

BEGINNINGS 20

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

FOREWORD

Writing is no time to be shy. There is no need to speak in your quietest library voice. Nobody is going to tell you to hush. Do not concern yourself with the volume button. The page looms before you in its blankness, asking to be occupied by your words. In order to get the words out, you need to surrender a bit. Remember that you are filled with language, and images, and the music of one vowel or consonant colliding with its neighbor, like wind chimes that produce an unexpected, sizzling clang.

The same can be said for publishing creative work, especially if it is your debut as an author. So often writers who are anything but quiet on the page—inventing new worlds, or making our ordinary world seem newly luminous and extraordinary—become timid upon viewing their own work in print. That booming brass section rattling the fences diminishes into the trill of one person barely whistling in a closed room. The voices that were never self-conscious throughout the act of writing suddenly become reluctant. But you don't have to let this happen. You, and your creative work that was selected for this collection, are in excellent company.

As children we look across a room and our eyes widen as we see sunbeams and motes cascading in the light. We imagine ourselves being so weightless and free. As adults, we witness the same scene and just see dust. Dust reminds us of all the chores that need to be done. We couldn't be farther from the world of childlike wonder that situated us, even if just momentarily, as a tiny speck among other specks, dancing without a floor. As writers, we have to remind ourselves daily to consider our surroundings through a lens of wonder, even if we're noticing the sunbeams while pushing a vacuum or mop across the room. Writing requires transformation, and sometimes the transformation involves sending ourselves back to a simpler time.



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Many aspiring writers dream of the moment they finally get to hold their work in print. Perhaps, in this dream version, there's ample confetti, or a disco ball, or the sound of fireworks in the background. But nothing could be more momentous than celebrating the publication of written work alongside other authors who are experiencing the same joy, in the presence of arts and literacy advocates who will be cheering you on long after the cover of this *Beginnings* volume is closed. You are now part of a community of writers. Do not muffle your applause. Hearty, and loud, congratulations on this accomplishment.

Mary Biddinger
2016 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.

Many things have changed in the twenty years since the inaugural *Beginnings* and Writers' Conference. However, what has remained constant is the perseverance of ABLE students; the unwavering support of their teachers, and the power of student writing. Each year has brought new authors who give us creative stories, unique perspectives, and expressive poetry.

Over 420 pieces of writing were submitted for review and possible publication in *Beginnings 20*. Ninety-four pieces were chosen for this edition. We are proud to publish the 20th volume of exceptional writing by Ohio's ABLE authors and commend these writers for their courage to share their stories.

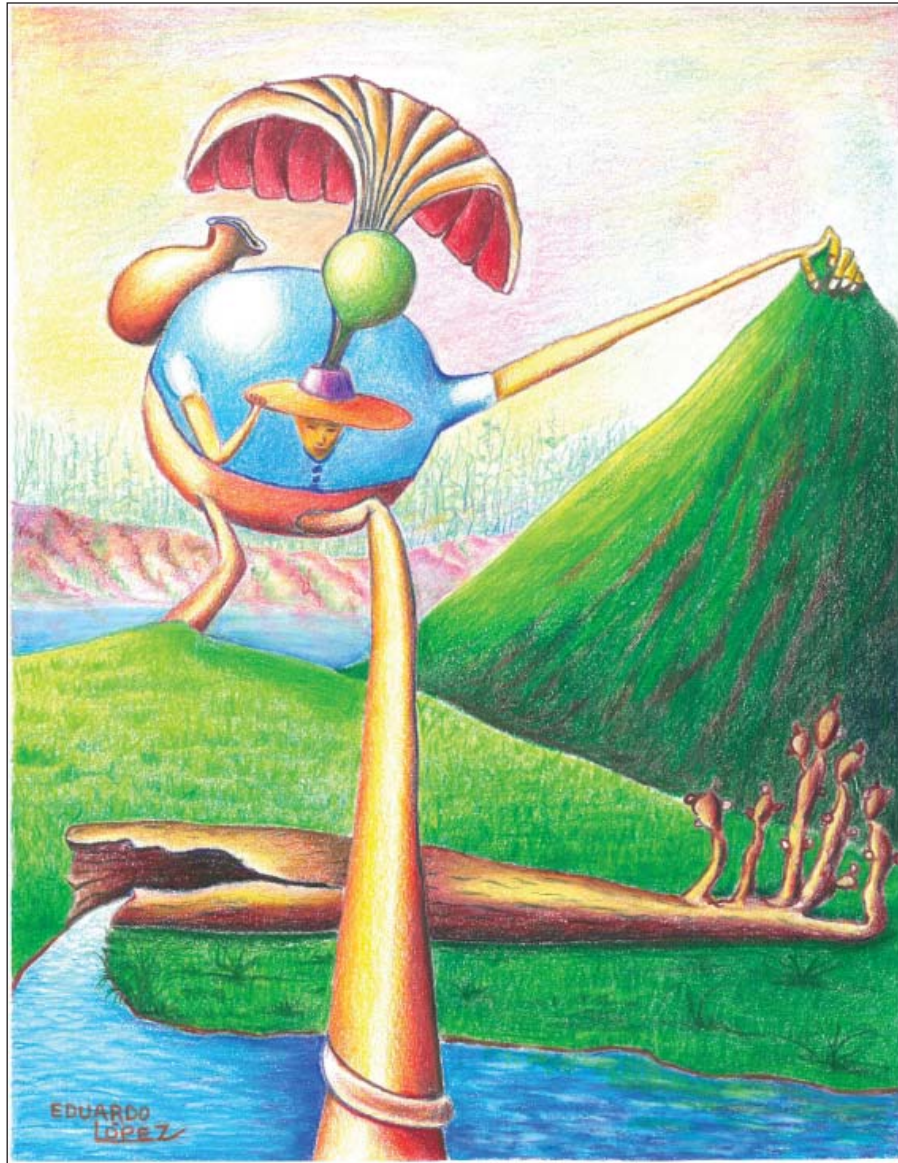
We also honor and thank ABLE teachers and tutors who dedicate their time to encourage students and provide instruction and guidance. We applaud each instructor for their passion and creativity to motivate ABLE students throughout their writing journeys. To celebrate this milestone year and to acknowledge the contributions that ABLE instructional staff have made to facilitate twenty years of *Beginnings*, this edition also includes the writing of ABLE teachers and tutors.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Adult Basic and Literacy Education Program. Their 20 years of support for *Beginnings* and the Writers' Conference have allowed many ABLE students to become published authors and public speakers.

We welcome our 2017 keynote speaker, poet and performer Ray McNiece, 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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When I Am Powerful

I remember the sweet juice of watermelon spilling down my chin, summertime laughing with my cousins, thinking nothing could be better. I remember how hard it was to leave behind my twin, the ache of letting go. I remember the uncertainty of reaching, choosing

to sacrifice. When I put my mind to something and get it done, I am powerful. I am powerful when I share quiet moments of bliss with the universe. I am powerful when I pray. I am powerful when I fail. I am powerful when I feel. But,

what if you lose?

What if you lose friends to fear? What if you find yourself soaking in sorrow with no loved ones near? What if you find yourself? Could pain be the gauge of one's own strength? We ask ourselves over and over again *do you have the power to overcome?* Well,

what if we do?

I am powerful in more than one way, when I am confident in my ability to handle what comes. When I am singled out, and keep going even if I must go alone, when I reach out for help, when I find joy in embracing my personal strengths, when I dance in the beauty of sharing them with the world, I am powerful.

When I put my mind to something and get it done, I am powerful. I am empowered when I share quiet moments of grief with the universe. I am powerful even when I fail. I become more powerful when I feel.

Eating watermelon alone is never the same, the front porch is empty, but the laughter and love is in me. I find myself taken by an early sunset in Ohio's cold air. I find that I am learning self care. I find myself

devoted to the promise of a brighter future. I give my time in order to build a better life. Before I die I will follow my dreams, I will build a home for my loves before I die. Before I die I will make things better for learners. I will be a teacher to many youth before I die.

Before I die, I will live,
empowered.

~Jennifer Cline
GED Graduate
B.A. in Pan-African Studies
Kent State University
MFA Candidate, Creative Writing

*The words in this piece reflect a collaboration of Ohio adult learners from across the globe who attended the 2016 Ohio Writers' Conference. Jennifer Cline, GED Scholar and poet, collected the words of attendees and pieced together their responses to allow **When I Am Powerful** to come to life.*

CURTAIN UP

Daybreak/Sunrise

My eyes have already adjusted to the pre-dawn darkness of morning as I take my seat on the old redwood swing – and I wait.

The fog is thick over the back field. The tree line is barely visible. The fog slowly begins to settle, the trees at the property line are silhouettes of black, and the trees beyond are assorted shades of misty gray – and I wait.

My eyes follow the unique sound of a hummingbird's wings, and I find it frozen in space just inches in front of my face. Did my unexpected presence startle it? Was it attracted to the artificially sweet scent of my cup of hot tea? Or was it drawn to the leaves of the infant mulberry tree near my feet? I blink, and it is gone – and I wait.

The wispy clouds have turned pink, and the sky is a soft blue. Twin streams from a jet slice through the clouds, but as it races higher they are graciously erased from sight. The outline of the plane is only a glimmering image as it continues its journey in the clear blue sky – and I wait.

A half-chewed hickory nut drops from the tree above. A quick rustle of leaves, as I look up, lets me know I am not alone in my morning outing, but he is now long gone – and I wait.

A sip of tea from my over-sized mug is still warm on my lips and cupped palms. The fog seems to be settling in the lower field, yet pulled upwards across the forms of the trees. The hummingbird is back as if to remind me to check the feeder down by the zen garden. I smile, nod slightly, and he's gone again – and I wait.

I hear competing crows from the young new roosters in the barn yard and glance again to the East just as an ever-so-slight glow of yellow breaks the fog. Dewdrops are sparkling on every blade of grass, and a spider's web on the corner of the deck is a work of art. I hear the sound of an alarm clock coming through an

upstairs window and know my oldest grandson will soon be piling out of bed, to get ready to head off as his electrician grandfather's apprentice for the day – and I wait.

Squirrels chatter as they start their play, running down one tree and chasing up another. I realize the grass is now a vivid green, and the droplets have slid down the blades. I glance up and the sun has reached the tree tops. Visiting grandchildren will soon be up looking for pancakes shaped into the letters of their names. I enjoy my last, now cold, drink of tea, lay my head on the back of the swing, and take a deep comforting breath. After mentally singing a "Thank You" I have composed just for Him, I rise and walk across the rose garden towards the step leading to the kitchen door – the weight has been lifted – and the wait is over.

~ *Barbara Annon*

Lenten Reflection

The gardener rises, walks to the front door, and examines the spot where the minor bulbs were planted.

Ubiquitous snow—

Questioners query, "Will winter ever lose its icy grip?"

Beneath the hoarfrost lie (dormant, but struggling for freedom) Crocus, reticulated iris, snowdrop—the first to brave the journey from sub- to super-terrestrial.

Crocus and iris—porphyrean—the color of Lenten vestments and altar cloths.

Snowdrops—Paschal, pristine whiteness.

And all with golden stamens, brassy brightness like lengthening sun
Reminiscent of the trumpet which will wake other sleepers.

The promise of spring is as certain as the promise of resurrection,
The darkness of death as temporary as the darkness of winter.

Botanical first-fruits foreshadow spiritual first-fruits

As seasons progress from glory to glory.

~ *Bruce Cline*

Moments in Time

Long ago, since I was a child
 Inspired by films of exotic places
 I dreamt of traveling to these amazing locations
 and having my own adventures.
 Drawn by the allure of these enchanting places
 it forever sparked the wanderlust in me.

Years passed, with all the twists and turns in life
 Never outside my own continent and comfort zone
 My dreams would start coming true
 Which began with a strong desire to get away from it all
 and discover my own self paradise
 And turned into more than that.
 It became a journey that was able to be shared with someone else,
 Someone I love
 Who shares similar passions.

Fascinated by Eastern culture
 And Buddhism we chose
 Thailand
 A unique place nestled in the Golden Triangle
 With its cinematic tropical beaches, secret lagoons,
 and humongous limestone cliffs
 From its roaring mountains, distinct wildlife, quaint villages,
 peaceful rice farms, and timeless nature
 To its charming culture, friendly smiles, glorious palaces,
 hidden temples, interesting statues, and ancient ruins
 To the hustle and bustle of the ultra-modern city of Bangkok,
 with its massive skyscrapers, scattered markets, bizarre foods,
 and unlimited entertainment choices which all seemed endless.

After months of planning,
 And many flight changes, layovers, and miles over ocean
 We arrived in Bangkok where we were greeted by the chaos
 of a sensory overload.
 It was a complete culture shock.

Our time in Bangkok had never a dull moment,
 Exploring back streets and alleyways
 All the sights and sounds
 Tuk tuk rounds
 All across town.
 A memorable moment was getting all dressed up to have
 a romantic rooftop dinner
 With a breathless panoramic view
 Over the city where we could see millions of lights
 and stars as far as the eye could see.
 We also made our way to Northern Thailand in cities
 like Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai
 Which we chose as a spiritual quest.
 We planned our trip around the festivals
 of Yi Peng and Loy Krathong,
 Which are held every year of the full moon of the twelfth month
 in the Thai Lunar Calendar.
 Both these festivals coincide with each other with similar aspects.

Loy Krathong,
 Honoring the goddess of water and paying respects
 Letting go a Krathong, a small floating vessel
 made from banana stalks and decorated with incense,
 offerings, flowers, and candles into a river,
 canal or pond making a wish.

Yi Peng, signifying making good merit,
 With the release of a paper lantern into the air
 resembling a fluorescent jelly fish
 gracefully floating through the sky
 Releasing one's troubles, bad luck, and misfortune.
 In this perfect moment,
 Under 10,000 lanterns, I proposed to my girlfriend
 and travel companion
 Which was witnessed only by a small Asian child
 mesmerized in the moment.
 A moment forever captured in our minds.

Moments like renting a scooter and exploring
only to take us up a winding mountain where we found
an amazing temple called Doi Suthep with its
magnificent craftsmanship tucked away in the mountain side.

Arriving at sunset with its peaceful view over the city
to the soundtrack of monks chanting in the background.

To moments like waking up early in the morning
after a long day and night
Taking a jog as the sun came up,
experiencing humble monks walking the littered streets
from a night of festivities before.

Spending time with tribes like Karen long neck women,
with their strange practices like wearing large gold rings
around their necks and just getting a glimpse of their world
And being captivated by majestic elephants
with their intelligence and charm.

In Thailand they have been important figures,
enduring symbols with spiritual significance,
serving as major tools for everyday life

To being amused by curious monkeys opening water bottles
and being up close and personal

And to moments just being out in the middle of the ocean
off an uninhabited island lagoon lying on my back
in the warm ocean water gazing up at the mysterious night sky
with all its millions of stars surrounding me
With bioluminescent algae glowing beneath.
A moment to remember.

All these moments, and moments like them,
are moments of enlightenment to me.

I think this is something I search for.
Soon those moments would all be in retrospect
I know this not the end of the journey
but it is the beginning of the adventure!

~ Derek Herb

Vietnam's New Year

Chinese New Year is Vietnam's New Year. This year it is January 28.
In Vietnam we have to prepare for the holiday by buying clothes,
food, everything new, because all of the stores will be closed for
three days.

Before the New Year we buy flowers, cook food, and burn incense
to celebrate, thinking about our parents who have died.

We eat together and have small envelopes to give to all of the
children and old people in the family.

On the morning of the 28th, we wear everything new. Old people
go to the temple to burn incense and pray to Buddha for luck with
their family. The children are happy. Wearing their new clothes and
shoes, they go to relatives' houses to say, "We wish you a happy
New Year" and receive a red envelope with lucky money.

During the New Year celebration (three days) we have a lucky
piece in our pocket. We always have the lucky money to give to
someone we know if they say, "We wish you a happy New Year" to
us.

The Vietnamese New Year tradition is to spend a lot of money!

~ Nhung Thai

Memories...

Memories are the souvenirs of our past. They are the very essence of our lives. Some are revisited to relive the past, others to live well in the present, and still others to project themselves on the future. In my memories, I see myself again. I glimpse a studious child who was not always calm and a pious teenager, frail but always determined and persevering. I see a thoughtful girl, too.

My memories unfailingly take me back to Porto-Novo, the capital city of Benin. This is the city where I grew up and discovered myself. Porto-Novo is a city with several religious communities and multiple ethnic groups, including the Goun and the Yoruba in the majority. I cannot evoke memories of this charming town, still under construction, without being drawn to the recollections of traditional festivals called Agô observed every Saturday. For the Porto-Novian, everything is an occasion for celebration, whether it is a wedding, baptism, anniversary, or other event. What makes these festivals unique is the choice of fabrics, rich in colors and specific to each event. I also see in the rearview mirror of my past children playing small games or football in the neighborhood. It is an exercise that leads them to forge links and social connections.

Beyond all these memories echoes the atmosphere of the second largest market of Benin, the Ouando Market. In the past, the lively market usually occurred every three days, but nowadays, it usually opens every day and is very crowded. Some come to sell all kinds of local products, and others come to buy. It is a public rainbow full of heat and grunting. It remains an authentic display of culture very specific to Africa.

How can we not also recall the songs of the rooster at daybreak, the warm greetings throughout the day, the seller of donuts made with yams and beans in the afternoon, and the deafening music with some refreshments in the evening? Yes, all this is typical of Porto-Novo, but also of many other cities in Benin.

One day, I had to leave all this to create my own universe – a universe not so dense and rich in colors, but filled with love and hope. Yesterday, I was a child and teenager, but now I am a woman and mother on another continent. It is the cycle of life. However, the most important lesson remains: Enjoy the magic of life!

~ Elvire Ahouangbe

Getting to Know the Culture of Laos

Laos is a Southeast Asian country. The capital of Laos is Vientiane. There are five countries connected to Laos. They are Thailand, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Cambodia. The Laotian capital is connected to Thailand, which makes it very convenient for both countries to do businesses together.

Laos and Thailand are like siblings because they're able to communicate with each other. We most likely speak the same language. People in Laos are able to watch and understand Thai television channels, drama, movies and news. It is very interesting that people from two countries are able to understand each other without learning each other's language just like Canada and France or the United States and England.

Most of the people in Laos have family businesses. They like to stick together, work together, and eat together every day. Their transportation includes cars, minibuses and public buses, but motorcycles are the most common way to travel.

People in Laos buy their own land all in cash and build their own houses. Inside the house, the floor is tile (not carpet); the kitchen is outside because of the heat. They use charcoal and wood to make fire and cook. Dogs are their security.

The weather is hot ten months out of the year and cold only in January and February, so the people over there are able to plant all kinds of vegetables throughout the year.

Having cash with you is very important. They use cash everywhere and for everything such as transportation, shopping, buying gas and food, buying food at a restaurant, and parking lot fees. Credit cards are not accepted. To make a phone call or text, you need to buy a phone card. You must type the number on the back of the phone card into your cell phone.

There is no freedom of religion. There are no house addresses or mailboxes. If a house is away from the main street, there's no garbage pick up.

But the thing I love the most is the food! Food in Laos is very healthy and fresh, not frozen. If you're visiting there, you will rarely see big or fat people. There are few people with bad diseases over there because they eat healthy.

Almost everybody in Laos has the same background and culture. Laotian people are taught to trust each other. Children over there are more connected and home schooling is rare.

Most people in Laos have their own gardens. The people love to eat seafood. Few people have allergies. They pick fruits from trees! I miss all the fruit trees that I planted very much. I feel like we grew up together. I used to see all the trees that I planted every morning, and I liked to sleep under the trees and feel the fresh air.

Laos is a friendly country where all feel welcome.

~ Hing McGrath

Dear Peru

I want to let you know how important you have been in my life, and how grateful I am to my Heavenly Father for letting me be born in your tender arms – those strong and stately arms that rise majestically through all of your territory.

Your chain of high mountains covered with white snow forms large rivers that feed your fertile valleys. The great diversity found in your different altitudes allows you to have a variety of fruits and products that feed the population.

Peru, the land of the Incas – our ancestors gave us a legacy of wisdom. They taught us how to live with nature's rhythm. They knew when and where each seed should be sowed. They allowed your soil to rest so it could renew, and they cared about your forests.

Since I was a child, I have enjoyed listening to your ancient cultures. How proud I feel when I remember that I am a descendent of a great culture where respect and working together was so important. They worked for their communities and families to find their well-being.

I could never forget your extensive folklore. It expresses your people's experiences, joys, and gratitude in each cheerful manifestation. I thank God and mother Earth for every gift they lavished on us, and for you letting me grow in your land. I am surrounded by love and your largesse which God in his immense love gave to me. I love my country, I love my people, and I love our folklore and history.

I am happy to be Peruvian!!

~ Marina Rubio

The Real Truth about Buying Food in Venezuela

Today is Friday, the day that I can buy food. Not yesterday, not tomorrow, today. It's today because the government sets the day of the week its citizens can buy food according to the last number of our national ID. Friday is 8-9. My number is 14588108, so today, Friday, is my grand day of the week to buy food.

I requested the day off from work so I can go early to buy food. By "early" I mean waking up at 3:00 a.m. to go to different grocery stores searching for the shortest line. Yes, at 3:00 a.m. people are already forming lines at the grocery stores to buy food because they want to be the first to purchase. There isn't enough food for everybody in the third largest oil reserve country of the world, Venezuela.

I must be careful because a short line could sometimes mean that nobody knows if the store is going to sell any food. At 4:00 a.m., I finally find a store that I think will work, so I get in line. I am approximately 225th in the line. There is another line with about the same number, but it is for people who are pregnant, disabled, and older than 60 – not me.

The grocery store won't open until 9:00 a.m., and the lines will get much longer after public transportation starts at 5:30 a.m. Some people in the line spend the night at the door. Some get there very early because they have their own car. I am lucky enough to get a ride.

At 6:00 a.m. the trucks with food begin to arrive, and I feel lucky. Another grocery store is about 6 blocks from where I now stand. I walk there to see about a place in another line. I'm successful, so I walk back and forth between them to maintain my place for both stores.

The second store is set to open at 7:30 a.m., but I discover I am wasting my time because they have no food there. I return to my first line where I count the food packs from each truck, and

then again count my position in line. Yes, there is enough food for 700 people and I'm still 225th, so I'm in a good place – even with the second line for the special needs.

At 9:00 a.m., security controls the line by letting only 20 people into the store at a time. Soon, people start organizing in groups of 20 with one person collecting all the identification cards in the group. Time passes as I wait my turn with my group, but I still think we're fine.

It's 12:00 noon, and just one group is ahead of mine. As I stand waiting, someone comes out of the store and says, "The food purchase is over. There is enough left for only 10 more people." I'm stunned. I don't know what has happened because I counted the food packs and the people. I suspect the store employees and security guards got the first chance to buy food. I wonder about how much of that food will go to the black market. My 8 hours in line is a waste of time because there is no more food to buy.

A lot of things come to my mind. I don't know if I should laugh, cry, or yell. To eat today I must spend money at a restaurant where the average meal costs \$1.50 and where I can eat 3 times a day. I work 5 days a week, 8 hours per day to make \$30 a month. How can I survive? Is standing in line a waste of my time? Should I eat more often at restaurants? Should I spend money to find food on the black market? Fortunately, I realize that my \$30 a month is much better than the \$10 a month minimum wage in the country. I am lucky to make more than others. What would I do if I made just the minimum?

As I walk away from the grocery store, I thank God. It's now time to return to my house for some rest. I wake up later with hunger, so I organize the money I have until next Friday when I might be able to buy again. Maybe if I spend the night at the door of the grocery store, they might sell me some food.

This is my story from a year ago, but this is still happening in Venezuela today.

~ Antonio Valero

The Village Crocodile

Once upon a time,
 There was a very big crocodile in our village;
 No other crocodile would compare.
 The village houses were close to the lake
 Where every little sound could be heard.
 Daily, the crocodile alerted everyone with his deep growls.
 He woke us at 6:00 a.m.
 And growled the same deep song at 6:00 p.m.
 Grrrrr Grrrrr Grrrrr – three times in the morning
 And again in the evening.
 Like the sun, he became part of the rhythm of the village.
 Everyone sang his song!

~ Olayinka Harris

Monarch Sara

Chapter 1

Monarch Sara woke up with the morning sun shining in her eyes. She arrived at the Wildlife Island yesterday. Today, she wanted to look around the Wildlife Island.

She remembered that her father told her that the Wildlife Island is beautiful, and there is much food there. Her dad died on the North migration, and before her father passed away, he gave Sara the information to find the Wildlife Island.

Sara's father told her when she reaches the Wildlife Island, she should visit the local butterfly's friends, the Black Swallowtail, the Tiger Swallowtail, the Spicebush Swallowtail, and particularly the owner of the Wildlife Island, Uncle Gerald. Sara's father stressed that visiting Uncle Gerald every year is a rule in their family. The father explained the will to his children, and that the will should be transferred from one generation to the next generation. Every year on the migration path, from Mexico to North America in the spring, and from North America to Mexico at the end of summer, five generations of a Monarch's family are produced. However, just one generation can see Uncle Gerald, and Monarch Sara is one of the lucky ones.

After Sara looked around the island, she loved the area very much. She saw many milkweed plants, one of her favorite foods. Milkweed is a poison plant, but after a Monarch eats the plant, the Monarch will get the poison and the birds can't eat them. She saw many flowers that butterflies love. The beauty of many of the flowers made Sara happy. She would have a wonderful summer staying on the island.

Sara saw a strange thing. Many of the wild plants on the fences around the border of Wildlife Island are gone or have died. She didn't understand why the wild plants had been destroyed. The flowers from these wild plants are the best food for the

butterflies. Why had this happened? Sara wanted to ask Uncle Gerald about the reason.

Chapter 2

Sara visited all the butterfly families on the island and then they went to Uncle Gerald's house together. Sara wanted to meet Uncle Gerald.

"Good morning, Uncle Gerald. I am Monarch Sara, and I am glad to meet you."

"I am glad to meet you too, Monarch Sara. Welcome to my island. Welcome to all the butterflies," Uncle Gerald answered.

Monarch Sara saw Uncle Gerald was planting some bushes and flowers. Sara knew these plants well, because all butterflies like to enjoy them in summer.

Sara knew the work Uncle Gerald did for the butterflies, so she said to Uncle Gerald: "Thank you, Uncle Gerald, so much for building a beautiful habitat for us. Wildlife Island is our heaven."

"You are welcome, but the work I do is not enough. Protecting the wildlife is an important task in my life. God blesses you, and God blesses the Wildlife Island. It is God's will!" Uncle Gerald responded.

Sara recalled the surprising thing she saw that morning on the island, so she asked Uncle Gerald: "I saw many plants on the fences are destroyed, the plants you know are good food to us. It is terrible! What has happened to the plants?"

After listening to what Monarch Sara asked, Uncle Gerald's face changed from gladness to anger. He said excitedly to Sara, "The thing you mentioned has made me upset for a long time."

"So sorry, Uncle Gerald. I should not have mentioned the thing," Monarch Sara said.

“Yes, what you said is true. You have the right to claim them.” Uncle Gerald said. After a while Uncle Gerald calmed down, and he told Sara this story.

“This winter, a developer company rooted out the plants to lay a pipeline. They did not notice my landscape before doing the project. When I came home from work, I found the plants gone.” Uncle Gerald was upset talking about the plants to Sara.

“I had planted some of the plants over thirty years ago,” Uncle Gerald said.

Monarch Sara was shocked after Uncle Gerald finished the story. She said to other butterflies: “Why are some people so careless? Trees, shrubs, grass, flowers, and our butterflies make people happy. Some people do not treat us as treasures.” Monarch Sara was dazed. She could not understand the people’s action.

Sara was sad and said, “Our family has met a serious problem in Mexico. In winter, we need to stay on a tree called oyamel, but the local people like to cut down oyamel trees. The oyamel trees are like our ‘palace.’ If there are no oyamel trees, then there are no Monarch Butterflies.”

All butterflies worried about the fate of the Monarch butterfly family. They said to Uncle Gerald: “Can you help Sara and her family, Uncle Gerald? The Monarch is the only species of migrating butterflies in the world. We hope to see Sara during the summers every year.”

“Yes, I can!” Uncle Gerald answered. “I will tell people the purpose of the oyamel trees and to protect the trees. Let the Monarch butterflies live forever!”

“Let’s go plant more bushes and flowers around the border.” Uncle Gerald said. He was happy and held many plants. All the butterflies were happy. They flew around Uncle Gerald and went to the border with Uncle Gerald.

The Wildlife Island will have a bright future. Butterflies will live forever.

~ Chun Qin

The Coqui of Puerto Rico

Every Puerto Rico sunset is filled with the lively sound of song. It is a unique croaking sound that is beautiful to hear. You might think that it comes from a large bird, but in reality comes from a small frog about the size of a person's thumb.

Coqui, Coqui, Coqui, is his sweet singing.
 The Coqui of Puerto Rico lives among plants and flowers
 of my Island Boriquen.
 My sweet Coqui, I would like to have your sweet melodious
 singing to sweeten my dreams and soothe my awakening.
 Your song is accompanied by the sounds of nature
 to form the perfect symphony.

~ *Monica Chambers*

We Are All Ambassadors

It may sound imposturous to say that I am an ambassador for The United States, but I truly believe I represent the U.S. every day. I've been an aide/instructor for an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program for the last 10 years. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of ambassador is, "An authorized representative or messenger." Each day when I stand in front of my class, when I go to the grocery store, or when I'm on Facebook, etc., I feel I have the ability to make a difference, to be a messenger for the United States. We all can be ambassadors.

With the chaos and division this country is currently experiencing concerning immigration policies, I feel even more strongly that we all have a duty to be an emissary to this great land that we call home. To me, it's not about what side you're on, it's about showing the world that even though we have different opinions and views, we as Americans can unite as one. We all can be messengers of unity.

It's not a secret that people from other countries have strong negative stereotypes of Americans. We are often referred to as arrogant, ignorant to cultural awareness, spoiled, etc. As I stand up in front of my class each day, I strongly feel the need to spread the message of true American values. In my opinion, true American principles are love, respect, equality, hard work, practicality, and freedom. The one that I think trumps all principles is love. For me, the love of fellow human beings (whether American or not) is what holds me accountable to be the best representation for the U.S. that I can be. Love is the connection that binds us. When we love each other, we show trust, respect, and affection. Let us all be representatives of love.

The eyes of the world are on each of us every day. What will we say, how will we react, what action will we take? Let us, in our daily lives, even when someone is not watching, be the best that we can be. I feel as if it's a true privilege to teach the English

language and culture to people from all over the world. My only hope is that I can be a good image of my country and its people. As I see it, we all have a duty to love our neighbors as ourselves and to be countless ambassadors of The United States of America.

~ Julie Frye

United

As alone as we are in this universe
we look up to the stars and break the curse
the feeling of being so very small
like standing in a forest with trees limitlessly tall
but we will unite together in our little world
every man, woman, boy and girl
through all the conflict, disease and war
we learn to love each other a little more

~ Dylan Potter

LEARNING YOUR
LINES

My Life As I Was Growing Up

My mother raised four wonderful kids. I was born and raised on the east side of Dayton. As I was growing up, I started getting wild and a little crazy. I started getting in trouble at school and at home. I was not listening to my mother or to anybody who was older than me.

I was put in a special school for bad kids. They all thought it would help me, but I got worse. I started smoking weed. My mother then moved to Fairborn, Ohio, to see if that would help me, since I wouldn't be around my same old friends. But that didn't help.

I wouldn't listen in school.

I started stealing cars and was caught, so I was charged with a felony. The courts had me locked up for two years, and that's where everything really started going bad in my life. I didn't care about anything or anyone.

I moved back to Dayton and started hanging with old friends. I was eighteen. I didn't have a job. I needed money, so I started to do what I know best, breaking and entering and selling drugs. I got caught and sentenced to five years in prison. Since I was just eighteen years old, I didn't get back out until I was 23 years old.

I wasn't out long when I started doing bad again. I got more time. Then one day, I was home for two weeks, and something really bad happened. I lost my brother. Man, that really killed me and the rest of us, because we are very close! It made me change my whole life. I quit doing everything crazy, wild, and going to prison. I made a promise to my mother and brother in heaven to get out of that life.

So, that's why I'm here today. I changed my life 15 years ago. Now I'm trying to get a G.E.D. and prove to my mother and

daughter that a person can do anything. I love my life more than anything now that I have my daughter. It makes me look at life a lot differently.

~ *Virgil Shepherd*

Open Doors

I awake

Early, far earlier than yesterday.

It's time to go, to leave, to walk through that open door and
Enter the other,

The one forty-five minutes north, leading

Nearly four-hundred fifty minutes east

To my

New home.

Upon arrival, there awaits a friend

A glass of water, a simple snack.

Unbelievable, how much easier it is to walk through

An open door when it's held by a kindly soul!

From there, to the next door,

Then outside and forty-five minutes south, leading to a

Fourteen-month pattern of new life,

Teaching, learning, teaching, learning – English, so I thought.

Instead, there is curiosity,

Elation,

Insecurity,

Everything that comes with

The knowledge that I'm in a new country, a new culture,
and a new way of life.

Every day leads me

Through new doors, new passages

Each open door is a possibility, a new start, a new

Teaching opportunity.

I awake

Early, far earlier than yesterday.

It's time to go, to leave, to walk through that open door and
 Enter the other,
 The one forty-five minutes north, leading
 Nearly four-hundred fifty minutes west
 To my
 Home.

~ *Rebecca Elkevizth*

Where I'm From

I am from hot stoves
 From flour and seasonings
 I am from the homemade soup and spectacles
 From Cleveland and Natchez Avenue, soups and poultry
 I am from the waterfall in the back yard
 I am from the pine trees and the red roses
 Whose thorns could make you bleed the same color
 If you're not careful
 I am from Donald, and Vagner and Ziegler
 I am from clumsiness and wit
 From can-do's and can-not's, from respect and toughness
 I'm from Catholic churches with my grandmother on Sunday
 mornings
 From the cars my uncles and grandfathers restored, the roaring
 engines of classic cars
 And the fast hands of my uncle under the shifter
 I am from family pictures in old lost boxes
 I share their useful information passed down and their intelligence
 I share their legacy

With thanks to George Ella Lyon

~ *Matthew Vagner*

My Story

My name is Florence Mary Baseke.

I thank God for all that He has done for me in my life and continues to do for me. The week I started to attend GED on Wednesday, October 12th, was the week of my 58th birthday. In this week, I came to do the test to enable me get scores for entrance into the school. I was grateful for the offer.

I have lived through many challenges in my life. Being deaf and from village peasant parents who divorced were obstacles. But thanks to my courageous mother who loved me and accepted me despite the insults heaped on her – that it was a curse which made me become deaf. She did all she could to see I lived and grew up as a normal person. She worked harder on the farm by cultivating cash crops. She planted coffee, cotton, maize, beans and bananas for sale.

From the sale of crops on 2 acres of land, she was able to send me to a hearing school through a teacher who told her that I ought to start attending. It was then I developed clear handwriting by copying letters from books and newspapers with pictures. This inspired me to look at and copy what was written on them. I had no knowledge of what they meant. My mother also did not know if the words I had written were in English. Those who could read English were able to understand the words I copied and wrote correctly on the papers. My mother did not attend school but was willing to ask the teacher to tell her what I had written on the papers. She collected my written papers for him to see and he read the words. He in turn told her that I ought to be sent to his school and start learning. He was going to deal with me as a deaf child by helping me do what he told others to do at school.

The first day I attended school, the teacher told me to write what was on the blackboard. It was to write numbers from 1 to 20. I had not known about that. So writing number 5 was hard for

me, and I made it a bigger one than the rest of my numbers. It was a struggle to write it correctly and small. During those years, there were no pre-school classes but started with P 1, (called class 1 in primary school). Here they call it grade one in elementary school. While at school, I encountered difficulties with communication. The teacher talked in the class while teaching but for me, I could only look at him without hearing what he was saying. He would try to face me and speak opening wide his mouth so that I could lip read what he was telling me. Other times, after I had learned to spell, he would write on papers. This led to learning how to write my name and other things. As I learned words, communication on paper developed.

At home, my mother struggled with me in communication. We used lip reading, so I watched her when she talked to me. She sometimes cried when I could not understand what she tried to tell me. There would also be some signs by stretching out her hands with gestures like calling me to go to her or telling me that I take things to other areas outside with direction signs.

Later, through a church priest, we were able to get a place in a Primary Boarding Deaf School in Kenya after 5 years struggling to learn in a hearing primary school. I was happy to meet other deaf children but communicating in signs was puzzling to me because I was used to lip reading and writing on papers back home. The education taught in classes was different from what I had learned in previous years. What was studied in P 3 at hearing school was being taught to the deaf in P 6. And what was taught in P 4 and 5 were partly taught to the deaf in P 7. It was the end for us in Primary Deaf School. After that, we were supposed to attend Vocational Training for the Deaf in sewing, cooking, and home nursing, and typing since teachers believed we (deaf people) could not make it up to Primary Leaving Certificate Examination and then attend Secondary School (middle school) and high school. There was no hope for university education. They said it because many of us had poor peasant village parents, who brought some of us with only two dresses, no shoes, one old bed sheet and a blanket. Some of the deaf children were so poor.

The white missionary did much to assist them by providing clothes, uniforms, bedding, and some shoes. For me, it was not that, but I lacked other things.

While I was in Kenya, wars broke out in our homeland, Uganda, through government coups. As a result, I had to stay in Kenya for many years. It was in Kenya that I got to know about Gallaudet University in Washington DC here in the USA. It is a university for the deaf, and deaf from other countries were studying there. A deaf young man who studied at the hearing secondary school a mile and half from our deaf school got sponsorship by a friend in the Baptist Church. He flew to Seymour in Tennessee to finish middle and high school. He went to Gallaudet to learn American Sign Language. While there, he hoped that some of us would make it to the USA. He sent us information about Gallaudet and its admission process. It required passing an entrance examination in math and English for secondary school. For us we did not have to do secondary education in those past years of 1970s.

I thought it would be good for me to attend Gallaudet too, but how could I get money for the secondary school education? I tried to tell my mom that deaf school education was bad, but she did not believe me. She was unable to meet the cost of its education since her income was average compared to other village peasants with large farms. She also had no contacts with government people. How could I get money to come to the USA? Everything resulted in a hopeless situation as wars continued. Private companies owned by Indians and NGOs were closed down. Indians and white missionaries got expelled from the country within 90 days. Poverty came in and made our people suffer for many years, nearly 20 years of economic collapse.

With prayers I learned to pray and got inspired in reading the Bible as I was good in my Christian Religious Education class. I loved hearing the teacher tell us about Abraham and how God asked him to give him his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed and God was pleased with him for being honest.

I was led into marriage, but it seemed God did not want it because His purpose was for me to come to the USA. My late husband was an abuser and a drunkard. He used to beat me, and one day he assaulted me badly while I was three months pregnant with my last fourth child, Deborah. That was the end of our marriage. We were divorced.

I became homeless and was sent away with little money for fare to my deaf friend's house. She welcomed me and invited me to stay with her until delivery. She did not have enough money, but we managed to live on one meal each day with some fruits. When time was approaching for delivery, my deaf friend went to attend a Deaf Annual General Meeting which called for them to stay two days in a hotel. This resulted in me delivering my baby alone in her house. We had moved to a new area and the doctor said the baby would come in a few days, but to my surprise and shock, the baby came before that. In pain, I prayed asking God to assist me in delivering my baby safely, and He heard my prayers. I had a little experience gained from First Aid study at the hospital where I worked some years ago. I would get permission from the senior midwives to watch and see how mothers were delivering their babies in the maternity ward. This enabled me to do what they did. My baby came out of the womb safely at 4:20 a.m. I tied her umbilical cord tightly, then cut it. I wrapped her in sheets with a blanket. Then I crawled to light a kerosene stove for warm water and washed my baby. By the next day, I asked someone to go to a missionary office and tell the lady there to come and take me to the hospital. Today, my baby is 24 years old.

My experiences in my life as a single parent, working hard and bringing up my children, have taught me to understand challenges facing many women who are voiceless because they see no way but to keep living as they are.

But they do all they can to send some of their children to school. I am happy to say, my children were able to receive education, some through university level.

Now I feel is my time to pursue education that I have longed for, for many years. My goal is to work hard and graduate University with a degree in community development.

A word of thank you to those who are encouraging and enabling me to get my GED, and who are providing me transportation to attend class. Without them, I would be staying at home, helpless and hopeless with learning.

~ Florence Mary Baseke

I Am From . . .

I am from a melody
my mother sang to me,
From the back yards
Hiding in the trees.

The morning air
freezing on my toes.
I am from the crowded
space shared with me.

I am from the singing birds
that comfort me.
I am from the hunger
Before sleep.

I am from the chaos,
The want, the dream.

~ Angela Bland

I Love to Learn English

Learning English is very important to everyone. When you improve your English you can speak; you can read; you can write. Speaking English is also very important for your life especially when you live in America.

For example, in 2014, my husband, my children, and I went to a Kroger store. My husband and children stayed in the car and waited for me to finish shopping. I was new in the country so when I had finished shopping, I went to the cashier. I remembered something that I needed to buy, but the cashier did not understand me because I was speaking both Somali and English. She said, "I cannot understand you. What are you saying?" I understood some words she was saying, but I could not repeat the words or use them in a sentence. She called her co-workers over and none of them understood me. So I decided not to go back and get the item I had forgotten. The cashier said, "Do you have a Kroger card?" She laughed at me. Tears welled up in my eyes. After that, another Kroger employee came and showed me how to use the Kroger card. The first cashier told me that I would have to go to school to learn English. I decided she was right and enrolled in school. I finished checking out at Kroger and left the store.

When I went back to my car, I told my husband that I would not shop by myself anymore and that I needed to learn English. So, that day I decided to enroll in English classes. I chose Eastland Career Center to take ESL classes. Now, I can speak, write, and read English. Finally, I want to thank God and then my teachers who teach me English.

~ Salma Mohamed

In Mama's Kitchen

I remember sitting at mama's kitchen table
 After school
 Pots hissing, boiling, singing our supper.
 On the yellow oilcloth,
 In a marble composition notebook,
 Are her family recipes
 Filled with cups of flour and teaspoons of sugar
 And words that I don't know.
 I take her ballpoint pen
 To an empty page
 And write the story
 Of my eight-year-old life.

~ Nancy Greissing

Sunday School Fool

There he stood in his little Sunday School. He often thought of what there was out there to do. So he left that little Sunday School and went out into the world and drank fermented wine. He liked it mighty fine. He thought he was having such a good time.

He chased wild women. He had more than one or two. He had so many women he didn't know what to do. For you see that Sunday School fool had fallen in love with a bottle of booze!

He thought to himself, "I'll brew my very own bottle of booze." So he built himself a still, and he brewed the most powerful bottle of booze. He like it well. He drank it for a decade or two. Then one day, he awoke and found he had no shoes. All he had was an empty bottle of booze! That Sunday School fool had become a drunken fool!

He thought to himself, "I'll buy myself some new clothes, and I'll go back to school." So, he bought himself some clothes, and off he went to the local school. He became an educated man, and now he doesn't feel so much like a fool. He likes to wear nice clothes, just like me and you.

He often thought of that little Sunday School way back when he was not such a fool. He returned to that little Sunday School, and now he teaches on Sunday. Now there stands a man, not a drunken fool. For you see, God forgives both you and me, and God forgives Sunday School fools.

~ Michael Newman

Back on Track

Let me start by saying that my life has been very difficult. I have to admit that so much of it is my own fault by the choices I made. I could go into my life story, but instead I'm going to focus on the reason I'm in my ABLÉ class today. I am a recovering addict with 14 months of sobriety. I'm getting my life back on track. I need to regain some control.

In the past, I have attended ABLÉ classes. I would sign up, go to an orientation, attend a few classes, and boom, just like that, I quit. Not this time. This time will be different. I am now able to think with a clean and clear mind, and I have set goals for myself. I am going to walk away from this program with my GED. I am going on to college and graduate so that I can start a career. I have realized I cannot overwhelm myself and change all at once. It takes time.

I've also learned I'm not good at making my own decisions. I need God in my life. By letting go and letting God take control, I can accomplish anything. I know this because God has already worked a miracle in my life with my sobriety. I am now completely free from the power of heroin, the most evil drug on earth. I tried for many years to fight my addiction on my own. It was not until I got on my knees, praying, crying, and begging God for help, that I felt free.

I allowed the power of the drug to control me for so long. I would be so impaired from the drug I'd come up with these bright ideas like wanting to go back to school and wanting to change my life. I would tell myself that I was going to go to rehab and be a better mom, daughter, and sister. Even being court-ordered to participate in and complete the GED program or get drug treatment never seemed to make a difference. I continued on a path of destruction.

But now, being sober, life is amazing. My focus is on using the ABLÉ program to get my GED and accomplish the goals I've

set. I want to be proud of myself. I want to make my parents and children proud. Most of all, I want to strengthen my relationship with God. In completing these goals, I feel my life will be on track. As long as I take advantage of the awesome opportunities God has blessed me with, I feel I am on the right path.

~ *Elizabeth Norman*

SUPPORTING ROLES

Because of Grandma

Is there someone special in your life that has made a positive impact? I am fortunate enough to be blessed with a grandmother who continues to have a positive influence on me. My grandmother is like no other in the world! She helps others like they are her best friends, spends quality time with the family, and always finds time for me. How can you not help love a person like that, especially one so close in the family, who gives her all, yet makes time for you?

Every Sunday after church service my grandma always manages to serve a wonderful Sunday dinner, her way of keeping all her grandkids together. Her house is like a magnet, creating long-lasting memories we're able to share as the years go by. After meals during fall and winter, all the kids get outside for rounds of some pretty rough football. During spring and summer it's roundball and getting out in the garden and doing our fair share.

She makes sure all her grandchildren go to church. Through her insistence and encouragement, I'm blessed with a solid moral compass. Her kindness and tenderness help me through the rough storms of life, getting me to settle down just when needed. Not long ago when she had me washing and styling her hair before services and I was going through a very rough patch in my life. She listened to every detail and told me her experiences. Oh, how encouraging they were to me, making my problems seem like practically nothing.

Even when helping others and I'm with her, she treats me like royalty. When she helped my uncle with rabbits he was raising for a 4H club, she would help me feed and water, make nests when they were ready for breeding, and take them to shows. I find myself wanting to help others even more as time goes by, especially spending many moments doing what I can for my neighbor, who is disabled.

She's still like a mother to me. Even though she is no longer with us and has been a great loss to me, the memories continue to give me a boost. They remind me I can do what needs to get done in life to make it worthwhile. She continues to inspire me to treat others as if they are part of my family and closest friends.

Writing this is my way of saying "thank you grandma" for always being that person who put meaning in my life.

I love you with all of my heart. One day I will see you again.

Your granddaughter

~ Bobby Jo Davis

My Studies

My name is Augustine Hakiza. I am a Congolese, born in DR Congo. In 1999 I left my country because of war. We ran away from Congo to Uganda. I was eight years old. I was with my family. I was able to go to school because my first level was free. For the second level I had to pay tuition, which my father started paying for me. After two years he passed away, and I stopped because I had nobody to pay school fees. My mother was old. She had no way to pay for me to continue my studies.

After one year, I joined a course to play guitar. My uncle was the team leader so I didn't pay any fees. After two years I started teaching other people. It was for everyone. No matter how young or old, you could join so long as you had money to pay. I continued teaching guitar for 1½ years.

In 2014 I saw a man with a lady coming to my house from the office. We had an organization which welcomed us known as UNHCR. The people were from there. Then they told me that my name had been written on the list of people going to the USA. I could not believe that because I had no hope of coming to the United States of America. Because of the power of God, it was like that. It took me two years to proceed with the process.

When I arrived here to the United States of America, another organization welcomed me, the ISC (International Services Center). I had a caseworker whose name was Mr. Abraham. He was a good man, and I liked him. The way he welcomed me was so nice. Then he told me to join an English class, so I did. After a couple of months he gave me a test for English and then he told me to join a GED class. I did that and now I am taking my GED class and I hope I will have a good future with my family. I am a man with a wife and three children.

Never lose hope.

~ Augustine Hakiza

Progress

About a month ago, I helped one student prepare to take the ESOL progress test. I tried to teach what the direction signs meant... up, down, right, left, and so on. I was dancing like a traffic cop. I tried everything that I could, but she just didn't get it.

I know she was frustrated. I was frustrated too, and I actually felt like crying. I felt that I was not good enough to help her understand what she needed to understand to take the test and make progress. I told her, "I am sorry!" She then replied, "No, I am sorry and don't cry." She said that what she really needed was to learn the ABCs. That was a relief. I told her that it would be okay for us to forget about the signs that show direction and the progress test. I would just help her write her ABCs.

After class, I told Emily, the teacher, what had happened. I told her the student and I practiced the ABCs and that I gave the student a practice paper to take home and practice at home over the weekend.

On Monday the student came back to class and said that she practiced her ABCs. She looked like she couldn't wait to show me that she did practice! I took the student out of the classroom to study in private with her. She said she knew all the ABCs now. I tested her on them, and she was right! She really practiced a lot at home. She wrote the entire alphabet without looking. It made her feel good, but it made me feel great!

She did finally take her progress test. She didn't do well on it, and she may have had a little stress at the beginning because she didn't know her directional signs, but at least now she knows all of her ABCs. I am so proud of her. She thanked me, and I thanked her back because she had made my day. This experience is what teachers live for.

~ Kilcha Canfield

My Great American Mom, Dorene

From: Dorene Miller

To: ...

Dear Friends,

Today, I went to Kohl's in Wooster and they had their Kohl's Cares Paddington Bear and Corduroy Bear on clearance for only \$1.50 + tax. I bought a bunch for our kids in Zambia, but would love to have many more to be able to give a bear to every child who comes to Sunflower Orphanage in the next few years. It would be a wonderful gift; their very own toy to love and cuddle at bedtime! Maybe you have a child in your life who would want to buy one for an orphan who has no toys or stuffed animals. ...

*Blessings,
Dorene Miller*

Dorene. She is my "adopted" American mom. Although she does not have a fancy house, a luxury car, or expensive clothes, she has a heart to love children and Africa. She feels their pain and their poverty. She appreciates the daily bread that is on the table. She is always dignified, and her red hair always shines.

We first met at Melrose, where my two daughters attend school. She is a teacher at Melrose. The first time I came here, two years ago, everything was strange and difficult for my family. My little girl, who did not even know the alphabet, burst into tears on the first day of school. After I dropped my kids off at the school, I could not do anything. All day I was just full of worries about my children. Did they find the restroom? Did they eat lunch well? I was worried unduly. The children were more adaptable than an adult like me. When they were in trouble, there was always Dorene next to them.

We have spent a lot of time together over the last few years. The first outing she suggested was a trip to the Cleveland Metroparks

Zoo. The following was one of the first letters from her. The times we shared started like this.

Dear Seunghee,

“Boo at the Zoo” is a lot of fun. If you are interested in going, maybe we can arrange to go together, and I will drive. The Cleveland Zoo is about 1 hour from Wooster.

Sincerely,
Dorene

Boo at the Zoo. It was raining that night. Mr. and Mrs. Miller had packed up thick, warm coats for us, as if to anticipate the fickle weather in Ohio and had prepared dinner. She told us about the origin of Halloween, the costumes and Jack-o'-Lantern of the Halloween festival, all of which were unfamiliar to us. My two daughters were amazed and excited, and that night we danced together in the rain.

*“A Thanksgiving Invitation”
Join us for dinner as we celebrate all of our many blessings
Thursday, November 26th 5:00 p.m. at our home
hosted by Dorene and Mark*

Thanksgiving Day. It was the first turkey I'd eaten in my life. She is always good at cooking and prepared a lot of delicious food for my family's first Thanksgiving. She explained the origins of Thanksgiving and said that we should be thankful for everything we have now.

Hello Seunghee,

Did you know that the Cleveland Orchestra is #1 in the world? They give amazing concerts, and there are many concerts and activities for children. I made a copy of their most recent mailing, so you would be aware of some wonderful activities for the girls.

Hugs, Dorene

O Holy Night. When we were just leaving for the concert in Cleveland, flurries of snow began to fall. Mr. and Mrs. Miller dressed nicely. As we got closer to Severance Hall, the road began to clog up. We barely found parking in the nearby lot and walked with short, quick steps in the snow. Severance Hall was brilliantly beautiful, and the orchestra was the best I've heard. We sang along to “O Holy Night.” They sang in English, and we sang in Korean. Though the language was different, we were united in the same melody.

친애하는 승희,

우리는 크리스마스 12월 25일 저녁에 우리 집에 오신 것을 환영합니다.
우리는 저녁 식사가 제공되기 전에 충족될 시간을 위해 4:30분에 도착하기를 요구하고 있다.
우리는 당신이 우리와 함께 축하하기 위해 여기에 있을 것 입니다. 너무 행복하다!

도린과 마크로부터

** I tried to translate her awkward Korean letter into English:*

Dear Seunghee,

We welcome you to our home on Christmas evening, December 25th. We are asking to arrive at 4:30 pm for the time to be met before dinner is served. We will be here to celebrate you with us. I am so happy!

From Dorene and Mark

Christmas Party. I received an awkward Korean letter from her about the Christmas party. It was her first Korean letter written in a strange word order with grammar that made little sense. I was embarrassed, because I thought that my English letters may have been similarly awkward. However, her awkward Korean letter gave me a calm impression.

I spent Christmas with her twice. On the second Christmas over one year ago, she gave me an ornament that says “A Daughter is a Blessing.” My “adopted” mom and I were gradually becoming less foreign and more intimate with each other.

Dear My Sweet Daughter,

Enjoy your New Year's celebration with your friends at church.

We are going to church right now. Please give our best wishes for a happy new year to all our friends at the church! Please extend a special greeting to Josh and Julie and for them we wish many blessings as they lead their congregation in the name of Jesus Christ. We send lots of hugs and kisses to you, Youngchoel and our granddaughters. Happy New Year, my sweethearts!

Lots of love from mom and dad

Blessings. I spent two summers, two falls, two winters, and one spring with her. After this spring comes to an end, we'll return to Korea. From the first time we came here, we were just visitors for my husband's business here for two years. The Korean people living here did not want to share the time and deep conversations with us, because they already knew we would eventually leave. After somebody leaves, there is a sorrow in those who are left. It might be painful for them to miss their home country. We could understand the invisible walls they had built up.

My American parents were different, though. When we were struggling with an unfamiliar language and strange places, they reached out to us. Now they are saddened that we will be leaving in only a few months.

Dorene has taught over the past 20 years and this year is her final year as a teacher. Her dream is to build a children's library in Zambia in Africa. She has made a lot of efforts over many years to raise the funds, and is still working on it. A few days ago, she was so happy that a heart-warming architect who attended her church made a free blueprint for the library. While I looked at the blueprints, I imagined the children who would be happy to read books comfortably in the warm library.

However, I am concerned about several neurological surgeries my American mom has recently had. She left for the Cleveland Clinic for the last surgery early this morning, and I am praying that her

dream will not be frustrated due to her own health. I just received a text from my American father. "Your mom is out of surgery. Everything is fine."

I think that the last two years of my time here have been a blessing to me. I had difficulties because of language barriers. Because I could not speak quickly, I could hear more and listen to others. I could think a lot before speaking. I learned from my American mom that love goes beyond language and cultural differences.

~ Seunghee Chae

My Inspiration

Why did I choose my mother for this essay you ask?
Because being a Father and a Mother must've been a hard task.

She supported a child who was mentally ill;
she helped me survive and worked hard to pay every medical bill.

She acquired a lot of debt from loans to help us eat.
She would cover our ears when Dad would yell;
I found comfort in her heartbeat.

While raising three kids, with one who was unstable,
she went to work in fear that something bad would happen,
just to put food on the table.

Her arms were like sunshine and her smile like grace,
but her temper and voice always put us in our place.

When the world gave up on me, my mother did not;
she told me I could achieve anything if I gave it a shot.

My father was abusive, so he left when I was a kid;
my mother raised me well and protected me and my sister
from the harm that he did.

I don't feel like I ever made my mother proud.
I dropped out of high school,
forgetting the speech I wrote early for the graduation crowd.

But my mother did not hate me. She only frowned a little bit.
She believed I could make it with a small amount of wit.

Then I joined ABLE to make my mother smile,
something she hasn't done a while.

So I chose my mother for this essay I wrote,
because there is nothing greater
than my mother's influence and love.
She has helped me to take this road.

~ Paige Davis

This Is My Story

My life is full. I am a happy 45-year-old mother and grandmother. My goal is to make a better life for my family. When I receive my high school equivalency diploma, I will be able to begin the career I dream of – nursing and caring for the elderly. I have a passion for helping other people.

Right now, I have a new responsibility in my life. I just received custody of my 11-year-old nephew. I went through the court system on my own to provide a stable home for him. Throughout his life, he faced problems that no child should have. His parents struggled with addiction and mental illness. The family moved many times, and the boy's education was interrupted. He faced the uncertainty of court placement and foster care.

I became the solution that he needed and I wanted. Although my eyes were closed when I started this journey, my heart was open. It's been a long time since I had a child to raise under my roof and my life and his will change – for the better. I have the confidence that my brother's son will become my child. I enjoy being someone important for him to look up to and to love.

It's been three weeks since my nephew joined me. I have hopes and dreams for him and his future. He may be in my house only until he is 18, but we will always have a bond. The first step was enrolling him in school. When his first day of school arrived, he woke up and was dressed by 3:00 a.m.! I also want him to join after-school activities. He loves playing basketball and watching it on TV. He enjoys family time and being with his two older sisters. This summer he hopes that he can go as far away as an amusement park. He has never been to the Quicken Loans arena in Cleveland, but this weekend we have tickets for the Monster Truck Jam. I know that it will be a wonderful experience for him, the kind any little boy would love.

There will always be challenges. Right now, I don't have a full-time job, and I know that welfare is not a permanent solution. When I receive my diploma, I will be able to work to become a nurse and provide a better life for him. I can be an example for him.

~ *Sharrita Cooper*

DRAMA

A Big Surprise

When I found I was pregnant with my second child, I was very happy because I had waited seven years for that to happen. On my first appointment with the doctor everything was fine and normal. My husband and I were very excited. My son was also very happy but a little jealous; for eight years he had all the attention, and in a few months he would have to share it with the new member of the family. I remember at that time we were about to move here to Ohio from Kentucky, so it was another change for him, but I knew that he could overcome everything with our help.

When we moved to Ohio I was around three months pregnant, so I started to look for a doctor to check my pregnancy. I made my first appointment. When the time for my ultrasound came, I was in my fifth month. I was a little nervous because it was the first time I would see my baby through the screen. I wanted to know its weight and size, and I wanted to know if it was a boy or a girl. And the most important thing I wanted to know was that the baby was healthy. The doctor started the ultrasound and told us that the baby was a girl. That made me so happy. She also said that everything was normal. She is going to weight about 5 lb. I looked at my husband and said, "It's too small." My oldest son weighed 6 lb. when he was born, so I asked the doctor why the baby was too little, and she said that probably because I was thin. "You don't have to worry about her size; it is still normal, and the baby looks good," she said.

I started to worry anyway. In my mind, I kept trying to find a reason why my baby was that small. I weighed 7 lbs. when I was born and my husband more than that. I was trying to feed myself well. I was healthy. I knew the doctor told me that everything was fine, but I could not stop thinking about it. I continued visiting the doctor every four weeks, and everything was good. At the 29th week, I visited the doctor for another ultrasound, and there was a problem. I didn't have enough amniotic fluid, so the doctor told me that she had to induce labor. That made me feel very sad because my baby was going to be born two months early. The doctor told

me to come back the next day for another ultrasound and to proceed with the delivery.

The next day they did the ultrasound. The amniotic fluid was normal, so they sent me home. Finally my daughter was born on time and without any problem, and there was a big surprise for us, even for the doctor. She said, "The baby weighed 9 pounds!" I remember the doctor looking at me and asking me, "Where did you hide that big baby?" I still don't know what happened with the ultrasound, but what a surprise we all had that day. I was so happy seeing my big baby girl, healthy and beautiful. Next week she will turn seven years old, and she is one of the tallest in her class, a very healthy, smart, beautiful and sweet girl who makes us feel proud every day.

~ *Veronica Almeida*

Praying for Peace

I am from a small village near Ramallah City, a town at the top of the mountains of Palestine. I spent much of my life in Ramallah under the Israeli occupation that killed my childhood. It was an occupation that killed many beautiful moments in my life, the occupation that was a part of every moment, in schools, homes, streets, and even in my dreams.

While on my way to school, I used to pass through checkpoints controlled by soldiers who never distinguished between adults or kids. We all were their enemies and possible targets of their weapons at any second. I don't remember a day going to school without smelling tear gas or hearing the sound of rockets or bullets. With the entire struggle, the love of the land and the nation was increasing in my soul.

The Holy Land had always been a land for everyone and for every religion. I still remember the streets when they were shared by Christians, Muslims, and Jews. I still remember when we were celebrating each other's holidays. Then the Israeli occupation came to the land and destroyed the unity.

Eventually, I moved to the United States and proudly became a citizen of a new country, a country that gives us freedom of religion and freedom of speech, a country that returned my childhood to my soul. I am praying every day for peace and wish to see Palestine live in peace as well.

I will continue to teach my children to love everyone.

~ *Karima Jabrah*

Street Fighting and Addiction

I grew up in a little town in Ohio. I'm the oldest of 3 kids. I have a sister and a brother. I remember as a child that my grandmother spoke German, and I learned it too. Later on I would find out why I was always different from the other kids. I didn't fit in. I spoke English with an accent. I spoke broken German. I got made fun of a lot. I didn't have friends. I was around 5 years old at this time. My father was of German descent, and my mother was of Italian descent. My mother stayed home with us kids, and my father worked at a couple factories and then landed a good job at the highway department. His hard work helped him get promoted to supervisor. My mother left our family when I was just 5 years old.

On the weekends my dad would take me to the bars in the old neighborhood. I loved hanging out with my dad. When I was about 6 or 7, I was shining shoes in the saloon. I stepped outside to get something out of my dad's car and put my shine box away. A couple of boys standing outside took the money that I had earned. I went in and told my father what had happened. It must have embarrassed him in front of his friends because he made me go back out and get my money back. I stepped out of the saloon and confronted the kids. The kids wouldn't give the money back. I knew if I went back inside my dad would give me a good going over. That fear made me attack the boys. After a few minutes, all of my dad's friends and my dad formed a circle around us. One by one I beat the kids to a pulp. The men were cheering and started betting on the fight. I got my money back. That's when I knew that's what I was going to do in life. From that point on, my dad started taking me around to all the other bars, basements, and alleys in the city, and I would fight. It was like a fight club.

I was good. My dad's friends told me I was a really good fighter. I was winning. That's when my dad met a guy who had trained with Cassius Clay. His name was William "Billy" Joiner. Little did I know how much this moment would define my life.

My dad told him about me. He said he wanted to "take a look at me." They took me to a ghetto gym. They watched me spar. Billy felt I was worth coaching. Once we started working together, I started winning all my fights. It was still street fighting, but I was winning. I was only 10 at this point.

This went on until I was 12. During this time, I was not made to go to school. All I did was fight and sleep. As I began to get older, I started to get broken noses, my face was busted up, my hands hurt all the time, and I just had all-over physical pain. I looked for something to help with the pain, and my dad gave me alcohol. It made the pain go away, but I'd pass out and wake up the next day very sick. This happened at least once a week. This went on for a year or so. Between 13-15 years old, I suffered a broken nose. There was a drug dealer who would hang out at the fights and bet. One night he gave me cocaine to numb the pain. It gave me a sense of euphoria. It made everything wonderful. I felt no pain. It heightened my senses, my reflexes, and made me faster. Most of all it relieved the pain. After a while Billy began noticing my performance was slipping. He had no idea I was using cocaine. He was a decent man. He wouldn't have stood for the drug use. This would have ruined his reputation. He dropped me as a student. Also, my doctor wouldn't clear me to fight anymore. At this point in my life, I still hadn't completed a full year of school since second grade.

I kept fighting on my own. I was winning "mean man" and "tough man" contests. The drugs and alcohol became the center of my life. I was about 20 years old at this point. I finally got a job at the highway department, and my boss was my old coach Billy. He thought I was not doing drugs anymore. I ended up working there 20-25 years. I was still fighting on and off. My last fight was in 1997 when I was 31. My last fight occurred right after I quit drinking and doing drugs. I started to suffer physical episodes where I would wake up in the ER and have no idea how I got there. The drugs and booze weren't working anymore. I wasn't finding the comfort from reality that it had once given me. My good friend cocaine turned on me. First I tried to quit cold turkey. It was such a powerful psychological problem that it never

left my mind. A friend of mine at work told me I needed help. I checked myself into rehab. There were few people back then that had a lot of knowledge to rehab addicts. They got me to join AA. So I started attending meetings, and once again I felt I didn't fit in. The alcoholics didn't like to be around a cocaine user. They felt they couldn't relate. I ignored them since I was so desperate. I just kept going to the meetings. I started toying with the idea that maybe God could help me. That's when I found the Lord and gave my life to the Lord.

I finally retired from the highway department. Since I couldn't fight any more, I wanted to try coaching. I had saved up enough money to buy my own gym. I needed a sense of direction in my life. In praying to God, I found out later on that he has a sense of humor.... Watch what you ask for because you just may get it. I started training young kids to box in USA amateur boxing competitions. This gave me purpose in life. I didn't want these kids to take the hard knocks like I had to. The USA amateur boxing organization gave the kids an avenue to turn their energy into something positive, and I was a part of that. At this point in my life, I had accomplished coaching a few national champions. I had nobody to share this success with since I had lost my brother, sister, father, uncle, grandmother. I did, however, find out I had a daughter. I had relations with a prostitute back in the day and a child resulted from this. The child's mother didn't want her. It was "cramping her style," so I formally took custody of my daughter. We always had a strained relationship from childhood on, but I love her and raised her the best I knew how. To this day I help her to raise her own children even though we don't always see eye to eye. My grandchildren are the center of my life. They are God's greatest gift to me. They give me the purpose I have wanted for a long time. Yet again they are another defining moment in my life.

Recently, while at the gym, I had gotten word that my old coach Billy had been diagnosed with "Boxer Brain" or dementia pugilistica. I felt like once again, God was playing a dirty trick on me. God was taking a person in my life who meant so much to me. I felt I had to do something. I prayed and prayed on it. My friends in AA told me that I needed to go back to school and start

learning. I knew at that point that if I ever wanted to help my old coach I needed an education. That's when I started going to GED classes. I met my teacher, Katie. I found that I wasn't as slow or dumb as I thought I was. She made me realize that I could do this. I could learn! I knew then, that since I had the confidence to learn, I could someday help my coach.

Some days in GED class I still have doubts about my learning ability. I question God's will for me. But, I just hang in there. I get really good encouragement from the teachers and all the volunteers. They keep me going with my education. No longer do I think about myself much anymore. I think God wants me to serve humanity on a different level. I can make up for all the stuff I've done in life and for all the people I've hurt. Being an inspiration to my grandchildren is everything to me.

~ Michael Schnetzer

The Truth, Continued

When I returned a second time to the United States from my native country of Mexico, it was in July of 2000. This time it was a bit trickier than the first time. I had been waiting for a few days at the border in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, with a group of fifteen people and a friend of my husband who was helping our group. Our first stop was to get across the border and then travel to Douglas, Arizona. Our final destination was Philadelphia.

Along with the fifteen people were a baby, four children, and four women. We were told not to bring money, jewelry, or anything of value as people were stealing. We had to take two taxis to get to a road where we had to start waiting again. It was about 9:00 p.m., and it was so dark that we could hardly see where we walked. We crossed the Mexican border and walked beside houses, railways, and wastelands.

We had barely walked for 20 minutes when four people came to rob us. Women and children were put to the side, and the men told us that we had to give them what we had. I did not give anything because I didn't have anything. However, some in our group had money and had to give it to the robbers. The men with us were stripped from shoes to pants. When the robbers were finished stealing, they had taken the men's shoes and left old shoes in their place. Some of these shoes were too small, but the men had to wear them anyway. The men finished dressing and kept walking with fear and shoes that didn't fit.

We walked for about an hour until we reached a road with a barbed wire fence. We had to back up a little, because the Border Patrol was patrolling nearby. Soon we jumped the barbed wire fence. We expecting a truck with a coyote for the guide. The truck arrived, and we climbed in and got allocated seats. I was a little scared when the coyote asked me if I came alone, but I told him I came with my husband. I had gripped the guide's hand, and he did not say anything as we went.

We traveled for 20 minutes on the road until he stopped and left us under a bridge. We waited there for two hours, slept a little, and then another truck came for us. They took us to an apartment where we spent the rest of the night. When the morning came, they began to divide us up. I did not know how the others were doing. I stayed there until my husband came for me, and we went to a hotel. We stayed there for two days. We could not get out at that time because they were arresting immigrants.

Then my husband's friend, who had helped me at the border, got us airplane tickets to Philadelphia. They told us to get dressed formally to avoid arousing suspicion. Soon it was time to take the plane to Philadelphia. We arrived in Philadelphia late at night, and we went to a bus station. We stayed until the early morning and then took a bus and a taxi. Finally, we arrived to Manayunk on the edge of Philadelphia.

Arriving in Philadelphia, I felt calm, thinking that I was no longer in any danger. Shortly after that, I started the process of living a new life.

~ Norma Feregrino

The Value of Freedom ...When You Don't Have a Choice

Freedom should be like the sun shining on every spirit without any conditions. It is painful to live in a place where freedom is dead, like a cold, dark room closed to the brightness and warmth of sunshine. My story begins in a country that I thought was the greatest in the world, but I was mistaken because it lacks true religious freedom.

I was born in Saudi Arabia into a devout Muslim family. My father was an Imam and head officer of the religious police. The religious police are responsible for insuring that Islam is practiced rigorously on the streets, especially at the time of prayers. They make sure that at prayer time, stores are closed, people are praying, and everything is in order from all religious aspects. My father married my mom when she was twelve years old and had seven children with her. I am the youngest. My father divorced my mother when she was 45. When we were kids, my father used to wake early to pray the dawn prayer before sunrise. When we did not pray and went back to sleep instead, he would beat us with a stick after returning from his prayer. I also used to see him treat my mom very badly at home, treat her as if she were a piece of furniture, and sometimes beat her. I grew up in this environment hating what my father was doing, seeing him live a hypocritical life. Down in my heart, I hated the God of Islam.

As a young man in this area of the world, though, I could not say anything or express my feelings. I was very oppressed, but at the same time, I still believed there was a God who was different from my father's God. From here, my journey of spiritual searching started. After I graduated from college, I said to myself, if I leave my country, maybe I will have the chance to look for the truth. The name of the country – America – was shining in front of me. I wondered how I could get a visa. I heard from my friends that it was very difficult for those in our age range, so I prayed to God the Creator that he would help me find a way to get to the United States. Miraculously, I got a student visa to come to the U.S.A. to study English and work on my master's degree. I felt that

this was the first step of my journey, of course without knowing what God had in store for me.

When I first entered the U.S., I studied English and was part of a student exchange program living with a Christian family. I talked with the mother of the family about Islam and Christianity. She and her son told me about a religious TV program that I started to watch. For almost five months, I watched the host of the program interview people who were originally of Islamic faith who shared their stories of how they were looking for the true God. They were living and searching just as I was.

At this time, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia died. He had promised to pay for my expenses to be in the United States, but with King Salman as his successor, things changed. Government officials announced that everyone with a student visa from now on would be on his own. I was very upset and angry as I felt I had been abandoned. I wrote a letter to my country describing my situation and blamed the new king for abandoning us and going back on his word. After that, I knew that I had committed a big mistake. Such an email was considered an insult to His Majesty, and I knew that I could not return to Saudi Arabia or they would put me in prison.

After I had watched many episodes of the Christian show, I developed the desire in my heart to be like the Muslims whom the host interviewed – Muslims who changed. The host always explained how they accepted Christ in their hearts and how He forgave their sins causing them to become new creatures in Christ. I decided to call the creators of the television program, and to my amazement, I spoke with the host and her husband for almost one and a half hours. I asked questions and listened to their answers. It was like God answered my prayers that day, and I accepted the Lord as savior and redeemer for the first time in my life over the phone! I felt real joy as the peace of God came into my heart, and I experienced how God is good and merciful in a way that I did not ever know when I was a Muslim. I remember that I slept like a baby that night in a deep sleep that cannot be described.

The pastor of my new Christian community prayed with me and served as my mentor on my Christian journey. He answered any questions I had and explained the Bible to me. He helped me move and introduced me to a new church. There I was surrounded by many young Christian men and woman who loved and worshiped the true God. They showered me with love that was amazing and unique. I cried a lot when I entered the church for the first time in my life. I felt the presence of God in a way that I had never experienced when I was a Muslim praying mandatory prayers every Friday in the mosque.

I had a problem, though; my student visa had expired. I had stopped studying, and the funds were cut from Saudi Arabia. I told the pastor about my situation. I had to leave the country soon and then return later so I would not break the law. Of course, he encouraged me to do so. His advice was that I go to Canada or Mexico, as they are neighboring countries, and come back on a new student visa that they obtained for me from a local college. I told them, though, that I needed to go back to Saudi Arabia and see my mom, my wife, and two children, perhaps for the last time in my life. Then I would come back to live my new life with Jesus Christ and worship him freely in America, the land of the free.

Because of the letter I wrote, though, I could not go back to Saudi Arabia, so I agreed with my mom that we would meet in a neighboring country and spend time together. My wife was supposed to meet me there as well. I left for my destination looking forward to spending a few weeks with my mom and hoping that my wife would bring our two children and come see me as well. Unfortunately, my wife refused to come, so I spent the time only with my mom. She soon realized that my way of speaking had changed. I asked her some questions about religion, so she started to have some doubts about me. I later discovered that she had checked my phone while I was sleeping and figured out that I had become a Christian. She left a few days before the day I was supposed to return to the U.S. via a new student visa, but my mom did not leave me alone.

On the day I was supposed to fly back to the U.S., she called and said that my father's brother and my brothers would be nearby that day doing some business and would love to come see me. She said they wanted to spend some time with me, say good bye, and give me a ride to the airport. I thought this was a great idea because it might be the last time I would see them. So I waited for them, and when they arrived at the motel where I was staying, everything changed. My mom had told them that I had become a Christian, so they came to beat me. They tormented me, locked me up in the room for weeks, treated me as an apostate, and hurt me physically and emotionally in all kinds of terrible ways. They used to take shifts watching over me so I would not escape. The employees of the motel stood by and did nothing. They called me an infidel.

During this terrible time, the Christian pastor tried at least three times to get me out of this misery, contacting Christians in the area to help. They got air tickets for me, but it did not work. I could not escape. My uncle had weapons, and my brothers did not leave me alone for one moment. I remember that once I secretly texted the pastor and told him that I was glad to share with my Lord a very small part of the suffering and pain that he faced on the cross to forgive my sins and iniquities. The pastor taught me to delete all my texts every time we finished. He encouraged me to keep holding onto the Lord and stay strong. He reminded me with words from the Bible that Jesus promised, "In the world you will face much suffering." After a few weeks in this motel, they moved me to an apartment that was owned by a friend of my uncle. They kept treating me very badly, locked me in this place, and forced me to watch Muslim scholars attack the Bible on YouTube. They even brought in an Imam to do some rituals over me to cast out the spirits so I would return a normal Muslim man.

During this time, my uncle was trying to find a way for me to enter into Saudi Arabia without getting into trouble at the border because of the letter I had written. He eventually managed to get my name off the black list. Since we are a society based on honor and shame, and my country didn't want to expose its dirty laundry, the government allowed me to re-enter Saudi

Arabia before the month of Ramadan started. My mother had warned my brothers not to kill me. She wanted me back in Saudi Arabia in the hope that I would go back to being a Muslim. I was transferred to Saudi Arabia and locked up in my mother's house, with no communication allowed with anyone. Praise God there was internet in the house! This is how I stayed in contact with my Christian pastor. After a very long month of challenging fasting for Ramadan, there is a feast. It was very hot, and against my will and new faith, my family decided to celebrate the feast far from the city. I urged them to leave me at home to spend time with my wife and children.

It was here that I started to feel that the Lord had answered my prayers. After I spent two days with my wife and children, I took her back to her father's house and broke into the cabinet where my mom was hiding my legal papers and passport. I knew where she kept all the valuable papers, and it was amazing that I was able to recapture them. With a miracle from the Lord, I crossed the borders in a washing machine box. One of my school friends helped me after I paid him a large sum of money that the pastor had sent. I left Saudi Arabia and then called the pastor. Within an hour, he bought a ticket for me to return to my new family of God in the U.S.

I am writing my story with a lot of tears in my eyes and wounds and scars in my heart from what I have seen from my own family. I never thought they would hurt me just because I had decided to become a Christ follower. Jesus has taught me to forgive them as he has forgiven those who crucified him. I pray that I can find peace in the U.S. to worship the true God, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and live a life that is worthy of Him.

~ Ahmed Nazareth

A Narrow Escape

It was on Tuesday, November 5, 1996, when the war broke out in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), known as Northern Kivu. It started with the killing of people from the southern parts of Northern Kivu towards the northern parts.

As soon as we heard that our neighbors from the south were being killed, we ran towards the forest that was neighboring us on the border of Uganda. I was three years old by then. One week later, we were advised to go back to our country after being told that there was peace. Within a week of our return, the village chairmen announced a meeting for all the residents in that area. The residents were convinced that the meeting was for informing the residents that there was no more war, that there was peace. All people were referred to a Pentecostal church hall as the venue for the meeting in that area.

On Wednesday, November 13, 1996, when the meeting was to take place, all residents in that area came to attend the meeting. My parents had gone to the garden and they were delayed there. They had told me to remain with a neighbor, that they would find me there. When the meeting time arrived, the neighbor told me to go with him. As the big number of people gathered in the church hall, including me and the neighbor, a gang of soldiers rained in from nowhere and gathered around the church. They had guns, swords, and hammers. In addition, they were wearing masks so that we could not know them. They killed everyone who was inside the church except me, who trespassed through a soldier's legs and ran away. Those who tried to escape were shot, others were bombed, and more so, others were hammered and cut with the swords. I was also shot but they missed the target, and they decided to run after me mercilessly without thinking of my childhood. As I was running I fell on a stone and my head was hurt. They found that I had fainted and I was bleeding through my head, so they thought that I had died and they took off.

An hour after, I woke up and went back to the church and found only dead bodies. I got up and walked into a village. It was quiet, and there were no people. By good luck, I met a man who had hidden himself in a thicket. He saw me crying with my bleeding head, and he felt heartbroken. He picked me up and went with me to where my parents had run to in Uganda after hearing that people were being killed, and that's how I escaped death narrowly.

~ Isaac Ndahayo

Oh Child

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
The game of hide and seek is over.

No more counting 1,2,3.
No more closing your eyes.
No more living in shame and guilt.
No more living with lies.

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
Like the tall tree
With autumn leaves,
Let your fears fall.
Down each one will gently come,
And God will catch them all.

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
Let your footprints mark the sand.
Dance and be silly all day,
For God is holding your hand.

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
Play with your dolls,
Have some tea,
Play little one
With comfort
And ease.

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
The angels light up the night sky.
You don't have to live life in darkness,
And no more will you have to hide.

Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
Please take my gentle hand,
For we are one, the same.
I've known you all my life,

Precious one, for we even share the same name.
Oh child, oh child, come my dear,
You are safe now.

~ *Rosanna Heintzman*

Avoid the Road at Night

We avoid the road at night. Everyone did. It was almost like a rule that no one talked about, but we knew. My husband and I needed to drive to California, but something dangerous stood in the way; or rather, something dangerous was our way.

We had to cross La Rumorosa, the most dangerous road known in Mexico. It was a winding road with terribly sharp turns and hills that would make you dizzy before you could count to ten to calm your nerves. There would be enough sunlight, or so we thought. The odds are never in your favor when you expect them to be.

When we had to make the drive, nighttime hit us like a sucker punch. I was pregnant, expecting a little girl, so I urged my husband to stop and find a hotel, but to no avail. We couldn't sleep on the side of the road. It was not even an option. My husband convinced me that he was okay to drive. I had a horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I agreed, promising him that I would stay awake with him during our drive. Some say that a pregnant woman can feel a lot; they become more sensitive about the world around them. The unknown was what I was worried about, since I had heard stories about La Rumorosa. None of them had a happy conclusion and all of them were mostly about death and ghosts. I feared them, no matter how many times my husband assured me they were just stories, legends people told to frighten others.

So, headlights from oncoming cars on the two-lane road became the enemy. "Focus," I would whisper to my husband every time a car would come toward us. The palms of my hands would tingle and I would break into a cold sweat. Something in me was unsettled.

I focused on the next car that came toward us. The lights seemed translucent. They dipped as if the earth had swallowed

the lights and the car. Maybe it wasn't a car. I made myself believe that it wasn't a car but maybe a ghost. Not because I wanted to see one, but because I was expecting to see one.

Light emerged again and continued coming toward us. I focused on the headlights as it passed us, but the afterglow of the headlights stayed with me. I felt a cold presence next to me and I turned. The light stayed in my vision. The road kept coming at me, even though I was the one traveling on it. I felt I was slipping away. "Stop," I said under my breath trying to bring myself to consciousness. "Stop," I said again. My hands felt frail, and I couldn't lift my legs even though I tried.

I saw another light coming toward us; I knew it was a car. I could swear it was a car, but my husband couldn't see it, only I could. It was coming toward us driving on the same lane as we were. We were going to crash! I tried to utter something. I was panicking inside, but all I could murmur was "stop." This time, I woke up.

~ *Mana Bravo*

Black Color

My name is Amna. I am 30 years old, and I am from Pakistan. Black is my favorite color. I like to wear black clothes, but my grandparents never allowed it. They thought it would bring trouble and a person who wore black would always have bad luck. But I really love to wear black.

If I wore black first they would ask me to go and change into any other color. I always did this, but I was not happy about it.

When I was in college my grandparents came to live with us for three months. They lived upstairs in our house. They were very old so they could not move well or go up and down steps. So my family would spend most of our time with them upstairs. I remember that I normally would visit them in the morning before going to my college. Then I came downstairs, changed my clothes to black, and went to college. When I came back from college, first I had to change out of my black clothes, and then go upstairs to see them. For three months I did this.

I don't believe my grandparents' views about black. Maybe I love black because it is the color of our Holy Place, Mecca, where Khana Kaba is. It is the sacred black building in the center of Islam's most holy mosque. Every year more than 1.8 million people perform their Haj, which is a holy pilgrimage that every Muslim man and woman must make at least once if they can afford to.

If my grandparents' views are wrong, then I hope Allah will bless me and, God willing, I will go to perform my Haj. Then, my eyes will feel comfort to see the black house of Allah, Khana Kaba.

~ *Amna Babar*

Beginning

Beginning...I think that's what life is all about. We are always starting something new that could lead to happiness. I'm not good at writing, but I have a story that I want to share. If you want to rebuild a relationship that seems impossible, I'm here to say that there's always a new beginning.

I was born in Peru. My mother was Peruvian, and my father was of Swedish nationality. They divorced when I was a 1-year-old, and at that time my father's company moved him to another country for work. I never saw him again. We had no communication at all.

When I was 26 I got a phone call at work. A lady asked me if I was Ingemar Hogland's daughter (that was my father's name). I was really surprised that the woman who called me was his wife, and they wanted to meet me. I was very scared, but my mother always told me that my father was a good man. As you can imagine, I started to question how good a man could be that never tried to contact his daughter for 25 years. I was so afraid to meet a man that I thought probably wouldn't like me, so I told him that I was fine and that I didn't need to communicate with him. I thought it was for the best. Even so, every night I prayed for God to protect him.

Time passed, I got married and started a family. My husband knew the history with my father, and he told me not to be afraid. He told me that I should think about trying to meet my father. That sometimes not knowing is much harder than facing the truth. If things didn't go well when meeting my father, then I could have peace in my heart that I tried. On the other hand, if they went well, I would have the opportunity to enjoy my dad and see what a wonderful grandfather he could be. I said, "I don't need him anymore, and he doesn't need me."

After my first daughter was born, I felt brave and powerful. I don't know why, but it gave me a lot of courage. One day I

decided to write an email to my dad. He answered quickly, telling me that they had been waiting for my call. We talked several times, and he asked me to travel to Sweden with my one-year-old daughter, Nicole. I packed my bags and headed to Sweden to meet him. When I saw him I didn't know how to treat him, and so I just said, "Hello daddy," and he hugged me. I spent thirty-three wonderful days with him and his wife. He took me to meet my whole family in Sweden. Every time I looked at him I saw myself in his gestures and many other things. He had the strength to ask for forgiveness, and I did not question him. I forgave him.

It was wonderful to have him come and spend time with us every year. He traveled from Sweden to Peru and spent 30 days with me and my family. I discovered the "wonderful man" that my mother always told me about. I was able to give my daughters their wonderful grandfather. My father spent every moment with my girls. He took them to and from school each day, taught them English, and played cards with them.

My father died in 2015 and I think his heart was at peace, just like mine. I share this story because he always told me that his friends wanted him to write our story. I don't think he could have ever done it, so I'm doing it for him. I love you dad!

~ Paola Hogland

I Prayed Today!

I prayed today, saying my legs don't work, my hands are cold, my arms are limp, my body feels like it's bonded and doesn't want to move. I can't bear the pain anymore. He says, "I got you, child of mine," and I hear the devil saying, "You're mine." The demons are trying to arise, and the angels are singing as the light shines down.

I say, "I can't get the words out of my head. My thoughts are scattered, pouring through my mind." He says, "My child, I will give you the words. Watch what you say for the tongue is powerful." Then I hear him again, "I got you, child of mine," and hear the devil saying, "You're mine." The demons are trying to arise, and the angels are singing as the light shines down.

I say, "I have no energy, and I'm tired all the time. I'm done trying. Everything's gone wrong. What am I supposed to do? I need help through this. I can't do this on my own." He says, "You're never alone; I'm always with you. I give you more than you can see. Open your eyes and carefully consider...then you will see all I have given to help you through." Once again, I hear Him say, "I got you, child of mine," and hear the devil saying, "You're mine." The demons are trying to arise, but it is of no use...as the angels are singing and the light shines down.

~ Barb Perkins

God's Saving Grace

Here it was the month of July in 2009, a rainy day compared to the scorching days we had had! I was just getting off of work at the Super 8 Motel. While walking on Grossjean Rd., I noticed a grey Grand Am sitting under the bridge covered in water.

As I got closer to the vehicle I started feeling very nervous and frightened. Looking at the car I noticed a woman gripping the steering wheel with her eyes as wide as a wise old owl. There were two men standing there with the look of despair. I asked the men if the woman was alive or dead. I wondered why they weren't doing something to help her. One man said, "We have called the police, and they are on the way!"

My adrenalin rush kicked in as I approached the car to see the face of the woman. Here it was my neighbor, my babysitter for my youngest son, whom she had babysat when he was two years old. I looked at the gentlemen and took off my coat, handed them my phone, and said, "If we don't make it back, my name is Patricia, her name is Hattie, and I can't swim, but I am going to try and save this woman."

So the one gentleman said, "Ma'am, are you sure you don't want to wait for the police and the paramedics?"

I cleared my throat and kept looking at the woman in the car and felt that there was not a minute to spare, so I said, "I'm going to save this woman!"

He said "Ma'am, then I will follow you!"

As we approached the water, it looked black and freezing cold, and in my mind I was praying that God would please spare us all because I couldn't swim!

When we got to the car, we placed our hands on the door and pulled on the left handle of the vehicle, and the door just

opened. Hattie was holding onto the steering wheel for dear life. So I whispered and said, "God had me come this way for a reason!" She looked at me with tears streaming down her face. I told her that this man and I would not be leaving without her, and by the grace of God, we managed to walk out of that five-foot water as if Jesus was our crossing guard!

The gentleman who had remained on the shore said, "Ma'am, I thank God for your bravery." The gentleman that followed me said nothing, but smiled.

I just thanked God for being with us and leading me down the path to help rescue someone! Sometimes God wants us to know that he is always available in any situation.

~ *Patricia Manuel*

CHANGE OF SCENE

A Woman's Travel in an Imaginary World

One morning a woman woke up from her bed. She heard the happy voice of her husband, "Hi dear, my job location changed, we must move to the USA next month." If her husband's job moved, she must leave her place, her job, her friends, and her family. She also thought about the new people, new location and the language. She worried a lot. All the time, she thought about that travelling. She asked God, "Why are you making changes in my life?"

One day in her dream, she saw a beautiful picture. It was made from sand. In her dream, she also walked inside that picture. She saw a house made from sand. On the top of the house white smoke was coming. She saw a moving sand car on the road. Inside the car, a man was waving his hand. She walked further inside the picture. She saw beautiful flower bushes made from sand. A white duck was moving on the sand pond. The sun was rising in the sand picture. Seeing all that made her feel hot. And, she saw a sand bike, sand swimming pool, and tall sand tree. It looked like a new brown world made from sand. A little white angel waved her hand and said "Hi" to the woman, and she woke up from her dream.

Another day she dreamed about a picture made with snow. In this picture, she saw another new world, everything made from snow. She walked inside the picture. She saw white houses, a white swimming pool, white bushes, and tall white trees. She saw snow falling. She caught some snow in her hand. She was so surprised. Each snow flake had a different structure and pattern. Even though the sun rose, she felt cold. She had never seen snow in her life because her country was hot. She felt happy that her dream gave her the opportunity to see and touch snow. Through this picture, she saw another new white world. A pink angel waved her hand and said "Hi" to the woman, and then she woke up from her dream.

Another day she dreamed of another picture. In this picture, she saw a flower world. She saw few colored flowers in her

country. But in this picture, she saw so many colored flowers! And she had never seen a black flower in her life. She saw a black tulip in her dream. There were also tulips of every color. She walked inside that picture. She had the feeling that she was walking in a rainbow. She saw the colorful trees of white, rose, red, and green. She saw green grass covered with a yellow quilt. It was not really a yellow quilt; there were countless yellow flowers on the green grass. In this picture, a white little angel waved her hand and said “Hi” to the woman, and she woke up from her dream.

One more day she dreamed about another picture. This picture looked like a fire world! For this picture, the artist used mostly yellow, red and orange paint. She walked inside the picture. She was a little afraid that she was walking into a fire. She saw houses and a road inside that fire. She felt a little cold also. The road and grass were also covered with fire. Then, she noticed it was not a fire. It was the color of the leaves. She took some leaves in her hand. She looked and she looked. A little white angel waved her hand and said “Hi” to the woman, and she woke up from her dream.

In her dreams, the woman was amazed with the great imagination of the artist. For all the pictures, the artist was the same person. Do you think it was a dream? In every picture, the little angel's sweet voice said “Hi” to the woman. She realized that it was not a dream. It was real. That artist's name was God. This was her USA trip. That little angel was her neighborhood girl. Four different worlds were the four seasons she saw in the USA. The brown world was summer in Arizona after a sand storm. The white world was winter in Michigan and Ohio. The flower world was spring in Michigan and Ohio. The fire world was fall in Michigan and Ohio. After seeing all these, the woman said thanks to God for the opportunity to see these amazing season changes. She had gone through almost four summer, winter, spring and fall seasons in the USA. She was still enjoying the four-season changes in the USA.

She has many new friends through the ABLE program. Her husband is supporting her financially. He taught her how to drive a

car! She has her driving license. She is driving the car on her own. She is talking and seeing her family everyday through the phone and media. She had one little boy when she was in India. After she came to the USA, she had one more baby boy. She wants to thank God, the ABLE program and her tutors, her husband and her family for making her happy. Even though she misses her country, she will not be sad anymore. She will be happy forever.

God gave an answer to her. God is great!

~ *Thilagavathy Shanmugam*

My Search

Twenty-two years ago my friend introduced me to his classmate. Her name was Svitlana. We were taking the train going to work every day from Kyiv to Boryspil. Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine, and I was born there.

Svitlana used to be the manager of one of the largest hotels in Kyiv. I fell in love with her. Every evening after work I waited for her at the train station. It took one hour to get from Kyiv to Boryspil, but time ran so fast, like in one minute we were good friends.

I got a job in Moscow and left my town. When I came back on vacation, I tried to find her, but she left Ukraine. Her friends from work said that she moved to the United States.

I found a job in Portugal and moved. I built hotels in Spain, Barcelona, Valencia and worked in Bordeaux, France, helping to build a very large laboratory called Laser Megajoule. I worked in Paris, San-Termer, Marcel and worked in construction in Portugal. Three years I worked on Azores Island building housing for military aviation for the U.S. base, but I had a hope that one day I would find that girl.

Six years ago I found her on a social network and sent her a picture of red roses. Four years ago I got a job in Toronto. I built skyscrapers for three years. Once every two weeks, I drove my car to Cleveland where she lived. We got married last year.

~Valentyn Mozgovyy

Decisions and Changes

The scientific view is that humans can adapt to any kind of environment. They can survive in tropical or cold climates, and they can learn different cultures and traditions.

When I was young, I wanted to study in the capital of my country Peru, but my parents did not have money to pay for the housing, food, and other expenses. It was in this moment I thought, "This is the last time that money will stop me or stop my dreams." I stayed in my city, and I studied very hard. When I finished my undergraduate degree, I told myself again, "This is time to continue my goals."

One of my dreams was to live in another country, learn new cultures, more languages, and see interesting places. However, at the same time I wanted to continue my education. I think education gives you freedom. I chose to study in Brazil, because it is a neighboring country from Peru and the language (Portuguese) is similar to Spanish.

I studied Portuguese two hours per day. I took the language test and the knowledge test to get a scholarship and earn my master's degree. I learned that if you want something, you need to follow your goal.

During the time I lived in Brazil, I visited the Atlantic Ocean and an island paradise called "Ilha Bonita"; I also saw tourist places such as the Corcovado Christ statue, and Rio de Janeiro, which is nicknamed "Marvelous City" with the peak of "Pão de Açúcar." I had an opportunity to know the real significance of Brazil's carnival season, and I participated in it. I experienced eating delicious typical dishes. I learned about the main holidays of Brazil including the Day of the Flag which is like America's 4th of July. I learned about colonization and migrant peoples.

One day, my husband said to me, "I got a new job! What do you think? Do you want to move to another country?"

I said, "Yes! Let's go." This new country was the United States of America.

When we arrived in the USA, everything was new for us. It was exciting. I was going to learn a new culture, see places and have a new life style again. We arrived in August and quickly autumn was coming.

I had never seen the autumn with the wonderful colors of leaves as they fall. I ate a lot of products made from pumpkins. I learned about a traditional holiday, Thanksgiving, and why the people eat turkey. For the first time in my life, I saw snow and my daughter had the opportunity to play in it. Another thing I learned was to drive a car. It was my first time! I am so glad for that.

When I started to talk with other people, they told me about the ABLE program. It was amazing for me and my daughter. She could learn English too and be taken care of by gentle and experienced teachers. I am so glad for this opportunity. I think the best part is every day I learn some new words and pronunciation. My daughter and I have been in the ABLE program for six months, and we can see the progress.

My daughter is four years old and has lived in three different countries. My family back in Peru believes it is sad and bad for her to change her house, school, room, toys... but I think it is not too bad. I think she is learning that the house and toys are only material things. What is most important is we are together as a family and we love her. My daughter's brain is learning new places, new languages, and new foods. I want her to grow up being a thinking girl.

We are satisfied with everything we have learned, with the people we met, and with the places that we have had the opportunity to know. We truly are able to adapt to new circumstances.

~ Silvia Valles Ramirez

Learning to Like the U.S. Lifestyle

Most Chinese people know a lot about the U.S., some from the news and some from Hollywood movies. I have lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for 6 years. I came from Shenzhen, China. When I think back over the past 6 years in Cincinnati, there are many different lifestyle and cultural differences between the U.S. and China.

I still remember when my husband picked me up when I arrived in San Francisco in September. My first day in the U.S. was a sunny day. When I looked at the sky, I was so excited. Wow, such a pretty blue sky! Like it was washed! I hadn't seen that kind of blue sky in China for a long time. Later I discovered that the blue sky with white clouds and fresh air is very normal in the U.S.

Besides the fact that my English needed to improve quickly, the other important thing is that I needed to get a driver's license so I could get around. In China I lived in a big city, unlike Cincinnati. There were many buses and subways. I still remember that my neighbor was so surprised when she heard that I walked to Kroger. What? You walked to Kroger? Yes! That is a very normal thing. We walk to stores taking 20 to 40 minutes in China. There is a Chinese saying: "After dinner walk 100 steps, live to 99."

I still persist in taking a walk in the U.S. every day. When I first came here, it made me so curious that I could not see any people when I was walking outside. I wondered where they were. Now I know that people are in their cars or staying inside. It's unlike in China where all places are crowded.

Food is the first necessity of all people. Chinese people like to eat fresh food, so they spend a lot of time preparing dinner every day. Fresh vegetables and fruit are especially important. In my family, every evening after dinner, my dessert is fruit, but my husband's dessert is sweet food. Yet, both U.S. and Chinese people say: An apple a day keeps the doctor away!

Chinese women think white and tender skin is pretty! But in the U.S., tan skin is very popular! People here even spend money to make their skin tan. In China I feel a little bad about my tan skin, but in the U.S. my husband and neighbors are often proud of my tan skin. Wow, that makes me so happy! When I lived in ShenZhen, almost every woman who went out needed to bring an umbrella in order to prevent too much sun tanning. But in the U.S., I often see women lying down by a swimming pool wanting sun exposure! Now I have changed my mind; I like tan skin too and go out without any umbrella at all.

In China, people do not often wear sunglasses. They think it is very cool with sunglasses. Sometimes a man who wears black clothes with black sunglasses in the movies is considered a bad man. So when I showed a picture of my husband with black sunglasses and a black t-shirt to my Chinese friend, she said to me, "Lucy, you need to be careful. He looks like a bad man!" Every time my husband and I talk about this funny conversation, it makes us laugh! Now I can't go without sunglasses when I drive on a sunny day!

In China, people take a shower before they go to bed. We think that makes us clean and comfortable. It also helps us to sleep well. In the U.S. most people shower in the morning. They feel new and ready to go to work. When I first came to the U.S., I could not get used to going to bed with my husband without a shower. I make a joke: My husband gives a bad smell to his wife, but gives a good smell to his co-workers! But now, sometimes I take a shower in the morning too.

There are real differences between the cultures and lifestyles of the U.S. and China. But now I can understand much of my husband's lifestyle. I also have gotten used to drinking coffee, wearing jeans, and sport shoes. My husband often makes a joke: Lucy is half U.S. woman now. Through 6 years of life and learning experiences, I like the U.S. more and more! I think it is civilized, polite, and friendly!

~ Lucy Yeardley

My Transition to Ohio

One part of my life was in New York City, where the life is so fast, so expensive, and too busy. I am a Mexican immigrant and a hard-working guy with big goals to accomplish. One of my goals was to buy a house for my family, so they could be comfortable. I wanted to give them what I didn't have.

My wife and I visited Youngstown, Ohio, in 2012. Stephanie's friend invited us to come over to look around. She was buying a house at an affordable price. We decided to do the same. We were looking to buy one, but all of them were kind of expensive for our budget.

I started to work a second job as a truck driver. I used to work from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Then I got ready for my other job as a server in the famous Tick Tock restaurant in Manhattan. My schedule there was from 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. Sometimes I had to work overnight, which was mandatory. It was a year of hard work. Finally, we had some savings, and we did it! We bought a cheap, old, damaged house.

We started working on the house's repairs to the point where I was about to give up. Everything was so expensive. Labor wasn't reliable. We hired contractors many times. They never finished what they started. When the house was almost ready, my wife decided to come to Ohio for good. I couldn't come with them. I didn't have a job. I didn't have any money. I had to stay and work in New York. It was hard for me seeing my wife and kids leave.

I stayed in New York for about a year. I was sending money so the repairs got done. I came a couple times to see how everything was going. My wife Stephanie and my kids visited me in New York once a month.

The day came – July 29, 2015. I finally moved in with my family. The house wasn't completely ready, but it didn't matter, I wanted to be with them. I missed them so much.

Now, I'm situated, working in a stable job, going to school, and trying to get my GED, so I can accomplish my other goals.

I'm so thankful to God. He is one of the reasons why I'm here. My wife is so optimistic. If it wasn't for her, we wouldn't even have had the idea of buying or moving.

~ Saul Bollas Zamora

Coming to America

Who am I?

Everything started with...an idea. A new life for a period of time, an experience, and opportunity for personal growth.

What I didn't know is that the things I know for sure were about to become foggy and asleep.

I began to become aware of sensations and feelings, and as strange as it may seem, without thoughts. This part was as if I was already on the other side of the ocean ...Yes! that I was already there...

The anguish of leaving the life we had built, the people we love, the ones who comforted us, supported us, the connection between us... to walk away from the references as a person. It follows me every day...

I wonder, who am I?

The decision is a turbulent whirl of emotions. The moments before leaving, the concerns are to minimize the damage on those who stay, finish the commitments, and appreciate every precious moment. With the special touch of what really holds us together, the love!

Smiles express themselves, tension decreases... arrival at a destination that already has a departure date. Here I am open-minded and at the same time, with all my senses alert, especially for myself!

Where am I? Who am I?

The lights on the road, the windshield wiper of the car that allows a view of the way home, a house that still has no color or smell. Everything seems enlarged, as if I have been inside a zoom-in world... everything is bigger, even the small everyday things.

The days go fast, everything is a novelty... meeting new persons and finding different ways to grow and live. Sometimes, it is like you run your life, like you are riding the sky without a sleigh.

One part of us feeling lost and the other determined to be brave. Be the person we need to be, for ourselves and for the ones we love.

Who am I?

A simple person who follows my heart.

Who chooses to live with the best that I know, without demands, letting it go.

It is funny, isn't it?

How we adapt to different things.

With a little strength, the sunshine of a little bravery, and a touch of humor.

We can find a little peace and be ourselves again!

Moving forward enjoying every precious moment of the new life.

~ *Sonia Paiva*

My Friend Abednego

I've been fortunate to work as an ESOL teacher and to intermingle with students from all over the map. By knowing and teaching my students, I've grown in a lot of ways that help me to see the world through new lenses. My students probably don't know this, but as an instructor of ESOL, I often feel like a student. I've learned so much from them, and my global knowledge has been greatly enriched.

I recently had a meaningful learning experience that didn't happen in my classroom. I had the opportunity to put myself in my students' shoes by traveling to a foreign country and struggling with a second language and culture. My husband, my daughter, and I took advantage of a terrific opportunity to travel to Mexico for four days, and there I was able to deepen my understanding and appreciation for the Mexican culture and the Mexican people.

Prior to our trip, acquaintances would ask us if we were going to a beach, maybe Cancun, Cabo, or Cozumel. On the contrary, we were excited to be going inland to visit our son who was studying at a university in Puebla, two hours south of Mexico City.

I was looking forward to using my Spanish skills, something I had sharpened while attending university many years ago. Upon arrival, I struggled speaking it. The service workers with whom I needed to talk spoke so fast. But it didn't take long before I was succeeding and able to talk to anyone with whom I came into contact.

Soon I was seeking out as many Poblanos (residents of Puebla) as possible who would carry on a conversation with me. The easiest people to talk to were the people manning the open-air market stands. Not surprisingly, they wanted to sell their artisan crafts, but they were also happy to entertain conversation with a gringa, like me. The Poblanos were exceedingly polite, sincere, trusting, and very proud of their art. I got the feeling that

they wanted my approval. It was not hard to give that, as I had fallen in love with the religious items, the Talavera pottery, and the colorful bags. Even if I only bought a postcard for a few pesos, they responded with humble appreciation for the business.

At one point, we were walking down from a church built atop a large former Aztec Pyramid. My daughter and I stopped to admire the handbags and jewelry at an artisan booth. I'll always remember the conversation I had with the young man working there, Abednego, named after the historical figure in the Old Testament. He was approximately 20 years old and offering assistance to his customers. Practicing our Spanish, my daughter and I asked questions about the bracelets and rings. Of course he recognized our American accents and seemed eager to talk to us. During our chat, my daughter and I mentioned how much we liked being in Mexico, commented on the crafts, and then our conversation grew more personal. He asked us where we were from. We said, "Ohio, en el norte," and he immediately recognized the location. He said he had been to the United States and had done some work in Ohio near some lakes for a home builders company. After a bit of prompting, he recalled that the name of the city was Cleveland.

From there, we talked about language. He mentioned that he had learned some English. "In school?" I asked. He shook his head negatively, and said he had learned while on the job in Cleveland. But he said he could only stay for three months and then the job was over. He said he would like to return to the U.S. to do any job if he could – landscaping, construction, whatever. He said he wanted to know English just as I knew Spanish, but it would be difficult to get back to the United States. He asserted, "You want Mexico, but I want the United States." It seemed that there was an intense longing within Abednego to do more with his life than manning the craft booth.

I gave him my advice; I told him he needed a sponsor in the U.S. I asked him if he had family in the U.S., and his answer was yes, but that they were there without legal documents. That was not going to help him. I recommended that he find an employer in the

U.S. to sponsor him, but I saw a sorrowful lack of confidence in his eyes for the reality of that idea. We continued to chat a bit more about various things, and eventually it was time for us to get on our way. As we left, he said goodbye, calling us "amigas." I think he felt the same sense of connection with us as we did with him.

I thought about it for a while afterward. I felt disheartened that a motivated young man, willing to learn and work, had run into road blocks and dead ends, trying to make a better future for himself. I thought that there has to be a better way for Mexico's youth to find fulfilling employment. There must be a plan for the future within Mexico's own power to serve its citizens, accommodating the hopes and dreams of their people, like the young, good-natured Abednego whom I had met.

Ironically, I doubt Abednego has any idea that a person "en el norte" has written a story about him. Yet, I believe he occupies a meaningful place in history because he has had a humanizing effect on at least one person in this world (me). I was the unexpected and grateful recipient of the expression of his unfulfilled dreams. And while he may want my education and opportunities, I want his humility and sincerity.

~ Susan Renner

Using Diplomatic Language

In 2016, I came to Ohio from Japan. I was surprised to learn that American people use diplomatic language just like Japanese people.

For instance, one American acquaintance told me that she didn't have time to hang out with me this week, but that she had time next week. She said, "Let's meet for coffee later."

So the next week, I sent her a message saying that I wanted to meet her for coffee, but there was no answer. Now I understand. It was diplomatic language.

People don't speak directly sometimes because they don't want to hurt someone. I didn't know that American people also use it. I thought it was used only in Japanese culture.

A Japanese friend told me about a book that describes relationships with neighbors in the USA. The book explains that when you move to a new place, a neighbor might tell you, "Come over to see me sometime." But don't actually go to their house. If you go to their home, they might feel uncomfortable, and think, "No, thank you!" I think that story is very interesting and funny.

I feel a sense of harmony because I grew up in a culture like that. I'm happy to learn one new thing about American culture.

~Yuka Yoshioka

My Journey

Born in former Czechoslovakia,
grew up in Slovakia.

As a teen, our country split in two,
the Czech Republic and Slovakia, yes, it is true.

Right after my graduation from the University,
I decided to explore the Windy City.

I'm grateful that this new opportunity came
and Chicago called my name.

I spent there four full years,
returned to my homeland with many tears.

It was sad to leave all my new friends,
but we promised for friendship that never ends.

After Chicago I was full of curiosity
and moved to Prague, the most gorgeous city.

We lived in Prague eleven great years,
and the birth of our kids was celebrated with many cheers.

We were happy to hear so many congratulations words
when our children finally arrived to this world.

I can say we truly fell in love with the Czech capital city,
then suddenly came a new abroad opportunity.

One day my hubby told me some surprising news,
and we were thinking of another U.S. move.

Our whole family agreed to move to the Buckeye State,
and Columbus welcomed us in the United States.

We all enjoy this new chapter in our lives
and are pleased to try this new American life.

It is lovely to get to know this beautiful land.
I'm so thankful we got this amazing chance.

~ Janka Curillova

Waiting

Hi, my name is Marcos, and I'm from Ecuador. Why did I come to this country seven years ago, you wonder? It was the simple vision of my father-in-law and the best possible future for his daughter, my wife, Shirley. It was the best decision I could make for the future of my family.

We started the documentation process for residence immediately, but we had to wait 10 long years for it to be completed. Why so long, you ask? It was all because of the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, September 11, 2001. This attack slowed down the entire process. Before 9/11, we were very anxious and excited that the process would move quickly. Sadly, it did not happen that way. When we first saw the news about the 9/11 attack, we started crying and worrying. Our parents thought that we had lost the opportunity for a new beginning and to have the American dream. We had only one thing to do as we waited – continue our lives as normal in our own country. Our parents were great and helped us through these difficult times. I continued my job as a baseball coach, the best job I ever had. I loved the chance to develop young athletes, to teach them about baseball, values, respect, and life.

I grew up in a Christian home, believing in Jesus. I learned about His principle on humility and patience and how He gave his life for us. I was now learning how to be patient as I waited for my dreams to come true. One day watching classic Baseball, "Yankees vs. Red Sox" on TV, we received a call from my sister-in-law. My wife answered the phone and immediately started crying. I looked at her and thought that our time had come and our residence was ready. When she got off the phone, she said that I was right, our residence was ready. We had only six short months to prepare to move to another world... The Big League.

We arrived in New York City, ready for our adventure. I remember thinking that I couldn't believe that my dream was now

a reality. We stayed, worked, and lived in NYC for 6 long years before we moved to beautiful Ohio. Dreams do come true, as my story continues...

~ *Marcos Barros*

New Life

When I first came to the United States, I actually didn't like it at all because it's different than my native country of Morocco. Moroccan life is simpler, and the weather is very nice. It's what I'm used to. The most important thing I miss is the sea. In Casablanca, the place where I used to live, the sea is very close – just thirty minutes away.

I now live in Cincinnati. If you don't have a car, you can't go anywhere, so I'm forced to wait for my husband to take me to the places where I want to go. Since my English is not very good, it is challenging to speak with other people. My husband always tells me to be confident and reminds me not to worry if I make mistakes. Most of the time, I can't understand when someone talks to me in English. When I do understand, I have trouble talking, and I'm not sure if people understand me.

It's difficult for me to live in a new place and leave my family, especially my mother. It was the most difficult thing I had to do. During the first few months, I cried so much. I often thought of returning to Morocco, especially because I spent so much time on my own. However, my dear husband's support was steadfast, and my love for him kept me from thinking about returning to Morocco. In addition, the people in this city are very nice, and many have offered to help.

Five months have passed since I arrived in Cincinnati, and I am now four months pregnant. My husband and I are so happy, but it has been a very difficult four months. I had morning sickness and could not eat or drink anything. I am now feeling a little bit better, and I've begun studying at a wonderful school with a nice teacher and students from all over the world. I do not know all of them yet, but they seem very kind.

~ *Hafsa Noumane*

COMEDY

My Lovely Robber

I found the criminal! There she was in front of me, her short brown curly hair matched her long nails. She was smiling with shiny white teeth. Our eyes met... "What?" she said. She stood defiantly but was hiding something. "Hey! What are you doing!?" I said. Suddenly, she put something in her mouth and started running away. Her hips wiggled while she ran, and her ears flapped in the wind. I tried to catch her but she was so fast. She jumped on the sofa and barked. I said, "Give me back my socks!" "Woof-woof!" she answered.

This was not the first time. She is a 9-year-old professional robber, and her name is Alice.

When I was visiting my uncle last Christmas, there was another robbery. Uninvited, Alice quietly went upstairs into the guestroom. I saw her come down... Alice was standing in the hallway biting a white sock. She said, "Look at me! It's mine now! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO!?" It was a declaration of war. "Hey wait! That's my sock!" said my father-in-law. "Why does she always take mine?" I knew the reason... maybe he has the strongest pheromones.

Slowly, we circled Alice. I came from the front, and my father-in-law came from the back. Alice was in the center and looked left, right... left, right. Like a basketball player, she dodged past us and went up the stairs. "Oh no!" my father-in-law said and ran after her. I'm not sure if he ever got his sock back.

Alice is a robber, but she also shares. A few years ago, I lived with my in-laws. I woke up and felt something soft and silky on my cheek. I was still sleepy and thought it was a handkerchief. The design was really nice and elegant. But it wasn't a handkerchief, and it wasn't mine. I looked closely and gasped, "Oh my gosh!" It was my mother-in-law's panties... "Ahhhhhh!!" screamed my husband. It was a gift from Alice's precious collection.

Alice also likes to collect bras, hair clips, pajamas and smartphones. I researched why Alice steals all our things. She feels safe with our scent.

She is my lovely robber... and she has stolen my heart.

~ *Hiromi Dang*

Fuente Ovejuna Did It!

I worked as a teacher for seventeen years. The children sometimes gave me a hard time, but sometimes they surprised me in a positive way and usually at a very unexpected moment... :-)

I used to love teaching children the main idea of my favorite Renaissance drama "Fuente Ovejuna Did It" by a very famous Spanish writer named Lope de Vega. First, I have to share what this drama is about.

Poor people from a small village called Fuente Ovejuna had to live under incredible tyranny of a vicious commander. This cruel and mean person killed men and raped women. Peasants made an agreement: "We have to get rid of him! We have to kill him." They chose one person as a killer. The very next day, the king sent a judge to Fuente Ovejuna. He started his investigation. The only way to survive during the interrogation was to stick together. When the judge asked who killed his commander, all people answered as one person: "Fuente Ovejuna did it!" These poor people knew very well that the judge could not execute all the people from the village. The judge had to give up because the peasants were loyal to one another and didn't tell him who the killer was. They always answered his question: "Fuente Ovejuna did it."

I enjoyed teaching children about the main idea from this renaissance drama. I tried to find parity with their behavior. I lectured them about how important it is to be loyal and friendly and to stick together and not tell on each other. Children listened to me and asked me many questions about the main characters from this drama.

One day, I experienced a horrible day at my work. I felt under the weather and had an incredible migraine. On top of everything, I was the teacher on duty. That meant I had to teach my lessons and watch the children during break. I didn't have a single free minute. I had only one more class left to teach and it

was a music lesson. My students were looking forward to their favorite music teacher, and they wanted to sing happily. However, you try to sing happily with a terrible headache in such a horrible condition! Finally, my lesson was over, and I had only one idea in my head – to take a rest! When I finished my class, three girls from seventh grade were waiting for me. “Miss Teacher, miss teacher! Somebody broke the glass bookshelf in our class room!” I think all teachers love this kind of excuse: “Mister Somebody did it!” I ran into my classroom, and when I saw the incredible mess, I started yelling: “You are not children! You are like animals! You don’t deserve to be in such a beautiful classroom! You belong in a pigpen! Who did it? Who broke the bookshelf?” My children looked at each other and then answered me as one person: “Fuente Ovejuna seventh grade class did it!”

I think I was always a very, very successful teacher! :-)

~ *Olivia Kneprova*

My Wife’s Way of Studying for Her Citizenship Test

I had taken my Citizenship Test, and my wife Estella was studying for hers. Late one night, when I was sleeping at my home, my wife woke me up talking in her sleep.

She said, “What is your name?”

She said, “My name is Estella Lopez.”

She said, “Where are you from?”

She said, “I am from Nicaragua.”

I shake her and say, “Wake up! Wake up! You are talking in your sleep!”

She said, “Ohhh, yes, yes, I guess I was practicing for my test!”

~ *Roberto Lopez*

Please Take My \$1.83

As a teacher, I get many gifts at Christmas time. My students feel the need (or perhaps obligation) to express gratitude with some tangible item they believe I will appreciate. In this year's mix came a \$25 gift card for Macy's. I was not happy.

You must understand my emotion. I love my students, but I zealously avoid the mall. Send me to a department store, and I'll need three days to recover from the excursion. I marvel at the joyous "let's go to the mall" mentality expressed by so many of my students.

Finally came the fateful day – my students were asking what I'd bought, the sales were on, and the card was ready to expire. I determined to be on the threshold of Macy's the next morning. My goal? Spend \$25. Not a penny more. I got there early to warm up my shopping blood, pumping through the perimeter hallways for about half an hour.

As Macy's cold steel gates slowly rolled open, I entered in, committed to my fate. I had prepared well for this moment; I had come up with a first priority purchase. I was only a few years behind in replacing a broken pizza cutter. Not the kind of thing you just go out and buy with your weekly budget but certainly game for the gift card shopper. Head to housewares with purpose...

Hey, here's a deal – a pizza stone and rack complete with cutter! Only \$14.41 to go. Well, that wasn't so bad. How hard can this be? I can handle a \$25 gift card with ease. Now, I'll try on 70 percent of the clothing that is remotely in my size or in my budget. You know, I do really enjoy these price check scanners... Why did I buy a pizza stone first? ...Ooo, there's the jewelry department. I do love sterling silver... Well, that should just about do it...WHAT? There's still \$5 on the card?! Well, let's be practical on this. What won't I buy at Goodwill? Off to the

undergarments department. Two pairs of panties later, I've spent it all but \$1.83.

I check my cell phone. I've been in the mall four hours (with warm-up time). Gritting my teeth, I admit my weakness. I've been done in by two full floors of shopping options (and that pizza stone's getting rather heavy). It's high time to pass the burden.

There's got to be another person here who's not shopping for pleasure. Hmm... she's having way too much fun... oh but here's a perfect target. That lady loaded down with four pairs of men's blue jeans is definitely not shopping on an impulse.

Excuse me, but are you planning to buy those jeans? (Not the best opener, I know, but I was tired.) Well, you see I've got this gift card (now her eyes light up a little) and I've spent all I can spend. I really don't want to feel obligated to come back here again, so could you please help me out and take this \$1.83 off my hands?

I feel much lighter, even with the pizza stone in tow. Who knew I could get such joy from leaving behind a \$1.83? Maybe compulsory shopping is all right once in awhile. (But please, don't tell my students!)

~ Heidi Daniels

The Adventure of SHE

My name is Brandon, and I want to tell you about my miracle that happened over Christmas break. This miracle is about my 1996 Dodge Ram 1500. We named the truck SHE. It has a 318 (5.2) gasoline engine... with 180,000 miles on it. I had 4 to 5 inches of play in my steering and I almost had to have my brake pedal on the floor to stop my truck. My wife and I (and the dog) drove the truck to Pennsylvania because my family offered to have it repaired as a Christmas gift. I had thought the truck needed inner tie-rods and rear brake pads. Multiple people had thought the truck wouldn't make it the 285-mile journey without falling apart on the way. I had confidence in my truck. She had never failed me before, so I knew she could get us there. And SHE did! We had even caught the tail end of a snow storm. The only issue we had was stopping in the snow. I had even stopped at a rest stop to do doughnuts in a snow covered parking lot. SHE survived speeds over 100 MPH! When we got to PA the snow started melting and everything turned into mud ... really deep mud. The mud was so bad I was ankle deep in it trying to walk across the yard to the garage. I was incredibly proud of my truck. I felt safe in her because I knew she would do her best to keep us safe.

When we finally started working on the truck, we found out she didn't need a tie-rod. All she needed was the drag link castle nut tightened. She still does have a driver front bearing that has a little bit of play but is within tolerance. The issue with the rear brakes was that the adjustment stars were frozen. The rear brake pads are still good for now. This meant I had been stopping with just front pads. I also had a stripped out lug nut stud. We found one that fit my truck in a drawer of the toolbox. So during this trip all that needed to be purchased for SHE was a handful of lug nuts to replace the bad one and a few of the cheap ones that were on her. We ended up saving around \$135 in truck repairs. We still need to put \$120 into her to make her run the best she can.

On the way home from PA, we drove probably 1 1/2 hours in nice weather conditions, but when we got to Ohio the blizzard-

like conditions were upon us. At one point I was going 10 MPH (with a speed limit of 70 MPH) on the interstate. Things were going ok ... except when other cars stopped faster than I could. At one point I had tried to stop behind a car that was 2 car lengths ahead of me, but my truck didn't want to stop. I ended up stopping beside that car on the shoulder of the road. Once I had gotten through the snowy road conditions, the roads were just wet. There was a drizzle coming out of the night sky. SHE was going around 70 MPH when all of a sudden both of her head lights went out at the same time. My park lights and my fog lights stayed on. I immediately pulled over and opened the hood figuring a wire had come loose, but I found nothing out of the ordinary. I started wiggling the headlight switch and the lights came back on. I assumed they would stay on the rest of the way, but I was wrong. Before too long they shut off again and didn't turn back on. So I ended up having to drive close to an hour with park and fog lights. I had just finished parking my truck in my driveway, when my headlights turned back on. I said "Really? Now you turn on?" to the truck. And shut the truck off.

The next night I drove to go see my grandmother but had no headlights for the full 30 minutes there and 30 minutes back. I went to bed that night and the first thing I did in the morning was head straight to the part store. I paid \$87 for a headlight switch. I hope to have many more adventures with SHE, but maybe next time I won't be so far from home.

~ Brandon Parks

Summer Chase

It was a beautiful summer day. The long green grass rippled in the wild. My chest was tight with the heat of the chase. The small white tail was taunting me as we ran. I reached out to catch my prey. I woke up to a crash, the vase that I kicked off the table in my sleep. I looked around and saw it was still snowing outside. I was still in front of a warm fire. I lay back down to my doggy dreams of chasing rabbits.

~ Elizabeth Parks

Look at Your Parents Closely

When I was pregnant with my first daughter, I was very excited until the big day arrived, and they wheeled me into the surgery room. I was anesthetized, and they started surgery. The next sound I heard was my baby crying. My eyes filled with tears of emotion. I felt my husband gently squeeze my hand.

The nurse wrapped the baby in blankets and put her on my chest. At that moment I saw a baby with black hair, almond-shaped eyes, and a small flat nose. Within the excitement, I thought, "My daughter doesn't even look like me." She seems to be the daughter of a Chinese family. I thought to myself, this is impossible because I knew the baby came from me. The nurse then took the baby and allowed me to rest from the anesthesia. After a few hours they took me back to my room where my happy husband was waiting for me.

When I was trying to breastfeed, my husband said, "The baby does not look like me. I don't have that nose and neither do you." I told him that I was thinking the same thing. A few minutes passed and my husband's mom came to visit. She gave me a big hug, and I took a close look at her face saw the face of my daughter. I urgently called my husband and said in his ear, "Have you ever seen your mother's face closely?" We laughed together. That is a moment we will always remember.

~ Paola Hogland

TRAGEDY

Dear Father

I'm writing you this letter to tell you that I forgive you, and that I'm not angry anymore. I'm not angry with you for all of the Christmases you've missed and all the birthdays you weren't there for. I'm not angry about the gifts that I bought for you. The ones that I saved all of my money for and you never came to get. I'm not angry because mom's husband stepped up to do what you didn't.

He adopted me as his own, and he taught me how to ride a bike, how to swim and fish, how to drive. He was there for every breakup, every mistake I made. He's always here when I need him. He held me when I cried because you promised to come see me, spend time with me, and you didn't. You never wanted me. Why didn't you want me? I am an amazing person. I am beautiful and smart and independent. Why don't you want me? How can you turn your back on such a lovely person, the human being you helped create?

No, I'm not angry. Often, I just feel bad for you. You will not walk me down the aisle at my wedding; you won't even sit in the front row. You will never meet my children, and you will never get the chance to come back into my life. This is the last time I will write to you, to tell you that I forgive you. I forgive you for making me think that you cared. You sent me drawings on tiny pieces of paper from prison, and you called once in a while. One time, I got to stay with you and your new wife for a few days, and you made me think you really were trying, that it wasn't your fault for leaving me. I'm trying to forgive you for lying and for hurting me.

Thank you for teaching me to stay away from men like you, for teaching me that family isn't always blood. Thank you for teaching me what a father is. Now I know it isn't someone like you. One day, I think I will forgive you.

Your Daughter

The Dream of Sorrow

Since I was little I have always wanted you. I would picture what you might look like. Would you look like him or me? Would you be a boy or girl? And so on. Then one day it happened. I was so happy, so overjoyed to hear that in just a few long months my biggest dream would finally come true. Every day I would think about you growing inside me. The love and fear that you brought me was odd – wonderful. The days seemed so long, but they went by fast. Then that day came, the day that changed both of our lives forever.

I felt like something was wrong, but I didn't want to lose you. I didn't want to think or believe that my body was killing you. Our dreams of a life together were ending. Your life was fading away, and I couldn't stop it. The burning in my heart will burn forever. The hole in my arms where you should be is filled with sorrow. The thought of my dream of being your mom will never come true. The dream of my soul is burning with sorrow.

~ Elizabeth Parks

The Depression

I lost a friend during our last year at university in my home country, Mauritania. His name was Oumar N'Diaye, and he was an intellectual. He asked himself many questions during our last months together. He questioned his future because he was uncertain: "What will become of us after completing university with our country in such turmoil?" "How can I repay all the friends and family that have helped me?"

He felt that he was responsible for his family now. He would be ashamed of not being able to take care of his mother. He felt he was the only one in his family who could save their honor. These concerns lingered in his head, preventing him from sleeping and eating.

Eventually, my friend Oumar got seriously ill. I no longer recognized him. He had changed character, and his face was no longer the same. He was severely depressed. He lost his memory. He was admitted to the hospital. His mother cried night and day. This was not her son. With some medicine, his mother decided to take him back to the village. Perhaps he would improve there.

I was taking my last test at university. Oumar was supposed to be taking the test with me. My phone vibrated repeatedly in my pocket. I couldn't answer it because of the test. When I finished, I walked out of the university and looked at my phone. The voice message was there. I learned that my friend Oumar had thrown himself into the river very early in the morning. I was so sad.

His mother cried all the time. She had lost her dear son, the one that went to university and was going to lead his family to a better future. Because of her loss, she became sick too, and died shortly thereafter.

Such a sad story makes me think of how we should remain positive even if things are difficult. I miss my friend, and I don't

want this to happen to others. I want things to change in my country to make life fair for people that work hard and are educated.

~ *Malick Ba*

The Trap

My mind went blank,
And that's a fact.
Besides for one word,
And it's got me trapped.

I run and hide,
I can't escape.
I close my eyes,
And I see her face.

That one little word,
And that's her name.
No matter where I am,
I can't get away.

I stumble, I fall,
I can't get up.
Here I am again,
FOREVER STUCK....

~ *Chadwick Smearman*

Love and Deception

When I came to this country, I came in search of love. I had not met anyone in my life yet. My friends often asked me why I didn't travel and possibly meet someone. That got me thinking. I had given my life and worked 20 years in a great company. I was doing well, but I was missing something. So one day I decided. I quit my job, and I came here to the country of dreams. I wanted to find a job working in the same field, but I didn't speak English. I said to myself, "Maria, you're going to have to start from scratch," and so I did.

After several months of being here, one beautiful Sunday after Mass, my friends and I went to a nice place to get something to eat. It was a day that changed my life. When we were seated I saw him pass by, and I couldn't help but stare at him. Our gazes crossed, and I think we were both instantly stuck. He approached the table and began to speak, but I did not understand because he spoke English. When he spoke he kept looking at me, so my friend translated everything he said. When we finished eating, I did not want to leave. The next week after Mass another friend wanted to go to lunch and chose the same place to eat. I was so happy. He worked there, but I wasn't sure if I would see him again. When we arrived, the first thing I saw was him. He immediately recognized me and came to me very gently and offered to take our order. He left us to eat but stopped at our table later to talk. Once again, my friend translated. She told me that he wanted to invite me on a date. I had never met someone and had an instant connection with him like this. With him it was different; I felt something, and so I accepted his invitation.

He picked me up at my house and was the perfect gentleman. He opened the car door for me and helped me out. We started to walk together and very instinctively held each other's hands. He had brought his notebook and translator because he had been learning some Spanish. Each day after that we got to know each other more. He wrote me in English, and I translated it to Spanish. I was afraid to answer him in English, so I

started to learn how to use words correctly, sentence structure, etc. I was worried about doing it right. I had never felt love so deep, the kind of love you feel once in lifetime. I was extremely happy because I thought I had found my soulmate.

We got engaged, and we made plans for our future, but things slowly started to change. He started hanging out at bars, lying to me, and even cheated on me. The engagement was postponed as we began to argue more often. As happy and complete as he made me, he also showed me how it felt to have your heart broken into a thousand pieces. I cried, I suffered, and there was nothing anyone could do to bring me comfort. Time eventually healed my wounds, but the things that you live you never forget. They are memories that you keep deep in your heart. I'm still waiting for that love that will complete my life.

~ Maria Velazco

Who Am I?

Who am I . . .
A little girl,
A woman,
A grandma,
A child,
Who am I?
Alone.

~ Brenda Hershman

Never Forgotten

Growing up in a big family meant someone had to keep the family running smoothly. That job was filled by my wonderful mother.

She was a teacher and a mother for all her students. She was filled with energy and life and enjoyed socializing. After retiring from teaching, my mom started to feel dizzy and had difficulty walking. My father took her to a doctor for an examination and the doctor found a big tumor in her brain.

After six hours of surgery, the doctor successfully removed the tumor. We felt very happy, but the doctor told us there would be side effects like loss of memory and drooping of the face. She stayed in the hospital one month recovering. During the month that my mother was gone, the house felt lifeless.

After one year the memory loss started. My mom began to forget how to talk and could not focus on her speech. Later she lost her sense of hearing in her right ear. Then she lost some of her cooking skills. This was very hard on my mother.

At the beginning our family did not take it seriously. Then my mother's condition became worse. She forgot her children's names and that my father was her husband, but she knew I was her daughter.

After some time I became engaged, and I wished she could have communicated with my husband, Mohammad, and could have given me some advice and her approval.

I moved to the USA with my husband. Everything was different from Jordan: the language, the culture, and the way of living.

A year later I became pregnant. I knew she would have been happy for me. I tried to tell her about the baby. If she could have

understood me, I would have said, "I have a beautiful little girl now. Her name is Talia and she is eight months old. Soon she will be walking. I wish I could put her in your lap."

My mom can no longer communicate with us. I miss her so much. I miss her voice, her laugh, and looking at her beautiful blue eyes. And no one can compare with her cooking!

My mom has had Alzheimer's since the age of 54. It's killing her day by day. I know it is hard for her. I can see it from her body; she is very skinny and short-tempered.

So dear mother, although your condition will not allow you to remember, I will never forget the wonderful childhood you gave me and my family. I will teach my children what you have taught me, and your memories will always live on.

~ Majd Al Hawawsheh

Pink Blossoms

Warm winds of spring came early this year,
 And my lovely magnolia tree illuminated
 The sky with its large pink blossoms.
 Winter, in a jealous rage,
 Could not stand the beauty
 Of the tree, and brought cold north winds
 That howled like wolves in the night.
 The sky became black with large thunderous
 Clouds that rolled in and blocked the heavens.
 And then the snow came with a vengeance.
 Sorrow filled my heart, I knew that winter would
 Destroy all the large pink blossoms that clung
 To the tree. Dawn slowly arrived, and the gold
 Rays of sunlight pushed through the black sky
 Of the night. As I looked upon my tree, tears
 Filled my eyes, and I wept. Winter, with all
 Its anger and jealous rage, had destroyed
 My lovely magnolia tree.

~ Susana Antal

Game of Life

Life is a puzzle
 Feels like a game
 One big struggle
 Always caught in the rain
 Work so hard
 Trying to figure it out
 Then go figure
 In comes the drought
 The weather is never perfect
 Always something in the way
 Most of the time wishing
 The sun would come out and stay
 No matter how hard we try
 There is no between
 The difficulty just gets harder
 As the level starts to lean
 We get so far
 Then fall off the map
 This game of life
 Seems like one big trap
 Stuck in the chaos and confusion
 Your head starts to spin
 Always feel like you're losing
 And you don't want to pick it up and play again

~ Tyler Sampsel

Earthquake

Mexico City
 September 19, 1985
 7:25 am

With disturbing dizziness, this day begins.
 Ripped from my home.
 How?
 I do not know.

Unrecognizable faces –
 Those of my family and neighbors.
 A gas explosion, terrific roars,
 Sirens, flashes of light,
 Wailing that makes one shudder.

Bewilderment –
 We all have questions.
 No one has answers.

From my house, crudely built of tree limbs
 Yet on a hill that protects and shelters,
 I fix my eyes on the city below
 Convulsing with the rhythm
 Of the bowels of Mother Earth.

Time stops.
 Life ends.
 A woman advanced in age
 Prays with a broken voice.

An odor permeates.
 The stench of death embedded in our skin,
 We realize how vulnerable we are.

But life is bliss,
 Blessing marked with pain,
 Pain that – though time passes – I can never forget.

~ *Gabriel Manriquez*

Myrtle

Tears rolled down my cheeks as I exited the school and hurried to my waiting car. I got in and wiped my tears with a napkin left over from a trip to Subway. I mumbled to myself about being an old, sentimental fool. After all, I hadn't played for at least thirty years. I was being silly. Starting the car and rolling slowly down the driveway, I blinked back additional tears. Good grief! Stop being so soft! This was a blessing, I told myself. I was passing my prized possession on to someone else. A someone who would not leave it mute under the dark bed, but someone who would bring it into the light and encourage it to sing. Myrtle, my violin, would have a new life in a young person's hands.

She was made in 1927 by a German immigrant who came to America in the later part of the 19th century. He had learned violin making from his grandfather, father, and uncles. It was a family business. Now, he was in a land where there was no war, and he could make beautiful violins for the Americans who had welcomed him into this new country. Each violin the man made was different. Each had its own look, sound, and personality. He created them by hand in his little shop located in a back alleyway in Philadelphia. Myrtle had many sisters that hung in the window and along the walls of his shop. One day a man bought her and took her with him to Ohio. As the man drew a bow across her strings, she found her voice and sang. Sadly, after thirty years, the man died, and Myrtle was given to the local music store to sell.

I began playing violin in fourth grade. The school had a string program, and I was chosen with some of my classmates to try the violin free for six months. Our violins were three-quarter sized instruments. I loved learning to play. At the end of the six months, I had grown out of the three-quarter sized violin and needed a full size model. My parents were not rich, and it looked like my music career might end, but my violin teacher told my mother about a violin for sale at the local store. Unfortunately, it was seventy-five dollars. In today's money, that doesn't sound like much, but back then it was like fifteen hundred dollars. My hopes fell when

I heard my parents talking about the cost. Somehow, though, they made a deal with the music store to pay five dollars every other week, and Myrtle came home to me.

Through hours of practice, I learned how to help Myrtle sing. Together we conquered classical to contemporary music. As part of the orchestras in junior high and high school, Myrtle blended her voice with the other instruments to form notes that reached into my heart. Sadly, some of the other violinists had more natural talent, so Myrtle and I never got to play the first violin parts of the symphonies, but we really didn't care. It was enough to make music.

I went to college, and Myrtle went with me. I wasn't able to play in the college orchestra, but I played her myself when I had time. After graduation, I began my career in education. My time with Myrtle grew less and less. She always was with me, but she lived under the bed. I would get her out on days I was sad. She was willing to sing, but I had lost my ability to make her sing, so I put her back into the dark.

The years have gone by quickly, and I am now almost seventy years young. I felt an urgency about finding Myrtle a home. Some other young person needed to help her sing again. I contacted the orchestra director at my old high school. Did she know anyone that needed a good violin? She did! I told her that Myrtle would be over the next Monday to meet her new owner. When the day came, I put my prized possession in the car and drove to Alliance. I sat for a few minutes in the parking lot before going in. Why did I have this lump in my throat? Just because it was right to give Myrtle a new owner, it was not easy to say farewell to an old friend.

~ Linda Ghonim

THE SHOW MUST
GO ON

An Open-Minded Experience

After I arrived in the U.S.A., my biggest challenge was the English language. I could read, but communicating with other people became a source of frustration. It was difficult to understand what Americans spoke, and I couldn't say what I meant. So, I decided to start ESL classes with one only expectation: to understand and be understood in English. But what I found and learned was much more than that.

I found an affectionate and supportive teacher. Besides her competency in teaching English language to foreigners, her positive attitude helped me pass through the adjustment period more smoothly. From my international classmates, I learned about life in different countries: the customs, traditions and hardships. Suddenly, the news I had only watched on TV became closer and more vivid than ever. I listened to stories about countries that were facing serious political problems from the perspective of people that were living that reality day after day. We shared stories about our lives, difficulties in the adjustment in our new country, and concerns about the future. We laughed at our mistakes.

Now, I am attending GED classes. My classmates are mostly Americans, and despite the different backgrounds, I think that all of us share the same idea: Investing in education is an important factor to achieve a better life. For helping us pursue the dream of furthering our education, we can count on a wonderful, supportive and committed group of teachers and volunteers. I am thankful for them.

My experience with adult education is ongoing. So far, I can tell that what I have learned and will always keep with me is tolerance of and respect for people of different mindsets, points of view, and cultures. I have also learned how teachers who really care can make a difference in a student's life.

My Dream Is...

My dream is...

To be a wife and a mother one day.

To be able to stand strong in my beliefs and not back down.

To continue to grow, not only spiritually but mentally
and emotionally as well.

To make amends with my past and overcome any obstacles I face.

To take risks and reach new heights.

To love completely, unconditionally, and without reserve.

To speak gently and from the heart in all aspects of life.

My dream is to become...

A wonderful embodiment of love.

A strong, compassionate visionary.

A devoted spiritualist to my path.

My dream is to become what I know I am destined to be.

~ Melissa Stefka

Please Make Some Mistakes

Fear of misunderstandings and mispronunciations
silences students. Attempts to avoid embarrassment,
in reality, only hinder progress. Even instructors
with a perfectionist nature dread the occasional miscue
that in their minds, exposes weakness. This anxiety only
inhibits creativity and spontaneity. All must realize
that mistakes are good; they are opportunities
to learn and advance. They are signs of what we
all have in common – our humanity. Those who are
courageous risk making mistakes, and their efforts
result in a transformation of “X” indicating an error
into a multiplication sign signifying an abundance of
lessons learned. So please make some mistakes!

~ Dianne Benson

My Voice

My voice is as deep as the Grand Canyon
It goes up and down
It falls off the tip of my tongue like tumbling rocks
It wakes sleeping babies from their slumber
It is an endless roar

It feels strong like a wind that can rumble trees in the night
It tastes like a pack of winter fresh gum
It is a voice I have grown to love
It tells the world how strong and courageous I am

~ Andrea Gaines

Lost Hope Has Been Found

When I was a small child, my life was good. At the age of five I became a victim of a bad circumstance. My innocence was taken by a very sick man. As I got older my feelings about being a young lady got harder to understand. By the time I was a teenager, it happened again, and I was devastated. This started a long road of drug and alcohol abuse.

By the time I was sixteen, I was a dropout and married. I had lost all of my hope. Drugs and alcohol consumed me. I wanted to be numb, never feeling hopeless again. When I was twenty, I had my first child. Three years later I had my second child. I still felt hopeless. By the time I turned twenty-four, drugs and alcohol abuse had taken over my hopeless life, beyond anything I could have imagined. For many more years I would struggle with this feeling of being hopeless. I had failed completely.

When I turned thirty-four, I knew I had to do something different, or I was going to die. I began to find help. Several months would go by, but with lots of hard work, encouragement and hope, my life began to change. My feeling of hopelessness started to slip away. I was finally on the right path. I'm a full-time mother and student, free of drugs and alcohol. I pray every day that God will give me the courage to continue on this path of finding hope.

~ Andrea Dzierwa

My Dream

There is something I can't understand
 I claim I'm a man
 But when things go down hill
 I forget who I am
 And hope falls out of my hand
 As it hits the ground
 So do my tears
 My heart pounds
 To the feeling of fear
 Negativity dances around
 My ears suddenly render to submission, and my
 Dreams are far from here
 As I stare, darkness is everywhere
 Light is near
 I am a man with
 Or without a wife
 I don't need a companion
 To do what is right
 I am a man. I have responsibility
 I have reason to use my creativity
 I am a father
 Who will participate
 In father activities
 I will be a father and a man to my fullest ability.

~ Joseph Sims

A Long-Term Investment in Life

I moved to the United States from Taiwan about 10 years ago with my husband and two teenage daughters. I quickly realized that the living environment and the culture in the USA are greatly different from Taiwan. My husband and I decided to join a local gym since we had free time in the evenings. I had never exercised when I lived in Taiwan. My husband went to gym every night after dinner, but I always had different excuses not to go.

I was working full time and always felt tired after work. I had allergies in Taiwan, but my allergies got worse after I moved to the USA. I slept very late on the weekends due to being allergic and tired. My daughters complained a lot because I did not spend much time with them. I was always in a bad mood because I had no energy.

One morning, I was talking to my husband about how to get rid of my allergies and gain strength without taking meds or supplements. He told me exercise was the best solution. I kind of doubted it, but I decided to try to go to the gym because I had run out of alternatives.

I decided to go to group exercise classes instead of using strength equipment or cardio. My husband laughed at me after my first Zumba class. He said I had two left feet. I told him, "Thank you for the nice encouragement. Just wait and watch. I will surprise you someday."

I got help from my instructor; she taught me the basic steps for Zumba salsa, and I practiced at home. I was doing much better after a month, and then I started going to every Zumba class. I learned all the steps and movements within two months. After six months of steady exercise, I could feel my health and energy level changing. Eventually, I became a Zumba instructor.

I have been doing Zumba fitness for about 9 years, and I no longer have allergies like I used to have. I do not get sick very

often either. Sometimes, when I have a cold, I can get over it quickly without taking medicines if I just keep exercising.

Many friends tell me that my face and figure have not changed very much over the years, and they ask me what my secret is to keeping my weight stable and looking young. I told them exercise and smiling are my secrets. I believe exercise is a long-term investment in your life, and there are so many benefits that this investment returns to us.

Taking care of your body is your responsibility. No one else is going to do it for you. The facts are simple: If you take care of your body, it will take care of you for many years. If you do not take care of your body, parts will start to fail early. It's just like ignoring your car maintenance.

According to health research, people who exercise regularly are happier. They have much less chance of heart disease, cancers, depression, anxiety, stress, and of course, gaining unwanted weight. The benefits of exercise will start to be visually evident. You will look better, feel better, have more confidence in yourself, and you will want to continue. Actually, your body will be telling you to continue. Exercise creates endorphins in your body. These hormones signal your brain and urge you to go work out because you feel better and happier when you do. Exercise simply provides you a healthy and longer life. I suggest people join a local gym membership. You may think it is expensive but it's cheaper than cigarettes or beer.

There are a few basic steps to get started:

- Convince yourself you want to have a healthy, long life
- Try different types of exercises, different equipment, or group exercise
- Bring along a friend or partner to work out with you
- Have a trainer stay with you for instruction and encouragement

The hardest part of exercising is just getting started. However, once you create a regular workout schedule, you will stick to it. Invest in your future, invest in your life, and start to exercise now!

~ Joyce Strain

My Voice

Swimming laps in a pool
 Scoop, kick, breathe
 Scoop, kick, breathe
 Flip
 Steady
 Holding my class together
 Keeping pace
 Don't stop
 Don't give up
 Just one more length
 Just one more problem
 My voice is confident
 You can do this
 Because I know you can

~ Lesli Smith

No Matter What

On July 3rd, 1970, my mother was killed at a party being held to celebrate the birth of our country. She left behind four young daughters, of which I am the oldest. Soon after, my father and his wife came to New York to take us to their home in Florida, and it did not go well. Before Christmas of that year the three oldest were sent to a children's home. The youngest of us was only three, so she stayed behind. My father at some point signed the necessary paperwork for us to be placed for adoption. Over the next year or so, I watched my sisters leave for new homes while I stayed behind. I haven't seen or heard from them in almost 50 years. I was moved from home to home over the next eight years and eventually aged out of the system. I didn't graduate from high school, had no skills, and was out on my own.

I found work in a factory, got an apartment, and made a life for myself. It wasn't easy, but I did it. A few more years in Florida and a friend of mine from one of the foster homes we were in together invited me to come stay with her in Ohio. I packed up the car and headed north. Once again I found work, settled in an apartment, and set about making a life for myself. I married, divorced, and never had children.

In 2009, I was working in a factory and living in an apartment in small town Ohio. One of my neighbors was a young woman with infant twins. She and I became friendly, and once in a while I'd watch the boys for her. Not long after the twins turned a year old she had another baby. I was the kids' MaMaw, and they were my boys. She moved away, but we kept in touch, and I saw the kids often, even after she added two more to the pack.

On September 30th, 2013, I was getting ready for work and my phone rang. It was the kids' mother telling me to come get them before Children's Services took them. I made it to their house in record time that afternoon. By March of 2014, I had custody of the five kids.

It didn't take long to realize that, if I wanted my kids to value what they were being taught, I would need to be their example. So, with a goal of pursuing a college degree, I set out to take my first needed step, getting some kind of high school diploma equivalent so I could be accepted to a college. I learned that ABLE provided classes to prepare for a GED, so I enrolled.

My kids are now learning that this takes time and effort. They see me preparing and studying to accomplish what I've set out to do. It's helping me also help them with their learning as I go. They're already seeing how well I'm doing in college. Yes, I passed my GED test and am enrolled in Edison State College. It is my hope, and even belief, that they will ultimately see the effort put into this part of my journey. I hope to show them the value of education, no matter your age or the circumstances you come from and must go through.

~ Jackie Czaja

I Am Driving to Reach My Dream

It's 4:45 in the morning on I-77.
 Why am I willing to drive through a blizzard?
 To fulfill my obligation of my immigration.
 When I first arrived at a U.S. airport,
 I was so afraid. I'd no confidence
 Even to say hello.

I've written two Korean poetry books.
 I'm a poet, but not in English yet.
 I've seen the birds and flowers on the road
 In conversation with each other
 Speaking better than me.
 So I decided to change my work schedule
 to attend English classes in the evening.
 That's why I'm on the way early in the morning.
 I dream of a life as an English-speaking poet.

I tell myself:
 "Don't forget the reason for coming
 Never stop taking steps to reach for your dream."
 Who am I? Where am I?
 Absolutely, I know!

~ Minseo Bae

My Voice

My voice
 Is expression
 Looks manly
 Feels raw
 Sounds wise
 Is where I express faith
 Tastes like fire
 Is from the heart
 Is inspirational

~ La Shawn Sherfield

The Courage at Square One

Day One – The beginning...Square One
 I met you today at square one
 I wonder how many thoughts you had this morning
 that froze you in your tracks

I don't want to do this
 What if I hate it?
 I was never good in school
 What if they don't like me?
 What if I get embarrassed?

You were here despite
 You began
 Maybe it was actually the end...the end of something else
 You were here despite

Day Two – Square Two
 I wonder how many thoughts you had this morning
 that froze you in your tracks
 I don't want to do this.../ I want my life to be different
 What if I hate it?.../What if I end up loving it?
 I was never good in school.../Maybe I'll do well this time
 What if they don't like me ?.../Maybe I'll make many friends
 What if I get embarrassed?.../Maybe I won't be embarrassed
 Melting frozen tracks
 Unrecognizable now because of the transformational thaw
 of your action
 Courage is not living without fear
 Courage is being scared to death and doing it despite

~ Amy Guda

APPLAUSE

My First Thanksgiving

It has been nearly nine months since I left Hanoi, Vietnam. I made a big move in my life and left behind a job that I cherished. I got married to my dear Alex. He is a very sweet hubby, and I love him so much. I just recently got a green card and a U.S. driver's license. I am hunting for a new job now. I have discovered that it is not easy to find a job that relates to my field of Petroleum Geology in Ohio.

Since I moved here, I have witnessed many American holidays for the first time. All were new and exciting. Yesterday was Thanksgiving Day in the United States. We did not do anything to celebrate it as many Americans did because my husband had to work on that day. He was in charge of serving Thanksgiving food for about one hundred people at his work place, Ivy Knoll Nursing Home. However, the next day, fifteen people came to a big dinner party at my mother-in-law's house. We had a Thanksgiving meal, said thanks to each other, and celebrated the birthdays of four people in the family who have birthdays in November. Alex made most of the food, and I helped him. We started cooking a day before, making a large green apple pie and two medium-sized pumpkin pies. We brought all the food to my mother-in-law's house. It was a wonderful celebration!

Actually, I already had my first Thanksgiving meal four days prior to Thanksgiving. I was with other ESOL students in the cafeteria of Live Oaks, a vocational school. We had baked turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, cranberry sauce, gravy, and pumpkin pie as dessert. It was the first time in my life to eat turkey. It was so delicious! Each person was served a plate with the same amount of food. Stan, a French student, and I were the only two of eight people at a table who ate up all of our food. At the meal, one of the teaching assistants said to us, "Forever on Thanksgiving Day, the heart finds the pathway home." When I heard that, I thought of everyone I love, near and far. Yes, Thanksgiving is a time to be grateful, to remember, and to hold those who enrich our lives close to our hearts.

~ Hong Lindenberger

A Fishing Trip with My Dad

As I finished unpacking, I could see the sun coming up over the horizon. I gazed out the window of our room and thought of many pleasant childhood memories of time spent with my father. Our relationship was very close as he taught me about many aspects of life, such as dancing, dangers in the street, and the relationships between men and women. As I grew up, we developed an intuitive sense of when to talk. We were more than father and daughter; we were friends as well. What I remember most was his love of fishing, which often caused fights between my parents. My father went fishing every weekend. Although he tried many times to convince me to go, I never had the courage to go fishing with him on the open waters of the Caribbean. I felt too afraid.

I had been living in the United States for six months, when in the summer of 2015, my husband and I went on a fishing trip. We went to Aristazabal Island in British Columbia, Canada, with some co-workers of my husband who had previously made this trip. I was over forty years old, and this was my first fishing experience as well as my first time on the high seas.

It was evening when the helicopter delivered us to the island. As we landed, I noticed a strong smell of fish. During the trip, we stayed in an L-shaped lodge on the edge of the port that was constructed from two old ships. The next morning, we were divided into groups, and a man named Tim was assigned as our fishing guide for the next three days. We left the port, and after some time, the small boat reached top speed. As I tried to clear my mind, I tightly clutched the swivel chair. Silently I told my father, "Stay by my side and help me to be brave. I am here more for you than me." Standing behind me, my father rested his hands on my shoulders; he made me feel confident.

The day was bright, and the sunlight reflected off the sea. We were about ten miles from the dock when Tim gestured. According to his experience and the fish detector, we were in an

area with salmon all around us. After we anchored, Tim asked me, "Belkis, have you ever gone fishing before?" I replied, "No, but my dad loved deep sea fishing." He smiled and began to instruct us on how to use the fishing rod and reel. I paid very close attention to what Tim said because I wanted to learn how to fish. After a few minutes of practicing what I had learned, Tim baited and cast my line into the water and then handed the pole back to me. I put it in the rod holder and fixed my eyes on the fishing line. Suddenly I saw the movement that signaled I had a fish! I grabbed the pole from the holder and began reeling with all my might. At this moment, I finally understood the excitement my dad felt when he caught a fish. In my mind, I could see the anticipation on his face. Then the wind caused the boat to sway heavily, and I immediately felt nauseous and got a headache. I felt dizzy and was concerned that my legs would not support me much longer. I told my husband, "Oh my God, I'm going to vomit!" He asked me if I had taken my Dramamine that morning. "No, I forgot it. It's still in our bedroom," I replied. My sea sickness was so violent and sudden, catching a fish was the furthest thought from my mind, and all I wanted to do was get off that boat.

I cannot stand on the boat, so I am not able to fish. I am disappointing my dad. My father was an excellent fisherman, always returning home loaded with a large variety of fish, such as grouper and tuna. Our fridge was so full of fish, you couldn't close the door. I desperately wanted to make my dad proud of me. I took my Dramamine and put on my rain gear. I was ready to try again.

Before sunrise the next morning, we left port. Tim suggested we go to an area where we could find large fish. The speed of the boat increased, and I held on tight. I was looking at the sea, which appeared gloomy. I was scared! With my father, I had learned how to swim, but on a boat, I was afraid I'd fall into the water and sink quickly, never to return. The wind caused water to splash on my face. I controlled my nerves, and Dad turned to me trying to give me courage. About fifteen minutes later, we anchored and cast our lines out. I watched my fishing line for a long time, and suddenly, I had a fish again. I jumped up, grabbed my pole and immediately began to reel in my catch. As the fish tried to pull

away, he caused the rod to bend. I released some line, and the fish started swimming away. I reeled in some line again, but this time slowly and firmly. I could feel him struggling to get loose, but my father said to me, "Do not let him go! That's our fish!" My husband and Tim yelled at me. "You can do it!" I finally succeeded. It was a big fish. My father and I laughed, full of emotion. We felt so happy and were celebrating. The moment I caught the fish, I forgot all about the sea. By noon, my husband had caught two salmon, and I had six.

Our last day on the island was beautiful. I woke up early after enjoying a deep, relaxing sleep. We were very successful this particular day; it was an excellent fishing day. I do not know how many salmon I caught. I know there were Chinook and coho salmon, and one of them was quite big. Sometimes Tim told me, "Let it go. It's very small and you already have reached your goal!" Oh, that feeling, that excitement!

We moved to the other side of the island. I was very relaxed. It was a very sunny afternoon and the sea was calm. I took the time to observe its beauty and intense blue color. The sea is portrayed beautifully in photographs, but nothing can replace the intensity of it in real life. I wanted to capture that singular moment when I finally felt at peace with the sea. I could now understand what my father was always saying.

Just then we saw some whales playing together, and I started recording a video to show our kids. We forgot about the whales as soon my husband realized he had a halibut on his line. It's a fish that very few had caught. Our attention eventually returned to fishing, but suddenly the immense whales were within five meters of us. They began to swim around and underneath the boat, and one almost upended it. I grabbed the boat firmly, holding my camera and continued recording. Tim began to worry. He collected the fishing rods and lifted the anchor since the other whales were trying to do the same thing, but eventually the whales moved away. When everything returned to normal again, I shuddered at the thought of what could have happened if our boat had turned over, and we had fallen into the cold water. I just

wanted to get back, so we decided to end the fishing trip early and return to the lodge.

That night I went to the restaurant because everyone from the trip was meeting for dinner. Someone commented that a woman had caught many large salmon. I did not understand what they were saying, and an employee approached me and said, "Congratulations!" I replied, "Thank you!" At the time, I thought they must congratulate everyone for catching some fish. Later we sat on the porch, and one of the leaders of our group approached saying, "I've been looking for you! Here is your cash prize." What a surprise for me! I never thought I could compete with this group of Americans and experienced fishermen. I got two prizes: second place for catching a Chinook salmon weighing over thirty pounds and first place for catching a coho salmon that was over fifteen pounds. Welcome to the fishing club of North King Lodge!

Back home I was thinking about my father. He had passed away five years before. He had left this life but was still with me. He was the one who had caught the fish. My most important accomplishment was facing my fears, and for the first time, I had gone fishing with my father.

~ Belkis Avery

To Catherine

To this woman who fought to succeed, to be independent, who faced every single problem that life imposed upon her. Who trusted her body to give life and who struggled against the disease with determination and strength.

To this mother who gave me all the love that a child could want. Who gave me an education and her good values. It wasn't always easy, but she's still here to support me, whatever my choices. Like my choice to go to United States to be an au pair and to leave everything behind. She adapted to it, and she found the strength to let me go.

If one day my life doesn't go the way I planned, I hope I will handle myself with the same strength, courage, and bravery that my mom did.

She may not be an Olympic athlete, an astronaut, or a president, but my mom is definitely my hero.

I love you.

~ Manon Dantan

A Letter to My Students

Dear Beloved Students,

Every day of class I am reminded of what amazing people you are. You have come from the four corners of the world to begin a new life – some by choice and some by unfortunate and often painful circumstances. Each of you has a story to tell: a story of struggle, frustration, disappointment and hardship and a story of hope, enthusiasm and happiness. I love being the recipient of those stories.

As I have worked with each of you over these many years, you have inspired me to be a better person. I have learned patience as I watch you struggle to learn English where it is two steps forward and one step back. I have become more generous by watching how you give when you have so little. You have shown me what sacrifice looks like when you are willing to leave all that is familiar and start anew in a strange land. When I have struggled with my job, I remember you and how you work ten hours a day seven days a week doing what no one else wants to do. And finally, I have learned how precious family is after discovering that many of you can only see your family through Skype because you cannot go home.

Lastly, I have been humbled. Despite all my education, I know very little. You have increased my knowledge of the world and of my own language. Geography was never my strength when I was young, yet because of you, I can now locate Togo, Armenia and Tanzania. Your rich cultures shine through in the foods we share and the conversations we have. Or how many times have I attempted to explain a grammar point only to be rightfully corrected by one of you!

Thank you for being a part of my life and allowing me to be a part of yours. I am so grateful that we have been able to learn from each other. I will remember you always.

Love,
Teacher Pat

~ *Patricia Dolezal*

The Best Man I Have Ever Met in My Life

I will never be able to thank you enough.
When I need you most, you are there.

Thank you for helping me recover my faith.
Thank you for helping me regain my confidence.
Thank you for helping me find what I had lost.

Thank you for knowing that my children
are the most beautiful treasure life has given me.
Thank you for holding them with your love.
Thank you for the times you hold me when I am needy.

Thank you for being the man who is there
in all the good and difficult moments,
and everything in between.

Thank you for putting up with my follies, my desires,
and my whims.
No matter what, you are there to help me fulfill my wishes
and desires.

You are the blessing that God sent to me in this life.
Thank you for accepting the challenge.
Thank you for taking the responsibility.
Thank you for making me happy.

Thank you, Donald Lee Beckel. You are the best man in my life.

~ *Kathy Ortiz*

Dad's Voice

His voice is the anchor that steadies the ship
 It solves the unsolvable
 It has hurt and healed
 It says "yes" when mom says "no"
 His voice cracked trying to hold back tears as he gave me away
 It brings a smile to my mom's face
 It smells like fresh brewed coffee
 It feels like the warmth of a summer bonfire
 His voice has a the ability to calm the fussiest baby
 It tells stories of the past
 It is the sparkle in the eyes of my children
 It lives within my veins
 His voice is love
 It is home
 It is all I need

~ Emily Ross

A Grandmother's Strength

My grandmother was a tough woman, to say the least. She was born, raised, and married in Ohio. Her parents, a strict German father and an Irish mother, had a lot to do with her demeanor. She grew up during the Depression and told me stories of just eating bread and butter, wearing clothes made by her mother, and reading books that served as her only means of enjoyment. That she had a depressing childhood is an understatement.

Once my grandmother came into her teenage years, life started to lighten up a bit. She attended a few beauty pageants and took home first place. She was quite beautiful. My grandfather, who was in the Navy, was in awe of her and, with her parents' permission, courted her. They married soon after her eighteenth birthday. He was twenty-two.

At the time of my grandparents' marriage, my grandmother was working as a switchboard operator for the local phone company. Shortly after they learned that they were expecting their first child. My grandmother soon discovered that the responsibility of taking care of their children landed solely on her. There were no exceptions for her even when she would work double shifts to help make ends meet. She knew not to ask for help from her husband because her pleas would go unanswered. "Back in that time, that's just how things were," my grandmother once said to me.

My grandfather passed away Christmas Eve 1996 from lung cancer. My grandparents had been married for 42 years. Once I was older, I asked my nana (this is what we grandchildren called her) how she coped with having to live the rest of her life without him. Her answer was "You just have to grin and bear it and keep going on. Just because you're mourning and in pain, life doesn't stop."

My nana was very straightforward with us even if it hurt our feelings. She would always push for us to do good in school and make good choices so that we could be self-sufficient. She would always talk about sacrifice and how it was necessary to survive and succeed.

On April 13, 2013, my nana passed away. It was ten days after her 76th birthday. She initially had a stroke that caused bleeding on her brain. Even so, the doctors were optimistic and believed that if they got the bleeding to stop, she would survive and adjust. Suddenly all our hope was gone. The doctors found my grandmother's body riddled with cancer that had metastasized. We had no idea she was so sick, and we were sure she didn't either because she never said a word.

After the funeral, while going through my nana's belongings, we found the missing piece. My nana knew all along she had cancer and was dying. My brother's discovery of her hospital paperwork confirmed the diagnosis. My heart broke. I realized the sacrifice my nana had made. I realized just how strong and unselfish she was. Everything she had been through during the course of her life gave her this strength. My nana chose to carry this burden on her own.

My nana's strength was one in a million, and I am honored to have had her as a grandmother. The memory of her strength motivates me every day and reminds me of what real love and sacrifice is. The lessons I have learned from her act of unselfishness will never be forgotten.

~ Jamie Andrade

The Miracle of the Woods

It was a very early cold November morning around 4:45 a.m. of youth gun season. It was my very first time going deer hunting where I was actually able to hunt. I got dressed with my uncle and headed to the blind. We hadn't gotten snow yet, so the leaves were very crunchy and loud. We had to walk slowly and light-footed the whole way. I could hear the water rushing in the creek nearby.

We finally made it to the blind and got settled in. We still couldn't see much since daylight hadn't arrived yet. My uncle told me I could take a nap if I wanted. I must have slept awhile because when I woke it was daylight. It had warmed up a bit but was still chilly. We had crackers, Slim Jims, and some type of sweet for breakfast. I remember looking out of the blind at the beautiful, peaceful woods. It was so still, nothing was moving yet.

I vividly remember saying a prayer in my head. And it has stuck with me to this day. I prayed to my great grandpa. I prayed that he would send a deer my way and help me harvest my first deer. All I asked was to see one.

I must have fallen back asleep at some point because I felt a slight shake and heard, "Get ready. There's a deer coming." My heart dropped; my breathing started getting out of control. I got my gun off my lap and pointed it out the blind window, and that's when I saw him standing in a perfect opening with sun rays beaming down on him. It was like something out of a movie, surreal; I couldn't believe it was there, like he was put there for me. I don't even remember shooting. I can only remember my uncle jumping up and shaking me uncontrollably and telling me I got him. I will never forget that moment; he was so excited and proud of me. We watched the deer run twenty yards and drop.

We waited about twenty minutes to make sure he was dead before getting out of the blind. We unzipped the back of the blind and got out to feel the brisk morning air again, but we were so

excited we didn't mind. My heart felt like it was going to beat out of my chest. We were walking the short distance to my first deer, and I could see him lying there. "I did it!" I shouted. I still couldn't believe it.

It was around 8 a.m. when I called my parents and grandparents to share the exciting news and to tell them to meet me back at the house. We took tons of pictures then started the long journey of dragging my buck back to the truck. I couldn't wait to show everyone. I was so proud.

Still to this day I can't believe how perfect the deer looked standing in the rays of sun. I thank my great grandpa for it every time I think about it. I honestly believe he sent it for me and guided me to harvest that deer. And that is something I'll never forget.

~ Chelsey Moor

A Tribute to an Old Friend

This story is about a good friend of mine, Danny, who lost his life to cancer in August of 2016. His passing left a void in my life, but in the time I knew him, he taught me a lot about life. My life is better because of having known him.

Several years ago, he and I, along with a few other friends, went on a trip to Michigan. We wanted to visit the Cabela's sporting goods store in Dundee. Because it was a long drive, we decided to leave on a Friday afternoon, spend the night in a hotel, and visit Cabela's the next day.

After we had checked into the hotel, we decided to go find the pool. There were several kids in the pool when we got there. Danny went to the table to take off his wig and prosthesis. He had lost his right leg to the disease several years earlier. When he got up and hopped over to the pool to get in, the kids that were in the pool took one look at him and ran screaming. They were so scared, they didn't even take the time to towel off. We all thought that was the best joke, and we had the pool to ourselves the rest of the night. Even Danny thought it was funny as he always made jokes about his leg and hair, and he liked to surprise people who didn't know.

I learned from him that no matter what happens in life, you can either choose to be happy or you can let it get you down. He battled cancer for over ten years, but he always chose to be happy and live his life to the fullest. Even when he was going through the harsh treatment and didn't feel well, he didn't give up.

One of his dreams was to travel and go hunting, and he did. He went out west and to Canada on elk- and bear-hunting trips, trekking through the snow and climbing mountains with just one good leg. He travelled to the Smoky Mountains and various other places with his friends. He and I also occasionally went fishing together.

Another one of his dreams was to have his own wood-working shop and work from home, and before he died, he made it happen. He had his own business, making cabinets and furniture. He worked hard at establishing it, and I have a few pieces of the furniture he made.

One day when he and I were out fishing, I asked him if he ever felt like just giving up. He said there were many days he felt like it, but if he did, he wouldn't be able to live his dreams. He reminded me that he didn't have strength on his own. He gave me a verse from the Bible which helps me every time I think my life is caving in. "He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:29-31.

Even though I miss Danny very much, I cherish his memory, and I am grateful to have been a part of his life. I know he is in a better place, and I hope to see him again someday.

~ *Nathan Miller*

A Thanksgiving

In stoic exposure, leaves cast off,
 Winter trees endure.
 Stripped of anonymity, each dips and flutters its skeletal fans
 In the groaning music of the whipping wind—
 Flirtations with a purple sky.

Alone and stark, surrounded by black silhouettes of others,
 The smooth sycamore arches lofty branches.
 Its white trunk, barkless from its July disrobing,
 With fallen leaves and empty branches,
 It could seem most vulnerable.

Yet its symmetrical majesty and soft-skinned beauty,
 Once hidden by the blended oneness of summer's leaves,
 Impress my heart and stir my faith
 With thanksgiving, my God,
 For your protection, provision, and power—

A winter truth expressed through
 The nakedness of trees.

~ *Lucinda Metzger*

My Brother

My neighbor Lito and I grew up together in Los Eliseos, San Salvador in El Salvador, Central America. He lived in a grand, three-floor corner house with a garage. The garage was made of brick, and the house was made of cement painted white. The house always smelled of cat litter. He had around 30 cats in his house! His mother had a tiny grocery store and a little restaurant called Comida a la Vista in the house, too. His stepfather, Mr. Carl, was a World War II veteran. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps. I always went to find him so I could play "Oh, Susanna" for him on my flute. Mr. Carl was our superhero. He always drank coffee and smoked cigars. He wore a cap saying "U.S. Marines."

I lived next door. My house had two floors and was made of white and burgundy cement. My father worked in a Government office called I.V.U. He was also a professional artist who painted all of the pictures in our house. My mother owned a little restaurant, too. My mom worked across the street in Duraflex Manufacturing, where she was a receptionist.

When I was four years old and Lito was five years old, he drove his little firetruck. He had been going through my house and talking tough. When I went outside, he stopped his car next to me and told his nanny, "Look at the little girl." At the same time a strong wind came. He took my arm and told me: "Be careful, cerota girl." I was shocked because we were kids and he said "cerota," a bad word. After that we were BFF. We played and fought too. We competed on bicycles, and when he was punished, he went through the roof to my room. We were together for the earthquake in 1986. During the war, we climbed to the roof to watch the lights from planes shooting. When they blocked out the light, we played hide and seek. We went to the fair every year with all of our friends. We always met with our friends in Lito's home to watch movies, and the last movie always was XXX. We always told him: "That movie is boring."

We went to high school together. He forced me to escape with him, and if I didn't want to, he grabbed my backpack and pulled me out of school. I was always punished for his guilt. He never let me have a boyfriend. We had the same haircut and sometimes wore similar clothes. We looked like twins. I often fought for him because I hated when someone bothered him. He always said: "I'm going to call my sister," and nobody bothered him. I supported him when he was drunk, and I was forced to go to all the parties with him.

One day, I disagreed with him because he started having bad friends. I was angry and resentful. I was so resentful, we didn't talk for thirteen years. One day, he called me and told me that he wanted to see me and speak with me. But we never did.

He passed away that year on December 28, 2013. I was the first person to arrive at his funeral because I couldn't believe that he had died. I only believed it when I saw him in his coffin. I waited to prepare his body and around eleven p.m., they put him in the cry room. I saw him and left the funeral. I wanted to cry but couldn't. I wasn't at his burial. I felt bad. I never told him how much I loved him, but I'm sure that he knew. The autumn makes me remember our childhood together because on vacation in my country the weather is similar. I remember my brother every day. He is my life.

In memory of Carlos "Lito" Antonio Portan Arias

~ Iris Rivas

Desserts

I do not remember where I heard the phrase: “Desserts don’t go to the stomach; instead they fill our heart,” but I truly believe it.

Think about it. Remember when you were a little one and you were finishing your meal, eating all of your peas and carrots, and then you realized that your stomach was full? Suddenly a big strawberry and vanilla cheesecake came to the table, and you knew you wanted a piece of that. It doesn’t matter if you were full or not. You deserved that dessert.

This kind of thing still happens to me, and I’m a grown up. I love eating desserts. It is obvious when we are sitting around the table, and someone asks if there is going to be dessert. My eyes just open brightly.

Recently I said the phrase while dining with my father-in-law. Since then he has also made the phrase one of his own. Now he is the one that teams with me at the end of the meals to be bold and ask for dessert. Maybe it is because we both have a sweet tooth. It is weird because my husband should be the one to understand this feeling, but he is always concerned about my dessert addiction.

There are a lot of different kinds of desserts that you can taste over your lifetime. Of course you have favorites, but is it fair that you only have one? I thought about myself, and I found that it depends on my mood. How about those rainy days when you want to feel cozy and warm? There is the perfect opportunity to have a warm cinnamon roll with a little cup of warm milk. Maybe for summer days when it is very hot you would prefer a big slice of a refreshing lemon pie with a cold brew of coffee that takes your thirsty tongue away. So every time is a special event to try to find a new dessert that can become a favorite.

Sometimes there are just seasonal favorite desserts. I remember the first time that I tasted pumpkin pie. I was so

obsessed about that flavor that everything had to be with pumpkin: the coffee, the pie, the soup, cookies, muffins and even the smell of some candle wax. Another seasonal dessert that I love is when it is Christmas. The ginger bread or the fruit cake with coffee in the cold season is the best way to watch TV or stay on the couch with some nice blankets.

There are also times when you have to search for the best desserts in town. I love one apple pie that has a little slice of pecans at the bottom between the crust and the apples that you can be delighted with. It is sold in my favorite cafeteria where I used to live. I found this cafeteria back when I was dating my now husband, and we went to have a cup of coffee and a piece of cake. After that date we visited this cafeteria regularly. This place became the perfect site to escape and have the best coffee and wonderful desserts.

I also remember desserts because of the people I ate with. My grandmother used to prepare a lime pie, with chocolate topping and whipped cream at the rim. It was absolutely the most wonderful pie I have ever tasted. But the best part was when we prepared it together. I remember measuring the ingredients, being my grandmother’s little assistant.

Sometimes it doesn’t matter what kind of dessert you are choosing, but it has to be from your favorite flavor. In my case it is strawberry. As you grow up, your family begins to identify you by your favorite flavor. My mother always brought or baked me a strawberry cake to celebrate my birthday.

Maybe at this point, you are also concerned about my love for desserts and how it can affect my health. Don’t worry about it. I do exercise a lot. Part of my motivation is the piece of cake that I will be able to eat afterwards, and the best part is that it is going to be guilt free.

So every time you are confused about having desserts or not, you must repeat the phrase “Desserts don’t go to the stomach, they fill your heart.”

~ Carmina

Thank You, Volunteers!

Teaching ESOL students at Live Oaks has its successes and challenges. Before starting the inspiring process of instructing foreign speakers, it's necessary to take stock of what resources we have to assist us. We have awesome books, monthly newspaper subscriptions, sharp boards with cool software, and a cart full of laptops for student use. All of these things are very beneficial in our mission to help our students improve their language skills. However, our most valued resources come in a completely different form. We are blessed to have the help of a top-notch set of volunteers. Their assistance has enabled us to do so much more with our program, and we are so grateful. On behalf of our students and us, we want to tell everybody how valuable each one of them is.

Rod has been a volunteer at Live Oaks for more than 15 years, serving the class 4 days a week. He began as a GED tutor and then filled a need in a new ESOL class. He is extremely resourceful and has a vast wealth of knowledge from his prior work as a civil engineer. He's quick to help by looking up something or by giving a synonym for a vocabulary word. While he has been a valuable assistant to us as teachers, his most enduring impact is on our students. Rod is known for his jokes. The students always genuinely laugh, even if they are clueless about the meaning of his teasing. He brings out merriment in everyone. He has given countless hours of his time in tutoring sessions to improve reading, pronunciation, or to help a student fill out an application. He has a heart of pure gold and seeks nothing in return, except maybe the satisfaction of knowing he has helped someone. Thank you, Rod! We could never compensate you for all you're worth, but realize, "Volunteers are not paid... not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless" (Quote by Sherry Anderson).

Frank, a treasured volunteer, reminds us not to take life so seriously. He is a classic "go with the flow" kind of guy. He always arrives on time, ready to help out wherever needed, but

usually has to wait patiently for a targeted tutoring student who is inevitably coming late. He's very gentle with the students, yet he challenges them to think outside the box. His area of expertise is assisting students to revise their Ohio Writers' Conference stories. As a former technical writer, he takes a lot of time with students, one by one, not giving them the solutions, but leading them to discover better use of language on their own. He is an excellent small group facilitator, leading lively small group speaking practice. He is generous with his time helping students to complete government applications such as for green card lottery or for ACA healthcare. Thank you, Frank, for your compassion for these immigrants who need some support. You are there for them, and that makes their lives more livable!

As a former teacher, principal, and superintendent, Bob certainly has the most educational credentials of all our volunteers. He uses the skills that he has acquired over the years to assist each of our students on an individual basis. He's an expert on learning styles and helps our students understand their unique approach to learning based on their strengths and weaknesses. Students enjoy talking to Bob because he's empathetic, a good listener, and makes them feel comfortable. He leads our students to think about realistic goals while grasping a mindset for the future. Both students and instructors appreciate Bob's knowledge and expertise. He's a valuable resource that does not go unnoticed. Thank you, Bob! We are better teachers and students because you are a part of our ESOL program.

Our students can see that Cheryl, a 9-year veteran volunteer and former special education teacher, has their best interests at heart as soon as she steps into the classroom. Cheryl is so warm and sincere in her desire to understand our students, and they're very comfortable sharing their life stories and goals with her. She's always thinking of ways to help them achieve those "a-ha" moments in their learning. Not only is she fantastic at working one-on-one with students, but she spends her own time searching for books, puzzles, flashcards, and other manipulatives that she feels will be particularly useful as learning resources for them. Cheryl is adept working with the full spectrum of student

ability levels, from one-on-one beginner-level to facilitation of an advanced discussion group. So, she is a terrific asset to all of our classes; therefore, it's not unusual on any given day to hear a teacher ask, "Hey, is Cheryl available to work with....?" Thank you, Cheryl! That's a testament to how special you are to our ESOL program!

Amy has already made a huge impact as a new tutor this year, drawing on her Bachelor's degree in speech pathology and experience as a homeschool teacher to build our students' abilities and self-esteem. Amy has a particularly strong passion for helping our students meet their speaking goals. Working one-on-one with lower-level students, Amy is very encouraging as she helps them with foundational English skills and focuses on their specific pronunciation needs. Her efforts have already made a dramatic difference to one intermediate student, who has struggled with pronunciation despite her hard work and was continually apologizing for not speaking English well. After just a few focused sessions with Amy, this student now beams with confidence in her vastly improved speaking skills. The student readily volunteers for class reading activities. Thank you, Amy! We're very excited for more of our students to experience similar success!

Although Chris is a new volunteer this year, she recently retired after 12 years of teaching level 2 ESOL students and is beyond valuable to our lower-level classes! Chris immediately connects with each student, even the most insecure individuals who come to class for the first time. Her love of teaching clearly comes across in the way she works with students, showing such compassion and empathy as she patiently helps them with vocabulary and pronunciation. Students smile and nod as soon as Chris starts talking to the class or working one-on-one, showing how quickly she makes them feel comfortable. Chris also sprinkles a great sense of humor into her conversations with students by creating fun concept connections that "stick" in their minds. Chris's vast experience with our beginner curriculum and online exercises, coupled with her nurturing approach, make her a real

"natural." Thank you, Chris, for assuring that our students are getting the best support possible!

Her smile is contagious, her wit is unmatched, and her love for ESOL students is never ending. Jacqui has been our volunteer and substitute ESOL teacher for many years. We are uniquely blessed to have such a talented and energetic person that we can call on at the last minute for just about anything. When she is subbing for us, we don't worry. We know she will be on time, conduct an excellent lesson, and give each student the attention he or she deserves. Jacqui studied social work and Spanish at Syracuse University. The reason people study social work is so that they can influence people's lives. Indeed, Jacqui influences our students' lives every time she steps foot in the classroom. Teaching grammar, translating Spanish/English, encouraging students to be the best they can be – these are only a few of Jacqui's valuable traits. Thank you, Jacqui! We are very grateful to have you on our team.

Jennifer is a breath of fresh air in our ESOL classrooms. A young lady in her twenties, she has a millennial perspective on things combined with a welcoming smile. We are glad to have her helping us in the evening with her boundless energy. She gives one-on-one tutoring to ESOL students at all levels. She has been very helpful with technology when the students use laptops. She has even created a Kahoot game! With her special skills as an artist, she brings a lot of creativity into English-speaking practice when she facilitates a small group. Jennifer is planning a trip to Haiti this summer to lead children in a camp focusing on crafts and language exchange. She is a true "neighbor" to everyone, even in foreign lands. Thank you, Jennifer! The world is a better place because of your kindness!

~ Julie Frye
Jan Matulis
Susan Renner



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Gabriele Bolik-Fuehser, Great Oaks ITCD - back cover

My name is Gabriele Bolik-Fuehser, and I am from Cologne, Germany. My husband's work brought him, my daughter, and me to Ohio in 2014. My interest in art expanded into stained glass many years ago. I worked for a stained glass designer and eventually my own company designing stained glass art. To me, the art in this book says "Everything takes time to grow."

Paula Garcia Contreras, Eastland Career Center - p.188

I drew the crying widow because it is about a story (legend) of my country and is a sad love story. I was born in Honduras and I like to draw in my free time.

Eduardo Lopez, Great Oaks ITCD - p. viii

My name is Eduardo. I am 26 years old, and I am from Guatemala. I studied Plastic Arts in college. I am an art lover. I like to paint, and my favorite styles to paint are Realism, Surrealism, and Cubism. My goal is to get the opportunity to continue studying art.

Brooke Potter, Miami Valley CTC - front cover

I was born and raised in Ohio, a place that truly shows the beauty in all of the seasons. This was my first time submitting a painting, and I am very grateful to be a part of something so appreciative of art and writing.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Elvire Ahouangbe, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 10

My name is Elvire and I was born 26 years ago in Benin, a small country in West Africa. My daughter and I joined my husband in Cincinnati, Ohio, six months ago. I recently started English classes at Scarlet Oaks. I'm proud of it because it will allow me to improve my English skills and better integrate myself.

Majd Al Hawawsheh, Canton City Schools - p. 135

I'm from Jordan and I'm 25 years old. I moved to the USA about 3 years ago. I have a university degree in accounting from my country. I'm attending class at the English Learning Center in Canton. I wrote about my mom because she inspires me.

Veronica Almeida, Wayne County JVS - p. 61

My name is Veronica Almeida. I'm from Ecuador. I'm a happy mom of two beautiful kids. I live in Wooster, OH, and I'm working on getting my GED.

Jamie Andrade, Auburn Career Center - p. 173

My name is Jamie Andrade. I am a devoted wife and mother of three beautiful children. I am beyond excited to be in the ABLE program and accomplish my goal of advancing academically. I am dedicating my work to my husband, children, and my teacher, Mrs. Dee, for supporting me and pushing me to be better.

Barbara Annon, EHOVE - p. 3

I believe our entire lives are made up of stories—some marvelous—some far from it! The day I started at the Norwalk ABLE/GED program began as a great one. I was hired on the spot at a job interview and excitedly hurried home only to hear a very familiar voice on the phone informing me that I had forgotten to check the box that asked, “Do you have a High School Diploma or GED?” I had neither. “I’m sorry,” said the voice, “let us know when you do.” I had gotten a job and lost it all within an hour! I immediately

called our Board of Education for days and times of GED classes and registered that very night. With the assistance of dedicated teachers and volunteers, I not only earned my GED that spring but also won an essay contest that helped pay for my first college class. I returned to the program that September to give back to the program and was hired as Norwalk's first ABLE/GED Teacher's Aide. This time I could check that little box on the application and I am honored to say that I have kept this job for nearly 27 years.

Susana Antal, Parma City Schools - p. 137

As a child, I always loved telling stories. I did not finish school, but I started to write and I loved putting my feelings down on paper. I have always enjoyed giving poems as gifts to friends to celebrate weddings and other special occasions. It has been a wonderful experience to have my poetry published in prior editions of *Beginnings*. In the future, I hope I can write a book, perhaps a children's book.

Belkis Rosario Avery, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 164

I'm from the Dominican Republic, and I'm 48 years old. I moved to the U.S. two years ago. I started ESOL class in September of 2016 at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ever since I was a young girl, I have enjoyed reading about the history and geography of other countries. I love learning about other cultures. Every day, I wake up with the need to learn something new. I also like to write about my personal experiences. My story is a gift for my kids, Daniel, Arthur, and Gabriel: Remember, pursue your dreams.

Malick Ba, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 129

Malick is from Mauritania and has been in the United States since the fall of 2014. He would like to finish university and get his doctorate in Management Economics.

Amna Babar, Wayne County JVS - p. 81

My name is Amna. I am from Pakistan. Allah blessed me with two kids and a really lovable husband. I want to live simply because I like simplicity.

Minseo Bae, Canton City Schools - p. 157

I came from South Korea a year ago. I live in North Canton and am working in Winesburg. I like to travel, write poems, and drink coffee. I also like conversing with and eating food with people. I'm learning English at Canton City Schools. I am making many new friends in the U.S and would like to spend more time with them. If they want, I will teach them Korean and how to make Korean foods. My goal is to publish a book of poems in English.

Marcos Barros, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 107

I'm from Guayaquil, Ecuador. I lived in NYC for 6 years and Cincinnati, Ohio, for ten months. I have four children. I enjoy playing baseball, watching movies, and playing with my children.

Florence Baseke, Wayne County JVS - p. 34

Flora came from Uganda and has been living in the United States for 3 years. Her goal is to get a degree from a university in Community Development.

Dianne Benson, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 147

I am an ESOL instructor at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. I thoroughly enjoy teaching all my wonderful students.

Angela Bland, Project LEARN of Summit County - p. 39

Angela is a hardworking mom and student.

Saul Bollas Zamora, Youngstown City Schools - p. 97

I'm a Mexican immigrant. I have been married nine years. I have three children. I am thankful for the opportunity to live in the United States.

Maria Bravo, Eastland-Fairfield Career & Technology- p. 79

I am from Mexico. I enjoyed writing this story because it was close to a real experience that I had in the past.

Kilcha Canfield, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 50

Kilcha has been a teacher aide for Great Oaks Career Campuses for over 10 years. She is a past Writer's Conference published author.

Seunghee Chae, Wayne County JVS - p. 51

My name is Seunghee Chae. I'm from South Korea. I have two daughters. My family has been here in Wooster, OH, for my husband's business for almost two years. Before that, I taught biology at a high school in South Korea. Now I'm an ESL student here. I'm also a volunteer teacher at my Korean church in Macedonia, OH. I teach the children of Korean immigrants the Korean language every Sunday after church. We're going to return to Korea in a few months. I think that the last two years of my time here have been a blessing to me. I'll miss everything here.

Monica Chambers, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 22

My name is Monica, and I am 65 years old. I moved to Ohio from Jayuya, Puerto Rico, eight years ago to marry my husband. This is my second year in English classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. I was a Head Start teacher in Puerto Rico for 29 years. I love teaching and am currently teaching Confirmation classes at San Carlos Borromeo in Carthage. I also enjoy nature and family.

Bruce Cline, Auburn Career Center - p. 5

Bruce Cline has been a general education teacher since 1980, an intervention specialist since 2012, and this is his ninth year as an ABL instructor. He considers ABL "therapeutic teaching" since he meets students with interesting histories for whom education has assumed an important role! Rather than being a captive audience, these adult learners enrich his life as well as their own by seeking to improve themselves by learning. In his spare time, Bruce enjoys perennial gardening and has turned this into a summer job.

Sharrita Cooper, Parma City Schools - p. 57

My name is Sharrita. I live and was born in Cleveland. I have four beautiful and very talented adult children. I just received custody of my 11-year-old nephew. I attend GED class at North Star in Cleveland and I have wonderful teachers who I really appreciate.

Janka Curillova, Delaware Career Center - p. 105

Janka grew up in the small village of Pribelce in southern Slovakia. This place is surrounded by beautiful forests and Janka loves

returning there to visit. She loves the nature and all of its beauty. Janka graduated from the Economic University in Bratislava, and she has been living abroad ever since. Her life milestone events are revealed in her poem “My Journey”. She feels that moving from one place to another is a great opportunity, and she can’t wait to see what life brings her next.

Jackie Czaja, Upper Valley Career Center - p. 155

I was born in Buffalo, New York, in December 1960. I am the oldest of four girls. My parents divorced shortly after my youngest sister was born. My mother is gone, and I don’t speak to my father. I live in Piqua, Ohio, with my five children and a big, yellow lab named Buddy. I’m currently unemployed, looking for work and attending Edison State Community College. I also volunteer at Habitat for Humanity as often as possible.

Hiromi Dang, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 113

I’m from Saga, Japan. I’m married to an American-Vietnamese man. We have lived in Cincinnati for 2 years. I was a professional hip-hop dancer/instructor for 10 years. I just recently starting playing classical guitar.

Heidi Daniels, Canton City Schools - p. 118

Heidi teaches for Canton City Schools ABLE and for the statewide distance learning program.

Manon Dantan, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 168

My name is Manon Dantan and I’m 22 years old. I’m from a small city south of Paris in the country of France. I’m currently working as an au pair in Cincinnati, where I take care of an adorable little girl. After my first year is finished, I plan to extend as an au pair for 9 more months in another state. I love to travel. I have a degree in Biology from France and someday I’d like to complete a program to become a nurse.

Paige Davis, Wayne County JVS - p. 56

My name is Paige Davis. I was born on August 3, 1995. I am twenty-one years old. My mom is my biggest support system in life so I chose to enter a poem I wrote for her. I enjoy spending

time at home. Being from a small town, there isn’t much to do. I have a cat and a dog, but the cat is my favorite. My family will be moving soon. I’m glad it isn’t to another town. I attend ABLE to get my GED and look forward to my future in this class.

Bobby Jo Davis, Upper Valley Career Center - p. 47

I was born in Troy, Ohio, and I am currently living in Versailles, Ohio. I have three beautiful children in their twenties. During my school years I eventually found enjoyment going through a restaurant operation program in a vocational school. However, I dropped out and now see the need to have a good education in order to take advantage of possible management positions that have been offered to me. I have held a variety of jobs in manufacturing, including drill press operator and paint inspector. I am presently involved in an assembly process building pallets.

Patricia Dolezal, Canton City Schools - p. 169

I have been teaching ESOL for over twenty years because I love the students. When I am not teaching, my husband and I are enjoying our three, soon-to-be-four, grandchildren. I enjoy reading, biking, and quilting.

Andrea Dzierwa, Mid-East CTC - p. 149

Andrea is a 37-year-old, hardworking, single mother. She is determined to get her GED and better her life for her family.

Rebecca Elkevizth, Wayne County JVS - p. 31

Rebecca Elkevizth was born and raised in Medina, Ohio. She has fourteen nieces and nephews, loves to travel, and lives with her peach-faced lovebird, Guinness.

Norma Feregrino, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 68

My name is Norma Feregrino. In 2002, my husband and I came to the USA from Mexico because of his work, first to Philadelphia, then Pennsylvania, and then to Cincinnati, Ohio, where our son was born. Because I like working with my hands, I enjoy cooking, needle point, sewing, crocheting, and writing. Being selected two years in a row for this book is an honor.

Julie Frye, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 23, 184

My name is Julie Frye and I've worked as an ESOL aide and instructor for 10 years at Live Oaks Vocational School in Cincinnati, Ohio. I love teaching ESOL and feel that I learn as much each day as my students do. I've grown as a person in this job, and I feel truly blessed to have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. I'm also married and have a son and a daughter. I enjoy running, working outside, and spending time with my family at National Parks.

Andrea Gaines, Project LEARN of Summit Cty - p. 148

Andrea is a dynamic personality who goes full force into anything and everything she does.

Carmina Galguera, Wayne County JVS - p. 182

I'm Carmina. My husband and I come from Mexico. We've been in the U.S. for almost 2 years. I love desserts, coffee, long conversations with friends, and crocheting. It's been an awesome adventure and a blessed opportunity to live here.

Linda Ghonim, Canton City Schools - p. 141

I have worked in adult education for twenty years. I teach Reasoning Through Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies in the Canton City Schools ABLÉ program. The students that I meet in my classes are my heroes. They balance work, family, and school to reach their goals. It is a joy to watch my students achieve their goals and gain confidence in themselves. I am blessed to have been a small part of their lives.

Nancy Greissing, Parma City Schools - p. 41

Storytellers run in my family. Growing up, I listened to stories about the way my grandparents came to this country and the Great Depression of my parents' generation. Every week, we went to the library. I love the smell of old libraries: wood and ink and comfy leather chairs. It has been my joy to teach literature and share stories with so many students.

Amy Guda, Lancaster Fairfield CAA - p. 159

Amy has been an ABLÉ instructor for thirteen years and is a graduate of Ohio State University.

Augustine Hakiza, Parma City Schools - p. 49

Augustine came to the U.S. from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016. He works at a factory to support his wife and three children and is studying diligently for his GED.

Olayinka Harris, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 17

Ola is from Nigeria and has lived in the United States for four years. She enjoys spending time with children and sharing with them. She likes spending time in English class and meeting people of different ages and ethnic backgrounds.

Rosanna Heintzman, Miami Valley CTC - p. 77

My name is Rosanna Heintzman. I love writing, photography, decorating, painting/drawing, sewing, and crafts. I also love helping people, praying, and serving others. I've been married to my wonderful husband John for seven years. Together we are blessed with a wonderful family.

Derek Herb, Parma City Schools - p. 6

After obtaining my GED, I hope to pursue a career in a creative field in which I can apply all my passions. I write music and lyrics as well as sing in a band and play drums and guitar. I am an artist and a special-effects artist. I am enthusiastic about enjoying and protecting the environment. One of my strongest passions is travel. I have visited most of the United States and Canada.

Brenda Hershman, Wayne County JVS - p. 134

I was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. I am now living in Wooster where I have been for the past 33 years with my four kids and five grandchildren. Love lives forever. . .

Paola Hogland, Great Oaks ITCD - pp. 82, 123

I am from Lima, Peru. I have lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for eight months. I have two children. I enjoy dancing, exercising, and spending time with my family.

Karima Jabrah, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 63

My name is Karima Jabrah. My first language is Arabic, but I will never stop trying to master English. I am originally from Palestine, but now I am a citizen of the United States of America. Thanks to all who have helped me to improve my English.

Olivia Kneprova, Polaris Career Center - p. 115

My name is Olga Kneprova and I am from the Czech Republic. I worked as a music and Czech language teacher for 17 years. After that, I worked as the manager for the pedagogical and educational departments at Bumble-Bee Preschool in Prague. Until 2016, I held a position as president of my local Kiwanis Club. Currently, I am a member of the Toastmasters Club in Medina, Ohio. In my free time, I enjoy sports, cultural events, and reading literature.

Hong Lindenberger, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 163

My name is Hong Lindenberger and I moved to Ohio from Hanoi, Vietnam, a year ago. I am a petroleum geologist with more than 16 years of study and work in the field of petroleum resource assessment. I worked for the Vietnam Petroleum Institute for more than 6 years, and I studied at the University of Science and Technology in South Korea for 3 years as a Ph.D. candidate. I recently married a US citizen whom I have known for more than 10 years. I am now working at Meijer's Milford store as a part-time cashier and am looking for a chance to work in the field of geology.

Roberto Lopez, EHOVE - p. 117

Roberto Lopez is from El Crucero, Nicaragua, and his wife Estella Lopez is from Managua, Nicaragua. They have been married for 23 years. After earning his GED, Roberto returned to work on his English and Estella also came to work on English, math, and towards her GED.

Gabriel Manriquez, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 139

I am from Morelia, Michoacán in central Mexico. My family has nine children, and I am the second youngest. I have been living in the United States for sixteen years.

Patricia Manuel, Wayne County JVS - p. 85

I live in Wooster, OH. 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.

Jan Matulis, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 184

Jan has enjoyed teaching ESOL through Great Oaks for the past three years, working with multi-level beginners at the Live Oaks campus. After working for many years as a market researcher and an education program evaluator at the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Jan wanted to "see the other side of the classroom" and become a teacher. She absolutely loves working with her students and has gained a much greater appreciation for the highly-individualized needs of lower-level learners. Embracing her new teaching career, Jan is also an adjunct instructor with the Department of Psychology at the University of Cincinnati.

Hing McGrath, Eastland-Fairfield CTC - p. 12**Lucinda Metzger, Auburn Career Center - p. 179**

Prior to being an ABLÉ instructor for the past thirteen years, Cindy retired from a thirty-year career in public secondary education. The dedication and sacrifices her students make to pursue their ABLÉ goals impress and encourage her to give her best and keep returning year after year.

Nathan Miller, Auburn Career Center - p. 177

Nathan was raised in an Amish community in Middlefield, Ohio, where he attended private schools. He always struggled academically and never met the minimum standards for graduation. Now enrolled in the ABLÉ program, he is discovering his learning style and has passed two of the four GED tests. He hopes to graduate in the spring.

Salma Mohamed, Eastland-Fairfield CTC - p. 40

I'm from Somalia. I like to write stories in English. I tell my children stories. In Somalia, my grandmother used to tell me stories of the past.

Chelsey Moor, Wayne County JVS - p. 175

My name is Chelsey Rae Moor. I was born in Wooster, OH. I have a wonderful fiancé. We've been together four years. In my free time I enjoy the outdoors: hunting, fishing, and camping. I also enjoy gaming. When I'm not outside, I love curling up by a big window and reading a book. My inspiration is my grandmother. She is my role model and my best friend.

Erika Motoyama, Miami Valley CTC - p. 145

My name is Erika, I have two wonderful sons, and I am from Brazil. Now I live in Ohio and I am taking GED classes.

Valentyn Mozgovyy, Parma City Schools - p. 92

Valentyn has traveled and worked in many countries. He is from the Ukraine.

Ahmed Nazareth, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 70

I was born in Saudi Arabia. I'm taking ESOL class to improve my English.

Isaac Ndahayo, Parma City Schools - p. 75

Isaac arrived in the United States from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016. His goal is to get his High School Equivalency diploma by May of 2017 and enter college for pre-medical studies.

Michael Newman, Pickaway-Ross JVS - p. 42

Michael is a student at Ross County ABLE. He earned his GED several years ago and has returned to school to improve his overall skills.

Elizabeth Norman, Wayne County JVS - p. 43

Elizabeth has three children, ages 11, 14, and 17. She is working hard to get her GED so she can go to college.

Hafsa Noumane, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 109

My name is Hafsa and I'm 27 years old. I moved to the U.S. nine months ago from Casablanca, Morocco. I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, with my husband.

Kathy Ortiz, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 171

My name is Kathy Ortiz and I am from Aguascalientes, Mexico. I study English at Live Oaks in Milford, Ohio. I recently earned my US citizenship and I feel very proud!

Sonia Paiva, Miami Valley CTC - p. 99

Sonia moved to the U.S. 2 years ago from Portugal with her daughter to join her husband, who is assigned to the U.S. Air Force for 3 years. She is a psychologist by background. Learning English has always been a goal for her. It is also important for her to serve as an example for and help her daughter. The first months were difficult, but now she can communicate and run her life. She is very grateful to have this opportunity and a wonderful teacher.

Brandon Parks, Wayne County JVS - p. 120

Brandon is my name and I live on a therapy farm. I try to work on trucks in my down time. The truck in my story is my daily driver and I have another, a 1986 Silverado, that can't be driven on the road...yet.

Elizabeth Parks, Wayne County JVS - pp. 122, 128

My name is Elizabeth Parks. I live on a therapy farm with my husband. I attend ABLE for GED classes but hope to go to the Adult Diploma program in the near future because that will help me to get into college. I am very thankful to ABLE for helping me to stay on track and not give up on myself.

Barb Perkins, Miami Valley CTC - p. 84

My name is Barbara Perkins. I'm 35 years old and I'm attending GED classes. The challenges of my life have led me here to better myself and to finish what I started with my dad. I remember everything he said to me and taught me. Even though I can't do what I enjoy the most, I'm not lying down without a fight. Being diagnosed with M.S. a year ago has had its ups and downs – both mentally and physically. I'm trying my hardest to get through this and overcome what has become this chapter of my life!

Dylan Potter, Miami Valley CTC - p. 25

My name is Dylan Potter and I was born May 29th, 1997. I grew up all over Ohio but I now reside in Xenia. I enjoy art in almost any form, such as paintings, sculptures, movies, or even video games. I believe imagination is the greatest tool a human being can possess.

Chun Qin, Delaware Career Center - p. 18

Chun Qin likes to write and to learn to write in English. She likes nature and bird watching. She is concerned about the relationship of humans and nature. It is the main focus of her writing.

Susan Renner, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 101, 184

Susan Renner has taught advanced level ESOL for Great Oaks for the past 10 years. Her favorite parts about the job are knowing the students and watching their progression in English. Susan is a former instructor of Spanish to junior high and high school students, and she is very interested in the Hispanic culture.

Iris Rivas, Youngstown City Schools - p. 180

I am from El Salvador. I am a single mother raising two daughters, and we live here in Ohio. I had my own company, Confecciones Landaverde, in my country. I escaped from my country because of the violence with the gang Salvatrucha. I paid my rent to the gang each week, but they wanted to kill my daughter. For that reason I decided to leave my country. Now I'm studying English because I want to be better, show my daughters that not everything is lost, and that we have a chance.

Emily Ross, Project LEARN of Summit County - p. 172

Emily is mother of four and friend of all. She is working hard to reach her goal of June graduation.

Marina Rubio, Canton City Schools - p. 14

My name is Edith M. Rubio and I am from Peru. I have three kids who are my precious treasures. I am an early childhood teacher and am working in a Montessori School as a teacher assistant. I love to work with children each day. I am also working to improve my English skills. ESL classes have been an amazing opportunity for us.

Tyler Sampsel, EHOVE - p. 138

Hello, my name is Tyler Sampsel. I was born and raised in Norwalk, Ohio, where I attended Norwalk High School. I dropped out at the age of 16 for a few reasons. Since then I've started a family and have worked hard to support them. I have three children now and I love them more than anything. I am currently incarcerated at the Huron County Jail for some poor decisions. I'm taking this time to learn from my past and to better myself. I am currently attending G.E.D classes here. My G.E.D. teacher, Mr. Duncan, was actually my high school principal. He motivates me and inspires me to do better. I've started writing a lot, trying to express myself and how I feel. I shared a few poems with Mr. Duncan, and he encouraged me to see about getting them published. I thank him for his guidance, inspiration, and friendship.

Michael Schnetzer, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 64

Michael is a 61-year-old GED student and boxing coach in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Shilah Shank, Wayne County JVS - p. 127

My name is Shilah and I am 17. I'm from Wooster. When I was 15, I dropped out of school to take care of my family and get a job. I'm working on getting my GED so I can become a beauty technician.

Thilagavathy Shanmugam, Wayne County JVS - p. 89

I am Thilagavathy. I am from India. I have been here in the USA for the past five years. We have lived in Arizona, Michigan, and Ohio. We have lived in Wooster, Ohio, for the past two years. My husband is working at LUK. We have two boys who are 9 and 5 years old. I worked as a Civil Engineering Assistant Professor in India. I have been a student of the ABLE program for the past year.

Virgil Shepherd, Miami Valley CTC - p. 29

My name is Virgil. I'm 41 years old. I'm raising my daughter by myself with my mother's help. I call her my angel and she is Daddy's number one. She is my first and only child. By my coming to GED, I'm showing her that if you set your mind to it you can accomplish anything. You have to give it your all.

La Shawn Sherfield, Proj LEARN of Summit Cty - p. 158

La Shawn is bright, caring, and a hard worker. He is an artist and a writer.

Joseph Sims, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 150

My name is Joseph Cochise Sims. I was born in Indiana in October 1990 and currently reside in Cincinnati, Ohio. My mother worked tirelessly to provide for our family after my father's death. I am a father to eight beautiful children, and I strive to be an active and positive role model in their lives. I began writing poetry as a way to escape the realities of my life. My poetry has helped me push myself to control my emotions and use them in a productive way. I write poetry like an artist paints a picture.

Chadwick Smearman, Mid-East CTC - p. 131

My name is Chadwick Smearman. I'm from Marietta, Ohio. I'll be 36 on the 18th of February. I have a 6-year-old son who I love with all my heart. I'm currently in the Washington County Jail taking ABLE classes to help prepare me for my GED test when I enter prison. Upon my release, I hope to have earned my GED to show my son I'm not a complete failure.

Lesli Smith, Project LEARN of Summit County - p. 154

Lesli is a teacher, and lover of good food. She also likes to swim and tell stories.

Melissa Stefka, Parma City Schools - p. 146

Melissa works for a large retail store. She's originally from Cleveland, Ohio. She enjoys writing in her free time, loves to play video games and listen to music. She also loves to sing. After a lot of hard work and dedication she obtained her GED on February 28th, 2017.

Joyce Strain, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 151

My name is Joyce Strain, and I am 45 years old. I am married and have two daughters. We are empty nesters now with both girls having graduated from college. I relocated to the USA from Taiwan after marrying my husband in 2005. I love to exercise, especially

Zumba. I have made many friends at our local gym. Exercise gives me energy, releases my stress, and makes me feel healthy. I am a Zumba instructor, and even though I am from Taiwan, I love Latin music very much. It's easy to get as much time in the gym as I want to because my husband is also a fitness fanatic. Exercise keeps us young. ZUMBA LOVE!

Nhung Thai, Delaware Career Center - p. 9

I came to the U.S. in 1996. I was run out of my country because of the Vietnam War. I have six children and four of them are in the U.S. I like to learn English. Before now I didn't have time because I was busy working. Now I am retired and have free time so I like to study English. I'm very happy with my life right now.

Matthew Vagner, Parma City Schools, p. 33

I'm learning to play the guitar and use other musical instruments. I enjoy listening to music and writing my own material. I also enjoy staying physically fit and pushing myself beyond my limits. I try to follow through with my goals and learn as much as I can in the process.

Antonio Valero, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 15

My name is Antonio Valero, and I am from Venezuela in South America. I came to the United States last October, six months ago. I am a computer science programmer, and I'm trying to learn more about the United States culture and the English language to get a job in what I love to do, be inside a computer! My last job was at Movistar which is the largest cell phone company in Venezuela. I worked with them for two years as a database analyst. I love the SQL language and I would like to learn more about it and find a job in that area. I had been learning English in Venezuela by myself, but the best classes I have ever taken were with the ESOL program at Live Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. They have taught me reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in a great way with a nice group of non-English speakers.

Silvia Valles Ramirez, Wayne County JVS - p. 93

Maria Velazco, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 132

I'm from Peru. I've lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for ten years. I enjoy dancing, watching movies, traveling, and spending time with friends.

Lucy Yeardley, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 95

My name is Lucy Yeardley. I came to the United States from the city of Shenzhen, China. I live in Cincinnati, OH, with my husband of 6 years. My first language is Mandarin. Now I can speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. I have over 15 years of experience as a professional in business and teaching in China. I also have some experience in teaching, translating (Mandarin & Cantonese), and tutoring. I look forward to having more jobs teaching Chinese in the U.S. I believe in the popular saying: one is never too old to learn. I am also interested in economics and politics.

Yuka Yoshioka, Great Oaks ITCD - p. 104

My name is Yuka Yoshioka and I am from Japan. My first language is Japanese. I have lived in Cincinnati for over a year. The reason I came to the United States was my husband's job. I enjoy studying English with my lovely classmates at Live Oaks. Learning English and the American culture are very fun and interesting! I have been studying English for 8 years. I'm a graphic designer. I joined a fashion show in Cincinnati last year as a designer. My goal is to be a graphic designer who can speak English!

HONORABLE MENTION

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Roberto Licea
David T. Mulbali

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 Mario Mendoza
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Montana Janis

Rugh Keim
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Jacob Simms
Trent Wigfield

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