

BEGINNINGS XXI

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Foreword

“We all have the extraordinary coded within us, waiting to be released.”
– Jean Houston, PhD,
author and co-founder of the Foundation for Mind Research

As a storyteller, I am also a story-gatherer, a keeper of the stories I hear. One of my favorites is a folktale that still offers me encouragement and confidence, a tale of two caterpillars:

Two Caterpillars

(A folktale from West Africa, shared with me by a man from Nigeria)

Two caterpillars crawled in a garden. As they made their way through the grass, they nibbled at this and nibbled at that. Then they saw something gliding down from the sky, something beautiful. It rested on a blade of grass, where it folded and unfolded its yellow wings. Then it fluttered back up into the sky and disappeared in the bright sunlight.

Amazed, the caterpillars turned to one another and began to speak. Shaking her head, one caterpillar asked, “Did you see that thing? Did you see how it moved? That looked dangerous! You won’t see me doing something like that. No, no, it’s too scary. I will keep my feet on the ground, stay right here where I know how things are. I will never, never try to do anything like that.”

She crawled across the grass again, and she nibbled at this and nibbled at that, while the second caterpillar gazed into the sky, and quietly said to herself, “Someday. Someday, I will fly.” The two caterpillars continued to make their way through the garden. They ate, and ate, but that’s all the first caterpillar did. She ate and ate, and stayed on the ground, never daring to be anywhere else. And after a while, simply feeding did not fulfill her. No matter how much she ate, she withered, and failed, until there was nothing left of her.

The second caterpillar ate until she was full. Then she searched for a safe place to rest. She crawled up the thin branch of a bush, and carefully clung to it. Then she wrapped

herself in the chrysalis of her dreams. She rested on those dreams until they became goals, ideas that played and stirred and itched inside her, making her stretch and grow. She stretched until she broke free from the one she had been, and slowly worked her way into a new life. Then she stretched even farther and knew that she could fly. She had become the one she was meant to be...a butterfly.

It is when we know who we really are, deep inside ourselves, that we can stretch, and grow, and play, and work, and fly, like the butterfly.

Adapted by Lyn Ford in 1992

Twenty-six years ago, a personal tragedy left me emotionally scarred and in desperate need for change. I gave up my fulltime job as a preschool teacher and my part-time job as a tutor in English Language Arts. I decided to become a “professional” storyteller. “Professional”—I would work toward getting paid for running my mouth. Storytelling had been a part of our family’s heritage for generations, but no one had ever gotten paid to do it.

I told my husband and children what I wanted to do. I explained that I knew this would have an impact on our family budget, but that I found more joy in the possibilities of storytelling than I did in sticking “close to the ground” in the childcare and tutoring work I’d done for decades. My husband said, “Go for it.” Our children said, “You can do it, Mom.”

Then I told my stepdad, who always seemed to believe in anything I did. He repeated my husband’s words and called me by his nickname for me: “Go for it, Sissy.”

Then I told my mom. She said, “You can’t do that. You won’t make any money.”

Guess whose words kept rolling around in my brain, even as I worked out a business plan and booked jobs and printed business cards and became a teaching artist in schools? Yep.

Then I thought of a quotation on a piece of paper I used as a bookmark:

“Aerodynamically the bumblebee shouldn’t be able to fly, but the bumblebee doesn’t know that, so it goes on flying anyway.”

– *Mary Kay Ash,*
businesswoman and founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, Inc.

I ignored my mother’s naysaying and cheered for myself. And I prayed a lot. To affirm that my own goal was more than a dream, I looked for other storytellers. And, I found them!

I discovered local, statewide and national storytelling organizations, and many, many people who had taken a chance and shared their voices, not just across the country, but around the world. Now, new generations around the world, supported by those who have already been there and done that, are adding personal narratives, folktale adaptations, and original stories to the mix.

And now, I get paid for what has always been my heritage and heart, the tradition, art and craft of storytelling. I encourage and nurture other voices. I’m in demand. And I’m published!

So, what’s the point? What does this have to do with YOU, and with this beautiful and inspiring publication?

There isn’t one point. But there are four things I’ve learned, four things that those who took a chance, stretched themselves, and submitted their writing or artwork for this edition of *Beginnings* are learning, or already know:

I. Believe in yourself.

“When you believe in yourself, in your personal potential, in your own future, you have no choice—surrender is not an option. There’s nothing to do but continue. Sometimes you want to give up, but you can’t—something deep inside you won’t let you. No white flags, no bailing out, no throwing in the towel for you. You have to keep going; you must carry on; you just take the next step...and the next...and the next...”

– Barbara “BJ” Gallagher, motivational speaker and author of
It’s Never Too Late to Be What You Might Have Been
(Viva Editions; 2009).

2. Seek out and surround yourself with those who support your hard work toward your own transformation and delight in the joy of your flight, not those who want you to remain as you were or predict that you will fall.

“Set your life on fire. Seek those who fan your flames”

– Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi,
better known as Rumi, poet, scholar, and mystic.

“Friends can help each other. A true friend is someone who lets you have total freedom to be yourself – and especially to feel. Or, not feel. Whatever you happen to be feeling at the moment is fine with them. That’s what real love amounts to – letting a person be what he really is.”

– Jim Morrison, singer-songwriter for *The Doors*, and poet.

3. Dream. Then, work to make that dream become a reality. If you must, build your own foundation.

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

– Henry David Thoreau, author, philosopher, abolitionist, in *Walden*.

“The distance between your dreams and reality is called action.” – Anonymous.

4. Through your words, your work, and your example, help others to fly. Published or unpublished (for now), if you submitted something for this book, you have already begun to do that.

“When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.” – Maya Angelou, poet, actress, activist.

The following pages are the triumph of magic people. Actress, director, producer and comedian Amy Poehler said, “It’s very hard to have ideas. It’s very hard to put yourself out there, it’s very hard to be vulnerable, but those people who do that are

the dreamers, the thinkers and the creators. They are the magic people of the world.”

Twenty years ago, when my storytelling career was still emerging from its chrysalis, I became a kind of “storyteller-in-residence” for the Ohio Writers’ Conference. In those twenty years, I have been informed and inspired by the lives and storytelling of people who felt the urge to change and grow, who looked toward the sky, who created their wings as authors and artists of *Beginnings*, and who developed new skills, enriched their lives and the lives of others, sought higher education, found new jobs, put tragedies behind them and continued triumphs before them. I’ve felt honored to witness them sitting with their mentors, families, and friends, the ones who fanned the flames of their aspirations. Their achievements have brought both tears and laughter and helped me and others to fly. They are a blessing to the world.

They are all magic people.

Lyn Ford

Storyteller, author, teaching artist, Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher,
and bumblebee-shaped butterfly



Acknowledgements

Each year since 1997, the Ohio Literacy Resource Center celebrates adult student authors and honors their achievements at the Ohio Writers' Conference. Those who submit writings for publication and celebration at the conference come from Aspire programs which provide adult workforce readiness education in Ohio.

While many things have changed over the 21 years since the inaugural *Beginnings* publication and Writers' Conference, what has remained constant is the perseverance of these 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.

Almost 300 pieces of writing were submitted for review and possible publication in *Beginnings 21*. Sixty-one pieces were chosen for this edition. We are proud to publish these exceptional writings and commend these writers for the courage to share their stories.

We also honor and thank the Aspire 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 adult students throughout their writing journeys.

We welcome our 2018 keynote speaker, a very familiar face to the Ohio Writers' Conference, storyteller Lyn Ford, who will inspire us as teachers, writers, and earth citizens to aspire to be the best we can be.

We thank the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Aspire program for their support and the Ohio Association for Adult and Continuing Education for including the Ohio Writers' Conference as part of their annual conference this year.

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Aspire to ...
Transform

A Confusing Situation

The story I'm about to tell happened a while ago. Unfortunately, it affected how I viewed the police at that particular point in my life. Since then, I have had other, more positive experiences that have caused me to question my original impressions.

When my husband and I were coming back from a concert in downtown Cincinnati several years ago, we were hungry, so we searched for a restaurant. It was very late, so it was difficult to find one that was open. We eventually found an open restaurant and stopped to eat a couple burgers. After several minutes, we saw our newlywed neighbors arrive with a friend. They ordered food at the bar where they sat. Our neighbors received their food first, but their friend did not. When he asked why he hadn't received his meal yet, a police woman who was inside the restaurant told the young man to leave the place immediately. He turned to the officer and tried to explain the situation. Our neighbor then stood up revealing his full six-foot-plus height. He reaffirmed to the officer that they had ordered at the same time, but his friend hadn't received his food yet. He stated that it wasn't necessary for his friend to leave because he hadn't done anything wrong. The officer then became angry and said that they all had to leave. My neighbor asked for some take-home boxes for the food. His wife boxed the food while the officer continued to rant. The wife picked up the food and walked toward the exit. Her husband approached the cashier to pay, and when he put his hand in his pocket to get his wallet, the officer panicked. She misunderstood what he was doing and immediately called for reinforcements and then tazed the young man. The giant man fell to the floor, shaking and losing control of his bladder. His wife heard the noise and screamed. Additional police arrived and began to enter the restaurant. The wife was hysterical and scared, but the police officers stood in front of her and did not allow her to see her husband. She tried to break through, but a police officer grabbed her and violently threw her to the floor. Both were arrested and spent the night detained in jail.

Many days later, we met with our neighbors, and they recounted the rest of the story. After their arrest, they had to get an attorney to resolve the situation. They managed to get the security video tape from the restaurant which was very helpful in proving they were innocent.

A retired police officer recently came to my English class to talk about safety, emergencies, and interacting with the police. He mentioned the phrase, "One bad apple can spoil the bunch." He explained that police officers often have a bad reputation because of the actions of one "bad apple." However, he told us that one bad officer does not spoil the rest; most officers are good people who are concerned about the safety and well-being of the people they serve. As he was talking, I thought about the incident in the restaurant and understood what he meant.

~ Maria Martel
Great Oaks ITCD

Time

Hey what time is it?
It's time for supper.
What time does the bus run?
I'll be late, can you tell me when the time's up?
The timer went off on the microwave--
Beep, beep, beep!
What time do you work today?
Don't forget to touch the time clock.
Are you going to be on time for the meeting?
Do you remember that time?
No, the one time.
This time next week they expect snow.
How much time are you doing?
How much time did the judge give you?
Oh man, will it be the last, just like last time?
Time's up!
You have 30 minutes.
Next time won't be like this.
Only time will tell.
You have one more time.
The time for peace is now.
It's the time of the year.
The time has come.
It's my time of the month.
It's time for me to end this rhyme about time.
Okay last line about time . . .
The clock is ticking; time is of essence,
A figment of our limited imagination.
Time is what is lost, time is what's gained.
We are burdened by time.
It counts down our days,

How long it takes to navigate our ways.
 They say time heals all wounds.
 I say time rests in the center of a burnt spoon.
 We are promised two dates and a dash,
 Once again time.
 How long will you last?

~Tiffany Cupp
 Great Oaks ITCD

My Lovely Dog Is Myloe

One day my husband was acting very strange. A co-worker at his company gave my husband a dog. He had a lot of puppies, and my husband said "ok." After that, he took the dog home without my permission.

It was my son's birthday, and my husband wanted to surprise our son. My son was at school at the time. He hid the dog downstairs in the basement. I heard the puppy bark. "You know that I don't like dogs," I said. "Who is going to take care of the dog?" It's not easy to take care of a pet. It's a lot of work and responsibility. My son came home from school, saw the dog, and was so happy. He said he would take care of him and then he said, "Thank you daddy!" "Thank you, thank you, I love him." He named the dog "Myloe." He is a mixed dog and has a fat brownish black body.

My son trained Myloe how to sit, stand up, and connect with people. I don't know what to do because my son loves it. Myloe ran around the house, peed and pooped everywhere. We put him in the garage. Myloe bit chairs, shoes, clothes and doors to exercise his teeth. Since Myloe was a puppy, we took him to the vet for checkup every 6 months. My son took him everywhere he went. Myloe liked to jump and run away when we opened the garage door and sometimes his collar got loose from his neck. Myloe ran around my neighbor's house, but people knew him well. Sometimes my neighbors would bring him back to us. Myloe liked to play with people around our neighborhood.

One time he ran away and we could not find him. We called out for him everywhere. Then a police car stopped, and a policeman asked us what we were doing. We said we were looking for Myloe, and then he said, "I'm going to park my car here and you guys wait here." We found Myloe hiding under the police car! We thought he was somewhere else.

Suddenly, the officer came back, he looked under his car, and saw Myloe. We called him out and Myloe wouldn't come out. The officer said you guys need to call him louder to command him when you call him. Then he called him, "MYLOE, COME OUT NOW!" and he came out.

Now we know Myloe very well; he is like our best friend. At home, he likes to sleep behind the door, waiting for people to come home. Then he comes upstairs to sleep behind the door of my room.

Myloe is an animal, but he is smart. He is just like our body guard in the house. Everyone loves him, because he is a part of our family. When we go on vacation, we don't like to leave him with other people who don't love animals. We leave him with people who love animals.

In many ways animals are just like us. Please support them, and please don't harm them. Love them because they have feelings like we do.

Every life matters!

~ Elizabeth Sacksith
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technology

Bishita

Usually, there is a big gap between two types of people: "dog people" and "cat people." It is kind of funny to see how people react when one asks that question. Some answer as to which category they belong right away, while others definitely take the time to think a little bit before responding. Every time I think about what kind of person I was before I came to the U.S., my answer was "dog person." I had thought that I was confident about my feelings between dogs and cats, and into which category I would fit.

Over the years, though, I've been changing the way I feel about cats. As a member of a "dog person" family I spent my whole childhood around dogs. Having cats around wasn't an option. My first experience with the feline species came when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. My best friend at the time had this beautiful, white, fluffy cat named Dolly. Every time I visited my friend's house, Dolly acted like I wasn't there. I was a stranger in the house, but Dolly didn't care. I thought, then, that all the cats were like Dolly; they don't care about human contact.

Over the years, my friend got new additions to her cat family, and I started feeling a little bit of curiosity toward the cats. There was one cat, in particular, called Blacky. As you may have guessed, she was black. She wasn't the type of cat that doesn't care about who was coming to visit. She was intrigued by my presence, and from the first time we met, it was clear that she liked me. She could stay still, lying in my lap, for an entire visit, purring and sitting comfortably.

When I moved to Ohio, I was feeling quite lonely and bored until Bishita appeared. At first, I thought that this beautiful, green-eyed stray cat, with brown stripes, must be a female. I started calling to the cat by a female name. However, I discovered that Bishita actually was a male. But after all the time we'd already spent together, I decided that we should keep the name because we felt comfortable with it. In fact, Bishita seemed to like it.

After some research and observation, I discovered that Bishita was my neighbor's cat, although he spent most of the time near my house, visiting me; taking the sun; sleeping in a little box I set up for him; or waiting for me to give him a little treat. I was so happy spending time with this cat.

Every morning, he visited me, so, we ate our breakfast together. I figured out what kind of cat food he liked, and every day, I would give him a little bowl with warm milk. In the afternoons, we would spend our time in my kitchen, eating snacks, relaxing, or playing. At the beginning, he'd barely come close to me — he used to act really cautious with each little movement that I made. After a while, Bishita started to trust me and felt very comfortable. The first time he allowed me to pet him, I was overjoyed. He liked so much to rub against my legs and purred all the time. Bishita clearly enjoyed my company. I could pet him to my heart's content.

As suddenly as Bishita came into my life, he went away. He just disappeared. I was so sad. I couldn't find him anywhere. Eventually, I realized that my neighbor had moved and, most likely, taken Bishita with him.

I still miss my sweet and lovely Bishita every day. I am so grateful that I got to know him and how he taught me that a cat can be a charming pet. Now, every time someone asks me what kind of person I am, a "dog person" or a "cat person," I will answer with a heartfelt "Both!"

~ Carmina Galguera
Wayne County JVS

Picture on the Wall

The picture on the wall
Is different than the fall.
There is nothing left to say
About marriage after all.

The fall brought shame,
But great men endured the same.
Dark transformed the picture
To lies that hurt and defamed.

The picture on the wall
Is different than the fall.
Am I a better man from all the pain?
Life is what I have to gain.

~ Lamont Chandler
Penta County Vocational School

The Ring

In life, you can easily get a ring from all kinds of people. You might get one from your parent as a gift, or one from your friend as a symbol of friendship, or you might even get one from your boyfriend as a promise to marry. Now, I am going to tell you a story about a ring. Oh, no. It's the Ring more than a ring.

I know many married ladies in my life. They hardly ever wear their marriage ring. I ask them, "Why don't you wear your ring?" Ninety percent of the time they will have the same answers. First, the ring is very expensive, and they are scared to lose it. Second, when they wear their ring it is not very comfortable to do their housework. Third, nobody really cares if you get married and wear your ring. So, it is better to put your ring into a box and keep it safe.

A long time ago my husband, Tim started saving money without telling me. He put it into a small box and hid it. On accident, I found it behind the bookshelf. When I opened it I found that there was a lot of money inside. I asked him, "What is this money for?" and "Why did you put it into this box and not in the bank?" He hesitated, then told me the money was to buy me a ring. Later, he bought me my first ring and used it to propose to me.

Then I thought the small box was done, but on accident, again, I found the box on the floor behind the curtain. Once more, I asked him the same questions. His answer was the same. The money was to buy me another ring, a wedding ring. Once I got my first ring he started to remind me every day to wear the ring. He said, "It has meaning." Even sometimes when I am rushing to leave home, he will magically pull the ring from his pocket and then give it to me. In his words, "The ring really has meaning." Before I thought it didn't matter whether you wore the ring or not after you were engaged, but a lot of my foreign friends said the same thing as Tim, "The ring has meaning."

That is why, for the second ring, I came to understand the different marriage cultures of China and America. In China, we only wear one ring: a diamond ring we get after we are married. But in America, they use two rings. One, the diamond ring is worn when you are engaged. A simpler ring is then worn once you are married. Many people will then wear both rings.

I still remember when I was a student I had to study very hard about the differences between Chinese and Western Cultures. But now I am living this life. In the end the cultural differences are not really what matters, but whether you truly love each other.

The ring is not only a thing, nor is it only a part of culture. It is a symbol of love. It really has a meaning.

*~ Lu Yang
Canton City Schools*

Love Lost

Love
Passionate, Happy
Talking, Dreaming, Loving
Husband, Wife, Child
Hating, Degrading, Unfriendly
Enemy

~ Shannon Greathouse
Project LEARN of Summit County

Aspire to ...
Achieve

Aspire

I am Rebecca Hayhurst. I am 76 years old. I appreciate Aspire school because I learn to read and spell and get a lot out of it. When the weather is bad, I use taxi passes so I don't have to walk. Aspire teachers and tutors help me with my school work. This year I received a reading certificate of achievement for most improved reading. In 2014 I wrote a paper on my great experience. I got to go to the Literacy Resource Center in Columbus, Ohio that year and read it in front of a group of people. Also, I helped make soup in the kitchen at Central Christian Church each year. That's how I came about getting the taxi passes. The soup lady told me about them. It was great to work with the other classes to help raise money for the grants for taxi passes.

~ Rebecca Hayhurst
Wayne County JVS

Built Entirely from New Beginnings

I want to start off by saying it is a pleasure to be here; I feel very honored to have the opportunity to share my story. My name is Samantha Nicole Marion. I was asked to come and speak tonight to tell you a little bit about myself and what led me to Southern State Community College. I honestly know nothing about giving speeches, but I'm going to give it a try. We all have a past, and, unfortunately, sometimes it can stand in our way. That is, if we let it. Parts of our past can be beautiful, amazing, and wonderful. Some parts of our past can be sad and painful. Tonight, I'm going to tell you my story.

I wanted to come up with a way to tell my story without going into too much detail. It's not that I'm ashamed of my past; it's that I choose to not let it define who I am. So, I wanted to come up with a list of words that describe me after being assaulted at a young age, after the loss of my father, after being kicked out by my mother, prior to getting my GED, prior to leaving my second abusive relationship, and prior to knowing I had value. There are several words that I would use to describe myself. Some beautiful and some not so much. Mother, daughter, sister, victim, broken, alone, abandoned, unwanted, unworthy, hopeless, useless, stupid, failure, shattered, coward.

I grew up in a nice home with mom and a dad and a brother and a sister. A very loving home. My dad broke his back and was not able to work, so he was the one who stayed home to take care of us kids. He was an honest man, a good man. He was strict, but fair, and education was very important to him. He pushed me and my siblings to do well in school and to plan for our futures. My plan for life was to go to school, graduate, go to college to become an RN, get my dream job, meet the man of my dreams, get married, and raise a family.

But that's not what happened. I was only 15 years old when I became a mother. From the very beginning there were lots of complications with my pregnancy. I was no longer able to attend

school and had to do home instruction for the remainder of the 8th grade. Not long after my son was born, I went to my school high school to show them a program that I had found. It was an online program that would allow me to finish high school. They approved the program, and it worked very well for me because it was on my own time. I could be a mom and a student. I finished my classes right on time and earned my diploma with the rest of my class. I was so proud of this accomplishment!

Little did I know that 8 years and two kids later I would find out it was all a scam, a \$700 scam. Not long before my 26th birthday I had been doing a lot of thinking about who I was, where I was in life, and where I wanted to be at this point. I just wanted something more for my children. I wanted to give my children a better life. I really wanted to change things. I knew that I would need to go to college in order to better myself. Just two days after my 26th birthday I found out my high school courses and my diploma were a scam. It was absolutely devastating. I felt like a fool and a failure. I felt like my chances of going to college were over. I went from a proud teen mother who worked hard to graduate high school to a devastated high school dropout.

It took a while for me to even consider trying to get my GED. One of the biggest issues was, at that time, I was still with my ex-husband. I knew that getting my GED was going to be difficult for me to do in that situation. I had already decided long before this I was going to leave, take the kids, and start over somewhere new. I finally did what I needed to do. I packed my kids up and we moved to another town. I got a job working in a factory, working 40 to 50 hours a week trying to support them, to make sure we had everything we needed, and to keep us out of an unhealthy situation. Once I got settled into that routine, I was so embarrassed and ashamed, but eventually I swallowed my pride and started looking for help in obtaining my GED. Of all the places to find GED classes, I found one on Facebook. I saw there was an open house coming up for free GED classes through Southern State Community College. I had so much going on in my life I wasn't sure if I could do it or not. I went ahead and signed up for the program and it was the best decision I've made, for myself

and my children. I started the classes at the end of March. I loved classes right away. I worked hard in class and at home and in June, I took my Post Test. My scores indicated that I had mastered many skills and should be able to pass my GED tests. But I didn't feel ready.

After summer break, the GED classes started, and I really wanted to finish up my GED. I wanted to move forward with my life. I was back in class for one week when I decided to talk to a student advisor at Maysville Community and Technical College. After talking to her, I learned that to start classes last fall I would have to get my GED, apply for admission, apply for financial aid, and take the placement test in less than 24 days. She said it was possible but starting the following semester would be a lot easier, so I went home discouraged. I was thinking I would have to wait until January to apply. The next day my brother showed up, and I was telling him about the day before, and he said why not go for it? So, I talked to my teachers and told them what I was wanting to do. They do what they do best; they gave me the encouragement and support that I needed to believe that I could do it. They helped me study and prepare for my tests until I felt confident. I took the first two tests in one day and passed them both. That same night I was back in the classroom sitting with my teachers and preparing for the final two tests. Two days later I took the last two tests and passed them! I did it, I got my GED!

Once I had my GED I still had a list of things to do, and I was lost. My teachers were there to help me and guide me. What I thought was impossible to do in 24 days was done in just 14. I'll never forget my first day of college, I was scared to death. I thought there's no way you can do this. I had to remind myself that I made it through my GED program. I got my GED and that if I worked hard enough I could do it. My first semester of college was terrifying. I thought every day I was going to have to drop classes, that I would never be able to make it. How could I balance school and balance kids and try not to screw everything up? I finished my first semester with 4.0. I was shocked. I couldn't believe it. I remember every day thinking I need to drop this class. I need to drop that class. I need to just give up, but I was able to get straight A's.

This last semester that I've just completed was also very difficult. I decided to take on college algebra, a math lab, communications, anatomy and physiology 2, developmental psychology, and NAA. On top of all of that I also started working at the school. I was a tutor for anatomy and physiology I.

I applied for the RN program for this coming fall. I knew with my classes I was taking that I wouldn't have the points most people had to get into the program. I would still be finishing up my prerequisite classes when they were considering applicants. I was told not to expect to make first round pick because there's no way I could get in first round. When the letters went out a few people asked if I was checking the mail, and I told them I was already told I wouldn't make the first-round picks. A few days later I was checking the mail, and there was a letter from MCTC. I was like "No way, this is not happening." So, I opened the letter and sure enough, I made first-round pick. I was accepted into the nursing program! I cried the whole day. Happy tears, sad tears. I was just full of emotions. I was amazed that I'd made first round because it was unheard of, having a lot of prerequisite classes left. I was sad because my dad was gone, so I couldn't tell him. I just couldn't believe I did it. I just was blown away and very proud of myself.

I could not have done it without my teachers, my family, my friends. Thank you for the love and support and encouragement to kick me in the butt when I needed it. You guys are amazing. If you don't mind I'd like to re-introduce myself. My name is Samantha Nicole Marion, and today I would describe myself as a proud single mother of three, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a tutor, a survivor, an overcomer, smart, strong, courageous, and fearless.

~ Samantha N. Marion
Southern State Community College

Hiding

I used to think I was the only one hiding. There are a lot of hidere like me, I found out (like I used to be).

Hiding that I couldn't read, hiding I couldn't break down a word.

Hiding I couldn't spell, I thought I couldn't spell because I couldn't read; I found out that's not true.

I'm no longer hiding, I came to the HSE/GED program and let the ugly secret out.

When you stop hiding and let it be known, it won't have that hold on you anymore.

Let me inspire you. No matter what age you are, whatever you're hiding, bring it out in the open, let it be known.

When you put it out there, you're free to move forward, to work on what you're hiding from.

Everyone wants to grow and progress in life. That's what hiding does, holds you back from going as far as you can in life.

~ Mildred Myles
Great Oaks ITCD

New Life and Learning in America

As the world becomes smaller with various cultures and languages coming together at school, the workplace, and many social circles, the ability to communicate becomes an even greater challenge than what our ancestors faced. Without good communication skills, one's employment opportunities are limited, and errors in communication can have embarrassing and costly outcomes.

One story that illustrates this point involves a man named Apoosh who was born in Gambia. He began studying at a university in the nearby country of Senegal but eventually moved to the United States in order to avoid an arranged marriage with his cousin. After moving, he discovered that things weren't as easy as he had expected. Leaving his friends, family, and everything he knew for a new life was difficult. Since Apoosh's English communication skills were weak, he had a hard time getting a job. In addition, no one would hire him because he didn't have the proper paperwork or reliable transportation.

Despite these difficult situations, he tried to meet new people and adapt. At one point, he met a gorgeous woman named April. He didn't know how to ask a woman out in America so he asked his friend to talk to her and let her know he was interested. When she walked up to him, he said, "I love you," because he didn't know what else to say. April was confused because he used the word love the very first time they met. She understood that his English skills were weak and that he probably just wanted to ask her out.

Eventually, they met for a date at an Italian restaurant. They were supposed to meet there at 6:30, but Apoosh didn't get there until 7:00 because he had gotten on the wrong bus. He didn't think it was a big deal since people are not always punctual in his country. April, however, was concerned by his tardiness. During the date, he yawned. She said, "You seem tired. Did you get any sleep last night?" Because his English wasn't very good, he thought she

had said, "Did you get any underwear last night?" In his country, the word sleep translates to underwear. It was a misunderstanding that caused some embarrassment.

The more they dated, the more she helped him learn the English language so these embarrassing misunderstandings would not occur. She recommended that he take ESOL classes to improve his English. He worked very hard, and his English improved to the point that he was able to get a part-time job. He eventually got his GED and then went to college to get his bachelor's degree. April and Apoosh finally got married. Thanks to April and his English classes, he was able to achieve his goals in the United States and live a happy life.

~ Abdoulaye Thioub
Great Oaks ITCD

Aspire to . . .
Honor Loved Ones

The Mother's Love

Mama, Mom, Mother

Mama

The one who knows true love after many years of life learning. The one who goes through pain for loving this boy, who holds this little baby boy knowing he's going to be growing up, leaving these arms to become a father, husband, and handsome man.

Mom

The one who in heartache watches this young boy skin his knee on his first bike ride, the first time he falls physically and spiritually. The one who watches this young boy, making the same mistakes she did, not very long ago.

Mother

The one who watches with a tear running down her face, this smart young man prove and finish what people say he can't, the one who hears the young man yell out victory after completing what people said he can't. The one she holds in her arms when his heart is broken, his dreams are shattered, or just needing a hug to hide from the world. The one who holds his little baby girl and says you're going to grow up to become a pretty princess, and you are a daughter of God. The one who watches her young granddaughter make the same mistakes that her daddy-o did, not very long ago, the one who watches the young man with tears down his cheek struggling through life like she did. There are many different ways of saying "mother," but only one way to say thank you for many years of a mother's love.

Thank you

~ Justin S. Murrey

Mid-East Career and Technology Center

Creating a Bond

Growing up as a little girl, the absence of my father was hard to deal with at times, because all I wanted was him. It used to make me so angry. I would be so mad at him for not being there. I had so many unanswered questions, and I just wanted to get a hug from him.

As I got older I found it easier to forgive him. I told myself I couldn't hold this grudge forever. I had to give him another chance. He is good at many things, but there was one thing that I also showed interested in that he had done. That was working on cars. When there was something wrong with the first car I bought, the only person I cared to call on at that moment was my father. He came quickly. As he looked at the car he was telling me what things were, what made them work, and how they worked. It was a moment of happiness and a moment I could never forget. I didn't even care about getting all dirty and greasy. I just cared about having that moment with my father and learning new things. Being able to work with him, to just be with him as we laughed, tears running down our faces from laughing so hard, made me ecstatic.

That's when it really happened: the moment I forgave him for all his past life. At that moment I told myself, sometimes you have to step up and be the bigger person and be able to forgive. Still to this day my dad calls on me if he needs help with car repairs. So it makes me feel good that I have been able to overcome the hate and disappointment, and that I learned how to forgive. It has made me a better person!!!

~ Rachel Liebenguth
Wayne County JVS

My Sunshine

In my brain was anger and betrayal,
But in my heart I knew I had failed.
I wanted to scream, I wanted to yell
How could my mother put me in hell?
She made the call to put me away.

They opened the doors, then slammed them in my face.
You had me locked up and threw away the key.

I was so miserable that it took me a long time to see
That this was exactly where I needed to be.
I'm locked in a cell, but my soul is being set free.
Everyday I think of you—
How you sat beside me, as my face turned blue.
When you looked into my eyes, my soul was gone.
I was clinging to life, trying to hold on
You made the call that saved my life.

I didn't like it. I put up a fight.
I was lost and broken, I could not live right.
Every day I wake up in a cage,
But now I am no longer a slave.
I used to have this ball and chain.
I pulled it around every single day.
Finally, one day that weight was lifted
When I realized that I have been gifted.

All this time I was never in hell.
I've just always had my eyes closed.
When I opened them all I could see
Was my number one fan, my mother!
She had been there the entire time

Always there, right by my side.
I have taken her for a wild ride.
Most people would run and hide,
But she will never give up the fight.
Because of her, I've found the true light.

~ Courtney Simmons
Lima City Schools

Don't Worry Mommy

I know you won't see me take my first steps,
Don't worry mommy, I walk beside you hip to hip.
I know you can't buy me gifts or toys,
Don't worry mommy, I'm up here making tons of noise.
I know you won't watch me grow up each day,
Don't worry mommy, the angel and I watch over you every day.
I know you can't hold me and squeeze me so tight
Don't worry mommy, it's ok I'm alright
I know I can't tell you how much I love you each day,
Don't worry mommy, God said you know how much anyway.
I know I can't tell you it will be ok,
Don't worry mommy, I'm not far away.
I know you think this isn't fair,
Don't worry mommy, God really does care.
I know you can't be with me today,
Don't worry mommy, God said you would be here one day.
So for now it's not a goodbye but a see you later,
I love you forever...Your Little Alligator

~ Madison Fenbert
Lima City Schools

How Wonderful Is My Mother?

When I think about the route I took in my life with all the lean and happy times, I realize I'm one of the luckiest people in the world. I'm not fortunate because I'm the richest man, Mommy, but because I had you as my mother. Thereby, I would like to take this opportunity to let you know because your mother-love toward your seeds is immeasurable.

Indeed, from the power of love, I grew in your womb for the first nine months of life before being born on December 31, 1986, in Gogo, a village of my motherland, Burkina Faso. After that, you kept up with nurturing and caring for me until I moved on to my village elementary school at six years of age in 1992.

In the beginning, I remember our life was very serene and full of happiness because we were all together in the presence of Daddy. In 1997, Daddy passed away too soon leaving you alone as the head of our family with five kids in your charge. "May his soul rest in peace."

I remember when we were crying, you said to us, "My babies, don't cry. God is in control of all." I was so scared about how tomorrow would unfold because you had to fight by yourself to fulfill our needs. As time passed, it was so hard, but I recall never going without food, clothes, or medicine when somebody was sick.

When I was 14 years old, some people advised you to remove me from school in order to work to help take care of the family. You refused to accept their advice as long as you were alive, because you were ready to "shake earth and heaven" to help me stay in school. Thus, I was able to pursue studying in our Departmental High School for six years after earning my elementary school diploma with "special honors."

I remember again Mommy, in 2006, when I earned both my high school diploma and an opportunity to move into the National

School of Public Health to study nursing. You reminded me, "I always told you, don't cry. The Almighty is in control of all." I was happy, not because I had graduated, but because I could read the relief on your face, and your eyes shone with tears of joy.

Finally, I recall the many times you would wake up early in the morning to look for our daily bread after staying awake all night and praying to the Lord for a better tomorrow. Also, your animated advice on the good manners of life recur in my mind constantly. I will never forget all those times when you tried to be both our father and mother. As you are a woman, some said that you would not be able to give me a good education, and they expected me to become a delinquent one day. Mommy, you proved them wrong by doing your best by me.

To be honest, I shouldn't ramble on about the events that mark my life with you. The most important thing I shouldn't forget is that you never gave up, you never gave in to the fight, and you prayed with all your strength for our bliss. It's why I'm able to write this story of our life mixed with sadness and joy.

I would like to thank you from the depth of my heart, even if it is difficult for me to find the right words.

Thank you for three decades of sacrifice for me.

Thank you for the heartfelt mother-love you showered upon me.

Thank you for all you have done for me.

Only thank you because unfortunately, I don't know another word from the dictionary stronger than this word "thanks" to express my gratitude. I would like to tell you this in person; however, I know you always feel my presence. Between you and me, it is a matter of "out of sight, but always near the heart."

At present, the seeds you sowed, so many years ago, are almost ready to be harvested. May God provide you longevity to delight in their fruits.

May God bless you forever for your infinite goodness toward me.

Mommy I miss you! Mommy I love you!

~ Benoit Bouda
Great Oaks ITCD

The Most Precious Pearl

I do not know in what manner to describe the unique love of my life. I grew up in a fairly large family; I have four siblings. My parents always tried to provide for our personal needs. I had a strong sense of sentiment towards my mother, so much so that I could not tolerate the home environment in her absence.

I can clearly remember, when I was very young, I did not enjoy eating breakfast. My mother always had my favorite morning meal, which included chocolate milk and homemade cake in her hand while she stood in the backyard. She always worried that I might get hungry at school. After I got back from school, she catered the most delicious food for all her loved ones; indeed, she had a strong sense of responsibility.

As I grew up, I felt like I needed her more than before. She was like a true and reliable friend to me. Whenever I faced emotional problems, she was the first person I spoke to. She always sat beside me and listened carefully; and then she would embrace me and shed tears for my sorrow. Later, when I calmed down, she whispered in my ears, "We have the Almighty, and we can overcome the difficulties." As time passed, I built up the courage because I knew I had strong motherly support.

When I got older and entered high school, she would help me with my studies, although she did not have any advanced education. At times, when I had to study until midnight, she would stay up beside me. If I had a test the next day, she would get up early and prepare my favorite breakfast and whole heartedly pray for my success. She told me, "Feel confident, and during the test imagine that I am sitting beside you." When I returned home, she would stand waiting for me in the backyard. When she saw the expression on my face, she immediately realized how I had performed on the examination. She would be immensely happy if I had achieved an outstanding score.

At the end I must admit that my mother was a true role model – actually, an ideal mother! Moreover, if I want to truly describe her, I would say that she was care-giving, self-less, and full of wisdom. To put it in a nutshell, my mother was a noble person who created motivation because of her hard-won experiences. She was a complete and humble loving mother!

~Tahereh Dehghan
Youngstown City Schools

Dee-Dee, Can You Hear Me?

A drip, drop, drip...
The tears fall making a puddle,
As I struggle to catch my breath.
A heartbeat stops,
As I look at the clock,
Knowing I can no longer hold her.

Somebody, please, listen to me.
My baby's gone.
I now sing a different song.
As I look at the sky,
I wonder why,
She's no longer by my side.

Dee-Dee can you hear me?

I know we can't question God's plan,
So I'll just remember when I held her fat hand.
Dee-Dee, do you miss me?
Dee-Dee, can you see me?
What's it like there?
Can you see your Nanna?
What about your homies?
Are you trying to text or phone me?

Dee-Dee can you hear me?

One thing I know for sure,
I wish I had a cure.
Then everyone could get well,
And maybe you wouldn't be gone.
We would be together again singing our song.

Dee-Dee, Can you hear me?

~ Nadine Saunders
Penta County Vocational School

My Mother

My mother was a very special person in my life. Even though I wasn't the best son, I loved my mother very much. We looked so much alike. Sometimes we would get into arguments, just because.

For a time, I thought I was the black sheep of the family. For example, I asked my mother if I could smoke and she said, "NO!" Mind you, I was already smoking, but she did not know. I just wanted to see what she was going to say. Then my other half (my twin) asked her and she said, "Yeah." Boy was I heated. One reason I loved her was because she would tell me if I was with the right girl or not. She would say, "That girl ain't no good." We always sat down and had coffee and talked about what was going on with me or her.

Every Sunday morning before my softball games, I would go over to her house, read the paper, and watch an old western with her. Then one day she was sick. She went to the doctor and found out she had cancer. When she told me, I did not know what to say, but I love you. She asked me not to tell my sister or brothers. But you know, I told them anyway.

As the years went on, she got worse and had to get chemo. I knew it was bad because her hair started falling out. I almost quit my job to take care of her. But she told me not to because she would be ok. What she did not know was that I had already started moving back in.

On my lunch break, I would go home to make sure she ate and took her medicine. She didn't have to do anything. I would wash dishes, clean the house, and just sit down and make her happy. I just didn't want her sitting around looking sad all day. My mother was my best friend because she raised us as a single parent. Now, it was my turn to take care of her. She had to go to the hospital, and they told her she only had a couple days left. We asked them to keep her in there so they could keep a close eye on her.

Then one day when I was getting ready to go see her, my sister called and asked me to come to the hospital. When I got there, my sister was looking real sad. Right then, I knew what was wrong. Mom had passed away that night. My mother was the love of my life. I would always buy things for her and just go without myself. Although she is gone now, I catch myself crying. I still think about the good times we spent together and start laughing. They tell me there is nothing wrong with crying. Sometimes crying is good for the soul. I have a lot of good memories that we shared alone.

When I get mad, people tell me that I got my temper from her and that I act just like her. But there is something good behind all this. My mother also left me something that nobody can take away. Mother had a bump in the corner of her eye and she had hazel eyes. When I was born, I got them both!

When I'm at work sometimes I will think about her. Then I just go for a walk or just go somewhere and be by myself and just look up at the sky. The worst part is her birthday is May, 20th, and my twin brother's and my birthdays are May, 26th. I still send her hugs and kisses. I'm scared to go visit her grave because I know what I will do. As I close this, I have a tear in my eye. All I can say is I love you dearly, and I know you've still got that watchful eye on me. I LOVE you for everything you did for me and taught me.

Love and kisses from your son.

~ Ozell R. Williams
Canton City Schools

Proud to Call You Mom

I first was nestled under your heart.
Your voice was so soothing, it was like sweet music to my ears.
No one could hold me but you.
Your arms were my comfort zone, safe from the unknown.
Your kisses were healing, with each and every boo-boo.
Your hands as gentle as a feather, caring for my every need.
Your stern but loving words, making sure I understood.
Your calming demeanor, and guidance
to keep me steady on the right path.
Your beautiful, courageous sacrifice
to be my superhero, my rock.
I love you more than you'll ever know.
I will forever be proud to call you
Mom.

~ Kami Amore
Buckeye Career Center

Aspire to . . .
Escape

I Can't Go Back Home

I was born in Mauritania in 1984. There, the fathers of families make all of the decisions. This even includes female circumcision. My sister and all other females in my family had this horrible procedure done to them. They will usually do this to young girls between the ages of seven and twelve.

My wife had this done to her when she was nine years old. My grandma came in with musicians and told her she would be given candy. They asked her to follow them, and then they put her through this. My grandmother would sit on the young girls if they resisted. Older people held her legs, and no one could hear her cries above the loud music of the traditional instruments. She didn't stop bleeding for weeks, and there was no medicine for pain or infection. She stopped going to school and couldn't work. Even today, she still experiences the mental and physical pain of female circumcision.

My family chose a wife for me to marry when I was eighteen years old. I wanted to be able to fix her circumcision ever since our marriage in 2013. In order to help her, I had to deceive my family and leave my home country so I could enter the United States. I worked for a Canadian company as an accountant and told my family and supervisor that I was going on a vacation with my wife. Since my wife has a sister in the United States, we went to her house. We then began the process of staying in the United States.

Once we were settled, my cousin told me about a doctor in Cincinnati who could do a procedure to reverse, or at least reduce, the negative effects of my wife's circumcision. I am glad we have the freedom to make decisions in this country. Back home, you do not have a choice about what happens to you. I don't agree with this practice, but my family will never understand. I have only spoken with my grandmother once since I deceived my family. She thinks I have done a shameful thing by coming here and "offending my ancestors." I don't share her beliefs on this subject and would

rather help other people who have also experienced this kind of lasting pain.

I can't go back. No one would ever respect me or talk to me again. This situation would make anyone sad; however, it motivates me to continue my studies and become a great executive in the United States.

~ Abdourahim Ba
Great Oaks ITCD

The Flaw in the Ripple

I still remember watching over the crib to make sure he was all right.

His safety was my priority and soon became a routine. Though he wasn't my first born, I still felt very protective of him—like animal instinct suddenly taking over me. I could stare at him for hours, and I noticed something different occurring with every day that passed. He was growing up.

My dream for him was to become a successful person, which is overrated, because every mother can only wish for the best for their offspring. Of course, you don't care what anyone thinks; you dream big for your child, even knowing they'll mature and do what they please, probably ignoring every path you open along the way.

He was a good child. At least, that was my belief. I knew he'd finish high school, and he showed a lot of promise as well. But I think I ignored something as he grew up, because I stood focused on the path ahead, and never noticed he had stayed behind. It felt like being at the fair. One moment you're holding your child's hand, and the next, you turn around and he's gone. Frantically, you search around, scream his name, and try to retrace your steps. Nothing.

Desolation hits you. It's like you've committed a big mistake. You know it was your fault; you let go. Maybe something in the crowd attracted him more than the shelter you provided, and in that fragile moment, he let go and traded you for something else.

Maybe it was a curse that ran in the family. We all grow fond of our demons as we grow, but some demons grow within us instead. I have seen it in the family before, multiple times. Addiction. The loss of time, the loss of sense, the loss of responsibility due to the thing that only enhances your brain for a moment, but causes more harm than you think. I worried it'd hit

home eventually, but never pictured it'd hit him. Not the person I wanted to have the most, to be the best, to succeed as not anyone had before.

One day, I stepped out of my home and looked inside. It was time to see things from the outside. The blinds could not cover what I had feared. It was like a dream, and in the dream my son held the Pandora's Box of self-induced demons. I wanted to scream at him, I felt myself back at the fair, him so close to me, yet so far away. His eyes sought mine, and he smiled with hints of excitement and wonder, bringing the lid of the Pandora's Box ajar.

In that moment, everything around me drowned, and the sounds that echoed were muted. A piece of me fell apart, or maybe it was melting with anger. Could I blame him? Could I really say it was his fault for wandering into that path?

I stand in front of the doorway. I can think back on this moment, so many times, so many years ago. This is nothing but a dream. This is nothing but a dream; I make myself believe. But when I peer inside the room and turn the lights on, he's gone. He's gone.

His demons replaced my motherly love, shadowing his every waking step, lurking in plain sight. I capsized at my inability to change reality. Is it normal to regret, to bask in the past, wondering of things I could've changed to make my child pick the right ways?

I wish he'd stay here, in his bed, where he is safe. But late at night he wanders, and all I can do is sleep with one eye open.

~ Maria Guadalupe Bravo
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technology

Sunlight and Shadows

I sit here in the cold, dark night
Pondering when I'll see the light.
The darkness keeps on creeping in.
When will I see Sunlight again?
The darkness overwhelms me.
The shadows sing a song
Not a melody of joy
But of sorrow all night long.
The darkness often asks me, "What are you doing here?"
I don't know what to reply.
The answer is not clear.
One night I asked the shadows a question much the same.
They replied with coldness and said,
 "To help you remember the pain."
So I sit here in the darkness
Remembering that darkest of days
And ask myself over and over, "Will I ever see sunlight again?"

~ Rose York
Buckeye Career Center

Pain Is Only Temporary

I never thought in a million years that being homeless would happen to me. I did not recognize the experience as being good or bad, but it became a definite learning tool for survival.

My family lived in low income housing with my mother sacrificing herself for her children's happiness. While being homeless, I experienced the common issues that all homeless people go through. It became hard to find a shower or wear clean clothes. I had no money, barely much food to eat, and no roof over my head.

As time passed, I truly believed no one cared as I faded into the darkness in hunger. I began to have thoughts about doing something illegal; no matter what it was. Every day I would go to the Stanley Row apartment building laundry room and stuff one of the dryers with a bag of my clothes. I did this as a disguise for warmth to socialize with people and to smoke their weed. It was only a mask to hide my pain and tears. When you are homeless you don't want anyone talking about you, laughing, or picking on you. Honestly, I was looking for help and love — someone to lean on, listen to me, and accept me.

I fell through the cracks on all of the above. People did not care. They look at you in disgust and mistrust.

~ Lawrence Williams
Great Oaks ITCD

Aspire to ...
Recapture a Memory

The Beach

The beach was beautiful. I made my way down the sandy shores, listening to the quiet sound of the blue-green waves rolling in. Wanting to take in every wonderful aspect as much as I could, I took my time, slowly walking from grass to sand to water.

As I walked, I closed my eyes and opened my other senses. The sun was warm and wrapped my skin in a comforting embrace. The air smelled of salt; it was fresh and clear, like a newly cleaned load of laundry. A slight breeze blew through, rustling everything in its path to life, nudging gently the leaves of trees and the beachgoers alike. The wind carried with it the sounds of gulls and other birds, singing praise to their freedom, as they soared high in the sky above.

The shore was white, a pure landscape of warm snow, welcoming bare feet with an inviting promise of comfort and fun. It squished between my toes, soft and warm underfoot, having been lovingly kissed by the sun's sweet rays. Seashells were dotted here and there, of different sizes and shapes, like the ocean's own little gemstones. They broke up the white expanse with splashes of color; some orange, some red, all beautiful.

And the water. The water was a moving field of blues and greens, reflecting the light, making it dance across the surface, dazzling anyone curious enough to gaze upon it. It was chilly at first, but my body quickly adjusted to the temperature; and then it switched to a pleasant warmth, wrapping me in summery heat. My body was weightless. I was floating freely like a piece of driftwood that had been swept up in the tender current that cradled me like precious cargo. I knew I was safe. The sea had adopted me as one of her own, added me to her family of many children. As I gazed up at the sky above, lying peacefully on a bed of wet, I felt just like one of the birds, flying, soaring, through the watery sky.

Eventually, I knew I had to leave the comfort of this place, my heart heavy in my chest at the thought. But, it consoled me to

know that someday I could return to this place of wonder, my new home, and the sea would pull me back into her welcoming arms, and I would feel whole and loved once again.

~ Sydney Erin Johnson
Butler Tech

The Latin Girl's Adventures in America

It is amazing to travel to new countries, especially when it is the wish of your life. What is more amazing is to know a new culture and learn new languages. For these reasons three months ago (November 13, 2017), I traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, because I wanted to learn about American culture and the English language.

My first adventure was two weeks after I was here in America. I walked for 25 minutes in downtown Loveland. I was super happy because I love taking pictures and knowing different places, but I didn't know that my cellphone battery, with the extreme cold weather, would be low very fast. It was very funny because I needed my phone's GPS to come back home. After the battery died, I did not know how I to come back. I thought and looked at buildings and streets until I found the street that took me to my house. I spent 30 minutes looking around to find the house.

On another day, I thought it would be a fabulous idea to walk on the ice. Of course, I slid, and it was very difficult to stand up again. That was very funny because my host family told me all the time that I need to be careful with the snow because it is dangerous, but I never believed it.

After my first day in class at Scarlet Oaks, I was starving. I went to McDonald's and I ordered a combo 3, and then continued standing in the line. When was my turn I paid \$18.95 for my meal. I was surprised because normally I pay only four or five dollars in my country, when the girl gave me my combo, I found that I got three combos number 3. So I received the three combos and gave one to my host mom, I ate one that night and one the next day for breakfast. Now I never want to eat a Big Mac again in my life.

As I said before, I love to know different places. That's why I traveled to America. I always wanted to know, so I searched the internet for places to visit such as museums, parks, and libraries. I wanted to go to the aquarium with my friend Mariana. It is a little

expensive but we bought the tickets. When she and I went to the aquarium and received the map, I was very happy because the map showed me how big the place is with different activities. I planned to spend all the day in that place. But when we went over there, we had a big surprise. We thought that the aquarium had many fun activities, but no, it was small with no activities. I was very furious. I had big expectations for that amount of money I paid.

~ Tania J. Valencia
Great Oaks ITCD

The Time I Was Doing Homework

Funny how some memories stick in your head forever, isn't it? I homeschooled for all 12 school years, and one of the things I remember vividly is the one time my brother and I were doing school together in the same room. We were doing school and watching TV at the same time, when suddenly an angry voice came from the other room, "Turn off the TV and do your homework!"

And we didn't want any trouble, so we turned off the TV and tried to do our homework once again (I was 8 at the time), when suddenly a pillow flew out from nowhere. I looked up only to see my brother standing on the couch holding two more pillows. He looked me in the eye and said "Are you going to throw that rock back?" I quickly picked up the "rock" he originally threw, and tossed it back at him. Eventually rocks were flying everywhere, and then he said, "The ground is lava, look out!" Hopping across the rocks over the boiling lava, I made my way to my brother.

My brother tried to shove me off but tripped and fell off the rocks into the lava himself! I reached out my hand and grabbed his wrist, only to find myself slowly sinking in the lava. I carefully pulled him upright before a giant lava burst flew up and hit us. The battle was getting intense! "What's going on in here," we suddenly heard the voice from earlier, "you are supposed to be doing homework!"

It came toward us, the figure was rushing after us walking on lava, chasing us down! We hopped across the steaming stone above the lava, running away as fast as we could from the shadow. Being cornered off, not knowing our next move, my brother and I were frozen in fear of what might happen.

Lost and cornered off, we looked at the shadow of a figure with fear in our eyes and said, "Look out you are standing on lava. Hurry, and get up here!" She looked down at us with anger in her eye and eventually said... "Oh no, the lava! Ah! Help me please!" Then we all began laughing.

Yet there is not much else to that day. After the playfulness, we began to do our homework again without a care. So if I could take away one thing from this, it is this: No matter what always remember family comes first. Over work, over fun, over stress, family is always first. I don't know to this day why that memory sticks with me, but I do know this, I don't regret a single moment that day.

~ Tyler Fisher
Butler Tech

The Avondale Children's Home

I went to a home
At the age of 3
A place for unwanted kids
Just like me

It was a place for girls
And a place for boys
While there we shared some sorrow
And we shared a lot of joy

The adults treated you
As one of their own
The place I am talking about is
The Avondale Children's Home

~ James Snodgrass
Mid-East Career and Technology Center

Saudade

I've always heard that word, but I never knew the meaning was so powerful.

In my country, Brazil, we constantly convey love, respect, happiness and the desire to always be happy and grateful for all that we have. Thanks to this, Brazilians' love is strong, and the will to live is immeasurable. Even if we face impediments we know that everything will be all right in the end.

SAUDADE is a Portuguese word that does not have a definite translation in other languages; it's a word typically Brazilian. You can only understand the meaning if you know Brazil and its people.

In English, when a person is far from us or we are far from somewhere we like very much, we say, "I miss ____." This would be the closest translation to the word SAUDADE. The difference is we use that word for something or someone we really love.

As much as I like to live in this country of opportunity, my heart remains in Brazil. That little word stays in my soul every day, which makes me understand its true meaning. And now I know this word will always live in me because even if I return one day to Brazil, I will feel SAUDADES of American.

~ Pricilla Marinho
Great Oaks ITCD

The Kitchen Is the Heart of the Home

I have always had a love for cooking. I learned cooking from my daddy who learned from his mother, my granny. Despite my passion for cooking, I cannot list recipes from memory, and unfortunately, I don't have my granny's dusty, handwritten cookbook stashed in my drawer since she never actually created one. Most likely, these deep, warm feelings I have are triggered by memories of time spent with my family in our kitchen. All the fragrances, feelings, and life snapshots are in my heart, and I bet I will never forget them.

When I was a child, we made something in the kitchen every weekend. We often made pancakes with my father from scratch. My brother broke the eggs, I poured the flour, and my father stirred the dough. We also peeled potatoes or apples, shredded cheese, and learned how to mix various ingredients and seasonings. I remember my father called us "little chefs." While a soup or meal was already on the stove, we talked, studied poems, did our homework together, or just went outside to play in the garden. At that time as a child, I didn't realize how important these common, sometimes boring, or even exciting events would be in my adult life.

During summers, we often spent many weeks at my grandparents' farm house with my cousins. My granny was a real institution, an old-fashioned, one-woman bakery and restaurant. She got up with the roosters and prepared food for the day. I admired how she could do everything so fast; it seemed like some sort of magic. She often prepared four- or five-course meals for six or more people within a few hours. We were very curious about what was happening in the kitchen and what was needed from the garden for the meals. Unfortunately, she didn't like when we meddled in her cooking; however, she loved telling stories about her life. For example, she told us that when she was six, she baked three loaves of bread every morning because she had lost her mother at an early age and had seven hungry siblings to feed. She also mentioned that making dough from scratch by hand was

very tough, and her hands often hurt. However, she learned to deal with it. Another story involved teaching my father how to bake crepes. He wasn't very skillful, and sometimes he threw the crepe too high causing it to fall into the washing machine.

When I was a teenager, I wanted to cook for myself. I made my parents mad because I did not accept what they had prepared for me. Of course, I thought I knew better than them – like what is tasty and healthy. Every six months, I followed a different diet – from the Mediterranean diet through protein-based ones. During my last year of college, I gave up my diet habits because I had started working full-time. It was a very busy period in my life, so I didn't have the opportunity to spend much time in the kitchen. On weekends, I usually made some simple, quick meals, but on weekdays, I would buy cheap meals from the daily canteen menu and eat in front of my computer monitor.

Since having kids, the old kitchen life has a renewed meaning. From the very beginning, we cooked and baked together. In the early days, they watched me from their high chairs while eating. Later, they stood on the stove and helped me with smaller tasks to prepare the meal. You can't imagine how crazy it was; they touched, dumped, and poured everything. Nowadays, they can be helpful, but at other times, they just play in our kitchen area, and we talk, sing, or listen to music together. Kitchen work with kids takes ten times longer than normal and creates more dirt and mess, and of course, they usually don't like to clean up afterwards. Despite all of this, I love spending time in the kitchen with them.

In today's fast-paced world, spending hours in the kitchen can be a luxury. Most people buy everything already prepared, half-cooked, frozen, or they just go out for a meal. On the one hand, it can be beneficial when you have little time for cooking, are tired, or simply prefer to go out. On the other hand, you are losing engaging and active we-time when constantly skipping meal preparation. One story that highlights this point occurred last Christmas when I went to my children's daycare to make gingerbread cookies. I brought all of the ingredients, and we started making gingerbread from scratch. I showed the ingredients

one by one, and the children touched and smelled them. We mixed all the ingredients, and after rolling the dough, we cut out the cookies and then decorated them. We talked while working, and I realized some of the older kids didn't even know that the dough contains real ingredients (flour, eggs, honey, butter, etc.), and it is not just something from a box. One of my favorite gingerbread makers asked, "Where did the butter and eggs go?" At first, the teachers believed that I was a crazy mom, and they probably asked themselves why I didn't just buy a roll of dough. Later, however, they also enjoyed the process and realized how valuable it was in getting the kids involved. We worked, talked, learned together, and enjoyed the delicious cookies. Two weeks later, children came to me asking when we would do the next baking session.

Besides work and school, people tend to spend little time together, so it would be a good idea to put aside quality time to spend with others. Watching movies, playing family games, and participating in a sport can be considered quality time. Why can't kitchen-time be the same? It can be a place for a little family therapy. In our life, my kids often describe what has happened in school, what is in their dreams, what hurts them, what makes them happy, and sometimes their deepest thoughts and feelings. On my kitchen wall, I have a note that reads, "The kitchen is the heart of the home." Actually, it is more than just the heart; it is also the brain and hands. It helps my family get together, talk, share, and learn while jointly preparing our meals.

~ Fruzsina Szabo
Great Oaks ITCD

To Live Is a Gift

When I was young, I dreamed of living a “White Christmas.” I saw many movies that were about Christmas. In these movies, the characters were very happy, because they got to play in the snow, they made snowmen, they ice skated, and Santa Claus came and brought gifts. I wanted to do all those things, because, where I lived, it never snows on Christmas, and the gifts of Christmas are brought by the three wise men. My Christmas was very different than Christmas in the movies. I thought how nice it would be to live a character’s Christmas like in the movies.

Life surprised me. I have now lived my “White Christmas.” My experience is not the same as that of the characters from the movies. The weather this winter has been very cold, so my family and I have not gone anywhere and spent many days inside in the house. I have been sick from the flu, and I have stayed in bed many days. Nothing is turning out like I had thought it would.

On the contrary, my children, are very happy; they have liked staying at home because they are on break from school, and they can play all day. They love playing in the snow and making snowmen. When they stay at home, they see more films of “Santa Claus,” and they sing Christmas carols all day. Every day, they clean the fireplace, because they worry that Santa Claus will not fit. On this past Christmas morning, they were so happy because Santa Claus on his sleigh was able to bring them all the gifts they had asked for.

I saw their eyes, faces...a mixture of innocence, joy, and happiness. I felt a great joy and experienced in that moment that it does not matter—the cold, the illness...I was so happy for them.

Now, I enjoy the moment and live life to the fullest, because
“TO LIVE IS THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT.”

~ Clara Diaz
Wayne County JVS

Life in India

India is the second most populous country in the world. There are 22 languages in India, but the most common are Hindi and English. India is made up of 29 states, and its capital is New Delhi. I was born in the state of Gujarat in the city of Gandhinagar. I was the oldest with three younger sisters and one brother. I have so many memories in India, but I remember my childhood and adolescence the most.

This is how my day would start. Every morning, my family woke up, and the first thing on our list would be to take a shower. Then we would pray by the temple in our house. (Mostly everyone has a temple in their house in India). Afterwards, we would eat breakfast. I usually would drink milk and eat some Indian snacks. Finally, we were ready for school. My school was private, so we had to wear uniforms. Most of the time we walked to school with friends or parents, but as we got older we rode our bicycles. We had school Monday to Saturday with only Sunday off. Every week on Thursday, we did not have to wear our uniforms because it was a dress-down day.

One class consisted of around 60 students. We stayed in one classroom, and the teachers would change every period. I had several subjects like the following: Gujarati, Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Math, History, Science, Computer, Physical Education, etc. My school’s main entrance had many eucalyptus trees, which smelled so good. Behind the school, there was a nice playground. We had three recesses during school. Two were short, and one was longer in the middle of the day after lunch. During lunch, we had seven or eight friends in our group. We would pile our lunch boxes on top of each other, and we would eat each lunch, one by one. Then we would play tag and other games.

After school, we went home and did our homework. We had lots of writing homework in mostly every subject. When we finished all our homework, we played outside with friends. In the evening, we ate our dinner, watched some television, and did some

reading. Finally, I finished high school and college. When I turned 22, I moved to the United States of America. Here I started a very different life. Even though I love my new country, I miss my native homeland, India.

~ Nimisha Patel
Great Oaks ITCD

Summer Nights on the Roof

On the very hot days of summer, above 95 degrees F, my brothers, sisters and I got organized to sleep on the roof of my house which faces a street. When the night came, we took an old wooden ladder and everybody climbed to the roof. We took snacks with us (mostly citrus fruits), blankets and pillows. Once we were on the roof, everybody chose a spot; I remember looking for a spot between my brothers and sisters. I was afraid to be on the outside. One of my neighbors had a big tree of zapote fruit. The fruit is brown, thin skinned, size of a lemon, and full of sweet pulp. That pulp attracted the bats during the night. What if some cats or bats were around? I did not want to have the feeling of being the first to be seen on the roof!

We started eating our snacks: all kinds of mandarins, sweet oranges, sweet lemons and grapefruits, including salt and crushed red peppers. Then we lay down on our stomachs facing the street and watched people passing by—the drunk guy trying to ride his bicycle, a group of friends returning from some kind of party, and the family coming back from a dancing night. In my little hometown once per week (mostly the weekends), there was a dancing night; it was one of the few entertainments people had in these early years when I was growing up. Parents accompanied teenagers who wanted to go to those dancing nights. In those years parents were present wherever their children were.

So, during those summer nights on the roof of my house, there was tremendous entertainment for us, and we had a lot of fun. We even invited friends and cousins to join us to eat and tell stories about what we saw. There was not much light, but we enjoyed our time. We spent most of the night talking about our family, our days, and our school.

When we were almost ready to fall asleep, we lay on our backs and looked up the sky. What a beautiful and majestic view! The moon was surrounded by thousands of stars, some big, others small. We followed the clouds, watching them as they traveled

across the sky until they covered the moon. We always thought that the moon must get sad to be covered by the clouds.

Finally, somebody would say, "I am ready to fall asleep," and then everybody would reply, "Good night!"

~ Miriam B. Wellman
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technology

Aspire to ...
Treasure Beauty

Sun Child

The rain poured as the sky roared
Tears rolled down the child's cheeks
The thunder sounded like cymbals clashing
The lightning was blinding to her large blue eyes

Under the soft cover of her blankets,
She slept until the sun twinkled across her eyelids
The birds outside her window sang:
Good morning sun child

*~ Katharine McQuaid
Project LEARN of Summit County*

My Body

My mouth is a honey jar,
sweet when it's opened.

My heart is a butterfly
that flutters with love.

My soul is a white pigeon
returning to heaven.

My cheeks are fresh red tomatoes
ready for a kiss.

~ Fatima Mardi
Project LEARN of Summit County

Butterfly

My butterfly is so colorful and smart
even though she is sad and her wings are damaged and scarred.
She can't fly 'cause her world is so crazy and dark –
but my butterfly is so beautiful that no one notices at first look –
the ugliness of the world has my butterfly scared, weak, and shook.
How can this beautiful creature
be so submerged in pain that her own life she took?

My butterfly is the reason I keep strong and stay breathing.
She's with me everywhere I go now and keeps my heart beating.
In the darkest of times,
for a colorful bright day she keeps me fighting.
All that remains now is the soul of a beautiful creature
that once had the power to soar as high as the sky.
Then the ugly world damaged my butterfly and she died –
rest in peace – you're free now – everything will be all right

~Alfred L. Lorch
Miami Valley Career Technical Center

Sunflower Bloom

I want to tell you about the sunflower
 I found on the sidewalk yesterday
 It is wilting and curled and gorgeous and knows it
 I want to age like that, never forgetting my own beauty
 Never forgetting how to say “bloom”

~ Renee Wiseman
Mid-East Career and Technology Center

Mother Nature's Jewels

As I stare at a blank page,
 mountains appear in my memory,
 the mountains of Pennsylvania in the fall.
 As I write of nature's portrait,
 of such beauty, I am mesmerized.
 For my mind cannot believe what I have seen.
 I watch the sun awoken
 from its night's sleep.
 The sun slowly starts to cover
 the large array of trees.
 I see Maple, Oak and Pine trees
 appear as ghosts through the mist
 that rolls down the mountains as if it were alive.
 The mountains reach for the warmth of the sun.
 By afternoon the sun blankets vast areas
 of the mountains,
 and Mother Nature's jewels appear.
 A bouquet of colors of red and gold explodes, blinding me
 for a second, and a feeling
 of calm and peace overwhelms me.
 The mountains surround the river that flows running into the lake,
 and the splendor of the reflection of the colors
 of fall onto the waters.
 Now on my blank page, I have described
 the beauty of Mother Nature's Jewels in the fall.

~Susana Antal
Cuyahoga County Public Library

*Aspire to ...
Be Brave*

The Window That My Mom Created for Me

When we begin to discover the world, we build with our first experiences the window where we will see the world in the future. I thank my mother for the help she gave me to build that window with feelings of courage and love.

When I was little, I remember how she could change a frightening moment into something simple and even fun. I would like to share some simple anecdotes that marked my life.

In my country, from time to time the earth trembles (earthquakes), and it has a very dangerous intensity. When I was 3 or 4 years old, there was a very strong tremor in the morning. We lived on the 6th floor of a building. I saw in the kitchen how things were falling. The refrigerator leaned forward and fell over. I think that was what scared me the most. I ran to my mother's arms to ask what was wrong. And she hugged me saying "You do not have to be scared. We put on music, and the house is dancing."

I also remember one day having bought an image of the Virgin Maria made of ceramics. I wanted to paint it and give it to her on Mother's Day. I was so happy, that when I came back home running, and I ran upstairs, it slipped from my hands and broke. I could not believe it! I had spent all my money to buy it, and everything was lost. I started crying, picking up the pieces off the floor. My mother, seeing what had happened, said to me, "Everything is arranged in this life, even though it seems that it was a disaster. I feel I received the best gift." I always remember that it was a beautiful Mother's Day because of the meaning of what I wanted to do, despite the result. Everything that is done out of love is always remembered with love.

In my future experiences, I always thought that I should not be afraid. No matter how far away from my mother, I always hear her words inside me: "Be brave. Happiness is inside you. Things are not what they seem." She always opens a different point of view in my mind and my heart.

I love you mom.

~ Paola Hogland
Great Oaks ITCD

Nineteen

I'm what they call a "call girl," but I have no phone.
I'm in the streets because I have no home.
It's a dark place and I'm all alone,
Left to be heartless with no feelings shown.
I sell myself to many men,
And when the day is over, I'll start it again.
A vicious cycle that has reeled me in,
but I tell myself "this soon will end."
I feel no shame as I hit the pipe,
Because it justifies my wrongs and makes them all right.
Like a wilted rose with no life left,
that was me even at my best.
Living in the streets is one big test,
You're labeled a statistic just like the rest.
At 19 years old, who would have guessed?
If you only knew my life, you wouldn't be impressed.
So if you're not in too deep, consider yourself blessed.
Get out while you can,
And give that old life a rest.

~ Abigail Current
Lima City Schools

Lost Country

At home, there is a model helicopter, a CH-47 Chinook. I asked my mother-in-law why it was there because it did not match the interior at all. Mom said it was a very important model – it was the style of helicopter that saved her life over 40 years ago. She survived the war because of that helicopter, and so I could meet my husband and live life happily in America. She told me its story.

10 years before the fall of Saigon

In the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War had already been going on for 10 years, and mom lived in Saigon. She was only in elementary school when she could remember the rockets coming at night and hearing big explosions. The family would run to the first floor because the Viet Cong, also known as the North Vietnamese Army, targeted high buildings. During those times, you would see the rubble of broken buildings and funerals everywhere. She said, “If you die, you die. People die everywhere, but it’s just life.” She felt sad, but said you had to live life courageously.

1 year before the fall of Saigon

In 1974, many refugees were coming to Saigon from all over Vietnam. I asked my mom if there was space or housing. She said they lived on the street and would try selling cake or soup as street vendors for survival. In 1975, the Viet Cong (VC) were coming closer and closer to Saigon, and it was getting scarier. This is because the VC would execute South Vietnamese citizens, especially rich people to take their money. The VC thought that people with a lot of money did not earn it honestly.

3 days before the fall of Saigon

My husband’s family decided to escape Saigon so they went to the airport. Everyone could only take one small travel bag, and Mom just had two sets of clothes. Only women, children, and the elderly could leave first. Mom’s brothers were held back because maybe they were needed to fight. When they were going out to the helicopters, rockets suddenly fired, and bombs started

dropping. The VC were attacking the airport to stop people from leaving. American soldiers yelled “Get down!” and everyone dropped to the ground. “Run! Run! Run!” Everyone ran toward the helicopters. This repeated many times. Mom said she could remember everything clearly, and it was chaos. It was a miracle that the family reached the helicopters. However, everyone was separated as the helicopters flew away. The family was reunited after landing in Guam. They were very lucky because soon after, there were no more helicopters, and no one else left behind could escape. Three days later, on April 30, 1975, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army.

After the fall of Saigon

Mom always wanted to live and study overseas, but she could not imagine it would be this way. She actually had a visa to study in France, but the war changed her life path. Instead, an American program let her enter university in the U.S. However, she could not speak English and had no money. Life was very difficult for her. For example, because she did not have money, she had to walk home from the university every day.

One day it was raining, and she was carrying her many heavy textbooks in her hands. It was cold, dark, and she was wet. Her books were getting wet too. She felt frustrated, angry, and empty. She had lost her friends, her home, her history, and her country. She knew that she could never go back to her childhood home in Saigon. She lost everything. She became a person with no country. She screamed and threw the books on the wet road and cried in rage and sadness. When she realized that everyone was looking at her, she was embarrassed! She quickly picked up her books and ran away.

It was tougher for her parents. They were already 50 years old and worked all their lives in Vietnam. Her parents had a restaurant and home in Saigon. The VC took everything from the family . . . land, bank accounts, and even pets.

Nevertheless, it was toughest for her family still in Vietnam who could not escape. Her cousin’s family in the north lived in

tunnels during the war, eating potatoes. The children could only see the sky once every few months. After the war, they could only get coupons from the government for 200g of meat each month for the whole family. There were many days of no food. If you grew your own rice or potatoes, you had to give it to the government.

42 years after the fall of Saigon

In 2017, at the age of 63, mom returned to Saigon. It is now called Ho Chi Minh City. It was 42 years since the CH-47 Chinook helicopters flew her and her family from Saigon to Guam.

It was not the country she knew from her childhood. Everywhere, there were communist flags and pictures of the North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh. She felt her country was stolen from her. Then, she went to see her family home . . . it was demolished. All she could find was a six-story hotel in its place.

However, she did find some happiness and reunited with her lost family. They embraced and cried tears of loss for the first time in 42 years. They laughed and cried tears of joy for the first time since the fall of Saigon.

Today

Mom is now retired and living in Florida with her loving husband. After graduating from the University of Louisville, she started many successful businesses and even won an award for entrepreneurship. She also has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. She has never lost a fight in a tournament, or even in business. The tough experiences from the Vietnam War made her a strong person. I am proud of my mother-in-law, “my mom.” I want to be strong like her too.

~Hiromi Dang
Great Oaks ITCD

Enough

Am I enough to make it through this world with sufficiency?
Holding my head up, moving and navigating through the pages
of life? AM I ENOUGH? Looking in the mirror, wondering who
I see. AM I ENOUGH? Will I know what to do with confidence?
AM I ENOUGH? When it feels like nobody loves or listens to
me, AM I ENOUGH? When the walls of defeat come crashing in,
AM I ENOUGH? When the road is long, times uncertain, AM I
ENOUGH?

When fear grips, and I can't go on, AM I ENOUGH? When the
script of life has no part for me, AM I ENOUGH? When the
days are dark and the nights are cold, AM I ENOUGH? When
nobody sees me for who I am, AM I ENOUGH? When I can't lift
my head, stricken with fear, conflict all around, AM I ENOUGH?
When the walls of separation are high and confidence is low, AM I
ENOUGH?

YES..... I AM ENOUGH!

I am one of a kind. I AM ENOUGH! I am unique. I AM ENOUGH! I
am a light in a dark place. I AM ENOUGH! I am gifted and valuable.
I AM ENOUGH! I am gracious and kind. I AM ENOUGH! I am an
offering to this world with so much to give. I AM ENOUGH! I am
confident and courageous. I AM ENOUGH! I am not a mistake! I
am perfectly made by a perfect God. I AM ENOUGH!

~Christina Marshall
Godman Guild

It Is Time!

It is time to rise above it all,
 a time where we are needed to ascend
 Like the GODS and GODDESSES we are, Time to take action
 And rise above the times of fault. Yes,
 It is time. Time to
 Lift one another in wisdom, gratitude, strength, and knowledge.
 Time to stop unveiling these beasts
 Through the electoral
 Votes from this mysterious and uncredited
 College!
 It is time again to become what they
 Try to hide—our power
 Courage and wit will no longer be denied
 As we wait aside and shield our pride.
 It is time to take back our piece of mind and walk
 Without fear or our brain on overdrive
 As we wait for true
 Freedom, we hope the hatred subsides.
 Truth be told,
 Are you tired?
 Living in a world where you are being forced to divide,
 when wanting to be
 Educated is considered rebelling, and
 People want you to build
 From the ground up but won't allow you to even
 Obtain a certificate in welding
 It is time, for Growth, Precision, and to be Divine.
 Yes, you!
 I am speaking to you, it is time!
 No more knock downs
 Or setbacks, let's humble ourselves
 Where we lack,
 No more locked doors or remove your hands
 where the latch rests
 We are not interested in taking back steps
 It is time

I am not amused at the thought of a rewind, shackles and cuffed,
 or have to move to the back of the line
 Nope, I just don't see it, not a part of any plan of mine
 I don't want war
 I just crave rise
 So please, those who are awake and listening...
 It is time!

~ Tinika Moses
 Great Oaks ITCD

The Pain!

They will get you, break you, and destroy you to make you scattered like autumn leaves. Destroy your being, equip you, and crush you as a train comes quickly. There is a miserable man who has ridden the railways hoping to end the tragedy that he lives! Maybe more happens, but in the end you should not be defeated! Do not give up. And do not despair. And rise up again and face no other option for you or the inevitable death, which has deprived you day after day.

On June 15, 2011, I was a student studying accounting. I had started peaceful demonstrations against the Syrian regime in most parts of my country, Syria, claiming freedom, justice, equality, and not arresting anyone arbitrarily without any charge or offense. I also needed a little oxygen to complain and express, inside me as a person, as an entity, as a person who lives on this land. His rights are stolen from him, and his freedom is stolen, and he must dabble and glorify the ruler in order to remain safe without any arrest or assault in the city of Homs specifically. I had witnessed the departure of many of the people of the city in demonstrations against the Syrian regime, which did not hesitate to kill Syrians directly. They shot live and dropped soldiers and tanks to the streets. The terror was random. People who said a word against the regime or criticized the leader were killed.

On that day, I went to the funeral of my friend, who was shot by the Syrian regime in a peaceful demonstration. When we finished the funeral, we were surprised to see tanks, soldiers, and weapons waiting for us in the middle of the road. They shot at us directly and indiscriminately. We encountered their treacherous bullets with bare chests and olive branches still in our hands trying hard to protect our heads from the fire which was everywhere. It was as if we were their enemies and not their brothers in the same homeland. I saw the innocent people being killed one by one; they had no fault except that they wanted to bury their friend safely. I wasn't afraid of death because I knew perfectly that their hands were cowardly and weak. The place was an agricultural

area, and there were no buildings to protect us from their cruelty. Suddenly, I felt something like fire enter my right leg and my left arm. Then I fell down bleeding and unable to do anything. The pain was unbearable. I was alone without any help. I began to tear my shirt with my teeth to tie it to my wounded arm in order to stop bleeding. I saw my blood bleeding in a straight line on the ground. The smell of the gun powder spread everywhere. I asked myself, what did we do to deserve all this pain? Are our demands for freedom and dignity a crime? Are we to be punished for it? The bodies of the people who were killed by the Assad regime were near me, and I couldn't do anything for them. My eyes were full of tears and I began to pray for Allah to help me. In the meantime, I was thinking about my family and how much I needed to be with them. I wished that the rain would come down to cool my wounds. The broken bone of my leg almost killed me from the pain. It was unbelievable. That was all I remember before I lost consciousness.

When I returned to consciousness, I found the doctor above my head, saying to me, "Do not be afraid. You are the son of this land, and this homeland is yours." I figured out that some people helped me, and they brought me to the clinic where the doctors operated on me. It was without anesthesia because of the lack of facilities. They did not have many tools. The Syrian regime was arresting doctors who treated anyone who had been injured in the anti-regime demonstrations. The operation was harmful, and I did not know what happened to my legs. Soon, the situation worsened, and we had to get out of Syria, my family and I, for treatment. We went to several Arab countries. They performed several surgeries on my right leg. No one could do the job properly, but they were commercial people. They took all our money and did not treat me properly. The pain killed my spirit, my veins, and my nerves. I finally reached the state of Turkey in 2015 and I submitted my medical file to the United Nations, which in turn completed the papers and sent me and my family to America for treatment and asylum.

Nothing remains for us, not a country we can refer to. I felt that I crashed and was finished. On August 25, 2016, our

plane landed at a Chicago airport. My heart was relieved, and I forgot the pain even as I had arrived in America to the country of freedom and respect for humans. In the U.S. they protect people and do not abuse them; they do not kill or crush them without any charge or offense like in my afflicted country. I loved America before I breathed in its air. I was confident that everything would be good and the doctors there would be able to cure me and end the pain in my right leg. My place of residence was in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the first month I went to the doctor. He tested me and told me that surgery for my right leg could repair the bone and lengthen it by 3 cm. He told me not to worry, that he would help me to be okay. I listened to the doctor's words. The rest entered and settled my heart. I began to cry with a burning and say I have achieved my dream and arrived here. The day without pain has become very close.

A few days later the surgery was done, and everything was fine. The operation was very difficult but the doctors were experienced and had the advanced equipment. I thanked God for having people who I can trust and be very confident that they would not hurt me. After a few days, I started to move slowly, and I was improving and recovering so much that after a year and two months I did not take any pain relievers. It was a miracle!

In fact, in America I found people to be very friendly, nice, positive, cheerful, and optimistic. They smile at each other. That is what surprised me. I loved everything here and loved all the people and all the places. I loved this great country that brought me here. I thank them all and thank the government for helping me and helping my family and resettling them. We all love America and we love this land as if it is our land. We will do all we can for this land and for this great, friendly, and loving people. We owe America our lives. In the end I can only hope that perhaps the wars on the planet will end one day and become a memory.

~ Hazzaa Altadmori
Great Oaks ITCD

Get Over the Isolation!

I can't wait to open the door in the morning to the snow.
The white trees, the white roofs, and the white grass.
Snow makes the world white through the night.
Just the rising dawn and the footprints of the deer and me.
I whisper to myself, "What am I doing here?"

I'm working 40 hours a week in English.
But, I'm still craving to speak English fluently.
I'm isolated from both Korean and English.
So,
I'm trying to come out of isolation every day by going to work.

One of my customers said, "I like your cross; it is so beautiful."
"Thank you. This cross has sentimental value to me."
"How so?"
"My daughter and I wear identical crosses,
and we are never going to take them off – ever."
"How nice!"

I have my lovely daughter in Korea.
She wakes me up every morning.
She's my dream.
She's my life.
She's my company.

There's no time to be afraid of my strange surroundings anymore.
I am staring over the white land again.
And,
I hit the number slowly.
"Hey, Pat! Let's do this..."

~ Minseo Bae
Canton City Schools

Aspire to ...
Overcome

The Scariest Day of My Life

When I was sixteen years old, I received the life changing news that I was going to bring a child into this world. At my first OB/GYN appointment I found out I was already 6 weeks and 5 days pregnant. Seeing what looked like a little bean on the ultrasound monitor made my heart flutter with joy. Hearing the heartbeat for the first time instantly brought me to tears. Even though I was filled with feelings of happiness and joy, I couldn't help but also feel scared and overwhelmed.

My pregnancy was a tough one. During the first trimester I got sick constantly. In my second trimester the morning sickness calmed down, but then new issues began to occur. One day, out of nowhere, I was walking through my apartment and instantly fell to the ground without any warning. My hip and back would randomly go out on me and I would fall wherever I stood. The bright side to being in my second trimester was finding out what my little bean was going to be. After what seemed like the longest 23 weeks of my life, I got the wonderful news that I was carrying a little boy. I had already known what I wanted to name my child, no matter the sex. So Cameron Matthew it was.

My third trimester was pretty smooth sailing, so I thought that from that point all I had to do was play the waiting game. On Sunday, May 1, 2011, I awoke to sharp pains at 6 o'clock am. I figured I had slept on my side wrong and tried lying in a different position, but the pains just kept getting worse. I called my mother to explain to her what I was feeling and she told me, "Kate, it sounds like you are in labor; you need to go to the hospital right now!" So I went to Robinson Memorial Hospital in Ravenna, Ohio. Upon arrival a nurse checked to see if I was dilated any. She informed me that I was at 8 centimeters. I felt panicked because I was only 32 weeks pregnant, so I told the nurse they had to stop this because he was too early. As I was being prepped for birth I was told that there was no stopping the labor, so I asked if I was able to have an epidural, but was told no. When the doctor came into my room he told me that my water still needed to be

broken, but since the baby was so early they had to wait for Akron Children's NICU team to get there because Robinson Memorial didn't have the proper equipment to take care of premature babies.

Cameron was finally born at 8:45 AM, weighing 4 pounds 1½ ounces and was 17 inches long. He was born purple and blue due to the fact that his cord was wrapped around his neck 3 times, but after the cord was unwrapped you could hear his screams and cries just fine. I didn't get to hold my son after he was born because he had to be put into an incubator almost immediately after birth. He was then transported to Akron Children's NICU center. I was unable to go with him because the hospital didn't transfer mothers and I wasn't allowed to be discharged until after 24 hours of giving birth. So, the first thing the next morning I had the doctor allow me to be discharged so I could go finally see and hold my newborn son. Cameron was so tiny. He had wires everywhere on him. He also had an IV on the top of his head, along with a feeding tube because he was too small to eat on his own. There were no other health issues with him other than him being early.

Cam had to stay in the hospital for almost a month before I could bring him home. He tackled each milestone that was required for him to be home with us. Each day we couldn't bring him home killed me a little more and more, but also brought me happiness knowing that we were one more day closer to him coming home with us. The day of my first son's birth was by far the scariest day of my life so far, but also the most joyful because I had given birth to the most beautiful, healthy baby boy.

~ Kaitlin B. Ray
Wayne County JVS

Scars

Once, not long ago, on the outside it was a beautiful, calm, and cloudless day. But inside my mind, there was a storm raging.

At that point in my life, I had lost just about everything that I have ever had, and I was just about to lose my freedom. With guns pointed at me, handcuffs pinned my arms behind my back, fastened tighter than a pit bull's grip. The two detectives had finally caught up with me. I had been on the run for the better part of six months. I had been filling my body with drugs and alcohol, and filling my mind with a false sense of security. I had sold my home, possessions, and committed felonious acts to support my addictions.

From my earliest years, my story was not a happy one. As a child, I suffered abuse at home. That pattern continued for years. As I grew older, "partying" was my escape. I was out of control with drugs and alcohol. Daily use creates a tolerance. More than two decades were a hazy blur. Blackouts came at least once a week, I was in and out of jail, and there were countless disappointments.

There were also some decent jobs and good relationships, but I was still addicted to drugs and alcohol. Eventually, I met a good woman who made a valiant attempt to sober me up. We dated, and were married. Things were great! We started a small business together, and were making a decent living. But this also came to an end.

I injured myself at a friend's house and went to a doctor who prescribed Percocet. Almost at once, I became addicted. I took seven to ten pills a day, and when my "scrip" ran out, I got the pills off the street. When the pills became too expensive, I met heroin, and the party was over.

I lost my wife, my job, and my business. It was "Goodbye!" to everything I had worked for. One of the most innocent things

I did for drugs (or so I thought) was to give people rides. I gave an acquaintance a ride so he could steal a gaming system. We did this several more times, but then things didn't go so smoothly. Something went wrong in the store and my "passenger" beat the clerk. I was charged with five felonies. I didn't understand, but I knew that I didn't want to go to prison. I "skipped" court and it was after six months on the run that I found myself in the back of the police car. First, I went to the city jail and in three days, I was sent to the county jail. I was sick from all the drugs for over a week, and couldn't sleep right for weeks.

When my day in court came, I didn't think things would turn out well. The two arresting officers were sitting in court waiting for me. When they were asked what sentence they thought I deserved, they said, in unison, "We want to see some prison time!" Instead, the judge sentenced me to the Judge Nancy R. McDonnell Community Based Correctional Facility (CBCF) in Cleveland.

At first, I was livid. "I don't need that; I'm past the sickness," I told myself. But when I heard the alternative of 24 months in jail, I no longer had a problem with the sentence. So, after two more weeks in the county jail, I was off.

When I arrived at CBCF, I was uncomfortable: new people, new surroundings, and a totally new experience. How was I going to make it? I didn't even know how long I would have to be there. It was a week before I even spoke to anyone.

Eventually I got into the groove. I started going to classes and support groups. And to my surprise, after many years away from school, I started taking GED classes. I couldn't believe how much these classes were helping me get through all of this!

Throughout my stay, I completed several behavioral and drug counseling classes. I also earned my GED. I even passed two of the test sections with honors! For the first time in a long time, I felt proud of myself. People were saying I was smart without the word "ass" behind it. What a great feeling!

I'm at the end of my tenure now, and am very positive about my future. A couple of things haven't gone the way I would have liked them to go, but I will persevere. Less than a year ago, I would have been crushed and wallowing in dope and drink. How the mind can change.

I'm looking forward to a happy "rest of my life" with my girlfriend, especially. I don't think I could have attained the happiness and knowledge I now have without the help of my caseworker, teachers, and facilitators. To all of them, I owe a huge "Thank you!"

I still have a lot of time left on this earth (I hope) and I intend to use the rest of it wisely. I'm sure that there will be a few bumps and more bruises. But that's okay because I have already survived more than my share of hardships.

And, I bear the scars.

~ Dennis Piotrowski
Cuyahoga County Public Library

Refugee

I was born in Sarpang, Bhutan on July 20, 1991. From my parents and elders, I came to know that the Bhutanese king forced my parents to leave our country when I was 4 months old. Bhutanese refugees are the Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin, who were evicted from Bhutan in the 1980s and early 1990s. They are descendants of people who, in the late 1800s, began immigrating to southern Bhutan in search of farmland.

We are named *Lhotshampa* (southerners, mostly of Nepalese origin). We were forced to become Bhutanese citizens under the Bhutanese government national law. The Bhutanese government burnt our Nepali books in front of the *Lhotshampa* people and banned teaching all Nepali subjects in school. The Nepalese were forced to wear the Bakhu and Kira (Bhutan National Dress) which was not comfortable to wear. The Bhutanese government did not allow the Nepalese to cremate the dead as my culture and tradition dictated. The police force was told by the Bhutanese government to destroy the houses and torture innocent villagers. They raped a lot of innocent girls and women and arrested people. Many were killed or disabled both physically and mentally.

My dad was also tortured by the police force. Many villagers were arrested and tortured without food and water for more than a half of a month. Ethnic Nepalese were targeted by the Bhutanese authorities, properties were seized, and individuals were forced to sign so-called "voluntary migration certificates" at gunpoint. Members of the same family were numbered 1 to 7 but only 1 could stay in the country and the others had to leave.

Eventually, at the end of 1991 the Nepalese government resettled over one hundred thousand of *Lhotsampa* to camps in the Eastern part of Nepal. Many people died when traveling to Nepal due to the lack of food. Inadequate huts were to be shelter in the beginning of the time on the bank of the Kankai River. Many refugees died due to lack of food and poor sanitation. After 2 or 3 months, the Nepal government managed to bring UNHCR

(United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees) to look after us. UNHCR provided more managed facilities like food, shelter, hospital, and education.

Life in the refugee camp was full of various limitations like insufficient food, social chaos, poor drinking water, poor sanitation, joblessness, and inability to explore life. Most of the time we were challenged with the climatic conditions during heavy rain and storms. Many times, floods swept huts away. Animal attacks happened many times and many people were killed.

These all happened when I was little. I started to go to school in 1996. On my first day at school I had no shoes on my feet. My family was poor and could not afford to buy school clothes for my siblings and me. Later, refugees started to go to local peoples' houses to beg for jobs. Some were nice and gave them jobs on farms. My father also got a plumbing job at the local water works in 1999. After that our family did not face as many problems like before. School, food, hospital and drinking water were free for all refugees. I graduated from school in 2008. Through many upheavals, the education was very poor. After spending two decades in the refugee camps, life was still difficult and painful. IOM (International Organization for Migration), a core group of eight countries, came together in 2007 to create opportunities for Bhutanese refugees to begin new lives in several different countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United States of America). This is one of the largest and most successful programs for us. After more than two decades in Nepal, we left the refugee camp forever. We were happy that our family would be together in a new country and get a better life. My uncle's family came to America in 2008, so we decided to come here. We came to America on May 18, 2010.

On May 28, 2010, I was blessed with an opportunity to move to the greatest country in the world, the United States of America. However, after my arrival to the U.S., I soon realized that adapting to a completely new environment in an American culture was going to be an uphill battle. I had to cope and overcome many challenges and difficulties in the U.S. Language was one of

the problems as I spoke little to no English. So, with this language barrier, it was difficult for me to find a job and get used to the American system and culture.

However, I never gave up. I kept pushing myself and learned English, and soon I got a job. After overcoming so many challenges and also following the U.S. laws and regulations, I have now officially become a bona fide citizen of the United States of America. I am always very thankful to the American government for their generosity that not only changed my life but also changed my family's life and life for the Nepalese community in the U.S.

~ Krish Bastola
Great Oaks ITCD

Waking Up from a Long Nightmare

Sometimes I surprise myself. Having moved to the United States from Japan with my husband and our two young sons twenty years ago, I thought I had faced some of life's most difficult challenges. However, these past two years have proven to be the most challenging so far. The surprise is that I have learned a life-changing lesson. I have more confidence to choose how I respond to my circumstances in a positive way.

Two years ago, my husband and I were involved in a car accident. We were struck by a hit-and-run driver, and I suffered injuries to my right shoulder, back and neck. Three weeks after beginning rehab therapy, I experienced a strange sensation in my right eye. It was as though a splash of heavy rain had suddenly covered it. What followed this experience seemed like a nightmare! I had to have three different kinds of surgery: Retina surgery (resulting in permanent loss of partial vision in my eye); Cataract surgery (resulting in a large "floater" in the center of my eye); and Tug surgery (needed to correct swelling and irritation in my eye). I could only focus on all of the limitations I was experiencing through no fault of my own.

One August morning, I decided to take a walk around the pond in front of my house. The brightness and warmth of the sunshine, the gentle breeze in my hair, the smell of grass and flowers, the sweet chirping of the birds, the reflection of white, fluffy clouds in the clear water of the pond. It was as though the sunlight was rising up in power and magnificence, encouraging me to use all my senses to appreciate life. Every day I was afraid of losing my eyesight, but on this day I received a special gift from nature through all of my five senses. I had been struggling with my life, but on this day I was inspired to move forward. I don't ever want to limit the possibilities in my life. This was a milestone day. That day I woke up from a long nightmare.

~ Mihoko Nagura
Delaware Career Center

This Is Me

When you look at me, I wonder who you see
 I wonder how many angles you have to look at me to see me
 I am who I am. Nothing can stop me
 Not your quick judgment of the words that screams “dike”
 Because I know it’s not right in the righteous eye
 But how could it be wrong, when it feels so right in my body,
 heart, and soul
 Growing up, my mom told me never be afraid to be different
 I knew I was, but I never thought it would affect me and my goals
 I never thought in a million years,
 that someone would make me lose my perception of life
 This may be my last chance
 Although I fear failure
 I will never be defeated

~ Lela A. Brooks
Mid-East Career and Technology Center

Only He Knows When

I came to the United States from Peru in 2003 after undergoing a very serious surgery. I had always wanted to come to the United States since I was a child, and finally my wishes were fulfilled! I made the move to provide a better life for my kids; however, I failed to make other changes at that time that would have been in my own best interest.

I remember having weight problems my whole life. In 2013, I went for a health exam, and the doctor told me I have diabetes, liver problems, anemia, and a low platelet count. I tried to make changes on my own, such as eating less, workouts, acupuncture, and taking diet pills, but I had little to no success. In addition to the stress created by the health issues, I had relationship problems with my boyfriend. Overwhelmed, I often spent the whole day playing on the computer.

One day, a question came to mind: What am I doing? I thought about my health and eventually started using the computer to look for answers to improve my health. After a few days of researching, I learned to stop eating sugar, table salt, and flour. I finally understood what I needed to do. I exchanged sugar for honey and stopped eating bread or anything made from it. I also exchanged table salt for Himalayan salt and reduced the amount used each day. A couple months later, I was working while listening to music on my cell phone when, suddenly, the radio station changed. At first, I thought it was a football game, but apparently it wasn't. Just as I was about to change the station back to the original one, somebody said, “We are now back to talk about nutrition.” I became paralyzed with shock because this show was exactly what I had been wishing for. I started listening and decided to follow the advice.

A couple more months went by before the appointment for my regular medical checkup arrived. When I received my lab results, the doctor was amazed. He told me, “I do not know what you have been doing, but keep doing it. Your glucose levels are

okay, and the results for your liver, anemia, and platelet count have improved.” By that time, I had already lost fifteen pounds, and eight months later, I had lost twenty more pounds. After two years of healthy eating, I’d lost a total of fifty pounds. I was so proud of myself! I never thought I could ever lose all those pounds.

This experience has been very significant for me since my health has steadily improved. I realized that nothing is impossible if you really want to achieve something. When I think of all that has happened to get where I am today, I just know that God had something to do with it. Only He knows why and when something we desire is possible.

~ Liliana Rojas
Great Oaks ITCD

My Journey

I have been through a journey of finding myself.

I’ve faced my anger and hurt and brought order and clarity to my inner world.

I’ve accepted the things I cannot change and changed the things I can.

I’ve shown the courage to face my inner demons and look them in the eye.

I feel stronger and more competent.

I have a renewed interest in life.

I see things differently.

I feel liberated from something that was tying up my energy. And I recognize and accept my own humanity, and the humanity of others.

Recovery is a rebirth of hope. A reorganization of thought and a reconstruction of dreams; meaning has been extracted from the difficult experiences and used to create a new set of moral rules and a new interpretation of life’s events.

Once recovery begins, dreams can be rebuilt!

~ Joseph Sanders
Lima City Schools

Surviving

Never in my mind did I imagine how my life would change after meeting and falling in love with my husband. Since then, I coined the phrase “I married a foreign man,” and I am now an expert on what that means.

One day, years ago, I met the perfect guy for me. I hadn’t been looking for a boyfriend, but it happened, and I let it happen. He is from another country, but I don’t care. I am in love, and, at the time, I wasn’t thinking about how my life would change or what I would have to do to make my family work.

After months, he asked me: “Will you marry me?” It was a surprise for me, because, all this time, I had thought “He is from Brazil; one day, he will go back to Brazil, and our relationship will be done.” But, no, he was asking me to spend my life with him. After maybe one minute, I said “Yes, I will.” I had never thought that this “yes” actually meant, “Yes, I will accept all of the challenges that come with marrying a foreigner.”

We planned for our wedding to take place on the beach because a lot of people were coming from Brazil, the airplane tickets were expensive, and I wanted to ensure that people would get to enjoy one of the best places in my country. The best beach in Mexico is Cancun, and we decided to celebrate our wedding there. It is paradise on Earth, with its beautiful turquoise waters and powdery white beaches. We planned our wedding in two months, even though, usually, in my hometown, it took at least a year to plan a wedding. My fiancé had been invited to work in Germany for two years, and we had planned to go to Germany after getting married. We enjoyed every moment of the wedding—we danced, we sang, we laughed, we drank, and we were very happy.

After the wedding, we went to live in Puebla, a city in my country, until it was time to go to Germany. I resigned from my job. Then, the company announced to my husband their new

plans: Instead of the two years we had expected, we would have to change to only three months, because of budgeting issues. It was impossible to have guessed that that would happen. We had planned our wedding so quickly, and I had resigned my job in preparation of going to Germany. Since I had no other option, I decided to enjoy my life. That was when I started to understand the meaning of “Yes, I will marry a foreigner.”

Life in Puebla was, for me, very difficult. The people are not friendly—sometimes they are extremely rude. The food is very different. In fact, almost everything was different. I felt like a foreigner in my own country. In my hometown, where I had grown up, all the people were polite and very friendly. Everyone talked with everyone else, even when they didn’t know one another. My husband and I lived almost three years in Puebla, Mexico. It was hard. A lot of things had changed—I stopped working, and I started to be a wife and mom. After that, I knew how hard it was to live away from my family.

Eventually, my husband and I went to Germany. We were very excited, even though some friends had talked about Germans being very cold people. For us, this was not this case. On the contrary, everybody was friendly and helpful. We visited exciting places, like Berlin, and a variety of concentration camps, Frankfurt, Dortmund, Munich, and other small towns. We also took advantage of being in Europe to visit several locations outside of the German border, including Amsterdam, Paris, and Brussels. We loved living in Germany, even if it was just for three months. We enjoyed everything—the people, the places, the food, the weather, the language (although we only learned a few words and phrases). To make things even more exciting, I got pregnant with my first child. It was an extraordinary experience!

Afterward, my husband was invited to go to Brazil. We accepted, because we knew that we hadn’t liked living in Puebla, and I loved the idea of getting to know a new place. So I moved, yet again, this time from the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn. Everything was different to me—the seasons, the language, the food; also I found that it is very incongruous to

celebrate Christmas with snow decorations in the malls and Santa wearing his traditional clothes, while the temperature is higher than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. There, the winter has an average temperature of 50 degrees, and everybody still wears boots, gloves, coats, etc. However I got pregnant, with my first daughter. We lived happily for almost three years in Sorocaba, Brazil. It was amazing, but I always missed my family, my friends, and my culture. I was fine, but there was always a feeling of incompleteness in my heart. I got pregnant again, four months before leaving Brazil, with my second daughter. It was a big surprise.

Then, again, my husband received an invitation to work in a new country, and we decided to come here, to Ohio. To me, this was an opportunity to live nearer to my family. It changed a flight of twelve hours from southern Brazil to Mexico, to five hours from Ohio to Mexico. My answer was, "Yes, of course. We can live the American Dream and my kids can learn another language. On top of that, in general, life in the USA is safer than it is in Mexico and in Brazil. Everything would be better."

Now, we are here, learning how things work here, learning English, trying new foods, meeting people from different places, learning about US culture, and making some interesting changes in our lifestyle.

I have three children; my son is eight years old, and he was born in my hometown, Saltillo, Mexico. My oldest daughter is four years old and she was born in Sorocaba, Brazil. My youngest is three years old and she was born in Wooster, Ohio. We have an international family and, while some people say it's really nice to have kids from different countries, it isn't. I need to apply for passports in three different offices, each of which has different rules and requirements. We always need to explain why we have two last names, and what the proper order of those is. We speak two languages at home—I speak Spanish with my kids; my husband speaks Portuguese with them; and sometimes, we mix English, Spanish and Portuguese in the same sentence!

We want to keep our families' traditions alive in our home. Mexico has some good customs, and Brazil does, too. We want to strengthen some of these behaviors and maintain our languages at home. Sometimes, my kids ask why they need to do something, like greeting people and saying goodbye when they arrive at a family member's or friend's home; sometimes, my answer, is "because we used to do that, and you need to do it, too." My husband and I need to work hard with our kids, explaining our traditions and making an effort to teach them, and to accept that, maybe, they will never feel respect for their native countries' flags or hymns, now they're learning to respect and love the US flag and country.

Regardless of which country my children choose to recognize, I have survived in four different countries, learned two new languages, and given birth to three kids. Now I am waiting happily for my next move!

~ Neyla Flores
Wayne County JVS

Rough Year

I started using in January '17
 It was only for fun, far in between
 Only at parties and on the weekends
 Little did I know, an addiction was to begin.
 Occasional use turned into an everyday habit
 I was running around like a crazy Jack rabbit.
 Cleaning my house five times a day,
 Too much to do, no time for play.
 Sweeping the floors and picking up toys
 I thought it was cool to hang with dope boys.
 I didn't realize how uncool it was,
 I shut out my family just for that buzz.
 Crushing up rocks into fine powder
 Slowly losing my mind, and power.
 Next thing I knew I had to have it
 Just to feel normal, I developed a habit.
 I got arrested and did time in jail,
 Two hundred and fifty thousand dollar bail.
 My life came crashing down in front of my eyes
 I tried to stay clean but to my surprise
 It was much harder than I had thought.
 I thought I could do it, but I could not.
 Fifty-five days was all that I made it,
 Why couldn't I quit? I hate it!
 I hated myself and the drug
 I'd hurt everyone who loved me.
 What had I done?
 I wanted to quit, I really did
 But each time I tried, I just failed again.
 I was really depressed most of the time
 But when I was high I felt just fine.

Three months later I had court again
 Exactly one year from when I began.
 Probation and fines and the WORTH Center
 I'd be there the rest of the winter.
 January 19th I did my last line
 I was proud of myself for the very first time.
 It's been a rough year, but I know I can do it.
 Don't believe me? Watch me prove it!

~ *Stephany Wilson*
Lima City Schools

From the Dark Life to the Bright Life

My name is Cung Bawi Thawng. I was born in Chin State, Myanmar. I have eight siblings and am the oldest among them. Our youngest sibling was born in USA.

As many people know, Myanmar was not a Democracy, and we faced so many hardships. Therefore, our Chin people have the Chin ethnic rebel group in the Chin State who has opposed the government for decades. We gave them food and shelters when they came into our villages. Therefore, the army arrested my father and tortured him. My father fled secretly to Malaysia.

My father applied for and was granted refugee status through UNHCR in Malaysia. Then we all went to Malaysia to join my father. We went secretly and had no permits from Myanmar government. We paid money to the underground agency who helped us to immigrate to Malaysia, and they took care of all of us.

We faced many unexpected hardships on our journey to Thailand. Sometimes the smugglers took us by a big truck and sometimes by a big boat. They asked us to sleep in a big canoe. After sleeping awhile I realized we were in the middle of the ocean. I was very scared when I saw the ocean and could not move my body. The weather was terribly cold and we were freezing in the ocean. We felt thirsty but there was no water to drink. We could not drink the ocean water. We felt hungry too.

My younger siblings were so hungry and thirsty and they could not move their bodies either. When we got to an unidentified seaport, they put us back into a truck again. We didn't have enough space inside the truck. They drove us for three hours on an unpaved road. Then they brought us to a big forest. The drivers left us in the forest without foods and water. It was hot in daytime and very cold at night. They didn't give us blankets. Millions of mosquitos bit us at night, and we could not even sleep.

We were so hungry and thirsty. So, we cut banana plants and ate the tender core. Our youngest boy was only two years in that time. There was no food for him at all, and he also ate a tender of the banana plant's trunk. I asked my little brother, "Is that good?" and he said, "Very good." My mother cried bitterly when she heard my little brother's words. My siblings cried a lot because they were too hungry. It was very difficult for us.

After three days without food and water, the Thai police who patrol that area heard the cries of my siblings, and they approached to us. We ran again and hid because of fear of arrest. My mother and other siblings could not run any longer, and the Thai police arrested them. My youngest brother and I hid in a little creek. I put him on my back. I put my body under the water, and he was upon the water. I told him not to cry, and luckily he didn't. The police probably saw us but thought he was a dead one. They left us there. After that, we heard the loud cries of my mother and siblings, so we went back to them and joined them. Then the Thai policemen arrested all of us.

We all were so hungry and could not walk anymore. The police were angry and they kicked and hit us many times. They gave us food, water, and juice at last. They talked to us in Thai language, but we didn't understand them at all. We just said "Malaysia, Malaysia." So they handed us to the Malaysian police, who guarded the Thai-Malay border.

The Malaysian police brought us to the Malaysian Immigration Office. My siblings were too young to be jailed, so they asked us if we had someone to call for help. We gave my father's phone number to them, and then they called him. My father and the refugee officer from UNHCR came to us. They released my mother and all my siblings but me. They told me that I was 15 years old and would be put in jail at KAJANG Prison.

That prison was pretty bad. The prisoners were so bad, and the food was too. When they gave us chicken, they cooked it with unclean feathers. But we ate it since there was no choice. We cleaned the feathers and ate them. They gave us only one pair of

pants and one shirt. There was no place to dry when we washed them. We tied our washed clothes with a little rope and threw them outside when we wanted them to dry. We stayed naked and held that little rope continuously until the clothes were dried because other people might steal them. It was so difficult. I had never been in prison before, and I was so young.

There were 30 people in that prison. There were only two Chin people including me. We two were new in that prison. They beat us one day. One person pulled my arms backward and put his knee on my back. Two persons took turns punching my chest and my ribs. I could not bear the pain. I thought I would die. It was so painful; I could not breathe and collapsed on the floor. They stepped on my back but the police didn't see us. They covered my mouth and tied up my neck so I could not shout loudly. After that they put my head up and punched in my neck 6 times. And I was in a coma. I didn't realize anything afterward.

After around two hours they put me in the bathroom, but I could not move. My friend took care of me. I could not eat or drink for about six days because my throat was too swollen. In the seventh day, my friend was beaten and treated like me. My friend told me, "Cung Bawi, I will surely die." He cried loudly. Unfortunately his two ribs were broken. He threw up with a lot of blood because of inner injuries. His throat was broken. He could not move at all. They put him to the bathroom like me. I took care of him for a while. I was also not able to move very much. I felt so tired and slept away about five minutes. My friend had already passed away when I woke up.

I touched him, and his body was so cold. I was so shocked. I shouted and cried. The police came over and looked at me. I was so sad. I cried and prayed to the God that I worship. The police came and took the body. The Refugee Officer came and picked my friend's body up. My friend's name was Biak Hmung from Leitak Village, Thantlang Township, Chin State, Myanmar.

The Refugee Officer interviewed me. After that I was put in a single prison cell. I was happy and more secure, but the cell

had no running water to wash my face and no toilet. They gave me a little pot to use. There was little light, so it was difficult to distinguish day from night. The cell was too small. When I slept, I had to bend my legs. There was no blanket. It was too hot in day time and too cold at night.

On July 4, 2006, they brought me to the court. The Refugee Officer came to the court, and they granted me refugee status and released me from the court. I did not return back to prison. Then the UNHCR gave me the refugee status Identification Card. Seven months later, in 2007, my family immigrated to the USA.

We got some helpers when we got to the USA, and we were so happy. I had no worries any more. But my parents didn't speak English and could not get jobs. I and all my siblings went to school. One day my parents got jobs and we were so happy. Six months later, our public assistance was stopped. My mother was pregnant and stopped working again.

My father's income could not support the whole family. We planned to purchase a Sushi Bar franchise. But my father could not speak English, and our plan failed. My parents were so sad. I was in school and could speak little English. So, we had a family meeting to solve the problem. I told my siblings that I would quit school to help support them. And all my siblings must go to school.

I was young, and we could not get a Sushi Bar franchise in my name. So, my father quit his job and took the Sushi Bar franchise in his name. And I helped him. By the grace of God, we are pretty successful in our sushi business today. God blessed me with a wife and two children today.

I had so many hardships in the past. I thought it was too difficult to walk in the dark road in the past. Today, the American people love us, and we have good jobs. I think we were in the dark life for years, but we are in the bright life now.

~ *Cung Bawi Thawng*
Great Oaks ITCD

His Heart Stopped Beating

He is charming, kind, affectionate, responsible, and brave, but at the same time, he is weak. Jairo Orozco is my father, a great person.

On March 8, 2018, International Women's Day, at 7:30 pm, I was sitting in a restaurant alone waiting for my mom, my dad, and my sister to celebrate that day together. However, nothing turned out as planned. My cell phone rang and it was my mother with her voice cut off saying, "Daughter, return to your house because we cannot get there." There was no other explanation.

As I was driving home, I tried not to imagine the worst, but vague ideas went through my head. To be honest, my heart was uneasy about something, but there was no reason to worry if it was not necessary.

I arrived home, and at 9:00 pm my cell phone rang again. It was my mom again. Her voice was broken, and her crying prevented me from understanding what she wanted to say. She was disconsolate, and I shared her pain without knowing what was happening. Then I heard, "Your father has had a heart attack." My legs trembled, my eyes clouded with tears, and my self vanished. It is something you would never want to feel.

The most important man in my life had stopped breathing. His heart had stopped beating. We are in this world living a life that belongs to us, but which is borrowed. We live with dreams and illusions that we seek to make reality. We idealize the word "happiness." Each person builds his or her own meaning. Some are lucky to achieve it but others, not so much.

I give thanks to God for giving my father a second chance to continue enjoying his life on earth. After a few minutes, his heartbeat returned. The universe conspired to let him enjoy a little more. He received the happiness of seeing everyone—his

graduated children, and his grandchildren. Perhaps this second opportunity was granted to him for all the good that he has done throughout his life. I love you Father, and I admire your courage.

~ Katherine Orozco
Great Oaks ITCD

My Last Day ... and My New Day!

I have always been on the go, working three part-time jobs in order to keep up with the bills and help my family both here in America and in Mexico. I start the morning by getting up and cooking breakfast for my son. I take him to school and then return home to shower and get ready for my first job. From ten to three, I work as a waitress. Afterwards, I pick my son up from school, drop him off at his grandparents' house, and then go to my second job. From 4:30 to 10:30 pm, I work as a waitress at another restaurant. On Saturdays and Sundays, I go to my third job waitressing all day. Despite all the work, I manage to get one day off a week, which I enjoy. However, I am still always in a rush!

Once on my day off, I planned to eat a nice meal I had saved in the refrigerator for lunch. I wanted to share it with my son after picking him up from school that day; however, he asked me to take him to his grandpa's house. I said, "Son, I have lunch ready for us." I didn't want to make a big deal about the situation, so I took him to his grandpa's house. I came back to have lunch at my place. I was alone.

When I sat down, I thought, "I'm always alone." I don't like to be alone; I like to be with family. I'm divorced, and it's difficult to do things by myself. On this particular day, I sat to eat my chicken and pasta dish. I took a bite, and the piece of chicken got stuck in my throat. I took a very deep breath, and when I tried to cough it up, it wouldn't come out. I tried a second time, but it still wouldn't come out. All I heard was a wheeze! I realized I had wasted time and failed to call 911. I wanted to go out and find someone who could assist me, but I felt embarrassed! I hit my chest, back, and the top of my head many times, but nothing seemed to work. I almost gave up, but one thought came to mind – my family in Mexico! I thought I would never see them again. I hit my chest one more time so hard that a breath finally came through. Lord, I was able to breathe. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't. I felt like half of my head was numb and half of my body was paralyzed. I sat down and realized what had happened. I almost had a stroke, but I was alive.

As weeks went by, I tried to maintain my normal, busy life routine. However, one day I woke up with numbness in my chest and thought I was having a heart attack. I couldn't fall asleep for weeks. I struggled and became very tired. I was afraid to eat and started to lose weight. I lost sixty pounds and felt very weak. I eventually decided to make a doctor's appointment. While taking x-rays and ultrasounds, the doctor discovered a lump in my throat that I later had removed through surgery.

I was desperate to get better. I felt life slipping away, but I didn't want to give up. I knew something was going on but couldn't figure out what the problem was. A friend of mine invited me to visit a group of elderly ladies she knew who prayed for people in need. As soon as I entered the door, I realized I was sick. Everything was a blur. I saw a lady who was looking at me, and her stare was powerful. Finally, she approached me and started to pray for me. I'm not sure how long it took, but I began to feel better.

When I went back to the doctor, she said I looked better. I then asked her what she thought had happened to me. I realized, even before she responded, that I had been depressed after my near-death choking accident. I became conscious of the fact that we can pass away at any moment.

I felt God's presence; God was with me. He had given me an extension on my life, and now my life started again. In less than a year, I began looking and searching. I started to volunteer in a bilingual school. I also went back to school to improve my English – something I had always wanted to do. In addition, I took classes to become an interpreter. I continue fighting to get better and do better every day.

The most important thing I learned from this experience is that we are not alone. "God is with us always."

~Luz E. Wagner
Great Oaks ITCD

Aspire to ...
Make a Difference

I Matter

In a world so big,
I am merely nothing but a tiny cell, but I MATTER.

I MATTER because God decided that the world needs one of me.
But why?
Maybe it's because of the voice I have,
to shout out the differences of the world
and which way we should go.

To offer support to those who feel they do NOT MATTER.
To give a helping hand to those
who may not understand why they are less fortunate.

Hear me when I say "YOU MATTER."
To the ones who are being bullied because this world
says you are not beautiful, I am here to uplift you.
To tell you the scars are nothing more than medals
that are proof that we have won the battle.

So guess what? WE MATTER.
I am here for it all, the good, the bad, the ugly and the falls.
But isn't it amazing that a tiny cell in an infinite universe
could shine so bright?
We are all stars that God has made, and that's
what MATTERS. You MATTER, We MATTER, I MATTER!

~ Sharde Hatcher
Cuyahoga Community College

A Misfortune During Springtime Travel

Chapter 1

Hummingbird Robert staying in his winter habitat, a warm area in the Gulf States, feels the springtime to be coming to the North of America. So he invites his friends, Ed, a Yellow-Rumped Warbler; Sam, an Eastern Phoebe and their family members, as well as other friends of the birds to start a trip together. They will go to a place in the North, a summer habitat for breeding their future generation.

There are many flowers dancing for welcoming the birds on their journey, such as Baby Blue Eye, California Poppy, Godetia, and Five Spot. The colorful flowers looking like a beautiful carpet covering the earth are so bright and peaceful. The smell and the taste from the flowers are so good and intoxicating. Robert, Ed, Sam and all birds are happy on their tour. They are singing and foraging every day, enjoying their trip very much.

One day, Hummingbird Robert sees flowers of California Bluebell, a native flower from desert areas. Robert knows that they are not far away from the Mojave Desert. So at the dusk, Robert gathers all the birds together and tells them about the geography of the place where they will arrive soon.

Robert says, "We will soon fly across the Mojave Desert. The desert is very wild. Its region has 124,000 square kilometers and is composed of a few valleys, such as the Death Valley, which we will go through. Otherwise, there is no more water, no more flowers to feed us and few foods that we can find in the desert. More cruel facts—the air on the desert is so burning, the hot temperatures will reach 120°F in the summer... all this will make us tired easily. Also, we can't stay there for long. We must fly across the dry and poor place as fast as we can."

"How should we do it?" Ed, Yellow-Rumped Warbler asks Robert. His voice sounds a little nervous.

"Yes, we need to get stronger. I have an idea," answers Hummingbird Robert.

"Tell us what to do. We trust you," Eastern Phoebe Sam says to Hummingbird Robert.

Seeing the birds focus on his speech, Hummingbird Robert speaks continuously about his plan in details. "We should search for food one more hour per day from now on, and take a good rest. We should keep doing these things for a week. Then we can have enough feedings and be across the Mojave Desert in three days! Tomorrow morning, we will arrive at the last safe spot near the desert. This is my plan so that everything will go well."

After dinner, Hummingbird Robert heads all the birds going forward to the North.

Flying all evening, all the birds feel hungry and thirsty. In the dawn, Joshua trees appear in their view. They land on the Joshua trees area. Hummingbird Robert says, "All right, this is a site where we will stay for a week and get prepared."

"Why is this a correct place to stop at for a while?" Yellow-Rumped Warbler Ed asks Robert; he is curious.

Robert says, "Generally, Joshua trees are thought to be a sign of a border of the Mojave Desert. They are a sign of native trees to the Mojave Desert, and I know that they still can deliver foods to us."

Chapter 2

After a week, a ceremony is held. Hummingbird Robert sings first, "We have a bright tomorrow. The world is wonderful with the beautiful habitats. We love and take care of each other. We enjoy our migrations."

All the birds follow Hummingbird Robert singing, "We have a bright tomorrow. The fresh air, water, foods and havens are granted

to us. We are like cousins, and we are a wonderful family. We help each other, and we enjoy our migrations.”

“God blesses us!” Hummingbird Robert says to the sky.

“God blesses us!” all the birds say in the same way as Hummingbird Robert.

In order to save their energy, to minimize being hunted, and to avoid overheating, Hummingbird Robert and his friends take nocturnal migrations. Now, they start across the Mojave Desert. They are not sure what they can or cannot control in their future.

When daylight first appears covering the Mojave Desert, they see where there are expanses of yellow sand and poor vegetation. The sporadic Joshua trees are scattered and isolated.

“The desert has no more food to find from here,” Eastern Phoebe Sam says.

“Yes, also I feel thirsty. It’s so hot!” Yellow-Rumped Warbler Ed says.

“I am a little bit dizzy,” says a bird.

“I feel dizzy too!” another bird says.

“All right, folks, there will be no more complaining about that! We must search for food carefully, and we can fly well through all night,” says Hummingbird Robert.

All the birds are hunting hard for their food. Some time, they take a short break, but still there are many birds who feel so tired at noon. In the afternoon, they find no more food while taking more breaks. Suddenly, a bird from Eastern Phoebe Sam’s family falls down to ground. Eastern Phoebe Sam reports to Hummingbird Robert in hurry.

“I think the bird is sick with heat stroke! We must save his life first!” Hummingbird Robert says to Sam seriously. Then Robert

directs Sam and other birds, “Move him to a shadow of a Joshua tree and peck his body with our bills till he is awake.”

Seeing the birds are rescuing the sick bird the right way, Hummingbird Robert says to Eastern Phoebe Sam and Yellow-Rumped Warbler Ed, “Check to see how many birds have the same problem! If most of birds are sick, we will stay here this evening.”

The next morning, Hummingbird Robert checks out the situation of the birds. Most of them are weak and have no energy to search for food. Their eyes look dull, and actions in flight are slower. Robert starts to worry a lot about their mission.

“I have never seen anything this serious. Let us think what to do,” Robert says to Sam and Ed.

While they are discussing this situation, Hummingbird Robert sees a bird flying toward them.

When the bird comes into view, Hummingbird Robert says, “It is an American Falcon.”

“Good morning, American Falcon! How are you doing?” Hummingbird Robert says.

“I am flying to a place in the East and changing my migration route,” replies the American Falcon.

“Why? The path through the Mojave Desert is your traditional path!” says Hummingbird Robert.

“Yes, it is. But the path so far is a dangerous way for migration,” the American Falcon replies.

“Sorry, I can’t understand the words you said very well. Could you explain the meaning to us?” says Hummingbird Robert.

“Well, when I was closer to the southwest of the desert, I felt headaches that were like a heat stroke. I can’t stay there for long time so I changed my direction,” says American Falcon.

The word “heat stroke” is like an electric current shocking to Hummingbird Robert, Yellow-Rumped Warbler Ed and Eastern Phoebe Sam. They watch the American Falcon carefully, who looks very worn out. His feathers are no longer bright.

“He might have had big trouble,” Hummingbird Robert thinks and says, “Could you tell us your story?” to the American Falcon.

“Yes, I can,” answers American Falcon.

Chapter 3

“This story is hard to imagine!” The American Falcon says as his first words.

Pausing for a while, the American Falcon says continuously with a sad sound: “It is like a nightmare. I am trembling with fear.”

“It has to be a deadly story. Look at the facial expressions of the American Falcon,” Hummingbird Robert thinks.

The American Falcon says, “Our family’s members go through the Mojave Desert in the migration times every year. In the past, the desert was not as the desert we see today. There were many lakes, streams and marshes. It was a vibrant and green world with plentiful plants and animal life in the regions.”

“Yes, it is true! My family likes to take this path for our migrating too,” Hummingbird Robert adds.

The American Falcon says, “But today in the desert, there are no more pleasant environments for us. We cannot stay for a long time and enjoy the migration while we fly across it. We are nervous and have to fly fast as we can. It is like we are chased by enemies. The conditions of the desert are becoming worse and worse, although we still can tolerate flying over it. But this year, the desert has had an extremely awful thing appear. A project the humans built makes the temperature on the desert very high. I was still far away from the building. The heat was like a wave that gripped me and made

breathing difficult. I was falling in a swirl that was similar to a black hole, and I used all my energies flying out of the swirl, which had me rolling down in the deep. I flew for a day, till I escaped from the area of the building. Then I met my friend, a Common Poorwill. He told me a terrifying experience, a story of deadly migration!”

The Common Poorwill said, “My brothers, sisters, and I were together for the migration this year, and in the evening time, we got to the building area. That day, when the sun was rising, we felt the rays’ heat not only from the sun, but from other things around us. The rays hit our eyes, and they were so hot that they burned our bodies. We can’t hide from the rays, so I called my brothers and sisters to leave here at once and to do so quickly.

“After a while, I sensed a charred smell from my feathers, and at the same time my eyes were difficult to open. I was scared and turned back to fly away from the deadly place. When I was able to open my eyes, I looked around the area, but I did not find my brothers and sisters. I missed them or lost them. I have searched for them for two days, but I do not have any signs of them as yet,” the Common Poorwill whimpered sadly. He said, “My brothers and sisters may suffer misfortunes. Yesterday I saw a Hawk who told me that his wife and son were dead by the rays’ heat. He saw other birds, such as a Falcon, a Grebe, and a few of sparrows were dead by the rays’ heat too, and many of the birds were hurt by the heat.” As he was talking, the Common Poorwill burst into tears, “I know that I might lose my brothers and sisters. They were my dearest family members.”

Robert wept for the tragedies after the Common Poorwill told the tales. He thought and worried about their fates!

“I wish you luck!” says the American Falcon to Hummingbird Robert.

“Thank you, American Falcon, and keep yourself safe and be lucky too!” Hummingbird Robert waves goodbye to the American Falcon.

Hummingbird Robert turns back to see Yellow-Rumped Warble Ed and Eastern Phoebe Sam, whose faces are serious. They are still immersed in the American Falcon's story. After a while, Hummingbird Robert says to his friends: "Let us discuss what our next steps are."

"We will leave here at once," Yellow-Rumped Warble Ed says.

"Yes, we will leave here this evening," Eastern Phoebe Sam adds.

"All right, your opinions are correct. So tell your family members immediately, I will tell the other birds. We will start to leave here at the sunset," Hummingbird Robert says.

When the golden sunshine covers the ground, all the birds rally together to hear Hummingbird Robert's speech. "We head forward to the East for a day then afterwards we turn to the North, straight to our summer's home. Everyone, do you understand the way well? Now, we kick off!"

The coda

After a week, Hummingbird Robert, his friends, and other birds come to their new habitat. They are searching for food and building their new homes. They are busy and cheerful every day, while Hummingbird Robert is not happy at all. He thinks about why the deadly thing befell the birds. The American Falcon said, "The humans built a solar thermal power plant in the desert. Reportedly, it was the world's largest solar thermal power station. The solar thermal power plant made the temperature in the area high to 1000F, because there are 173,500 heliostats deployed, and the heliostats' mirrors focus sunlight. Birds will be burned to death if they are flying across the sky of the area. The main part of the zone of the power plant is so wide. It is 4,000 acres."

"Maybe the project is a good thing to humans, but it is not good to us. It is a grilling bird project!" Hummingbird Robert feels heavily in his heart, when he thinks about the project the humans made.

"God blesses us! I hope the humans know what our cries are. I hope the harmonies between animals and humans who all are living on the blue planet improve! We should be friends, and we should take care of each other! Isn't that it?" Hummingbird Robert, with his wings together, is praying for the birds.

~ Chun Qin
Delaware Career Center

Legacy

I brought nothing to the Earth.

I can't take anything from the Earth.

I can't permanently live on the Earth.

But during my life, if I spread my love, kindness, and happiness to others,

I can give peace to the Earth!

I can leave sweet memories of my life on the Earth.

Even after I am gone, I will live in other people's hearts on the Earth!

~ *Thilagavathy Shanmugam*
Wayne County JVS

My Taste of Buckeye Chocolate

Buckeye Chocolate is one of the signature desserts in Ohio and in the Midwest. It was named as "Buckeye Chocolate" because it looks like the fruit from a Buckeye tree which is a symbol of Ohio. But I never knew about it before I came to America. I saw it at the Christmas party of my husband's family home for the first time in my life. I found that it is a prevalent dessert at many kinds of parties. I became interested in Buckeye Chocolate when my husband told me that it was his favorite dessert.

Buckeye Chocolate tastes very sweet and smells nutty. The texture of the outside of Buckeye Chocolate is solid because of coated chocolate, but the texture of the inside is soft because of peanut butter. These mixed textures differentiate Buckeye Chocolate from common chocolate. It entices people, especially those who are fond of peanut butter. I think that it is served as a popular dessert at many parties because of not only the great taste but also due to the special shape, resembling the fruit of a Buckeye tree.

My husband wanted to make Buckeye Chocolate by ourselves at home. One day I found the recipe on Facebook by chance. I tried to make it according to the recipe. Unfortunately, I was not successful the first time. It was somewhat difficult to make rolls because my dough was runny. So I adjusted the recipe. My husband and I were satisfied with the adjusted recipe. My recipe is as follows:

Ingredients

1. peanut butter 1 jar (16 oz.)
2. crushed rice crispy 4 cups
3. powder sugar 3 cups
4. melted butter 5 tablespoons
5. chocolate bars for candy coating 20 oz.

Steps

1. In a large bowl, mix peanut butter, melted butter, powder sugar, and crushed rice crispy. Then knead them until the dough holds together.
2. Chill it in the refrigerator for approximately 30 minutes.
3. Roll into 1-inch balls and place on waxed paper-lined tray.
4. Chill it in the freezer for about 2 hours.
5. Melt chocolate in a bowl that is set over a pot of barely simmering water and turn off the stove when chocolate is melted enough to be able to dip balls. (When dipping balls becomes difficult, turn the stove on again.)
6. Put a toothpick into the top of each Buckeye ball.
7. Dip 3/4 frozen peanut butter ball in chocolate holding onto the tip of the toothpick. Leave the top uncovered so that it resembles a Buckeye Nut. Put back on the waxed paper-lined tray and remove the toothpick. Smooth over the hole of the toothpick.
8. Return chocolate-covered peanut butter balls back to the freezer until chocolate is firm. Once the chocolate is firm, return to the refrigerator before serving.

I make Buckeye Chocolate for the important meetings at the church and family gatherings or giving to people as a gift. It takes a long time to make it. What's more, it is not easy to roll into small balls and dip it in melted chocolate. After I make it, I feel tired. However, when I see that people enjoy Buckeye Chocolate which I have provided, it relieves my fatigue. When I share it with Americans, I feel like I get closer to them. Buckeye Chocolate is another way to show my heart to Americans. My taste of Buckeye Chocolate is still quite new but it connects me to Americans. Buckeye Chocolate came to me so that I can plant seeds, take root, and grow in American society.

Buckeye Chocolate is the beloved dessert in Ohio due to the special taste and shape. It also has a special meaning for me. It links me to Americans, so Buckeye Chocolate is more than chocolate for me. That is why I make and share it with people.

I hope that my taste of Buckeye Chocolate might be continued more deeply and widely.

*~Young J. Wook Shin
Delaware Career Center*

Artist Biographies

Daniel Currey - p. viii

I was born October 17, 1968, in Massillon, Ohio, and grew up in East Akron.

Danping Huang - Front Cover and Back Cover

My English name is Nina. I come from Southern China. I have been in the US for two years. I am enjoying living in Cincinnati, Ohio. People are very friendly here. I have been making some American friends. I was an art designer in China. I am an art teacher of children in the US. I am really glad and appreciative of learning English at Great Oaks.

Author Biographies

Hazzaa Altadmori - p. 86

My name is Hazzaa. I'm from Syria. I have been in U.S.A. for one year and six months. I work at a super market, and I study English at night. This is my first writing story in the English language.

Kami Amore - p. 40

Susana Antal - p. 73

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

Abdourahim Ba - p. 43

My name is Abdourahim, and I'm 34 years old. I am originally from Mauritania. I am currently married and living in Cincinnati. I received my masters degree in economics. I would like to give many thanks to my wife, teachers, and fellow Great Oaks students.

Minseo Bae - p. 89

I relocated to the United States of America in November 2015, and I have been working at a restaurant as a waitress for 1 year. I am meeting lovely customers every single day, and I am talking to them about my life. I have enjoyed working in the United States, and I have gotten a good impression of the country. Sometimes, however, I also struggle to speak English and live in this new culture. But, I am sure that it is a great experience for my future. I am hoping to bring my daughter here shortly; she is my only child. I really want us to live together in the United States. I believe that we will make a wonderful life here.

Krish Bastola - p. 98**Benoit Bouda - p. 32**

I'm 32 years old and from Burkina Faso, a country in West Africa. I have lived in Cincinnati for about seven months with my wife. I have enjoyed learning English in ESOL class at Great Oaks because studying helps me understand the culture of the United States and in my career building in this country. In addition, I have learned various things from my classmates. I dedicate my writing to my mother who is my source of inspiration.

Maria Guadalupe Bravo - p. 45**Lela A. Brooks - p. 102**

Lela is an Aspire Student working hard to achieve her GED and better her life.

Lamont Chandler - p. 11

I am a man of God, a father, a grandfather, and Freemason. I survived a failed marriage that affected me deeply. I now try to rise spiritually through prayer and self-reflection. Education is a way I am bettering myself.

Tiffany Cupp - p. 5

Tiffany Cupp recently received her GED through our Aspire program. Tiffany has relentless energy when she writes. She has the ability to express her feelings and energy to anyone who

cares to read her message. Tiffany had many struggles and through recovery she will be back on top again.

Abigail Current - p. 79

My name is Abigail (Abbey) and I am 19 years old. I have lived in Lima, Ohio, for the past 2 years. I enjoy writing about my life experiences in hopes to touch someone else's life. I am also very talented with writing music. I have been in and out of the legal system for many years as a juvenile and recently experienced prison. I have recently begun viewing life with a different perspective; I have a more positive attitude now. I am utilizing my time in positive ways, and am ready to apply myself in all aspects to my full potential after this program.

Hiromi Dang - p. 80

My name is Hiromi Dang and I'm from Japan. I'm married to an American-Vietnamese man, and we have lived in Cincinnati for 3 years. I'm learning English at Live Oaks. I love my teachers and classmates.

Tahereh Dehghan - p. 35

Tahereh is from Iran, where she was born and educated in chemical engineering. She is living in the US and now studying to improve her English.

Clara Diaz - p. 62

Clara comes from Spain. She now lives in Wooster, Ohio, with her husband and four (soon to be five!) children.

Madison Fenbert - p. 31

Hello, my name is Madison Fenbert. I'm 21 years old from a little town called Pandora, Ohio. I lost a child almost a year ago on August 19, 2017. He was still born and it happened a week before my due date. In the hospital, I received a box from them that had a blanket, foot prints, hand prints, and so much more. Recently I have started crocheting, so that I am able to make blankets and donate them to people who have been in the same situation I recently was in. I would also like to donate them to children's hospitals as well. I'm currently working on getting my GED. I hope one day to become a cosmetologist.

Tyler Fisher - p. 55

My name is Tyler Fisher, and I am a student in the Aspire College Readiness program. Ms. Frame and Ms. Osborne have been really nice and good at helping further my education. They have been great teachers and are helping me reach my goals of becoming a designer.

Neyla Flores - p. 106

I'm from the north of Mexico. I have a Communication degree. I'm married and I have three kids, each one born in a different country. I love to exercise; my favorite class is Zumba.

Carmina Galguera - p. 9

My name is Carmina, I'm Mexican. I came to the U.S. with my husband in 2015.

Shannon Greathouse - p. 14

Shannon is an aspiring singer and great mom. She is thinking about joining law enforcement.

Sharde Hatcher - p. 123

Sharde Hatcher is a young woman on the move! She enjoys reading, writing and learning. Ms. Hatcher is interested in making a difference in the world we live in today with her impactful writing and insight.

Rebecca Hayhurst - p. 17

My name is Rebecca, but I like to be called Becky. I am from Pennsylvania and moved to Ohio in the year 1959. I am 76 years old and like coming to Wayne County Aspire classes.

Paola Hogland - p. 77

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

Sydney Erin Johnson - p. 51

My name is Sydney Johnson. I am a student currently taking the Aspire classes offered by Butler Tech, aiming to get my GED. In my spare time, I like to write, and I hope to someday have a book of my own published.

Rachel Liebenguth - p. 28

My name is Rachel. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. I am currently living in Apple Creek, Ohio. I am 29 years old. I have three children and they are my world. I am unemployed and trying to earn my GED so that I can get back into the workforce and get the job I would love to do.

Alfred L. Lorch - p. 71

I was born in Queens, New York, and now live in Xenia, Ohio. I enjoy the writing process: poetry, rap lyrics, short stories. To me, writing is a blank canvas - there is always room to change and grow.

Fatima Mardi - p. 70

My name is Fatima Mardi, and I'm from Morocco. I came to the USA in 2006. I started working in a month. Before that I was working with the Italian Embassy. Now my husband and I are working in our business.

Pricilla Marinho - p. 58

Pricilla is 25 years old and is from Brazil. She believes a smile can change the day. She has been in the USA for one year to improve her English and to broaden her horizons.

Samantha N. Marion - p. 18

I enjoy spending all my free time with my children. We enjoy hiking, fishing, camping, swimming. Anything outdoors whatever it may be; as long as we're together, we always have a blast.

Christina Marshall - p. 83

My name is Christina Marshall. As I look back over my life, now at the age of 43, I can see I'm not a mistake. Throughout the years, I have had many voices telling me that I am less than what I am meant to be, and that I will never be enough. I am now a business owner in process of earning my GED and college degree. I have put myself in a position to help other young ladies as hopeless as I was, and fill their lives with that same truth and hope that saved my life. To God be the glory...I am not mistake.

Maria Martel - p. 3

I am originally from Venezuela. I am currently studying English at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Katharine McQuaid - p. 69

Katharine loves to read and may go to art school when she gets her diploma.

Tinika Moses - p. 84

Tinika Moses recently received her GED through our Aspire program. Tinika walked into the classroom only to achieve her goal to be a role model for her 5 young sons. She can sing and loves to write poetry.

Justin S. Murrey - p. 27

Justin is a husband and father of four. He is currently in the ASPIRE program, working to better his life for his family.

Mildred Myles - p. 22

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

Mihoko Nagura - p. 101**Katherine Orozco - p. 116**

My name is Katherine Orozco. I was born in Ibague, Colombia. I'm 25 years old, and I'm a Communications Journalist. I moved to the USA to improve my English and to have a great experience as an Au Pair. Right now, I live in Cincinnati, Ohio, with my host family, the Kincaids. I love this family. My story about my father and his survival is very important for me. I continue to thank God for the second opportunity for his life. I am grateful that he is still alive!

Nimisha Patel - p. 63

My name is Nimisha. I live in Loveland with my husband and two daughters. I have been taking English instruction classes at Live Oaks. My dream is that I can speak better English. I love the ESOL classes.

Dennis Piotrowski - p. 95

Dennis Piotrowski recently received his GED after taking classes provided by the Cuyahoga County Public Library's Aspire of Greater Cleveland program.

Chun Qin - p. 124

Chun Qin was born in China and lived in the south of China until coming to the United States twelve years ago. She and her husband enjoy birdwatching. She is currently working with the local Chinese government to establish a bird sanctuary in the area where her parents still live. Chun wants to improve her English skills so she can write her and her family's story.

Kaitlin B. Ray - p. 93

I am a single mother of 5 from Akron, Ohio. I am currently attending ASPIRE in Wooster, Ohio, to finish my final test of the GED. I'm almost 24, and live each day to better my children's future as well as my own.

Liliana Rojas - p. 103

My name is Liliana Rojas, and I am originally from Peru. I am 53 years old, and am the seventh of eight siblings. I have two daughters. I'm currently taking an ESOL class at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. Once I complete this course, my goal is to get my GED.

Elizabeth Sacksith - p. 7

My name is Elizabeth Sacksith, and I was born in Laos. I came to America 37 years ago. I am a student at Eastland-Fairfield Career & Technical Schools. I go to school two nights a week. I enjoy learning, and I have learned a lot coming to class. I've been married for 36 years. I have two children, and I am a stay-at-home Mom. I wrote this story to get people to be kind to animals; they love and have feelings too.

Joseph Sanders - p. 105

I am Joseph Sanders. I was adopted from Karaganda Kohistan in Russia. I am 27 years old and have one beautiful daughter. I have a loving family who loves and supports me. I love learning new things and working with people. I get along with new peoples and love others and also love myself.

Nadine Saunders - p. 37**Thilagavathy Shanmugam - p. 132****Courtney Simmons - p. 29**

I'm Courtney, and I grew up in a small town in Ohio. I'm 24 years old and have battled with addictions for about 8 years. I'm an aunt of 2 children and sister to 4. I've overcome my demons and am now beginning to pursue my dreams of helping others who struggle with addictions.

James Snodgrass - p. 57**Fruzsina Szabo - p. 59**

I'm originally from Hungary which is located in the middle of Europe. I'm 33 years old and have two kids. I moved to the U.S. with my family less than a year ago because of my husband's job. I'm currently taking ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati. I love this course because it helps me understand American culture as well as both spoken and written English. I have met many great people, for example, teachers, volunteers, and guest speakers, who have helped me maintain my motivation for learning new things.

Cung Bawi Thawng - p. 112

I am from Myanmar. I have two children, and this is my first time to write the story.

Abdoulaye Thioub - p. 23

I am originally from Senegal. I am currently studying English at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio. I hope to get my GED someday.

Tania J. Valencia - p. 53

In early childhood education I loved to be a teacher. I'm a happy and kind person. I like people, animals, and nature.

Luz E. Wagner - p. 118

My name is Luz Wagner, and I'm originally from Mérida, Mexico. Mérida is the capital and largest city of the Mexican state of

Yucatán. I currently live in Cincinnati and am studying English at Scarlet Oaks. My goal is to work as an interpreter someday.

Miriam B. Wellman - p. 65**Lawrence Williams - p. 48**

Lawrence Williams was a former Aspire GED student. Mr. Williams is a single parent. He has a passion for writing and making sure everyone is happy around him.

Ozell R. Williams - p. 38

My name is Ozell R. Williams. I am from Warren, Ohio. I've been living in Canton, Ohio, for over 20 years. When I was young, I was in and out of school, and decided to quit. I'm glad I came back because I missed out on a whole lot.

Stephany Wilson - p. 110

My name is Stephany, and I am from Convoy, Ohio. My family is the most important thing to me, especially my four-year-old daughter. I hope to someday become an addiction counselor to help others.

Renee Wiseman - p. 72**Young J. Wook Shin - p. 133****Lu Yang - p. 12**

Hi, this is Lu Yang from China. I have been in America for three months. I like it here a lot. Anyway, I have studied English since I was in middle school. I love reading, writing, and thinking. I really love writing stories which happened in real life. It makes me happy. I want to be a writer one day, that is my dream. I know it is still far away to achieve it with my English level. But, I always remembered the saying from Eleanor Roosevelt, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

Rose York - p. 47

Honorable Mention

Artists

Nour Albdour
Adriana Bugg
Reggie Capeles
Kaylalee Decore
JinHao Kou
Dimche Krninov
Nikhoh Lemaster
Maria E. Mendez
Elvin Roblero
Lee Sullivan
Uriel Vasquez

Authors

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Toshiko Abe
Hakeem Al Sammarraie
Fahad Alanazi
Maryam Alanazi
Nour Albdour
Rawan Alkenni
Elvia Arias
Madina Aripova
Mona Basley
Tammy Beal
Kenneth Betts
Gerawork Bireya
Wanda Bogdanowicz
Dan Braun
Adriana Bugg
Jarred Bugg
Diana Castro
Erricka Chatman
Jenny Chirinos

Edgar Cifuentes
Xiomara Cifuentes
Jeana Cogswell
Aurelia Constantin
Irasema Cuéllar
Janka Curillova
Chelsea Damron
Amanda Dayton
Joana Deuschle
Tokoye Diagana
Maimouna Diew
Habibatou Djigo
Lourdes Dominguez
LsShonne Drummond
Sarah Enochs
Arlette Espana
Norma Feregrino
Alicia Flores
Shyana Fox
Patricia Franklin
Kidist Gebremariam
Juana Paz Gonzalez
Marina Rubio Gonzalez
Della Gray
Brian Griffin
Adriana Guedes
Paloma Gutierrez
Yvone Hangoue
Dana Harney
Alisha Hartman
Demetrius Haywood
Asa Heilman
Deijohnna Henderson
Wilson Herrera
Donna Hickenbottom
Jackie Ibrahim

Kravuth Im
Gulnoza Ishnova
Rahma Ismael
Yuka Iwakura
Luis Jijon
James Jones
Kristel Jones
Frederic Kabore
Daniel Kamba
Baljinder Kaur
Licheng Ke
Laul Kebede
Claudette Keen
Vaughn Kennedy
Akila Khalfoun
Maryna Kharchyk
Sitora Khaydari
Suzanne Kiemtore
Mary Kissiva
Johanna Knoll
Motshidisi Lebakeng
Terry Lewis
Qing Li
Claudia Linares
Carmen Londono
Estella Lopez
Jose Lopez
Sheyla Lopez
Krystle Magee
Iryna Mamontova
Naomi McGraw
Liliam Medina
Nesrine Mehdi
Esther Merlos
Jexandra Miljanos
Elizabeth Minta
Fereshteh Mohammadi
Joshua Mumaw
Kayo Murodate

Maryem Naimi
Marielis Navarro
Eduardo Neri
Michael Newman
Oumar Niane
Joseph Osborne
Kenia Ponce
Rosanny Pool
Vasalina Pop
Radmila Popovic
Angelo Rajaonarivo
Gertean Real
Ashley Rice
Alice Rivera
Irma Rivera
Ivelisse Rivera
Rosgisell Rodriguez
Rosa Maria Rueda Quintana
Ludmila Russu
Efrain Sanchez
Linda Schumacher
Angel Scott
Keith Sculley
Fauzia Shaukat
Sukhwinder Singh
Monae Sisk
Jacqueline Smith
Tammi Snodgrass
Tasha Sobers
Corey Somler
Mike Stanforth
Lee Sullivan
Noriko Takahashi
Mayya Trachenko
Katerina Trikilis
Innocent Tshiala
Melanie Tyler
Barno Umarmkulova
Edilberto Vasquez

Juan Vazquez
Erbin Velazquez
Tim Vincent
Nina Ware
Zeinab Warsame
James White
Hilary Whiting
Angela Williams
Gloria Williams
Hernandez Williams
Margaret Wornee
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