

Beginnings XXII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF
THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Foreword

Making Connections

Today (March 30), we are entering our third week of a stay-at-home order. I suspect that you are staying at home too. It's a scary time, and maybe a strange time to be writing about writing. But here we go:

I write every day, even while staying at home. I always make lists and notes to myself. But I also write for more important reasons. Yesterday, for example, I wrote back and forth with our 9-year-old granddaughter using Face Book's Messenger for kids. We shared information about what we planned to do for the day and later, what we actually did. I caught her up about what her 9-year-old Ohio cousin had been doing. We "chatted" about which character from Charlotte's Web was our favorite. This writing made us feel closer to each other, even though she is in California and I am in New York.

I have read the pieces in this year's Beginnings book. Congratulations to you all! Many of your pieces reflect this idea of writing bringing you closer to others. You have written about your parents, grandparents, and children. You have written about places you lived before moving to Ohio and what life was like there. You have written about important events in your lives—who was there, what happened, what you learned, how you felt.

Let's think for a minute about how writing made you feel closer to the topics of your writing. If you wrote about a person, did you "see" him or her in your mind's eye? Could you "hear" this person talking to you? Could your imagination "see" events from the past? Probably so. So, as a writer, you became closer to the topic of your writing.

Now think about reading someone else's writing. When you read a classmate's writing, do you feel a bit closer to him or her? Perhaps you learn about what is important to the author.

Perhaps you learn something about a person or event from your classmate's past. Perhaps you learn about what your classmate believes is joyful, or important, or frightening.

We at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center learned this lesson about the importance of connections very early on in our Writers' Conference history. The conferences began in 1998 (!!). Our first plans included a) a guest speaker, b) small group sessions about writing, and c) presentation of certificates. The first and third ideas went well, but when we tried to offer small group sessions, we found that our audience had diminished dramatically. "Where are our authors?" we wondered. So we set out throughout the hotel to see what was happening. We found many clusters of authors sitting together listening to each other's writing. These were often people who did not even know each other, but by listening, they were making connections. (We learned the lesson. After that first year, we instituted one of the most popular parts of the conferences: the open mic, where anyone who wanted to could read his or her piece aloud to the audience.)

Writing—whether you're thinking about it as an author or as a reader—is often about making connections. Always, but especially now, these connections are precious.

Nancy Padak
Lakewood, New York

Acknowledgements

Since 1997, the words of adult student authors have been published in a soft-bound anthology called *Beginnings*. This publication has always highlighted the collaboration between Aspire authors and their instructors. The unusual circumstances of 2020 not only forced the urgency of this partnership, but fortified it. The Ohio Literacy Resource Center honors *Beginnings XXII* authors and is grateful for the teachers who not only instruct, encourage and guide their students, but share their love of writing.

While we cannot celebrate the 70 *Beginnings XXII* authors and two artists in person this year, we applaud each author and artist who had the courage to share their voice and vision. We also congratulate those who appear in our honorable mention section. Thank you for your submissions and we encourage you to keep writing.

We are grateful for the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Aspire program for their commitment to the development and celebration of student writing and for their continuing support of the teachers and students in Ohio's Aspire classrooms.

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Safe at Home

Home

Home

Comfortable beautiful

Laugh support rest

Love is very important.

Discuss believe care

Peaceful happy

Family

~ Zhu Mei

Going to America: Everyone's Dream

"I'd love to go to America."

Everyone in Saudi Arabia always said this. And I did, too!
But now I know why. Here are the reasons I love America:
Life is easier, and there are lots of opportunities.

That's why I love America.

Children who are born here are American from birth.

That's why I love America.

No one can abuse anyone, especially the women.

That's why I love America.

You can work, you can study, or you can do both.

That's why I love America.

You get your citizenship and you travel around the world.

That's why I love America.

Most Americans are fair, and most of them are helpful.

That's why I love America.

You are free, and you can do anything good you love.

That's why I love America.

You have hope, you have a dream, and you have faith.

That's why I love America.

If you haven't yet accomplished anything, you still have hope in the future.

That's why I love America.

There are fifty states, so you can live in the state you love most.

That's why I love America.

You can be whatever you want to be.

That's why I love America.

America is a land of dreams.

I love America, and I am happy to be in America.

Can you give one reason why you won't love it?

~ Asma Mohamed

The Best of Both Worlds

Culture is a combination of beliefs, behavior, and language. These beliefs move with you to any new community, and you can attain a greater understanding of growth and living. It is extremely important to respect and accept different cultures if we want our lives to be simpler and enjoyable.

Like several others, my family has various cultural traditions, and I arrived in America with a quantity of them. Some of those traditions are from my Libyan environment and others are from religion.

However, my parents taught me two things that helped me in life. One is that our relationship with God is significant and individual and that does not mean having a closed mind. Secondly, I always have to respect and accept others for who they are, even if they don't agree with me. These ideas have made me enjoy many new things in American society and helped me accept this culture.

As parents, we like to give what is best for our kids, but how to give them the best is not always easy. We need to react to this challenge with patience and experience. When it comes to parenting and facing these challenges, my husband and I need to find a balance between two different cultures and two different worlds.

Our dream is to try our best to raise our son with a combination of two different sets of beliefs and traditions: Libyan and American. This sounds easy, but it is difficult. It is a big challenge for us. First, we want him to know who we are as a Libyan Muslims, and that he can accept anyone from a different religion and culture.

When he was young, we tried to keep visiting Libya at different times of the year to experience several Libyan holidays. This gave my son a lot of information about Libyan culture, Arabic language, and special holidays. Most of the time he has a lot of

questions about the difference between an American lifestyle and a Libyan lifestyle. He is growing up proud to be a Libyan American. Now my son is 15 years old. We are excited to celebrate every Libyan and American holiday together.

This is how we celebrate both cultures. For thirty days we fast during Ramadan with a big delicious meal. My son likes to say, "In America we have one big meal on Thanksgiving, but in Ramadan there are an extra 30 big meals." After Ramadan, our important festival is called Eid. Eid is similar to the Christmas holiday, but Eid is a three-day celebration and we eat a lot of cookies. In the Libyan traditional way, we usually give money to children during Eid, but we exchange this with gifts. When he was 5 years old, his teacher and class were surprised when he said, "We don't celebrate Christmas like Americans. We celebrate it in our way. We have traditional Libyan food and a lot of cookies on Christmas day. And we exchange gifts at Eid instead of money as the Libyan tradition."

We are still excited to commemorate every American holiday with some variation: Trick or Treating on Halloween, passing out cards on Christmas and Valentine's Day, a big Turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, barbecues on 4th of July, and traditional Libyan food on Christmas day.

We always made holidays an important opportunity. So the cultural tradition that we are celebrating allows us to have the best of both worlds for our son. He has a balance between Libyan and American culture.

We raised him to be American while still holding our family's Libyan beliefs and background. Culture is all about family, and we still learn something brand-new every day about other cultures different from our own. We are all part of the same big, wide, world.

~ Nadia Lthrm

Babushka (Grandma)

As I was growing up I spent a lot of spring breaks, summers, and winter breaks at my grandma's house. I remember that very well, and those good memories hold a special place in my heart. As I grew from a child to an adult, wife, and mother, these memories grew with me. My memories are of a caring, loving, brave grandma with a strong work ethic.

My visits lasted as long as possible, which could be a week, a month, or even two months. I knew she waited for her grandkids to come and wanted them to visit for as long as they could.

She lived in a village about an hour from the city where we lived. My grandparents had a lot of land and a variety of animals. They would wake up each morning before the sun came up to take care of the animals. Babushka would say, "Whoever wakes up early will receive God's gifts." Now on the other hand, my brother and I liked to sleep in. We were from the city and the city does not wake up until about 9:00 a.m. Around 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. We would start hearing our grandma walking outside and talking to herself just loud enough for us to hear her. She would say, "Still sleeping. The sun is up and they are still sleeping." At that point my brother and I knew that it was time to get up.

Babushka always kept everything in her house very neat and clean. When we got up we would make our beds the way she liked them made. As we walked outside she gave us a big smile and would tell us that breakfast was already made. Somehow she always knew when we would wake up and what time to have breakfast ready. Homemade omelets or crepes from scratch were our favorite. She would make us anything else we asked for. The one thing she was concerned about was making sure our bellies were always full.

Through the day she had a simple routine for us, which was to have a good breakfast, then help her with chores. Our chores included sweeping outside, feeding the animals, helping in the garden, and later in the day running to the store. If we ran to the

store, which was about a half a mile away, she would make sure we had enough change to buy an ice cream for the way home. When we grew up we did not keep a big box of ice cream in the freezer like we do these days, so going to the store was a good deal.

At Grandma's house the days flew by quickly. Every few hours she would ask us what we wanted to eat, and she would always have snacks for us through the day. Often she would have fresh picked strawberries, apples, or cherries, and fresh cooked corn on the cob for all of us and all of our friends on our street. Somehow she always had enough for everyone, and she welcomed everyone. She would say, "There is always an extra bowl of soup."

After about 3:00 p.m. we would be free to go play and do things we wanted. Usually we would go to the lake with friends. The most fun was when Grandpa would let us take the horse with us. Horses are great swimmers and we would have so much fun. We also would take a big tube from a tractor tire to jump off of and swim with. We would jump off of it until we didn't have enough strength in our arms to pull ourselves back up on it. We would get home from the lake tired and hungry. As always, Babushka knew it all, and she would have fresh homemade dinner ready for us. Later in the evening all of our friends would gather together again in the grass field that was a couple houses down from Babushka's to play games or have a fire. We liked to bake potatoes in the fire and yes...potatoes, not s'mores. Those were the best times as I was growing up.

Did I always want to do chores? Did I always want to wake up early? No, but somehow we had been raised that you respect your parents and the elderly. We helped with no questions asked. After all, we enjoyed it. We felt loved. We felt safe. We felt cared for. We remember our favorite meal or the extra bowl of soup for the friend that you did not tell her was coming over. We remember the 6 pairs of rain boots to pick from on a rainy day because Babushka would save outgrown boots from nephews or cousins.

As our summer break was coming to an end and we were getting ready to leave to go back home, Babushka would make sure that she would pack as many bags full of food as we could

carry. She always said, "In the city you don't eat enough or healthy enough because city people have to buy everything versus growing your own fresh food." About a week after we left each year, Babushka would take the hour-long bus ride to the city because she already missed us. I remember she would bring her own homegrown apples and my mom would pack them in our lunches for school.

As I grew older, I realized how much I learned from her. I learned to overcome hard times, how to love and care for my family, to appreciate things that you have, and work hard for the things you own. I learned how to work and be fast at it. She would always say, "You got to be quick."

Babushka was born May 3, 1933. She was raised by her dad and step-mother and was the oldest of five children. In the 1940's during World War II, her dad was taken away by the Germans and never returned home. Grandma was the oldest of the children and unfortunately lost one of the younger sisters to hunger. She participated in World War II earning medals of defending land and 3 more veteran medals on the anniversary of the war. After the war she also earned a medal called "Veteran of Labor." Her first husband died in a fire. She was left with a small child and later remarried and had 2 more children, including my mother.

When I got older, I realized why my Babushka was always concerned about our stomachs being full. During the war and after, she saw people die of hunger, including her baby sister. I understood why she would get up so early and work so hard because no one knows what tomorrow will bring. It is sad for me to realize that my kids will not have a grandma like that since my relatives still live in Ukraine. I know when my kids will have their own kids, they will have the best grandma that I can be because my grandma taught me how.

In memory of my loving Babushka Valentena Tetys
May 3, 1933 – March 29, 2018

~Alona McFrederick

Top 10 Ways to Avoid Homesickness

After traveling and living in America for almost 3 years I came up with a list of things to do if you find yourself homesick. I enjoyed making this list and hope it will be helpful for someone else who might be homesick, too.

10. Always have pictures of you, your family, and your country. Someone would like to meet them.
9. Volunteer at a food pantry, pet shelter, or home for senior citizens.
You'll receive more than you give.
8. Attend any kind of sporting event.
You will love the fun and excitement of being with a crowd!
7. Winters in Ohio are long and cold.
It's a good time to read a book, watch movies, or learn to love the snow.
You can learn to ski or try making a snowman. In spring and summer, do outside activities.
When fall arrives you will marvel at the amazing colors of the trees.
6. Don't limit your eating to your country's foods.
Taste new things or visit new restaurants. There are so many restaurants to try!
5. Make time to try something different every now and then.
I am doing yoga and taking dance lessons (and I never thought about these activities before!)
4. Get out and travel every chance you get.
Take a short road trip. Visit a museum or an interesting building. Find a favorite spot in town.

3. Challenge yourself.
Libraries are free and awesome. Get a library card and borrow books in English about subjects that interest you. Even children's books can help you learn English.
2. Improve your English.
Find an ESL class or conversation club. They are great resources.
It also makes you feel good when you see that there are other people having the same feelings. You will be amazed by how many native speakers want to help you.

And # 1. Meet someone local and make a friend.

You will be surprised how many things you have in common even if you are from different sides of the world. And your differences will make life more interesting!

Good luck and have fun learning about America!

~ Amalia Aguilar-Alcala

Life in Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia was in one of the oldest eras that belonged to the BCE time. Life in Mesopotamia was hard; on the other hand, it was primary, simple and routine. There were different categories of Mesopotamian population. The wealthier category was from royals, nobles, and priests; their life was luxurious and comfortable. By contrast farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, temple workers, and slaves owned no property, always worked with their hands, and were poor.

The daily life of both categories of people was different, but everyone's aim was to get healthy food. The Mesopotamian people were adept at agriculture, fishing, and hunting. They also had domestic animals; moreover, they had the desire and passion to discover all that was new on the land and in space.

One of the most striking features of this era was the way they wore their clothes. The climate was very hot. Their clothes were very simple; most women wore simple dresses and men wore short skirts. The clothes of poorer people were made of wool, in contrast the wealthier people and royals wore linen, which is lighter than wool in hot climates.

Like their simple clothes, their houses were simple and made of mud bricks with many rooms and roofs. Most people preferred to sleep on the roof due to the hot weather.

Mesopotamians read and wrote using cuneiforms. They retold epics from the ancient oral tradition and practiced polytheism with multiple gods.

Most people owned small parcels of land; they worked on it individually or with others.

Daily life in Mesopotamia began at sunrise. Women fed the domestic animals and milked the cows. Then they prepared a simple breakfast, which included bread, barley or wheat, vegetables,

fruits, and fresh milk. After that, they explored to find new wild plants and new water sources for planting the seeds and different varieties of crops. Finally, they hunted to obtain meat that is a source of proteins.

By the end of the day, in the evening, they started to collect and ignite the firewood for lighting and heating. All family members collaborated to prepare the main meal; they roasted different types of meats and vegetables. They prepared fruit and poured the wine, which was the favorite beverage for wealthier people.

At night, when darkness commenced, they talked and looked up to outer space, sky, stars and moon. They tried to find out how the day started and ended, and they thought about what they should do to improve their routine life.

~ Noha Meghawry

Supporting Each Other

My Son Inspires me

With a big grin on his face, my young son looked up at me and said, "Nice!" His words and actions inspired me, and my confidence in myself and my ability to speak English soared.

I have been studying English since I was a middle school student in Japan, but I still find it difficult to speak English. Then there's my son. He is four years old and has been attending preschool for six months. He is getting better at speaking and listening to English, so I am very surprised and envious of him. I often say to my husband, "He is a child, so he absorbs English fast!" I ask myself, "Is there any other difference between my son and me?" I think about my son's process of learning English and then consider what I need to do to improve my English skills.

My son attends a local preschool five days a week. He has some Japanese classmates, so he speaks Japanese as well as English at the preschool. However, the teachers are teaching them to use English in the classroom as much as possible. He has the opportunity to listen to English spoken by his teachers all day. He tells us what he has learned and sings English songs after returning home from school. My son also gains a better understanding of the English language by observing the actions of friends and teachers around him as well as looking at illustrations in picture books. He seems to learn new words quickly and then begins using them soon after.

My son is cheerful and talkative. He speaks Japanese very fluently and also does well when talking to mothers of Japanese friends. When he experiences something for the first time, he is not intimidated by a challenge and will give it a try. He often likes to imitate people or characters that he observes in his life or watches on TV. For example, he will explain the day of the week in the manner that the teacher does every day at preschool. He also likes to imitate musicians from band performances. I saw him talking to his teachers, friends, and a friend's mom using English at school. He communicated well with words as well as body language. His teachers praise his English.

Based on these observations of my son, I learned that it is important to speak English without worrying so much about making mistakes. I've realized that there is much to be learned from these errors. In addition, I discovered the importance of remembering and using words by imitating others.

The following story illustrates these points. When I came to register for my ESOL class, my son came with me and was waiting with my husband outside. I successfully registered and left the office with a piece of paper that contained the date and time of when I was to return. However, I realized the particular date assigned to me was inconvenient. I needed to ask whether I could change the date, but I lost my confidence and just stood there muttering. Then my son said, "Mom, don't say that, go and listen!" His words and serious face helped me. When I went back to the office in order to get the date changed, I succeeded this time. Once I returned to my son, he smiled and said "Nice!"

Thanks to my son's words, I realized the importance of communicating my thoughts without worrying about mistakes. This experience has given me confidence. The word "nice" from my son made me very happy. I knew that being praised by someone would make me want to persevere and do my best again.

Through these experiences, I have learned much from my son. Since I currently do not practice speaking English very much except for ESOL class twice a week, I need to dedicate myself to spending more time learning and actively speaking English. Even if I make a mistake, I can't let this bother me. Instead, I need to continue to build upon my experience by speaking English and gradually building up my confidence. I want to set a good example for my son and encourage him to work hard without giving up. I know there will be times when I get frustrated, but I know I can do my best because my son is. As he learns more English, he will need to practice English at home. At that time, I want to be able to support him so we can learn English together.

~ Eriko Kikuchi

In 2017

In 2017, my life changed when I moved to the USA. It wasn't an easy decision, but I took the opportunity after thinking about my future. This time it was hard for me! My brothers and parents always encouraged me. It's like a challenge.

May 22, 2017 was my first day in the United States. It was terribly serious. I did not feel good.

You know why? Because my first problem is that I can't speak English and I can't understand. I blamed myself. The other problem was I didn't have friends and family. I had to take care of myself. In the beginning I didn't like the food here. It tasted different. After that I met one friend in the market place and he helped me. I have never forgotten that.

After that, I researched online about an English class. They helped me to speak and write and read. I met a lot of friends. Finally, I didn't give up. I stayed to learn day after day. I do not regret it because I'm here in the United States. It's a nice country and has beautiful people. I love this place.

~ Imad ElYounsi

Start Now!!

You've been dreaming day and night about this since you were a child, although you've never spoken it out loud. Start now! What are you waiting for? You've allowed this dream of yours to burn within you begging to get out, yet it's left beating on the door of your heart. Why?

Start now! What are you waiting for? Are you afraid to fail? Is it because you don't know where to start? Or is it because you're afraid of it actually working and wondering if you will be able to maintain the success?

Start now! What are you waiting for? Fear is natural. It happens, but don't allow fear to control you.

Start now! What are you waiting for? The problem is we have too many reasons why we can't and not enough reasons why we should. So just start now! What are you waiting for? Live your dream! You deserve it!

~ Amanda Allen

School Experience Behind Bars

Before this experience of incarceration this time around, I had a mindset that will never change. I was going to be the same, "Me," no matter what I went through. I was also influenced by drugs when I made my decision. Being locked up helped me sober my mind from all the drugs but also all the hate that was in my heart. I had to start thinking rationally about my situation. I couldn't continue to think the same way or do the same things with a smarter plan and think I was going to not end back up in here.

I would see the ad for school on the T.V., when I was upstairs sitting on those benches. One day, I was in my cell reading letters that my girlfriend had just sent me and thinking about the visit that I had received from my sister who was my favorite sibling growing up. I started to cry silently to myself. As a juvenile, I spent two years away from society doing this same thing, but my mindset never changed. I couldn't fathom not being "gang-gang" with my guys. That day, I became so overwhelmed and intrigued with the things my loved ones were telling me and the death of my best friend the prior year, I made the decision that the streets were not for me. I had to change!

Coming to school here gave me an opportunity to be surrounded by great teachers. These teachers didn't look at my charges and define me, but they looked at the mind and persona that God blessed me with and judged me as a young potential-educated man. Always hearing you are nothing and you are not going to be anything, you start to believe it! Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Nolan, and Mrs. Roseberry did more than kill that image or thought; they all gave me HOPE. The hope that I didn't make this choice to change for nothing! Going through this school program did not solidify my change and make me a better person, but it definitely gave me a start and a push to do so. And earning my GED gave me a great position to do something better once I stepped into society. It equipped me with a tool that will allow me to get my first official job.

Never again will I have an excuse. And I will not have to sell, rob, and steal anymore, thanks to this program. So, thank you for giving me this opportunity. I hope you all do something with the knowledge you are getting from this school experience.

~ *Jer'Reco Harris*

My History

My husband and I got married in 1990. When we got married, my husband was studying and working. For me, it was difficult because I was pregnant. We had moved to another city, and I didn't know anyone.

After my son was born, I started my own bookstore. I began meeting people and felt better. Then my husband applied for visas for my family to come to the United States. We moved here in 2003. Thank God. It is better to live here because there are more opportunities for jobs and housing.

I have three children. My son is a barber; one of my daughters is studying to be a child care worker, and my other daughter is studying to be a computer designer. My family has improved economically. We have met very kind people here. Despite the fact that I did not know English when I came here, my boss showed me how to do my cleaning job and helped me understand some English words.

~ *Felicia Liriano*

An Important Lesson That I Learned from a Real Experience

My grandmother had a huge impact on the person that I am today. From her I learned respect, humility, and sharing. She always told me, "The hand that gives is always the hand that receives."

One day, we received a visit from an old man that was traveling. The old man wanted to have a rest before continuing his trip to the nearby village. My grandmother received him with the greatest respect and consideration. She gave him water to wash, a room to rest in, and by God's grace, our only evening meal.

The old man was so happy with her hospitality that before his departure, he blessed my grandmother and all her offspring.

I went back to my grandmother to ask her how she could give the only evening meal we had left? She took my hand and asked me how she could leave such an old person in need without helping? She told me that she would cook for us in the evening, and that I must always have the notion of mutual help and sharing in life.

Three years later, our village experienced the worst drought since its existence. The old man my grandmother had helped was the father of the head of the neighboring village. When he heard this news from our village, he ordered his son to help our village. They gave food to my entire village, which allowed us to survive until the end of the drought.

Our whole village was saved by a simple gesture of goodness, and of generosity, of my grandmother.

It was one of the most important lessons of life for me. I understood how often it was important to be there for people in need. I have understood since that day that life is only temporary, and that life can change any moment.

Coping with Fear

~ Mouloukou Soumah

My Life Changed

My life changed when I moved to the United States. Before I thought if I moved to the U.S., everything would be difficult. I would leave my home and the work that I studied for. I would leave my sisters, my mother, and my father, but my husband and I wanted to live in peace.

The conditions in my country (Iraq) are very difficult, and everything gets worse every day. Lawyers like myself often received calls from an unknown number warning us and saying, "They will harm you and your family." Not only me. Many doctors and engineers migrated to get rid of this fear and danger.

My country has ancient studies and an awareness of civilizations. It is rich in oil resources and industries, but it is not at peace. It has many wonderful provisions like free health care and education, but the security situation is deteriorating. The fear surrounds us from all sides, and the situation is increasingly dangerous. That is why my husband and I began to think about the idea of immigration. We had heard about immigration from others, like my husband's sister and her husband and their children who immigrated to live in freedom. Soon we started to complete the documents for travel. We went to Turkey to do the necessary procedures, despite fear chasing us.

After we came to the U.S., we felt safe and free. Today we are very happy. I hope that my children's future will be better because they live and study here and everything is available for them.

~ Ikram Almahdawi

Ukraine

My father was a very creative person and a photojournalist. Unfortunately, my father did not live long after I was born, but several of his talents, such as his passion for photography, still live on in me today. When I was young, I always enjoyed school. My favorite subject was Russian literature. My love for books began in early childhood. My mother would often read bedtime stories to me. My grandmother also told me fascinating stories from her life. She was a combat nurse in the first World War. During her service, she was severely wounded and captured. She managed to escape and was later presented a prestigious award.

Later, I went to study in college. My mother made the choice of profession for me. I did not resist, although I wanted something else. I always dreamed of working in medicine; I think this is my true calling. But by training, I'm a food industry engineer. Although, as fate would have it, I got a job at the Medical University after graduation. I worked in the department of Ukrainian and Russian languages and literature within the medical university. I was a senior assistant. My work was very interesting, I talked with students from different parts of the world, from different cultures. They dreamed of becoming doctors, and I helped them study the Russian language. This was a very happy time for everyone. Until 2013.

For me, 2013 is divided into before and after. I remember this time with horror, with pain in my heart, and with tears in my eyes. But first, I want to give a short introduction about my city before I explained what happened there. I want to talk about my city where I was born, grew up, and was happy. This is the city that I love, where my family lives, and I want to share it with you!

Donetsk is in southeast Ukraine, part of the Donbass region, not far from the border with Russia. Donetsk started as a small settlement, and then became a working village. Later, it grew into one of Ukraine's largest industrial, scientific, and cultural centers, with a population of more than a million people. There are dozens

of factories and mines. The city became famous for its products, with a reputation going far beyond its borders. Inscribed in the emblem of the city is a worker's hand, firmly holding a hammer – this truly symbolizes my city! Poetry and songs were written about Donetsk; it was known as the city of a million red roses. Donetsk helped create the Aswan Dam in Egypt, the famous Ostankino television tower in Moscow, submarines, coal mines, infrastructure, and much more. Donetsk is a great scientific and creative center. Within its walls are some of the oldest universities in the Donbass region. The thoughts and efforts of scientists and engineers are developed in these universities and brought to life in Donetsk. This is why Donetsk is known as the city of work, the city of science. Donetsk ... this is my city!

Then came 2013. The initial uprisings in Ukraine occurred in the capital city, Kiev, in 2013. There were protests and civil unrest. The problems started when the Ukrainian government withdrew from an agreement with the European Union and instead chose closer ties with Russia. I remember my colleagues and I occasionally discussed the growing wave of protests in the capitol, but everyone was busy with life. These were not the first uprisings; everyone remembered the 2004 "Orange Revolution."

As the situation began to deteriorate, the east and west of the country became more divided. Western Ukraine was trying to pull away from eastern Ukraine and vice versa. The west wanted closer ties with Europe, while the east was leaning more towards Russia. It was scary to look at the paralysis in Kiev, but all the people in my city thought it was far away and that we would not have such problems. The first alarming incidents came when military aircraft started flying over Donetsk. Soon protesters began to seize administrative buildings. Classes at my university were regularly canceled. Within my group of friends, it was not possible to avoid constant discussions on the topic "who is right" and "who is to blame." There were supporters of both sides. Such disputes occurred throughout the country. The worst thing was when people close to each other stopped communicating due to disagreements on political issues. Soon, roadblocks and checkpoints were set up outside the city. People trying to travel

outside the city were detained and forced to dig trenches in preparation for an invasion.

During this time, many of my friends left Donetsk. They moved to cities in western Ukraine, Europe, and America. Normally, people only left the city to somehow improve their lives or for a better career, but in our case, everything was different. People fled from war. The remaining population had to adhere to the new rules of life in the city. When moving, you must have a passport with you. If the military stops you, documents must be presented. Sometimes personal property was confiscated, such as cars and trucks. During this period, people tried to hide their vehicles. Also, anyone with a camera phone was a potential spy. It was not safe to take pictures; people could be detained. I felt there was no purpose in choosing sides and fighting for this conflict; you would only die or become a cripple for the sake of someone else's interests - this is not for me and not for my loved ones. I will not write about the extent of Russian involvement in this war.

Then came the shelling. You must jump to the ground as quickly as possible. It does not matter if you get dirty. Shell fragments fly in all directions. If a shell explodes twenty or thirty feet away from someone, they are probably dead. I never ceased to be amazed at the destructive power of shrapnel; with pieces the size of a fingernail, they would tear apart thick metal doors like thin sheets of paper. One can only imagine what will happen to human flesh. I jumped to the ground for protection many times - I wanted to live, and in my arms was a small child, only six months old. After the first shelling began, people started to tape their windows crosswise to prevent the windows from shattering and causing severe injuries. Often the shelling occurred when my family was at home. We would go out into the corridor of our building for protection. While waiting, I often thought, "How did we get to such a life that dozens of artillery shells were fired around the house?" The arsenal of the military on both sides was very large. Mortars were commonly used and "Grads," Soviet-style, truck-mounted rocket launchers were common. We prayed; we wanted to survive; it was scary. Here we lived under such sounds. During the first years of the conflict, the shelling was day and night. Only

the intensity changed. The city was empty. Infrastructure was destroyed, from residential buildings to schools, boiler houses, gas pipelines and water pipelines. I think these sounds will remain forever in my memory and the memory of my son. Now it is difficult to calmly listen to fireworks during the holidays; thoughts of the conflict and painful memories immediately appear.

Perhaps this is all I would like to tell about my past life. I am grateful to God that all the people whom I love are alive and well, and that our home was not damaged. Someday, I hope that we will regain what was lost. I want to thank fate, which brings me to good people who love and value me and whom I love. Special thanks to my husband for his love and care, because now we live in America and sleep peacefully. Thank you to his family for helping and supporting us in everything.

I often ask myself the question, how did I deal with this nightmare? I was able to forgive, but I will never forget. Like the Phoenix bird from mythology, I was supposed to burn in Ukraine and be reborn in America. Now I have a new life, a new blank sheet of paper. I am learning to live, read, write, and speak again. My motto in life is to move forward and not look back; to be able to forgive, love, and forget about the bad, although this is not easy. I believe in miracles and dream of something good, because miracles do come true.

~ Karyna Stepanova

Historical Palestine

I grew up in a small town called Ein Yabroud near the city of Ramallah. I come from a big family. My father was a mayor like his father before him, but it stopped after Israel occupied Palestine. The capital of the state of Palestine is the city of Jerusalem, and it is the largest historical city of Palestine. It contains many different religious sites. I am a Muslim, and I go to pray in the Asqua Mosque. It is a hard journey to be able to pray there nowadays because there is a wall that has a lot of checkpoints.

When I was younger, I used to go often with my family and it was so much easier. I realize that I took it for granted. Now I go with my youngest daughter, Ayah, once a year during Ramadan. Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims where we fast every day from sunrise to sunset for a whole month. Jerusalem is a beautiful place, it also contains Al-Quema church. I visited this very beautiful church.

The Jews have the Wailing Wall, but I cannot visit it. I did get to visit the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. That is the church where Jesus was born. I am lucky to be from Palestine. Many people would not think so because of the war, but being able to see all the history of three religions is a blessing not everyone gets to have.

~ Karima Jabrah

My Most Difficult Life Decision

In my home country, Syria, I worked as a civil engineer and was a Director of Engineering Technicians Institute, a building contractor, and an inspector for the banks and courts. This was full-time work and I was happy about that. My wife worked in a good engineering company, and my sons were in school. We owned our own house and had our own car. Life was good.

At the end of 2009, my wife told me that her Green Card document had processed and she would receive it soon. When it arrived, we would have to move to America. I felt like a bucket of cold water had fallen on my head! This was a surprise to me and I was not currently ready to change my life.

I started thinking about what I should do. I was confused because my friends, relatives, and work were in Syria. How could I leave everything and go to America? I decided to visit the U.S. to see what life there was like. I couldn't decide without seeing life in America for myself.

That summer, my wife and I took time off from our work and traveled with our kids to the U.S. My brother-in-law welcomed us in New York. We toured New York and visited Atlantic City, and then my brother-in-law drove us to Columbus.

We stayed in Columbus for a month. We were surprised by how clean and organized everything is here. I took my driver's license test and passed on the first try. I was impressed that it only took 10 minutes and I had the license in my hand. In my country, an ID takes the whole day.

Next we visited OSU with our sons. At that time, my oldest son had finished high school, and he had decided to travel to the U.S. to study at OSU. When he saw the campus, he really liked it.

When we went back home, I started making a list comparing everything in my life in Syria to a future life in America. The

internal struggle started. Did I have to start a new life in a new country with different traditions, another language, different weather, and a new job? I was afraid of the unknown future. This was the most difficult decision of my life.

Then the crisis started in Syria and I was afraid for my sons. Syria no longer felt peaceful and safe. I decided to send my family to the U.S. while I stayed in Syria.

But when conditions grew worse, I decided to leave everything and travel to be with my family. They needed me beside them in America.

What I learned is that sometimes you can't control the conditions of life. The conditions of life force you to make the decision to sacrifice and abandon the past and look forward to the future. Our home country will always stay in our hearts. We still have family, memories, and friends in Syria. We hope that peace and safety will one day return to the country we loved, so we can visit there again. But I am happy with my decision to come to America.

~ Bassam Deiratany

The Devil

I want to warn you about this boy
He used lives like they were his toy
He gets you close to him like you were his friend
But beware of the devil that's hiding within
He will bend you and twist you and tear you apart
He will take away anything that's close to your heart
He can be put in a needle by melting him down in a spoon
He sweeps through towns like he was a typhoon
Living right next door or by the neighborhood park
To him we are the fish. He is the shark.

~ Joshua Lingrel

You Can Be Killed If You Speak the Truth

Many people in my home country of Angola die before their thirtieth birthday. Life is difficult there. Despite this, I experienced good things during my upbringing and made the most of my childhood. I liked fixing things, drawing, playing basketball, and singing. I started to learn English on my own at home. I also taught myself to drive. I was so addicted to basketball that I had hoped to be an NBA basketball player someday. However, life is not easy most of the time because the government does not provide adequate support for the people. In addition, the educational system and medical care in Angola are poor.

Despite all these issues, I still love my country; however, I don't like the way the government treats us. Without us, the people, a nation can't prosper. There is a lot of injustice that makes my stomach turn. People are suffering so much. If you go there right now, you won't find clean water from a faucet or any other source, and the electricity service isn't good. It is a shame because we have enough rich minerals that could result in better living conditions for the people. Unfortunately, the government is corrupt. The leaders choose to steal all the money and hide it in other countries. They also make investments in other nations instead of our own. I don't have a problem when people choose to invest in other nations; however, I feel a country's leaders should first strive to find solutions to satisfy their own people. They should not be selfish and do things that divide the people. Instead, they should treat everyone the same way.

I sang about this troubling situation in my country, but the government chased me out and forced me to leave. Many other people who spoke out about bad electrical services, the expensive food, and our bad healthcare were also forced to leave. It's crazy! If you go to an Angolan hospital right now, you will find many people on the floor. In addition, most people have difficulty finding and purchasing essential medications. These situations cause me great sadness. I'm an activist who is still fighting for better days in my country as well as opportunity for all, not just for the sons of

government leaders. The country is for all of us and not just for certain groups.

You can be killed if you speak the truth in Angola. They will chase you and even use your family to catch, arrest, and eventually kill you. I was so terrified for my family because I didn't want anything to happen to them. That's why I'm here in the United States! I had to think of my brothers, nieces, and nephews. It was so hard to make this decision, but I did.

I had some friends who were also activists, but the government killed them using poison, guns, or any means necessary. The goals of our fight involve obtaining the same opportunities as the corrupt leaders who have stolen all the money from our country. Their sons can buy a million dollar "watch" while the hospitals lack medication. The educational system is poor, food prices are extremely high, and water that comes out the faucet is so dirty that it can make you sick. Basic sanitation is repulsive! We all know that we won't find a place like home, and that's why we fight and pray for things to get better in my country and the rest of Africa.

Note: As a man, I would like to say that I'm not perfect. I have sins too, but I believe we should have the sensibility to value people over riches and our ego. If we don't, more people may die because of disease and lack of adequate food and necessities.

~ *Baptista M. Muatchitanga*

Escaping to Nature

A Love Story of Winter

I write of a love story of two spirits of nature
as different as night and day,
as old as time itself.

There under a lamp post on a cold winter night,
Snow's gown of flakes appears as
Shimmering lace.
The year seems so long.

Only in winter can Snow and Wind
embrace and dance
to the melody of their love and passion.
Wind appears and they start to dance.
Snow's gown twirls and flows
with beauty and grace under the light
of the lamp post,
her gown almost blinding.
They dance every night of the long winter.
Their love at times
becomes a soft dusting of snow
or a storm of passion
that paints the night sky with lightning and thunder,
that brings harsh winds with heavy snowfall.

Soon the days become warmer,
and Snow's flakes turn to tears of sleet,
knowing their time together
is coming to an end.
In Snow's dreams,
she's dancing with Wind
Under the lamp post in her gown of flakes
that appears as shimmering lace
to embrace with a winter kiss
of never-ending love and passion.

A Journey

When I received the notice that I was admitted to the University, I had a bitter feeling and at the same time sweet victory. After two long years my family had something to celebrate. My dad had passed away less than a month earlier after a hard fight against brain cancer. My mother, brother, and I had a long embrace.

Some months later I began to study at the Federal University of Parana, the most renowned institution in my state. At that time, I was trying to figure out why I had chosen Forestry Engineering as my degree. Actually, I still ask the same question until this present day, but I have no answer. With or without knowing why, the fact is that I'm passionate for it.

During my studies, I began to learn about the dynamics of a forest and its individuals. Also there was a lot of knowledge about biochemistry, botany, entomology, hydrology, statistics, forestry inventory, harvest, and degraded area restoration flowing and being absorbed by my mind. A lot of math was harder to absorb, but I did it the same way. Paraphrasing Louis Armstrong: "It really was a wonderful world."

Almost every person who lives in south Brazil has a strong will to go to the Amazon Forest or at least a little curiosity about it. The "Mother of Forests" is a world completely different from what we live in, in the south two thousand kilometers from the Amazon River. I had the same dream as many colleagues to visit the Amazon Forest.

After many years, exams, nights without sleeping, parties, and a year of study in Germany, I finally got my degree. I guessed it was the toughest part, but I was fully wrong. A new phase had begun: to get a job. Every day, I made a ritual of searching on websites and newspapers to find a job. I filled out forms for training opportunities and made updates on my resume. I made contact with friends who already had jobs. Some months passed, and I got a freelance job. Too much work, not too much money. Better than nothing. It was a beginning.

Few temporary jobs later, I got a job a thousand kilometers away from home. The opportunity was good for learning, but the money wasn't very much. My duties included planning, making interviews, hiring people, and overseeing the plantation activities. We planted 25 thousand hectares. I stayed there for more than a year and did a great job.

One day my boss came to me and made me an offer. He was starting a Forest Management Operation in the Amazon Forest and wanted me as his Engineer there. It was a dream come true. It was beginning of a new story for my life.

~ Otávio Augusto Bressan

Waters

Oceans

salty, deep

sailing, traveling, scuba diving

waves, currents, rocks, rapids

fishing, kayaking, swimming

long, fresh

Rivers

~ *Maribel Moncada*

The Alarm Went Off

Chapter I

As spring advances, and everything is waking up. The yellow, red, and pale green buds are springing out on trees and bushes that had no life in the winter. Some flowers that bloom in the early springtime are colorful in the fields. These views show a peaceful, sweet, and clear world.

The migrant birds are busy preparing for their journey. They eat more and put on weight. The seasonal changes trigger the preparations of the birds. They say goodbye to the year-round resident birds that hold a party to see them leaving.

A young bird, Jack, a dark-eyed Junco, is happy with his family coming back to their summer home, a beautiful forest in Canada, where there are many trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. The mild weather accompanied Jack's family on the trip, and they forgot their tiredness and hard work at once when they arrived at their home.

Jack's parents start to build a nest for laying their eggs, and Jack is happy that he will have his new sisters and brothers soon. This is the first spring in Jack's life that he has come back to the summer home, so he is busy singing and searching for food each day. He hopes learning the new world and practicing his skills of hunting will go well. In the winter home, he learned to seek out seeds from the snow and ice; but now, there are many insects active in the forest. Jack would like to be a good hunter and help his parents a little bit with raising the youngsters.

One day, when Jack was singing, his mother asked to him, "Jack, did you catch cold?"

"No, I am fine, Mom," Jack answered.

"The tone of your song I heard is hoarse," Mom said.

"Really?" Jack was confused.

For weeks, Jack's songs have problems. Soon, his throat does not feel good. It is a little sore when he sings. "Maybe some food I ate is not healthy?" Jack thinks.

Soon, Jack meets his friend, Rich. He is a dark-eyed Junco too. They were together enjoying the winter time in a forest in Wisconsin.

"Hello, Rich, how have you been?" Jack asked.

"I am not fine at all," Rich answered.

"Why? What has happened to you?" Jack asked.

"I do not know why, I cannot sing after coming back here from the winter home. My throat is painful, and I feel tired when I fly for a short time. My mom said maybe I was too tired from the trip," Rich said.

"You can't sing? Me too!" Jack is so surprised. It is like having a big stone pressed against his heart. "Maybe there is something wrong with us," Jack said. He told Rich what things had happened to his body, and how terrible it made him feel.

Rich and Jack are confused about the problems they are having.

The time has passed, but the problems of Jack and Rich are not solved. Instead, they found more and more birds living in the forest having the same problems. The birds lost many of their functions such as hearing, singing, and flying. Some parent birds have even lost their ability to nest. Recently, Jack's mother is upset. She has just laid two eggs, and that is not enough, as having four eggs laid during a breeding season is a normal thing in their family. But it looks like mother cannot lay more eggs this season.

Broken-hearted, Jack's mother said to her husband, "I cannot lay more eggs."

"It is okay, my honey. We will raise the two chicks well," answered Jack's father sadly.

Jack is also sad. He heard his parents talking, but he cannot give them any help.

Later, there is awful news spreading everywhere in the forest, "Mercury pollution! The mercury is polluting our home!"

"What is mercury?" Jack found Rich and discussed the new word. They thought that maybe the mercury was the reason for why they felt as they did.

"Let us check a book to learn about mercury," Jack said to Rich.

"This is a good idea!" Rich answered happily. They made an appointment and went to the library in the afternoon to find the answer.

They noticed one paragraph from a book. They read the paragraph aloud together: "Mercury is a chemical element. It exists in rocks in the earth's crust naturally."

"Oh, that it is!" Jack said.

"But how is the mercury escaping from the earth's crust to our forests?" Rich asked Jack.

"This is a good question," Jack answered. He scratched his head with his hand, thought for a while, and said, "I have no idea. Let us read the book more." But they did not get more answers from the book.

A month passed. One day, Jack's mother told Jack, "There is a speech tomorrow. It is about our environmental problems. So your father and I would like to go to hear the speech. Do you want to go?"

"Sure. I will go with you," Jack answered.

Chapter 2

The next day, even though it is a sunny day, Jack's feelings are not good at all. His heavy heart is covered by a dark cloud. When Jack and his parents arrive at a big lawn in the center of the forest, they see that the wildlife living in the forest, including all of the birds, whether the year-round residents or migrants. The wildlife, some of them standing and some of them sitting have their eyes focused on the speaker who is talking about the mercury pollution and how it damages the life and environment.

Jack is happy that Rich and his parents are there too. He thinks that he can discuss the question of mercury pollution with Rich after the speech.

The speaker is Robert, a famous hummingbird, who cares about the fates of wildlife. Jack read many stories about him and is happy today to listen to his report in person. The topic of the report is "Mercury in Your Environment."

Hummingbird Robert says, "Mercury pollution comes from many of the humans' activities. It especially is in emissions from coal-burning power plants, but mercury pollution has a variety of sources. If mercury pollution is in our air, land, and water, it will become a serious threat to the environment and our health."

"How does mercury emit?" a bird asks Hummingbird Robert.

"That is a good question," Hummingbird Robert replies. Then he continues, "Humans building power plants for making electricity changes their lives. Then, in order to get the energy, the power plants need to burn coal and other fossil fuels that contain mercury. When the fuel is burned, the mercury is released to the air."

All the wildlife is shocked about the way mercury is emitted. They are very angry and say, "We need healthy bodies; we need fresh, healthy air!"

"Yes, it is very dangerous to us. The mercury releases to the air, then it goes to the waters, lands, and our forests by winds and rain. That is causing the mercury pollution. For example, when a river is polluted by mercury, then the fish and shellfish in the river contain methyl-mercury," Hummingbird Robert says.

"How does the mercury pollution damage us? Can the mercury pollution affect our children growing up?" Jack's mother asks. Mother's voice is full of fear and Jack understands why. Raising their babies in health is the most important thing to his

mother and all parents. All the parents living in the forest want to ask the same question.

Everyone watches urgently. Hummingbird Robert explains slowly, "Although the impacts of the mercury pollution on birds and other wildlife are not yet fully understood, a new study suggests that it is capable of compromising birds' abilities. The ability of birds to fly, sing, nest, and balance may be compromised. Young birds' growth and migration patterns are also in danger because mercury poisons the creatures' nervous systems."

Jack's mother's face changes to white because of Hummingbird Robert's words. And she prays, using her hand on her chest continuously. Hummingbird Robert has felt the sadness around the wildlife, so he says, "Don't be sad everyone, please. We still have time to save ourselves. I have a plan to take a survey about how the mercury pollution affects us. A scientists' group from the humans keeps in touch with me. We will continue to report the results of mercury pollution to the human society. They know that wildlife's fate is the fate of the humans too. Volunteers are welcomed to join me to help with the plan."

Hummingbird Robert's words inspire all the wildlife. Those words give them hope for the future. Jack is excited about the speech. He wants to join Hummingbird Robert's cause. He understands that it is not only for himself, but it is for all!

Jack and his friend, Rich, get encouragement from their parents. They are happily working together with Hummingbird Robert for protecting themselves, their family, and all wildlife.

~ Chun Qin

Equines

Horses

soft, fast

eating, walking, running

saddles, carts, mountains, practical

listening, watching, walking

noisy, small

Donkeys

~ *Gregorio Rodriguez*

November 11th

It wasn't meant to be, but it happened right outside my door.
 I had heard that this event wasn't very common this time of year.
 OH WOW! HOW CHARMING IT WAS!
 My backyard turned completely white
 and looked like the most beautiful palette.
 My coat and boots were waiting by the door.
 I was only seven years old at the time
 and was so excited to touch it.
 I had often dreamed of seeing this view.
 I could see the little flakes, suddenly, floating through the air.
 It created a mix of feelings within me.
 Thank you, November 11th, for making my heart smile
 and my eyes shine.

~*Noemy Almeida*

Summer

Summer

Heat Swimming

Travel Vacation Fun

A very hot season

Picnic Hiking Sweating

Sunny Long

Season

~Mohammed Tazi

Maintaining Strength

Forged

Trials and tribulations. Imagine me, as a child with tribulations, so there's no wonder that years later I'd be on trial for tribulations.

Evidence and others' insinuations would have me sent to prison for years before I'd be awoken.

To what some may consider a nightmare, but in all actuality it was God saving my life, staging my life, so I'd be here on this stage, at this stage of my life, where a stage and my life are one and the same.

This is for the years that I bottled my emotions, almost got swallowed by own emotions, then I discovered that I am most creative when I am at the bottom of my emotions.

And for the people who have been bothered by emotions, please believe that you now inspire my poetry to be a model for emotions, so come and follow my emotion.

Back into the fire from which I came, see I can claim that I was almost claimed by the fire, everything I am now, I became by the fire.

If you stand next to me, you may say I smell like...propane, I'm so optimistic about my opposition in life, that one may think I was..."pro-pain."

But no, I just know pain, down to its deepest fibers. In my life, I've only had two options, get burned alive, or get forged by the fire.

~Tye C. Banks

In the Skin of an Immigrant

My family and I had a happy life. I remembered that we've been traveling a lot, my two brothers, two sisters, and I. I understood all of that when I grew up because I am separated from my family.

Being an immigrant is the worst name I could ever call someone. Immigrants are people who move from their hometowns, cities, and villages, because of some conflicts, civil wars, or political situations, which are still going on in some countries. They are families who lost everything including lives or materials. Some of them have been forced to leave to keep their life safe. Others have gone in diverse camps of refugees in different countries and have started a new life as an immigrant.

Living as an immigrant is starting life over, a new beginning; you are just like a newborn who has to learn everything, being fed, and helped by his parents. The only difference is that an immigrant is independent and by himself to learn everything. This includes learning the language, which is the key as well as other things.

As an immigrant, people treat you like a fugitive, someone who doesn't belong to the society. In some places, people don't even consider you and your rights. They even tell you that you don't belong here. And if you are a black person, some white people are still calling others Negroes, and that just brings division back. As an African immigrant, life is so hard because some people want me to go back to Africa. When I think about this blessed country, America was built by immigrants. Immigration policies are bringing division, separation between people, families, friends and others.

As an immigrant, I am an ambassador, a messenger of freedom, love, and peace. I am working hard to learn more and get all the help I can. Hopefully, I will achieve my goals in assisting people in this world with basic needs.

We, as humans, need unity and love. Love breaks every boundary, no matter your race, gender, or status. Let's love, live, and enjoy life together as one.

~ *Istina Colombe Tsoukou Mbaya*

My Goals

I am looking for a better life;
I know that I can achieve it.
I think about it every night;
I won't waste any time getting started.

My goals are to:

- Be a better man,
- Care for myself without depending on others,
- Own a house,
- Gain more education.

To achieve success, I won't close any door –
Even if I must wake up early each morning
And work day and night.

I want to become the pride of my family
And ensure that my parents enjoy every day of their lives.

These are my goals!

I will reach these goals!

~ Emmanuel Kegnide

Karma, the Boomerang

I am a product of my environment. We all know that there is, and always will be, children raised by one parent, whether it's the mom or the dad. In many cases, that can be a recipe for disaster. In my case, however, my mother was a wonderful woman who provided for me with the meager resources she had, and protected me, as best she could. She raised my two sisters and me and always did her best, in spite of difficult circumstances. We were fortunate to have grandparents in our lives, especially our grandma. We had love in our lives.

I was born in the 1970's, so things were different than they are today. One thing that hasn't changed is "Karma." It has been the same since the beginning of time. It was in my early years that Karma introduced itself to me. That was when I was about ten.

One of my friends, Keith, and I were playing in my yard. We were having a good time with my toys and my Big Wheel, the "Green Machine." Then Ray came into my yard. He was a few years older, and was a bully. After a few minutes of playing with us, he became hostile. I can't quite remember every detail, but Ray roughed up Keith first. Then Ray focused on me. He slammed me up against a fence, and then pushed me on the ground. I thought he was going to continue to hurt me, because he collared me by my shirt. I braced myself, preparing for whatever came next.

Just then, someone yelled, "Let him go!" It was my friend Keith's older brother, Andre. He came into the yard and said, "What's the matter with y'all?" We told Andre what had been happened, and Keith and I must have had terrified looks on our faces. Without warning, Andre grabbed Ray, and pushed him down. When Andre felt Ray had enough, he grabbed him by his shirt and made him apologize to Keith and me. Ray warned him that if he bullied us again, things would be much worse for him. Ray ran out of my yard as fast as he could. That experience made me understand that Karma meant you "reap what you sow." I hoped that Ray figured it out as well. We learn through experience.

Karma was not finished with me. When I was about 16 or 18, I experienced a time of trouble. There were gangs, violence, drugs, and guns. People began to look at me as a leader, and I was leading them in the wrong direction. I loved music, and I was influenced by some of rap music's worst messages. What a huge mistake I made! Too much alcohol and marijuana gave me a false sense of courage and strength. I was motivated to say and do bad things, and my mind was altered when I made life-changing decisions.

I was becoming a person that I did not know. It was the summer of 1990, and the using and selling of drugs was taking over the neighborhood. I was caught in the middle of it all. My mother had taught me the right things to do, and to treat people the way you wanted to be treated. I pushed these values far to the back of my mind where the memory was lost.

In the atmosphere that surrounded me, I was popular and had a new "family." Someone I knew supplied me with cocaine. I would buy some, and sometimes he gave me some without charging me for it. This was a trap he set for me, so I would sell the cocaine to others, and buy more from him. In some strange way, I thought I had earned a "bonus." Slowly, but surely, I realized another reason he was giving me drugs to sell at no cost. He was using me as protection and "muscle" when operating on the street, to move the product smoothly, without any hassle. What I was really doing was destroying more lives.

My dealer was a guy who was known as Hemp. He didn't come from the neighborhood, but lived in the suburbs. I thought he was my friend, and that made me feel important. That wasn't the truth. One day, Hemp picked me up to be his muscle, as he tried to pick up his payment from a buyer. I am really not sure if he was using me to intimidate the buyer, or if he took me along to show that he was just another guy from the "hood." Hemp and I went to the buyer's job, and the man came out to the car. He spoke to Hemp from the passenger side of the car, where I was sitting. I was drinking a bottle of beer, listening to them go back and forth about how much money was owed to Hemp. Hemp got more aggressive and angry because the money was short. As tensions rose, I took on Hemp's negative energy in a domino effect.

I was getting more and more upset. The buyer reeked of alcohol, and as he yelled, he began to spit on me. Before I knew it, I hit the buyer in the face with my bottle of beer. The bottle broke when it hit him, and he backed away from the car, clearing beer and glass from his face. He was yelling for help. Hemp threw the car into drive, and we sped off. Hemp praised me for being wild and crazy, and we laughed about it for the rest of the day. Little did I know that I had just made another date with Karma to enter my life.

Later that summer, I was walking up the street making drug sales and speaking with friends. As I passed by, up ahead I could see and hear a lot of commotion. There was a crowd of people. As I got closer, I saw that some of my friends were jumping another guy that I knew. They had already beaten him up badly before I arrived. I tried to stop them, but before it was over, I went across the street to the neighborhood store. I was waiting for more drug sales.

A man came up to me and said, "Hey, you was one of those guys who jumped on my boy!" He then hit me in the head with a beer bottle. When this happened, I had a hand gun tucked in my waistband. Instead of using it, I took off running. I'm glad I did, because if I had used it I probably would have gone to jail for murder or attempted murder. Either way, it would have meant the loss of my freedom, and great pain placed upon two families. I made my choice, and Karma was there. I have been working to turn my life around ever since this happened.

In closing, I hope that those who read this are influenced to make sure they make positive choices and lift up one another. As I learned, what you put into the atmosphere comes back to you, just like a boomerang. Have compassion for others, encouraging and motivating them. Help move each other to greatness and be mindful of each other's needs. Keep hope alive and keep Him first. Treat everyone like you would treat the person you see in the mirror. Reap the benefits of the harvest of good Karma when it comes your way.

~ Shawn Jordan

Mr. Heroin

Growing up I used to hear about you in the streets.
 I used to think that me and you would never meet.
 But we did and I fell in love right away.
 From then on I had to see you each and every day.
 I thought it was a beautiful relationship.
 Without you here was a feeling I hated everything.
 'Cause you was here and I was there and I was about to trip.
 And when you didn't call, it really made me stinking sick.
 In my bed it was hard for me to even fall asleep.
 The thought of you with someone else really made me weak.
 You came back, and I forgot how mad I'd been.
 You went from being who I hated to my best friend.
 A cycle that repeated; I came to know it well.
 I get a couple of hours in heaven, a couple days in hell.
 Every day that you are gone, I gain strength.
The most I got from you was all I could take.

~ Samuel Moore

A Woman Rescued by the Grace of God

Everything was different before the pregnancy. I was born in Mexico thirty-four years ago. When I was eighteen years old, I traveled to Chicago, Illinois. At this time, I had a very messy life. I started getting into drugs and alcohol. I was also in gangs and had relationships with multiple men.

At the age of twenty, I became pregnant and didn't even know it. To be honest, I originally didn't plan on keeping the baby. With a baby on the way, I felt like the world was collapsing on top of me. With the encouragement and support of my boyfriend at the time, we decided to have an abortion. I was already about six weeks pregnant.

I remember going to the clinic in downtown Chicago for the abortion. Then the process began. Deep down in my heart, I knew it was wrong, but I thought it was the best decision to not have the baby. Two hours passed, and then everything was done. We went home, and in my head, I was so sure that everything was over. In reality, it was actually the beginning of my realization that we had made a horrible decision.

I cried every night and dreamed about the baby. Every day, I was reminded of the room where it had all happened. That room is where I killed my baby. Days passed, and I was still suffering in my depression. I drowned myself in alcohol, went to parties, and continued to go out with multiple men, but none of that helped take the pain away. Years passed, and I was still in depression. I didn't know how to fill up the empty space that I had in my heart and soul. I carried that empty space with me every day.

Then the day came when I had an encounter with God. This experience completely changed my life. My depression went away, and I was healed. I no longer felt any blame because God had forgiven me for my terrible sin. I have learned that it is impossible to go through these situations alone. I now know that I must always put God first. I have learned that if you carry God in your

heart, He will heal you and your wounds. Everything is possible with Him!

When you have an abortion, you are killing two people at once, you and the baby. However, there is hope with the redemption and forgiveness of God. Today, I am a completely happy woman. Every day, I thank God for His grace and healing.

“It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.” – Mother Teresa of Calcutta

~ Laura Hernandez

My Transformed Behavior as a Black Man

In many lower income communities, black males have been lost, confused, and misled about the necessary steps to live a positive and productive lifestyle.

Growing up as an adolescent, it was easy for me to absorb the contaminated actions that were shown through others. Selling drugs, fighting for respect, stealing, and robbing people was the type of occupation I thought I would be successful in.

Over the years, crimes started to increase, which placed me in greater positions of being hurt, killed, or sent to prison for a very long time. I have been hurt, and almost killed, on multiple occasions. I was sent to jail a large portion of my life.

I was released from prison last year, February 20, 2019, finishing a sentence of 13 years. At the time, I thought that being away from my daughter was the hardest part. But I see that it wasn't. Now, I know the most hurtful part is not creating a foundation and building myself into the positive-productive man I need to be for me and my baby girl.

I believe that with the experiences people encounter in life, no matter how painful they are, some gain strength, confidence, courage, and the will to overcome the troubles of life.

So, to the men who have been misled, confused, or grew up around people who have lost themselves, please pay attention to what I have said. Stay focused on the “nutrition” of building a healthy foundation. The vitamins needed are keeping God as the center of your life, with education, patience, and the determination to be successful. Then you can grow into a real Black man.

I don't believe I would have understood any of this and started to put it into action without the help of three loving, motherly, intelligent, and professional teachers that I am so grateful

for. Thank you Ms. Harris, Ms. Roseberry, and last but not least, Ms. Nolan. I dedicate this Black History Month to you three ladies.

Please keep up the good work by helping men to become better men than some of us already are!

Thank You and A Lot of Love to You All!!

Respectfully,
Edwards

~ James Edwards

Progress

I'd like to say I'm getting better
I'd like to say I'm getting help
I'm trapped inside this mind of mine
I'm trying to save me from myself

Many days I try to cope
I search inside to find the hope
The want and will to stay afloat
They laugh at me like life's a joke

I'm out of tears I'm out of lies
Throughout the years of trying to hide
I admit my guilt. It's time to try
I'm out of cries. My eyes are dry.

~ Doug Davis

My Heart's Desire

It was once said that there are two tragedies in life. One is to gain your heart's desire, and the other is to lose it.

On an ordinary day like so many others that blurred together like groundhog days, I met the love of my life. I had never believed in love at first sight, until I laid my eyes on Rodney. He frightened me a bit at first, with his wild energy and animal magnetism. I swore I could feel it radiating off his body, as if it were going to crack the shell of my contented if somewhat boring life. I think it was the way he so openly and hungrily looked at me, oblivious it seemed of everyone else in the room. I sat there for a moment, quivering slightly, and as he watched me I could feel my face start to burn. Finally I laughed helplessly. I knew he was the one, and I sent up a quick prayer that God would make him mine.

I couldn't seem to stop staring. I was mesmerized by this beautiful man. His face was baby smooth, cupid bow red lips, brilliant smile, and crystal sea blue eyes. When he flashed me that crooked little half smile, I was for sure a goner. All it took was one kiss and we were madly in love. For the next five years we were deliriously happy and almost inseparable.

Halloween night was damp and chilly. After parting with some friends for the holiday, I grew tired and went upstairs to sleep, leaving Rodney and a few of our friends in the kitchen. I figured I'd wake up when he crawled into bed. So when I woke in the middle of the night alone, I was surprised, but still didn't think to worry.

I padded down the stairs in search of him. The house was silent and empty. Upon entering the living room I could see Rodney's still form on the couch, sleeping peacefully. I tried to wake him to come to bed with me. He wouldn't move. I tried again, shaking him harder. With growing horror I realized he was completely unresponsive to my touch. In a panic I dialed 911. He was still warm so I tried to breathe life back into him. Again. Again. Again.

By the time the EMT's arrived I was a mess.

At the hospital I waited for someone to tell me something. I began to pray, begging and bargaining with God. I would do anything as long as he would be ok.

Rivers of tears streamed as the minutes ticked by like hours. Finally a doctor appeared and informed me that the man who had captured my entire soul with one smile hadn't made it. He had overdosed on heroin.

It felt like I was plunged underwater. I struggled to breathe. Shocked and sickened to the core to hear those words so coldly spoken, as if she weren't speaking of the man who had been my world, that had meant everything to me. The man who had promised never to leave me.

I wanted to scream at her. Instead, I just stared straight ahead, speechless, tears running down my face. She looked at me, sympathetic, and then whispered, "Come with me."

She led me to a back room. It felt sterile. Empty. Dead. The glaring lights above the table made it look as if he lay floodlit on a stage for no one but me to see. I couldn't bring myself to keep my eyes on him. I wanted to look anywhere but at him. When I eventually found the courage to look at his face, everything around us faded away, and it was just us. I stood there silently, staring down at the only man that I had ever truly loved.

All I could think was this can't be real.

I can't say how long I stood there trying to grasp the reality that the man who had held me all those nights, laughed with me, danced with me, teased and kissed me so gently, who could ignite my flesh with a touch, take my breath away with a look, or stop my heart with his laugh... he was gone. The body on the table under the lights was just a shell. The best part of him had left. To a place where I could only hope that he would be waiting for me someday.

His eyes, once crystal clear and blue, were now glassy, milky, and unrecognizable. Why hadn't they closed his eyes? Or wiped away the brown leftover mess from the Narcan?

How could I be here all alone? The only one knowing he was no longer of this earth? I held his face in my hands, leaning over I touched my forehead to his, as I had done so many times before, and gave him one last, long and lingering kiss.

In that moment I believed his death was my punishment for some yet unknown sin.

I gathered myself and rose slowly then with one last longing look back, I gathered the strength to walk out of the hospital and away from the love of my life. Outside the sky was gray and bleak. I sat in my car and smoked a cigarette. I had to be strong now. I had to go home.

Home. Where I would have to face everyone alone and tell them he was gone. Home. Where his clothes hung in the closet and his razor and toothbrush lay on the sink, last night's towel still hung damp and smelling of him. Home. Where his boots and lunch box still sat by the front door as if everything were normal, and he might enter any moment, voice booming, laughing that contagious laugh. Home. Where his pillow still held the indentation of his head. Where everywhere I looked everything would remind me of him. Because it was our home. Had been our home.

I threw my cigarette butt out the window, unclenched my fists, dried my eyes, and put the car in drive. I left him there, on the table, eyes open under the lights, all alone.

Once home I could only lay on our bed and draw myself into a tight ball. I thought I would scream and sob out my grief. But I did not. I only lay there still, my face pressed into his pillow, taking small, quick breaths. I shook my head back and forth, whispering, "no...no...no..."

I couldn't seem to banish the image of him laying there cold and still. I felt as if I would see it forever, as if it was burned into my brain. I will have to die, I thought. Surely I cannot live like this. This can't be what I think of when I think of him. Because of course I would think of him. Every. Day.

And then the tears came. Torrents of them. Harsh, hoarse sobs torn from deep in my belly. Weeping like vomiting. A hole in my heart that will always remain. I wondered how a human being could have so many tears.

I finally cried myself to sleep, thankful for its dark relief. When I awoke there were tears still wet and clinging to my swollen cheeks. My eyes were puffy and tender. My body felt like I had thrown up my whole being. What replaced it was cold and echoing pain.

I thought to myself that surely I must die of such pain. Even though I knew that was impossible. Maybe I wished it. I do know I wished that God had taken me instead.

I became a lost soul. Life had lost all purpose for me and all of its magic. A great heaviness set in that nothing could penetrate. It was as if I had been given a bubble to wear, like I had been placed in a snow globe. No one could reach me.

This would be the first of many mornings that I would wake up without him by my side. I stared into the gloom of the bedroom. I thought maybe if I got up and opened the window and curtains and got some fresh air that the day might even seem somewhat ordinary. But I didn't move, not for a long time. Because I knew, deep down, there would be no more ordinary days.

Because how would any mundane task ever seem ordinary again? He was so kind and generous with a big heart. He had a way of making everyone (especially me) feel comfortable in their own skin. His personality shined through the ordinary, making it wonderful, until it seemed like there was nothing ordinary about

him, about us, at all. After him, ordinary seemed... pointless. Dead. What could there be for me after him?

There were times after his death when emptiness howled. His death put me down a crazy path, thick with the unexpected and unimaginable until I couldn't even begin to see beyond my next step.

Where it led me was here, far from home, to this classroom. I am a prisoner sharing my story with you. Trying to find a way to cope with the pain and the loss led me into a downward spiral that landed me in a place that I thought would be the end of my life.

But, I've found here that just like Rodney, I am strong and can endure. And I will make it. I am much like a phoenix, rising from the ashes to be born again. Again I hold my head high.

I know he's looking down on me, not unlike a guardian angel. So I step up to every challenge. I'll never be the carefree girl I once was, but I'll never forget her. Nor will I ever forget this man, for he was my heart's desire.

~ *Desiree Gomez*

My First Love

She was beautiful, she was stunning
 She was smart, she was cunning
 She took care of my sickness
 She took care of my worry
 When I needed her, she was there in a hurry
 She was my best friend, she was my light
 She was my escape away from this stressful life
 She became greedy, she became jealous
 She demanded all of me, she was zealous
 Once a hold of me, I couldn't let go
 We were destined to be, the two main actors in the show.
 As time went on the show faded
 I became weary, I became jaded
 All was lost, the people that were there before
 I soon became ashamed of the woman I adore
 She kept my secrets, she bore witness
 How could she be my cure as well as my sickness?
 Marks on my skin to prove the pain
 My exterior may never be the same
 I can heal through my scars
 I embrace the pain in my heart.
 My first love was a lesson
 A beautiful disaster became my greatest blessing.

~ *Cole R. Cother*

Jack Johnson

John Arthur Johnson was born on March 31, 1878, in Galveston, Texas. Jack's parents, Tina and Henry, were former slaves. Jack's father, Henry, served as a Civilian Teamster in the Union 38th Colored Infantry. Jack once said that his father was the most perfect physical specimen he ever saw, even though his father was 5'5" with an atrophied leg from his service in the Civil War. Jack had to drop out of school to take care of his family.

Jack worked a lot of jobs. One of his jobs was exercising race horses, but it wasn't until he got the job as an apprentice for a carriage painter named Walter Lewis that he learned how to box. By 1902, Jack Johnson won at least 50 fights against both white and black opponents. In 1903, Jack Johnson defeated Ed Martin to become the black heavy weight champion. Jack had golds in his mouth and during the fights, the crowd would spit and yell racist slurs. Jack would smile at them with his gold teeth and continue beating his opponent.

In 1910, Jack defeated Jim Jefferies, a retired world heavy weight champion. Race riots broke out and the public called for "The Great White Hope" during the Jim Crow Era.

Jack had two Caucasian wives. That's why he violated the Mann Act and spent a year in prison for it. After being out of the ring for a while, he was out of shape. In April 1915, Jack lost his title to a younger boxer named Jess Willard. The public was happy again.

Jack kept boxing until he was 50. Jack Johnson proved that African Americans have never been inferior.

~ Brianna Williams

Showing Gratitude

Precious Gifts

Dear Lord,

I want to express my sincerest gratitude for the new life and precious gifts you bestowed upon me and my siblings after the death of our mother. My mother, Sandra, received a cherished gift from You when she gave birth to her first child at the age of fifteen. In 1986, You gave me life on the day of my birth in Rio de Janeiro. Before I turned one year old, You called my mother home when she passed away. My siblings and I were put up for adoption since there were no other family members to care for us. It was a very difficult time.

After my mother's death, my brother, sister and I were separated and went to live with three different families. As it all happened when I was very young, I don't remember the details, but I do know You must have been watching over me. My heart is filled with nostalgia each time I think of my siblings and our life together. Today, we have managed to restore our family relationships and have grown very close.

My new family was a gift from You. My parents did make some mistakes, but there were many successes. They gave me love and an education. They also did their best to provide me with many opportunities within their limitations. Today, I see how difficult it must have been for my parents to deal with the fact that they couldn't have children of their own and had to choose to adopt. At that time, they faced prejudice and misconceptions; however, my parents never gave up. They adopted me when I was almost two years old, giving me a new beginning.

At the age of eighteen, I started law school, and another gift arrived in my life, my future husband, Marcos. After dating for one year, we got engaged. While planning the wedding, I got pregnant with my first son, Marcos. His name was chosen in honor of my husband. The arrival of my son helped to complete our life. A few years later, another gift arrived, João. He came to bring joy to our family after a very difficult period for me.

In the midst of a stable moment in our lives, my husband was transferred from Rio de Janeiro to the United States. Today, I find myself facing new challenges. I have the opportunity to learn English and thus provide our children with this fantastic life experience. Thank You for this great opportunity that my husband won through hard work, along with Your blessing.

My God, there are so many gifts You have bestowed upon me. I can't list them in just one letter. I am thankful for everyone in my life. Thank You for never leaving me, even though I don't always feel I deserve it. Thank You for all the happy moments and the difficulties I experienced as well. Going through the difficulties helped shape me, making me who I am. I know that You are already aware of all these things about me because You created me. However, my heart is filled with sincere gratitude, and I desperately want to express how grateful I am to You for these precious gifts.

Your loving child,
Fernanda Lisboa Lima Marques

~ *Fernanda Lisboa Lima Marques*

My Parents

What do you think about your parents? When I was a child, I just cared about my friends. I always made a fuss to get my parents angry because I usually went out with friends to play games all day. Deteriorating in my school, I did not get great results in learning. Even then, I did not care about my parents when they taught me good things such as how to be polite and honest with grown up people. When I grew up, I understood that my parents wished for me to become a good person to help and respect everyone. When I get old, I will reveal to my children the good things I learned from my parents. I will tell them that my parents always loved me, listened to me, and forgave me when I made mistakes. They looked after me. I will be trying a lot until they are happy and not worried about me. The best thing in my life is my parents. I will get to be a good person to make them happy and proud of me.

~ *Lam Thanh Dang*

Introspective Winter

I arrived here along with the winter! Metaphorically, I find it interesting to relate this moment of my life precisely to this season. Nature in its wisdom reflects life. I find it beautiful, divine!

It is time to take root in the ground, endure the cold of longing, and gather resources that feed me until “my reinvention” in a colorful spring.

My daughter read my drafts to produce this text and said, “Mom, you are really crying! That is sad!” I was the opposite of her because she was always happy like a summer sun. I just laughed at her comment and felt silly. I feel sad? I believe this is not the right word. I think I felt introspective.

Life is made up of seasons, and in this season my introspection is searching for the best in my heart for a rebirth. Everything is all right! I know spring will soon come, but the summer sun is shining in my life no matter the season. Thank God, I have it! I am very happy and grateful for that!

~ Daniela Barbosa

Never Give Up

Life is not easy, especially when you move to a new country and have to start over. Adapting to a new culture and learning a new language and different rules and laws is never easy for anyone.

When I moved to the United States, I started attending the Greek Church. One time after the service, I met an older man named Chris and his wife, Sue. With time I started getting to know him better.

Chris came to The United States from Greece when he was 20 years old with only \$1000 in his pocket. He didn't speak English either. He started working at a printing company and worked on improving his English at the same time. Later on he managed to buy a small printing machine to work on after finishing his work. Then he started making contacts in his community and neighborhood to sell his products. At the same time he continued to improve his English. Eventually, Chris became the owner of one of the most successful promotional products company in Columbus, which he still runs with his daughter and son.

When I moved to The United States, I was so excited but nervous at the same time. I didn't speak English well, I didn't know much about the culture, and didn't have a friend or family to rely on. After settling down, I had good and bad days. But having Chris in my life during that period of time gave me the courage and the support to move forward one step at a time towards achieving my short- and long-term goals. I am glad I met Chris. It's always great to have someone like him in your life for inspiration and motivation. As I think of his journey, how he overcame so many obstacles and didn't let the language barrier stop him from achieving his dreams, he is a reminder to never give up on achieving my own dreams.

~ Elias Hanna

The Fruits of Labor

My father, Mohamed Idris, is my role model. I learned a lot of things from him. The most important thing I learned is to be ambitious and always follow my dream.

In 1989 he started his journey to success. He had a small office in the corner of his room in our home. He spent most of his time writing about various topics. When he was at work, he also recorded a documentary program for the radio. And when he returned home he wrote about what he recorded.

In 1999, my father became a journalist for a newspaper. He worked there until 2005. Then he started to write his own book. In 2007, he published his first book "BITTER HARVEST." It was about the civil war in Somalia. People liked the book, and it achieved record sales. After the success of his first book, he became a well-known author. Since that time, he has been published 7 more books.

My father's success didn't happen quickly. But he continued to work and follow his dream. I want to do the same with my life.

~ Muna Idris

The Family I Didn't Choose

I'm an au pair, and I take care of a family of American children. The family gives me a place to live, food, and a stipend. Before I came to America, I understood what kind of program it was.

What no one tells you is how the relationship with your family grows and changes your life. And how hard I think it will be to say goodbye when that time comes.

You share a year of your life with them. You see them happy, sad, bored, tired, sick, hungry, angry, spontaneous, etc. Day by day you create new stories and memories. I hope they have learned something from me, as I did from them. I hope they'll remember the lessons they taught me: how to be so natural, how to forgive and forget almost immediately, how to enjoy what you have and live in the moment, and that there is nothing wrong with being silly sometimes. I learned not to be afraid to sing and dance or express my feelings. And I learned that it's OK to hug at any time. I have learned something new every day.

Every day isn't perfect, but we always find a way to have fun together. I've been introducing some "Mexican games" and games from my childhood. (I don't even know if anyone in my country plays these games anymore). I teach the family some Spanish words, and I have learned a lot from hearing them try to pronounce my language.

I still have five months to go, but I have nothing but gratitude for this experience and for my two different families. Each of the 5 children is different and special. I know I will miss them so much, and I hope I will see them again in the future.

~ Amalia Aguilar-Alcala

Who Do You Admire Most?

I admire my grandmother because I grew up living with her. She let me become who I am. When I was two years old, my grandmother took me from my parents. I was living with my grandmother until grandmother died. Then I moved back with my parents. My grandmother was a farmer and a very hard worker. She was a kind person. Everyone looked up to her. I learned a lot from my grandmother, and I thank her for raising me. My grandmother was my role model, and I love her so much.

~ Elizabeth Minta

Managing Emotions

Your Thoughts About You Matter!

Sometimes our perspective of ourselves is the very thing keeping us from reaching our greatest potential. We find ourselves feeling unqualified or unequipped so we disqualify ourselves, which results in us declining positions or requests that are meant to strengthen us, build our confidence, technique, perspective, and more.

This past year, I have been asked to do things I didn't believe I was qualified for. In fact, for most tasks, I had no skills, training, or experience whatsoever to make the requests happen. However, I continued to pray every time I did anything towards accomplishing the assignments. As I learned to fearlessly embrace different requests, I found myself getting better at listening to instructions, researching, and developing new strengths.

Trust me, I know it's very uncomfortable with the heaviness of fear and ruminating thoughts of failing to complete what is required, but the Bible says: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. - Philippians 4:13

So to the person that needed to hear this; Go for it! Stretch beyond your fear and say "Yes I can, and I will," because you are more than capable. Understanding this is half the battle.

~ Amanda Allen

Eyes of Red

As I opened my eyes
 I began to cry
 This happened every night
 In my dreams I fought
 Seeing you looking so nice
 Oh, how I cried
 Knowing you would never be by my side
 I will never feel the warmth of your hands
 I could no longer count on you to help me with the land
 In my dreams you will stay
 Never to come out in the light of day
 Then I sigh
 That's when I cry
 For now, I know that you have died
 Just like God had said
 With eyes of red.

~ Melody Shlyk

Misunderstood

I'm a raw material straight from the Earth.
 And I'm misunderstood
 Misguided, unfortunate, and misinterpreted.
 Inside I'm hurting? Yes
 Sometimes discouraged? Yes
 But always pray to God to help take my worries, blessed!
 Blessed is the Lord's name.
 Misunderstood in this world's game
 Of checkers, 'cause I look at it like
 A more complex board game, Chess.
 Feelings and emotions rising from my chest
 While I ponder
 In deep thought about what move I'll make next.
 Challenge my enemy and take him out or recognize
 His purpose and take the safer route
 I think that would be best.
 But then I'm misunderstood again
 They say if they try it once and get away
 They gone do it again.
 It's hard to turn a cheek in the world we're in
 But I choose to turn my cheek or just separate me
 because I refuse to keep indulging in the acts of sin.
 But then somebody thinking, he gonna let the punk 'em then.
 But in reality I'm just trying
 Change the way I live
 But then I'm misunderstood again.

~ Jer'Reco Harris

Hear Me

My heart weeps of the emptiness
 that I feel on this cold gray morning.
 No sound of life to be heard.
 I call out to the sun, "Please touch my heart
 with golden rays of warmth."
 But the sun does not hear me.
 I plead with the wind to blow
 all the gray clouds away.
 But the wind does not answer.
 I am lost, for the elements laugh at me
 and bring cold north winds
 with a deep freeze that numbs life itself.
 Despair fills my heart.
 I fall into a deep sleep
 that takes me to the core of the pitch black of the night
 and numbs my soul.
 Dawn whispers to me,
 "Awaken child, the sun heard your plea,
 and with golden rays, warms the land."
 That brings the sound of life
 and joy to my heart.

~ Susana W. Antal

Mondays

Yesterday was rough, not that anything happened. It was just an ordinary Monday – slow, sluggish and unmotivated. Yet, today I woke up with so much energy and ready to conquer the day ... What stopped me from feeling this way yesterday?

We have to be careful with the words we subconsciously speak. "Just an ordinary Monday" is a dangerous phrase. I think it, then passively speak it, and that's how I approach my Mondays. Because of this, it makes them harder to conquer than any other day of the week.

It's a mind game. What we think is what we speak. What we speak is what we believe, and what we believe is what we do or how we approach things. From here on Mondays are my best day.

~ Amanda Allen

Take Its Course

My tears become a river, onward the flow,
along the straight and narrow then splitting,
which way to go?
Having chosen the wrong path soon becomes damned,
filling my heart with sorrow, replacing its love with despair.
The pressure is building, I've taken all I can take.
My walls become weaker, buckling I break.

~ *Kevin M. Adkins*

I Be Calm

I be calm like the breeze when the sky be sky blue
Nothing but chill vibes inside of my room
Reggae music sets the mood
Almost time for breakfast soon
Flapjack, grits, eggs, and orange juice
Fall season
Get rid of demons
Through meditation
Puffin' on good Jamaican
It helps me feel amazing
Park the I-Roc by the lake to watch the sunset
There's no need to be upset
...I be calm

~ *Tyre Jones*

Staying Connected

Papa

Papa, I am sad to say
that I have not visited
your grave in twenty years.
You are but a whisper in the wind,
a shadow I cannot touch or hear,
and memories that seem more like
dreams of a time so long ago.
Sadness, that's what I remember.
Mama's tears as she watched you wither away.
She held your hand and spoke to you,
but I don't think you heard.
There was no sound
from your lips, no movement of your body,
just a cold stare.
That I remember the most, Papa,
your body but a shell
your light of life burned out
long before your soul left your body, my Papa.

~ Susan W. Antal

Moving to Mexico: Moving Your Heart!

Being a manager in a multinational company means that a family move is likely. My family and I moved from Spain to Mexico five years ago, and now we have been living in Ohio since last October. But the first move is always the most eventful. It's the moment when you leave your home, your family, and your life as you know it. Deciding to leave your country is a great decision. You fear the consequences, especially when you have two children. However, living in another country opens your mind and helps you to understand distinct cultures, to respect them, and to live well with diversity.

I remember comments people made to us just before we traveled to Mexico. When we said that we were going to Mexico, people responded with things like "You poor things! What a dangerous place it is!" or "Are you sure? You're going to the Third World, you know!" A lovely boy, the son of a friend, asked us if we would live in a cabin! When our friends prepared a farewell party, it was as if it might be the last time that they would see us. But I wasn't worried. We were moving with the company where my husband works, and they helped us with everything. It was the best opportunity to have a future full of new experiences!

I also remember the first days in Mexico. When the company picked us up at the airport, we got our first impressions of the area. Everything seemed in disarray: the houses, the roads, the electrical wires above the streets. However, the second day we had already become more familiar, and it seemed much better than that first impression. It's amazing!

After a week, my husband had to start working, but my children still did not have school. In the morning, we decided to go out with our dog. We didn't have a car. We still didn't have cell phones or the internet. The day was hot and dry, and there was no one in the streets. We felt so alone! Even our dog wanted to come back to the house, which was crazy because our dog always

wants to go outside. I remember thinking, "What the hell are we doing here?" I think it was the only moment that I doubted if that move was a good decision. But a few days later, we met new people and I met my friend, Teresa. She had been an expatriate for a long time and her behavior and advice taught me how to live in another country, how to minimize and appreciate the differences. The following summer Teresa moved to another city, but by then we had already adjusted to Mexico, its culture and its people, and we had made great Mexican friends.

After a year of living in Mexico, we went back to Barcelona to visit our family. One day, I was on my way home and I needed to stop at a gas station. In the store, a graceful young girl waited on me. She looked familiar to me, with her well-groomed brown hair and large brown eyes. When she started talking, I understood why; she was Mexican and from Guanajuato, the same state in which we lived! We were talking when a young man appeared. He was good-looking with charming ways. He came directly to me and said, "I was listening to your conversation. I'm also Mexican. I have lived in Barcelona for a year, the same amount of time that you have lived in my country" We laughed together and felt comfortable speaking about Barcelona and Mexico. When it was time to leave, the young man told me then, "It was a pleasure to meet you. You are one of the few people who has shown some interest in our lives, in our stories. Thanks for that."

That was the moment! When I was outside, I realized that I had changed. When had I ever spoken with immigrants who worked in my country? Never! When I lived in Barcelona, I had my family, my friends, my work, and everything was easy for me. Why would I want to talk to an immigrant? I didn't need them, and I had no time or interest in them. But when I lived in their country, I was grateful because people were kind to my family and helped us through many situations. No one else could understand this unless they had this experience themselves. All in all, the Mexican people helped us to feel comfortable in their country and to have a happy life there! At that moment I felt very moved; living in Mexico made me more empathetic with others.

I have a thought that I always remember when I am telling stories about our years in Mexico: most of the time, we forget to stop and see who is really in front of us, and we have our own vision of them and of ourselves. It's only a perception, but it may not be true. We lack empathy. It is diversity that makes us interesting. Life would be boring without diversity. Mexicans with their surprising ways often made me laugh, and I always heard music on the street. I miss all those things. Let's give diversity a chance!

~ *Sonia Esteve Armela*

A Father's Love

Raindrops fall on my son's soul
Dad he didn't know
Mad at his reflection
The similarity is untold

Just love me, love me
Is my plea
Can't get mad if his eyes can't see

To the corner of his feelings
I go, contagious to society's thoughts
A son's love can't be bought

Ashamed, unmastered of being a man
She was his teacher, provider, and dad
A strong woman wasn't the plan

All I have left is a father's love
I hope he knows
Come back, come back. I hope it shows
That together we can grow.

~*Xzaverry Hick*

Elizabeth

Elizabeth
 loving friendly
 play run jump
 It's always my life.
 educate warm interact
 noise little
 My baby

~ Ruth Ulloa

Will She Ever Know?

Will she ever know, the boy before the man?
 Will she ever know, will she ever understand?
 A little boy without a voice, and the trauma he'd withstand.
 Or the obstacles he'd overcome without a helping hand?
 How could she understand the pain, the pain that he had felt?
 Or the hurt that he'd endure alone and by himself?
 The days were long, the nights were longer, for a child who is afraid.
 A father gone a mother absent, who would lead the way?
 His siblings left with no regard, to him or where he was.
 With no one left to love the boy, who could he ever trust?
 The streets were rough as they were violent, a pistol was a must.
 With nothing to lose and so much to prove, he's sure to see the judge.
 He found comfort in the noisy streets, and peace in the array.
 Of bullets flyin, people dyin. But one day he would pay
 With his life or with his time, no one could really say.
 It was life or death, black or white, without a shade of gray.
 An empty hole inside of him, only seemed to grow.
 Along with sadness and his rage, why, no one seemed to know.
 To no avail, he tried to fill the hole deep down inside.
 With every passing day, the boy inside him slowly died.
 With every night that came about, the man inside him came alive.
 One day everyone would love him, and for this he would strive.
 He looked for love in many places, but all that he had found
 Was that love is pain, and pain is love. This game was pound for pound.
 He abandoned love, the way that love abandoned him before.
 He wouldn't let love impact him, or hurt him anymore.
 The quality of life seemed to dwindle with the time.
 His hands where stained with blood, but the drugs would fog his mind.
 Nightmares plagued his sleep, from all the evil that he'd done.
 And all the evil done to him, since his time begun.
 His innocence was shattered, security was stole.

The day he was brung in this world without a stable home.
Now he's forced to move along, portraying a false pride.
Displaying much aggressiveness, to hide the hurt inside.
Traumatized by life, and its most violent events.
One day he'd rise above it all, till then he wouldn't rest.
He didn't have a prospect, and not the slightest clue.
How to achieve the task at hand, he knew not what to do.
One fateful day he met someone, so kind, tender, and sweet.
He knew another one like her, he'd never get to meet.
The only problem that he'd have, is how to let her know.
The things he's done, and how he feels, deep down in his soul.
Will she ever know the boy, that lived so long ago?
Or understand the man that stands, in front of her or not?
Will she ever know the boy, the boy before the man?
Will she ever know, will she ever understand?

~ Ricardo Obregon

Little Angel

From the moment you were conceived
You were already many things to many people.
Those you have left behind
Have emotions strong and raw,
Like the waves in the ocean.
Know that now and for years
To come, you are loved and will
Be missed and never forgotten.
Your brief time here left an
Impression in all our hearts and souls
That can never be taken away.
You have an important job
Now, Little Angel. Go forward
With our love, thoughts, and
Prayers for a special mission,
Whatever is planned
For you.

~ Valerie Hendrix

Parents

Father

tall, intelligent

working, sleeping, watching

jeans, shoes, cap, scarf

cleaning, cooking, sweeping

small, beautiful

Mother

~ Jose Mendez

Keeping Hope Alive

A Life to Imitate

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be like Jesus. The good thing is that there is an entire book teaching us how to do this: the Bible. Jesus Christ, for Christians and non-Christians alike, is a historical character who is known for his goodness and love.

Even as a child, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52) and was dedicated to learning more of what he believed. He was even able to teach adults. Growing up, he was always patient and humble, helping the ones in need and showing his disciples how to do the same. When he was betrayed by all his immediate friends, he did not get angry or bitter, but acted with love. He prayed for God to forgive them while he was on the cross.

When I look at Jesus's life, I see a great role model to follow. I want to become a better person to everyone around me, but I especially want to lead a life to be imitated. Following Jesus's example is not an easy task for me because I don't always pay attention to everything that I say or do and how others feel. Is there someone besides Jesus who can actually do this? I'm not sure. But I believe that I have to be much less selfish and more aware of my actions all the time. This would be a first step to imitate Christ. I am not saying that I am a horrible person, but Jesus never did anything wrong. So I need to work hard to imitate him. I believe the world can use one more person trying to be good.

Looking at Jesus's life has led me to an important decision. I have decided that I want to be a teacher too. Then I could try to be as good as Jesus was and teach others to be like him.

~ *Lais Santos*

A Letter to Myself After I Graduate

Dear Mr. Stormer,

I would like to congratulate you on accomplishing a goal I know you had set for yourself many years ago. And I know your mom and dad would be proud if they could see the accomplishment. I hope you can continue to strive for greatness as I know you can. I know there's nothing you can't do if you put your mind to it.

Sincerely,
Larry Stormer

~ Larry Stormer

Stagnation Season

Approximately ten years ago, I was a typical university student close to achieving the goal of her life. I was full of very big dreams and high expectations. Born on the shores of a tropical country, with a strong character and great self-confidence, I had decided to conquer the world.

Finally, with many sacrifices, I achieved one of my greatest goals in life. I got my first job and, by the way, I met someone special. Very proud of my achievements and not in the mood to stop, I continued to dream big.

After some time, my boyfriend asked me to marry, and although I wasn't completely sure about it, I decided to accept the proposal and get married because I was in love. Then I got pregnant with a beautiful baby girl. Although a pregnancy is a blessing, I began to feel like my world was slowly beginning to crumble.

With a difficult pregnancy and a child birth that was not easy, I was without a job. I had ups and downs, and felt like I had no choices. With my back against the wall there was only one way out, and that was Jesus. Even though He was always there for me, I never saw Him as a priority-- at least not at that moment.

After all that difficult time, God brought us to the U.S. to serve Him. A few months after our arrival to the U.S., I fell into a deep depression. So in the search for the cause of that depression, I concluded that it was because my normal life was gone, together with my dreams. The deepest longing of my heart was stagnant.

It seemed like all my dreams were locked away in a box with many padlocks. I couldn't open it as much as I tried. I wondered what defined that box enclosed with all my dreams.

The stagnation or what I called *The Locked Box of Dreams* is defined as the state of not flowing or moving and/or lack of activity, growth or development.

Upon knowing the cause of my depression and how that depression had affected all the members of my family, I thought, "I know Jesus, His word, His promises, and His power. Why am I stuck? Why can't I move on?" Sometimes sad and other times upset, I just wondered, "Why?"

Despite not understanding very well what was happening and why it was happening, I began to pray while knocking on many doors. Some opened for short periods of time and then closed. That confused me more, but I was determined not to give up on my search and obedience to God. I told myself, "Dig deep into His word for hope and responses." I kept going, and yes! He always has an answer! This wasn't the exception, so the answer came and it was this:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts. I know the plans I have for you and they are good. For those who love me, all things work together for good. Be still and know that I am God."

The deeper I went the more I understood. I understood that God is in control of my life because He loves me first, and I decided to love Him and give Him the wheel. I would sit in the back seat like a girl on a trip with her Father. I would be confident that no matter how long the road is, He is in behind the wheel, and I am safe.

I understood that what is called a season of stagnation does not apply in the lives of those who love God, because God is on the move even though we can't see it. He is working perhaps in our character, in teaching us to establish priorities, dependence on Him, learning forgiveness, giving up resentment, and healing wounds. The list goes on, but remember He is working.

I could only open the box because I found the key that opens all the locks. That key is HOPE in Christ Jesus.

I want to encourage you to open your box. When you open it, you will realize that the dreams that God has for your life

are better than any dreams you could dream for your life. His dreams will transform your whole life and will give you peace that you will never experience by planning out your own life.

Please find the Key.

~ Jenn Mejia

Enough

When is it enough? The life we have, is it what we wanted or dreamed of? For most of us, no, but for us locked up or in treatment, the answer is more than just 'no.' It is a painful reminder of what could have been. As for myself, I think about all the years I have lost chasing my drug or from my criminal behavior. For me, it is enough – enough tears, enough pain, enough days locked down and gone for good!

You cannot buy back time, you cannot undo yesterday... however, you can fix tomorrow. We can choose not to use, not to hang around with people from our past. We can choose not to frequent the same old places. Enough! Really, think about it... when is it real for you?

Our choices affect so many of our families, our friends, our communities. More times than not, our drug addictions lead us to criminal behavior which, as I mentioned, only hurts more people. The victims and their families, us and our families. Enough! Say it, believe it, and live it.

Make the choice to stand up and be a better man, father, husband, boyfriend, son, and friend. Be a king, a man your family and kids can be proud of. Stand up and say "enough" – it is as simple as making up your mind and saying "enough!"

~ Anonymous

I Just Look to the Sky

It was a good life before the war started and before I lost my only brother. He died in the war. I am Ranea. I was born in Syria in 1985. My brother and I were like twins. Sam was only one year older than I, and we did everything together. He was my everything. We enjoyed helping our family and even had a business together. When we first got business cards, he handed me the card and said, "This is your business." I was very young to have a business and was so happy and proud. Sam laughed at me when I said I wanted to go to the United States. He laughed and said, "Good luck with that!"

Things began to change. I got married, and it was a lovely wedding. It was the last time I was with my family because I then traveled to the United States. It was so hard going to the United States for the first time. I didn't speak any English. I didn't know anyone, and I missed my family.

I remember the morning when my sister called. It was a complete shock. Sam died from a bomb explosion during the war in Syria. It was difficult, but my husband helped me. After God gave me the gift of my daughter, Jessica, things began to change. I started to make chocolates and sweets at home. It gave me a sense of meaning and accomplishment.

Now I go to school to learn English. My business is growing as I ship chocolates all over the states! I love my life, my family, and my online business. Still, I am sad that I never had the chance to see my brother again. He never got to meet my daughter, nor did he ever learn about my new business. Whether I am happy or sad, I just look to the sky to share with my brother. I tell him I am doing well. I tell him I miss him. I tell him, "Your sister is strong!" I hold up my new business card so he can see. I tell him that my new goal is to have my very own chocolate sweets shop. I am sure he hears me and is proud of me. He tells me as I now tell you, "Stay strong and work hard to achieve your dreams!"

~Ranea Deeb

Change

Change is key
 Change is needed
 Change is inside my spirit.
 I feel the change within my brain
 What use to be fun then
 Now just doesn't feel the same
 No more time for gangs.
 Gotta take life, a lot more serious
 'Cause life is not a game.
 Think this just a phase
 'Cause I'm locked away?
 You can test my faith and my ways.
 No bets, but guarantee they'll stay the same.
 At nights I pray, just for change
 The mornings I wake I'm thankful for change
 To some, change, you seem strange
 They know of you but don't respect your name
 I respect you, 'cause if not for you, change,
 I would be okay spending my life in chains
 So thank you, change, for coming to me
 For I am change, and change is me.

~ Jer'Reco Harris

The Request

Every day the number of souls whose hands I hold while guiding them to Heaven from this... disease, is innumerable. Each premature soul I must take makes me feel what you humans call sadness. It has been a disease that does not care whether you are a father, a mother, a friend, or a foe. It cares not for your skin color, your religious beliefs, nor does it care whether you are rich or poor. I have watched this disease for centuries, from the opium dens that ravaged China's people from dynasty to dynasty, to the morphine that took the whole world by storm from the 1800's, to after your Second Great War. Even now, what you humans call heroin is bringing me many appointments, many hands to hold, many destroyed families, and many sorrows. My tight schedule is demanding but, with the few moments I have, I want to tell you of this great disease, this drug addiction. If not corrected, it could be your very own bright soul I ferry away while your family wails and moans, while your sons and daughters weep and mourn, while your distraught friends discover your now empty vessel.

Dearest human, I know not how this disease came to you or the reasons why it chose you. It is not my place to know such things... but I can assure you that I do not want to meet you any earlier than we must, that I care about you. I know this beast both loathes and detests any measures taken up against it, but please combat it every step of the way. This disease is not you. You are so much more than what this monster tells you that you are.

I am Death, and even I am rooting for you, human. I must take my leave now, for the job of a reaper never ceases. My single and solemn request is for you to find the strength I know you have, the strength you have always had... to beat this demon, this addiction.

It is up to you and you alone to decide when it is time to hold my hand. You are loved and cherished, little one, and I hope it is many a moon before I take your hand into mine.

~ Stephen Plank

The Journey

The sun rises as I toss and turn in my bed
 My mind replays and struggles over the words that you said
 The dreams I once had fade and the tears begin to fall
 My feet are stuck in the mud, my life is at a stall
 Analyzing every word spoken and where I went wrong
 These nights are so dark and every day seems long
 Time is all that is needed; it has nothing to do with me
 Lies disguised as truth as they infiltrate my reality
 This road is familiar as if I have been here before
 Alone and rejected, my heart remains sore
 My confidence is weakened and my mind covered in doubt
 As I set out on a new journey but travel the same route
 Later I wonder... how did this happen? Why am I here?
 I can't breathe, my heart is heavy there goes another year
 The pain is sharp and quick as if it were left by a knife
 I am alive and alert but have yet to live a real life
 Recovery is long and I am overwhelmed with sadness
 But I am willing to do whatever it takes, to flee the madness
 So I will be still and wait, for the peace that is coming
 I am so sick of being sick and its time to stop running
 Hope has returned and even in the darkness I can see light
 As I wait for my next chance, chance to do what is right
 I know God has a plan and a purpose tailor made for me
 Those old chains are gone, replaced by peace, now I am free

~ Benjamin Reed

ERF

I've been dreaming of this moment ever since I was a little boy. I was excited and nervous at the same time. I would soon be the first human being to step foot on Mars. Honestly, I didn't care about any giant leap for mankind. I wanted to experience this for my own personal interest.

I'd been working for NASA over a decade now. No matter what I experienced during my internship at NASA, nothing was better than this moment now. I breathed in and out as the countdown began, "5, 4, 3, 2, and 1." The space shuttle began to rock back and forth before it took off into the air. The takeoff was slow but picked up speed along the way.

I was sent alone on this trip. My boss thought the trip was too risky to send more than one person. NASA was well prepared for the mission. The shuttle was constantly upgraded over the years. It was equipped specifically for humane purposes outside the Earth's atmosphere. Mars is approximately 140,000,000 miles away from Earth. Mars would make the entire trip a little shorter for me.

I had finally reached the outer bounds of Earth's biosphere. I was fascinated by the stars I could see. The moon appeared to be crescent, but I could still see the full body of it. I'd been looking through the telescope for almost an hour when the alarmist voice box installed on the shuttle came on. I was confused because I did not see anything on the radar.

"Come in commander 1," I quickly spoke into the intercom. I waited a few seconds, but there was no answer. The intercom was working perfectly at the beginning of the journey. I headed back to the radar. Curiosity had me stuck for a minute.

Then I saw it! A small circle appeared then disappeared. I continued to watch. Twenty seconds later it appeared again. The circle was coming towards the shuttle, and it was coming fast. I

headed back towards the big telescope to inspect. I watched for a whole minute as a ball of light appeared then disappeared.

The voice box announced, "3,000 feet away." The only thought that came to mind was a meteoroid. But how could a meteoroid disappear then reappear? I had no time to prepare for a meteoroid. This was much unexpected. The voice box announced, "1500 feet."

The object was coming faster than I expected. I was in a dreadful situation. I headed toward the telescope again. My eyes widened as a meteoroid popped up out of nowhere. It sounded like an explosion as it collided with the space shuttle and sent it spiraling out of control.

I tried to reach for the belts to strap myself down hoping the spiraling would come to an end. The shuttle must have collided with something else because there was another bang sending me crashing into the window. The spiraling seemed out of control. I started to slowly black out from the pain of the crash. My eyes shut and life went blank and black.

When I woke up space seemed to be glowing. I floated to the window to see a thick looking cord attached to the shuttle. My mouth dropped as I followed the cord to a multi-colored spacecraft. I headed toward the telescope and brought it to the window. The spacecraft was a bit too far away to inspect. I could see Earth, and it appeared to be much smaller.

"Hello, hello," said a loud unfamiliar voice. "Speak your name."

"Um, what are you all doing? You all can hear me?" I asked again, confused. It was silent. Nobody was on board to be able to hear me. "Loud and clear," said the unfamiliar voice. "Now, speak your name." Larry John. I am third in command for Mission M1 of the NASA space program.

There was silence for a few seconds. "Are you all taking me back to NASA?" I asked.

There was no answer. Suddenly the shuttle started to move faster and closer to the spacecraft. There was an opening to the spacecraft's lower area. I was being brought aboard. The door to the shuttle seemed to have opened by itself. "Come out," said the unfamiliar voice.

I slowly stepped out; I covered my face as I tried to adjust my eyes burning with bright lights. I observed multiple men and women standing around. Everyone was dressed in long black silk robes. "NASA is unheard of," said a voice that came out of nowhere.

A short male stepped out into the open. He was very pale looking and looked to be over sixty years old. His voice was unfamiliar.

"Everyone has heard of NASA. You know the space program in the United State on Earth and situated in the Milky Way Galaxies," I said, sarcastically.

"I knew it!" said one female. "If there are trillions of galaxies then there is no way we are the only ones living."

The old man spoke. "Do you have any ideas where you are? This is the Andromede Galaxy."

I was not expecting that answer. So many questions ran through my mind. Where are we going now? How did I end up here?

"Have you ever heard of the zipper effect?" Older women spoke up: "YES! We are not sure somehow we assume it has something to do with your crossing of galaxies."

To be continued...

~ Quincy King

Reflecting on Happy Times

Missionary and Teacher in Africa

A missionary is a person whose main objective is the proclamation of the gospel through works and words among those who do not believe. In 2004 when I was studying the last year of Theology, I was invited to be part of a missionary project in Equatorial Guinea, Africa. When I received the invitation, I was filled with excitement, because one of my dreams was to be a missionary in Africa. I had heard many things about Africa, mainly the suffering and needs of the people, including children. The time had come to be able to serve and do something for them, so I signed up to be one of those who would participate in the mission. At last I finished my degree in Theology, and the project was ready to run. I had traveled a lot in Mexico, but I had never left my beloved country, and now I was about to enter into a wonderful adventure. When the day of the trip arrived, I felt happy and nervous, a rare mixture of feelings. We were preparing to take a very long and distant journey from home. During the trip I had a series of experiences that every traveler who does not know English often has experienced such as: I often got lost in the airports, I could not find the doors easily from the boarding rooms, and I tried to communicate with signs.

Republic of Equatorial Guinea is located in Central Africa. Formerly the colony of Spanish Guinea, its post-independence name evokes its location near both the Equator and the Gulf of Guinea. Equatorial Guinea is the only sovereign African state in which Spanish is an official language.

The missionary project had some objectives to achieve. One objective was to give a volunteer a year to work in a school giving classes to children of first grade. I had the privilege of teaching children and being able to love them very much. Their smiles were the best payment I could have received from them. It was the first time I worked with children. At the beginning it was a very tiring and complicated experience, but as the days, weeks and months went by I was able to achieve success with the help of God. At first, I could not recognize my students because all the

faces seemed the same, but I got to learn all their names. Their last names were not easy since their last names were not in Spanish but in the language of their tribes. I imagine that I made many mistakes when trying to teach young children. Being a teacher is not easy, but you feel very happy when you teach your little students.

In reality I had not studied to be a teacher. I had to learn a lot of techniques; nevertheless I recognize that I made mistakes in the process. I had four objectives to reach with my class: a. read, b. write, c. add, and d. subtract. Every day I spent time to accomplish the objectives. We didn't have teaching materials to teach how to add and subtract, so we used pebbles. The kids were attracted to the pebbles and used them to learn. Possibly I put them to work a lot, but when the school year ended many parents approached to thank me because I traveled to a place so far away to teach their children. The parents of my students were very happy with me and brought me nice gifts at every parent meeting. I was happy because a lot of kids learned the four objectives. I felt very happy to be in Africa during that year and to contribute to the children's education. I still remember them as if it were yesterday and, of course, I would love to see them again. I wish that God touches the heart of the people and that they can contribute to the services of the humanity in Africa or anyplace around the world.

~ *Román López Dominguez*

Boat Race

I lived in the Western part of South Vietnam, in a district where most people can speak 3 languages: Vietnamese, Chinese, and Khmer (Cambodia). Today, I would like to introduce to everyone the tradition of the Khmer boat race in Vietnam (Soctrang province). The annual boat race of the Khmer people is also called the "Festival of Moon Worship." It takes place along the river. The Khmer local residents and visitors alike gather in the town on the 15th of October, Luna month, about 2 kilometers along the river.

Each boat race is comprised of 50 people with the most experience. A man sitting at the front or the middle of the boat directs the team to go faster during the race. They compete in a 1200-meter-long race. Each boat is delegated one pagoda. The winning boat gets a prize, a medal or something more, but the money they earn will be a gift to the pagoda. This money will be used to help the monk go to school or repair and build the pagoda.

At night the Khmer people celebrate outdoors and pray for happiness and good weather. They pray for bumper crops for the next year and for a better life. People enjoy these boat races. They are just for fun, not profit, after a hard-working year.

~ *Nhung Thai*

Motown Memories

Motown
 African American soul
 Hustling, dancing, kickin' it
 With the Dexter Avenue boys
 After midnight

Motown
 Unstoppable intensity
 Singing, touching, loving
 The sounds that changed America
 Absolute purity

~ Terry Allen Lewis

Christmas in Mexico

I have been living in the United States for 13 years, and I still miss Christmas in Mexico. I want to share how most of my family celebrates this holiday and tell you about what I miss the most.

I have a huge family in Mexico, but I do not have any brothers or sisters close to my new house. That is the reason I feel so sad every Christmas. I know my family will see and talk often during this holiday.

My family really enjoys this holiday because they spend a lot of time together. The celebration starts on December 16th, nine days before Christmas. We called this time "posadas." During these nine days, we remember the journey of Joseph and Mary, from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On December 24th, all the households are busy with many activities, such as putting up the Nativity scene, preparing food and drinks, and collecting a lot of candies for the children. The best cooks in the family make dinner. For this special day we have a special dinner, like tamales, bunuelos, pozole and atole. Dinner is always amazing, and my brothers beg to have some of the leftovers to take home. Close to midnight all the members of the family gather together. Everybody wears nice clothes and feels happy. When the clock strikes 12:00, we all begin to sing songs about Jesus' birth. After that, we hug and wish each other Merry Christmas. Then we exchange some presents. Everyone laughs and talks loudly. Finally the food is the last part of this celebration. Sometimes the celebration continues until the next day. This is Christmas in Mexico.

~ Ma. Gloria Garcia

The Chinese New Year

The Chinese New Year is the most important festival in China. It's on January 1st according to the Chinese lunar calendar. In China, different cities have different customs. My hometown is in Guangdong, Taishan City. In Guangdong we start house cleaning a month before the New Year. We clean everything in the house. We prepare in advance for the New Year by buying food, clothes, shoes, and decorations for the house. We make the house look beautiful.

For the New Year, we use flowers, fruits, food, and cakes. We burn incense and burn paper money to celebrate. We worship our ancestors too. We sit together to eat and have red envelopes with money (we call luck money) to give to all the children and old people in our family. On New Year's day, we get up very early and cook Buddha's delight (mixed vegetables). On New Year's Day we don't eat meat. We wear our new clothes to go to the temple or just in our houses to burn incense and pray to Buddha for luck with our family. The children are happy to wear their new clothes and shoes. They write "god of fortune arrives" on red paper. They go to each house to say, "We wish you a happy New Year" or "Kung Hei Tat Choi" and give a red envelope with luck money.

We celebrate the New Year for 7 days. We go to relatives' houses to pay New Year's visits. We wish each other good luck, health, and happiness. We always have luck money in our pockets to give to someone we know who isn't married yet and we say, "We wish you a happy New Year." We have a lot of entertainment, festivities, dancing, singing, playing chess, firecrackers, and watching lions and dragons dance. It's very interesting. After 7 days, we go back to work and everything returns to normal. On Chinese New Year we spend a lot of money, but we're very happy.

~ Zhu Mei

Remembering the Child Within

There is a child within all of us. My child's childhood reminds me of my own childhood. Here are some of my funny childhood memories.

My childhood was in an interior village in India. My family was big, with 16 members in one large house. I was the eldest child of the family. During summer vacation, my mom usually forced me to take a nap with her. She locked the bedroom door and we would lie on the big bed together. Then I waited quietly for my mom to fall asleep.

When I was sure Mom was sleeping, I left the room very silently. I gathered together with my neighbor friend and cousins. First, we went to kitchen to get the homemade pickles. In my country, this is a kind of dessert food that kids find very delicious. The youngest child climbed on the shoulders of the tallest one to reach the pickle jar. This mission was completed with great secrecy. One gang member was posted as guard at the kitchen door. The sentry would alert us using that folk song, "Haa...ree..ree...amay chere dee ree...", a song in our native language. There was always a possibility that we might get caught if we made too much noise or someone made a mistake. Then our mission would be a failure. If successful, we then jumped over the fence or unlocked the main door, went outside, and enjoyed our treat together.

Another incident I remember was when the popsicle seller came to the village. That time we did not have any pocket money, so how could we buy a popsicle? There was only one way for kids to get money: to exchange something of value for the Popsicle. We ran over to the harvested potato field, dug up some soil with our heels, and searched for potatoes. Then we exchanged the potatoes for popsicles. I still laugh when I remember this story!

In the days before we had a TV or phone, we children used to eagerly wait for a letter or post card from a relative, especially our grandparents. That was a very exciting time. The post man

used to come by bicycle and ring the cycle bell and announce, "Mail came, and mail came." I ran immediately to meet him before other children and shouted with joy, "Hooray!!! I got here first!" This made us all so happy! After receiving a card, we replied to the sender. Each of us wrote individual post cards. We knew that they were waiting for our mail, too.

These stories are glimpses of my favorite childhood memories. I think the essence of those past days is missing due to social media and advances in technology, like video games, electronic toys, apps, etc. Although I am sad that these days are gone, I will always remember these stories and smile.

~ Ananya Banerjee-Bara

Artist Biographies

Alona McFrederick - back cover artist

My name is Alona McFrederick. I came to America in March of 2004 from Ukraine and became a U.S. citizen in August of 2009. When I came to the United States I did not know any English and did not have the opportunity to learn or get an outside education. I was able to teach myself English by reading books to my children. The rest of my family live in Ukraine. I am married and have three sons and four step-daughters. After being here for 15 years, I have finally been given the opportunity to study more in-depth and to be able to pursue my dreams. Thank you so much to my teacher and my family in this part of my life.

Program: Wayne County JVS

Daiane Rhaimelis S. Rodrigues - cover artist

I'm Daiane Rhaimelis, 26 years old from Brazil and currently living in Ohio to learn English. In my free time, I like to draw and color. I truly believe that art can touch our hearts. Thank for this opportunity to show my talent.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Author Biographies

Kevin M. Adkins - p. 92

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Amalia Aguilar-Alcala - p. 10, 83

I am 26 years old and I'm from Mexico. I came to America a year and a half ago to work as an Au Pair, but in my country, I'm an environmental engineer. I enjoy traveling, meeting new people, learning about different cultures and seeing new places. I love cooking, nature, the arts and spending time with family and friends. In the future, I want to travel more and hope to get a job in my career field.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Amanda Allen - p. 20, 87, 91

I am 28 years old and my dream is to be a motivational speaker. I did gymnastics from the ages of 4-16. One day during practice, I fell on my neck and was injured immediately. My life shifted drastically with days filled with physical and mental agony. I found myself severely depressed. I wasn't motivated to do anything, not even shower. After years of not seeing a reason to continue living, I made a decision that I was tired of being sick and tired, so I took my life back. Since this declaration over my life, I've been on a narrow path to empowering, encouraging and persuading the world that as long as you have breath in your body, there is still purpose in you.

Program: Godman Guild

Ikram Almahdawi - p. 27

My name is Ikram Almahdawi. I'm from Iraq. I came to the U.S. in October 2014. After three months, I finished my paperwork and I started working in the daycare in January 2015. I like to work with children.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Noemy Almeida - p. 51

I am 20 years old and was born in Brazil. I am doing a cultural exchange program in the USA. It will give me more independence and a fresh perspective on life. I have an amazing family that consists of my father, mother and sister. In August of 2019, I started ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. They have given me a chance to improve my English skills.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Anonymous - p. 114

I had a hard life, and I have struggled with addiction for many years.

Program: Mansfield Board of Education

Susana W. Antal - p. 41, 90, 97

Susana has been writing poetry for many years, and has often written a poem to commemorate a special occasion for a friend. She has been published in "Beginnings" several times and enjoys meeting other writers at the Writer's conference. Susana is also a

member of the West Side Poetry Workshop, which is sponsored by Cuyahoga County Libraries. Her poetry has been published in their annual West Side Poetry Anthology.

Program: Cuyahoga County Public Library

Ananya Banerjee-Bara - p. 131

My name is Ananya Banerjee-Bara. I was born in India and was raised in a nature laboratory* in my village. My hobbies are reading and gardening. I am also an Indian classical and folk singer. I was a Science major in college and I have a diploma in Education. I was an elementary school teacher in India. My family and I moved to Columbus for my husband's job.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Tyee C. Banks - p. 55

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Daniela Barbosa - p. 80

My name is Daniela. I'm from Brazil. I'm married and I have a daughter. I have been living in Wooster just three months. I'm happy to stay here and be able to live this experience in the U.S.

Program: Wayne County JVS

Otávio Augusto Bressan - p. 42

My name is Otavio. I am from Brazil. I was born 33 years ago in Curitiba. I have a degree in Forestry Engineering. I have already worked in different places in Brazil; most of them were far from cities. The nicest place that I worked was Amazon Forest. I arrived in Ohio almost a year ago. Now I am working in improving my English taking classes at Delaware County. I hope to find a job soon.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Istina Colombe Tsoukou Mbaya - p. 57

Young African woman from Rep of Congo, single mom of Tod, 8-year-old boy.

Program: Godman Guild

Cole R. Cother - p. 73

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Lam Thanh Dang - p. 79

My name is Lam Thanh or Brian. I come from Vietnam. I have been in the U.S. for 9 months with my family. I have started to learn ESOL for 4 months. At present, I want to know more English because it will help me a lot in my future.

Program: Canton City Schools

Doug Davis - p. 67

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Ranea Deeb - p. 115

My name is Ranea, and I am 35 years old. I was born in Homs, Syria. I currently live in Cincinnati with my husband and daughter. The rest of my family, including my sister, still live in Syria.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Bassam Deiratany - p. 33

I was born and grew up in Homs, Syria, where I was a civil engineer, building contractor and inspector of the banks and courts. I was also a Director of Engineering at the Technicians Institute. I'm married and the father of 2 sons who are OSU graduates. I have lived in Columbus, Ohio, since 2010 and became an American citizen in 2015. I am currently the property manager for ERM Forward LLC.

Program: Delaware Career Center

James Edwards - p. 65

I have always struggled in Language Arts and really wanted to learn how to express my thoughts and feelings. The Beginnings XXII will help me to continue with my writing. Thank you.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Imad ElYounsi - p. 19

My name is Imad. I am from Morocco. I live now in Columbus, Ohio. I am twenty-six years old. I have been here in the United States for almost three years. I have a bachelor degree in my homeland, but here I start over. I take ESL classes. I'm so glad because I have a good teacher and friends.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Sonia Esteve Armela - p. 98

My name is Sonia. I'm from Barcelona, Spain. I'm married and I have two children. I have lived in several different countries and now I live in Columbus, OH. I am a psychologist and I love my job! I like to travel, meet new people and learn about new cultures. Life without new experiences is nothing, and I am fortunate that my family sees life as I do.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Ma. Gloria Garcia - p. 129

My name is Gloria. I was born in Mexico in a beautiful city called Leon. I love to ride my bicycle and walk in the park. I was an Accounting Assistant in Mexico. I am very thankful to live in the United States now.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Desiree Gomez - p. 68

Desiree Gomez is a student with the Aspire Greater Cleveland program. Ms. Gomez is unique in that she is currently incarcerated at the North East Reintegration Center (NERC), a step-down women's prison in Cleveland, Ohio, but through a partnership with Lutheran Metropolitan Ministries (LMM), she is able to participate in an innovative Re-entry Program: Chopping for a Change (C4C).

Program: Cuyahoga County Public Library

Elias Hanna - p. 81

Elias Hanna was born in Damascus, Syria. After he graduated from high school he worked in his family's business until he moved to the U.S. to begin a new chapter of his life.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Jer'Reco Harris - p. 21, 89, 116

I have always enjoyed writing poems because it relaxes me. I received my GED and tutored the class. I hope the writing I am submitting takes me to the next level where I want to be.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Valerie Hendrix - p. 105

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Laura Hernandez - p. 63

My name is Laura, and I am 34 years old. I moved to the United States fourteen years ago. I live in Loveland, Ohio, and attend Great Oaks ESOL class in Sharonville, Ohio. I dedicate my writing to my husband and three beautiful children to demonstrate that nothing is impossible. I would like to thank my school and teachers for their help and support in making me happy and proud.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Xzaverry Hick - p. 101

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Muna Idris - p. 82

I am a Somali girl who was born in Saudi Arabia. I have a Bachelor's degree in mathematics. I have been in the USA for 7 months. I am currently working as a warehouse associate but I hope to begin college in May. I am a very social person and I enjoy meeting my friends for coffee and conversation. I like to cook and invent new recipes. I also enjoy learning to cook foods from different countries.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Karima Jabrah - p. 32

My name is Karima Jabrah. My first language is Arabic, but I will never stop trying to master English. I am originally from Palestine, but now I am a citizen of the United States of America. Thanks to all who have helped me to improve my English.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Tyre Jones - p. 93

Tyre is an excellent student who has a positive attitude and is always willing to help others in class.

Program: Cuyahoga County Public Library

Shawn Jordan - p. 59

Shawn Jordan is a GED student at North Star Reentry in Cleveland, Ohio. He is an aspiring writer of short stories, poems, and music.

Program: Cuyahoga County Public Library

Emmanuel Kegnide - p. 58

My name is Emmanuel Kegnide, and I'm 23 years old. I was born in Benin, a country in West Africa. I have lived in the United States for a little over a year. I have been an ESOL student at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, OH for five months. My leisure activities are soccer, drawing, and reading.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Eriko Kikuchi - p. 17

My name is Eriko Kikuchi, and I'm originally from Japan. I have lived in the United States for two years and have been attending ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio, for six months.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Quincy King - p. 119

I am an 18-year-old male, raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, but originally from Cleveland. I have one child and 6 siblings with me being the eldest. My favorite thing to do is write stories and lyrics.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Terry Allen Lewis - p. 128

I am a 65-year-old life-long learner. I have learned valuable lessons in the GED class, but more importantly, I have learned many lessons through my journeys on the streets of cities like Detroit. I began singing the songs of the greats at nine years old when my mother received a second-hand record player from a neighbor who was dying. I have been singing ever since.

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Joshua Lingrel - p. 35

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Felicia Liriano - p. 23

Felicia is a first-year English student who is happy to be in the U.S.

Program: Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technology

Fernanda Lisboa Lima Marques - p. 77

My name is Fernanda, and I am 33 years old. I am originally from Brazil. My family and I moved to the U.S.A. in early March 2019

because my husband was transferred to Cincinnati due to his work. We have two boys: Marcos (12) and Joao (7). I am privileged to have started my ESOL class at Scarlet Oaks in August and am thankful for the opportunity to improve my English with the help and care of all the professionals. I have enjoyed writing my autobiography because I realize how good God is in my life and would like to share with the world that everything is possible for those who believe.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Román López Dominguez - p. 125

My name is Roman Lopez Dominguez and I'm from Mexico. I am a Pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. I studied Theology (2005) and I did a Masters degree in Pastoral Theology (2014). I was working in Mexico for ten years and since 2016 I work in Columbus, Ohio. I'm a husband and dad; my child is 1 month old. Currently my family and I live in the city of Columbus.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Nadia Lthrm - p. 5

I am from Libya. I live a very simple life and I like to take care of my family. I like to enjoy my time learning about different cultures.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Alona McFrederick - p. 7

My name is Alona McFrederick. I came to America in March of 2004 from Ukraine and became a U.S. citizen in August of 2009. When I came to the United States I did not know any English and did not have the opportunity to learn or get an outside education. I was able to teach myself English by reading books to my children. The rest of my family live in Ukraine. I am married and have three sons and four step-daughters. After being here for 15 years, I have finally been given the opportunity to study more in-depth and to be able to pursue my dreams. Thank you so much to my teacher and my family in this part of my life.

Program: Wayne County JVS

Noha Meghawry - p. 12

Noha Meghawry arrived in the USA in 2019, accompanying her husband who is currently doing a Post Doc Fellowship at OSU. She attends the advanced class at Godman Guild. She herself has a PhD in Microbiology and was a lecturer in the faculty of science at Bemha University prior to coming here. She has two children. Her goal is to also do a Post Doc at OSU in the future.

Program: Godman Guild

Zhu Mei - p. 3, 130

My name is Zhu Mei. I'm from Guangdong, Taishan City in China. I'm learning English at Live Oaks.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Jenn Mejia - p. 111

My name is Jennifer. I am from Honduras. I am married and I have a three-year-old girl. I have been living in beautiful Ohio for almost two years. I enjoy English classes and fellowship with my classmates.

Program: Wayne County JVS

Jose Mendez - p. 106

ESOL student in the Painesville ASPIRE program.

Program: Auburn Career Center

Elizabeth Minta - p. 84

My name is Elizabeth Minta. I'm from Ghana. I came to the United States about 19 years ago, and I'm an ESL student. I'm thankful to all my teachers at school. Without their help I would not be able to learn English.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Asma Mohamed - p. 4

Asma is a Somali woman who was born in Saudi Arabia. She moved to Syria where she got her education and worked as a laboratory technician. She and her husband were married then moved to America. They have 3 children.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Maribel Moncada - p. 44

ESOL student in the Painesville ASPIRE program.

Program: Auburn Career Center

Samuel Moore - p. 62

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Baptista M. Muatchitanga - p. 36

My name is Baptista Muatchitanga, and I'm 34 years old. I was born in Luena, a city in the province of Moxico in eastern Angola. I am the son of Baptista Muatchitanga and Florinda Joaquim, but unfortunately, I lost both of them. I am the youngest of three brothers.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Ricardo Obregon - p. 103

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Stephen Plank - p. 117

I wrote this poem from the perspective of death because I know how destructive heroin addiction can be. I hope this helps someone.

Program: Mansfield Board of Education

Chun Qin - p. 45

Chun Qin was born in China and lived in the south of China until coming to the United States twelve years ago. She and her husband enjoy birdwatching. She is currently working with the local Chinese government to establish a bird sanctuary in the area where her parents still live. Chun wants to improve her English skills so she can write her and her family's story.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Benjamin Reed - p. 118

Program: Penta County Vocational School

Gregorio Rodriguez - p. 50

ESOL student at the Painesville ASPIRE site.

Program: Auburn Career Center

Lais Santos - p. 109

My name is Lais. I love music and play the guitar. I like to read and watch movies or TV. I also love sports, especially swimming. I enjoy gathering with my family and friends to watch a movie or play the guitar and share some food together.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Melody Shlyk - p. 88

This is about my brother that passed, 09/26/19.

Program: Mansfield Board of Education

Mouloukou Soumah - p. 24

Mouloukou Soumah is a student in the advanced ESOL class at Godman Guild. He is from Guinea Conakry in West Africa and obtained a Green Card in 2017 to come to the US to acquire additional training and certification in project management. He has a Masters degree in management control and has previously worked in a private firm in accounting and analysis. He lives in Columbus, along with his wife and two children.

Program: Godman Guild

Karyna Stepanova - p. 28

My name is Karyna. I am from Donetsk, a city in the Donbass Region of southeastern Ukraine. My father chose my name. He dreamed I would be special and decided to look for a special name. Karyna is not a very common name among the Russian and Ukrainian people. Thank you so much for your attention. And thanks to my teacher, April, who believed in me and encouraged me to submit this article. And to my husband, Jesse, who helped me with the translation. Thank you to Scarlet Oaks school for helping immigrants adapt and for helping us learn English.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Larry Stormer - p. 110

Larry enjoys cooking and spending time with his children. He would like to obtain a CDL license after earning his GED credential.

Program: Cuyahoga County Public Library

Mohammed Tazi - p. 52

My name is Mohammed Tazi. I am from Morocco. My teacher is April and I take classes at Scarlet Oaks.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Nhung Thai - p. 127

My name is Nhung. I'm from Vietnam. I came to the United States about 22 years ago. I worked everyday then, so I didn't have time to go to school. Now I'm retired and I'm trying to learn English because I don't believe in myself when I go somewhere.

Program: Delaware Career Center

Ruth Ulloa - p. 102

My name is Ruth Ulloa. I study English at Live Oaks.

Program: Great Oaks ITCD

Brianna Williams - p. 74

I love learning. I love informing others about subjects hidden from the masses of people. I am the manifestation of harmony, balance, and judgment on the earth. I have a lot of heroes who I strive to be like every day: Micheal Jackson, Dr. Sebi, Dr. Umar Johnson, Khalid Muhammad, General Sara Seti, and Dr. Welsing Cress. Even though most of them are no longer here, I will continue the legacy of waking people up before the sift and the alignment in 2050.

Program: Godman Guild

*Honorable Mention***Artists**

William Fetters
Leon Foster
Joe E. Munn Jr.
Mary Smith
Chad Stefaniak
Douglas Whitmore

Authors

Brenda Abercrombie
Isidra Aleman
Fahad Alrifai
Asmaa Alrifai
Ahmed Benamar
Geobany Cabrera
Robert Carey
Debora Cassiola
Yeimi Castaneda
Joyce Chen
Hoang Long Dang
Lam Nhi Dang
May Du
RamaDevi GopiReddy
Hamziya Hassan
Rebecca Hayhurst
Sebastian Hernandez
Patricia Herrera
Kerrie Holley
Anaya Hsissou
Rabeya Ive
Tajuana T Johnson
DeJean Joseph
Tomoko Kora

Jovan C Kyles
Katherine P Li
Carmen Londono
Oscar Martinez
Rosana Mateus
Benedicte Mbumba
Laura Mendoza
Justin Moody
Mildred Myles
Klorance Marie Ngu
Sayaka Okumura
Uri Passin
Haylie S. Pekarcsik
Graciela Ramirez
Alinda Roblero
Stefen Santos, Jr.
Amel Souflene
Aicha Soumah
Debra Steele
Ousmane Sy
Malika Symonds
Nasra Tahir
Yitbarek Tilahun
Tatiane Tozzi
Roberto Velazquez
Luz Wagner
Miku Yamamoto
Essoyomewe Yom
Olga Zhukavets

