

Beginnings XIII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

Foreword

Every time we sit down to an empty page or blank screen to write, we are offered the opportunity to create ourselves anew, to begin again. That is part of the power and allure of writing, and remains one of the inspiring beliefs of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's Beginnings project. I was honored to be a guest speaker at last year's 12th Annual Ohio Writers' Conference and am equally honored to introduce this year's anthology, *Beginnings XIII*.

What inspired me most about the Ohio Writers' Conference was the spirit of inclusiveness and deep listening that occurred throughout the entire program. As we listened to each other, I felt that, collectively, we were giving voice to a much larger, hopeful story of ABLÉ programs throughout the state of Ohio. And indeed, this story included many heartfelt tributes to the dedicated teachers, administrators, and volunteers who offer their talents, time, and energy so generously throughout the year. I have attended many writers' conferences, but none have inspired and uplifted me the way the Ohio Writers' Conference did. Robert Bly has said that "a poem is not completed until it is heard." The same could also be said about any powerful story. I was deeply moved to hear and witness this medley of authentic voices.

Congratulations to all the ABLÉ authors whose voices grace these pages and to all the students throughout Ohio who have written down and spoken their truth. Congratulations, as well, to the dedicated teachers and organizers who breathe their passion and dedication into the lives of their students.

The title of this year's anthology, *Beginnings XIII*, speaks volumes for the energy and inspiration that continues to flow through the ABLÉ program. Thirteen years of giving voice to the truth within our lives. Thirteen years of listening to one another with the hope of starting afresh. Thirteen years of beginning anew!

David Hassler

Acknowledgements

“It is my hope that whoever reads this finds that though the road back for some of us is hard, it is not impossible. Don’t give up!”

~ Billy Wagner, *Beginnings XIII* author biography

Beginnings XIII is not just a collection of words. It is the result of the perseverance of many writers – finding just the right word, making time to attend class, and working to accomplish goals they set for themselves. For some, writing is a chance to put thoughts into poetry; for others it is a chance to tell a story they’ve been developing in their minds for years or to inspire their children and grandchildren. Some write to express themselves in a language they didn’t grow up speaking. For many ABLE authors, writing demonstrates that their determination is stronger than any obstacle put before them.

This year over 300 ABLE authors submitted nearly 400 pieces of writing to be considered for publication in *Beginnings XIII*. Putting words to paper in just the right way is difficult in itself, but letting others read those words is even more difficult. We celebrate all ABLE authors and acknowledge the courage it takes to let others read their work. Each author should feel a tremendous sense of pride in their accomplishments.

The pages of *Beginnings XIII* showcase the artistic skills of three ABLE students. Santos Yolivan Cabrera is the artist responsible for the work that graces the front cover; Mario Alexander Martinez created “Taking Flight,” located on the back cover; and Hikaru Sato’s “Heartful Wind” is found on page viii.

We are so grateful to the Ohio Board of Regents State Adult Basic and Literacy Education program for their ongoing support of the Ohio Writers’ Conference and *Beginnings*.

To the teachers and tutors in Ohio ABLE programs: your dedication, guidance, and leadership give your students the opportunity to achieve not only their goals, but also their dreams.

A special thank you to the 2010 Writers' Conference featured speakers: Ray McNiece, nationally recognized poet and performer, who is our keynote speaker, and Lyn Ford, Writers' Conference resident storyteller, who inspires us all with her Home Fried Tales.

Finally, we'd like to acknowledge the retirement of Dr. Nancy Padak, who has been Project Administrator for the Ohio Literacy Resource Center since its inception in 1993. Nancy's support, guidance, and expertise have been invaluable to the OLRC and the *Beginnings* project. It was because of Nancy's desire to publish student writing that this project was started and, because of the dedication of ABLE students and teachers, it continues to flourish. We are forever grateful.

"I never knew I was a writer until we had our first writing workshop at Godman Guild. That goes to show that you never know what you can do until you try."

~ Marketa Slaughter, *Beginnings XIII* author biography

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Reaching and Roots

People have carved their initials:

“H.T.‘02”

“Tommy Was Here”

I have branched out,
continued to reach up
Little birdies

sit with me, sight see
come to share their ideas, but
their little nests
 blow over
when heavy winds come

- Naturally, I am determined to keep growing.

My leaves shake and shiver
through stormy hours
but my body remains rooted
steadfast. sturdy.
strong at the core

My purpose is planted deep
I was born of an apple gone rotten
a lone seedling sprouted
soaking up Earthly gifts
made able with divine light

- My understanding stems from the spirit in my trunk.

Scarred deeply, man inflicted lacerations
I lose some of my bark
my skin has grown thick
I have loved men who have drawn nooses
surrendered themselves, became strange fruit

For them, I have snapped, I have broken
children nail boards to my stomach
and climb into my hair
For them, I remain grounded
my arms are ever reaching

In a young tree, there is patience, pain, forgiveness. Resilience.

Pouring rain and Golden rays
nourish my height and diameter
In this air from which I take, to which I give
I smell the fruitfulness
that I am destined for

*Jennifer Cline
Former ABL Student
GED Scholar
Senior, Kent State University*

Ensemble

My Happiness

Wake up and enjoy every day.
See my son grow up.
Live with my family.
Laugh with my friends.
Go to church and talk to God.
Have faith, love, and hope.
Breathe, feel, see, and hear.
Dream and smile.
Dance and sing.
Enjoy a good meal.
Be alive.

Happiness is all the people, details, things,
and moments that make us smile.
What makes you happy?

~ Pamela Hernandez

This Lady

I remember the first day
We were introduced ...
She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen
No taller than 5' 3", brown skinned, hair down to her shoulders
She was much older than me
But that didn't change how we felt about each other
I didn't have anything to give
Nor could I do much for her
But she smiled and smiled at me like
I was the best thing that happened to her ...
She took me to her home
 fed me and let me sleep in her warm bed
 and use her big tub
 and bought me nice clothes
I didn't know what love was 'til
I was invaded with her love ...
This lady is very rare
 and like her I have found no other
I will never find another lady like this –
 like my mother.

~ Dwalyn Green

The Day We Tried to Burn Our Sister

I remember one summer back when I was around eight years old. I was at my grandparents' house in West Virginia with my two older sisters.

I am the youngest of three girls, but I was a tomboy growing up. Sue was the oldest, then Ethel is in between us. Sue and I were always picking on Ethel. She was always whining about some things we did. So we picked on her a lot. Some times we were mean about it; other times we were not.

One summer, we all decided to pretend to be cowboys and Indians. I'm not for sure who was who now. But Sue and I had talked Ethel into going in the house to get some kitchen matches. While in there, we found a rope. When Ethel came out, we got hold of her and tied her up to a big tree in the back yard. Then we put branches and twigs around her. I'm not sure who lit the matches, but we lit the wood around Ethel. Ethel kept screaming for Grandma.

Grandma came out of the house to see what was going on. Sue and I knew we were in big trouble. I'm not sure what happened next because I was too busy climbing that tree that we tied Ethel to.

Sue ended up getting into more trouble than I, because she was the oldest and knew better. When I finally came down out of the tree, Grandma gave me a tongue lashing. I would rather we had a whipping because Grandma's tongue was sharper than a whipping.

We are all grown now with our own children and grandchildren. But when we get together with our family, somebody always brings up the day Sue and I tied Ethel to the tree and tried to set her on fire.

~ Jackie Colflesh

What You Are to Me

Uncle and Aunt
What you are to me
Inspirers of life in a positive light
Teardrops of memories that once saved my life
Teachers of lessons I needed to know
Pieces of yourselves given to help me grow
Smiles from your hearts and love from your souls
You are more to me than I could ever show
Than you will ever know
A silver lining that tugs at my heart
To let me know that you are there, always.

~ Toni Garcia

How I Came to Own a Dog

If there was one thing my husband and I totally agreed on, it was that we would never have a house pet, other than a fish. We were convinced that it would be more trouble than good. After having Rusty (my niece's dog) at our house for about a month and potty training him, we were definitely convinced that we didn't need a pet. But gradually it all changed, and we got attached to the pup.

It all started with my niece, Brooklyn's 6th birthday. All she wanted was a miniature poodle. Her mom would try to suggest other things to her, but Brooklyn insisted that the only thing that would make her birthday perfect was a miniature poodle. Finally my sister and her husband could not resist it any longer and decided to get her one. The problem was that when they found just the right one, it was still a month until her birthday. So my sister asked me if we would be interested in keeping him until her daughter's birthday. The only problem, she told me, was that he was only about 4 months old, and he wasn't potty trained at all. Although I had some misgivings about it, I told myself, it can't be that bad. After all it would only be for a month. So I conferred with my husband, and after some discussion, we decided to do it.

When Rusty moved in with us, we had to make some changes in our lifestyle. We had to adjust our schedules so we could take him outside to go potty every three hours. During the night he had to hold it for eight hours. At first his messes were pretty bad; we had to clean up after him almost every day. And he chewed on things, so we had to be careful about what we left out for him to discover. However, towards the end of his stay things were starting to look better. We only had to clean up messes about two times a week, and it was rather nice to have a dog to take along on walks and to throw a toy with.

Then came the long awaited day, Brooklyn's birthday. My brother-in-law took Rusty for his first haircut two days before her birthday, so he was looking as cute as a doll (although we didn't

tell him for the sake of his ego), and we were actually pretty sad to see him go. Brooklyn was happy with her puppy for about two months, but like most kids, she hadn't counted the cost of time and energy spent on taking care of a puppy. So she asked her mom and dad if she could have a scooter instead. Brooklyn's parents travel a lot, so they were getting tired of finding sitters for Rusty all the time. On top of that, they were expecting a baby, so they agreed.

Now they had to find a home for him. I guess my husband and I were the first ones they thought of since we had taken care of him when they first got him. When they first asked us if we wanted him, we said no because we remembered our decision never to have house pets (not to mention the remembrance of peed-on carpets). But we couldn't get Rusty off our minds, and we remembered how much fun we had with him the last week he was at our house. So after reconsidering, we finally called them back and said we wanted him after all, hoping they hadn't found a home for him in the meantime. They said no, they still had him, and we could come get him anytime. So we went over and picked him up that same day.

While it definitely hasn't all been a stroll in the park to have a dog, we have had a lot of fun with Rusty. There is just something nice about coming home to something that is absolutely excited to see me, no matter how late I was out. I guess for me that's the best part of having a dog. They don't get mad at you, and you can tell them anything you want to, as long as you say it in a nice voice they will wag their tails and tell you they love you with their soft puppy dog eyes.

~Viola Hershberger

A Sweater from My Father

My father gave me a sweater when I was in high school. I have kept it as my valuable possession for about ten years. It is neither a birthday present nor a reward for my good performance. However, it represents my father's love, which warms my heart especially on my hard times.

I remember clearly that it was a cold winter morning. I was doing morning exercises in the playground when my father came with a new sweater. It was a milky white woolen sweater with beautiful dark colored strips. He handed it to me and just asked me to try it on. We didn't talk much before he left for his busy work. It was a special moment in my life. Whenever I see that sweater, I can still picture the view of my father's back when he was leaving. It was such a simple sweater. However, I could feel my father's silent but warm love. That might be what he should do as a father, but I saw it as a treasure he gave me in my life.

I still keep it even though it becomes old and will never fit me any more. As the years roll on, my father aged, and I grew up as a man. Sometimes I imagine a scene – I get married and have my child. What gift shall I give him or her? I am not sure. But I'll definitely tell him or her the story of the old sweater from my father.

~ Lan Kun Guo

Family

Family
Love, Strength
Uplifting, Nurturing, Empowering
Diverse yet Unified, Competitive yet Caring
Struggling, Arguing, Criticizing
Priceless, Irreplaceable
Forever

~ Live Oaks Group Project:

Isha Cham

Zambia Sherland

Michaela Thomas

Janeth Urgilez

You're Not Here

You're out of my eyesight,
out of my vision,
but when I look in the mirror,
I see a reflection of you looking back at me.
You're me 23 years ago.

You're out of my home,
out of my life,
but memories of you live in my heart,
and when I see my shadow on a sunny day,
I see an image of your hopes and dreams.

You're out of my reach,
out of my touch,
but when I close my eyes,
I can remember all the hugs and kisses
I gave you for seventeen years,
and these I will cherish always.
They will carry me through the rough times.

You're out of my voice of reason,
out of my hearing,
not that you would listen anyway,
but when I watch the sunset,
I feel closest to you.
I can feel your love so deep and pure.
You're confused,
but I know our love will always stand.

~ Karen Flick

My Precious Grandson

This is a story about my grandson. When my daughter was eighteen and still in high school, she said that she was pregnant. Well, I was quite upset, but I got over it. Then came little Landyn. He had to be the most precious little guy that I had ever seen. One reason he is so precious is because he looks like my little brother who died when I was three years old. He was only about two years old, and I have to believe that God needed him in heaven then.

He and my daughter live with me and Grandma. He is five now, and he is what keeps me going in the summer. We go fishing and play outside. He also loves to go down to Williamsburg, Kentucky; that's where our cousins and family live. They have a skating rink, and he loves to skate. He never gets tired.

When I was working, I couldn't wait to hit the door so I could rush home to see him. When he gets sick, I feel his pain. When he gets his picture taken, I can't wait to take them to work to show them to everybody. I am so proud of him. I thank God for him, and I can see why God loves us so much. We are his children.

He is also why I need to get my GED so I can get a better job; that way my family and I can have a better future and spend more time enjoying life together.

~ Steve Baird

Bedtime Story

A dedication to my son Garrett

When you were little I could not read and write. I could not read you a bedtime story. Now that I have been tutored, I can. Let me tell you this story about your life.

When you were born your mother and I were so delighted to have a son. I think about the times you and your mother sat on the grass, and the grass tickled your legs and made you laugh. I laughed with you.

And then along came your brother – a little brother to love and fight with. I know that is the way it is, having a brother of my own.

Your mother got sick with cancer. Years later she had your little sister. But before your sister could grow up we lost your mother. Your sister was only 1½ years old. Our world fell apart.

And a few years later we lost you, but not before you had gotten married and had a little girl on the way. Just two weeks prior to your daughter's birth you passed away. Her name is Adriane.

I love you and your mother. I miss you and all the joy you brought into my life: building cars, racing motorcycles, and hunting deer together. I remember when you shot at a deer and you swore that you had hit it! You didn't know that I had loaded your gun with blanks. It was your first time hunting. I thought it was funny. You sat and took your gun apart to check to see if your gun was clogged.

As I'm reminiscing about these joyful times, I'm getting choked up. I will say goodnight, my first born, goodnight.

January 2010

~ Ronald Fugate

Milkyas

Matt and Million are his brothers.
Ice cream is his favorite food.
Likes playing golf,
Keba is his friend.
Yesterday he went to school.
A good student –
Student of the month.

~ *Birkita Tesfageris*

Thurlbredz

On September 6, 1985 an amazing baby was born into the world by the name of Reginald Eggleton. Reginald wasn't exactly what you would call a normal baby. He was moved by music. Reginald was usually a lazy baby. His mother had to place pillows around him to hold him up, otherwise he would flop over. It seemed like the only time Reginald would be active was when music was on. Then he would bounce, clap his hands, and babble as if he knew what he was saying.

By the time he reached the age of seven, he started to put his words together magnificently. He was part of a really enormous family. His mother would throw parties every other weekend so the family could get together and have fun. Reginald would put on a show for his family, dancing and rhyming words together. His father always said he would be a rapper.

By the time Reginald turned 15, it was apparent he was an artist. He signed a contract to be part of Marco Records. His older brother, his cousin, and he had started a rap group called Thurlbredz. After only a week of being on the label, they recorded their first song on a CD. A month later the Thurlbredz threw a hip hop concert which was over-crowded with family and friends. The show was very successful. They quickly became very popular.

No one expected for Reginald to be the very successful artist he is. His mother knew from the time he was born that he was a baby with a gift. A gift that she hoped would pay off one day. She always told Reginald to follow his dream and that is exactly what Reginald is doing.

~ Reginald Eggleton

Duets

As I Sit Reminiscing

As I sit reminiscing,
thinking of the love that's missing,
and all the time that we shared together,
remembering the loving fulfillment
and knowing that I could not have asked for better,
from the very beginning even until now,
you strengthen me in ways that I don't know how to express,
and so more or less,
I can only say,
I never imagined things would end up quite this way,
that there would ever be separate places
that our two heads would lay,
it's so much between us including three little lives,
and the turbulence that it causes them,
the pain, cannot be disguised,
microwaved, from inside out to the core, my love is hurt,
but with all systems operating, I tell myself to revert
back, undercover, to shield myself from the pain
knowing if this was a pipeline, I'd be labeled the main,
you see, I do forgive you, but it still doesn't cease my pain,
and deep, deep within, I know true love never dies,
so don't mistake the pain for hatred, when you gaze into my eyes,
devastating circumstances, the situation took me by surprise
my family life is now gone, in the blinking of my eyes,
no more sharing our love,
no more hearing my babies' cries, at night,
I know there must be a reason for all this,
so I pray looking into the skies, in fright.
But who am I to question
the forces guiding the courses of our lives?
So I can only surmise the reflection of your actions
as I reminisce on our goodbyes.
The 'till deaths' do us part and all the other lies,
now suffocate my thoughts as the feeling slowly dies.
I'm thinking, you must have thought what you felt
was you loving yourself, and my love was only in my mind.

But in your continual search for love, my dear,
this is what you will find:
*The love you thought I didn't have for you
is the love you left behind.*

~ Lemuel Israel

Love on Board

March 30, 2008...my life changed forever. I was working as a tour operator for the Cukka Cove Tours. The Royal Caribbean "Navigator of the Seas" was the tour ship for that day, and my tour site was the White River Tubing. Fifteen tourists were approaching my van, and at the end of the group I saw a beautiful woman wearing flowered pants, a white shirt, and a bikini top. Not to be obvious, I spoke in my native language of "Potwa," telling the tour guide to seat her up front with me.

Thirty minutes later, we arrived at the site, and she told me she was ordered not to bring a towel. I offered her and her sister my towel. She undressed to her bathing suit, and I watched her go off to the river. Within 45 minutes, the tourists were back from the tour. When she went to the restroom, I asked her sister if she was the "wild one." Her sister replied, "Yes, my mother sent me to take care of her." I smiled and returned to the sitting area while the passengers shopped the souvenir stores.

About 10 to 15 minutes later, I heard someone yell, "Baxter, did you see my sister?" I smiled and responded with a "no" and told her to hurry because we had to leave soon. "Don't leave me," she shouted. I smiled and said, "Don't worry. I won't leave you." I never realized that response would become reality. On the trip back, I couldn't work up the nerve to ask her for her phone number. I never liked attention or rejection, so I dropped her and the other passengers off at the shopping plaza. She left, and I thought that I would never see her again.

I usually went straight home after work, but on this day, I happened to see my brother. I decided to stop and chat with him for a while. After leaving my brother, God gave me a second chance. Walking out of a store headed in my direction, I saw her again. She smiled when she saw me and said, "Hey Baxter," as if she had known me all her life. I smiled and asked her if she would like a ride back to the ship. She replied, "I don't have any more money to tip you with." I told her not to worry because I

wouldn't accept it anyway. I asked her about her sister and she told me her sister had left because she couldn't find jerk chicken. We drove around the block to see if her sister was still walking. When we couldn't find her sister, I offered to take her to The Ocho Rios Jerk Center to buy her sister some jerk chicken.

Finally, alone with her at last, I asked for her name and phone number. She wrote it down and told me she wouldn't be back on land for two days. I looked down at the paper and I thought to myself, beauty has a name, "Shannell." Thursday finally came and I called her. From that day forward, we talked on a daily basis. Sixteen months later, I came to the United States, and we were married on July 25, 2009. My love on board is now reality.

~ Lebert Reid

My True Love

I learned something in life: One should never say “never”. When I was a little girl I experienced a lot of things. I lived in a good neighborhood, and my family was wonderful. In my house I had parties every single weekend, and if something good happened during the week there was a party. I was a good little girl, but I remember saying to my grandma, “I will never want to get married.” I remember her saying, “Never say ‘never.’” But I had my vision about marriage.

I remember my mom and dad fighting a lot. I was seven years old when they got a divorce. I was very upset because I had to go live with my grandma while my mom went to live in another city and my dad stayed in the same city as I, but he hardly came to visit. My sister went to live in a boarding school. It was hard because the family was separated.

And I remember my grandma was sad, angry and crying because my grandpa was never home. He always told my grandma he needed to stay late at work, or sometimes he didn't tell her if would come home or not.

The time passed. When I was 19 years old I got pregnant, but I didn't get married because I didn't love him. But he gave me a little angel, and my life changed for good. After my daughter was born, I went to live with my sister. The year I got pregnant she got a divorce after seven years of marriage, so I moved to her city to help her with her kids.

One night my friends and I went to a main square of the city where everybody was talking about an American boy. My friend asked if I knew him and I said no. Later that night I had the pleasure of meeting him. And that's how it all started. We talked until 5:00 o'clock in the morning. My heart was beating hard, my ears popped, my voice trembled, and I felt afraid because I had never felt that way before. I knew he was the man for me. I was in love, but I thought to myself that he can't be for me

because he's rich and I'm poor. I also have a daughter. I believed he would return to the United States and forget about me. I was so nervous. Days went by and we became best friends. We went everywhere together – clubs, bars, the supermarket, the mall, dancing – everywhere.

One night we kissed, and I asked him if he wanted to be my boyfriend. He said yes. I was so happy and so was Josh. He said he fell in love with me the first time we met and talked all night. I was so happy that I couldn't believe we were dating. We enjoyed every second, but a month later he returned to the United States. I couldn't believe he was gone, but he promised me he'd come back to marry me. I said, "OK," but in my head I thought, "YEAH, RIGHT, I'm a poor girl with a daughter already, never!" He also said he would be back in two months to marry me on my birthday.

He kept his promise and came back to me on May 31, 2003. I couldn't believe it, but he did, and we got married on July 19, 2003. Since that day we have come through a lot of things, but we have never stopped loving each other. We have two beautiful daughters, and I hope we grow old together – my true love.

~Sara Hagan

My Most Treasured Possession

When I think of my most treasured possession, only one thing comes to mind – the love letters my husband wrote to me. As the saying goes, the course of true love never runs smooth. We knew each other through the Internet, and we were in love for more than two years before we actual met each other face-to-face. At that time, he was studying for his Ph.D. in America, and I was studying in China. We hadn't had a dinner together, watched a film together, played together, or had a picture taken together before we actually got together. We were apart in space and time.

However, these 12 letters are our love's constant witness. In these letters, he told me how much he loved and missed me. He made a solemn pledge of eternal love. He sent me red roses every Valentine's Day in a letter. He used special stamps printed with my date of birth and my picture. He told me he would write me one letter every month, and he would come back to China when he had used up all the special stamps. I knew he wanted to give me the hope that we would be together one day. As I remembered, I was excited when I received his letters and was moved after I read them.

Finally, he came back to China last October, even before all the stamps were used up. He gave me an affectionate hug when we first actually met each other. We got married and went to live in America together. Even now, whenever I read those letters, I cannot help crying with tears of joy. To some, waiting means suffering; to others, happiness. For us, it is a mixture of both.

~ Ling Zhu

Worldwide Symphony

A Traditional Laotian Wedding

I was born into a big, warm family in Laos. I never thought that I was going to leave my family, but then I met a man who was living in the U.S.A.

This man was visiting his sister in Laos. One day when I was doing my shopping, we met at the grocery store. When I first saw him, he was wearing a kilt. He looked so funny! Since he was walking with a lady and a little girl, I thought he was married.

When I went past him, he smiled at me. He walked back and forth for a long time, until finally he came up to me. He asked my name and my address. I told him a wrong number because I didn't want him to be able to find me again.

It only took him one week to find me. I was embarrassed because I had lied to him the first time we met.

After that, we continued talking and getting to know each other better. He was a nice guy. When I talked to him, he made me feel happy. We spent three months together, and we fell in love. But his passport was about to expire. He had to go back to America.

A couple of days before he left the country, he asked me to be his fiancée. We told our families. He promised he would return to Laos in two years and we would marry.

It took one year and six months for the government to finish the documents he needed to return to Laos.

In 1998 we got married. We invited all the members of our families and our friends to come to the wedding. Both of our families prepared food.

My wedding day was a special day in my life. The wedding took place at my own house. I wore a red silk sein (skirt), a gold shirt, and a red silk parbieng (scarf). We believe that the color red

will bring us luck. My husband wore a white tuxedo.

For the ceremony, we sat around a parkuam, which is a special Laotian wedding decoration made of banana leaves and covered in ribbons and flowers. We sat side by side and bowed to the preacher who was facing us across the parkuam. The wedding ceremony took about one hour. Afterwards, we could go see our friends.

From that special day until today, we have been married for eleven years. Our marriage is still happy.

~ *Khounkham Khamvongsa*

Natural Disaster in the Hispaniola

I am from the Dominican Republic, a country that is part of Hispaniola, the biggest Caribbean island. In my opinion, this tropical island has some of the most beautiful beaches, most delicious foods, and most gentle people in the world. We currently have a democratic government. Even though it is a poor economy, we all have enough to survive.

Our capital is Santo Domingo. The Dominican Republic occupies about two-thirds of Hispaniola. It has an area of 48,442 kilometers. By 2007, the population was estimated at 9,760,000. The country has been hit by several hurricanes. David, a category 5 hurricane, devastated the country in 1979.

Ironically, we share the island with Haiti. I say "ironically" because even when we have a big slump in our economy, we still have to handle illegal Haitian immigration. Haitians are poorer than Dominicans; their country is not as developed as ours. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Haitians have migrated illegally to the Dominican Republic. The estimate is that over 800,000 Haitians are living in our country. They live and work primarily in cities that have sugar refineries, such as Bajos de Haina, Santo Domingo, San Pedro de Macoris, and La Romana.

According to the Richter Scale, Haiti had a 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010. It devastated many families with death and health problems. Now many Haitians have nowhere to live and no food to eat. Many buildings collapsed. Major buildings, such as the Presidential palace, Court of Justice, and other government offices fell because of the earthquake. But nothing is more crucial than the tens of thousands of lives that were lost that day.

Even before the disaster, Haiti was the poorest country on our side of the world. Over 75% of its population already had to work in horrible conditions to survive, and few people with jobs earned enough money to cover their needs.

Historically, Haitians have lived with a lack of natural resources like water, clean air, and trees. Haiti has never had a stable economic system. The President of Haiti is Renee Preval who, by the way, is 67 years old. Even before the earthquake, he didn't have absolute control of the country.

About 120 flights land in Haiti daily, bringing food, medicine, and donations from many locations around the world. Unfortunately, the distribution of these supplies is not well organized, and it is difficult for all the people to get food and water.

According to the news, as of January 25, 2010, the American Red Cross has gathered about U.S. \$1,000,000,000 in donations. Many other donation programs, such as "Save the Children," are also working to help Haiti recover from this disaster.

I am very proud of my country, because it was the first in the world to bring aid to our neighbor. Even with our own medical and financial needs, we are still helping them as much as we can.

~ Onasis Pena

The Legend of a Chinese Family's House

I was born in the 1970's in an old fashioned country house located in southern China. The house was somewhat similar to a hut in a primitive society. The walls were bricks made of clay and the roof was covered with rice straw. It consisted of three rooms, a bedroom, a kitchen and a storage room. I still remember being about four and watching the men in the village helping each other make the clay bricks. They would mix the clay with water, smash it, use a mold to form the brick, and let the sun dry the brick. They would collect the bricks to make houses. A single brick was very big so a wall made of this kind of clay brick was very thick making the house warm in the winter and cool in the summer. But most of the houses in the village built with clay bricks and a few wooden poles to support the roof couldn't withstand a flood or an earthquake.

When I was ten years old, the dream of the whole family was that my dad would make enough money to change the roof to tile made of baked clay because a roof covered with rice straw would rot, and my dad was tired of repairing the roof every winter to prepare for the rainy spring. My little sister, brother and I were scared by the worms falling from the roof. The rice straw roof was a good place for the worms to grow. We were lucky to realize our dream. In the beginning of the 1980's we changed our roof to tile, and my dad also managed to build another two bedrooms. We began to use electric bulbs to replace the oil lights. I still remember the night when the engineers finished assembling the circuits, and my dad told me to turn on the bulb. The whole house became bright, and we all screamed in delight.

With the development of my country, our life improved. My parents managed to send all three children to study at the university. But it was a difficult time for our family. My parents worked day and night, and they even sold parts of our house to pay for our studies. After graduating we got jobs and helped our parents to build a very solid house made of cement and steel. It was a two-story building with enough rooms for the whole family. It was

beautiful with flowers and evergreen trees surrounding it. The interior was very nice also. My sister, brother, and I would return to our hometown every year to celebrate the Spring Festival with my parents. I felt so happy seeing my parents laughing with their children and grandchildren.

Sometimes when I think of the development of my house, it seems like a legend. It started from such humble origins and became a modern house with access to the Internet in just thirty years! I feel I am so lucky. The experience taught me the meaning of life and how to cherish the life I have. In the course of realizing our dreams, we learned to work hard, never give up hope, and love each other.

~ Zhihong Chen

France

Whoever wants to travel to France should know details,
Especially about shopping in a store. Be sure you have a
Little coin of 50 centimes of Euro to borrow a
Cart that you'll find exclusively
Outside in the parking lot. You'll get your coin back only if you are
Meticulous and return the cart to a specific place and not
Elsewhere.

To agree with the French environmental politics, don't forget bags
Or baskets to carry your purchases. Cashiers won't give them to you!

French people have to utilize their own bags many times and then
Re-utilize them again.
Another important bit of information is not to forget your smile because
Not many of them are found in French stores.
Certainly the cashiers have to be trained to use friendliness and they
Excel in this competence! Welcome to France!

~ Delphine Brunet

On the Other Side of the Mountains

I was raised in the City of Zacatecas, Mexico. I remember the majestic mountains surrounding the city and the most amazing blue sky, among many other things. I had a father who was a happy man that loved life. My mother was a beautiful woman who took full charge of the household, cleaning, cooking, and taking very good care of two older brothers and me.

I was a very active and happy girl. Things were going very well. I participated in many activities and festivities at school. We sang, danced, and recited poems. I remember in 3rd grade during Geography class I realized there were other places on the other side of the mountains. I asked myself where are those places and what did they look like? I secretly promised myself that I would find out sooner or later.

My mother then had another son and daughter. When I was about to finish the 4th grade, my father felt ill. He died shortly after with "Black Lung." At the time of my father's death, my mother was seven months pregnant. Things changed dramatically. One year before my two older brothers had left to another city to attend a seminary to be Franciscan priests. They did attend my father's funeral and shortly after returned to the seminary. They left me no choice but to become head of the household.

I had to put my education on hold, and get two jobs at age ten to help support the family. It was hard to keep up with two jobs, but I felt very important. My first job was in a small clinic from 6 a.m.-1 p.m. I cleaned, helped deliver the food to the patients, and ran errands. My second job was in a bakery from 3-9 p.m. My job was to bag the pastries for the customers. Two years later my mother became a very good seamstress and started to work from home.

I then went back to school to finish my elementary. If there was any doubt that we weren't going to have enough money for the bills, I always had an answer. I had my mother sew little

dresses for little girls, and then I would go and sell them for her. It was such a pleasure to do that for my mother to help out.

I would listen to the radio frequently because we had no television. The radio station always talked about other countries. My curiosity grew; I wanted to know what was on the other side of the mountains.

I really wanted to attend cosmetology school, but my mother told me that I had to continue working. I wanted to visit my mother's sister who lived in the state of Aguascalientes to see if I could get a better job. My mother agreed with me, so we took a two-hour bus ride south. The bus ride was wonderful. We saw small towns and land filled with cactuses until we arrived at the big city. My mother left the next day, and I stayed with the family. My aunt decided that I was too young to be working. The following week I went back home. I took a job as a receptionist at a small doctor's office in Zacatecas.

Two years later my aunt visited us from Guadalajara, Jalisco. She told my mother to let me go with her, so that I could get a better paying job. My mother agreed again and thought it was a great idea. I then packed my bags and went. It was an eight-hour ride. I loved it! There were more cities, states and agaves (plants that produce tequila). We finally arrived to the second largest city of Mexico with one of the best climates of the country. I adjusted well with the family, which consisted of my aunt, uncle, and their children.

One Friday night my uncle got home drunk, screaming at my aunt to get up and fix him something to eat. He would hit her continuously and none of the children would do anything about it. My aunt said that this happened every payday. My uncle had a good paying job working with marble. On payday, he would spend all his money on alcohol and who knows what else. My aunt would clean homes and the oldest children had to work to bring income in.

That night I made up my mind that I had to do something for me. There was nothing I could do to help my aunt's situation. I

refused to watch continuous abuse. My only choice was to find a job with living accommodations.

The next morning I told my aunt that I was going to look for a job. Guadalajara is a big city, and I had no idea where to go. I took a bus ride until I saw a residential neighborhood and got off. I then began knocking on doors to see if anyone needed a maid. Unfortunately everybody had a maid. I took another bus and went further down to see if anyone in that area had an opening. I think I knocked on at least eight doors until a beautiful elegant lady let me in. She interviewed me and I told her that I had never been a maid before. I promised her that I would be a good one. She smiled and told me to start that day. One of her daughters and a chauffer took me back to get my belongings. As they drove me back, I didn't realize how far I had gone to get that job. I promised my aunt I would visit, and I did.

The following morning I found myself in an enormous home that belonged to a well known physician. The physician and his wife had eleven children. He had six girls and five boys. The house was run by three maids, two cooks, two nannies, two chauffers, and a gardener. I helped with laundry and learned to iron. The four oldest daughters and I became very good friends. We used to hang out together and go shopping, to soccer games, and to coffee shops. The family often took vacations and I went along. We visited different beaches, which is how I encountered the Pacific Ocean. I couldn't believe how beautiful and peaceful it was. I stayed with the family five years. During that time I visited my mother once a month to take money and presents.

One of my friends from my home town moved to Mexico City, looking for a better life like me. She needed a roommate, so I decided to move to one of the largest cities in the world. It was hard to leave the great family who had given me so much love and comfort. I did promise the family that I would visit them often.

I took a bus going south again, passing through more states and cities, green and not so green land. Ten hours later we arrived in Mexico City. Once we arrived, I was very impressed

with the size of the city. It was huge, too crowded, lots of traffic, and noisy. This definitely was so different than Zacatecas, where it is small and quiet. I quickly got a job selling magazines door to door. It was so great that it gave me opportunity to learn the city. I was one of the best sellers. I would get prizes once a month for selling the most magazines.

A year later someone approached me with a job offer to be a traveling pharmaceutical representative. I accepted, and began my journey down south. It was so much fun. I met so many people and the journey was beautiful.

Three years later I had the opportunity to go to the United States. Without any thought I accepted. I then flew to Cincinnati Ohio. This was the hardest challenge for me because of the language barrier; again I made up my mind to learn the language and the laws of United States. Shortly after arriving I went to work in a five-star hotel as a housekeeper. One year later I was promoted to a supervisor. I stayed there nine years.

During that time I met a wonderful gentleman. We dated for a year and then got married. Our first daughter arrived two years later. Our second daughter was born four years later. When my children started elementary school, I decided to accomplish one more thing, cosmetology school. I attended school and obtained my Managing Cosmetologist and Instructor's License. I had a successful working career in a salon in one of the city's department stores. While working there I won a trip to London, England, to a world-wide hair convention.

My husband and I are retired now. My two daughters are married to great guys. We have an eight-month-old grandson. Through the years I have traveled into the United States and other parts of the world. I have encountered so much beauty, experience, happiness, and a great family. That is what I found on the other side of the mountains.

~ *Velia Ripperger*

Miracle in the Mediterranean

You can already see the 2000-year-old miracle from the airplane as it begins its descent; the white sandy beaches that outline the pristine blue water of the Mediterranean. Its beauty invites you. In just a few minutes you will land and arrive at Ben Gurion airport, located halfway between the ancient, holy city of Jerusalem and the much newer urban center of Tel Aviv. From the moment you land, you know this trip will be like no other.

From the airport, it's an historical 1½ hour drive to Jerusalem, up through the mountains of green forests until you reach the summit and "The City of David," Jerusalem. You can immediately feel you are in a special place, that you are at the center of the world.

Jerusalem has a history that goes back to the fourth millennium BCE but was chosen as the capital of the Jewish nation in 1000 BCE. Today, Jerusalem is the center of the world's three major religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Muslim. "The Old City" is home to sites of key religious importance. Among them are the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Dome of the Rock, and al-Aqsa Mosque.

The city is really a city within a city. The old walled city is divided into four quarters, named for the churches that dominate them; Jewish, Armenian, Christian, and Muslim. Outside of the walled city is the modern city of Jerusalem which houses the Knesset, Israel's parliament, shopping malls, five-star hotels, and all the amenities of a twenty-first century growing city. The exception is on the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday, when the city sleeps.

The most holy part of Jerusalem is located in the old city and is referred to as the Western Wall. This is the part of the wall of the Jewish Second Temple that the Romans destroyed in 70 CE. Jews from all over the world come to pray or to leave written messages. But the "new city" of Jerusalem has more to offer: museums, fashionable and ethnically diverse restaurants,

many outdoor cafes featuring exotic and authentic foods from the Middle East and all over the world.

Traveling east out of the city for a short twenty-minute drive, you will arrive in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. There you will find the Church of the Nativity, a favorite pilgrimage site for Christian tourists.

If you continue to drive east for another fifty minutes, you will reach the lowest place in the world where you can experience the magic of floating on water in which you cannot drown: the Dead Sea. This body of water is so salty that there is no organic life in it. A favorite tourist picture shows a person lying on his back on top of the water reading a newspaper! But many tourists from around the globe also come for the healing properties of the water and the mud packs. It is said that the air around the sea has a healing quality. Some tourists have even sworn it removed their warts. But all around, you are surrounded by the beauty of the hills and mountains of the Judean desert. The weather is always hot and sunny, as it rains very rarely.

I am originally from Israel. I remember my first visit to Jerusalem when I was nine or ten years old. It made a big impression on me. Now, I have lived more than half of my life, and I have visited many other world cities. But there is no other city on earth where you can feel history in your bones like you can in Jerusalem.

When you go to Israel, the country that made the desert bloom, don't end your trip in Jerusalem. North, South, East and West, you can experience the beauty, history, and specialness of the whole country. It is for everyone, so come...and enjoy!

~ Hanoch Grinshpan

What Is the Soul of My Country?

Colombia, my home country, is often shown by Hollywood or international news as a place full of drugs and violence, in a stereotypical way. Not everybody knows the real soul of my country. I'll give you an idea from my experience as an au pair in the United States, a student of ESL classes living in this American culture, how beautiful my country is. And I'll also let you know a little bit more about this stunning Latin American country. It has problems like all nations, but with great expectations about its present and future.

Colombia is a gorgeous country considered the gateway to South America. The stark gray of the mountains, the lavish green of the Amazon and the deep blue of both oceans, Atlantic and Pacific, are the canvas of my home. These gifts make it one of the places on the planet with the most exuberant and diverse flora and fauna.

It has five regions, like the regions in the USA, and thirty two "departments," similar to your states. It is full of colors, food, music, flavors, sites, and forty-four million hardworking, kind people who work every day to build a peaceful and dynamic country. The people are usually happy despite the difficult situations they face daily. In addition, they are women and men with problems, but who is not hindered by problems?

This is Colombia, a place with many festivals, celebrations, and concerts. Examples of our vibrant culture are Barranquilla's Carnival, the International Book Fair in Bogota, or Miss Beauty Queen in Cartagena. The music of my country is as varied as the landscape. Vallenato music is one of my favorites; the accordion and the rhythm make me feel closer to my home. The Salsa and Merengue are from inside of the country, Llanera from the Southeast, Pop Rock from all parts, and many others. Moreover, good singers of Colombia are internationally recognized, such as Juanes, Shakira, Carlos Vives, Fonseca, Fanny Lu, Jorge Celedon. These singers give passionate performances with each one of their songs.

Similarly, there are good actresses such as Catalina Sandino, who was nominated in 2005 at the Academy Awards in the category of Outstanding Lead Actress, becoming the first Colombian to get this distinction. She was one of only three Latin American actresses nominated for an Academy Award.

Likewise, Gabriel Garcia Marquez was born in Aracataca, Colombia, in 1927. He is a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and journalist. In fact, he is considered one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century. Additionally, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 “for his novels and short stories, where fantasy and reality are combined in a peaceful world of rich imagination, reflecting the life and conflicts of a continent,” according to the laudatory Swedish Academy. His novel most recognized internationally is *One-Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien Años de Soledad*).

At the same time there are many good athletes in Colombia; however, the sports are different from those in the USA. The popular sports are soccer, cycling, swimming, race car driving, tennis, and others that provide so much fun. There are excellent athletes like Carlos Valderrama, “El Pibe” with his mass of blond hair, who captained the Colombian national soccer team in the ‘90s and in addition, three World Cups. Juan Pablo Montoya is a race car driver; currently, he competes in NASCAR, and many others.

Colombia has one of the greatest tropical climates in the world. In fact the average is not the same across the territory. For instance, Bogota is 2600 m above the sea level and the Valley of the Magdalena River is 300 m above sea level. That means you could travel around it according to your preferences. They provide a most beautiful place to live. In addition to this, there is colonial architecture based on Spanish architecture from the era of colonization in Colombia. Furthermore, there are exquisite women, coffee and orchids, recognized at the international level. Finally, its racial identity, ideology, and culture add to the Colombian experience.

Spanish is our official language with different accents in spite of speaking the same language. The vocabulary around its regions is totally different; sixty-five ethnic languages have been studied by many linguists, because they belong to the cultural and social heritage of Colombia.

Finally, I should say one more thing about this marvelous place....All of you are totally welcome to come, enjoy, and taste our most complete and beautiful weather, food, coffee, music, carnivals, beaches, and warm people never seen before. Discover what is the soul of my country...Colombia.

~Yuleidy Lizarazo

A Wise Decision

In 1993 after I had married my husband, I came to the United States. He wanted to live in the U.S.A. after he had finished his college degree at Y.S.U. He felt we could have a better life here as opposed to a life back home in Jerusalem.

When I came to the U.S., I was so happy because I love my husband, and I wanted to go with him anywhere he wanted to go. However, after a while I started to get bored because I had nothing to do while my husband worked many hours a day. We didn't have children yet. I had no job, no friends, and no family nearby! Everything was difficult for me!

Later I started to work with my husband, and I liked doing so. Then I had my children. So I stayed home because I wanted to rear my children.

Today I am happy and busy, but I miss my family overseas. Whenever I have any small problem, I feel it is big because I have no help. I would love to move back home to Jerusalem, and my children want to go back too because they have many cousins and friends there. My husband can go back and forth between the two countries until he has set up a good business in Palestine.

So we have decided to go back this coming summer.

~ Manal Ilaiyan

Harmony

Seasons Changed and Rearranged

Some people enjoy the constant warmth of the southern or western climates; others enjoy the changes that the seasons bring. I enjoy the variety of the seasons, but to a lesser extent the length of the seasons. My ideal climate doesn't exist in reality, but living in Ohio is the closest thing to it. My ideal climate is a mixture of the best in all the seasons but not with the same time frame. Spring would last two months, summer would be four months long, fall would be a little over five months, and winter would be a few short weeks!

The new awakenings of spring put a smile on my face. Seeing the daffodils begin to bud along the roadside brings the deeply buried feelings of energy and excitement out of hibernation. The days grow sunnier and longer. As the season progresses, several varieties of flowers and shrubs begin to bloom. The colorful displays of pinks, purples, blues and whites are a visual delight.

With the approach of summer, the flowery displays have now become the norm and there is not such a strong interest in their abundance as there was a few short weeks ago. But the warm temperatures and the wispy breezes are a walker's delight. On these types of days, I feel like I could walk forever without growing tired. I find that the summer evening warmth is the perfect time to sit and gaze at the stars and ponder the next day's activities. On the other hand, a powerful thunderstorm off in the distance is a display that I find fascinating. A good summer is full of sunny days and vivid thunderstorms.

The mild temperatures and changing leaves in the fall mark what is probably my favorite visual season. When driving along through the countryside and reaching a crest in the road, the colorful displays of reds, oranges, and yellows can be seen for miles. The contrasts in vividness are truly amazing. Still driving down that same countryside road, I can travel through a heavily wooded area of trees overhanging the road. It feels like a picture right out of Norman Rockwell's abundance of paintings.

Lastly, what would the winter holidays be without the sight of freshly fallen snow? The earth feels clean and at peace in the silence of a winter's night. The snow would last for a few short weeks from mid-December through January's beginning. It would be the soft, fluffy kind of snow that would not cause havoc when one walks or drives from place to place. To sit by a blazing fire with a good book, an afghan, and hot chocolate (in view of the picture window!) with light snow falling is the best way to enjoy a winter's day.

All the seasons have something good in them that I enjoy. I just wish the gloominess of a misty, foggy rain and the bone-chilling cold that hits Ohio quite frequently would find another place to take up residence!

~ Cheryl Brazie

The Vacation

There once was a group of three friends that spent a lot of time together. They went shopping together and even vacationed together. They met in school and that was where their friendship began.

One day they planned a camping vacation. They left early and finally arrived at the entrance to their campground. Out of nowhere, a bird flew in front of their truck and hit the windshield. The girls got out of the truck and found the bird with a hurt wing. They picked up the bird and gave it food and took care of it. Soon, the bird was able to make short flights, and finally it was well, but it never left them. It went everywhere with the friends while they enjoyed their camping vacation.

One morning they decided to go exploring. They found a beautiful lake. Walking along the shore they saw a crocodile and were afraid and began to run. One of them noticed something and said, "Don't run. Come and see this poor animal."

They saw that the crocodile was bleeding and had a harpoon stuck in his back. The friends moved closer and closer, speaking in soft voices until they got close enough to remove the harpoon. Finally, the crocodile began to move slowly into the water, and the friends went on their way.

A little farther in a field, they found a beautiful white horse that was running from one end of the field to the other. The friends watched. One of the friends who liked bubble gum took a pack of gum from her backpack and asked her friends if anyone wanted a piece of gum. At that moment, the beautiful horse came to her and smelled her hand as if to say, "Me, me, I want a piece of gum!" The girl was surprised, but she gave the horse a stick of gum. The horse started chewing it and as the friends walked away, the horse followed them. At the end of their day, the friends returned to their campground followed by the horse.

The next morning they had a big surprise when they found fresh fish in front of their tent. They didn't know who had brought them. Then one girl noticed the crocodile slowly coming toward them with more fish in its mouth as thanks for the help on the previous day.

It was incredible, but in just a few days the friends had made lots more friends so they decided to name them. They named the horse Turlututu, and they named the bird Risas. And they named the crocodile Fisher. One of the friends got out her camera and said she wanted to take a group picture. Another friend put a small bow tie with red and blue stripes on the bird. Lots of pictures were taken.

Their vacation was almost over, and the friends were very happy that they had had such a wonderful time and had made so many new friends. They were laughing and talking in the camp when a black limousine entered the campground. The friends were wondering who was inside. They were surprised when the people got out and asked if they could spend the night and share some food and water. The friends said, "Of course," and asked whether these people were lost.

The visitors said, "No, we're here to work. We're going to photograph and film here in the countryside."

One of the friends asked, "What kind of work do you do?" The visitors said that they worked for *National Geographic* magazine.

One of the friends said, "Then you would probably like to take some photographs of our new friends." The friend started to explain how they had met each of their new animal friends. The visitors from *National Geographic* listened with interest to the story. Before the friends knew it, their photos and story were in the famous *National Geographic* magazine!

~ Irza Flickinger

My Most Memorable Day

I knew I was headed for a hair-raising experience when I saw the pamphlet advertisement. The day I took a guided horseback ride through Bryce Canyon National Park became a memorable excursion, unlike any other. The selection of the groups and their guides, the narrow path that wound down to the bottom of the canyon, and the beautiful landscape were all I needed to hope that someday I would return again to this exhilarating expedition. A guided horseback ride onto the floor of Bryce Canyon tested my spirit and resolution.

To begin with, the horses in the corral were the biggest I had ever seen. Tied to their posts and dusty, I knew they had blazed this trail many times. Trail guides were busy preparing for the journey, talking among themselves, and welcoming the tourists. I felt a great sense of apprehension about the ride, but the trail guide assured me these horses were skilled and well trained. While this may have been true, my instincts told me to run. Everyone mounted the horse chosen for them by the guide, and then the process of appointing trail hands with groups began. I was assigned to the last group and the last guide. I felt certain this would guarantee me the expert leader.

After receiving our riding instructions, we headed toward the canyon to begin our descent. Leaving Sunrise Point, the trail was narrow with drop offs on both sides. Soon on our way, we passed a woman walking back from the group up ahead. She had been so frightened during the ride that she abandoned her horse and walked back to the corral. Feeling threatened, I determined not to speculate what might be waiting for me up ahead. With great anticipation, I watched our guide take the reins of her horse and proceed to lead us down the chancy trail. I was petrified while my horse mastered the sharp switchback with barely room to maneuver. My horse skillfully placed his feet near the edge of the trail while following behind the rider ahead of him. Slowly and steadily, my horse made turn after turn. As my heart raced and panic overtook me, I remembered what the expert guide

instructed each one of us to do, "Trust your horse; he is sure of his footing." I knew if I was ever going to enjoy this adventure I would have to do just that. Besides, as I looked around, the other horses were rehearsing the same routine. So I began to relax and trust my horse for the thrilling descent to the bottom of the canyon floor.

In any event, the frightening experience to begin with could not diminish the astounding beauty of what I viewed on the two-hour ride that memorable day. In particular, the skies were brilliant and nothing could shut out the sun's rays. We rode on, viewing some of the oldest Joshua trees and rock formations, thousands of years in the making. Majestic views, compelling photo op's, and the good humor from our trail guide made this an unforgettable day.

On the whole, the horseback ride through Bryce Canyon was a thrilling adventure. The dependable horses and cowboys were the authentic players in this drama. With the scary descent to the canyon floor and the enchanting rock pinnacles, one can see how this day was exhilarating. I had learned to trust man's oldest and most reliable mode of transportation to take me on a trip to see the world from a new perspective.

~ Linda Neal

Ice

Shimmering rainbows on every tree
Such a beautiful sight for you to see
Bright sunlight shining through
God's beauty for me and you

Icy, cold weather keeps people inside
Furry little creatures
Stay inside and hide

Light snow flakes are falling down
Rock salt and shovels
Are the only sound

I love the fresh air
That blows on my face
I need to walk
A short step pace

~ Theresa Hall

A Trunk Called the Heart

I have tickled my sister to stop her from crying.
I have played with a candle and burned myself.
I have blown a bubble that broke and covered my face.
I have talked with a mirror to get a reflection
and have even played at being a witch.
I have always wanted to be an astronaut, a poet, a magician,
a hunter, and a trapeze artist.
I have hidden behind a curtain and have forgotten
that my feet were sticking out.
I have made a crank call.
I have taken a shower in the rain
and ended up addicted to running in the rain.
I have stolen kisses and had confused feelings.
I have taken wrong shortcuts and kept walking into the unknown.
I have licked the pan of Brigadeiro candy.
I have cried listening to music on the bus.
I have tried to forget dear friends,
but I discovered that they are the hardest to forget.
I have walked up hidden stairs to a roof to try to get to the stars.
I have climbed a tree to steal the fruit.
I have slid down the banister from the top floor.
I have made eternal vows.
I have written on the school wall.
I have cried sitting on the bathroom floor.
I have run away from home, forever,
and have come back at the same time.
I have run to someone, sobbing.
I have been alone in the middle of a thousand people,
missing someone.
I have seen a sunset, pink and orange.
I have jumped in a pool with no desire to return.
I have drunk whiskey until my lips felt numb.
I have looked up to the city and still could not find my place.
I have awakened in the night, afraid to rise, shaken from nerves,
and almost died of love.
Yet I have been born again to see the smile of someone special.

I have run barefoot in the street, cried with happiness.
I have lain on the grass at dawn
and have seen the moon turn to sun.
I have stolen a huge rose from a garden.
I have loved and thought it was forever,
but it was always half a "forever."
I have cried to see friends leaving,
But I have soon discovered that new friends arrive,
And life is coming and going without reason.
So many things I have done,
So many moments I have photographed
through the lens of emotion,
and stored in a trunk, called the heart.

~ Lais Felix

Sinthominic

“Since the Beginning of Time”

As the wind blows through the trees,
Indians play their instruments with the breeze.
Some people say they can still hear them in their dreams.

“Wake up with the sunbeams
upon your face as they glare
through the window with grace.”

Sometimes you wish you were with them,
And sometimes you really are.
The rhythm of their soft cries is just in the eagle’s eyes.

~ *Chrissi Brown*

Moments at the River

I get on my bike and start to ride.
Along the way I pass the park.
I feel like I am on a journey to some far-away place.
As I go over the hills, seeing people on my left and right,
I ride down to the river.
When I get there, I sit on a log and start thinking about my past.
I watch the sunlight shimmer off the river.
It makes me feel warm on the inside.
As I watch the river flow by it calms me down on the inside,
quiets my thoughts.
I don't know why I'm happy when I am here;
it's like some incredible power here.
Words can't begin to describe what it is like to be here.
Sometimes I sing when I'm down by the river.
No one has ever heard me sing before.
When I start to sing, suddenly life seems to slow down a bit.
It's like the river wants to hear me sing to it.
The songs I sing are picked by the river.
It's like the river knows what I am feeling in my heart,
then picks out what I need.
I sing the song as I sit there on a log watching the river go by
until the sunset's rays turn into darkness.
Then I go home back over the hills, past the park, and home again.

~ Ashley Dingey

Fall – the Beginning of the End

Crisp air blows against my face
Smell the burning pumpkins
Atomic explosion of colors
Leaves crunch beneath my boots
Ghosts and goblins from dusk to dawn
Give thanks to all
The snow will fall
And the sun will go away
To rise again in May.

*~ Live Oaks Group Project:
Carolyn Colwell
Chris Meier
Ethen Morehead
Alex Price
Jasmin Reinmoeller*

Storm

Faint whisper
Calm stillness
To all living things
This feeling you get just before
a strong rain.
Lightning
Erupts the heavens around
Turn night into day without a peep or sound
Your blue-white arms of fearsome power
can make the strongest tremble with fear and cower.
Thunder
As if a mighty stone fist striking the ground
Trembling, shaking, you can feel the sound
Rushing through your body like a tremendous wave.
With love and fear I bear witness to thee.
Your power and glory are not wasted on me.

Birthed 11/18/09

~ Billy Wagner

Summer

Summer
Steamy, Colorful
Swimming, Playing, Fishing
Sweat, Heat, Shiver, Cold
Skiing, Skating, Sledding
Frosty, Barren
Winter

~ *Sheila Hightower*

Dissonance

The Truth About Drug Addiction and How it Affects One's Life

If there was only one profession/career that I could be, it would be a drug counselor. I think that would become my line of work because I've done every drug you can possibly think of. I've been strung out from the age of fourteen to twenty-one and am now working on my second year of sobriety. I've lost everything because of drugs and with the knowledge that I have gained, I want to use my life experience to help others. I now think that being a drug counselor is what I was put here to do.

When it all began, I was a sheltered kid who attended a private school. For crying out loud, I couldn't tell you what a joint was. I had never even seen a beer before, but when I was twelve, I had smoked my first joint. I wasn't pressured, and it wasn't the crowd of people I hung out with either. I was at my dad's house in Indiana, and I went through the house looking for it. I had seen him use it, and I knew he hid it. After about an hour of looking, I found it. I didn't know what it was. I thought it was dried up grass that smelled like a skunk. So, I used the machine I had seen him use and rolled it up and smoked it. After I was done, I felt really tired, disoriented, and sleepy. It almost felt like I was floating in the air. Needless to say, it was something I really liked and needed daily.

When I was fourteen years of age, I decided to move to Indiana. I was put in a public school instead of a private school to finish my education. During my freshman year, I was expelled for selling prescription drugs. I lost over a whole calendar year's worth of schooling, but I discovered cocaine for the first time. I was smoking at least four joints a day and doing about a half gram of coke a day. The way I was able to afford it was with my allowance. By that time I had found a different connection of getting it. I worked with a guy who would give me a pretty good deal. I was getting an eight ball (3½ grams) for seventy-five dollars.

When I was re-enrolled back into school a year later, I was able to find people to buy drugs. In school I was selling an eight ball a day for \$150, so I was able to make seventy-five dollars profit plus an eight ball to do for myself. When I had reached sixteen years of age, I had discovered what crank/crystal methamphetamine was. I didn't really like it all that much at first, but I had also started working in a restaurant, and there my taste for drugs accelerated. I had also picked up another coke dealer, a dealer who had more weight and better product. So along with a better dealer, my clientele got better and my tolerance got higher. I was selling a half ounce to an ounce and a quarter (14 grams – 35 grams) a day. I always ran around with no less than \$1600 in my back pocket, but I also learned how to cook crack (freebase cocaine) and got addicted to crack really bad. I got to where my crack/cocaine habit was \$750-\$850 daily. I snorted 7 grams in a half hour once.

I knew I was already too far gone to quit. If I didn't have any dope, I did pills (pain killers, downers, uppers). I'll put it to you this way; I've done every pill starting with Coricidin to Ecstasy (MDMA) to shooting up Oxycontin. That's not all I've done either. I've done MDMA, MDA, 2c-c2 (synthetic mescaline), acid, shrooms, peyote, PCP, and Fentanyl. You name it. I've done it. I've even shot up heroin. By the age of eighteen, I had already done every drug in the book. Soon after, I got very bad from the drugs and couldn't afford my habit. I started stealing and writing bad checks, forging other people's names to checks so I could get my fix. Soon after that, nothing was really doing anything for me, so I started smoking methamphetamine. I always told myself if I got to the point to where I could smoke a gram of crack/meth, roll over and go to sleep, there would be no point in doing it.

I got to that point. I could eat, sleep, and function on it, but couldn't function without it. I got bad enough on methamphetamine to where I was buying supplies to make it rather than buy it. I didn't spend as much money on it. I could buy a box of Sudafed, a couple bottles of iodine, lye, and red phosphorous and get three to four grams of meth. Those supplies only cost me about thirty-five dollars so I was saving a few hundred. I was so

strung out on dope/meth, my body weight got down to ninety-five pounds. My original body weight averaged between 155 to 163 pounds. I stayed on meth until I was tired of being sick and tired. I decided I wasn't going to live chasing that first hit anymore.

Overall, if you were to ask me if it was worth it all, I would truthfully answer, "Hell no!!" Don't get me wrong – I honestly love the buzz and the rush you get off the drugs I've done. I lost everything I once had, hitting rock bottom time and time again. I watched my own father bring me big black garbage bags. My own flesh and blood, my family, told me to throw my belongings in the bags and to get the f--- out of his house because I was no longer his son. Yes, that happened to me at the age of eighteen. I had no money, no gas, and nowhere to go. I lived out of my car for a couple days. If it wasn't for my sister helping me out, I would be living on the streets to this day.

When I was seventeen, I tried to commit suicide. I took over sixty over-the-counter sleep aids, twenty muscle relaxers, and eight prescription sleep aids. I was so far gone and strung out that I had hit rock bottom. If I hadn't made it to the hospital within a ten to fifteen minute time frame, my heart would have exploded in my chest. My heart rate was up to 176 to 183 beats per minute. I had lost everything. My whole family disowned me because of drugs.

I am twenty-three years old. I've had to start over five times. I'm a convicted felon because of a drug charge with an assault and battery charge with it. I'm not allowed to have a checking or bank account because of forging checks and writing bad ones. I can't even get a loan for a car or house because I messed up my credit. I'm almost \$20,000 in debt to hospitals because I went to every hospital faking a back injury so I could get pain pills. Was it worth it? Hell no! But these are the consequences I have to live with everyday of my life. Drugs aren't cool! They can ruin your life. I know because I've been there – they ruined mine. Hopefully, whoever reads this story will use it to help someone close to them. My name is Cody Edward Hunley and my second year of sobriety will be November 22, 2009. Until the day I die,

I will always be a drug addict. If you're reading this passage and you are hooked on drugs or on your way, quit doing dope. If you don't, you could wake up tomorrow and the dope could be controlling you. You are in control, drugs aren't – remember that! It's all in your head.

~ *Cody Hunley*

Life Is Like a Chess Game

Someone very close to me once said,
"Life is like a chess game."

If you don't straighten up
And watch yourself

It could be game over
And you will never get things out of checkmate.

~ *Cody Hunley*

The Reality of War

I had a dream when I was a small kid in India. It is still very clear in my mind. In my dream, I saw people coming and killing others, and we were hiding wherever we could – behind doors and under tables. I had this dream for many days.

Years later, we went to Kuwait. When Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, we were there. That was when I first felt the shadow of my childhood dream.

When the Iraqi soldiers came to Kuwait, they tortured, looted, and killed people. I heard stories about the kinds of torture they did, like pulling out people's nails, taking out their eyes, and cutting their hands. People were running for their lives because of the fear of war.

None of us left our homes during this time. If we needed water, the men who were staying in our building would get together, and go outside as a group.

From the first days of the invasion, people stocked all kinds of dried and frozen food. We hid this food and water under our beds because the Iraqi soldiers took whatever they could find. At night we were afraid to turn on a light because we didn't want anyone to know where we were staying.

We could hear the sound of guns in the distance. One day we heard the gunfire very close to our building, along with the noise of people crying and running away.

We had no way of contacting our family and friends. The TVs and phones had been disconnected. Everybody was panicked in this situation. Day by day, we lost any hope for escape. We considered nothing to be more important than our lives.

Then we got some wonderful news. Our names were on the evacuation list. We packed some necessary items, includ-

ing food for our journey. We traveled by bus from Kuwait to Iraq. This trip was dangerous because there were land mines hidden everywhere.

Late that night we reached a tent in the middle of an Iraqi desert. We had a torch with us, and the only other light we could depend on was the light of the moon. The tent was smelly and dirty. We managed to clean it up a little and spent the rest of the dark and windy night inside. I worried why we had been brought there in the middle of the night.

To my surprise, in the morning, a water tank and some food appeared. We also met a number of families who had been in the desert for many days and were waiting for a flight. Some of these people told us stories about their risky travel by car and how they had become lost in the desert because the border was closed.

By the grace of God we got our flight to Amman that same day. When we arrived in Amman, we had good accommodations. A lot of people were waiting there for a flight home. The next day we boarded a plane to India. We finally landed at the Bombay airport. After one night in Bombay, we traveled home by train.

Because of this experience, we saw for ourselves how good God is, and how he had protected our lives. We had arrived home before the war got worse. Thanks to God!

~ Rose Mathew

Recreating Me

Once upon a time there was a young boy named Byrd. He grew up in a poverty house, along with drugs. All he saw was gang activity and fast money.

When Byrd was a little boy, around six years old, his dad left him behind with one brother and two sisters. This made it very hard for his mother. Eventually he decided to sell drugs and run the streets with bad company. He thought this would be the easy way out, so he dropped out of school.

Everything was going great. Byrd had two cars and a lot of money. Then one day he decided to go to a place he knew would bring him a lot more trouble. Byrd didn't care about the choices he was about to make, even though his heart told him not to do it.

Byrd ended up in a lot of trouble with the police. He sold drugs to an informant and got caught. He went to jail for not listening to himself. He got two months in the county jail. The whole time his mom had been telling him to get his life together. All he could do in jail was think. He thought about the decisions he had made and the ones he had yet to make.

Now Byrd is out of jail. He is going back to school. All he thinks about is why he made those types of choices in life. He is eager to get his life on the right page. He wants to start his own businesses and own his own properties. He has good friends around him now. They want him to make the best decisions in life. With their support, he will break free from his old habits.

~ Offorie L. Banks

Brother of the Struggle

I am a part of the struggle
I was born through pain.
I am a black man
in search of change.
A convicted felon
with a lack of skills,
realistically speaking
how else can I feed my seed
and pay my bills?
Education I believe
is my last hope
and if not,
I guess it's back
to slinging dope.
Or robbing
or whatever else it takes
to eat.
I really want change
and to better myself,
but my ultimate battle
that I am losing
is against myself.

~ Chris Ware

Painful Memories

I am from Mexico City. Along with my parents, I have 7 sisters, and 1 brother. We are a typical middle-class family, but my childhood wasn't a normal one. When I started middle school, I realized that my family had a lot of problems. All our problems were the result of economic issues.

My father used to work for the government in Mexico City. He was making enough money to support us, but then everything changed when he had an accident. One night he was taking my pregnant cousin to the hospital, because she was in labor. He was crossing the street when a drunk driver hit him. My father was thrown a few meters away, but he was alive. The ambulance came and took him to the hospital. His two legs were completely destroyed. He also had broken ribs and a broken arm.

My father spent six months in the hospital. That whole time I only saw him once in the window from far away because my sister and I were too little to get in the hospital. I never got the opportunity to give him a hug or tell him how much I missed him.

Finally, my father came home, but then everything changed. My father lost his job. The government gave him a pension, but it wasn't enough money to support our family, because there were so many of us. The problems at home got worse because we didn't have enough money for our daily needs, such as food and clothing. That's when my father started drinking, which only made our problems worse. He started fighting with my mom every single day, and sometimes he got violent. When he was drunk, we were so scared! We knew that he was going to hit us, so we tried to hide and we prayed, but nothing really worked. He always found us.

I tried to concentrate on my education. That was the easiest way to forget about my family problems. In school, I met my best friend Veronica. We spent all the years of middle school together. We both liked to play basketball and study. She helped

me a lot. Those years at the middle school were the most beautiful moments in my life. But when we went to high school, the two of us had to separate because we went to different schools.

I have tried to forget this part of my childhood, but these memories still hurt my heart and sometimes make me cry.

A few years later, some of my sisters moved to the U.S.A. My mother decided to get a divorce from my father, but he wouldn't agree. The only way for her to leave my father was to move to another country. She decided to move with my sisters to the United States. I told her that I wanted to move with her, and that I didn't want to live with my father any more. She finally said yes. So we all came to the U.S.A. in 1996. The worst part was that we had to leave three of my younger sisters behind.

I was 16 years old when I came to the United States. The move was difficult. Everything was so different in America: the culture, language, and the food. I missed my sisters, my father and my friends. I often felt lonely. I was so depressed that I cried for days. Then, one day, I started to see everything in a different way. I knew that I needed to get strong, so I would be able to help my little sister come to America. After four years my sister immigrated to America. We finally had our family together again, except for my father. He still lives in Mexico, but he has changed a lot. We see him every year.

Nothing has been easy for me. But I think that all the problems and troubles I had as a child have made me a stronger person today. Now I'm happily married with a wonderful husband. We have three beautiful kids.

~ Juana Rueda

Pain

Pain

Why won't you go away
I have asked nicely
So why do you stay

Pain

I feel you in my sleep
Doctor after doctor
Medicine isn't cheap

Pain

Must you be so bad every day
Surgeries and injections
I'm feeling pain in every way

Pain

Please let my family be
I'm their mother and wife
Don't drain the life out of me

~ *Laura Meiers*

Road to Recovery

All the while I thought I was brave
But a path to destruction is what I paved.

I hid my fear behind anger and violence
Painfully my true intellect was silenced.

I suffered not due to others, only myself
It had reached a level that was detrimental to my health.

My heart was weak, my body was worn
Emotionally I had been stretched and torn.

Finally, at my bottom I heard a voice
I can change your life but you must make a choice.

Turn your life over to me
I'll open your heart and set you free.

Thus began my road to recovery.

~ Kory Barthany

Crescendo

Comparing My Life to Anne Frank's Life

When I read The Diary of Anne Frank for Reading Book Club in our ABLE class, I was struck by the similarities in Anne's life and my life. Anne grew up with the brutalities of war all around her, as I did. She suffered as a child but used books as an escape from her problems. Anne's emotional life had many ups and downs, as mine did.

I was born in Cambodia in 1980 after the war in which the Communists had taken over my country. My father was killed, and my family had escaped and was hiding in the forest. We went to live in a Red Cross refugee camp where I was given books to read. I taught myself to read while studying under a tree on the grounds. Like Anne, I found that books were a way for me to escape my surroundings. When we left the refugee camp I was 11 years old. I could only carry a few things with me, and I chose my books over my other belongings.

We moved to the country where land mines were hidden underground. People in my family were injured when trying to clear the land to build houses. I wanted so badly to learn more and go to school. We had little food or clothing. We were very poor, and I could not go to school because it was miles away, and I had to help my mother with all the chores and my younger brother and sisters.

I understand why Anne's story became so popular. When I read her story, it made my heart cry. Every time I read it, I understood more and more about her. Anne had no one to talk to about her emerging adulthood. She had conflicting emotions about her family and herself. I realized that I experienced many of the same emotions as she. I did not have friends to share and explore my feelings. My life was surrounded by terror much like Anne's.

I saw man's inhumanity to man, as Anne did. Anne lived in a concentration camp and died there. Thousands of people were

tortured and died around her. However, there were people who helped the Jews and risked their own lives. People were murdered and raped all around me in Cambodia. I also had the experience of a soldier who could have killed me when I was nine years old after finding out my father was a soldier in the anti-communist forces, but instead he let me go.

Anne's and my story should remind us how lucky we are to live in a country where freedom is enjoyed by everyone. In America we don't have to be afraid. The soldiers protect you and guard our country. There are so many opportunities here. There are people here who will help you reach your goals. You can work hard and enjoy a good life. Anne Frank died at a very young age and was not able to achieve all her dreams. However, I have the opportunity to get an education and realize my dreams. I am determined to do that.

~ Daovadi Chen

I Wish ...

I wish I had an older brother or sister;
They would have spoiled me.
I wish I were younger again;
I would've studied harder.
I could have concentrated on studying,
Not like right now.
I'm under a lot of pressure in my life;
There are too many things to be taken care of.
I wish I was more thoughtful.
If I were, I wouldn't have broken up with my first boyfriend;
I wouldn't have hurt him so much.
I wish I could have come to the U.S. earlier;
The economy is not so good now.
I wish my parents could live with me;
They're getting older.
If they could, I would be around them more often;
I could take good care of them.
I wish I had a daughter;
I would dress her up.
I wish I had a special skill;
I could find an easier job.
I wish I had a house;
I could decorate it nicely;
My son could have space to play;
I could have a study and a big kitchen.
I wish we were near China;
I could visit my family and my friends more often.
I miss them so much.
I wish I had good English,
That could make things a lot easier in my life.
I wish...
I have been working very hard these days;
I hope I can have a better life in my future,
And not just wish...

~Yuan Hua Li

On My Way

My life is changing every day.
My life is changing in every way.
It took awhile but I think I'm on track.
Now that I'm on my way, there's no turning back.
The future is all I see.
In five years where will I be?
A career, a family, I don't know.
I have a natural high instead of a natural low.
My life is finally coming together.
I will be grateful always and forever.

~Angela Harmon

Something for the Sistas

You can do what you do
You can do what you can
But no matter what
You can never change a no-good man.

You can pour your heart out to him
You can even try to bring him the world
But as soon as you turn your head
He's with a whole new girl.

Don't trap yourself and get pregnant
'Cause, boy, will you be stuck
You'll be taking care of a baby
Still won't have him and really be out of luck.

Get yourself together
For you don't need a man,
God gave you two feet and
On your own you must stand.

Stand up for your rights and don't let him take advantage of you
You are too beautiful to be mistreated
And the benefits – that's something you best not go through

Don't get me wrong, all men are not the same
But one thing for sure,
Ms. Car is not the one
And I'm not 'bout to play no games

Just a little word of advice for my sistas
Be all you can be
Don't take no crap
We are beautiful
And we deserve to be treated like QUEENS!

~ Caralissa Scott

Who Am I?

Who am I?
A cool guy
My presence strong
 like the scent of moonshine
Built with the integrity that is warm like sunshine.

I'm me, a tangible being
 who believes life is a procedure,
So I'm proceeding
 to dominate it any way I see fit.

I'm me, a person constructed
 by gifted hands
 from a greater being
 that I can't see – that we can't see.

A personage that wanders through life
 not yet aware of the potential
 to operate the tools
 that have been specially crafted for me

But striving to tap into the frequency
 to eliminate the fuzz
 and get a clear understanding
 of me.

~Vyrán Clark

Been There, Done That

Well, at this age, you're probably thinking you know it all, you don't need adults telling you what to do, and you know all there is to know. And here's the best, all you need is your friends. I thought that too at your age...

Read my story and you might think twice when you make your future choices. Around the 9th grade, I had a lot of friends. I hung around with Caucasians, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Italians, Greeks, jocks and burn-outs. I partied with everyone. If there was alcohol or weed, I was there! My grades were dropping, my mom was getting on my nerves, and it was all good because I had my friends. Or so I thought. I moved out of my house because my mom's husband was a drug addict and an alcoholic. I stayed with a few friends for awhile, bouncing from place to place. I finally got a job at Dairy Mart on Hillman Street and got a cheap apartment on top of a bar on South Avenue.

The more I partied, the less I cared about school. I was too worried about meeting up with this person or that person. Mr. Grohovac, my principal at the time, tried talking to me. He said I was a bright young lady with an incredible future ahead of me. Miss Ruffley also tried talking to me. She was my Commercial Art teacher at Choffin. She came to my house and job on several occasions to try to convince me to stay in school and to improve my skills. She kept telling me how talented I was and how I had the potential to really be successful in life. They both seemed sincere, but I didn't listen.

By the time I quit school my senior year, I had lost several friends. First, there was Nick. He was drunk, walking home, and decided to walk across the freeway. He was hit by a car. Then, there was Tony, walking home one night, who got shot in the head by a drive-by shooter. This one I really never got over. He was a football player, and a really good kid. He hung around with some partiers (you may call them gang bangers) but really didn't do anything wrong. The police thought it was drug related. We assumed it was

because he was a young black male. They never caught the shooter. Was Tony caught up with the wrong people or just in the wrong place at the wrong time?

I was young and thought I knew everything I needed to know. I didn't understand the whole "guilt by association" idea. Was Tony's death an accident? Probably not... Where were our friends then? We thought they had our backs... Then, there was Angie who disappeared after a night of partying with a few friends. The police found her head in a trash bag at McKelvey Lake. No one would speak up, nor was her killer or killers caught. Where were her friends? Who could do something like this? Did her punishment fit her lifestyle? She was the mother of two. What about her children?

Then there was Jimmy. We were all out riding around, drinking, and having a good time. We decided to go back to Jimmy's house and get everyone's motorcycles. At the last minute, I chose to go home instead of going with them. The next morning I received a phone call telling me that Jimmy had wrecked and died. I could have been on that bike with him. I was supposed to be on that bike with him! Sometimes you have to follow your gut feeling, your instinct, and not follow your friends. Jim hit the wall so hard on I-680, they had to have a closed casket at his funeral.

Through the years, I had made my choices, still continued to party, and had no intentions of finishing school. I started feeling my choices weren't there anymore. My best friend had just been murdered, I lost my job, I got really sick and had no medical insurance, nor did I have family to turn to. I didn't think it could get any worse. As I took a look around, I had to ask, "Where are my friends now?"

I realized I had to pick myself up and change things. I chose to completely cut-away my old, so called "friends." I finally got a job. I then went to a real friend whose family had stood by my side, picked myself back up, and changed my life by choice. I found a new circle of acquaintances; like I said before, I had to cut myself off from my old crowd. I met a new man, who ended

up becoming my husband. After 15 years of marriage and three children later, I realized I had changed my life. I have looked back at those people I used to hang around with. A lot of my old friends are either dead, in prison or jail, drug addicts, or just the same as before. They have no families or life to be proud of. Then I asked myself again, "Where are my friends?" I had two that stayed by my side through the years.

It takes time to realize your mistakes in life, to realize who your true friends are, and what to do to fix those mistakes. I lived and learned. I became a better mother than what I had growing up. I became a better person for being more active in my community with children who don't normally get the attention that they deserve. I went back to school to get my G.E.D... and will earn it. I can say to you, "I've been there and done that" and really mean it. Only one person can fix your life...AND THAT'S YOU!

~Tina Toporcer

Composing

Poem

I had a poem in my head and
I thought I would write it down,
but halfway through I thought I knew what it was about.

Now stuck here staring down on paper and pen in hand...
I thought if I kept on writing it would come to me, again.

Was it a poem about my past? Or maybe some point of view?
With my memory failing me...
anguish is what this poem is putting me through.

Staring at a blank page...Wait!!!! It's not blank any more!
I wrote this poem while not thinking...
maybe I should not think anymore.

~ Juanita Baisden

“To The Top”

A play written by and starring Live Oaks ABLE students

Director: Marty

Producers: Donna & Scottye

ACT I: (scene – first day of GED/ABLE class)

Nervous wreck
Didn't know what to expect
Not sure if I was going to get it right
Scared
Tried it before
Knew teachers were good
Felt like a loser and failure
But so glad I came back
Will stay until I reach my goal
Very tired, not wanting to test
“Please, please come in, glad to see you here,”
The teacher said to calm my nerves
Butterflies in my stomach
Been made fun of all my life
Thought teachers would tell me I couldn't do this
Happy because I knew I was not turning back
Relieved because I knew life would be better
Anxious because I wanted to know it all now!
Questions – can they really help me?
Will they judge me?
Say I'm a loser, deadbeat?
Will it be like all the other places I tried?
God, please give me the strength to walk through that door!

ACT II: (scene – settling into class/gaining confidence)

Hard to get to class – working full time
But feel so much better about myself when I do
Gained confidence I didn't know I had
Learning something new everyday
Know if I try hard enough I will succeed
Feel so proud of myself

See the whole world opening up for grabs
I don't give up anymore like I used to
Leave my troubles outside the door
My teachers keep on top of me
I know I am not a failure now
My teachers believe in me
And now I believe in myself
I am off to a great start
Learning faster than when I was a teenager
Feeling more confident with each class
A lot of positive energy from the teachers and students
I feel so much better about myself
Gaining ability to work out problems on my own
Never thought I'd learn this much in so little time
I think I am getting it

ACT III: (scene – reaching goals)

I'm doing flips – I'm a gymnast
I'm loving what I've accomplished
A boulder has been lifted from my shoulders
Peeled away like an onion
The day I pass will be a new start for me
To move on to better things
The teachers believed in me
They let me learn things I was told I never could
I now love to read and write
I know my GED is around the corner
And that is something I thought would never happen
Sometimes I wanted to give up
But I have held on – it was worth it
The climb was worth the courage it took to take the first step
I never felt so proud of myself
I reached the top!

~ Live Oaks Group Project: Sara Arthon, Toni Garcia,
Denis Rust, Claudia Rust, Sharon Cromer, Karen Brown,
April Norvell, Mindy Blaney, Billy Wagner, Anthony Nichols, Steve Baird,
Crystal McKnight, Cody Hunley, Doug Rasnick, Jerry Tharp, Laura Meiers

Writing

Willingness to share a part of yourself

Requires discipline and originality

Immortalizes your thoughts

Transports you to places in your heart

Is sometimes a struggle

Never easy but always worthwhile

Gives you the opportunity to become an author

~ Group Project:

Gaius Birkis

Starlee Bowling

Iglal Kuku

Kevin Mitishin

One Special Pen

I have a heavy, yellow pen made of metal. I like it very much because it not only brought me luck on the graduate entrance examination, but it also recorded an important period in my life that was very hard. At that time, I was unhappy about many things in my life. I felt that it wasn't the life I wanted to have and I needed to make a drastic change. So I began to prepare for the graduate entrance exam. I used up lots of pencils doing all the exercises and then purchased the metal pen because of its durability. I did well on the exam and feel I owe it to that special pen, which always reminds me that luck depends on hard work.

~ *Benny Wang*

Learning English

Learning English is like a cup of coffee that we can smell from ten miles away. Before we can enjoy it, we have to take the journey.

Learning English feels like climbing a mountain. We have to struggle to get to the top.

Learning English looks like kids on the first day of school. We are so excited, yet nervous about the new experience.

Learning English sounds like electronic music. Sometimes it makes us feel good, but sometimes it makes us feel bad.

Learning English tastes like eating peanut butter. It's sticky, but we enjoy it every day.

Learning English is like running a marathon. We need strength, endurance, and perseverance.

~ Live Oaks Group Project:

Deniz Demircan

Lais Felix

Maria Giuliberti

Betty Krimmer

Yuan Hua Li

Sara Revilla

Fabiana Silva

Lyrical

Exercise?

Some people think that regular exercise is good for you. These people would have you believe that the more you exercise, the longer your life will be. You'll be thinner, you'll have more energy, and you'll be a magnet for the ladies, or the guys, or whatever you prefer. Why, you might even live forever. You're sold, right? Well, allow me to rain on the parade...

When you exercise, you get your body in shape, you get your muscles strong, and you release stress... They say. A healthy lifestyle with regular exercise can be beneficial for some, but the truth is what's good for one person, might not be good for another. The *crème de la crème*, though, is this: Everyone dies. Senior weight lifters who sell juicers, to Herculean body builders will die. It's the one thing we're all born to do, and the one thing that we all get right.

I have a friend who obsesses on his exercise and what he eats. Running until he pukes, eating cardboard flavored health food, and obsessing on his physique. Is that what life is, though? Every second we're alive is a blessing, every breath we take bringing us closer and closer to our sweet reward, but here's this guy, counting calories and eating something about as delectable as a sandal. Is that the price of the immortality this lifestyle offers us?

Now, you'd think my friend who works out a lot would be stress free, since exercise helps decrease stress. If not stress free, perhaps more adept at coping with the many problems one faces in this adventure called Life. Sorry, old chum. I'm afraid not. I'm sorry to say that this feller has Biblical freak outs.

The truth is exercise helps you stay in shape, but with hereditary diseases, cancers, and all the uncertainties in life, it's more important to just stop and enjoy breathing every once in a while. Better yet, stop and eat a cheeseburger. I maintain that you can't ever really say you've lived life to its fullest until you've sunk your teeth into charred mammal flesh covered in gooey cheese,

smacked between two pieces of bread, but I digress.

Back on track! What these diet gurus with perfectly sculpted abs fail to tell us in their infomercials is that genetics play more of a role in our life-spans and our physical appearance than who runs sixteen miles or who can bench-press an Escalade. No amount of exercise can save you from the Reaper. Run as fast as you can; the Reaper can run faster.

In the final analysis, I say exercise... some. Yeah, I said exercise some! It'll make your life healthier for sure, but like fast food, or sugary snacks – all things in moderation. Even too much exercise can be a bad thing. Life is about living. Enjoy every second that's given to you. Some of us are given eighty years to enjoy it, others no time at all. Life is a precious gift, too important to spend every waking minute cramped up in a sweaty gym, or eating chemically enhanced protein nibs.

Until next time, live, eat, drink, and be merry! You might just live to see pigs fly, and with the genetics of today, that may be sooner than you think. Or you might not make it to the end of this sentence. The ball's in your court. Cheers!

~ *Christopher Meier*

My Closet

I don't know what to wear
When I have to go somewhere.
When the sun comes up
Another challenge fills my cup.
During the day, so many things to do;
Go to work, go to school.
Before I make a move,
What colors will I choose?
Red, yellow, blue, or green,
Find something that makes me seen.
After I find something good to wear,
I think about my shoes... which pair?
After three minutes in the closet,
I feel terribly exhausted.
But I won't fear
I'm in a good mood here.

Working all day
Listening to my boss,
He's a pain in the neck
And I'm ready to get lost.
I'm finally at home enjoying my family,
Time with those I love so dearly.
My husband and kids,
My cat and my dog;
I must say out loud
Oh, thank you, Lord.

Now it's time to rest.
My head on the pillow is the best.
I sleep well all night,
But when I open my eyes, the closet is my first sight.
Oh, here we go again....
I don't know what to wear
When I have to go somewhere!

~ Juan Leyria

Limerick

There was an old lady named Ruth,
Who sat in the corner booth.
She had a bad pain,
That drove her insane.
Turned out it was a bad tooth.

~ Dave Humphries

The Wasp

Any change in your life should be progress is stated in a Romanian proverb. I thought of how exciting it would be for me if I change my residence location to another one that is more advanced, more civilized, and with a variety of cultures. This could be America.

I had some experience moving from one place to another. I had moved from Moldova (over a hundred kilometers from Bucharest) to Bucharest. It was 1954. Now, in 1985, I changed my country to America. As a refugee, I came to be with new people, a new life, and a new start.

Youngstown is the city where I started a new life. I had no car, no job, no friends ... nothing! I couldn't communicate at all, only "excuse me" and "OK" but nothing else in this new language. From the north side of Youngstown to downtown was too far to walk. I took the bus. I wanted to see my new city. The bus was crowded, and there was no seat for me. Emotionally I wanted to speak to people, to say, "Hey, listen to me, I am new here. I am Grigore and I came here two days ago from far away to live with you. Do you accept me? I am a good man and I have a family." I wanted to speak but I couldn't. I needed something to attract these people who were young and old, men and women, and black and white. Soon this "something" came instantly ... it was a wasp!

Just after three bus stops as the driver opened the door for people to come in and get out, a small intruder came inside. It was a wasp! All of us were agitated and trying to avoid being stung by this little creature. The driver stopped the bus. Only one person was trying to catch the ugly dangerous insect and that person was me!

With a piece of tissue from my pocket I followed the wasp everywhere it flew. I kept bumping people on the bus. I was saying, "Excuse me, OK? Excuse me, OK?" Finally, I got it. I caught the wasp and threw it away. The reward was wonderful. People

were talking to me! I didn't understand them but I answered by saying, "Grigore from Romania" again and again. It was a beautiful evening in November of 1985.

~ Gregory Fesko

Like Coffee

Smooth but strong
My emotions are the flavors
That come from deep within the bean
My soul screams white like the cream
In my coffee bursting with Colombian steam
Hot with the heat of my anger
Double dip of chocolate
To top off the caffeine
Keep my spirit high
Like the sugar I claim
The spoon of life stirs me up
Like Maxwell House, I was good to the last drop in my cup

~ Marketa Slaughter

Sports: Great Exercise, but Are They as Fun to Watch?

My name is Corne Eksteen, and I'm from South Africa. I have been living in Cincinnati, Ohio, for four months because I am an au pair. In South Africa there are a variety of sports, but America has more, like basketball. I recently experienced my first time watching a basketball game live in a basketball arena.

It was a cold, wet Sunday morning as I looked out of the window, but I was still excited to go and watch the Louisville/Cincinnati basketball game. After a warm shower, I walked to the kitchen to get myself a bowl of cereal while I was waiting for the time to pass, until we were supposed to leave for the game.

As it was raining down on the cars, the wipers cleared my vision to see all the sports fields of the University of Louisville, and I realized we were almost there. When we got to the basketball arena called Freedom Hall, there were only a few cars, but that didn't surprise me. Normally the parking area would be full of cars with fans tailgating – barbecuing before the game. The rain, however, didn't make that possible with everybody just getting out of their cars and running to the Freedom Hall to evade the rain. While we were standing outside waiting for the doors to open, I realized that everybody was wearing fan apparel of their respective teams.

When the doors opened, there was a tall young man standing at the door, scanning our tickets before we were allowed to enter the stadium. After the young man scanned my ticket, I walked through the doors, overwhelmed to see what you can do and what you can buy to support your team. While we were walking around the stadium looking for our seats, I observed all the people around me. Everybody looked so happy, laughing, and having a good time with friends and family, giving me a warm feeling inside.

When we found our seats, we sat down and waited for the clock to count down – thirty minutes until the game started. While the clock was counting down, both teams were busy warming up on the court. As it got closer to tipoff time, we sang the National Anthem and the lights went off with only one spotlight on the court where the players were standing. The music started to play, and one loud voice introduced the team to the crowd. That was unbelievable.

The whistle blew and the game started. Everybody went crazy as the team scored its first goal. With the first time-out, the cheerleaders and the card girls danced with the band playing in the background, while the teams had their team talk. After the time-out, the game went on at the same place where it stopped before the time-out. The crowd started to scream “defense, defense!” I thought to myself that it was so worth it, to wake up early on a rainy Sunday morning, to stand in a line to get into the arena, to get a drink, to go to the restroom, and to sit next to a total stranger.

The best part was yet to come. During half time they honored a few people who had season tickets for over forty years. Now isn't that a good reason why sports is not just good exercise, but also fun to watch?

~ Corne Eksteen

Rhapsody

My Freshman Year

It was March 31, 1976, and it was my freshman year of high school. I was so excited that my father was dropping me off at school for my first donkey basketball game. I went in the school, and I started talking to a couple of my friends who told me that two of my other friends didn't have a ride to the game. Seven of us jumped into our friend's 1969 station wagon. There was a driver, my friend's brother, and four other girl friends. This was a disaster waiting to happen. Needless to say, we didn't make it back to the donkey basketball game.

The driver, who was a new driver, decided she wanted to drive fast. We told her over and over again to slow down, but she didn't listen. She lost control on an S-curve on Hutchison Road in Newtownsville. Everyone was able to get out of the car except me. I was trapped under the engine of the car, and it took the EMTs about 2½ hours to get me out. One of the EMTs knew who I was, so he sent the police officer to my parents' house. My father answered the door, and the officer told him about the accident. He just couldn't believe it. My father told him I couldn't have been in a car accident because he had driven me to school. Dad was in shock!

After the EMTs got me out from under the engine, they took me to the nearest hospital. Later that night they found out that my pelvis was broken, and my left shoulder was pulled out of its socket. My face, which had cuts all over it, had to be stitched up. I was a mess. In fact, a month later I was still in a wheelchair. I had to go through a lot of therapy before I could walk again. How crummy is it to be sixteen, in a wheelchair, and learning to walk again? I felt like a 12-month-old child learning to walk.

There were six other kids in the car – three in the front with me, three in the back seat. The two girls in the front also got hurt. One of the girls went through the windshield, while the other girl had her leg broken in three different places. The driver didn't get hurt, nor did the three in the back seat. We all made it

back to school about one month later.

The kids at school had started calling us Hip, Crip and Stitch. I was Hip, because of my broken pelvis, the girl that had her leg broken was Crip, and the girl that went through the windshield was Stitch. Stitch had to get 74 stitches across her forehead. She had to go through a couple of plastic surgeries because of her scars. It split her head wide open. We were all lucky that we didn't get killed. I'm thinking the only thing that saved us was the 1969 station wagon – it's a heavy-duty car. If we had been in a newer vehicle, we possibly would all have died.

I have two children now, and I worry about what impulsive action they may take. I have told them this story many times and explained how crazy it is to get into a car with excited kids and new drivers. They need to understand the danger of kids and cars. I was one of the lucky ones; some are not.

~ April Norvell

The Scariest Day of My Life

I was almost done with all my exams in medical school in Nicaragua. I had to take the Gynecology exam on December 18. I was praying that I would have time to finish my last test before my daughter was born. My daughter was born on December 19, right on time.

The day she was born, I had been in class in the hospital all morning. Everything was fine when I returned to my house, and I decided to go to the house next door to give a classmate the notes I had taken that morning. As I was walking back to my house, I felt a movement in my womb, and I immediately looked on the floor, but I saw nothing.

I told my husband what had happened. I was a little scared! Since he was also a doctor, he examined me and told me that we needed to go to the hospital because I was starting to dilate. I was all ready for this day. In a bag, I had my prenatal medical records, but we were so nervous that we forgot the bag!

When we got to the hospital we knew a lot of people because both of us were students at that hospital. My pains continued, but it only hurt a little, not too much.

The nurse put me in a wheelchair. When I got to the labor room, the pain and the contractions were fewer. The doctor came in to help. When he was putting a catheter in me, he made a medical mistake, which caused my membranes to rupture prematurely. He told me to start pushing continuously. When another woman doctor saw how I was being treated, she ran to get the director of the hospital.

But she was too late. I had spent a long time pushing and I didn't have any more strength to continue. The nurses gave me Oxytocin so I would have more contractions and my baby would be born quickly. Then two women sat on me, right on top of my big stomach! I was so scared for my daughter! I was afraid that she

would be injured by the weight of those two women. I prayed to see my baby be born healthy. Finally she was born.

I didn't hear my daughter cry, and I was very worried! I said, "My baby doesn't cry!" The pediatrician told me not to be upset. He aspirated her mouth and nose. At last I listened to the first cry of my baby! I felt so happy!

My daughter was born with a lot of black hair. She had grayish blue eyes, and a red, round face that looked like a tomato. She was a big baby, weighing 8 pounds and 14 ounces. December 19 was so special to me. After all the stress and worry that day, I received the best gift: a normal healthy baby girl!

~Tania Montalban

Lil' Chris

Lil' Chris is what we called him.
We named him after his dad.
We were so excited, as time went on,
To deliver this child we had.

The labor came two months too soon
Before the due date we had.
The pain grew worse as we knew it would,
But the news we received was bad.

What we thought would be the birth of our son
Turned out to go all wrong.
His cord broke loose from the wall inside
And we knew our son was gone.

To this day, our hearts are broken,
But we know he is with the Lord.
One day we will be with him;
That's what we pray for.

Just about eight months later
I planned to get pregnant again.
We found out right before Christmas.
Oh boy, did we have a grin!

At five months I went to the doctor.
He told me the child was a girl.
We were so excited and yet afraid.
Our whole life seemed to be in a whirl.

Hadassah was born this past August.
We know that she was a true blessing
For she stopped growing at six months.
At this, the doctors were guessing.

She weighed 4 lbs., 13 oz.
She had a pencil size cord.
The doctors stood in amazement
And could not speak a word.

In intensive care they placed her,
But only for about five days.
We took her home and she is perfect.
For that, we give God the praise!

~ *Lindsay Louis*

Best and Worst of Life

Throughout life, there are good and bad experiences. I have experienced ups and downs in life, as I'm sure you have. We can learn to appreciate the lessons learned from the bad experiences as much as we cherish the good experiences in life. We all have different experiences. Here are a few of mine.

The best experience in my life was when I became a father for the first time. I'm not sure how to explain my feelings; it was wonderful. It is...a new feeling. I didn't know what to do, laugh or cry. But when my little girl was in my hands, I forgot everything around me. At that time in my mind, it was just my little girl and me.

The worst experience in my life was when I began my new profession as a doctor in a tiny village in Colombia. I had a little 4-year-old girl as a patient. She was very sick. I was not sure what she had but I saw her in the worst physical condition. Unfortunately, her mother waited until the last moment to take her to the hospital. The little girl had respiratory problems, probably pneumonia, and I didn't have the right equipment to treat her. That night at the hospital, I was alone in the E.R. I made the decision to send the little girl by ambulance to another hospital that was bigger and better equipped. At the larger hospital they had medical specialists and everything to help keep her alive. On our way to the other hospital, the girl's respiratory problems got worse. I had to put a tube in her mouth to help her breathe. I knew in my heart that her prognosis was not good, but I was the doctor and I had to do everything I could to keep her alive. When we got to the hospital, everyone was waiting anxiously for the patient so that they could continue the treatment. Unfortunately, a couple hours after we arrived, the little girl died.

Whether it is life's good experiences or bad experiences, there are valuable lessons to learn from each. Often times it's the same reminder; life goes by so quickly, you need to be grateful for every moment.

I am grateful for my family and the lives that I have made a difference in by becoming a doctor.

~ Abdelrahman Saleh

Where Did Those Times Go?

One day long ago, when I was maybe eight or nine years old, I was playing with my sisters. Lilly is two years younger than I am, and Dora is two years younger than Lilly. We were playing next to the beds and using an old end table as a desk. I pretended to be a doctor. As always, I took this position in the group. I laid down the dolls on the desk, I interviewed the moms, asking why they brought their kids to me, “the doctor.”

One of the moms, Lilly, said, “Doctor, my daughter fell from her crib and she has a big cut on her forehead.” I suggested that she would need to have twenty stitches because her injury was very deep. I did my job as a doctor, I put on a bandage, recommended that she give orange juice in the morning and that was it.

The other patient came with a tooth pain. I recommended to her mom that she not give so much candy to her child. I also suggested that she take her child immediately to the dentist because probably she needed to have the tooth pulled.

On the other side, my brother Albert had the pretend bus ready. He aligned six chairs to use as bus seats, and then he used a pot lid as a steering wheel. We paid for the bus ride with money. Of course, we were too little to use real money; instead we used leaves as money. The biggest leaves were used as the highest denominations. He returned our change with small leaves. What funny times those were!

Before I finished my elementary school days, we had a career custom day. I remember it as if it were yesterday. How excited I was! My mom sewed me a white nurse uniform and made me a white hat with a red cross quilted on the middle. The nurse dress had two pockets on each side of it and buttons in front. I felt so happy and pretty wearing my nurse uniform. I felt so clean and anxious to grow up. I identified myself with that custom. I thought I could be a doctor.

My elementary and middle school years came to an end. During the last two years in high school I worked so hard, studying English, French, Spanish, grammar, math, social studies, science, philosophy, and physics. I thought sometimes that my head would explode. But I continued to hang in there, learning, doing piles of homework. Sometimes I couldn't sleep, we had so much homework. Our goals were to end with the highest grades, not with the average. And we did. My class finished in the first position in the school on the government test that each student needed to take before graduation. This test was an equivalent to an SAT in the US. Our class had a score over 400 points and mine was 385. The class average was 355. Great, now I could enroll myself in medicine at one of the famous universities of the country. It's famous because the educational level and preparation for the students at that school were the highest.

I miss those days so much. This story is not finished...yet I am persisting in reaching my goals.

~ Betty Krimmer

Author Biographies

Sara Arthon - p. 92

Steve Baird - p. 12, 92

I was born in Jellico, Tennessee, and raised in the hills of Kentucky. I am one of nine children, one girl and eight boys. I love the way I was raised, but I dropped out of school at the age of 16. Now I'm working on my GED so I can better myself and my family. Having faith was instilled in me from my parents and I'm thankful for that, since with faith all things are possible. The teachers are great to work with and I thank them for their help.

Juanita Baisden - p. 91

I am a single mother of three and live in Lancaster, OH. I love writing poetry and reading it as well. I have written many pieces, but I never had the opportunity to submit any of them until now. Thanks to my wonderful teacher, I finally had the confidence to do so. My only hope is that one day I can gather my work into a book and have it published. Many of the poems I have written come from my life experiences and inspiration from my children. So, until my kids grow up or run out of ideas, I will keep writing.

Offorie L. Banks - p. 71

My inspiration is life, good and bad. My family and friends have taught me that making a mistake doesn't spell the end. Anyone can change if they really want to, even me.

Kory Barthany - p. 76

Kory plans to take the GED test this spring. He hopes to go to school for Business Management and eventually open a restaurant. Kory is married and has one daughter.

Gaius Birkis - p. 94

Gaius Birkis is a dedicated GED student who enjoys writing. He would like to make his family proud by improving his academic skills and getting his GED.

Mindy Blaney - p. 92**Starlee Bowling - p. 94**

Starlee Bowling came to Scarlet Oaks to earn her GED. She would like to obtain a job working with animals and be able to support her family.

Cheryl Brazie - p. 49

I am an employed grandmother of four delightful girls. I have been married for 37 years. Getting my GED has been a long-time dream of mine and not one that is known by my children or others. At my age it is more for personal satisfaction than anything else. I will continue to find other ways to expand my education in the future.

Chrissi Brown - p. 58

I'm Chrissi and I am 29 years old. I have a 6-year-old son who is in kindergarten. Deep emotional words inspire me to write what is in my heart. Thank you for choosing my words.

Karen Brown - p. 92**Delphine Brunet - p. 35**

I am from France. I moved to the United States six months ago with my family because of my husband's work but also to live a new adventure with our kids. My English is improving thanks to The English Center lessons in Youngstown. Although I am busy with my three children, I love to write and make new friends.

Yolivan Cabrera - cover

I'm from Honduras. My name is Santos Yolivan Cabrera, but my artist name is Yolivan. I have been in the U.S.A. for 2 years and 11 months. I am 40 years old. I love to paint.

Isha Cham - p. 10

Isha Cham was born in Gambia. She came to the United States to further her studies. Language is difficult for her, but she is a dedicated student who will succeed.

Daovadi Chen - p. 79

Daovadi Chen was born in Cambodia and suffered through much turmoil in her country. She came to America for a better life including an education. She is devoted to her family.

Zhihong Chen - p. 33**Vyran Clark - p. 84**

My name is Vyran Clark. I live in Youngstown, Ohio. I have a twin brother named Myran. I am the father of a son named Peyton Clark. After I receive my GED, I plan to continue my education, although I am currently undecided. My passion is writing poetry.

Jackie Colflesh - p. 5

I am a mother of two, and I have two grandchildren. I lost my husband 8 years ago. After losing my job, I decided to go back to school to get my GED to show my family that it is never too late. So with family standing behind me, along with the people at Tolles, I did it. I want my granddaughter Jessie and grandson James to stay in school and reach for their dreams just like I did. God has blessed me in so many ways.

Carolyn Colwell - p. 60**Sharon Cromer - p. 92****Deniz Demircan - p. 96**

My name is Deniz and I am originally from Turkey. My family moved to Germany when I was a child. My first language is Turkish, but I speak German and English as well. I am spending a year in the United States to work as an au pair. I attend ESOL classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio.

Ashley Dingey - p. 59

I'm a big Ohio State fan. I love nature and enjoy working with animals. I'm getting close to my GED Certificate. I am also a fan of Naruto. My family is pushing me to get my GED and to start college this year.

Reginald Eggleton - p. 15

I have been writing all of my life and hope to make it my profession someday. Hopefully, getting my GED will bring me closer to college and to someday owning my own business.

Corne Eksteen - p. 106

I am 24 years old, and I am from South Africa. My first language is Afrikaans. In South Africa, there are eleven different languages, but I can only speak two, Afrikaans and English. At the moment I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, as an au pair, taking care of four children ages 8-18. The reason why I came to the United States of America was to improve my English and to see the world. This is my first time out of South Africa, and I wanted to be closer to my boyfriend (Regardt Ferreira). He is doing his PhD at the University of Louisville, and I would like to dedicate this story to him to thank him for all his help, motivation, and inspiring me to be a better person.

Lais Felix - p. 56, 96

Hello, my name is Lais Marcondes. I am from Brazil, and my first language is Portuguese. I came to the United States to work as an au pair. I have attended Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, to improve my English.

Gregory Fesko - p. 103

I was born in Romania a long time ago (76 years). I came to the USA as a refugee (thanks to The Helsinki Accords) in 1985 with my wife and two daughters. I was a graphic artist in Romania. I am now retired but continue to do artwork. I am active at The Butler Institute of American Art - Youngstown, Ohio. I became a citizen in 1993.

Karen Flick - p. 11

My name is Karen Flick, and this is my thirteenth year of being published in the Beginnings series. Pierre Frozen Foods makes this possible by providing the Learning Center for me to further my studies. I love coming to the Writers' Conference. It is always a learning experience. I dedicated my writing to my husband Ken and daughters, Cindy and Angel.

Irza Flickinger - p. 51

Irza is from Mexico. One of her many talents is writing. She prefers to write in Spanish, but for this activity she wrote in English. She is also gifted in making jewelry and other hand crafts.

Ronald Fugate - p. 13

I'm a 63-year-old man. I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't do dope. I'm currently being tutored to learn to read and write. I enjoy writing stories that touch others and express feelings that come from my heart.

Toni Garcia - p. 6, 92

My name is Toni Garcia. I am married with five beautiful children. I have always enjoyed writing, so this is an honor to be published in this book. My long-term goal is to one day be a nurse working in a hospital. I encourage everyone to chase after their dreams until you catch them.

Maria Giuliberti - p. 96

My name is Maria Giuliberti. I was born in Italy in 1961. I came to the United States a couple of years ago. My most important job is as a wife to my husband and mother to my daughter. I also attend Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, to improve my English.

Dwalyn Green - p. 4

My name is Dwalyn Green, and I live in Youngstown, Ohio. I am 21 years old. After I receive my GED, I plan to further my education. I like to write poetry and hang out with my friends.

Hanoch Grinshpan - p. 40

Hello, my name is Hank and I am from Israel. My first language is Hebrew. I am an electrician by trade, and I also attend English classes at Live Oaks to improve my reading and writing of English.

Lan Kun Guo - p. 9

Sara Hagan - p. 23

Sara is from Brazil. She has two beautiful daughters and a wonderful husband. She keeps busy by helping on the family farm.

Theresa Hall - p. 55

My name is Theresa Hall. I am 58 years old, and I live in Lancaster, Ohio. I like to write poetry and enjoy writing what I see so others can enjoy reading it. I sent my poems to a priest in Minnesota, Father Killian, who is an author himself. He wrote back stating he enjoyed my poems. I have met four other poets, and I have their books. I had my picture taken with one of them, Ted Koosier.

Angela Harmon - p. 82

My name is Angie and I am 30 years old. I am a single mother to a very handsome boy who will be three in January. I am back at school getting my GED. I take my pretest January 19th. After that I plan to go to school for sonography.

Pamela Hernandez - p. 3

My name is Pamela Hernandez, and I'm 22 years old. I am from Mexico. I'm a single mother of one boy. I work as an au pair, and I attend classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio. My goal is to learn and improve my English.

Viola Hershberger - p. 7

I am 26 years old, and I have a wonderful husband. We have had our dog "Rusty" for almost a year now. Things I enjoy are walking, reading, writing, and motorcycles.

Sheila Hightower - p. 62

My name is Sheila Hightower, and I work at Pierre Foods in the packing department. I attend the Learning Center at Pierre, and I enjoy working on the computer and cooking.

Dave Humphries - p. 102

I am a father of four. All of my children have graduated, now it is my turn. I am also a baker. It's a great job, I love baking. My mom would be very proud to see me now.

Cody Hunley - p. 65, 68, 92

I have been attending Live Oaks ABE classes for several months and am very close to obtaining my GED. I am turning my life around and look forward to future successes.

Manal Ilaiyan - p. 45

Manal is married and the mother of three girls. She has been living in the U.S. for 17 years and has been studying English at the English Center for six months.

Lemuel Israel - p. 19

Lemuel Israel, 50, is a GED student at Mercy Neighborhood Ministries in Cincinnati. He served in the U.S. Army in Stuttgart, Germany, from 1976-1979. Lemuel is the owner-operator of the No-Touch Gardening service for homeowners. Writing poetry is his hobby.

Khounkam Khamvongsa - p. 29

My name is Khounkam Khamvongsa. I was born in Laos. I feel so happy that I had a chance to come to America. Now I am a student in the ABE program where I hope to improve my English. I am so happy that I had a chance to write this essay.

Betty Krimmer - p. 96, 119

My name is Betty, and I am a native of Colombia. I have also lived in Ecuador, and my first language is Spanish. I am happy to attend classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, so that I can improve my reading, writing, speaking, and listening of English. I am hoping to earn my citizenship of the United States of America.

Iglal Kuku - p. 94

Iglal Kuku was born in Sudan and came to the United States ten years ago. She wanted to get an education and eventually open a spa. She enjoys writing.

Juan Leyria - p. 101

My name is Juan Leyria, and I am from Argentina. My first language is Spanish, but my English is improving every day. I work as a DJ in the Cincinnati area. I live in Milford, Ohio, and I attend ESOL classes at Live Oaks.

Yuan Hua Li - p. 81, 96

My name is Yuan Li and I am from China. I have been in the USA for almost one year. When I first came here, it was really hard to get used to it, especially because I could not speak English well. What I learned wasn't just a piece of cake. There are so many problems when you try to take care of a family without speaking English well. I decided to find a school to learn more. Now, I am an ESOL student at Live Oaks. I have met some really nice teachers who are very helpful. I have met some interesting people who are from all over the world. They speak all kinds of languages. They are here to learn English too. Isn't it amazing? English brings us together and I feel so lucky that I am a part of them now. I am working as a housekeeper; it's not an easy job and I can only make a little money. I want to change. You won't have a better life without knowing English and learning American culture. I am eager to learn more.

Yuleidy Lizarazo Alfaro - p. 42

My name is Yuleidy, but everybody calls me Yuly. I am 22 years old, and I am from Bogota, Colombia. I came to the United States as an au pair on January 18, 2009, with a lot of goals in my mind including: improving my English skills, attending a school, watching little kids, living with an American family, making friends, meeting new people, adjusting to a new culture, and sharing mine as well. I have been attending ESOL classes in the morning at Live Oaks for one year. I enjoy learning and living in Cincinnati OH, one of the most beautiful cities in this country. By the way, I want to give special thanks to Susan, Rod, and Julie at Live Oaks for their support and teaching, and also all the special people who are around for me despite the distance. Also, I dedicate my writing to my boyfriend, a wonderful and patient person who is doing a good job teaching me French and English. I am still working on my goals, but I feel that I just took a step ahead with my success in the Ohio Writers' Conference. To my loving family, my parents, and my sisters, I miss all of you from the bottom of my heart. Finally I dedicate my writing to God; without him in my life none of this could be possible.

Lindsay Louis - p. 115

My name is Lindsay and this is my story. I am happily married with a beautiful daughter, Hadassah Bethea. She is here for a reason!

Mario Alexander Martinez - back cover

My name is Mario Alexander Martinez. I am from Honduras and I live in Norwalk, Ohio. I am 27 years old, and I like painting and drawing in pencil.

Rose Mathew - p. 69

My name is Rose Mathew, and I live in Canal Winchester, Ohio. I'm a housewife, and the mother of two children. I am from India.

Crystal McKnight - p. 92

I'm 31 years old but I have lived a life of an older person. I have survived a lot. I was born with cancer; they removed my eye when I was 18 months old, so now I have a glass eye. I have had many other trials and tribulations in my life, but now I am on a path to success. I am married to a wonderful man and have four children, who are my backbone. I look back on my life and all I can say is, "I survived."

Christopher Meier - p. 60, 99

I was born on January 19, 1985, in the frozen tundra of Cincinnati, Ohio, and raised in the sweltering jungles of South Florida. I currently reside in a secret bunker somewhere in the Midwest with my family.

Laura Meiers - p. 75, 92

The road to improving my health, both physically and emotionally, started with improving myself. I earned my GED while making new friends. I continued to come back and help others. The more I can help, the better I feel.

Kevin Mitishin - p. 94

Kevin Mitishin is a student who loves nature. He would like to attend college and incorporate his hands-on personality with a career that involves working outdoors.

Tania Montalban - p. 113

My name is Tania Montalban. I have been living in Ohio for five years. I became a citizen of the United States one year ago. I continue studying English with my teacher, Charlotte Plutt, because I want to be able to speak English.

Ethen Morehead - p. 60**Linda Neal - p. 53**

I am 53 years old and have been married for 34 years. I am a mother of four children and have five grandchildren. I came to ABLE to become better prepared academically for a higher education. I have enjoyed my learning experience with ABLE and will use the valuable skills that I have acquired while attending college. I will be earning an associate degree in Business Management.

Anthony Nichols - p. 92

I am currently attending the GED/ABLE classes at Live Oaks. I am also looking for work at this time and planning to go to school after I earn my GED.

April Norvell - p. 92, 111

I live in Goshen, Ohio. I have a daughter and a son. I would like to get my GED so that I can go farther with my education.

Onasis Pena - p. 31

My name is Onasis Pena. I was born in Bajos De Haina, Dominican Republic in 1975. I have completed my college degree in accounting. I am married and I have two boys. The 12 year old, Francis, was born in the Dominican Republic. The 6 year old was born in Columbus, Ohio. Both of my children are bilingual. Since 2009 I have worked at a call center as a collector where I have a challenge every day.

Alex Price - p. 60**Doug Rasnick - p. 92**

Lebert Reid - p. 21

Lebert was born and raised in Jamaica. He came to the United States to marry his wife, Shanell. He loves to spend time with family and cook.

Jasmin Reinmoeller - p. 60**Sara Revilla - p. 96**

My name is Sara Revilla. I am from Lima, Peru. I have three children whose ages are 15, 14, and 5. We came to Cincinnati six years ago for my husband's job at the University of Cincinnati. I graduated from law school in my native country. Now I am a housewife, and I attend classes at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, to learn English. Knowing English helps me to be able to help my kids with their homework. While we are living in the USA, I want to continue to learn more about this culture and its history.

Velia Ripperger - p. 36

"I have always wanted to write my feelings but never knew I could do it," said Velia, Ripperger, who has lived in the United States for 37 years. Velia is a wonderful devoted wife and mother of two daughters and grandmother of one who is inspired to keep writing. She plans to write more and hopes to one day have enough material to put together a book. "I don't care if I have to give it away," she said. "There is just so much life out there to write about. I believe we all can do what I've done and share it with the world."

Juana Rueda - p. 73

My name is Juana Rueda. I am from Mexico City. I have lived in Columbus, Ohio, for fourteen years. I am an American citizen. I am studying because I want to improve my English and try to become a police officer so that I can help people.

Claudia Rust - p. 92

I am a mother of four and a grandmother of four grandsons. I decided to come to the ABLE class to get my GED so I can be a nurse's aide because I love to help people.

Denis Rust - p. 92**Abdelrahaman Saleh - p. 117**

My name is Abdelrahaman Saleh. I'm from Colombia. I'm 34 years old, and I speak Spanish and Arabic. I'm a physician. I was working in my country as a doctor in a hospital and sometimes in an ambulance. I have been living in Cincinnati, Ohio, for 7 months. When I came to the USA, my English was very poor. I didn't know how to speak with people, but I began to learn English on a computer. Then somebody told me about ESOL classes at Live Oaks. Since I've been attending I can understand and speak a bit more English. Right now I'm studying and practicing for a USMLE test so I can work here in the future.

Hikaru Sato - p. viii**Caralissa Scott - p. 83**

My name is Caralissa Scott. I am from Youngstown, Ohio. I am a 23-year-old single mother of a 4-year-old son named Kevin Clinkscale, Jr. After I get my GED, I plan to go to school to become an ultra-sound tech. I like to cook, sing, talk on the phone, and spend time with family and friends.

Zambia Sherland - p. 10

Zambia Sherland recently moved to the United States from Jamaica. He would like to get his GED so that he can take advantage of all the wonderful opportunities in America.

Fabiana Silva - p. 96

My name is Fabiana, and I'm from Brazil. I decided to become an au pair because it was a great opportunity to improve my English, to meet new people, and discover a different country. It supports my profession since I'm a graduate in Tourism in my home country of Brazil. Studying at Live Oaks gave me the opportunity to practice 180 hours of English and also to meet many good friends! It was the best choice that I have made, and now I can get a better job upon my return to Brazil!

Marketa Slaughter - p. 105

My name is Marketa Slaughter and I am from Dayton, Ohio. My favorite food is pizza. I love to cook and I love reading to my children, Italy and Donte Jr. I have written two poems in my life, *Like Coffee* and *My Sister*. I never knew I was a writer until we had our first writing workshop at Godman Guild. That goes to show that you never know what you can do until you try.

Birkita Tesfageris - p. 14

I am from the country of Eritrea in East Africa. I now live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I worked for the TFE Company, but I was laid off in 2009. I am a mother of four: three boys ages 10, 11, 12, and a 5-year-old little girl. The inspiration for everything in my life is my children and my husband. I can't imagine life without them. I am looking forward to helping my children by getting my GED, and that is the key to my success for my future education.

Jerry Tharp - p. 92**Michaela Thomas - p. 10**

Michaela Thomas is a devoted mother of two children who are very supportive of her finishing her education. She will be taking her GED test this spring and fulfilling a lifelong dream.

Tina Toporcer - p. 85

Tina just earned her GED in January and plans to further her education. She is married and has three children.

Janeth Urgilez - p. 10

Janeth Urgilez was born in Ecuador. She had to work hard to come to the United States and get an education. She would like to go to nursing school and secure a career where she will be able to help people.

Billy Wagner - p. 61, 92

Greetings. I'm a 35-year-old man on the road to higher education. I never knew I could write until I tried it for the first time at Live Oaks ABLE/GED class. It is my hope that whoever reads this finds that though the road back for some of us is hard, it is not impossible. Don't give up!

Benny Wang - p. 95**Chris Ware - p. 72**

Chris Tyron Ware was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. He has a four-year-old son named Zakyi. His younger sister's name is Linda, same as his mother's. He is an aspiring writer, musician, and poet.

Ling Zhu - p. 25

Honorable Mention

Rogelio Abad	Nol Chan
Mohammed Abdesalam	Li Chen
Abed Al Hamzeh	Siyu Chen
Reina Albores	Tiffany Conner
Hanan Almalalha	John Covic
Khalid Alshboul	Michael Craver
Jeff Altman	Yeni Cruz Martinez
Dave Andera	Marcus Cunningham
Marco Antonio	Anna Czajka
Mary Azbell	Danuta Czyzycka
Ibrahima Bah	Magdalena Czyzycka
Kay Bailey	Gulnara Dadabaeva
Juliana Baki	Irene Davis
Kim Barnes	Randy Duff
Griselda Bernal	Jason Dukes
Cheri Berte	Svetlana Dyshko
Maryana Bilaska	Jovo Dzelajlija
James Blakeney	Justyn Edwards
Brenda Blankenship	Diego Enquatequi
Julia Blasque	Phyllis Evans
Victoria Boeke	Tasha Evans
Anthony Boerio	Brittany Fanin
Gary Boley	Laura Figueroa
Sherry Bossick	Sunshine Finney
Keisha Bradford	Pierre Fouetsa
Rick Brandenburg	Luz Franklin
Carmen Brennan	Rochelle Franklin
Dino Brown	Robert G.
Maria Bulucea	Luis Garcia
Yolivan Cabrera	Miguel Gonzalez
Hilda Campagna	Mike Gonzalez
Lillian Caraballo	Ekaterina Gorbunova
Yesenia Cardona	Amanda Grant
Ralph Carpenter	Ken Green
Paula Castro	Juan Gutierrez
Maguy Chaccour	Sevada Hakobyan

Ashley Hall	Mario Martinez
Lisa Harper	Vilma Martinez
James Harris	Rosalba McCain
Torrance Hawkins	Michelle McDew
Brittany Heeter	Hugh McGrew
Stacey Heller	Megebnsn Mengestu
Amber Henry	Alin Mihaila
Julio Herrera	Mihai Mocanu
Debra Hickson	Shirley Montgomery
Yolanda Hightower	Yuka Morimoto
Donna Hines	Nicole Mosier
Ahmed Hjayyer	Tabie Myers
Fatemeh Hosseinipour	Zeina Nader
Patricia Hoyos	Iryna Nedoshytko
Zhixiong Huang	Nathan Noe
Roxann Hyde	Lourdes Nunez
Awilda Ibrahim	Maria Obugene
Hayfa Ilayan	Ana Carolina Oliveira
Catalina Izquierdo	Melissa Opincar
Jessica Jackson	Chasity Parks
Mona Jawhari	Joaquin Perez
Martha Jiminez	Maria Perez
Christopher Johnson	Yolanda Perez
Tonia Jones	Chante Perry
Elena Kamienski	Cheryl Pete
Yuka Katayama	Linh Pham
Jeanne Keller	Tri Pham
Sumalee Kennedy	Bertha Popovich
Sevada Kobyan	Sandy Radcliff
Maria Laguer	Rajbinder Randaur
Herminia Lamatrice	Lisa Reynolds
Charles Lawson Jr.	Jana Rice
Monty Lester	Stacey Rice
Ella Lewis	Yavanoot Robbins
Geraldine Lewis	Ebony Robinson
Chheng Lim	Anthony Rodriguez
Wenrong Liu	Michael Rohrbaugh
Mary Majano	Marysia Rosier
Suzette Malave	Natalia Rotar

Elizabeth Rueda
Tomas Ruiz
Elizabeth Sacksith
Andrii Samar
Miguel Sandavol
Constancia Scharff
Cordell Schultz
Linda Seymour
Olga Shadina
Oksana Shkodzinska
Anthony Sinito
Lyubov Smetanyuk
Derrick Smith
Mindy Smith
Zahra Smith
Kiara "Kiwi" Spencer
Olga Stepanova
Leslie Strodes
Jasmine Stuart
Wendy Sullivan
Doreen (So Chia) Taylor
William Taylor
Maria Tirado
Roksolana Tkachyk
Lillied Torres
Marta Tracewska
Mamiko Ukai
Darlene Underwood
Luis Vazquez
Josh Veach
Carlos Velez
Hannable Venable
Sade` Vinson
Constantinescu Vlad
Elizabeth Wade
Jessica Ward
Peggy Weldon
Alena Westfall
Sharon Westfall

Dale Whitesell
Diennetta Williams
Coreal Wilson
Kim Wilson
Jessica Wood
Jamila Worthey
Afi Wozufia
Sakeo Yamamoto
Zhongqiu Yang Yang
Mohamed Youseff
Ivan Zakharko
Maria Zamora
Fanor Zapata

