

# Beginnings XII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER



## Foreword

I write this Foreword with an odd mixture of embarrassment and pride. Until I was asked to speak at the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Ohio Writers' Conference, I confess I was unaware of the noble and exciting work done by the OLRC and ABLE programs. But to have spent the day with young and seasoned writers from all corners of Ohio brought me unbridled joy and pride—pride in realizing the magnanimity of all those involved in the undertaking and pride at having shared the dais with so many gifted voices.

Each person who submitted one of the seventy-two entries in this book, as well as those nearly five hundred writers who offered their work for consideration, deserve our applause. I have been to many writers' conferences in my life, but I know with certainty that I have never seen such enthusiasm for the written word as I found at this OLRC event. I like to think I was present at the opening salvos of many great writing careers.

The British poet Charles Causley once wrote: "We need art to remind us not to spend too much time in the office or on the factory floor caring about things that on our deathbeds will mean less than nothing." Here are people, many getting their GEDs, who have already learned that message and taken it to heart.

So, to all of the budding poets, short story writers, and novelists who are toiling at the writer's trade, I tip my hat.

Never fear failure. Failure is your friend. Embrace it, for nothing succeeds like failure. Know that you can never be a writer unless you promise yourself to be a rewriter. Revise, revise, revise: the only mantra for us all.

*J. Patrick Lewis*

## Acknowledgements

The book you hold in your hands represents the culmination of paths each person has walked to meet together, here, in the pages of *Beginnings XII*. These vital and original, creative writings show the heart of the ABLE students in both triumph and loss, but always with a strong spirit of perseverance. Be assured after spending some time reading the literary works within, you will leave changed in some way. This year nearly 500 entries were submitted for consideration in the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's *Beginnings XII*. All were worthwhile contributions and we bow our heads to each writer who continues to step forward and to their teachers who do not fail to encourage those steps or leaps of faith to bring them closer still to their dreams. As you read the 72 works, prepare to step into a different time, another place or new circumstance.

We are grateful to the winning artist entries. Masayuki Itaya's *One Soup, Three Bowls* was created after he thought about his country, Japan. This beautiful drawing graces the front cover of *Beginnings XII*. Artist Julie Ward shares, "My piece, *The Angel of Hope*, directly contributes to the art and literature contained in prior *Beginnings* compilations from the standpoint that hope is change for the better." Contained within the pages of this literary work runs a strong current of hope. Of equal importance is artist Cristina Ortiz's interpretation in *My Feelings, Expressions*, "I would like to write my feelings and thoughts in stories and poetry, but I cannot find good words and beautiful sentences for that. Instead, I draw a picture." We are proud to showcase a wonderful partnership of both verbal and visual representations of artistic ability.

We thank the Ohio Board of Regents State Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program for the continued support of this honorable project. We also thank the reviewers who spent innumerable hours with a quickened eye for judging and a passion for reading during the selection process for the 2009 Writers' Conference.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the ABLE teachers throughout the state of Ohio. Your encouragement and support inspire students to reach higher, go farther, and work harder to bring their dreams to fruition.

Our special thanks to the speakers who converge with us at the 2009 Ohio Writers' Conference: Award winning poet and author David Hassler, our keynote speaker; and to story-teller and long-time friend to the Writers' Conference, Lyn Ford, who shares with us her "Home-Fried Tales." We welcome this opportunity to share together *Beginnings XII*.

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**Ohio Literacy Resource Center**

**Enhancing Adult Literacy**

Research 1 - 1100 Summit St., P.O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Phone: (330) 672-2007 or (800) 765-2897 Fax: (330) 672-4841

<http://literacy.kent.edu>

*For my fellow Adult Learners*

WALK THIS WAY

There will be times  
as you travel along the road to literacy and learning  
you will get tired, rest and move on.  
you will stumble, stop and regain your footing.  
you might even fall down, pick yourself up and move on.  
I did.

There will be times  
as you travel along the road to literacy and learning  
you will feel alone, know that you are not.  
you will be stressed, know that this will pass.  
you will be challenged, success comes with challenge.  
I was.

There will be times  
as you travel along the road to literacy and learning  
you will wonder if it is all worth it, it is.  
you will question your choice, education is always the right choice.  
you will struggle to keep your head up,  
I did.

When these times come,  
as you travel along the road to literacy and learning  
you must continue to walk,  
walk through,  
walk around,  
walk on,  
in spite of everything.  
I did.

*Marianne Thomas-Jackson  
GED Scholar  
Kent State University  
MFA Graduate*



Respect

敬



## FISH HEAD SOUP

What would be your response to your friend's offer to treat you to a bowl of fish head soup? Personally, I would love to have a bowl of fish soup! However, anyone who does not have my background in island living and seafood eating might feel squeamish. In Sabah, Malaysia, where I come from, seafood is very popular, as well as very expensive. In my home town, we love fish head soup, which we serve to our guests to show our hospitality to them.

I did just that when my American husband first visited me in Malaysia. I took him to a famous seafood restaurant in my home town and ordered a whole steamed fish (another popular local dish served to our guests). My husband was very funny! While eating the fish with his right hand, he kept his left hand over the fish head so that he couldn't see its eyes staring back at him. He told the fish head, "Don't look at me!" and then turned to me and said, "It tastes really good." At that point I realized that Americans don't eat fish heads and don't lick fish bones. Nonetheless, my husband showed his respect for my ethnic culinary specialty.

The second time my husband came to marry me was another interesting culinary experience for him. He had trouble with his jaw, so we went to see a doctor in my home town. As a result of the visits to this doctor, my husband-to-be and I became good friends with this doctor. We invited him to our wedding, but he couldn't attend. He felt sorry about having missed our wedding, so he invited us for lunch at a restaurant for the best fish head soup in town. When my husband heard that the doctor wanted to treat us to fish head soup, his eyes opened up very wide. He said to himself, "Oh, no!" We respectfully accepted the doctor's invitation. When we sat down to eat at the restaurant, my husband said

to the doctor, "If I get sick, I have a doctor with me." We all looked at each other and laughed.

*~Doreen Taylor*

(UNTITLED)

I am a piece of ground.  
I used to have twins,  
but I do not now.  
I used to be covered in material that towered in the sky,  
but now I'm a grave where thousands died.

*~Jesse Altman*

## HELPING THE HOMELESS

It is a bitter cold day

And you wonder—  
what are those bundles of coats and blankets

That are laying on the sidewalks?

Black and blue blends with the weather and view.

People, walking the beat,  
staring at what these bundles of coats are.

Then suddenly, they move—a head, then an arm,

A head, then an arm, a hand,

Helping us to realize there is someone in each.

As we walk, we see their eyes worried and hurt.

When I kneel to add more coats and hot soup,  
I hope to change their day.

But it never changes.

It happens everyday.

*~Carl Jennings*

## THEORIES OF IMMIGRATION

My name is Soichi Oya, and I am a visiting physician from Japan at the Cleveland Clinic in the Neurosurgery Department. I have worked as a neurosurgeon in Japan for 11 years. Most of my work involves the surgical treatment for cerebral vascular diseases. I am working with a well-known surgeon here in Cleveland.

In addition to my work, I am also interested in improving my English. I have never lived abroad before and there are not many English-speaking foreign people in Japan. Therefore, we seldom have opportunities to communicate in English. So as soon as I arrived, I enrolled in the ESL class at Case hoping to develop my English language skills.

The class had completed a unit on diversity in American society. I was faced with taking a test on this unit even though I had not been in the class for discussions on this topic. I decided to do it as practice. One of the questions that was presented was to write my opinion on whether I agreed with the term used in the early twentieth century describing the immigrant experience as a "melting pot" or whether I saw it more like the term that is used today, "a salad bowl" or "patchwork quilt."

The theory of immigrants as a "melting pot" may sound reasonable when used to refer to the desire for unity among the American people but the word also implies that immigrants in America should become identical. In other words, a person who did not fit in to mainstream America and tried to keep his or her unique identity would be considered a threat or at least an undesirable. I admit that people living in a country should conform to societal norms, but does this mean that foreign people must totally conform to the existing culture? I think not.

The newly termed words to describe the immigrant experience such as “salad bowl” or “patchwork quilt” create the impression that immigrants are encouraged to keep their cultures but also adapt to American culture. Under this circumstance, people from other countries are able to learn about America but remain individuals. Foreigners would be required to be sensitive to American people and their culture but so would Americans respect their identities and cultures. In this way, Americans could embrace foreign cultures instead of excluding them. I believe that this mutual respect encourages true communication. Ingredients in a salad bowl never lose their special taste and each patch of a quilt never mixes into another patch. They create a harmonious result as would the American society.

In the two months I have been here, many people in America have helped to make my life as comfortable as possible. I hope to see more of what’s going on here. I will remember always to have respect for American culture while taking pride in my own.

*~Soichi Oya*



## THE LOVED ONE

It's true what they say about it. We hurt the ones we love the most. We get too comfortable with the fact that they like or love us too much to leave us. When we start to believe this, we start to forget the value that they have in our lives, and therefore, don't realize that they can leave us until it's too late to fix it.

So if you're reading this please  
Don't let your loved one be the forgotten one!

*~Diane Chuck*

## THE NAN KING HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

A few months ago, we went back to China. My sister was getting married, so we had to go to her wedding. Before the wedding, we decided to go to the Nan King Holocaust Museum. This is the city where I was born. This museum is about what happened in 1937 in Nan King.

Here is what I learned. In seven weeks the Japanese killed between 300,000-400,000 people. They didn't just kill them; they tortured them to death. They raped people, burned them, buried them alive. They held races to see how fast they could kill the Chinese.

After I went to the museum, I bought a book named The Rape of Nan King, which was written by a Chinese American named Iris Chang. This book taught me a lot!

On the museum walls there were a lot of words. The one that I can remember the most is the last saying: "Forgivable, but Unforgettable." We can't change history, but we should learn from it!

*~Layla Martin*

## THE BILL OF RIGHTS

My name is Xinxin Tang. I am from China and study ESL at Case Western Reserve University. This class not only helps me to improve my English, but it also teaches me about American history and culture. For example, we studied about the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the American Constitution. I think all the amendments are important. As a newcomer to the United States, I feel I must understand how they work and how they affect our daily lives. They are the protectors of our civil liberties in many different ways, and each affects the other.

However, of all of them, I think the third amendment is the most important. Originally, this was to prevent the government from sending soldiers into a person's home and taking their property. The colonists felt it was not fair when King George III had his British soldiers take over private homes. Now, this law applies more to illegal searches of people's homes by the police.

There is a saying that a man's home is his castle. In a democracy such as America, people feel that their home is a safe place. Therefore it is unlawful for the police to enter a person's home and violate his personal property. In some ways this is comparable to soldiers entering because whether it is soldiers or the police, the effect on the homeowner is that he feels his home has been invaded.

Furthermore, when police come to search a house, it throws suspicion on those who live there. Without a search warrant that shows reasonable suspicion of guilt, a search could ruin a person's reputation and make him an unwanted neighbor. This is emotionally damaging. Of course, if there is reason to believe that the people are involved in criminal behavior, I agree that the police have a right to

search. The problem involved is that if the search proves the people innocent, how could their reputation in the neighborhood be repaired? This is a very difficult situation either way.

In many countries, innocent people have no way to protect themselves against the abuse of power. Their homes are invaded, their property is confiscated, and even their very lives are threatened. In such countries, the authorities are looked upon as the enemy. In America, the third amendment helps to maintain a good relationship between citizens and law enforcement agents. We respect the police, and they respect us. Everyone stays within the framework of the law.

*~Xinxin Tang*

Courage

勇



## BORN IN A JUNGLE

I was born in a grass hut in the jungle of Panama. I was the fourth born in a family of five girls and one boy. As a little girl, I can remember being hungry and having no shoes or underclothes. About two times a year, my mother went to the closest town, Las Minas. She bought material from which she made dresses for us to wear. We wore them until they were shreds. I can remember climbing trees and catching bugs. My dad made us little toys from wood and moccasins from cow hide.

People in the jungle didn't have regular jobs. They would work for each other when someone needed something done. When my dad went to work for his friends, he used the money he made to buy chicha (like moonshine) to drink instead of bringing the money home for the family. He became an alcoholic and eventually lost everything he had. He even sold our possessions to buy alcohol. My mother's adopted parents lived within a mile of us and helped as they could.

When I was about eight or nine, a woman came to the jungle from a small village and said she was my aunt. She asked to take me to live with her. My mom said she could take one of her daughters because it would help her. She told my mom she would send me to school. Really she was no relation and was just looking for a servant. She sent me to school, but I could go only when I wasn't busy taking care of her or her store. I walked about three miles to the school. She didn't help me with my schoolwork and treated me mean. The other kids at school called me a "chola" which means a poor person from the jungle. I remember they made fun of me and didn't want to play with me. The woman I lived with abused me physically and made me take her homemade tamales throughout the neighborhood selling them door to door. She

said, "Don't come back until they are all gone." I was very unhappy. It was so hot, and I had no shoes.

I stayed with her three or four years. One day she sent me out to sell tamales. It was hot, and I was very tired of being her "slave." The tamales sold for 25¢ each. I figured out how much money I should get for the tray of tamales, took that amount out of the cash register in the store, and then went out and gave the tamales away. My "aunt" had told me not to come back until I had sold all of them, and that's what I did.

One of our regular customers saw how I was being treated, so she helped me make a plan for running away. It was very scary for me. I went to bed one night as usual, but I stayed awake and waited for the bus that came by at 1:00 A.M. She advised me to put a veil on my face. I took the bus to Central Avenue in Panama City where I met the customer's friend. She took me to live in her home in the Canal Zone. I was a maid for her and helped take care of her kids, but I was treated well. I stayed with her about four years. The only thing that I was thinking about was survival.

At this time I still didn't know how old I was. We never celebrated birthdays in the jungle. When I was about four, my mother took the day-long walk with me to the little town of Las Minas in the jungle to have me baptized at the Catholic church. She must have remembered the day of my birth to tell the priest at the church, but she never told me. In the jungle we were more concerned with just making it through each day than with celebrations.

I must have been around sixteen when I decided to go off on my own. I left the woman in the Canal Zone, got a job in a bar in Panama City, and rented an apartment. It wasn't long before I was pregnant. I became a single, unwed mother. Life was very hard for me and my son Jorge. When he was three, I met a wonderful man from the United States who was in the



Air Force. We married and lived on base. In order to get married I had to have a birth certificate. We took a trip back to Las Minas where I had been baptized, and they still had the record in the priest's small office. That's when I found out that I was twenty-one years old.

My husband, Joe Lofink, adopted Jorge soon after we were married. Three years later we came to the United States and set up our home in Thornport, Ohio. We were married twelve years. After our divorce I got a job with Bundy as a production specialist. I met Greg Peck, and we eventually married. Jorge is now married, also, and has two boys. He is a construction worker. In 2007 my job ended when the factory was closed and moved to Mexico. With no formal education and bad health, I once again had to find a way to survive. Bundy arranged for all of their employees to go to training through One Stop to help us find work. As part of my training, I was sent to the Perry County ABLE class. This has provided me more formal education than I have ever had in my life. I am grateful to be in the United States where you have the opportunity to get an education and become someone. I am very happy that my son had the chance that I didn't have and am very proud of my two grandsons.

*~Eneida L. Peck*

## MY STORY

My name is Mattie E. Linscott. I was born on Nov. 1, 1978, to Eli and Susan Slabaugh in Mt. Eaton, Ohio. I have four older brothers, five older sisters, and one younger brother. I started school when I was five, but after two months the school board said I was too young, even though I did better than the other kids that started the same time. My parents took me out of school, but my sister Katie home schooled me that year. I ended up having to take first grade again at school.

I went to a one-room schoolhouse with 50 other students. It wasn't always fun because in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade an older kid who sat behind me kept poking me with his pencil. I told the teacher, but nothing was done. Within a few months I was swollen under my arms. I had to go to the doctor. The doctor took two cups of infection from under my arms because of the poison from the lead in the pencil.

A few years later, in the end of June, my stomach hurt. My mom made me crawl down the stairs headfirst. This was supposed to make the fluids in my appendix empty. The next day they took me to the hospital to find out what was wrong. The doctor said it was appendicitis and they would have to operate. I was a scared little ten-year-old when I had to go to the hospital for the operation. I was in the hospital for three days. After the operation, it took me quite a while to get strong. I had to relearn how to walk.

After 6<sup>th</sup> grade my parents moved everyone to Shreve, Ohio. My mom home schooled my brother and me. She had other chores she wanted me to do, like baking bread, mopping floors, or something that kept me from my schoolwork. I quit trying because it was too hard to do school work and do house work. My education came to a halt.

Mom said it was time for me to go to work, so I started work at the orchard with my sisters MaryAnn and Amanda. Mom kept the money I made because until you are 21 you have to give your parents any money for giving you a place to stay and for raising you. Our boss at the orchard started the day with a Bible Study. That was my introduction to the Word of God in English. I really enjoyed this.

My sister MaryAnn started to go to a Bible study on Wednesday nights to learn more about God. I tagged along a few times. Going to Bible study was against the Amish culture, so when my mom found out about our excursions there she wanted to stop us. Her remedy was to move our family to my brother's house, which was about 15 miles away to distance us from this evil. The whole church was at our house early, before daylight, to move us to his house.

That day, I decided that I did not want to stay in the Amish church. I made plans to leave for good. I was 15 and a half years old. As my family was packing, I hid my boxes of clothes in the attic. After dark I grabbed my things and crawled out the window to escape. I walked to Shreve Lake, around a mile away, on the dark warm summer night. I was scared but also felt relieved that I would not have to live in such a strict environment any more.

For a couple of weeks I lived with my sister Amanda at my cousin's house, an old chicken coup that was fixed into a home. Then I moved in with my sister MaryAnn and her husband for a couple of months. My mom found out I was there. She was going to make me move back home because she thought I was too young to be away from home. Before she arrived I called my sister Amanda, and she picked me up. I lived with her for about a month. I worked as a housekeeper at a restaurant in Shreve in the evenings. I didn't like some of the things that were happening there, like drugs, and I feared for my safety.

I wanted to go to the same church as my sister MaryAnn and her family. I moved in with Tim and Jennifer Miller, who were friends from MaryAnn's church. I grew spiritually. I met others my age. I also was the "big sister" to the Miller children. In my family home there were no hugs and goodnights, but living with the Millers there were. If I was away from them at bedtime, I came home to find a note telling me goodnight and some words of praise. I felt such a part of this family. They gave me birthday parties and treated me so great.

I met the man who won my heart through my cousins. When I was eighteen Mike and I got married. His eight-year-old son Mikey came to live with us. We soon began our own family of two more boys. I thought everything was okay between Mike and me, but things with Mikey were shaky. Mikey was doing a lot of complaining to his grandma that he was being made to do things he didn't want to do, and he made up stories that were untrue. He also threatened my life and our boys on several occasions. Things got out of control the longer he was there. He stole, lied, and was violent.

Mike said his Grandma needed his help to move one Sunday. He took the kids while I went on to church. When I arrived back home I was horrified that my husband left with everything. He had taken our sons, Jesse and Thomas, with him. They were only 6 and 3. I was left with only a couch, a bed, and books. I felt like a piece of discarded trash. He took everything that was of value to me, my kids, himself and he just left me. The trailer roof fell down a couple days after he left after a heavy rain storm. The next week, the furnace gave out. It was cold on those fall days in Ohio. I had my kitchen stove to keep me warm until it quit working within a few days. I felt so desperate. My world fell apart.

I was alone for at least two months. My boys were the only thing that kept me alive for a while. I loved them, and I knew

they needed me. Then Mike asked me to get back together. I didn't trust him, but I wanted my boys, and with the living conditions at the trailer I knew he wouldn't let the boys live there, so I made the decision to move in with him. He insisted that I get a job, so I found an ad in the paper to deliver newspapers. I was hired a couple days later. I worked delivering papers in the wee hours of the morning seven days a week. I still deliver papers four years later.

Things were no better with my stepson, who was now 15. He continued his disrespect, lies, and stealing. His violence scared me. He shoved me to the ground, but Mike insisted I drop the charges. It was always Mikey over me. I stayed in this situation because I found out I was pregnant. I hid this from Mike until around my fifth month. At first he wasn't very happy about it, but because it was a girl, he was accepting and he calmed down. Things were a little better, but Mikey was still in the picture. Finally about two years later Mike and Mikey had a fight. Mike made Mikey move out. Things have been so much better for our family.

Mike wanted Thomas to be in a preschool. I was interested in pursuing my GED and went to The Gault Family Learning Center to find a way to get my GED and get Thomas into a preschool. I met Bonnie Sander who sent me to "Families Learning Together Preschool". We began in September 2005. Anastasia was born on Nov.29, 2005. We enjoy FLT so much. We learn here. I enjoy my tutors. It is like a big family. I get so much support. I've been here with my big FLT family for 4 years...and I'm finally about to receive my GED now!

*~Mattie Linscott*

## C-H-A-N-G-E

- C** is for the **constant** up-hill battle to bring this nation together.
- H** is having the **heart** and determination to take on such a task.
- A** is for the **admiration** from others to stand on at all times.
- N** is the **need** for a better society.
- G** is for the **gift** of the task in order to bring this nation through.
- E** is for the victorious **end**, which is the evidence of the change we need to unite this great nation.

~Micaela Strickland

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## MY DREAM OF HAPPINESS

May 24, 2008. My throat is dry, my knees are shaking. I'm grinning with anxiousness at my three testing teachers, not knowing what will happen in the next few minutes. I just know this will be a disaster—like every time when I have an oral test. I couldn't sleep the night before because I was so nervous. My adrenaline was zapped before it could have helped me in my graduation test. I see in the eyes of my teachers that I'm looking terrible with black rings around my eyes. Terrified, I start to speak...

3 months later: "You're crazy," Tobias, a classmate, told me. I knew that he thought I wasn't tough enough for the United States. But I'm here right now, aren't I? (I'm an Au Pair, working for an American family and taking care of their child for one year.) It was not like I decided on a whim to go abroad. There was always the wish deep inside me to go to another country for one year or more. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people have come to America to live the American Dream—to have their freedom, whatever freedom meant to them (success, happiness, religious freedom, etc.). It's the same for me. The small difference is that I want to have achieved confidence when I go back to Germany and start from there to fulfill my goals. It's not that I'm dreaming of a life as a nanny. There are different reasons why I came to the United States: learn the language, meet new people, travel around, and learn many things about different cultures. To me, the most important goal is to improve my self-confidence. Maybe after the Au Pair year I will finally know what I want to do?

Now I've already been here for 18 weeks. How shall I make up my mind, when life shows me more and more opportunities every day? I have been here for just 4 months, and I have seen more places in the U.S. than most Americans could see in that short time. I have also met a lot of

interesting people. Once I talked to an astrologist who asked me what I want to do after this year. I said "I don't know. It's difficult to make a choice." And he said "No, no it's not difficult. You just have to know what your passion is." "Oh, great!" I thought. The problem with that is that I don't know what my passion is! There are many things that I like to do, but nothing I really would love to do. Also I would be unable to do everything that might interest me. Because I can't speak in front of groups and the majority of well-paid positions include this ability, right now I wouldn't be great at these jobs.

In my dreams I thought after the year I would be changed when I went back to Germany. Change of character and maturity comes without much realization. I told my mom once, after a few months working with my host child, "I'm sorry, mom, for the hard times I gave you in my childhood!" (Not that I want to compare myself with my host child in any way!) Finally, I started to think about certain things in a different way. Of course, I'm still far away from being an old, wise, gray-haired lady. That's probably why I realized pretty late that change doesn't come over night. That's not realistic for skills I need to acquire and for my big goal to have more self-confidence, which is essential for my success at work, conferences, meetings, and other life situations. It takes hard work to change. And I need to work on it every day.

The truth is: just dreaming, believing, and hoping can't make changes! It's your choice how your life is going to look, which is also part of the idea of the American Dream—to work hard and gain much. We would say in Germany: You're the smith of your own luck! Of course, this is not just about making a career. That's not my definition of happiness. Like Linda, the sister of my host dad said: "You are special and you are no big deal. At the end, all that counts are the relationships you had." To love and to be loved. What I



wanted to say and you probably know: Basic needs and happiness are very closely connected nowadays.

I want to have my own family and two kids in about 10 years, but to feel safe in times like today you need enough money! So I need to work hard to fulfill my dream of happiness. Right now not all opportunities are open for me because of my uncertainty. Maybe I will get closer to this dream after my Au Pair year, when I have lessened my fear of speaking in front of groups. Maybe you have a similar situation and think "I cannot change it. I'm different and my situation is different!" Don't give up! There is more strength in you than you think. Rod, a volunteer in my English class, would say: "Face the fears, then you get used to it." I'll keep trying, although my history isn't very motivating and because of that it's very hard for me. We must always remember that we get another chance to make it right. You never want to ask yourself when it's too late: "Why didn't I just try?" So grab it! Because in the end, what matters is that you believe in your dream of happiness.

*~Ines Mueller*

## TO MY SON IN IRAQ

You're fighting for freedom  
It's the right thing to do  
But it doesn't stop me  
From missing you.

I know you are strong  
You are a part of me  
But my baby boy  
You will always be.

I know your eyes have  
Seen more than mine  
More than most will see  
In a lifetime.

My heart goes out to you  
In that dark place  
I long to see  
Your lovely face.

Until that day I will  
Wait and wait  
I know right now  
It's up to fate.

Love,  
Mom

*~Paula Mitchell*

## IN THE EYES OF

In the eyes of our young soldiers at war... some joined the armed services to follow in their ancestors' footprints. Some of them planned to go to college. Some of them wanted to learn to fly a plane. Some of them wanted help at becoming men, and some of them just wanted to play out the army games they played as children.

Imagine the fear of a young soldier at war. One day he was being all he could be at boot camp, driving Army tanks, throwing fake grenades, and "Playing Army." Now he must fight for his life and the lives of others.

The grenades, bombs, and guns are now the real thing. Is he properly trained? Is he ready to fight in a war? Did he understand what he was doing when he signed the dotted line? How could he have understood? He's still in his teen years! Most of them had no clue that they were signing their death wish.

Embrace the pain of our young soldiers at war. The men and women, all of them young at heart, will return home never the same again. They have seen things many of us could never imagine. The prisoners of war have sustained pain, which is of a torturing nature. Visualize being a pilot, being given orders to drop bombs on Iraq, and then later to hear of the civilian casualties. Think of the guilt these soldiers must feel in their hearts, to be accountable for that much blood on their hands. Nobody really wins in a war. Everybody loses. Lives are changed forever.

*~Karen Flick*



Happiness

幸



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PERU

My homeland

Divided into three regions

Coast, mountains, jungle

Coast produces best cotton and fine wines

Mountains in the middle and cold all the time

The jungle borders Colombia and is hot

My homeland is pretty. I like it a lot

Coast, mountains, jungle

Divided into three regions

My homeland

Peru

*~Maria Egoavil*

## MY BELOVED SISTER, OLGA

When I was growing up, the person who helped shape my life is my beloved sister, Olga.

We were born in the small Russian city of Sochi. We had the pleasure of growing up along the seashore of the Black Sea. My family consisted of all females: my mother, grandmother, sister and my beloved terrier dog. Can you imagine what kind of commotion went on in that apartment?

Luckily for me, my sister was a bookworm. When I could barely understand human speech, I was by my sister's side listening to her read. She read books for grownups: romance, comedy, tragedy and even medical encyclopedias. Every place she went, she had a book to read in her bag. I have sweet memories of us lying on a beach on a hot summer day, under a striped beach umbrella listening to her calm voice reading Alexander Dumas' Quinn Margaret. My sister was always a very emotional and sensitive person. She read books with passion, sometimes using a gruff or high-pitched voice. We had very little TV, video games, or cinemas in our small Russian city in the mid '70's. My best entertainment was my sister reading.

Art was another passion my sister and I shared. At an early age, my grandmother was teaching us some drawing basics. Little by little my sister was involved in painting, sculpting, and drawing. Every day after school she dragged me to the library and then art school. My mother worked two jobs, trying to provide for her girls; therefore, my babysitter was my sister. I was introduced to the history of art, oil painting and water color techniques from the time I was seven years old. History books of ancient sculptures, Roman Empire, gold Incas, Mayan mystery, and Egyptian pharaohs' treasures filled our daily conversations. As a little shadow



behind my sister, I discovered many wonderful things in this world.

In just a few years she was taking first place in art contests and festivals. She attended Art College and then Art University in Krasnoy, Russia. Time went by so fast. Now, she is a famous artist in Russia. She has her own studio and art exhibitions. Art museums from all over the world buy her paintings.

Olga visits me sometimes in America. We keep in touch via phone or the Internet. I cannot imagine not being able to talk to her often. She gave me a love of both reading and drawing. Her desire to know more about the world, her curiosity about life, and her motivation to learn will always stay with me. After all, we are sisters. Just like years ago, she will say on the phone, "Are you ready to listen?"

*~Anastasia Henize*

### MY LIFE IN MEXICO AND IN THE U.S.

My family and I moved from Mexico to the U.S. in 2000. We were not prepared for the differences between the two countries – things like weather, lifestyle, and working conditions.

Mexico has numerous social and economic problems that affect all people in Mexico. Despite these struggles, Mexico is a very nice place to live. It has wonderful weather, great fresh food, tourist attractions, beaches, and more. The problem is that the people can't earn a good salary. For example, in Mexico City the people commute 2 to 3 hours to work, work 10 or 12 hours and only receive fifty dollars a day. In contrast, people in the U.S. commute no more than an hour to work, work 8 or 9 hours and receive fifty dollars per hour. In my case, my husband has time to play with the kids and has more personal time to relax, read, or do other healthy activities.

Mexico City is also very stressful. All day there's heavy traffic, smog, and other pollutants that affect everyone's lives. However, life in the U.S. is more comfortable and more relaxed than in Mexico. You don't spend a lot of time driving to work and other places. Here you feel safe.

Even though many differences exist between the two countries, I've come to appreciate both places. I can never forget friends and family back in Mexico or our life then, yet I'm very glad that we can live in the U.S. now.

~*Maria S. Perez*

## THE PLACE I CALL HOME

The place where I grew up was a quaint sleepy town named Mukah. It is located on the east coast of Malaysia. Mukah is a small fishing town that has a population of about one hundred thousand. This is a picturesque town nestled on the seacoast with refreshing ocean breezes.

People are warm and friendly in this village. Maybe because the weather is so beautiful, people feel the warmth and then share their inner peace with others. The population is about thirty percent Chinese; the other seventy percent is the native people of Mukah. Although their skin and language are different, the people get along well. Everyone is kind and compassionate.

In the morning when I would wake up, I could always hear people greeting each other outside. Neighbors would be riding bicycles to the market for locally grown foods. Local open air coffee shops were filled with people sipping coffee and enjoying the scenery. You could smell the aroma floating in the breeze. The calm sound of the ocean would whisper in the background. In the evening beautiful birds called swallows would cover the sky. This made the skies intriguing, and their singing resonated throughout the streets.

Coconut trees grew abundantly, and people could enjoy their sweet taste whenever they wished. The restaurants in Malaysia not only served their native foods but also served Chinese and Indian food. Food is very expensive but delicious. One of the most popular foods is Kam Pua. It is made from noodles. Fresh seafood is abundant and scrumptious.

Mukah is my favorite city and the best place I have ever lived. I love everything about it including the ocean, the food, the sounds, the scenery and most of all its inhabitants.

The environment is so relaxing and peaceful. It is the place that I will always call home.

*~Joanne Carey*

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SMILES ARE

**Smiles are**

Happiness  
Time spent with my friends and coworkers  
Good memories  
Children and spouses

**Smiles are**

Rainbows  
Fall colors  
Winter snow  
Laughing babies

**Smiles are**

Beaches and ocean waters  
Visits from loved ones  
Wisdom from elderly relatives  
Funny movies

**Smiles are**

Good grades  
Children returning home for the holidays  
Promotions at work  
Newborn babies

**Smiles are**

Healing  
Contagious  
Healthy  
Kind

Try to see the good in your life and SMILE!

**Just smile!**

*~Pierre Foods Group Project by  
Karen Flick  
Sheila Hightower  
Catherine Phillips  
Kim Wilson  
Afi Wozufia*

## THE ROSE

I sit alone and stare down  
at the rose in my hand. I clench.  
I picked it from the rosebush  
that grows along our fence.

I sit and ask the flower  
if he really feels the same.  
I smell its soft, sweet petals  
and play this silly game.

I pluck its petals, one by one  
and watch them fall and rot  
While I quietly recite  
“He loves me, he loves me not.”

I don't know why I sit and ask  
a single simple rose  
But I ask it quite sincerely  
as if it really knows.

I shouldn't let one rose  
determine how he feels for me,  
But whatever that last petal says  
is how things have to be.

This is my democracy.  
The system seems quite fair,  
And I've become quite attached  
to the rose at which I stare.

Its petals feel my kisses, and  
its thorns have drawn my blood  
And I'll sit and pluck each petal  
till I reach its tender bud.

This rose is slowly dying,  
and I fear it's almost time  
to lay to rest my flowers  
and to end this silly rhyme.

Just a few more petals,  
and this rose is finally free.  
So I pluck one more  
And hold my breath...

Whew... He loves me!

*~Darlene Underwood*



Responsibility

任



## MY LIFE

I am a young man living in a foster home. Over the last ten years I lived with my dad and his wife. They sold drugs for as long I could remember. Now I am far away from my brother and sister. I haven't seen my mom in about three years. I really hope to get to see her again. Sometimes I wonder if my parents even miss me. I would rather have them back than have all the money there is. I haven't seen my father in 12 months. He probably won't get to see his grandchildren grow up. Now I live with my new family, the only people who really love me. My father is in prison doing six years, and when he gets out I hope he'll be with us.

My sister is 19 and lives in Kentucky with her two sons. I'll be there with them as soon as May comes. That is when I turn 18. When I go, I hope I can bring my 13-year-old brother. Right now he lives with my aunt. I want my brother, my sister, and me to be with my mother.

I really like my new foster parents. I've been here for three weeks, and I really enjoy it. I'm glad that my foster parents love me. They bought me new clothes and everything I need. I stayed with three different friends for about a year before I got put in this home. A friend's mom wanted to get custody of me, but she couldn't. I'm just glad that I'm in a good foster home, but I only get to talk to my family on the computer or phone. I really miss having my family around. Where I live now, I have four little sisters and one brother. Larry is my foster dad, and Lisa is my foster mother.

When I grow up and have children, I'm going to give them a better life than I ever had. I hope that I have a really good job so I can support my wife and kids. I want to earn enough money so I can buy my kids what they need and still

pay rent. After I turn 18, I'll be on my own. I hope I'll have my GED so I can get a good job and have a nice home.

*~Chad Hale*

## A MORNING WELL SPENT

Tuesday morning,

Upon my arrival at Live Oaks at my usual time, running five minutes late, I saw familiar faculty members fully dressed in business suits, which is unusual for them. I also observed other well-dressed men and women with smiling faces, talking, shaking hands, and waving their hands as if to be directing individuals to the place they were to go. They were in place as if they were a welcoming committee for dignitaries who were to be present.

I quickly signed the attendance book and asked Harriet, "What is going on today?" Harriet Mason is Live Oaks' most efficient front desk secretary, and I knew that she would know exactly what was going on. Just as she was telling me about the Economic Forum and about the two governors that would be speaking that morning, my dear friend, Charlene Hanners, Vice Mayor of Milford, Ohio, gave me a big hug. She said with much excitement, "Thank you, Rose, for coming to the Pit Stop Lecture." She continued, "Two United States governors, Janet Napolitano, Governor (D) of Arizona and Kathleen Sebelius, Governor (D) of Kansas, will be speaking."

My plan was to go to my ABE class; however, the thought of being present for an Economic Forum and meeting two state governors was overwhelming! I knew I could catch up on class work the next day, so down the hall to the meeting room I went.

Both governors spoke on behalf of Senator Barack Obama, a Democratic African-American Senator from the state of Illinois, who was running for President. Their topics were mostly concerns about the economic crises in our

country. Followed by their short but dynamic speeches, there was a very informative question-and-answer period.

After all was said and done, very excitedly, I took the elevator up to my classroom. I apologized to my teacher, Marty, for being late to class and told her where I had been. Marty was impressed that I took the time to attend the Forum. It was very informative for me to attend the Forum. Hearing and learning about our government helps me as a United States citizen to make better choices when the time comes to elect our new president.

It truly was a morning well spent!

*~Rose M. Buckner*

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE FIRST 10 AMENDMENTS?

The Bill of Rights and later amendments are meant to protect the rights of Americans. All of them are very significant, but it seems to me that the first amendment is the most important.

The first amendment guarantees our right to freedom of religion and speech, the right to assemble peacefully, and the right to petition the government for wrongs we feel it has committed. It does not, however, give us complete license to say and do anything we please. Instead, it is meant to be used when citizens feel that the situation is unjust and violates civil liberties. The amendment is not a license for slander. If a person violates this right, he is guilty of abusing this privilege.

So why is this amendment so critically important? The United States is a democratic nation. Its ideological basis is individual freedom. There have been, throughout history, dictators who refused to let their people exercise their right to freedom of speech. This was especially true if the ideas people wanted to express were against those of the dictator. In my country, South Korea, there was a dictator, Park Junghee, during whose rule no freedom of speech or press was permitted. People who defied this rule were taken away. The president of the country was afraid that if he opposed this dictator, his government would be overthrown, so he ignored what was happening. Later this dictator was assassinated. The chaos that this created demonstrates why the first amendment is indispensable in preventing the misuse of power.

A democracy depends on the individual making his or her own decisions and not on someone in power forcing

them to accept the ideas of those in power. This guarantees equality. No one is more valuable than another. For a sound society, everyone has to be able to express his or her ideas especially when they are in the minority. The first amendment encourages discussion and debate to find solutions to problems. Such open conversation has helped America be productive and innovative.

The idea of democracy can only be achieved by protecting our first amendment rights, which give us the freedom to voice our opinions. Yet it also gives us the burden of using this right correctly.

*~Jeehye Song*



## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

A new year is here, and we have lots to do  
Here are our resolutions. We hope they inspire you!

Tougher mother is the new me.  
It's for your own good, kids, you'll one day see.  
(L.R.)

My wife is ill, and I want to stop the pain.  
One day she will be cancer free, I hope, again.  
(V.T.)

The G.E.D. is so important to me.  
I will study real hard and leap to be free.  
(A.T.)

I would like for me to go back to work  
So I can be no longer broke.  
(R.W.)

My duty to serve is calling me.  
I must prepare and cannot flee.  
(C.O.)

What I'd like most is to spend more time  
With my 3 kids; they're always on my mind.  
(P.M.)

Quitting smoking is a bit hard for me  
But '08 to '09, I'm smoke free.  
(A.D.)

Want to be a size 8  
Before my wedding date.  
(M.B.)

Confidence we've gained indeed.  
That's why we'll succeed  
(E.V.)

A sharper mind is what I need  
To help me in my life succeed.  
(R.B.)

*~Live Oaks Group Project by  
Mindy Blaney  
Rose M. Buckner  
Anthony Dunn  
Paula Mitchell  
Christian O'Mara  
Lisa Reynolds  
Victor Taylor  
Atonya Trusty  
Ellen Valvassori  
Rickie Weise*

## ANOTHER DAY FOR THE ZOOKEEPER

The zookeeper passes the gate, sees the **ape**,  
slips on a peel, and breaks his heel.

The man walks up to the **bear**,  
he knows he is scared, and then he loses his hair.

The man walks to the **crocodile** cage.  
He knows the croc is enraged.  
He gets out of the cage,  
gets onto the ledge, and slips off the edge.

He lands near the **donkey** and gets kicked.  
The man is beginning to get ticked.

He goes to the **elephant** hole to feed them.  
While he is feeding, he looks around at the elephant  
and gets hosed by the elephant's nose. He is feeling cold.

He goes to the **flamingos** to give them a taste,  
and then he leaves and he is being chased.

He looks at the **giraffe**,  
his foot gets smashed, and he gets a rash.

He hops over to the **hippos**,  
eats a bag of Cheetos,  
gets stuck and feels like a bimbo.

He goes into the building to feed the **iguanas**.  
It feels like a sauna like in the Bahamas.

That night he goes to see the **jaguar**,  
but he trips on some wire which knocks out the power.  
The jaguars were loose for an hour.

After the power comes on,  
he walks through the **kangaroo** field.  
He watches the animals hop,  
he sees something pop, the kangaroos stop,  
he gets bopped and lands in slop.

He walks to the **lion's** den and takes off his shoe.  
He steps on a pin and yells "Ooh!"  
The lion growls and grins.  
The man frowns.  
The lion hears a sound, turns around,  
but the man is not found.

The man goes to the **monkey's** cage.  
He knows he is in for a game  
when he feeds the monkeys.  
The monkey takes his keys,  
and the man gives him some cheese for his keys.  
He gets his keys from the chimpanzees.  
He slips and falls from the tree,  
and then he feels his weak knees.

That was the zookeeper's day!

*~Samuel Buckingham*

## THE BILL OF RIGHTS

My name is Yi Daio and I'm from China. I have been in Cleveland for 15 months because my husband is an international student at Case Western Reserve University. To improve my English, I enrolled in an ESL class at Case. I have made progress due to the guidance of my ESL teachers.

This semester, we are using a new text, which is about America. The first unit was about the writing of the Constitution. This document was adopted on September 17, 1787 by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. The Constitution defines the organization of the United States government. Any power not given to the federal government is left to the individual states, but the Constitution is the highest law in the land. There have been additions to the Constitution in the form of amendments. The first ten are the Bill of Rights. These rights were passed in 1791; they protect the rights of all citizens, residents, and visitors. They place limits on the powers of the federal government.

When we were asked to choose which of the amendments we thought was the most important, I did not hesitate. I think that the first amendment, which guarantees freedom, is the most important. It gives Americans the right to religious freedom, freedom of speech, freedom to gather together to express their beliefs, and freedom to petition the government if they think it did something wrong. These rights are the keys to democracy. I can't think of any better example of the exercise of these freedoms than in the election in November 2008 of a new president. In the election, people expressed their dissatisfaction with the government through their words both spoken and written. This ability to speak gives the people a great influence on the government. If those in power want to stay in power, they must listen to the people. This is what true democracy is. Government is not just to lead the

people but to serve and benefit them. If the majority feels that the government is not doing a good job, they will replace it.

I must say that freedom of speech is a relative term. People can't say things that will be harmful to others. This would be libel. In this era of high technology, news spreads very fast. There are people who use the media to spread vicious rumors, and we saw this also in the election. The misuse of this liberty can be very dangerous.

Yet, it is freedom of speech that makes America such a progressive society. In countries that are run by a monarchy or a dictator, the people can't talk freely. Those who dare to speak out suffer cruel suppression. I know this from what happened in my country during China's "Great Cultural Revolution" from 1966 to 1976. All freedom of speech was taken from the people. It was a period of violence and chaos.

People all over the world are crying out from freedom to express their thoughts, and this seems to me to be a right that all people deserve. Let us hope that our world is moving in the direction of giving this right to everyone on this planet.

*~Yi Daio*

## BOUND OR FREE?

“Are you bound or are you free?”

Hello. Let me tell you all about me when I was younger. I asked my parents, “Why must I go to school?” My mother sat back in her chair and gazed at me. Then she leaned forward and smiled and started to speak to me, not at me but to me because she wanted me to understand.

“My precious child,” she said as a tear fell down her face, “I know you think an education is free and a waste of time, but let me tell you about some people who died and paved the way, at one point and time in life. Our people were not allowed to read or write. To be caught with a book could cost them their lives because they knew freedom came in the mind. A man can put chains on you and you can still be free because in your mind you can see things in their clarity.”

“But my baby,” mother said as she brushed her hand over my cheek, “ignorance is an invisible chain and that’s the most dangerous chain of all. You can’t outrun it; it’s a battle you must turn and fight. It may cost you some blood and some major battle scars if you don’t give up. Fight to the end and I promise you, you will win without a dime in your pocket or a penny in the bank. You can travel the world and it won’t cost you a thing, because you already paid the price when you learned how to read.”

I looked at my mother with this strange gaze then I asked her how then would I pay? She handed me a book and said, “Let your mind take you there.” So I went to school to learn to read.

The End, no it’s my beginning. I’m about to see the world.

P.S. Would you like to travel with me? Come on, hop on board.

*~Judy Brewer*



Confidence

信



## WHY ENGLISH IS IMPORTANT FOR ME

The United States is the land of freedom. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, speech, and the press. This country also allows its citizens and immigrants to keep their own cultures, religions, and languages. This multiculturalism is the reason why America became a great nation. It encourages diversity. Some people have concerns about allowing linguistic pluralism. Those who advocate an English only system have created an issue important for all Americans because this country has never established an official language. So the question is: should English become the official language?

I want to share my background and opinion on this subject. It seems to me that people who want to come to live in the United State should learn English. But I understood that even while living in Cambodia, knowledge of English would offer me the opportunity to find a good job. All Cambodians speak Khmer, the official language, but it is used only by Cambodian people. We are proud of our language because it reflects our culture. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, religion, money, and ownership were all banned. The authoritarian government dictated the life of every Cambodian citizen. All rights were discarded. Thousands of years of Cambodian history were forced to come to an end.

After the war, the country had to start from scratch. The school system was a mess. It would be hard for you to imagine how Cambodian kids like me could hope and envision any future for us. But a new generation rose from the darkness. Without our setting goals, we would be lost at sea with no hope of reaching the shore. Because we had been controlled by France, French was the dominant foreign language. We had no choice. By the time I finished high school, times had changed. Because of the world economic

situation, English had become a popular choice of language study. It was quite chaotic. Some university curricula were based on French, some on English. The challenge for me was that all of my studies and exposure to a foreign language had been in French, not English, so I had to start all over again. I wanted to enroll in an English-based university in Cambodia and study business. All the texts were in English. It was extremely difficult for me. I suffered from a complicated and mismanaged educational system.

In 2006, I immigrated to the United States. Language became an even more difficult issue for me. My English was limited, and my pronunciation was terrible. I felt I was in an alien world. I could not speak very rapidly, did not understand the proper body language, and on top of that I suffered from the cold weather so different than the hot climate of my homeland. I was cold inside and out. I had no self-confidence. Every aspect of daily life was a challenge for me. But I was determined to become part of this great country, and I knew I needed to learn English.

I enrolled in an adult ESL class at Case Western Reserve University. Everyone was very nice and friendly. I started feeling comfortable and began to use English. My self-confidence grew stronger. It was a wonderful experience. I had to use English to communicate with my classmates who came from Mexico, India, China, Japan, Brazil, South Korea, Romania, Taiwan, etc. Sometimes they used their native languages to help each other, but I was alone. This was hard but good for me. I was forced to go directly to the English. The more I learned the happier I felt. English is a language that I can now use to express my emotions and to communicate to different groups of people. It is what brings us together. It creates a tight and lasting bond between total strangers. There are so many foreign languages spoken in this country due to immigration, but it is important that English be used as the common language so that all foreign speaking

immigrants can communicate clearly and assimilate into one common culture.

This is my second year here in America. I feel safe and secure and warm despite the winter winds. My new world seems quite beautiful, and the sense of freedom and equality here is inspiring. With my new English skills, I can travel all around the globe without fear. I am now ready to help others master this language.

*~Sophea Heng*

### A YOUNG INTERN PROVES HER WORTH

My sister-in-law, Ai, has been interning at the United Nations in New York for two months. From the moment Ai decided to come here from China, we told her that we could ask our friends living there to give her a hand, such as picking her up at the airport and helping her rent an apartment. But she refused the help.

At just 21, Ai has lots of courage. She entered the university she had dreamed of and has worked in several foreign companies in Peking and Shanghai during her summer vacations. Last year she was recommended to the best university in China for graduate work with a full scholarship while others have to take the strict entrance examinations. Still, to us, she is a little girl.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of November, we received a message saying she had settled down in a small apartment in Manhattan and would begin work two days later. My husband was busy, so he suggested that I fly there to see if the “little girl” was okay. Again, Ai declined the offer, saying she would be busy preparing for work.

The following days, everything seemed to be going well. She sent messages and pictures through her blog nearly every day. This way we could get a general idea of her daily life. We didn't visit her until the Spring Festival Eve, and then just for a day. The moment we came into her apartment, we were surprised by the sight of a huge teddy bear she had brought from Beijing. An hour later, we followed her into the UN. There was an exhibition about Chinese oracle-bone inscriptions, and she was the speaker.

Looking at this young woman dressed in career apparel and speaking with confidence, we knew she had been

right when she had told us that we didn't need to worry about her. After the presentation, we enjoyed a delicious dinner for the Chinese New Year and a concert in Carnegie Hall. The next afternoon we left NY after a delightful visit to Chinatown. She had arranged everything for us perfectly.

On the way back to Cleveland, I thought of a lot of other undergraduates such as Ai. Most of them were born in 1987 or after. They are open, independent, and confident. They have broad knowledge of the world, strong characters, and all speak fluent English. Their parents are the first generation who enjoyed some wealth after China initiated some reform and opened up to the rest of the world. This young generation is much luckier than their parents. They have only one or two children in their families and have been raised with great care. They are a product of the advancement of information, not only through the Internet but also from trips, schooling abroad, and internships such as Ai's. They seem liberal and enjoy entertainment like young Americans, but are also hard workers aware of the competitive pressure from their numerous peers. At the same time, they have learned to take responsibility for family, friends, and society. This is shown in their independence and their initiative.

Before we left, Ai said work was hard in every country now, but harder at the UN. How ironic to hear such serious thoughts from the "little girl" who lugged that giant teddy bear all the way from China. How beautiful to think of her hopes and dreams for her future.

~XianXian Wang

## I CAN TIE MY SHOES

Crisscross underneath,

Pull it to my feet.

Make a tree,

Leave a root.

Around the tree,

Through the root,

Pull it to my boot.

Hurray! I did it by myself!

*~Monique Privara*



## GOOD NEWS

Hello. I am 63 years old. In 2008 I got to vote for the first time in my life.

I did not have the skills and confidence to vote because I did not know what the process was all about. I could not read and write. I was basically ignorant about knowing how to vote or even why I wanted to vote.

I have been tutored for three years. The first time my tutor and I met she asked me if I was a registered voter. I replied no. I did not know how to read the ballots.

My tutor brought me a long way. She helped me with registering to vote, gave me the skills to read the ballots, and let my voice be heard as an American.

Just one voice being heard can encourage millions. My voice would not matter one way or the other, I felt. If we all felt that way, we would not have a democracy.

You can know that your vote does count. It is about freedom and opinion.

In closing, I will say to each and every one, get out and vote.

I voted for a winner in the presidential election. My tutor made me a winner. So I want to thank her for giving me confidence to vote and voice my opinion.

I'm an American citizen.

I love this country – the U.S.A.

*~Ronald W. Fugate*

## I KNOW MY PAST IS MY PAST

I know my past is my past  
And I couldn't change that.  
I act tough, but my insides are scarred  
More than a slave's back.  
I procrastinate too much  
And need to start doin' things ASAP.  
It's tough 'cause at the same time  
I'm dealin' with life's drama.  
Good thing my confidence level  
Is as hard to crack as a knight's armor.  
I keep to myself 'cause you never know  
Who might harm ya.  
So I keep to myself just to keep myself safe  
'Cause your enemies got more pockets  
Than a CD case, and you never know  
Which pocket got a weapon.  
And gettin' around it is like  
Trying to avoid shit  
Without steppin' in it.

~Myran Clark

## A NEW LIFE

On 20 March 2003, my life in Iraq as I knew it ended. A new life began. At that time my husband and I had a 2-month old baby. We wanted to build our new life in Iraq, but circumstances beyond our control suddenly stopped our plans. The bombs and chaos started; there was no security, no calm. After four years in Baghdad and the birth of our second son, we realized for our children's sake that we must come up with a plan for their future. We wanted them to grow up in a peaceful land and to be well educated.

We decided to move to Jordan, where we lived for about one year. Even though I couldn't work as a pharmacist, being with my family in a calm, modern country was more important. We enrolled our kids in preschool and kindergarten so they could learn how to communicate with others and get over the terrible memories that they had endured.

Then everything changed when my brother made a simple call and told me that we would come to the U.S.A. soon. Maybe not as quickly as we would want, but it was going to happen. We arrived in the U.S.A. in the fall of 2008, and our new life began again.

First, we set up our home. Then we enrolled our children in their schools. Next, we learned what type of certification we would need to begin working again as a pharmacist and a physician. Right now we are learning English and studying for testing and certification in our fields. The kids have settled into our new life, and we are hopeful that once we can work again we will be happy and peaceful once more.

~Rawaa AM Taki

### WHY I WANT TO STAY HERE LONGER

I decided to come to the USA while I was working at Tumble Tots. Tumble Tots is a developmental child center where the English language is used to teach Thai kids. It became my dream to come to the USA to be an au pair to improve my English skills and most importantly to find new experiences by traveling.

Finally, I got a host family in Cincinnati, Ohio. While I was living here I got two weeks for vacation. I had a great opportunity to go to California on the west coast and to New York on the east coast. The weather was pretty different from place to place. I would love to visit each place again. I plan to start traveling again from Ohio. The Midwest of the USA is very interesting to me too. I would like to visit Chicago and Colorado.

I'm always very excited when I'm going to travel to new places. Especially in the USA, everything such as food, weather, culture, language, and driving is different from Thailand. But this is not a problem for me. I'm ready to learn something new everyday. I want to get as much experience as I can.

I'm studying in an ESOL class, and I enjoy this class. I have met friends from other countries in Europe, South America, and Asia. The friendships have helped me learn more about lifestyles. When I came to the class for the first time, I was embarrassed and nervous to introduce myself to everybody, but I have had a great teacher, Susan, and many volunteers to help me improve my English. My goals are to improve my speaking, reading, and pronunciation. In two and a half hours I get a lot of new information that I should know about English. I enjoy the discussion at the end of each class

because it helps me improve speaking, and we can share our opinions.

I was really worried about taking a test when I first arrived, but I learned that my score was not bad! Three months later, I took a test again. I improved! Hooray! I would love to continue studying in this classroom until the last day of class in May.

I want to feel confident and comfortable among different people from different cultures. I want to overcome my insecurities of being a foreigner and absorb as much of the American way as possible, as well as many of the cultures represented in the USA.

When I go back to Thailand, I would like to be a tourist guide. I plan to take group tour travels, in-bound and out-bound. Then I plan to study for my Master's degree with a major in Tourism Management. I graduated in Hotel & Tourism Management for my Bachelor's degree. Now I have experience in traveling abroad, so I want to use my knowledge and experience to get the best job possible.

*~Kaew Khonken*

## G.E.D.

I'm sitting in class and was just informed that the test results are still not in.

I told them, "That's O.K., I still enjoy coming to class."

Coming here is refreshing; people are learning what people are teaching. The atmosphere is encouraging and pleasant. It's a healthy way to learn and teach. These people are here because they really enjoy helping people learn and grow. They are really the definition of "teachers."

The students are here because it was either court ordered or the opportunity is here to really finish something they started. Either way, if they succeed in getting their G.E.D., it will be because they wanted to do it.

To finish something you started is a very good feeling! Personally, I have found every hour I spent here very rewarding. I brushed up on skills I've used over the last 30 years. I found I remembered more than I thought. Things I forgot I was able to learn over or remember.

This is my way of saying Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! Without your help, without your guidance and instructions, I never would have succeeded! You made your time and talent available to me and from the bottom of my heart I am thankful. I want to go to college so now I am waiting for the results. If I pass, I can sign up for college. I will be fulfilling my dream. Better late than never!

I raised two children and both went to college. I have two grandchildren, 11 and 13 years old. I told them, "Boys, Grandma's going to college to fulfill a dream." They think it's

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“kool” and “awesome” to follow your dreams. Thanks to you, I was able.

~Constance Kocher





Soul

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## AN OBSERVATION

This is about the first time I came to America.  
It was eight years before.  
When I was in Africa,  
I believed that there was no one in America who was poor.  
Then I saw a man who was standing in front of the grocery  
store.  
He asked the people if they had money to pay for something  
to eat.  
So then I felt sad.

*~Ifrah Samalar*

## WHAT A DAY!!

It was just his luck  
He had to go back  
To his Mack truck  
For his pack.  
When he got back  
He heard a quack  
Thought it was a duck,  
But, he ran smack into a buck!  
He dropped his sack  
On the track  
Took off his shoe  
Stepped on a tack.  
He screamed, "Ow!"  
He got stuck.  
He turned around and saw the duck.  
Then he knew it would be  
MORE BAD LUCK!!!

~Samuel Buckingham

### IF I COULD ASK GOD ONE QUESTION

If I could ask God one question, it would be why did my brother have to die at a young age? He didn't get to see what life was about.

My brother was a nice young man. He was raised in a household with two ladies and one male – our grandfather, grandmother, and me, his sister. He lived with our grandparents until he was thirteen years old. Our grandparents passed away, so he had to move in with me. I was his older sister, and I was still a child myself. But I took him in and raised him to be a young man to the best of my knowledge.

But he tended to go his own way as he got older. So you know what that means. He started getting into trouble, which means going in and out of juvenile. One time he went to juvenile, he had to stay for awhile. They put him in this program where he could earn privileges to go on field trips. He had earned enough privileges to go on a camping trip with some of the other kids from the program. On this camping trip, some of the kids and my brother wanted to jump in the water without supervision to see who could swim the farthest. But as they were swimming back, something went wrong, and he didn't get to make it. He started to panic and drowned.

The juvenile program was for young, troubled teens who had drug problems. The program was like a C.C.A. program. They let the kids go home on the weekends if they earned enough points. He had earned enough points to go on this field trip, which was supposed to be supervised by the juvenile employees. I feel that they were not being watched properly if a young man died right in front of their eyes. They should have had all of their attention on the kids, letting them

know not to jump in the water. I feel that kids who go to juvenile shouldn't even be able to go on field trips. That's not what they are there for. This incident was on the news and in the newspaper.

Through this program we could see he was changing. He had a bright glow on his face. The day before they went on the trip, he was so happy and excited because he had never flown on a plane. He never even got to show me and his family how he had changed. He went on that trip and never returned. But after my brother passed away, they closed that program.

*~LaQwanda Walker*

## CYCLONIC VIEW

As thoughts begin to unravel, they begin to spin.  
Traveling through my mind and into my heart, hitting my  
stomach like a whirlwind.

My heart races; it beats out of control.  
Pain, joy and love overcome my soul.

It feels never ending...it's carrying me...why can't I just stop?  
The cataclysmic feelings sweep over me,  
and suddenly I feel as though I've been dropped.

It gets heavier and stronger with each breath I take.  
The terror and fear behind the choices we make.

It stops for a moment; it breaks but won't mend.  
It captures you forever; the ride will never end.

*~Miko Tabler*

I AM VISTA

i am artificial  
i am disposable  
i am programmable  
i am binary  
i am machine  
i am obsolete

i am error  
i am problematic  
i am incompatible  
i am vista  
there is no light  
on the faraway screen

i do not like this energy  
i exist too nervously  
the monitor is watching me  
i am overdue for servicing

*~Clay Young*



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## HEARTACHE

One of life's lessons for me was trying to cope with the sudden death of my brother.

For many years I've known that he was an alcoholic. I could never understand why he continued to drink; he knew he was causing himself serious harm. Since our mother was residing in a nursing home with chronic health issues resulting from her years of abuse with alcohol, my thought was that her situation would deter him from drinking.

His drinking became so bad he lost several jobs. Over the span of a few years he was so sick physically that he couldn't eat and had developed high blood pressure, seizures, and bleeding ulcers. He often drank to help control the shaking. He only took medication when he had it. If he ran out, he would often refuse to go to the doctor for a new prescription. Often he just didn't have money to pay for it.

He made his way to a family friend's house and stated upon arrival that he didn't feel good but proceeded to the refrigerator for a beer. While trying to open it, he started having a seizure. Friends noticed and helped him back in the chair. He appeared to be somewhat coherent, but minutes later he collapsed on the floor again. After noticing he wasn't breathing, CPR was administered until the paramedics got there. But, he died shortly after he arrived at the hospital. The shock from his sudden death at age 39 was almost too much to deal with. He was too young, he had two young boys, he was a good person, and he would help anybody – but himself.

The Saturday before his death he told me that he knew he needed to quit drinking and that he wanted to, but he wasn't sure if it was possible. I hugged, kissed, and

reassured him that he could if he really wanted to. That would be the last time I would see him alive.

Having to tell our mother was the most heartbreaking thing I have ever had to do. Although she suffered from dementia and a few other health problems, she understood but quickly forgot until something would trigger in her mind. Mom became seriously ill the evening of his funeral and was hospitalized the next morning. The doctors say she went into shock. Against the doctor's odds, Mom came home three weeks later. When the subject of my brother would arise, I went along with whatever her mind set was. Some days she would remember he was gone, and the other days she would tell me that he called and was coming over to visit her.

Many attempts to help him were made, but he just wasn't ready at that time. I believe when he seriously wanted to quit, he just couldn't do it physically. I often still wonder about the "I could have," "I should have," and the "what ifs," but I know in my heart I did what I could. I do wish I had found some way, somehow, to make him understand that his lifestyle would lead to a premature, senseless death.

*~Charlene Robinson*

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## SOCIAL DOGS

Stealin', killin', shootin'-- are we for real men?  
What about our children? They copy what they're seein'  
These little human bein's act now with no reason.  
Now we're weepin' because we're losin' our children,  
and we are the reason.

Drive-by bullet in her brain,  
now her daughter's life is not the same.  
Her momma's gone insane, and her tears fall like rain.  
So to take away the pain, she smokes on cocaine.  
Now how can she explain how her son gets taken away?

We set in front of our TV's babysat so easy.  
The generation's new breed is plugged into the main feed.  
Gold teeth and freeze, why are they competing when the  
hood's full of needy people dying cause they are so greedy?

So we kill ourselves just to make some ends.  
Just to keep up with the latest trends.  
As long as the money spends, the vicious cycle never ends.  
Get the message that I send. Come on back from la-la land.

Why do you kill each other like flies?  
We must realize we are our best allies!  
We must stay focused on the prize.  
It's all been sent to us in a good disguise.  
Listen! All is not diamond and gold when it shines.  
It's materialized to make you blind.

This ain't nothin' but the truth, friend of mine!

*~Benjamin C. Clark*

## THE i BECOMES LOWERCASE

Dead silence turned to fear and flashing lights,  
It was the storm spoken after the calm  
Death in the air, and blood fell from the sky,  
A single drop on my arm  
I had not gone unscathed,  
The wrinkle didn't happen, not this time,  
Not here,  
Not ever,  
Hardship and pain is life,  
Everyday nailed to the cross,  
Every day beat,  
Beat in the head  
How dumb am I? how much of an imposter have I become?  
I am the Mona Lisa who never smiles,  
Life will pass like a leaf in the wind,  
I am a butterfly that never became,  
A child's book full of black lines,  
No color is dirty enough for me,  
A word search with a missing word,  
Never complete,  
Alone and forgotten,  
Buried in stupidity,  
Waiting to fossilize,  
Never to be rebuilt,  
Crushed like the fly in the window sill  
With a broken wing,  
i am done, powerless, used,  
i can't be me again,  
The i becomes lowercase,  
i fell from my place like Humpty Dumpty,  
i don't want to be rebuilt  
*Just collected and replaced.*

~Brian C. Potts

## THE PICTURE

Clouds made it dark; cold wind. Someone is getting hurt in memories, dismembering thoughts. Stagnation of movable thoughts and movement of stagnated feelings. A day in the evening that comes upon the night. Or an evening at night that comes upon the day, not allowing the hours to be left over.

Now, yes, it's dark.

She felt a shiver that made her sigh deeply and sickly for the second time. Unhappy night. She fixed herself in the opaque picture on the wall. Someone who looked at it would see the eyes in the picture, for it was unanimous. It attracted the attention of anyone ordinary. Stuck looking, sound of a dead look, sick sound. It came from that look a sound which actually came from...her? A sound of nothing, of silence. Dead...dead.

The look was fading away...more than it had been for a long time. She frowned and closed her eyes, tightly, very slowly, in slow motion, with disgust. It felt like her salivary glands were being infected. The taste was bad. It could be seen. She grimaced; it was a face of one who didn't like it, of bad taste, of disgust...disgust.

She turned her whole body to the other arm rest side. She wouldn't have herself looking at that drizzled picture. It was slightly horrifying, nostalgic and almost spooky to face it. It'd have been better if a lack of courage hadn't allowed her to go into the room. Once she left herself to be taken by insensibility to that old time, she wouldn't spend one single night alone. It kept company to her the heavy smell of old wool and the lively heat of people talking so closely, almost twisted. Talks about objections of an old and

concealed time, outshined by a white sun of a past scene, when the color she could see now was only the white, from the black and white, when white is all the colors that twist around, and it looks like one, stuck in time. The white, the colors; the black, the background.

She rested her head on the back of the couch and felt a cold wind coming upon her back and nape. She held herself with both arms. She held tightly, more likely to heat the legs. Nothing comfortable; stiff, they held the grief from the whole body and supported the pain – cold that felt like it was coming from inside. The joints ached following the cold. A cold pain. It was a cold pain.

Cold pictures came into her mind. The time was insistent upon invading reality, which, by the way, was already doubted. What was it? What was it? The sensations that controlled her. They fused everything, everything. Or maybe not. Maybe they weren't, and there was no clue of what could be made real by then. But it was a figurative life imprisonment. It couldn't be glimpsed – a chance of living in another dimension. As if going back to it made her go into the surreal.

Now, at that hour, someone could have had a deep impression that nowhere existed but there, or have created the ability of climbing the walls, or have calculated the hypotenuse of a triangle rectangle of one of its sides, or have had the idea of painting them with another color – black and white. The voices around could not be distinguished anymore. Familiar voices made themselves unknown. By the way, there were no more familiar voices. And she needed a fair stare to recognize them, the familiar faces that were no more familiar either. They turned into enigmas, shadows, ideas. What had been there of physical and concrete once, had now disappeared with the conviction that the world

focused and narrowed itself in a room, in a picture, in small pictures of the mind. It was all possible. It was very possible.

No time was there besides this in which the soul had already got lost. A lost soul. It was a lost soul. And what should be done to the past that contributed to the return of a sane time? Maybe it was the wait. The time dominated her, and no part of her could be moved. She didn't even own strength and didn't make herself react to go up any level beyond these appallingly movable disruptions of feelings, stagnated, apparently movable, and always stuck in the picture, frozen, in the black and white time.

It was no longer possible to count the sensations or try to measure them. There was no time. The hours took it and taught her not to allow time to be left over. It was in the picture. The time and the days, the night and she...were in the picture.

*~Ellen C. Valvassori*





Harmony

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## SNOW

## SNOW

Slippery, blinding  
Shoveling for hours  
Hazardous, cold  
Causing accidents  
Makes you want to stay inside

## SNOW

Pretty, glistening  
Children play and make snowmen  
Snowflakes sparkling  
A carpet of pure white  
Frozen wonderland outdoors

*~Sheila A. Hightower*

## A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

I'm from Eritrea. Some Eritrean customs are different from the ones in America.

Once when I was ten years old, my parents had to travel to the village for a whole week because of an emergency. While they were away, all of our neighbors took care of my brothers, sisters, and me. Helping each other in this way is not unusual, because in Eritrea we believe that it takes a whole village to raise children.

Five years ago, I bought my first house in the United States. I have neighbors on both sides of me, but none of them talk to me, other than smiling and saying hello. I don't think that there is the same kind of community life here that there is in Eritrea.

Life is very easy in the United States. Kids have more things than they need. Kids here don't respect their parents. I think that as soon as they become teenagers in the United States, children are allowed to do whatever they would like.

Life is very hard in Eritrea. Many kids suffer there. Children are respectful to their parents. When they become teenagers, they have a lot of responsibility taking care of their younger brothers and sisters.

In an Eritrean household, for example, the father is the provider for the other members of the family. If he becomes sick or hurt, one of the older children has to assume his role in the family. If necessary, this child must take time off of school so he can earn money. Since Eritrean women are not allowed to work outside the home, one of the children has to make this sacrifice. The community is

always there to help too. The family always knows that it is not alone in a crisis.

I have met some Americans who feel the same sense of community that I grew up with in Eritrea. For example, I used to work at Value City, and one of my coworkers became just like a member of my family.

I hope change is coming; I hope more people here will learn to help each other. I hope that we will all learn the lesson that human beings are more important than material things.

*~Fereweini Gebrehiwet*

## WHEN WILL THIS CEASE?

In a life of violence and uncertainty,  
I'm uncertain of my life this time around.  
When I sleep, I dream of being wide-awake.  
When I'm wide-awake is the only time I sleep.  
Recuperating from countless loveless and new surroundings  
Often it seems I'm reunited with a love of the past.  
When I close my eyes for a break in time,  
Nothing has changed.  
But upon optical clarity  
It is irrefutable that everything is different.  
I mutiny my own mind over and over  
To free me from this horrid curse,  
I beg and plead  
But it shows no emotion or mercy.  
When will this cease?  
Can anybody tell me when the storm will blow over?  
And for once allow me  
To reconstruct the pieces of my soul and life  
So I can finally live in peace.  
That's all I want.  
Peace  
...Peace

~Bradley C. Bechtel

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## WHERE I'M FROM

I am a Black African Queen,  
From the heat of my mother's body, born into the heat from  
the old potbelly stove  
In my grandmother's house.

I'm from a beautiful black family, the most loving and the  
most hurt family.  
From a family that has a body of lies and a bed of tears  
A family that has no color,  
With a grandmother from the Ukraine and a grandfather  
from America.  
Always together, even when there's hard times—we stick  
together like glue.

I am from a family where all we know is loving and caring,  
hugs and kisses,  
Enjoying every day life brings.  
From Grandma and Grandpa to my mom and dad,  
And now I have my own generation, from me to my daughter  
to hers.

I'm from the root of the Rose that grows up through  
concrete,  
From the despair, grief and pain of gun violence that claims  
my family and friends.  
From the cactus that has thorns that will hurt you whenever  
you touch them  
And having big responsibility at such a young age.  
Couldn't no one else but my mother keep me going,  
A single mother with thirteen children to raise  
The Daisy who had a daughter, and she is me.

I'm from Columbus, where we folks eat a lot of ribs and  
greens,

From Cleveland, the lakes and inner city.  
I am from nothing more than what you call a duplex, but to  
me it's a half of a double.  
From Heaven and Ivory soap, 50 cent and zebra cakes.

I am from the sweet smelling grass when it rains in the  
morning.  
From soil, sunflower, laughter, respect and loyalty  
From the apple that doesn't fall far from the tree  
And the streets that will hurt you if you let them.

I am from faith, love and hope,  
From being hurt to finding the Lord.  
I am from "I'm going to make it" and "Never give up"  
From "Always hold your head up" and "Follow your dreams."  
From dreamers who believe in trying to make a difference.

I am an open spirit, full of hope  
I'm from a world that I'd like to call love.

*~Godman Guild Group Project by*

*Gary Brown  
Tessia Davis  
Mary Dortch  
Nate Gammon  
Luciana Garner  
Zeze Hamilton  
Yvonne Howard  
Denzel Jenkins  
Kennic Kirk  
Shontay Lee  
Jessica Morrow  
Deborah Norah  
Vernon O'Neal  
Tyeisha Ruskin  
Patricia Smith  
Carmen Williams*



## MIND TRICKS

Your thoughts can make you crazy! A depressing thought is a type of illness. I had an experience that convinced me.

I still remember the day when my uncle passed away in my arms, in a hospital in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was the worst day of my life! A doctor at the hospital told me that my uncle had died because of liver cancer. I asked myself, "Why did my uncle have to leave me?" He was only 32 years old! My uncle was like my oldest brother. We were raised together.

The day after he died, my family and I decided to arrange for his funeral. Two weeks later, my husband and I drove home. I started to feel lonely even though I had my own family to take care of me. I didn't talk or listen to anybody.

One month later, I was very sick and my stomach hurt a lot. I went to see a Vietnamese doctor, but he could find nothing wrong with me. I was sure I had stomach cancer. I wanted to have an appointment with the doctor every day, but he wouldn't allow me. I was upset and hated it when the doctor told me that there was nothing wrong with my stomach. He told me that I had a mental problem.

Two weeks later, I went to an endoscopy center to meet a specialist who examined my stomach, but he couldn't find anything wrong either. Instead, the doctor advised me to eliminate my depression by learning to relax. So, each night before going to bed, I began to sit quietly with my legs crossed. I felt better with my eyes closed. My mind became clear when I focused on one thing and practiced slowly breathing in and out. One month later, as I continued learning more about how to relax, I began to feel better and my stomach pains disappeared.

It is true; the more you worry, the more upset you will become! I realize now that even if you are going through a lot, you have to learn to relax your mind. It's always a good habit to clear your mind and not let things get to you and make you crazy.

*~Xeng Veopraseuth*

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SIMILAR YET DIVERSE

Interesting                      Diverse  
Learning                      Communicating                      Eating  
Unique                      Creative                      Similar                      United  
Inspiring                      Progressing                      Socializing  
Friendly                      Imaginative  
World Citizens

*~Live Oaks Group Project by*

*Yuko Akiyama*

*Analia Amarilla*

*Sara Angella*

*Esmaralda Apaza*

*Aline Bora*

*Susan Choe*

*Sumalee Kennedy*

*Kaew Khonken*

*Betty Krimmer*

*Kara Kurtz*

*Ines Mueller*

*Martha Munoz*

*Lena Ritter*

*Yavanoot Robbins*

*Anna Carolina Santiago*

*Gladis Villavicencio*

## THE POWER OF THANK YOU

How do you feel when someone shows you appreciation? Even if it is a simple phrase like “Thank you” or “Thanks a lot,” it makes you feel better. Suppose you have just gotten back from a very exhausting and upsetting business trip. You might feel better and get over your fatigue when you hear that your boss or colleague tells you “Thank you, welcome back.” Only one phrase may help you feel relaxed and comfortable yourself. Just hearing someone say “Thanks” to others may give you a warm feeling when you are disappointed. I think it is amazing that such a short phrase could change our feelings.

I read a Japanese article that reported that “Thank-you greetings” recently have become less used among young people in Japan. Since I have said “Thank you” many times a day and told my daughter not to forget to say that, I don’t understand the reason. Whenever I feel as if I left something behind and feel sorry about it, I forget to say “Thank you.”

“Thank you” makes people happy. When I do something for others, they usually say “Thank you.” I do not expect any appreciation from them, though. If you say “Thanks” on the surface, nothing will change. If it comes from the bottom of your heart, it surely will give a happy feeling not only to others but also to you.

When I was a child, my parents always told me that we should be thankful for many things; for God, being alive, being healthy, the fact that I could go to school, my teacher, and even little things in our daily life. We cannot live without a lot of invisible help. We should not take anything for granted. Being grateful makes us realize how happy we are. Feeling how happy we are makes our lives much better. We never forget to express our happy and grateful feelings, which

have the magical power to warm our hearts and our relationships with people in the world.

I believe that the more expressions of “Thank you” there are in our world, the happier we will be. Could you imagine that this easy, simple, and familiar message brings us great happiness? Why don’t you try to use this magic when you see someone who doesn’t seem happy?

In the end, I would like to deeply express my appreciation to my ESOL instructor Susan Renner, her aide Julie Frye, the many generous volunteers who have been instructing me, the kind classmates at Live Oaks, and to my dear family who has been supporting me.

*~Yuko Akiyama*

## THEORIES OF IMMIGRATION

A few months ago, my wife and I went to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to take the written part of the driver's test. The test was computer-based. I was assigned a booth where I would take the test and my answers would be recorded by touching a monitor screen. I was surprised to hear from an official that there were versions in several different languages and that I could choose one of them, and not have to take the test in English. Unfortunately, there was no option to select Korean, which is my mother tongue, but I was intrigued by this concern to make the test more accessible for immigrants. Later in my ESL class at Case Western Reserve University, I learned that there are as many as 21 different languages provided for the written test in New York. We also learned that the United States has never declared English as its official language.

In the last century, the United States was known as the *melting pot* in the manner that it absorbed immigrants. The image was that of a large container that dissolves lots of metals into one piece of iron. Therefore, a melting pot philosophy meant that immigrants from different countries would become one unified people, who have the same identity. If this is the case, it is not a good idea to provide a variety of languages for something like a driver's test since this does not force immigrants to learn English. Without the language, immigrants can't integrate into mainstream America. Everyone speaking a different language can hardly unite into "one people." Such a system could lead to a separatist movement like the one in Quebec, Canada, where many people felt that they did not want to use English as the rest of Canadians do but instead insisted on using French. To establish the "melting pot" of one identity, one must start with the premise that all the citizens use the same language.

More recently, a different term has been used to describe the immigrant experience. The *salad bowl* theory of immigration means that people don't lose their own ethnic identities but instead are allowed to maintain their unique identities. The new image is that of a salad bowl in which all the vegetables are mixed together but still retain their unique features. When mixed together, each ingredient tastes different than when eaten on its own. I admit that this image does not convey the same cohesion as the piece of iron, but salads are inviting just because of the variety in the taste. A *salad bowl* approach to immigration respects the unique cultures of the individual immigrants while encouraging them to assimilate to American customs. This, in turn, strengthens America.

I think that each theory has its merits and its defects. Therefore, it is best to take the strong points from each one. Immigrants should be unified into America, but America should take advantage of the diversity of these newcomers for the betterment of the economic, political, and educational systems. In the ESL class, I learned that some states have passed bills declaring an "English only" policy which I do not support. I certainly see the dangers of too much language diversity as described in the Tower Of Babel story in the Bible, but I think it is better to support programs for learning English, like my ESL class than not to provide foreign language services. The United States has become strong because of its language diversity, not despite it.

~Seung-Ho Yang

## ONE DREAM COMES TRUE

Slaves helped build the White House. The land that became Washington D.C. was acquired from the states of Virginia and Maryland. Both states practiced slavery.

Historic payroll reports document that many of the workers hired to build the White House were African Americans. Some were free, and some were owned as slaves. The African American workers worked along side white laborers. They cut sandstone, dug footers, built foundations, and fired bricks for the White House. After working all day, the slaves were put in underground cells while their owners enjoyed the comfort of local hotels in the area.

The architect for the White House, James Hoban, owned three slaves who worked on the project. The owners of the slaves received payment for their work.

Slavery was finally outlawed in 1865, but the inequality continued. Even after nearly 100 years after it was banned, Pennsylvania Avenue did little to advance justice for the African American race.

In 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, outlawing discrimination of blacks in restaurants, department stores, and schools.

From 1964 to 2009, our country and the world saw great changes. As the 44<sup>th</sup> President Barack Obama took his oath of office January 20, 2009, we see our first black President of the United States.

President Obama spoke of himself as “a man whose father, less than 60 years ago, might not have been served at a local



restaurant, yet one who could take this country's most sacred oath."

As we look back over the history of the slaves in the United States of America, those who worked on the construction of the White House, cooks, housekeepers, fieldworkers, teachers, business owners, soldiers of war, we see that they are a big part of who we are today. They never could imagine in their wildest dreams that a man and woman of "color" would sit in the White House as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and the First Lady.

Yes, we can bring hope to all people of the world. We are not the red states or the blue states; we are the United States of America.

God bless America and God bless the world!!!

*~JoAnn Franke*



Persistence

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## WARRIOR

Hold me back from temptation  
for sometimes I know not my strength.

Keep me safe within reason  
for at times I'm not aware of what might be at stake.

Hold me back when I am fearless  
for sometimes my limits are not within reasonable bounds.

Keep my eyes held open  
for I do not always see everything within plain sight.

Hold me back when desperation grips me tight by my chest  
for at times I do not see that it is a test.

Keep me honest  
for I am tempted to lie for I keep most secrets from myself.

Hold me back from the emptiness I constantly creep into  
for I do not see the darkness capture me.

Keep me strong and bold  
for at times I do not know what more I must face.

This is a letter to me – a promise to stay strong-minded and strong-willed. Failure is not in me, for I am a warrior, although I have not killed. I am a warrior and am in a constant battle with life. I will always be a survivor through guilt, pain, failure, love, loss, and envy. I will overcome anything that just might be thrown at me. I will keep myself strong, and I will hold myself back when the fight is not worth fighting for. I am a warrior and surviving is what I do.

*~Tonya Clark*

### ONE SPECIAL DAY

I miss the busy days when I worked in a hospital in Nicaragua, even though back then I always had too much stress in my life. I especially remember one night shift while I was doing my social service in the hospital. On that night I helped sixteen babies be born. That night was very busy! I was the only doctor available to assist all the women in the hospital who were in childbirth. The other doctor was in ICU caring for a very sick baby.

I was worried about the babies getting mixed up, so I repeated several times to the nurses, "Don't forget to write the mother's name on the babies' bracelets immediately after I give the newborn babies to you!" I kept running around, trying to help all the pregnant women, some of whom were screaming in pain. Some women were in beds that were too small for them. Some women were even waiting in the hallway outside of the three labor rooms because those rooms were already full.

I always worked hard at my job, but this night was amazing because of all the work I had to do. I helped dilate the mothers-to-be, removed placentas, aspirated babies' noses and mouths, cut umbilical cords, and sutured some of the mothers. Meanwhile, the nurses put drops in the babies' eyes so they wouldn't become infected. The majority of the babies born that night were girls. All of the babies were born healthy – thanks be to God! All of the mothers were happy with their new children and thanked me for my help as they left the delivery room.

The next day, in our morning meeting, the head doctor told us how scared he was when he heard what had happened. He asked, "Who was the poor doctor who worked so hard last night?"

I answered, "Me!" He was so surprised that I was the only doctor to deliver sixteen babies! I had started working at 6:00 P.M. and finished at 8:00 A.M. the next day. I hadn't had a second to close my eyes! I felt happy, though. Losing sleep didn't matter to me; the important thing was that I was able to deliver so many healthy babies in one work shift!

*~Tania Montalban*

## LONELY MAN

I am a lonely man,  
put upon this earth  
to raise a good family  
and see what I'm worth.

I couldn't read or write,  
and I just struggled through the night.  
I sat here and pondered about my wasted time,  
and finally – I made up my mind,

To make my life better  
and to learn more skills,  
to be a better person,  
and, in turn, it gives me chills.

My tutor, Mrs. Schmits, has encouraged and taught me  
about education and self-worth.  
I've learned to breathe and see a new hope,  
and I feel like a baby experiencing birth.

*~Ronald W. Fugate*



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## WHAT IT FEELS LIKE FOR A BRAZILIAN GIRL TO BE AN AU PAIR IN THE UNITED STATES

This title is a little big, I know. But that's exactly what this story is about. I know it looks silly. But keep reading until the end. I promise you'll not regret it, even if you don't know what an "au pair" is. Let's call our "au pair" character Bruna, not only because most of the Brazilian au pairs I know are named Bruna, but also because it's a nice name.

Before leaving to go the USA, Bruna first packs all her favorite stuff like her sunglasses imported from Paraguay, her summer clothes – that she won't really wear in the United States, for some reasons that you, reader, will find out later – and finally her winter boots – which she won't wear either, because her feet would freeze in the first snow due to the thin leather, or she would slip due to the high heels. After that, when her parents are already thinking the baggage is going to overflow, she packs all she knows she can't live without, like her Always pads – because she doesn't know yet whether there are Always pads in the United States or not – and a big Brazilian chocolate box that she claims to be the best in the world. And I don't think she's wrong. You should try it.

In the airplane, Bruna feels cold for a long time because she forgot how to say "blanket." It's not because her English is still terrible but because she is so excited that if someone asked her name speaking in English she would think twice before answering. But then she finds out the flight attendants speak Spanish, and because she speaks Portuguese, she thinks she can speak Spanish too. She struggles with some words until she says "una manta" and tells the other au pair seated beside her that, outside the plane is much colder than

inside. Later the other au pair remembers how to say “blanket” and tells the flight attendant they need some more.

When Bruna gets to New York, she spends three days at the Holiday Inn, but she doesn't really rest from the trip. She needs to attend the Au Pair Training – which feels like a 24-hour-a-day training because she has only three days to learn how to take care of an American child, how an American child thinks, behaves, expresses him/herself, plays... and throws feet. This is so that she can be a professional au pair, with a Red Cross certificate and everything else.

The happiest moment at the hotel is when she finally gets through to talk to her mother, not because her mother wasn't home earlier – actually, her mother was holding the telephone wondering whether it would ring or not during all this time – but because the phone card she bought from the agency just didn't want to work. Then, when she calls her boyfriend, she doesn't tell him she just realized the card was perfect, but she didn't know how to use it.

Then Bruna flies to the town where her host family lives, thinking not about the other au pairs she met at the hotel from all over the world, not about her mother, not about her father, not about her boyfriend. But, it goes more or less like: “Will I be able to remember everything I heard at the training? Will I survive after all they told me about American kids? Will I be a fatso from eating too much junk food? Will I like the kids? Will the kids like me? Will they respect me?” Then, 45 minutes before the arrival she starts thinking “Will it be possible to find my host family at the airport considering I'm so sleepy and tired that I can't even see? Will the kids be with my host parents waiting for me? Will the kids smile at me? Will I be nervous? Will we understand each other? Will I be able to speak English? What time can I go to sleep?” Then the flight attendant asks if she's all right, because she is sweating, and it isn't even hot.

The first three months are really hard. Bruna feels like she left the whole world behind along with all that really matters and wonders when this American dream will be over so that she can meet her family and friends again, and her dog and boyfriend. She needs to hug them all, to eat her mother's rice and beans with Brazilian steak and Brazilian salad, which she believes to be the best in the world... What? Just try it. Bruna cries every night and tries to like everything around her. She tries to like the food, the kids, her host parents, and her new bedroom. And she knows this is supposed to be her family, but everything seems unfamiliar.

About 100 days after living in the United States as an au pair, she starts introducing herself like "Hi, my name is Bruna, I'm from Brazil," and instead of saying her age, she says, "and I take care of three children." But sooner than Bruna expects, she meets other au pairs, and, believe it or not, there are about 80 of them. And that's when everything changes! From all 80 she makes friends with 2 who think like her and do things just like her. And she starts driving every weekend to their houses, and they sleep each weekend in one another's house, because she never thinks they live too far, even if one of these friends lives an hour away.

Soon Bruna finds out that she is not the only one who can't stand Dora, Thomas, and Wiggles anymore; who can't stand her host kids crying because they don't want to do their homework; and, finally, who can't understand how her host kids can eat mac and cheese everyday if she can't even smell it after she pours the cheese. Her au pair friends feel exactly the same, and there are many more amazing things to share! They tell Bruna that people have asked them the same stupid questions they did to her like "Do you have cars in your country? Do you have cell phones? Do you have Internet? Do you eat only rice and beans? Where is your country? Do you guys speak Spanish or what? Why do you wear gloves inside the house? Are you serious you haven't

seen snow yet? Do you play soccer?" She also finds out she's not the only one who says "Now I know how hard it was for my parents to take care of my brother and me."

When she's driving somewhere with her friends, they turn on the radio; otherwise she'll start singing kids' songs inside the car. Then they stop at the McDonald's drive thru and each of them asks for a double cheeseburger and a big coke from the dollar menu, and they comment they are getting fat. They drive Bruna to the nearest Victoria's Secret, Gap, and Calvin Klein stores, and her life will never be the same again. Bruna gets really happy that, with her own money, she can buy Victoria's Secret, even though she spends most of it at Target. In summer she buys about a hundred nice t-shirts and fifty shorts for \$1.00 each, which she found on sale at Aeropostale, Charlotte, and Target. She says she'll never buy clothes in Brazil again because it's much cheaper in the United States, so she sends it all on a ship to Brazil, because it won't fit in the baggage.

I'm saying all this because it's true, for many girls. But it doesn't really matter which country you come from. You will always be unique. In reality, I don't even buy Victoria's Secret, and I use the lotion from Meijer. My friends laugh at me, but I don't mind! Every girl is different and unique. And being an au pair is much more than all this. This is just the funny part that everybody tells. And every girl has a unique life experience as an au pair in the United States, even if we generalize when we are exchanging experiences.

Some girls say they definitely needed to be an au pair to find out they really don't want to have children. Other girls find out it's not as hard as everybody says, and they now decided they do want to have children, and, believe me, no one is as ready to have kids as an au pair!

After the third month you start feeling like this is home, because you have finally gathered pieces enough to make it look like home. And later, you even find out that anywhere in the world can be home when you have friends and people around who love you. I wonder if one day I will be able to leave the kids I take care of. They became my kids. I wake them up, I help them get ready for school, I help them with their homework, I pack their lunchbox for school, I make their food, I comb their hair, I want them to look good at school, I want them to feel good and healthy, I laugh with them, I feel their pain when they are sick or sad, I teach them the way I think they should live life, see people, love others and be happy. Their mother doesn't live here. Their father is home only at night so they are really mine during the day, and nothing can change it.

When you leave the United States for your home country, well... I can't tell you because I haven't left yet. I'm just wondering if I can, if I should leave one day; if I should leave these kids; if I should leave my friends from here, my church, my teachers, my school, my bedroom, and everything else that makes my world real today.

Finally, I want to answer those curiosities about Brazil that I was just kidding about being stupid. It's completely normal to ask questions about a country you don't know yet. We are usually ignorant when dealing with people from other countries, but there are no stupid questions at all. I could have asked my host family if there were Always pads at the supermarket before coming. Yes, we do have cars, and Brazil is among the five biggest producers of vehicles in the world. It has 135,000,000 cell phone users – with 190,000,000 inhabitants. We are also among the top five countries in the world in Internet use. Our country shares frontiers with all of the countries in South America, except Chile and Ecuador, and it is the only one in South America where people don't speak Spanish. We speak Portuguese,

because Brazil was discovered by Pedro Alvarez Cabral, who was from Portugal, while the other countries were conquered by Spanish colonizers. We do have snow in Brazil, but only in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, two southern states. Soccer is as popular in Brazil as football is in the United States, but it doesn't mean that all Brazilian au pairs play soccer.

I'd like to thank, in the name of all au pairs of the world, all host families and all you Americans who know this is a wonderful country to live in, with wonderful people, with wonderful seasons, with wonderful places, including the shopping malls. You welcome people from other countries to share everything with you, so they can experience the American dream. I can tell you, I'll never forget any piece of it.

*~Ellen C. Valvassori*

## HIGH SCHOOL DROP OUT

I never intended to drop out of school,  
But life will throw you curves.

Pregnant at a very young age,  
I seemed to break all the rules.

I thought for sure that I'd go back,  
Finish like all the rest.

But raising a little one at home  
Put me to the test.

I had to work to help pay the bills.  
We had a mouth to feed.

It made going back to graduate  
Harder each day it would seem.

I've been out of school since '86.  
I never did go back.

I made a life of motherhood  
And a wife too, I might add.

Now here I am; now 41  
I'm seeking still to find.

A satisfaction I've longed for so,  
An education left behind.

The only advice that I can give  
To other drop outs just like me:

It's never too late to educate –  
I'm getting my G.E.D.!

*~Sherry Walter*



### A VERY PROUD MOMENT IN MY LIFE

In February 2006, I lost my job at a shop that made automotive parts. I was sent to the unemployment office to see if they could help me with my education, so I could get a job besides working in a factory or being a laborer. I was given a test at the unemployment office and was told that my education skills were not up to par for any other type of work. I also had physical issues that prevented me from doing the work I had previously done. I went to different programs such as the Veterans Administration and state programs that told me I should seek special help.

I started out with the L.E.A.F. (Literacy Education for Adults and Families) Program where I took a test to show them what my reading, writing and math levels were. The L.E.A.F. Program sent me to the Miami Valley Literacy Council to help me with the basic skills I needed for future everyday functions. My feelings towards attending this school were very doubtful because other programs had not really helped me. I was wrong, and the instructors and/or teachers at the school were very helpful and encouraging as my test scores improved. The instructors and/or teachers, Mary, Michelle and Maria, always got excited when I improved in the tests. I really did not understand why they were getting excited by my improvement. In the past others had just kind of shrugged it off when I had done something good.

I finally realized why they were getting excited when I was at a store one day and picked up a CD and was able to read all the songs on it. It was then that I realized how well I was doing with their encouragement and help. By writing about this experience in my life and how well I have been doing, I will be able to inspire others to constantly keep striving and working towards a goal of improving themselves

in whatever they do and to realize that age does not mean anything.

*~Robert Todd*

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## I WILL SURVIVE

I was told I was an accident  
Parents divorced  
Lived with my mom and then my dad  
Beaten with a belt buckle and a 2 x 4

### **I will survive**

In and out of many different schools  
Couldn't keep up  
Put in a Special Ed class  
Pushed through the system until 11<sup>th</sup> grade

### **I will survive**

On my own at 16  
Earned \$21.00 a week  
Groomed and trained horses

### **I will survive**

Made many mistakes  
Smoked pot  
Drank and then drank some more  
Couldn't stop  
Broken jaws, broken hip, plates in my face,  
pins in my arm  
Next stop prison  
Mind game  
Disease, homemade knives  
Couldn't sleep, violence  
Fought back in self defense  
Stabbed in the arm while defending self  
Lifers were there

**I will survive**

Did my time and learned many lessons  
Out of prison  
No more pot  
No more alcohol  
Been dry for five years  
Going to ABLE  
Trying to find a job  
I am not an accident. I have purpose!

**I will survive!**

*~Rickie Weise*

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## WHEN I WAS YOUNG

When I was young, I wanted to have a job. As I got older and reached the fifth grade, my teacher told me to read a book. I realized that I could not read at all. The only words I could read were “the,” “and,” “me,” “to,” “right,” “went,” “go,” and some names. I saw my chance to have a job just drop out of my life.

That day, I went home and cried my little heart out. That is when I asked my mother, “What is wrong with me? Why can’t I read like the other kids in my class?”

My mother said, “Ask your teacher to help you.” So the next day, I asked my teacher if she could help me with my reading. I was full of hope. She said, “I can’t stop teaching my class for one person just to help them.” There went my dream out the window again. Then she said, “You need to ask your mother, brother and sister for help.”

When I went home and talked to my mother, she said, “Baby, I work too hard to put food and clothes on my children’s backs. Ask your brother and sister to help you, and if they don’t help you, let me know.” I did ask them, but they did not help. They had things to do for themselves. I gave up and I did not care about reading any more—and I never told my mother.

The next thing I knew, my teachers were passing me along like I was water. It really hurt me, but I did my best not to show it. I did a good job playing it off. When I was in the eighth grade, one of my teachers said she was not going to pass me. That made me happy, because I thought that I would have a chance to do it all over again and it could help me to learn just a little more. I think the other teachers must have

talked to her about passing me along again, because she ended up passing me anyway. I really hoped someone would see the hurt in my eyes and help me, but no one ever saw it.

High school was coming and I did not feel good about it. "But I will be with my friends," I kept saying to myself. It was summer break, and I put eighth grade behind me and played with my friends. However, when it was time to go back to school, boy I hated it. I thought, "Everyone will know I can't read, and it is going to be so hard for me." All I could think about was that my teachers were going to pass me like water again and I would never learn anything. I had to go to school, but I did everything I could to stay out of class. Do not get me wrong, I went to gym and cooking classes, but nothing else. One day, I was walking in the hallway and ran into some friends. Someone asked me, "Do you want to go to the other school to see what is going on?" I went with them and I am not going to lie, I had fun. However, when school was out for the summer, my mother got a letter in the mail saying that I had to go to summer school in order to be in the tenth grade. I went for a month and a half, but then I started playing with my friends and skipping class again.

We were downtown one day and I saw a building with a sign on the door that said "JOIN JOB CORPS." The next day, I ran down there and signed up. After that, I went home and felt so good about myself. I ran in the door. "Mom! Mom!" I cried, "Guess what? I signed up for Job Corps! I can get a job to help out with your bills!" She was so happy for me. "When are you going? What city are you going to?" she asked. All I could say was that I did not know yet. We waited for two weeks. When my letter from Job Corps came, it said that I would leave in three days to Cleveland, Ohio.

Everything was fine until the reading problem came up again. In Job Corps, you have to go to every class. I could not read in class, so I stopped going. I managed to stay eight

months. Then, the lady who was in charge came to my room and asked me why I had not been to classes. I just looked at her without saying a word. That is when she told me I had to go home. I thought, "Boy, my life is so over. I need to dig a hole in the ground and stay there until I die."

Years later, I found out about the Miami Valley Literacy Council. I signed up for classes there and you know what? I found out that I am not the only one that has trouble reading. Man, I feel good. Now I am a whole new person. Thank you, Literacy Council. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

*~Realdia Wilson*





Devotion

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## LIFE

Life is full of twists and turns,  
Some hard-aches and pains,  
From which we learn.  
Sometimes it might be hard and seem unfair,  
But the one thing we know is that God is there.

You may not be able to see him,  
touch him, or stare,  
But the one thing we know is that God is there.  
Without a shadow of a doubt, I know this is true,  
Because I've had hard times and  
He's brought me through!

I always kept the faith and never gave up.  
I just kept on moving and didn't get stuck.  
So if you still have doubts and just don't believe,  
Just say a small prayer and then proceed.

*~Mary Harris*

## WITHOUT JESUS

Without Jesus I don't know  
Where I would be.  
For when I was lost  
He came to me.

I was in the darkness  
And out of my mind.  
That's when He came and said,  
"You're going to be fine."

I had a lot of pain  
And I was full of fear,  
That's when He said,  
"I am here."

The overwhelming peace  
I can never explain.  
I know now it was Him  
Who took all my pain.

*~Paula Mitchell*

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## THE CANDY WRAPPER

He wanted to step forward but the girl in the next line would notice him. He reached into his pocket and feeling a candy wrapper, he pulled it out. It read "You're special!" Yes! The girl in the line next to him was very special, maybe the most special girl Jake had ever seen!

He didn't see her face, but her hair was long, curly with big curls, and strawberry blond. Actually, more orange than blond. He had never seen hair like this. Strawberry blond hair... he'd seen a lot, and, orange too. Old women dye their hair blond to hide their gray, and crazy girls color their hair orange. But not her. Hers was the only hair in the world of this color, with this style and, oh, that movement when she took a single step forward.

The girl didn't cross her arms. She held a paper, maybe a check, with both hands. She held it delicately with her fingers. Watching her from behind he could see she was beautiful!

The perfect time to hand her the message would be the moment it was his turn to step to the counter. Thus, she wouldn't see his face, as he hadn't seen hers. He held the wrapper with both hands this time and read it again. What would be her reaction when she read the wrapper? He read it again, and again. He read it eleven times and got confused. He must be kidding himself with this idea of handing her the candy wrapper. How foolish! Who in the world wastes time creating foolish phrases for candy wrappers?

The girl moved her arms. It was different this time; she looked impatient! She lifted a hand to her chin... or to her cheek. Then she finally crossed her arms. The line was taking too long to move! What the heck! That's why nobody likes

to go to the bank after holidays. Was it possible that no one could see there was a wonderful girl waiting in the line? It was the kind of girl who probably had a very busy life and a lot of things to do. She wouldn't have time to wait. She wouldn't even have time to read foolish stuff and wouldn't understand the meaning of a candy wrapper carrying the message "You're special!" Probably, she didn't even have the time to think of how special she was and how perfect her hair was.

Jake knew this kind of girl who would never look at him and never even look at anyone. She knew, yes, that she was special, but she had more important things to do other than to notice how special she was. He knew that; he was not stupid!

And what was this old hag behind him looking at during all this time? Surely she had already seen that he didn't stop for a second to think of the girl from the line next to theirs. Anxiety and nervousness came upon him. He couldn't make a move, but certain determination was pushing his courage to the surface. He took hold of his bravery and decided to take action. He wouldn't give in like this!

The old hag worked at the same school where he finally concluded high school three years ago. She was the cleaning lady. She always watched him from a distance, as everybody does everywhere he goes. He felt she could see all his imperfections. She knew he was a stutterer, and for this reason plus the ugliness, he never got a girlfriend in high school, or elsewhere. He needed to take action, but due to the fear of his own impulsiveness, he didn't trust himself around many people.

He placed the wrapper in the old hag's hand and asked her to hand it to the girl with the nice hair from the other line as soon as he left the bank. He didn't want the girl to see him. If there was a sensible reason for that candy

wrapper phrase, it was that the special girl could be distracted from the routine and boredom of the day for a while, just to know how special she was. He left the bank in a hurry thinking he finally did something brave in life and happy because she would never know the dummy who did that.

In less than one year, Jake and Marina got married. The cleaner read the candy wrapper phrase and told the whole story to the girl, because Marina was special. She was blind and couldn't read. With the help of the old woman she found Jake's house and wanted to know him. And she also wanted to meet his family.

Today, Marina's love is helping Jake see how special he is. And every day Jake realizes, in fact, how special he is... how special Marina is, how special the old hag is, and... how special may be the person who made the phrase for the candy wrapper.

*~Ellen C. Valvassori*

MY LIFELINE

**Lindsey**

Nineteen years old  
Spunky, smiling, giving  
Reminds me of myself when young  
**Daughter**

**Samuel**

Seventeen years  
Athletic, strong, polite  
Always makes me laugh when I'm down  
**My son**

**Children**

Special people  
My frustration at times  
Different personalities  
**Lifeline**

~Tonia S. Jones



## I AM THE MOTHER OF A NINE-MONTH-OLD BOY

I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.  
I wonder if he knows he fills me with joy.  
I hear the way he cries, and  
I see the way he looks in my eyes.  
I want him to know he is my world.

I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.  
I pretend it's just me and him in the world.  
I feel so grateful that he is my son.  
I touch his cheek with a kiss goodnight, and  
I worry until he wakes in the morning light.  
I cry because I am filled with joy  
To be the mother of a nine-month-old boy.

I understand he is my baby for life.  
I say I want to be a good mother and wife.  
I dream that he will stay little forever.  
I try to teach him to be clever.  
I hope he makes it far in this world.  
I am a mother of a nine-month-old boy.

*~Heather Holscher*

## MY DARLING DAUGHTER

I loved you before you were born  
The bond between a mother and her child  
Feeling your presence within me  
Growing stronger everyday

Counting down the days  
Thankful for every new morning  
Bringing you closer to this world  
Closer to the love I have for you

My little daughter  
So tiny and new to this world  
Depending on me to show you the way  
Keep you safe and protected

You are my everything  
My reason to live each and every day  
Watching you grow into a beautiful young lady  
Thank you for blessing my life

*~Erin Nealey*

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## MOTHER'S BIG BED

It all started years ago. What I can recall of that bed ... it all began when I was a little girl. We didn't have a real nice home to live in, but it was our home. We all had to make the best of it. I was just a little girl. I didn't understand about being poor or not having everything I wanted. We had a television. We had electricity, no running water or indoor plumbing. We had to go outside to an outdoor toilet. We had to carry out water from a well hole back to our house. We had to use that water to drink and for dishes, bathing, and laundry. Some days when it would rain a good spell, Mother would catch water in tubs beside the house. It fell off from the roof. She said that was for her washday, and we'd have enough to wash our hair in it. It made our hair soft and shiny.

There were eleven of us children, two brothers and the rest sisters. My mother's bed was a full size bed. Most of us girls slept with mother in bed. We only had two bedrooms in our house. The boys slept in their own room. The girls all slept in mom's room, and my two sisters slept in another big bed across the room. We had enough room for those beds and a few dressers. I liked sleeping in mother's bed. It was fun at times to sleep in her bed. At first, it was only my smaller sisters and mom and me, but mom was going to have another baby soon in May, so we had to be very careful about kicking in our sleep. If our feet got in her face, she would just move them over away from her. She always made sure we were covered up well at nights. At least, she thought we were, but sooner or later one of us would kick the covers off and we'd get cold again, so mother would try to cover us up. I don't know how she did it with us in her bed, but she put up with us. It was warm in her bed. We had a lot of blankets on the bed. That way if someone kicked off the covers, we'd have a blanket to put on us.

We played on that bed. We jumped up and down on the bed. We used the bed for the safe point when we played tag or hide and seek, or mom would chase us around the bed. She let us jump to see who could jump the highest from the bed. Well, one day she put a stop to it. My sister and I were jumping, and I fell to the floor too hard and bit my tongue. It started bleeding bad. My sisters got really scared about what might happen to us for jumping on the bed.

See, mother and dad went shopping for groceries, and my oldest sister was not supposed to let us do it. Well, we did it anyway. So we didn't get to jump on the bed anymore. I learned my lesson real quick. We still had the fun on that bed. We thought of other things to do on mom's bed. We hid under her bed. We took dad's flashlight and made designs or hand puppets with it till dad came looking for his flashlight, and we'd have to give it up.

Mother's bed was where we always laid if we got sick or to take a nap. If we got into trouble, we'd cry there on her bed. Mother always made sure we were clean before we got into her bed. She'd make sure our feet weren't dirty. She didn't want us to get her clean white sheets or the blankets dirty. Her sheets always smelled so fresh from hanging outside on the line. I could smell them today.

Mother always made sure we said our prayers at the bed at bedtime before we got into bed. I miss those days; those were great memories of my life. I'll always cherish them, and I tell my grandchildren about the bed, how lucky they are to have television, games, VCRs, and DVDs, but especially how lucky they are to have their own rooms and their own beds.

Now when they come to my house, they want to sleep in my big bed. So they do, and just like Mother, I always wake up to make sure they are covered up so they'll stay warm and cozy.

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I used to ask my mother how she ever put up with us all in that bed. She'd just laugh and say, "Didn't have much choice!" But she enjoyed having her babies close to her and she knew, someday, we'd all grow up and have our own children and grandchildren, and they'd probably be sleeping with us. That sure is the truth!

*~Brenda Carroll*

### A FAMILY'S LOSS

My grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2006. She slowly started to lose her memory. The medicines the doctors prescribed didn't help her much. She couldn't remember where she put things; she started hitting people and accused them of doing certain things. She was acting like a young kid again.

In 2007, she woke up in the middle of the night screaming and yelling that something hurt. We took her to the hospital, where the doctors informed us that she had a massive heart attack that blew a quarter-sized hole in her heart. The doctors gave us her options. They could do the surgery, and there would be a fifty/fifty chance she could die on the operating table. If she survived the surgery, the Alzheimer's would progress rapidly. She would probably live her remaining days as a vegetable. My grandfather decided not to do the surgery, so we took her home.

She lived her last three days at home, but before she passed away, she remembered where she was and knew all the people who were there to see her.

She passed away on August 20, 2007. My grandfather visits her grave every weekend. He is grieving so badly that he set up a shrine in her honor in their bedroom. I ask myself why God took her from us, but deep down in my heart, I know it was her time to go to heaven. And there are times that I feel her presence.

"Grandma, we love and miss you dearly."  
Love,  
Your Grandson

*~Victor Taylor*

### MY SPECIAL PERSON, BRITTANY

The person who has influenced and shaped my life is my precious daughter, Brittany. She changed me from a wild and crazy teenager to a loving and responsible mother.

When I was a teenager, I thought I knew it all. School was just another headache. My parents didn't know what they were talking about. I used to think I was right and everyone else was wrong. I lost sight of all the important things. I no longer had the dream of completing high school or even going to college.

At the age of fourteen, my life started its downward spiral. My parents divorced, and they were going through their own emotional turmoil. This event in my teenage years had a negative influence on me. I started drinking and doing things I shouldn't have done. This went on for a few years. I had no sense of direction. At this point, my life was about to take a drastic turn.

I was tired of living that way. So I pulled it together, found a job, and started living a better life. I met a man whom I am still with to this very day. Soon after, we had our daughter, Brittany. She truly changed my life. Things were no longer about me. I never knew one person could love another one so much. From then on I became a mother she could be proud of. Brittany is fifteen years old and a blessing in my life. She shows compassion for others and has a kind and gentle spirit. She has a bright future ahead of her.

Because of Brittany, I stopped thinking of myself all the time. My focus was on someone more important, Brittany. She still influences my life every day. Since she will be graduating from high school in a few years, I think it's only appropriate that I

get my GED. I want to show her that it's never too late to accomplish your dreams.

*~Gloria Philhower*



## LOVABLE

My family is so far away from me, but in many ways they are close to me. My daddy, mommy, brother and sisters love me no matter what mistakes I make, and I love them just as much. They are the best family and the most important people to me.

My father is the best dad anyone could have. He is the smartest human being I know. He gives his life for our family. If there is anything my family needs done, my daddy does it. He builds tables, he makes jewelry, he does everything. He is the "Jack of all Trades"! I like to remember my childhood when my dad told my brother and I good-night stories and at the end he fell asleep. On a lot of mornings at breakfast he starts us out with jokes, funny faces, or stories about his life. He understands everything. **He is just lovable!**

My mother is an angel; she organizes everything. She is so strong; she protects me and my siblings. She takes care of four kids, her husband, and one dog. If I want something or my brother and my sisters want something, my mom makes sure it happens. I enjoy the time with my mom when we go for a walk with our dog or I sit on the couch next to her. She cares about everyone. She is sensitive to everyone's feelings. My mom is a positive person; she teaches me that we can have a good world and life. **She is just lovable!**

Anne is special to me because she is my oldest sister. I'm so happy for her, she has a really nice boyfriend and they are expecting a baby together. I hope she gets married to him, but it's scaring me because she has her own family now. She is very careful because she is afraid to lose one of us. She is different from me, but I know if I have a problem or questions, I can go to her and talk about it. Anne is pretty and elegant. Her feelings are warm. **She is just lovable!**

Julia is my older sister and my best friend. I spend a lot of time with her; she's crazy, a risk taker, and athletic. It's really difficult for me to pick one activity that we enjoy doing together more than another because there are so many, and I enjoy all of it with her. Julia and I talk about boys, go clubbing and hiking. Sometimes we start laughing about something and we can't stop. By the end we don't remember what we were laughing at. She is a really good friend. **She is just lovable!**

Maximilian is my little brother. He is so sweet, funny, creative, clever, friendly, and shy. Not a day passes where he hasn't said something funny. He has a lot of ideas in his brain. If I need help from him, he helps me no matter if it is money or something else I need. Max loves to work on his car and scooter. Every day he has new ideas. I think I have to look after him because he is my little brother. In my heart I know he is a good guy and does the right thing. **He is just lovable!**

I'm grateful for my parents. They enjoy sharing life together and with us. My parents are my heroes, my idols! I'm very proud of my family, and I look up to all of them. I'm the luckiest person in the world because these days it is not usual to receive so much love and happiness from a family.

*~Lena Ritter*

## MY LOVE

The first time that my husband, Rada, and I ever talked with each other was three years ago on the telephone. He had seen me in a video picture at his aunt's in Boston, and he told his aunt that he loved me. His aunt is my cousin's wife. When my aunt heard his feelings, she called Cambodia and told my family the news.

My parents agreed to let me talk with Rada and also to talk to his parents. The first time we talked on the phone it was hard to understand each other because I only knew a few words of English, and he only knew a little Khmer. But he called me every weekend, and we began to understand each other a little more.

One year later, our parents decided to arrange our wedding. Rada and his father would have to travel to Cambodia for the wedding.

January 5, 2007, was the first time my husband and I met face to face. We were both shy and quiet. Luckily, we fell in love with each other. Even if we hadn't, we would have married anyway, since our parents had arranged this wedding for us and had made a lot of preparations. I wouldn't have wanted other people to look down on my family. A day later, Rada gave me a wedding ring to keep until our marriage. I took him to the store to buy clothes for the wedding.

January 10, 2007, was our wedding day. Carrying a bouquet of beautiful flowers, my husband-to-be walked a long way to my home. We both felt happy and nervous. A Cambodian wedding lasts a day and a half. A monk has to come visit us. Our parents must prepare a lot of food, and we must invite all our friends and relatives to the wedding.

Two days after our wedding day, we all went to Battombong Province, which is my father-in-law's homeland. We stayed there two nights and three days. We traveled to several other exciting places together too.

On January 25, 2007, Rada and his father went back to America, but I had to stay in Cambodia and wait until I could legally join him. During this time we emailed each other every day and called every weekend. Eight months later the U.S. Embassy approved me to live with my lovely husband in America.

When I arrived here, I felt so lonely. It was quiet here, not like in my country. Our house didn't have a lot of people living in it like our house in Cambodia. When my husband didn't have to work, he tried to make me feel better by taking me places where he thought I would have fun.

Rada is a good man. He loves me so much. He takes care of me and never makes me angry or sad. He also loves and cares about my parents; he even sends money to Cambodia every month to help support them.

Now I am used to living here. Four months ago, I gave birth to a baby girl. Her name is Boraliyah, which came from my husband and I putting our names together. Our love is stronger than before. We have plans to visit my homeland again when our baby is three years old.

*~Bormey Hing*

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## INSEPARABLE LOVE

When I was about twelve years old, I found Maggie-May as a puppy running along the fence row at our farm. Someone had dumped her off and made sure to put her over our fence. When I found her she was covered in mud; it was packed so hard into her fur it looked like that was the color of her coat. My mother even told me to stay away from her because she thought that Maggie-May was a coyote pup, but I picked Maggie-May up and carried her to the house; I asked my mom if we could keep her since we hadn't had a dog in awhile. She allowed me to keep her. I gave Maggie-May a bath to clean off all of the packed-on mud. After she dried off, she was absolutely adorable! Maggie-May was black and white, perfect markings; she looked like a small Akita mix.

Years passed and Maggie-May grew up into a wonderful adult dog. She had a very sweet temperament, very quiet and calm. Maggie-May was just a joy to have around the farm. One summer I came home from school and Maggie-May ran up to greet me. Following behind her was a huge black and brown dog. When they approached me the black and brown dog began growling at me. I began to get a little scared, but I stayed in the same spot. I slowly reached toward the ground and picked up some gravel and I threw it at the dog. I began yelling at it, telling the dog to get away. He wouldn't leave, and he just sat there looking at me. I then ran toward the house and when I got inside I told my mom about the dog. She said that she had seen him too but didn't get too close to him.

A few days later the dog appeared again. This time he just came straight up to me while wagging his tail. He stopped right in front of me and just looked at me. I was puzzled; I had never seen a dog that would just come up to me and just sit there looking at me. I laughed a little and then I told the dog,

“Well, Beast, you’re a strange dog.” I then reached out to pet him. “Beast” as I called him, stayed at our farm for days. He would follow Maggie-May around all day and wouldn’t leave her side. Maggie-May and Beast would groom each other, lounge together in the shade, and even take naps side by side; the pair was inseparable. After a few months had gone by, Maggie-May had eight puppies. All were black and white, solid black, black and brown, or solid brown. When the puppies were weaned and old enough to find new homes, we posted a “Free Puppies” sign. The puppies were all in their new homes within two weeks of the posting. Maggie-May and Beast were still an affectionate pair, walking around the farm together.

A few weeks passed by, and one night my mother and I went to the store. As we were walking out, I saw a picture of Beast on the notice board. Along with the picture it had a note saying, “Lost Dog Comes to the name Sampson. Please call if found.” When we got home my mom called the owners and told them that their dog, Sampson, had been at our house for awhile. They said they were going to come out to get him that night. When they arrived, we all talked for awhile. My mom told them about Sampson's and Maggie-May's puppies. They were shocked that the dogs had produced puppies already. They said they felt bad about the little accident between the dogs. They offered my mom \$100.00, but my mom turned it down. They apologized and then loaded Sampson into their truck and left.

Sampson showed back up at our house about a week later. He was happy to be back with Maggie-May. We called Sampson’s owners and told them that he was at our house again. Within a few hours, they showed up and told my mom that they were taking Sampson to get neutered. They thought that should fix the issue with him running away. Sampson didn’t come around for nearly a month, and we figured that he was gone forever. My whole family liked Sampson after we

got to know him. He was a very intelligent and friendly dog. When someone pulled into our driveway, Sampson would greet the visitor with a loud grumble which sounded like a growl. People were afraid of him since he was so big and seemed to be growling (that explains what he was doing when I first met him). My family began to miss Sampson; so did Maggie-May. She would aimlessly wander around the farm and was very uneasy about things. Maggie-May just wasn't herself without Sampson by her side.

Just when we thought we would never see Sampson again, he showed back up with stitches still intact. Maggie-May and Sampson were once again happy together. My mom waited about a week to call Sampson's owners to let them know that Sampson was back at our house. This time when my mom called Sampson's owners, they said, "We're not coming back out to get him; he obviously is happier at your farm than with us. We are tired of going back and forth when he just keeps running away. We thought that having him neutered would fix the problem but it didn't." So we kept Sampson. Maggie-May and Sampson were glued to each other still. They were in love, and it was so sweet to watch them. Weeks and months went by; still the two were together always. Until one day when Maggie-May mysteriously disappeared.

After Maggie-May went missing, Sampson was crushed. He just lay about, sleeping all day. He was obviously depressed. I wondered how Maggie-May could have left without Sampson noticing or without him following; it just didn't make sense. I was sad that my dog had left, but I was even more upset for Sampson. Sampson did next to nothing for a year. He barely ate and barely walked around the farm. He acted as if he were afraid to move in case Maggie-May showed up and wouldn't be able to find him. I tried to cheer Sampson up. I started taking him for walks down our country road, and I tried to offer him treats and toys. I even talked my mom into allowing Sampson to come into the house. Still Sampson was

like a broken-hearted zombie. After a little over a year of taking Sampson for walks, he started to brighten up. Sampson began acting like the big guy that my family had fallen in love with.

My whole family really did fall in love with Sampson. He was a character! Sampson was a German shepherd and Rottweiler cross, so he was real big and stocky. He liked to jump up to greet us when we got home; he greeted us with his signature grumble. Sampson enjoyed any type of attention – from belly rubs to being saddled up like a horse (one of my friends decided that the saddle would look good on him). Sampson became a member of our family. We loved him, and he loved us. If we were outside and Sampson wanted to go inside, he would come up and lightly grab one of our hands and pull us to the door of the house. He was one of the most intelligent dogs I have ever met.

My grandfather even became greatly attached to Sampson. My grandfather bought a John Deere Gator one year, and every time my grandfather went somewhere in it, Sampson rode shotgun. My grandpa enjoyed driving around with Sampson next to him; they became good buddies. Since my grandpa couldn't walk too well, I think that it was a comfort to have Sampson with him at all times and I think Sampson knew that.

Sampson lived with us for years after Maggie-May disappeared, but I think he still waited for her to come back home, which she never did. Sampson stayed with us until he died in 2006. He lived a long life and was one of the lucky dogs to find true love. Sampson not only found love with Maggie-May, he also found love within my family. We welcomed him into our home and loved him as if he had always been a part of it. Sampson will always be remembered as the best dog we have ever had, and he is still to this day, greatly missed.



In loving memory of Sampson "Sammy."

*~Carla Watkins*



# Author Biographies

**Yuko Akiyama – p. 99, 100**

**Jesse Altman – p. 5**

Jesse is a resident of the Dayton area and was a contest finalist last year. The title from his poem last year was "Overcoming".

**Analia Amarilla – p. 99**

**Sara Angella – p. 99**

I am from Italy and have studied English for 5 years. I hope to improve my speaking and pronunciation while I am in the U.S. working as an au pair for one year.

**Esmaralda Apaza – p. 99**

I am from Peru. I am working as an au pair in the United States for one year. I attend Live Oaks Vocational School to concentrate on improving my skills in speaking and writing.

**Bradley C. Bechtel – p. 94**

**Mindy Blaney – p. 49**

**Aline Bora – p. 99**

**Judy Brewer – p. 55**

My name is Judy Brewer. I love to read and write. I enjoy T.V. and playing games on the computer.

**Gary Brown – p. 95**

**Samuel Buckingham – p. 51, 76**

Born in Plattsburg, New York, in 1985, Samuel has traveled the United States extensively and has lived in five American states: Arizona, Texas, Montana, Indiana, and Ohio. An Ohio resident of 16 years, Samuel attended Fairmont High School and is currently working on upgrading his basic skills to achieve his goals. Samuel lives in Beavercreek, Ohio, with his family.

**Rose Buckner – p. 45, 49**

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 six or seven 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.

**Joanne Carey – p. 35****Brenda Carroll – p. 139**

I'm 56 years old. I live in Circleville, Ohio, where I attend Pickaway County ABLE classes. I enjoy learning. I enjoy writing stories. I want to thank my mother, my family, and all of my teachers who gave me the confidence that I can do it.

**Susan Choe – p. 99**

**Dialne Chuck – p. 9**

I am 18 years old. I live in Delaware, Ohio, and have been taking GED classes through the Delaware Area Career Center. I moved here from California. As soon as I moved to Ohio, I started writing my thoughts and feelings and I have been writing ever since.

**Benjamin C. Clark – p. 83****Myran Clark – p. 66**

My name is Myran Clark. I am an outgoing individual who would like to go into the field of construction.

**Tonya Clark – p. 109**

I am the mother of a 5-year-old son whom I adore. I am attending classes at Live Oaks to get my GED. After achieving that goal, I plan on attending Massage Therapy School.

**Yi Daio – p. 53**

I am from China. I came to Cleveland in August 2007 because my husband was a student at Case Western Reserve University. I enrolled in the ESL class at Case to improve my English. This course not only helped me in the language but taught me a lot about American culture. I have a lot of fun with my teacher and fellow classmates who come from all over the world. My husband has been given a job here, and we are expecting our first child. Both of these events have made us extremely happy.

**Tessia Davis – p. 95****Mary Dortch – p. 95****Anthony Dunn – p. 49**

I attended ABLE classes at Live Oaks in Milford. I worked very hard and achieved my goal of passing the GED Test in March. I'm not sure where I'm heading from here, but have

many options. The most important things in my life are God, family and music.

**Maria Egoavil – p. 31**

I was born in Peru. I work at Pierre Foods in Cincinnati, Ohio, and attend The Learning Center. I am the proud mother of three boys.

**Karen Flick – p. 27, 37**

My name is Karen Flick. I am married and have two beautiful daughters. My heart goes out to those families who lose their loved ones to war.

**JoAnn Franke – p. 104**

I am a 77-year-old ABLE/GED student who lives in Pleasantville, Ohio. When asked why I am studying for my GED, I tell them it is keeping the moss off of my wheels.

**Ronald W. Fugate – p. 65, 112**

I am a 63-year-old man who has not finished high school or gotten my GED, or finished college. I'm looking forward to accomplishing all of the above. I've raised my family, my wife has passed away, and I'm by myself. The goals that I have set for myself this late in life are the following: to get my GED, to go to college, and to write a book.

**Nate Gammon – p. 95**

**Luciana Garner – p.95**

**Fereweini Gebrehiwet – p. 92**

I was born and raised in Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, a country in Africa. I am married and have a 13-year-old son. I am now attending a GED preparatory class. It has been 22 years since I was in school! When I finish this class, I would like to take some cooking classes, which has always been my dream.

**Chad Hale – p. 43**

I've been living with my foster family for five months now as of April, 2009. I love my foster family. They treat me well. I enjoy sports and being with my family and friends. I hope I can go on to college or some other training. I'm glad my story was published. Thank you for selecting it.

**Zeze Hamilton – p. 95****Mary Harris – p. 131**

I am a single mom of three children and had a stressful and depressed life in my past. Now I'm looking forward to being a successful person and having a better life in the future for my children.

**Sophea Heng – p. 59**

I am from Cambodia. I came to the United States almost 3 years ago. I work and attend ESOL classes to improve my English. I plan to continue my higher education here. Living here, I have had many different experiences I compare to my life in a small country. Here in America I see natural beauty, freedom, love and strong values all coming together. It seems to me that America offers endless possibilities. This makes me feel sad for my fellow countrymen who have suffered so much since the Civil War. My hope is that soon people in Cambodia will enjoy freedom. Much of my heart remains there.

**Anastasia Henize – p. 32**

I was born and raised in Sochi, Russia. After traveling for quite a while, I found my home in the United States – Miami, Atlanta, then Cincinnati. I can't wait to see what state will follow next. Hopefully it will be a state in the south. I am married and have a beautiful six-year-old daughter.

**Sheila Hightower – p. 37**

I am an employee at Pierre Foods in Cincinnati. I attend the Learning Center and have improved my math and English. My hobbies include going to the movies, cooking, and working on the computer.

**Bormey Hing – p. 147**

I'm from Cambodia. I am 26 years old and have only been in Columbus for fifteen months. When I first arrived here, I felt sad because it's very quiet in Columbus, not at all the same as in Cambodia. But now I love it here! I have a good family to make me happy and warm. I am studying English at Eastland Career Center and would like to get my GED. I would like to study nursing skills so I'll be able to get a good job.

**Heather Holscher – p. 137**

I am the proud mother of a nine-month-old boy. I attended morning classes in the fall at Live Oaks and received my GED in December 2008! I am happy being a stay-at-home mom. I'm not sure what my future plans are, but I plan to further my education.

**Yvonne Howard – p. 95****Masayuki Itaya – Cover art**

I like to draw in my free time. When my teacher, Sameera, asked me to draw, I thought about my country, Japan. I drew *One Soup, Three Bowls*.

**Denzel Jenkins – p. 95****Carl Jennings – p. 6**

My name is Carl Jennings, and I have lived in the Mahoning Valley all my life. I enjoy reading, writing, and playing chess. I think the Ohio Writers' Conference is a good opportunity to gain some experience in writing.



**Tonia S. Jones – p. 136**

My name is Tonia. I work at Pierre Foods in Cincinnati, Ohio. I have two teenagers, Lindsey and Sam. I enjoy spending time with them.

**Sumalee Kennedy – p. 99**

I arrived in the U.S. from Thailand in 2006. My native language is Thai. I am a mother of two children. I attend Live Oaks Vocational School in Milford, Ohio.

**Kaew Khonken – p. 68, 99**

My name is Kaew Khonken, and I'm from Thailand. I work as an au pair in Cincinnati, Ohio. I enjoy attending ESOL class at Live Oaks.

**Kennic Kirk – p. 95****Constance Kocher – p. 70**

Constance Kocher grew up in Chardon, Ohio, and is one of eight children. She loves reading and writing. She lives in Eastlake, Ohio, and is happy she received her GED. She is from Painesville ABLE.

**Betty Krimmer – p. 99****Kara Kurtz – p. 99**

I am from Thailand. I have been living in the United States since 1999. I studied English for 2 months prior to enrolling in Live Oaks Vocational School to improve my English skills.

**Shontay Lee – p. 95****Mattie Linscott – p. 18**

I'm a 30-year-old mother of 2 boys and a girl, and I help my family's finances by delivering papers in the wee hours of the morning and still go to school so I can further my education.

**Layla Martin – p. 10**

I enjoy learning and meeting new friends. I've attended ESOL and now ABE classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio. I want to improve my reading, writing and math skills.

**Paula Mitchell – p. 26, 49, 132**

My name is Paula Mitchell. I'm a single mother of 3 children. Jesus has really changed my life and has given me the strength to go on.

**Tania Montalban – p. 110**

I'm from Nicaragua. I have lived in Ohio for 4 years. I'm studying in a Bridges class at Eastland Career Center. I have a very good teacher; her name is Charlotte Putt. Three months ago I became a U.S. citizen. My next goals are to learn to speak English very well and, if God gives me the strength, to work as a doctor again. I was a doctor in Nicaragua, and I would like to continue helping people in the United States.

**Jessica Morrow – p. 95****Ines Mueller – p. 23, 99**

My name is Ines Mueller, and I'm from Germany. I work as an au pair in the country. I've been attending ESOL classes at Live Oaks for 4 months.

**Martha Munoz – p. 99****Erin Nealey – p. 138**

My name is Erin Nealey. I was born and raised in Ohio. I am married to my best friend, and we have three beautiful children. My children are a lot of the inspiration for my poetry!

**Deborah Norah – p. 95**

**Christian O'Mara – p. 49**

I have been attending ABLE classes at Live Oaks in Milford. My goal is to pass the GED Test. After that, I have a strong desire to serve my country and go to college.

**Vernon O'Neal – p. 95****Cristina Ortiz – Back Cover Art**

I would like to write my feelings and thoughts in stories and poetry, but I cannot find good words and beautiful sentences for that. Instead, I draw a picture to express myself, my feelings, and a story.

**Soichi Oya – p. 7**

I am from Japan. I am currently working at Cleveland Clinic as a visiting doctor. This was always a dream of mine. I have encountered people from many different cultures not only in my work, but also in my daily life. This puzzles and amazes me. This is not the case in Japan. My wife is teaching here at a school for Japanese children. We are both enjoying our lives here.

**Eneida Peck – p. 15**

I have experienced many different things in my life. Some of them were difficult, but I survived. I sometimes think I must have nine lives like a cat. I enjoyed telling my life story and hope that others can take something from it that will make their lives better. Life in the USA is not as bad as some people think it is. I hope people who read this will understand why.

**Maria S. Perez – p. 34**

I was born in Mexico. I moved to the U.S. in 2000 with my husband and three children. We lived in California for several years before relocating to Ohio. I enjoy spending time with my children, reading, swimming and traveling.

**Gloria Philhower – p. 143**

My name is Gloria Philhower. I am 35 years old and live in Milford, Ohio. I have two daughters – Brittany (15) and Savannah (8). I work the night shift at a printing company, and I would like to change jobs and get into nursing. By getting my GED, I hope to be one step closer to my goal.

**Catherine Phillips – p. 37****Brian C. Potts – p. 84**

My name is Brian Potts. I am 20 years old from Urbana, Ohio. I enjoy writing and someday I hope to make it my profession. Writing is the way I express myself and get my head on right when I am going to do something that I may regret. Writing is the only positive way I know how to express myself.

**Monique Privara – p. 64**

I wrote this poem while I was teaching my grandson to tie his shoes.

**Lisa Reynolds – p. 49****Lena Ritter – p. 99, 145**

Hello, my name is Lena Ritter and I'm from Germany. I'm 22 years old and work as an au pair in this country. I enjoy living in the United States, but I really miss my family a lot.

**Yavanoot Robbins – p. 99**

I arrived in the United States in June of 2008 from Thailand. My native language is Thai. I worked for a car dealership while in Thailand. I am improving my English as a student at Live Oaks Vocational School.

**Charlene Robinson – p. 81**

I attended ABLE classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio. In November 2008 I obtained my GED. I plan to continue my education in the medical field.

**Tyeisha Ruskin – p. 95****Ifrah Samalar – p. 75**

Ifrah Samalar is an ESL student living in Columbus.

**Anna Carolina Santiago – p. 99**

I am from Brazil. My native language is Portuguese. I arrived in the fall to the U.S., and I work as an au pair. I studied English for 2 years prior to my arrival in Ohio.

**Patricia Smith – p. 95****Jeehye Song – p. 47**

I am from South Korea. I have lived in Cleveland for one year. My husband is a Post-Doctoral student in the physics department at Case Western Reserve University. I was an elementary school teacher in Seoul. My husband and I love and hope to travel a bit while we are here. We are expecting our first child and that is my focus now. I find life here very comfortable and much less competitive than South Korea. I love the ESOL classes. I not only improve my English skills, but I meet international students and make many friends.

**Micaela Strickland – p. 22****Miko Tabler – p. 79****Rawaa Taki – p. 67**

I arrived from Iraq in August 2008 along with my husband and two young sons. I am a trained pharmacist. As well as attending English classes, I have been studying many hours so I can pass the test to become certified here in the U.S. When I have time, I enjoy reading, home decorating and cooking delicious meals for friends and family.

**Xinxin Tang – p. 11**

I came to the United States last year with my husband, who works at Cleveland Clinic researching Parkinson's Disease. We have no family here, and I miss my parents and brother very much. However, I have made a lot of friends from China and from other countries also. The ESL class at Case Western University has been a wonderful source for meeting an international group of people. In the beginning, I felt awkward speaking English but the class helped build my confidence. I not only learned English but broadened my perspective on life. I was a nurse in China and even though my visa will not permit me to work as a nurse here, I volunteer at the Clinic and a nursing home. I get a great sense of satisfaction from this work, and I learn a lot that I could never get from books.

**Doreen Taylor – p. 3**

I came from Malaysia almost one year ago after marrying an American man. I have completed studies in business in Malaysia.

**Victor Taylor – p. 49, 142**

I dedicate my writings to my loving wife. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007, so I dedicate them to her.

**Robert Todd – p. 121**

Robert Todd is very dedicated to his studies. He always comes to class on time and is an active participant in all discussions.

**Atonya Trusty – p. 49****Darlene Underwood – p. 39**

**Ellen Valvassori – p. 49, 85, 113, 133**

My name is Ellen Caroline Valvassori, and I'm 22 years old and from Brazil. In this country I work as an au pair. I've been attending ESOL classes at Live Oaks for 5 months.

**Xeng Veopraseuth – p. 97**

I have been in the United States for 25 years. I attend a Bridges class at Eastland Career Center. My English is improving. Now I can read, speak, write and listen much better. I feel happy and comfortable because I can take care of myself. I can communicate with my doctor and other American people much better now. My life has changed so much! I would like to continue taking English class so that one day in the future I may be able to achieve my goal of getting a GED.

**Gladis Villavicencio – p. 99**

I am from Peru. I worked as a businesswoman in Peru before coming to the United States with my husband and daughter. My native language is Spanish, and I attend Live Oaks Vocational School. I am working hard to improve my speaking ability in English.

**LaQwanda Walker – p. 77**

My name is LaQwanda Walker, and I am twenty-eight years old. I am a mother of three boys. I am attending GED classes at Youngstown ABLE.

**Sherry Walter – p. 119**

A special thanks to Amy Guda!! I couldn't have done as well as I have without your support and teaching.

**XianXian Wang – p. 62**

I am from China. I am in Cleveland with an F2 visa, which allows me to remain here for at least 4 years, because my husband is a student at Case Western Reserve University. My major job here is to take care of the house, but I am not

locked in the kitchen cooking and cleaning all day. I try to participate in much of the colorful life offered here. I volunteer for 2 non-profit organizations. I am an usher for Playhouse Square, and I work in a Chinese school teaching adults Chinese. I love to read and spend lots of time in the library reading the *New York Times*. I also like watching *60 Minutes* and, as a former journalist, it is exciting. Lately, I have added regular museum visits to my schedule and try to go to all the festivals and exhibits. My life here is a journey. I am not sure where it will end, but I am going to enjoy the ride.

**Julie Ward – p. 154 Art**

I have been involved with art most of my life. My piece, *The Angel of Hope*, was drawn in 2007. I believe it directly contributes to the art and literature contained in prior *Beginnings* compilations from the standpoint that hope is change for the better, “a new beginning,” if you will. I attend ABLE classes at the Job Center in Akron, Ohio, and am almost prepared to take the GED test.

**Carla Watkins – p. 149**

My name is Carla, and I'm 21 years old. I have a beautiful daughter and another little girl on the way. I have a wonderful family and an outstanding fiancé. I would also like to thank all of my ABLE teachers for all of their hard work.

**Rickie Weise – p. 49, 123**

I started the GED classes at Live Oaks in November of 2008. I plan to stay with the program until I receive my degree.

**Carmen Williams – p. 95**

**Kim Wilson – p. 37**

**Realdia Wilson – p. 125**



**Afi Wozufia – p. 37**

I am from Togo in West Africa. I came to the USA in 2002 with my husband and three children. I have been married for 26 years and am very happy with my family. I have been working at Pierre Foods for about 6 years. I attend the Learning Center to improve my English and math skills.

**Seung-Ho Yang – p. 102**

I am from South Korea. I came to the United States because my wife was studying social work, and I became a house husband. In South Korea I worked for a government agency. Before coming here I traveled to 15 different countries. I am an avid scuba diver, and I go where the water is warm and the weather is tropical. These travels gave me insight into the value of diversity. The ESL class at Case Western Reserve University offered me an opportunity to learn the American culture as well as English. I am excited to see where my life will take me.

**Clay Young – p. 80**

I am an ABLE/GED student from Bremen, Ohio. I obtained my GED in November, 2008, but still attend ABLE classes at Lancaster Fairfield Community Action to prepare for my post secondary education.



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## Honorable Mention

**AUTHORS**

Rogelio Abad  
Samer Abukwaik  
Fumiko Adair  
Carol Adams  
Emma Adamski  
Oscar Akins  
Rex Allen  
Jeff Altman  
Maher Alwishah  
Joseane Andriamasilalao  
Yasue Arceno  
Kelly Artis  
Alejandro Ayala  
Rebecca Baker  
Rain Bao  
Melinda Barres  
Abasse Bassoum  
Tewabech Belachew  
Dustin Bennett  
Agnes Bijika  
Olga Binczyk  
Julia Blasquez  
Aquila Blue  
Edna Boylen  
Latera Bratton  
Shavonne Bratton  
Lanesa Bristow  
Ciara Brown  
Mari Bulucea  
Roxanne Burney  
Donna Burney  
Hilda Campagna  
Fanchon Ceasar  
Radek Cermak  
Kristi R. Chevalier  
Okhee Chor  
Carrie Christie  
Camille Cier  
Carrie Cloud  
Luz Esther Cogollo  
Stephanie Cole  
John Covic  
Jennifer Coyier  
Yeni Cruz  
Dijana Cukic  
Kamala Cummings  
Stacey Cunningham  
Charlee Daniels  
John Dawson  
Melesia Day  
Victor Deeds  
Ashley R. Deitrick  
Vilma Delco  
Pilar Diaz  
Carolyn Dodson  
Donald Downs  
Daria Dragan  
Kory Dunaway  
Tonita M. Eisennacher  
Emily Fairbanks  
Jennifer Farwick  
Gregory Fesko

|                                     |                      |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Dometruce Flint                     | Christopher Joslin   |
| Toni Floyd                          | Elena M. Kamienski   |
| Ismail FNU (family name<br>unknown) | Jagwinder Kaur       |
| Pierre Fouetsa                      | Amy Kelley           |
| Savinni Frazier                     | Aretina Kennedy      |
| Tiffany Garrett                     | Khounkham Khamvongsa |
| Kayyanna Garrett                    | Iana Kharlan         |
| Janine Maitelli Gatto               | Tiffany Kilgore      |
| Jessica Gomez                       | Kum Sun Kim          |
| Claritte Goode                      | Airrhon Kimbrough    |
| Juan Gutierrez                      | Andrew Kopec         |
| Tera Guy                            | Sanja Krdic          |
| Sandy Hamilton                      | Donald Kuhlman       |
| Arnita Hampton                      | Latonia Lake         |
| Djente Hani                         | Tanisha Lee          |
| Shawn A. Hanners                    | Ella Lewis           |
| Tammy Harkness                      | Sonya A. Lewis       |
| James Harris                        | Dan Li               |
| Sally Harvey                        | Terry A. Lightle     |
| Chro Hawyamani                      | Bettie Link          |
| Mindy Haynes                        | Ashleigh Lown        |
| Heather Heldt                       | Angel Lozada         |
| Rosy Hernandez                      | Dominique Lucky      |
| Julio Herrera                       | Seanly Lucky         |
| Lena J. Hershberger                 | Simon Makoso         |
| Loretta Hill                        | Nicole D. Malicoat   |
| Lee Scott Hoffman                   | Edna Martin          |
| Sonny L. Holency                    | Wlima Martinez       |
| Dan C. Howard                       | Salad Matan          |
| Marina Hubner                       | Dustin McDole        |
| Taylor Huddleston                   | Edward McLane        |
| Kimberly M. Jackson                 | Karima Mekaouche     |
| Hayder H. Jaffer                    | Juan Mercado         |
| Patrick James, Sr.                  | Tambra Miller        |
| Wynell Jarvis                       | Star Minehart        |
| Ronald Jefferson                    | Odete Mirtel         |
|                                     | Althea Mitchem       |

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|                        |                              |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mohamed Mohamed        | Tomasa Ruiz                  |
| Shirley Montgomery     | Elizabeth Sacksith           |
| Christina Moore        | Julia Schulenin              |
| Sharon Moreland        | Bouchra Semlani              |
| Nicole Moschella       | Linda M. Seymour             |
| Tiffany Murphy         | Michelle Shaw                |
| Randall Napier         | Jiad Shen                    |
| Frank Newsom           | Kailee Shields               |
| Aisha Noor             | Toshiki Shimada              |
| Noah Norris            | Ronald Shumaker              |
| Andrea Notestone       | Sarah Shumar                 |
| Benjamin Jacob Nunlist | Luz M. Silva                 |
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| Onasis R. Pena         | Ashley Spence                |
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| Cheryl Pete            | Dorothy Swearingen-<br>White |
| Tiffany M. Phillips    | Dominique Tabet              |
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| Laken C. Pleichner     | Alma Tarver                  |
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| Anna Polinski          | Satoko Terada                |
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| Marysia Rosier         |                              |

Caroline von  
Westernhagen  
Mike Waddle  
Carolyn Washington  
Alexis Watkins  
Kin Wijasa  
Louise Wilczynski  
Barbara Wilson

Danielle Wilson  
Rick Wolfe  
Chad Wright  
Bin Wu  
Ivan Zakharko  
Abby Zecher  
Kabira Zerdaoui

**ARTISTS**

Gabby Agreta  
Richard Anzeveno  
Sara Aquino  
Daynen Bevly  
Richard Brenizer  
Michelle Burns  
Marie Capps  
Sheyla Caraballo  
Arthur Carrizalez  
Patrice Carroll  
Christopher Centofani  
Stephen Chuey  
Percy Cooper  
Jermaine Craft  
Marsha Critus  
Heather Davies  
Roy Decker  
Catherine DeSalvo  
Mary Dottz  
Eva Dreher  
Carolyn Duke  
Sabrina Earvin  
Gregory Fesko  
Savinni N. Frazier  
Daniel Freeze  
Kevin Glines

Frank Gregorich  
Neil Gruber  
Ted Hardie  
Robert Hewitt  
Curtis James  
Ashley Kannal  
Ron Kolat  
Thomas Kutty  
Chalfi Loubna  
Bertha Lynch  
Faye Marciano  
Jennifer Markovich  
John McMillan  
Samantha Metzger  
Jennifer Mikavich  
Robert Morley  
Robert Nick  
Anita Ohlin  
Cheryl Patton  
Marvin M. Perez  
Dale Polchies  
Jasmin Reinmoller  
Richard Rich  
Lena Ritter  
Larry Rizer  
Ryan Rizzon

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Lakieth Robinson  
John M. Roman  
Cynthia Rotz  
Laurel Shannon  
Heather Steele  
Craig Thompson  
Scott Trotter  
Michael Vadjunes  
Charlotte Vernello  
Paula Voytilla  
Gaye Weatherall  
Larry Williams

