Sea
Traveling the world with my wife and my family
Hearing the voice of my girl when she sings
These are a few of our favorite things.

Going to movies and shopping for new clothes
Sleeping for hours and looking out windows
My husband and I exchanging our rings
These are my favorite, favorite things.

Looking at landscape while biking and walking
Drinking hot tea with fresh mint and good talking
Planting a garden with beans on the strings
These are a few of our favorite things.

Making and baking fresh bread in the oven
Dancing and singing to tunes I am loving,
Summers and autumns and winters and springs
These are a few of our favorite things.

When my dog barks and the fish bite, if I'm feeling sad
I simply remember my favorite class, and then I don't feel so bad.

~Vasile Bugnar
Anna Chen
Irani Crispim
Amal Fana
Veronika Jaczko
Duyen Pham
Ahlam Rahli
Nhu Tran
Nabil Younan

Love Is

Love is a friend of the heart
It dresses up to play its part
It romances and joins together
Always to be one
Love is playful and fun
It is many years old but forever young
It is alluring, stirring, and forever enduring
It is faithful, true, and trusting.
Love is the taking of hands and the joining of hearts
Forever together till death do us part.

~ *Lisa Williams*

My Therapy

LAUGHING - a visual expression of a number of positive emotional states.

I chose to write about laughing because it has been an amazing tool for me. It is like therapy!

Since I was little, I've been always very charismatic, outgoing, friendly, and a person with a great sense of humor. I could go on listing my wonderful qualities, but human as I am, I also have flaws. This past year in particular has been a really different year for me. I'm originally from Mexico, and I started living in the U.S about 13 months ago. I came here as an Au Pair. For those who don't know what an Au Pair is, it's the same as a nanny; however you live with a host family and take care of the kids of your host family for the period of a year.

It has been a year full of every kind of experience imaginable. To begin with, I had to speak in another language which makes it more challenging. It has been amazing, with good moments as well as bad ones.

It is really hard to be apart from your family, friends, and my native land for a full year. Laughing has been a life saver for me, like a blanket to a kid when he is cold or needs it to go to sleep. When I'm having a bad moment or I'm feeling homesick, I just try to remember or think about something that makes me happy and can bring a smile to my face.

So what I do when I'm feeling down is to close my eyes and think about something very funny so I can laugh and feel relief by all those endorphins that my brain produces when I'm laughing. And sometimes when I laugh and I receive that positive feedback because others around me also laugh. It is pure therapy!!!

So the message I'm trying to send is this: Always ... even though you may be having a hard time, try to smile, to laugh, and

to give the best face you can to life. Try it once and you will feel the difference. Hopefully by feeling the change, you can help others feel it too, by stealing a smile or laugh of theirs.

~ *Patricia Rabago*

Laughter. (2014, March 19). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 19:09, March 20, 2014, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Laughter&oldid=600377307>

Wild Rose

The Number Hit One

It all started off as a dream. I felt hopeless and scared to death. It was the most frightening dream anyone could ever imagine. This dream haunts me to this very day. My fear...elevators.

It was a stormy, dull night. I remember this as if it really happened. Everything felt so real...rain pounding against my car. I took a glance over to my right then another one, "Is that my little brother outside?" I put my car in park. There he was, just sitting out there cold and wet. I yelled, "What in earth are you doing out here?" He said nothing and ran to our apartment building around the corner. I was so shocked and curious. "Why would he be outside?" I asked myself. I finally get to the building going up the elevator. My brother knew I hated them because I have claustrophobia. If I'm in a small area it will make me panic.

While in the elevator, I heard something – something unusual, the sound of cracking. It started to get very loud, then it just stopped. Not a few seconds later the whole elevator snapped. The wire had broken! Lights were sparking in and out, moving so fast I couldn't stand. There was the smell of rubber burning. All I could think about was my little brother. Is this happening to him, too? At this point I was screaming for help begging this not be the end. I felt so weak and as though it was going to be all over.

After dropping 48 floors counting down to my own death, I realized I had my phone. I tried to call my mother to say my goodbyes but the phone flew out of my hand. I ran over to the other side of the elevator hoping it wasn't too late. I was now on the 10th floor and moving fast, not having a second to breathe or even think about what I was going to tell my mother. I could just fear my death but I had to be strong. My mother answered and I said, "I love you, mom." The number hit one...and I opened my eyes.

Winter War

Holidays
Snow plows
Family gatherings
Bitter cold
Snow men
Snow shovels
Decorations
Bulky clothes
Ice coated trees
Falls in the icy parking lots
Grey skies
Slush on the roads
School's canceled
Dangerous drives
Who wins?

~ Peggy Davis
Robert Giesige
Ken Gorenica
Heather Krupica
Tiwan Sain
Demetri Tye
Agustina Villanueva

Sometime Around Midnight

I never sleep much anymore, because when I sleep I'm missing out on so much more.

Sure dreaming is wonderful and brings me anything I want, but when I wake up I feel disappointed because I'm dreaming of someone I'm not.

I don't know why some people fear the night.

When the clock hits midnight, that's when I feel alive.

Maybe it's the streets of desolation.

Perhaps it's the luminous constellations.

I hear the peaceful melody of a cricket's song.

Sometimes I can't help but simply hum along.

A nighttime of internal conversation does good for the mind.

Thinking of my future, or looking at funny cat videos. Sometimes they get intertwined.

The sun will be coming soon, so I better hit the hay.

Who knows, maybe tomorrow will be a good day.

My eyes are weighing down, they're becoming too much to fight.

Nice talking to you, brain.

See you tomorrow night.

~ Jalen Diendl

On a Snowy Morning

Look at the window
Still dark, snow on the branches
I imagine freezing temperature,
Snow shoveling, icy roads, busy traffic...

How about staying in the bed all day?
Alarm clock say "ring ring NO!"

Finally I get up and open the door.
Wind freezes my body.

Look at the ground
Small footsteps crossing the road.

The steps will bring me spring.

~ Asuka Kuriyama

Behind MXOI1286

My name is MXOI1286. I can fit in a computer. I have no form. I have no function. To many people in the computer world, I am just some electrons. They can only decode that the person came to the United States of America on 3 March 2013, and her story was unknown and unwritten. Even though my identity is listed as letters and numbers, let me tell you about my time in America, in the USA.

I arrived to this country with a lot of emotions and feelings, such as happiness.

My story began; I landed in JFK in New York. I started with the opportunity for something new. I was here to learn new things, to meet new people, and to improve my knowledge of another language.

My whole world fit in 55x25x35 centimeters. What I brought from my past only weighed 23 kilos, and fit in a suitcase. I was looking forward to discovering my reality. I was going to go far into the future, with maturity and bravery. The limits have not been a problem. Now my existence is in the American world, not my home.

In my country we don't have the same diversity that America has such as races, religions, languages, social conditions, and the most important things, opportunities.

I am not just a number. I spoke a foreign language in a new environment. Coming from my home country was like landing on the moon. I was ignored. I didn't have any support. I entered into the concrete jungle. Real life. This was my reality.

Before this crazy trip began, my life was in another kind of routine. I came here to work for at least this year and to live on my own.

To live in the past is not an option; now I'm a different person. This adventure transformed my mind, my style, and my whole being. The future is the only truth I have now.

I discovered new people.

I discovered new things.

Because I breathe, because I think, and because I have feelings, I'm a human. I'm not just a code of numbers and letters.

The world is mine. I don't have limits, except the sky. My year is almost over. The dreams came true. And this is my story.

~ *Paulina Bonilla*

The Falling Dream

As I fell asleep in a big bed with pillows I started thinking of the hard long day that I had. The work, people and the challenge I had gone through had my head pounding and rushing – my eyes feeling weak, heavy. They started to darken and then close.

There's no noise but I can feel something in my hands. What is it in my hands? I can't tell what is in my hand because there is no light where ever I am. Out of nowhere light starts to beam and then my vision starts to come clear. I can see big tall green trees everywhere. I look down and see trees and more trees. How did I get up here on a tree that high in the yellow sky? Starting the way down I get weak. My grip gives way, now falling at the speed of a car. I try to stop my fall by using my hands to grab every tree I see. But my hands are like ghosts' hands. Now falling and falling going through trees after trees falling and falling.

~ Anthony M. Heard

The Race

There is a place in space,
Where a race is taking place.
The sun has the fun of chasing the moon
Into the breaking of a new day,
And together they fight for a little of the limelight,
Until the never ending race strikes again and sends them,
Dancing, dancing, fading away and away and gone.

~ Lisa Williams

The Walking Cat

This is a story that happened to a friend of mine and how she told it to me.

“We have a wonderful cat who is the favorite of our family. The only problem is that when we go to bed, the cat always takes a walk on the headboard of our bed. And as our cat was a cow in her past life, she usually falls on the fifth or sixth time across. All of her weight lands on me or my husband’s head. Hoping to cure the cat of this habit, I created a topic on the women’s forum describing the problem and asked for advice.

“I was advised to put a bowl of water beside the bed, so that the cat, being afraid of the water, would run away. That evening I did that. The cat was surprised, splashed a little bit in the water, then as usual went for a walk on the edge of the bed, but now wet. As a result, the cat had fun and we had a wet bed.

“The next tip for the cat was to buy an aromatic repellent for animals. It turned out that it was not the cat’s favorite smell, but it was still not enough to give up the walk. However, my husband was very fussy and flatly refused to sleep in the bedroom. He demanded that we ventilate the room. Girls, if anyone needs a repellent for men, please ask me, I still have some!

“Next suggestion was to nail a shelf to the bed that was wide enough for the cat to walk around and not fall. My husband did the best he could, and I was immediately regretting this idea, fearing that now the cat would fall along with the shelf. In the evening, as usual, the cat came for a walk, but suddenly jumped back afraid because of a toy motion sensitive hamster, that my child left there on the shelf earlier in the day. So, suddenly we received a wonderful nighttime security guard, of whom our cat is really scared. After making a few more attempts to walk on our headboard with the same lack of success, the cat gave up and abandoned his nightly walks.”

Author Biographies

Bobby J. Abling - p. 107

I was born and raised in Greene County, Ohio. I have always been interested in nature. I spend as much time as possible outdoors riding my bike and visiting, photographing, and sketching the old covered bridges in the area.

Keiko Akita - p. 114

I'm Keiko. I came from Japan. I am going to live here 10 more months. I would like to stay in the U.S.A.

Andretta Allen-Owens - p. 101

My name is Andretta Allen-Owens. I attend T.L.C., Trinity Lutheran Church where I'm studying for my GED. It's been a struggle for me for the past two years, but I have to keep my faith in God and not lose sight of my goals. Here is a message for students: Please don't give up on your education. We have already cheated ourselves enough without it.

Anthony Ayers - p. 3**Phyllis Jayne Baldwin - p. 67**

I am a mother, wife, daughter, and friend. I come from a family of teachers but have always danced to the beat of a different drum. My mom always called me a "free spirit" and my dad called me "flighty". I have been writing short stories and poetry for as long as I can remember. It has always been my escape from the troubles of life. In my eyes, nothing is better than a pen and paper.

Brandon Bane - p. 113

Brandon works full time, is a film enthusiast, and aspires to attend college. He will major in film studies.

Cloude A. Banks - p. 25

Anthony Banks is a young man currently building a career in construction.

Vandana Bansal - p. 95

I am a 27-year-old woman. I live in Wooster along with my husband and my 22-month-old daughter. I am a housewife and my husband is working at OARDC.

Paulina Bonilla - p. 127

I'm Paulina. I have been living in the United States for a year as an au pair. I plan to go back to Mexico in March 2014 and begin graduate study at a university. My dream is to go to the World Cup in Brazil.

Vasile Bugnar - p. 117

Vasile was born in Romania where he enjoyed swimming in the Black Sea. He now lives in Seven Hills and enjoys spending time with his wife, children and grandchildren.

Derrick Burnett - p. 74

Derrick is a 33-year-old male attending Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. He believes that it is never too late to better yourself and complete your education.

Sonia Campbell - p. 78**Kuo Chao - p. 9**

I am a student from Taiwan who currently lives in Ohio. I enjoy participating and learning English.

Anna Chen - p. 117

Anna was born in China and now lives in Brookpark where she enjoys taking care of her one-year-old daughter.

Hafida Choukri - p. 37

Hafida came from Morocco in 2013 to marry her husband. Her favorite sport is gymnastics. Her dreams for the future include having two children, a boy and a girl, finding a good job using all of her language skills (She is fluent in Arabic, Spanish, French and English.), and to remain in love with her husband forever.

Jariya Cicchetti - p. 83

I am Jariya, and I am an ESOL student from Thailand. When I was living in Michigan, I volunteered at Mejer's Garden. Now, I am learning English in the Warren County ABLE class.

Irani Crispim - p. 117

Irani arrived to Middleburg Heights less than a year ago and enjoys the outdoors with her husband and five-year-old daughter.

Karen A. Cuevas Landero - p. 27

Karen was born in Mexico and moved to Wooster, Ohio, in 2007. She enjoys reading, playing piano, and spending time with her family. She is a mother of two children.

Peggy Davis - p. 124

I attend GED classes at the Southeast Library.

Marcela Diaz - p. 103

I was born in San Fernando in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. I came to the United States in November 2012 with my husband and our two sons. I had a few English lessons in school. In the USA, I am studying at The English Center in Youngstown, Ohio.

Jalen Diendl - p. 125

My name is Jalen Diendl. Don't let the last name stump you. It's not that important. I'm from Ohio, born and raised. I'm a chill person. I love music. Also, if you involve pizza, I'm there. That's me.

Kayla Adair Dillon - p. 73

Kayla Adair Dillon is a young woman who has struggled through the justice system looking to make changes in herself to better her life. She wrote this piece as part of a creative writing series while incarcerated. Since, she has passed her GED and has been released.

Regina Dunbar - p. 41

Regina Dunbar is a very hard-working student who is determined to earn her GED so she can pursue other post-secondary and vocational options.

Marta Eelen - p. 48

Marta Eelen was born in Siberia, Russia. She got married in the US to her husband in 2013. In her country she was studying at medical college. Marta likes biological sciences and hopes to become a microbiologist. In her free time, Marta enjoys watching movies and reading poetry.

Amal Fana (Artist) - cover, p. 117

I was born and raised in Kuwait and am living in Cleveland. I have been here two years and am an ESL student at Polaris Career Center in Middleburg Heights. Since I was a child I loved to draw and paint. I share the same hobby with my husband. Now, I can share it with you.

Lidia Fateeva - p. 131

Lidia lived in Russia before she met her husband. She enjoys exercising, socializing with friends, and exploring places in her new country.

Joshua A. Fowler - p. 79

My name is Joshua A. Fowler. I live in Bainbridge, Ohio. I am a married man with three children, two boys and a girl. I enjoy spending time with my family. I like to hunt, fish, swim, and play in the snow and mud.

Frank Frasier - p. 77**Martha Maria Gajón - p. 21**

I'm from Mexico. I'm married and have three children. I had to move to the U.S.A. because my husband, Alberto Suarez, worked in an automotive company in Mexico and was transferred to the U.S.A.

Masako Garskie - p. 24

I am from Japan and have been living near Parma for many years. Some told me that I spoke English with a heavy accent. I wanted to speak better English and decided to do something about it. A couple of people suggested attending ABLE class. I was skeptical

and hesitated. Finally I enrolled in ABLE class last winter. Not only is my English improving with each lesson, I also have a good time learning in the class.

Jessica Gary - p. 92

Jessica Gary is working toward her GED and would like to seek a career in the medical field.

Ana A. Gay - p. 35

I'm originally from Brazil, but moved to the USA about 2 years ago. I have a university degree in Administration from my country, but now study at the Madison High School - ABLE with Mrs. McCarty. I am married to Marcus Gay and we have two sons. I wrote this poem to show my happiness in achieving my English learning goals.

Robert Giesige - p. 124

Robert is a student in the Parma ABLE program at the Southeast Library.

Marshall Golden - p. 39

My name is Marshall Golden, 31 years old, from Columbus, Ohio. I owe getting my GED to myself, my boys, Daylin Golden and Jayden Golden, and my mom. After obtaining my GED, I would like to start a career at COTA as a bus driver, or at CSX as a train engineer. I'm currently a truck driver and a part time motor coach operator. I'm a person just trying to be successful, and create happiness. I'm also in pursuit of happiness.

Ken Gorenich - p. 124

I have done many different projects in business before settling on creating a membership for students learning internet marketing. I am working to obtain my GED so that I can subsidize my income and help others to do the same.

Keven Graham - p. 8

Hello my name is Keven Graham. I'm a Cincinnati native. I attended the GED/ABLE classes at Scarlet Oaks. I want to take this opportunity to thank my wife for pushing me to get my GED. I'd also

like to thank my teachers, Mary Blankenship, Mary Wolfe, teacher's aid, Laura Meiers, and all the tutors. Without their support and wisdom, I would not have obtained my GED or this honor. I do hope to continue my education in the near future.

Lydie Enato Guedegbe - p. 60

My name is Lydie Enato Guedegbe and I am from Benin (West Africa). Since November, I have lived in the USA. My first activity after I arrived was to enroll in ESL classes which I enjoy very much. Everyone who lives in my heart can see himself in this bit of prose. I like my new life and I feel blessed.

Dianna Hallahan - p. 22

Dianna Hallahan is married and is currently taking care of her husband who is ill. She came back to school after being out for about fifty years and earned her GED.

Dorothy S. Harvey - p. 89

My name is Dorothy Harvey. I have been a Geauga County resident for 45 years. My family, my extended family, and my friends are the light of my life. My job, of 27 years in the healthcare field, ended in March 2013 when my position was eliminated. I began attending the ABLE program at Auburn Career Center where I quickly discovered a passion for writing. I found putting words on paper to be a way of healing the soul.

Anthony M. Heard - p. 129

Shannon Scott Hines - p. 65

Shannon Hines lives in Marietta, Ohio. He takes GED classes at the Washington County Jail. His goal is to get his GED and go to college.

Jason Holbert - p. 28

Jason is a young man who has a full-time job and is working very hard toward getting his GED. He wants to be a good example for his son whom he adores!

Percy James Huffman - p. 69

I am Percy James Huffman. I am 32 years old and was born in Detroit, Michigan. I now reside in Lima, Ohio. I have a beautiful daughter, Alana. I am currently enrolled in GED classes to further my education. I enjoy cars, sketching, poems, and quotes. My goals are to someday own my own mechanic shop. I have worked hard to get where I am today and I feel very blessed. With God on my side, I can accomplish anything.

Veronika Jaczko - p. 117

Veronika is from Hungary and lives in Strongsville with her husband and dogs.

Victoria S. Jonekis - p. 40**Porcsché Jones - p. 13****Nichole L. Keene - p. 50**

You tell me I'm ABLE; I tell you I'm willing. You tell me to stay strong; I tell you my head's held high. You say have faith; I say I have hope.

Kyong Hee Kim - p. 43

I came here with my husband, 8-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter. I love my family very much. My kids and I had never lived in another country before, so we were worried about our new life. But we have adjusted and are doing well, because my neighbors are very kind and my children's school is very good and safe.

Susanne Knotts - p. 111

Susanne Knotts lives in Marietta, Ohio. She takes classes to earn her GED at Washington State Community College.

Heather Krupica - p. 124

I am a mother of three children and working towards passing the GED test.

Asuka Kuriyama - p. 126

I'm from Japan. I've lived in Dublin, Ohio, for almost three years. I love studying English and talking with friends at my ESOL classes. I've learned a lot of important things there.

John Leadman - p. 70

My name is John Leadman. I'm from Groveport, Ohio. I'm currently an ABLE/GED student at Eastland Career Center.

Ana I. Maldonado - p. 97

Hello, my name is Ana and I am from Mexico. I live in Ohio, and I'm studying English at Live Oaks in Milford.

Gabriela Martinez - p. 84

I am from Mexico, and I came to this country with the dream of opening my own business with my husband. We want to establish our own film production company in Los Angeles. To this end, for the last year, I have been enrolled in the ABLE program to bring my English up to speed. We hope to be able to complete our move to LA by the summer of 2015.

David Mathis - p. 81

I am David Mathis, and I am getting my GED to feel that I am on the road to success and accomplishing something meaningful in life.

Jamie McAllister - p. 58**Mary Moore - p. 93**

My name is Mary Moore. I'm 61 years old. I have three children and six grandchildren. My goal is to get my GED for myself and my family.

Clarice Murray - p. 68

Clarice Murray is a home health aide who enjoys helping others. Her goal is to earn her GED so she can pursue her nursing degree.

Jocelyn Otero - p. 123

Jocelyn is currently working toward her GED and would like to become a massage therapist. She enjoys running, studying, and spending time with friends.

Lawrence Pastor - p. 82**Jamee Peck - p. 6**

My name is Jamee Peck. I am 20 years old and I live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a mother of a beautiful one-year-old girl named Alisa. I currently am working on several other short stories to be published for other publishers. I also love to travel. I wouldn't be where I am now without all the help from the ABLE Program.

Duyen Pham - p. 117

Duyen was born in Viet Nam and now lives and works in Cleveland where she likes going to movies and shopping for new clothes.

Patricia Rabago - p. 119

Hello, my name is Pato Rabago. I am from Mexico and my first language is Spanish. I have been living in the United States for almost a year, working as an au pair. I'm hoping to extend my stay for another year as an au pair.

Ahlam Rahli - p. 117

Ahlam is from Morocco and just moved into her first home in Fairview Park where she likes drinking hot tea with fresh mint.

Shaquille Reynolds - p. 51

Shaquille Reynolds is a very hard-working student who is determined to earn his GED so he can pursue available post-secondary and vocational options.

Tiffany Rose Rittenour - p. 17

Tiffany Rose Rittenour has had a difficult life, but wants to make a better life for her son by being a good role model. For that reason, and the desire to better herself, she is going back to school to work on getting her GED.

Andrew Rodriguez (Artist) - p. viii

I'm Andrew Rodriguez. I am 23 years old and reside in Leipsic, Ohio. I have a son, Daniel, who is 4, and a daughter, Autiana, who is 2 months. I'm a creative person who is easy to get along with. I tell my life story through drawings. I'm dedicated to succeed in life for my kids, my fiancé, family, and most importantly for myself.

Laura Romero - p. 29

Laura is a young wife and mother who came to this country with her husband ten years ago from Mexico. She is now working very hard to earn her GED.

Emily Runions - p. 99

I wanted to share my story of struggling with epilepsy as a way to encourage others who are having difficult times. I am enrolled in Warren County ABLE to prepare me for community college and will soon take the certification test to become a Pharmacy Technician.

Tiwan Sain - p. 124

I attend classes at the Southeast Library.

Brenda J. Sanchez - p. 56

I was born in Mexico. I came to America 5 years ago. My husband works at The Ohio State University Research Center. We have two children.

Maryellie Santiago - p. 15

Maryellie Santiago is from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and has lived in Cleveland since 1997. She adores her family and wants her children to have the best life possible.

Candice Starling - p. 18**Seth Stephenson - p. 47, 53**

My name is Seth Stephenson. I am 23 years old and live in Lima, Ohio. I have been a musician all my life and enjoy traveling and the outdoors. I love to write and hope to continue doing so for many years to come.

Brandi Stevens - p. 54

Brandi just passed her GED test in December of 2013.

Nhu Tran - p. 117

Nhu enjoys traveling and was born in Viet Nam. He lives in Cleveland.

Demetri Tye - p. 124

I'm from Cleveland, OH. I am a huge fan of comic books, video games and martial arts. Currently, I am in training to become an amateur mixed martial artist.

Sara Velazquez - p. 31**Agustina Villanueva - p. 124**

I came to the USA in February of 2001. We were looking for a better life. There were many illegal drugs and much violence in my country. Schools were not very good either. My husband and I decided to come to start a new life. Now we are happy, we have three boys who are so good in school. My goal now is to get the GED and then continue studying because I want to become a nurse.

Agata Wajda - p. 4

My name is Agata Wajda. I was born in 1964 in Poland. I came to the USA almost four years ago. In America I live with my lovely husband and daughter. I learn English in The English Center in Youngstown, Ohio. I'm thankful to my teachers for their knowledge in helping me to achieve my goals.

Lin Wang - p. 19

Lin was born in I-Lan, Taiwan, and studied economics in college. She likes traveling, eating good food, and pretty stones. She has two grown daughters and enjoys swimming.

Elizabeth Nora Willard - p. 116

I have lived on a small horse farm all my life. I now go to GED classes.

Lisa Williams - p. 115, 118, 130

My name is Lisa Williams. I am a recent widow and mother of four sons. I have been in GED classes for four months. As a child I always loved using my imagination, being read to, and looking at the stars and clouds. I still do! I have loved writing poetry ever since I was in the eighth grade in middle school. I hope to one day have a book of poetry published.

Nabil Younan - p. 117

Nabil grew up in Egypt on a big farm and enjoys gardening in Olmsted Falls.

Honorable Mention

Angelika Afanasyeva-Kruttlin
October Ahmed
Michael Aldridge
George Alexandru
Juan Alvarez
Gloria Amarilez
Earl Anderson
Omar Ankcum
Graciela Aranda
Yasue Arceno
Deqa Arog
Ofelia Atilano
Comfort Ballah
Tiffany Bellamy-Tucker
Providence Bierman
Lucila Blanchard
Annette Blue
Wanda Bogdanowicz
Corey Boothe
Carmen Bradley
Fernando Bravo
Nancy Brenizer
Shaneik Brown
Hoby Burke
Angel Campbell
Nathan Caraballo
Yaritza Cedeno
Charbel Chahine
Valerie Cham
Sergii Chebotar
Stacy Christy
Tionna Clark
Joshua-Jamal Collins
Bettelgueuze Conte
John Covic

Danuta Czyzycka
Stanislaw Czyzycki
Maria Dahmen
Melvin Davis
Mariapaola Di Re
Mamoudou Diawara
Blasa Dimmerling
Manuella Dominguez
Sovann Em
Laila Etawerghi
Jasmine Evans
Aylin Faghihi
Keisha Fawcett
Ivelisse Fernandez
Elvis Flynn
Maisha Fowler
Sheila Gales
Laura Gay
Reggie Graham
Imani Green
Juan Guitierrez
Crystal Gunther
Shqiponsa Gupe
Tay Ha
Hiam Haddad
Audrey Hall
Catlin Harding
Pok Harris
Hong Ying Li Hazel
Alfonzo Hernandez
Moraima Hernandez
Maria Herrera
Nichelle Hinds
Shafi Hiray
Derrick Hubbard

Joshua Huddleston
Lynn Hunt
Fatima Hussein
Yasmine Hussein
Tevin Ingram
Ionela Ionita
Haseena Jannan
Martha Jimenez
Yoselin Jimenez
Semhar Joannis
Annette Johnson
Barbara Johnson
Deborah Jones
Demetria Jones
Tumika Jordan
Don-Hyung Jung
Nahla Kamoni
Jessica Keating
Khounkham Khamvongsa
Saleem Khanfar
Akila Khalfoun
Candis King
Mark Klaus
Katuizync Klejna
Norman Kline
Susan Kosunick
Ange Kouakou
Lesia Koysman
Emiliya Kozak
Masako Kuehmstadt
Ray Langhurst
Elena Leydiker
Mei-Ling Lin
Maria Lopez
Arnetta Love
Tong Ly
Marylin Marrero
Doris Martinez
Eric Matheny

Karen McClain
Sarah McCowns
William McGill
Constance McManus
Shawnekah McNarrin
Briana McQueen
Prasanna Medarametla
Brandon Melton
Katyam Mendez
Clarissa Miller
Jodie Miller
Chelsea Milum
Jorge Moreno
Edmond Murray
Anatolii Muzychuk
Vita Muzychuk
Brittany Myers
Mildred Myles
Stephen Mywatt
Yuri Nakamura
Tam Nguyen
Phuoc Nguyen
Adriane Okzko
June Ollison
Feng Pan
Jacie Penn
Michelle Peppers
Javier Perez
Mildred Perez
Lora Platt
Roxana Polanco
Clarence Pryor
Gloria Pryor
Christian Puente
Linh Quach
Maria Quinones
Yang Qunjiao
Radmila Radjenovic
Maurice Reddick

Flor Reyes
Susana Reyes
Demarco Rhym
Katrida Robinson
Celia Rodriguez
Margarita Rodriguez Perez
Melissa Roman
Kathy Ross
Betty Ruckes
Dee Dee Rundles
Michael Russo
Elizabeth Sacksith
Chelsea Sagowitz
Surrinder Sahota
Elham Salameh
Mayra Salas
Sonia Salloum
Rafila Sarbu
Eric Sciance
Deb Scott
Afusatu Seidu
Edmund Serafin
Anna Sielska
Teresa Sowinska
Terrell Spencer
Qiana Stanford
Sonni Stanford
Jimmy Stoll
Roderick Stoudemire
Elzbieta Swiderek
Malgorzata Szpakut
Lucy Talley
Anthony Tates
Shante Taylor
Mariko Tesaki
Angelet Thema
Anthony Thompson
Nina Tolochko
Luis Toro

Carmen Torres
Kieu Tran
Lydia Troche
Elena Turnyanskaya
Adriana Belen Vasquez
Dulce Vasquez
Elizabeth Victorio
Sonia Villaneuva
Andrea Voss
Jeremiah Walker
William Wallace
Tabitha Way
Darrius Welch
Heather Williams
Reseign Wilson
Edwin Young
Maria Zamora
Lisbeth Zelaya
Erik Zitney
Mohamed

