

Beginnings XIX

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center



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Foreword

I never really know what I think about anything until I start to write. Often, probably most of the time, I think that whatever I might have to say is not going to be worth the words on the paper. And until I begin the process, I'm probably right.

So I sit down at my writing desk, a blank computer screen before me, more often than not feeling empty and intimidated, uncertain of myself, or maybe even certain of my own impending failure.

I am about to suck, I think.

That screen, empty and white, stares at me. I stare at it. Nothing is more empty than this.

I reach for the keyboard, the cool vinyl of my office chair slowly warming, my clumsy fingers finding their places on the plastic squares and their disorderly alphabet, and I begin to type. Often I fumble, hitting wrong letters, not yet ready to make proper words, much less sentences. I allow myself to do this, to free-associate, to wander, to wonder, to fail.

And then, often slowly but almost always surely, it begins to reveal itself. Just like that. A single word that pleases me. A thought worth keeping. An idea. A line that feels true.

Writing is an act of discovery. It is a communion of action and thought. The process uncovers old memories, old truths, old surprises of language stashed somewhere in that mysterious attic of the imagination. It pulls these things together, often in surprising and satisfying new ways. For me, at my desk, something about the physical – the very act of typing – connects to the metaphysical – the mysterious realms of imagination and intellect. If it's working the way it should, I discover something I didn't know I already knew.

It may sound mysterious, or mystical, but it's not. The mechanical act – hammering the fingers, scratching on a notepad – is simple hard work that draws us upward. If we were musicians we would practice our scales until a symphony arose. If we were gardeners, we would weed and water until a lovely flower emerged.

I remember once hearing the poet Rita Dove say she writes her drafts with a No. 2 pencil, because it slows the process of getting the words down to the speed at which her mind works.

We don't think ourselves into our best ideas; we write ourselves there.

The pages of this collection are a validation and celebration of this process. Every writer here, I'm certain, felt anxious and tentative when she began. Every writer then entered the work, the pecking and scratching and the eventual formation of words and lines. And I trust that every writer here discovered something she didn't know was already there inside, waiting for release.

One of them, Susana Antal, put it better than I could:

“...A play appears and all the characters
dance and float across the paper
as if they were ghosts.
I am amazed.
I can't control my hand as my pen creates love stories ...”

Being published in this collection is a reward for the hard work. But the beauty and truth in such lines is a greater reward: proof that the work can always amaze us.

David Giffels
2015 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 400 pieces of writing were submitted for review and possible publication in *Beginnings XIX*. Seventy-five pieces were chosen for this edition. We are proud to publish the 19th volume of exceptional writing by Ohio's ABLE authors and commend these writers for their courage to share their stories.

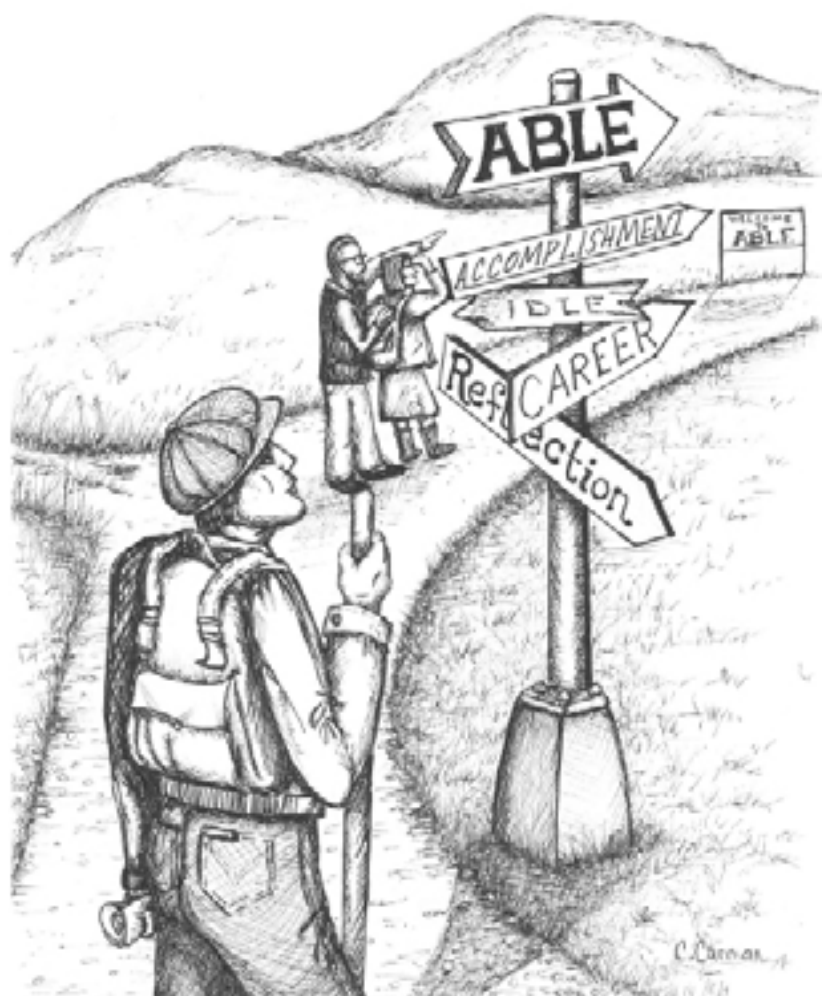
We also honor and thank ABLE teachers and tutors who dedicate their time to encourage students and provide instruction and guidance. We applaud each instructor for their passion and creativity to motivate ABLE students throughout their writing journeys.

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

We welcome our 2016 keynote speaker, author Mary Biddinger, to this year's Writers' Conference, and we're pleased to have our resident storyteller Lyn Ford participating again this year.

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Determined Soul

The soul has nothing to do with the body
For it is but an inadequate shell
Designed to propel the spirit
Or keep you grounded in Hell
Determined to forever live in whatever time and space
Past lives collectively stored and labeled by face and faith
With no race to win
only spiritual perfection to gain
To be able to rise to the most high
Or fall victim to the lower plane
With highs and lows like hills and valleys
For what you have done since existence only the soul can tally
Like a notch on a stick that poked you awake
But the soul was never asleep
just awaiting spiritual change to take place
In a cocoon full of possibilities forming off vibes
Bracing itself for the love and hate that awaits on the other side
Because in order to move ahead we must remember
That for spiritual growth to take place
The lessons of life lived must first be rendered

~ Eddie Thompson
GED Graduate
B.A. in Pan-African Studies
Kent State University

Auntie Your Love Lingers

in the nooks
and crannies
of cooking up
earth suppers

Sunday music
in the soft heated pads
on the ironing board
in my second hand memory

cotton-picking before school

I
am still holding onto
the voracity of your voice
softness in your curls
still holding onto
the rhapsody in your laughter
sharp pierce in your glare
will never forget
your round face warm
you cooked
in your core
forgiveness

woven your proverbs
into prayers tasks
singin'
nursing
loving

paying respect
frying catfish nuggets

perfection

*~ Jennifer Cline
GED Graduate
B.A. in Pan-African Studies
Kent State University*

I watch the story appear...

Susana W. Antal
My Enchanted Pen

My Enchanted Pen

As I sit down to write,
My pen and paper become enchanted.
Magic appears on the page
And all of my thoughts come to life.
I watch the story appear
As my enchanted pen glides across the paper
And my heart flutters.
A play appears and all the characters
Dance and float across the paper
As if they were ghosts.
I am amazed. I can't control my hand
As my pen creates love stories of loved ones
And loved ones lost,
Of the beauty I have seen
And the colors, the scent of perfume in the air
And the sound of life and the feel of all the seasons.
All my emotions and fears are in a play.
I am the audience. I watch as my enchanted pen
Writes each sentence of the poem that appears
And has total control over me. With every poem,
I hold my breath in anticipation
To witness the next play
From my enchanted pen.

~ Susana W. Antal

How a Book Changed My Life

When I was a child, I did not like to read, but a Colombian author changed my mind about books and my lifestyle forever. In 1986, my mother tried to introduce me to the reading world. She picked a book from our home library and made me read for an hour every day. I remember the name of the book. It was called *A Happy World* by Aldous Huxley. I did not like that book so I did not like to read.

For four years, I tried so hard, but I could not finish that book. One day, in 1990, I heard about the author, Gabriel García Márquez, who had won the Nobel Prize in Literature, and I remembered that I thought, "What kind of book could he have written to win that prize? It had to be something really special!"

First, I decided to read something about the author. I found out that his literature style was magic realism. He turned ordinary stories and realistic situations into magical events with a fantastic touch. He was born in a little town named Aracataca in Colombia, my country. He was considered one of the most significant authors of the twentieth century and one of the best in the Spanish language. He started as a journalist, and wrote many acclaimed non-fiction works and short stories, but he is best known for his novels. One of them, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) was the book in which I was interested.

I started to read the book. I read all night. For twelve hours, I could not stop. My mother was very upset with me. "Are you crazy? You can't read that way," she yelled at me. Who can understand mothers?!

That day my mind changed. I started to want more books, all kinds of books. He made me want to know how other people told stories – real or unreal events.

Now, I am a passionate reader. I read three or four books per week and I always desire more. I think that every book

opens you to a new world. It gives you the possibility to live other people's lives. The characters become your friends. You can love, dream, or whatever you want. If you do not like to read, maybe it is because you have not found the perfect book for you yet!

~ Ana Ceron

An Open Letter on Loss

Hello, Dear Reader.

We probably have not met before, and I may never have your audience again. You are taking a chance on reading this, and I hope I can give you something of value before your eyes and presence leave this page.

Today is November 29th, and if you have been in Ohio long, you know what that looks like. The sky is gray, a thick, impenetrable gray. The wind is stirring the heavy, wet leaves, all of which have fallen from these naked trees, limbs exposed. We each are subconsciously bracing for a long season of cold. The kind that makes you feel lonely, isolated by thick clothes, fear of colds, and of the cold itself. Our windows and doors are clamped shut; even the birds have fled.

It is a hard season, winter. It stalks jealously behind summer, such contrasts. Summer: rather short, riotous, and sunny. Steamy, even. She wears hot, loud colors, and has celebrated adventures. Her sounds are large, like so much jewelry clanging. Summer's kids run loose, and they adore her. How quickly everything shifted. The winds drove her further south; her refuge. Somewhere, it is still summer, but not here. How quickly she gave up the fight, and retreated. You could not tell she was here, save the dried remains of her flower heads, and a few cast-off toys.

Maybe it's a mourning of its own, our loss of carefree summer. A time you could forget your coat, your hat, your gloves, and go unpunished. But that was then. Now we are winter's stepchildren. We have received our future, our "inheritance" – that celebrated "gain" that often disguises a greater loss.

Sometimes the seemingly brutal turn of events serves to show just how good we had it. And what of the comforts winter brings? Like any loss, we draw in, we gather with those who love us. We warm our hearts with the promise that they will take the

place of the sun's too fleeting time with us. There will always be changing seasons of our life. Certainly some so hard, we scarcely can stand the onslaught -- dark days that menace in an unholy way.

Be assured, like a pearl has at its core an intruder – the cutting sand – the cutting hurt of loss will heal. No, never will it leave. It is there, under the nacre of time, but transformed into a hurt that was not in vain, but acknowledged, explored, and covered by peace and forgiveness. Now, borne as a truly precious, treasured memory, forever part of us. Adornment and companion, appropriate for every season.

~ Carol L. Carman

Power of Money

I've spent my life
Trying to get riches and gold,
Not just for myself,
But for my kids before they grow old.
I learn that to be my own BOSS
Is a feeling of power,
So I hustled
Every moment of the day and every hour.
It didn't matter if I sold dope,
Or steal and rob,
Getting that cheddar
Was a full-time job.
But now they got me locked down
Counting days in the year.
I won't, I can't come back to jail,
I want that perfectly clear.
So I'll do the opposite of my chosen work –
That means legal earnings, ok?
Because not only do I want my kids to learn to provide
for themselves,
I want them to learn it the right way.

~ Casey Carpenter
Brian Dixon
Harvey O. Higgs
Ric McKitrick
Bobby Patterson

Chu-zuma: Life in My Case

“Chu-zuma” means “wives of overseas resident businessmen,” in Japanese. Most “Chu-zuma” are housewives. There are some stereotypical images, such as it is easy just staying at home, just enjoying having a brilliant life without working. But as a matter of fact I object to the idea that “Chu-zuma” are lazy and just enjoy their life. For me it is really hard to do that.

From childhood I dreamed to be a career woman. I was dedicated to my job for twelve years. I was very busy and I didn't have enough time to rest, but it was worthwhile and fulfilling.

Moving to America meant I had to give up my career and leave my family and friends. I need not say that it was tough. I used to meet a lot of people everyday and they needed me. I had a big responsibility and felt connected with people. It totally changed. I felt like I had become a housekeeper and lost my name, plus I didn't have any friends and my husband would come home late. I often cried and said to him, “It's not me. It is your life, it is not my life!” “I don't want money; please give me back my life!” (Sorry I am not a good wife.) My head knows that nobody forced me to come here and I decided that by myself, but my heart doesn't. I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if I were in Japan.

Now I still have a bad day sometimes, but it is getting better and fortunately I have made some friends. One of the chances to get over the bad condition was ESL. It depends on the person, but for me to have something to do is really helpful. I can meet and talk to people at the class and study English. Here in America, there are a lot of ESL classes. I really appreciate it.

If there are “Chu-zuma” who feel like me, I would like to say you don't need to blame yourself and take it easy. Keeping ordinary daily life is not easy. Learning a new language or starting to play some sports, or concentrating on raising kids, anything will be

fine as long as you are mentally and physically healthy, even though you don't work.

Mahatma Gandhi says, "The future depends on what you do in the present." I have plenty of time now and I hated it, but it may be a gift. I will keep studying English, and I might work in America in the future. There are infinite possibilities and nobody knows the future. I want to do my best and enjoy my hard "Chuzuma Life!"

~ Aki Umetsu

Teenage Years

Being 17, you think of high school football games, hanging out with friends, and just being a normal teenager. Not the case for me, walking into school on your first day being 7 months pregnant is a fearful thing -- not knowing if you're going to be judged, stared at, or made fun of. Having that responsibility on top of everything else is overwhelming. Becoming a mom, instead of worrying about dress colors or what your plans are for Friday night, you worry about diapers, bottles, and doctor visits. You go through so many emotions – happiness, sadness and depression. You grow up so fast. But in the end, after it's all said and done, and you hold your child for the first time, every emotion, every doubt is all worth it.

~ Renee Gabbard

What English Can Be

When I was a child, I hated English. I'm Japanese. In Japan, students usually start to learn English in junior high school, and I also started in junior high school. On the first English test in junior high, I got a 100% score because it was really easy. On the second test, I got 40% score. That one was a bit more difficult. Although I tried to understand, I wasn't able to get good scores after that. Eventually, I hated English. Now that I am older and more mature, I love English. The reason is that now I know the significance of English in my future, and English is more interesting than I originally thought. In this essay, I will describe what English was to me, what English is to me now, and what English will be to me in the future.

I can say that English has several significances to me. First, overcoming English is necessary. As I said, I hated English. However, I grabbed an opportunity. The reason was that my father decided to go to the US to gain a promotion. The circumstance built up the courage for me to try to enter a university in the US. I had to improve my English so that when I took the TOEFL test to go to a university, my score would be high enough. My weakest part is writing. I had never written long statements since I took the first TOEFL test. I got 10 points of 30 on the writing part of the first TOEFL test. That first test was a humbling experience. I knew that I had to develop a plan to improve that part of the total score. I didn't have extensive vocabulary and clever expression. Besides, I had few chances to practice to put ideas in writing like essays in Japanese schools. I wanted to get my wish to enroll in a university in the US in spite of that tough challenge for me. However, I learned a lot when I didn't give up, despite a failure. I learned that it is very principled to control irritation about doing poorly and not to give up on challenges.

Second, English as the primary common language is also the most important language to people all over the world. There are many opportunities to use English in jobs. Other various languages in the world are wonderful, but it's definitely inconvenient

to use them in business abroad. For example, Rakuten.com, the largest e-commerce retailer in Japan, requires English in all meetings, even if all attendees are Japanese. Foreign companies need people who can communicate with English speakers to succeed in their business as excellent human resources. If I'm able to speak English, it will be favorable to me in the future.

I have taken a few steps to improve my English. In fact, I was in a private school, which was called the ELS (English Language Service). In the ELS, instructors teach students academic vocabulary, how to write research papers, and so on. At the time I enrolled, it was challenging for me even to use simple phrases, and my English was awful. Nonetheless, I developed my skills in all English parts, especially in writing skills. I tried to write at least 2 essays each a month. Plus, I memorized a lot of vocabulary to write intriguing essays. Furthermore, my English skills should not be for only daily-life, but also for competitive advantages. Through attending a university, I can use various grammar constructions and vocabulary. For instance, I'd learn attractive expressions so that I could publish my paper in a scholarly journal and make a presentation. Additionally, I'd hold an exchange of views on the results of experiments with classmates. That could help, too. These tips may help to produce high performance in jobs and to be skilled in the art of conversation.

To sum up, I have trouble with English. As you can see, learning English has been a very tough part of my life. However, even if English might be a barrier, I'd like to enroll in a university to pursue my interest, chemistry, in the English language. That is a big opportunity for me.

~ Takeshi Ito

Math Rant

a.k.a. sharing my frustration

I am recognizing one of the reasons I have dreaded math all of these years. It isn't really the "you do this" nuts-and-bolts sort of math. I am fine carrying, borrowing, and such. It's when these math people slip off their numbers and symbols, and camouflage themselves in that realm I love: language. When these 2 worlds collide, I feel as if a home invasion has occurred. A snake oil salesman has infiltrated, and a wordy lawyer is trying to hide something.

I was motoring along reasonably well in my math book, until I hit the soliloquy on...page 69, I believe. I quote, "Since subtraction is the inverse, or opposite of addition, you can think of subtraction as adding the opposite of the number being subtracted."

I was FLUMMOXED! This is exactly the sort of thing that causes average people like myself to look at their math friends and think of bad words, like "Inverse is the new perverse," or, "They really ARE nerds! They have attained the pinnacle of useless math skills, the most circuitous route to an equational destination."

I am thinking this may be an inappropriate use, a violation, of the English language. My English teacher never insisted we learn to spell our words backwards ("the inverse"). I always suspected math people don't play fair.

~ Carol L. Carman

You Can Do It If You Try

My name is Mouhamed, and I am from the land of “Teranga” which means hospitality. It is the country of Senegal. It’s a wonderful country certainly, but with some problems. One of these problems is the education, and I would like to share with you the troubles that students have over there by recounting the experience of my graduation year.

My graduation year taught me something really important: if you believe in yourself, and you try your best, however hard and difficult the situation is, you can achieve your goal. That year was particularly difficult for all students across my country; we just had four months of class instead of nine. The fact is that the teachers were on strike the other five months.

In my class, we had only one teacher (our physics and chemistry teacher) who would teach us during that tough period of time. The other six wouldn’t instruct even if we begged them on bended knee to teach us. They said they had to respect their union’s decision.

As the academic year went by, we were down, hopeless, and lost. We just came to school and played scrabble or soccer until it was time to go home. We thought that the year was going to be worthless. But it was not. In May, the strike ended, and the teachers went back to the classroom. However, we had just three months to get ready for our exams.

I remember when our biology teacher said to us, “I know you won’t pass your exams but just take the test to get experience for the next year’s exam.” It was horrible to hear that from him, our teacher. At that moment we decided to show him we could do it. We studied harder than we had ever studied in our lives. We spent all day in our classroom sharing with each other what we learned by ourselves the night before. We went even further than what our teacher taught. We had faith that we were able to pass our exams brilliantly.

In the end, all my classmates and I passed our exams. In fact, half of the class passed with honors. In general, our school had more than a 75% success rate. That was the best rate that our school had ever had. And the icing on the cake was that our physics and chemistry teacher organized a wonderful party for us.

~ Mouhamed Fall

The Best Day of My Life

Happy event – the moment we're all waiting for! Getting into place, feeling the excitement, hearing all the laughter. Everyone expressing their thoughts. Not ready to walk. Yet very anxious, excited, nervous, and can't wait. We're all in line, we're walking – the time is now! We're getting closer. We can now hear the cheering, the yelling, the excited conversation, but not really making out what anyone is saying. Now comes the nerves. Now I'm scared!

I then hear someone scream –Yvonne! I look up with a huge smile on my face! Now I'm extremely excited and bursting with joy. I feel loved and it's time to step onto the stage and suddenly I can't breathe. I am now deaf; I can't hear a thing as I walk slowly on stage!! Everything is a blur as I shake hands with a big smile on my face and grab my diploma. Now, if only I can only make it without falling.

It's a wonderful day – Graduation Day!

~Yvonne Tatianna Palmer

You gave me wings to fly...

Ji Hye Park
Out of Mother's Arms

Out of Mother's Arms

I could do everything over the limit
under your knees.
I was something above potential
in your arms.
You gave me wings to fly away.

I was out of the safety zone
to see farther up.
Your world was getting smaller
beneath my notice.

Ah, I was nothing without you after all.
You were everything beyond myself.

Ah, you are the shelter to fold my wings to rest.
You are everything beyond myself.

~ Ji Hye Park

My Brother

I was born and I grew up in a small town in Guanaguato, Mexico. I am the third of five children in my family. I am the middle one, two siblings before me and two after. I was ten years old when my mom bore my younger brother, and a year later she gave birth to my last sister.

I would like to share the story of my early childhood. I call it my golden age. For most of my childhood, there was only me and my two older siblings. I still have those memories in my mind as if it were yesterday. Back to those days, my mom used to work as a maid and my dad in a factory, building parts for cars. That is why the three of us, my sister Consepcion, my brother Guadalupe, and I had to spend the time alone. Since I didn't go to kindergarten, I had to wait at home for them to get back from school. Every afternoon we played together and every day was different from the other. Sometimes we pretended to be a musical band. I was the singer, my sister played the guitar which was a broom, and my brother played the drums which were made out of old buckets and pot lids. We played for hours and hours until neighbors got fed up with us. Other days, with nothing to do and no money in our pockets, we let our minds fly and do the first thing we came up with. One day, we felt like eating meat so we went to an open field behind our house to hunt pigeons. We did so, and we caught three. When mom got home from work, dinner was ready, and guess what? We never told her what the meat was. We kept it a secret. Those were the days!

As I grew older, the focus of my life changed from thinking about my family to getting a job and becoming independent. My life was centered around me. Time passed so quickly, like a dream, and I don't remember much of it until I was 15 years old.

One morning after returning home from my 3rd shift factory job, I arrived home to find my mom sitting outside the house. Something looked different in her countenance, she looked so pale. I asked what was going on and she answered with

a lonely and empty voice, “your brother is sick, he has leukemia.” While I was working, they took him to the hospital because he fainted. That is how they found out he was sick. I turned to see my brother, a strong and tall guy of 17 years old, and there he was, like a scared little boy trying to be strong, pretending nothing happened. But within him, I think he knew what he was about to face. My brother was tall, strong, and dark skinned with beautiful thick black hair. Because of the treatments, he wasn’t strong and tall anymore, and he began to lose his hair. My brother, who used to play with me, was dying. Since that day, life changed for all of us. I stopped working to be in charge of my 2 little siblings while my mother was with my brother at the hospital. Sometimes it was for weeks. My dad and my oldest sister worked harder to cover all the costs for the treatment my brother needed. It is too difficult to describe in words how painful it was to see someone you love fighting for their life. It was a pain in my heart to see my brother lie on his bed sometimes with a high fever that made him shiver to the point that his bed shook. Other days, it was a bloody nose that would last a few hours. With every drop of blood, it was like a little of his life was running away. Sometimes I asked myself, “Why was it him?” He was the one who made my parents proud.

Day by day, I saw my brother grow weaker and weaker. There were some bad days, others were not that bad. From all of this, we grew a little closer again. After two years of treatment, we all thought that the end of the chemotherapy was close and that he was getting better. How could we know that, in fact, the end was coming? Time is a deceiver. On November 1, 2002, time was different. On that day, which was Friday, my brother went out with his friends to play football. When he came back, he made jokes. He was happier than ever, full of energy. By evening, he said that he was tired and he went to sleep. We thought it was normal for all he had done that day. On Saturday, he spent most of the day in bed with a stomach ache. By Sunday night, we all were about to get in bed earlier than usual because it was raining. My brother called for help but got no answer, so he got up to get a glass of water and his pills. All of a sudden, we heard a strong sound like something crashing against the floor, and then it happened again. In that moment, my biggest sister ran to see what happened and

I followed her. My brother was on the floor. I don't know how but I put my arms under his shoulders and held him up while my sister was screaming. My parents came and as soon as my mother saw her son unconscious, she fainted. I yelled at my sister to help my mom, while we, my dad and I, were trying to put my brother in bed. Battered and bleeding from the fall, he could barely breathe enough to say, "I am okay. I am okay. Tell my mom that I am okay." Finally, my mom woke up and we could calm down a little, but no one slept that night. How could we have?

On Monday morning, since we had no car, we asked one of the neighbors to take my brother to the hospital which was about 2 hours away. Right before they left, he fainted again right into my mother's bosom. With pain in our heart, we said goodbye to the both of them. The next days we had no communication with them because the phone cable didn't work in our area. My dad decided to go to the hospital on Tuesday. We believed it was going to be another week as the others in the hospital, and then they would all be home. But the truth was different. He was actually balancing between life and death. My sister decided that the four of us were going to surprise them at the hospital on Friday after she came home from work. On Friday morning, I woke up at 7:00 am to send my little siblings to school. The first thing I thought was, "God, if you want my brother, take him, but if not, heal him, but please, let this nightmare end." I wish that I had never thought that. I was dressing up my little sister when I heard a sound at the front door. For a second, my heart jumped within me. I thought, it's them, they came back. I went out of the room and saw my sister with her fiancé, who usually never got inside the house unless my dad gave permission. One look at my sister's face and I knew everything was over. She held me in her arms and told me, "Our brother, our brother is dead." I couldn't say anything. I couldn't cry. I didn't know silence could feel that heavy. My sister and her fiancé went to help my parents. By evening all of them arrived home with my brother in a coffin. My heart broke in pieces when my mom put my brother's belongings in my hands. It was like his belongings were dead as well.

After 2 or 3 weeks my parents were ready to talk. They said that my brother asked for me many times. He remembered his pet cat. He had asked for all of us. But the dawn of his last day, they said that he had asked something else, it was, "What if I die? Are you going to forget me?" All of a sudden he began to shake his head side to side with desperation and to say, while my father was holding his hand, "I can't make it, father, I can't make it this time. I will not be able to take care of you, father." And as in slow motion, he closed his eyes.

I lived this experience as a sister, and it was painful. I don't know how much more painful it could be as a parent. All I know is that something within my parents died with my brother because they were not the same again.

But one thing is for sure, and we all learn it. Love does not leave when a loved one dies. This is why I always remember to say "I love you" to every single member of my family and make sure that they know that I love them.

~ *Laura Romero*

Memories of My Mother

Ignorance is like a disease; it is also like a virus that spreads in the body. But ignorance is also in a person's mind. I would like to tell you about my mother and how the ignorance of others affected her life in a profound way.

My mother's father married her off to a man who lived in a small town, in a small city. She was just eleven years old. I remember her telling me that when her husband went to work, she would go out to play with children her own age. She had gotten pregnant two times, but she couldn't carry the babies. They died before they were born.

She also had a cat that she had named "Apicha," which was her mother's name. How could this very young woman, who would one day be my mother, have children? She was still a child herself, and she needed her own mother's love and care.

Eventually when her husband was very sick and dying, his family forced him to divorce my mother because they didn't want her to have a share in the inheritance. It was so sad because my mother's husband had loved and cared for her as the child she was. He himself was crying when they separated and she had to leave to return to the place of her birth. She even had to leave behind the cat she dearly loved. This was because my mother could barely feed herself, much less her beloved cat. Her mother-in-law had been so selfish and cruel to her.

Years later at the age of fifteen, my mother was married to the man who would be my father. By the age of 28 or 29, she had given birth to eight wonderful children, including myself. I have a beautiful family with loving brothers and sisters. I am so blessed!

This is a brief story of my mother's life. Even though she never was able to go to school, she had the knowledge and wisdom of life. She gave us a good education and taught us how to

love and respect each other. She never spoke harshly or hurt us with her words. We could only see much love in her eyes.

I'm very proud of this woman! There is only praise for my mother and other noble women like her who suffer in silence.

~ *Rachida Bourzak*

The Last Tribute from a Son to His Beloved Mother

You are my mom, my personal hero.
You carried me for nine long months in your little belly.
You were always taking care of me.
You were so anxious when I was sick.
You rocked me all the time when I was cold.
You carried me on your back down every road.
While seeking our happiness,
You gave me all the love that a mother could give her son.
You taught me to love everybody without discrimination.
You taught me to fight for a better future.
You taught me to be honest and respectful,
But where are you now, Maman?
Why did you leave so early in my life?
Why didn't you stay to taste the fruits of the plant
You sowed and maintained during many years of hard work?

I remember our last day together!
It was March 8, 2003—
The day on which many people worldwide celebrate women.
You were in the town square where the women were honored.
You were so beautiful and cheerful,
And I came to see you to wish you a happy holiday.
You were happy to have me as a son,
And I felt invincible in honoring you as my mom.
Our eyes were filled with plenty of emotion.
I said to you, "Love you Maman. See you later."
You said back to me, "Bye my darling. Take care."
I never saw you again until that terrible day!

It was March 11, 2003 – the darkest day of my life.
I was at school and I thought about you.
When school let out, I met my cousin who told me
You weren't feeling well this morning,
And you were taken to the hospital.
When I went to see you, you were not there.

Arriving at the family home, I saw many people,
And I saw sadness in every face.
Outside, some people dug a grave – your grave.
You left us without any word,
Leaving your seven-month-old son, Benjamin, inconsolable,
Leaving a void in my heart that nothing can fill.

But know that your time on Earth was valuable
Because your kids are staying united and standing,
Because you left behind fighters of freedom,
Because you left behind fighters who serve humanity.
Despite thorns under our feet and storm clouds above our heads,
We always continue the dream you had for us.
I loved you, I love you, and I will love you forever my brave hero,
Maman.
Goodbye Maman, I will see you again someday for eternal life.

Your Darling Son

~ *Tibi Kabore*

Rambo

When I was a small girl, growing up in Quito, Ecuador, I always had a dream to have a puppy. My mom didn't like dogs because she said that it is too much work to take care of them. I was always trying to convince her but she constantly said, "No!"

One day, my best friend told me that she had puppies to give away. "Do you want one?" she asked me. I totally said, "Yes!" I remember that day, how excited I was. I couldn't believe. I said to myself, "My dream is going to be true."

The next day, at the end of school, my friend gave me a puppy. I named him Rambo. I was so happy. I fell in love with him immediately. He was brown and black with sweet eyes. I didn't know what kind of breed he was, but I didn't care. I held him and I hugged him all the way home. Then I started to think about my mom. I didn't tell her anything about it. "She is going to be mad at me," I thought.

I arrived at my house. My mom was in the kitchen. I walked in with a big smile on my face. I said, "Mom, look, I finally have a puppy. I am so happy!"

But my mom's face didn't look happy. She told me, "Why didn't you ask me first? You know that I don't like dogs in my house!"

"I know, Mom," I said, "but don't worry, I'm going to take care of him."

My mom smiled at me and said, "Okay, he can stay."

From that day, my life changed. I spent most of my time with Rambo. He was very playful. We loved running and chasing each other. Wherever I went, I took him with me. I felt sad when I had to go to school because I had to leave him.

When I got home, I heard his yipping of excitement when he saw me. Those days were some of the best of my life because I enjoyed watching him play, getting in and out of trouble, wagging his tail all the while.

Two weeks passed and my mom was the one who ended up doing all the work for Rambo because I was at school. One day, when I came home, I was looking for my puppy. “Rambo, Rambo, where are you?” But he wasn’t there. I started to cry. “Mom where is my puppy?”

My mom told me, “Don’t worry, he is fine. My friend came today and she likes Rambo. I gave him to her. As you know, I don’t have time to take care of him, and you are at school. I think it is not the right time to have a dog.” For my mom, “never” was a good time to have a dog, but I was growing up with that desire in my heart.

Today, I am married. I have four beautiful children. One day, they asked me, “Mom, can we have a dog?” I didn’t hesitate. I bought a dog for them. They don’t have just one dog, they have two. I enjoy every day seeing my children’s faces, how happy they are. I am so happy, too, because finally my dream is true.

~ *Adriana Vasquez*

Where I'm From

I'm from scrub boards,
From Purex and lye soap
I am from the wild weeds
Switch, tall, (it tasted like leeks)
I am from the pricker bush,
the shumac,
the itch I still remember
and Queen Anne's lace that was taller than me
Trees all around,
A cool breeze (it smells like rain).
I am from wood stove and gather,
I'm from Gurt and Gurtrude
From the half breeds
And whispers when walking by.
I'm from all night
dance, and headdress,
Loud song and drum
Eal clan, longhouse dance
Or eat 'til sunup
Daddy sang and played the riddle
As he became chief.
I am a little Indian girl
Raised on the reservation
Where the grass is green, and the trees are tall,
And white men have no say.
Daddy built our home, and then, at forty, left us
Going off to war,
but not before passing his seed
to fourteen children to raise the farm.
Mother hardly knew him, but loved him anyway

We lived in a two-story house,
Beams, no walls
A basin in winter, a creek in spring
Two pails for drink, cook and wash
I'm from potbelly stove and wood crackling warmth
The flour apron and smells of baking
wash the clothes, scrub wood floors
(mom's work never done)
"twins just tracked manure again"
No wonder mom's apron is so worn.

With thanks to George Ella Lyon

~ Sheri Readence

New Shoes

It is an old tradition in China that a mother makes new shoes and clothes for her son who will travel far away, when he is doing trade, joining the army, or taking exams in the capital. Due to the lack of synthetic strong and long-lasting materials in ancient China, the soles were usually made by stitching layers of hardened clothes together called “thousand layer soles”, which one can still buy from some stores nowadays. (Natural materials such as wood or bamboo are too hard and animal skins were too expensive; however, some people also use straw or vine as material for soles.) One can imagine the time and effort it may take to make such new shoes. This poem was inspired by an ancient Chinese poem “*You Zi Yin*” expressing the gratitude and love of a traveler to his mother.

New Shoes

A pair of new shoes I hold in my hand,
 At the shoes I look again and again,
 Carefully I put them on and up I stand,
 Slowly I walk with soft steps on land.
 For I know the long time my mom spent,
 Sewing the new shoes day and night.
 Like movie clips, memories flash in my brain,
 A winter with snow covering the mountain,
 Cold northern wind howls outside our small hut,
 On my mom's white hair the dim candle light shine,
 Stitch by stitch the sewing seems to never end,
 The thread dances and the needle flies like a wand,
 Into the shoes mom put all her love through her hand.
 Layer after layer as the soles get thicker,
 Nobody knows how much love they may contain.
 Even though I now live in a far away land,
 Every time I look at the shoes,
 Beside me I feel my mom firmly stand.

My Dear Friend

I never would have thought that in this always changing world, I would meet a kindness, real love, and unbreakable loyalty without reproach. You were not expected and came as a surprise. Every day you taught me that it didn't matter how bad a day was because by looking in your eyes I knew everything would be okay.

We have been through so much, but we have always stayed together. Our first adventure was when you were hit by a car and it was a miracle that you only had a broken shoulder.

Next, we decided to make the move to the United States, and I couldn't leave you behind. People called me crazy for paying five hundred dollars for a friend like you, but they just didn't understand. But I couldn't do it alone, and we both had an experience with fear, so I knew we would be okay as long as we were together.

Lastly, the night I lost you, I was going mad. I thought I had lost you forever. I would never see you again. But God was on our side and once I paid to have you back, you were returned safe and sound.

I couldn't imagine not getting the chance to say goodbye. Or not to see your bright brown hair and glowing brown eyes which slowly turned white with time.

Now you only can see my silhouette and can hardly hear my voice. You are a lot slower, our walks have gotten shorter and your teeth are now slowly falling one by one.

But the one thing that has not aged by days is your love and happy heart. Eighteen years together, and I thank God for giving me the chance to have a friend like you.

And even though you are not a human, you will always be my unconditionally loyal, four legged friend.

My dog!

~ Marbella Hernandez

My Mother's Strength

My mom is an extraordinary woman in my eyes. She gave birth to five kids by the age of twenty-nine. She was young, just 17, when she fell in love and had my eldest sister, Zaira. She had to leave her behind with her parents so my sister would have a better life. She knew my grandparents could set a good Christian example for her.

My mom comes from a family of 12 siblings, 5 girls and 7 boys. My grandparents did the best they could for them, but it was not always easy. Still they made sure to help my mom get into college, but that was not enough. After a year, my mom had to leave college. She left my sister behind with my grandparents. Within four years, she met her only husband, Yancy, and they had my second eldest sister, Yanice. After only two years of marriage, he was murdered. She could not stand to stay in Puerto Rico and decided to relocate to Miami, Florida. Three years later, she met my father, but right before I was born, she left him. She met my sister's father and had my sisters, Blanca and Yessenia. Sadly, two days before my baby sister turned two months old, she passed away from SIDS. My mom's life spiraled when my little sister, Yessenia died. She was so depressed she ended up in a hospital in a coma. When she awoke, two months later, she could not get over her guilt and began to rely on drugs to numb her pain. She soon realized, however, that this was not the example she wanted to set for her children, so she cleaned up her act, by herself, with no detox.

My mom is an extraordinary woman who tried to give us a better life. Sometimes I forget that. My mom couldn't live in Miami any longer. It reminded her of my little sister, Yessenia. She moved us to Ohio to forget. When we arrived here, we had to live in a family shelter. Once my mother's life improved financially, she moved us to our first apartment. Working two jobs at a time, she took care of us by herself. I always remember her making sure to be there for us before school and afterwards. She always made us dinner. When my mom had saved enough money,

she moved us to our first house. After seventeen years, she had enough money to pay for my oldest sister to travel to Ohio to live with us. Zaira came home and stayed with us for two years before she got married.

Eventually my sisters and I began to see only the mistakes our mother had made, each in our own way. Slowly we began to pull away. This drove our mother to become an alcoholic, but after 2 years, we came together again. My mother got better, stopped drinking, and began going to her AA meetings. She's been sober ever since.

It's been two years since her recovery. My mother goes to church, and our family has never been better than it is now. I have written this story for my mother so that she knows we are aware of all she has done for us and all she has endured, sacrificed, and surpassed. She remains clean for us, now. Sometimes I forget how much she loves us and what she had to do for us.

I love you, Mom. If God gave me a chance to choose a mother, knowing what I know right now about you, I would choose you ten times over. You are the strongest woman I know next to Grandma, and though I may not always seem to appreciate you, I hope you will never forget how much you mean to me. To me, you will always be the strongest and the most extraordinary woman in this world.

~ Catherine A. Marin

Life

Children

Energetic, Innocent

Playing, Jumping, Eating

Amazement, Excitement, Wisdom, Happiness

Retiring, Doing hobbies, Traveling

Experienced, Relaxed

Elderly

~ *Nong Huffman*

Tibi Kabore

Paola Lopez

Ayaka Yukawa

Where the homes were made of
love...

Jermaine Hines
Homes Made of Love

Homes Made of Love

I am from where the homes were made of love.
You can hear kids playing a mile away.
You can feel the sun as it beams down on the children playing.
Music's playing from one of the neighbors' houses.
Kids are having water fights, riding their bikes.
There's a smile on everyone's faces and love in their hearts.
It was a great place to be at that time.

My parents worked so we could have nice things,
There were times when we didn't see them until late.
My siblings and I would start dinner, getting things ready.
I would set the table and my sisters would make the salad.
My brother would start frying or baking
so when my parents came home
There was little for them to do. We always loved cooking together,
The smell of the food cooking was always a delight.
I just didn't like cleaning up the mess we made.

As a kid I was always into sports a lot.
You could always find me playing football or basketball.
That was always so much fun for me and my friends.
I remember one day I played football in my school clothes.
I was covered in mud from head to toe.

With thanks to George Ella Lyon

~ Jermaine Hines

Life Stories

How I Learned to Ride a Bicycle

When I was a child, I wanted to learn bicycle riding. I was so excited and scared. My dad offered to hold the back of my bicycle. I began to pedal and rode faster and faster. After a long way, I found that my father wasn't behind me, and I rode all the way by myself!

My New Eyes

It was so amazing when I wore my glasses for the first time! I had never seen something like that before. Everything had details. Leaves on the tree, bricks of a wall, designs of a rug, faces of people, even with distance! I didn't know the world was like this. I remember their effect on my life, but I'm not sure if they changed my dreams when I sleep, too!

Climbing Alone

My family and I went somewhere for a picnic. They wanted to rest in the foothills. While I was climbing the mountain, my mother saw me. My mom and dad shouted to me, "Be careful! Come back!" But I couldn't hear them because of distance. I thought they were encouraging me to go higher. It was so dangerous!

"Topoly," My Lovely Doll

We wanted to move to another house, and I should select things to take with me. In the basement, I found something that was wrapped in a fabric. "What's that?" I thought. "Wow, it was Topoly, my lovely doll!" My dad gave her to me as a gift when I was 5 years old. At first, she was a boy, but I preferred to change it to a girl. She was as tall as me at that time, and I tried to pull her with me everywhere. She became my best friend. I protected her, like she was my daughter. I fed, washed and dressed her. She even let me use her nose as an eraser when I drew something wrong and chew her fingers when I had stress. What great days we passed!

I remembered all sweet memories that we made together. Much time has passed, but she has kept her beautiful smile on her face yet. I looked at her kind eyes, touched her red hair and smelled her fragrant skin. I could see somewhere that I had sewn on her body to repair her, too. I was so happy to find her, one of the most important parts of my childhood!

~ *Bahareh Bokharaee*

Rufus's Brutal End

I was 13... not an adult, not a child. One day my sister and I came home from school. When we got home, we were surprised to find a chicken on top of our kitchen table. We were surprised because this chicken was particularly uncooked and alive! Blanca and I had never seen a live chicken before in our lives. He had golden brown feathers and an orange beak. Blanca and I gave him some bread and named him Rufus. After a half hour of my sister and I playing and grooming him, we were surprised to discover Rufus had laid an egg. We thought he was sick because the egg was brown. After some research, we learned better. We were surprised to discover Rufus was a she and that eggs apparently come in brown, too.

The next day my sister and I came home from school, and we immediately noticed a giant splat of blood on the driveway. We ran to the house only to discover feathers on our kitchen floor, blood on my mom's marble counter, and Rufus's headless carcass on top. She looked like she'd been put through a guillotine. To make injury worse, my mom had her hand up Rufus's behind as if she were digging for gold.

Blanca and I did not eat dinner that night. Instead, we gathered up Rufus's remains and buried her in a most proper way... six feet down with a cross of Popsicle sticks.

~ Catherine A. Marin

Lake of Memories

Sunny Saturdays spent on the water
Yellow perch glistening gold
Catching walleye with Grandpa and Uncle
They knew how to find them with radar
Tinder box tobacco, I loved the smell
Potato chips and ham sandwiches, with iced tea
We stayed out till the sun went down

I watched as they cleaned and filleted the catch
While Grandma made a beer batter and fried them up,
Crunchy, mouth watering, my favorite supper
These are my favorite memories of Saturdays in the summer

~ Derek McCormick

My Best Memories of Korean Holidays

Growing up in South Korea, I have wonderful memories of annual events that I enjoyed.

On New Year's, we wear *Hanbok* which is a traditional Korean dress. We visit every relative or neighbor and bow down to get money. It is called "Sebeh." *Sebeh* is a traditional activity for New Year's. Children bow down to their parents, relatives and neighbors and say "*Saehae bok mani badenseyo*" which means "please receive a lot of luck in New Year." In return, adults give money to the children in (good) luck bags.

When I was young, I lived in a small town. There was no playground for children. Instead of a playground, we played together in the only church and church yard in the neighborhood. Every Christmas, most of the children acted in a huge performance in the church. The practice for it began two months before Christmas! Now when Christmas comes every year, those times come to my mind. The memory of those Christmas performances with all my neighbors in the church is eternally unforgettable for me.

~ Soohye Kim

Renee Hocevar

I am from clean clothes and shoes,
From clothespins and kitchen gardening.
We grew apples, vegetables and berries.
I am from the wealth and hard work
(my legs felt like they were going to fall off at times),
From respect, fun, and it felt so warm.
I am from the roses and lilies that grew around our house,
to racetracks and motorcycles
The foreign language being spoken to at home and English at school.
I'm from the Catholic and Ukrainian festivals
From Baba and Gedo, and aunts and uncles.
I'm from church on every Sunday and taking trips with Grandpa to gamble.
From "listen and pay attention" and "always tell the truth."
I'm from Catholic beliefs (Ukrainian) and speak firmly about my beliefs.
I'm from Cleveland, Ohio, and I am Ukrainain, Polish, and Slovenian.
From homemade pierogis and homemade cheesecake.
From playing in the creek with my cousin and the shouting from my father
I am from all the family portraits hanging all over the walls.
I am from a family of having fun, going to racetracks and gambling.

With thanks to George Ella Lyon

~ Renee Hocevar

What Brings Me Comfort

Growing up we had woods behind my house. My younger brother and I would always go exploring. One day we came across this huge tree that leaned out over a small creek. It was amazing! As often as we could, we would go out to it. Bringing snacks and a toy keyboard, we would sit out in the tree looking down into the creek sparkling below. Making music on the keyboard and munching on our snacks, we would spend all day playing in the massive branches.

I haven't been out to the tree in many years, but I think of it often. The tree itself, the landscape, and the memories made with my brother will always be something I hold dear.

~ Teia Griffin

Our Childhood Games: A Class Essay

Each country has its own unique games. Some are played outside; others are played inside. We each have our favorite games from the past: hide and go seek, roller-skating, head ball, and the elastic game.

I, Yuko from Japan, used to play hide and go seek as a child. I used to play with my neighbor friends: boys and girls, younger and older, all mixed together in the park near our home after school. It was so much fun to hide in a place where the “seeker” couldn’t find me. I was good at hiding and often couldn’t be found! This was my greatest memory with my neighbor friends of my childhood.

I, Diana from Uzbekistan, liked to roller-skate. I was eight years old when my mom bought skates for us. It was the happiest moment because all the kids in the neighborhood had them, and we got them later. It’s better late than never! Then my siblings and I would take turns wearing them because we only had one pair. One day my older sister wore them. The next day I wore them. Then the twins had their turn.

I, Ali from Saudi Arabia, loved to play head ball. The head ball game required two groups of kids. One group was the enemy, and the other was the offense. The rule was that the enemy group escape within an area 100 yards by 100 yards. The offense group must kill the enemy personnel by throwing small balls that would hit the person’s body. The enemy that was hit could stay in play if he hit the ball with his head. I was fat, and so I was frequently “killed.”

I, Rachida from Morocco, liked to play the elastic game. I remember in my childhood, we would collect a small amount of money to buy elastic so that we could play the elastic game together. It was a popular game in my country. My friends and I had to jump while keeping the elastic at our knees at the same time. The elastic would go higher and higher during each game so that

eventually we couldn't jump at all. It was a very funny game, and we enjoyed playing it together.

So hide and go seek, roller-skating, head ball, and the elastic game are our favorite games. They are each different but were all created for fun!

*~ Yuko Tamura
Diana Nabieva
Ali Albishi
Rachida Bourzak*

The Magic Key

“What happened?” I shouted. One day, I went out of my house to take out the garbage. Suddenly, the door shut. I tried to turn a knob while my 3-year-old youngest son pushed and pulled the door, but the door didn’t move. The lock bolt seemed to snap into place by the momentum. “Why? What should I do?” I panicked. All of other doors were locked, and what was worse, I didn’t have my cellphone. I didn’t remember my husband’s new cellphone number, and I can’t speak English. My youngest son began weeping. My other children would be home from school shortly. I didn’t know when my husband was going to be back. This happened after only being in this country for one month. “What should I do?” I didn’t have any idea. I was wandering around outside my house.

At that time, I saw Joan, my next-door neighbor come home. I ran up to her and said, “Help me.” She listened to my story carefully, as I told it in poor English. She came over to my house and pushed the door and turn the knob again, but it didn’t work either. She said, “Come in!” We went in her house. She took a key out from a drawer. “This is your house’s key. The previous owner of your house gave it to me.” I was surprised but very glad.

I went back over to my house and used the key to open the front door. It was like magic. We hugged together and delighted in it. She asked me, “Do you want the key back?” I said, “Of course not.” She smiled and went back to her home with the key.

Later, I talked to my family about the serious situation. At the end, I said, “If you lose your key, you should go see Joan. She keeps a copy of our key for us.”

Now, when I go outside, I always use the door stop.

~ Hiromi Ito

Ohio

I am from Ohio
From Dum Dums and Buckeye candy
I am from Lake Erie,
(Greenish blue, and the best Walleye)
I am from the Buckeye tree,
Scarlet carnations
Sweet and strong

I'm from the OSU games and "Hang on Sloopy"
From Grandpa's Cheese Barn and Rock n Roll
I'm from the Cheese Cones and Perch oh-so fresh
I'm from the angry drivers
And hating the Steelers
From the way we say "pop" and "O-H-I-O"
I'm from Cleveland and the long rides to Amish country,
Kielbasa and Chili on top of spaghetti
From the Browns championship in 1946,
The Blue Jackets, Cleveland Cavs and Indians

I am from Ohio, where we eat Buckeye Candy
And stand behind our teams
We say "pop" and expect when we say
"O-H" we get an "I-O" in return

With thanks to George Ella Lyon

~ Jessica Schuette

Colors are clad
in good intentions...

Cephas Q. Archer
Pigmentation

Pigmentation

The Greats of the universe
Visualize the world as a garden,
Comprised of miscellaneous floral parts.
Like a mansion,
It has many entry and exit points.
Colors affirm the essence of creation.
To dilate more, they are mere gateways.
Usurp the power color provides.
Colors are clad in good intentions.
Discard the obstinacy, and the
Inward-looking attitudes.
It's Okay! Blue, green, yellow,
Black and White –
Those are just for sharing.
Last, color is for mutual benefit.

~ *Cephas Q. Archer*

Bullying Hurts

One day there was a young woman. That woman was me. My day was complete, so I went to relax. As I went to sit down I grabbed my phone and watched a video on Facebook. Now, I typically don't watch the videos but this one was different; it was about bullying. This video was about a young man who had been bullied throughout his life of going to school. It started out with kids calling him names, and then led to punching and beating him up. Never did the boy say anything other than he knew this group of kids didn't like him. So, he didn't bother them but couldn't understand why they couldn't pay him the same respect back. It led to these bullies texting him saying mean cruel things like, "Do us all a favor and go kill yourself." The young man, having felt that enough was enough, he did just that – killed himself.

As I sat on my couch watching this video, tears streamed down my face. I felt saddened, knowing that someone can have such impact on someone to where they feel as if suicide is the only solution for the problem. I was fearful of this happening to my children. Thoughts were going a mile a minute in my head. I had to regroup myself, wipe my face and call my children to me.

I sat my older three children down and started talking about bullying. I asked my daughter and my niece who are 6 and 7 years old if they knew what bullying was. They responded to me that they knew what it was and gave me an example. The oldest child is 12, and I already knew that she knew what bullying was because she had experienced some bullying in her past. I had the children watch the video. I made sure they were watching, and that they were able to understand what the video was about and what was being said.

As all three of them watched the video, tears streamed down the 12-year-old's face. I asked, "Are you okay?" She responded to me by nodding her head yes. The video was over and the girls were speechless.

Then I asked the girls what they had learned. The younger two girls told me that bullying isn't nice and you shouldn't do it. The 12-year-old was still speechless with tears still rolling off of her face. I wasn't trying to make it too overwhelming, but powerful enough that they knew bullying was serious. First I called for my 7-year-old niece to stand, and I slightly pushed her and said, "You're stupid and ugly. Do us all a favor and kill yourself." Then I asked her, "If someone did this to you, or you saw someone doing this to someone else, what do you do?"

She told me, "Tell an adult or you, Aunt TT." I let her know that I was very proud of her and that she was right.

Next I told the 12-year-old, "I'm not going to do to you what I did to your sister. You know how it feels and what you should do. Tell the girls how it made you feel when you were bullied." She then told them what it felt like to be bullied and what some of the kids did and said to her.

Finally I asked my daughter who is 6 the same question as my 7-year-old niece, "What do you do if someone says this to you, or you see someone doing this to another child?"

Her response was heartbreaking. She said, "I go home and kill myself." Tears were pouring down my face, not knowing what to do; I was thinking to myself, "What happens when someone says this to her?" My head was spinning, many thoughts going through and thinking of what I just heard my daughter say. Her dad called for her, she started crying thinking that she was in trouble. He had her sit on his lap as he explained to her that she was to tell someone and never do any harm to herself, especially kill herself. He continued talking to her and letting her know that Daddy, Mommy, and many others would miss her if something happened to her, and that we all love her.

Now I knew to make sure I paid special attention to this child. She may in fact harm herself if she were told to. The other girls sat and watched not knowing what to say or do. I continued to enforce that bullying was wrong and you never do harm to

yourself or anyone else. This is a mother's nightmare. One that one could only hope never happens. I think that this was a valuable lesson to all of us.

In conclusion, I ask a favor from all of you. Parents, please take the time and talk to your children about bullying, and be sure to let them know how wrong it is, how serious it really is. The children need to know that it is wrong to bully others and to be bullied.

Children, don't be afraid to tell if it's happening to you or another child. If you hear or see someone being bullied, stand up for that child; don't be part of the problem. You are just as guilty as the person who is doing the bullying if you sit and do nothing. They're valuable, too. Tell a teacher or adult. If you happen to know the parents, have your parents call them to make them aware. Don't let one life go. We are all God's children. All of us are unique, beautiful, intelligent, smart, and amazing in our own ways. God made us all different, but we are all still loved. Remember you matter, and you can make a difference!!!

~ Tonya Bowers

Traveling Opens Your Mind

Traveling is to open yourself to the world.
Traveling is to leave your cocoon.
Traveling is to discover new cultures, new thoughts.

We always know what we leave behind,
but we are ignorant of what we are going to find.

Traveling means to learn about the world,
to learn about other people,
but first of all to learn about ourselves.

When you are in a foreign country,
When the language spoken isn't yours,
There is just you, nobody can help you.
To make yourself understood becomes your priority.
To get used to it, a necessity.
To socialize yourself, a need.

No matter the place where you will go,
No matter the difficulty of the spoken language,
Don't be afraid to reach out to others.
Each person has something to teach you.

Don't underestimate anybody by prejudice.
Knowledge is in all of us,
and is made to be exchanged and shared.

That's what we call communication.

~ *Coline Bounous*

Poison Ivy

(A person prepares to cut poison ivy. When he is lifting the knife in his hand, a bird is flying at once on the poison ivy and stops the person who wants to cut the poison ivy. Then, there is a conversation among the Person, the Bird, the Poison Ivy, and Nature.)

Bird: (Facing the Person and angrily) Stop! What do you want to do?

Person: (Points to the Poison Ivy) This ivy is a bad plant, it has poisons! I have to cut it out.

Bird: Why do you think the plant has poisons?

Poison Ivy: I am not a poison ivy! I am not...

Person: (Interrupting the Poison Ivy) Yes, you are. You make my skin itch if I touch you carelessly. So I have to cut you away. I do not want to see you again in the area I often walk by.

Bird: (To the Person) Do you know, the name "Poison Ivy" is given by you humans? We call the plant, Sweet Ivy. Their berries are our favorite foods in the fall. There were a lot of Sweet Ivies in these areas. You destroyed them! (Sadly) Now, there are no more foods for us in the fall.

Poison Ivy: (Sadly too) This is true, this is true! We lost most of our habitats! We are a lovely plant. Our beautiful shades are in autumn, our leaves change color from green to red, the color of our berries is pale yellow, and the birds like the berries. (Proudly)

Person: (Being shocked) Is this true what you said?

Bird and Poison Ivy: Yes, it is!

Nature: Wow, this is a wonderful communication! God creates the world; he does not want you fighting each other. And in con-

trast, he hopes you will live in nature in harmony! (To the person) Humans are a smart and powerful species on the planet; I believe that you can do a good job!

Person: (Thinking deeply, and says slowly) A few years ago, I heard a story about the fate of animals that lived in the Florida Everglades, especially about Snail Kites and Apple Snails. Let me remember. Because people drained the marsh in the Florida Everglades for farming, the Apple Snails lost their habitat. As there were fewer Apple Snails, there were fewer Snail Kites. There are many animals like the Snail Kites and the Apple Snails. There used to be more, but their numbers went down as their habitats became smaller. So far, they are still endangered species. The story of the Poison Ivies and the Birds is similar to the story of the Snail Kites and the Apple Snails! Oh, my God! I can't do a stupid thing again! I heard seemingly a warning from the Snail Kites and the Apple Snails: "You are so selfish! You should leave some spaces to the Poison Ivies and the Birds. We do not want our story to happen again on the Poison Ivies and the Birds."

Person: Now, hello Birds and Poison Ivies, we are good friends! (Stretching his hand to the Bird and the Poison Ivy)

Bird: (Being glad) Hello, Person! You are a good friend! (Using the bill to hold the Person's hand)

Poison Ivy: (Being glad too) Hello, Person! But, I can't touch your hands. I am so apologetic about that. I am still a poison ivy for people. You should keep far away from me!

Person: (Being glad) That is good! Thank you very much for reminding me!

(The Person, the Bird, and the Poison Ivy enjoy time together.)

~ Chun Qin

Alter Ego

I was born with a different brain
That made me hard to understand
How to act with friends

Growing up wasn't easy
Always feeling alone and trying to please
I just wanted to breathe

I think I knew I was different
When I look back on my past it seems coherent
Why people thought I was belligerent

I'm scared of being social
I don't keep my entourage very long, it's crucial
They used to call me antisocial

I can laugh or I can cry
In a few seconds, tears can flow from my eyes
Because everything to me is magnified

But I know someone
Who is better than everyone
Living in this "brain of no fun"

She is perfection

~ Lisa Moro

Far in Distance but Close to My Heart

One year ago, I made the difficult decision to go to the US to learn English. I'm from Panama, and my life changed from the first day I took the flight to New York, which was my first stop in the US, to participate in a cultural training. However, the hardest part was being separated from family, especially my twin sister. Her first name is Denisse, just like mine, and her middle name is Mayela.

Years ago, she gave me the best gift ever, my niece Mayenne Denisse. She is now 8 years old, and she is a smart and sweet little person. I have the best title, "Aunt."

The best thing about growing up with a twin sister is that I never needed friends to play with, to ride, or to go out with because she was always my other half. Now nobody knows how I feel because it's very sad not to be together. She can't feel the same weather as I can. I felt snow for the first time here in Ohio, but she couldn't feel the snow with me. But I know we will get together again in a couple of months.

I'm here for a reason, and I'm going to finish my objective of learning English. As an au pair, I live with a host family and I take care of a little baby. She is one year old, and she always knows how to make me feel happy when I am sad. They are a great family, and they are always trying to help me to feel a part of their family. The food was a new experience for me (especially the hot dog). The culture and new style of life wasn't easy for me, but now I'm so happy to be here with them.

Coming to the US has been the best opportunity for me, and I look forward to learning and visiting new places during my next year here. I take comfort in knowing that my twin sister is very proud of me.

~ Denisse Torres

Three Cities of My Life

In my life, there have been three cities that have made me who I am.

I was born in Odessa, that very original, pretty town south of Ukraine on the shore of the Black Sea. My childhood years were very lean, if not hungry. During and after World War II, we spent time away from home, but we returned after the war. My youth was spent there in Odessa. Unlike many other cities in Russia and Ukraine, Odessa was a truly international city, and it showed in its population.

The city was founded by Catherine II, and city plans and buildings were designed by French and Italian architects. The first mayors were also French nobles such as Duke de Richelieu and Marquise de Valon. City planning was modeled on European standards. This practice has continued until the present. City blocks were organized to fit to the seashore. Trees were planted along the streets and around squares. The French and Italian architects designed the opera house, city hall, stock exchange, Noble Assembly, and houses, as well as apartment buildings in prime districts.

The city population was truly multi-ethnic – Greeks, Italians, Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians, and a sizable Jewish community. All of these folks lived side-by-side which promoted a great deal of tolerance.

Time went by, and my childhood years were over. I got married and moved to Saint Petersburg, back then called Leningrad. This was the town that would teach anyone to appreciate beauty, and I was no exception. The city was and remains truly magnificent. Remarkably, this town is also unlike any other Russian town. Its founder, Peter the Great, had a vision of a new capital to replicate a Dutch city, notably Amsterdam. Canals, parks, large squares, and fountains were all part of the city landscape. The tradition did not stop after Peter the Great passed away. Many renowned European architects, such as Trezzini, Carlo Rossi, Ras-

trelli, and Voronikhin (born in Russia, but educated in France and Switzerland) continued to build this famous town. I was used to going to theaters, museums (Hermitage!), concerts, and art shows together with my intelligent and funny friends.

Life took another turn as my son with his young family moved to the USA. Two years later, my husband and I followed. My husband got a job at US Precision Lens Company here in Cincinnati. I started working for Fifth/Third Bank, and over time, we bought a townhome and settled here for good.

Cincinnati was founded in 1788 by German immigrants. Many of the city's cultural institutions were also financed or influenced by Germans. The Over-the-Rhine district today has a status of a Historic Heritage Site. There are many notable buildings in the city that are of prime importance to the city's life. Music Hall, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Museum of History, and the Taft Museum of Art grace our town. Some notable landmarks are the Tyler Davidson Fountain (considered a symbol of Cincinnati) and the Suspension Bridge. It is on the list of 100 famous suspension bridges in the world and was designed by architect John Roebling.

For me, Cincinnati became the place where I made new friends. I have lived here for 18 years, and I have learned to love this city and its friendly people.

~ Inna Ardashnikova

I Have a Heart for the Poor

I have a heart for all poor people because being generous is so nice, and giving to charity is good for everything. I love helping all needy people and being so nice to them.

There was a family who didn't have a place to stay, nothing to eat and nothing to wear for clothes. They lived in one of the refugee camps in Kenya. They fled from Somalia. They had a very nice house. Unfortunately, their house was destroyed because of the civil war which is still going on. Some of the family members were killed for no reason. Now they have a very hard life which is difficult to survive in. Sometime, the UNHCR helps them and gives them something to eat, but it's not enough. They need more help. They don't have what we call basic needs such as shelter, food, and clothes. Also, they don't have good health care and education. I'm absolutely feeling so sorry for them. I couldn't help them when I was in Kenya, but now I am trying to work hard and help them as much as I can. I am hopeful to assist them with at least the basic needs which are very important to everyone's life. You cannot have a good life without them. It's a matter of survival.

~ Abshiro Mohamed

*It's like trying to catch
your breath underwater...*

Rae'chelle Tootle
The Rabid Hole

The Rabid Hole

I can feel it.
It begins again.
I sense the overwhelming sensation of panic
swarm my body.
The cold but wet feeling of moisture builds up
in between my fingers and toes.
My heart races in time with my thoughts.
I'm trapped in the feeling of falling endlessly.
A dark haze sets over my eyes.
My chest tightens with surprise.
I am alone in this darkness.
I feel a weak and homely emptiness.
I stifle to catch my breath.
This time must be the billionth.
I'm tired, but can't cease to rest.
They run around me excited and trying their best.
But I just can't shake it.
Like it's strapped to my chest.
My entire skin itches.
I could almost scratch it off.
My hearing grows dull,
My sight very dim.
It's like trying to catch your breath underwater.
The chance is slim.

~Rae'chelle Tootle

The Heart Labyrinth

The girl moves slowly, like her legs are in quicksand. The chains around her body clang as they drag on the floor of the dark tunnel. She can hear the demons whisper, reminding her of her failures, of what she could've accomplished but couldn't. She comes to another dead end, a reminder of how useless it is to struggle. She thinks back to a time before this, where there was light and friends, and what it felt like to smile.

Until that day that person she cared about most abandoned her, leaving her in the place to rot in sorrow. She turns back, the chains getting heavier, whispers getting louder as she tries to find her way out of this prison where there is no escape, the Labyrinth in her heart.

~ Zoei Rosado

Insanity

What is it, but
a way of thinking different than yourself?

The line between
a genius and a madman
is so thin, it is not visible
to the human eye.

So if we can't truly
see, how do we really
know right from wrong?

If we can't see the line,
why condemn people,
who might really be right?

What side of this
non-existent line is good,
and what side is evil?

If we have all these questions,
what right do we have
to condemn them
to
death?

~ *Brittany N. Hull*

My Name Is Heroin

I've been thinking of an evil thriller.
A 100-unit syringe filled with liquid killer.
My brain is screaming, I want more and more.
This mortal's gone evil – run for the door.
Watch your back because I have no shame.
Look for the answers, there is no one to blame.
I'll come like a thief in the night.
Give up your life – it's not worth the fight.
I can come through all shapes and spaces,
I can come with the friendliest faces.
When I come there's no time to flee,
So hit your knee and pray you die quickly.
While you are praying, you better repent,
Because if I see you in hell, I'll kill you all over again.
Looking in your eyes as your skin burns,
Seeing you free for me, for that I yearn.
So watch your back if you cross my path
Unless you want to feel the pain of my wrath
My name is Heroin, I got you stuck.
Use me and live – consider it luck.

~ Josh Groves

The Scariest Moment

In 2012 I was living in Columbus, Ohio. I came to Wooster in May for about a month to stay with my family. On Mother's Day, I left Wooster to return home, back in Columbus.

We left Wooster about 7:30 and arrived in Columbus about 10:00. I asked my kids if they could take me home first. When we got to my place, the first thing we noticed was the lights were on and the door was open. The kids asked me if I had left the door open. My response was, "No." They asked me if I wanted to go inside and I said, "Yes."

When I went inside my home, there was a lady in the kitchen, so I asked her what she was doing. The woman explained to me that she was making sure that nothing was left behind. I told my daughter to call 911, and while she was on the phone I showed the woman my son's and my mail. I told the woman that my son and I lived here, but she kept on rambling in the kitchen, so I asked my daughter to watch her while I went upstairs to see if there were any damages.

As I looked up the stairs, there were two ladies; one had a three-month-old baby, and a man coming down the stairs with three of my brand new bath towels. He laid them on the chair and they all ran out the door. He kept running but the women agreed to stay until the police arrived. My daughter called 911 once again and told them that there were three more adults and a baby leaving her mother's place.

The women filled out a police report, and explained to the officer and my family that the man said we were moving and whatever was left they could have. I explained to the officer that we were in Wooster with our family for Mother's Day and this is what I came home to! My home being burglarized! The officer asked where the man was. So I told him that my son went chasing him down the street. The officer got a call while talking to me, and he asked me if I could go with him to identify the suspect! My

four-year-old granddaughter saw me crying and she said, "Granny, Jesus loves you and so do I." The moment she said that, I grabbed her and my heart was racing. I told my granddaughter I was coming back, and she said, "I love you, Granny!"

So, I got into the vehicle with the police officer, and we went to where the suspect was. I had to identify him. I was so terrified that I didn't even get out of the police car. I told the officer that this was the man, and they took me back to my place.

Two months later, I moved back to Wooster, thanking God that my four-year-old granddaughter, my kids, the suspects, and I were not hurt. This was the scariest moment in my life, not knowing if we would have been harmed or killed!

~ *Patricia Manuel*

Deep Dark Ocean

Depression is an endless ocean where the individuals who bear the waves cannot swim.

Each person stands at a different level, whether it be shallow or deep depths of the ocean where many tend to drown.

Those standing on dry land yell out to us, trying to suggest how to swim back to shore by using simple strategies.

“Quit being so negative.”

“Have you tried exercising or yoga?”

“Just think happy thoughts!”

If it were that easy, don't you think we would all be on land too?

~ *Katie Mikola*

Life

Life
Eats at you, and

Some
of
those
Wounds,

Never
Heal.

~ Brittany N. Hull

My Childhood

Hi, my name is Casey. I had what you would call a violent and rough childhood. My mom loved me and wanted the best for me, but she had a very bad habit! Alcohol! She couldn't quit drinking and one day Children's Services came in and swept me away.

I was in foster care in Harrisville, West Virginia, until I was two years old. My grandma went to court every time, no matter if it was bad weather or good, to get custody and keep me in the family. I was two by the time she won the case.

It was lovely to be raised by my grandmother. She did a very good job. She taught me my manners and how I should be toward other people. I grew up with fourteen other kids in the household. They were cousins and we all saw each other as brothers and sisters. My brothers/cousins had a way to make me tough, as they said, and that was by hitting me. Although they weren't just hitting, I took steel toe boots to my ribs, face and other parts. It was not going to stop until the day came that I stood up and swung, and hit back. If it wouldn't have been for them, I wouldn't be tough or have the kind of pride I have today. There were times we had to hunt for our own food to have a meal at the table. There were so many of us and it was hard!

By the time I was twelve, I was locked up in the Juvenile Detention Center in Marietta, Ohio. I was there for a year and then went to a boy's prison called DYS. DYS is just like adult prison just with the age group of twelve to twenty-one. As for myself, I was thirteen when I was transferred and did not get out of there until I was sixteen. All together I was down for three and a half years.

So that's my childhood and there's always one thing that kept me going – there is always someone else out there that has a worse life than I do and did.

Invisible

I look at you,
but you don't see me.

I touch your hand,
but you don't feel me.

I try to speak,
but you don't hear me.

The world around me
is a world without me.

I try to give you hope,
but you don't seem to want it.

I try to give you love,
but you just ignore it.

I try to give you peace,
but it's harder than you think.

No one seems to notice me
because I'm in a world of invisibility.

~ Lindsay Dancker

Constantly building momentum...

Lisa Williams
Constant Chatter

Constant Chatter

Thoughts line up one by one in a row, but not in vain,
And take off in a whistle like a runaway train,
Constantly building momentum.
With a burst of steam gaining through lack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack,
Upon this railway track.
So much anticipation, arriving at my destination. . .
Thoughts running wild and loose, from the conductor to the caboose.
My anxious thoughts keep chugging on,
Oh, when will I arrive, for the hour is late,
Yet I do not hesitate to gather, the thoughts that scatter,
Into a night of constant chatter.

~ *Lisa Williams*

Story of My Life

My name is Nargis. I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. As well as I remember my life as a child in Afghanistan, it was with beautiful people who were happy. Everyone lived in peace, until the war started. When I was 11 months old, we fled Afghanistan to Pakistan as refugees because of the Soviet Union war against Afghanistan. We lived in Islamabad, Pakistan, for a couple of years. Then the U.N. started to accept Afghan refugees to foreign countries. My family applied, and we got accepted to the United States of America.

I was 10 years old when we came to the U.S.A. It was very hard for me. I didn't know how to speak English, not even how to say "hi". The culture, language, almost everything, even the dress code was so different. I wore a head scarf – and the time we came was right after September 11, 2001 – so the kids were calling me Osama Bin Laden's daughter! But somehow I survived to finish school here.

Ever since I was a little kid, I have always wanted to be a flight attendant. I love traveling. I even got accepted to American Airlines, but my mother wouldn't agree to it. Instead she took me to Afghanistan for an arranged marriage which I was not happy about at all. My mother said, "You're 19 – time for you to get married. I can't get you married in the U.S. because I don't know any Afghan in the U.S. Other Afghan men may use you for your papers to get in the U.S." So she arranged my marriage with her second cousin. I couldn't say no to my mother because she left Afghanistan for our, her children's, sake. She did it so we would have a better education and a peaceful life, where we would not get killed during the war.

So I accepted the arranged marriage, but I was not happy at all. I was crying even on my wedding day, because I wanted to continue my education – my flight attendant dream which I know will never happen. I got back to the U.S. and had to work day and night for my husband to get him here. I had to do his paper work

plus send him money so he could take English courses to learn how to speak English.

When he arrived in the U.S. the first thing he told me was, "I took you as a free ticket to America. I was not happy to marry you. I did so that I can come to America." He said, "I don't love you." That moment he told me three times verbally "I divorce you," which is divorce in Islamic way. But I kept on working on my marriage hoping maybe one day it will get better. But instead it got worse; he started to abuse me physically, mentally, emotionally and verbally. He was never happy with me, never appreciative of what I did and had done. I even helped him to get permission to have 10 years in the U.S. on his green card. I was like a soccer ball. He would beat me up, and I would go to my family. They would send me back to my husband again to try to work it out.

Until finally I stood up for myself. I gave him a divorce. I didn't want to live every day getting beat up by him and being called names every time he faced me. When my family found out that I gave him a divorce, they weren't happy. They said no one has ever done this in our entire generation. They said that I'm a shame to my family and have a bad reputation. I had given up on everything I had dreamed. But I do have my two little boys – Arman, 3 years old, and Hamza, 1 year old. They are like diamonds in my life.

Here I am back to school trying very hard to stand up on my own two feet to be something or someone better in the future – maybe my flight attendant dream will come true someday!

~ Nargis Ali

The Day My Dream Came True

I come from a family of hunters. For longer than anyone can remember, my family has gone out every fall during deer season and reaped the year's harvest of venison. After the hunters had skinned the deer and cut up the meat, my mother would spend hours canning jar after jar of ground and cubed venison. Some of the meat would get frozen, but most of it was packed into canning jars and processed in the pressure cooker. Afterwards, we would carry the jars to the basement where rows of shelves were already half-filled with the summer's harvest of vegetables and fruits. In a few months, they would get filled completely with jars of beef, chicken, and pork. This would be our meat supply for the following year.

Every year at deer season, the hunters would take turns telling their stories of the hunt. The long hours sitting in a tree stand, the drives, the tense moment trying to remain invisible when a deer came within shooting range, the rush of adrenaline right before squeezing the trigger. The excitement afterwards, knowing they had advanced their status in the world of deer hunters. I would listen to their stories and read others in hunting magazines, and always in the back of my mind, I had a dream. Someday I would go hunting too. But not just for the thrill or even just for the meat. No, I had something else in mind. I would go hunting with my father and make a hunting memory with just the two of us. I had read many stories of father/daughter hunting trips, and I wanted to do the same thing.

For a long time, the trip did not happen. There was always something that got in the way. To top it off, my father was starting to stay home from the hunts more often. He was not as young as he'd once been, and there were enough younger people to bring home the meat. Getting up in the wee hours of the morning and making the long drive to the state hunting land, and being out in the weather all day, just wasn't as appealing as it once was. I had almost given up on my dream. Then when I was twenty-two years old, my brother convinced me to enter my name in a drawing for a controlled hunt. A controlled hunt is when the Division of Wildlife

decides a certain area that is normally closed to all hunting, has become over-populated with deer, and decides to allow limited, regulated hunting to control the population. Interested hunters then submit their names for drawing, and a limited number of names are randomly drawn to participate in the hunt. When the letter came, telling me I had been selected, I wasn't sure what to do. The location I had been chosen for was over three hours away. Was it worth the drive? We decided it probably wasn't, and so my dream got pushed even farther away.

Then we found out that a friend of mine had been selected to hunt the same location on the same day as I had. He was planning to make the trip, and asked if I would like to go together and split expenses. That sounded very agreeable to me, and so plans were made. I was allowed to take one non-hunting partner, and of course I chose my father.

The day of the hunt finally arrived. We got up at 2:00 a.m. to make the long drive to the wildlife preserve where we would be hunting. The hunting area was divided into blocks, and my friend and I were assigned to separate units. Half an hour before sunrise, my father and I were out in the woods. For several hours, I did not get a shot. Then I fired at a doe and missed. Several more hours passed. We decided to walk around a bit in hopes of scaring up a deer, as they were mostly bedded down for the day by now. We finally spotted one not too far away, but there were too many bushes and thickets in the way to get a good shot. I found a fallen tree and climbed onto it in order to get a better shot. I fired, and because I did not have good footing, tumbled over backwards to the ground. I got back up, and the deer was still standing there looking at me, so I fired again, and fell off again! This time he took off, and I knew I had missed again. We spent another hour walking around, hoping to scare up another one, but my hopes were fading. I didn't have much time left. We were both getting tired, and were almost ready to call it a day. We decided to make one last circle and if we didn't see any deer, we would head back to our vehicle.

It was then that I saw him. Half hidden by brush, I could only make out a head and the front half of his body. That was all I needed. I fired, and he went down on his knees, struggling to

get up. I fired again, and he lay still. We walked over to him, and only then did I see the antlers. I had shot my first buck. For a few moments neither of us could speak. We both felt an overwhelming sense of sadness at the death of such a magnificent creature. I filled out my tag and my father started the gutting process. When he finished, we tied a rope around his antlers and dragged him to our vehicle.

We arrived at my friend's assigned unit just as they were dragging his deer out of the woods. We had both shot a buck around the same time. We loaded up and headed home.

And so, my hunting dream finally came true. I will forever cherish the memory of that day.

~ Irene Miller

Carly

My mother-in-law had spent a couple of months with us during the summer until the time arrived for her to go back home to Italy. Her plane was leaving from Chicago, and I had to drive her there. My thoughts went to my beloved dog, Carly, a Great Pyrenees. I needed a nice place to leave her for a couple of days, since my husband was too busy to take care of her. So I put my dog Carly in a kennel in Indiana, about 45 minutes away, but I didn't like it. We arrived to Chicago in the evening and spent the night at our Italian friends' house.

The next morning, as I was ready to take my mother-in-law to the airport, I got a phone call from my husband that hit me like a punch in the gut! My dog was lost in the woods! Carly had run away from the kennel just a few hours after she arrived. She had pulled the leash hard, and the lady at the kennel let her go. My adored dog had to spend the whole night alone in the woods! She has always slept just in my bedroom. My husband's phone call literally made me panic. So I left my mother-in-law at the airport and drove back toward Cincinnati as fast I could. I was praying, "Dear God, I promise I won't kill that lady at the kennel, but please let me find my dog, please!"

I spent the weekend with the help of family and friends looking everywhere for Carly. I called her name, and whistled for hours. I also followed all the craziest suggestions such as urinating on my t-shirt and hanging it on a bush, but nothing happened. Then a gentleman with a pack of hunting dogs was called. These dogs were supposed to follow Carly's tracks to find her. I was dragged by them through the tangled forest. I ended up covered by mud, dirt, and bruises, but we weren't able to find my dog! I felt tired, depressed, and desperate. I couldn't stop crying during those days.

I got a chance to know some amazing people: kind and caring people who helped me a lot, gave me water, food, and most importantly of all, their time. The worst moments were always before bedtime when I could see that Carly wasn't there with me.

But I knew that she was still there around the kennel area because a lot of people called me after seeing her. I decided to bring her food every day in the woods. One afternoon, I prepared food and water and drove back to the kennel. I was alone this time. I headed to the point where the people told me she had showed herself recently, and I started to walk into the woods. I was holding a cookie box, shaking it to make a familiar noise that Carly knew very well. The woods were very silent, and while I was walking, the light was dimming. I arrived near a small bridge. I could see just the beginning of the bridge because it was getting lost into the darkness of the deep woods. The place was almost magical, bright green, and pierced by sunshine. It was surrounded by the forest's silence, broken just by the slight sound of the forest trees. I called my dog gently, trying to hide my fear. Suddenly, as in a happy ending story, she appeared from the darkness and she ran to me. Carly licked my face. She had never done that before, and I doubt she will again. I was incredibly happy and scared at the same time. I was worried that she could run away again. I grabbed her by the collar and quickly made an improvised leash.

Finally, I kissed and hugged her. I gave her all the food that I brought. Then I started walking slowly to the car. But she wouldn't get in! I pushed her into the car using all of my strength, and I'm sure my fear made me stronger. I locked the door and drove home like a maniac. I cried all the way home. But those were tears of happiness. Carly was back home again.

~ Maria Luisa Giuliberti

Snow!

Blinding White like a bright light
snow on my boots
I can feel the wetness coming through
cold fingertips and frostbite too
toes so cold they can barely move
walking down the street as snowflakes hit my face
but no matter what, today is the day
I make it all the way...To School!

~ Ericka Joy Rouser

I Prevailed

My whole life changed in the blink of an eye....

On October 30, 2011, I woke up at a rocky parking lot adjacent to The Executive's Den in Cleveland, Ohio, not knowing what had happened to me or who was leaning over me. The last thing I remember was getting in the car with my boyfriend (at that time) and my son, Blake, who was 11 years of age. I was addicted to heroin and had been addicted to any and all mind-altering substances for about eight years. Our plan was to meet our dealer to buy heroin. We parked in one of our usual places so not to be seen. As usual, we were dope-sick and in withdrawal from not being able to feed our addiction to stay high. We couldn't wait to get home to inject ourselves with this poison.

I had stopped breathing after I injected myself. I turned blue. My son ran into the Den and asked for help. Cleveland EMS showed up, gave me CPR, and took me to the hospital. I asked to leave. I didn't want help, I wanted to get high! Shortly afterwards, I was released from the hospital.

The next day was a normal day. I went to work and came home. It was Halloween and my son and I were getting ready to go trick-or-treating when there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, there stood a social worker and a policeman. They sat me down and told me that because my son was with me while I overdosed, I was being charged with child endangerment. They were there to make sure that my son was safe and out of my custody. They asked me if I knew anyone who would take him and care for him for a few months or for as long as it took for me to get help and get sober.

I was to follow a written plan. It involved an eight-day rehab, a two-week Partial Hospitalization Program, a year in an Intensive Outpatient Program, court-ordered screenings, one year of after-care, counseling, parenting classes, and Alcoholics Anony-

mous meetings. At the conclusion, a court date would be set to determine if I was fit to care for my child.

When Blake was taken from me, I felt as if my life was over. He was the only person I had left. It was the worst thing that could have ever happened to me.

Within six months, I had completed everything the court asked of me. As long as I stayed sober and attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, my son would be released into my custody.

It has been four years since this experience. I have remained sober since November 8, 2011. I am in a good relationship with my boyfriend, Michael, and my son. I live in Willoughby where I work two jobs and attend classes to earn my GED. I have gotten my life back. I go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings regularly, not because I am told to, but because I love to go. If I want to stay sober, I have to follow and live by the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I'm loving life today because I have the tools that I need to continue on my new journey through life, and I am able to deal with life on life's terms without drugs. I can honestly say that I continue to kick heroin's ass, "one day at a time." The road to get here was a very rough and bumpy one, but I have prevailed.

~ Nicole L. Dybzinski

Yellow Rose That Is Budding through Pain

My faith believes that I will blossom into a unique yellow rose that is set apart from any other flower in the Garden. The reason I believe this is because of the pain that I endured while developing. Through the growing process, it was like a thorn stuck in my side; but through enduring this pain, I trust my Gardener in spite of everything around me.

The Gardener dug deep into the ground when sowing the seed of me. He gave me security every step of the way. He waters me every day and makes sure the light shines on me even in my darkest moment. Through this process, I wanted to blossom before my time to get over the pain of development. Now I fully understand that the Gardner will take care of me until I am ready to bloom.

Through life with its ups and downs and obstacles to face, I know that I had to stay grounded and rooted in my Maker. I know that I have to always stay strong even if I suffer a tear. Waiting and trusting every step of the way would, in due season, bring fulfillment of my purpose. Regardless if I never look like the rest of the flowers in the garden, I will stay humble, finish my course, and be glad in my purpose. If I do not grow into a beautiful rose, I will continue to trust and give my all to the end. I will always be a beautiful flower in my Maker's eyes.

~ Latasha Polston

The Blue-Haired Boxer

Today is a hot day, I thought as I slipped my worn-out boots off my feet. My bare feet felt good on the cold concrete floor as I made my way through the halls and down the stairs of our well-kept home. Soon enough, I would arrive at the corner of the tippy top of the basement steps. From there, I could sneak a peek at what my father loved the most. I watched him as he hung up the very first boxing bag I would ever hit. I knew I wanted to take a swing. I left that day and contemplated how I would learn to master this sport, how this cotton-candy blue-haired girl could be one of the best at boxing.

That very evening I made my way up into our little nook in the house which we liked to call the attic. There I began to find old newspaper clippings of my father. "Young Fighter from Brooklyn" was one headline. I smiled as I felt the old ripples beneath my finger tips that held the old news articles. The more I looked, the more I began to dream, until suddenly I heard a creak in the steps coming from behind me. I was slightly startled as I quickly clutched all of the newspaper clippings. With a jump, I turned, and there was my father shaking his head with a slight smile on his face. "Come," he said with a strong but soft voice. I immediately dropped everything and took off behind him thinking to myself, this is it! He is going to give me my very first lesson.

That evening my father gave me all the basic pointers I would need to get started. I barely slept that night. The very next day I hopped out of bed, brushed my teeth, washed my face, and then I tightly tied up my worn out boots. I then maneuvered my fluffy cotton-candy blue hair through my black hoodie. I was almost ready to go. I had to eat two hard-boiled eggs and lots of water as my father explained to me the importance of eating light and healthy before any kind of training. Now I was ready. I had lots of water and my favorite pair of headsets. I started be-bopping all the way to our neighborhood's boxing gym that was only 850SF for beginners. The name on the building read "Red Gloves" in big bold letters. I entered the gym enthusiastically. I then realized I was

the only girl there. "Oh my," I thought to myself. An older man then approached me and said, "I'm Larry, are you a boxer or are you here to waste my time?" he said with a serious face. I swallowed deeply and said with a strong but shaky voice, "I'm a boxer, sir!" He nodded and said, "Let's get started."

Three hours later I was on my way home. What once seemed like a short walk, now felt like a never ending mile. Every step I took, "Ouch!" I finally arrived home letting another "Ouch" out as I stared at the bathroom ceiling. I was floating on my back laying in ice cold water, thinking about what I had learned. I learned shadow boxing, left hook, right hook, the upper cut, and how I should stand. For the next four weeks I went to the gym every day for three hours. I graduated from shadow boxing, to sparring, to my own very first match.

The match was held on a Saturday afternoon in mid-July at an old Baptist Church not too far from home. All I could remember was the sweat from my palms sticking to the inside of my gloves, and my heart racing a hundred beats per second. I had to remember to breathe, but before I knew it I was hitting the ground with a right hook to the jaw! I came crashing down, my face stuck to the floor as I repeated in my head, "Get up." As I was getting up, I started to think about all the reasons why I wanted to be a boxer. I wanted to be the best, and I began to breathe. I won that fight that day in July, and became known as the blue-haired boxer.

~ Jessica Luz Morales

Running and I

Five years ago I started to run...

Until then I had never run, it seemed to me like an impossible mission!

My husband and I, together with our 4 children, arrived 6 months ago to Dayton because my husband was assigned for a mission in the US Air Force.

Before we arrived, I served as an officer in the Israeli army. One day I received an email offering the opportunity to join a running group. It explained that the group was also suitable for people who had never run before. I was just returning from maternity leave, and had the desire to lose weight, like most women. The opportunity to experience something new intrigued me. I said to myself that in the worst case I will leave the group.

So, I found myself every Tuesday at 6 am with 20 other women, standing on the track, wearing sports clothes and new running shoes, very hesitant, but with great determination.

Gradually I increased the frequency of my training. I became more physically fit, and ran longer and longer distances.

Soon, I found that running became a routine part of my life, gave me energy, and filled me with a sense of achievement and success.

I decided to offer my colleagues at the base the personal experience that I cherish and help them to make a difference that could be so important to their lifestyle.

I initiated a "Project Healthy Lifestyle" in my unit. I asked for permission and a budget from the commander of the unit, and luckily, because he liked sports, he supported the idea and gave me his blessing.

When I presented the project to the unit, the response was predictably mediocre at first. Some of the people did not believe in their ability to persevere and succeed, but it would not deter me from encouraging them to try.

I knew, just as I was at the beginning, it would be difficult to make a change. But after promoting the project to my unit, and arranging lectures on health and fitness, there were an impressive amount of participants. We started the project, the response was enthusiastic, and everyone started to believe that they could become physical fit. Their ability to persevere proved to themselves what they are capable of. Over time, we added a dietician who gave a lecture program and all participants weighed in weekly.

Six months later, the project was finished. In the end, all the group participated in a race for distances of either 10, 5, or 3 km. The feeling of competence and joy was heavenly.

I learned an important life lesson from this process:

1. True faith in a project or process is important and necessary in order to succeed.
2. All of us need personal attention, encouragement and reassurance, which bring power to us.
3. Working with a group enhances individual ability and sense of self-efficacy.

One year ago I ran my first half marathon. After that I felt that I could do anything, I felt better about myself, more vital and calm.

And if I can, everyone can!

~ Galit Maman

Let your soul and spirit fly...

Halal Al Thaneer
The Wolf and Moon

The Wolf and Moon

There was a young, kind, gentle and lovely man called Wolf. He used to go to the beach at midnight when no one was there. But he was following his heart that led him to the beach, listening to the voice of the beach that spoke to his soul looking at the moon.

He would say, “The sand may brush off,
 The salt may wash away,
 The tans may fade,
 But the memories will last forever.”

One day Wolf felt heavy pain inside him, as if he remembered all his sorrow, heartache, and pain he had throughout his life. He went to share all this heavy deep pain with the sea; he tried to bear it, but he could not. So he cried over and over, the sky too cried for him, and the waves were raging in the ocean. Under this raging rainy weather, a beautiful and cute woman called Moon used to see the beach from time to time, and heard him crying on the other side of the beach. She went near him and, sharing his heavy pain that she already had felt before, tried her best to heal it for him.

She told him, “Smell the sea, and feel the sky,
 let your soul and spirit fly.”

The Moon’s powerful few words had a positive effect on Wolf. Her voice was like a white light spreading into his heart and mind; he felt like he knew her since his birth! She gave him the peace, the beautiful pure feeling called love, which quickly and suddenly spread deeply inside him from the first look. Those feelings made their soul smile through their hearts, and their hearts smiled through their eyes, that scattered rich smiles in their sad hearts.

The waves and sky were happy for both of them. At that special moon night, the night walked down the sky with Moon in her hand. Moon said that she can’t leave the sky and they were parted.

Wind

I'm the wind, bending and swirling, making noise.
Diving, twisting, blowing; I'm the wind.
Up and down and all around
I'm the wind.
Circling and circling all around
Into a cone, growing bigger and bigger,
Louder and louder,
Whipping and swirling up and down,
I'm the wind.
I start and stop.
I'm there and I'm not there.
I'm the wind.

~ Priscilla Hathaway

Let's Chase the Cat!

Do you remember a time from your childhood when you were afraid of one particular adult for no reason? I felt this way towards my uncle Fany from Moravia, who was otherwise a very innocent person. Every time he came for a visit, my sister and I hid under the bed immediately. I have no idea why. As time passed by, I surprisingly became a similar "Uncle Fany" for my nephew Martin...

For a long time, Martin did not want to have anything to do with me. I tried to accept that with a calm face and kept comforting myself with a trite phrase: "So what, at least I don't have to watch him."

On the day of my 38th birthday, things suddenly changed. After lunch, I made another attempt to be a "nice aunt," and I offered to take Martin out. Of course, I expected to be refused again; however, to my surprise Martin suddenly ran up to me and said, "Yes!"

It seemed that he had finally made up with me and we became friends. To seal the peace between us, we went for a walk. It was a beautiful summer day and I felt joy that at last I could be the nice aunt for my nephew.

Martin's little shoes pitter-pattered next to me, and occasionally Martin looked at me and smiled. Suddenly, the neighbor's red tomcat appeared on the road. We called him Garfield because he was unbelievably obese. Nevertheless, Martin adored the cat and immediately ran after him. The cat did not wait for anything and despite his large body jumped swiftly through a hole in the fence and into the neighbor's garden. My nephew got on his knees next to the hole and looked for the cat. It was quite comical. On one side of the fence, there was the bristled tomcat ready to run for it if Martin should manage to get through the hole – on the other side of the fence was our little Martin. They were facing each other like David and Goliath (in this case Goliath was the fat Garfield). In the end, the cat realized that Martin posed no danger to

him because there was no way Martin could squeeze through the hole, and so Garfield stretched out mockingly. Then he lay down on his belly and rested his head on his front paws. Martin looked at the cat and then at me. He kept sticking his hand through the hole but no matter how hard he tried, he could not reach the hairy fat cat. At that moment, I decide to help my nephew.

“Kitty, kitty, kitty...,” I called to the cat.

The cat just yawned uninterestedly as if he were now taunting us both. Martin pondered for a while about his next move. He took one step aside, crouched and hid from the cat. The plan was brilliant. (You can tell that both of his parents have university degrees.) Suddenly, the cat’s head appeared through the hole. Nevertheless, Garfield was not stupid either, so he first looked around cautiously. With a scream of excitement, Martin immediately went for him. When Garfield detected his enemy’s attack, he retreated back to safety.

“You have to lurk silently, Martin...” I laughed. But my fifteen-month-old nephew really did not understand what I meant by that. The cat stuck his head out two more times, but Martin always scared him off.

The hunt ended up without success. We left the terrified cat alone and headed for home. I looked back when we approached our gate and saw the cat sitting in the middle of the road again.

His face expression said it all: “I won! Meowihihih!”

~ *Olivia Kneprova*

No Parking Zone

My grandson Le'shawn, whom I affectionately call Turtle, wanted to go the golf course with me. It was a gorgeous day to hit the greens; nearing 80 degrees, a beautiful light blue sky was overhead.

I called the clubhouse manager Beth to let her know my grandson would be tagging along so he could be added to my R.S.V.P. of 9 holes. Our tee-off time was scheduled for 11 a.m. at the nearby Spear Peek Golf Course, but when we arrived there were no parking spaces available.

By the looks of the parking lot, Turtle wasn't the only one who thought it was a great day for golfing. So we circled around the lot a few times in search of a parking spot, but still there were no spaces! I'm a little annoyed at this point. I'd been going around in circles for the better part of five minutes. I could see the disappointment on my grandbaby's face when it looked as if we weren't going to make our tee-off time for fear of not finding a parking space.

We scanned the area with the anticipation that someone might be leaving soon. No sooner had I put my car in park and dug out my cell phone to cancel our reservations than Turtle yelled and pointed in the direction of an empty space. I told Beth maybe we would be teeing off after all.

I disconnected with Beth and moved in for the space before someone else entered the lot. Turtle showed the anticipation that only an eight-year-old boy could display, as the ray from the sun peeking through the windshield landed on his butterscotch complexion that suddenly seemed to glow, baring a wide ear-to-ear grin. When I pulled up to the one spot in the entire lot that had not been yet occupied, there was a good reason as to why it remained vacant; it was the No Parking Zone.

Well, needless to say, we parked there, got out, and I left a note on the windshield. I thought that if I left the security officer a note, he would page us over the loud speaker before towing the vehicle. The note read "Dear security officer, I've rounded the lot for the past fifteen minutes in hopes of finding a spot, to no avail. Please overhead my tag number when a spot becomes available. Thank you" and I signed at the bottom. Then we headed across the track to the tee-off area. "I hope the security officer pages the license plate number over the loud speaker rather than have me towed," I said, thinking out loud. I made one last futile attempt to reach Beth to inform her that it was my car in the No Parking Zone.

We made our way through the multitude of people, waving at some who recognized us, and commenting on the large turnout at the course. Turtle's game had gotten considerably better over the summer. The other golfers who had witnessed the game complimented Turtle on his skills at such a young age. After Turtle won, he beamed with pride, and he had a stride to match the marks of a champion golfer who'd just won the P.G.A. tournament.

We were heading back towards the parking area and I was relieved to see that the car was still there. I'd considered myself to be lucky that I hadn't been towed. Turtle spotted the ticket affixed to the windshield.

As we got closer he yelled, "Don't look now Grandma, but I think you got a ticket." I removed the ticket only to notice the security officer had left me a note. It read. "Dear Lady I've circled this lot for the past year, and if I don't leave you a ticket, my supervisor will make the last five minutes my last five minutes of being employed here at Spear Peek Golf Course. Signed, Dear Security Officer."

~ Angela D. Williams

Ohio Is an Island

My husband, my daughter, and I went on vacation. We flew to Playa del Carmen in Mexico at Christmas time. It's a very nice place to relax and to have fun. We checked out of the hotel after ten days. Frankie, at the reception desk, asked us: "Are you flying back to Germany?" My husband answered: "We are going to Ohio!"

Frankie started to smile and he sang:

"Ooo....h...i...ooo!"

He repeated to his coworker: "They're flying to

Ooo....h...i...ooo!"

I think Ohio is a pretty place, but not the most beautiful in the world. My husband asked: "Do you know where Ohio is? It's a state in the US."

Frankie's eyes got bigger and he started to laugh very loud. He said, "I thought it was an island."

Now, if someone says Ohio, we start to laugh and sing:

"Ooo....h...i...ooo!"

~ Gabriele Bolik-Fuehser

Caldonia

Her husband had died. As was the custom where she comes from, it was the norm to have one's deceased to lie in state in a family member's living or sitting room. Caldonia was a runaway from New Orleans, and, at seventeen, she met and married Harry after knowing him for a mere few weeks. They set up housekeeping in a two-room shack on the south side of Chicago. Caldonia had a dark brown, clear complexion, and extremely slanted, brown almond-shaped eyes. Her good looks caused quite a stir from men. However, one of the first friends Caldonia met when she arrived in Chicago was Minnie. Minnie had been a good friend of Harry's first wife before Stella took off with another man. In any event, Harry was just as harmful and hurtful toward Caldonia as he had been toward Stella. He was always critical of Caldonia for no apparent reasons. In addition, he constantly accused her of flirting with one man after another.

The neighbors never blamed Caldonia for threatening to leave jealous Harry, especially when he cursed Caldonia in public and threatened to do her bodily harm. Harry accused Caldonia of alluring a man when she had glanced at him too closely. However, Harry's looks were peculiar enough to scare a scarecrow; he always walked rapidly as though someone were chasing him, or that he was chasing something. People would cringe watching Harry doing his running walk. They were thinking that he might lose his balance and fall. Some neighbors said his pigeon toes were more profound now that he was older. Devastation from a house fire had left the pupils of Harry's eyes a violet look in color, and this unique hue appeared more passionate when he was angry. This intense purple color in Harry's eyes always shocked and frightened Caldonia.

Most neighbors knew that Harry was a frequent visitor at Minnie's place. She sold Moonshine liquid. Minnie was known around Dread County as one of the best Moonshine makers, and many others coveted her successful business. Minnie also had a reputation of getting customers to pay their liquid debt one way

or another. Minnie's Moonshine was brewed with something special that her great grandfather, Broth, had passed down the family line. Clients who took too long to pay risked a mysterious demise; therefore, Minnie and her doings were frequently whispered as culprits even when Minnie was innocent of doing wrong. Since her lifeless customers couldn't defend themselves, Minnie used this as an opportune time to pad the deceased liquid bill and hound the dead customer's family to pay up. Now Harry, shortly after having a huge dispute with Minnie surrounding his liquid bill, mysteriously passed away.

So, Caldonia was delighted; she arrived at Freight's Furniture Store before the store opened. So intent and eager to get into the furniture store to select Harry's casket, that Caldonia never heard Freight's store owner when he greeted her with a "Good morning." The store owner had to greet Caldonia twice before his words penetrated her jovial thoughts.

She saw just the right one outside the store's window; it appeared violet in color. Now, inside, she could look at the casket more closely. She looked for damages, hoping to get Harry a discount. If the casket's lining was ripped, or if the casket itself was damaged from shipping, she was sure she could get a discount. That's what Caldonia wanted, a reduced price for Harry's casket rental. She would rent the casket for Harry's viewing, but she knew she had to watch it carefully so it could be returned to the store. Caldonia knew that mix-ups had happened before between families and Freight's Furniture Store, and it took one family years to buy a casket that they thought they were renting.

The week following Harry's cremation, Caldonia's first sleepless and scary nights began. The flashing red and violet light shined so brightly and intensely from the living-room into her bed-room that she woke screaming. Night after night the images of Harry came until Caldonia couldn't take it anymore. She nailed the door shut with the strongest nails she could buy. Yet, that didn't stop the violet light reflecting images of Harry's eyes peering at her. Pitch darkness didn't stop the flashing, bright colors from Harry's eyes from glimmering into her tiny bedroom,

exposing images of his face. Finally, the violet and red colored light shone through the living room window so intently and brilliantly that it broke the window with such force that it shook the house. Meanwhile, Caldonia continuously saw pictures of Harry's violet eyes seeming to question her about his demise. Night after night Caldonia was scared half out of her wits. Finally, she got Harry's ashes and buried them in the crematoria. Caldonia knew that after the effects from that dreadful house fire, Harry never wanted a cremation burial. No more fire for Harry. So, Caldonia collected money from the neighbors for Harry's in-ground burial. This time Harry's body was buried twelve feet in-ground instead of the required six feet under. Now, with his triple burial, Harry's spirit was in order. Caldonia knew that Harry was at peace, and she too would finally be able to sleep peacefully.

~ Inez Boone

The sun must be patient...

Susana W. Antal
Gray Skies

Gray Skies

Fall has arrived like an unwanted guest
That brings shorter days
And dark skies.
On the wings of the wind you can hear the trees weep
For the loss of foliage, and each falling leaf is a tear.
As the days become colder
The trees fall into a deep sleep.
Winter has cast a spell on the trees
That only the spring can break.
The trees stand tall as the wind blows hard
And rain turns to snow.
The trees seem frozen in time under their blanket of snow.
The sun must be patient
For only spring can break winter's spell.
Each day becomes longer and warmer.
Then spring arrives on a warm wind that breaks winter's spell
And awakens the trees from their deep cold sleep.

~ *Susana W. Antal*

The Truth

It is very hard for me to tell this story because I couldn't tell it to my mom in real life. This is my story...

I came to the United States from Mexico in July of 1999. I had to wait at the border for two days because the group of people I was supposed to travel with left the day before I arrived. During that time, I talked to my mom on the phone and she asked me how I was going to cross the border. I told her that I was going to cross with papers. I felt bad lying to her but I couldn't tell her the truth because she was already very worried about me leaving. My mom and I always had a very strong bond. She was my best friend!

It took three days to cross the border into the U.S. I was with two other people and it was NOT easy. I had to walk for four hours, among cornfields, by mountains of gravel, ducking under things, and trying not to make noise. One night we had to jump over a barb wire fence and walk crouched down for many hours under many small trees. I tripped over something in the dark, fell into thorns, and hurt my foot, but we had to keep on walking. When we came to a road, we had to hide and wait until they finished patrolling it. We then changed our route and went where there were bigger trees so that we could hide more easily and rest. After two hours of rest, the rain woke us up. We got up and started walking. As we passed houses, we had to drop to the ground and crawl like babies in the dark while dogs were barking. I was scared and tired but had to continue to move. Suddenly a very strong storm came, and it rained so hard that the water was up above our knees. I asked how much time was left and they told me that we were almost there, but it felt like forever.

Finally, we had arrived at the safe house and I could not believe it. The people were very kind and treated me well. They gave me dry clothes and a bed to sleep in. The next day we had breakfast and I waited for my husband to pick me up. At 10:00 am my husband arrived and we started our trip to Philadelphia, where

he lived. We passed through Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, through the city of Chicago, Indiana, and stopped in Cincinnati to visit friends. After traveling for nine days, we finally made it to Philadelphia.

I was there for three months when I received the horrible news that my mom had cancer. I had to go back to Mexico and be with her. I left on the 22nd of October. Everything happened so fast that I was unfortunately only with her for one month. She died of cancer on the 22nd of November 1999. I could never tell her the truth of how I crossed the border into the U.S. and to tell her that I was sorry. I hope that she has forgiven me.

I soon returned to The United States but that is another story...a much more terrifying one!

~ *Norma Feregrino*

My Diamond Life

My name is Nouch Long. I'm originally from Cambodia. I came to the United States in 1984. In 1979, my journey started for freedom.

In 1974, I was 14 years old. From 1974 to 1978, Cambodia was under Communist rule. During that time, everything was owned by Angka, the communist government. The government owned your children, your spouse and all your property. All people had to move from the cities to small villages and were forced to work in the fields. The Khmer Rouge (government soldiers) guarded our village. Families were torn apart. Husbands were separated from wives and children from their parents. Babies were taken away from their mothers. Children were also separated by gender and age. Everyone had a job to do. Children 5 to 10 years old had to collect wood for cooking. Children 12 years or older did heavy jobs. Everybody worked 12-hour shifts a day. The government limited the food. There was only one cup of rice soup for lunch and one cup for dinner. We all had to eat at the same place. After we ate, everyone had to go back to a shack to sleep and then wake up at 5 am to work until noon. Every day was the same. During that time, a lot of people died from starvation because they gave us so little food. Sometimes the soldiers gathered the people in the village for a meeting to announce that we had to respect and obey all the rules of the government. Sometimes I was lucky to see my parents or siblings at the meeting, but I could not talk to them or even cry. If you cried in front of the soldiers they would kill you. Two million people in Cambodia died under the communist regime.

Vietnam invaded Cambodia at the end of 1978. The Vietnam government was also communist – just a different form. My father realized that communism is still communism – the form did not matter. The soldiers could not guard the people in the village and also fight with Vietnam, so they went to hide in the mountains away from the Vietnam soldiers. My father realized that if Vietnam controlled Cambodia, even then it was not safe. My father decided

to gather all the family and try to move west toward Thailand, even though it was very dangerous.

In 1979, my family walked from Cambodia to the Thailand border. It took about one month. We had to walk at night because soldiers were up in the mountains, guarding the border. If they saw you walk across they would kill you. We were told, "RUN! RUN! RUN!" Even if they were shooting or somebody stepped on a land mine bomb, we had to keep running. Even if people got hurt, we could not stop running. I was so afraid but I couldn't think about it. If you were lucky and God blessed you, you would still be alive. This is a very sad part of the story, but it is my life. I don't like to remember it, but I need to. It is important.

When we reached the border, my father heard from a friend who told him the United Nations came to help refugees. One night my father sat down and told the whole family we had to cross the border to Thailand. He told us we had to divide up into three groups in case something happened. My father, sister and brother-in-law, they reached the border okay. My brother-in-law came back to pick up me, mom and my little sister and then came back again to get my cousins and their siblings. My brother-in-law was a very brave guy with a good heart. We all moved in to the refugee camp inside Thailand. We lived there for four years. We wrote permission letters to different countries and governments to accept us. In 1983 we got accepted by the American government. We moved from Thailand to a refugee camp on the Philippines. We lived there for a few months to learn English and American society of life.

On May 1, 1984 we flew from the Philippines to the United States. We landed in San Francisco and left for Cincinnati, Ohio, on the same day.

We did not know anyone in Cincinnati. My family got many donations of clothes and other things from churches and other people. I am so thankful that so many people had a good heart for my family. It was a hard life at first. There were 4 families living in one house and no one had a car. But now I am very happy.

I have a good job and I can get what I need. My children have grown up to have a good education, a better life and freedom. My life now is bright like a diamond. My diamond life is a life that has transportation so I do not have to walk, clothes to wear, and food to eat. I am very happy now to have such a life and I thank the government of the United States who accepted my family. I will never forget.

~ *Nouch Long*

The Misunderstood's Bright Light

I was at home on a Friday night, when I got a phone call. It was my friend Mike, and he wanted to ask me something important. He asked me if I could pick up his son Robert from school tomorrow because he was going out of town. I accepted. So we said our goodnights.

Later that night, I wrote down my schedule for the next day, so I wouldn't forget. I went to sleep and got up two hours before Little Robert got out of school. I freshened up and was out of the door by 12:30 pm, because Little Robert gets out at 1:15pm. I arrived at school with minutes to spare, so I waited.

The school let out and I didn't see Little Robert, so I waited a little more. I started to pace back and forth nervously, because it was 2:15 pm now. So I tried the door, and it was locked. So I waited a little more because he should be coming out anytime.

As I continued to pace, I saw a policeman walking towards me, so I stopped. He began to pat me down and asked me what is in my pocket. He took out \$1,500 in \$20's, tied up with a rubber band. The reason is that I stopped at the bank, so I could get my car fixed. That's why I had the money.

The officer didn't ask anything. We walked over to the car and he told me, "Get in, you're coming with us." I asked what this was for, but I got no answers. He didn't give me a Miranda Warning.

I was taken to jail and stayed countless days, waiting for court. When I was taken before the judge, he told me that I was being charged with "attempted kidnapping and possession of drug money." I told him, "You made a mistake, I didn't do anything wrong; I was picking up my friend's son for him because he went out of town." I was convicted and sentenced to 15 years and a \$500,000 bail with no 10%. I got a lawyer as soon as possible.

I told my lawyer that I would like to appeal my case. He asked me, "Are you sure about that?" and I said, "Hell yeah, make it happen or I'll get someone who will see my side." I studied all night preparing for my case and this is what I came up with:

- 1) I just wanted to pick up my friend's child.
- 2) The money was taken from the bank between 12:30 and 1:00 pm.
- 3) There was no probable cause as there was in the John V. Terry vs. Ohio case.
- 4) No reading of my rights.

Amendments to the U.S. Constitution:

- 1) The Fourth Amendment states that I can protest against unreasonable searches and seizures.
- 2) The Fourth Amendment also states that a warrant must be issued for a search and acknowledged in court.
- 3) The Fifth Amendment gives those accused of a crime the right to a grand jury proceeding.
- 4) The Eighth Amendment guarantees the right to a speedy trial.
- 5) The Eighth Amendment also states that there will be no excessive bail or cruel and unusual punishment.

The Supreme Court has also decided that evidence used in an illegal search is inadmissible.

The next morning, it was time for court and I held my head up high with no regrets. In court, things were looking up for me because the judge looked into my evidence given, and it showed that they had made a big mistake. I also had four witnesses. My friend came to court and told the jury of the people of the United States that we talked the night before about me picking up his son because he would be out of town the next day.

Next, his son told them that his Dad told him that I was picking him up and how I wasn't a bad person. The Aunty stated that she picked him up early from school because he wasn't feeling well and was throwing up. The school called his Dad, and he told them to call her. She forgot to call me and say that she had taken

him early. "Sorry!" Finally, the bank teller who was working at the time didn't say much, but brought the time stamp, withdrawal of money slip, and all transactions between 12:30 and 1:00 pm. After all the statements were made, the court was silent and it made me happy.

The judge ruled that everything be thrown out because of state law, the Amendments, the lack of evidence, no warrant, no probable cause, no reading of rights = no time or case. The officer and everyone involved who had a part in it were suspended without pay, and the first judge had to step down. All I can say is justice was served!

~ Lindsey Johnson

Life in Afghanistan

Amir, as a young boy, lived in Kunduz province of Afghanistan where his family were farmers cultivating wheat, maize, fruit, and vegetables for their everyday needs. Amir was twenty-one years old when the Taliban invaded his country, and therefore, many people escaped to Pakistan and other neighborhood countries. Amir's family also moved to a neighboring country because of the violence and war everywhere around them, but Amir stayed behind to defend his motherland. He wanted to save his country and bring the peace back in every home.

The families in Afghanistan were torn apart due to the unavoidable war that was upon them all of a sudden. A regular day that used to be about family, work, hard work and family in the life of an Afghan, now consisted of fear, violence, and spending the day trying to get one meal a day for the loved ones. These god-fearing, honest, hardworking, and good people were willing to do almost anything to feed their families, including putting their lives at risk. Amir was also in the same situation like these other Afghans in the country. This was just the beginning of the dark period under the reign of Taliban. Despite all the odds against him, Amir didn't give up and continued in his efforts to defend his country against the enemy.

Amir was happy when the United States and NATO forces came to help his fellow citizens. A new ray of hope was raised, and everyone was happy. The situation started getting better, which made many Afghani refugees in neighboring countries come back to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, that did not last for long. Initially, it seemed that Taliban might be facing an end due to the presence and efforts of US/NATO forces. Gradually, Taliban adopted a different strategy and continued with their destructive efforts towards the citizens and forces. The violence and fear of Taliban among the people has increased day by day, making it difficult to live there. This has badly affected the economy of the country that is currently in a horrible shape. People are dying all over the country even these days, and no one can imagine living in

a place where you have no clue what will take place next. No one knows whether you will survive to see the light of day, or not. The government is getting weak and corrupt day by day; the education system has no facilities or resources for students. This leaves most people with not much choice, and they are leaving the country once again.

The war on terror is no longer an important mission for NATO forces, as it seems they are also looking for better ways to combat this. This is a conflict that only time can change. However, so many Amirs are still staying back in the country, hoping to regain the peace and happiness of their people. There are many who don't have a choice to leave their motherland, and hence they continue living a life full fear and disappointment with the hope that one day the sun will rise with renewed happiness, and the daylight will bring peace that all these Amirs and their families haven't experienced in ages.

~ Karim Khan Zawari

Never Impossible

This is a story about Jack and how he overcame an obstacle everyone said was impossible.

When Jack was born, he had to wear a heart monitor because he had a heart murmur, which basically means his heart will skip a beat or just stop for a second, and can be deadly. A couple of months after he was home from the hospital, it happened. His heart stopped. His father rushed him to the hospital. The doctor told the parents of Jack that they had brought him just in time. Jack was going to be all right.

When Jack was 6 years old, he became very ill. He started puking frequently, always sleeping, and going to the bathroom quite often. His parents took him back to the doctors. They examined him thoroughly. Jack was diagnosed with type 1 juvenile diabetes. The doctors told Jack's parents that he would never be able to play sports nor live a normal healthy life, that it would be impossible for him. Hearing this at a very young age, Jack became very depressed. He thought he had nothing to look forward to doing. He thought it would be impossible to live a happy life.

Jack's health began to decline quickly, and over the next few years, Jack would be in and out of the hospital because he wouldn't take care of himself. He wouldn't eat, wouldn't take his medication or anything until one day, while he was lying in the hospital bed, he thought to himself, "What am I doing?" He realized that he was letting the disease ruin his life. He also realized that not only was he harming himself, but that he was making his family very sad and disappointed, and he wasn't about to let that happen.

Jack began to take his medication regularly, exercising daily, and eating a healthy diet. Remembering the doctor said he couldn't play sports, Jack started playing t-ball, then eventually following in his brother's footsteps by playing basketball. He would go on to be on the all-star basketball team at his school. Jack wanted to do something a little tougher, so he joined his school's wrestling

team. The doctors advised against it saying that it would be impossible for him to go up against normal kids because his diabetes would make him weaker than the rest; therefore, he would get hurt. Hearing this, Jack was not about to let it bring him down. He kept wrestling and pushing himself to better himself. Jack went on to have a winning record of 27 wins and only 5 losses his first wrestling season, but Jack still wasn't satisfied. He wanted to prove that he was just like everyone else.

Jack began mixed martial arts. Training very hard, he went on to have a winning record of 9 wins and 2 losses over the next few years.

Jack had finally become satisfied. He had accomplished what everyone else said would be impossible. Jack had proved that just because he had an illness, he could be a normal person. He had beaten the impossible.

The moral of the story is that no matter how impossible the situation might be, as long as you believe and have faith in yourself, even the impossible can be overcome.

~ *Dustin Roy Vakoc*

Worth

Early last evening, I got a text from someone sharing about an incident at a meeting – how someone took a chair and hit another person who has mental illness.

“Wow, that’s sad. How is the person who got hit with this chair?”

“Scared.”

“And the gentleman who threw the chair – what’s really going on with him?”

“Don’t know.”

So this morning on my drive home from work I thought about a couple of things.

The program of Recovery has taught me that I can recover in all areas of my life. But I must face those things no matter what. And when you think about it, how much is it worth to take care of yourself: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual? It’s the value that you put on your life. Being worth life or death, “Face it,” for what it is worth.

I want to thank my two sobriety sisters Teresa and Tres for always being there and telling me the truth even when I did not want to hear it. I was miserable living in this house on Griffing, yet I had everything a girl could want. Two-family house converted to one-family; six cars in my driveway and I could go and get in anyone of them and drive off; furnished from top to bottom; the man of my life that I was to marry; my children; rolling in money; going on numerous vacations all over the place; and even the perfect dog (Prince). None of these things made me happy – after a while they were just things. Things that I tried to hold on to that liked to have killed me. Literally, one day I packed a bag for my children, took them to a friend’s house, asked her to babysit my children for a couple of days, and she said yes. I went back to that house and took a bottle of sleeping pills and swallowed them. I tried to kill myself. That man found me, and when I woke up three days later, I asked God, “Why, why? Why didn’t you just let me

die?" And a still, soft voice said, "Because it's not your time yet, baby." I finally surrendered it all on Dec. 3, 1995. I left that house with nothing at 7:30 in the morning, nowhere to go. I called my brother, and he said I could not stay with him because of where and who he was staying with. I hung up the phone and dialed 0. And the operator patched me in to the emergency shelter.

My worth started in that shelter, and tonight I was thinking about my worth. "My worth is not who you (man) say I am or what you (man) say I am. My worth is who God says I am and what God says I am." And it all started the night I came home to the shelter from a meeting and found a quarter outside the back door. I picked it up, went to my room, turned on the radio, and this song* was playing: "A penny for your thoughts, a nickel for a kiss, and a dime if I tell you that I love you." And I turned that dime into a quarter, "If I tell me, that I love me."

In conclusion to this journey of my life, I have to say that this experience has truly taught me how to enjoy my life one day at a time. I see the beauty in everything from the trees to the homeless man. It was a tree that sat on East 89th and Chester in 1995. One day while walking crossing the street, I saw this big, tall and full-of-life tree; that was the day I saw life to the fullest for me. I knew then I wanted to live. No matter what comes up, not only do I give it to God, I now ask God, "What would you have me to learn from this?"

Today not only do I celebrate my worth but also the worth in my life: my peace, my joy, my integrity, my word, my work, my voice and much more.

Being afforded the opportunity to share my experience, strength and hope with others in many different avenues, in my profession, I work with other recovering women, battered women, and rape victims and their children.

~ Karen Florence

*Lyrics from "A Penny for Your Thoughts" by Kenny Nolan (1982)

Keeping Myself Straight for My Family

My plans for 2017, if I receive my GED and also make it out of jail on time, is to take myself to Columbus State so I can sign up for college. My next step is to find a job that pays enough so that I can provide for my wife and kids. Then, once and for all, I need to ask myself a lot of questions about how I will keep from going down the same path again. As I really think about all the things that started my situation, I need to get new friends. I also need to say no to drugs and keep my thoughts off the fast life, because every time I turn to the streets, I take time away from my wife and kids. Being around my family brings the joy out of me as a man that I can't show the outside world because of how I carry myself. Then finally, I take control of my financial problems because I would like to be a painter and my own boss in life so I can pass my business down to my kids.

~ Harvey O. Higgs

Saving a Life

My name is Yasmine. I'm an au pair from Martinique, a French Island. I speak French, Creole, and some English. I'm 23 years old.

On Saturday, January 30, 2016, something exciting happened to me. I saved a life.

I went to Popeye's restaurant to meet a friend who works there. He told me to come at 4 pm when he would be finished. But I arrived at 3:50 pm and waited for him outside the front door. I saw a man leaving Popeye's, maybe 45 years old. He was large, and he was walking strange. He went to his car, and I was on my phone. A few minutes later, I heard an unusual noise, like suffocating. I looked over to the man's car, and I saw that he looked unconscious, with his head against the steering wheel. His shoulder moved up and down, up and down, with the suffocating sound. I told myself that I needed to do something to help the man. I knocked on the car but there was no reaction. The window was partially opened, so I put my hand on the man to touch him, but still there was no reaction. I said, "Can you hear me? Can you hear me?" Still no answer. So I went inside Popeye's and I said, "Call 911 please, Call 911..." I went back outside and opened the door to lift his head up so he could breathe better. But the man remained unconscious.

Two minutes later, I heard an emergency siren. A couple of seconds later, I saw an ambulance, a fire truck, and a police car. I was shocked at how quickly they came because it is so different in Martinique.

The emergency crew took care of the man. Fifteen minutes later, a firefighter came to me and asked, "Who helped this man?" I said, "It was me. I lifted his head up, and I asked someone to call 911. I'm sorry but my English is bad, and I could not give you enough information to describe the situation." He replied, "You did fine, thank you. You saved his life. He was in cardiac

arrest. If it had been 10 minutes more, he would have died. Good job, you can be proud of yourself.” I said, “Thank you.”

During the situation, I was calm, but afterward, I was really anxious and nervous. I thought, “Oh my gosh, I saved someone’s life.”

I needed about 20 minutes to calm down. I got in my car, I drove to get an ice cream, and then I went home. When I told the story to my host parents, they were shocked. My host mom said, “You’re a hero.” She said, “Maybe we can call the emergency room on Monday to find out if he is better or not.” I replied, “I prefer not, because if he died, I don’t know what reaction I would have.”

However, the next Monday, I went to Popeye’s with my host child. I did not see the man’s car in the parking lot, so maybe he is better now. I feel better about the situation, although I thought of the man before I went to sleep, and then again when I woke up.

This experience showed me the differences in emergency vehicle reaction time in my country and in the U.S.

Most importantly, I learned that saving a life it is a thing that you cannot be ready for. I was not prepared for that because when I left my home that afternoon, I thought I would see a friend, not save a life. We never know what will happen around us. I’m not a doctor; I’m just an ordinary person. I learned that during a stressful event, I can be functional and efficient to help someone who needs me. Before that, I thought that maybe I could do it, but now, I know for sure. Also, I was a little scared about touching the man’s car because I know in the USA when you touch someone’s car, it is like you are touching someone’s property. I didn’t know what might happen, but when I saw the man unconscious, I told myself I needed to do something to help him. I’m glad I did.

~Yasmine Merkiled

My Life at a Glance

I was born and raised in the great state of Tennessee. Some people often consider Tennessee as the Bible Belt State. As I look back on my life, it amazes me on how far I've come since I was a little kid, a teenager, and then a man. I hope that my story will encourage and help you through your storms of life.

I was raised in church my whole life. I was taught about God's love for me and how I am so precious to him. As a kid, my grandparents had a huge part in helping my mother raise my siblings and me. It was through their love, knowledge, and support that I was taught about the morals of life and how to always be the best I could be. I never thought I would be blindsided and forget all that I was taught.

As a teenager, I started being led down the wrong path. I started hanging out with the wrong crowd, and it ended up costing me so much. I got involved in drugs, alcohol, and many other things that would trap me and bring me down. As the drugs and alcohol started gaining in my life, each day seemed to get shorter. At times I would often find myself questioning the reason of life and why I was still here. At that point in my life, I thought about ending it all, but that was the devil's plan. God had bigger plans for me.

Many years later as a grown man, I started noticing something changing in my life. The urge and want for drugs and alcohol started subsiding. That's when I started having a new hunger that I have never felt before for something to change in my life. I then started remembering everything that I was taught as a young kid, and that's when I realized that I had lost sight of everything that was important in my life. I then decided to go to a local church that I used to go to as a young boy. When I went in, I sat on the back pew. I was listening to the great music that was playing, and it reminded me so much of my childhood. Then the preaching started. After the preacher got done, I couldn't take it any longer, and I knew I was ready to make a life change. As I started walking down the aisle to the altar, I started feeling weight after weight

being lifted off me, and then I just fell to my knees and gave my life completely to God. I knew right then that I would never be the same, and I never was after that moment.

Looking back now on my life, it still to this day amazes me on how far I have come since I was a kid, a teenager, and then a grown man. The day I let Jesus back into my life is a day I will never forget. So if you're struggling with an addiction in your life and the storms seem too rough, just look up and realize that sometimes life takes you to the garbage pit. But it's through all that dirt and mess that you can find the clean spots. I hope and pray that my story encourages you and leads you down a better path in life.

~ Matthew Brandon

Failure

Once again, I wake up in an emergency room in the I.C.U. The nurse is reminding me that she is amazed that I am talking to her – I should not have made it. They told me that so many times before, nothing new. I've gotten so bad not even death wants anything to do with me.

I go back to Christmas of '65, I got a set of drums. I became Ringo Starr instantly. So began my musical career. Little did I know this was the beginning of a downward spiral that would steal decades from my life.

At the age of 13, I was already playing nightclubs, weddings and all sorts of gigs in Chicago. Good money, lots of girls, the "good life," so I thought. The consequences were to follow. Along with that lifestyle came the alcohol and endless drugs. Soon I was flying under the banner of the lost cause. No matter what I did, I was labeled.

In 1997, I was born again and baptized. Soon after that I began to serve on the worship team. Gone were the days of nightclubs and nightlife.

Last year, life got the best of me again. I fell and I fell hard. Now I was a FAILURE. I decided I was not going down that easy and decided to pull myself up by the bootstraps. I set my priorities and pursued them to the fullest. I'm one test away from getting my GED, and afterwards I plan on attending Tri-C to get my associate's degree in human services focusing on chemical dependency. I long to help people who are going through the things I overcame.

I write this to say to everyone who thinks there is no way out: Set goals, you can do it.

FAILURE IS AN EVENT NOT A PERSON!

~ Juan Montanez

Flowers Do Really Come from Dirt

Life for me has not been easy. Actually I never realized how difficult life was until I was able to clearly see that the “norm” for me was truly chaos. Some would say that we are products of our environment. This may be true for them. For me this story is about how that theory is proven to be incorrect.

I was born in 1982, to an unwed couple. My parents were both drug dealers. While my mother was always loving and nurturing, she still did what she knew to do to provide for her family. My mother learned about this life from her parents. So we had a generation of drug dealers and drug abusers. I was raised by my mother and grandmother. I lived in a duplex with my five uncles and a host of cousins who were more like my brothers and sisters.

As a child, I was afforded the best and newest of everything along with my cousins. My grandmother made sure we attended church regularly and participated in church events as an attempt to keep us out of trouble. However, the mean Cleveland streets would soon show me a harder way. At the age of eight, my father left our home because his drug dealing turned into a drug addiction.

Soon after my father was out of the household, my mother started a relationship with a Jamaican man. It was not long before he and his family moved into our home. It was at that time that I first realized what drugs were and how they really affected our family. The Jamaicans and my mom sold Marijuana and Crack from our house. I could remember walking in on my mother packaging her product. She would attempt to hide it, but I was ten now and was more aware. Eventually the Jamaicans were no longer living in my house. However, I don't know why.

Not long after they left, my mother found a new love interest in a young drug dealer. They were married in a short period of time. From this union my little brother was born. By the age of

fifteen, I was bored with school and began smoking weed with my cousins. I was once a bright young man who loved math and science. I had now been introduced to a different way of life. At sixteen years old I began to sell crack. How could a young man who was a lover of God turn away from all the good he had known? Somehow I did. Around this time my mother and stepfather went to jail. My mother was sentenced to a year and my stepfather was sentenced to six years. This left me to play a big role in raising my little brother along with my grandfather.

I soon completely dropped out of school to pursue other lifeless interests. I spent my days in the streets selling, gambling, and drinking; ultimately wasting my time and my life. I never really sold drugs out of necessity; it was more so due to my environment. My grandparents sold drugs. My parents and uncles did the same thing. This was our way of life. Jail did not scare me because we always had someone going in and out.

When I was eighteen, my lifestyle caught up with me and I went to jail for selling drugs. I stayed there for six months and vowed not to return to that lifestyle after I was released. When I came home, I got a job which was totally new for me. I was used to getting money in a quick and senseless way. Once I lost that job, I went back to doing what I thought was the only thing that I knew how to do.

One night, I met a young lady who would eventually change my life. The first day we met, I knew she was different from anyone I had ever met before. We dated for some time and she made it clear that my lifestyle could not continue if we were going to be together. She despised drugs. She enlightened me on all the damage caused to myself, my family, and the families of the people I sold drugs to. During our courtship, I went to jail again. This time it was different. While I sat in the cell away from my love, I wondered if she would stay with me. After all, we had two totally different backgrounds. She was from the suburbs with a stable life and two parents. She was a true Christian with high morals and values. When I came home, I had a new outlook. I knew that the drug world was no longer the place for me. I knew

that I couldn't stay in a familiar environment. So I moved to the suburbs away from my old life, away from my family, and away from what I had always known. I must admit that this change was frightening, but it was a necessity. Eventually I married this young lady and started a family. I obtained a position at a local company, which I have been at for over ten years now. I made a dedicated decision for change and I never looked back.

Though life started out on a dark path, I can finally see how all of the things I have been through have contributed to who I am today. I have lost several loved ones along the way to a life that I thought was glorified based on quick and easy riches, but I found that life has so much more to offer. I look at myself; not only do I see a hard-working husband and father, but I see a flower who has come from the dirt.

~ Jeff Moore

Goodness Is a Virtue

There was a man who worked hard and lived his life far from troubles. He was always looking to live in peace. He was a well-respected man, and had a dream to marry and have a house with a nice wife and kids. He was always working hard to make this dream come true. In his culture, it is expected and assumed that the future wife or bride must be good in the eyes of society, respectful to others, and should not have been in any relationship before. Her married husband should be the first person to know her – physically and otherwise.

He thought that the time had come to realize his dream of settling down with a nice girl. He hoped all his hard work would bear fruit once he was married and had a house. He was happy when he found the girl of his dreams. He threw a huge party, invited all his family and friends, and spent a lot of money. After the party, when all his guests had left, he proceeded to start his new life with his new wife. However, he was in for a big surprise on his wedding night, when he discovered that his bride was not a virgin and was sleeping with another man before. It was a big shock for him, as she broke all his dreams. He was upset and very disappointed. The girl was crying and asking him for forgiveness.

He was a kind man and had a good heart. He told his legal wife that she could stay with him for one year, and after one year he would divorce her – that way, the society and people wouldn't tarnish her image or say any bad things about her. The girl was relieved to hear this and agreed with her husband's proposal.

The man continued working with his broken heart and shattered dreams about his married life. He had no hope anymore in his life. All seemed dark and black.

During this time, he fell seriously sick and was unable to move around. He couldn't go to work and was sleeping all the time. When he would wake up, he saw the girl sitting beside him crying. She was taking good care of him. She was praying to God

for his good health and recovery. She was taking care of him as a mother would take care of her baby.

Finally, one year of their legal marriage was completed. It was the last day before the completion of the year. It was time for him to fulfill his word that he gave to his legal wife on their wedding night – to divorce her and send the girl to her family. He told her to put on her wedding attire and get ready like she did on their wedding day. The girl was surprised at her husband's suggestion and wondered why he asked her to do so.

She went to a salon and got dressed like a new bride. After a couple of hours she came back home to a huge surprise party, with all her friends and family members in her big house. She wondered what was going on. Suddenly, her legal husband appeared there with a bouquet of flowers and bowed down on his knees. She was in shock and could not figure out what was happening around her. He held her hand and said, "Will you please stay here as my wife and give our marriage a chance? I want to begin my life with you."

The girl was in a happy shock after hearing these words from the man she married a year ago. She said "Yes" right away. Then she asked her husband as to when, why, and how did he change his mind. The man told her that she took such good care of him when he was sick – and that is the most important quality to look for in a life partner, to support and take care of each other in most difficult times. He gave her a chance also because she was a good woman despite what happened in the past. The man further stated that we should not discard someone just because they made mistakes in their lives. People should be given a chance to prove they could be good human beings. He said just like her or others, he had also made many mistakes in his life; however, that doesn't make him a bad man for a lifetime.

Hence, we all are humans, and make mistakes, or take bad decisions. However, we should still seek to improve ourselves, and give others a chance.

Author Biographies

Halah Al Thaneer - p. 99

Halah is from Iraq and moved to the U.S.A. a few months ago. She is living with her mother and siblings, who had moved to U.S.A. a few years ago. Halah worked with a U.S. affiliated government agency in Iraq and has experience in administration. She was in her final year of college when she had to move to the U.S.A. She plans on attending classes at Tri-C to continue her education.

Ali Albishi - p. 49

I am from Saudi Arabia. I live in Beavercreek, Ohio, with my family. I have been an ABLE student for a couple of years. This semester I am a Wright State University student, having been admitted to the LEAP program.

Nargis Ali - p. 82

I will decide for my life from now on...

Susana W. Antal - pp. 3, 111

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. In the future, I hope I can write a book, perhaps a children's book. I have always enjoyed giving poems as gifts to friends to celebrate weddings and other special occasions.

Cephas Q. Archer - p. 55

I am an African, a Ghanaian, who migrated to the U.S. in 2000. I am in this wonderful land to pursue my dream.

Inna Ardashnikova - p. 64

Inna is from Russia, and she has been studying English for many years. Prior to her move to the United States, she was a chemist. She is proud to be a United States citizen.

Bahareh Bokharaee - p. 42

I was born in Iran and came to the United States in January 2015. I'm a graphic designer and an animation maker.

Gabriele Bolik-Fuehser - p. 105

I am from Cologne, Germany. I have lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for one and a half years. I'm married and have one daughter. I enjoy painting, exercising, and spending time with my family.

Inez Boone - p. 106

Inez is a student in the Key College Prep Academy of the Cuyahoga County Public Library System.

Coline Bounous - p. 59

Coline is from France. She has spent one year in Cincinnati, Ohio, as an au pair to improve her English and to discover the United States. In France, Coline has worked and studied in communications, and she would love to become a communications director for a big company or in a communications agency. Also, she loves traveling and discovering new cultures. Her dream is to do a world tour.

Rachida Bourzak - pp. 26, 49

I am from Casablanca, Morocco. I never thought I would come to Ohio and spend my life here. My goal is to get my GED and study child psychology. I personally believe that family is the most important thing in life. That is why I wrote this story.

Tonya Bowers - p. 56

I was born in Rittman/Wadsworth, Ohio, and grew up in Wooster, Ohio. I have 3 sisters and a brother. I have two children, both girls, and I also have custody of two of my nieces that 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.

Matthew Brandon - p. 129

I have had a dream my whole life of helping people through hard and difficult times. Some people often ask me if I regret everything that I used to do. The answer is no. It is only through my mistakes

that I have learned how to help other people. Since I have been back on the right track, I have started preaching, and my wife Laura and I have become youth pastors at our church. Being a youth pastor opens up so many doors to helping young teens who are going through what I went through. I am just a simple man trying to make a difference.

Carol L. Carman - p. viii artwork, pp. 6, 14

I am a late-blooming Adult-Ed student living in rural southern Ohio. I still have my first “books” that I fashioned, wrote, and illustrated when I was 6. Words can build worlds, liberate us, and link us. They are my favorite allies to assemble, revisit, and sometimes share.

Casey Carpenter - pp. 8, 77

Casey lives in Marietta, Ohio, and attends classes at Washington County ABLE. Casey was raised with fourteen cousins.

Ana Ceron - p. 4

I recently moved from Colombia with my daughter. My goal in the future is to find work in my field.

Lindsay Dancker - p. 78

I am a single mom looking to go back and finish college. I have been writing since high school. I have written over forty poems. All of my poetry has come from experiences and feelings.

Brian Dixon - p. 8

Brian is in a class for Washington County ABLE made up of students from all over the United States. This class is not mandatory, but he has elected to attend and hopes his progress aids in his future.

Nicole L. Dybzinski - p. 90

I am 32 years old and live in Willoughby, Ohio. I Prevailed is a true story of my life four years ago. My sobriety date is November 8, 2011. Sharing my story helps me remember just how bad life was. I have continued to stay sober and regularly attend A.A. meetings.

Mouhamed Fall - p. 15

Mouhamed is from Senegal. His first language is Wolof. He also speaks French. English is his third language. He hopes that he can master English and finish his studies in order to make a big contribution in science and make the world a safer place for human beings.

Norma Feregrino - p. 112

I am from Queretaro, Mexico. I have lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for 14 years. I have one son. I enjoy cooking, needle point, watching movies with my son, and making many different things with my hands.

Karen Florence - p. 124

Karen was born and raised a resident of Cleveland, Ohio. Her mother passed away when she was fourteen years old, and her father passed away June of 2007. She grew up with her two siblings. She is newlywed to her wonderful husband for the past twenty-three months; between them, they have a total of thirteen beautiful children and seventeen grandchildren. She has set in place a five-year goal preparing for the future with her husband as they send their last two children to college. Her family means the world to her, and they do so much together. She has recently enrolled into the Seeds of Literacy program; her goal for 2016 is to have her GED. She found out late in life, but not too late, the type of learner she is, and the Seeds of Literacy program has been the right classroom setting for her.

Renee Gabbard - p. 11

I am from Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a single mother of two girls and currently in school for my GED. At the moment, I am proving to my kids that no matter what, you can do anything.

Maria Luisa Giuliberti - p. 87

I am from Italy and my first language is Italian. I arrived in the U.S. in December, 2008. I live in Cincinnati with my husband and my daughter. My goal is to become familiar with others' cultures. Here at Great Oak campus, I have the privilege of meeting people from all over the world, and I hope to get along with all of them, peace-

fully respecting our differences. The secret weapon against fear is knowledge.

Teia Griffin - p. 48

I am a GED student at Live Oaks/Great Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am working hard to achieve my goals.

Josh Groves - p. 72

I am a 38-year-old from Lima, Ohio. I have 3 children who enjoy camping, hiking, and canoeing with me. I like to write poems, and I have been sober for over 17 months.

Priscilla Hathaway - p. 100

I am a single mom, and I like coming up with poems. Poems are easy for me; they come right off the top of my head. Stories just take too long for me.

Marbella Hernandez - p. 35

Harvey O. Higgs - pp. 8, 126

Harvey is 29 years old and was born on February 15, 1986, at Ohio State University Hospital. His hometown is Columbus, Ohio. He was married on May 20, 2015, and he has two little girls with his wife.

Jermaine Hines - p. 41

Jermaine Hines enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and write about special family memories. He was delighted to hear that his poem would be published.

Renee M. Hocevar - p. 47

Renee Hocevar is a dynamic student. She enjoys assisting other students in writing assignments and computer skills.

Mike X. Hu - p. 34

Mike is currently attending ESOL and GED classes offered through Miami Valley CTC's ABLE program. He has a science background and is now expanding his knowledge on social studies, education, and examination systems. He is also preparing to get involved in TEFL, ACT/SAT preparation, and AP class instruction in China.

Nong Huffman - p. 38

Nong is from Thailand and was recently married. She is a student in the ESOL program at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati.

Brittany N. Hull - pp. 71, 76

I was born in West Chester, Ohio, and have lived here my entire life. I am 19 years old and have suffered from severe migraines since 2009. This has made it difficult to attend school regularly. Since I couldn't attend school and understand the curriculum, I took a break for 2 years to get healthy again. Now, I am ecstatic because I can finally graduate. I hope to share more of my writings and to become a book editor after college.

Hiromi Ito - p. 51

I'm from Wakayama, Japan. I've lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for one year. I have four children. I enjoy cooking, shopping, and spending time with my children.

Takeshi Ito - p. 12

I came to the U.S.A. because of my father's work and also because of my dreams. I wasn't very good at speaking English a year ago, but now I think I might be a pretty good English speaker. I'm planning to attend a university in the U.S.A. My dream is to earn a degree.

Romeo Bethyu Jajju - p. 135

Romeo is a refugee immigrant from Iraq. He grew up in Baghdad. He completed primary school, and after that joined the family business with his father. When life became really hard to live in Iraq, he moved to Turkey with his wife. He stayed there for three years. He took English classes in Turkey. He moved to Cleveland, OH, U.S.A. in December 2015 along with his wife and a 3-year-old child. He is working with the Employment Team at International Services Center, a refugee resettlement agency, for a job, and also taking English classes. He is hopeful about his life here, and looking forward to a peaceful and content life with his family.

Lindsey Johnson - p. 117

Lindsey is a GED student at the North Star Reentry Resource Center in Cleveland, Ohio.

Tibi Kabore - pp. 28, 38

I am from Burkina Faso in West Africa. I studied macroeconomics in my home country, and I am currently learning English in the ESOL program at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. After I improve my English, I'm going to continue my studies here in order to be useful someday for my continent, Africa, the U.S., and humanity. I am a great lover of nature and I advocate for a green world where environmental protection will be a priority. I dream of a reconciled world where everyone is accepted regardless of color, origin, or culture – a world where love will take over hatred and selfishness.

Soohee Kim - p. 46

I was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea. I have two daughters, who love to go to school. My husband and I like to eat chocolate and ice cream a lot, but we don't give it to the girls. We are so selfish.

Olivia Kneprova - p. 101

I earned my teaching degree in the Czech Republic majoring in the Czech language with literature, music, psychology and pedagogy. For 17 years, I worked as a teacher at elementary, middle and high schools. Recently, I earned a university degree in school management. This year I have the opportunity to improve my English speaking skills at a one-year intensive English language program in Ohio. In my free time, I enjoy sports, culture, and reading literature.

Nouch Long - p. 114

Nouch is a Great Oaks ABLE student and is working toward earning her GED by attending classes at the Tech-Reach program at Elder High School in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Paola Lopez - p. 38

I am from Mexico. I moved to Cincinnati ten months ago for my husband's job. I'm taking English classes because I am interested about the culture of the United States. I am happy to be able to learn English and meet new people.

Galit Maman - p. 95

I moved to the U.S. 6 months ago from Israel with my family because of my husband's assignment in the U.S. Air Force. I have 4 children. My kids are struggling to learn the language and succeed in school. It is important for me to serve as an example for them, so I am making an effort to improve my English.

Patricia Manuel - p. 73

I live in Wooster, Ohio. I have 7 grandchildren, whom I love spending time with. I do a lot of volunteering for the community, and I love going to church.

Catherine A. Marin - pp. 36, 44

I am 23 yrs. old. I like to write about my experiences to improve my writing skills.

Derek McCormick - p. 45

I have worked in construction for many years and studied for my GED in slower seasons. This assignment brought back great memories of fishing trips with my family.

Ric McKitrick - p. 8

Ric was born in 1982 in Marietta, Ohio. His six children are Cherish, Wyatt, Maddie, Junior, Gatling and Cole. He lives with his domestic partner Tabitha Way.

Yasmine Merkiled - p. 127

I am from Martinique. I am 24 years old and I came to the USA to become an au pair. It is a crazy experience, but a job that I love. It is not easy to be an au pair, but my host family is just great. I love them so much! I have met so many great people – girls, boys, and a great teacher, Susan. She is my ESOL teacher at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio. I appreciate everyone who has allowed me to live this experience. I am thankful for everyone accepting my differences and my personality and for helping me to become the woman I am.

Katie Mikola - p. 75

If you ever meet me, most impressions I leave are quiet and/or nervous. But no one knows what I'm like because I am afraid to screw up. I have switched many schools because I was bullied at each school and struggled to work without a teacher to help me. After my fifth school, I dropped out. These GED classes were my last hope at succeeding in life, and I am grateful. I have never received such respect in my entire life. Most days it makes me want to cry tears of joy and to thank everyone for what they have done to make such a positive effect in my life.

Irene Miller - p. 84

I grew up in Middlefield, Ohio, and attended a private Amish school through eighth grade. Ten years later, I got married and soon afterwards started studying for my GED. I am over half way through, and I hope to graduate this spring and attend a community college in the fall. I love learning and am very grateful to the ABLE program and my teachers for helping me achieve my goals.

Abshiro Mohamed - p. 66

Abshiro is a new student in our Transitions class. She is from Kenya. She enjoys learning English and helping people. She attended Atlas University in Nairobi. She hopes to continue her studies at an American college in a computer-related field.

Juan Montanez - p. 131

Juan is preparing to enroll in classes at Cuyahoga Community College for a career in chemical dependency counseling. He enjoys history, helping others, and participating in activities at his church.

Jeff Moore - p. 132

Jeff is a native of Cleveland, Ohio. He is a husband and father of three. He is a hard worker who constantly receives promotions and accolades on his job. His goal is to become a certified electrician and establish his own company. While he never considered himself to be a scholarly person, he is now finding a new love for personal growth and education. In his spare time he enjoys watching sports and spending time with family and friends. He is eager to embrace every new endeavor presented to him.

Jessica Luz Morales - p. 93

Jessica works full-time and attends ABLE classes. She has grown as a student and as an author.

Lisa Moro - p. 62

Lisa is from France. She has been studying art for 7 years and has specialized in product design. She loves art in all its forms. She is passionate about writing, and she would like to become a scenarist for TV shows or a romance writer. She can't live without being surrounded by cats.

Diana Nabieva - p. 49

I have a son who is six years old. He is my world. I have seen a lot of sad stuff in my life. GED is my key to a new life.

Yvonne Tatianna Palmer - p. 17

I grew up with 14 brothers and 3 sisters. Out of all of them, I plan on being the 3rd one to go to college, but only the second one to graduate. I want something that gives me purpose, and right now, I am going to class at Great Oaks in Cincinnati.

Ji Hye Park - p. 21

Ji Hye is an au pair in Toledo, Ohio. She pursued this opportunity to improve her English, to experience life in America, and to follow her dreams of working with children and teaching. She is from South Korea. She has worked very hard to improve her English during her time in the U.S. She has taken advantage of a wide variety of educational opportunities, including ABLE ESOL classes.

Bobby Patterson - p. 8

Bobby is in a class for Washington County ABLE made up of students from all over the United States. This class is not mandatory, but he has elected to attend and hopes his progress aids in his future.

Latasha Polston - p. 92

I am taking GED classes at TLC in Mt. Healthy, Ohio, near Cincinnati. I believe my strong faith in God will help me attain my goal.

Chun Qin - p. 60

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.

Sheri Readence - p. 32

The story I wrote is everything I remember of my home and growing up. I gathered facts from the eldest in my family to my sister who is two years ahead of me. I no longer have my mother's apron, but the pictures and memories are still very much alive.

**Nicholaus Richey - p. 150 artwork
(*Grasping New Beginnings*)**

I was born in Van Wert County, Ohio, in 1993. I am a single father to a very handsome and lively young boy that was born April 23, 2013, in Allen County, Indiana. I am currently going through recovery at the W.O.R.T.H. Center in Lima, Ohio. I aim to complete my recovery program, to grow to be a better father, and to continue to pursue art as a career.

Laura Romero - p. 22

Laura came to this country from Mexico with her husband in 2003. She tested out of ESOL and came to ABLE classes. She passed her GED in English in November of 2015. She has continued coming to class where she has focused on writing as she worked hard on her submission piece. She has 2 children and spends time at their school volunteering as an aide and a translator.

Zoei Rosado - p. 70

Zoei is an 18-year-old ABLE student in Ashtabula County. Her hobbies involve reading and playing video games; she likes to read horror, adventure, and mystery novels. Her favorite authors are Darren Shan and Erin Hunter. Zoei has always enjoyed the Japanese culture and has a dream of someday traveling to Japan. Zoei says that her future is open to many possibilities.

Olivia Rossetti - cover art (Hope)

Olivia was born in Columbus, Ohio, and spent most of her life growing up in Hilliard. After moving to Canfield, she is currently working to earn her degree at Mahoning County CTC. She aspires to become a professional artist and a voice-over artist. Her aspirations were inspiration for her piece.

Ericka Joy Rouser - p. 89

Ericka was born March 22, 1985. She is the youngest of 8 children and is a mother of 4. She loves baking and spending time with her family. She is currently a student working on her GED at Project Learn in Akron, Ohio.

Jessica Schuette - p. 52

My goals are to finish my GED. I would like to get into maintenance. My father works as a maintenance man for a living, and I have always found it fun helping him fix toilets, sinks, fans and a lot of other things. My reason for writing Ohio came from my love for Ohio. From our Great Lake to our marvelous zoos, the yummy coneys and beautiful parks we all love to explore. My inspiration came from all that Ohio has to offer.

Yuko Tamura - p. 49

I came to the U.S. from Japan for my husband's job three years ago. I am going back to my country this summer. I have made new friends and will miss them.

Rae'chelle Tootle - p. 69

I was born October 26, 1996, and I have lived in Ohio all my life. I love writing. I have mainly only written poetry and fiction short stories. I enjoy poetry more because it gives me a chance to reveal myself all the while disguised behind word play and rhymes. My hobby is freelance writing. Sometimes, I even make money on small articles I write for newsletters and independent magazines across the country. My hope is to one day be a successful writer and published author.

Denisse Torres - p. 63

Denisse is from Panama. Her first language is Spanish, but she is working very hard to improve her English during her 2 years as an au pair. Before coming to the U.S. as an au pair, Denisse worked as a journalist.

Aki Umetsu - p. 9

I am from Japan. I have been here for four months. I have worked as a speech-language-hearing therapist. My field of specialty is special education and swallowing. In order to find volunteer work, I am studying English.

Dustin Roy Vakoc - p. 122

Dustin is a 23-year-old guy from the country. He is a type 1 diabetic. He is in ABLE classes at Washington County ABLE.

Adriana Vasquez - p. 30

Adriana came to the United States from Ecuador in 2000. She has tested out of the ESOL class, but continued in ABLE classes to get her GED. She is married and has 4 children. She is active in her community as a translator to help other Spanish-speaking people who are new to this country.

Angela D. Williams - p. 103

I'm a resident of Cleveland, Ohio, who is currently attending the Seeds of Literacy program. I love to write short stories and essays as a hobby.

Lisa Williams - p. 81

I am a recent widow and a mother of four sons. I have been in GED classes for over a year. As a child, I always loved using my imagination, being read to, and looking at the stars and clouds. I have always loved writing poetry ever since I was in the eighth grade. I hope to one day have a book of poetry published.

Ayaka Yukawa - p. 38

I was born in Japan. I came to Cincinnati in the spring of 2014 because of my husband's job. I want to make friends with people from different countries and talk to them about various things. I'm

studying English in an ESOL class at Scarlet Oaks so that I can get a job someday where I use English.

Karim Khan Zawari - p. 120

Karim moved to U.S.A. from Afghanistan in November 2015 and attends ESL classes at ISC. He completed high school in Afghanistan and worked with the U.S. Army as an interpreter for a few years. He wants to go to college and complete his education. He has a good knowledge of U.S. culture, and he seems to be assimilating here already.



Honorable Mention

Hanadi Abdulrazzak
Eva Acosta Trejo
Rafael Aguiar
Abdullah Alantari
Arkan Albarazanchi
Fatima Alberico
Julia AlCheikh
Adham Aldaoud
Fiona Allen
Kahrica Allen
Andretta Allen-Owens
Veronica Almeida
Mizdelina Almodovar
Marshamelle Alphabet
Sonia Aluarado
Maria Alvarez
Philomeme Antangane
Camilla Araujo
Samuel Asamoah
Zamir Asliev
Sabah Asskar
Monica Baclia
Anne Bahlmann
Ruth Balarezo
Heather Berkshire
Hanna Bernhofer
Marylou Bohhannon
Vicente Bolanos
Robert Bollinger II
Keisha Booker
Maxine Booker
Francis Borges
Joseph Broa
Kellie Brookes
Kristy Brown
Miesha Burten
Sandy Buzuleciu

Dontez Caffee
Edelma Cancinos
Imelda Caraballo
Diana Cardenas
Yasmin Carrillo
Bruna Castilho
Hilaria Castro Riz
Alejandra Catala
Monica Chambers
Joseph Chapman
Lu Chen
Han Chong
Norine Ciaio
Fernanda Cobo
Catalina Cojocar
Dannielle Coleman
Ashley Comello-Tepole
Iselda Correa
Shuntai Crawford
Julia Crespo
Carlos Cruz
Danuta Czyzycka
Stanislaw Czyzycki
Ada Dague
Malik Daniel
Amanda Davis
Gregory Davis
Hector Delgado
Kevin Dennis
Alka Desouza
Gaye Diabira
Fatma Diouf
Hitomi Doi
Stephanie Dorsey
Connie Doss
Amber Dugan
Vanessa Edsall

Mohamed Eldarawi
Chad Elling
Hesham Elmgerbi
Sahar Elsayed
Sovann Em
Assia Essamad
Lucas Evangelista
Ricardo Fernandez
Loren Fetz
Devin Fink
Angelia Fitzgerald
Elizabeth Flores
Courtney Francis
Naho Fujii
Norma Galdamez
Corey Galetti
Katee Galgoczy
Jonabel Galopo-Kimmie
Carolina Garcia
Lorena Garcia
Lourdes Garcia
Teresa Gartner
Ana Gay
Dillon George
Serkadis Getachew
Cassandra Glenn
Emi Gokan
Gabriel Gonzalez
Minnie Graham
Monica Guilherme
Angie Guiza
Mia Gunn
Subitra Gurung
Chadia Hachem
Augustine Hakiza
Anna Halgas
Dora Hamilton
Dawn Harper
LaQuan Harris
Melvin Harrison
Concetta Hasson

Rebecca Hayhurst
Emerenz Hermann
Jesus Hernandez
Emily Hiles
Maki Hirata
Kelly Holcomb
Teresa Honis
Shanin Hudson
Hoa Huynh
Jackie Ibrahim
Betsy Imler
Ayaan Ismail
Mamie Ito
A. J.
Karima Jabrah
Connor Jackson
Yoselin Jimenez
Eddie Johnson
Kendra Jones
Flor Jordan
Tomoko Kambe
Kenney Keathley
Myung Kim
Bradley Kingery
Hasan Kodra
Mimoza Kodra
Masako Kuehmstedt
Megha Kurdekar
Amani Lababidi
Ilham Lachheb
Gloria Lahoud
Polly Lam
Wee Loon Leow
Inelda Ley-Garcia
Dan Li
Sharon Little
Ana Lopez
Rolando Lopez
Arnetta Love
Brittany Love
Vonda Lovett

Edward Lowry	Izabayo Nsabiyeze
Tatiane Lucas	Ernestina Octhere
Ana Lup	Hatsumi Okuyama
Grigore Lup	Flor Oliveras
Heather Mahon	Wilmer Orozco
Makol Makol	Lakia Orr
Gabriel Manriquez	Genesis Ortiz
Velda Markley Marsh	Yoanie Ortiz
Alexandria Maysonet	Chiara Osley
Nelly Mbeka	Ilham Ouchchach
Erma McClarin	Inoussa Ouedraogo
Prasanna Medarametla	Saidou Ouedraogo
Fatima Mejia	Khrystyna Padyuka
Pavlo Melnyk	Alejandra Paredo
Mariangela Mendez	Joon Pak
Silvia Mendizabal	Brandon Parks
Florinda Mendoza	Nicoll Parra Marino
Rosa Mendoza	Brian Patrick
Bruce Miller	Terry Patrick
Clarissa Miller	Yaroslav Pavlov
David Miller	Marleny Perez
Jaree Mobley	Omayra Perez
Ihab Mohamed	Willie Perry
Khalil Mohammad	Valentin Pina
Vahid Mollaie	Sarahy Pineda
Yoko Monda	Maria Quiles
Danielle Monkam	Francisco Quinones
Sonia Montero Alvarado	Maria Quinones
Francisco Morales	Jashu Rai
Dennis Morris	Rony Ramirez
Valentyn Mozgovyy	Rolando Ramos
Tresor Mukendi	Al-Jaf Ramziyah
John Mullee	Kanwaljit Randhawa
Laziza Muminova	Anagha Rathi
Mildred Myles	Clara Ravanelli
Mihoko Nagura	Abdullah Rayizah
Amina Nash	Sabrina Re Fiorentin
Shwetha Nayak	Keiger Reed
Binta Ndiaye	Rivera Richard
Phuoc Nguyen	Rosa Rivera
Petra Novotna'	Maxie Rivers

Kateka Robinson
RaShawne Robinson
Dorian Rodriguez
Caleb Roe
Taylor Rogers
Carlos Saavedra
Som Sakda
Hanna Saker
Diana Salinas
Michaela Salsburey
Maribel Sanchez
Ikuyo Sasaki
Michelle Schmerge
Shavon Shields
SheRa Shields
Samantha Shreves
Rafaela Silva
Jennifer Singh
Partiman Siwa
Marcus Small
Orlando Smith
Satausha Smith
Rochelle Stafford
Seata Stephens
Varetta Stone
Suk Subba
Randolph Swander
Elzbieta Swiderek
Hua Tang
Lorena Tapia
Livia Tataru
Joel Tavarez
Deirdre Taylor
Christelle Tchouante
Esmeralda Terranova
Chutima Thambun
Chris Thornton
Alina Todoran
Dalia Tohme
Lurinso Tolber
Lorethia Tolbert

Veronica Tolentino
Aurora Torres
Maria Torres
David Totterdale
Sanaa Toussai
Loan Tran
Delisha Turner
Elizabeth Victorio
Vincent Vogt
Liudmila Vorontcova
Khardiatou Wade
Akiho Wallen
Iyasha Washington
Sandra Washington
Shequetta Washington
Brenda Watkins
Krishanthi Weragalaarachchi
Kelvin Whitaker
Lorraine White
Latifa Whitfield
Antoinette Whitman
Kristina Wiehalm
Elsbeth Wienstroer
Elizabeth Willard
Robert Williams
Valerie Williams
Joel Wilson
Damen Winning
Penny Wise
Serges Womeni
Xuexin Xiao
Rada Yerebakan
Shirley Yeung
Rachel Peng Yuhua
Marua Zamora
Maria Zayas
Yun Zhao