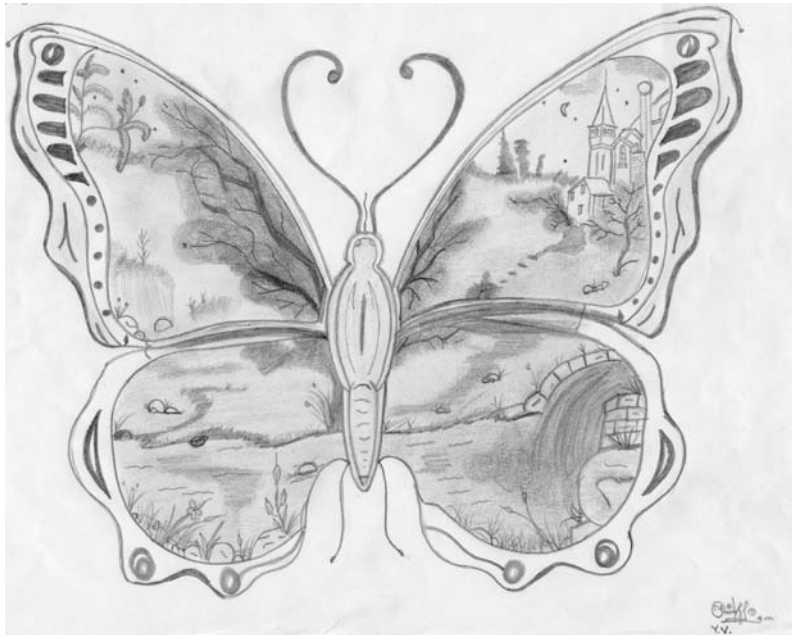


Beginnings 10



A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

Foreword

Every story has a beginning. A well-told work of fiction usually has a beginning, a middle, and, happily or sadly, an end. But the stories of our lives have many beginnings, many new chapters, created as we grow and learn, as we change with challenges, as we love and hate, as we age and simply progress from day to day. Each new morning is a new beginning.

The narrative of a life is not a once-upon-a-time tale; few of us ever reach “happily ever after.” Still, we strive for that moment, and seek opportunities to pursue it. Hopefully, we find enlightenment in each adventure, and have plenty of time to work our way out of plot twists, and to resolve conflicts and solve mysteries before we reach the last word of the final chapter. But, no matter what our personal story is, it is the most important story that we can share.

The events of our lives connect us, to our heritage, our sense of who we are, and the world beyond ourselves. Our stories can touch others; they can teach, bring joy, and invoke empathy and understanding. Sharing what we have experienced can help others to recognize their own humanity, the importance of who they were, who they are, and who they can become. Telling our own stories is the beginning of true communication and community.

In her 1992 “Storyteller’s Calendar” (Stotter Press), Ruth Stotter said, “...I think we’re made of stories!” I believe that stories are as essential as food and water, as necessary as air; they are vital to both the one who offers the narratives, and the ones who receive them. For many years, I have enjoyed the satisfying banquet of stories that is appropriately titled *Beginnings*, the collected works of adult students united

in the community of the Ohio Writers' Conference. This is a community made of stories.

This tenth edition of *Beginnings* offers us another banquet, with much to savor: personal experiences and remembrances, stories of renewal and celebration, tales of healing and humor, gifts of knowledge and love. Each published work chronicles a moment or thought, a life or phase of life, a chapter, a beginning. The authors honor us with the richness of words from their hearts, minds, and spirits, food for thought from the pages of their lives.

The authors share themselves with each reader. We become acquainted, and a new story begins.

Lynette (Lyn) Ford
Storyteller

Acknowledgements

The publication of a collection of writings such as *Beginnings 10* does not happen in a vacuum. The effort put into this collection is widespread and substantial.

We thank the Ohio Department of Education's Adult Basic and Literacy Education Office for the continued support it has provided for this successful project. We also thank the many reviewers and judges for the hours they have dedicated to reviewing and judging the nearly 350 submissions received for the 2007 Ohio Writers' Conference.

We offer a special thanks to the ABLE teachers throughout the state of Ohio for the encouragement and support they provide to their students.

We want to recognize the cover artist, Yldigar R. Villatoro Herrera, and thank him for sharing his artistic talent for this publication.

Our special thanks to the speakers who share with us at the 2007 Ohio Writers' Conference: first of all, to Lee Peterson who is the keynote speaker for the conference and author of *Rooms and Fields* (a book of poetry); and secondly, to story-teller Lyn Ford who shares her "home-fried" stories that give us a chance to laugh and cry.

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Dedication
to
Art Massengill



IN MEMORY OF MY FRIEND, ART

I met Art Massengill as a student at Live Oaks ABLE Class in September, 2000. Being the oldest two students, with other younger ones, we more or less developed a bond together for study habits. We read each other's stories and complained about how the computers wouldn't work the way we wanted them to. We both became published authors in 2001.

Art received his GED Diploma in February, 2006, and was very proud of his achievement. In his first story, "A Tennessee Childhood", featured in *Beginnings IV*, he wrote about working to achieve his goals. He wrote,

"I was determined to do the best I could in life even if I didn't have a good education. At the age of sixty-four, I decided to start going to school to get a G.E.D. Diploma. I am presently working hard to achieve this goal."

In 2005, Art's health began to fail and he often missed classes; however, we kept in touch by e-mail. During his last days, I joined with our teachers Marty, Donna, and Alyssa to visit with him. It was a fun visit, full of laughter, taking pictures, eating his favorite ice cream, and reminiscing about old times. That evening, Art returned to Marty a stack of books that he had used in class and for homework study. Inside a math book, she found the following story of Art's.

"It was a journey I wasn't sure I should make by myself because of my health – back to the hills where I grew up in Tennessee."

"For many years, I had gone back to the small country cemetery on a hillside where my parents are"

buried. My grandparents and many other family members are buried there also. It's a little place where only community people are at rest. I placed some flowers on the gravesite of eight family members.

"I like to go there late in the evening when the sun is beginning to set and just spend a little time gazing at the beauty of the beautiful Powell Valley. It is an awesome site to view the beautiful Powell Valley. The people who live there take it for granted, but to me, it is awesome just to spend some time overlooking this beautiful valley."

Our friend and classmate died November 1, 2006. As a tribute to my friend, I wrote this story as if Art was speaking to me:

The evening sun, with its magnificent light and beauty, has now gone down for me. No more lonely trips back to my childhood home in Tennessee. No more trips to the old cemetery on the hillside where I used to stand and gaze at the beauty of the Powell Valley below.

I have now made my final trip, which has carried me to my final destination. Not to the hillside where I can look down on the beautiful Powell Valley, nor stand at the gravesites of my grandparents and my parents. I have gone to that great celestial home far beyond the sky. No more aches, pain, hospitals, and struggles for life; just peace, rest and contentment for me.

Oh! What an awesome trip!

~ Rose Buckner

SUCCESS

No one is a failure unless they want to be.
Some people say, "I won't even try."
Some people say, "What's the point?"
Some people say, "It won't make any difference."
Some people say, "So what?"
No one is a failure unless they want to be.

Some people say, "I'll think about it."
Some people say, "Maybe tomorrow."
Some people say, "Oh well, I tried."
Some people say, "Maybe and maybe not."
No one is a failure unless they want to be.

Some people say, "I'll do it."
Some people say, "I failed, so I'll try again."
Some people say, "It won't be long now."
Some people can finally say, "I did it."
No one is a failure unless they want to be.

In memory of Art Massengill

~ *Ethan Thomas*

A TENNESSEE CHILDHOOD

I was born and raised in the mountains in Tennessee. The Tennessee mountains are very beautiful, and Tennessee is a beautiful state. I love to go back to my home state and visit often.

I began my formal education at the age of six. During my first year I successfully completed three grade levels: primer, first, and second grades. The following year I completed two additional grade levels: third and fourth grades. Unfortunately, the small school that I attended was forced to close and the children were bussed to the valley. But my father decided that he would not allow his children to be bussed to the valley, and so my education was put on hold while I was forced to help with the chores around the farm.

At the age of sixteen I began to attend school once again. I started in the fifth grade and was promoted to the sixth grade. After completing one month of sixth grade classes, I was forced once again to leave school and work on the family farm.

There was a lot to do on our farm because we produced all of our own food. We grew all of our own vegetables. We grew wheat and corn and processed them to make our own bread. We raised chickens for eggs and poultry, hogs for meat, and cows for milk.

My mother, father, two younger sisters, and I lived with my grandparents. My mother was epileptic and, because of her frequent seizures, needed help raising the children.

My mother and grandmother both passed away when I was around eight years of age. My two sisters and I were left for my father and grandfather to care for. Because I

was the oldest, I was forced to take on the responsibility of caring for my two younger sisters. I cooked, cleaned, laundered the clothes, and completed any other household chores that were needed.

As a young teen while doing my chores, feeding the animals, and milking the cows, I would dream of living in a room in the barn with a clean floor, wallpapered walls, and a bed with a bedspread. I wanted to be on my own with no one to care for but myself.

At nineteen, I had no goals in life but to somehow find a way to get on my own. Then a friend of mine asked me to come to Ohio with him for a visit with family. I decided to stay in Ohio and find a job. This job was the thrill of my life. I was finally on my own.

I was laid off work on January 19, 1959, and went to work at Totes, Inc. in May of that year; I worked at this job until October 1966. I then found a better job with the Borden Chemical Company in Cincinnati, Ohio. I worked many different jobs at Borden.

I could have been a supervisor, but due to the lack of education and confidence, I didn't accept that job offer. Upon leaving for retirement at age sixty-two, I was a lead person and ran my department on second shift. I was able to handle people well, and the company was happy with my performance. I did my job well while at Borden Inc. I had one new home built, later sold that home and bought another new brick home on one acre of ground. I still live in this home today.

I was determined to do the best I could in life even if I didn't have a good education. At the age of sixty-four, I decided to start going to school and get a G.E.D. diploma. I am presently working hard to achieve this goal. Also, I am

hoping to buy a computer soon and learn how to operate the computer.

Sometimes I still think about my childhood days, and, at times, returning to the beautiful mountains in the state of Tennessee where I was born and raised, but I'm not sure that will ever happen. The state of Ohio has been good to me in many wonderful ways. I will continue to work to achieve all of my goals.

~ *Art Massengill*
(reprinted from *Beginnings IV*)

Beginnings 10



MY JOURNEY TO THE WRITERS' CONFERENCE

On a dark, rainy morning, I woke up and got up. I was still half asleep but excited about going to the Writers' Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Not being a morning person, I had to crank the old body into high gear and get moving.

The Writers' Conference is for students who attend Adult Basic and Literacy Education classes in the state of Ohio. Students write articles such as stories, poems, and tributes, even things pertaining to their personal lifestyles. I am a student at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, under the instruction of our excellent teacher, Marty Lopinto, who insisted that I write a story. My first story that was submitted to the contest was "Grandmother's Flower Garden." To my surprise, I got an Honorable Mention. That was not good enough for me; so the following year I made some corrections and submitted it again. Bravo! My story was accepted as a winner and was published in the *Beginnings V* edition. I was now considered a published author!

Four years later, I wrote a winter poem with two of my fellow students. Again, we became published, and I was excited to head to Columbus once again. I invited a friend, Franki Butler-Kidd, to be my guest at the conference. Franki is a screenwriter and was very excited to attend the conference, hoping to get some points in her field. Another student, Maria Thomas, was also going with us. Franki offered to drive us to Scarlet Oaks where we were to join the other students for the bus ride to Columbus, Ohio.

It was sprinkling rain by now, and Franki was late arriving to my house. I was afraid that we would be late getting to the Oaks, and the bus would leave us. One more delay: the two of them had to stop and get a cup of coffee. I

was now at the panic stage, so I whipped out Franki's cell phone and called Marty to tell her that we were on the way and not to leave us. Thank goodness we made it on time.

Rain was still falling as we journeyed up the expressway, making slow time. We were already running behind schedule; unfortunately, and to our surprise, the bus driver didn't have last-minute instructions on how to get to the hotel from the expressway. There were detours along the way that he was not aware of. He was now on my last nerve. Consequently, we were late on arriving; therefore, we missed the opening session and welcome by Lyn Ford, the storyteller, whom I had heard before and was looking forward to hearing again. A delicious continental breakfast of coffee, tea, Danish rolls, and fruits were still being served. Quietly, we took our seats while the keynote speaker, Eileen Moushey, finished her address. She then gave us numerous points on using dialogues in writing a story. She was very interesting and informative.

We then ate a delicious lunch with dessert that I should not have eaten. After lunch was the awards ceremony. I was so shocked when my name was called to receive an award for "Snow", a team poem I helped write with two other classmates, Kum Sun Kim and Joe Pilot. I could hardly get up from my chair! Maria Thomas received an award for her story, "If I Could Do It All Over." Nineteen students from Live Oaks received certificates, but the one that impressed me the most was Aaron Willoughby's. Aaron's artwork was displayed on the back cover of *Beginnings IX*. I was very excited for him; plus he received his GED diploma and graduated the night before the conference.

I had a wonderful time, in spite of the rainy weather and arriving late. I sat at a table with some students from Canton, Ohio, who were very friendly. My hat goes off to my teacher, Marty, and, of course, her two most able sidekicks,

Donna Chrin and Alyssa Morrison, whom we just can't do without in class. They also went along with us to the conference.

The excitement of being an author and being able to attend the Writers' Conference, meeting new people, seeing new and old faces, has motivated me to look forward to next year.

I have passed my golden years and am not a morning person. This says to me I am going to have to crank up the old body and get a move on it. I need to kick and I need to get ready for next year at Live Oaks and once again, to become a published author.

~ Rose Buckner

SCREAM

I don't know what this is turning into.
Maybe a bad intro, too much info.
But how you gonna know me?
All you sell outs,
Well you know...

Up every morning five-o'clock.
I don't run the streets with a glock.
It feels as if my life never stops.
Well it don't.

Tortured by this gift.
Not just trying to get a lift.
Yet something's got to help me
Sift these images and words I write.

I lose my might.
I'll never make it to the mic.
So I'll just keep writing.
Telling you stories of might
That you relate.
Turning a new leaf might bring relief.

In a new talent.
My hands are sore from all the work before.
I have written; I'm not mistaken.
It's my life that I have written.

I once thought I was forsaken.
Always fighting upstream.
Once again it's my turn to scream.
About my dreams.

Hear me now.

Follow this; don't just reminisce or you will miss.
Stand and scream "I must follow my dreams!!!!"
Follow your dreams. Don't let anybody miss your screams.
Take your dream.
It's in your blood stream.

Passions that follow.
Turn the leaf; it's time to get relief.
Turn this into not lost grief.
Inspire others to do the same.

'Cuz that one leaf came from a tree
Which has many branches.
But dead inside from much whispering.

Can you scream?
You are ready to follow your dreams.
C'mon I want to hear you scream about dreams.
Scream about sadness, how you feel.

Why do I write? So you can feel.
Relate to a cry to live by,
Don't whisper. I can't hear you!

Don't stifle; you're only getting closer to what's real.
Don't ignore; that's not what life's for.
Don't hurt yourself; don't put your life on a shelf.
Rise to make you "you."

Scream, scream!
Yet another one just turned a new leaf.
Others hear, others follow.
It's hard to swallow.

What's that I hear?
Another scream.
Someone's following their dream.

Raise your hands; stomp your feet.
Make noise. You are not oppressed.

Kick off your shoes,
We ain't got nothing to lose.
Start off slow, then kick some tail!

Yah, goodbye to the past,
Yah, I'm glad it didn't last.

~ Joe Hammett

BEGINNINGS' PAST AND PRESENT

This year for *Beginnings* is number ten.
It's time for us to start writing again.

I think back through the years starting with one,
Out of the entries written, they chose fifty-one.

Many more entries are submitted today;
Beginnings has surely come a long way.

Students write stories involving their lives:
Their struggles, their hardships, and their need to strive.

Some write about goals they would like to reach,
Obtaining them assures a better life for each.

A variety of poems, some short and some long,
Some funny, some sad, and even a song.

Introducing art in two thousand three,
Artists showing their talent and strategy.

Anxiously students sit back and wait,
"Will I be published? What is my fate?"

The letter arrives; oh what a thrill!
Can you come to Columbus? "You bet I will!"

Beginnings is for readers, writers, and teachers alike.
Unknown authors are published much to their delight.

Students honored in Columbus and praised for their feat.
The Writers' Conference is really a treat.

Inspired by authors, entertained by Lyn Ford,
A delicious meal and students given an award.

Pictures are taken, so much to do,
Reading of works and book signing too.

A pat on the back for the OLRC;
Our works are now published for all to see.

A sense of accomplishment, beaming with pride,
Now I know I can do it; I'm glad that I tried.

Beginnings Ten is now published and complete;
Next year again, we will try to compete.

~ Carol R. Rudder

RECIPE FOR *BEGINNINGS 10*

4 cups adult writers	2 tsp. artwork
2 cups true life stories	¼ tsp. imagination
½ cup poems	1 tsp. creativity
¼ cup songs	¾ cup judges
1 ½ cups childhood memories	3 cups paper

Blend adult writers from all over the state of Ohio with true life stories, poems, songs, and childhood memories. Fold in artwork. Flavor with imagination and creativity. Spread on paper, and sprinkle with judges' approval. Bake at Ohio Literacy Resource Center until golden brown. Cool on rack, bind it, and call it *Beginnings*.

*Finished product is known to improve self-esteem and self-confidence of writers and provide encouragement to others.

~ *Pierre Learning Center Class*



Life's Beginnings



CHILDHOOD DAYDREAMS

What is your earliest childhood memory? Was it playing with your favorite G.I. Joe or Ninja Turtles on the floor of your first bedroom? Was it riding down the driveway on your bike without training wheels for the first time? Or maybe you remember jumping into a crystal clear swimming pool on a hot summer day.

One of my earliest memories was when I was about eight years old. On a cool summer day you could always find me in the back yard beside the pine trees on my old, rusty swing set protected by the canopy of leaves next to the dog house and the recently built tree house at the edge of the woods. I always chose the same swing hanging from the red and blue striped frame in between the monkey bars and teeter-totter. With the cool, refreshing summer air rushing through my red, curly hair, I would swing back and forth for hours and hours, listening to the squeaks in the rusty chains and enjoying the sweet smell of freshly cut grass.

With the warm summer sun on my face, I would put my imagination to work. Immediately my swing would turn into the starship from the movie *Star Wars*. Sometimes I was racing down the L.A. streets in a 1994 Dodge Viper with the brains blown out sitting on 20" spinners. For some strange reason the most fun and imaginative time I can remember was those carefree summer afternoons spending four to six hours swinging, lost in a daydream.

~ *Dusty Shriner*

I WANTED A BIKE

November 19, 1960, was my twelfth birthday. I asked for a new red bike. My parents both worked, and I had no sisters or brothers, so I was really hoping to get a new bike that year.

My dad worked with pottery in Roseville, and he had been there for a long time. In May of 1960, my dad got sick and went to the doctor. The doctor told my dad that he had liver cancer and would have six months to live. He kept working until he started getting sick at work, so he quit.

My mom worked at a store in Zanesville. She had to keep working to pay the bills, but it was hard for her with dad getting worse. She thought she was going to have to quit her job to take care of him, but my grandmother came to stay with us and help take care of her son.

On November 3, 1960, just sixteen days before my birthday, my dad got real sick. It had been six months to the day when the doctor told him about his liver cancer. My grandmother told me to go to school, and if I was needed at home, someone would come to get me. It was about noon that day when my aunt came to school after me. She said my mom needed me at home. When I got there, I found out that my dad had died. My mom and grandmother were in the living room crying, and I just wanted out of there, so I ran out the back door. I just wanted to be alone for awhile.

That night after everyone had gone home, I said to my mom that I probably wouldn't get my bike for my birthday now. She told me that my dad had her put the bike in layaway two weeks before he died. I missed my dad a lot and was very upset, but I know he was as happy about my new bike as I was on my birthday. I asked for a red bike, but I got

a green one, but the color didn't matter. I was so happy. I kept my bike for a long time.

Sometimes I think about things that happened when I was young and my dad; my bike always comes to my mind. It was one birthday I'll always remember.

~ *Charlene Rhodes*

BARBIE'S NEW DO

When I was about four, I gave myself a haircut because I wanted to make my Barbie doll's hair longer. I got out the scissors and started cutting my hair from the underneath. When I thought I had enough of my own hair, I started to glue my hair to Barbie. Once I realized it wasn't working, I panicked. Not only was some of my hair missing, but also my Barbie's hair was full of glue. What a mess I had made! So I decided to throw all my hair and the doll behind my dresser.

About a week later, my mom decided to clean my room. "Uh-oh!" I thought. When she pulled out the dresser, she found my mess. She picked my hair up in handfuls and picked up my doll and asked, "What did you do?" As innocently as I could, I said, "I tried to make my doll's hair longer." All she could do was laugh. To this day she teases me about it.

~ *Melissa Martin*

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF BEING A PARENT?

Being a parent is a lot of work. As parents we have to watch everything we do and say in front of our children, because kids are like sponges. They do what they see us as parents do. Being a good role model can help parents want to be better people in the eyes of their own children.

Being a parent has been scary, exciting, and joyful all at the same time. I have one daughter who is 10 years old. I had my daughter when I was only 18, and she really opened my eyes and helped me grow up. But if I had to do it again, I would.

One of my favorite memories of her growing up was potty training. We worked at it for so long and I never thought she would do it. Finally, one morning I heard her wake up and sit on the potty. She was so proud of herself!

I also enjoyed teaching her shapes and colors. She loved to learn different things when I made it fun for her. She is still that way. Now that she's 10, she's getting more independent. I'm starting to feel a little less needed, but she still needs me when it matters.

Being a parent has its good times and sometimes bad or sad times. I know when she goes off to college or gets married, I won't want to let her go. But isn't that what we do as parents? We spend all this time raising kids to teach them how to make it in this scary world, with hope that they'll remember some of the advice we give them.

~ Valerie Puckett

MY LIFE

Growing up for me was hard most of the time. I was a happy kid, but as the years went by, life just seemed to get harder. We didn't have lots of money. My dad worked every day, but the pay wasn't very good. He supported my two brothers and me. My mom stayed home to take care of us. She did not trust anyone to watch us because my older brother was very hard to handle. She was afraid that someone might mistreat us.

We didn't have a car most of the time. When we did get a car, it would last maybe a few months. Then it would break down, and we didn't have money to fix it up. My dad had to ask people to give him a ride to work and home. We walked to the store to get our food and personal items. My parents didn't even have enough money to buy us clothes. We wore hand-me-downs from a friend of my mother. Her friend had three boys, so most of my elementary days of school, I wore boys' clothes. Lots of times they were too big, but that's all we had.

My mom was depressed most of our lives. She would have liked to buy us nice things and take us to a movie or even to a nice restaurant, but it was impossible. But she always made sure that we had a place to live and we never went hungry. Watching my mom and dad struggle their whole lives was hard.

When I started school, the other kids always picked on me because we couldn't afford to buy clothes. I didn't fit in at all. They called me names everyday throughout my school years. By the time I was in my sophomore year, I just started giving up. I didn't care anymore about myself. Life had been a struggle from day one. I figured what was the use of trying.

I started working at 16, so I could get things for my mom. I didn't want to see Mom beg for anything, and I wanted to buy myself some nice clothes. I thought buying nice clothes would make things a little easier for me in school. I thought finally I would fit in. But it was too late for me. People already had their opinions about me. They just didn't like me, and I didn't even like myself anymore.

I dropped out of school at 18 and worked full time. Six months later I got pregnant with my first son, Matt. His dad was in college and he wasn't ready to be a dad, so he took off. I raised Matt by myself, with the help of my parents. Three months later I met Roger. I thought maybe my life would start getting better because someone loved my son and me. He asked me to marry him, and I said yes. I got pregnant with my second son, Chris, before we could get married. Soon after that Roger decided he didn't want to be around for us. I then was stuck raising two children on my own.

We didn't have anything. I had to work three jobs in order to have a place to live with my boys. We had no car, no phone, and I had no friends. I had my mom and dad. I was on welfare so we could have food and medical coverage. I then met Noah's dad. I thought he was going to be good for us. Be he wasn't; he was on drugs. And that wasn't good for my children to be around. So I told him he had to go. I would do it alone.

I was depressed and started drinking a lot after my third son came along. That went on for about a year. Things were so hard, and I wanted to give up, but I couldn't because of the boys. They only had me to depend on. I turned to God to help us. I started working hard for them and me. I built myself up, met a wonderful man, and I couldn't ask for a better life now.

So no matter how hard your life is, never give up.
There is a better life out there. But it takes hard work to get
where you need to be. It's your choice.

~ Kelley Kerper

MY LIFE THEN AND NOW

My family had seven kids plus my parent – 5 girls and 2 boys. We lived in the country with a big back yard, and we got our water from a cistern. In the country, a lot of the neighbors grew their own vegetables and fruit, and my mother would buy from them. She made us kids break up half-runners every weekend in the summer before we could go outside and play. Back then, we had to make up our own games because we never had a lot of toys. So all the kids would come to our house and we would play “cops and robbers,” jump rope, or climb a tree. There was a creek across the road that sometimes we were allowed to play in. I remember one day I got my foot cut on a piece of glass, and I told my mother a fish bit me! I remember on Friday nights my parents would get a babysitter so they could go to the grocery store. They would always bring home a big watermelon and after we would eat some of it, my sister and I would take the seeds out back and plant them, hoping we would grow our own watermelon.

One day, my parents decided to move to the city. It was different because there was a lot of cars and noise. Every morning we got up for school, ate breakfast, and got dressed. Then I stood on a chair to do the dishes and put them away before we left for school. In the city, my mother always took us to church, and that was a lot of fun. There was a time when one of us was talking in church, and my mom would whisper all of our names until she got to the right one. She said when we got home she was going to spank us. We would all say the other one was talking, so she spanked all of us so she would be sure to get the right one! Again, in the city, we had to make up our own games to play, so we played hide and seek, four-square, and hop-scotch.

When it was time for Christmas, we would put up a silver tree, and we had a light with four colors that would shine on the tree. Right before Christmas, my mother would buy fruit, candy, and nuts and put them in brown paper bags for our church to give to kids. For Christmas presents, we either got a doll, a coat, or a watch. Today, kids get everything on their list. We never had a lot of toys, but we had a lot of love and laughter in the house.

School was hard for me. When I was born, the cord was around my neck so it made me have speech problems. In the country, we had to catch the bus to go to school. I didn't like the bus because I would get motion sick and the other kids made fun of me. In the city, we moved right across the street from the school so we could walk. My older brother was the only one who could understand what I was saying when I talked. In school I had to take speech lessons.

After about three years in the city, we moved again. From the new house, we had to walk about a mile to the school bus. I remember a lot of hills and a big dog that would always chase us. Every day I would save something from lunch to give to the dog so I could get back home. I remember going to junior high school and my mother made us wear dresses all the time, so the kids made fun of us. My older sister would roll her skirt up so it would be short, but of course, I was afraid to do that. So not only did they make fun of me because of my speech but also because of my clothes. I used to cry all the time and would hardly take part in the school room.

But one day, I went to church and learned about a man in the Bible that had a speech problem also. When God told him to go and speak to people, he said, "I can't, because of my speech" and the Lord would say, "Don't worry about your speech because I will give you the words to say and they will understand." And the man did what God told him to do.

So I decided to start praying about my speech problem, and for a long time nothing changed. And then one day, people were starting to understand what I was saying. I kept praying every day. Even today, there are words that I know I have a hard time saying, but I have come a long way by the help of the Lord.

At the age of fifty, I started a new job. To work there, you need a diploma or GED. Of course, I never got one. Because all the kids at school made fun of me, I had quit. My new employers asked me to go to school for my GED and I said "yes" even though I hated school. They encouraged me to go by letting me keep my job while I get finished with school. I would like to thank my job for pushing me and having faith that I can do it. And thanks to my teachers for taking the time to teach me and trying to get me ready for the GED test. Thanks everyone!

~ Brenda Dicus

THE GOLD HILL

To the north of the town where I was born, Aguacatan, are many hills with trees, animals, and a beautiful river. When I was a child of approximately 3 or 4 years old, I had an uncle; he was the oldest uncle, a poor man, and he couldn't get the money he needed to rent his traditional costume to be in the Moros Dance.

The Moros Dance is a typical dance, and they use a special costume made out of expensive materials. The masks are made of wood and are carved by men that work a long time to make beautiful faces. That year was his turn to dance at the traditional party. In April every year we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Maria La Encarnation Honor (Patrones of the Village) with a party that lasts for one week (Monday through Sunday). All of the people enjoy dancing to the Marimba music; the Marimba is a traditional instrument in Guatemala. People wear elegant dresses, see family members and friends that they haven't seen for a long time; it is a vacation week in my city.

On Sunday in April, 1980, my uncle was very sad. He left his house, because the party was going to start the next day; he went to the forest and he sat on a big stone on the bank of the San Juan River. He didn't come back home that day.

The San Juan River is a big river and was born on that hill, many years ago; it was a water well, and one day when a girl called Juana arrived to get water from that water well, she saw a full basket of beautiful flowers and gold in the middle of the water well. She wanted to reach it but the basket moved inward very slowly. She followed it and she sank into the water well; she was gone and never came back.

Later the water well converted into a big river, now called the San Juan River.

In 1995 the big river disappeared for seven minutes. All of the fish were jumping on the sand, some people were crying, others were praying. After seven minutes the big river came back. It was very strange, and that place is the main tourist attraction in my city.

My uncle was sitting and thinking there on the bank of the river, when a horseman appeared with a sword and gold clothes. He said, "Why are you sad?" My uncle said, "I'm very sad, because I couldn't get the money I needed to rent my costume." The horseman said, "Come with me; climb up onto my horse's back, but I want to tell you something. Close your eyes and do not open them until I tell you." My uncle got onto the horse's haunches, he closed his eyes, and he could hear that they were walking to the west, they were climbing the hill. He could feel when they bumped the wall of the ravine; he could hear when three horse's locks rustled. When they arrived inside the place, the horseman said, "Open your eyes now! No more sadness, no more worries and find the costume that you like."

It was a big surprise for my uncle, because the place had many beautiful things. It was inside the hill that belonged to the horseman. My uncle started to search for a costume when he found the costume he wanted. He was very happy because it was very beautiful. It had shiny ornaments on it. Then he started to search for a mask. He found one that was so beautiful; right away when he touched it, the hill thundered and he heard, "Don't touch that mask! That's the Mr. Thunder's mask." When he found everything that he wanted, the horseman said, "Let's go. Bring all of your things and engrave this in your memory. Don't tell anybody, don't accept gum, don't drink any liquor (beer) with the people during the week of the party." They left that place, which had

three locks, and he had to close his eyes again, so that he couldn't recognize the place where they had gone to get the costume. My uncle was afraid as they came down the hill. They walked between the stones and arrived at the same place where they had met. It was there, when the horseman told him to open his eyes, he realized what had happened, and he understood that he was sitting on the same bank of the river. When the horseman appeared again, he said, "Go with your friends to the party and enjoy it."

On Monday he went with his friends to the party. When my uncle arrived to dance at the party with his friends, all of the people gathered to see him. None of the dancers wore a costume like he wore; he was the best dancer dancing to the Marimba song. My grandfathers had been looking for him. They found him dancing at the party with a pretty costume. They met him there, and he told them everything that had happened to him. For the ability that he had to dance, many people started to offer cigarettes, gums and liquor to him.

In the beginning, he didn't accept anything from anybody; he danced for six days without smoking or drinking liquor. But in his happiness he forgot the warning, so on Sunday in the middle of the day, he accepted a cup of liquor. He had almost finished his drink when suddenly a whirlwind started in the middle of hundreds of people. He was raised up by the whirlwind, and he was gone. All of the people were sad and surprised. My family started to cry, to worry and began waiting for him, but he never came back.

My grandfather said that he went back to the hill where he had gone to get his costume for the Moros Dance because he had broken the rules.

~ Juan Mejia Lopez

Beginning Again in America



MY FEELINGS FOR AMERICA

Since my childhood, I've been fascinated with the USA; this was my dream country. In my imagination it was almost paradise. Hollywood movies and stars had reinforced my conviction. After arriving in America, I was completely disenchanted, but now I can see my future with more serenity.

When I was a child, my dream was always of America. In high school, I learned and read a lot about this country. Great Americans like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and Elvis Presley were my favorite heroes. My passion and admiration for this country gave me the nickname of "Americaine" meaning American in French. Although I couldn't speak a lot of English, I sang American songs and was always up to date in American news. Really, in my thoughts, it was the country of opportunities where I could easily and quickly fulfill my ambition. So when I got the opportunity to immigrate to the USA, I didn't hesitate for one second; straight away, I left my country of Togo, Africa, for the "Paradise" – my American Gold Rush.

Once in America, my first month in New York was a big disappointment. The cousin, who had promised to give me shelter in his big house, didn't own one but rented a studio. I slept on the floor and was haunted by the three bedrooms I had left behind in my country. Three months went by without finding a job, and then one of my cousin's friends found one for me – a gas station attendant. I spent my first winter outdoors selling gas with my frozen hands and runny nose. I started regretting my move and missed all I had left behind in Africa. I felt like all my valuable knowledge and experiences were nothing in America.

I considered that my poor knowledge of the English language weighed heavily on my future in this country. The fortune I was looking for would not be easy to get. I started asking myself if it was the America I had heard about. Soon I realized that the America of my dreams was different than the place I had dreamed of. I felt discouraged. I had some dark days and seriously envisioned the possibility of going back to my country, but I feared I'd be ashamed in front of friends and family members, that prompted me to reject this idea. In this darkness, God came to my rescue; a friend of mine living in Cincinnati found a job for me. Consequently, I moved to Ohio to start a new life.

Now after years of hard work, I feel that those bad days are over. Still, I'm fighting everyday to work and take care of my family; however, I have a goal, and I know I will try with all my strength to reach this goal. I firmly believe that this country is the land of opportunity and that everybody can succeed if he or she doesn't surrender. Although I like my native Africa, I prefer to live in America because life here is so exciting.

Today I remember my first steps in America, and I consider them helpful in building my personality. I learned to never give up because America has always been the land of those who overcome obstacles. With my experience, I can advise a friend who is preparing to come in this country. I know that every new immigrant must always face some problems, but I will never forget my first contact with this American land.

~ Afi Abi DeSouza

MY LONG WAY TO AMERICA OR A NEW WORLD FOR THE GIRL FROM THE DEVELOPING COUNTRY

My name is Olga Heasley, and I am 25 years old. I am from the developing country, Kazakhstan. I have lived in the U.S. a little bit over one year. I want to tell you a story about my trip to America.

First, I want to say how I got my chance to go and live in the USA. I had never even dreamt about life in America or thought about the possibility of marrying an American guy. I knew that was impossible for me. But it was exactly what happened to me. I met an American guy, we fell in love, and he proposed to me. I consented, and we started preparing papers to get a fiancé visa for me. My way to America started from this moment.

There was no way to know how difficult it would be to get an American visa. For me it took eight months. I remember I couldn't believe that this moment had come and soon I could go to America and see my fiancé. I hardly realized that my new life was starting.

So I bought my ticket. My trip went from my hometown, Pavlodar, to Astana, our capital city. I went by train, and it took twelve hours. My mom and my cousin went too. They wanted to be with me for my last hours and to see me off on the plane. I wanted to have them there too. I didn't know when I would be able to see them again. Next my trip went from Astana to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and then from Amsterdam to Detroit. My fiancé met me there.

In the Astana airport I found out that, at first, I would fly to Frankfurt, Germany, and then to Amsterdam. They said that I would stay on the plane while we were

stopped in Frankfurt. When I bought the ticket, I knew nothing about that. I thought sarcastically: "It is a good beginning!" In my country it is always this way. Things never happen how you were told or how they should be. Friends, be careful, if you decide to visit Kazakhstan!

So I couldn't change anything. I hugged my family, said goodbye, and went to register. I was very nervous. I had flown by myself only once before. I was in Turkey. I have never been in Europe. I almost saw nothing in my life because I am from a simple, not rich family, and we never traveled. My English wasn't good. I couldn't explain what I wanted. I was scared of Europe. I asked myself: "How will I be there alone? How can I find everything? How can I make it?" With these thoughts and worries, I was leaving my country.

After I took my seat in the plane, I relaxed a little bit. After the plane took off, the stewardesses distributed a small pillow, blanket, socks, blindfold and headphones to each passenger. That was a new thing for me, compared with my flight to Turkey. When I saw socks, I didn't know what I should do. I had comfortable shoes. And these socks were a huge size! I observed people around me. What had I found? Sure not everybody, but some of them started taking off their shoes and putting on these huge ugly socks! Without thinking twice, I did the same. Oh..!!, I want to tell you, I felt much better than when I had my shoes on. During my whole flight I had these socks on. I didn't even put on my shoes when I went to the restroom. I felt strange glances at me.

I looked around one more time and found that almost everybody had their headphones on their heads, and they were clicking buttons on their armrests. I put on my headphones and started clicking too. In amazement, I discovered up to ten different music stations for any taste! That was a great discovery!

My flight to Frankfurt was good; we landed without any problems. Almost all passengers left the plane. There were only three more persons except me. I started to be nervous again. I thought that I could ask somebody on the plane to help me in the Amsterdam airport. And now I had only a Chinese couple and an old woman, who asked me to help her. As best as I could I tried to calm down.

The flight from Frankfurt to Amsterdam was horrible because of very bad weather. During the whole flight the plane was shaking. I was scared to death and kept hoping for a good future. Only these thoughts helped me.

Thank God! Finally, we landed successfully! When we were leaving the plane, I heard that Chinese man could speak Russian. What a miracle! I found a person who could help me! I couldn't believe how lucky I was! This man and his wife not only showed me the way, they even led me to the registration desk. I was able to continue myself.

The Amsterdam airport, Schiphol, is the biggest airport in the Netherlands. I knew it was big, but I couldn't imagine how big until I saw it with my eyes. Before my trip I found a lot of information about this airport and even printed a map of it. To be honest, there is a huge difference between the map and reality. For me, it was hard to find something on the map and, of course, hard to find where I was on this map. Amsterdam Schiphol is more than an airport; this is an Airport City – catering to an audience wider than the humble traveler. There is a casino, a sauna and massage service, and the massive Plaza, which includes more than 40 shops.

The first moment I was left alone, I panicked and almost started crying. But good for me, I collected my strength quickly and went to register. After that I thought, "That wasn't too hard! People could understand your

English, and you could understand them.” Without any problems I found my gate and sat down on the chair next to it, now knowing what I was going to do during seven hours till my flight. So I started looking around.

Most of all I was amazed by the quantity of foreign people. There were black, brown, dark brown, red, white, and other skin-colored people and different nationalities. I had seen only two black persons in my life before this. That was very interesting and unusual for me. I enjoyed that. Next, I noticed people’s clothes. Some of them had national clothes; others had sport clothes. Anyway, clothes were very simple. Sometimes it seemed to me that they were wearing clothes from the Soviet Union time or from the “Second Hand” in my country. Funny, isn’t it?! To observe them was very interesting. All of them were very natural and simple and seemed confident to me. Compared to Kazakhstan, there was a big difference.

Next I paid attention to the accommodations in the airport. First of all, I like all of the stuff for disabled people: special cards, doors, etc. Again compared with my country, it’s amazing, because in Kazakhstan we have nothing to make life easier for disabled people. We have only wheelchairs, but only a small percent of the disabled population in our country can have these. These lucky people can move only inside of their apartments, because our standard lifts in the buildings are narrower than these chairs. I also liked the moving belts and golf carts to transport people inside of the airport. This is very comfortable! I had never seen them before! I was really surprised at seeing all of these things; everything was for people, to make their lives and trips easier, to make them happy.

One more machine that I noticed was the floor buffer. Wonderful! What a technical progress! A worker didn’t wash the floor himself; the machine did. The worker

was in the role of the driver. These workers were only male and black persons. "Interesting. Why?" I asked myself.

So I sat there for 25 minutes and decided to walk. I was afraid to lose my gate, so I walked only straight on and backwards. Step by step I became more confident. I already remembered where my gate was. I couldn't walk and sit in the same place for seven hours. I had a chance to see a lot of new things in this airport, so I decided to have an excursion by myself. At the same time I was very hungry and needed to use a restroom.

I found the restroom first. Here I noticed that on the toilet bowl was a toilet seat. It surprised me! I am not kidding! To have a toilet seat in the public restroom for Kazakhstan is unbelievable! I kept silence about other stuff I saw, like sanitary papers for the toilet seat and spray bottle with sanitary liquid. In Kazakhstan, we can't even dream about things like this. I felt like I was in a movie! Yes, one of the American or European movies!

I still was very hungry. I couldn't find a good place to eat. I mean a place, where, first of all, I could pay in dollars and understand the name of the food, at least, a little bit. I saw bars, cafes, and cafeterias, but I couldn't understand what kind of food they had or if I could pay in U.S. money. I was afraid to ask. I continued my walk. I hoped to find something or exchange dollars for Euros and then buy food. On my way I didn't stop seeing new things like a massage, a casino with separate smoking and non-smoking areas, a room for mothers with children, and duty-free shops. Unexpectedly, I found the telephone booth. I was happy to call my fiancé or one of my friends who lived in Germany and to ask them how and where I could find a place to eat. I was excited! I started to learn the instructions for using the phone. Unfortunately, I couldn't understand and was very afraid to ask for help. I was very upset and in a bad mood, but I continued looking for

food. I looked around almost everywhere and didn't find what I needed. I decided to wait until my flight and eat on the plane. Suddenly I noticed the stairs. "It couldn't be stairs for the second floor. I am already on the second floor," I thought. This upstairs went to the balcony with a food court. I got hope. I went there, and I couldn't believe my eyes. I found McDonald's! This place I knew for sure; I had been there once in Turkey. I bought McChicken, French fries, and a cup of coffee. They gave me a gift – cookies. I remember that I paid \$9.25. I made it! I found food, ordered, and paid myself! I was very happy and proud of myself!

Until my flight, I spent my time on the balcony observing people and looking at the planes. On the plane every passenger had a TV-computer on the back side of every seat. I had the list of movies, music videos or only music, and a map of our flight. It was awesome! My flight was good. We landed without any problems. I was very excited to see my fiancé and America, too.

In the Detroit airport I didn't have any problems. I could understand the necessary signs. The airport in Detroit was much easier than the airport in Amsterdam. So I passed through passport control and went to get my baggage. I waited for a long time. I checked every suitcase and I couldn't find mine. I had hope until the end. Even then every passenger from my flight got their baggage. I still hoped that soon I would get my baggage. I waited and waited. Nothing happened. I asked for help, but I couldn't understand what they told me. With a lot of language problems I answered the questions and gave them my fiancé's information. Then I went straight out to look for my fiancé. I was very happy to see him! Only one thing makes me upset – I lost my baggage! But that is another story. Finally, I reached America!

~ Olga Heasley

MY GOALS

At the age of 19, I left my native country Yemen and came to the United States for economic reasons. I would have preferred to go to college, but the economy in my country is poor, and my father wants me to help him financially because there are five younger brothers and sisters in Yemen to raise.

I would like to learn enough English to help me pass the GED test so that I could go on to college and prepare for a better paying career.

However, learning a new language is a slow process and an average college education takes 4-5 years. When am I going to be financially ready to help my family, as well as marry my sweetheart to whom I have been promising marriage for three years?

This is my dilemma. Do I continue to work at the gas station and help my family until at least the girls are married off? Or, do I tell my father, "I'm sorry dad, but I have to make a career for myself and the love of my life"?

~ *Mahar Alwishah*

HISPANIC SUPERSTITIONS

1. Never give your love a pair of shoes as a gift. They will walk away. (I'm not sure of this!)
2. If you place a pair of open scissors under the bed when in a lot of pain, it will cut the pain. (I'm not sure about this.)
3. If you drop a spoon on the floor, a woman is coming to visit. Tap it on the floor three times for good luck.
4. If you drop a fork on the floor, a man is coming to visit. Tap it on the floor three times for good luck. (I'm not sure about this. I've dropped both forks and spoons and no one has come to visit!)
5. If you hit your parents, the hand that you hit them with will dry up. (Nobody hits a parent. I've never known anyone who has!)
6. If you watch a dog or cat poop, you'll get a sty. (I see my puppy poop, but no sty!)
7. If you cut an apple in half and place a picture of you and your love in it, tie a red string around it, and bury it under an apple tree, supposedly your love will grow. (I don't know about this.)
8. If you place your wedding picture in a jar, fill it with rice and honey, and bury it under an oak tree, your marriage will always be sweet and strong. Rice stands for abundance, honey is sweet, and an oak means strength.
9. If you take a picture of you and your love and tie red thread (the entire spool) around it, your love will always be tied to you.
10. If you take a lock of your hair and a lock of your love's hair and braid them together, you will always be entwined together. (What if you can't braid?)
11. If you are single and wear black to a wedding, you'll be a widow after yours. (Scary!)
12. If you wear one single pearl, whether it is a necklace or a ring, you will shed tears.

~ Rebecca A. Ramos

LIFE TASTING

This is the ninth month I have been in the United States. In the past months, I have learned what a real life is.

I was born in a small city in China and grew up under the aegis of my parents. From elementary school to college, then work, my parents made most important decisions for me. Every time troubles appeared, they always resolved problems right away. My life was so happy and peaceful at that time.

From the day I came to the United States, my life was totally changed. Everything was new for me. I had to face troubles alone and learn how to be independent. That was really a nightmare to me for the first two months in the United States. I recalled the first time I went shopping at Kroger alone. I took almost 10 minutes to find a bar code for each product I bought and took another two minutes to pay the bill with a credit card. I knew that must be incredible for all Americans. But for me, I really did my best to do it.

I felt so hurt when I couldn't find a kind of bread I like because I didn't understand what the ingredients showed on the package. Although I knew it was bread, I still didn't know what it tasted like. Everything is different from China. I never had trouble shopping before, but now it's a big trouble for me. I was totally lost and felt useless. After despairing for a couple weeks, I thought it was time to rally my spirits and go through it. No one could help me if I gave up first. I decided to learn something. Driving was the first thing that popped up to my mind, so I started to learn it.

I spent five months getting the driver's license. From the writing test to the driving exam, every step was difficult for me. For the writing test, I reviewed the Vehicle Laws

brochure with a dictionary. That's a boring task. I had to take a long time to read only one page and memorize keywords over and over. After one week of hard work, I passed the writing test. My confidence was increased.

Later on, I practiced for maneuverability. That's the hardest part for me because I never drove before. I can't remember how many times I crashed the poles and how many times I wanted to give up. But I remembered clearly how nervous I was the first time I drove on the highway. I didn't know how to merge with the traffic flow even though a guy sitting beside me told me what to do. That was really a moment I had to hurry, but I was unsure.

I took my first exam on December 16. I failed because I knocked down a marker during the maneuverability test. I felt frustrated and wanted to give up again. But there was a sound from the bottom of my heart to support me. "Don't give up because you are half way to getting the license." So I re-scheduled another driving exam. The date is January 06. I wanted the next exam to be my last one, so I practiced one hour a day until the date. Fortunately, I didn't disappoint myself this time. I passed finally!

I was so excited to have a driver's license in my wallet, not only because I could drive legally, but also it was the first step to being independent in the United States. Today, all nightmares about driving have passed. It becomes a good experience in my life.

The events of the past nine months are clear. They taught me to face life bravely and not to give up anything easily. I'm the only actress on my life stage. If I give up and do nothing for this stage, then who else can complete the life for me?

Every time when I am in trouble, I comfort myself that there are only two kinds of things in the world. One is good, another is bad. Don't care too much about the bad things because everything has two sides. Bad things may cause lots of troubles to me, but take it as a lesson and I will grow up quickly and maturely.

I know a lot of truths but cannot always do them. I know how to make a tiny goal to myself every morning: learn five new words or read an English newspaper. As long as I am better than yesterday, I am still the winner today. I know there must be a lot of new difficulties waiting for me. I'm not scared; I am full of confidence to face my future life.

~ Bella Yang

WHAT SEPARATES US IS ONLY THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

Every long journey begins with a first step! My journey led me to an exciting but challenging year in the United States. I'm Jasmin, and I come from Germany.

Germany is the country where I grew up; it's the country where my family lives. In the city where I grew up, I know everybody and everybody knows me. I'm familiar with every building, every street – I'm in my routine!

But that has completely changed – now I'm Jasmin, the new Au-pair, at the Ward family in Maineville, Ohio. In case you don't know what an Au-pair is, let me explain it to you. I'm not what most people think, a nanny. I finished my school in Germany, and afterwards, I decided to stay for one year with a family in the USA. I take care of their children and get paid for it – which sounds like a nanny. This is where most people have a point, but here's the difference. I also have to go to school to increase my English level! So, it's not only taking care of children; it's also a cultural exchange.

The second comment people make when they hear that I'm from Germany is, "Oh, you're from Germany. Then you must be very neat. And, I've heard that Germans are always on time, but they have no sense of humor!" Honestly, how should I react to a statement like that? I mean, excuse me! Let me make one thing clear. Yes, I'm very neat and I try always to be on time, but not all Germans are like that. I just had very strict and neat parents, and they just raised me like that.

But, let me get back to the problems I had adjusting myself to a whole new culture. I arrived at the airport in New York after a nine-hour flight – too tired and too excited to be homesick. The week in New York was great. As I said,

I wasn't homesick at all; there were so many things to see – an unbelievable city.

But, the first night in Maineville, Ohio, in my new home, alone in my room, was the loneliest night in my whole life. It finally hit me all at once. What was I thinking going to America thousands of miles away from my family, living with complete strangers? Was I out of my mind? Why did I leave my family, my friends who mean so much to me? I couldn't find answers to all of these questions, and that night I cried myself to sleep! I talked a lot to my host family and to other Au-pairs, but nothing seemed to help or comfort me! The first time I talked to my mother was awful too! I realized how much I missed her. Again, I felt terribly alone after we hung up. So, I called my grandparents. I also have a very deep connection with them. When my parents got divorced and my mother had to work all day, they took care of me and my sister. I must have sounded so desperate to them, even if I tried to be brave and sound happy. I couldn't fool them. They called me two hours after we finished our conversation. It was very late for them because Germany is six hours ahead of the American time. They told me they couldn't sleep because they were worried about me.

So, there I was in a foreign country, talking to my 78-year-old grandmother on the phone, and she gave me the most wonderful advice; I'm sure I'll never forget what she said to me. She said, "Jasmin, why are you so sad? Child, don't be sad, what separates us is only the Atlantic Ocean! That's no distance for the connection our hearts made the day you were born!"

Don't get me wrong. Every day, every minute and every second I'm separated from them, I still miss my family; but it's easier for me to handle my homesickness now that I know that I have the blessing from my family.

~ *Jasmin Palasz*

MAKING A SIMPLE LIFE MEANINGFUL

In our ESL class, we read a poem by W. H. Auden called "Day In, Day Out." The poem describes the life of a typical 20th century man whose life is very routine. He does everything at the same time everyday with little change. Our teacher encouraged us to discuss the poem and asked us to write about our life and compare it to the life of the man in the poem. I don't think my life is as routine as his, but I have to admit that I have a routine in my life. This routine helps me to accomplish my goals. But this routine is far from being robotic. I always take a break to relax and refresh myself, and I take the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the world around me. I enjoy these precious moments in my life.

About a year ago when I first came to Cleveland on an H4 Visa, my weekdays were very regular and kind of dull because I spent my time alone studying English. However, my weekends were much more spontaneous and exciting. Weekends were spent relaxing, not studying.

On a typical weekday, my husband and I would leave our home at 9:00 a.m. and walk to Case Western Reserve University. Then he would go to his lab and I would go to the library to study English the whole day except for a lunch break with my husband. Finally at 7:00 in the evening, we would meet at the library, go back home, and make dinner together. After dinner, we would take a walk around Little Italy and watch TV for an hour or so before going to bed at 11 p.m.

This routine was a little boring and lonely because it was so very different from my previous life in China where I worked and had family and many friends. Sometimes I couldn't focus on learning English, so I would browse the news in Chinese on the Internet.

Now things are much better. To improve my English, I joined an ESL class at Case Western Reserve University which I attend three times a week, usually on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m. This class helps me a lot. Not only do I learn English, but I also learn about American culture and have made quite a few new friends from many countries with different background and customs. With our English teacher's help and guidance, learning English has become interesting. I'm not bored and lonely any more. Also by communicating with my friends in this class, I feel I am not alone struggling to learn English. Now I feel more confident to pass the GRE and TOEFL for my further studies in the United States.

When weekends come, everything is different. I always get up very late. After going to the grocery store to buy food for the next week, my husband and I hang out with our friends. If weather permits, we go fishing. While fishing, we have a picnic by the lake. Sometimes we just drive to a park and take a walk. In the evening there is always a party. We invite friends to our home or go to their homes. We usually play cards, see a film, or sometimes just chat together. The most interesting part of our party time is making Chinese dishes together. Almost all of my friends are good chefs, and I have learned a lot about cooking from them. They can make delicious, tasty Chinese dishes that are much better than those of the Chinese restaurants in Cleveland. I am not bragging. This is true because many restaurants here have lost the original Chinese taste in order to cater to the needs of customers who are not Chinese. Usually we stay up very late on weekends, but on Sunday nights we go to bed no later than 12 p.m. in order to get back to the routine for the next week.

The description of my weekday and weekend life in Cleveland shows how I am pursuing my goal and also enjoying the precious moments in my life.

~ *Cuiyu Geng*

SIMPLE, BUT WONDERFUL

After reading the poem "Day In, Day Out," by W. H. Auden, most of our ESL class thought that the main character's way of life was boring, just like a robot. When we were asked to think about our lives, there was no doubt that we also have routines in our lives. But my ESL teacher pointed out that despite the routine, there is beauty in our simple lives if we just can find that beauty. She encouraged us to seek this kind of happiness in our daily lives.

According to the poem, my life could be considered boring because I have no job except for cooking everyday, and I have no official studies, even though I attend ESL classes at Case two evenings a week. Luckily, I possess eyes that are able to discover beautiful things in the simple things in my life.

When my teacher asked us to write about our life and contrast our weekdays with our weekends, I thought that there really was no obvious difference between the two. However, there is one very important change that occurs on the weekends. My wife, who during the week is a researcher at Cleveland Clinic Foundation, is home; she always brings some interesting changes that make weekends more enjoyable.

During the week, I have to prepare three meals, and I need enough time to sleep. After breakfast is done, I send my wife off to Cleveland Clinic and I go to the library at Case Western Reserve University. I spend most of my time studying English. On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, I attend my ESL class. I enjoy the class because my teacher is ebullient and good-tempered. I also enjoy meeting people from different countries and getting to know them.

On weekends, I am sure that my wife is even happier than I. She transforms from a researcher in biomedical engineering to a “shop till she drops” girl. She loves shopping. However, she is not good at driving because she always loses her way. The formidable task of driving in America belongs to me. On weekends, I become a chauffeur for my wife. Although my wife always loses her way when she drives, she never loses her way in the malls. She moves around the mall as if she were taking a walk in our neighborhood in China. In contrast, I always get lost in the mall because it is like a labyrinth for me. My job in the mall is to follow my wife and be her porter. I carry all her purchases.

We are like a symbiotic creature when shopping. If I were not a good chauffeur, my wife would lose this wonderful opportunity to shop at all the malls in the Cleveland area. On the other hand, without my wife’s love of this great American pastime, I would have to chuck the pleasure of “playing the peacock” with my wife.

These simple pleasures – cooking meals, studying English, driving and shopping – are the beauties in my life.

~ *Liyong Wang*

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

My name is Hayfa Ilayan. I lived in Palestine, but I had to move to America because of war and because my husband moved to the U.S.A. Living in Palestine got too hard, which caused our family to move to America.

In our new country, the language was very hard to speak. I had four children who did not know English. It was getting difficult teaching the children because none of us knew English.

Later on, I became very sick, and when I went to the doctor he could not understand me. Because of the lack of communication, I became very, very sick. I had three surgeries and it was really painful.

Life was moving on, so I had to move with it. I had to do something and I decided I must learn English. Going for lessons was one of my ideas, and my husband told me to go to the English Center.

From my experience, I think that living in America is even more difficult than in my country. I wish that I could go back to see my family. I miss the life in Palestine. I miss the snow in the high mountains, the fresh water in the river, the humble people everywhere, and even the narrow streets. I miss my mother, my father, and my sister. I miss the wide fields and fresh streams.

I love fresh air. I would like to go back again because life was easier. I know the language!

~ Hayfa Ilayan

CAMBODIAN WEDDING

Would you like to know about different wedding customs? I am from Cambodia, and I would like to share with you my wedding ceremony to demonstrate traditional Cambodian wedding customs. The wedding was one and one-half days, and it was at the bride's house.

In Cambodia, people usually get together the day before the wedding. For example, I had family and friends come over to help decorate the house and prepare the food for the next day. Then some played cards, some watched movies, and some sang karaoke until 1:00 a.m. I didn't stay up that late because I had to wake up early to get ready for my wedding.

The bride normally wakes up very early in the morning. For me, I woke up at 4:00 a.m. to get ready. I hired a stylist to come over to help me get ready. She brought everything that I needed for the wedding, such as dresses, flowers, and make-up supplies. She did my hair and make-up, and she helped me get dressed. I didn't have to do anything. I felt like a queen for a day. In the United States, the bride wears only one white dress, but in Cambodia, the bride could wear as many as she wants. The average bride wears about eight dresses for the whole wedding day. I wore 12 dresses the entire day. My favorite was the red one. I wore it at the end of the ceremony.

Only two or three dresses are the most important. In general, the bride wears them in the morning for the ceremony. The dresses have a similar shape. They have a shimmer sash, a golden belt, a golden crown, and a lot of gold jewelry. They are the old fashioned dresses that have been around for a long time. Traditionally, they came from the first queen of Cambodia, who wore that kind of dress on her

wedding day. Since then, the dresses have become the traditional wedding dress. The evening dresses look like an American or Chinese wedding dress. The bride just wants to feel as special as she can on that day.

In Cambodian tradition, the groom pays for the wedding. The groom wears a suit in the morning and then changes to a traditional Cambodian dress that resembles a king's robe. Later in the day, he switches back to a suit. The wedding usually starts in the morning. My wedding started at 7:00 a.m., and I wore the blue dress. The groom and his guests walked from his house to my house. Each of his guests brought a tray of fruit, vegetables, or meat for the ceremony. When the groom got to my house, I went outside to meet him, we put flowers around each other's neck, and I went back inside and changed my dress.

A couple minutes later, my sister held the groom's hand and led him into my house because the groom isn't supposed to go into the bride's house unless someone in the bride's family leads him. Next, we both bowed to our parents to thank them for letting us get married. A priest blessed us; then we exchanged the rings and became husband and wife. My husband held a sword in one hand and with the other hand held part of my dress and followed me to the bedroom. In Cambodian culture, females and males aren't supposed to sleep or live together before they are married. This part of the ceremony represents that now they can. The sword means he has become my husband and has to protect me with it. In the middle of the bedroom, there was a fruit basket for us to feed each other, which represented that from then on we were to share everything.

Later on, the reception began. The groom, the groomsmen, the bride and the bridesmaids have to stand in the front hallway and bow to the guests. This means, "Welcome and thank you for coming." A couple hours later,

the reception was over and we rested for a little bit. Around 7:00 p.m., we started to dance until 11:00 p.m.

Finally, the wedding was over. In Cambodia, the wedding ceremony is very long and a lot of work. Everybody was exhausted, but they had so much fun. As the bride, I had a great time. It was my dream come true to have a nice wedding. Even though I was very tired, I did not complain. I will never forget that day. Once in awhile, my husband and I watch the videotape. It seems like our marriage ceremony just happened yesterday. It also helps to remind me of all the friends and family that were part of my wedding day.

~ Sein Han Cozad

MY LIFE

I am Michael Drozdovsky. I am from the Ukraine. I have a wife Tatiana and two daughters. My older daughter Christina is 22. My younger daughter Oksana is 18. My parents already died. I have a brother, Peter. He is a nurse. He lives in the Ukraine. He has a son and a daughter. They have their own children.

I am a priest at St. Anne's and Holy Trinity Churches. I became a priest because I heard a voice from God. I was a teacher and an engineer. I had two degrees and went to the seminary because my heart told me to do this. I really enjoy being a priest. I studied theology for five years.

I studied at the Holy Spirit seminary. I studied many theological classes. Every day we had morning and evening mass; we prayed on the Rosary.

I had to live at the seminary away from my family. I could see them only on big religious holidays. I dedicated myself to the service of God. However, we had a lot of difficulties in the seminary. Sometimes we didn't have electricity and water because the seminary just started to function after 70 years of being forbidden during a totalitarian regime.

When I almost finished my studying, I got very sick. I got jaundice because of unsanitary conditions. I was yellow. Our dishes were not very clean because they were washed by hand. I was in treatment for a long time because there were no good medicines. The doctor let me out on the day I became a priest, but the next day I went back in the hospital.

I bless people and serve liturgies every day. I give communion and baptize children. I read saint books, preach,

and help people in their needs. I am very happy to do this work.

I came to the U.S.A. because there was a need for priests in Ukrainian Catholic churches. The bishop from the Ukraine and a bishop from the Parma Eparchy gave me their blessings to come here. I am a volunteer. I am very glad.

~ Michael Drozdovsky

MY STORY

I was born in a small town in India in the year 1938. I am the eldest male amongst my eight siblings. I was educated in a reputable public school (Dr. Annie Beasant Theosophical Society, Varanasi, India). I enjoyed my childhood with eating, singing, and playing. My favorite hobby is stamp collecting. I completed my school education in the year 1957. Science and mathematics have always been my favorite subjects.

During my school days, I received one enduring lesson, "Do good and be good" and never try to harm anyone on the earth. Since the time of my schooldays, I have received a good understanding of the idea "worldwide brotherhood." I respect all the religions and enjoy different cultures of the world.

My father died at a very early age due to complications of diabetes (1961); thus my mom was responsible for bringing up all of my eight siblings. She was a great mom and did very hard work with full devotion for all of us. I did some clerical and other jobs to help support my mom.

Later on, I was admitted to an engineering college. There I graduated in science and electrical engineering. I started my engineering career in the year 1963.

Suddenly in the year 1964, my mother arranged my marriage with my present sweetheart, Raj Gupta. She is still with me. I have enjoyed my married life with Raj for the past 43 years. I have two married sons, one married daughter, and five grandchildren.

I am very eager to learn but could not learn enough when I was younger, so I started my master's in electrical engineering and completed my degree in the year 1984. I also completed 38 years of a successful engineering career in India.

Now I am enjoying my retired life in the USA with my son's family and their daughter. Sometimes I enjoy living with my daughter's family in California. There I enjoy my granddaughter and my grandson. In the USA, I have three grandchildren.

My eldest son lives in Australia with his family. He has a wife and two sons. My great desire is to visit my eldest son's family and to enjoy them. I have been very fortunate throughout my life. Blessings of God and of my dear, sweet mother (who died in 2003) are always with me. I pray to God to impart good luck to others who live upon our home, our planet earth.

~ Ram Gupta

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PLACE

Can you imagine leaving your life and moving to a completely different place? I think only people who have experienced that are able to express their feelings about it. You and only you are able to remember that exact moment and feel again that deep sadness and your eyes tear up as on that day. Everyone feels the same no matter their race, color, or age.

I think my first impression wasn't good when I first arrived here because of my attitude. I am not saying that language, differences in culture, or even transportation weren't a big shock for me. But if I have to be honest, if I would arrive in a bigger city similar to Buenos Aires, I don't think I would feel any different. Because the problem wasn't the place; the problem wasn't the people; the problem wasn't even the language. The problem was me. I just couldn't feel complete. I wasn't myself. I was like a shadow of me. I know it sounds weird, but that is exactly how I felt. I had that horrible feeling of being here but wanting to be down there.

I used to talk by phone almost the whole day with my Argentinean friends. I guess I was trying to keep my place, trying to be there, trying to be just with them. Now, I know that wasn't good for me. That just made things harder. Now, I can see that. Some people thought that it was a typical teenager reaction. But in my opinion, it was a human reaction, the reaction of someone who has feelings. It was the reaction of someone who knows how it feels to be standing at the airport saying good-bye to your friends, to your family, to your place, to your life. I was hugging them as hard as I could, trying to keep them with me just another second.

For all of these reasons, I can't say I had a good impression when I first came here. But as I said at the beginning, it wasn't because of the place or anything like that. It was because of me. I strongly believe that if you don't feel good, you can rarely make others feel good. Happily, I have changed my attitude; I met a lot of nice people. I still miss some people, but I'm sure they will be waiting for me at the airport when I get back. Distance doesn't destroy feelings; it just makes them more powerful. At the beginning, two years sounded like a long time. But time goes so fast. That is why enjoying the present is the base for a great future.

~ *Luciana Salaverry*

MY ROOM

I love my room. It is my real world.

The first sight I can see in my room is the nine-foot long and three-foot wide Chinese bamboo painting on the left side of the wall. It is one of my older brother's best art works. Under the painting is a long, white dresser that has two pictures on the top. One is of my daughter and me at Beijing Airport in China, which was taken ten years ago before I left for America without her. She was three years old at that time. Every time I look at that picture, I see the tears in my eyes, but my daughter is smiling, for she does not know that I'm going away. The second one is a black and white picture, which was the first picture in my life, and I was eight years old. I always wondered why my brothers and my sister had a lot of pictures of themselves ever since they were born, but I didn't. It made me wonder, "Maybe I was adopted or neglected as a baby?" Either way, I really appreciated the fact that my older brother, who is nine years senior to me, used his first paycheck to pay for my very first picture. I have a lot of pictures of myself now, but none of them are better than this one. It is my treasure.

In the left corner is a cable TV, but I barely have time to watch it. The better way to call my TV maybe is my "weather reporter," because that is what I use it for. I want to make sure my daughter wears warm enough clothes to go to school every day.

Next to the TV are big windows on the right. White and purple curtains are opened on the side, and I can watch the beautiful view outside. Especially in the fall, it is a beautiful, colorful world.

On the right side of the room is my queen-sized bed in the middle; it's covered with light purple bed sheets and four big pillows, for purple is my favorite color. I have two night stands on each side of the bed, and two purple lamps on each of the stands; the lamps are touch-on or off, so they are very convenient. I keep my magazines or the books that I am reading on the right-side night stand, so I can read some before I go to sleep. I keep the things I need before I go to bed on the left-side night stand, and some of these things are eye drops, nasal spray, cotton swabs, and facial tissue.

Near the door are two bookshelves, one for Chinese books and the other one for English books. Between them is my big desk, which holds my calendar, computer, printer, and all my textbooks, notebooks, bills, and another picture of my daughter and me, which was taken two years ago at the Los Angeles International Airport in California. We both are smiling with tears after being apart eight years and finally being reunited.

My room is not fancy, and I don't have any expensive stuff, but I love my room. It is my eyewitness to how I overcame so many difficulties in a foreign country without my daughter and my family. Finally, I have my daughter to live with me. What a blessing! I believe my room knows how happy I am because I can smell sweetness in my room.

~ *Chengfang (Sharon) Zhao*

BUCARAMUNGA, COLOMBIA, AND ITS UNTOUCHED BEAUTY

Bucaramunga, Colombia, is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It is near the equator and has many jungles surrounding it. Most of the roads in Bucaramunga are made of dirt and are unpaved. At night there are extremely large bugs and insects that crawl and fly all around you. The jungle is abundant with exotic plants that are unmatched in beauty in any other part of the world. The trees are as tall as skyscrapers and hang all the way to the ground.

The exotic animals are very beautiful in Bucaramunga. I have seen all kinds of monkeys, birds, reptiles, and aquatic animals. My favorites are the birds. The color, length, and shapes of the birds are what make them so beautiful. The Banana Parrot, I think, is the neatest looking bird because of its bright yellow wings and feathers.

The city is very poor. The houses are made of clay, straw, and wood. On most houses there are no doors like mine had. The stoves are open flame stoves and are made out of clay and metal. Most of the houses are only one-room huts like mine was.

In my orphanage, there was a row of coffee bean bushes all along the driveway. My brother and I would pick the coffee plants and eat the beans like grapes. We would have to walk to school from the orphanage. Our school consisted of one chalk board, no seats, and no surrounding walls. We had to sit on the ground and try to learn how to write our names.

The main reason that I want to move back is because of the memories. One memory was playing in the

dirt streets of Bucaramunga. I also went fishing with my dad, and we would cook the whole fish and eat it. We would catch iguanas and eat the reptile along with its eggs. I hope to move back and find a beautiful woman and start a family. I saw beauty in my country as a young boy, and I know that the beauty is still there.

~ *Alexander Morris*

LIVING IN THE U.S.A.

Nora is originally from Honduras. She immigrated to this country in the 1960's. She came with the ambition to prosper and never return to the manner of living in Honduras.

She worked very hard in the cotton fields and in child care and never refused to do any work that was asked of her. After a few years she became a citizen of the U.S.A. and became married. She has a daughter and a grandson. Through the years she worked several jobs and met a lot of nice and good people. But a few were not kind, and she became downcast and wanted to go back to Honduras.

One day after her husband got sick, she decided to go to school to learn to speak better English. She looked at different schools and finally decided to call the Great Oaks Career campus. The director asked her what she wanted. She answered, "I don't know. The only thing I know is that I have an empty space in my brain and need to fill it." After meeting Lew and Joann, she felt at ease. They made her feel like home. So she will continue studying until she is able to teach young children the second language, which is Spanish.

~ Nora Burger

MY LIFE

My name is Carmen Cotto, and I am from Panama City, Panama. I have two sons and three grandchildren. My husband is working for Coca Cola Company. We have been living in this country for 19 years, and we enjoy living in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am working at Pierre Foods; this company is good to me. I like my job very much, and I help other Spanish-speaking people understand the English language. I have a lot to learn.

I like music, dance, singing, and walking. I also like to watch television. I miss my family in Panama, and I call them three times a week. My hope is that they can come to the United States someday for four weeks.

I have many nice friends at work and home; I love them so much. I want to learn reading and writing for better English, but it is hard for me. I hope I will learn it sometime.

~ *Carmen Cotto*

Beginning to Celebrate

BAH, HUMBUG!

Holidays – there are all kinds. We have Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Bah, Humbug is what I say. We've lost the true meaning of these holidays.

Easter is when we should be thanking Jesus for dying on that tree, but instead we watch for that bunny hopping down the bunny trail. Bah, Humbug is what I say. How do you get a rabbit to lay an egg?

Thanksgiving is a day we should be giving our love and thanks just to be able to sit around the table with family and friends enjoying that big feast. Bah, Humbug is what I say to too much fighting on this holiday.

Christmas. There are the pretty lights and that big tree, but when I look around, I don't see the baby in the manger. Oh, where can he be? I see Santa and his sleigh, Frosty and the old Grinch, but no sight of that babe that was born on Christmas Day. Bah, Humbug is what I say. We have lost the true meaning of these holidays.

Let's forget that rabbit. We know he can't lay an egg.

Let's forget the turkey and dressing, stop the fighting, and show our love instead.

Let's forget all the pretty lights and just throw that tree away. Take a minute to remember that little babe who was born on that Christmas Day.

Bah, Humbug is what I say. Is it too late to find the true meaning of these holidays? Bah, Humbug is what I say.

~ *Geraldine McQuitty*

MY TRIPS WEST

When we were young, in the early 60's, my husband and I drove west to the state of Washington. We started out from Ohio in April. We drove on old route 80, which at that time was just beginning to be built into four lanes.

I remember stopping at a roadside rest stop to eat lunch at a picnic site. It was a beautiful, sunny day, but a bit chilly. We sat at a table with budding trees and bushes on one side of it. We looked down and saw a cute little chipmunk about four inches tall just sitting there, eating away at his food, which he held out like he had two hands.

On the way through Wyoming, we saw a small, 1800's ghost town with a few white buildings. One was a saloon out in the middle of nowhere. There was not even one tree and no sign of people.

This state is as flat as it can get with a lot of open land. We saw Indians who lived on this land riding their horses and driving their cattle. Wyoming does have one set of large mountains, which we had to drive over, the Rocky Mountains. We drove into Cheyenne and did not see any snow, but when we drove up the mountains it had snowed about four inches. The snow plow was in front of us clearing the road. A person wouldn't want to be stranded in those mountains! There is not a store or gas station for miles. We drove over the mountains at night, and the next evening we saw a beautiful sunset with pretty blue sky, with low hanging white clouds. The sun looked like it was sinking down into the earth.

The next day we saw an antique car with a long, green body and yellow wheels sitting there on top of a huge sign saying "Pioneer Auto Museum." Further on up, we saw a

huge creature just standing there off the side of the road. It was a dinosaur. We called them long necks. It wasn't real!

On the way through Utah, the roads we traveled wound through high mountains. You could see each layer that was made over the centuries that built the mountains up to what they look like today. We also saw the Great Salt Lake.

On the way through Oregon we saw a river running up the mountain instead of going down. There were also beautiful waterfalls on the side of the mountain, like water coming slowly out of a hose, hitting rocks in a gentle stream. You could see a rainbow going across the waterfalls as the sun hit the mist.

Oregon is a beautiful place to see. There is a town called Dalles. Driving past, I looked up and saw a high hill full of dahlias four to six feet tall. There must have been hundreds of them, all the colors you could think of going across the hill. What a beautiful sight!

We drove along the Hood River and saw the huge Hood River Dam on our way into Washington State. We saw Mount Rainier. It is 14, 411 feet and is an active volcano with lots of dense forest. It was so huge and tall and had a top full of snow. People can go up only to a certain level to visit. Some actually go up in shorts in the summer because there is still snow and they can play in it. People can see Mount Rainier on a clear day from as far away as Tacoma and Seattle. Washington has the bluest water, and Tacoma and Seattle have lots of beaches. People go sailing on small boats and go swimming. We walked along the beach on sidewalks. People go skating there and walk their dogs. You can walk out to the dock and fish. We saw huge freighter ships and a ferry boat. It was very nice and relaxing.

We really enjoyed our visit, and the country was beautiful. Just last February, we made one last trip out west, but that time we took the northern route. I saw the Mississippi River and was thrilled by the sight of it. This is truly a beautiful country to see.

~ *Donna Hines*

A CHRISTMAS TRIP

For Christmas of 2006 I went to New York. I flew from Cleveland to Kennedy International Airport in New York City. When I saw my son and my granddaughters waiting for me, I gave them all big hugs.

My granddaughters had written letters to Santa Claus. I knew what they wanted for Christmas, and I bought these gifts in Ohio and brought them to New York for the girls.

During my visit we all went to an Italian restaurant. It was very pretty there and the food was so good! We also ate New York style hot dogs! My brother made a wonderful dinner for all of us. He prepared rice and beef, coquito, and sweet rice. It was a delicious holiday meal.

When we walked down Fifth Avenue, it felt like a dream! We visited St. Patrick's Cathedral. This church is big and beautiful. We walked through Central Park. This was so much fun for all of us at Christmas.

For New Year's Eve we watched the big ball go down in Times Square. The New Year, 2007 was beginning, and there were thousands of different kinds of people there. This was such a good Christmas trip. I hope I can go back next year, God willing.

~ Carmen Visalden

MEMORIES OF MOTHER

My mother was and still is today a great mother. She did not have much as a child, but she sure did have a lot of love in her heart to pass around.

She only completed the eighth grade. Her father and mother moved a lot in and out of town. She didn't like going to different schools. My mother is smart in many ways. She can do math really well. Still today, she keeps her money straight by figuring out her money and not overspending.

She is a great cook. She always made sure we had food on the table and always said, "Girls, are you ready for dessert?" She made homemade lemonade and sugar cookies for us in the hot summer months.

Mother would hand sew dresses for my younger sister and me to wear to school and church. I remember when I was younger she showed my sister and me how to draw dolls on paper. We liked to draw pictures and had coloring books. She showed us how to stay in the lines so the pictures would look good. I remember when she came back from the grocery store, she would tear up a brown paper sack to make art paper for us.

I remember when she would be sweeping the floor and some of us girls would bother her until she gave in and played with us. She would run through the house chasing us, and we would run screaming for joy. Sometimes she would cackle like a witch while she chased us. Other times, she would play "pinching bug" or Doctor – where we made her lay on the couch, fed her candy pills, put a washcloth on her head, and then we took her blood pressure or checked her heartbeat or her eyes. After a while she would say, "Girls, I

have laundry and supper to get done,” and then we’d let her go.

When I was eleven years old, I got really sick. Mother stayed up at nights taking care of me. She put hot towels on my back and legs to help with the pain. Then I went to Children’s Hospital. Mother couldn’t stay with me because she had seven other daughters and two of my brothers to take care of at home. Later, I had to have bed rest and didn’t get back to school until the last days of the school year. During that time, Mother waited on me hand and foot plus took care of all my other siblings and made sure supper was on the table and everyone was fed.

My mother never complained about anything. She just did her work and took care of everybody’s needs. She never had much either, but she just kept on giving her love to all of us. She always put everyone’s needs before hers. She taught us all how to be good to other people, not to lie because if we did nobody would trust us, and to be respectful to elders and not talk back to our aunts, uncles, or teachers. Do what we were told to do, but do not let anybody hurt us. If people were not honest, she wouldn’t go around them or talk to them. We followed her example.

Another reason I am proud of my mother is because at the age of forty-two (42), she had to take on the responsibility of the whole family when my father passed away. All the family responsibility lay on her shoulders. She never had a job outside the home before, so that was scary and exciting for her. I was proud of the way she took everything in stride, never letting things get to her. If they did, she never let her family know. She was never too tired for us or our problems.

My mother taught us to love the people who we love and are dear to us, how to be independent and not lean

on others to take care of us. She taught us to believe in God and “keep the faith” and believe in miracles. She has always been there for us children, and we will always be there for her, no matter how far we have to travel.

Therefore, these are just a few of the many reasons I want to thank her. She is eighty-one (81) years old.

“Thanks Mother.”

Love,
Your daughter

~ *Brenda Carroll*

BRAVERY AND HONOR

They go to unfamiliar lands
They do not always get hot meals
Or hot showers
Or warm beds
Or clean clothes

Some come home with no legs
Some come home with no arms
Some come home blind or deaf
And, sadly, some come home dead

But these sacrifices that they make
They do not make them in vain
For the reason that they make them
And have made them
From the Revolutionary War
To the war with Iraq today
Is so that their families
Can live in freedom

Dedicated to all soldiers especially my grandfather,
Edward Masters, who fought in World War Two

~ *Ethan Thomas*

CHRISTMAS

Standing in the kitchen all grown up with Grandma makes me think about how I learned to cook from what she taught me. She taught me all I need to know and what to do if there is a missing ingredient. My 79-year-old grandma cannot cook now, and it is up to me to cook, to carry on what she taught me. This past Christmas of 2006 was the first Christmas without Grandpa and him trying to grab a bite of sweets. I fear that this may be the last with Grandma.

I rose Christmas morning to find Grandma already awake, and to my surprise, the ham already in the oven. She told me that she wanted to help me out. I spent the next several hours preparing Christmas dinner, and we had a nice feast of mashed potatoes, vegetables, sweet potatoes, and cornbread. And the ham my grandma was so proud of. We didn't have much for Christmas. We didn't exchange gifts or visit much with relatives, but we had a small tree and we had Grandma. We all gave thanks to the Lord and for a good year.

Christmas to us this year was hard without Grandpa, but we were all grateful for what the Lord blessed us with.

~ Lindsey Wittmeyer

ONE LIFE

Did I ever thank YOU for my life YOU spared with YOURS
today?
I get down on my knees each night as I begin to pray!

I slowly walked upon YOU as the blood began to flow,
YOU hung from that old rugged cross as I watched from
down below!

YOUR feet and hands were nailed and the crown of thorns
was tightly wrapped around YOUR head,
And not too long after YOU hung there until YOU were
dead!

The cross YOU carried was so very heavy, but YOU did not
make a sound,
It was just three days later that YOU arose from beneath the
ground!

We rejoice in YOUR name as we give YOU our sins,
We gave away our old life, so a new one can begin!

~ Carolyn Sue Jones

MOTHER

My best friend
Sunshine on a dreary day
First face seen in the morning
Last face I see at night

Shoulder to cry on
Ear to listen

A source for favorite recipes
A companion for church

Teacher of sewing
of respect and prayer
Whatever I need
you are always there

and quick to share
happy laughter
pleasant walks
and private talks

I wish my mother
could live
forever

~ *Theresa Stone*

Beginning to Love



LIFE'S WATER POND

They say our love is but
A drop in life's water pond.
The tears of joy that come
In a new relationship.
The tears that are shed
When a loved one passes on.
The tears when we brought
A new life into the world.
Each and every tear we shed
Brings new waves to
Life's water pond.
All the tears we are made of are
But a drop in life's water pond.

~ Joanne "Nicky" Roach

PECK ON THE CHEEK

I'm awakened in the morning by a sudden peck on the cheek.
My eyes are still closed, and now my lips try to speak.
The very few words I've time to say right now
Are meant to make the bond between us rebond somehow.
Somehow I fit in: I love you, have a nice day or just
goodbye...in a rush.
I hope my words are helpful to you; not much time before
the bus.
And thank you for remembering me before you fly away for
the day
'Cause I feel so loved and special to greet the world this way.
I'm so happy you are my child – so close to my heart
So many mothers' children tear theirs apart.
I'm suddenly finding myself noticing a responsible young lady
And hey, you're making it harder to believe you ever were a
baby.
So, as I sometimes wish that I'd really like to sleep late,
That peck on the cheek makes me happy I'm alive, I'm awake.

~ Donna Caplinger

LOVING FATHER

I would like to be remembered as
A loving father
A father of three daughters
Hannah, Hayley, and Hope
A father who did his best to raise them on his own
A father who took them to sporting practices
and games for school
A father they came to when they were sad
A father they could talk to so they would feel better
A father that would give his own life to save them
A father that loved them
A father who was proud of his three beautiful daughters

~ Gary Bunch

REFLECTIONS OF LOVE

I feel for you the indescribable; I know you and I are only one soul. We don't need words to say "I love you" because we feel it when we look at each other. When you think of me and touch me, you don't need a sign of approval to know that you are me and I am you. You respect me all of the time because you love me, and I love you. You miss me and I miss you too. We always wait for each other. We wish always to be together from the start to the end of each day and for each minute of our lives.

Tenderness, passion, comprehension, respect, consideration, love, security—all is natural because there is love. In all relationships there is love. I do believe that a better way to live in peace is with love: loving your work, loving your friends, loving your children, loving your life.

This year was good although there was so much suffering. I missed my father, I missed my mother and other friends too. My sister Inirida had cancer; she had nine chemotherapies and she said, "I won't let that cancer kill me." With her second chemotherapy she lost her hair, her eyebrows, eyelashes, and almost her life, but love won the race: Love for her son, for her family, for her life. Her perseverance, her desire for life, for love, for help, to see her son grow up even more, and the love that she received from her friends and her family made it possible too.

We had a hard time, difficult, terrible; my sister who always was very happy, strong inviting and enterprising – I saw her in a condition of weariness, sadness, desolation, not wanting to think about tomorrow. This pain is hard for anyone to imagine. My heart shrinks when I think about it, but although that cancer made metastasis, it went the same way it came. It's a miracle that she was healed and is now cancer free; love triumphed.

In situations like this, love looks like it's been given in different ways, but in reality it is always the same, the same dedication, the same worry, the same interest and wishes for our beloved beings not to suffer and to keep them always with us. It is merely a human condition, which should never be forgotten because nothing prevents us from suffering by internal or external causes. We should cherish how beautiful life is. With love we can confront life and overcome all obstacles.

~ Doris Molina Hernandez

HOW I WOULD LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED

If it should be the will of God for me to die and go on to Heaven, I would like all my friends and family to remember me as a loving and good father. I would also like to be remembered as a loving and good husband. Most of all, I would like to be remembered for my spiritual life with God – a man who loved God and who was a good servant of God.

I would like my wife to remember me as a husband who had the love to prefer her over myself. That my wife would know that she was my best friend. I also would want her to believe and know that she was the love of my life. My wife and I have been married for 34 years. If I had a choice, I would do it all over again. If I had 10 lives, I would want to share them all with her.

I would also like to be remembered as a good father who loved his children very much. A dad who had patience with them when they didn't always do right. That I showed patience and gave them time to learn some lessons on their own. A father that was always there in their failure and their success, to cheer them on.

In my spiritual life, I would hope to leave a legacy of being a good servant. One who loved God with all his heart. One who was faithful to God and the house of God. Also, that I stood firm on the word of God. That my life would shine long after I am gone by the work that God allowed me to do by serving others.

I believe that these principles are the most valuable things that life holds. A good father, a good husband, and a good servant of God. I would hope to fulfill these valuable principles and be remembered for them if I die.

~ Donald Bunch

MY MIND WONDERS

Every time I close my eyes
My mind wonders
What would it be like if
I wasn't around?
Who would clean the house,
Cook, and take you to school?
Who would ask you, "How was school?"
Help you with your homework?
Who would replace my dinner chair?
Who would tuck you into bed,
Read you a story, tackle you,
Kiss you goodnight, and say, "I love you"?
My mind wonders
What would it be like?
No one knows the little things
That mean so much to you.
I wonder, what will tomorrow bring?
Will I be around to fulfill your needs?
My mind wonders every time I close my eyes.
What would it be like, if I were not by your side?

~ Ivette Soto

THINKING OF YOU

What is it like to find true love?
Is it like a splinter in your thumb
that you can't get out?
Is it like a rose that wouldn't grow,
or the light that wouldn't shine,
or the night that never ends?
And how will I know when I have found it?

Will it hit me like a speeding car,
or will it be as slow as a growing garden?
I hope that one day I will find it.

~ Shannon Zimmerman

Beginning to Learn



DID YOU HEAR ABOUT SAID?

Many verbs are used today to take the place of “said”.
The word is out, you know; they say that “said” is dead.

The verbs are used in many ways depending on their need.
Descriptive words are used to carry out this deed.

Here are some examples to show you what I mean.
These verbs are more expressive; they surely can be seen.

Instead of “said,” he “groaned”
Or is it that he “moaned”?

Replace the “said” with “bragged”
Or would you say he “nagged”?

Do you think he “grumbled”
When he really “mumbled”?

Or do you think he “bickered”
When he really “snickered”?

You can substitute with “shouted”
Or use a word like “pouted.”

“Recommended, refuted, retorted, or joked,
Testified, taunted, mentioned, or spoke.”

“Bantered, bellowed, babbled, or stuttered,
Cackled, giggled, laughed, or muttered.”

Now you know that “said” is dead.
Many words can be used instead.

~ Carol R. Rudder

WINTER CLASSES

My body shivers as I feel the cold
My tightened lips grow chapped and old
My mouth puffs smoke as a dragon will
My bright red cheeks start to glow
My fingers numb from the chill
My feet trudge determinedly through the snow
My mind tells me
To GED class I must go

~ Group of Great Oaks Students:

Victor Ankiambom

Blake Phillips

Melissa Randolph

Kathy Romans

Najia Salmi

Delores Smith

Rouhki Sylla

Rawan Zarour

PEOPLE ON WELFARE ARE LAZY

I'm on welfare.

You say and assume I'm lazy.

Did you know my first job was selling a tray of jewelry door to door at the age of fifteen?

Did you know I worked and paid taxes for almost 20 years before I had the need for assistance?

Did you know I'm the single mom of four?

Did you know I'm a football mom, a 4-H volunteer, a music booster, a children's church leader, and a clothes closet coordinator?

Did you know that I stayed working when my doctor said not to?

Did you know I found employment without a high school diploma?

Did you know I'm currently getting my GED, attending CASA classes, and planning on college?

Did you know my home is clean, my children are fed, and their clothes are clean?

Did you know my children are in church plays, the two oldest are high school grads, and the oldest was the valedictorian?

Did you know I drive 56 miles a day five days a week to give my children a good education and a fighting chance at a good future?

Did you know I receive no child support and work with only \$500 a month, which is going to drop to \$340 a month?

Did you know that with this assistance I pay my bills (including car insurance), have to manage gasoline all month, and still find a way to afford simple basic needs such as toilet paper and soap?

Did you know I've sewn everything from church play costumes to my girls' prom dresses to wedding dresses?

Did you know I make grave blankets for my beloved family members who have passed?

Did you know that I'm disabled and currently unemployable?

You assume I'm lazy because I receive welfare
Only because you don't know.

~ Debora L. Sellers

NO MORE EXCUSES

I was in my senior year of high school when I got pregnant with my first child. So I dropped out of school. I tried going back a couple of times to finish, but there was always some excuse for me to quit.

When I was twenty-six, I met my soul-mate. He tried to encourage me to go back to school and get my GED. Again, I got pregnant. There's my excuse, but I really didn't have one, because he was always there for me. My next excuse was because I had to work. I've been working dead-end jobs for the last twenty plus years.

My soul-mate (now my husband) never let up on me about going back to school. Both my children have graduated from high school. My oldest has an associate degree in business administration, and my youngest has enrolled in college for nursing. Once again, my husband said, "The kids are grown. Now what's your excuse?"

I'm now working two part-time jobs and attending GED classes. I hope to be enrolled in college within the next six to nine months. If you have family support, go for it. I'm so glad my husband didn't give up on me. With God, my family, and prayer, I know I can do it. NO MORE EXCUSES!

~ Althea Mitchem

I AM...

I am a student in the ABLE class.
I wonder how much I'll achieve.
I hear the teacher loud and clear.
I see everybody growing in their education.
I want to be successful.
I am a student in the ABLE class.

I pretend I understand when I don't.
I feel overwhelmed at times.
I touch my pencil; I'm ready to excel.
I worry about running out of time.
I cry out with joy when I get the right answer.
I am a student in the ABLE class.

I understand my teacher because she's passionate with her
work.

I say, "I can do it!"
I dream of my success.
I try something new everyday.
I hope I can be successful.
I am a student in the ABLE class.

~ Group of Students from Live Oaks:
Rose M. Buckner
Michaela Gill
Pankaj Patel

I AM...

I am a teacher in the ABLE program.
I wonder how my students are progressing.
I hear the questions the students ask.
I see various expressions on their faces.
I want to see students succeed.
I am a teacher in the ABLE program.

I pretend that I'm getting the point across to them.
I feel what they are feeling.
I touch their hearts as they touch mine.
I worry if I'm going too fast.
I cry when they are struggling.
I am a teacher in the ABLE program.

I understand the students are doing their best.
I say, "You can do it!"
I dream of them achieving their goals.
I try to do my level best.
I hope I have given them as much as they have given me.
I am a teacher in the ABLE program.

~ Group of Students from Live Oaks:
Rose M. Buckner
Marie Davis
Debra Smith

CONNECT AND PASS IT ON Where Roots Come From

Looking back at my childhood, my spiritual and life experiences molded a human being to draw on innovation and creativity to succeed in spite of the odds. At age 8, I wanted to be a doctor. I received a doctor's kit for Christmas. My mother allowed me to see that I could dream, and I knew that my elders believed in me when I received the Christmas gift. I began to expand my imagination and innovative approach to building and making things like racing carts, skate scooters, and sleds. My perfection and talent allowed me to take pride in building the best pair of skates in the neighborhood.

Even the way I approached my chore of collecting coal and wood for the burning furnace – I came up with yet another idea to create and produce a wooden chute with legs that would go from the window to the coal bin. I learned to “think outside the box” and be efficient with time and skills to benefit not only myself but also the entire family. Once again I shared my idea with my grandfather, an elder, who was pleased with my creative way of thinking and knowing how to implement the plan to make it come to fruition. As I became a teenager, I worked at a Chinese restaurant after school to buy my own clothes. As a male, my elders provided me the direction to take care of myself with pride. By the time I turned 14, it was inevitable that my skills, growth in innovation and creativity, and my elder roots created an opportunity for me to utilize my size to have the railroad supervisors believe that I was not 14 but 21. To guarantee this, I used coal to make a fake mustache. Clearly, I had aspirations to always seize the opportunities presented for personal growth and spiritual growth. When I turned 16, I signed up to go into the Army although the legal age was 18. My parents signed for me to have permission to enter the

Army early. However, my life was about to take an unexpected turn.

The very day I was supposed to leave for the Army, Anna's grandmother found that Anna was pregnant. A Judge told me I could spend 3 years in jail or marry Anna and give the baby a name. I married Anna in September and by December, our son, Curtis, was born. I quit school and got a job at International Harvester. I continued my commitment to complete school and started correspondence school for auto mechanics. Again, I dropped out of school and took on two jobs to support my family. Decades later, in Chicago, I started a General Education Diploma program to continue my aspiration of completing my education. I also worked for the food service industry as I went to Washburn Trade School. My school schedule was late in the day that ended at midnight and work was in the mornings. In hindsight, I think I would have become an engineer if I stayed consistent with completing my education. I loved taking on a variety of jobs.

Currently I look at my life at almost the age of 70, and I still have been creative and innovative in utilizing the ultimate strength that was passed on to me from my elders. My integrity and keeping my word for myself has allowed me to complete my G.E.D. this fall. I believe that my spiritual innovation to think outside the box has been passed down to my granddaughter, who has accomplished 3 college degrees. In her, I see the dreams and aspirations coming full circle of accomplishing the wisdom and knowledge that every person dreams of having in their lifetime. Ironically, I am completing my G.E.D. the very same year this grandchild will complete her third college degree. The connection of passing it on has taught me that elders' spirits and intention live on in all generations. This even allows for a younger generation to inspire me, an elder, to complete and fulfill dreams.

I feel and know I am a blessed man with a beautiful family that is spiritually powerful to transform generations to come. The pride of passing on traditions of the spirit and love to one another allows my spirit and wisdom to feel and say “well done.” I am forever grateful to see dreams come full circle and to fruition in my lifetime. Elders, and present and future generations, have a connection to inspire the human spirit.

~ *Curtis E. Davis Sr.*

THE ART OF WRITING A LOVE LETTER

Amor's arrow, the Roman God of Love, finally got you. It hit you right in your heart – you're in love! Nearly everybody knows this feeling, the beautiful and exciting feeling of butterflies that fly around in your stomach. You're in 7th heaven. There's only one problem: how am I going to tell the one I love that I've fallen in love with him or her?

There are many ways to confess your feelings. A very personal, but still distance-keeping way, is writing a love letter. All you have to do is write down your thoughts and feelings and mail the letter to the person you love. But that is easier said than done! Before you send the letter on its journey, you have a lot to do.

Which one of us hasn't sat in front of an empty sheet of paper, trying to fill it with emotional and capturing words? I have to admit not everyone is a "pro" at writing a love letter; not everyone has the last name Shakespeare. You become frightened of sounding stupid or not being taken seriously. There is this fear of being disappointed and embarrassing yourself.

One of the biggest fears is possibly that your feelings won't be reciprocated. Of course, there is the possibility that all the effort you brought into this letter won't bring the wished success. But you shouldn't be discouraged by that. There are no professionals when it comes to feelings and love. The more you try to make it perfect, the more it will sound forced and wrong. Let your heart lead your hand. Don't be afraid to write down what you're feeling. Translating affection into words can often be very difficult. Sometimes you might be frightened seeing your own feelings written down on a sheet of paper. But even if it seems threatening to you to open your heart, it's also important to

take risks to gain security – the security of knowing whether or not the person you love feels the same way about you.

The result of your effort doesn't matter; you relieved yourself. You wrote down your feelings. Nobody can give you a warranty for being successful with your love letter. Also, nobody can force you to send your letter. It's your decision if and when your letter arrives at its destination. You're still in power over the truth about your feelings.

At the end, we come to the conclusion that it's not art to write a love letter; it's art to actually send it to its destination – the person you love!

~ Jasmin Palasz

I AM...

I am a curious woman.
I wonder what is beyond our world.
I hear suspicious noises.
I see things I can't explain.
I want to learn about the unexplainable.
I am a curious woman.

I pretend that I am part of what's "out there."
I feel like I'm in heaven.
I touch the clouds.
I worry that I'm going to fall from space.
I cry out for help.
I am a curious woman.

I understand this might not be believable.
I say, "I wish people would listen to me."
I dream about life in outer space.
I try to do research.
I hope my research will be successful.
I am a curious woman.

~ *Students from Live Oaks:*
Sein Han Cozad
Melissa Jones

IN THE MAKING

What makes a poem?
Is it a sentence with rhyming words?
A set of stanzas?
Then what makes a poem absurd?

What makes a poet?
A person who shows their feelings through their writing?
A person with meaning and depth,
A person whose life they're still fighting?

What makes a judge?
Telling you what's art and what's not,
Making the decision that you're good enough,
When you're doing just what you were taught.

~ Tyeasha Bradford

HOLLYHOOD
(Eclectic Limerick Poetry)

Close your eyes and visualize, journey through my eyes.
Don't be surprised if vivid images leave you
hypnotized.

But in the meantime and in between time, just relax your
mind.
As my sounds of word play leave your thoughts
entwined.

Take a stroll with me, through "HollyHood" U.S.A.
No need to be nervous, it's just another day.

But in the beautiful land of "HollyHood" U.S.A.,
You'll find that we do things a different way.

In "HollyHood" there are entrepreneurs that work 9 to 5,
the *other* 9 to 5.
Up all night, hustling to get their cheese (money) on
a mission to survive.

Instead of country clubs and golf slacks,
We enjoy juke joints and big rims (wheels) on
Cadillacs.

Corporate America may call this life a hypothesis.
They may consider "HollyHood" a philosophy,

But I consider "HollyHood" a vision of reality.....
.....Peace (an interjection meaning goodbye).

~ Reggie Sanders



Beginning to Succeed



BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

Each time when I hold my driver's license in my hand, I feel happiness, gladness, even pride. I feel self-confident because I did it – I learned to drive, and that was an accomplishment!

A few years ago circumstances occurred that my husband and I remained at home alone because our children were living away from home for a few years. My husband was sick and all of his care, not only indoors but outdoors too, fell upon me.

I understood that we had to have our own private transportation. This was necessary to be independent from other people and feel free. My husband's health did not allow him to drive. Only I could solve this problem!

For American people (even women) this is not a big problem. They start to drive from sixteen and continue until ninety and even more. For me, at my age, it was a problem bigger than global warming for earth, because in my life I had never held a steering wheel. I understood that I didn't have another chance and I believed in myself. I decided I could do it.

I received my driver's license three months later. Now I have been driving for almost eight years. Oh yes, I was sixty-seven years old when I started to drive!

~ Ragiye Ibragimova

LEARNING TO OVERCOME MY DISABILITY SO I CAN BE FREE TO FLY

I did not know I had a learning disability until I started second grade. Teachers tried to help me understand addition and subtraction, but the higher the numbers went, the more I wanted to stop or shut down. I would get up and go over and listen to books on tape instead of working on math. In reading and spelling, I would say or write the word “dad” instead of “father,” which was the right word. Again, I would go listen to books.

“Angela has lots of problems with her work,” my teacher said to my mom. “She can’t focus because when she is not looking at me. Angela is lost, but if she is looking at me, she can stay on task.” The teacher continued, “I feel strongly that she is reading my lips; she needs to have her ears checked out.”

My mom said, “Angela, you need your ears tested by a specialist.” I needed to have tubes in my ears. My mom and I went to Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, to have my surgery. In one week I was back in school, and I was clearly hearing my teacher and classmates for the first time.

I just cannot explain how difficult having this learning disability was. I thought fixing my ear would fix my disability, but it did not. The next year, they put me in a special classroom. I was upset at the world, so I said to myself, “I give up on learning; I am too set in my ways.” It was like saying, “How do you teach an old dog new tricks?”

Years went by. I became shy around people and too nervous to say a word. I was afraid of making a mistake and having classmates laugh at me. I was like this until my husband came along and said it was okay to talk and to speak

my mind. Once when thinking back, he said to me, "I wish I had never encouraged you to talk and speak your mind because now you never shut up!" We both laughed.

We started a family together, and it was wonderful until my children started West School in Lancaster. While they were in kindergarten through second grade I was okay, but once they were in third grade I had to learn all over again. I attended the literacy class at the library where I learned that Helen Keller had a different disability. She needed someone to teach her to care about herself; then she started to learn. She knew she had to tell her story to other people because people with disabilities can learn if they have someone to care about them. I started GED class, and I have caring people around me, so I will not give up.

Now I have three teenagers, no husband, and one dog. I know now I can make it through anything. Teaching myself to care about my disability is hard because I am the hardest person I have to prove my worth to. To love yourself is to care about your hopes, dreams, and future.

My teachers help me understand what my disability is and how to work around it so I can learn. Teaching people without a disability is easy, but teaching people with a disability is not. Teaching a person with a disability is not teaching only subjects like reading, math, and social studies. It is also teaching them to care about the person inside the body like Helen Keller's teacher did. To care, to teach, is an awesome gift to give. My teachers are teaching me to understand my disability and to appreciate my gifts so I can be free.

~ Angela Keller

MY LIFE

When I was a youngster growing up I used to think that I had a very loving family that had not a problem in the world. My mother and father both worked and provided the best life that they could to me and my 2 brothers and sister. We always got what my parents could afford, but sometimes it wasn't exactly what we wanted.

I can remember one Christmas I wanted a bike. It was a bike that all the kids at school were talking about. It was called a SIGMA. It was white and gray with a free spinning sprocket. It had handle-grip brakes and mag wheels! I wanted that bike so bad, but I got a Huffy instead. I was upset, but after about 10 minutes I got over it, went outside, and was on that bike all day long.

By the time I was 13, I started to see changes with my mother and father. They were not as happy as I remembered when I was young. There was not a lot of family time anymore. We stayed at home a lot, and it was quiet in the house. When we played games like red light/green light, my mother and father would sometimes play with us, but all that had stopped. My father stayed in the backyard a lot working on everything he could get his hands on, and we started to spend a lot more time at Grandma's house.

Well, eventually they got a divorce, my father moved out, and we moved in with my grandmother. We lived with her for about two years and then my mother got an apartment around the corner. The years after that were kind of rough on my mother. She was raising four kids in a one-bedroom apartment.

My mother was a very laid back person. She did not complain a lot and was not big on discipline. She worked at a nursing home and went to school at night so she could be a nurse. I don't think she made the money that she wanted to, but it got us by.

One time for my birthday, when I was 15 or 16, I asked for a stereo. I was thinking she was going to buy me a small, hand-held boombox, but to my surprise she went out and got me a stereo with a CD player, tape player, and a record player, all in one. It also came with two speakers and a sub woofer for more bass. I think that was the best thing that happened since my mother and father had split up.

The hardest thing about that time was that I had a lot of questions that I did not want to ask my mother about things that I would hear from my friends about girls and sports. I wanted to play football, but I wanted my father to take me to the Boys & Girls Club and practice with me like all of my friends' fathers did.

I can remember when I was 16 or 17, my father called one day. I picked up the phone and said "hello" and he said he was going to come and pick me and my brothers and sister up for the weekend. He had moved to an apartment complex with a swimming pool, so we went swimming all that weekend. It was like everything was back to normal for the weekend. We were a family again, and we had no worries. My dad was back in the picture, and we talked to him a lot more often, but with us not living in the same house things were still different.

My brother and I got older and started spending a lot of time outside in the neighborhood. As we got older, our friends started to go to jail because they would get in trouble with the police.

My brother got caught one day and he went to jail for about two years. That was about the time I was done with selling drugs so I got a job at McDonald's. I think I was the only one on my street at the time that did not go to jail. I think I was the lucky one.

Well, after that, I dropped out of school and worked. I have had a lot of jobs from restaurants to being a janitor. All of those jobs were labor jobs with bosses saying "Do this and do that." I kept thinking that there had to be a better way of life for me.

When I started the job I have now, in shipping and handling, I thought it was a very good job. But after working there for three years, I began to look at my life and want more.

Sometimes at work, people from the front office bring in pictures of their new house or their new car and I always wondered how they got in the position to be able to have those things and not work so hard. I decided that I wanted to be able to go to work without the physical labor and get paid for what I know mentally. I think that can happen for me if I get focused on something and then stick to it. That is where I am today. I want to get my GED and go to college or get some kind of continuing education. I feel that if I can better myself by going back to school I can't be limited in the workplace. I have come to the conclusion that education is the key, and with it I will have more doors open. I want to be someone that was here for a purpose and did something good with my life.

~ *Jamiean Ruffin*

FULFILLING MY GOAL

I have been in a constant struggle with myself my entire life. I have always tried to improve everything. Nothing was ever good enough until it was perfect. Now I am ready again for that thinking, and I am going to push myself into the next chapter of my life. I am not going to stop until I am content with myself and have become who I know I am capable of being.

Many times in my childhood I pushed myself to be better and do more than what was expected of me. In school and at home, I always felt like I was in competition with myself. I felt that I had to be perfect in school and always be the best in the class. At home I felt that I had to keep up the same stamina to keep my parents proud of me. I always felt that there was so much more expected out of me because I was the brain of the family. My parents were always so proud of me, but it was always hard to feel proud of myself because I always felt that it was unfair to my sisters who didn't accomplish as much as I did.

I always felt that the world thought so highly of me. It was hard sometimes to try to be perfect. My teachers and parents always thought that I would be the one to succeed and do great things with my life. I was on the right track my entire life. I not only accomplished everything I attempted, but I mastered it and was the best at it. I was always my own biggest competitor. It was hard trying to keep everyone proud of me all of the time. The stress and pressure sometimes was almost too much to handle. I did sports and different activities just as something else to master. Things really started becoming too easy for me.

Then it happened: the time came when I felt that I had let everyone down. I had brought failure to everyone

that had put so much time and effort into my success. I felt that I failed myself and everything that I worked for my entire life. Life then became an unknown. I didn't finish high school, and I didn't get my diploma. That was the very first time in my life that I failed and didn't complete something. Due to all of the stress and pressure that I felt growing up to be perfect, I finally cracked. I wanted to be more normal and party. I wanted to rebel and show that I was a child, that I too could make mistakes. I ended up getting pregnant at 17 and becoming a mother by 18. I thought that my life was over and that I would never be anything because I was a failure.

Failure to complete one major thing in my life helped me to succeed in another. I became a mother. I devoted my life and time to my child. Everything that I had and knew I put into my daughter. I found love, and that was greater than any judgment or anything anyone could say or do to me. I realized that this was my life, and I embraced it. True happiness had entered my life for the very first time. She was someone who couldn't judge me for not being perfect, but rather someone who loved me for my flaws. The one thing that I once saw in my life as a failure really was just success wrapped in a different way – a way I never expected or thought I was ready for.

Now I am ready for something else in my life: to go back and complete what I started a few years back. I want to finally complete school and get my GED, to show myself and my daughter that I am still not a failure. I want to prove that I can still do it. I just needed to take time for the direction my life led me. I have spent the past six years raising my daughter and realizing the greater part of life. It is time for me now to repay her by educating myself and doing better for my family. She has given me confidence to make me want to be better.

Life doesn't always take you in the direction that you expect. It doesn't always lead you in the easiest way. The key to success is being able to handle what life gives you. Not to despair. To keep your head up and know that there is always tomorrow to take you into the future.

~ *Angela R. Nicolson*

A NEW CHAPTER

An important goal I would like to achieve in the next few years would be to develop a career and be an example to my family.

I am from a big family and, unfortunately, a highly under-educated one. I was never shown an example of anyone who worked “smarter not harder.” The women in my life have never had lives outside the home. None graduated from high school, learned to drive cars, or even had a job once their children came along. For whatever reason, it’s become a legacy to the women in my family not to enjoy life, just to live it.

When my thirtieth birthday was looming, I began to realize that I had a whole lot of time left to live. By choosing not to have a litter of children, I didn’t have to spread myself out. There was still a chance for me to end the cycle. I realized I could help everyone in my life just by helping myself.

I took a driving lesson two months before my birthday. I passed my driving test two weeks later. My sisters passed their driving tests soon after. By the end of the summer, I had inspired, encouraged, and taught several of the women in my life to drive.

It was then that I realized that without an example, I had never had anyone to aspire to be like.

Now that some of my family had decided to make an example of me, I had to move forward for all of us. I joined the ABLE class and made it a point to let all of my siblings know how exciting it was. I hoped that they would follow me. I decided that college was the next logical step. I passed

my GED test in December, 2006, and now I'm going to be a freshman at the University of Cincinnati. My sister has joined me in my educational venture; she is now enrolled in a community college.

Together, we are making a new path for those in our lives to follow. My hope is that more of my family will join me and help me to inspire their children and my children. I have started a new chapter for our family, and, by rewriting a few pages, I know it can be a great story.

~ *Lianna Bramer*

STRIVING FOR SUCCESS

My name is Kim, and I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. I had a learning disability in school and had a hard time. I have always wanted to improve myself in education.

When I was young, I always wrote my feelings down on paper. That is how I got myself through school. I also took up sign language, which became helpful when I went through some hearing loss. There were bullies in school that would pick on my speech. I knew I was slower than others, but they made me feel that I couldn't accomplish anything. I had to take speech therapy to improve the way I talked. This helped me feel a little better, but I still had low self-esteem.

I graduated from Mt. Healthy High School with a diploma in 1980. My junior and senior years, I attended a vocational school and studied secretarial skills. After I graduated, I went on to other training programs. I trained at Goodwill and learned factory skills. From there, I entered Jewish Vocational Services and worked in a factory packing Proctor & Gamble's products. I boxed the products and labeled them for shipping.

From there, I did odd jobs that included babysitting for both babies and senior citizens. I also worked in retail stores as a sales clerk and stock clerk. I am currently employed with Pierre Foods and have been for the past five years. I attend their Learning Center to better my math and open the door for better opportunities in the plant. I am very proud of myself because I recently got a promotion; I am now a Line Coordinator. I have been given many new responsibilities.

My learning disability has NOT held me back. I continue to strive for success. I've grown each and every day, and my self esteem has improved.

~ *Kim Wilson*

KEEP PUSHING

My mother believed in me more than I did.
I dropped out of school and had me a kid.

She looked out for me. She wanted the best.
I sort of gave up. I wanted to rest.

I was wasting my life. I was going nowhere.
She pushed me to want. She pushed me to care.
She pushed me and pushed me to go back to school.
I had to get up. I had to enroll.

Now I got my diploma and I'm going to college!
Where would I be without mom and her knowledge?

~ Aaron Keffer

Quiet Beginnings

THE TRAIN

At night I lie and listen to the train whenever things are quiet. I hear it down by the river at night. I wonder where the passengers are going and who they will meet. I listen as it slows down and blows the whistle. The train passes every night and sounds go further down the tracks.

~ Sue Glover

THE WIND

It twists and turns,
It frolics and romps,
It swirls and whirls,
It whistles and sings,
It brushes against almost everything.
It bellows and blows,
It shrieks and screams,
It whines and whispers,
It tugs and pulls,
It taunts and plays,
It swoops and sways,
It preys and frays,
It weakens and wanes,
It calls my name ...
Only to fall silent and die, once again to rise.

~ Jennifer Warren

SNOW

Glistening snow falls ever so softly,
Making not a single sound,
Covering the ground in its white beauty,
Producing the brightest reflection of the sun.

Children laugh and play
Grasping handfuls of it and pelting it at each other,
Each laughing as the balls of snow hit their targets
Dispersing their remnants to the ground once more.

I marvel at the immense amount of individual snowflakes
All piled one on top of the other,
Knowing not two are the same,
Astounded by the impossibility of this
And amazed at the ability of nature
to create the phenomenon.

I exhale, watching my breath as it leaves me.
I close my eyes and inhale the cool crisp air
And give thanks that I am yet again blessed
with another winter.

~ Marie Davis

THE OCEAN

Hear the roar of the ocean as the
Waves come crashing in.
Taste the salty beads of dew as it
Gently mists your face.
Feel the peace and tranquility while it
Whispers a nightly lullaby.

~ *Veronica Highfield*

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED

A couple of months ago, I went on an emergency trip to my country. I knew this was going to be the last time I would see my father; it was going to be a very difficult time for all my family.

When I was at the airport waiting for my connecting flight, I had time to sit down and watch people pass by. At that moment, I started to analyze some of them. I was thinking about their lives; were they waiting for somebody, or were they going on an emergency trip like I was? The only thing I felt in them was rush. They didn't seem to care about others' feelings; they seemed to care only about themselves. Of course, they didn't know what was going on in my life either!

At that time I didn't want to hear a noise, a conversation, even a cellular phone ringing. I was thinking – it would be a great idea if the airports or the airlines had special treatment for people who were traveling in an emergency situation, like me at that moment. The airport should have a quiet room where people can relax, or can be by themselves only with their sorrow. That day, it would have been nice if somebody had offered me something, but nobody knew what was going on in my mind. Who cares, I thought, only my family who was waiting for me in my country.

Have you ever lost someone dear in your family? It is a very sad time, but it is worse when you live so far away. It is so hard to know somebody is suffering, and you cannot do anything for them. My father passed away two weeks after I got there.

My father used to smoke for 40 years. He quit 20 years ago, but the damage was already in his lungs. During his

agony, he cried telling my family not to smoke; he was an example of what smoking can do to you. I wish I had a video tape, to show people who smoked the damage they are doing, not only to themselves, but to other people. My mother died 12 years ago, and doctors asked her if she used to smoke. No, not her, not even a cigarette, but she was with my father for 50 years and didn't know she was a second hand smoker at that time.

When I see people smoking, I feel so sorry for them. They don't know what they are doing, not only to their bodies but to somebody else. I wish they would stop it before it is too late.

I hope if you want to smoke, you think of all the people that will be affected by your decision. If you want to die, think about another way to do it, but do not take your loved ones with you!

On my way back home, I was watching people at the airport again, but this time they didn't bother me, I was one of them..... But have you ever wondered how life would be without your loved ones? Don't forget to always say "I love you" to them; you never know if that will be the last time you can say it!

~ *Claudia Cabell*

TWO FACES OF WIND

Wind
Strong, fierce
Destructive, howling, biting
Chilling to the bone
Devastation

Wind
Gentle, warm
Calming, billowy, cooling
Spreading fresh, fragrant scents
Comfort

~ *Students from Pierre Learning Center:*
Geeoun Post
Carol R. Rudder

LITTLE CHOCOLATE HOUSE

It is early in the morning on a winter day. It's cold outside, and I am very worried about my daily homework. I need to go to work and if it is possible I would like to catch up with work that's been due for a long time. I had my shower; I am in my uniform and ready to start my day of work. Now I have a moment to take a seat and drink my cup of hot chocolate. I feel comfortable and I am only concentrating in the exquisite taste of my cup of hot chocolate. I sense the aroma of chocolate through the house and it brings me great memories with my parents and my brothers, as well as having breakfast in the cottage with my sons. I feel a comfortable sensation when I smell and drink the hot chocolate. I don't want to stop feeling this pleasure that carries me away to many sweet memories of my infancy when our happiness was found in the smallest of details.

My husband and my sons just got up, and they are happy. They want a cup of hot chocolate too. They are not worried about anything, and the odor of hot chocolate invades them. My family joins me, and we sit together to enjoy the moment while drinking hot chocolate. Oh lord, if everything could be just like a cup of hot chocolate on a winter day!

~ *Doris Molina Hernandez*

Beginning to Heal



FROM PAIN TO TRIUMPH

This is a true story about demons that I have conquered and anger that I have channeled and overcome.

There were times when my childhood was bearable; there were times when my childhood was very hard; but never was my childhood unbearable or I would not be here today. If it had not been for James, my counselor, my loving family and friends, and the Lord above, I would still be struggling.

When I was 7 years old, I was diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD. On top of that, my father, at about that same time, was suffering a severe nervous breakdown that lasted two or three years. Because of his nervous breakdown, he had to retire at the age of 39, after 21 years as a Cincinnati police officer. He had not made enough money to support the family. When he recovered, he didn't try to regain his job as a policeman; he fooled around with part-time jobs or should I say, "dead-end jobs." Because of my father's poor choices, my mother had to work full time. This created a tremendous predicament for me because I was home schooled. My mother couldn't find much time to teach me, and my father was too lazy. For many years, I free floated. I couldn't spell, I stumbled a lot when I read, and it seemed like there was a better chance of Hell freezing over than me ever learning to work around my disabilities.

When I was 15, my mom took me to see a doctor who specialized in helping people with learning disabilities. I made no progress. I felt like a complete imbecile, especially when other kids laughed at me, which happened quite frequently. Between that, and being verbally abused by my father, I became very shy and easily dominated.

When I was 16, my mom took a class to learn a special teaching method, which was to have me use as many of my senses as I could. When we tried it, I went through the roof with my spelling skills, but the hard part still had yet to come. I still couldn't write a group of sentences adequately.

When I was 17, my father left. Nothing could have prepared me for that. I was confused at first. Then I blamed myself and almost took my own life to punish myself, but I realized that I would not have eased my pain by any means. I started drinking; I drank more and more often to the point where it became a daily thing. I thought that it would make me feel better, and it did, but only in the short run. I was starting to see things from a different perspective. I was angry at the whole world. I took every little thing personally. I was beginning to feel like everyone was out to make me miserable. I became very unpleasant to be around.

My misery didn't last forever. My mom had to work more than ever, so my Uncle Dan started tutoring me. He worked with me for a year and a half and helped me improve my writing skills. By the time I was 18, my writing skills skyrocketed. I was writing poetry and short stories. There was a time when I avoided writing; I was afraid of it. Now, it's one of my biggest hobbies, and, as a lot of people have told me, I am a very talented writer.

When I was 19, the youth minister of my parish, John, and his friend, Matt, who have both become good friends of mine, introduced me to a young adult group. These people have really raised my self-esteem. They have accepted me for who I am.

Three months after my 20th birthday, I started attending classes at Live Oaks to prepare for the GED. That was a load off, because I was finally setting a goal for myself. I

went through with it, and I have learned a valuable lesson. The lesson I have learned is to look at what I hope to achieve in the future, not what I didn't get in the past. My life has been like a frying pan. If I committed suicide when my father left, I would have been jumping from the frying pan to the fire; but because I hung in there, the pan was taken off the heat, and now my life is better than ever.

For those of you who have learning disabilities, remember one thing: you are **not** stupid. Do not believe anyone who tries to convince you that you are. You just learn differently from most people. There are people who have helped me find the way that I learn; my mom, my uncle, my counselor, and my teachers at Live Oaks. No matter where you live, there are many people who can help you find the way that you learn. It is not a lost cause. For those of you whose parents are getting a divorce, I have lots of advice that I have based on my own personal experience.

Number one: understand that it is not your fault. I am not saying that it *probably* isn't your fault; I am saying that it is *absolutely* not your fault. It has to do with their relationship with each other; it is never your fault no matter what anyone says. It also helps to know how and why it happened, because if you know who is at fault, you'll know who needs your forgiveness and your prayers. If you know that, you will heal much sooner.

Number two: there is no easy way out. Drugs and alcohol are nothing more than band-aids, filthy ones. They will cover up the wounds temporarily, but they will not heal them; they will only make them worse. Suicide is not the answer either. It doesn't solve anything; it only eliminates your chances and hurts the people who love you. Do not try to pretend that it isn't happening. Hiding from it won't make it go away; it won't make you forget it; it will only make your anger build up inside you and make you a walking time bomb.

You have to face it. Just remember that you don't have to face it alone. There are people who love you and want to help you. There are a lot of people who love me and have helped me.

Number three: it helps to know someone who's been through it. My best friend's parents, Christie and Dean, both went through it when they were growing up. My father's siblings, Louis and Keith, went through it. I also have a friend named Stephanie who has been through it. All these people have empathized with me and have helped me come a long way. They all have a special place in my heart. I hope that each of you can find a friend like that because it helps to be reminded that you're not alone.

Number four: if you have a good memory of the parent that you're angry with, hold on to that and forget the unpleasant memories. Hold on to that one good experience that you had with him or her because that's the only memory of him or her that will ease your pain.

Last but not least, remember that it is okay to cry; I'm not just saying that to you girls, I'm saying that to you guys as well. I know that some of you might find it very embarrassing and, frankly, there have been times when I wouldn't have blamed you; but I've done it and it helped. When it was over and done with, I felt 50 pounds lighter. I'm not saying that you have to force yourself to cry, but if you ever get the urge and you can't get it past your throat, take the advice that my friend, Susie, once gave me. "If you get the lump in your throat and you can't get it out, say a prayer because then, at least you're acknowledging it."

It won't work overnight; it will take some time. But I promise you, if you take my advice, you will go from pain to triumph.

~ *Ethan Thomas*

DECEPTION

Stacey's phone rang a sweet little jingle as she looked into the mirror and applied her brown eye liner. She reached over and grabbed for her phone with her thin fingers. As her fingertips met the phone, she flipped it open and put it to her ear.

"Hello?" she called. The voice on the other end came back deep and shaky.

"Stacey. It's me. I'm in trouble."

"Who is this? Brandon?" Brandon was a tall and unusually skinny man. He had blond hair and needle marks in the middle of his inner arms.

"Stacey, I need your help. Aaron found me. I'm in the pub. They're going to kill me, Stacey."

Stacey paused for a moment to let the words sink in. "Brandon, I gave you money. I gave you ten grand to give to them a month ago. What happened?" Her voice sounded surprised and frustrated at the same time.

"Uh Stacey, I have no time to talk now. I need three grand now or they are going to kill me."

"Damn it, Brandon!" She paused in thought as she looked around her tiny bathroom. "I'll be there in 20 minutes."

"O.K., sis," he said, his voice trembling. "I love you."

As Stacey hung up the phone, she cursed and looked at her pale slender face in the mirror. She headed for the door as she threw on her coat and grabbed her purse.

Stacey arrived at the pub with a yellow envelope tucked under her left arm. She opened the door and stepped into the darkened room. The bar appeared to be mostly deserted except for six men sitting in a corner booth. As she walked toward the men, she took a deep breath and noticed the bartender duck into a back room. "He's probably as scared as I am," she thought to herself as she got closer. When she was close enough to see their faces, a rather large

man at the end of the booth got up and motioned for her to sit down. She sat lightly on the sticky seat and looked up at her brother's petrified face. He looked as though he hadn't slept in days.

"Brandon," she whispered in a frightened voice.

"Your brother has gotten himself into a bit of a mess." The voice came from the dark-haired man to Brandon's right. The man's name was Aaron. He was Brandon's dealer. He was a very large man, so large in fact that his chin covered his neck completely. When Stacey looked at him, she found him staring straight back at her. Stacey looked down, terrified, but she still felt his eyes staring so hard she thought they would burn a hole right through the top of her head. "He owes us a lot of money," he said as he continued to stare.

"Yes sir, I have three grand with me. I can get you the rest by next month. Please don't..." Her voice trailed off as Aaron raised his enormous hand to silence her.

"He owes us more than you can give, my dear. In fact, more than you earn in a year at the library, but there is an up side. Your brother has found a way to repay us the amount he owes and more." The man glanced at Brandon with a giant grin on his face. He then looked back at Stacey. "Your brother is very twisted."

Stacey looked puzzled as she glanced from the man's enormous face to her brother's reddening face. For only a moment, his eyes caught hers before he put his head down in shame. "Brandon, what are they talking about?" She was terrified at this point. As she stared at Brandon, her eyes widened. "You don't mean...?"

Stacey grew frantic; she took one last look at the fat man and jumped to her feet. She turned for the door and ran directly into the man that was sitting there when she walked in.

"Going somewhere, sweetheart?" The man looked down as he grabbed her shoulders and spun her around to face the giant man now getting to his feet.

“Your brother has no morals. You see, to pay off his debt,” the man paused as he stared at her, “he has given us you.” Aaron’s smile widened as he looked Stacey over. The gigantic man grabbed the yellow envelope off the floor and threw it to Brandon. Brandon let it hit him in the chest then put his head in his hands and wept. Aaron looked at the crying man and shook his head. Then he motioned to one of his men. “Go get the car, bring it around back, and let’s get going.” The man walked quickly off as he turned back to the woman. “Tie her up and put her in the trunk. I would like to get her working soon.”

Stacey looked at her brother and had more hatred for him now than any other feeling. Glancing around the room, she slowly reached into her pocket and pulled out a snub-nosed 38 special. She knew that she would only have time to get off one shot. She lifted the gun and pointed it right between the eyes of the fat man. Everyone in the room froze. Stacey shifted just a bit as she took her only shot. The bullet went right by Aaron’s head and hit her brother right in the left eye. All the men hit the floor as she fired the weapon. For just a moment everyone was silent. They were in shock at the violence that had just occurred. She looked at her brother for a split second longer and ran for the door. Several more shots could be heard as she exited the bar and ran down the street.

~ Heather L. Schrull

BORN ON THE 4TH DAY OF NOVEMBER

Born on the 4th day of November,
This is a day that I will always remember.

Life was nice, the baby of eleven.
Five brothers, five sisters; I was truly in Heaven.

But I should have known that the joy would not last.
Ten years later my mother would pass.

Don't like to talk about that; it just makes me want to melt.
Let me tell you more about my life and the hand I was dealt.

Raised by my father; he was a man who loved to drink.
He gave me the world, even the kitchen sink.

A very proud man that would give you his last ten,
But I wasn't his first love. I came in second to gin.

My father was proud of me; I could tell by the way he talked.
Yet, he never had time for simple things, not even to go for a walk.

I craved for attention and was very popular in school.
I was the best dressed; I looked good; everyone thought I was cool.

Later I dropped out of school because I didn't want to go.
No one paid any attention, so how would anyone know?

Met a man, and we moved in together.
I thought we were in love and he would be there forever.

We both wanted children so we worked on that first.
We wasted no time, nine months later I gave birth.

Just what we wanted – a bouncing baby boy.
He made us both happy; he brought us so much joy.

Sixteen months later I had another son.
It wasn't easy; that's when all the drama begun.

He became really violent; everything was my fault.
I had to have him arrested for attempted assault.

Stayed with him anyway because I was I.
You can say that I loved him and didn't want to leave.

I was unable to leave, and I couldn't come out of the house,
Not having friends was a rule of my spouse.

He always would tell me he loved me, and I believed him
Even when he wouldn't come home and would sleep with
other women.

He would hit me, smack me, and call me names,
I would back down, cry, and play his game.

I kept it a secret; I didn't want anyone to know.
The life that I was living I had to keep on the down low.

I wanted to get out; I was scared to death.
Then one day I packed up my things, and I finally left.

I moved to Atlanta, GA; my sister said "come, stay with me."
Didn't want to live with her long; I just wanted to get on my
feet.

When I got out there, I knew things seemed a little shady –
The house where my sister lived was the home of some
other lady.

I knew I couldn't stay there long, living there was sheer hell.
With all the drama that went on in that house on Creekview
Trail.

My sister called me childish, said that I hide behind my kids.
She told me I need to grow up. I didn't even know what I did.

So, I went to a shelter so I could have peace of mind.
The kids and I were happy there; we would be there only a
short time.

Living in the shelter was going well if you ask me
Until February 25th when my son was hit by a taxi.

My God, what else can I be dealt, the cards that you have
given to me suck.
What made this situation so crazy was that I watched my son
get struck.

This is a true story, you have heard me correct.
My son had suffered a brain injury, a broken kidney, leg, and
neck.

The doctor said it was hopeless; my son's injuries were too
intense.
Everything was happening so fast; it didn't make any sense.

A nurse told me he might not walk; the doctor said he could
die.
His neurologist didn't know what to think; he said I should be
glad he had youth on his side.

Jesus was who I had to call on to help my son get through,
Praying to keep my sanity and raising the other three too.

My children and I made it; we knew it would not last
Only having one another we knew that this too shall pass.

Perfect strangers came to our aid; people we never knew.
They helped me to cope with the drama and raised money
for us too.

Where was my family when I needed them most? I may have
mentioned them twice,
But they weren't involved in my simple little life.

Some had work to finish and others had things to do.
Two came to visit; the rest never knew.

I am a very strong woman as you can tell. I let nothing break
me.
With a lot of prayer I've made it through all this adversity.

Life for me wasn't easy, but I always have a smile,
For who knows what's around the corner or ahead the next
mile.

So keep your head up, never stop, and always remember to
pray,
Because tomorrow is not promised, and neither is today.

~ Donna E. Williams

ONE DAY AT A TIME

What does it mean to take one day at a time?
My today is filled with yesterday and tomorrow.
Tomorrow did not take care of itself; it was waiting
for me when I got there. Taunting me, saying,
“You should have taken care of me yesterday.”
My yesterday told me, “I will never be your past.”
My one day at a time said, “This is too much for you; let it
go.”

~ *Mahalia Jackson*

STRUGGLE

Coming from where I come from, you learn to count your blessings and embrace the truth no matter how bad it is. Lately I've been faced with a lot of truth.

I am a 35-year-old woman with two kids and no man, and I'm struggling on my own. I know that's a story that is told over and over. But mine is a little different. Spring of 2006 I met a wonderful man who took care of all of my needs and wants. He was a proud strong man who lifted me up whenever I was down.

My life was never easy, until he came along. Once he told me he loved me and wanted to marry me. Well, that was something that I thought I would never do. I mean I'm 35; two kids, two baby daddies, and I don't have good luck.

Everyday I thanked God for my man that I wished for. Oh yes, he gave me everything I needed and some things I didn't. He got really comfortable with me and my surroundings. I'll never forget one day he took me on a shopping spree. We went to a wonderful dinner, and that's the night it all began. It started with an argument about how ungrateful he thought I was. Then he decided to slap me to show me how serious he was, then a punch, then to top it all off he kicked me unconscious. That man beat me for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and sometimes dessert.

I stayed through it all and I actually married that fool. I kept up with everything he wanted so he wouldn't beat me. He beat me so much he beat my soul.

I realized that I had to get out for the sake of my kids and my life. I had to go. One day I waited until he went to work, packed my kids, and bolted. When I left I had no

money, no where to go, no idea what to do, but I was free.
Thank God Almighty I Was Free.

Every morning I woke up with the same boring
routine. Get my kids together, go to work, and live my life
strong. Now I appreciate my struggle.

~ *Brandi A. Gilmer*

DON'T BE LIKE ME

Don't be like me; be better than me. I'm thirty-five years old, and I had a normal childhood growing up. I had a good home life and parents who cared about me. Even today my parents have been married for forty-one years. My life was good and as normal as one could expect. I had good friends and a great life. Then one day it all changed.

I started drinking alcohol when I was sixteen years old. The next thing I knew I had been charged with a DUI (Driving Under the Influence). My parents paid my fines, sent me to DUI school, and managed to keep me out of jail. My parents thought I had learned my lesson, but I did not pay attention to them. I thought I knew everything; I only went to DUI school because I was forced. In 1990, I graduated from high school; then my real problems began. I spent most of my days working in a local bakery. I spent my free time with my friends, and I continued to drink.

In 1993, Labor Day weekend, I cashed my paycheck and met up with my best friend at the bar to shoot some pool. I had had very little sleep the night before and had spent all day working at the bakery. I remember being so tired that night I laid my head down on the bar table. Soon after we agreed it was time to go home. I remember leaving the bar that night with two friends. The rest is kind of a blur. I got behind the wheel and dropped off one of my friends at his home. The other guy, my best friend, stayed in the vehicle. We headed to my house. We never got there.

I woke up in the hospital in intensive care with my mother standing over my hospital bed. When I asked what had happened, she told me I wrecked the car, and suddenly it felt like someone stuck a sword into my stomach. She told me that my best friend didn't survive the accident. I pulled

my hospital gown up and saw seven staples in my stomach. I had two broken femur bones, my heels had been crushed, and my liver was lacerated. The doctors weren't sure I would survive long enough to experience the surgery on my body.

I spent the next nine days in intensive care and finally managed to come home from the hospital in a wheelchair. I had casts on my legs and casts on my heels. I had scars all over my body, and I was in pain. You can imagine the amount of physical pain I was in, but most of the pain I suffered was over the death of my best friend. The scars I had outside were nothing compared to the scars I had inside. While sitting at home, I kept hearing whispers from my friend saying, "Why, Craig, why?"

Over the next several months I saw many doctors about my legs and heels. I remember the doctor telling me that every time I took a step I would remember the accident because my heels would never be the same. My body healed itself and things appeared to be fine until one day the sheriff came to my house and served me a warrant to appear in court. I went to court where I was charged with vehicular homicide, a felony charge. I was found guilty and sentenced to nine years in prison. Prison was a terrible experience. I was scared of the other inmates. The worst thing about prison was that I missed my parents and family. I spent a total of five and a half years in prison and was later released on parole.

When I got out of prison and came home, I could never forget the accident. I still had pain in my heels and could feel it with every step. The wreck and the feelings for my dead friend would not go away, so I washed them away with alcohol. In 2002 I got mixed up with the wrong people. One day I was involved in an altercation and was violently hit in the head. I was life-flighted to OSU Medical Center where

they performed brain surgery. After the incident I remembered nothing. I was weak and they kept me in intensive care for seventeen days. I would go on to live the rest of my life with a severe brain injury. My life will never be the same again.

Now I spend my time talking to others about the mistakes of drinking and driving. Every month I speak at the DUI school. I wanted to find a way to teach others about my mistakes and about the death of my friend. I am now in school to become a drug and alcohol counselor. I thank my teachers Scott Meredith, Gina Bichard, and Selly Bloom for the time and hard work they spend with me each day. As every week goes by, I'm thinking about my best friend's death. He is my drive and determination to become a drug and alcohol counselor. For him I dedicate my work, my life, and my hopes of reaching others.

~ Craig Morris

RACISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This is the 21st century, and I thought racism did not exist anymore. I learned first hand that I was wrong.

I am Korean and my husband is American. Of course, my two boys are a mixed race. A couple of months ago my younger son met a girl in his physics class. They started going out together as boyfriend and girlfriend. We welcomed her into our home.

The first day my son visited her parents, her daddy didn't welcome my son. He didn't come out to say hello to my son. On my son's second visit he didn't bother to meet him again. When I asked him about the visit, my son told me that his girlfriend's daddy didn't want him going out with his daughter. He doesn't believe in mixed marriage or dating either. When I heard this I was angry. I couldn't believe in America in the 21st century such ignorance could exist.

I married my husband more than two decades ago. At that time, in my country's culture mixed marriage was strongly discouraged. Marrying a foreigner was considered shameful. When I told my parents I was going to marry my husband, I knew they would not be happy about it. However, they did not act ignorant. They wanted to get to know my future husband. My parents knew right from wrong. After they learned more about my husband they were happy for me. Mother told me, "It doesn't matter about looks and skin color. What is important is if your husband is nice and makes you happy." If I am happy that is all that matters. This was what my mother told me. Even my parents-in-law told me they were going to trust their son. They believed their son would choose the right person, and they wanted their son happy. This was more than two decades ago.

My son and his girlfriend are still going out together. It made her father angry to know his daughter was seeing my son. My son is not to come in their house at all when her dad is home.

Racism has happened to me several times since I moved to Ohio. I can deal with stupidity and ignorance, but not when it comes to my child. We raised our children very well. They are smart, sweet, handsome, athletic, and well mannered. I never heard from others anything negative about my boys. Every parent, coach, teacher, and even student told us we have good boys. All these compliments from others made me happy and proud of my boys.

I want to ask my son's girlfriend's father why he thinks his skin color is better than others. How many Americans have pure blood? What is wrong with a mixed baby? I want to shout at him, "What color blood do you think you have?" This is the 21st century. The whole world is closer than ever. You sit in a living room and with one push of the button on the TV you can see the whole world.

I was worried about my son. I did not want him to have a scar on his heart. He is still too young to deal with this kind of prejudice. One day we talked about what happened to him, but he understood it better than I. I was embarrassed in front of my son because of what he said to me. He said that he was okay. My son respected his girlfriend's father's opinion. When he said that I said to my son, "This is not an opinion; this is racism." I know this incident has hurt his heart. I told him that I was very proud of him. I said, "You are a better person than your girlfriend's father." When I talked with my son, my heart was angry, and I was crying.

Now I wonder why all my friends told me how good my boys were. They said they wished their daughters would date my sons. I would like to ask them if they really meant it. One

thing I know, and that is I am very proud of my sons. They are better than stupid ignorant people. I want everyone to know that this is the 21st century, and we are all one people under God.

I wish this experience had not happened to my son, but I realize this is the reality in America. I can't do anything to change ignorance, but I can pray. I pray for my son's girlfriend's father and myself. I ask God to help me with my anger. I believe someday we will all be together with God.

~ Kilcha Canfield

THE MANY FACES OF LOSS

Everybody has a story. Some people seem to be lucky, and everything they do succeeds. Others are unfortunate, and everything they do seems to go in the wrong direction. I would like to tell the story about someone I knew nearly 20 years ago.

In 1987 I lived in Santiago de Cali, Colombia. I was married and had two wonderful sons. Although my relationship with my husband wasn't the best, we both enjoyed our boys very much. We lived in a beautiful new condominium. Everyone in the complex seemed to be very happy, except for the lady who lived next door. She appeared to be almost 60 and never spent time with anyone else. I always saw her with her granddaughter who was 12 years old. Sometimes my sons would play or swim with this little girl, so we knew that the two of them lived alone. The children enjoyed spending time together.

As the years passed, everybody in the complex got closer. We had meetings and parties, but this lady never showed up. Her granddaughter, Carolina, grew into a lovely young lady with long black hair and blue eyes. She was sweet and cheerful.

One day on my way home from work, I ran into them in the parking lot. They were very excited. Carolina's mother, who had been living in Spain, was coming back to Cali soon. I said to the grandmother, "Mrs. Carmen, I think we should plan a Welcome Home party for your daughter."

The older lady replied, "Yes, I think my job will be finished by then. My daughter went to Spain when Carolina was only five years old." Carolina was eager to see her mother and her little sister after so many years.

Soon after this, Carolina came to my home to show me her bulldog, Papy, which her mother had given her for her fifteenth birthday the previous year. Carolina took the dog with her everywhere. It was a big, beautiful dog and very protective of Carolina.

Almost everyone in the condominium complex was invited to the party to welcome Mrs. Carmen's daughter home from Spain. The happiness in Mrs. Carmen's face seemed to dissolve years of worry and make her look younger. I felt much sympathy for her because of the difficult life she must have had.

That year at Christmas, our family went to my husband's father's farm for vacation. We returned to Cali in the middle of January. My husband was approached by one of the groundskeepers soon after our return. The man said, "Something terrible has happened! I'm not allowed to say anything, but you can ask one of your neighbors." We thought something had happened in our condo, so we immediately went to one of our neighbors, Mrs. Martha.

"Yes, it is terrible," she said. "It happened in early January. Three guys came to Mrs. Carmen's condo. She wasn't there, but her daughter and granddaughters were. The younger girl was in her room watching TV, and Carolina was with her mother in the living room. The men knocked on the door, and Carolina's mother opened it. Later we heard screaming. After about 30 minutes, the men left."

My heart was pumping fast. I asked her to tell us what happened. Our neighbor told us that minutes after they left, they heard the little girl crying, "Mi mami! Mi mami!" Another neighbor went in and found the two women beheaded. It appeared that Carolina had been trying to protect her mother when she was killed. I immediately asked

about Carolina's dog. Our neighbor said that her mother had tied it up before opening the door. When I asked about Mrs. Carmen, our neighbor said she was in the hospital. We were all devastated by this horrible news.

For the next year we all lived with this terrible nightmare. During this time I gave birth to our third son. He brought much happiness into our lives, though we constantly lived with the memory of this horrible tragedy. I had trouble sleeping almost every night. I even thought this event had brought us bad luck because during this time I was struggling with separation from my husband.

As anyone who has been through this knows, it takes great resolve and determination at a time like this. I had to make decisions and be strong; I decided to take my three boys to their grandparents' home in another city. This meant storing my furniture, renting my home, and looking for a job.

I must explain that looking for a job when you are over 30 years old is very difficult in Colombia. I was in a desperate situation and did not have time to think about other problems. I stopped thinking about Mrs. Carmen since I wasn't living in that complex anymore.

One evening I was just sitting in my car crying. Why did I have to be separated from my children? Why did I have to go through this? The very next day I was in the city looking for a job, and I ran into Mrs. Carmen. We hugged each other and cried. I asked her if she had time for coffee, and she did. She was very sympathetic when I told her what I was going through.

She then told me the story of her life:

I came from a very humble background. I grew up in the country, and when I was 20 years old, I went to Bogota. It was hard to survive in the big city, but I did. At that time, it was not acceptable for young people to leave their homes. After I left, my father disowned me even though I sent money home to them. I went back to visit after about ten years, and my father told me that my mother had already died. I returned to Bogota.

One day I met a man who promised me a wonderful life. I became pregnant. He left two months before my daughter was born, and I ended up raising my daughter alone. I worked as a maid until my daughter was 12 years old. I don't remember ever having a vacation. My daughter eventually married but after several years, her husband began abusing her. My daughter and I then moved to this city. My daughter moved to Spain when Carolina was five years old. From that time on, my dream was to have my family back together.

When my daughter came home, I thought it was the beginning of my happiness. I never imagined my daughter and granddaughter would have such horrible deaths. I don't know why this happened to me, but what I do know is that I have to stand up and move on because I still have my five-year-old granddaughter. She gives me hope.

When I left her that day, I felt that I now had the resolve to fight against anything that tried to take my sons away from me. I was reminded of an old saying: "I used to cry because I had no shoes until I met someone with no feet." I knew how lucky I was.

~ Emily Nutter

TRAPPED IN A CAGE

Here in a place run by a push of a
A button, thinking in the back of my
Mind: Does life really mean something?
I'm trapped in a cage.

I wake in the mornings by a voice
Saying to get out of bed. It's chow
Call. It's time to be fed.
I'm trapped in a cage.

Like an animal waiting to be set free
The sounds of these doors opening
And shutting. Man, that really bothers me.
I'm trapped in a cage.

Three hots and a cot is what they said.
Waking up to see I'm here are the days I dread
Sometimes I don't know what to do but I look
Up to the sky and God sees me through.
I'm trapped in a cage.

Although there's day ahead being in this cage
My Lord sees me wake up and go to bed.
And I will soon be in a glorious place.
I'm trapped in a cage.

Let the Spirit lead you and you will be set
Free from all bondage and all anxiety.
Jesus died for the love of you plus me so
The day he rises again will be an eternity.
I'm trapped in a cage.

Amen.

~ Timothy Edwards

DEAR SON

Dear Elijah'Bleu,

I hope one day you can fully comprehend how grateful I am to have you in my life. Right now you are 1 year old; before we know it, you will be 21. I pray every night that I will be blessed to live the next 20 years so I can see what a wonderful man you will grow up to be.

When you were born, I cried; tears of joy and excitement was the reason why. I would lean over your bassinette and watch you sleep. You would always smile as if little angels were keeping you entertained. To this day I still watch you sleep and I try to figure out why God blessed me with such an amazing child. But I knew from the day the stick turned blue that God truly loved me. He knew that I needed you. You are my second chance at being a mother.

When you were 5 months old, you were hospitalized and had to have surgery due to a spider bite. You were there for a week or so, and I will admit I was scared. I held you in my arms at night and rocked you until you fell asleep. We would watch your favorite DVD, *The Wiggles*, and you would giggle as I sang along. I stood right at your side during the surgery; I rubbed your face and kissed your cheeks. When you got through the surgery, you became really sick and your hospital stay became a little longer. So I prayed that you would heal and I could take you home and comfort you. Within a few days you were released to go home. This experience is an important event in your life, and you will have many more on your pathway to adulthood.

As I write this, I can hear you in your room, and you're not happy. You're at the toddler stage where you want things your way or you will cry and make us all miserable. Of

course I get frustrated at times, but your smile reminds me that you're just an innocent little boy who wants his mommy's attention. I hear you running down the hallway and I know you will come face to face with me and fall into my lap, letting me know you want a hug. You are such an affectionate kid; I hope you will never lose that quality. I look forward to your bedtime hugs and kisses because right now that is your only outlet of showing me how much you love and care for me.

So, my son, my eyes are getting restless and soon I will be asleep never to awake to your smile again. I trust this letter will give you closure, and I hope you will see how much I loved you and how important you were in my life. In closing is my favorite poem that I often read and now dedicate to you.

You will always have my love!

You are someone to be proud of
Someone to be thankful for
Someone to always love
In everything you hope and do
I'll encourage and believe in you
For your every joy is my joy too
I will forever love and treasure you.

- Unknown Author

Love, Mommy

~ Antawanna Burt Witherspoon

AMERICAN SOLDIERS

My name is Linda Seymour, and my story is about our soldiers. I just want to say that I am very proud of each and every one of our soldiers who have fought and are still fighting to keep America free.

My brother served in the Marines a long time ago, and he has told me stories that would make your hair stand on end. He was in Vietnam. He told me about how mean the men were to the women and kids. They would hit the women if they didn't do what they told them to do.

He also told us about the time that they took one of their kids, who was only fifteen, and put a bomb around his waist and used him as an ambush for U.S. soldiers.

Also, my brother told me that one of his buddies saved his life. They were in a foxhole and his buddy covered him so he wouldn't get shot. Instead of my brother getting shot, his buddy got shot. He rose up to see what was going on and one of the enemy shot him in the head. My brother held him in his arms and cried. He said that was one of the saddest days of his life.

My brother will tell you today that he is very proud that he served his country. He said that he would do it again if he had to. He also told me that the memories never go away, but he's learned how to deal with them. Still today my brother talks to someone at the Veteran's office. He said it helps him to talk to someone, but the pain still remains when a person has gone through what my brother went through.

I just want to say God bless the families who have lost their kids who served their country. God bless them for

keeping us all safe, and we are carrying them all in our hearts.
God bless America.

~ *Linda Seymour*

FEELINGS

Why do we hide our feelings the way we do?
Is it because that is what we are accustomed to do?
Some people laugh and smile in spite of their fears,
Yet behind closed doors, we've all shed tears.

Strong hearts are sometimes filled with joy and pain.
Some people hide behind others to avoid their shame.
We shelter our kids from all of the above,
Wishing our parents had shown that same kind of love.

The moral of this poem is to hold your head high,
For it's okay to be strong yet cry.
You deal with your feelings the way you want to.
Just do one thing for me and always be
True to yourself and others.
For at the end of the day
Your heart won't feel so cluttered.

~ *Angela Bonner*

DARK FURNACE

As I travel a long and dark road
where no one will ever want to go
As I enter behind the bars of my dark nightmare
I live in hurt, pain, and a loss of respect from my family
As I stand alone...I see someone
Watching my every move and listening to my every word
But there's no movement

I wish I could erase the mistakes or ease my troubled mind
Erase the hurt I have caused my loved ones
As this person gets closer, he says,
Don't be afraid...I'm your friend
Confide and trust in me that I can give you anything you want
Just believe I will be your strength when you are weak
I will be your confidence when you feel like giving up
I'm the key to your freedom from this dark place
I'm your light when you are unable to see
I'm your guide when you are lost...I will guide you back home
I will forgive you of all your sins, your hurt, and your past
Now it is time for you to know my name
Jesus Christ

You are my child whom I love
Go back in time and learn from your mistakes
Do not return to that dark place

~ Yolanda Ivy

WHEN LOVING TOO MUCH HURTS

I FEEL AS THOUGH I DON'T HAVE A VOICE.

INSIDE OF ME, I AM SCREAMING FOR HELP.

SOME PEOPLE MAY LOOK AT ME AND WONDER,
WHY THE TIRED AND SAD FACE?

THIS MASK IS GETTING OLD.
IT HAS MANY LAYERS AND IS STARTING TO WEAR
AWAY.
SOON ALL MAY BE REVEALED.

I GREW UP WITH HARDSHIPS.
THE SAME PATTERNS FOLLOWED.

I HIDE MY PAIN BEHIND OTHERS' TROUBLES,
BUT THEIR TROUBLES STAY, AND SO DO MINE.

LOVING OTHERS TOO MUCH TAKES AWAY
FROM ME.

IT'S TOO PAINFUL TO HELP ME.
I FEEL BETTER BY DOING GOOD FOR OTHERS.

EVERYONE SAYS THAT I'M THE BEST.
EVERYONE TELLS ME TO SMILE.

NO ONE SAYS, "WHAT'S WRONG?"
SURELY THEY CAN SEE.

I AM A WIFE,

A MOTHER,

A DAUGHTER,
A SISTER,
AN AUNT,
AND I AM AN ENABLER.
I AM ADDICTED.
I AM CO-DEPENDENT.

~ Christine J. Carter

ALL OF ME

I don't want to run
From someone
Afraid to speak
Afraid to cry,
The truth I seek
Behind the lies.
No one knows.
No one cares
What I see
Behind my fears.
Drown from tears
Deep inside,
I hide my pride
From all I feel.
My love not real
Covered in grief
From all of me
And who I see
Just let me be ...

~ *Meghan Marie Piatt*

UNTITLED

There is more to me than pretty brown
round, flesh and bone

I want my man to know for real what
he's got waiting at home

All woman is who I am with feelings and I
love with all my heart

Sitting here wondering why my relationship is
falling apart

No one feels my pain, nor would they understand.

Because I can't talk to anyone about how
I feel lately not even my man

There is more to me than pretty brown
round, flesh and bone

Sitting here wondering why a heart full of
love has now turned to stone

~ Chauntea Henry



Beginning to Smile



LARRY'S BABY "TEAK"

Today is the anniversary of the day that my oldest brother Larry's dog died. The dog was named Teak. Larry should have named that dog Bruiser or something you would name a mean dog. At least that's what I thought back then. Teak died just two years ago on December 12, 2003. Teak was very special to me and my whole family, for that matter. He was the only living thing that we had left of my brother. Larry was murdered on April 21, 1998, at 38 years young. He had never been married and was without children of his own.

Teak was definitely a watch dog. He protected Larry. Whenever I went to Larry's house to visit, if there wasn't a place to park in the front of the house, I had to park in the back alley. I then had to walk through the back gate to get to Larry's house and back door. That was a problem because Teak was kept in the back yard. Teak would growl, bark, guard the back door, and show his teeth to us until we either left or until Larry would hear us in the yard and open the back door and calm Teak by talking to him just like a baby. We could then visit my brother. Larry always said that if we talked to Teak as we walked to the door, then Teak would butter right up to us, but I didn't want to take that chance! As a matter of fact, my oldest daughter Cynthia tried talking to him with no success, until after Larry knew we were there. We could only pet Teak after Larry was aware of our presence. I believed that Teak was a one-man dog, and that one man was Larry.

On the night that my brother was murdered three doors down from his house in that same alley, Teak broke his chain and jumped the fence. The dog catcher was going to take Teak to the dog pound but one of Larry's good neighbors, Dreama, talked him into chaining Teak up to the

fence next to Larry's house where Gene, another one of Larry's friends, lived. Gene said he would feed Teak and take care of him. Gene was like family to Larry and to Teak too. Gene and Larry were roommates for many years before Gene moved next door in a house that Larry owned. We knew Teak would never hurt Gene because he knew Gene. I was going through so much with losing Larry that I sort of forgot about Teak. Besides, I knew that he was being cared for by Gene who I knew he loved.

My dad was making Larry's house payments, so to help Dad out I said I would move in and pay rent. The day we went to Larry's house to clean, as soon as we parked in the alley, it dawned on me. Teak!!!!!! This was his home! He hated me and the girls unless Larry calmed him down first, and Larry was gone now. I thought to myself, "What am I going to do now?" My dad needed me to help out, and it only made sense that I help out. "What now, Big Shot? What are you going to do now?" I didn't know how I had gotten myself in this mess, but I had. I couldn't say anything to Dad so I decided I would have to make friends with Teak or let him bite me. I took a big breath and prayed for a miracle. With the help of God, I knew it was possible. My girls and I got out of the car, and Teak didn't even bark at us. As a matter a fact, Teak was wagging his tail! We walked through the back gate. Teak still didn't bark at us. We were talking to him about Larry and how much we missed him, and how he must miss him too. The girls wanted to pet him right away, but I told them not yet. I walked over to him just outside of his chain length, and I petted him! I then let the girls pet him too! He was very gentle with them! Cynthia was nine years old at the time, and Angelica was two years old. A miracle indeed we had received!

Teak took up to anyone that came in the yard from that point on. Anytime we came to the backyard for any reason, we had to stop and pet Teak. He wouldn't have it

any other way. You could have two arms full of groceries, and you still had to stop and pet Teak. He was a changed dog. I think dogs are a lot smarter than anyone gives them credit for. I think Teak knew Larry was gone, and he would have to butter up to somebody else. Teak knew how much we loved Larry. We even grew to love Teak.

The State notified my dad about six months later. They were going to make Dad sell Larry's house, so we had to move back into an apartment for a while. As soon as I got a house, Teak came back to live with us. My youngest brother, Darrell, built Teak a new doghouse, and we brought Teak to his new home.

He lived in his new house for about three years, until he started getting sick. One evening we came home to see he had dug a hole for himself, and he was laying in it. Teak wouldn't get out of the hole, not even to eat. Cynthia, Angelica, and I went over to him and tried to get him to come to out, but he just laid there yelping. We began to think he was stuck in the hole. We tried to help him out, but he snapped at us when we touched him. We told Ken, my fiancé, what had happened. Ken went outside and determined that Teak had some sort of pain in his back hip and leg area. It was then that I remembered Larry telling me that when Teak was a puppy, he was hit by a car and the vet had done surgery on him.

Ken got a sheet, and he carefully put the sheet under the front part of Teak's body. Then he and Cynthia lifted Teak up and walked him around the yard. I told him to bring Teak to the house, but Teak didn't want to come. He wouldn't go past 20 feet. He wanted to go in his house. Cynthia and Ken helped him inside his house. Teak then ate his dinner. We put some Tylenol in it; we were hoping that if it was arthritis setting up in his hip, then it would ease his pain. I was worried about how we would get Teak out of his

house. Ken said if we had to we'd saw the top of his house and help him in and out of his house and then set the top back on afterwards.

The next day Teak was out of his house and walking around! He seemed fine for a few days but one night Teak was lying on the cold ground, instead of in his house. I went outside and tried to talk him into getting inside his house, but he wouldn't budge. He was whining like he was in pain. Ken was already in bed, so Cynthia and I tried to help him up. He had no desire to get up so we covered him up with a blanket. I didn't sleep all night; I kept getting up and checking on him every two hours. At 2:00 a.m. when I checked on him, he had moved about ten feet, and by the time I went to work at 6:20 a.m., he had moved ten more feet. I talked to him; I told him to hold on because I didn't want to lose him. He was the only living thing left of my brother. I covered him up and told him that I was going to take him to see the vet when I got home from work.

After work, I could see Teak in the back yard. He had moved another ten feet, and he was covered back up again. Something didn't seem quite right; I was hoping that my instincts were wrong. We got out of the car, and before I could stop Angelica, she ran to Teak. He was dead! Larry's baby was gone! My heart was breaking, just as it had the day my brother died. That dog had sentimental value to me. I loved him!

I tried the best I could to comfort Angelica; she was very upset. When Cynthia got home we told her about Teak, and she, of course, wanted to see him. Ken had just gotten home too. He already knew that Teak was gone. The four of us walked back to say goodbye together. When Larry died, and Teak buttered up to me, I felt a little better, but now I felt that pain, that emptiness, all over again. I felt like another part of me had died. How much of me was left? I

had to pull myself back together; I couldn't give up. I had two lovely children to raise. I stood there wishing that I hadn't put so much faith in Teak. I wasn't prepared for this. I felt like Larry's spirit lived inside of Teak and now that Teak was gone, Larry's spirit was gone also.

Ken broke the silence; he spoke of how Teak was no longer in any pain and how he was in heaven now. Cynthia spoke about how she would miss going to see him every morning and the protection she felt with him near. Angelica spoke about how she would miss playing ball with him and petting him. I spoke of how special Teak had been to me for the past five years. I used to talk to him the way I used to talk to Larry. Nobody really understands the pain of losing a loved one who has been murdered! My brother was my best friend. I felt that Larry's spirit had died forever. My eyes began to tear up. Ken then said that the next day he would take Teak to be cremated, so we could always have Teak with us.

I feel Larry's presence sometimes still today, and I know I always will. It's a comforting feeling. Yes, I still miss Larry from time to time, but in my heart, I know that he'll always be with me in a greater way than he was when he was alive because now he's watching over us 24 hours, seven days a week. We try to keep Larry's memory alive in the hearts of his nieces and nephew also. They were so young when he died. Every November *Victims United* in Butler County has a candle vigil which my family attends. On the anniversary of the day that Larry died, our family and friends place a cross where Larry was murdered. Larry's memory will live on in our hearts forever. As for Larry's baby, Teak, he lays forever by our side.

~ Karen Smith-Flick

NOVOCAINE, WHISKEY, OR PAIN

Not too long ago, I had an abscessed tooth and had to have it taken out. The week before, the whole side of my face had been swollen from infection. It felt like my eardrum was going to explode. The infection was getting worse and making me really sick! I went to the emergency room with thoughts that I would get something for the infection and for the pain. The emergency room doctor took care of me and sent me home.

As the week went on, the swelling started to go down, and I slowly started to feel better. It took a few days for the medicine to kick in and start working. As my appointment got closer, I started to get nervous. I had been to the dentist only one time in my life. My parents did not have much money or insurance when I was younger, so I was very inexperienced in having dental work done.

The day of my appointment came, and my wife decided to go with me in case I didn't feel like driving back and also for support. I sat in the chair, and the nurse pushed a button in the back that tilted me like I was lying down. The dentist walked in with a needle about three inches long. My hands went tight on the armrests as I asked her what she was about to do with it. Then the nurse walked in with a tray full of metal tools that looked very painful. I assured them that all of this was not really necessary, that I just wanted a tooth pulled. The dentist then told me she could pull a tooth with a numb mouth, or she could just give me a shot of whiskey and start yanking like the good old days. I then decided to sit back, shut my mouth, and let her do her job.

The dentist and her assistant were very gentle and took very good care of me. After it was done, they crammed a wad of gauze into my mouth so the bleeding would stop

and told me to sit there for a few minutes. I then started to calm down; I thought to myself, "This was not as hard as I thought it was going to be." I had it licked, and it was not really a big deal.

Lying there I felt the need to sit up. I asked my wife to set the chair up, so I wouldn't have so much blood going down my throat. She asked me how to control it, and I told her I didn't know. I said, "Just start pushing buttons." When she did, the head of the chair slammed down, and my feet went way up in the air. She then started to laugh hysterically. I was gripping the armrests while trying to stop my body from sliding out headfirst. I said, "Can you please find it in yourself to stop laughing and go get some help?" Finally she went out into the hallway and looked for a nurse, pointing at me while asking for help (still laughing). The nurse started laughing out loud, and before I knew it, there were about five or six of them losing control by the door. A nurse came in and brought the chair back up, and still we couldn't stop laughing. My wife told me that her side hurt that night, so I told her she shouldn't have laughed so hard.

I took my son to the dentist last week and was recognized as "the Chair Man." The next time I go to the dentist, I definitely think I will have a much easier time.

~ Scott Myers

MY LITTLE RED BEETLE

It was one of the most exciting days of my life! Back in 1983, I won an approved loan for my first brand new red car; notice arrived on a Tuesday stating that the closing would be on Friday. On Friday morning, somebody from the loan company called and told me the closing for my car was changed from Friday to Monday. I was worried and disappointed. Unfortunately, at that time the economy in Mexico was unstable, and the money value fluctuated everyday. Precisely that weekend, the money market dramatically fell, and the dollar doubled in value. Consequently, the cost of the car increased to twice the original price.

The loan company contacted me and said that they would only loan me the amount established before, and if I still wanted the car, I needed to come up with the difference in cash. I was sad, but not discouraged. I asked some of my cousins if they could loan me some money to complete the amount required; they did, but I still fell short. I thought, "What else can I do?" I had some collectible items, and I could sell them. I felt so sad; one item in particular had a lot of sentimental value to me because it was one of the last gifts my father gave me. At that moment I had to decide if I should keep the gift or forget about the car. My heart said not to sell the item, but my mom said to me, "Your father would be so happy to see you smiling and driving the car. You really need transportation. It is not a luxury; it is a necessity." I sold the collectibles. Finally I had all the money necessary, and I was ready.

Days later, on the way to the closing, I took the subway and fell down stairs, about 22 feet. I was injured and semi-unconscious. Someone screamed, "Call the ambulance!" Immediately, in a matter of seconds, I remembered I was

carrying a large amount of money in a plastic bag inside my underwear. I thought if somebody found out, they could steal the money from me. I quickly got off the ground and took the next train to my destination and closed on the car.

In Mexico, when you buy a car, the buyer must wait three days to be able to insure the car and process the paperwork. For some reason I had a bad feeling, so I fully insured it. I remember my mom, sisters, and brothers went with me to pick up my new red beetle on my saint day, December 12th. When I saw my red beetle, I felt an indescribable emotion; my heart started to beat so fast I thought it would break; I could not believe it!

My family and I were invited to celebrate New Year's Eve at our friend's house, and I parked the car on the street. My friend and I were having fun dancing and celebrating the New Year when my friend's neighbor walked in and screamed, "Guadalupe, your car has been hit!" I opened the window to see my car. It was dark and foggy. Frantically, I went running down the stairs to see my damaged beetle. I felt furious, angry and depressed. I was so relieved my car was able to get fixed.

Months later, my sisters and I went to the movie theater and parked the car on the street. After the movie was finished, we looked for the car, but the red beetle was missing. I felt my heart breaking, and I felt miserable. The insurance company found the beetle sixty days later. I needed to go to identify it. What a surprise! It had no tires, no engine, no seats, no wheel, only the skeleton with the serial number on it. I started to laugh! What else could happen to me?

Fortunately, since I bought the car, it went up in price. The insurance company paid me more for my beetle than I had originally paid. The insurance company paid the

remainder of the car loan, and the difference came to me. With the remaining money, I had the opportunity to go to Paris, France, to study French. I couldn't have gone without this money.

I never, never will get a red car again, even if it is free!

~ *Guadalupe Ramos*

CURIOSITY

This is so boring. He keeps telling me to lie down on this stupid floor. I'd like to see him lay down on the floor for once. He should let me have the bed. Yeah, that would be great. How come he gets all the good stuff to eat? I get the same stuff, every day, in the same stupid blue bowl. He better not put that sandwich down. It looks so good. Stingy old man! He didn't even save me a bite. Can't you shut that box thingy off? Come on, play with me! It'll be fun. You can throw the ball; I can go get it and make you chase me to get it back. It'll be fun! Come on! Pay attention to me! Maybe if I nudge your hand a little..... Uugh!

Whatever. I'll just find something else to d- Wait a minute! What's that? I smell it! What's th- oh! It's that pesky squirrel again! I'm gonna get it! I'm gonna get it! (BOOM!) Ouch, that clear stuff hurts. Why haven't you gotten a doggie door like I asked? How many times do I gotta say it? Hey, come on! Let me out! It's getting away! Stupid squirrel! Always digging holes in my yard. I dig the holes! Who does that squirrel think he is anyway? I'll show him. One day, I'm gonna get that doggy door. Then he's really in for it. Where did I bury that bone anyway?

Hey, I bet if I grab that clicky thingy for that box he always watches he'll play with me. Got it! Mmmmm. This thing is pretty good. This is better than those smelly things from his feet. Yum, yum. I just chew on this for a while until he- OUCH!!!! Not the newspaper again. I thought I hid that thing. Maybe I should just go lay down on the floor for a while.

~ Misty Dawn Gannon



Author Biographies

Mahar Alwishah – p. 47

Victor Ankiambom – p. 102

I was born in Africa. There was only one school in my area, and it was not complete. Because of this, I did not have the opportunity to get a good education. I decided to come to GED classes because I wanted to improve my life.

Angela Bonner – p. 174

I am a 29-year-old loving mother of a beautiful daughter who believes that education is the best gift that you can give yourself and your loved ones. I am planning on a nursing career after earning my GED.

Tyeasha Bradford – p. 114

I passed the GED test in March and will graduate from the Canton City Schools Even Start Family Literacy Program in June of 2007. I have enrolled in Stark State College of Technology where I will be majoring in Emergency Medical Services. I have a two-year-old son, Travis, and another child due in June.

Lianna Bramer – p. 128

I am the proud mother of two sons. I received my GED in December of 2006 and am currently enrolled at the University of Cincinnati in their Paralegal program.

Rose Buckner – p. 3, 11, 106, 107

I am seventy-six years old and graduated from Milford Public High School in 1948. When I started tutoring elementary school children, I felt the need to refresh my education, so I joined a Live Oaks ABLE class in 2000. I am now fondly known as the “Welcome Wagon Lady” in our morning

classroom. The ABLE experience has been therapy for me: helping with my computer skills, keeping my memory sharp, and allowing me to interact with the younger students. I am honored to have my writings published and wish to thank my teachers at Live Oaks for their support!

Donald Bunch – p. 96

I am a husband of 34 years to the love of my life, and we have three precious children, one boy and two girls. My wife and I also have nine granddaughters. I have been an assistant pastor of a church for the last 8 – 10 years and have been saved now for 23 years.

Gary Bunch – p. 93

I am a single father of three beautiful daughters, Hannah, Hayley, and Hope. My poem is about how I would like to be remembered – as a loving father to my three girls. I am very proud of my daughters and would do anything for them. I have enjoyed attending classes at Live Oaks with my father.

Nora Burger – p. 73

I progressed through the 4th grade in my native Honduras and came to the United States as a child. I worked hard through the years. I am a U.S. citizen and a past matron of my local Eastern Star chapter. I drive 60 miles roundtrip to attend English classes at Live Oaks. I encourage other students to do their part.

Claudia Cabell – p. 139

I am from Colombia, and my husband is from Cincinnati. We have two children and a nephew living with us. My story is about the difficult time people have when a loved one is ill and you are far away.

Kilcha Canfield – p. 162

I was born in South Korea. I have 2 beautiful sons and a very supportive husband. I have attended Scarlet Oaks and will be

taking the GED Test soon. I enjoy the classes, especially those on writing.

Donna Caplinger – p. 92

After staying at home, raising my four children, and ending up an empty nester, I decided to obtain my GED so that I could get the job I always wanted, driving an elementary school bus. At age 46, I started, and with the support of my husband, I achieved both of my dreams. I have been writing poems for many years about a variety of subjects to help to recall good times with families and to get through some of the not so good times.

Brenda Carroll – p. 82

I have been coming to ABLE classes since 2004. I really enjoy coming to my classes. I have learned so much more, especially in math. Also, I enjoy writing short stories and poems. I really want to thank my Mother who gave me knowledge and the push to write, as well as my teachers who have helped me tremendously with my writing. Thank you.

Christine Carter – p. 176

I attend classes at Diamond Oaks.

Carmen Cotto – p. 74

I have been married for 27 years to a wonderful man, Jose, and we have two beautiful sons in their twenties. I have lived in the U.S. for 20 years and became a citizen in 1996. I have been employed at Pierre Foods since 1989, and I enjoy my job as a box maker. I am glad that this company has a Learning Center to help people learn and improve their futures.

Sein Han Cozad – p. 60, 113

My main goal in attending the Live Oaks ABLE class was to improve my English. Not only have I improved my English skills, but also my Math and Writing skills. I am from

Cambodia and came to the United States after marrying my American husband 5 years ago. I work as a nail technician at a salon in Loveland, Ohio. I have enjoyed learning new things and getting to know my classmates.

Curtis E. Davis Sr. – p. 108

Marie Davis – p. 107, 137

I am the proud mother of two wonderful children and grandmother of four beautiful grandchildren. I am studying for my GED at Live Oaks Career Development Center in Milford, Ohio. My hobbies include bowling, working in the church nursery, and gardening. I wrote the poem “Snow” with my granddaughter.

Afi Abi DeSouza – p. 39

I came to the U.S. from Togo, Africa. I am married and have handsome twin boys. I am an employee of Pierre Foods and attend the Learning Center there to improve my Math & English skills. I am happy to be living in the land of opportunity.

Brenda Dicus – p. 31

I attend classes at Diamond Oaks to improve my life.

Michael Drozdovsky – p. 63

Timothy Edwards – p. 169

Timothy was an inmate as well as student at the Lake County Jail at the time of his writing.

Misty Dawn Gannon – p. 193

I am a mother of one son, Antonio. My dream is to become a successful doctor one day!

Cuiyu Geng – p. 54

I was born in the Hebei Province of China. I studied physics in China and received my PhD in Material Science. I am now attending Advanced English Second Language classes at Case Western Reserve University in order to improve my English.

Michaela Gill – p. 106**Brandi A. Gilmer – p. 157**

I am 29 years old with two girls and am getting my GED to provide a better life for them. I don't want them to ever be without. I want to be proud of who I am and what I've become.

Sue Glover – p. 135

I live with my family in the lower eastside of Campbell, Ohio. I have been attending the ABLE program for about six years in order to receive my GED. When I am not at school, I enjoy baking and caring for my animals.

Ram Gupta – p. 65

I am from India. After my three children left there, my wife, Raj, and I decided to move to the United States. Both of us earned engineering degrees in India.

Joe Hammet – p. 14

I'm 32 years young. I was adopted from El Salvador and have lived in the USA for my entire life. I enjoy art, music, and bodybuilding. I have two boys, ages five and six, and have a little girl on the way. For me, writing is a gift from God. It's not easy when I write because things come out that are so real to me. I thank you all for reading and writing. Never stop, even when it is a challenge, for as we write and read, we create a balance in our lives. Once in a while, the spotlight stays on. Like a cat in the sun, absorb it and share it. In life, our best work is to relate. That's why we write: to hear, to sing, but most of all, to listen.

Olga Heasley – p. 41**Chauntea Henry – p. 179**

I am a student at Project Learn of Summit County. I began the program May of 2006 and am well on my way to receiving my GED. In my free time, I love to write poetry and dream about having it published someday.

Doris Molina Hernandez – p. 94, 142

I was born in the city of Bogotá, Colombia, and I went to José Allamano High School. I got a degree in International Business in Cooperativa Integral Avvanera. I am married, have two children, and work at the Marriott Hotel North in West Chester, Ohio. Now I am studying English (ESL) at Great Oaks.

Yldigar R. Villatoro Herrera – Cover art

This is the first time that I drew for a *Beginnings* publication. I am glad it was accepted.

Veronica Highfield – p. 138

I am 32 years old and have been married for 12 years. I have two wonderful children, Gary and Simone. I am attending classes to get my GED, so that I can be a good role model for my children. I also would like to open my own day care center someday.

Donna Hines – p. 78

I'm sixty years old, a mother of three, and grandmother of twelve. I love the outdoors—I have worked with plants and flowers most of my life—and enjoy doing crafts and sewing. I attend G.E.D. class in Lancaster, Ohio, where I live. I wrote this story because I have traveled with my husband and children across the United States and back three times, and I have seen lots of beautiful country. I was very surprised when my story got picked for publication.

Ragiye Ibragimova – p. 119

I was born in the Ukraine and taught biology in medical school in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. I came to America 12 years ago with my husband, my daughter, and my granddaughter. I am a student at the English Center in Youngstown and am very proud to have become an American citizen.

Hayfa Ilayan – p. 59

I was born in Palestine. I have four sons. I finished high school in Palestine. I came to America one and a half years ago. I am studying English at The English Center in Youngstown.

Yolanda Ivy – p. 175

I am 35 years old, and am attending ABLE classes to get my GED, so that I may attend college in the upcoming year. I want to show other people that they can do anything that they put their mind to. I want to be a role-model to someone else.

Mahalia Jackson – p. 156

I have had a long history with poetry. I first discovered it through my oldest brother, Jesse Benson, who is also a poet and writer. Then, in 7th grade, my teacher asked the class to write a poem on any subject. I wrote a poem named “Black Butterfly” about perceiving one’s self image. Now at age 24, I continue to perfect my God-given gift of writing and creating poetry. My future plans include working with children to help them become aware of their self-worth and value.

Carolyn Sue Jones – p. 87**Melissa Jones – p. 113**

Obtaining my GED is my main priority at this time, aside from family. I have been working very hard for many years to achieve this goal. I have passed everything but the Math section, and it has been quite a challenge since I didn’t have a

lot of Math in school. It means the world to me to continue to work towards this goal, because it would make my father and my family very proud.

Aaron Keffer – p. 132

I am 19 years old and after much hard work, I received my diploma in June 2005. I am a rapper/writer and plan to continue pursuing this. I also have training in different construction trades in case my music career does not turn out as planned. I would like to thank my mother for doing all that she did to help me graduate, Mrs. Nancy of Life Skills, and YouthBuild Mahoning County.

Angela Keller – p. 120

My life is like a volcano erupting in the middle of spring because I have just recently divorced, and for me, being an individual parent gets very complicated. I restarted my life and it is slowly getting better. I have three teenagers who can be a handful. My first girl is sixteen years old, and she can be herself sometimes. My second girl is fourteen years old, and she can be helpful in many ways. My third girl is thirteen years old, and she can be hilarious. I also have a wonderful dog named Pebbles. She is twelve years old and loves to walk up to the pond watching the ducks swim around. As I said, my life is getting better with my three girls by my side. I like to write poems and I like to read all kinds of poems, too. I love to draw pictures of nature scenery, but all I have time for is working at my job and remodeling our home.

Kelley Kerper – p. 28

I have three sons, ages 14, 12, and 8. I raised my sons on my own with help from my parents for 11 years. I am currently married to John Kerper, who is now helping raise my sons. I would like to go to college to study counseling after I get my GED. I want to help others overcome obstacles similar to those I faced when I was in school. I would like to thank my

parents, John and Cathy Mussell, for all of their help and support.

Juan Mejia Lopez – p. 34

I was born in Aguacatan, Guatemala. I finished my high school over there. Now I'm studying English at Scarlet Oaks. I have many goals to reach in my life. I already got one of them, which is to be a winner in the Ohio Writers' Conference #10. I dedicate my winning to my mother. She is not here, but she is here in the spirit. I also dedicate it to my teacher, Sameera, for her encouragement.

Melissa Martin – p. 26

I am 25 years old and have two kids. Alex is three, and Alysha is six weeks. They're my pride and joy and will probably be as ornery as I am.

Art Massengill – p. 6

Art Massengill was a student at Live Oaks ABLE and has been published in several of the *Beginnings* publications. He received his GED in February of 2006, and his death in November 2006 has spurred members of his class to write tributes in memory of him. One of his previously published stories has been reprinted in this edition of *Beginnings*.

Geraldine McQuitty – p. 77

I am a 51-year-old mother of two, grandmother of six. I love to read and write and am trying to get my GED. If I could, I'd tell all young men and women to STAY IN SCHOOL because young minds work better than old ones.

Althea Mitchem – p. 105

I live in Youngstown, Ohio. I have been attending GED classes since September 2006. My goal is to receive my GED by September 2007. This has been one of the most challenging experiences in my life, but also one of the most

exciting, almost as exciting as becoming a grandmother for the first time.

Alexander Morris – p. 71

Craig Morris – p. 159

Scott Myers – p. 188

I am 33 years old and am married with five kids. Health problems forced me to change my career, and I have to go back to using my brain to make a living. I recently earned my GED and am now pursuing college classes. I will not go back to working 60-80-hour weeks, because I have learned how much I enjoy spending time with my family.

Angela R. Nicoson – p. 125

I am married and have two wonderful children. I am enrolled in the Real Estate course at Lakeland Community College, beginning in May.

Emily Nutter – p. 165

We have all had experiences in our past that are painful to remember. After I wrote this story about something that happened in my life, I felt better. It helped me realize that even though bad things happen, we have to overcome them.

Jasmin Palasz – p. 52, 111

I am from Germany and have been working as an au pair in Maineville, Ohio. While it has been very hard to be away from my family, I have enjoyed my classes at Live Oaks and Scarlet Oaks. It also has been fun traveling the United States and experiencing new places.

Pankaj Patel – p. 106

I joined the Live Oaks ABLE class to improve my skills in order to pass Reading, Science, and Citizenship for the Ohio

Proficiency Test. I am 20 years old and was born in India. I currently work at my family's convenience store.

Blake Phillips – p. 102

I am a 21-year-old student at Scarlet Oaks. My mother and sister are both college graduates. I think it is time for me to get my GED and go on to college.

Meghan Marie Piatt – p. 178

I am 19 years old and am currently still working on getting my GED. Afterwards, I would like to attend college or at least take some college classes. This poem was written from the way I was feeling inside at the time. It means a lot to me that my poem was chosen, and I would like to say thank you.

Pierre Learning Center – p. 19

Our class meets on Mondays, and our teacher is Marty Lopinto. We are busy studying all kinds of things. Some of us are studying math so that they can get a promotion in the Pierre company. Others are studying their English, writing, computer skills—all of the basics. We enjoy coming to class before work, break time, and/or after work. We'd like to thank Pierre Foods for offering a Learning Center to us! We have accomplished one of our goals—getting published! That's quite an accomplishment!

Geeoun Post – p. 141

I am married to a generous man, James, and I am very proud of my son, Kenny. I work at Pierre Foods and enjoy learning new things at the Learning Center. I have lived my life with lots of love, and I am very happy. I became a citizen of the US in 2003.

Valerie Puckett – p. 27

Guadalupe Ramos – p. 190

I am the proud mother of a beautiful 15-year-old daughter, the joy of my life. I have lived in this country for about 19 years and truly enjoy it. I started attending ABLE classes at Live Oaks to improve my language skills. My future plans are to move to Florida and open my own business. I believe that mastering the language of this country is important because I feel privileged to live here.

Rebecca A. Ramos – p. 48

I was brought up with certain beliefs and superstitions because of my Hispanic and Southwest Texan background. When I write about these superstitions, I write about my culture. Some of these things were started long ago and are still continued today. Whether these things are true or not is a personal choice. I still believe in some of these superstitions. When I drop a fork or spoon, I still do a little ritual just in case!

Melissa Randolph – p. 102

I am a mother of five children and am very busy with my family. I would like to become a nurse because I like helping people. The ABLE classes will help me prepare for the entrance test to nursing school.

Charlene Rhodes – p. 24

I was born in 1947 in Zanesville, Ohio, where I attended school until the tenth grade. Married at 16, my husband and I raised six children. After 24 years, my husband had a heart attack and passed away. My children and my 18 grandchildren are very close to me. They are my life. In 2002, I met a good man. We started going to church together, and in 2005, we got married. I thought I would never be happy again, and I am so glad God put him in my life.

Joanne Roach – p. 91

My name is Joanne, but people call me “Nicky.” I am a 24-year-old mother of five. I enjoy reading, writing, and playing with my children.

Kathy Romans – p. 102

I am a high school graduate who has returned to Scarlet Oaks to prepare for the Licensed Practical Nurse entrance test. I would like to become a nurse and continue in school to get my degree.

Carol R. Rudder – p. 17, 101, 141

I have two children, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. I have worked at Pierre Foods for twenty years. I just retired in March.

Jamiean Ruffin – p. 122

I am 30 years old. I started GED classes at Diamond Oaks because I wanted to have a better life. I currently live in Cincinnati and work two jobs, a shipping and handling clerk and a maintenance man.

Luciana Salaverry – p. 67

I am an advanced ESOL student. I recently returned with my family to my home in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I plan to attend a university and study genetics.

Najia Salmi – p. 102

I was born in Morocco and studied International Law and Islamic Law there. I have been in the United States for three years. I have learned a lot in my ABLE classes.

Reggie Sanders – p. 115

I’m a single father from the city of Youngstown, Ohio. I’m 25 years of age and love my life as it is now. Through the ABLE program, I was able to achieve my diploma. I will be

attending Cleveland State University in the fall of 2007 as a Business Administration major with a Marketing minor.

Heather L. Schrull – p. 149

I'm a 21-year-old mother of two beautiful girls. The inspiration for everything in my life is my children. Even though I had them when I was young, I still can't imagine life without them. I'm working toward a college education. Although I'm not sure exactly what I want to be yet, I'm sure I'll figure it out soon.

Debora Sellers – p. 103

I'm a 45-year-old college student now. I was on welfare at the time of the writing. It was a response to some narrow-minded folks in a training class who were asked, "Do you think people on welfare are lazy?" I got my GED with the help of welfare, and this is a glimpse of my life. I'm a busy mother of four, two still at home. I'm recuperating from a second back fusion surgery, got my GED and CASA, and plan on a career in Human Services/Criminology.

Linda Seymour – p. 172

I have been coming to GED classes for three years, and I have enjoyed every minute of them. My other interests are listening to music and taking long walks. I am a person that loves animals and talking with people. I especially love talking to my Mom; she is my best friend and the biggest influence in my life. I love her with all of my heart.

Dusty Shriner – p. 23

I work for J&L Poured Walls, pouring concrete footers. I am a hard-working young man. Despite life's ups and downs, I have found that I am a goal-oriented, determined, and strong-willed person. With a positive outlook on life and a peaceful attitude, I strive to make the world a better place for myself and others.

Debra Smith – p. 107

I am the mother of 4 children. I started attending Live Oaks ABE classes last year to work towards obtaining my GED. Due to a back injury, I have not been able to attend classes as often as I would like. Once I get back on my feet, I plan to attend more regularly.

Delores Smith – p. 102

I was born in Jamaica. I finished the ninth grade, married, and had four children. I then moved to the United States. I realize that in order to have a better life, I need to get my GED.

Karen Smith-Flick – p. 183

I have worked at Pierre for several years in the Quality Control Department. I have had my writing published in previous *Beginnings* books. I enjoy writing and am proud of my accomplishments.

Ivette Soto – p. 97

I am an enthusiastic student who is also the 40-year-old wife of Robert Soto, the mother of three children, and the grandmother of one grandchild. I am looking forward to entering the field of nursing after earning my GED.

Theresa Stone – p. 88

I reside in Lancaster, Ohio, and have four grown girls. Last February, I went to Ohio Wesleyan University to hear Ted Kooser, former poet laureate, speak. Ted's poetry really inspired me to read and write more poetry. Having my poem published was a great honor, and I look forward to celebrating with fellow authors.

Roukhi Sylla – p. 102

I am 21 years old and live with my family. I was born in West Africa and did not complete my education before moving to

the United States. I would like to get my GED and go on to college.

Ethan Thomas – p. 5, 85, 145

I took the GED at Live Oaks in 2007. Now, I plan to go to college to get a degree in religious education. After I graduate, I plan to become a priest. I've struggled a lot in my life as I talked about in my story, From "Pain To Triumph," but it did nothing but make me strong. I hope that as a priest I can help people strengthen their relationship with God.

Carmen Visalden – p. 81

I was born in Morrovis, Puerto Rico, and moved to New York ten years ago. After five years there, I decided to come to Lorain, Ohio, with my husband and five children. I enjoy attending ESOL class and am working hard to improve my English.

Liyong Wang – p. 57

I studied Polymer Chemical Engineering and Chemical Technology in China. I moved to the United States in 2005. I now live in Cleveland.

Jennifer Warren – p. 136

Donna E. Williams – p. 152

I live in Lorain, Ohio. I am a mother of four. I have three boys ages 13, 12, and 8 and a 4-year-old little girl. I was inspired to get my GED, because I can not enforce education upon them without being educated myself. Having gone through a lot in life, I now realize that life is too short. I have learned to take each day in stride and follow my dreams. That is the key to my success!

Kim Wilson – p. 130

I have worked at Pierre Foods for 6 1/2 years. I recently got a promotion as a Line Coordinator. I have attended the

Learning Center at Pierre for 3 years—improving my math, writing, and computer skills. I enjoy writing because it is a way to express my feelings on paper. I would like to thank my mom and my two sisters for being such great role models!

Antawanna Burt Witherspoon – p. 170

I am a diverse writer who strives at becoming a well-known poet and someday an author of my own novel. I am known to be a motivator and a self-taught professional. I take pride in being the mother of my one-year-old son Elijah'Bleu. I dedicate "Dear Son" to Elijah'Bleu in hopes that he has a full understanding of my love for him.

Lindsey Wittmeyer – p. 86

Bella Yang – p. 49

I was born on November 9, 1983, in China. I received an associate degree in Republic Relations from Jiangxi Normal University in 2002. After graduating from college, I worked for a trade company for about three years. I met my wonderful husband in that company in 2004, immigrated to the United States on April 23, 2006, and married on June 15, 2006. At the present time, I am starting classes at Sinclair Community College. My dream is to be a pharmacist someday.

Rawan Zarour – p. 102

I am 24 years old. I was born in Jerusalem and have been in the United States for five years. I am married and have children.

Chengfang (Sharon) Zhao – p. 69

Shannon Zimmerman – p. 98

My piece was written while in Logan County Jail. I am now moving forward with my life by attending rehab in Lima.



Honorable Mention Authors

Antoine Abi-Saloum	Judy Combs
Medhat Abou El hana	Lydia Cook
Osama Aburahma	Irma Cordero
Keishma Adkins	Yocelin Cruz
Miguel Angel Aguila	Pilar Curran
Kpakpo Akue	Shalla Dabney
Robin J. Allen	Janay Tishone Daniels
Petra Arroyo	Christian Darks
Roberto Aviles	Trisha DeBinder
Erika Ayers	Theresa DelliSanti
Denise R. Baas	Jackie DeRouchie
Bill Bailey	Clarisa Diaz
Talena Baker	John DiBenedetto
Hattie Banks	Carolyn Dodson
Dorrine Bankston	Mallory V. Draper
Barbara Bear	Tatiana Drozdovska
Monica Bebb	Marguerite Drummond
Jessica M. Bell	Jenell Dusenberry
John Berling	Laila Eltawerghi
Betty S. Black	Landie Erasmus
Bladimir Bonano	Norma Y. Espada
Crystal Boswell	Nelly Estupinan
Charity Brady	Karen Evanoff
Aaron Brathwaite	Adande Kinti Eytayo
Greg Brown	Joe Felix
Michael D. Burnsworth	Adella Fitz
Susan Buslik	Boris Flider
Rachel Castle	Julissa Fuentes
Anna Chernuyk	Louis Gamba ti banguima
Kudakwashe Chizinga	Linda Gao
Carmen Cintron	Carmen Garcia
Felicia Cochran	Lisa Garrison
Stephanie Cole	Maria Garza

Jeanie Gerlach	Luba Miktuk
Kory Green	Sarah J. Miller
Christina Greene	Gloria Molleno
Vianey Guzman	Monique Neail
Roger Hampshire	Carmen Ortiz
Lamont Harmon	Ahmad Parker
Miyra A. Harris	Katina Pastrikos
John Hawkins	Melissa Pertuset
La'Tara S. Helm	Catherine Phillips
Sarah Hightower	Jason E. Prater
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Yolande Jackson	Andrea Reed
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Trish Jeffers	Ashley Rice
Nancy Johansen	Benjamin Rivera
Tonia Jones	Gladys Rivera
Barbara Kaminska	Sara Rivera
Mona Kassem	Tessy Rivera
Khaldoun Kawa	Quintessa Roberston
Kevin Keevey	Sonia Rodriquez
Christina Kelly	Carmen Roldan
Kum Sun Kim	Shameika Rollins
Aretha Kimble	Lorraine Rose
Christine Labato	Sandra Santiago
Christina Lampron	Quanita Seymore
Yvonne Lee	Matt Shelton
Steven A. Leverette	Pennassa Shelton
Sofya Lippert	Crystal S. Simmons
Dean Long	Lucy Esther Soto
Carlos Lopez	Donna Sousa
Anthony Malachin	Yasha M. Sparks
Yeni Carolina C. Martinez	Christina Stephens
Andron Massey	Greg P. Stewart
Eugenia McClelland	Tamara Stewart
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Teresa Strahler
Moneek Tarver
Anthony J. Taylor
Sherri Taylor
Roslynn D. Thomas
Sara Ticala
Shari Todd
Lisbeth Torres
Luis Daniel Torres
Liliana Trifan
Klara Trusova
Mary Tucker
LaQuandra Underwood
Richard Volkenant
Mittie Walker
Latonya Walton
Yvonne Warman
Nicole Watkins
Ana Whorton
Kin Wijasa
Nickeia Williams
Erica Willis
Vicki L. Witt
Afi Wozufia
Yaneth Wynn

