

Beginnings xviii

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER



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Foreword

Today probably feels a lot like an ending. You put in some hard work. You came up with a story that was somehow something new. The first draft was junk but you revised and revised and revised until it was pretty good and better than most. And now you get to sit in a room and have a little something to eat on white tablecloths and your story is in a book and soon you'll be called up to stand in front of everyone for a moment. This is the end of a process, right?

Wrong.

This is the beginning. Which is why, you know, the book is called *Beginnings*. Your award is not so much a trophy, but a challenge. It's a challenge to do this again and again and again. That could mean writing a new story and finding a new publisher. It could mean simply following a new project to completion the same way you took that first draft and made it into something special. Can you attack an education the same way? A career? Can you be counted with the best in whatever you do next? That's the challenge.

My first novel was published when I was 34 years old. It was the end result of a lot of failures. After graduating Kent State, I worked at a movie theater because nobody was hiring journalists. I wanted to write funny articles for the op/ed pages. My first humor column was accepted in 2001 and was scheduled to run the second week of September. After 9/11 happened, the piece was put on hold. Nobody was in the mood to laugh. In 2003, I finally got a job writing for a local newspaper, *The Cleveland Scene*. It was the best job I ever had. It was so much fun. I was using my background in English and journalism and getting paid. And then people stopped reading newspapers because the Internet came

along and made it easier to get the news from a laptop. *Scene* could no longer pay for all of us to write. My friends and I lost our jobs, and went freelance. In 2003, a freelancer was paid \$2,500 for a cover story but in 2010, the same article got you \$250. So I suddenly found myself with a lot of spare time and that's when I wrote my novel. It was a success that could not have happened without a cascade of failures. I'm sure you have experienced your own setbacks. And each has led you here. And that's the point, I guess: the ability to roll with it.

I hope you look at today as another beginning, that you're almost bored with the award and you're sitting there anxious to get back to work. My boss at *Scene* had a box of awards under his desk in his office. I asked him, once, why he never hung them on his walls. "I'm too busy writing," he said.

Keep writing. Find the time to write a little everyday. Mornings are best. Save the evenings for reading.

Allow yourself a brief moment to feel proud today. You've earned it. Then get back to work!

James Renner
2014 Writers' Conference Keynote Speaker

Acknowledgements

Each year since 1997, Ohio Adult Basic and Literacy Education celebrates its student authors and honors their accomplishments at the Ohio Writers' Conference. Over 300 pieces of writing were submitted for review and possible publication in *Beginnings XVIII*. Sixty-eight pieces were chosen for this edition. We are proud to publish the 18th volume of exceptional writing by Ohio's ABLE authors and commend these writers for their courage to share their stories.

We also honor and thank ABLE teachers and tutors who dedicate their time to encourage students and provide instruction and guidance. We applaud each instructor for their passion and creativity to motivate ABLE students throughout their writing journeys.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the Ohio Board of Regents' Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program. Their eighteen years of support for *Beginnings* and the Writers' Conference have allowed many ABLE students to become published authors and public speakers.

We welcome our 2015 keynote speaker, author David Giffels, to this year's Writers' Conference, and we're pleased to have our resident storyteller Lyn Ford participating again this year.



perfect pear?

Table of Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
Elder Vance and the Pallbearer	ix
Teach & Learn	I
Departures & Arrivals	13
Earth & Sky	31
Questions & Answers	43
Love & Loss	55
Body & Soul	75
Touch & Taste	85
Beginnings & Endings	93
Heart & Home	107
Author Biographies	123
Honorable Mention	135

In Memory

Marlene Kuhns, 1940-2014

Julius Ropog, 1941-2015

Elder Vance and the Pallbearer

A hound dog named cornbread was sleeping on the church house steps
The preacher man stepped over him as Elder Vance wept
The old men lined up along the deacons bench
As the congregation filed in, they began to sing 'O'Death'
I could feel every voice in the scripture they would quote
As the elders led us in song ... I began to float

I rose above the walls of that old mountain church
I could see as if I were a bird who was high upon a perch
And in my distant gaze, I could see her resting place
The grave was dug, the stone was set, and the flowers wrapped in lace
I could feel every voice in the scripture they would quote
As the elders led us in final prayer, that's when I awoke

*I'm the Pallbearer...you don't need to know my name
I will carry you off to your final resting place
I will comfort your family..."I'm sorry for your loss"
I will say "you were a good man...the best I can recall"*

*I bow my head in prayer as the mourning kinfolk cry
Press my hands together but I never close my eyes
I daydream away the misery of such an event
I shovel fill the graves and pack away the tents*

~ Michael Smith
GED Graduate

B.S. Education, Kent State University
M.S. Geographic Information Science, University of Akron

Former ESOLIGED Instructor



A Great Experience

I started in ABLE on August 19, 2014. I am 73 years old and going back to school to learn to read, do math, and spell better. It is a great experience for me to get so much out of this school. I am getting better at reading and math. I read 2 books. They were biographies. I even stood up in front of the class and read a book report!

I have made two good friends in my class. We all help one another. One will pick me up and take me home so I don't have to walk. She is a good friend to have.

It is like back in the olden days at school. The teacher takes time with us. If you don't understand, she will take time to help you. You are not too old to learn in the New Year 2015.

~ Rebecca J. Hayhurst

The Mountain of Education

There is a mountain in front of me,
The other side I cannot see.

I have struggled and tried to no avail,
Somehow or other I always fail.

Until one day I realized
What this mountain symbolized.

It is the mountain of education
Keeping me from my destination.

Now I've joined A.B.L.E. to get my G.E.D.
I'm so excited; it's perfect for me!

Still so much I need to know,
The fact is, I have far to go.

Lots of learning to be done,
No problem there; it's so much fun!

I have not yet taken my first test,
But I'm trying to do my very best.

Education has become a passion for me,
Beyond anything I could imagine or see.

With notebooks and papers now gracing my view,
Laptop and curricula to mention a few.

So, big mountain, get out of my way.
In front of me you cannot stay!

~ Ruth Keim

Words

I'd always thought that I was a normal kid growing up. I had similar interests to most that I came into contact with—sports, books, video games. It was all there for my childhood experience. Friends came and went, although I didn't have many. My family was intermittent. My father wasn't a stable figure. I relied on my mother for the majority of parental guidance because that was all I had. Throughout my life she has been a wonderful teacher, and it prides me to put pen to paper because this is for her.

In my early years I was one of those kids that asked why? Where? How? It was a constant thing that would turn out to plague me for my entire life. For those around me it never had an end. I'm sure I made plenty of people mad with my endless array of questions. In my head though, it was my own interminable thirst for knowledge that I was sure separated me from most kids. It made me different. Analyzing everything. One little thing at a time until I was sure I knew all about it.

At a young age I was diagnosed with A.D.H.D, or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. I went through plenty of counseling for it although it didn't seem like it helped much. Was this my first test as a child? To overcome the urge to act beyond the normalcy of so many around me? At the time I didn't understand what it meant. To me I was expressing my hyperactive brain. At times I'm sure most didn't know how to take it. It wasn't exactly normal in a sense. Akin to growing up, was this something that all kids dealt with? Couldn't be. I felt different. I acted different. I was different. I accepted it early out of necessity because I knew it would eat at me forever.

In fourth grade I had my first great memory. My mom and boyfriend had decided that a change of scenery would be a good thing and started to plan a move. It was a disappointment to me because I had developed my first friendship, something hard for me with all of my issues. I also knew that I wanted to take part in the school spelling bee. If we were going to move I wasn't going

to be able to spell in front of all my classmates. I was distraught. I wanted this. The spelling bee was my way of expressing myself. In fourth grade I realized that not only did I have a thirst for knowledge, but also a thirst for words and all of their uses.

I pleaded and begged, but it was done. We were moving. I went to class just like I normally did. The long bus route to school. Everyone was given their Scripps National Spelling Bee words booklet. Except for me. I was moving and didn't need it, right? My teacher compiled a list of all of the students that planned to take part. I wasn't on it. Three days before we were supposed to move and when the spelling bee was set to happen, my mom decided to let me stay and take part. Only problem with that was all the spots were set. I went to school, and it seemed like a miracle that one of my classmates allowed me to have her spot. This was amazing to me because she was the one I competed with in school. She was like me. Exceptionally smart and had a thirst for words like I did. I didn't really study for the big day. It was something that came naturally. Words have had a profound effect on my life. I ended up getting fourth place on a word that still beats me up today: "Librarian." Seems so ironic because that's where my safe place was later on throughout school—the library.

The move to a new school turned out to be a major hindrance to my childhood. It did teach me a fair number of lessons on perception and how to treat the things I went through. I learned at my new school how mean and cruel people really could be. From day one in the Claymont school district I was bullied. It made me question everything. My looks, my intelligence, even my sanity. Was I really so different than others? What did I do to deserve this kind of treatment? Was it jealousy? I was given one gift in life: an imperfect but hyperactive brain. Sifting through all of what people said and did by day, dreaming of being different and how to separate myself from them by night.

I eventually turned to reading books. It was my thirst for words that needed quenched. It was also a way to get lost in myself. Not worrying or caring about what went on around me. At times, my quest to read a new book or get lost in the one I

was currently reading became insatiable. I actually got in trouble a couple times for reading books instead of doing my homework in school. Who would have thought? The people around me unknowingly created this monster though. The library became part of my regular routine. My safe zone. Seemingly endless shelves of words that could never hurt me. Was my reading a product of confusion? Was it a subconscious quest for clarity? Through all the characters I encountered, all of the different stories about strife, love, happiness, even the gruesome war stories, I started to liken them to my own story. My own personal strife as a child. The lack of happiness. I hadn't encountered love yet, but I knew it would come someday. I was too young to wrap myself up in the thought of life's most trivial feeling.

By the 7th grade I was reading a book a day or every couple days depending on the thickness. My ability to get lost in a masterpiece of words became bar none—from *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls to *A Tale Of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, to various Clive Cussler novels (who became my personal favorite). I was developing the beginning of my perfect story in my head. One with all the great qualities of writing.

By high school, I was budding. I had read so many books that there were endless ideas floating around my head. Through my reading, a way to put them down on paper in my own way developed. My dream of becoming a writer was nourished by every book I read. Throughout high school, to most people I was a lost kid. My attention deficit wasn't an excuse to me anymore. It was me lost in my thoughts. Dreaming. What if I had put all the things I learned in life down on paper in my own creative way? All these lessons and words I had learned had to have a use, right? I had one problem though. What if what I write isn't good? Was this something that every writer goes through? Writer's block? Just like all the seemingly endless shelves of words I sat with almost every day, I put all my ideas on their own mental shelf. For my first encounter with love.

Towards the end of high school, I met my high school sweetheart. It truly was love at first sight. Beautiful in every way I

could imagine. She not only was my first love but also became my best friend. We were inseparable. Just like me and all the books I read. I still had questions about love though. Was this going to be my happily ever after? Was I still too young to understand? All the books I had read that had a hint of a love story in them kind of felt this way. This wasn't fleeting. It was completely real. Around the time I met her I also started the line of work I still do today. Landscaping. I had read so many stories about hardworking people that achieve their dreams through hard work. I wanted to be one of those people. I wanted to take care of my newfound love and live happily ever after. Greed for money won over school. I ended up quitting, with 2 months to go. To this day I still beat myself up about it. It was one of the poorest choices I've ever made. I shelved my dream of a glorious graduation and as a writer to work instead. I know I was a disappointment to plenty of people, especially the teachers and family members who saw me grow as person and mature.

A couple of years later, it turned out that I didn't exactly have a direct line into the female psyche either. I knew that I didn't know everything about love. But I was still young and learning. I have since chalked it up as another life lesson.

Fast forward a couple years to now. It wasn't until recently that I had an epiphany that my dreams were still possible. In the pursuit of a much better and fulfilling life I signed up for the GED course at Buckeye Career Center—the same school that I quit 6 years ago. Dreams are always possible if you work for them. Heck they even have me writing. A 6-year-long writer's block is no more. My creative juices are flowing once again. Time to put all those words I learned to use. In my writer's mind, words define people. They can hurt, they can please you, they make you. This isn't a stroke of genius. But it is nonetheless a simple beginning....

~ Brad Reeder

The Classes Are Calling and I Must Go

When I moved to America
I found a world of inconveniences,
An endless list of things to learn but
Also an infinite range of possibilities.

The reality, of course, was gray
Like a unique winter view.
How can I keep myself safe
If most everything is new?

I noticed that I needed help,
Intensive care and support.
I needed to know a new code
And put it next to my passport.

I had an urgency to add
New words to my vocabulary.
There were a lot of fresh sentences
To write down in my diary.

What was the recipe
To communicate with no doubt?
So these people would know
What I was talking about?

I have crossed continents
And have no regrets.
In life you have to take some risks.
I just had to place my bets.

Now I am finally here.
And know I'm going to reach my goal
Because I found inspiring teachers.
The classes are calling and I must go.

Going Back

As a teenager from a broken home, I gave up on graduating from high school. In the eleventh grade, I became anorexic. This really began before school started that year. A couple of months after school began, I snapped out of being anorexic to a certain point. That point was enough to make me healthy again, but I was still “fat” in my mind. I was too ashamed of the weight I had gained. I went from 117 pounds to 150 pounds. At 5'5", this is not a fat girl.

I had missed so much school that year that I failed. I hadn't passed tenth grade math the previous year, but the school system considered me an eleventh grader. The following year I went back to school and got a job. That year started out okay, but I gave up on school. A lot of the reason why was because I didn't care. I also figured that even if I were to finish school that I would not be able to graduate because I was lacking a math credit, or at least so I thought. To this day I am not sure about that.

In 1988, I decided that I would try to obtain my GED. I never knew such a thing existed until that summer. Needless to say I didn't attend the GED class long because I needed more than what was offered in the classroom. I went back a couple of times after that but never attended long.

This time around I have been attending for over a year. The classroom setting has changed. Now math, language, science and social studies are all taught as if I were back in high school. A dry erase board is used, and the teacher actually teaches us. Before it was “take a book and teach yourself.” I am not good at that. At ABLE there are two wonderful teachers, Cindy and Karla. I am sure I have gotten on their nerves, but they haven't kicked me out. Without my teachers I don't think I would keep trying to obtain a GED.

Thank you.

~ Dee Dee Rundels

From Hate to Love

I would like to tell you about how I fell in love with books. I think I was about 8 years old, maybe in the third grade.

In the beginning, I hated books or anything to do with reading. Maybe the word I am looking for is “despised.” I hated words with a vengeance. Words and books were my enemies because I had trouble reading. I felt that teachers looked at me with pity like I had been denied something. Just because I couldn’t read like the other children did not mean I couldn’t watch the movies.

One day, I got into trouble with one of my teachers, Miss Smith, who was a teacher’s assistant. To tell you the truth, her hair reminded me of a fox, and her personality matched. She was the type of teacher who used the art of manipulation and trickery, but she was the one who helped me unlock the mystery of books by helping me to discover books through audio cassettes.

It all happened because I put super glue on her chair. She had a feeling that it was me. So, in order to teach me a lesson, I had a choice of cleaning up the arts and crafts room or taking my book and listening to one of the 10 cassette books. She was very tricky. So I chose to read one of the books, and I lost track of time and missed recess. I finally looked up and all of my friends were coming into the classroom. I had missed recess, and the fox lady was smiling like she had just won a prize (maybe a chicken which my mom tells me is a fox’s greatest prize). In total I read all 10 books. The two books that struck a chord with me were *The Little Engine That Could* and *The Ugly Duckling*. This feeling was new to me. I now appreciate books.

After that I read and listened to every cassette book in my school library. Eventually I had to expand so Miss Smith took me to my local library where I began to devour every book in sight. She also helped me get my first library card. That’s how I began my love of audio books.

~ Catherine Marin

Departures Arrivals



Before Leaving

Leaving my country and moving the whole family to the U.S.A. for at least three years was an unexpected choice.

Opposing feelings filled my mind. I was excited and very curious for the new experience. At the same time, I was concerned about not succeeding and worried about such a big life change! I was also very sad to leave all the loved ones, and I thought it would be very difficult to make new friends in another country. I had supposed people in the big city were more indifferent and cold, particularly with strangers.

My thoughts were absolutely wrong. I remember the first day I arrived with my family in the new house. I found on my doormat a gift from a neighbor (hot soup and cookies) as a sign of warm welcoming. Since then, I have met many people and, little by little, all of them have offered their friendship, making themselves available for everything, taking care, and providing attention for my family and me.

Before I left, I was worried about the dimensions of the city, by comparison, with my small town. I thought that socializing would be difficult because of the distance. On the contrary, I have discovered many little communities, where people live and contribute, often on a voluntary basis, to manage and organize several public services (school, library). I have seen first-hand, working as a volunteer on a farm, the sense of community, the effort in working together and the passion of helping and sharing.

Before I left, I imagined how difficult was the integration of a foreigner, but I was wrong there, too. I always had a very warm welcome everywhere, and I found a strong support to overcome any obstacles, such as the language barrier, thanks to my ESOL and GED classes. I have appreciated the great consideration for cultural, ethnic, and religious diversities, particularly at my daughter's school, where I have enjoyed meeting with international families from all over the world.

Before I left, I could not imagine such deep respect for nature, love for the landscape, or passion for a historical site's preservation. I was impressed by the pioneers' settlement, and every time I walk along the old cemetery close to my house, I'm touched, imagining how big an effort poor families put into the village's foundation.

Before I left, I was literally worried about the nutritional style, thinking junk food was the most common diet. In contrast, I was surprised to find many local farmers growing fresh products, and several families taking care for the original middle-western cooking. I have never eaten so many delicious homemade soups, casseroles, recipes, pies, cakes, cookies and so many different kinds of sweet potatoes! Here I found, unexpectedly, the same passion that my Granma nurtured for homemade cooking!

Before I left, I thought that "Land of Opportunity" and "Land of Freedom" were only common clichés. Now, I have seen a society that offers everyone the opportunity to get better, to improve themselves, to be respected. The sense of community looks like the secret of this recipe. Welcoming and valuing diversity are the best ingredients. When I come back, I'll fill up my luggage with everything I have learned.

~ *Isabella Marie Allieri*

My Journey to the United States

My story begins in 2013 when Tadeo, my husband, got an opportunity to come to the U.S. to work. He had been looking for this chance for about a year, and nothing had happened. One day he got a call asking him to come for an interview, and after that... everything changed!

He got offered a position which was what he wanted, but the company asked him to move quickly. In spite of relocation being part of our plan, we almost considered staying in Mexico while he started the process. Fortunately we sold most of our belongings and made the necessary arrangements so my daughter and I could travel with him from the beginning.

We spent our first days at a hotel, rented a car, and started our own adventure. I could even say that we were void of possessions but full of dreams and expectations.

After one week, we moved to a rental apartment and began to settle down. I knew many interesting places around the area, tried delicious American food, and met really good people. However, I have to admit that it was hard for me to understand the language and as a consequence, to adapt to my new environment easily.

As time went by, I moved from “the tourist phase,” when it felt like we were enjoying days as if on vacation, to “the local phase.” It was necessary for me to get more involved in our family routine, acquiring more responsibilities like walking my daughter to school, interacting with teachers and doctors, getting my driver’s license, and going shopping by myself. Shopping was (and sometimes still is) challenging for me in many aspects. I had never lived in a different country before, and even though I had studied English, I was out of practice. So I definitely felt like a fish out of water.

The good part of my non-comfortable situation was that I started taking some English classes, and I'm currently studying in the ABE classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. After a few months I saw the results.

I could hardly say that I'm done. I know I'm still in the process of learning, discovering interesting aspects about the language, and taking little steps in this long path to knowledge. What keeps me motivated is that I feel better now, and this "learning process" has brought me self-confidence and life-changing experiences.

Now, I'm optimistic about my future. I'm thankful for this chance to know another culture, to learn a second language, to consolidate my marriage and family, to be a better person, and to make new treasured friends.

I have only been in Ohio for a little more than a year, but I have the feeling that there are many more years to come.

~ Rocio Aviles-Gomez

A Worthwhile Journey

Today I asked myself, “What were the things that made me come to the U.S.A.?”

Ever since I can remember, we had financial problems at home. There were ten kids in my family. My parents provided us with the best they could, the necessities. For example, in my house it was a huge privilege just to be able to eat cereal when we could afford it.

The most education we could receive was through middle school, but we had to work in order to pay for school tuition. It was very difficult for us to be able to afford it. I was able to study hard enough to get good grades and earn a partial scholarship for a three-year course to become a secretary.

When I graduated, I was 18 years old. I started to work so I could help with the expenses at home, but it wasn't enough. I remembered my uncle had told me that there was an opportunity for him to work in the U.S.A. and send money home to his family. I decided to go with him and help my family as well.

My uncle arranged everything about crossing the border with the smugglers. We had to pay \$2,000 per person. We crossed the border without any problem and made our way to Chicago. However, my fiancé was living in Painesville. I went to visit him and decided to stay.

It was hard to start our life here. We didn't have a car and had to walk everywhere. We had trouble getting legal status. (It had become very much more difficult as the laws were changing.)

After five years and two kids, we finally had the opportunity to get work visas. In order to get the visas, we had to return to México. Once there my husband was interviewed and given his visa. After my interview, I was denied. I was told that the work visa was temporary; because we were married, they assumed we

would want to stay in the U.S. permanently. My husband was able to book a flight and return to Painesville. Our kids had to fly back with a friend who was an American citizen, not with a temporary worker (my husband). I couldn't return to Painesville.

The only way I could get back to my family was to hire and trust another coyote (smuggler) to get me across the border. The only one was in Ciudad Juárez, and even though it was very dangerous, that's the only option I had. When I got there, I saw about 20 people waiting for their turn to cross. I had to wait three days for my turn.

Finally, I was on my way. Unfortunately, I was caught by the border patrol. They held me in detention for 10 hours. Inside the jail, it was very cold. I was really afraid. It seemed hopeless. But thinking about my two little ones without their mother gave me the strength to fight all those feelings. I felt I would be able to hug them again with God's help.

When they finally released me from detention, I contacted the coyote so we could try the crossing again. The next day we finally made it. He took me to a house where about 50 people were waiting to go to their destinations. The lady in charge of the house was nice. She gave us one meal a day, water to drink, and a place to sleep on the floor. The worse thing was that we didn't know when we would be able to leave. We couldn't talk to our relatives or friends. It was like we had disappeared.

One day the lady told us she knew another coyote who could take us to our destinations. When he came to pick us up, he told us to lie down on the floor of the truck like sardines in a can. Twenty minutes later, he stopped the truck just before the check point and told us to walk into the forest, go across the river, and then meet him at the other side.

We had a guide who told us to lie down single file and hold onto the person's foot in front. It was dark, and we were crawling like snakes. There were dry bushes, thorns, and animals. We had scratches all over our bodies. Two hours later we were out of the forest. We didn't see any river, only desert.

We walked and walked all day long until it was dark again. We had no water, no food, no shelter; we were exhausted. Night came again; we were starving, thirsty, and cold. We realized the guide was lost. There was no sign of the coyote waiting for us. When we got close to the road, he told us he was going out to find the truck. We waited and waited, but he didn't come back for us. We went out to the road. Five minutes later the border patrol picked us up.

Eventually I was returned to México. The nightmare started over, but this time it was worse. For one month I moved from place to place trying to connect with someone to help me cross the border again. I ended up with the same coyote who kept me isolated until she got more money. She even threatened me. When my husband sent her the money, she made the arrangements. This time I had to take off my clothes and swim across a very dangerous canal. I made it. Arrangements were made for me to get in a trailer and go to Los Angeles. From there I took the bus to Painesville where my family was waiting for me. That was an experience I will never be able to forget.

Now, I thank God for the opportunity to be here today sharing with you a part of my story.

~ Rosa Villa

Ganga from Bhutan

Ganga was only six years old studying in grade I in a school in Bhutan. One day she was called to the principal's office and informed that she could not come to school anymore. She was told that since she belonged to a different ethnicity, Nepali, and she was not originally Bhutanese, she did not have the right to continue her schooling in the country. Ganga belonged to an ethnic group Lhompmtsha, meaning southern Bhutanese, who were of Nepali origin. These people settled in Bhutan more than 500 years ago. This news was devastating for Ganga. All of sudden her dream to become a doctor had shattered and she could not understand the reason behind it. In her dismay, she went home sobbing. Her mother calmed her down and assured her that she would have a brighter future.

It was very difficult for Ganga to understand truly what was happening around her. She could not comprehend the logic behind her not being able to go to school. She was heartbroken trying to figure out why and how it could be a crime to be born into the community/family that she belonged to. Her hopes rose when southern Bhutanese (who were supposedly an outcast group) launched a peaceful march demanding basic human rights in 1990. However, instead of trying to come to a consensus and understand where this ethnic group was coming from, the king of Bhutan, Jigme Syngye Wangchuk, ordered his army to arrest the peaceful marchers. It did not end at arrests only; at the king's orders, the army committed atrocities on people of Nepali origin. They were tortured ruthlessly, leading to killings. The king was forcing southern Bhutanese to either leave the country or die at the hands of his army.

Ganga's hopes were shattered once again when her people decided to flee the country for the safety of their families. Ganga's father also decided to move to Nepal leaving all their farms, property, and wealth. Those were very difficult times for Ganga and her family. They spent one year on the bank of river Kanki, surviving with crumbs of grain. It was not until the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the government of Nepal extended help to Ganga's community that they heaved a sigh of relief.

Ganga moved to a refugee camp with her family and other people in 1992. They started their lives all over again hoping for a better tomorrow. CARITAS, a charity group, came forward to help the refugee children and adults living in camps in Nepal to continue their education. Once again, Ganga was excited and hopeful for her future. There was some ray of hope left for Ganga to fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor. Even though there was no school building and all the classes were held in open ground, Ganga was very happy to be back in the school.

~ Gopal D. Chhetri

Masako's Story - A Continuous Learner

I was born in 1934, and the war began Dec. 7, 1941. My home was in Japan. I lived with my mother, father, sisters, and a brother.

My mother died in WWII, along with two of my sisters. We lived in Nobeoko, and when the bombs started dropping, our family separated. My mother and two sisters went underground for shelter. Sadly, a fire bomb dropped on them and killed them.

I was about 10 years old and had not been to school for a while because of the fighting. When the war died down, I went back to junior high school. After my father died, I quit school and stayed home to take care of my younger sisters. They went to school until junior high, as very few people went to high school.

In 1954, I met my husband. Soon we got married, and for a while, we lived in Japan. My husband was transferred to Ft. Knox, Kentucky, and in the U.S.A. we started our family. To make extra money, I did ironing, making 10 cents an item.

I saved my money and hired an instructor to learn how to drive, because my husband worked at night and was not able to drive the kids to places they needed to go. I did get my driver's license, then saved my money and bought a used car. I was so proud of myself, and I was happy, too.

I am now 80 years old and continue to strive for an education, because I know how important it is to be educated.

~ Masako Kuehmstedt

Libya after Gaddafi

I want to tell you about my native country, Libya, after Gaddafi. Conditions are very bad, far worse than before. People know that Gaddafi was bad and crazy, that he put people in prison for criticizing him or his government. He did not like the extremists who wanted to have an Islamic state. Libyans were at first happy when he was killed because they thought that life would be better, safer, less dangerous. But, in reality, people are fighting about who is in charge, who will rule, who will make decisions, and who will steal the money.

The militia from Misurata are the most violent. They tore down the airport and burned down the oil wells. They want to make Misurata the capital of Libya.

The Xanthan come from another town southwest of Tripoli. They are fighting against the Misurata militia. Some people in Tripoli side with one group, and other people side with the other group. Some people are kidnapped for ransom! Others are killed for no ransom at all!

The extremists rob banks. They kidnap girls and boys. Life is very dangerous! Utilities (water, gas, electricity) are in short supply. Power plants have exploded. There is an overloading of the grid which brought about blackouts. In some cities the militia have taken over houses and people are displaced. They have bulldozed houses of Gaddafi supporters.

Before everybody was working with Gaddafi because he was the only authority. The militia tried first to punish the people who had worked with Gaddafi. They put them in prison and later killed them. They have tortured people. Some people died from torture. I have two cousins who have been jailed since 2011 because they are from some town where most of the people supported Gaddafi. They are still in prison. The Human Rights Organization came to Libya in 2013 because Libyans had sent them letters and pictures of the criminal activities of the militia men.

People are living in shacks and tents. In Tripoli there are several refugee camps for people who have fled their hometowns because life was so dangerous. Some relatives of ours from my father's family live in one of those camps. Two of my uncle's sons were already in jail when the militia came to arrest the youngest one (nineteen years old). He has been there now for a couple of weeks. My uncle was afraid that he would never see his young son again because his son might not be able to survive the torture. However, from all the stress, my uncle died!

I hope from my heart that Libya will soon have a safer and better life!

~ Laila Etawerghi

My Life

I love and admire my family. We are a small family: my husband, Hani, my twin daughters, Sara and Naya, and me. We used to live in the center of our country, Syria. Hani worked in his own dental clinic, and I worked in a bank processing car loans.

In 2011, a month after my daughters were born, a war started between the Syrian government and those who wanted change. Initially, the rebels had no guns and life did not change very much for us. Then in August of 2012 the situation became very bad because the rebels started to receive help from the outside. Bombs began exploding and people were carrying guns. It was no longer safe so I could not send my daughters to school. Life was very expensive. Before the war the price of one gallon of gas was twenty dollars and it kept going up. Now it is sixty dollars. There was no work for most of the people. After all this happened, we decided to leave Syria at the end of 2012. It was a very difficult decision for us because we were leaving everything we knew. We moved to Amman, Jordan, and stayed there for two years.

In Amman, Jordan, the life was good, but really difficult. I did not know anyone; I felt lonely with my two young daughters. I lived in very nice house, but it was in the suburbs so I could not get any place without a car.

In addition, the Jordanian government does not welcome outsiders unless they can benefit them economically. They place many conditions on people from other countries. For example, the government requires that Syrians have a Jordanian license plate. However, we would have had to pay 6000 dollars to transfer all the documents or sell the car in the free zone for 2000 dollars. Because all of that and because my daughters and I have U.S. citizenship, we decided to move to the United States to start a new and, we hope, better life.

My daughters have lived through a lot of changes and they have been able to adapt well and quickly. Maybe it is because

they are still very young. I have put my daughters in school to help them learn English so they can communicate with other people and make new friends. They miss our family in Syria and are always asking me about their grandparents and cousins in Syria. I always pray to God that He will give my family good health and enable us to stay together.

~ *Julia AlCheikh*

My Trip to Grandma's

My name is Beverly Deokarran. I was born in Georgetown, Guyana, in South America. I currently live in Parma, Ohio, and I'm a mother of five children. I've decided to write a story about a trip I went on when I was 12 years old.

It all started when I was going to my grandma's house for a week's vacation with my dad and brother. My dad rented out a fishing boat to take us in. It took about twelve hours to reach my grandmother's house. The name of the place was Berbice River. It's also where different Indian tribes live. It's a very beautiful, tropical place, like going to Hawaii. After a week, we headed back.

My grandmother packed us Caribbean vegetables and fruit, like bananas, coconuts and mangoes. We left for home, expecting a 12-hour trip, but four hours later, the boat started to slow down. Finally it came to a stop. I thought my dad might have forgotten something. Everyone was quiet for a few minutes, then I went to my dad and asked what was wrong. My dad told me that the engine had broken down. At first I was a bit scared, but knowing my dad knows how to fix appliances, that feeling eventually went away. For two days we were far out at sea. I saw dolphins, turtles and jumping sharks. I saw colorful beautiful birds, such as toucans and macaws. Bananas were the only fruit that was ripe enough for us to eat.

After two days, one of my dad's Indian friends was passing by in his boat and saw us. He came to our rescue. He tied a rope around the bow of the boat and pulled the boat to the shore where he lived. He introduced us to his family. They offered us hot soup, tea, and a place to sleep until the engine was fixed. Until today I'm still traumatized by bananas! It doesn't stop me from eating them, but it's the memory that comes with it.

~ Beverly Ann Deokarran

The Story of My Life

I was born in 1989 in a small village in Burma. Burma is a beautiful country with high mountains and great scenery. It is a very nice place to live. I belong to the Karen ethnicity. Many ethnic groups stayed in Burma at that time.

I was very young when my mother passed away. I stayed with my father and my siblings. I went to school until the age of 13. After that, despite me wanting to continue my education, I could not. The situation in Burma had changed, and it wasn't considered safe for many ethnic groups to go to school or other places. Civil war in Burma had changed our lives altogether. Things became so difficult that nobody could continue living there. Eventually, people started running away to safer places. My family and I also hid in the forest for a while. There was not enough food for everyone. Many people got sick and infected with deadly diseases due to lack of nutrition, medicine, and proper care. It was sad to realize that we were all homeless all of a sudden.

Several ethnic groups, including ours had no support from the government. Our basic civil rights were taken away and we were left to suffer and die. We had so many questions, but there were no answers. I was in shock for a very long time. After suffering so much, I fled to Thailand with many others seeking safety and shelter. I reached a refugee camp and stayed there for 10 years until I came to the U.S.A. in 2013. My family stayed back in Burma, but I lost touch with them. I was all alone and missed my homeland during my stay in refugee camp.

After moving to United States, I made friends here who are also from the Karen ethnic group. I live with my friends now, as I do not have a job. I lost my job and my agency is helping me to get a new one. I come to English classes during the day. I still miss my country and my family. There are times when I am very sad, but usually I am happy that I am safe and can start a new life.

~ Kaw Nay Htoo

Earth Sky



Ohio Summer Sky

I immediately fell in love with
this blue infinite sky.
I can't see the end.
I can't count the clouds.
I just stand by under a sea of light
and breathe a never-ending breath.

This was the amazing welcoming
I received from Ohio
when I had just moved here from Italy—
a blue, crystalline hug over me.

~ Clara Ravanelli

The Park by My Home

I have fond memories of the park I call my special place.
It was a gentle walk on the road past mine.
I would shuffle by the houses of friends,
Until the road branched off to the opening of imagination.

It was full of wonders for a child like me—
Waist high in a world so big.
I walked along the tar-beaten path.
I tasted dirt as the bases were stolen.
The lilacs whispered to my sweet sense of smell,
Pricked my hand on the vines.
As a family, we plucked the berries so ripe and round.

I crossed over the bridge and put my memory to test,
Picking up where I left off the long day before.
I would listen and watch as the water moved swiftly beneath me,
Then make way to the faces that greeted me;
Each one a friend or one in the future.
Full of adventure and ideas so big.
We conquered kingdoms on playgrounds,
Fought lions in forests,
Discovered Toad Island,
And swayed on the largest oak trees.

This park was more than just a place.
Each day, a new story to be written.
It is my childhood, my heart and my past.
I go back from time to time.
I relive my memories and make new ones for my heart to hold.

Time has passed,
Yet it is just as I left it.
The laughter calls to me;
I am grateful I had it.
It's the park that was close to my home.

Hey, Tamarindo Is Singing

I grew up in the countryside. Fresh air, green meadows. There was a creek. I imagined she could sing songs. Do not tell anyone because they might think I am crazy.

This was a very talkative creek, very giggly, crossing the field, coming down from the hill and passed near the Town of the Ladies. (People named this sector Town of the Ladies because almost all of them were widows.) She was a crystal clear creek, abundant and overflowing with joyful sparks. I visited her when I could because I had been forbidden to leave the house without permission. I was then twelve years old.

Bordering the creek, I could hear her speak. In her conversation she said, "Do you like my singing?" "Yes," I replied. So, while I could, I went to see and talk to her. She was very proud because she thought she was the only creek that could communicate with humans.

One day I went to see her and she said: "Jum, there is someone else who walks around here talking a lot. No, no, he's trying to say something." I looked around. The breeze hit my face. Then I heard his song. It was the Tamarindo, offering me his song.

El Tamarindo is a tree that provides a bittersweet fruit. It was on the top of the hill and from there he could see and hear the chattering creek. "I want to do a duet with creek, but she is always talking, and not listening to me, until today," he said. It was late and I had to go home. But I left them talking for the first time. They talked about many things.

I had to leave. I moved, came to the United States. I formed new beliefs. Some of them good, that help me, others did not help much. As you grow in age you forget the dreams you once had. Stress takes hold of you and you fall asleep, blind to the invisible world.

One day I was busy. I had no time, and I was in a hurry. I had to take a break. I could not be that way anymore. Then I closed my eyes and went back to the field where I grew up. I could hear the creek singing and accompanying Tamarindo in his humming. I again feel the wind in my face. How beautiful was this time.

I am the humming creek
Running, running down the hill
My friend the Tamarindo
My friend is getting free with me

Creek and Tamarindo were happy. They got along just fine. She washed his feet going down the hill. He filled her with leaves floating endlessly. Without straining both they were having a good time—sharing their secrets, their feelings, their wishes. They were very happy every day.

Over time the creek dried and a storm took Tamarindo away.

And I ... I got old, full of gray hair and wrinkles, less perfect, but happier. I never returned to this place. But when I want to go somewhere to relax or to meditate, I just close my eyes, I return to Tamarindo, I sit in his roots, pampered by the creek, who loves me unconditionally. I hear them talking and humming. In this place there is no space or time, only eternity.

I love that place. When I was a child I was so happy there, and even today it continues to serve me as my place to meditate and be me. I can reach it anytime I want; I just close my eyes wherever I am.

I keep hearing the song of Tamarindo. I keep hearing the endlessly talking creek. I still feel the breeze on my face. I still dream of eternity.

Backyard Theater

The stage is my backyard patio.
As I open the curtain, the show begins.

On a fresh morning,
A young deer between new leaves of the two trees
Stands and stares at me in my pajamas.

On a bright brunch time,
Chipmunks dig up and eat herb seeds in the pots,
Playing hide and seek.

On a warm day,
Herbs become only stems
Two chubby green caterpillars wiggling.

On a lunch break,
A red cardinal flies to a branch of a mulberry tree
Resting for a while.

On a muggy afternoon,
A squirrel sleeps soundly on a wooden railing
Under the leaves' shadows.

On a harvest evening,
A mysterious small apple appears on the railing
Disappearing after a while.

On a windy night,
A storm blows down all the leaves of the trees,
Changing all the lawn to yellowish brown.

In a quiet morning twilight,
White snow covers the branches,
Only small footsteps crossing the backyard.

The only audience is me in the dining room.
Every scene captures a moment of Ohio ... and my heart.

~ Asuka Kuriyama

Stormy Weather

“The snow is snowing, the wind is blowing,
but I can weather the storm,
Why do I care how much it may storm,
I’ve got my love to keep me warm.”

Oh, the many and ever-growing perils of winter weather!
Oh, to be ominously engulfed by a marshmallow world!
The hands are numb, the walking slowed, the vision compromised,
but it all can be forgiven
by the prospect of a vision of a winter wonderland!

Wintery wonders!
I have roamed in the snow, I have showered in it, I have eaten it;
I have also fallen, precariously, on and in it.

Last year, every cold of mine was in the cold.
As if being on my deathbed, I
suffered from the winter blues.

But I don’t mind the stormy weather, at least not with the proper
equipment, nicely and cozily clad.

The wind sings grave carols.
The sun is warmless and “red like a pumpkin head,” and everything
underneath is sleepy.

But aside from the cold, it all swings.
Everything is warm in memory, like hot chocolate.
Tales of food and sweets—and dinner conversations.
Everything is warm on the plate, also.

Icy teeth by the window.

Inaccessible roads.

“I’ve got my love to keep me warm.”

~ Luis Terrones

This composition was composed hastily with wintery songs in mind. I didn't know it rhymed. My dear teacher broke down the one paragraph into this. I quote "I've Got My Love to Keep Warm" by Irving Berlin, 1937 and "Marshmallow World" by Carl Sigman, 1949.

Seasons

Winter

Cold. Frozen.

Snow. Ice. Blizzard.

Coats. Gloves. Thermal underwear.

Chili. Hot chocolate. Stew.

Fireplace. Blanket.

Winter

Spring

Fresh Air.

Showers. Flowers. Greenness.

Rain Coats. Umbrellas. Goulashes.

Birds chirping everywhere.

Easter eggs.

Spring

Summer

Hot. Sunny.

Swimming. Picnics. Frisbees.

Popsicles. Cookouts. Ice cream. Lemonade.

Shorts. Flip flops.

Suntan lotion.

Summer

Fall

Leaves. Coolness.

Jack-o-lanterns. Halloween costumes.

Apples. Pumpkins. Spices. Cider.

Hayrides. Football. Bonfires.

Red. Orange.

Fall

Enticed by the Wind

As I look out the window, I watch the trees as they sway to the melody of the wind. Birds glide on the tips of the fingers of a gentle breeze. Flowers in a field of tall grass sway like lovers on a dance floor. And the wind's playful side is twirling a seed and then letting it fly away. When the wind is happy it feels like the soft caress of a warm hand or like a lullaby that can soothe and sing an infant to sleep. The wind seduces us and enjoys the effect it has on us.

Stand in front of a large body of water and the wind engulfs you and holds you as if you were in the arms of your lover. Sad is the wind on a tearful windy day. Angry wind becomes a storm that can destroy all that gets in its way. Or like a broken heart that has become cold is the wind of a winter storm.

~ *Susana W. Antal*

Questions Answers



What Happens Before and After?

Death is a tricky thing... A mystery of what comes next...

Is dark and cold the last thing you feel when alive?

Does the explorer learn what it's like to stay in one spot
to have a family?

Does the cancer patient who passed learn what it's like
to be free and not sick?

Do the old folks learn what it feels like to be young again?

Do the young get to feel what it's like to get old?

Does the abusive person get to feel what it's like to be abused?

Do rich people learn the heartache of being poor?

Do war vets get to feel peace?

Do judgmental people get to feel what it's like to be judged?

Does the saint learn what it's like to be a sinner?

Does the sinner learn what it's like to be a saint?

Do racists learn what it's like to be in the other's shoes?

Do blind folks get to see? Do the deaf get to hear?

Does the bully learn what it's like to be bullied?

Do idiots get smarter?

Does the killer get to be in the victim's shoes?

Is it true that when one passes, another is born...?

We won't know till it's our turn to cash in our own ticket
and start a new journey.

~Vincent Fields

Dear Old Year

I have loved the time we had together. I am sorry to see it end. I wanted to do so much but we only had 12 months to be together. I learned so much that I jumped up a grade in school. I made new friends and lost some. I learned how not to host a jewelry party when I am sick with flu.

I was able to help so many people with you in so many ways. For example, in March my sister Ashley (more than a best friend) was in the NICU with her 3rd child. I babysat her older two who were 3 and almost 2 years old. Yeah, it was fun-- and I slept for a month after. I got to go to Washington for 10 days with my big sister, Kassie, and almost lost my eye on her vacuum cleaner handle.

The sad part was I lost forever some great friends, some animals, but not, thank God, any family. I still have not broken a bone, but hey, there's always next year. I got to see people I love and find love. Next year my family will be bigger with my sister getting married. Maybe next year it will be my turn.

As I looked back over the months, I got to see some amazing things like baby bunnies being born, mountains for the first time, and the look on my dad's face when he showed me my new truck.

I will miss the "us times" when I just sat looking up at the stars or on the back of my horse Apollo, just enjoying life. I think of all the times I have cried when my friends were hurting. I have cried more times than I wanted. I hope I didn't make others cry. I think just writing this might make me cry. I am so thankful that I knew you. I enjoyed our time together. I know there were some bad times, but the great times are too many to count.

~ Elizabeth Willard

Dear New Year

I am looking forward to spending time with you. I know we will only have 12 months together, but hey, we can do so much in so little time. I am so happy with the thought of all the great times ahead, like my older sister getting married in March and my turning 21. I can drive now, so no more missing church or horse and rabbit shows because I don't have a ride. Now I can see more of my family too, and I can't wait for that. I think this time around I may break a bone or at last see more of the TV show, *Bones*. Maybe I will fall in love. I know I will fall in love, but the question is-- will it be human? I think back over all the years of my life, and this year I am looking forward not back. I have some great friends who are like my family. Still, I need to find a good job. I hope to get babysitting jobs so I still have time to do what I love to do and to finish school. I love just thinking of all the great times ahead, but I have to go for now.

Your New BFF,
Elizabeth

~ Elizabeth Willard

Who's to Say?

Mom on drugs
Dad got money
One life bad
One life good
See my mom roam through the hood
See my dad work all day
Which life do I choose?
Who's to say?

~ *Travis Hughes*

Missing Screws

On the outside I seem fine
I got a war going on and it's in my mind
Go ahead look inside
But you might be scared at what you find
Better off to be on my own
I don't care about you
So leave me alone

My heart is growing cold/I feel like I done sold my soul and they can't stand it/so don't ask me 'bout that future because I don't know what my plan is/it's got me going crazy/and lately I hate me I don't even know how to take me/so I wouldn't expect you to/I don't even care about me so screw you/and this life ready to be a ghost screamin' at God if you love me/why take the ones that mean the most/I don't know if I'd cry or cuss you out if I met you close/but it's only cuz

On the outside I seem fine
I got a war going on and it's in my mind
Go ahead look inside
But you might be scared at what you find
Better off to be on my own
I don't care about you
So leave me alone

~ Johnathan Walker

The Mask

The mask is a wonderful thing that I wear. When I wear it I become more powerful. The mask controls everything. It controls my thoughts, actions, and feelings. But one bad thing about the mask is that it comes with great deception. People don't know when I wear it or even that I wear it. Though when it comes off, everything you see will be different.

Without the mask I feel naked and vulnerable. Without it I feel weak and powerless. Without it you see the pain and under the mask everything is broken. You see another person, someone who tries his hardest to be evasive to society. This makes the mask seem magical.

The mask can make you secure and excited. It can make you humble and intelligent. The mask gives you encouragement and uplifts you. It makes you happy and can give you a great personality. The mask makes you feel this way because of its beautiful design. The bad thing about the mask is that the more and more you wear it, the more it destroys who's underneath it.

~ Nedric Pritchett

My Music

What a powerful voice music is.
Telling how I feel when words can't describe.
The goose bumps I feel when a rift is too good.
The soul, the spark, the melody, the voice, the passion!
My one true love that lifts my spirits all the time. The dopamine
That rushes through my veins when a ballad is too sweet.
The head rush. Lyrics telling a story of hardship, romance, blues,
and so forth.
It is an "Escape," perhaps to have some Pina coladas with Rupert
Holmes
Or even grabbing "Two Tickets To Paradise" with Eddie Money.
I have a "Spirit of Radio,"
Giving me the power to choose between different rhythms and
rhymes.
Different channels voicing different tunes.
The choices are endless! Rock and roll is my go to.
I guess I could "Ramble On" day and night, dusk till dawn.
Although today's music is different from yesteryear,
"It's Still Rock and Roll to Me."
My music gives me hope, purpose, life.
It will never be my "Beast of Burden."

1. *Escape*, Rupert Holmes
2. *Two Tickets to Paradise*, Eddie Money
3. *Spirit of Radio*, Rush
4. *Ramble One*, Led Zeppelin
5. *It's Still Rock and Roll to Me*, Billy Joel
6. *Beast of Burden*, Rolling Stones

~ Concetta Hasson

As Sure as Death

As sure as death
Once a day
The warmth of the light
Will go away
But a temporary candle light
Can help evade the night...for a while.

A night
So silent, cold and slumber,
Around you it grows
Always at bay
Just awaiting the instant
For the light to stray.

For in the dark of night,
A choice is made:
Flee for the light
Or stay and play.

~ *Marshall Olsen*

Escape from Reality

It was the year 2005, and Victoria was in the middle of the first Tomorrowland concert. Her dark clothing, red hair, and green eyes reflected what was happening inside of her. For twenty-one years of her life, she had wanted to find the motivation that her heart needed. She had lived many lives in one throughout her life, in a constant war with herself. Her senses had fallen asleep, and her desire to keep fighting had dwindled. She had asked for help for many years as she had many dreams. Some seemed unreal, but they were her most precious treasures. In fact, they were the only things she really had.

She had always lived in a big world, a complex and lonely world, full of her passions and fears. The people in her life quickly came and went. However, at the concert, she was just one of many and was able to find serenity and peace. The conflicts in her world subsided.

All the people were forming hearts with their hands, pupils were dilated, thousands and thousands of voices were joining to create one melody. For one moment the lights were turned off and the DJ slowed the pace of the music. All were waiting in anxiety, but Victoria was in ecstasy. Since she had been a girl, she had had a special connection with music, and that would be her salvation and release forever...

She remembered her adolescence: the long walks on New York City streets and the flickering of neon lights until dawn. She recalled the sound of the turntable when her favorite song was over and the flavor of champagne she drank when her heart was broken. These sensations and memories flooded her, like photos projected on a screen, and told her to explore herself in places that she hadn't been. In this moment something changed inside of her. Her heart began to slow, her senses abandoned her, and gravity consumed her.

The colors and the sounds of the concert made one final appearance. This last burst of energy passed through her body, seizing her, and she lost consciousness. The concert finished, the balloons rose in the air, and her soul rose to join them.

Her soul and world were reflected in the colors of the dawn. Her complexity and different traits matched the morning sky. Her soul was released and finally freed; one soul desperate to escape, one heart in pain. This was the end for her but also a new beginning. A second chance.

~ Maria Alejandra Guerrero Castellanos



Love

Loss

7:53 A.M.

My name is Edward Bale, and I survived the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941.

I arrived in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on the 8th of November. It was my first time away from home. I'm a country boy, born and raised in Bean Station, Tennessee. I was excited and couldn't wait to see the ocean. I quickly found out that I wasn't sent to Pearl Harbor to relax by the beach. There was a war going on. The United States was a neutral country during World War II, but nevertheless we had to be ready. We had to prepare for the worst. I was a tail gunner on a classified United States aircraft now known as the B29, the newest and most state-of-the-art aircraft at the time.

Life at Pearl Harbor was relaxed for the most part. We had a lot of fun on our down time. We'd play card games and baseball. The time just seemed to fly by. On the night of December 6th, 1941, the mood was very light, as most Saturdays were. Some of us were dancing, and others were playing cards or reading. There were even talks of the war ending and us all going home. I was opening the Christmas gifts my mother had sent me; there were some pictures and a small box with a yellow ribbon around it. I opened the box, revealing a wonderful pocket watch with a giant eagle on the front. The hands were gold and the numbers silver. It was the most beautiful time piece I had ever seen. I set my new watch to Hawaii time, and I lay down for the night.

I awakened at 6:45. It was Sunday December 7, 1941. I began my morning routine of a hot cup of coffee and a hot shave. Sunday at Pearl Harbor was a day we would relax and clean the planes. As I was slipping my boots on, I heard the loud rumble of jet engines. We were expecting a fleet of bombers, so I didn't think much of it. As I turned to exit the barracks, the windows started breaking. I couldn't understand what was happening. I ran out of the building to see people running, planes shooting at our people and at our ships. Bullets were whipping by my head. As I tried to

help people get to cover, another soldier comes running up to me. "It's the Japanese," he said. I just remember him being incredibly calm. We looked at each other; we knew what we had to do. We had to save everyone we could.

After carrying about a dozen people to safety, we noticed it was now eerily quiet. I thought to myself, this can't be it. We still have ships. We still have planes. Before I could utter a single word, I heard it again—the rumble of jets roaring through the sky. We had to stop this; we had to get in the air. Without saying a word we ran for the hangar where the B29 was. About ten yards from the door a woman was lying injured. I couldn't leave her. I picked her up and carried her to safety. When I returned to the hangar, the B29 was gone. It was in the air with a lone pilot. As more of our planes were in the air, more of theirs started to come down either by being shot down or intentionally diving into what was left of our naval fleet.

Gradually, the chaos in the air calmed, but the chaos on the ground was just beginning. Smoke filled the air as our planes, ships, and buildings burned. The screams of people trapped in ships pierced the silence. I was approached by a young lady in a grey dress; she pulled a picture out of her pocket. It was a family portrait; she asked if I had seen her husband. I glanced down at the picture in her hand. It was him, the man who helped me carry all those people. "His name is John, John Rogers," she said. I couldn't help but to gasp in disbelief. I said, "Mrs. Rogers, your husband is an American hero. We will find him." I then walked away to help with the rescue efforts on the USS Arizona. We were too late; there was nothing we could do. We were all there working to save as many people as we could. For the first time in my entire stay at Pearl Harbor, everyone was color blind. Everyone worked side by side to do whatever we could to help.

I could've been in the air that day; I should have been in the air. I reached into my pocket for my watch, only to find that the watch was damaged. There was a bullet in the door of the watch I opened it to determine my watch had stopped working at 7:53.

We lost 2,500 people that morning, with thousands more injured. The Japanese destroyed 18 American battleships, 300 planes, and dozens of buildings and homes.

“December 7th, 1941 - A date which will live in infamy”

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt

December 8, 1941

~ *Bill Flynn IV*

Haunted Past

She stayed trapped in her past....

She was not able to move forward or run away from all the pain, the suffering, the abandonment, or the molestation. Her life as an adolescent became negative. She would put up a fight with anyone. She just wanted the attention and love from her mother. But she felt that her mom never listened to her.

She became a young mother; she was only 14. She was terrified and a bit lost as to how she, being so young, was going to be able to raise a baby. She didn't even want to see the baby, but her sister made her look at the gift God made. But it didn't matter. She wanted to continue to be the child and go on with her own life. So she stayed in her past.

She was not able to move forward as a mother. Her own mother had to step in to support her and the baby. She was not fit. She had wild ways. Her mother knew that the baby needed proper care and a stable environment, so she took custody of the baby. She decided that her mother could take her place while she went out to find herself. But she could not escape her past, so she only found excuses that kept her from being in her child's life.

In her mind, she did all she could, and that was to carry me for 9 months. To her, I am a reminder of a past that she cannot erase.

She stays trapped in her past....

~ Porsché Jones

Little Girl

She comes home from school. Her mother is sitting on the couch, crying. She looks at the little girl and yells at her, "It's all your fault the police took him away!" The little girl runs to her room, sobbing, as she thinks to herself, "Why me? I didn't do anything wrong."

Time goes by and the mother is still with that man. The little girl lives in a home where she doesn't feel safe. With every move she makes, she thinks he is watching her.

Years go by. She's 16 now. She meets this young guy. She falls in love with him. His family loves this little girl. She feels safe around them. The little girl's mother doesn't approve of the young guy. That man in her mother's life looks at the young guy with anger and jealousy. They both decide to kick the little girl out. She moves in with the young guy and his family. She feels like no one will ever put his hands on her again. She is wrong. A year passes and the love of her life puts his hands on her. The little girl doesn't know where to go or who to turn to.

So she moves back to the hell house of her mother and that man. She's 18 now and still in love with the young guy who was supposed to be her best friend. One day the young guy came with a gun. He began shooting at her mother's house. Her mother and that man are angry. That man gets in the car and goes after the young guy. That man wants to kill him.

They move away, and her mom is still with that man. Her mom doesn't want to believe the little girl and how the little girl feels about her life. The little girl cries every night. She just wants to get away from them and be happy. One day, as that man stands next to her mother, the little girl can't take it anymore. She confronts her mother and that man. She cannot believe what she is hearing or seeing. The little girl takes her things and leaves, planning never to return.

The little girl is sitting in her ABLE classroom, and her teacher tells the class to write an essay for the Ohio Writers' Conference. The little girl is now 23 and finally decides to share her story.

~Yaritza Santiago

The End

As the sun slipped away on that final day, he had the foresight to know it would be his last. Though it all led up to this inevitable end, he still questioned if it could have gone differently. Where did he make the mistakes that forever sealed his fate? As he lay there, strangely calm, he waited for the grim end that only the Reaper could bring forth. The memories of the previous week and years, so far forgotten, erupted like a volcano that once laid dormant beneath the surface.

For if he knew that dark clouds had loomed over that tranquil moment he found himself in at that time, would he have been able to avoid what was about to happen? Could he have arrived at a different destination? Then reality snapped back in, reminding him of the insignificance of one man facing what can best be described as the end of society as he knew it. Maybe it was wishful thinking or blind optimism, for a man has nothing left to give in a moment like that. Then emotionally he started to break down, remembering all that was lost. It was too much for him to bear. He could not allow himself to go to that dark place. So he surrendered to the truth and accepted that mistakes were made. Did he not prepare well enough? Was there never going to be help coming? Should he have tried harder to survive? Was he ultimately just weak and feeble of mind? One thing was for certain, he was not cut out for this and now he knew that. So now he could embrace his fate.

As the warm sensation of blood began to pool in his lungs, the first to go was his vision. As it did, he thought to himself what a cruel unimaginable punishment to be left in total darkness for his last moments of life. Then the cold grasp of Death came over him, releasing him as soon as it had come. All that remained was a lifeless shell of what once was. He passed on from life, to bone, then dust. Nothing remains in the end.

~ Richard B. Bolen

The Explosion

About four years ago I had an experience that changed my life. I was established with a well-known company, which is a supplier for the locomotive industry, making massive crankshafts for locomotives/trains and ships ranging from 2,200 lbs. to 7,700 lbs. I dedicated my life to this job from 1997 till November 3, 2011, the day I walked away from an explosion that almost killed me.

For most of my employment with this company I was a second shifter. I worked my way from the bottom to the top within the company, becoming a C.N.C. and Automatic Precision Grinder. Holding this title for about 8 years, the best of the old schoolers taught me everything I know. I learned well, becoming very good at my job, giving great quality work, and feeling proud of doing what I did.

Until one day, or I should say night. It was around 7:20 p.m. right before our lunch time. I was setting up on the next pin position, so when I returned from lunch I would be ready to just start running the machine. This machine is about 50 feet long, and I would stand on a platform 20 feet long 3 feet off the ground. It's massive in size, built for the shafts that we do, and can be intimidating at first until getting used to it. So I was setting up, when all of a sudden the grinding wheel before me started rattling, shaking, and then it started to make a rumbling sound. Standing there in front of it, I thought, "WTF?" Then BOOM! It exploded—all this within seconds—particles, fragments of metal, pieces of grinding wheel blew right past me, nearly striking me within a half inch or less. I felt the wind of things blowing right past my face—dust particles and tiny pieces of the wheel spraying me, hitting me. I reacted quickly, covering the left side of my face and leapt off the platform. But I heard everything behind me going to hell: booming, cracking, popping, ripping, hissing, the smell of burning. I ran and never looked back.

Afterwards, when all was done, all of us in the plant that night surrounded the machine—me still trembling, shaking beyond

belief. This had just happened to me; the entire grinding wheel and slide table for the grinding wheel pretty much was destroyed. The good thing was that no one got hurt, at least not physically, nor was I at fault for anything. After our company and wheel supplier did their investigation, it was believed that the bolts to the wheel hub were over tightened by the wheel room guy, causing a small crack in the wheel. Eventually in time, as the wheel spun at a high RPM (revolutions per minute) the crack grew bigger, causing it to explode.

Although no one had been hurt physically, I had yet to realize that I had been hurt mentally, taking away a part of me inside, a passion. I was good at doing this job. As I stepped up on the other machine similar to the one that had exploded, I began operating the machine as I always did and an uncontrollable trembling came over me. My hands began to shake as my heart started racing. I shut down the machine, stepped outside trying to get a grip, not understanding what was going on with me. I returned to the machine after taking a breather, fired it up for running, and said to myself, "Let's do this." Again trembles and shakes returned uncontrollably.

This continued on day after day, getting worse. Often while I was sleeping I would awake suddenly as if I were getting struck by something. I went to the doctor, explained to her what had happened and what was happening to me now. After her evaluation she diagnosed me with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). I thought it was no big deal, that I would get past it. I went back to work, but when I got up on the other machines, again I would start to tremble, hands shaking. This went on for three months after the incident.

One day I never went back. I quit my job. So here I am, 3 and a half years later, starting over, trying to find an establishment where I fit in. This is why I am getting my GED. I have found a place that may be for me, but the company I am employed with requires a diploma. This how my life changed.

Little Girl

I once knew a little girl who was a daddy's girl. She loved her dad. He thought paying child support and doing drive-by visits every now and then was being a good dad. He would do his drive-bys in his big pretty car. He would let that little girl sit in his driver seat and play like she was driving. The little girl thought it was a big thing sitting where her daddy sat and wearing his hats.

Then he would take them for a ride and buy them something to eat. Wow! Her day was made.

When he would get ready to go, the little girl would say, "Daddy, when are you going to come and get me to spend the weekend with you?" He would lie to her and say, "Next weekend, Baby, I'll be to get you." She would hug and kiss her dad.

All week she couldn't wait for the weekend to come. She got her little suitcase all together and got dressed and got her hair combed all pretty. She sat on the steps waiting for her dad. Her mother would just come and look sadly at her, but she wouldn't say anything. Finally, she realized he was never going to come. She cried herself to sleep. I wonder, do you know any little girl like this?

I do. The little girl was me.

~ Mildred Myles

My Nightmare

As I settled down for the night, I thought I would do a little reading before going to sleep. It was a James Patterson novel. I like to read a good thriller or murder mystery once in awhile. As I was reading, I drifted off into a light sleep. I could hear the TV in the next room and people talking in the parking lot below.

As I was sinking deeper into sleep, I began to dream. I could see the silhouettes of trees and faintly hear children playing. As the dream progressed into focus, I could start to see the children running and jumping rope in driveways of the street where I once lived. The sky was so blue; apple, pear, and blackberry trees were blossoming. The sun was shining, and the temperature was in the mid-seventies.

In this dream I thought to myself, what a beautiful afternoon. I had a real good feeling, smelling the scents of different flowers. As the afternoon proceeded into the early evening, I started to go visit my boyfriend. My boyfriend's name is James. We both had lived on the same street, right next door to each other, but James' family had moved near the park a few blocks over from my home.

James told me the name of the street his family had moved to, but I couldn't remember the address. Since he couldn't remember the address, he told me the color of the house and that it was a two-family duplex. I am well into this dream now, walking down a block and over two blocks toward my boyfriend's house. I remembered the color of the house, but when I got there, there were four houses the same color and they were made the same.

There were five houses from the corner and the first house was blue. The other four houses were white with green trimmings and green awnings over the windows and porch. Each house had hedges by the driveway. Since four houses looked the same, I went to the fifth house first. There was a woman outside doing yard work.

I asked the woman if she knew anyone just recently moved onto this street. She replied, "Yes." She said that they were the only family that had moved on this street in years, that just about everyone on the street knew each other. I asked her which of the houses it was, since four of them looked the same. The woman told me it was the second house from the corner.

As this dream continued, I walked back to the second house. As I stepped onto the porch, I saw a note on both doors stating, "Go to the side door." I went around to the side door to ring the doorbell but there was only one. I didn't know if the bell was for the upstairs apartment or downstairs so I decided to knock instead.

Music was coming from upstairs, and it was a bit loud. I continued knocking and a man finally answered. This man looked to be in his fifties or older. He had salt and pepper hair and mustache, wrinkles about the eyes, and wore light tan khakis with a shirt that appeared to be a uniform.

I asked this man, "Did a family just move in?" He replied, "Yes." I explained that there was only one doorbell, and I didn't know if it was for upstairs or not. I told him that my friend had just moved in. I asked if I could go upstairs and knock on the door. He suddenly got this strange look on his face and replied, "No." I told him that I was expected, but he still said no and refused to let me pass.

I thought to myself, why won't this man let me go upstairs and knock on the door? I pleaded with the man to let me go knock on the door but he stood there, looking at me with a smirk on his face. I yelled up to the window for James, but no one came to the window. Again I tried yelling up towards the window, but no one heard me.

This tall man started to laugh and had a glassy look in his eyes. His laugh sounded eerie, making the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Suddenly, I got this unnerving feeling. I thought this man was very disturbed. I took a couple of steps back, trying to ease out of the driveway.

I could hear him mumble something. But what? This dream was starting to get intense. I slowly started walking out of the driveway. Just before I got to the edge of the hedges, I slightly turned my head to look out of the corner of my eye. I thought I saw two Dobermans. I started walking faster, trying to figure out which way to go, where I could run to. Should I hide or run to the nearest house and bang on the door?

I thought, My God what did I do? Why is this man doing this to me? This was my first time coming to their house. It had been only a week since they had moved there. Just then, I realized that it had gotten dark. How could it have gotten dark so quickly? I wasn't planning to stay that long. I wanted to be at home before dark. There was a park close by. Walking faster and faster now, I could hear him teasing the dogs, getting them worked up, agitated.

The dogs were barking and growling. As I got closer to the park I could hear him say, "sic... get her." I started running through the park. I don't know what made me run through the park. That should have been the last place to go. I just knew I had to get away, escape.

I was halfway across the park, and I could hear the dogs behind me barking. My heart was pounding, throbbing as if it were coming through my chest. I thought, why? Why is this happening? I could hear the dogs getting closer as they gave chase.

The dogs were getting closer and closer. I thought to myself, these dogs are fast! How can I get away? I tripped over something and down I went, skinning my knees and tearing my pants. I could barely see what my feet hit as I felt around to grab for it.

The first dog came charging at me with the other one close behind. I managed to quickly stand, swinging the big stick I had tripped over. The dog jumped at my throat, and I swung again hitting it across the mouth and knocking out one of its teeth. The other dog came charging, growling and snarling, snapping at my leg.

I screamed and screamed, but nothing came out. One dog bit me on the leg by my ankle. The other one tried to bite me on the hand, but I managed to move it, swinging the stick with all of my might. I could feel the blood rushing to my head as I was stepping backwards, trying to get away. I could feel the blood running down my legs and knees.

Taking steps backward and saying, wake up girl, this is nothing but a dream, I could feel my temples pulsing as I tried to wake up. I tried to move but couldn't. I was almost at the street and suddenly the dogs turned and ran back as if they were being called.

Taking a deep breath, I was able to move again. I slowly awakened in a sweat with my pillow soaking wet. I sat on the side of the bed and thought, was that a dream or nightmare? I reached down and felt my legs to see if there was any blood. Oh, thank god! It must have been nothing but a nightmare, and I hope I never have one like that again.

~Wanda L. Babb

Unfortunate Coincidence

When I was 11, my family decided to change our way of life. We packed our belongings and headed to the United States for good. With nothing but our clothing on our backs and just a few dollars in our pockets, we decided to settle down in Cleveland, Ohio. My father and mother began to look for jobs, and I had to stay home with my siblings. At the age of 13, my older sister and I found jobs at a bakery. We started to work there immediately, and I loved the job. They paid me a good amount of money every week, and I got also lots of attention from the male customers. It was annoying sometimes, but I thought some of them were attractive.

Life was good, and everything was going great. We were all happy; there was clothing on our backs and food on the table. At 14, I had worked at the bakery for a year. I got to know most of the customers that came on a daily basis. One day one of them came up to me and asked me out, and so I said yes. I decided to give him a shot. We went out on the following weekend to a restaurant and watched a movie at the theater. But I just didn't feel the connection or any sparks between us, so I told him the next day that we should just be friends.

Summer finally arrived and the heat was really getting to bother me since I had to work near lots of hot ovens and stoves. Also the owner did not have any intention to fix the air conditioning. After a year and a few months, the owner decided to give me and my sister the responsibility of closing and locking up the bakery. We did not mind, but the only thing that bothered us was that the last door we had to lock up was at a dark alley behind the bakery. We were starting to get the hang of it and were very used to the dark, until one night, a man appeared out of the dark with a handgun pointed in my direction and told me to go inside the bakery and grab the money from the register. I did not know that the bakery owner had taken all the money before closing the bakery. The robber was very disappointed and upset, then he pointed the gun back at me and told me to take my clothes off. He

said if I didn't follow his instructions, he wouldn't hesitate to put a bullet in my head. So I did as he told, and he began to touch me. He raped me that night. The police came and they also notified the owner, so the owner decided to give me the week off.

A few months after the incident happened, I started to feel nausea and finally threw up at work. I decided to visit the doctor, who told me that I was pregnant. I was confused and had no idea what to do since I didn't know the father of the child or how to raise a child. At one point, I decided to have an abortion, but something in me told me not to. After investigating, the police found the suspect and summoned me to appear in court. There he was, the man that I went out on a date with more than a year before. He raped me and was also the father of my child. They sentenced him to life in prison since he was tied to a murder in another state.

So here I am, a single mother who decided to get my life back on track by getting my education (my GED diploma). I will be the first in my family to get a diploma.

~ *Lisauri Cruzado*

Shots Fired

As a kid I grew up with a single parent. My mom was really strict. I went to Catholic school from K-8. After graduating the 8th grade, my mom didn't have enough money to send me to a Catholic high school, so I ended up attending a local public school. There I made lots of friends instantly. I started hanging out with two girls. We used to be inseparable; we went everywhere together. One day we met up with these boys we'd known for a while and made plans to meet up later on that night. When I got home from school, I asked my mom if one of my friends could sleep over because she and I had made a plan for us to sneak out while my mom was sleeping. My mom said yes, so later that evening the guys texted us.

We made sure my mom was fully asleep and we both jumped out of my bedroom window and met the guys around the corner from my house. We both got in the car, and the boys drove off. They told us, "Don't worry girls. You're cool. You'll be okay with us," so we thought nothing of it. We first went to the store to get soda and some snacks before going to their house, but as we pulled up we saw our other friend being robbed by a man with a gun. When he saw us pulling up he started shooting! I yelled, "Duck, Jess!" The guys that we were in the car with jumped out, ran, and left us in the car. Then, complete silence.

I was wondering who got shot until I heard noises coming from behind me like someone was gargling. When I turned around I realized it was my best friend who had been shot! I instantly started screaming, "Oh my god, oh my god. It's Jessica. Someone please help!" I hopped out of the car and pulled the seat up. As she was looking at me, gushing blood out of her mouth and down her clothes, she said, "Viv, please I don't want to die." I started crying even harder and told her everything was going to be okay and that she was not going to die. I held her head until the ambulance arrived.

Finally paramedics got there. I got out of their way, and they immediately got to work. They got her out of the car and stood her up against the splint. The lights were all shining on her, and all I could remember is standing there covered in blood, with blood leaking out of her mouth, with this scared helpless look on her face. The paramedics took her to the hospital. They wouldn't let me ride in the ambulance, so I walked to the hospital. I waited until I heard news if Jess was okay. Doctors came out and said "She is one lucky girl. The bullet hit her straight in her front teeth, and she swallowed the bullet. Her teeth slowed down the speed of the bullet. They saved her life!" We all cried and were glad she was going to be okay.

After hours of being at the hospital, it was time for me to call my mom! Now remember she thought we had been at home that whole time. Finally I called her and when she answered, I told her what happened. She instantly started crying, asking why? Why would we decide to do such a stupid thing? You never know what can happen, especially with guys who didn't care one bit out about us and who had just jumped out and left us in the car! She was so disappointed in me that I broke down inside.

The point of this story is, think before you act and don't just trust anybody. Everything may seem okay, but observe your surroundings and don't make stupid decisions that can affect you for the rest of your life. I was only 16, and that is not a situation a 16 year old should have gone through! Be a leader not a follower. Set your own goals. Think before you act.

~Vivian Quinones

Body Soul



Christmas Memory

In Japan, our religions are basically Buddhism and Shinto, so we don't have a religious custom to celebrate Christmas. But, after World War II, celebrating Christmas has been becoming popular, and now most Japanese do so.

The way to celebrate Christmas in Japan is different from the U.S., with two differences between them. One difference is that young people spend Christmas with not their families, but with their lovers. The other difference is that we think Christmas Eve is more important than Christmas Day on the 25th. I don't know the reason why.

My most funny memory was when I was 20 years old. Some of my friends held a party on Christmas Eve because they didn't want to spend the night lonely. Only people who didn't have boyfriends or girlfriends were allowed to join the party, so we called it "Single-Bell Party." There were more than 20 people.

We drank a lot and talked a lot. Of course, I had fun all night, but, to be honest, when I came back home the next morning alone, I felt lonely and thought, "I prefer to stay with my family."

~Yoshimi Sugino

A Different Path

I was in the county jail. Pod 45-E. There were two women to a cell and about 25 cells in my pod. Each cell was 10 feet by 10 feet with one bed, one desk, and a drinking fountain over a toilet. Whoever was placed in the cell first got the bed. The other slept on the floor.

The women in my pod passed the time by playing cards, writing letters, and arguing over what to watch on the pod's single television set. My bunkie's name was Florence. She was known for telling jokes and making everyone laugh. She had a terrible toothache and had been waiting to see a dentist for days. It had grown into a painful abscess, but she continued to crack jokes. It helped to take my mind off my case. I worried about going before the judge and being sentenced.

Every afternoon we had count time. We didn't know exactly when it would happen. We had to sit in our cells and wait for the guards to go through the entire jail and count every inmate. During count time, I sat at my desk with a hardcover Bible that was given to me by the jail's chaplain. He told me to start by reading the Gospels, so I opened the Bible to the first book – Matthew – and started reading. I read stories about Jesus and the miracles he performed on the poor and sick. I thought, "If he did that for them, I wonder what he would do for me." I closed the Bible and started to pray. I felt a peace come over me. As I talked to Jesus, I felt like he was in the cell with me. I wondered why I had waited so long to talk to him.

One night, I was lying in my cell when I heard prison guards call my name. I woke up. They told me to pack up my things. They said we were going for a ride. It was 4 a.m. They didn't tell us where we were going. They took my belongings, shackled me to another inmate, and loaded a group of us onto a bus with bars over the windows. I knew where I was headed. Prison.

Sitting on the bus, I started to pray. I told God I was scared. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. But I asked him to help me. I asked him to be my strength. As I was praying, I noticed the woman seated next to me was very upset. She had been sentenced to a term of two years. I silently prayed for her too.

When the bus arrived at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, we were unloaded and taken through Admissions. We were showered, weighed, and administered a shot. We were read a list of rules and then given a brown jump suit, a towel, a bunk assignment, an ID, and an inmate number. They took my picture. I was led into an enormous room that looked like a warehouse, filled with bunk beds. There were probably 500. I found my bunk, quickly made the bed, climbed onto it, and prayed.

I remembered watching a movie and hearing this line: "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans." That was me. I had spent my life doing what I wanted, following my own plans. I had ignored God. And here I was.

I realized that I was not perfect, but God had a plan for me. I prayed and asked God to put me on his path instead of my own. I had to break the cycle that had been my life. From now on, I wanted his plan. His path.

Ten months later, I was released from prison. I was given \$75 cash, a brown shirt, and matching brown khakis to wear out. I was on my own again. I walked out the doors of the prison and said, "Thank you, Jesus." My sister Lisa picked me up. We were excited to see each other. I stayed with my sister for the next couple years and started attending a small church near her house.

I still wasn't perfect, but God put me on his path. And that changed everything.

Keys to Self-Truth

Voices fill the air around me,
Rumors, slander and gossip.
Deafening my inner voice,
I ponder the simplest questions.
Who am I? Where am I?
Nobody has the slightest idea.
I could be a hollow shell of an artist,
sulking around my studio loft in Paris.
I could be a once famous chef, forgotten
reminiscing about my once beloved Italian restaurant.
I could be a busy workaholic in a big corporation,
crawling into bed at night resenting the day to come.
Whoever I am and wherever I'm from,
I am no different than you or anyone else.
I am made up of the same chemicals and elements.
But my personality is what defines me as a person.
Ignore those who put you down or act out of jealousy.
We all deserve to dive into a safe haven in our hearts.
Hoping, caring, and longing for those days of bliss.
Everyone deserves to know what that feels like.
So, listen to me when I tell you – you do matter.
You will reach the stars above and shine brighter than before.
You will meet your soul mate and live happily ever after.
You will know your true potential and waken fully refreshed.
Reality, dreams, and imagination are keys to self-truth.
When you realize that, make your life how you want it to be.
After all, we are all stories in some way – so make it a good one.

Inspired by the creator of "Doctor Who," Steven Moffat

~ Nicholas C. Gresley

Superstition vs. Logic

Superstition refers to any belief or practice that is explained by mystical causality and is in contradiction to modern science. I know some of the superstitions of United States, and they are called old wives tales. For example: If your nose itches, a fool is about to kiss you. Thirteen is just an unlucky number in general. If an umbrella is dropped on the floor of a house, someone in that house is going to die shortly.

I am from India, and there is a lot of diversity in our country. Each community has their own beliefs, traditions and customs. Some of the beliefs have no explanation, and according to me they are just superstitions. For example: We should not cut our nails on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Women should not wash their hair on these particular days. It will bring bad luck. Some kids look cute; therefore some people put a black spot with eyeliner behind the kid's ear or on the kid's forehead. That mark will protect them from bad omens. Broken mirrors and stopped watches bring bad luck. There are two other superstitions that are very common in Indian and U.S. culture. First, if a black cat crosses your way it is bad omen. To correct that omen you should go three steps back and spit. A second omen is while boiling milk, the milk should not get out of the container. If that happens it will cause bad luck.

Sometimes I think of these, and I laugh a lot. We are living in the 21st century, and we still believe these things. I admit that I am a bit superstitious. I want to share one funny thing. If my daughter becomes sick or cranky, I always think she got a bad omen. I do the remedy by putting some salt or black tea seeds on my palm. I spin my hand around my daughter seven times and throw it away. After I do that it is believed that bad omen has gone away. My husband used to tease me by asking me how much salt and tea powder I wasted this month. This made me laugh, and I rethought-- maybe there is nothing like bad omens or bad luck.

After thinking, I realized that broken mirrors and spilled milk are just small accidents. Stopped watches need new cells. Kids

are always attractive, and they are loved and blessed by most of the people. A cat has to pass somewhere on that road, no matter if you or your car are in its path. There could be unlucky days just by chance. Sometimes, I make connections between superstitions and reality. For example: If I cut my nails on Tuesday I may have bad luck. My point is that there are certain things which have no logic, yet we keep on believing them. You have to consider logical reasons for things that happen to us.

Today superstitions are taking a modern form. Some of my friends post pictures of Gods and Goddesses on Facebook. They tell you to share the pictures on your timeline. If you share them you will hear good news in next few hours. They also write that you shouldn't ignore the request. Sometimes people share them because they are afraid if they don't, something evil will happen to them. Believe me! I have never shared these pictures, and nothing bad has happened. I am not saying that we should not share these religious pictures, but if we choose not to share them, nothing bad will happen. We can believe in things if they are not hurting us. Belief in superstitions can create more stress in our lives. On the other hand, if we make connections between superstitions and reality, it is not good for us. If superstition is leading our life, we should stop and think from our brain and heart. What is best for us?

~Vandana Bansal

God Requires Faith

Growing up, I didn't understand why we went to church and why Mom got on her knees and told all our business to this God we couldn't see. And bad things continued to happen.

I would call my mom with my problems and she would say, "You have to give it to the Lord," and "I will pray for you."

Then one day, my mom told me the doctor said she had cancer and didn't have long to live, but that she wasn't worried. She was tired and ready to rest. She said, "I've done all I could do in this life. Now, it's time for God to do the rest. God won't judge the fight. He judges the faith you bring to the fight."

When I look back over my life, I know through my mom's faith and prayers that God really cares. And if you'll take one step, He will take two.

So, never give up because He will never give up on you.

~ Caryn Jackson

Touch Taste



First Impressions in the U.S.

I came to the United States for the first time in the spring of 2010. I still remember several things were very impressive. I will write about them here.

There was a small pool in our housing area. I thought it might be for children. To my surprise, not only were there many children but also many adults too! However, the most amazing thing was the many people wearing bikinis and lying down on long chairs, just letting sun shine on their bodies! It was unbelievable. In our country, we always protected our skin with sunscreen, long sleeves, UV cut umbrellas, etc. We would never expose ourselves like that!

There were only a few people walking on the street. In our country almost everywhere will be crowds of people, just like on Fifth Avenue in New York City. They walk on streets in most cases because of walking dogs or exercise in the U.S. They walk to somewhere (like supermarkets or bus stops) in our country.

Here is more natural. This surprised me. I could see many wild animals in my backyard! Like squirrels, deer, rabbits, even snakes... In our country if you go to the mountains far from noisy cities, maybe you will find some wild animals, but not nearby.

The traffic signals were hanging from electric lines! When it's a windy day, the signals will swing. I had never seen them like that before! I wonder if they will drop down one day. That would be bad.

The last one, the houses! I like them—they are just like in the fairy tales described that I read when I was a child! In our country, most cities have many apartments several floors high where many families live.

Many things in the U.S. were different from our country. All of these were exciting for me, and are exciting even now. I will

always enjoy the difference and try to study and understand this different culture.

~ Karin Li

Job Search

The essay question requires me to answer the question: Is it better to have a high paying job that you don't like, or a job you like that does not pay well? I am 18, and I have not had a job, so I don't know what is best. I have not even chosen what job I would like to have.

I cannot cook, so culinary arts are out of the equation. The reason culinary arts are out of the equation is because I either burn myself, or I burn the food. I have actually managed to cut my fingers prepping the food.

Although I have participated in sports, I cannot see myself as a fitness instructor. I tend to be accident-prone. There was a day when I jumped half into a garbage can and cut myself rather badly trying to keep the basketball from going out of bounds. Another incident during a 5k marathon resulted in my vertebrae slipping out of place.

I help my dad who happens to be a mechanic and works in the garage. I do not want to be a mechanic. Once I spilled hot oil on my arm. Another time I dropped the car hood on my hand.

I am still trying to find a job.

~ *Ryan Spencer*

Poetry

Poetry is strange
Catharsis and emotions
Too public for me.

~ Kyle Lea

Chop-Chop

Have you ever seen something that's considered to be a form of art but can be eaten?

Imagine a mountain of dough balls mixed with your favorite ingredients. It's not an elegant dish, but it's family-friendly. If it weren't for Chef Ken, my family would never have the chance to enjoy his recipe, "Chop-Chop."

For the past seven years, my family and I have had experience with a variety of recipes. It started while my father was attending culinary school. I was fourteen at the time. He was in school learning more about the art of cooking fine cuisine. Luckily, what he learned in school, he taught to us.

I remember the day my family and I made "Chop-Chop." First, we doubled the recipe for pizza dough. Next, we separated the pizza dough into meatball sized balls. When making "Chop-Chop," you can choose to combine any of your favorite ingredients. On our first family try, we chose pepperoni, green peppers, and banana peppers. We added these ingredients to the dough balls in a large bowl. We sprinkled vegetable oil and gently mixed it all together. Then, we mounded it on a cookie sheet and baked it in the oven. When it came out, it looked like a mountain of bite size pizzas. We almost didn't want to eat it because it looked like a work of art, but we're sure glad we did!

~ Ryan N. Williams

My Son's Jobs

My son is 5 years old. He has two jobs.

One is to open and close curtains. When he gets up in the morning, he has to open the curtains. And after he comes home from school, he has to close them. There is one point he should watch out for. When he closes the curtains, he shouldn't put them on the outlets for the stove. One of our curtains is too long. I haven't adjusted it yet. He sometimes can do this job well but often can't. The curtains are closed on one side but the opposite side is opened.

The other job is to push the cancel button for appliances. When a rice steamer or a bread-baking machine is finished, the machines make some sounds to remind us they are finished. Then he has to push the button. If I push it, he gets very angry. I am very careful not to push it first.

When he does his jobs, he always seems to be bustling.

~ Naho Fujii

Beginnings Endings



Dandelion

There is a wild flower that I will not erase from my mind forever. The wild flower is called dandelion.

I knew the name of dandelion (Pu Gong Ying) when I was a teenager. It was from a song that was the main song in a famous movie in China. But I did not see the plant until later.

“Pu Gong Ying” is the name of the dandelion in the Chinese language. A Chinese movie shows people who had hard times during the Cultural Revolution, a tough period in China. The life of the people in that time was like a tiny dandelion, facing the powerful wind and rain, yet still growing up tenaciously.

So I have remembered that the dandelion is a kind of pliable but strong flower.

One day in the early spring eight years ago, I saw a yellow spot of plant springing out in my front yard where it still was covered with a thin layer of snow. Nothing in a bright color had been growing in my yard for a long time. I walked around the yard every day. Except for bright snow, northern cardinals and blue jays were the only beautiful colors. I felt so bored with the white color. It was the first long winter in my life.

“This is so amazing. What is this plant that wants to rush to welcome spring?” I thought, when I met the wonderful color. My fingers dug away the snow around the plant. Wow, it is a very pretty flower! It is small, but there are many long and narrow yellow petals which were lit with sunshine and looked to be charming. I love the flower!

I showed my husband the flower I had found when he came home from work.

“Its name is dandelion,” my husband told me.

What is the meaning of “dandelion” in the Chinese language? I checked the word at once with my translator. Oh, it is “Pu Gong Ying!”

It made me feel excited. I remembered its nature for a long time. I started paying attention to see how the flower was growing every day. The next day, I saw there were a few dandelions in my front yard.

The weather in early spring changes often. One day, cold came again. It damaged the dandelions a lot. All the dandelions were ruined. I thought that they would die soon, they sprang out so early! But it was a big surprise to me, after a few days, I saw the dandelions that had been ruined recovering and getting strong. This time, they grew fast and spread more and more, spreading from one place to many places, until finally they covered all the ground.

I knew that the spring was truly coming!

They showed their sweet smile on earth and let nature have more color. Their state of hugging sunshine let me feel warm and get a kind of positive energy. They shared their beautiful life with nature, such as their seeds letting birds be happy. And in the end of fall, there were still a few blooming on the lawn. They liked to say to the earth, “See you next spring.”

I admire the courage of the dandelion in facing nature where it is not good weather all the time. I praise the beauty and selflessness of the dandelion, and I appreciate her bringing joy to me.

The growing process of the dandelion in the spring impressed and inspired me. I thought that I had just started a new life in the U.S., and I was a person whose age was close to half of one hundred. Definitely there are many difficulties that will appear in my life. So I should learn from the spirit of the dandelion and have the courage to face any challenge in my future. At the same time, I will have confidence like the dandelion, sharing and contributing

the best things I have to the world, even though it is a very small flower.

I have lived in the U.S. for eight years. I enjoy life with my family, my study and my work here. For six years, I have done three different volunteer projects. Simultaneously I get much help from people too. The feeling is happy and sweet. So far, I have been honored in the Volunteer Spotlight from the Council for Older Adults of Delaware County, with two award plaques from Walmart, and by winning two times the Adult Student Writing competition in Ohio. I am thankful for all the people who help me.

I will keep on going forward in my future. I thank the dandelion very much for giving me these inspirations.

~ *Chun Qin*

Through My Tears

Through my tears, I am able to see some good things that had been buried so deep inside of me.

There are memories I have from when I was a child; some are very hurtfull, but most make me smile.

Through my tears, I can clearly see that when I am myself it feels good to be me. When I run, when I fly, when I accomplish a goal, through my tears I feel good all down in my soul.

Through my tears, it isn't always sadness or gloom. Through my tears I find happiness, I feel breakthroughs and hope.

Through my tears, I've finally found what's been lost: Me!

~ Lolita Lumumba

Opportunity

Only two years ago, I couldn't think it was possible to change my life completely.

Perhaps, "It could be a big occasion to improve my job," my husband said one day.

Perhaps, "I'm not ready to leave everything: my family, my friends, my habits, my culture," I replied.

Only a little step to open my mind, to find the courage, to sail toward far horizons, to be free to accept any new experiences without prejudice.

Reorganizing my life and the life of my family.

To take that chance for personal growth, meet other people, and visit new places.

Understanding new difficulties, try to improve my English, and beginning to explain correctly my dreams and my emotions.

Nothing is impossible if you work hard and well.

I'm happy and proud now of my little achievements.

Thankful for this great country that welcomes foreign people in appreciation of diversity.

Yet, there is still a long way to go, but I'm confident I'll overcome.

~ Michela Benicchio

Without a Home

I used to be homeless. I used to live in a shelter called Norma Herr. I was homeless most of my life from the age of 28 until I was 40. While I was homeless, I felt less than and unwanted. I also felt disrespected. For example, people would ignore me when I asked a question or even if I asked how they were doing. I would not get an answer.

I tried to live on my own, but I couldn't, so I stayed at the shelter. I had a case manager, and she saw what an improvement I had made, so she said it's time to move on. So she had me meet the intake specialist of T.H.I which stands for Transitional Housing Inc. I then filled out my application for housing. I had an interview on February 14, 2014 and within three weeks I got my discharge date which was March 7, 2014.

Now I have successfully moved out of the shelter system. I have not had to return for any reason. I can actually hold a conversation with someone, and they don't look at me with strange expressions on their faces. I also get pleasant responses from them. I am treated with respect and dignity. I also have to say that the staff who work with the clients show respect to us. They also pick us up when we are feeling down. They don't talk to us with disrespect, and they treat us like we are somebody. That means a lot, especially to me.

Front Step Housing is now permanent supportive housing, which means I don't ever have to leave and I can finally say I have a home. Since I now live on my own, my health has also gotten a lot better too. I don't go to the hospital so much. I am now enrolled in G.E.D. class at Merrick House. Now all I have to do is accomplish my goal and get my G.E.D. I would like to thank everyone who has helped me get to where I am today.

~ Norine K. Ciaio

Journey to Sobriety

I, Teresa Honis, have been sober seven months on January 24. When I drank, it was to get very drunk. I acted stupid and didn't care what people said or thought. I always caused fights and arguments. One day, while drunk, I called both of my daughters at their homes. They told me that they were never going to talk to me again or let me see my grandchildren if I kept on drinking. My sisters wouldn't talk to me either. My boyfriend and I fought all the time.

The police were called and took me to the hospital because I had suicidal thoughts. I spent three days in detox. It was like I was in prison, and I had the shakes all the time. They gave me medicine to calm me down.

That experience changed my life. I feel better about myself. No more headaches. I am happier now. I can sit back and see how the other drunks act, so that helps me stay sober. I say to myself, "No way!" That was the way I used to look and act. So if I think about drinking, I call my sponsor. There is a lot of temptation out there when friends drink or I go to parties. I do fear sometimes that I will fall back into drinking. When this happens, I pray. Other things that keep my mind off drinking are going for walks, playing games on my phone, and calling my dad or daughters. It feels good when you can call your daughters and they ask if I'm drinking, and I can tell them "NO!" It's been 7 months. They say, "I'm proud of you, Mom."

~ Teresa M. Honis

Overcoming Fear

When I was a little girl, I was scared of dogs.

I was afraid of dogs because I was attacked by a German shepherd. I was sitting on a bench, with my back against a window, eating a mango, and watching the adults talking. I was six years old. The dog reached out a paw through the window and tore my face underneath my left eye. I screamed, the adults turned and saw me, then came running to help.

The expressions on their faces made me more afraid. To repair my eye, my parents took me immediately to get medical attention.

For several years afterward, I remained afraid of dogs. When I was 11 years old, I visited my friend's house to work on a school project. My friend had a dog, a German shepherd, and she introduced me to her dog, which was friendly. Although I was afraid, I petted the dog, and the animal reacted with love.

I learned that not every dog is mean, and some dogs are sweet. This is when I overcame my fear.

~ Selena Cruces

Child to Adult

When I was a child I was helpful; now I am hard working.

When I was a child I was quiet; now I am outspoken.

When I was a child I was sarcastic; now I am humble.

When I was a child I was disobedient; now I am obedient.

When I was a child I was selfish; now I am generous.

When I was a child I was adventurous; now I am aware.

When I was a child I was talkative; now I am a listener.

When I was a child I was shy; now I am outgoing.

When I was a child I knew everything; now I am filling in the gaps.

~ GED Class at Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library

Ramelle Arnold

Turina Burton

Bernice Doster

Christine Jones

Douglas Martin

Tyonna Rogers

Agustina Villanueva

Jessica Warren

Catching Rabbits

There is an old Japanese saying, “The one who tries to catch 2 rabbits at the same time will not get any rabbit.” This saying indicates that to focus on a single target is very important when accomplishing something. Although this is a precious piece of wisdom from our ancestors, I recently found out that this old Japanese saying does not fit life in the United States.

After staying in a different country and culture for one and a half years, I do not disagree with this saying but would change it to say, “Try catching multiple rabbits. You can do it! But never stop trying!”

During my stay in the U.S., I have had numerous opportunities to participate in social activities such as participating in Base spouse group, volunteering at school, and listening to cultural speakers. Initially I often hesitated to participate due to my English skill, cultural differences, and tight schedule.

However, I pushed myself every time. Even though I had to spend a lot of time for preparation or put up with an uncomfortable atmosphere. I always think it is worth the challenge, and I always have a good time after all!

Of course I wasn’t successful all the time. But I always could learn a lot of things and obtain tips for the next opportunity. I can say “failure” does not exist. Or, not accepting the challenge is the only failure. Failure can’t improve our lives.

I have an 8-year-old son. He has a very cautious character and hesitates to try because he worries about failure too much. I understand how hard it is to push an 8-year-old boy. But I would like him, and all young and old persons, to keep on trying. Trying never creates failure. Not accepting the challenge itself is the failure.

There is another Japanese saying, “No shame during the journey will last.” For us, life in the U.S. is a journey, so I don’t have to worry about failure. In other words, our life is a journey itself, so let’s not worry about making mistakes and keep on trying. That will make our life better, rather than doing nothing and having a dull life!

~ Yuko Tamura

Heart Home



My Heart

I've been through a lot in the past three years...
My heart's still fighting away tears.
My heart is broken, I don't let people know...
Deep inside I can't let go.

I put on a smile, even when I don't like.
Wondering if my heart will ever be right.
My heart, my love will never be the same...
Ever since the day cancer took my mom away.

My heart was my mother, she was all I knew...
Now that she's gone, I don't know what to do.
I decided to write, it helps with the pressure.
Maybe my heart will make it through any weather.

My heart feels the ease as the days go by,
But I'm not going to lie, I still cry.

~ Shaunda L. Clifton

Going from One to Four

It began on February 22, 2009, when I found out that I was going to be a mommy for the first time. That thought was such an amazing feeling; I was overjoyed. On October 21, 2009, our precious baby girl joined us. To be around such an abundance of joy and laughter was beautiful. The thought that I had started a family was such a "Wow!" We enjoyed being her parents and teaching her as she taught us as well.

Then, on March 19, 2012, my sister was experiencing some troubles. Who would've thought that her four beautiful children would be torn away from her arms? When I got the phone call, I raced to my sister's house, only to see that I didn't make it in time, feeling as if I failed. Into the "system" they went. Children's Services had these beautiful babies. What was I going to do?

On March 20th I went to the agency to see what I could do to help these children, not realizing that I would be in the battle of a lifetime. I only heard that they didn't feel it to be in the best interest of either party that the children be placed in my warm loving home. The fear of never seeing my nieces and nephews was now becoming reality. Many days and nights went by with lots of heartache and tears.

I then realized that I couldn't give up. I thought to myself, "I have to do everything within my power to help these precious children." Off to the agency I went once again. I had attended every "team meeting" to hear what was going on with these children and their parents. Once I got to the agency, I gave them a letter of my beliefs as to why I didn't agree with their decisions. I didn't mention the long road my family had traveled with me! We all continued to live our lives to the best of our ability, and we kept faith that one day this battle would come to an end.

In May of 2013 I received a phone call while at work. It was the man who is the father of my children, my rock, my best friend, and my biggest supporter. Not expecting anything, I heard,

“You ready?” As I then replied “Yes,” he said to me “We get the girls!” I started crying, praying to God, and was just overjoyed that the battle was now going to come to an end. My family was now going to be three beautiful girls instead of just one.

Now, at this point, I am a mom to three, not one. We didn’t realize the damages that had been done to these children and the continuing battles that we were going to face. Finally in August 2013 we got legal custody of my nieces.

Next, we found out that our family was going to expand again; yes, we were expecting. We were trying to figure out how we were going to make things work. Four children in a year seemed a bit overwhelming. As I was feeling overwhelmed and unsure, many nights I would cry thinking “How?” and “I can’t do this.” Really, it was God’s plan, and we could do this. The smiles on these children’s faces are worth all the battles, worry, and stress that my family and I have experienced. I never thought I would be a mom to three. Now I say a mom of four; man am I blessed!

As I sit back and look at these children, I am grateful. Grateful that I’m given the opportunity to give all of these children a life, a life they deserve. Now as the days and nights go by and we still face many challenges, I don’t regret fighting the battle of a lifetime. We face many battles still, and we still fight them to the best of our ability and continue to give these children a life that is more fulfilling to them.

~ Tonya Bowers

My Grandson

Dallas is my favorite person. I have been watching him grow and learn from the very first day he was born. From the very beginning he has seemed to choose me over all his other grandparents. In the hospital when he was born even. He could be crying and everyone else would try to console him to no avail; but I could come in, pick him up, and he was fine. It was as if he knew from the beginning he was loved and safe when he was with me.

As he started to grow and his mother went back to work, he would stay with me. I would sit in the rocking chair looking down at his little round face and big brown eyes and read to him. He would just stare up at me while I read to him like he was hanging on every word that I spoke. It wasn't long before he started rolling over, sitting, and starting to crawl away. He would crawl right to me to pick him up. When he started pulling himself up on to me and other things, I knew he was ready to take off walking. We bought him a walker. Again, wherever I went in the house, he would follow. I had noticed for a long time he was fascinated with my hair. It was very long. He would always grab for it and want to pull it as most babies do.

One day we started trying to get him to walk on his own. He would look at us, grin, drop to all fours, and take off crawling. So one day my daughter stood him up and told him, "Walk to grandma." He laughed and grinned so big. Since he was so interested in my hair I told him, "Dallas, walk over here to grandma and I will let you play with my hair." He just smiled real big at me with his little front teeth just shining. I took my hair around to the front of me and kind of shook it at him. That was all it took. It was then he decided it was time to walk. Off he took, and now at 3 years old he walks and talks very well. And I am still his favorite grandparent.

~ Sharon Tipton

Trent

People seem to experience loss in many different ways. Some turn to drugs, while others seem like it doesn't affect them, but at the end of the day break down behind closed doors. When I lost my son on August 25, 2013, I was on the path of self-destruction.

If it wasn't for being incarcerated shortly after, I don't know if I would be here to write or tell this story. My son was my world, my rock, and my best friend. He was only two and a half years old and completely changed my outlook on life. When he passed, my world was crushed, my rock was no more, and I watched as my best friend passed away in my arms. It was only in jail that I was able to gain closure, soberly. I was able to come to terms that it wasn't the doctor's fault. It was God taking away his pain. Considering he was going to need a heart and lung transplant, I have no choice other than to believe that God didn't want him to suffer that.

Being forced to work things out the right way definitely helped. I've gotten greedy with life. I want to succeed. I want to help people even though no one could help me. No one was there that truly understood. I was a single father and had to work everything out myself. My family helped as much as they could. The one person that really helped was my grandmother. She sat with me the day I was released from jail. She told me something that has really stuck with me. She said, "Boo, you must keep them in your thoughts, keep them in your heart, but don't forget you have a life to live still, don't let this be the reason you go through life backwards." It took some time to realize what that really meant.

I know that my guardian angel is looking down on me. I refuse to let him see his daddy in a gutter somewhere or sad and miserable all the time. He always put a smile on my face. I refuse to have that stop now. I will forever love and miss my son, Trent Alan Morris.

Looking Back on My Life

What am I more thankful for now since I am older and wiser?

I am thankful I have God in my life more than ever before. I am thankful for having a good Christian husband, Mark, and very nice boys. I have learned to be more loving and caring as I help them to grow up in life. God has helped me to be stronger in situations that are so challenging for us.

My husband and I saw that our 2½-year-old son Matthew was developing very slowly. He wouldn't play or talk or crawl around like other children. We decided to call a neurologist. He tested him and said Matt was definitely autistic and had cerebral palsy. We took him to intervention preschool and therapy for help. He did get better motor skills, but not with his communication. Matt started sign language with his hands, and I picked that up right away because I could tell what he was saying. He would show me too. It was very hard for him to speak so I would try to say a word over again with him.

When Matthew turned 7 years old, his behaviors were so bad I couldn't do anything with him. When we lived in Shelby, Ohio, no one could help him. Not parents, friends, or teachers. He would knock and throw things off tables, desks, counter tops, and anything he could get a hold of. He would put holes in doors, break windows, and break his toys. At school he would hit the teachers. His teacher felt she could handle him, but it was clear to me that she didn't know how. Then, the school hired a Behavior Specialist. It didn't do any good. Matthew would fight with him. I went to school one day and caught the teacher in the act, shoving Matt in a corner with a big heavy desk against him. Matt was screaming and yelling and was hurting. That was enough of this! I signed him out of this school and moved to Pennsylvania.

We decided to enroll Matt in the Barber Center in Erie, PA. They couldn't handle him either and sent him to the emer-

gency room. He was in the hospital for about a month. During this time we were able to figure out which medicines would work for him. And this really helped out a lot.

Paul was an aide who helped Matt out. He was such a blessing to our family. He helped Matt calm down, potty trained him, and taught him how to keep from breaking things. Matt was much better when he got out of the hospital. Matt and I moved back to Shelby.

The school in Shelby decided they would just tutor Matt. We didn't want to keep doing this and decided to ask Matt's doctor what to do. She said we should move to Wooster, Ohio, because there is a school and workshop he can go to. We decided to move for Matt's sake.

Everything is better than before, but we still have problems with Matt. That is why it is making us stronger in our faith. We love him no matter what it takes. He still hits, bites, throws things, and breaks anything he can get a hold of, but he's older now. We can redirect him now from doing too much damage. He will be getting an iPad soon which will help him communicate better so he won't be so frustrated. We hope it will help him be calmer.

We went through a lot for a long time, but with God's help we kept holding on without giving up. There is a true God that will help. Truly believe and ask, and he will get you through it all, in bad times and good times.

~ Martha L. Stentz

One of My Most Favorite Teachers

My favorite teacher is my mother. Her name is Maria Lugo. She taught me everything. She taught me many values and has taken care of me since I was in her belly. She is my best friend.

My mother loves my brother, my sister, and me with all of her heart. She helps me when I am in trouble. When we talk together, she teaches me to trust her ideas. When we are cleaning the house, we like to listen to music together. Mom took care of my son when I was working in Puerto Rico. Mom is always helping me. Mom taught me to cook and to fight for what I really want. Even when she is not around, no matter our distance, there is always communication between us. My mother is a good example for me because she studied at a police academy and graduated. She is always teaching me to respect others. She is the best teacher in the world.

~ Lady Pons

Super Mom?

Naively I thought sexual assault wouldn't happen to my loved ones.
I'm Super Mom.

Unfortunately, it happened to me, so I vowed to be extra protective with all my children.

Sadly, I stand corrected. What if I cannot protect you and I'm not Super Mom?

Unwillingly doing things you didn't feel comfortable doing, you now suffer from someone else's sin.

Ugliness creeps into every corner. Times like these make it hard to have faith in humanity.

Super Mom digs deep within to find rays of sunshine in a thunder storm.

Happiness and trust in your soul will need mending. Super Mom does what it takes to restore all sanity.

Molesters, I pray for you all and hope for you to reform.

~ Ashley S. Pethtel

Where I Come From

I'm from the fresh clean smell of Gain laundry soap
first thing in the morning

I'm from that tan little 2-bedroom house
that holds 9 people at a stoke

I'm from Nana's flower garden in the backyard
and Papa's apple tree that's been growing tall

I'm from making Christmas cookies every year with my family,
and eating them all

Before Christmas!

I'm from the true love from my Aunt Kimmie and Uncle Tommie

I'm from warm hugs and long talks, the "Don't do that's"

And "Be nice to your little brother"

I'm from the family that said "Ashley had to grow up too fast."

I went to that little ol' church at the top of the hill in West
Virginia, coming home to baked macaroni pie and fried chicken!

I come from an alcoholic father and drunken mornings,
going back home to the warm

"It's gonna be okay's" from Aunt Kimmie.

I'm from old photo albums on my Nana's dresser
with old pictures of her and me as a child

~ Ashley Lynn Elmore
With thanks to George Ella Lyon

My Grandma

My grandma was born in the early 1900's, way back when it was very different than the days in which we now live. It was different in the sense that in her world there were no modern conveniences. She was Amish.

Grandma's house had no electricity, no indoor plumbing, and the lights after dark were dim, kerosene lamps that shed little light. I guess that was reason enough to go to bed early, not to mention that there was nothing much to do but work. If you didn't like to read, you might have found yourself quite bored!

As a child, I would sit at grandma's feet and she would tell me tales of her childhood. These stories are treasures to me and very precious.

For the most part, it was a much safer world. Locks on the doors were not considered necessary. The dog outside was sufficient to alert us about danger.

My great-grandfather was a bishop in the church. He was also a farmer, the occupation of most Amish in those days. They lived off the land.

There was a wooded area on great-grandfather's land. It consisted of many maple trees. He used them to gather sap and make maple syrup. Since it was the last chore of the day, great-grandfather was sometimes out late.

On one such occasion, grandma, along with some of her siblings and her mother, were in the house by themselves. With little or no light and being afraid of the dark, great-grandma would gather her children on the couch, huddling them together, and waiting for great-grandfather to come home.

On one particular night, they were especially scared because the dog outside began to bark excessively. Everyone

froze in their seats as they heard sounds coming from the front porch. They all held their breath as the front door slowly opened. They heard someone walking quietly in the kitchen as if he or she did not wish to be heard. It was very scary! They could hear the person moving around, ever so slowly, creeping back to the door. Following this, the door quietly closed and, once again, the dog began to bark.

Great-grandpa eventually came home, and everyone felt safe. They all went to bed. In the morning, they discovered that a loaf of bread that great-grandma had baked the day before was missing.

That very same day, great-grandma talked to her neighbor lady who in the course of the conversation said, "Oh, your bread was so good!" The neighbor lady was a very different kind of lady who would hang around, and she probably smelled the aroma of bread and decided to help herself. Needless to say, her cover was blown!

I wonder if locks were installed after this experience, at least a bolt, on the door.

This incident never happened again. Maybe great-grandma gave the neighbor lady a loaf of bread every now and then.

This is just one of the accounts grandma shared with me. There are many more. It is my heart's desire to archive these stories in book form for my children and grandchildren as their legacy and heritage.

Thanks to my A.B.L.E. class, I am learning how to write. I, too, grew up Amish, and I only went through the eighth grade. Because I am no longer Amish, I may further my education and am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

~ Ruth Keim

My Greatest Hero

My admiration goes to a very important and inspiring person in my life. You could say he is my hero. No matter how bad things get, he always finds the good.

Even in severe pain, he helps anybody, even strangers. He may not be able to work, but he always does his best to help in any way. He is the wisest, kindest, and most understanding person I have ever had the honor to even know.

Just to hear some of the stories he has to tell inspires me to always try my hardest in anything I may ever do. His actions motivate me to see the light in the darkest of times. I can only hope, wish, and pray to even be half the man he is.

Just to be his son is the greatest blessing God has ever given me. I know a lot of people say they have the best dad ever, but when I say, "I have the greatest dad," I know it to be true. I thank God every day for that.

The lessons my father taught me I will never forget, no matter what life throws at me. No matter the problem, I know my dad will be there in some way to help.

Thank you, Dad. I will always admire you.

~ Christopher E. Blessing

Author Biographies

Julia AlCheikh - p. 27

Julia is thirty-four years old and has two adorable twin daughters. She graduated from Damascus University in Economics.

Isabella Marie Allieri - p. 15

My name is Isabella. I'm from Italy and I moved to Cincinnati one year ago with my family. I'm so happy for my GED class, which has given me a great opportunity to improve my English, to learn American history and culture in-depth, and to meet people from all over the world. I like reading novels, writing, and activities that make me better.

Susana W. Antal - p. 42

As a child, I always loved telling stories. I did not finish school, but I started to write, and I loved putting my feelings down on paper. I hope in the future that I can write a book, perhaps a children's book. I have always enjoyed giving poems to people as gifts.

Ramelle Arnold - p. 103

Ramelle is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Rocio Aviles-Gomez - p. 17

My name is Rocio. I am from Mexico. I decided to take this journey to the U.S. with my husband and daughter in October 2013. Since that time I have been taking English classes. In September 2014, I started ABLE classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. Being a part of this group has given me the chance to improve my English and make new friends. I am looking forward to new enriching experiences.

Wanda L. Babb - p. 67**Vandana Bansal - p. 81**

Vandana Bansal is a 29-year-old woman from India. She lives with her husband and her 3-year-old daughter in Wooster. She misses her family back in India. Vandana is planning to start working soon, as she wants to remain busy all the time.

Michela Benicchio - p. 99

My name is Michela, and I'm 52 years old. I moved to the U.S. two and a half years ago from Milano, Italy, with my family because of my husband's work. I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I have attended Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio, to improve my English. I dedicate my writing to my husband, Danilo, and my kids, Giulia and Anil, to demonstrate that nothing is impossible. I would like to thank my family for all their help, their support and making me happy and proud.

Christopher E. Blessing - p. 121

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I'm the son of Christopher Blessing and Heather Blessing. My grade school was Hartwell School; then I attended Northwest High. Sadly, I didn't see it all the way through. Now, I'm working to earn my GED to better myself.

Richard B. Bolen - p. 63

I enjoy writing stories, cooking, and most of all spending time with my beautiful family. At this moment, I am working diligently on getting my GED.

Tonya Bowers - p. 110

My name is Tonya. I was born in Rittman/Wadsworth, Ohio, and grew up in Wooster, Ohio. I have 3 sisters and a brother. I also have two children, both girls. We also have two nieces who live with us. I have an amazing boyfriend, Troy, who has been an awesome support system. Nothing is more important to me than family. Currently I am unemployed and am working on getting my GED. Once I get my GED I'd like to get back into the work force. One thing I can say I have learned is life isn't easy and sometimes you have to fight for what you want.

Trinity Brooks - p. 34

Trinity Brooks was born and raised in Stow, Ohio. She is a single mother to her son. He inspires her every day. She found her love for writing and passion for poetry as a child, and carrying it into adulthood has been a gift. She is a mother, daughter, girlfriend, sister, and friend, which have all given her the drive to be creative. The words she believes in and lives by are simply this: Life is a painting. Paint with all the colors. Make it as worthy as a Vincent Van Gogh. The goal is not just to spark, but to inspire others.

Turirna Burton - p. 103

Turirna is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Gopal D. Chhetri - p. 22

Gopal is an ESOL Advanced Level Student at International Services Center. He moved to the USA from a refugee camp in Nepal in December 2014.

Norine K. Ciaio - p. 100

Norine is a hard worker who has come a long way.

Shaunda L. Clifton - p. 109

I'm a 34-year-old woman trying hard to finish her education because I made a promise to myself and my mother before she passed. I don't care how long it takes; I want to get my certificate and further my education. I know if I put my mind to it and stay focused I can go far.

Selena Cruces - p. 102

Selena is a student in the GED/ABLE program at Great Oaks in Cincinnati. She is from Peru and has been living in the U.S. 13 years. She is the mother of a daughter, 21, and a son, 23.

Lisauri Cruzado - p. 71

Lisauri is currently studying for the GED and hopes to one day enter nursing school.

Beverly Ann Deokarran - p. 29

Beverly Deokarran is the proud mother of five children, who are all excellent students. She is determined to make her children equally proud of her academic achievements.

Connie Doss - p. 78

I am from Cleveland, Ohio. I attend Cuyahoga Community College and recently graduated from the Women in Transition program. I am currently studying for my GED. I attend Gateway Church where I participate in several ministries, including the bus ministry and missional community, as well as garden in the church's community garden.

Bernice Doster - p. 103

Bernice is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Ashley Lynn Elmore - p. 118

Hello, my name is Ashley Elmore, I'm 20 years old, and I want to be a writer. I like to write poems about my life and things I've been through.

Laila Etawerghi - p. 25

Laila came to the U.S. from Libya in 2003. She is married and has two children. In Libya, she was a social worker. Laila has been attending classes at The English Center through Youngstown ABE for many years.

Vincent Fields - p. 45

My name is Vincent and I'm the oldest of 7. I dropped out of school my 10th grade year. Kids my age thought we knew more than our moms and we were wrong. My mom and I decided that my uncle and I would attend Buckeye Career Center to get our GEDs. Once I earn my GED I plan to get a job with my uncle to help my mom. I want to be a welder and I can do that with the help of my uncle.

Bill Flynn IV - p. 57

Bill is a history fanatic. He especially loves American history. Bill also enjoys writing and has many notebooks full of short stories. He is even writing a longer novel. Bill also enjoys studying science and weather. Bill lives with his girlfriend, Amanda, and the two have one daughter, Nicole.

Naho Fujii - p. 92

I am Naho Fujii, from Japan. I have been in the United States for 15 months. I have always struggled with English but have been enjoying learning it.

Ana A. Gay - p. 9

I am originally from Brazil, and I moved to the USA about 3 years ago. I have a university degree in Business Administration from my country, but now I'm studying at the Auburn Career Center with Mrs. Metzger. I am married to Marcus Gay and we have two sons. I wrote this poem because I feel blessed to have met teachers that inspired and helped me reach my ultimate goal, which is to write, speak and understand the English language.

Nicholas C. Gresley - p. 80

Nicholas C. Gresley was born on April 12, 1994, and raised in Parma, Ohio. Most of his writing styles come from 18th century literature and gothic writing styles.

Maria Alejandra Guerrero Castellanos - p. 53

Maria Alejandra is from Bogota, Colombia. She is 19 years old and her greatest passions are art and writing. She's lived in many cities and has gone to numerous schools. After she graduated in 2013 from high school with an emphasis in graphic design, she decided to visit the U.S. Her father has influenced her a lot, and she is who she is today because of him. Her future plans include studying languages and traveling.

Concetta Hasson - p. 51

Ms. Concetta Hasson is of Sicilian nationality, born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, by her loving mother. Her writing inspiration is inspired by the female movement and the era of classic rock.

Rebecca J. Hayhurst - p. 3

My name is Rebecca but I like to be called Becky. I am from Pennsylvania and moved to Ohio in the year 1959. I am 73 years old and like coming to Wayne County ABLE classes.

Teresa M. Honis - pp. 41, 101

My name is Teresa Honis. I am 51 and the proud mother of two beautiful daughters and grandmother of seven lovely grandchildren.

Kaw Nay Htoo - p. 30

Kaw is an ESOL Advance level student at International Services Center. He is originally from Burma and he moved to the USA from a refugee camp in Thailand in 2013.

Travis Hughes - p. 48

Travis was born and raised in Chillicothe Ohio. He enjoys working with computers and plans to pursue that interest in college and as a career.

Caryn Jackson - p. 83

I am the youngest child of Christine Jackson who had 9 daughters. I grew up a Missionary Baptist and enjoy meeting and helping people. I love reading, working on obtaining my GED, and spending time with my daughter and 2 grandkids. I would like to thank the staff for their love and support. They teach from their hearts.

Christine Jones - p. 103

Christine is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Porcsché Jones - p. 60

Porcsché is a student, mother, and aspiring writer. Her goals include completing her GED, attending college, and starting her career as an author.

Ruth Keim - pp. 4, 119

Masako Kuehmstedt - p. 24

I was born in Japan. I met and married an American soldier in 1955 and together we moved to the USA and started our family. After 56 years of marriage, I lost my beloved husband. I enjoy learning

and pursuing education.

Asuka Kuriyama - p. 37

I started my life in Ohio in 2011. In my first year in Ohio, I was shocked at how hard it was to express in English what I had in my mind. I decided to take English lessons right away and my English has improved lesson by lesson. I am lucky because I have gotten a lot of opportunities to learn and to make friends. I appreciate my husband for bringing me to Ohio and my teachers and friends for supporting me and making me comfortable living in the U.S.

Kyle Lea - p. 90

My name is Kyle. I am from Ohio and I spend my time enjoying different forms of artistic media.

Karin Li - p. 87

I'm from Dalian, China. I've been in the USA for 4 years. I am in the US because my husband got a job here. I live here with my husband and our son. I love ESL classes and all of my teachers very much. I started to go to ESL classes 2 years ago. At first I even couldn't say and answer "How are you?" And now I can say something that I thought. I always appreciate my kind teachers because they understand me and what I want to say! I will continually study English with my classes and teachers!

Lolita Lumumba - p. 98

Lolita is working toward advancement in her career by achieving her educational goals.

Catherine Marin - p. 11

My name is Catherine. I am twenty-two years old. I was born in Miami, Florida, and now live in Painesville, Ohio. I am just learning to overcome and face my disabilities and not avoid them.

Douglas Martin - p. 103

Douglas is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Dennis Alan Morris - p. 113

My name is Dennis Morris. My family is very important to me. I enjoy working on cars or spending time with a few of my friends. I want to be a mental health counselor to try and help people.

Mildred Myles - p. 66

I attend GED classes at Mt. Healthy, in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a daughter of the King, striving to become the woman God created me to be. This G.E.D. class is helping me to become her.

Marshall Olsen - p. 52

Marshall Olsen, an aspiring engineer and current artist, decided to begin the path of future education at the age of 31, but first he needed to acquire his GED. After getting "up to speed," with study, he passed his tests, mostly with honors. As can you!

Ashley S. Pethtel - p. 117

I have two young boys. They are, of course, my world. I've been through a lot in my life. Despite all of it, I believe that my life is really just beginning with my GED.

Lady Pons - p. 116

Lady Pons was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. She came to the United States one year ago, bringing her six-year-old son, Jayaiel, with her. Lady wants her son to have a good education and a better life than he might receive in Puerto Rico. It is difficult for Lady that her mother is in Puerto Rico, so much of her heart is with her, yet much of her heart is far away. Lady is learning English in ESOL, and hopes, one day, to become a teacher.

Nedric Pritchett - p. 50

Nedric enjoys drawing and would someday like to become a comic book artist.

Chun Qin - p. 95

Chun is a volunteer at the Senior Center in Delaware County. She crochets items for them, and for friends. She loves bird-watching and has written books about warblers. She is adventurous.

Vivian Quinones - p. 73

Vivian attends GED classes at Merrick House and is working toward her goal of becoming a dental assistant.

Clara Ravanelli - p. 33

I'm Italian. I moved to Cincinnati in 2013 for my husband's work. Since I moved to Ohio, I have tried to enjoy my new life by experiencing many activities and improving my English and my knowledge of American history and culture. I'm 42 so it was a unique opportunity for me to write a new chapter in my life and explore new lands of my mind and heart.

Brad Reeder - p. 5

My name is Brad. I am currently enrolled in the GED course for my area. Writing for me is an aspiration that was born over the course of my life. Having some of my writing published would be a great accomplishment for me and I am sure it would make those that are most important to me very proud.

Tyonna Rogers - p. 103

Tyonna is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Dee Dee Rundels - p. 10

Dee Dee is the mother of three children. She enjoys rescuing cats.

Yaritza Santiago - p. 61

I'm 23 years old with a 2 year old son. I work and go to school.

Joe S. Spangler Jr. - p. 64

Joe is seeking career advancement in the steel industry while studying for his GED.

Ryan Spencer - p. 89

Ryan Spencer describes himself as a handsome, lonely redhead trying to get past the potholes and cracks in his life, to achieve his bucket list : Sky-diving, Deep-sea diving, Trout fishing, and Touring Alaska.

Martha L. Stentz - p. 114

I live in Smithville, Ohio. I am a housewife with 2 grown sons, Aaron and Matthew. I have been married to my husband Mark for thirty years.

Yoshimi Sugino - p. 77

I am 29 years old and from Japan. I've lived in Mason, Ohio, for five months with my husband. I've enjoyed learning in GED class at Live Oaks because social studies help me understand the culture of the United States. In addition, my classmates from the United States and other foreign countries have taught me various things that I'd never have known if I had stayed in Japan.

Yuko Tamura - p. 104

My husband is in the Japanese military and we are staying here for a few years. I have two boys. Now I am really happy to have many great friends in Ohio.

Luis Terrones - p. 39

My name is Luis Terrones, and I like chocolate.

Sharon Tipton - p. 112

My name is Sharon Tipton I have 5 children and 1 grandchild. I am 50 years young and I am in school for my GED at Pickaway Ross. I have spent my time raising my children and now that they are grown I am working to get myself through school. I also have a CDL and have driven all over the US.

Sara Velazquez - p. 35

I am from Puerto Rico, a tropical island. I came to Ohio in 2006 to help my daughter and son with their relocation and taking care of my grandsons. This story was about part of my childhood and the imagination I had in those years.

Rosa Villa - p. 19

I was born in Mexico 36 years ago. I am the mother of 3 children: Cynthia (12), Francisco (10), and Daniel (9). I am an enthusiastic woman who enjoys learning new things and helping others.

Agustina Villanueva - p. 103

Agustina Villanueva is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Johnathan Walker - p. 49

My name is Johnathan Walker. I was born in Atlanta, GA. I'm 23 years old and I like to write music because I've used it my entire life to get through things. This is only one verse out of a whole song I wrote for my teacher that we picked to be submitted because the rest of the song was too long. I would love to become a writer and record music but if that doesn't work out I'd like to produce music or work with helping kids who have been in the same situations I have been in.

Steven Ward - cover art

My name is Steven Ward, I'm 23 years of age. Art is my main goal and my ambition in life. My two beautiful daughters are what drive me to accomplish my dream, because I don't want them to ever have to want for anything in life.

Jessica Warren - p. 103

Jessica is a participant in GED classes at the Warrensville Heights Cuyahoga County Library.

Elizabeth Willard - pp. 46, 47

I live on my family farm. I was home schooled due to my many eye issues. I now go to GED classes and I hope to get my GED by the end of next year. I would like to go to college a short time after that.

Ryan N. Williams - p. 91

My name Ryan Williams and I am 21 years old. I have been interested in writing for some time now, but I'm not that good at writing. That is why I have joined the contest.

Honorable Mention

Artists:

Debra K. Bell
Hae G. Cho
Dustin Crawford
Debra (Cheyenne) Dean
“Chunk the Artist” Markus
April Miller
Daiane A. Novelli
Abraham Penn
Vivian Quinones
Cieran Speakman
Yuko Tamura
Marcus Walker
Regina Williams

Authors:

Mohamed Abdellah
Debra Adams
Beatriz Aguilar
Magda Aguilera
Randa Alali
Tania Aguilar Alcala
Jennifer Alvarado
Chayra Alexander
Miracle Alexander
Veronica V. Almeida
Mizdelina Almodovar
Fatima Alshakhatreh
Beronica Ambrocio
Graciela Aranda
Janitza Arzola
Sabah Asskar
Alexander Atlas
Veronica Bahena
Isiah Ball

Katherine Bartimus
Debra K. Bell
Kristi Bengé
Terrence Bennie
Sunita Bhujel
Saha D. Biswa
Wanda Bogdanowicz
Tiffany Bohanon
April Borelli
Danielle N. Bowling
Diane Boyd
Hannah Boyd
Gregory B. Britton
Rhonda Lee Bruce
Andrea Burgyan
Sandra Buzuleciu
Eladio Caban
Denise Calhoun
Bradley A. Carpenter
Matthew S. Carpenter
Patricia Carrasco
Mehmet Celik
Edgar Chan
Stephen Elijah Cohen
John Covic
Juanita Crespo
Melissa Cruz
Ewelina Curylo
Danuta Czyzycka
Stan Czyzycki
Debra M. Dean
Tutu Degaga
Migdalia Delgado
Fabio Di Carlo
George Dial

Marcela Diaz
Jordan DiMuccio
Charles Donald
Merced Donnersbach Parra
Walno Dupont
Daniel N. Edwards
Mohamed Eldarawi
Clifford Anthony Elliott
Sovann Em
Ivelisse Fernandez
Josie Fisher
John Fleck
Michael A. Ford
Paula L. Franks
Kyoko Fukushima
Jerome Fuller
Erica Gaines
Lorena Garcia
Lourdes Garcia
Georgina Ghobrial
Tonya Gipson
Edna Goodwin
Daniele Greene
Megan Grundy
Sakila Gurung
Medhat Habib
Lula Haile
Hannah N. Hall
Kenneth L. Harmon
Jacqueline Hartman
Aya Hasegawa
Sam Sam Hassan
James M. Holland
Jessica D. Holland
Mami Ito
Sierra Jackson
Diana Jaramillo
Yoselin Jimenez
Antoinette Jones

Jill Jones
Damion Jordan
Samira Anna Kern
Akila Khalfoun
Soohee Kim
Chris P. Kiral
Hasan Kodra
Mimoza Kodra
Ange Kouakou
Hiep Le
Jennifer Linn
Qiuxia Liu
Tong Ly
Darlene Lynch
Ana Lup
Grigore Lup
Yuki Maekawa
Sandrine Mahoum
Amruta Main
Elaine Maldonado
Santino Manot
Ofelia Marcos
Stephanie Marcus
Claudia Martinez
Devora Matos
Jamie McAllister
Joven Harris McLoughlin
Briana McQueen
Annie Meadows
Jessica Metheny
Clarissa Miller
Hifziy Mohammad
Kelvin Molina
Rafael Monta
Libia Montalvo
Claudia A. Montero Vidal
Jonathon Montgomery
Andrea Morales
Angel Morales

Axel Morales
Elena Santa Moreno
Ruslana Moskaliuk
Brian Mullings
Colton Musser
Yuri Nakamura
Jon Neal
Chi Nguyen
Hanh Nguyen
Phuoc Nguyen
Trung Nguyen
Librada Nicolas
David Nichols
Chiemi Nishi
Regina Nivens
Artis Lee Norman
Jacob Nulton
Gheorghe Olar
Aicha Oujbou
Joon Pak
Paul Park
Yolanda Pearson
Jasmine S. Pettis
Tanisha D. Petty
Katherine Pizzaro
Prem B. Poudel
Clarence W. Pryor
Linh Quach
Maria Quiles
Maria Quinones
Roberto Quinones
Amalia Ramirez
Rajbir Randhana
Joana Rich
LaToya L. Rivers
Donyale Roberson
Ileana Roche
Titus L. Rollins
Laura Romero

Jeritza Rosado
Michael Russell
Akiko Saito
Leidy Salvador
Angelica Santos
Cecile Sawadogo
Khrynn Schmidt
Marnita Kay Schrock
Joel Shafer
Stacy Shafer
Hani Shalash
Samantha Marie Shreves
Afegenet Sinegiorgis
Shawnte Smith
Sue Smith
Rosa Solis-Mendoza
Teresa Sowinska
Mary Alice Spears
Rochelle Stafford
Sarah N. Summers
Domanic Suraci
Elzbieta Swiderek
Amal Talbi
Lucy Talley
Barbara Ann Talmadge
Cassandra F. Taylor
Wichuda Thamrongwang
Larmarco Thomas
Trayvon Thomas
Timothy Tiday
Cindy Ting
Alina Todoran
Veronica Tolentino
Donisha Toney
Luz Torres
Kieu Tran
Liet Tran
Nhu Tran
Phung Tran

Elena Turnyanskaya
Mika Vanderpool
Maria Vega
Elizabeth Victorio
Tyler Vonderberger
Maya F. Walton
Darrius Welch
Novear Wood
Vicki Wright
Viktoria Yakushchenko
Lydia Yoder