

# *Beginnings xi*

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

**Ohio Writers' Conference**

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER



## Foreword

I have been fortunate enough to travel to many places across the U.S. to read and present my work. Last year, I had the great pleasure and honor of speaking at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Ohio Writers' Conference in Columbus. On that cold day in May I spoke about truth—how it is double edged—both a burden and a joy. I talked about how in writing and life we must 'bear' our truths as we might bear weight and how this is not easy. But if we can stand it, if we rise to the challenge, our efforts transform into another kind of bearing—our efforts bear fruit. Yes, there is a kind of joy, pride, satisfaction that comes at the end of our labor whenever we face fear, which is what telling the truth requires. It is what writing requires.

I gave my speech about truth. Then, once I was done speaking, I spent the rest of the day listening. I listened to former author/scholars, to current graduates of ABLÉ programs read their work and tell their stories. Now, thinking back on what I heard that day, and meditating on exactly what I might say in the foreword for this year's *Beginnings xi*, I am reminded of these words: "Poetry is Not a Luxury." This is the title of one of Audre Lorde's most famous essays. And the sentiment these words express never felt more true, more resonant, more alive, than on that day and in my memory of it. One after another of the ABLÉ authors/scholars stood up and read, stood in front of a microphone and at least a hundred people. Their copy of *Beginnings 10* in hand, they stood behind their own words and truths. But what was felt and said struck me as entirely essential. No, not a luxury at all. A joy maybe, a pleasure, but also a necessity.

Poetry is not a luxury. No writing is. Writing is rather a great requirement of life, like food or breath, a matter of survival. The personal reflections, pieces of fiction and memoir, as well as poetry in these pages are crucial. But they are also

great gifts. And like all gifts, these pieces benefit all involved—giver, receiver, accidental witness. We give ourselves to the work of writing. It gives to us. We let what we've made fly into the world so that it may give to and serve others, a gesture that is so gratifying to ourselves.

Audre Lorde also said, "When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

Writing does require an acquaintance with fear. But at some point, whether we befriend fear, stare or shout it down, wade quietly through it, or maybe, as Lorde suggests, set it aside, fear is nothing next to the need for truth and the expression of vision. And it is nothing next to dreams—the theme of this year's issue of *Beginnings*.

That is what they showed me last year, one after the other in a great line snaking through the big white tent. And it is what these pages in your hands represent. This great gift of words, a reminder of what writing is and can be—truth, vision and dream combined and brought to light. I wholeheartedly congratulate you, the authors of *Beginnings xi*, on your achievements represented in these pages. They are many. They are boundless. And, finally, I admire the courage you all mustered to walk through the fire of fear in service of your dreams.

**Lee Peterson**

Author

## Acknowledgements

The publication of a compilation of writings such as *Beginnings xi* requires patience, dedication, and a passion for writing. The team effort put into this book is more than just the sum of its parts.

The Ohio Literacy Resource Center would like to recognize the retirement of Connie Sapin, Literacy Projects Coordinator. We applaud her vision for this series and thank her for her 11 years of continued dedication. We wish Connie success and joy in the next chapter of her life.

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 for the countless hours they dedicated to reading and judging of the 503 submissions received for the 2008 Ohio Writers' Conference.

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We want to recognize the cover artist, Denny Semler, and thank him for expressing himself artistically and allowing us to use this expression for this publication.

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## ABLE

1. ***in position to do something:*** physically or mentally equipped to do something, especially because of circumstances and timing
2. ***Capable or talented:*** having the necessary resources or talent to do something
3. ***Good at learning:*** quick to learn in an educational environment
4. ***Be able to do something:*** to be able or have the ability to do something

*Synonym: See Intelligent*

I'm not changing my tune for you  
I'm marching to my own beat  
You can not defeat  
Me  
I am able  
to see between the lines and cracks  
I've made a pact with myself  
Given this opportunity  
If I don't take it  
Got no one to blame but me  
Close that government study book  
I am not your statistic  
I am able  
And if you were my friend  
You wouldn't send me on this guilt trip  
Teasing me because I want to learn  
To be better equipped  
To have a good life for myself  
And my family  
I am learning  
I am able to wake up every morning  
A day filled with endless possibilities  
This tornado in my brain  
is taking me to new heights

Showing you what I'm made of  
I'm here to inspire you  
But you inspire me  
Being smart  
Takes a lot of heart  
Hard as nails but with a soft side  
Filled an ocean with the tears I've cried  
But I am precious  
I am blessed  
I have been put to the test  
And I am good enough  
I am able  
I am tough  
Out of society's chains  
I am set free  
Life is hard, let there be no doubt  
But I'm trying a different route  
Only one I am a slave to is me  
I am able to read  
Able to write  
Forget the sword  
The pen has more might  
I'm a product not of where I came from  
But of where I am going to be  
I'm starting to see the forest  
And not just the trees  
I still have a way yet to go  
But listen to how able I am  
I am more than my income, my sex, and  
the color of my skin  
I'm speaking out loud  
And writing with words  
I will be heard  
No longer obscured  
I am choosing and perusing  
The next course in my life  
Throw away that old label for me,  
"You only got your GED"  
I am able

To learn and discern  
I am able  
Don't know yet where all I am going  
But I know where I've been  
Gonna rise up  
Take paper and pen  
And show you just  
How ABLE I am.

*~ Heidi M. Bauer  
GED Scholar  
GED Scholars Initiative  
Graduate, Kent State University*

DAYDREAMS



## CHRONICLES OF A WORDLESS WRITER

The pen sits on the desk  
untouched for ages.  
The pages lay scattered  
on the cold wooden floor,  
and the held captive words  
are so dense that they intoxicate  
the very air I breathe.

*~ Amanda DiCapo*

## I PLAY WITH WORDS

I play with words, I set them free  
I take many trips with them  
Into the past, and on the wings of fantasy  
I change them, erase them  
and constantly rearrange them.

I play with words, I set them free,  
I use them as weapons  
and for armor to hide behind.  
I can use them to make the cripple walk  
and to take away the darkness from the blind.

I play with words, I set them free  
I let them run on and on,  
or I can stop them without notice.  
I use them up relentlessly.  
I abuse them. I hear them  
and I feel what it is I see, written down in front of me.

I play with words, I set them free  
and because words are such a great part of me,  
I save them up, I write them down  
and at times, I have them in my head just spinning around.  
Words are all I can give you  
They're all I have to leave  
So, I play with words, and I'll always set them free.

*~ Linda Barrett*

## DOMINO EFFECT

Thrills come with bills,  
which leads to a drink,  
nine shots of liquor requires a shrink,  
shrinks lead to confession,  
which leads to a mess.  
Hear this, my darling,  
madness is best.

*~ Amanda DiCapo*

## BLINK

There's this horrible feeling  
That lingers around.  
It's the wheel that keeps spinning  
Bound to cover more ground.  
You can shout in the wind  
But it won't hang around.  
So what is the use  
Of believing in sound  
When no one takes the time to think.

There's a thick liquid darkness  
That's consuming me.  
It's surrounding you too;  
You just choose not to see.  
You can try to avoid it,  
But eventually  
Your eyes will be ripped open  
And sooner or later  
All who are floating will sink.

Hey, everyone, look  
At your great Uncle Sam.  
And he's promising peace,  
But look what's in his hands  
It's a bomb. It's exploding  
For oil and land,  
And the children are dying  
In a war amongst sand.  
And the shed blood stains it all pink

I am nothing great,  
A mere mortal man.  
And there's so many things  
That I don't understand.  
Would I be out of line  
To ask for your hand?

I'd have it in writing  
Autographed by a man,  
But it would just be a big waste of ink.

*~ Clay E. Young*

## WHAT DREAMS MEAN TO ME

Dreams are very important to me, both the dreams I dream at night and the dreams I have in the waking world.

When I was in high school, I had a book that would tell me what my dreams meant. I would write down my dreams right when I woke up, before I forgot them, and then try to figure them out. In my book I could look up different words and there would be an explanation what it meant to be dreaming about these things. If I, for example, had a dream where I was swimming, I would look up the word "swim" and read about what it means to be dreaming that you're swimming.

Nowadays I do not use that book very often. Instead I try to think about why I have the dreams that I have. If I, for example, dream about my family a lot one night, I think to myself that it is probably because I miss them. Then I try to do something about the problem. If I am dreaming about my family I might give them a call that day or write them a long email, so that I will not miss them as much.

It is not every day that I remember what I have been dreaming about at night. I usually remember my dreams if I wake up to my alarm clock, because then I am often in the middle of a dream when I wake up. I think it is amazing that according to science, we dream every night, even if we do not remember the dreams. It is interesting how the body deals with everything we experience during the day in the dreams.

Besides the dreams I have at night, I also daydream a lot during the day. It is important for me to always have dreams or goals in life that I am working on reaching. When I have a goal that I want to reach, I am happy and it helps me to make the right choices in life. I have always been a person who daydreams a lot, but since I started studying pedagogy at the university, having goals in life have become even more important. Nowadays I always

make up both long-term and short-term goals for everything I do in life. I work on reaching my goals every day.

As time passes I might change my goals and make them higher or lower depending on what I need. I have noticed that I love the way it feels to reach a goal or fulfill a dream that I have had for a long time in my life. That is why I always have a few goals that I am working on reaching. A lot of my dreams or goals are simple things that are not very hard to reach. I might put up a goal to save some money each week and then go on a trip to a place that I have always wanted to visit. If I succeed and go on the trip, it feels like a little victory to me that I managed to reach my goal. The victory makes me motivated to work on reaching my other goals.

One goal that I have right now in my life is, for example, to be able to work out five times each week. Another goal is to save money for vacation. My goal is to have enough money at the end of the year to be able to go on a trip to North Carolina.

My goals in life seem to change pretty often. The important thing is to keep dreaming and setting goals, even though I might not reach them all. As long as I reach most of them, and the most important ones, then I am happy.

*~ Jennifer Karlsson*

## LINES

Lines, lines, everywhere are lines  
Perpendicular, straight, parallel's fine  
They're used up and down on crossways and signs  
Very confusing! They mess with my mind.

Perpendicular lines we see everyday  
Four square on the playground with children at play  
Parallel lines never touch all day  
I see yellow lines striped along the roadway.

Lines, lines, everywhere are lines  
Perpendicular, straight, parallel's fine  
They're used up and down on crossways and signs  
Very confusing! They mess with my mind.

~ Live Oaks ABLE Class  
Kim Backer  
Samantha Naylor  
San Pol  
Kathleen Reid

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IF I

If I could capture happiness,  
If I could capture love,  
If I could catch a rainbow  
Or sunshine from above,  
I'd wrap them up and save them  
Until I found someone who needed them.  
I'd search for someone who  
Had only known sadness,  
Never a smile had they seen,  
I'd give them all the happiness and let them build their  
dream.  
I'd look until I found  
A person full of hate,  
I'd give them the love I'd captured,  
And pray my gesture didn't come too late.

If I could choose a person,  
To give a rainbow to,  
I'd choose a blind one,  
Whose life in darkness was lived,  
So, he could see just once, what beauty God has to give.  
With the sunshine I had captured  
I'd spread it far and near,  
For a tiny smile from someone I love  
Or someone I hold dear  
I'm tired of spreading tears.

*~ Linda Barrett*

## FREEDOM IS...

Freedom is...  
the birds  
in the sky  
through the clouds  
way up high.

Freedom is...  
every little tear  
that we cry  
when we have  
to say goodbye.

Freedom is...  
the love  
I share  
with you  
and all  
the things  
we can do.

Freedom is...  
what we will  
feel  
when all  
our dreams  
become real.

Freedom is ...  
in our hearts  
to stay  
that no one  
can ever  
take away.

Freedom is...  
all of ours  
today, tomorrow

and every day.

So, listen, my friend,  
stand proud  
and tall  
and always  
remember  
Freedom is...  
IN US ALL!!

*~ Denise Baas*

## MY LIFE AS A SIDEWALK

My life as a sidewalk is very hard and awkward. I am found near most of the city streets and many people walk all over me. I sometimes feel the rain fall, and it's uncomfortable because it feels like millions of tiny stones hitting me. On hot days, the sun dries me, and I feel the warm vapors through the process.

Winter is the roughest season of all. It is very cold and the wet snowfall is often freezing. I can become very slippery and dangerous to pedestrians. To prevent people from falling, salt is thrown on me to thaw any icy spots. Actually, I like the way the salt feels and tastes. However, by the end of winter, I have cracks and scrapes from all the damages caused by the salt and snow shovels.

I feel that I am used and abused most often in the summer. I can feel the pressure of people walking in all directions. In addition, I experience the different textures and weights of the bicycle tires. Thus, I often feel sore and achy when the day ends. You often find trash and debris tucked in my crevasses, which makes me look and feel unattractive. I would feel better if people would care for me as they do their own lawn.

In conclusion, my life as a sidewalk is not everything it's cracked up to be. People walk all over me, pollute me with things that are not so pretty, and use me for things other than walking. It's not so easy being me, but I could be a street.

*~ Tami R. Ballas*

*DREAMSCAPES*



## PRISONER

Sometimes I need to run away from life–  
Run far from here  
Just to be me.  
Everyone thinks of me differently,  
But I think of myself  
As a  
Prisoner  
Who wants to be free.

*~ John Reed*

## BOOTS ON GRAVEL

A short journey made hundreds of times.  
The October night air, still and calm, stings my lungs.  
The only sound, my boots on an old gravel road.  
End of my cigarette flirts with the lighter's flame.  
The smoke rises to meet the night sky under a full moon.  
I stare into the night. The night stares back,  
not at me, but deeper, something inside my mind.  
I open myself to the night.  
It sends me a sign as though it understands;  
I look away from the microscope  
to see the world as it truly is.  
A shooting star burns through the sky  
and tells me to struggle on,  
the end nowhere in sight.  
Nothing is in a hurry.  
Nothing matters more than this moment;  
I am part of something greater than just me.  
Trends, fashion, drama, jealousy, greed—  
The trivial day-to-day envies dissolve.  
The vast night embraces me and I feel a part of it,  
a universe where everyone and everything is temporary.  
I become something more than everyday pettiness.  
I drift lighter, lifted, elevated.  
I will meet my end someday.  
Maybe soon, maybe not. Not my call.  
I go to my nowhere. I snap back.  
Everywhere is somewhere.  
I crawl back inside myself and walk home.

*~ Joshua Lee Tatman*

## I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO GET THERE

There is this place  
I like to go sometimes  
when it is late and  
I can't sleep,  
a place where the only sound  
that can be heard is  
the beating of your heart.  
I want to take you there  
with me  
and tell you things  
that I've always kept  
inside—  
The dreams  
and hopes  
and tears  
and scars  
(not to mention)  
the mistakes I've made

Here, take my hand.  
I'll show you how to get there.

*~ Amanda DiCapo*

## THE SAHARA DESERT

Hear the whistling of the hot, humid air as  
The sand blows from east to west.  
See the white, yellowish dunes,  
Moving and ever-changing.  
Camels travel in groups and walk for miles,  
Never thirsting.  
I feel lost and alone,  
Scared and disoriented.

*~ Amadou Mika Dia*

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MY ISLAND CRUISE

Mysterious and deep waters  
Blue waters that remind me of silk  
A seagull singing the song of its life  
Waters roaring and the winds whistling a song  
The smell of salty waters  
And the aroma of food in the air  
Many wonderful flavors of food  
Delicious pineapples and mangoes  
Soft mists of the sea on my face  
Wind blowing through my hair  
The sun is running away for the night

*~ Anastasia Lohner*

## THE SEASONS

When winter comes, we get snow. Snow is so cold, but it looks good. I like the way it looks, but I don't like to get cold.

However, winter only lasts three to four months, and then it goes and spring comes along. Then everything comes back to life. The flowers can be planted, and the trees get their buds. It is so nice and cool outside.

But then it is time for summer. That is when the temperature gets hot, the humidity soars, and it gets mucky. The grass and flowers need water, and the grass needs to be mowed.

Then it is time for fall. That is my favorite season of all. The reason that I like fall is the way the leaves change. My grandson can play in the leaves. The only thing that I don't like is that everything dies, and then we start winter all over again.

*~ Coreal Lynn Wilson*

*DREAMING  
POSSIBILITIES*



## A NEW BEGINNING

Every day is a new beginning  
For me to start over  
To see things I've never seen  
To hear what I've never heard  
To taste things I've never tasted  
To feel what I've never felt  
To be who I never was  
To explore the world that wasn't explored  
To have what I never had.

*~ Vicki Addy*

## CHOICES

My name is Sereice, and I am twenty-five years old. I have two handsome boys who are six and four. I had to make a change from the streets. I had to change a whole lot. I had to do it on my own.

I started off in "da hood," then moved out, and had to change the way that I am. I had to realize that I am a mother, not a child.

Throughout the past years I had to change the things that I've learned to make a better life for myself. I had to learn to do everything that a mother needs to know. I tried to get a job and go to school. Between the two of them I'm all tied up. I want my children to know that their mother is trying. My children are also in school, and that makes me feel good.

I keep on continuing to do what I am supposed to do—go to school, try to work, and watch my children grow. I don't have custody of my children because I wanted to have someone from the streets next to me. But no matter what I went through, I didn't let that stop me from keeping myself in control. I am still trying to help my family. I'm still looking for a job, but I haven't found one yet. I want a better living with my two children.

I know that I am doing the right thing because I've made a lot of changes. Not finding the right job, no income, a mother with two children...it is tough. But along the way of my ups and downs, I've learned to keep on going. Don't let anyone pull you down. No matter what, there will always be something out there good for you. I've gotten a lot of help from many people, and they helped me get through my thick and thins until the very end. I know that I can do it, no matter how light or how heavy it is.

I had a home with my two children, but I let it go. I had to, or I wouldn't be where I am right now. My children are both safe. One is living with his father; the other one is with my mother. I am still fighting my way to get ahead, get back right. I am starting to find my way to the top. So no matter what you do, always listen to those who are giving the correct advice to you. Say, "I can do it!" If I can do it, then you can too! Keep on striving, and don't give up!

*~ Sereice C. Harris*

## OVERCOMING

I feel as though I must climb a mountain,  
Just to reach a rope.  
Is there hope? Will I choke,  
or was life created just for a joke?  
Maybe so, maybe no,  
But for now I must go.

P.S. if I reach some stairs  
I will face my fears.  
Even with dripping tears,  
I will dodge the spears.

*~ Jesse Altman*

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## DETERMINATION

Determination is an amazing thing.  
It drives us up mountains  
And built this great country from only dreams

I believe determination is held in examples  
Both large and small  
The greatest of beings,  
Those that society simply deems "null."

It's all around the armies of soldiers fighting in our defense.  
It's the flag that flew high despite the attack.  
It's the new World Trade Center built back from the floor.  
It carries the single mother who refuses to be poor.  
I see it in Armstrong down the Tour De France.

Determination can take many forms: family,  
children, or the desire to simply open all of life's doors.  
One thing is certain and always will be—  
We couldn't have much if it wasn't for determination  
Held within you and me.

*~ Caleb Robertson*

## DREAMS VS. REALITY

I don't remember exactly what kind of visions I had of living in the United States, but living here has changed my life completely. After years of hard work and depression, I finally met my current husband and came with him to Cleveland—a challenge as well as a chance to better my life. I had to quit my job and leave everything in Germany. I don't remember what I was thinking and hoping but I was excited about this fresh start in the United States. It would be the first time in my life that I didn't have to work for a living. And although I had to leave my family and my friends, I felt confident and hopeful.

In the first year here, we tried to get used to the American way of life, which I hadn't imagined would be so different. From a European perspective, everything here is hidden. How could anyone know that "Heinen's" was a grocery or Beachwood Place a mall? And how do Americans clean the floor? Where could I buy real bread? I was very busy finding out about all those things and learning English.

The second year began very dramatically. Twice I had emergency surgery. I learned a lot about American hospitals and how to handle illness. It was a shock. When you are sick you really feel the loneliness of not being in your own country.

After one and a half years, I met an English woman who introduced me to a German group and an international women's group. Being in contact with people from all over the world is very interesting, and I think I have learned a lot. In the United States, I feel closer to European people, although we don't speak the same language. And I have learned to see my own country differently. I was never aware of the beauty of Germany before I lived in another country. I also have learned to admire the friendliness and

open mindedness of many Americans and how they make you feel comfortable.

This September I started a yoga teacher training class. I did it to deepen my knowledge of yoga, but in the training I learned a lot about myself. I learned that the search for something more than money and comfortable living is the same all over the world. This desire to seek a more spiritual life is what unites us.

Maybe those dreams of a better life in the United States were a bit of a fantasy. One thing I have learned for sure is that even if you change the continent where you live, you always have to live with yourself. If you are not happy with yourself, you will be unhappy everywhere.

*~ Caroline von Westernhagen*

## GHETTO CHRISTMAS

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the hood  
Not a creature was stirring, only a drug dealer collecting on his goods.

The hood was all quiet, not 'cause they was asleep  
Some had no 'lectricity, some wit no heat

The houses was dark, windows draped wit stained sheets  
Garbage and trash lay in the streets

There was soiled pampers all on the curb  
One smelled of piss; it had two tiny turds

No decorations were hung, no colorful lights  
You could see snow everywhere, all the hood was white

There was frost in the windows from the weather being so cold  
You didn't see anyone, not one poor soul

All of a sudden we could hear someone's teeth chatter  
We stepped outside to see what was the matter

It was the nasty crack-head neighborhood pimp  
He rocked from side to side with a funky old limp

He was big and ugly, and he was fat  
He was 'bout nothing, just an old hood rat

He was slipping and sliding, couldn't even walk straight  
He was so big and fat he broke down one of the hood  
momma's gates

Boggling some old junk he had found on the way

We wondered what he had, it was 'bout to be Christmas day

We knew it was broken up toys in the big red bag  
The way he treated the hood mommas, it was so sad

Yelling out loud and grinning from ear to ear,  
"Come one, come all, pimp Santa is here"

A big fat blunt he held between his teeth  
His only one ring was a Christmas wreath

Going round and round on his head was a spinning top  
He tried pushing the button, but it wouldn't stop

All the hood kids were jumping with glee  
Hoping for a real Santa and a green Christmas tree

One hood momma said, "Pimp Santa, you gotta be joking,  
Coming round here in front of our kids smoking"

A hood momma said, "We ain't see you po ass in bout fo days"  
Another said, "We hate you and yo dirty ways"

When he opened his mouth, out came a bad smell  
The little hair he had was slicked down with gel

His teeth was all shiny but not wit gold,  
They had this hard substance like a buttery mold

He said, "Come on baby girl, you know I'm doing my best"  
She whistled real loud and out came the rest

One stood six feet tall; she had real big breasts  
Her weave was all matted; she had crusty lips and a hairy chest

Pimp Santa thought he was going for a sleigh ride

Out came one more hood momma, she was short, fat, and  
real wide

None of them wanted to hear what he had to say  
Pimp Santa was going down on that cold winter's day

Hood momma grabbed pimp Santa and tossed him. His fat  
ass hit the ground  
All you could hear was a loud grunting sound

They beat pimp Santa until he threw up and passed gas  
He had all kinds of shit coming from his ass

As a tall momma got up, then she stood  
She said, "No more pimping in this neighborhood!"

A little old lady came out of nowhere  
She had big pop eyes and thin gray hair

Grandma spoke stern with a very soft voice  
What she was 'bout to do, he left her no choice

She said, "I am a senior citizen, I deserve a little respect  
You wit yo old ass, pimpin' through the hood and still trying  
to have sex"

"You know you can't do shit, you look like an infested  
disease"  
"Hell, you blow six farts each time you sneeze"

She told that fat pimp that his days were done  
She reached in her tiny little bosom and pulled out a gun

It was one of the biggest I had ever seen  
Little old grandma let out a real loud scream

She then said to him, "Now you looky here  
This is our neighborhood! We will not fear!"

She said, "You are a dirty old man with your nasty self  
Believe me when I tell you this is your last breath"

Just as she raised the gun and was 'bout to pull the trigger  
A nasty looking hood momma ran up and said, "Hey, that's  
my nigga"

Right away they began to exchange hateful words  
Little old grandma said, "Listen bitch, save that shit for the  
birds"

She told Grandma, "That's my man, and he's all I got"  
Grandma pointed to the ground and she fired two shots

She said, "You nasty ass tramp, you got twelve kids  
Everybody in the neighborhood know ain't none of 'em his"

"He pimped you ass and you had a baby each time  
he kept all the money and never gave you a dime"

"After he used yo dumb ass all up, then he got 'em another  
dumb hoe  
this nasty cruddy ass pimp has to go!"

Grandma said, "Now I'm bout to do my thang, don't you  
interfere"  
All the crowd from the neighborhood began to cheer

"This is you last chance to give pimp daddy a hug  
You don't scare me; twenty years ago I shot and killed a  
judge"

"They locked me up and I served my time  
They gave me only fifteen to twenty-five"

"Get the hell out my way, cause I'll shoot you too  
I back down from no one, bitch, I thought you knew"

Pimp Santa was cold, shaking, and scared

There were frozen ice balls clinging to his beard

The great big woman that stood six feet  
Took pimp Santa's hoe and tossed her to the street

Then grabbed pimp Santa by his only one ball  
Shook him, then slammed his face into a brick wall

Then rammed her size twelve boot up his butt hole  
Some old guy yelled, "Damn hood momma, now that was cold!"

Now that will put pimp Santa to a stop  
He died instantly of a foot treatment shock

One hood momma yelled, "Now we got one more to get  
It's that po ass drug dealer who ain't never got shit"

Just as she was done saying what she had to say  
He walked up to them and said, "How you hood moms  
doing today?"

One hood mom said "What the hell you want?  
You got anything to say? We prefer that yo don't"

They grabbed him, then threw him down  
One said, "You are done dealing in this part of town"

They beat him so bad he wished he was dead  
While laying there visions of crack cocaine danced through  
his head

He said, "Now it didn't take all ya'll to beat my ass  
My body is aching, and my heart's beating real fast"

Grandma said, "No more dealing in this part of the hood  
You are corrupt and you ain't no good!"

"Now I do believe you know what I'm talking about

Mess with another hood mom, and I will take your ass out!"

As he was getting up he said "Thank ya'll for sparing my life  
But lucky for you hood moms, I wasn't carrying my knife"

In all that snow the drug dealer got up and got on his bike  
As he rode off you could see 'bout fifty red flashing lights  
He said "Good night to all and to all a good night"

*~ Gloria Neely Tucker*

## MY STORY

What can I say? God is good. He is good all the time.  
I have gone through the wind and the storm.  
It's not the norm when you go through the storm.  
It's hard and tough, sometimes rough,  
But Jesus is on the main line; tell Him what you want.

Be faithful, be strong. You can't go wrong with God.  
The Bible says, "He will never leave you or forsake you,"  
So that's what I depend on.

The ups and downs in life are just that...  
ups and downs.  
Faith—that's it...hoping in things unseen,  
And knowing that prayers will be answered.

My story is like any other...  
ups, downs, and turn-a-rounds.  
Wind storms blowing everywhere.  
But there is one thing that I'm sure of,  
And it's that I believe the one in control will handle it.  
I have faith in knowing that God is in control.  
He can change it, fix it, and turn it around.  
How do I know? Because He told me so.

*~ Rhonda D. Ware*

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## EDUCATION

Extraordinary outcomes

Doors open and dreams come true

Unlimited opportunities

College is a real possibility

Awakens your potential

Tactics to reach goal

Intelligence and independence

Opportunity to succeed

Never too late to get started

Live Oaks ABLE Class knows that education is the key to success! You have to have it to succeed in life and fulfill all your hopes and dreams. It is a lifelong journey. Seek your future!

*~ Live Oaks ABLE  
Rebecca Baker  
Rose M. Buckner  
Tiffany Coleman  
Curtis Johnson  
San Pol  
Caleb Robertson  
Coreal Lynn Wilson*

**LOOKING FOR YOU, LORD**

I am gone down that road  
feeling blue... Lord, Lord-  
and I am looking for you.

Yes, I am goin' down that road...  
feeling blue Lord... looking for you.

I know what I'm going to do  
I am going to get down on my knees and pray  
And hope you can hear me.

Yes, I am going to  
get down on my knees, Lord,  
and hope you hear me.

I am goin' down the road  
And if I stumble and fall  
I know you will pick me up.

I can go on down that road  
and when I get to the end  
I know you will be there  
to see me through.

I know you will take  
me away from these blues  
and show me all of your love.

The road above will be smooth.  
There will be no more blues.

*~ Stephanie Cole*

### DREAM VS. REALITY

When I received the visa to America, I was so thrilled. All my friends congratulated me and told me I was lucky because I was going to live in the most sophisticated country in the world and would enjoy a western life style every day.

My husband is a thoughtful guy. He worried that I wouldn't adjust to American life, so the first week he took me to many restaurants. We ate steak, pizza, spaghetti, and Mexican dishes. I don't know why, but the dishes which I had been interested in trying when I lived in China could not satisfy me now. By the second week, I began to miss Chinese food.

I have never been separated from my parents. Every day in China, after I came back home from school or my workplace, my mother had already prepared dinner for me. I didn't know how to cook and had never even tried. But the Chinese restaurants in Cleveland did not cook in the traditional Chinese style, and they also were very expensive.

So the first reality I faced was that I needed to learn how to cook. I often called my mother and followed her directions as to how to cook. I visited friends who were older than me and good at cooking, to watch how they cooked. I also searched for recipes on the Internet. After all these efforts, I cooked my first meal. The fact that it was so salty that my husband almost couldn't eat it, made me feel upset. But my mother told me that the first time that she had cooked, the pork was even still half-raw. She told me that cooking and learning English have the same trick-practice. And that practice makes perfect!

Now I can use all the supplies in my fridge to make a wonderful dish, even Japanese and Korean dishes. I always cook for my friends, and they always say that the dishes are so delicious and even look appealing.

Although life in America is very different from my expectation, it has made me grow up fast and become a woman and good wife. I really appreciate that.

Dear friends, when you can't change reality, please change yourself. Don't just wait for your dreams to come true.

*~ Wenyuan Hou*

## MY LIFE IN AMERICA

My husband's friend told us that the day we arrived in Cleveland was the coldest day in the past five years. As I left the airport and stood waiting in the street, I felt totally chilled, not only because of the bad weather, but also because I suddenly realized that I was far away from my families and friends.

On our second day here, my husband and I went to a supermarket. Looking at the prices, I felt a sense of desperation. Everything here was expensive when compared with the prices in China. I looked around and saw blue eyes and turned up noses everywhere. There were no faces I could identify with. On top of that, I couldn't understand a word of what people were saying. As we walked home, I saw only slushy snow, withered trees, and grey sky. There were few people on the sidewalk, and at that moment, I asked myself, why had I agreed to come to the United States?

For the whole first month, I refused to leave the house. I moped around thinking only about my mother, my friends, and all the good times we had spent together. I dreamed about all kinds of delicious Chinese food.

But soon I realized that what I was doing would not help make things better. I had to adapt to my new life. My husband's friend told me that Case offered free English classes, and I soon found the registration office and enrolled. Besides improving my English, I learned a lot about American culture and customs. The best part was that I met many new friends. Joining the class was the best decision I had made since coming to America.

If winter comes, can spring be far behind? No. The cold winds stopped blowing, and the snow melted. The leaves turned green, the sky was a clear blue, squirrels

jumped on the grassy lawns looking for food, and people smiled at each other when passing on the sidewalk. Then summer came. I went to Lake Erie, joined a fitness center, and learned how to make sushi. I borrowed books from the public library and got my driver's license. Autumn arrived. I was astonished by the beauty of this season. I liked sitting near the window looking out at the people jogging or walking their dogs; I saw families riding bicycles. It seemed that all around me people were sharing love and happiness. I enjoyed driving down the city streets looking at the colorful leaves. I had only known this from seeing it in pictures.

Time flies. Each season in America brought new experiences. Now I am entering my second winter here. I still remember that second morning a year ago, when I had just come to America. I told my husband that I hated America. A year later, every morning when I open my eyes, the first thing I want to do is to tell everyone how happy I am to be here.

*~ Wei Wei*

## DREAMS AND REALITY

In Romania, many people dream of living in America. I never had this desire; I was a successful professor of Romanian, French, and Russian literature. I was content. I came to America for the first time in 1995, one year after my son got married to an American. After that, my husband and I visited this country five times.

Then in 2003, we came here for a surgical procedure for my husband. My dream was to see him well, not to realize something extraordinary in America. We realized it was too late for us—the United States government would not recognize our degrees and we were too old to begin again. We lived in my son's house for awhile, and after that we rented a house, close to my son's family, and a new period in our life began.

We got green cards and permanent residence. Very soon we got jobs—totally different from our education. We felt disoriented in this new culture with so many difficulties, beginning with learning a new language, (we spoke four languages but not English), bills, customs, traditions, and life style. Slowly we adjusted to everything, even though each step in our American life was a challenge. My husband and I have done pretty well. In addition, we have the joy of being with my son and his family. I have good friends among the Cleveland Romanian community and even some American people. This means so much in my life, because I'm a very social person, and I like to spend time with them. I have come to see that America is a wonderful country, and for us it offers a unique experience of life.

*~ Maria Bulucea*

## DREAM VS. REALITY

I came to America quite by accident. I had had a peaceful life in China. I graduated from the university, got a good paying job as a teacher, met an old friend from elementary school, fell in love with him, and got married. Everything was going smoothly. I remembered that on my wedding day, I imagined that soon after my marriage, I would get pregnant, have a baby, buy a new car, and stay at home caring for my beloved ones. We would travel during the holidays and life would be quite enjoyable with my family, friends, and my students. It was like a fairy tale. I would live happily ever after...

But before this could all happen, my husband was on a plane heading for America. I was shaken out of my idyllic life to open my eyes to a much harsher reality. I was miserable without my husband and therefore I decided to follow him to America where he was doing research. I tearfully said goodbye to my family, to my familiar world, and set out for the unknown.

When I was reunited with my husband after the long flight, I remember sitting on the mattress in the apartment and looking at him through the dim light. I saw a man who had become thin and pale and my joy in seeing him was overtaken by a deep fear of the strangeness of my new surroundings. The next day, my fear was increased as I watched the news on TV of the school shooting in Cleveland. My whole body was tense and I sat alone in the room, thinking any moment something dreadful would occur. Even the rustling of the wind outside the window would make my heart shudder. When my husband came home, all my tension poured out on him. I lost my temper and quarreled with him for no reason. I cried for a long time. I felt angry that we had come to America and left a life of contentment in China. This was not what I dreamed about for my married life.

I complained about my terrible life to my mother over the phone. She only laughed and told me that all I needed was time. I was doubtful about her words. One day my husband brought home a lamp to replace the old one. After his work, I turned on the light, and I saw my husband smiling under the bright lamplight. It was so sweet.

I was determined to build a life here. I joined a Bible study group. The class was a totally new experience for me. In the class, I made some friends. Then I registered for an ESL class at Case. At registration, I received praise for my English skills. This meant a lot to me and helped to bring me out from my state of depression. I also began to invest time in improving my cooking skills. I wanted to help my husband to succeed, and I knew that good meals would be a start. I saw him gain some weight back, and I felt pleased. I even began to cook some American dishes. I remember the first time I made pizza, my husband joked pointing out that I never would have attempted to do this had I stayed in China. I began to see that I would develop myself here in ways that I could not do in China.

I remember that before I got married, my husband had promised me a holiday in Europe, I now believe that this will happen someday but not for now. We are on a different holiday—building a new life here in Cleveland. It is a challenge but one that will make us both grow stronger together.

*~ Ye Zheng*

## THE DRAGON WITHIN

It is every person's right to cultivate their mind, wisdom, and the intelligence that they possess. In doing so, they learn how to be more productive.

When you can't read and write, it is hard to be as self-confident as you possibly can in society.

At this point in time I'm being tutored to become literate. I feel I have a lot of wisdom to share. My goal is to write a book on experiences that I have undergone through life by being illiterate. People who read the book will recognize difficulties in others and be able to assist those who have trouble with reading and writing. I hope to be a better person, for my own peace of mind, and in doing so, it will help me help others.

Reading and writing will profoundly change my outlook on life after 61 years.

Metaphorically speaking, my pen is my sword, and illiteracy is the dragon. As I learn to read and write, I defeat the dragon within.

*~ Ronald W. Fugate*

## MY JOURNEY

I begin my *Vivaldi Concerto in A Minor* a bit hesitantly, nervously glancing around the dark auditorium of people watching me. My violin shakes as my trembling fingers fly to play the familiar notes. My hands take over the piece as my mind wanders.

I find myself reflecting how, at the age of six, I received my first violin, a half-sized instrument well used and aged. I recall the feeling of pure elation as I squeaked out my first song, music I myself had made. I concentrate again as I come to a difficult passage in my concerto. Breathing an internal sigh of relief, I make it through my dreaded high D run.

As my hands once again take over the song, I begin to think of another difficult occurrence I overcame, the experience of finding a new teacher. Little did I know at that time, a time when I was resistant to change, that my new teacher would not only guide me through my next seven years of playing, but would also become an amazing role model, someone I would look up to as I grew well into my teenage years.

I recall how fortunate I was to have had the amazing experience of attending music camp at the age of 16. As a sponge sucks in water, I drew in every word my mentors and instructors taught me those two short weeks.

As I steal a glance around, I see the smiling faces of those in my orchestra watching and listening intently as I finish my piece. Their now-familiar faces remind me of my first practice with them and how I struggled to keep up with the group. I smile in excitement and amazement thinking of how my long journey has brought me here, from being a child barely able to get a note out, to a young violinist, a featured soloist at this concert of my orchestra. As I strike

my final note, the crowd burst into applause. Knowing my journey has not yet ended but is only beginning, I smile brightly and take my bow.

*~ Ann Holbrook*

DREAMS COME  
TRUE



## MY LIFE

My life started all over again for the better after I gave my heart, mind, body, and soul to God. I used to drink, smoke and do drugs; I was homeless. I am not ashamed to say that I dated men who beat me.

Through the course of my life I have lost so many people—my mom, my dad, aunt, uncle, and friends. My children were taken away from me also. With drinking and drug use, I lost a lot of time. The thought of my children kept me alive. I was just surviving and living from day to day.

Now, by the grace of God, I am me again. I am learning to live again, a clean and sober life. I have contact with my children and grandchildren. I have a place of my own. I am finally working on getting my GED, and I have two jobs. I am in church too. I can truly live now.

I am still dealing with some things, but God has put so many good and wonderful people in my life to help me on my journey to do His will. I hope to have my own business one day. Hopefully, I can help people who are going through what I have been through.

This is my story. I hope someone can get some hope from it. We can start over for the better. We can live again. We can love again. We can be loved without being hurt. I am a beautiful woman. I can do for myself with God's help. And you can too. Just let go and let GOD. Keep the faith.

*~ Evelina Robinson*

## MY SILVER LINING

“Every cloud has a silver lining.” I did not always agree with this statement. I would actually get angry every time I heard this saying. I went through a bad divorce about four years ago, and I truly thought my life was over. I did not want the divorce – my husband walked out on me and my son. This was devastating to me. My husband and son were my life. I always put them first. I lived my life for them.

During and after my divorce, I was angry, very angry. I was angry at my ex-husband, I was angry at life, and I was even angry at God. This went on for two years, being angry and hating life until I started talking to an old friend again. She would annoy me because she was so positive all the time, even when bad things were going on. How can someone be so positive? We talked for hours, and she would tell me all the time how I needed to start seeing the silver lining or the good things through the bad. I thought she was crazy.

The more I talked to her, the more I started to see these silver linings, like my son. I got my son out of my marriage, which was the biggest blessing. I also started to look at life differently. Instead of what bad could happen, I started to see what good could happen. My self esteem started to go up, and I got the courage to go back to school.

I am starting to realize life is not so bad if I can be positive. We know bad things happen and that we can't stop them. We can, however, not let them get us down and know things will get better.

So, I now see that my divorce was a complete life changing event. Even knowing it was devastating to me, I am now a more positive person. I even started school, which is always something that scared me. I plan to go to

college and to get a good job so I can take care of my son by myself and be a good role model for him.

“Every cloud has a silver lining” no longer angers me; it inspires me to be more positive and a better person.

*~ Angela Traylor*

## MY ABLE (GED) CLASS

Going to GED class has changed my life. It has turned me into a whole new person. I'm not as shy or quiet; I have the self-confidence I need to answer questions and to ask questions, so I can succeed in class. I finally feel that I have the ability to learn like everyone else. I used to believe I did not have the ability to learn. Now that I know better, I'm working hard for a better future for my family and myself. I believe we have the power to change our lives.

It's not that my life is terrible. I have a great life, three beautiful children, a perfect husband, and I adore them. But I've pretty much always worked nights and my husband works days and two of the boys are in school all day, so I don't get to spend any time with my family. I couldn't find a day job paying enough for me to leave my night job. I knew the only hope I had of ever spending time with my family was to go back to school so I could get a good job. We just need time together; we already have everything else.

Starting these classes was the hardest thing I've ever done. Walking in the classroom for the first time took more bravery than jumping out of an airplane and was harder than jumping off a cliff. I never did well in school; in fact, I only made it to the third month of eighth grade, and I only went two to three days a week at best. I was 15 years old and in the eighth grade when I left school. After moving in with my husband at 16 years of age, I was home schooled by my husband, Troy, and his brother, Matt. I never felt that the home schooling was as good as real school. I only worked on school work when I wanted to. Troy and Matt helped me so much, but I wasn't able to remember anything I learned. I had little hope and much fear.

I walked into class the first day at Live Oaks; I was going to what they called Orientation. I got there, and I had to take tests. I almost panicked. When I left that day, I thought there was no way I would ever go back. After

taking that test, I thought I would be laughed at for doing worse than anyone in history. The next day I forced myself to go back. Then I went the next day and the next day until I really started liking school. Then it started being what I looked forward to. Finally, I loved it!

The first change started from just enjoying how nice my teacher, Paula, was. She was always happy to see me and always had kind words to say. One day I was really having a hard time. I couldn't understand how to do a problem, and Scottye, the teacher's aide, came and sat down beside me, put her hand on my arm and said, "I'm really not very good at this either, but I'm going to try; maybe we can do it together." She helped me. I felt so good having people who cared about teaching me. I knew they wanted me to make it; this class truly cares about its students. They saw me as a person, not just a number. They even have great volunteers; I was really enjoying it.

Shortly after getting used to the night class, the girl that worked for me quit. I was stuck working nights by myself; it left little room for school. So my husband started going to work for me on Tuesdays and working with me on Thursdays so I could still go to school. I finally got a break. A spot in the AM pre-school opened up, so now I was able to go to school in the morning. But I was scared because this was something new – a new teacher, new aides, and even new volunteers.

I went to class scared that first morning, and Marty, the morning teacher, greeted me with a smile and introduced herself. She was very nice, but I was still not comfortable. I wondered if it was even possible that they would be as supportive as my night class, but they were. The first time I had trouble, Marty sat down with me one-on-one, after she sent everyone on break, and stayed with me until I got it. I then knew she would not give up on me. It was great! I had two teachers who didn't think I was a lost cause. I'm sure as bad as I did in the testing the first two days no one would have blamed them if they would have just written me off, but they didn't. The volunteers were great as well. Before my college pre-test, one of the

volunteers (Rod) sat down with me, worked with me one-on-one, and just kept telling me, "No matter what you do in there, don't sweat it. Keep your head up; be confident." Today when I get scared in college, I hear his voice. They also have a great aide, Donna, in the morning. She types all our papers for us, encourages us before we take tests, and puts our mind at ease. She also sings when we do algebra, "Plug-it-in, plug-it-in," so we'll never forget to plug in the numbers. I even have met friends on the way.

I have loved every step on the road because of these wonderful people who chose to believe in me; they chose to help me. But remember, it's still an uphill battle; we still have to want it for ourselves. It is a choice we have to make, to get up every morning and to go to school and to study. No one can give it to us. Hopefully, if more people know that there is a place that can help them, even if they feel it's impossible, maybe more people will get help. One day when I was feeling scared and doubtful, I looked up and saw a poster hanging on the wall. It said, "If you don't take a chance, you don't stand a chance." My son saw me read it, and he read the next one, "If opportunity doesn't knock, open the door."

*~ Samantha Naylor*

## MY MOTHER

I am writing about my mother. She has always been there for me.

When I was a baby, I was sick a lot. There were tons of hospital visits. At age 12, I caught the flu. I was so sick, I could not walk. My mom took me to the hospital. My white cells dropped, and I almost died. My family was told to plan my funeral. I did not want to die. I had my whole life ahead of me. So we prayed, and I got better. Since then, I get my flu shot every year. I also stay away from sick people.

My health improved over the next couple of years. However, when I was nineteen, I started having unusual thoughts and feelings. I became obsessed over cleaning, and I would scrub myself raw. I remember my hands bleeding. My mom noticed I was talking really fast and not making any sense. I refused her help and, instead, I left home. I had a car, which I crashed.

I stayed on the street for a few days. Later, I walked to an airport, but I had no money. The next thing I knew, I was handcuffed and taken to U.C. Hospital. After three days, I was told I was Bipolar and had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). They told me I would not be able to work again. I had to take pills that cost \$900.00 each month, so I was forced to go on Medicaid. The only one who helped me was my mom. She took me for treatment.

I am now 29. I am trying to get my GED. I live on my own, and I have a nice place to live. I have a dog that I really love, and I am also engaged to my high school sweetheart. My mom has been through hell and back with me.

I used to get mad at God for giving me a second chance at life, just to have me become mentally ill. But I am using my experience to help others, including my mom who, after

many years, is finally in treatment for the same illness. We are both learning how to live each day. I know that, no matter how bad things get, she will be right here beside me.

*~ Amy Dunham*

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### GED CLASS IS LIKE GOING TO THE HOSPITAL

I have been at the Scarlet Oaks Adult GED class for many years. Every day when I come to class I feel great because I know I am in the right place. It is just like when I go to the hospital and feel like I am in the hands of a good doctor.

When you visit the doctor he will examine you and find out your diagnosis. After the doctor finds your pain he will try everything to help you get better. If you need medicine or you need comfort he will be there for you. He will encourage you to do better.

This class is just like a hospital. I took the exam. After that they helped every way they could. When I needed help in English, they were right there. When I was struggling they were a comfort to me. When I was frustrated, they encouraged me. They never put me down. Whatever I needed, they were there for me. This class's teachers and volunteers are like a doctor or nurse in a hospital. They did everything.

It doesn't matter how much a doctor or nurse helps you if your attitude does not change. It will not be better. I realized my negative attitude would not help my skills get better. I said to myself, "I can do this." I talked to myself many times. If I can't pass the GED in this place, I don't think I can do it in another place. I really wanted to pass the GED this year. When I took the GED test I changed my attitude. Now I found out I passed the GED. It was so exciting, and I could not believe I passed.

I am so grateful for all of the help I was given. The Great Oaks GED morning class gave me so much, and everybody was so wonderful to me. They are so happy for me. They are as excited as I am. I would like to tell people if you need help, come to the Great Oaks GED Class. They are the most helpful and wonderful people.

*~ Kilcha Canfield*

## HAPPY WITH WHO WE ARE

I'm Cyndi...  
I'm happy, easy going, loving, and caring.

I'm Kim...  
I'm friendly, shy, trusting, and stubborn.

I'm Becky...  
I'm funny, ditzzy, crazy, and wild.

I'm Angela...  
I'm sensitive, caring, funny, and honest.

I'm Carrie...  
I'm loyal, sassy, boyish, and loud.

I'm Rose...  
I'm honest, friendly, patient, and welcoming.

I'm Sam...  
I'm happy, silly, dedicated, and I wear my heart on my sleeve.

I'm Kristin...  
I'm happily married, respectful, full of energy, and fun loving.

Together, we are a class.  
We're a family.  
We're all different, but alike.  
We're all achievers.  
We will reach our goals.  
We believe in ourselves.  
We are happy with who we are.

*~ Live Oaks ABLE  
Kim Backer, Rebecca Baker,  
Rose M. Buckner, Kristin Bush,  
Carrie Christie, Samantha Naylor,  
Cyndi Prewitt, Angela Traylor*

*SHATTERED  
DREAMS*



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ANGEL DUST

As humans we die for the one we love  
Maybe because the one we love  
We can't live without

It's haunting me, taunting me  
Telling me that I need you  
Like a needle, I'm forcing you, pushing you inside of me  
This compulsive obsession is draining the life out of me  
Just the thought of me losing you  
And I lose it

She my drug and I'm stung out  
I know we fight, fuse, and argue, sometimes fall out  
But you know that I'm coming back  
A relationship of "The Dealer" and "The Fiend"  
I'm always coming back

It's like she got that good work, but it still hurts  
'Cause I'm giving her the "Best of me"  
And the "Rest of me" is telling the "Best of me"  
I want to be the person I "Used to be"  
But the person I "Used to be"  
Isn't nearly as happy as the person I have "Grown to be"

Therefore, I'm stuck in this rehab  
Trying to make loneliness heal me  
But I have to let you go  
Because this love I have for you  
Is killing me~

*~ Corey T. Barnes*

## ACCEPT ME FOR WHO I AM

Remember the girl in school that sits in the back of the classroom by herself, alone and depressed?

You walk by this person everyday. You don't look her way unless someone comments on her weight or what she is wearing just to get a good laugh.

How can you be that mean and cruel to someone you don't know and have never tried to get to know?

I don't make fun of you, laugh in your face, comment on your weight or what you are wearing!

Why do I have to be the outcast, the one who cries herself to sleep and dislikes going to school because I don't want to get laughed and pointed at?

I just want to be a kid who has friends and to be accepted for who I am!

*~ Rebecca Baker*

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HEAVENLY ANGELS

My mother had five girls.  
They all have children but me.  
I got sick one day and went to the doctor  
And this is what he had to say:  
"Shellie, you have little ones on the way."  
I was so happy that I went rushing home  
To tell my mother the news I heard today  
'Cause she is my best friend.  
We went to the store and I got a new shirt  
That said "Baby '98."  
I was happy as could be because  
We bought a lot of new things for the babies.  
But one day, I woke up in a lot of pain.  
God had come and taken my babies away.  
He had taken them up high.  
This made me sad, alone, and blue.  
I didn't know what to do.  
So I turned to drinking, drugs, and other things.  
I would fight people just to release some of my pain.  
I hit rock bottom and tried to take my own life.  
If it wasn't for God walking and holding me up through my  
hard times  
I wouldn't be here to watch my nieces and nephews run  
and play.  
So no matter how hard life comes down on you,  
Don't let drugs be the road you choose.  
If you put your faith in God  
Things will work out no matter what.  
Today is January 16, 2008  
I, Shellie Hicks, wrote this  
For my babies in heaven today.

With Love,  
"Mommy"

Rest In Peace  
Dakota Wayne and Shawnta Shantell  
April 2, 1993

*~ Shellie Hicks*

## PICKING UP THE PIECES

How can you go on when your world's been shattered?  
She's still here, and that's all that matters.

So young and full of hope,  
Yet you still find the courage to cope.

At night you dream of her smile that lights up the room.  
When you awake, your day is filled with gloom.

You express your sorrow to those who listen,  
Because you can't seem to take being without Tristan.

We love our cousins and two nieces.  
Together we're still picking up the pieces.

An Ode to Tristan

*~ Shannon Reynolds*

### WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

I was twenty-one years old when I got pregnant with my first child. I was so happy. I felt like finally my prayers had been answered. At fifteen weeks, I had a check up with my doctor. It was time to hear the baby's heartbeat, but the doctor could not find one. Almost immediately they sent me to Bethesda Hospital for an ultrasound, but still no heartbeat could be found. I really can't describe the pain and anguish I felt or still feel.

After the ultrasound I was sent home and scheduled to come back a couple of days later. I didn't know how to handle this. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do, I couldn't sit, I couldn't stand, I couldn't eat because I felt like it was unfair for me to eat when my baby couldn't. A couple of days passed, and I was back in the hospital so the doctor could remove the baby. I stayed in the hospital for three days while they put some kind of pill inside me to open my cervix so the baby would slide down to the birth canal, but unfortunately it didn't work. The doctor sent me back home saying in the next couple of days my body would miscarry the baby on its own.

So almost a month went by, and I was still carrying a deceased baby inside me. The doctor told me they were going to send me to O.S.U., another hospital. The whole time these doctors had me on the run-a-round. All I could think about was my baby deteriorating inside me and if my body would get some kind of poison from that. I got to O.S.U., and they put sea weed sticks inside me. About eight hours later, I felt something warm gush out of me so I paged the nurse. She came in, checked me, and said she could feel the baby. She pulled out my stillborn baby.

It was so tiny but not gruesome at all, just a little tiny baby. I put my baby in the palm of my hand and just cried and cried. I kissed my baby and told it how deeply sorry I was

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and I love it and then I said my good bye's. I got my baby cremated so it is with me all the time in mind and spirit. To this day I wonder what it would be like having two kids instead of one, and I always think about my baby that should have been.

*~ Jessica M. Tate*

## MY MOM THOUGHT

Do you want to know the one thing about my life that I would change? It is something that happened to me years ago when I was about seven years old. My mom met a man named Norm (changed name) in church one Sunday. To her he seemed nice. She thought he was perfect. She met him in church and thought there could be no better place to meet a good man. She thought maybe he was God sent.

They soon married in that same church. I had begged her not to marry him; it did no good though because I couldn't tell her why. After they got married, we all moved into another home. She thought we were living as the perfect family.

The reason I would change that day Mom married Norm is because he raped and molested me for four years. It went on for so long because he had me too scared to tell. Then, finally, I confided in a friend who told her mom. Her mother told me I had to tell my mom and that everything would be O.K. eventually.

It took me a couple more days, but I finally got it all out. He had hurt me very badly in many different ways, both physically and emotionally. For instance, still to this day, I have a hard time talking to anyone about it. It has affected my relationship with my husband and also my past relationships. I have a difficult time trusting men and feel scared and uncomfortable when I am around them, especially when I don't know them very well, or when they are older than I am, or when no one else is in the room with us.

I thought I had blocked out memories of what Norm did to me, but they come back to me in my dreams. It's like he still has some control over me.

The day my mom met this man is the one thing about my life I would change. Shortly after she met him, he started hurting me, so if that day hadn't gone the way it did, none of this horror would have happened. As to his conviction for his crime, there wasn't any. He is a free man because there wasn't enough evidence, and the others he molested would not come forward to testify! This is the man my mom thought was going to be the perfect husband....

*~ Jade Jones*

## A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

Child abuse is growing in numbers every day. When you turn on the news or read the newspaper, you hear about people abusing their children or other people's children. This is a sad but very true reality. This is my story...

About four years ago, I moved into the apartment where I now live. I met this woman who had a beautiful, blonde-haired, blue-eyed baby boy. He was about 10 months old. About three days later, she knocked on my door. She asked if I would watch her child for a few hours. I don't even believe she knew my name yet. She told me that she needed a break. She needed to get away for awhile, and she had no one else to turn to. I agreed to watch her son.

I took the baby inside and noticed he smelled badly of urine, so I decided to give him a bath. As I undressed him, I noticed little blisters all over his body, like bed sores. I ran some warm bath water and put him into the tub. He started screaming to the top of his lungs. I thought the water might be too hot for him, so I pulled him out and ran some cooler water, but the same thing happened. I decided to wash him off with a warm wash cloth and redressed him.

After a while, he was getting hungry and his mother had sent him no baby food. All I had was Spaghetti O's. I fed it to him, and I was shocked to see him eat a whole can. Afterwards I laid him down for a nap.

His mother finally arrived, and I expressed my concerns with her. She had told me that he was like this every time he returned from his father's house. I told her that I wouldn't let my child go back if the father couldn't care for him properly.

A few more days passed. She returned to ask if I would watch her child again, and I agreed. Only this time, he smelled like urine and cologne. It was like she was trying to cover up the smell of the urine, so I gave him another bath. The blisters were much larger and more inflamed, which really concerned me.

After his bath, I was putting some diaper rash cream on his bottom and noticed that his rectum looked as if he had been sexually abused. Without further hesitation, I called child services. They told me that they would look in to it if they felt the baby was in danger. When his mother returned to pick up the child, I told her that I had called child services. She had no reply and took the baby and left.

Five months later, I got a knock on my door at 3:30 a.m. on December 19, 2004. The words I heard from the other side of my door were a parent's worst nightmare. "Help! The baby's not moving!" I opened my door to find the mother's boyfriend holding the lifeless baby in his arms. I took the baby from him and placed him on my shoulder supporting his neck. I asked the boyfriend what had happened. He told me that the baby had fallen off the couch.

I took the baby into the kitchen and dialed 911. As I spoke with the dispatcher, I tried to talk to the baby. He would respond for a few seconds and go unconscious again. When the EMTs arrived they took the baby from me, checked his vital signs, gave him some oxygen, and then rushed him off to the hospital. I later found out that they took him to Children's Hospital where he was on life support for a few hours before he passed away.

After a few weeks, the boyfriend confessed what had actually happened to the police. This man received only three years in prison for what he did. Yes, only three years for a baby's life!

To this day, I still do not know what truly happened, but I do know that if help would have stepped in when it was asked for, that baby would still be alive today.

This is a prime example of child abuse that could have been stopped before it was too late.

*~ Ashley D. Green*

## FATHER

I went all of my life with just my mother. My father left when I was very young. I saw very little of him when I was growing up. I felt like he was ashamed of me. If I was to pick a hero, it would be my mother. She has been by my side my whole life.

Just recently, since I moved back to Lancaster, Ohio, my father contacted me. I started working with him on his paper route. We get along like he has been there for me all of my life. I decided to move in with him in December, 2007, but I moved out in a month. We didn't exactly see eye to eye. Even though he is trying to make up for the past, sometimes it's just not enough. I feel that a child should have both parents growing up.

My father and I get along great now that I am older. But where was he when I needed him the most? When I was young I used to write him letters praying that he would write back, but all he did was laugh and toss them in the trash. All I want to know is if he loves me or if he is just being nice and trying to act like a "real dad" should act?

*~ Matt Haynes*

## A VOICE OF A CHILD

I can hear your voice.  
I can sense your fear.  
I'm trying to cope in your womb  
Nowhere to run or hide.

I can feel your pain.  
You are so sad.  
You wonder what's to gain?  
Did I make you mad?

I feel the force of something pulling;  
My life is going to be over soon;  
What did I do?  
What didn't I do?  
How could this be?  
You don't want me?

I will never have the chance  
To see your face;  
Hear your laugh;  
Smell your scent.  
I'm only four months.  
Why did you choose this?  
My face is being displaced.  
My soul is being misplaced.  
You chose this route;  
You said yes to abortion.  
Now I must pay.  
Good bye  
Forever  
To the mother  
I could have loved!

*~ Mary E. Torres*

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## TAKING THE LAST BREATH

Lying in the bed is a small fragile woman. Her face is worn and tattered by the years she has seen. The shadows under her eyes make the sparkle that she once had look dim.

Strands of silver hair streak the background of white that was once black as coal. Time has weakened her sense of thought and her physical being. She doesn't laugh anymore, nor does she hold her own. Not wanting to wake her, I just watch.

She wakes to say in a little above a whisper, "Jenny, my little waddling girl!" I stand up from the dust-ridden chair to join her at the foot of her bed. I grab her little wrinkled hand and hold it, for tomorrow I may not have that chance. I watch her breathe; her chest heaves up and down like a fish out of water gasping for air. I ask, "Granny, you feeling okay today?" She replies, "I feel okay, no different than I normally do."

I know she is lying. I have witnessed this a thousand times; she is not ok. Her eyes show the troubled life she has lived and the hardships she has endured. The deep lines on her face show the death of four children she has witnessed, an alcoholic husband, and now a disease that she cannot control.

She is not aware that I know more than she thinks. I speak with my aunt, and she gives me all the harsh details. My aunt says to me, "Your grandmother will never get better. That is just the reality of the disease." I want to burst into tears because I know what that means. She was straight to the point so I asked, "Now what?" She replies, "There is nothing anyone can do. She will die from this!" I said to her, "Does grandma know?" She tells me, "Of course she knows. I could not hide something like this from her." I nod my

head and prepare to spend as much time helping out as I can.

When I return to the living room I pull up her covers and give her a teaspoon of apple sauce, cocktailed with the twelve medications she has to have for the day. She swallows hard to take on the mass she just received. She looks up and says to me in a soft voice, "If I had known that letting people smoke their damn cigarettes around me would make me a cripple, I never would have allowed it." I paused to watch the expression on her face. There was anger and sadness drifting in her eyes. I never thought that she would have to deal with the struggle of a disease that would take her life.

Today she is weary. She struggles with her thoughts and tries to cope with the pain of arthritis. Her lungs fill and release heavily as she breathes in her oxygen. The skin that shrouds her face is pale and shows dehydration. I take out some night gowns and put them in her bag. She is a strong but fragile being. I have never witnessed a woman with such courage. We sit and watch her gasp as though she is taking her last breath.

My aunt and I call 911 and prepare her for her journey, her last destination, the hospital. This is the typical day of a Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseased (COPD) patient.

*~ Jennifer Samons*

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MOTHER'S LAST CHRISTMAS

Christmas time is coming; I have so much to do.  
I've got to get a Christmas tree, to decorate for view.  
I'll buy each one a present and put it under the tree.  
They need not buy me anything. It's them I want to see.

I'll cook a big dinner. Oh, I can hardly wait  
To see their gleaming faces at the food upon their plate.  
Well dinnertime has passed and no one came around.  
And I don't understand; they just live across town.

I'm going to clean off the table and put the food away.  
Why didn't they call or come around today?  
I'll put all the presents away and take down the tree  
And store them in the attic. Maybe someday they'll  
remember me.

Well, it's evening now. The light is getting dim.  
I'm going to kneel and pray for God to watch over them.  
I'll turn all the lights off and pray, before I go to bed.  
Those were the last words she wrote. By her bed they  
found her dead.

*~ Margaret Moore*

## BEFORE I SAY GOODBYE

I'm the reason for your sadness  
How I wish to be your happiness  
I'm the reason for your shame  
How I wish to be your pride  
I'm the reason for your pain  
How I wish to be your strength

How I wish you knew I would never try to harm you.

I'm still here  
in each thought that flows from your mind  
in each sigh that comes from your soul  
in each thing that you can see, smell, taste, hear and touch.

How I wish you knew I would never try to harm you

Now, let me give you a forever kiss  
and you'll remember me in the children's smile  
and you'll remember me in the warm summer  
and you'll remember me when you see stars high in the sky  
and in ever simple and amazing things that you'll do... you'll  
Remember me.  
I'll be forever near, for I live within your heart. . .

Mommy

*~ Niny F. Rosso*

### MONKEY BUSINESS

When I was a little girl I had a friend whose name was Vhane See. She was the only child in her family. Her parents worked at a farm. We went to school together in a middle school in Laos.

One day Vhane's parents brought a monkey into their house. When they went to work, the monkey had to stay home alone. Every day the monkey was good in their home. But one day Vhane's parents came home tired from work. They didn't pay attention to the monkey. So the monkey began jumping around the house. They got angry with the monkey, and the monkey got mad too. (Monkeys with long tails get angry very easily.)

Monkey climbed up to the roof and ran back and forth. Monkey grabbed some grass from the roof, threw it down, and spit on his owner. The owner was so mad at the monkey that he took a bamboo stick to punish him, but the monkey ran away to the roof again.

The next day everybody went to work. The monkey stayed home. The monkey was still angry from the day before. He found a lighter and began to burn the house. His owners didn't know about the fire, but the neighbors saw it and called people to come and stop the fire. It was too late because the grass roof burned so quickly.

Then Vhane's parents came home. When they saw that the house had burned down, they were shocked and passed out.

This is a true story that can teach people who have an animal like a monkey in their homes. Please don't leave your monkey alone because monkeys can be dangerous.

*~ Elizabeth Sacksith*

## OH DEER - OH DEER

Oh deer, Oh deer  
As I'm sitting here  
And Mother Nature calls

I set my cross-bow over there  
Oh deer, Oh deer.

A trophy buck happens by  
And here I am squatting over here  
And my bow is over there  
Oh deer, Oh deer

Ten yards away  
He turns and looks  
And my bow is over there  
Oh deer, Oh deer

As the trophy buck runs away  
Oh deer, Oh deer

*~ Ronald W. Fugate*

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## RACCOON AND ROOSTER

Raccoons and roosters are not friends. Raccoons always want to hunt roosters.

One day a raccoon found a rooster resting under a bush. The rooster was very afraid, and he flew to a branch of a tree. The raccoon hid himself under the tree and waited for the chance to hunt and eat the rooster.

But the rooster wouldn't leave the branch, so the raccoon decided to pretend to be a friend of the rooster. He said, "Why are you afraid of me? We could be best friends." When the rooster heard the nice voice of the raccoon, he relaxed and began to sing a song to the raccoon.

The rooster complimented the rooster's singing. Then he said, "Your father sang better than you because he closed his eyes when he sang. If you close both eyes to sing, you would sing more elegantly than everybody else." The trusting rooster believed his strange friend, and he did what the raccoon told him to do. So, in this way, the raccoon was able to catch the rooster by his neck, kill him, and eat him.

This story is a lesson. It has been told by people from the oldest generations to the youngest generations in the country of Laos. It teaches us to not always trust someone who is a stranger and pretends to be nice to you.

~ Eastland-Fairfield Group Project  
Khounkhan Khamvongsa  
Zheyen Pearsall  
Xeng Veopraseduth

## A SECOND CHANCE

Up until the time I was fifteen my life was great. I was captain of the cheerleading squad, popular in school, a straight A student, and lived in a nice house. What was not so great about my life was all the secrets my family kept. Two weeks before my sixteenth birthday my stepfather was placed in jail for six months for non payment of child support. That's when all the secrets began to unravel.

I soon discovered that life was not so great after all. During the six months that my stepfather spent in jail, my mother began to experiment with harsh drugs, which she soon became very addicted to. She and my stepfather had split, which meant that we had to move from our home. Over the next year we moved three times, and I had begun to skip school more and more each month. By the time I was seventeen my mother's drug habit was even worse; it was like she wasn't even my mother anymore.

Toward the end of my junior year in high school, I met a great guy named Mike. At that point and time in my life, he was the best thing that had ever happened to me. After only dating for eight months Mike moved in with my family and me because his home life was even worse than mine. One month after he moved in, I found out that I was pregnant. I was now eighteen and in my senior year, my mother was at her worst with her drug use, and I was lucky to see her three times a week. I was scared to death, and I knew this was not the right time in my life to bring a baby into this world.

Mike stayed calm. He already had a son who was born when he was only seventeen. Soon after I found out that I was pregnant, I started to work so I could save for the baby. I never saw my mother so I had no idea how bad she had gotten. On January 1, 2006, I miscarried my baby. That was the hardest thing I had ever had to go through. I still

continued to go to school and work everyday, but it grew harder and harder each day to focus when I knew my mother was out there somewhere using drugs.

Four months passed, and I was still working hard to get my life back on track. One day while I was at work I received a phone call from my brother saying that when he went in to wake my mother, she was barely breathing, so he called 911. The squad took her away. In that two-minute phone call my whole world came tumbling down. No matter how bad my mother's drug use was, she was still my best friend. All I could think was that I now had lost her forever.

As soon as I hung the phone up, I ran to my car and flew to the hospital. When I arrived they had my mother in the ICU unit. I did not even recognize her. The next couple of days were hard, but I never gave up hope. Two months before I was due to graduate, I dropped out of school so that I could be by my mother's side. After 52 days in the hospital she was starting to become herself again. The day after she was released from the hospital she entered a drug detox center. On May 6, 2006 she was released from there and on her way to a better life.

Soon after I found out that I was pregnant once again, only five months after I had miscarried my first baby. My mother promised me that she was going to do whatever she had to do to stay clean for her new grandchild. On November 4, 2006, Mike and I got married. I was only eighteen, and I felt as if my childhood was snatched away from me over night. On February 13, 2007, I gave birth to my son. It was the happiest day of my life, and right there by my side the whole time were my mother and Mike. I thought I had the world in my hands.

My mother had over a year clean and sober and Mike and I were doing great until November 8, 2007, my twentieth birthday. Mike came in from work carrying two cases of beer. He knew that I hated drinking, and he didn't even

seem to care. After fighting for a good hour Mike threw our nine-month-old child and me out in the freezing cold. I was in shock. I had no idea what to do. Two hours later my mother showed up with balloons and came to surprise me for my birthday, only to find that she was the one that was surprised. She found my baby and me out in the cold. That was the day she rescued me, and I knew I had gotten my mother and best friend back. It was one of the worst days of my life and one of the best.

Now I am living with my mother and going through a divorce. It's hard, but it's what I need to do for me. I am also going back to school to earn my GED. It's like my mother is helping me get a second chance at life like I helped her to.

*~ Megan Marie Smith*

*SWEET DREAMS*



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## LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

The year was 1944. The Second World War was getting close to the end. I was fifteen years old. The German Army was still occupying Holland, my country. The fifth and last winter was upon us. Hunger was the order of the day. Very little food was available. The occupation forces were SS troops. They were not very friendly people.

The Allies were stopped at the Rhine River. The Rhine River flows across Holland from east to west. The Allies – Americans, English, and Canadians – made a serious attempt to cross the river but didn't make it. They then decided to go east into German territory.

The southern part of Holland was now free of German forces. The northern part above the Rhine was not. Many young Dutch boys volunteered to become Marines to help fight the Nazis. The young boys had to be trained. They were transported to the USA because training in southern Holland was out of the question. By the time they were trained and returned to Holland, the war had ended. They became the officers who instructed the new recruits who were going to be sent to Indonesia.

Indonesia had been occupied by Japan. Indonesia had been a Dutch colony for more than three hundred years. The Indonesians were tired of all the "foreign" people ruling their country. They decided to fight the Dutch, and they became independent by the end of 1949.

I became a Sergeant rather quickly and worked with the heavy mortars. The equipment was well used. The order I received was to travel to Surabaya to get new supplies. It was not the largest operation but very dangerous. We were on a flatbed truck with a driver and me and four Marines on the back of an open truck. On the outskirts of the city the driver said the engine was overheating. We decided to stop

at one of the homes and ask for water for the radiator. The lady of the house invited us in for refreshments. We welcomed this after driving all day in an open truck on dusty roads.

I stayed with the truck for many reasons. The lady of the house sent her young fourteen-year-old daughter, Gerda, out to give me some pineapple. The daughter asked, "Where shall I put this?" The movable windshield was down, so I told her to please put it on the windshield. I was asking her to set the bowl on top the windshield. Instead, she emptied the bowl onto the windshield. She walked away from the truck, and I fell in love. That was December 1947. From then on I never left her alone.

Since I was stationed in many different villages outside the city of Surabaya, I only came back to town once or twice a month for rest and relaxation. I needed an excuse to stop at Gerda's home to see her again. A person in love always finds a way. The Marine Corps had furnished me with a military watch, so I had no need for my own watch. My driver had to travel to the city, and I had him drop my watch off at Gerda's home. That way I could pick it up and see her again. From the first day I met her, I was certain I was going to spend the rest of my life with her. Sorry to say, she didn't feel that way for a long time.

For the next two years we went out together with several of my friends. Those were the worst years of my life. I wanted to be with her, but she didn't want to be with me. I kept stopping at her home and writing her notes. She was so beautiful. I was persistent and never gave up. After fighting for two years in the war I was stationed on the Island of Madura. With a small torpedo boat I was able to go to Surabaya every afternoon at 2 PM. I would take the Marine Corps bus to the city and then walk to Gerda's home. I would return to Madura every evening. The next day I would do the same all over again.

In 1950 Gerda finally agreed that I would be her future husband. She left her home to go to Holland, a place she had never been. She had to board a ship, and I snuck on the boat to be with her until the very last minute. It was very sad for both of us to leave each other. It took three months before I came back to Holland. We married on September 5, 1951. I'm very much in love with the same beautiful girl I met 60 years ago.

*~ Harry Van Loveren*

## PICKLE MAN

His name is Ralph. Ralph Lawson. He was born on June 5, 1924, in Fayette County. That makes him 83 years young.

Ralph retired from many, many years working as a school janitor. He worked for the city school system at Cherry Hill, the middle school, and Washington Senior High. Ralph met a lot of kids over the years. He is remembered as the tall, slim looking man.

Personally, I have known Ralph a lot longer than some. We have been neighbors since I was 6 years old. Everyone in my family called him "Slim." If my family went fishing, we took him with us. That was many years ago, and I am still his neighbor.

In his spare time, Ralph likes to fish, hunt, garden, and especially make pickles. He has a lot of people in Fayette County spoiled with his freezer pickles. Those pickles reach a lot of people: doctors, nurses, friends from the schools, and pretty much everyone he knows.

My children and grandkids all love them. I've been fortunate to know this man almost my whole life. He has some health issues, but he doesn't let it get him down. He can still make that jar of pickles for someone who wants them.

I am one of the lucky ones. He gave me the recipe so I can make them too. But I still like his the best. There is something very special about his, so he will continue to make his pickles and make everyone happy.

This is Ralph. Ralph Lawson – the "Pickle Man." I am proud to say that I know him.

*~ Tonda L. Minney*

## JOHNY BOY

My brother John died October 16, 2007, from cancer. Johnny-Boy we called him. We miss him so much more than words can say. He was 54 years old, the oldest in our family. It hurts me deeply accepting that he will never be around any more. I have such great sorrow. Regrets, I do have some. He died so quickly. I have to wonder if he would have lived if he had gone to the doctor earlier.

You see, my brother and I weren't that close when we got older. He moved out of state for years, but every time we got together it didn't matter. It was as though we never were apart. It won't be the same without him. He will always be in my heart and in my head forever.

My brother had a two-month illness that spread quickly. It took all of us by surprise. We learned about suffering and pain through my brother. He developed a lump on his neck. He grew a beard to hide it and refused to go to the doctor. He probably waited too long. If he had gotten it checked out sooner, maybe he would still be here.

Cancer is a terrible disease. The doctor told my brother about chemo and radiation treatments. It was possible he might live longer. He tried both for a couple weeks and decided to stop the treatments. He told us that they made him feel worse. He didn't like not being aware of who was around him. He wanted to know we were there with him. My family and I couldn't accept losing him. I can remember my mother asking my brother what his pain felt like. My brother told us it felt like both his legs were being electrocuted.

I feel a lot of regrets. I never realized we had so much in common. I got close to him and got to know him better after I found out he didn't have long to live. He told me his favorite singer was John Mellencamp. I have gone to

a lot of his concerts, and he has always been my favorite too. I didn't know he was a big fan of the Indians and that he had gone to a lot of the games. I had won Indian tickets from a radio station and never went to the game. I would have given him those tickets, and it would have brightened his day!

I was with my brother a day before he passed. His breaths were 42 seconds apart, and it was more than I could handle. I took my brother's hand to wipe the tears from my eyes, and I told him if he could understand me to squeeze my hand. He did. I then told him I couldn't stand to see him like that and kissed him and told him how I loved him. He passed away late that night.

I learned a lot about my brother toward the end of his life. I could see much of myself in him. I'm very sad he's gone.

My advice to anyone is, don't wait to go to see a doctor. If you find something that doesn't feel or look right, go see a doctor right away. Don't try to hide something. Get it checked out. Don't wait until it is too late. If someone in your family is ill, be there for them. Don't wait until your family is sick to see them. Cancer is a deadly, suffering disease that can kill you.

*~ Donna R. Sousa*

## NO NAME

I remember one vacation when I was 14 years old. Mom took us camping down to Natural Bridge. One morning that week, our family woke up to this dog barking outside our camper. I peeked out the door, and lucky for me, it was a black and white beagle. Mom told me not to feed it because it would stay around if I did. Well, that's exactly what I wanted. So I gave him some hot dogs and other food scraps that we had, but I didn't tell that to my mom.

He was a sweet dog and I named him, "No Name." Mom said that we shouldn't name strays, so that's the name I gave him. He would come up and sit at our feet when we sat by the fire, and he would lick my face if I let him.

Later in the week, we went for a walk up to the store. We tried to make him go back to the camp, but he followed us anyway. On the way back, he saw a possum in the road and went running after it. Before we knew it, a truck came along and hit No Name. The driver just kept going. I hurried up to him, took my coat off, covered him up, and carried him back to our camp. It made me sick to see him suffer. By the time we got back to camp, he was dead. I was heartbroken because he really made me feel needed. My friends helped me bury him in the woods. I cried for days.

Even though Mom knew best and lessons were learned, we wouldn't have had the happy memories of No Name if we had listened to her and not gotten close to this stray.

*~ Tonia S. Jones*

## DOGPATCH

Everyone has his/her own childhood vacation memories and places. This is one of mine. My mother's side of the family is a large Polish family that lived and still lives in the suburbs of Chicago, technically, Hammond, Indiana. My mother's parents were my grandfather Babe and grandmother Lottie. Before I was born, Babe and Lottie purchased some vacation property in southwest Indiana about a 3-1/2 to 4- hour drive from their home in Hammond, Indiana. The vacation property is also near Turkey Run State Park, Slate Park, and Raccoon Lake. They built a modest cabin they called the Dogpatch. As the years rolled by, they slowly added to and improved the Dogpatch cabin.

I cannot remember how far back my earliest memories of the cabin go. But when I was seven or eight years old, my parents were divorced. It seemed like my mother, my younger sister and I were there every summer after that. The cabin was located at Hideaway Lake. As kids, we always knew when we were getting close and bounced around in the car, looking with great excitement out the windows. Yes, there's the little store as we turned off the main highway and passed all the cornfields on both sides of us. And there's the bait shop. We were on fire now and Mother would say, "Sit down and calm down. We're almost there." But we never did.

As we turned off the last paved road and onto a gravel one, we were at the entrance to Hideaway Lake. Immediately the gravel road split off in all directions. Some roads were dead ends and others wove and wound all the way around the lake. As we neared the Dogpatch, on our left was the middle of the lake and on our right was a small dam surrounded by tall, grassy fields where the lake's overflow ran into a small creek that ran off in the distance as far as the eye could see. As soon as you passed this, there sat our

family's cabin up against a beautiful backdrop of woods. The Dogpatch lot was a lot more private and hidden than most of Lake Hideaway's lakefront properties. Not to worry, though. It was only a five-minute walk to the lake which was complete with a small private beach, a pavilion, and what we called Devil's Island way out in the middle.

Going to the cabin was doubly exciting because you never knew who would be there or when more cousins and relatives would show up. Babe would take all the grandkids out on the lake paddle-boating, tubing, boat riding and fishing. He even let the youngest of us drive his boat. He and Lottie provided much fun and so many activities I couldn't begin to mention them all.

In addition to the lake, there was the dam. The dam was a little scary to us kids. Nobody went there except us. It was a favorite hangout, especially when just a few of us wanted to fish. It had no fence, safety rails, or signs saying "Stay Out." It was exciting fishing off the dam as we sat on the three-foot wide concrete walk that went all the way across the middle of the dam. Countless lures, flip flops, and other stuff were constantly knocked into it by accident. Even me one time. Yep, at around nine years of age I fell backwards into the part where the water comes rushing and roaring down into the dam. I wasn't scared until the only other person with me, my cousin Kelly who was around twelve at the time and a girl, started screaming and freaking out. It was kind of contagious, and I got scared. Above me was the roar of the water and her screams and cries for help. I had to make myself heard and convince her to calm down and actually go get help. Finally she did, and there I was alone with the cold, swirling, roaring water all around me. All I could see was the sky and the walls that kept me there, wondering what was in that dam and in the water with me. With such a small space, I figured a catfish as big as I was would sting me in the leg and would eat me. All kinds of thoughts raced through my mind, but I didn't cry, scream, or panic. I just waited looking up at that sky. Well, help

came, or I wouldn't be writing this now. Yes, my mother got gray hair at a very early age.

The Dogpatch was an amazing place and one I'll always remember and cherish along with the grandparents who provided it all. Today it's a different story. You can't swim in Hideaway Lake now because of a problem with silt. Since Babe died about five years ago, Lottie doesn't like to go there and neither does the rest of the family because the founders aren't there. Lottie would love to sell the property, but nobody else in the family wants the responsibility of upkeep. And to top it all off, the neighbor now hassles anyone who is there about cutting through the yard to get to the lake or dam.

*~ Lee Scott Hoffman*

## INFLUENCE

The person who influenced me the most in my life was my mother. She was so many things to so many people. She was a great wife, mother, and a best friend to many. It was hard for anyone she touched to complain.

My mother was a great wife. She was very strong-willed and always kept my dad on his toes. She would never let an argument get in the way of her marriage. She always made sure that the problem was settled and that they didn't go to bed angry. She always kept the house spotless. Even when we didn't have any money, she would always find something to make us to eat, even if she did without.

My mother was the best mother a child could ask for. She was always playing with us. She made sure none of us felt left out. She loved to teach us new things. I have memories of playing school, baking cookies, and reading piles of books. No matter what was going on in her life, our family was what was important to her. She always made time for us.

My mother was also a great friend to many people. There were very few people she didn't win over. I remember, as a young child, watching her have hair and make-up parties with her friends. I remember how much fun they were having. My mother was always there when someone needed help or just wanted someone to listen. She was very caring, and everyone knew she was genuine.

My mother influenced me in so many ways. Even though my mother passed away when I was a young child, the stories and memories I have of her will live in my heart forever. If I could live to be half the wife, mother, and friend she was, then I would know I had lived my life well.

*~ Heidi Coffey*

## THE JOYS OF OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

Bird watching is an enjoyable pastime. It is sometimes very humorous watching birds during their mating season. They also can become very territorial. I also enjoy the migrating birds at the change of seasons.

I always look forward to spring and the mating season. It is so sweet to watch a male cardinal feed a seed to its mate. It is almost like viewing a flirting kiss. The doves are another favorite. I watch the male chase its mate around the yard as she acts so coy.

My favorite territorial bird is the hummingbird. I have one bully bird that will sit on a tree branch guarding the sugar water feeder. As soon as another bird comes close to the feeder, she will swoop down to battle, chase the other bird away, and return to guard her food once again.

Lastly, the migration of birds is another favorite of mine. The birds you have not seen, for instance the dark-eyed junco, return every winter and speckle the snow with their adorable small gray and white bodies.

Bird watching is an enjoyable pastime, with their antics during mating season, the humor of them guarding their food, and the joy of seeing them return for another season.

*~ Kim Backer*

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### THE SOYBEAN INCIDENT

It was the most terrifying and helpless moment in my life. In Korea, in 1993, my daughter was 3 years old. She started to scream and said, "Mom, help, help!" She kept putting her finger in her nose. I asked her, "What did you do?" She said, "I put peas in my nose." I left a bowl of soybeans on the table while I was fixing dinner in the kitchen. I tried to help her take the bean out of her nose with a pincher. The bean seemed to get bigger because of the moisture inside of her nose. I tried it many times, and it didn't work. I felt that I was helpless.

I was hoping that blowing her nose would help, so I kept telling her to blow her nose, but the bean would not come out. I told her to blow the other side of her nose, and that didn't work. I looked at the bean inside her nose, and it was as big as my thumb!

I was very terrified, and I ran over to my sister-in-law's house for her advice. Her house was a few blocks from us. She said, "Take her to the hospital." We rode the taxi and rushed her to the hospital. When the doctor came in to see my daughter, he chuckled at her and then brought 3 more doctors in to see her, and they all laughed at her. Three doctors held my daughter's legs and hands so she couldn't move while the other doctor used pinchers to take the bean out of her nose.

Although it started out being the most terrifying moment of my life, I never felt more relieved than when the doctors helped her take the bean out of her nose. I sometimes tell her about that day and she starts to giggle.

*~ Kum Sun Kim*

## GRANDPA'S "INDIAN SPELL"

While I was growing up, I was part tomboy. I had a younger brother, Darrell, and we played together a lot. When I was about 11 years old, the county workers put new ditches in the area where we lived, so everyday during that summer, we would play in the clean water. We would wade up and down the ditches, through the tubes that supported the driveways to the houses. We played Cowboys and Indians.

Well soon, the ditches were no longer clean. Tadpoles and frogs made their homes in the ditches. Darrell and I played with these new creatures. When Mom realized that we were playing in these dirty ditches, she told us to stop, and we did. It was too late though. I ended up with 12 warts on my fingers and hands. Darrell didn't get even one. How unfair was that? Mom bought something from the store to put on the warts, but they didn't go away. I was so confused. I did what I was told, yet I still felt as if I was cursed somehow.

On Sunday, our family went to see Grandpa Delph. I ran to give him a hug, and he spotted the warts right away. He asked how I got them, and I told him about playing in the dirty ditch. He said that he could get rid of them for me, but only if my mom and dad would let him. So I sat and waited for my parents to park the car and come inside. Meanwhile, I sat wondering what on earth my Grandpa was planning to do to get rid of those ugly warts. I had already tried poking one of them with a needle, but I just brought myself pain and blood. I worried that maybe he wanted to burn them off with the lighter he was using to smoke his pipe. That sounded painful, but I didn't want to live with those ugly uncomfortable things for the rest of my life. Mom and Dad finally came inside and sat down. The first thing my Grandpa did was talk about the warts. He asked if he could get rid of them for me. Mom asked, "How?", and he told her it was an old Indian spell his Grandma, who was full blooded Indian, had taught him.

Mom said, "No way!" She said that she was going to take me to the doctor. Grandpa said he didn't think that would work, and it was a waste of time, but Mom was insistent. My dad asked me to go outside to play, and the three of them continued to talk about my warts.

I went outside as I was told but didn't feel like playing much. I wasn't sure if I was disappointed or relieved that Mom wouldn't let Grandpa do the "Indian spell." To me the word sounded like something of the devil. I was confused because I felt cursed. Anyway, I was convinced I had disobeyed Mom or Dad, though I couldn't remember when I would have. It made sense that a spell would remove a curse, so maybe I was cursed. At church that night, I stood in the prayer line. That night when I went to bed, I prayed that God would take away those nasty things.

A few days later, Mom took me to the doctor. He gave me some cream to put on those warts. The doctor said that it would take them away. Three weeks later, they were still there, all 12 of them. I asked mom if I had done something wrong to be cursed for the rest of my life! Mom really didn't know what to say. She just said, "No, Karen Sue, I don't think so." When Dad came home from work that night, Mom told him that she was ready to take me to see Grandpa. She still wasn't convinced that he could get rid of the warts, but she knew how bad I hated having the warts on my fingers and hands, so she was willing to try.

That night we went to see Grandpa. Mom told him that the cream the doctor had given me didn't work, and that she was ready to try his way. My grandpa called me over to him. I was scared to death. He sensed my fear. He told me that he was not going to hurt me. He asked me if I believed that he could get rid of the warts on my hands and fingers, and I told him that I did. I was still afraid of spells, but I didn't dare say so. I had to trust that my grandpa would never use any evil spells on me, only good spells. And so my grandpa mumbled a bunch of foreign words, and as he did, he licked his fingers and then rubbed each and every wart on my hands and fingers. Then he was done. He told me that in one week or less, the warts would

be gone. I thanked him and hugged and kissed him, and we went home.

Three days later, I was in school doing my work. I was taking a spelling test actually. Something seemed different. So after I got done with the test, I tried to figure out what was wrong. I looked at my hands, and those ugly warts were gone, each and every one of them! I felt normal again. I no longer felt cursed or ashamed of my hands and fingers. I couldn't wait to get home to show my whole family. When I got home I thanked Mom for letting Grandpa do what he did to get rid of them. Then I called my grandpa and thanked him. And last, but certainly not least, I thanked God because I know He has a hand in all good things that happen. I still wonder sometimes about the "Indian spell," but I guess some things are best left unknown.

*~ Karen Sue Flick*

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I AM...

**I am** a proud grandmother  
**I wonder** if I will be a good one  
**I hear** my grandson, Robert, play and laugh all the time  
**I see** him walk and crawl  
**I want** him to be good and aware of the world  
**I am** a proud grandmother.

**I pretend** to play peek-a-boo with him, and he loves it very  
much  
**I feel** happy when he said, "Grandma" for the first time  
**I touch** his heart when I say, "I love you, Pumpkin"  
**I worry** when he is sick  
**I cry** when he gets hurt  
**I am** a proud grandmother.

**I understand** everything that he says and does  
**I say** "No" when he does something bad and "Very good"  
when he does something right  
**I dream** about him all the time  
**I try** to keep Robert safe when we're out and about  
**I hope** he will be very successful when he grows up  
**I am** a proud grandmother.

*~ Coreal Lynn Wilson*

SANTA

Jovial, Endearing, Affectionate, Faithful  
Lover of Children, Cookies, Reindeer, and Chimneys  
Who gives Presents, Hope, and Happiness  
Who fears Selfishness, Snowstorms, and Scrooges  
Who would like to see Generous Spirits, Peace on Earth,  
and Goodwill Towards All  
Resident of the North Pole

Claus

*~ Great Oaks Group Project  
Yao Akakpo  
Kilcha Canfield  
Daveeta Grether  
Harry Van Loveren*

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## I INVITED HIM

It was 1995, the fourth year of war in former Yugoslavia. Although in my place there was no fight, we felt many consequences of the situation of war. The stores were almost completely empty. The inflation of the national currency was enormous. When you got your wages, you had to run immediately to street dealers and change your money for some stable foreign currency. If you did not do this, the next day you would be able to buy just one loaf of bread for all your money. It was like a bad dream. The whole region of former Yugoslavia suffered in one or the other way. Many people lost their loved ones, lost their homes, everything they lived and worked for. Their former neighbors and friends suddenly became their enemies. People lived in constant fear, distrust, confusion, and torment. Every day, lines of refugees miles long came over the Danube, carrying just their own lives and their sorrow. They needed help. Not just food, clothes, medicines, a place to live, but also some food for their souls. Something that can bring them hope and encouragement.

In that difficult time, my church planned a series of sermons, with the title "Amazing Discoveries." This series had to help people to change their focus. Instead of worry, look at God and all the beautiful promises in His word! We decided to invite the whole town. We got invitation cards and spread them through the town. We went from house to house and dropped an invitation card in every mailbox. And people came. In the church hall there wasn't enough space for everyone. So each sermon was repeated in three different sessions, every day.

After a while, I got to know many of those people. Some of them became good friends of mine. And one person was even something more: the man who later became my husband. When we started to see each other, I realized that he lived right in that area where I was spreading the invitation cards! That means I was the person who put that invitation card in his mailbox! I invited him!

You might say: "What's the big deal?" But I was touched very deeply with this fact. That was something amazing for me. And I can tell you that it is important for my husband too, because he keeps this special invitation card even today.

Many times we cannot know where our paths will take us. And things happen we cannot even imagine. But we know what God's word says: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55: 8, 9).

*~ Valerija Glad*

WAKING UP TO  
REALITY



## MY FIRST WRITERS' CONFERENCE

My most exciting and life-altering day was the *Beginnings* Writers Conference Day on May 12, 2006. My teacher told me my essay was selected for the *Beginnings* book. I was very excited and I couldn't believe it. My essay would be published. I could not imagine this was true because I had a lot of problems with my English. I never thought I would write.

I thought about what to wear and what would the conference be like. I laid my dress out the night before and was very excited about the next day. When the day came, it seemed everything was going wrong. First, the weather wasn't right for May. It should have been warm with a light breeze that brings the smell of May flowers. It didn't happen. The day was cold and rainy and it was very windy. I knew my dress would be inappropriate for the weather or the conference. I didn't realize until I came to school that everybody wore a nice warm dress. I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable with what I wore. I wished I could go home and change my clothes, but it was too late.

We all were on the bus. The ride was longer than I thought. I told my classmate, "It seems the ride is longer than it should be." We found out why the ride was so long. The bus driver was lost. When I looked outside the bus window, the bus was at the edge of the road. Then our bus stopped both lanes of traffic to turn. I was worried about getting to the Writers' Conference. We were late but we made it.

When we got there, it was a warm and exciting atmosphere. They welcomed us even though we were late. It sounded so alive and everybody was enthusiastic to be there. It seems all of the students were ready and eager to talk about their stories. Their stories were unbelievable and amazing. It was the most fascinating experience I ever had.

Another memorable thing happened to me. It was at the end of the day when I was coming home on the bus. Two young ladies from different schools sat behind me. They were sharing their life stories with me. They talked about why they started the GED. One of the ladies said she had just passed her GED. She sounded very excited. She said passing the GED will make a change in her life. They explained how their lives will be changed and what they wanted to do. I just listened to them. It was amazing.

I enjoyed the fact that they shared with me their life story. I learned so much, and I am blessed with what I have. I never had a difficult life. At the beginning of the day I was concerned about my dress, the bus driver being lost, and the weather, but I forgot all about those things. It turned out to be the most exciting and most memorable day in my life. I really want to thank everybody who helped give me this opportunity.

*~ Kilcha Canfield*

### THE FIRST STEPS OF A STRANGER

When days from your childhood become the dreams of your current life, when the echoes of past sounds call you night and day, when every scene of your past life plays as a movie in front of your eyes – the faces of your parents and friends, and even that of the driver who took you to school, the bistro that was your everyday place of friendship and warmth – when all these mismatch in time – then you are perhaps a stranger in a strange land.

My first experience of this began seven years ago when I left Iraq for Germany. It proved to be the most difficult period of my life. Living in a new country, I found myself changing from a hard working, independent woman, to an unemployed, completely dependent one. I felt I had become disabled. I was unable to do anything. Even speaking, which had been one of my joys, became an ordeal. I was living in a nightmare where there was no difference between day and night, no difference between the conscious and unconscious state. Slowly as time passed, I became more able to manage. Therefore, when I had to face this again, moving from Germany to the United States, I knew what it was like to be a stranger.

I realized after that first experience that the process of adapting to a new life would be hard but doable. I believe that every newcomer needs time to learn how to adjust. It's like breathing a different air, just as a new born baby takes its first breath out of the womb. Things that were done with great ease, almost instinctively, need to be learned and practiced. You have to think deeply about the most trivial of daily activities.

This dream life started to become more real as I learned some tricks to make the adjustment easier. It's like having a one pass ticket – it works everywhere and for anyone. You just start with a small, first step. Perhaps, because I am a

doctor, I compare it to the magic of the human body – an opening of the senses. You open your eyes, in the true sense of watching everything, even the lips of the speakers around you. You open your ears to listen to everyone around you, especially the children. You open your mouth and speak with everyone. This goes for the friends around you and those that might become your friends some day. Keep the possibility of the impossible far away. Eat not just out of hunger but to taste every bite and enjoy it.

I believe that these tricks worked well for me throughout the last seven years of my life, and I believe it is universal when one faces living in a new place and facing a new culture. Every person can make the necessary changes. This does not mean that you should forget your old life – the truth remains – your childhood memories will be a part of your life forever. They remind us of a time when life was innocent and free.

We are constantly gaining new knowledge. Life is about movement. There is no way to remain still. To step forward is the key of living.

*~ Shanaz Shalli*

## TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH

As a child my life was pretty normal. I went to school and hung out with my friends. But no one knew that I had a terrible secret eating away at me. Since the age of five, my father had been molesting me every night. He always said it's what real fathers do. For the longest time, I actually believed him. At night, when everyone else was asleep he would come into my room and touch me. I always pretended to be asleep, but the tears would always show. It got worse when my sister moved out when I was about thirteen. That's when he started calling me into his room when no one was home but him and me. That's when he started making me do things to him, and he would do more vile things to me. The crying for help, screaming for him to stop, and asking him why he would do this to me did not affect him at all.

When I turned fourteen years old, I finally opened up to my best friend about what was happening to me. She promised me that it would never happen again, and she would help me. All I could keep thinking was how is she going to help me? But she did. That day she told her parents what was happening to me, and they called Children's Services.

The next day at school was terrifying. A social worker came to school and asked me if my father was molesting me. I told her "No," but I knew she could see in my eyes that I was scared and afraid to tell the truth. That day the social worker came back to my house and talked to my parents before I got home from school. When I arrived home both of my parents said to me they needed to talk to me. My mother asked, "Tell me it isn't true. Is your father molesting you?" I told my mother it was not true because I was scared my father was making signals that he would kill me if I told the truth.

That night I tried killing myself by slicing my wrist with a knife, but I didn't succeed. I thought the rest of my life was going to be hell. But I thought wrong. The next day my sister took me to her house. When she asked me if the accusations were true, I broke down in tears and said "yes." My sister told me it had also happened to her ever since my mother and father had got married. She told me he actually raped her, and my mother walked in on it happening. She told me all our mom said was "go take a shower." My sister stayed in the shower for an hour crying. After she had got out of the shower, my parents acted like nothing happened at all.

The next day my mom called to tell my sister that she wanted me back home. My sister made an excuse to keep me another night. She did that every day for about four days. Throughout that time I was there, my sister and I went to the police and told them what was happening to us. The next week the cops came to my house and picked me up. They took me to the police station to verify that what I said in my report was true. They called my parents to the police station and told my father he was being arrested for molestation and rape. Two days later they released him to his parents' house and said he could not make any contact with me or my sister or he would be arrested on the spot.

Finally, I thought my life was going to get a lot better, but I was wrong. After everything that happened with my father, my mother started acting like she was the victim in everything, like he was raping her too, but my sister and I just did not want to hear or even talk about it anymore.

My mom tried to kill herself at least three or four times and has been in the mental hospital twice. She started going to counseling and was put on medication. The medication made her even crazier than she already was. My mother said she started hearing voices and was afraid she was going to hurt me and my two brothers. That's when we moved into my grandparents' house. We lived there for

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about a year, but I had got kicked out of my grandparents' house and went to live with my aunt and uncle.

After about four months living with my aunt and uncle, my mother and oldest brother found an apartment in Amherst. We moved in, and that's when the real fun began. I began smoking weed and partying a lot with my friends in the apartment complex. I began to be unruly, always yelling and screaming at my mom. I told her I hated her and I wished she would have gone to jail along with my father. School started back up again. I was in eighth grade, but I was supposed to be in tenth. School was awesome – all my friends and I would do was smoke and party every day. In about April of 2006 a new neighbor moved in across the hall from me, and we became real good friends.

She introduced me to an amazing guy. He and I talked on the phone for about a month until we started dating. Everything was going great. I could tell him anything and he could tell me anything. We started hanging out a lot more. That's when I started to smoke and drink a lot more. With him, it was smoke all day everyday or he wouldn't be able to make it through his day. He would do anything to get what he wanted, whether it be weed or alcohol.

My family and I moved to Oberlin after my friend got me kicked out of the Amherst apartment. That's when the partying really started. In August of that year my boyfriend got arrested for theft. He had stolen a gun from his best friend to get weed to smoke. He hid at my house for about a day until he had got arrested. Watching him get arrested was the hardest thing I had ever had to see. About two days later, I found out I was pregnant. He called from the jailhouse and my mother told him I had taken a pregnancy test. When I got home from my friend's house after telling her I was pregnant, he called again. He asked me if he was going to be a daddy and I said "yes." We both started to cry. Four days later he got out of jail, but three months later he failed a drug test and had to go to Community-Based

Correctional Facility for about four months. When he was gone we wrote each other almost every day telling each other we would be together forever and nothing would tear us apart. When I was about eight months pregnant, he finally came home. Within a month, we had our beautiful 7 pound, 4 ounce daughter, Jasmine Nevaeh. About two weeks after our daughter was born, my sister also had a baby, a beautiful girl named Ava Maire.

Having my daughter changed my life completely. I have not touched drugs or alcohol in over 17 months. I am going back to school to get my GED to hopefully go to college to be an ultrasound technician. Being a mother is the greatest thing in the world. I would not change it for anything. Her father's life has changed drastically; he has been sober for 14 months. He is working and is enrolled in the Lorain County Community College to study business and entrepreneurship. He is an amazing father and a wonderful boyfriend.

My thought on life now is that it is worth living. Life does get better after a bad childhood, but you have to want it to make your life get better.

*~ Rachel Forrider*

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## MY LIFE AS A CHILD OF DIVORCE

Divorce is the toughest situation a family can go through or experience. When I was six years old, my parents came to the conclusion that their relationship was not healthy for any of us. At that point, I did not understand what they meant by "healthy," but as a young girl I experienced how my parents were growing apart. Two years later I started to have an empty feeling inside of me. This feeling grew more and more, and I found that emptiness was stemming from what I was missing out on, which turned out to be the love of parents as a family unit. After they separated, I stayed with my mother who took care of me while I was developing into a young woman. Though my father was not with me every day, he did call me every time he had a chance and sent me money every month.

I spent ninety-nine percent of my life with my mother. Since I only had a female role model while growing up, I came to think of my mother as a hero. We were together for almost all of my birthdays, during sad and happy moments, parent/teacher conferences, etc. As for my father, he did not attend or share many of those experiences with me then. I do not know the details of the obstacles that prevented my father from being with me, although I am 100 percent sure it was because my mother refused to let him be a part of my life.

This situation went on until a point of my life I will never forget. This was the night my father asked me not only to come live with him but to move with him and his family, who is my family as well, to the United States of America. I thought to myself, *this is the answer to my prayers. I can finally live with my father after all of these years of living apart.*

Several years have gone by and now I am in the United States of America. It has been five years since I left my mother in Venezuela. I cannot wait until I graduate from

college, so I can spend some time with my mother like the old days. By coming to America, I have grown and learned a lot. One of the things I learned is the difference between father/daughter relationships compared to mother/daughter relationships. I miss the wonderful relationship my mom and I had, but if I were to go back with my her I would also miss the remarkable relationship with my father.

Today I see my life with positives and negatives. The positives are becoming bilingual, participating in school and community activities, meeting the best teachers of my life, receiving recognition for my hard work, meeting friends who have helped me with the paradoxical moments of being a teenager in America, and the list goes on. The biggest negative is once again having that empty feeling I talked about before, and I am fully aware of what the cause is. I know the problem is my mother's absence, but on the contrary, I also know that her absence has made me stronger. I fear that if I go back to Venezuela I will once again become dependent on my mother. Moving here to America has helped me mature and taught me to become independent with the help of my father and stepmother. And to be honest, my mother's absence keeps me going every day, every hour and every second of my life. It drives me to do what I do and pushes me to succeed. I know I will see my mom again one day and this also helps me continue my path towards reaching my goals.

This entire experience has helped me become who I am and has made me stronger, more mature and more responsible than most people my age. For 14 years I received guidance and direction from my mother, but for the last five years it has been my father's turn to teach me the lessons of life from his point of view. My plan is to keep certain aspects from both of my parents, a divorced couple with two different points of view, and apply them to my life now and in the future.

*~ Maite Yoselin Barrios*

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NEEDLES AND CAPS

I was angry, so very angry  
always stuck in my drugged mind  
never wanting to feel my emotions  
always wanting my next fix.

People meant nothing to me  
needles and caps  
needles and caps  
always my mind screaming  
always numb to the world.

I lost my mind.  
The voices chanted in my head  
wanting me to die  
paranoid of what will happen to me  
I hid my arms in shame  
never wanting people to see  
never enjoying my teenage years.

I forgot how to feel;  
then I snapped!  
I was restrained, and institutionalized  
weaned off my needles and caps.

It's been three years  
I'm just now starting to feel  
the emotion is overbearing  
not used to feeling  
never wanting another fix  
still I live with the scars I am hiding.  
this new world scares me  
I hope to succeed!

~ Johnathon K. Janney

## AS I CLOSE MY EYES

As I close my eyes...  
I think of the person I once used to be,  
But she's full of guilt and envy.

As I close my eyes...  
The tears stream down my face.  
Oh dear God! Am I a disgrace?

As I close my eyes...  
I think of the things I should have done,  
The only one left is my son.

As I open my eyes...  
I see the eminent woman that stands before me now.  
I no longer walk with my head hanging in disavow.

As I open my eyes...  
I try to imagine my son,  
His eyes shining bright like the midnight sun.

As I open my eyes...  
I see another chapter of my life unfold.  
I am eager to see what my life's yet to behold!

*~ Laura Ickey*

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## LIFE'S LESSONS

Life is the most important lesson of all. You have to respect yourself before you can respect anyone else.

When I was seventeen years old, I dropped out of school to support my family. It wasn't something I wanted to do...I had to. My father was addicted to crack. He was stealing money and food. I had a younger brother, and my goal was to make sure he did something with his life, so I started selling drugs to make a living.

By the time I reached eighteen, I was making three to four hundred dollars every day. I wasn't living at home. I chose to leave so that my mother and brother were safe. My mother didn't know what I was doing. I put money in the mailbox when she wasn't there, just to make sure the bills were paid and there was food in the house.

At the age of nineteen, I took my first bullet in the foot, and I still didn't change my ways. I paid for my brother's cap and gown, but I didn't see him walk across the stage because in his eyes, I was his father figure, but in mine, I was a drug dealer.

A few months later, my friend got killed just after I left his house. Three months after that, I took four shots to the chest area. After that I had a baby girl and promised her that I would be here to watch her grow up. She is six. My brother is in the Army. My mother is doing great, and I am making life changes. True story.

*~ Antwan Leggett*

## SOME CHILDHOOD THINGS

I would like to share some of the things that happened when I was a child. I am the youngest of nine children. My mother was not married when I was born. She lived on my grandfather's farm.

Back then black people didn't own property. I don't know how my grandfather got the farm. Mom had to work so my sisters took care of me. Later, my two sisters and I went to stay with my oldest brother and his wife. Later on, I went to stay with my oldest sister after she got married.

Things were okay until my oldest sister started having children of her own. Then things changed. She was so mean to me. By this time I was seven years old. She made me do all the work. The only thing I didn't have to do was cook. We didn't have a washing machine so I washed the clothes on a washboard. We had hard wood floors. I had to get on my knees and scrub the floors. I was a babysitter, maid, and I worked in the fields. My sister would keep me out of school to do whatever needed to be done.

I don't remember how old I was but I had a problem with acid every time I ate tomatoes. I would break out with sores. I loved tomatoes. They were my favorite food. My sister told me not to eat tomatoes, but I didn't listen to her. Sores broke out all over me; they were really bad. One time while the sores were bad, I broke a jug. My sister beat me so bad blood was coming out of the sores. That weekend my mother and younger sister came to visit us. They saw how bad I was. My mother was so upset. My mother and younger sister came back that Monday and took me to the doctor. It is so strange; I can still remember the doctor's office. It was on North High Street in Daville, Virginia.

My mother and younger sister took me home with them. When I got well my oldest sister came and took me back

with her. I have to tell you something. My older sister would always say mean things about Mom, and I believed her. She would tell me Mom didn't want me and that's the reason I was with her. Mom told me I didn't have to go back with my oldest sister, but she had me brain-washed. She was a terrible person, but I wanted her to love me so much. I never had anyone to love me. That's all I wanted, just to be loved. So, things didn't get better; they got worse.

I left home when I was 16 years old. After that things went downhill. I started drinking. I was married three times. I have done so many bad things. But, one day, God changed my life. He gave me a new life. I am happy there are people that now care for me. I thank God for all the wonderful things He has done for me.

*~ Ida Davis*

## A PROUD MOTHER

Cousteau, my first born son, was born in 1985 in Togo, West Africa. He was very quiet when he was a baby. He was very close to me, closer than my other children. He used to be afraid of military men in uniform. In 2002 our family of five moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. At that time, Cousteau could speak very little English. He attended Princeton High School and joined J.O.R.T.C. (Junior Officer Reserve Training Corps), but after one year, he quit the training corps.

In his last year of high school, I asked him, "What do you want to study in college?" He would say, "I don't know yet," and other times, "I want to be a pilot."

In 2006, he graduated from Princeton High School. He was unsure of what he wanted to do. I was surprised when one day my daughter, Christel, told me, "Your son took a military test, and he passed it."

I was shocked, but said, "If this is his dream, may God bless him." But truly I was sad. I was worried about him, thinking about his decision. Then the day came for him to leave. It was like a part of my body was missing. I started to cry, "Where is my baby, Cousteau, going?" I sat and looked at his picture. I remembered his hugs each morning. I remembered his sweet words, his shyness, and his smile.

That day, Cousteau moved to South Carolina for boot camp for 3 months. He couldn't call me; he just sent letters. A few days before his graduation from boot camp, the phone rang. I picked up the phone, and surprisingly, it was my son. I was very happy to hear his voice, and he was happy to hear mine too. He wanted to make sure that our family was coming to his graduation ceremony on March 9<sup>th</sup>. He knew we had never gone on a long trip.

The day before his graduation, my husband, two children and I drove nine hours to see Cousteau in South Carolina. We were tired but very excited to see him. When we arrived, he screamed with joy and then gave us all a hug. He then showed us his room and introduced us to his friends. He was so glad to become a Marine. The next day, we attended his graduation ceremony. I was so proud of him.

Today, he is stationed at Camp Pendleton in California. Now, he's that military man he used to be afraid of as a young child. I miss him and worry about him, but I am a very proud of him.

*~ Afi Wozufia*

## MY DOG

Chicky was my first dog's name.  
It was a gift from my daughter's school teacher.  
We kept Chicky from when she was two months old  
until she was ten years old.

When she was five years old,  
I mated her with the neighbor's male dog.  
Then she got pregnant.  
One day before she gave birth,  
Chicky was fighting with someone's dog  
who was walking in front of our house.  
Then that night the puppy was born.

The puppy was so small and weak.  
It was born early!  
I thought it would die, but it lived!  
I wrapped it in a handkerchief,  
then I put the puppy in a basket.  
I saw that the puppy had no face.  
There was just a tiny hole for the mouth.  
My husband said, "It can't live."  
But I said, "No, it's alive, I can help!"

Day by day, I took care of the puppy.  
I poured some milk into an eyedropper  
because the hole for the mouth was very tiny.  
Everyday I saw a difference in her face.  
It was growing! "Oh!...what a miracle!"  
The puppy was growing outside the mom's womb.  
That's what gave me more strength to take care of it.

In two weeks I saw two tiny holes  
appearing to become a nose.  
Then in three weeks, again two tiny holes became ears.  
Then in a month I saw two eyeballs.  
The last change made me scared

because the face was changing its form  
to look like a triangle and to add the eyeballs  
which were not open yet.

Three months later the puppy's face was complete.  
The body was pudgy with beautiful colors for a mutt,  
white, light brown and dark brown.  
I gave her the name Fin-Fin.  
She had a big mouth.  
When someone came, she barked loudly.  
A miracle happened! I'm so happy and thankful.  
I'm not a doctor, I'm not a nurse,  
but I was successful in keeping her alive.

This is only part of the story of my dog.

*~ Kin Wijasa*

## A CHANCE TO LIVE IN PEACE

On April 15, 2004 I was returning home from school. Israeli soldiers came to my city in Palestine to arrest someone for some reason.

There was a clash between the Israeli soldiers and the Palestinian people. They shot each other. We looked at this from far away. The sound of the discharge of the guns was normal for us because it always happened, so we were not afraid.

For a short time, everything was quiet. The fight was almost done. We could take another way home, but the shooting stopped. So my brother and I took the normal way home. While we were walking down the street, I was surprised by one shot into my stomach. I didn't know why or how or what I did to be shot.

My brother, my friend, and I saw an ambulance, so we started running towards it. The ambulance came and picked me up. My brother, a doctor, and I were inside the ambulance. We went to the hospital very quickly. I stayed for three days.

Then I got out. It wasn't a dangerous wound, and I'm fine now. But there was something I didn't know. Before I got shot, I was thinking about going to study in America. I already had one sister, many cousins, and friends in America. Getting shot helped me to come and live here in America. I'm applying for political asylum now because it's too hard to live in a country that's at war. You can't live a normal life. You can't study. You can't go wherever you want and get whatever you need. This is real. I was living in a country at war, so I came to America because I know I can live comfortably here. I can study. I can do a lot of things. I hope to live in peace. Finally, I hope my country has peace someday.

*~ Mohammed Abu-Kawik*

WAS IT A DREAM?



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## LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

I can remember the chilly morning that I began school. I had been longing for this day! Daddy had bought my new uniform from the market. I guess the time was 6:00 am when my elder brother woke me up to take the goats outside and feed them. After we came back from the bushes, where we tethered the goats, mummy served us with hot *fufu* corn (corn cake) and *njamanjama* (cooked and heavily spiced vegetable).

We happily trotted off to school. At school I discovered that my brother, Chah, had not been very truthful to me. He had painted a wonderful picture of school to me, and my expectations were very high. I was floating in the sky. On arriving at school, it did not take long for me to get out of my fantasy world. I discovered that my teacher, Mr. Francis King had a couple of whips, which he used consistently as a correctional aid. He did not hesitate to use the whip on me or anyone else when we made mistakes, and it was very often. My zeal for school quickly evaporated.

The days that followed brought more misery to me. My state of mind amplified the pain I felt from the prickly stones under my bare feet as I walked to school each morning. To make things worse my Mum was not feeling like cooking a generous breakfast every morning. Lunch break was a great relief to me and some children in my situation. We would beg with the most convincing tones of our voices for little pieces of donuts or bean cake from those rich children who could afford to buy lunches at school. We would wander into the near bushes and farms so that we could steal some guavas, pears, sugar cane, and mangoes. Then we were late for classes, and another round of serious beatings ensued. I put up with this misery for four years. By the time I decided that I had had enough of this misery, I was promoted to primary five, a turning point in my education.

A classmate of ours, Kuma, was far bigger and older than all of us. In fact he was too old for his level and had beaten up our teacher, after the teacher had slapped him. Consequently, he skipped school permanently and became a very active member of our village secret society called "Ngang Mulion." After a few years picking up coins for dancers and carrying drums and xylophone poles for occasions, his status had been upgraded to a dancer.

We greatly admired him and would gladly skip school and follow him around when there were occasions like funerals and death celebrations. We assisted him in picking up the coins that the bereaved family member dropped in front of him as sign of their appreciation of his performance. Thereafter he gave us 25 cents, 50 cents, or 75 cents depending on the how much money he got from dancing. Wonderful money, so we thought! So Juju could pay this much, we would wonder aloud. As the days went by, we had the timetable of all the death celebrations around our neighborhood and beyond. Kuma also promised us that he could use his position to influence our rise to the position of dancer if we continued carrying xylophones to death celebrations unflinchingly.

Yes, that was primary five! I would leave the house with my uniform and a t-shirt in the bag. With this discovery, my parents were not very happy. Dad, who was the disciplinarian of the two, was on my side when my status in the secret society changed. I started bringing home some fowls and on some occasions salt. It did not take long for my professional mourner friend and me to become popular. We traveled the length of the valley on foot from North Mulion to Tuafundong West passing through the forest of Aweh Hill. Sometimes at night we walked about six hours on foot. We did so happily. The interactions I had with the professional mourner community gave me a lot of self confidence and sense of fulfillment. My popularity was further enhanced by the secret society I belonged to.

This worked out well for me. This could be a wonderful attraction to the opposite sex, who were not supposed to know theoretically who was behind the mask. Years went by, and I became quite powerful in the secret society. "Ngang Mulion" could not go any where if I did not perform some rituals. Even my parents feared and respected me. No one in the village could match my physical prowess.

I think I must have been 18 when I started to become uncomfortable. I performed fewer spiritual rites, sometimes only once or twice a year. The reason was primarily because my elder brother spent his time reading books and always looked a lot better dressed than me. He could also defeat me in all logical arguments. On top of all of this, he was the only person who could read and also write letters for the elders in the village. I wanted to be able to do these things too. So, I went back to school for two years, and I learned to read and write in French and English, just like my brother.

*~ Victor Ankiambom*

## THIS BEAST

Looks kind of splotchy and yet dull and mismatched  
Like a tumble weed it moves on free, unattached.  
It's matted with hair and with some horrid smell  
Your hatred is growing. You wish it to hell  
Somehow you move and then you catch eyes  
And here with this beast is a startling surprise

Pride  
The way that it lives, it has nothing to hide  
And as you stand staring as if for weeks  
The beast opens its mouth and it suddenly speaks

And it said,

"I am a man.  
I try to live life as best as I can.  
I'm not like you, and it is my choice.  
I only wish you to hear my voice.  
I feel and breathe and hurt and bleed.  
Just like you I want and need.  
Though you're maybe scared of me,  
But what I really am is free."

This realization has you taken aback  
Maybe now you will cut him some slack  
Just 'cause something appears as a troll,  
Nevertheless it still has a soul.

*~ Clay E. Young*

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THE POEM

Skies as beautiful as an African queen and  
Grass as sweet as the first day of spring.  
Flowers that smell and feel like a newborn baby's skin and  
Water like a blanket, warm and silky.  
The soil is like a feather bed, and  
Air like . . . **SULPHUR** . . . permeates the air.

"Fallout, platoon! Soldier, let's move it! This isn't a garden party!"  
The young soldier puts away his scrap of paper and pencil,  
picks up his helmet and AR15,  
and jogs back into formation.

*~ Jamar Mitchell*

## BIG BOY

Daydreaming while listening to the thunder and watching the rain hit the window of his room, the little boy is startled when he hears a noise coming from somewhere inside the house. He slowly opens his bedroom door and walks down the hallway. Suddenly, he hears a large crack of thunder and the lights begin to flicker on and off, on and off. Frightened, the boy stops and braces himself against the wall.

Now the little boy hears a shuffling coming from the direction of the kitchen. Nobody's here! Everyone's at a church meeting. Mom and Dad wanted him to come with them and his older brother, Rosco, but he refused and yelled that he was a big boy now, so they left him home alone and promised to be back soon.

Again a thumping came from the kitchen. The little boy's heart begins to pound as he continues to inch forward, hands feeling the rough wallpaper along the passage. He is wishing them home right now and also wishing he had gone with them! He hears a chair scrape the kitchen floor, and the boy lets out a little squeak. He cannot help himself and continues towards the kitchen door.

Just as he is about to open the door to the kitchen, his heart slamming in his chest, the door bursts open and his mom, dad, and brother shout "Happy birthday!" while wearing party hats and holding a big round chocolate cake.

*~ Rosco Pearce*

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## DREAM VACATION

“All that glitters is not gold.”

I got a call today – you know the kind! “Hello, Mrs. Stieber, you have just won! The prize is ... A four-day, three-night cruise to the Grand Bahama Islands. A luxury overnight stay in a DELUXE SUITE at the Beautiful Discovery Beach Resort. All you need to do is give us your credit card number so you can pay just two-hundred dollars for round trip airfare. Everything else will be included.”

WOW! You say, that is an incredible deal! Well, by now you know the old saying, if it sounds too good to be true, it is. What you weren't told is... Your all-inclusive cruise has all sorts of taxes, fees, and gratuities you weren't aware of when you left home and the bank behind you.

Also, they neglect to tell you that your deluxe accommodation at Beautiful Discovery Beach Resort is a time-share offer. The cocktail social and the viewing of a night space-shuttle launch is really a four-hour, hard-sell presentation to invest a mere \$20,000 in a time-share condominium.

Meanwhile, as your friends back home are waiting to hear all the details of your fabulous dream vacation, you and your spouse are cooling your heels at the airport, since your flight has been delayed six hours and you're trying to scrape up enough change for a drink from the vending machine.

While this telemarketer sounded like the answer to your prayers, she only wanted you to see the sunny side. No one tells you that their preferred airline has more blackout dates than cable TV and the N.F.L. Or that they have crash landed in the Everglades three times in the last year alone.

All taxes, fees, and gratuities are to be paid at the dock. So there went all your spending money! And you missed the spectacular night launch because you were locked in an office with a time-share salesman.

Some dream vacation! You can bet, it was just too good to be true.

*~ Meredith Martin*

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### MISTAKEN IDENTITY

In 1969, my first airplane flight was from Greater Cincinnati Airport to New York City, landing at JFK Airport. My niece, Jerry, and I were going on a 21-day tour to Europe. All expenses were paid by my employer.

We were very excited about this trip. As we embarked upon this huge American Airliner jet, we were escorted to our seats by the stewardess, who then gave us the instructions on the airbags, seat belts, ear phones, exits, and restrooms. Cool! The stewardess had served me a glass of water just before the plane took off, and to my surprise, the plane went straight up. Needless to say, my glass of water spilled, and I was wet from this point on to JFK. I was so excited, so what the heck, no big deal.

After landing at the airport, we took a taxi cab to the Waldorf Astoria. We signed in, and the bell boy escorted us to our room. After reading the safety instructions on the door, we decided to take our traveler's checks and passports to a security box downstairs at the front desk. While we were on street level, we decided to take a short walk in New York City. We came back to the hotel, took an elevator to the fourth floor, and lo and behold, there was a guard on both ends of the hall. We felt very secure with guards on our floor. Upon opening the door and entering our room, on the table was a large bouquet of long stemmed red roses. Jerry called her husband and thanked him for sending her flowers; however, Charles said they were not from him or her parents. There was no ticket on the flowers; therefore, we were not aware of who they came from (Mistake #1).

Reservations for our dinner had been made at a hotel on Times Square, so we put on our finery and white gloves, went out the door of our room, and saw that the two

guards were still on board. Again, we felt secure in our hotel. We felt like celebrities.

Stepping out of a taxi on the great Times Square, we saw bright lights and people coming and going, buses, taxi cabs, cars, even horse-drawn carriages. What a sight to behold!

After a five-course meal in the Edwardian room of one of New York City's finest hotel dining rooms, we departed, amazed at all the night life on Times Square and returned by taxi cab to the Waldorf Hotel. As we sojourned from the elevator to our room, the guards were still there. By now we are wondering, "What's up with the guards on our floor?" Upon entering our room, the lights were on, our beds were turned back, and in the middle of the table where the bouquet of long-stemmed roses were, there too was a huge bowl of fresh fruits (Mistake #2). We thought, "Well, now who are we that we are getting such hospitality by the hotel?" As we examined the fruit bowl, we found a note saying, "Welcome Madam Mahatma Gandhi, to the USA and New York City." We both fell across our beds with laughter.

The next day, we went on a walking tour of the city and to see the Empire State Building. We went up to the observation deck, looked over the city, and took pictures. We then went back to the hotel. There were no guards, no long-stemmed roses, no more mistaken identity, only a huge bowl of fresh fruits that we could not consume.

Later that afternoon, we went back to JFK by taxi cab and waited for our night flight by Swiss Airline to Europe to start our 21-day tour.

*~ Rose M. Buckner*

DEAR ABBY,

I am looking for a few answers. I love a man who loves three women. He calls one his "Black Beauty," one his "Hawaiian Queen," and then there's me. I've known about them for some time but say nothing about them.

One day, he and his Queen passed me on the interstate. He looked at me and smiled. I could not stop thinking about it all afternoon. But that night, we talked about the high points of our days, and I was delighted to hear that she was not one of them!

The following day, he and Beauty went to town. If he goes somewhere, one of these two women will tag along. This goes on all the time! Abby, both women live behind us. Should I be concerned?

Signed,

A Concerned Woman

P.S. Abby, the other women are a black GMC pickup and a Harley Davidson!  
HOW DO YOU STOP A LOVE AFFAIR LIKE THIS?

*~ Charlee Daniels*



# Author Biographies

**Mohammed Abu-Kawik – p. 132**

My name is Mohammed. I came to America in 2006 because I want to study here.

**Vicki Addy – p. 25**

Vicki Addy is 23 years old and the mother of Ryan, age 4, who is a cancer survivor. She attends Even Start Family Literacy classes in New Philadelphia and is working to improve her basic skills, so she can attain her GED. She says she likes interacting together in class to learn new things, and she loves to write poetry. She would like to work with animals some day.

**Jesse Altman – p. 28**

My name is Jesse Altman. I'm 20 years old, and I'm originally from Dayton, Ohio.

**Victor Ankiambom – p. 137**

I was born in Africa and suffered many hardships before coming to the United States. I would like to pass the GED test and go to college to pursue a career.

**Denise Baas – p. 13**

My name is Denise Baas. I am an enthusiastic adult learner who enjoys being in the ABLE classroom, learning new things and helping others. I am a person who enjoys music and talking with others. I am a devoted mother to my children. I would also like to dedicate my poem "Freedom Is..." to the soldiers in Iraq.

**Kim Backer – p. 10, 62, 102**

My name is Kim Backer, and I live in Milford, Ohio. I am 49 years old, married, and have one beautiful daughter and one grandson. I am pursuing getting my GED because I dropped out of high school in my senior year. I worked for

a company for 19 1/2 years and now want to change careers. In today's job market, a high school diploma or GED is required for most companies. For this reason, along with self gratification and self esteem, I am pursuing this challenge.

**Rebecca Baker – p. 39, 62, 66**

My name is Rebecca Baker. I'm an achiever in life. I'm trying very hard in life to get my GED, and I want to thank my mother, Nancy, and my boyfriend, Shane, for supporting me through my journey to further my education.

**Tami R. Ballas – p. 14**

Tami is the single parent of a teenage boy. She returned to school last year to work on her GED, not only for herself, but for her son Josh. Her biggest obstacle is her lack of self-confidence. Tami was convinced she couldn't write until she was asked to imagine what her life would be like if she were a sidewalk.

**Corey T. Barnes – p. 65**

**Linda Barrett – p. 4, 11**

My name is Linda Barrett. I attended GED classes to get the education that I missed out on. I am an avid reader and want to convey the love of reading to others. I am just an everyday housewife of three grown children and six grandchildren.

**Maite Yoselin Barrios – p. 121**

My name is Maite Barrios, and I was born in Venezuela. I am 19 years old, and I moved with my family to USA five years ago. I graduated from high school the spring of 2007, and I am currently assisting Owens Community College of Toledo, Ohio.

**Rose M. Buckner – p. 39, 62, 143**

After graduating from Milford High School in 1948, I didn't feel as if I was college material, so I dropped the idea of

further education. One thing that stayed in my mind was my sophomore journalism class with a very firm English teacher. During the month of February, I wrote an article on the two presidents whose birthdays were in February. The teacher accepted it, and my article was published in our school's newspaper, "The Reflector." Many years later, I started in the ABLE Class at Live Oaks and was introduced to the Ohio Writers' Conference in 2000. I was inspired by a wonderful teacher, Marty Lopinto, to write again. I have been published or received honorable mention in *Beginnings* every year for five or six years. At this late date in my life, I found that it is never too late to learn and pick up where you left off.

**Maria Bulucea – p. 45**

My name is Maria Bulucea, and I am from Romania. I became a teacher of Romanian literature and grammar. I was also a teacher of French and Russian. I studied many languages. In 2003, my husband and I decided to come to America to be together with our married son. It was interesting being in America and getting to know different cultures and people. I look forward to new things every day including learning English and being involved in many aspects of American life.

**Kilcha Canfield – p. 61, 108, 113**

My name is Kilcha Canfield. I received my GED this year and fulfilled a life long dream. I am interested in furthering my education and pursuing a degree. Being part of the Writers' Conference has been a great honor for me.

**Heidi Coffey – p. 101**

Heidi Marie Farley-Coffey was born in Coshocton, Ohio, on October 10, 1981. She is a mother of three children, all boys, and a stepmother to two children. She has always enjoyed reading and writing. In November 2007, after preparing at the Coshocton Family Literacy Program, she obtained her GED. She now attends Central Ohio

Technical College with a major in Registered Nursing. She hopes to work in labor and delivery.

**Stephanie Cole – p. 40**

My name is Stephanie Cole, and I have three children: two sons and a daughter. I am working on getting my GED. My faith is in the Lord. I would like to add a special thanks to my teacher, Amy Guda, because she has been a great help.

**Charlee Daniels – p. 145**

My name is Charlee Dainels, and my contribution to this book is a short story called "Dear Abby." I was born in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1952. I am currently 55 years old. I attended Zanesville High School as well as our local vocation school, which was referred to as MAJVS (Muskingum Area Joint Vocation School) in my day. It is now known as Mid-East Technology Center. I majored in printing.

When I graduated, in 1972, I got married and started to work. Between 1972 and 1993 I was blessed with two children, a girl named Lea and a boy named Billy. In 1993, I found a job working for the state of Ohio. My job title started out as, "highway maintenance worker." Over the years the title changed to Tech 1, but it's really the same job.

I began coming to the ABLÉ program to improve my basic literacy skills so that I could pass tests at work and receive raises. So far, I have started to pass these tests, but they keep adding more. I have improved my reading, spelling and writing skills since I began coming to the program, but I want to continue working on these same skills because I am considering attending Zane State College sometime in the future. I am interested in a degree concentrating in the area of construction/highway repair.

**Ida Davis – p. 126**

My name is Ida Davis. I am 71 years old. I am a Christian. I love the Lord. He is my life.

**Amadou Mika Dia – p. 20**

My name is Amadou Mika Dia. I was born in Mauritania, West Africa, where I went to school and became a civil engineering technician. I came to the United States in January 2004. I work at Pierre Foods as a grinder. I attend classes in their learning center to improve my skills to attend college in the USA.

**Amanda DiCapo – p. 3, 5, 19**

My name is Amanda Ashley DiCapo. I am 19 and live in Chardon, OH. I've been writing since I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and it is my one true passion in life.

**Amy Dunham – p. 59**

My name is Amy Dunham, and I am currently studying at night to get my GED. I have written about my mother because she has always been there for me, and I am very grateful for her.

**Karen Sue Flick – p. 104**

My name is Karen Flick, and I am married with two children. I have told this story to my children, and they have asked me to tell their friends this story also. I thought I would put this story on paper, so it can be shared for generations to come.

**Rachel Forrider – p. 117**

My name is Rachel. I am 18 years old, and I live in Elyria, Ohio. I have an 11-month-old daughter named Jasmine; she is everything to me. My goals for the future would be to get my GED and go to college and to be a good provider for my daughter so she will never have the life I have had in the past.

**Ronald W. Fugate – p. 48, 84**

My name is Ronald Fugate. I have a 10th grade education; yet, I was illiterate for most of my adult life. When I was 18, I got married, and we had three children. My wife passed away. I had a low self-esteem, and I dealt with people who were in the same category. After I raised my children, I wanted to do something about my illiteracy to better myself. I've been tutored for the past two years through The Literacy Council of Clermont and Brown Counties. It has profoundly changed my life and is helping me become a more confident person. I'm on my way to bigger and better things.

**Valerija Glad – p. 109**

My name is Valerija Glad, and I'm from Sombor, Serbia, but I currently live in Milford, Ohio. My native language is Serbian, but I've been studying English for a year. I have improved my conversation and pronunciation skills by attending ESOL class. I also feel that I'm learning a lot about American Culture. I come to ESOL class every week in hopes of enlarging my vocabulary and speaking more fluently. I arrived here in America four months ago, and I have learned a lot. Not only have I learned the English language but also how different things are here than what I'm used to in my home country. For example, I've never driven on a highway before. In my country, I usually walk or ride a bicycle. I like it here, and I hope my family and I will prosper here. I really like the people here, and because of this, I feel very good here in the United States of America.

**Ashley D. Green – p. 74**

Ashley is 24 years old and has been married to Oran for seven years. They are the proud parents of three children: Oriana, 6, Oran, Jr., 5, and Olympia, 2. This is the third of several accomplishments for her this year. The other two include earning her GED in February and being accepted to Ohio University Chillicothe for the spring quarter. Her goal is to become a registered nurse. When not caring for her

husband and children, Ashley enjoys cooking, swimming, bowling, and writing.

**Daveeta Grether – p. 108**

I am a visually impaired student who has always wanted to get my GED. I volunteer at a nursing home, and the staff at the home has helped me to come to classes at Scarlet Oaks.

**Sereice C. Harris – p. 26**

I thank everyone who is trying and not giving up! I'm here, and you are too!

**Matt Haynes – p. 77**

My name is Matthew Haynes. I am 21 years old and live in Lancaster, Ohio, with my mom and sister. I work at night and go to GED classes in the morning. I'm working on getting a better job. I enjoy playing basketball and Guitar Hero with my friends.

**Shellie Hicks – p. 67**

**Lee Scott Hoffman – p. 98**

My name is Scott Hoffman, and I am 28 years old. These stories are the first time I have written since the third grade. I have had bunnies as pets for about three years.

**Ann Holbrook – p. 49**

I am 18 years old and currently in my freshman year of college. After graduating, I hope to become an elementary school teacher. During my free time I like to play music, go shopping, and talk on the phone.

**Wenyuan Hou – p. 41**

My name is Wenyuan Hou. I come from Beijing, the capital of China. I was a performance manager in Beijing. I got married on Christmas Eve in 2006 and then came to America so that my husband could pursue his Master's degree. In my ESL class this year, I have improved my

English and made a lot of friends. I am enjoying my life here.

**Laura Ickey – p. 124**

I was born and raised in Akron, Ohio. I am the youngest of three girls. I am also a mother of a two-year-old boy named Ayden. He is definitely a handful! My parents are wonderful people. They have stood by my side through some very trying times! I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for the people in my life helping me along the way.

**Johnathon K. Janney – p. 123**

My name is Johnathon K. Janney, and I live in Fairborn, Ohio. I've been moving and fighting my addiction for three years now. It's been difficult, but I hope to improve my life.

**Tonia S. Jones – p. 97**

My name is Tonia Jones, and I live in Hamilton, Ohio. I am a single mother of two teenagers, Lindsey and Sam. I've worked at Pierre Foods for 21 years.

**Jade Jones – p. 72**

I am a 25-year-old mother and wife who lives in North Central Ohio. This has always been a hard issue for me to talk about, but I wanted to write about it and put it out for the public eye to view because I don't feel, as a victim, I should be ashamed of it anymore. I hope reading my story will make it easier for another woman to talk about her issues and not feel shame. On a personal note to you victims, "You didn't do ANYTHING wrong; don't beat yourself up and let it ruin your life."

**Jennifer Karlsson – p. 8**

My name is Jennifer Karlsson, and I'm from Finland. My native language is Swedish, but I have been studying English for 10 years. Currently I'm in the United States for a year working as an au pair and living in Covington, Kentucky. One thing that I've learned in ESOL class is the different slang sayings. I continue to come back to ESOL

class because I want to work on my English pronunciation. In my country, I am studying to become a teacher. In my spare time I like to run. My goal is to go back to my home country after this year and finish my education. When I have my degree in education, I might come back to the USA for a few years because there are still many parts of this country that I want to see and explore.

**Kum Sun Kim – p. 103**

My name is Kum Kim, and I have been coming to GED classes for 7 years. I am trying my best to achieve this goal so I can go on to a higher level and get a better job. I know my children will be proud of me. Thank you so much GED classes, staff and volunteers.

**Antwan Leggett – p. 125**

My name is Antwan Leggett, and I am a father of one. I live in Youngstown, Ohio. I like to play basketball on the weekends.

**Anastasia Lohner – p. 21**

Anastasia Lohner, a student at the Columbus Literacy Council, is originally from Germany and has lived in Central Ohio for the last 29 years. She would like to dedicate this poem to her daughter, who she is extremely proud of, and thank her for always offering her encouragement and support.

**Meredith Martin – p. 141**

Meredith Martin, 37 years old, is the mother of David, (19 months), Jocelyn, (5), and Justine, (9). She presently attends Even Start Family Literacy classes at New Philadelphia where she hopes to attain her GED this year. Born in San Pedro, California, and having had various retail jobs and life experiences, she finds the greatest adventure of all to be raising her children. Her goals include working in research or social services some day.

**Tonda L. Minney – p. 94**

I am a wife and mother of four and a grandmother of nine. My life is pretty full, but getting my GED would make my life complete. I attended my class faithfully and plan to pass my test really soon.

**Jamar Mitchell – p. 139**

My name is Jamar Mitchell, and I am 23 years old. I have two children: a boy and a girl. After I receive my GED I plan to go into a kitchen/bath renovations and landscaping business with my cousin.

**Margaret Moore – p. 81**

My name is Margaret Moore, and I am a 51-year-old woman who quit school at sixteen to work and help support my mother, who had a lot of health problems. Now I am going back to school to get my GED and then beginning to take classes to become a supervisor where I'm working. My family is supporting me all the way!

**Samantha Naylor – p. 10, 56, 62**

I'm a 30-year-old, loving mother of three boys – 12, 8, and 4. I'm also a wife of 12 years, but I've been with my husband for 15 years. We are all very happy! I would like to thank everyone in the ABL program. I'm so much happier now since I'm back in school.

**Rosco Pearce – p. 140**

My name is Rosco Pearce. After receiving my GED, I would like to help build and design bridges.

**San Pol – p. 10, 39**

My name is San, and I am from Cambodia. I have lived in the United States for 11 months, and I really like living here. Before I came here I was a salesperson in a small market in Cambodia, but my new job is as a nail technician. I think if I had more education I would probably get a better job. I try to study hard, and I hope I will succeed in the future.

**John Reed – p. 17**

My name is John Reed, and I am 19 years old. My hobby is writing. After I receive my GED, I hope to go into a career in the health field.

**Kathleen Reid – p. 10**

My name is Kathleen Reid. I'm 40 years old and have two children. I love nature walks because they are good for the mind and body.

**Shannon Reynolds – p. 69**

Shannon Reynolds is a single mother working on her GED. She loves to write and share her passion with others. She is very good at motivating the other students. This poem was written in honor of her niece, Tristan, who was badly injured and continues to struggle from an accident she encountered a few years ago. Shannon is currently employed as an STNA. She plans to attend Clark State Community College later this year to study writing and psychology.

**Caleb Robertson – p. 29, 39**

My name is Caleb Robertson. I attended Live Oaks ABLE class in Milford, Ohio, and received my GED in November, 2007. I am intent on being successful in life in everything I do. I expect the best of myself in the large and small objectives of life. My dream is to graduate from college and one day own my own business. Receiving my GED is the first step in achieving these goals.

**Evelina Robinson – p. 53****Niny F. Rosso – p. 82**

Her name is Niny F. Rosso, and she is an ESL student from Colombia. She is hoping to be able to get a job in her field of Psychology. She currently lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband and is looking forward to visiting with her family again soon.

**Elizabeth Sacksith – p. 83****Jennifer Samons – p. 79**

My name is Jennifer Samons, and I am an ABLE/GED student in the London program. I have lived in London for most of my life. I also volunteer in the center and have a part time job at Bob Evans restaurant.

**Shanaz Shalli – p. 115**

My name is Shanaz Shalli. This is a Kurdish name, which means proud in English. I am from northern Iraq. I attended medical school there and met my husband, who is also a doctor. We moved to Germany to continue on our medical careers and then came to the United States where there are more opportunities for us and our future children.

**Megan Marie Smith – p. 86**

My name is Megan Smith, and I am 20 years old and live in London, Ohio. I have a 1-year-old son named Dwyane. I am enrolled in ABLE/GED classes in London.

**Donna R. Sousa – p. 95**

My teacher really encouraged me to write this during a hurting time. At first, I did not want to write, but putting this into words helped heal the pain. I dedicate this in memory of my brother, John Jesse Sousa. I thank my teacher for helping with my grammar and for her support in helping me work for my GED.

**Jessica M. Tate – p. 70**

My name is Jessica Tate, and I come from a big family. I am the mother of one child. I'm working on getting my G.E.D. and improving my basic skills. I want to make a good life for my child.

**Joshua Lee Tatman – p. 18**

My name is Joshua Lee Tatman. I was born on the 18th of July in 1989. I now live in Shawnee, Ohio. When I was young, we used to travel a lot. I have been from D.C. to

L.A., as far north as Canada, and as far south as Mexico. I have always loved to travel, so I do it as much as possible.

**Mary E. Torres – p. 78**

My name is Mary Torres, and I am 21 years old.

**Angela Traylor – p. 54, 62**

My name is Angela Traylor. I am a single mom to a 10-year-old boy, Codey, who inspired me to start GED classes, which I love!

**Gloria Neely Tucker – p. 32**

My name is Gloria Tucker. I have three daughters and five grandchildren. I write poems and short stories in my spare time. A few of my poems have been used for funerals. I would like someday to have all my work published.

**Harry Van Loveren – p. 91, 108**

I am a 79-year-old man who was born in Holland. I have owned my own business but always wanted to get my GED. I received my GED in February of this year.

**Xeng Veopraseuth – p. 85**

There are three authors who wrote the story, "Raccoon and Rooster".

**Rhonda D. Ware – p. 38**

I have daughters and two grandchildren, and a son-in-law in the military. I love to cook and read. God is very important to me and my household. I would like to go to Youngstown State University.

**Wei Wei – p. 43**

My name is Wei Wei. I am from China, and I came to America with my husband, who is a PhD student at Case. When I first came here, I had a hard time: I was far from my family, with no friends, and I couldn't speak English very well. Then I enrolled in an ESL class, which led me to a new life in the U.S. No winter lasts forever. I am now enjoying

my life here. My ESL teacher encouraged me to write, and I am grateful that she helped me gain the skills to be a good writer.

**Caroline von Westernhagen – p. 30**

My name is Caroline von Westernhagen. Because my father was in military, we moved very often. After getting my degree I worked for an insurance company, but I did not find this interesting. After my son was born, my husband and I owned a pizza delivery service, which was very successful. When my marriage ended I became a tax accountant. After some difficult times, I remarried, and my husband's company offered him a job in Cleveland. I like the challenge of going to another country. In ESL class I improved my English. I began to study to be a Yoga teacher. My previous writing had only been for school, but I like to read. I do keep a journal of my life. In Cleveland, I began to write in English because now all the books I read are in English. I feel now that I can think in English and express my feelings as easily as I can in German.

**Kin Wijasa – p. 130**

My name is Kin Wijasa, and I came to the United States eight years ago from Indonesia. I have two daughters and one son. I am also a 65-year-old grandmother of four, learning English as a Second Language.

I study ESOL because I want to set a good example for my children and grandchildren about life-long learning and trying new things. Cooking is a favorite hobby of mine. Recently, my young granddaughter and I competed in an international recipe cooking contest, and we won!

I enjoy my English classes and my teacher, Nancy Maynard. Through these studies, I have gained the confidence and ability to submit writings to the Beginnings publication and to take the U. S. Citizenship test later this year along with my husband, Antono.

**Coreal Lynn Wilson – p. 22, 39, 107**

My name is Coreal Lynn Wilson. I am 37 years old and have four children and one grandchild. I am a stay-at-home mother right now and take care of my grandson. I hope to be able to open my own daycare soon. I am very happy to be able to go back to school and be able to get my GED. I am very grateful for my children and my family for being there for me and being supportive of me at this time. I am also very grateful for the people in my class for being there and encouraging me and all the others to keep all of our hopes up everyday.

**Afi Wozufia – p. 128**

My name is Afi Wozufia, and I am from Togo, West Africa. I have three children that I am very proud of. I work at Pierre Foods and attend the Learning Center. Soon, I will be a US Citizen.

**Clay E. Young – p. 6, 138**

Clay Young is an ABLE/GED student at Lancaster Fairfield Community Action Agency.

**Ye Zheng – p. 46**

My name is Ye Zheng. When I was in China, I worked as a high school teacher. I came to the United States to be with my husband so that he can devote more time and energy to his work.

When I got the essay assignment during ESL class, a lot of scenes and feelings came into my mind. The first few weeks in the U.S. were really hard for me. It wasn't the lack of money or physical pains that made life hard. It was the totally different surroundings, my deep homesickness that made me scared spiritually. I knew nobody else but my husband. However, my life was to change when I joined the ESL class, where I met some friends and got to know U. S. life. With all the scenes sliding in my mind, I wrote the essay smoothly. After the essay, I felt tears on my cheeks. I knew it was about happiness and hope.



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## Honorable Mention

**Artists**

Victoria Addy	Shellie Hicks
Richard Anzerino	Jermayne Higgs
Amos Cody Asbury	Jackie Hoover
Valijean Barker	Randy Horst
Maite Barrios	Amanda Houshoulder
Amie Boyd	Melinda S. Huff
Richard Brenizer	Curtis James
Michelle Burns	Tim Johnson
Marie Capps	Timothy Johnson
Sheyla Caraballo	Bill Jones
Chris Centofanti	Ashley Kannal
Stephen Chuey	Ronald Kolat
Jermaine Craft	Tom Kutty
Sherri Danko	Kirk Madden
Heather Davies	Faye L. Marciano
Cathy DeSalvo	Jennifer Markovich
Eva Dreher	Kazumi Matthews
Carolyn Duke	Jeannie McCord
Sabrina Earvin	John McMillan
Gregory Fesko	Jennifer Mikovich
Robert Fink	Betty Miller
Paulina L. Foley	Robert Morley
Luz Franklin	Robert Nick
Valerija Glad	Anita Ohlin
Kevin Glines	Roberto Cruz Ortiz
Chad E. Graf	DJ Poichies
Kevin W. Gray	Pamela Price
Frank Gregorich	Asia Provost
Tracy Guinn	Sarah Rice
Ted Hardie	Richard Rich
Paul Harris	Ryan Rizzo
Robert Hewitt	Evelina Robinson

John Roman  
Laurel Shannon  
Misty Shuman  
Karen Smith  
Lesley Jean Smith  
Linda Joyce Smith  
Heather Steele  
Greg Stewart  
Miruna Thangavel

Amber Tetzlaff  
Ben Todd  
David Torres  
Michael Vadjunec  
Paula Voytilla  
Gaye Weatherall  
Larry Williams  
Cindy Yarotz

**Authors**

Atsupi A  
Hind Aaffi  
Fumiko Adair  
Donna J. Adams  
Mayra Aguirre  
Samuel Agyeman  
Theresa Agyeman  
Yuko Akiyama  
Valeria Alexander  
Hayfa Ali  
Kasim Alikar  
Susan Alloway  
Maher Alwisha  
Tahniah Arif  
Gerardo Atrolozaga  
Diop Asso  
Brian Ball  
David Banks  
Rain Bao  
Drenda Barber  
Andy Barnum  
Melly Barriga  
Alcira Barrios  
Yuri Basishvili  
Dany Bassil  
Sema Bayrakdar  
James Beatty

Susan Belk  
Shari Berendes  
Charles Blue  
Terry Bowser  
Amber Bronish  
Ashley Brown  
Jennie Bruner  
Anecia Burr  
Jerry Burton  
Brenda Byers  
Mariam Caballero  
Veronica Carlin  
Charles Carr  
Brenda Carroll  
Deepika Chebattina  
Marie Cherestal  
Crystalyn Chisenhall  
Hing Choi  
Darla Churchill  
Camille Cier  
Kevin Coleman  
Shamala Collier  
Columbus Urban League  
Group Project  
Geciane Costa  
Ashleigh Day  
Massa Diabete

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Clarisa Diaz	Sheila Hightower
Ashley Dingey	Leretta Hill
Juan Duarte	Theresa Hoffman
James Dunkle	Roberta Horstman
Tarry Elcher	Dan Howard
Laila Etawerghi	Bard Hupp
Chante' Evans	Juyoung Hwang
Gregory Fesko	Rabia Idaddi
Kayla Fink	Hayfa Ilayan
Andrea Flowers	Shannon Jackson
Jose Fontanez	Tina Jackson
JoAnn Franke	Sanchez Janette
Luz Franklin	Won-min Jo
Jim Freeman	Easter Jolly
Jamie Funnell	Donicea Jones
Mercedes Garcia	Alsu Kadirmaeva
Donald Gardner	Chetan Kapoor
Joshua Garner	Zeynep Karatas
Russell Gatten	Diebert Kenne
Luis Gaviria	Aretina Kennedy
Jennifer Gonzalez	Gary Kies
Vanessa Gonzales	Aretha Kimble
Constance Gray	Charlene Klegman
Shalayne Gregory	Betty Krimmer
Anja Grimming	Victoria Kryvoruchko
Gul Gurbuz	Charnie Leonard
Juan Gutierrez	Sonya Lewis
Maia Gvatamadze	Linda Leyman
Marcus Hamilton	Chie Lioka
Dana Hammond	Veronika Litvina
Shawn Hanners	Alfredo Lopes
Nicholas Hanning	April Lowery
Tracy Hatfield	Jayson Lozar
Candy Hayes	Sandra Luckett
Annie Heath	Joyce Lutz
Amanda Hensley	Heather Mahon
Porfilio Hernandez	Varsha Makwana
Veronica Highfield	Jacinta Marrhaye
Sarah Hightower	Edna Martin

Marc Martin	Alveta Prather
Matthew Mason	Pam Price
Kazumi Matthews	Marcella Pruitt
Svetlana McClanahan	Jessica Queener
Carol McCreary	Sandy Radcliff
Arvin McGhee	Tessy Rivera
Jennifer McMahon	Jesus Riveros
Doris McMillen	Claude Roberts
Genevieve Milhoan	Janette Rodrigues
Erica Millender	Axia Rodriguez
Angela Miller	Carolyn Roney
Tambra Miller	Richard Rutter
Benjamin Mitchell	Raphael Ryan
Holly Moga	Sanae Sakami
Doris Molina	Julia Santiago
Johnnie Moore	Angela Schuler
Jeanette Morales	Bill Seevers
Youseff Morsli	Royce Sells
Anne Moyers	Denny Semler
Martha Munoz	Linda Seymour
Safia Najah	Sheena Shams
Elena Neboga	Jack Shepherd
Waveline Nelson	Holly Silcox
Tabitha Newland	Tim Siler
Soksan Nuon	Quanita Simpson
Emily Nutter	Destiny Smith
Regina O'Dell	Aline Souza
Kenji Okino	Courtney Spellick
Nana Okino	Andre Springs
Judy Parrott	Angela Stanziano
Katino Pastikos	Linda Starcher
Hun Pech	Erica Sullivan
Chante Perry	Titania Sumner
Yen-Ly Phan	Laura Sunday
April Phillips	Bock Tatjana
Catherine Phillips	Sherril Taylor
Sheryl Pierce	Two Teams
Pierre Learning Center	Pam Thimmes
Angel Pineda	Tessa Thomas

Trisha Thomas  
Robert Todd  
Luis Torres  
Awa Toure  
Melissa Tremaine  
Jacqueline Tucker  
Rhonda Tucker  
Beatrice Uwamariya  
Claudia Vargas  
Mittie Walker  
Yue Wang  
Yvonne Warman  
Elmer Watkins

Kamilla Weller  
Tzu-I Weng  
Shauna White  
Latoya Whitfield  
Kayla Williams  
Amber Wireman  
Stefanie Woods  
Juju Xu  
Jacod Yarger  
Tiesha Young  
Abby Zecher  
Jing Zhang

