

Beginnings XXIII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Foreword

During this past year, as we spent time away from others, we spent more time with ourselves – in our own heads – reflecting about what our lives and our relationships meant. We ate, we slept, we worked (if we were able), and we made sure that our loved ones were cared for. We also read, watched the news, and we waited for normal to return. While we waited, some of us wrote. We wrote about our lives, our dreams, our memories, and our hopes. We wrote about our happiness and our sorrows. And most importantly, we wrote to make sense of the strange and uncertain times that we were living in. Some of the writing we did appears in this volume of *Beginnings* which includes a special section – *Pandemic Ponderings*. *Pandemic Ponderings*, a reflection of 2020, not only showcases students’ stories, but contains the voices of teachers who were also willing to share their experiences and feelings about this unique year. Our *Aspire* teachers work hard every day to help their students succeed, and we were excited to include them in this special section.

When thinking about what I would write for this foreword, I couldn’t help but to reflect on the beautiful cover art created by Gabriel Pereyra. His creation “Man and a Book” reminded me of being in my own space – in my own head. When the *Beginnings* authors spent time in their own heads – thinking, worrying, reflecting, remembering – they found stories and wrote them down. Now we hold those stories in our hands. I hope you will enjoy every story in this book. I know I always do. Even after 21 years of reading student submissions, I still laugh, cry, sigh, and smile as I read. I know that spending time in the place where these stories come from – in our own heads – can be scary, but it can also be the best place we can possibly be. It allows us the opportunity to heal our confusion and uncertainty. This healing often leads to creativity that, when written, can become published writing.

Dianna Baycich, PhD
Literacy Projects Coordinator
Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Acknowledgements

Since 1997, the words of adult student authors have been published in a soft-bound anthology called *Beginnings*. This publication has always highlighted the collaboration between Aspire authors and their instructors. The unusual circumstances of 2020-2021 not only forced the urgency of this partnership, but fortified it. The Ohio Literacy Resource Center honors *Beginnings XXIII* authors and is grateful for the teachers who not only instruct, encourage and guide their students, but share their love of writing.

While we cannot celebrate the 61 *Beginnings XXIII* authors and two artists in person this year, we applaud each author and artist who had the courage to share their voice and vision. We also congratulate those who appear in our honorable mention section. Thank you for your submissions and we encourage you to keep writing.

We are grateful for the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Aspire program for their commitment to the development and celebration of student writing and for their continuing support of the teachers and students in Ohio's Aspire classrooms.

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In My Own Mind

Broken Times and New Masterpieces

I've been sitting silently sifting through the memories.
There I am trying to find the rest of me.
There are only tiny pieces that you left here of me.
A torn tapestry left solely for all to see
a broken vase tattered so sorrowfully.

Paintings displayed for the world to see of this
Battered frame that is to center around me.
Colors of our discord stroked across this page
coming to an end in this collage of a gallery.

Taken from me everything you see.
Discarded here for all eyes to see.
Your masterpiece of my broken dreams.

Hope so shattered and faith so broken
Pride so battered and life so captured

Snapshots from my distant past being burned to ash
Smiles of depravity chased away with innocent tones.
Scorched ashes of discarded memories
Gathered neatly in this boxed heart
Emitted sulfur of abused instances.
Light sparkles slowly kindling
Crisp cracklings in renewed serenity.
Bygones of clandestine scars washed away
in reimposed seas of endless stars.

Memories burned in desperation.
Dotting the blank canvas pains of sorrows
Shined away with joyous amoré,
Broken mirrors formed into a destined star
Closer now and never far
Gaze upon this one shattered fate.
For now, nothing more is at stake.

Resounding in symphony a new path to life
No longer broken by your endless strife,
A new tapestry woven in next to a faithless past.
No longer entwined, our paths diverge,
Cutting the old red thread.

Silence overwhelms me though without blight
The old fight brought to its bitter sweetened close,
A new work of art not to be exposed.
Tempting as the echoes of calls, here they are
To no longer give me pause.
Hope, not shattered faith unbroken
Pride not shaken and life not captured.
Steps to a ladder here I come.
For now the old song will never be resung.

*~ Jamie McAllister
Canton City Schools*

Life Transcribed into Words

I was a little girl
I had a big dream
I was born in a beautiful place
Its name is Brazil

When I grew up
I kept walking with resolve
Pushing towards my dream
I never gave up

One dream was learning
Wisdom gives us wings
With knowledge I'm invincible
I can do anything

I was faced with obstacles
I made mistakes
Now fulfilled -
But alone, I couldn't do it

My family and God
are my foundation
Friends and teachers
Helped in my transformation

Leaving my country
Was difficult, but necessary
Excellent opportunities
Helped change my life

Sometimes I felt weak
But the Lord reminded me
That I'm unique
And I'll always be

My path was arduous
But God stayed with me
He is glorious
And never abandoned me

I need Your force
I know it is hard
Life lessons help me evolve
Each day, gaining a yard

The distance apart
I need to keep them in my heart
I will be smart
I'll devote myself to my art

Everything I learned
Helped me to proceed
Writing is my therapy
Fills me with hope and gaiety

*~Fernanda Lima Marques
Great Oaks ITCD*

Winter Is Coming

As I rapidly approach my re-entry into the world, I sense an impending darkness. This demon or entity is not unfamiliar to me, for he has been stalking me for almost two decades. Like a rotted tooth, I always feel his presence; however, he has proven to be much more difficult to extract. He despises my laughter and my successes, and he feeds on my joy. These positive things do not deter him, only motivate him further. He is persistent and opportunistic. He senses my vulnerability and promptly strikes. Much like a Wes Craven character, he will attack me in my sleep. When I wake, and the pseudo-euphoric feeling fades, I am left with a mix of defeat and relief. I know by myself I am no match for the demon, for he has been destroying lives long before I was born. I have been building an army, surrounding myself with soldiers who will fight along side of me. I refuse to be another casualty to the monster. I am ready to go to war.

~ C. Samuel Reymer
Mansfield Board of Education

She Sits Alone

In a room full of people...

She sits alone.

Laughing and talking...

She sits alone.

Surrounded by family...

She sits alone.

The world everchanging...

She sits alone.

In the darkness...

She sits alone.

~ *Dorine Nienkark*
Ohio University

Two Lives

I have lived two lives. When I moved to the United States, one whole life was left behind in Brazil. So much time had been spent planning every little detail for the move because I needed to finish my old life and then prepare for my new life as well. Once I completed this difficult step and was finally ready to move on, my first thought was, "Yeah, I got it. Now it's just a matter of starting over again." However, starting over was just a small part of the big picture. A more profound aspect involved thoughts and feelings I had never imagined until I moved away from the people I loved, the ones who were once with me every day.

It was an ordinary day when I received a call from my sister that triggered some thoughts I had never contemplated before. By the end of the call, I realized that I had prepared for many things, but I had never prepared for this. Despite frequent calls to family and friends in my home country, my sister surprised me by saying, "I'm really afraid that my nephews have forgotten me because we are no longer together." I quickly replied, "That is impossible because we are family." I had always believed it was highly unlikely to forget or feel detached from those I loved. Despite the distance, we remained in touch. Nonetheless, this conversation unsettled me, and after hanging up the phone, I continued to think about it for days.

Although I often think about those who stayed behind, a part of me feels empty. I long for their physical presence. I realize this is not about being forgotten; it is about being separated and no longer a part of the whole. On the one hand, I tried to prepare myself for this change by being open to new opportunities and life experiences. On the other hand, I was unprepared to no longer be a part of the lives of my family and friends. I have always had mixed feelings knowing they have continued to live their lives without me. They have shared special moments like parties, birthdays, weddings, funerals, and other small get-togethers that I will no longer be a part of. I understand this is part of the choice I made, but it still hurts. It's painful not being a part of their lives anymore.

Sometimes I feel it's like watching a movie, but this movie is about my old life without me. Of course, they always remember me, but I'm not there anymore, and they just stop expecting me to be there.

The phone call from my sister was difficult because it made me think about something for which I was unprepared. However, it reminded me that the connection between those who stayed and those who moved consists of love and the hopeful anticipation for the next face-to-face encounter. I believe this is the secret to not being forgotten. This call also made me aware that moving to another country was crucial to recognizing just how fortunate I had been during those special moments together with the ones I loved while sharing all the memories and hugs.

My sister probably didn't intend to cause me such reflection; the world is really powerful.

*~ Lorena Daniele
Great Oaks ITCD*

Finally for Me

Years and years of confusion,
or just diluting the truth,
but knowing that I don't know what's best for me,
too busy giving all of me,
now settling for what's left of me.
No longer seeing beauty,
just damage and insecurities that exist because of the unseen,
or what my mind makes me see,
praying for guidance.
So now I'm questioning,
are you even there?
Or is life just one big hell?
If so, burn my soul so good that I have no choice but to be cold,
better yet, selfishness,
so I can stop being so damn selfless.
My one wish.

~ Chanel Hernandez
Godman Guild

Stop Overthinking It

It may seem strange if you tell someone that you are going to leave the state where you live and go to a different state without any plans! That's what happened to me and my family.

Two years ago, we decided to leave New York and move to Ohio. We had no plans. New York was too expensive and crowded for us, so we decided to move to any other state. One of our friends suggested Chicago and another friend suggested Columbus, Ohio. We didn't know anything about either of them. Then we just decided to go to Columbus, Ohio. My husband quit his job, my son left school, we rented an apartment online, and asked an acquaintance in Columbus to help us with the lease papers, and we just moved.

Step by step, we built a new better life for our family. We started everything from the beginning, as we are new immigrants to the U.S.

Changing your entire life, quitting everything, and leaving to start fresh may seem frightening, but sometimes it can turn out to be a turning point in your life.

~ Noor Khozayem
Delaware Career Center

In a Good Place

A Better Person

When I was young, never in my life did I think I would live somewhere other than my hometown in Jordan, but then I got married. My husband and I moved to the U.S., and we rented an apartment close to my husband's college. It was challenging because I didn't understand very much of the language. We didn't have a car back then, so we had to use the bus every time we went grocery shopping, but it was still a good experience. I had no family here except for my uncle in Chicago. It was a bit difficult but fun.

One year after we came to the U.S., we had a baby boy, and two years later I had a girl. It was a lot of responsibility being a housewife having to take care of the kids and my husband. In Jordan, the families help. My mom and my mother-in-law would have helped me. My husband and I helped each other. I have learnt a lot of things throughout the years and started to depend on myself. It is very nice to have help, but when I think of what I did, I'm proud of myself. This has made me a better person.

*~ Duaa Alzoubi
Canton City Schools*

My Seasons

In the summer I will ride bikes with my brother;
I won't use my winter jacket.
In the spring I will plant some flowers;
I won't need to rake leaves.
In the winter I will drink hot chocolate;
I won't eat ice cream.
In the fall I will rake leaves;
I won't plant flowers.
I wish we had summer all the time like in Mexico.

~ Graciela Ramirez
Auburn Career Center

Becoming Courageous

When I first came to America, I had a lot of fears. Everything was difficult for me. I didn't speak English, I couldn't drive, and everything was done here in a different way. Even doing laundry was different from my home country in Algeria.

This stirred a lot of fears in me and my self-confidence was shaken. I had a lot of support and guidance from my husband, but I still felt imprisoned by fear.

After a while, I started to know how to do things and small things turned into bigger things that I could accomplish. My confidence came back bit by bit. I realized that I have grown a lot and that facing my fears has made me a stronger person, and I liked growing into a better version of myself. So I decided to make a list of things that make me afraid and face them, to remind myself that fears exist to be conquered, and that despite having fears, I am actually courageous.

Last May, I decided to conquer my fear of cats. I have always been afraid of cats and I avoided them walking down the street. They make me uncomfortable. I asked my husband to bring us a cat home for a while so that I could face my fears. In June, he brought us "Whisky," a grey and white cat with very long whiskers, which was why she was called "Whisky."

At first, she made me uncomfortable when she moved suddenly, and her hairs were everywhere. She wanted to sleep in our bedroom, and I couldn't stand that! I couldn't pet her or come near her at first. I gave her cat food and some water on the first day and watched my husband play with her. On the evening of the first day, I petted her gently once, very quickly!

Every day she stayed with us, I became less afraid and played with her more. By the end of her week with us, I was playing with her and holding her. I was very sad when her owner came to take her back.

In life everyone has to face their fears to grow. I decided to grow the muscle of courage to be ready. I decided to become courageous. Thanks to Whisky the cat, now I am.

~ *Nabila Hasni*
Godman Guild

Yoga Journey

Yoga has changed my life. It has taught me the importance of learning. Even though I'm over 40 years old, possibilities have broadened, and my future has opened.

In 2017, my family and I came to the United States from Japan. Since my husband worked and my children went to school, I needed to find an activity to occupy my time and stimulate my mind. I searched for something to do or learn, but after half a year, I still hadn't found anything that interested me.

Over time, I realized I needed to energize not only my mind but my body. Since I rarely exercised, I often felt under the weather. In addition, I had fractured my collarbone one year earlier, and because of that, I couldn't lift my right arm. To benefit my health, I began to participate in an online yoga class, and a short time later, I also began working out at the gym. I soon discovered the calming effect of yoga and felt better in no time. After continuing this routine for three months, I was eventually able to lift my right arm again. I was convinced I needed yoga for its healing qualities and the enjoyment it brought to my life. I had finally found something I wanted to do.

Because of my commitment to learning yoga, I started yoga teacher training at a studio in Mason, Ohio. I had a lot to learn: yoga poses, as well as history, philosophy, and anatomy. Of course, I had to do all of that in English. I studied for hours and practiced every day. In the six months leading up to graduation, I spent more than 600 hours on my study of yoga. I was elated after passing the tests. I hugged my yogi friends, teachers, and family who all supported me.

The possibilities resulting from one choice to learn something new are infinite. Learning yoga empowered me to start my own class, and I eventually felt inspired to learn meditation and Ayurveda, which is closely related to yoga. My yoga journey will continue forever, and my dream is to travel around the world

doing yoga. I've discovered that it doesn't matter how old you get; learning something new is always beneficial to one's life.

~ *Nanae Maruyama*
Great Oaks ITCD

My Hobby Is Writing About My Life

I like to spend at least five minutes a day writing. Most of the time I write when I'm alone; that way I can focus on my memories because the house is silent. I enjoy listening to music and writing about my life. It is kind of a diary.

I would like my daughters to know how I grew up in my hometown. I have written about everything since I was a child. I also write about how my parents gave me an education, and how they wanted us to preserve our traditions. I also write about my dreams. I would like to buy a big house so that I can bring my family to visit me. I write about how I emigrated to the USA, and how difficult it was because I didn't know any English. I describe how hard it was to look for jobs and find transportation.

Writing about my life is very important to me because I have very nice memories about my parents, and I want my daughters to enjoy my history some day. In conclusion, writing is a way to keep my memories fresh.

*~ Rosalia Pablo
Delaware Career Center*

In Admiration

Someone I Admire

My brother always said, “The day will come when everything will be fine. Focus on your studies to succeed in life.” My life as a young girl was not easy, but my brother provided inspiration and hope. He is the one person in my life who I truly admire; I owe him so much. He is selfless, kind, intelligent, and very understanding. My brother likes to help others without expecting anything in return. He doesn’t want to see anyone around him suffer, especially his loved ones.

As a young teenager, my parents separated and were not present in my life to provide the care and guidance I needed. However, my brother was always there to support and protect me during these difficult moments. My mother left our homeland because she was extremely ill and needed to go to Europe for treatment. My father remarried and focused his attention on his new wife and job; he never had time for my brother and me. He often went on business trips and spent long stretches of time in Germany and other foreign countries. These long, difficult periods without our parents brought us close together. There were times when we didn’t have enough to eat, but because of my brother’s self-sacrificing nature, he left his studies at the age of seventeen to earn money by doing odd jobs such as unloading trucks, selling small items, or even cleaning people’s homes to provide for me. He never grew discouraged no matter how hard life became. I remember once not having enough money to buy books I needed for my classes, but my brother sold his phone in order to buy them for me. There were also times when people were cruel to us, but that didn’t stop him from always smiling and continuing to do good for those around him.

Today, it’s all behind us. I finished my studies and immediately began working, and my brother started a business. For the past two years, I have been living in the United States with my husband and son. My brother still lives in Africa, but it has not changed our special relationship. He is still my advisor and source of inspiration, strength, and courage. I can never thank him enough for everything

he has done for me. I continually try to live a good life to make him proud of me.

I realize I am very lucky to have him in my life, and I know he will be a great uncle for my children. I can't wait to see his beautiful smile again and wrap my arms around him in a loving embrace. I am very proud to be his sister and would not trade him for anything in the world.

~ *Fatoumata Diakhaby*
Great Oaks ITCD

A Worthy Action

Through my life path, I made a lot of sacrifices to help my children succeed in education. I also lived many interesting experiences, and one of them was to care for an orphan girl. This wonderful experience illustrated who I really am, as I managed to draw a smile on the face of a helpless child. Thus, this action gave me a huge amount of satisfaction and made me feel happy and proud. I have just given her a sustainable amount of financial aid, which consisted of 1/6 of my monthly salary during a period of 12 years. I also helped her with her schoolwork and her education, thinking that a good education for her will be the key for a good future. Recently she graduated from college and started work in a company.

In conclusion, I think that the human being must not be selfish. He must be generous and have a glance around him in order to detect the people in need.

Let us imagine the world if each one of us holds the hand of a falling or needy person in everyday life. This will prompt strong relationships among the human race, put an end to misery, and sow happiness in the world.

*~ Karima Kerboua
Delaware Career Center*

Best Friend

Another life lost
A soul gone too soon
Another chapter ended
Never to see another moon

The days have grown longer
Oh how I miss you
My heart has grown stronger
From all the pain I've endured through

Your spirit will be everlasting
For now, I bid you adieu
Until we meet again
Dad, I love you

*~ Chad Carlisle
Mansfield Board of Education*

My Mother, My Inspiration

It is said that God is omnipresent, but He can't be everywhere. This is the reason He created "Mother." Mother truly epitomizes God during our lifetime through her constant love, care, and dedication. No matter who you are, where you are from, or what languages you speak, all people agree that mothers are precious. Without mother, life is less sublime.

During my upbringing in India, my mother played a significant role in raising me, especially after the death of my father. She was truly a guide who inspired me in all phases of my life. As she was an elementary school teacher, she explained the values of education and inspired me to do my best. She was fearless, resilient, and extremely virtuous. She encouraged me to follow her example by making courageous life decisions. She also inspired me to become a trustworthy and reliable person in society.

Five years prior to coming to the United States, my mother became severely ill and was completely bedridden. It was now my turn to pay back her love and affection. I attended to all her needs and remained by her bedside for many months until she passed away. A compelling image of my mother during this time remains within my mind. She often expressed her intense desire for me to get married since she was concerned about my future and was worried that I would be left alone without her. She therefore encouraged me to find the right person as a life partner and get married.

As she drew her last breath, my mother reiterated that I should get married as soon as possible. Regrettably, she passed away one early morning leaving me alone in this world. In addition to experiencing extreme sorrow for losing her, I was feeling guilty for not fulfilling the wish she had for me. Miraculously, in the afternoon of the day she passed away, a gentleman from the United States called and asked me to meet him for marriage discussions. Although I was in complete distress due to the loss of my mother, I was filled with wonder and was convinced that this man's

phone call was a message sent to me by my mother. That evening, my mother appeared to me in a dream and requested that I get married to the man who had called me. I sensed that my mother was still with me. Eventually, I married the gentleman and came to the United States with him. He loves and respects me profoundly, and we live a peaceful, wedded life together. He is not only my husband but a true friend, philosopher, and guide. He supports me in all my decisions.

My current happiness is due to my mother's heavenly blessings.

~ Parul Vyas
Great Oaks ITCD

Awesome Wonders

It is difficult to explain how small things or decisions can change part of history. I cannot explain how I wonder at all the things in this world starting with the creation of life and culminating in death. I wonder at how everyone is lucky to be able to breathe, love, laugh, and even cry. How everyone can live their own history even for a second or many years, leaving a mark in time.

I am Maria. The seed of life grew in my belly on three occasions. To become a mother was the most beautiful experience, and I never want to change it. Each one of my deliveries was so special. On the first occasion I was curious about the idea to have my first girl. We named her Alexa and she is the little girl of my eyes. The second time I delivered another little and sweet girl that we named Carmen. Lastly, a tender and energetic boy was integrated into our family. We named him Tadeo.

The first time that I saw each one of my children is one of the most valuable memories that I keep in my mind, in particular the birth of my little Carmen. When I was four months pregnant, I attended one of my doctor appointments. The doctor gave me terrible news. My little Carmen had a condition named Trisomy 13. The doctor did not expect her to live and even suggested ending the pregnancy, but I totally disagreed with him.

This situation surprised my little family. The sadness entered like the dark while the uncertainty and hope rose like a whirlwind to finally let us fall straight to the entrails of the emotional pain.

The day was cold, and the sky was gray. I arrived at the hospital accompanied by my daughter Alexa. We went there to deliver my little Carmen. She was born alive and cried. That was the sweetest crying that I ever heard. When I saw her, it was like love at first sight. The doctor placed her on my chest. I hugged her, and immediately I realized that I did not want to let her go. Hurriedly I tried to breastfeed her, but it was unsuccessful.

We spent all night with my little Carmen. She was sleeping over my chest, and I remember how good I felt touching her little and warm furry head. I kept smelling her hair. "Everything is okay," I told myself. "My baby is here, she is breathing, I am holding her, and that is the most important thing."

Suddenly her face started to change color, and she was purple. I had the most terrible sensation. My daughter was dying in my arms, and I did not have any idea how to help her. My reaction was to cry and scream "help." My heart was beating very fast, my hands and legs were shaking, and my brain was confused.

Little Carmen was stronger than me. She overcame that first crisis and others more during that night. She was determined to live, I thought.

Unfortunately she passed away the next morning. Dedicating her last smile to her father, she closed her eyes slowly to never open them again.

Immediately I fell into a deep emotional well. It was like I was in another dimension looking at a sad movie. Things kept getting worse. When someone from the funeral home came to our room to take our little Carmen, my daughter Alexa was there in the room with my husband and me. She was so sad. "Daddy, please take my sister Carmen into your arms and let's go to our home because that man wants to take her to another place," Alexa said to her father while her sweet tears sprouted from her eyes.

The worst part came when we left the hospital. While I was walking to the main door, I was remembering when I arrived at the hospital the day before and how I looked with my big belly and my little Alexa taking my hand. Now Alexa, my husband, and I were leaving the hospital without a smile on our faces. I left the hospital without my baby in my arms. All I carried in my arms were all the pieces of my heart accompanied by some pictures, her little footprints and more things in a blue box they had given me.

While we were on our way to our home, I wished that I would not arrive because the time was elapsing, and I was feeling sadder. I felt that I did not have enough time with my little Carmen.

Later, we left her in a special place in the cemetery. I remember that I went to that place and laid down a blanket on the grass. I was there, sitting down on the blanket but my eyes were looking at the horizon and my mind was creating a beautiful history where my little Carmen was the protagonist.

I was imagining a large wheat field with a narrow road crossing it. At the end of the road were some mountains. At the top of one of those mountains a light was shining brightly. I was standing at the start of the narrow road under a mesquite tree. The appearance of that tree looked like my feelings at that moment: opaque green, a sad shadow. The leaves were moving with the gentle wind making a sound that sounded like they were asking her to come back. In my mind, my little Carmen was walking in the narrow road to cross the wheat field. When she was at the end of the road. She turned her body, looked at me, raised her hand, and said goodbye to me. I stayed there looking at the wind playing over the wheat.

To: My little Carmen

I want to let you know that I am the luckiest mom in the world. I am so proud of you because although you were so small you gave me a great lesson. With your determination, you clung to life like a brave warrior on the battlefield. Being so small you left your mark in the deepest place of my heart. Being so small, you left a great sadness in my heart. I confess to you that I am satisfied and happy and I calm my feelings thinking that you are in a beautiful place. I like to think that you are playing with the water, hiking in the mountains, climbing a tree, swinging in a swing, and looking at the moon. At the same time, I am looking at you, too. My love for you is like the oxygen in the Earth. It is wherever you are. I love you so much. The last things that I want to forget in this world are the memories of you, my child. That is the only thing that belongs to me. I love you.

~ Maria del Carmen Ochoa
Godman Guild

A Ella
(“To her”)

To the strong woman she became
That one that has suffered and cried in silence
That one that works long days
That one that goes to bed tired and wakes up tired
But she wakes up with a big smile on her face
Like there is no pain on her soul
No matter how difficult the roads gets
She will go back down that road where it all began
And without looking back, she will pass
But she will never forget where she comes from
That strong woman she has become

*~Judith Nonato Guijosa
Godman Guild*

Fall in Love

When you start reading the title of my story, you'll probably think it's about my husband. You will almost be right because it was he who gave me this opportunity to fall in love. When I dreamed of being the wife of this man, I could not imagine what perfect love is. It all started when he gave me the confidence that I was protected. I began to dream of a child. Right now begins my story of how I fell in love.

I remember well the day it happened. Early in the morning my husband made coffee and we went to drink in the backyard. We like to drink coffee and pray and read the Bible. How wonderful to drink coffee in the warm autumn. It was the same that beautiful morning. I think those who like the sunrise will understand. For those who like to sleep in the morning I send a secret message: "Wake up and try the early morning to get a charge of energy from it."

After our time with God, we went to the hospital for an important event in our lives. We went to meet our daughter. That beautiful day, we were preparing to become parents, and yes-yes we were giving birth to our child.

You have no idea how afraid I was to become a mother. I was not afraid of medical procedures at all. I was afraid to be responsible for someone. I was afraid that I wouldn't understand what my child wanted. I was afraid to be a mother. The Lord does not look at your fear because He sees the future. Through faith in God and hope, I felt that all would be well.

When we were in the hospital the nurses gave a lot of compliments and kept coming to ask how our time was going. My sister-in-law was there with us (because my English was bad). She said that people are very interested to see who you are waiting for there. My English at the time was weak and my language was bad but I could joke in English so much that everyone thought I was funny and clear. I think it was due to stress.

When it all happened I couldn't hear anything anymore. I heard that amazing thin voice of my daughter. It was something unreal. I seemed to hear her call me. I know she needed me the most in the world. She so wanted to tell me how difficult the journey was. She told me all this with her pleasant cry. She looked me in the eye, and at that moment I fell in love for life.

I wrote this story for you. Do not be afraid and believe in God. He created everything in me, and He gave me peace. My fears simply disappeared. With God everything is possible.

In the end, God always wins.

~ *Kateryna Runkevich*
Canton City Schools

The True Meaning of Love

Can you believe there is a fifty percent chance that love alone will not save your relationship? Love can be a challenge to define. Often, the person who experiences it can only define it. People say love is pure and painful, sweet and dreadful, all at once. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the number one definition of love is, “a strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.” However, for many people, it is much more than that and very subjective. For me, when you are truly in love with someone, you discover moments of love and affection in the most normal situations. The truth is love is a necessity in everyone’s life. Everyone needs to love and be loved in order to live an emotionally healthy life.

First, people define love through their own expressions and understandings. For some, it is a variety of feelings, emotions, and attitudes. For others, it is more than just being physically into someone; it is an emotional attachment. Often in relationships, we attract people who are reflections and extensions of our true selves. Therefore, in order to attract true love, we must exhibit the qualities we seek in our partners. Personally, for me, here is what true love feels like. Some may disagree. We never have to “try” to spice things up. Everything seems fun and effortless just the way it is. We never have to try to go out of our way to please the other person. Love exists in the simple things we do together. There is no need to convince or force anything on each other. Love just comes naturally.

Second, we cannot truly love unless we have trust. Trust is the foundation of true love. For example, while it is crucial to trust the person with whom we are in love, it is equally important to always trust ourselves. Loyalty in relationships not only brings emotional stability, it also increases intimacy. When two people live with love and unity, there is no fear of getting hurt. In unity, love grows and strengthens with time. As stated above, approximately fifty percent of relationships fail because one partner has violated trust. Along the same lines, true love needs communi-

cation. Many people in relationships say that they struggle to express their feelings to their loved ones. Studies show that the only thing in the way is their ego. Ego is not necessarily defined as arrogance, but it can be a symptom of trust in yourself and what you are willing to share with your partner.

Finally, true love is teamwork. Knowing when to step up and have control or when to back off and trust your partner to take control is teamwork. Many relationships fail due to control issues. True love means combining your strengths to work as a team. When working with your partner, you will know when to keep quiet and when to say the things that need to be said. When words have meaning and said with good intentions, it should never be difficult to speak them. Making yourself understood and understanding your partner is the only way communication keeps two people connected on every level. When we speak our hearts and are open and truthful about our feelings, it shows courage and generosity. A true love will always respect you for letting him or her inside your secret, sacred space. Miscommunication can destroy your ability to plan for the future, making it impossible to move forward. However, with shared goals, partners create something so special that it is unique and indestructible. They share life objectives and work together to achieve their common goals.

In conclusion, true love removes ego, which brings us joy and closer to our real selves. True love is based on trust, communication, respect, loyalty, and teamwork. We find true love by being ourselves. It comes when we least expect it. True love is never a result of chasing after someone. It comes when we are comfortable in our own skin and grateful for who we are. We attract true love when we love ourselves. Love is the result of knowing what love is.

*~ Marina Ngatsing
Cincinnati City Schools*

My Everything

My sugar, my honey,
Who made my heart beat
And my eyes see in you
the light that brightens my life.

You are my life.

All the words of the world are not enough.

I love you.

It's not enough.

You are my everything.

*~ Fatiha Idsidi Ali
Great Oaks ITCD*

In the Past

Miracles and Favors of Life

As a Catholic, we have a lot of beliefs. For example, we believe in God, his holy Mother and him as an Infant, too.

In my case specifically, I can tell about the miracles and favors of life that happened to me from the Divine Child Jesus. On August 4, 2004, when I arrived at the hospital's emergency room, my blood pressure was normal, but my friend explained to them that they needed to do something to see inside my brain because I was like someone who had had a brain aneurysm, but my body did not accept it. The results said that I had two areas of my brain that were damaged, one recent and the other from birth. All that happened at the age of 30 years old. After 4 days at Saint Ann's Hospital (Mount Carmel North), they still didn't know what was wrong with me, and they had to give me a blood test every day.

On August 8, after I ate some fruits (I don't know what connected with that), I started feeling bad. They tried to help me. They said, "We are losing her, and we don't know what to do." They decided to do a heart catheterization to figure out what was going on with me. After that, I started having the worst pain ever in my pelvis. I literally couldn't sleep that day.

The next day, August 9, they had to do a sonogram to know what caused the pain, and they realized that it was a clot (the size of a golf ball). They decided to operate and that was risky for me because they didn't know if I would survive or not. They thought I might end up in a vegetative state. It was around 10 am, and I asked the doctor if someone in Spanish could explain to me what was going on with me. At this moment there wasn't anyone who could translate. The doctor let me call my dad's cousin, who is a doctor in a hospital in Maryland. My cousin talked to the doctor and he explained to me that I should start praying because the surgery was risky. After that, they moved me to intensive care. Before I was moved, I had started a prayer to the Divine Child Jesus. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I woke up because I felt something cold and I heard voices saying, "It was there, I saw it this morning,

but now it is not there.” After that I spent 10 more days in the hospital. They had to do a spinal tap test and take blood through my aorta vein because they couldn’t find anywhere else to draw my blood. Finally, they told me I had had several strokes, but that I also had a brain disease called Moya Moya.

In 2010, I started going to a Rosary for Our Lady of Schoenstatt at the home of a Venezuelan friend who introduced me to another devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague. Throughout all these years, I have received several favors. One was in November 2014 when one of my 60-year-old friends had a ruptured vein in her brain. I found out at 10:45 a.m. because another friend asked me to pray to the Infant Jesus of Prague. Then I prayed for my friend to be healed completely. I prayed to the Infant Jesus of Prague for nine consecutive hours. At 7:45 p.m., I ended my prayers, and everything was fine with her without any repercussions.

The other time was on August 25, 2017. My friend’s husband, who was in his 70’s, had a heart problem. He was taken to the hospital for surgery to uncover the veins of his heart. At 8 o’clock p.m. they started the surgery. I had started my prayers at 4 am, and when I finished my prayers, I texted his wife to say, “I have finished my prayers.” She texted me back and said the surgery was successful. At noon, I went to the hospital to see his family. During my visit, the nurse came out to talk with my friend’s wife. I was scared because my thought was something bad had happened to him. As it turns out, he was walking and asking for food, and had good signs of recovery. As I said in the beginning God did a lot of favors for us.

In conclusion, I believe everything is a matter of faith and prayer to a powerful and merciful God, who listens to us.

~ Angela Suriel Abreu
Delaware Career Center

Abigail's Freedom

Slavery was the worst thing that happened to the continent of Africa. It destroyed whole families and deprived them of their happiness. It left major consequences in Africa.

Millions of Africans were forced to travel into the unknown, in horrible conditions, crammed like common items into ships between two continents. This continued from the 17th century through the beginning of the 19th Century.

It was in this way that my ancestors came to this country called America, deprived of their freedom, to be made slaves by their fellow humans. These slave owners had discovered gun fire and had used it to spread sadness and fear to the vulnerable for more than 300 years.

The slaves were put up for sale at auction and then went to the plantations to work there without pay. Owners had the right of life or death over their slaves and suppressed their human rights.

I am the 4th generation of slaves. My parents were separated from their families when they were fourteen. This was because of a law, which attests that slavery is hereditary and is transmitted from mother to children.

My parents met at Bunch's plantation. Despite the horrible conditions for slaves, they didn't complain and hoped things would be better for my generation. They were too optimistic. I did not agree with them, and I always told them I would leave Kentucky for Ohio and freedom. They knew I would do it one day, and how I am tenacious if I decide something.

My name is Abigail. I am seventeen. I am very lucky to live until this age under the same roof with my parents. Everyday we are scared we will be separated if Master Bunch decides to sell me. I promised myself that I would not be a slave my whole life. I

would fight for my life. I already had a rebellious background, and nearby overseers knew about me. I always faced them when they treated us unfairly.

We are more than 200 slaves working for Master James Bunch, Sr., at Bunch's Plantation in Kentucky. Master Bunch's family had owned the plantation for more than 100 years. His plantation was the most successful on the boundary with the Ohio River valley. Our master was not too strict, unlike other masters of the plantations around us, but he respected the Kentucky slave code as following:

- Any slave if the master gives freedom must carry a certificate of freedom.
- Slaves must have notes giving permission to be off plantation.
- Slaves cannot carry weapons.
- Conspiracy by slaves is punished by death.
- The slaves are not allowed to work or ride on a steamboat across the Ohio River.
- No person can sell or give alcohol to slaves.
- There is a 10 p.m. curfew for slaves.
- In the countryside, police patrols ride horses at night looking for escaped slaves.

Those rules scared my parents when I talked to them about escaping. In our plantation two dozen young men and women had already escaped, and we never heard about them again. I hope their dreams became true. I had a conversation with my parents.

Me: I regret I didn't listen to the agent who came to explain to people how to escape.

Mother: Why are you so stubborn? We explained to you why we didn't take the risk to escape. At the same age, we were thinking about it all the time!

Father: And you know the rest of the story, why we never tried it!

Me: Yes! you lost your best friend who was captured by the marshall at the boundary and brought to Mister Bunch Senior. He

beat him to death and hanged his body for a week as an example for other slaves.

Father: Exactly! Do you want to finish like that?

Me: No! but things are different now! Many people are there ready to help us! It's my wish to be a free woman.

Two months after the discussion with my parents about my intention to escape, another group of 20 slaves were bought by our master. Half of them were my age. After their first day on the plantation, at night time, we met, prayed and sang before we went to bed. I quickly became friends with some of them, especially with the most rebellious of the group, a young man called Salomey. He became my best friend. We had many things in common. He was so polite to my parents. They thought maybe his presence would help me to change my mind about escaping. What they didn't even know was Salomey and I had already discussed escaping and had our plan. We were waiting for only one thing: the day of our escape.

In Kentucky, the slaves usually escaped in the middle of the fall, because the weather was not nice, and people didn't stay outside too long or travel too much. They explained we should take the boat at the boundary. The Ohio River is big. Our agent told us about the danger of swimming in the river. He said it's easier to cross by boat. Two days later, the agent came back and told us to be ready for Saturday night. He gave us a map for the trip and the instructions for not being captured. We would leave in two days.

I had always dreamed about this day, but now I started to be anxious about what could be next and thinking about my parents. Maybe they will not be surprised when they will understand I have left for real.

The day of our escape we did our normal duties and I spent the time with my parents in our cabin. We talked about everything that night, our future and what could be our life if

one day we become free. We sang together, but at the bottom of my heart I knew that it was our last night together. I was not too anxious about them because they chose to finish their life on the plantation. We wished good night to each other. When I was sure they were sleeping, I started crying and whispering that I loved them and that I promised if I managed to escape, I would do anything to see them again.

I left the cabin, looking around confidently that I was not followed, to meet the others at our meeting point.

The trip started in the middle of the night with our first conductor. I felt the fear on each face. I said, God is with us! The group looked at me, and they tried to smile. That night everything went well. We arrived at our resting place early in the morning.

We walked for three nights before we arrived at the boundary of Kentucky and Ohio, to meet our third conductor. Our pass code was a bird call. When we arrived at the boundary the conductor imitated a bird called "Yellow-billed," a small Ohio bird. The second conductor repeated the same sound; then we came out of the woods. The boat was already there to take us to the Freedom Land.

We crossed the big Ohio River with fear, but God answered our prayers. We arrived safe and happy to be free. Our last conductor sent us to another place to spend the rest of the night. The next night some were going to continue their trip to Canada.

Salomey and I decided to live in Ohio. I wanted to be near Kentucky and hoped to have the news from my parents. We were free, but we had to continue fighting with others to end slavery. We heard the good news about the job the Abolitionists were doing across the country. I hope that this evil, which decimates and dishonors my fellows, will end one day soon.

~ Alcha Soumah
Godman Guild

City of Lights

He killed 65 people and injured more than 850. Then he killed himself. It was the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.

This is my story about my first trip to Las Vegas. My husband and I decided after a year of work to take a mini-vacation. In late September 2017, we got tickets to fly to Las Vegas. When we arrived, there were fantastic music, lights, and casinos. We rented a car, we visited beautiful places. The nature there is kind of wildlife. In our last night we hung out in that crazy and beautiful city. We walked through the town, ate ice cream, and took a lot of photos. The town was very crowded because of the 91 Harvest Festival. I was very impressed to see the big M&M building. It was very close to us. We tried to get to that place, but at the same time there were a lot of ambulances and police driving in that direction. It was inexplicable. A lot of people were running in the opposite direction. Everybody looked fearful. We didn't understand what was happening.

Someone shouted, "Go back." We stopped for one moment looking around. A woman was running and crying through tears said, "There is a man with a gun, shooting people." Then I really heard the sound of gun shots. I forgot where I had to go, my heart rate increased, and my hands had started shaking. It was a crazy feeling. You can feel it when your life is in danger and you can't do anything about it – just run if you have a chance. I imagined how my parents would feel if they knew that I was not alive anymore. I understood that I had to do something to be safe and to escape from this nightmare.

The police closed all of the intersections. We were so afraid that we ran to the parking lot to take the car and go to the hotel. It was the best solution for us.

Almost all the streets were closed and the highway too. I had never seen so many police cars, helicopters, ambulances in my life. It was like being in a horror movie. After a few hours, I watched

the news about that terrible incident. It was about gunman Stephen Paddock who had opened fire from the 32nd floor suites of the Mandalay Bay hotel on a crowd at the music festival.

It was a big story with many thoughts and experiences for us. I made a conclusion after that trip: "Love your life and live it well." You don't know when your life will end.

~ *Florentina Nosaci*
Great Oaks ITCD

The Consequences of Disobedience

My name is Mercedes. This is my history. When I was a child, my mother and I used to go to church almost every day. One of the things I read in the Bible is that it is not good to have a relationship with people with different beliefs. When I was growing up, my mom always told me when you grow up and decide to get married, open your eyes wide and see if the person you choose is God-fearing because otherwise that relationship is not pleasing to God.

When I was about 16 years old, I met a person who was very nice to me. We began to meet each other, and the relationship became more serious. This person was 12 years older than me, but I fell in love with this person. My mother did not agree with this relationship. First of all, this man did not have the same beliefs as me. Second of all, this man was 12 years older than me. Third of all, I was very young. I was only 16 years old.

My mom said you need to wait a little more because you are too young. You are a child yet. But I did not listen to my mother. One day he proposed to me, and I was very happy but disobedient of what the Bible said and my mother's advice. I decided to accept to be married. When my mother learned of my decision, she told me, "Okay, I want to tell you something, you already made a decision, but I won't go to your wedding because I don't agree with your decision." So I told her, "It's okay if you don't want to go then."

I thought she was joking and wanted me to change my mind, but she wasn't joking with me. On the wedding day, everything was ready. I was very happy, and I did not care about my mother's advice or what I learned from the Bible. So we got married.

After that, our marriage was a disaster. I was sorry I was married, but it was too late. After I made this mistake, I understood that disobeying God and parents brings many consequences.

In Transition

Destiny

My name is Radhia Hemadou. I was born in 1993 in Algeria. My family consists of eight people: my mother, three sisters, two brothers, and my father who passed away last year in February 2020.

I started school when I was five years old, and I finished my university studies at the age of 23 years old.

There are a lot of things I like and that I don't like. I like to have fun with my family. I love soccer and swimming. The things I don't like are peppers (I really hate peppers). Another thing is bean soup. For me, beans taste horrible.

The biggest and most difficult decision I have made in my life was moving to the USA. I had to leave all my friends and my family, because my husband didn't want to miss the chance to live in America and discover a new life here.

I am an optimistic woman. When I was a child, my parents always told me that I was a brave girl and I would be a successful woman. I'm also brave, honest, and creative. I always try to give the best especially for me and for other people.

My hobbies are shopping, cooking, and traveling. Shopping for me is about seeing everything because I love fashion, elegance, and beauty.

As for cooking, it's one of the hobbies that I like and do with love. Cooking reminds me of my mother and my family. Traveling is fun for me. I like discovering new places that I did not know and meeting people from all over the world.

I'm married, and I have a son. I got to know my husband for five months and then we decided to get married because we have almost the same goals, thinking, and mentality. That's why I chose him as husband to continue the rest of our lives together. Last

year we had our first child, which fills our lives with happiness and joy.

My mom is my inspiration. She always gives me advice and the spirit to look ahead. She always helps me to realize my dreams.

The biggest shock I received in my life was the day my father died. I was here in America and my son was 23 days old. It was a big shock for me.

In the future I wish to help poor people, because I love helping those in need. I hope that everything that I want will be achieved.

~ *Radhia Hemadou*
Godman Guild

Set You Free

To be able to set you free
I must not be blind but able to
See
I cannot have a blind
Eye
I have to be able to say
Good bye
I hated just watching you
Slowly die
But the day I got that
Phone call
That you had passed
Away
I knew it was all a part
Of God's plan
For you
But I couldn't deal with
You not being here
I knew that you wouldn't
Want me to shed a
Tear
Even though you knew your
Time was here
You were so brave and
Showed no fear
In so many ways you are
My hero
I have in my life felt
So much pain
I never felt so hurt
Until you left

But you are still here
Looking over me
I feel like there is nothing
Left for me to gain
I love you and miss you
More than you know
Now I know for you
To be free I must let
You go

~ Randall Leicy
Mansfield Board of Education

Making the Decision to Come to America Changed My Life

I'm married and I have four amazing boys. I came to the USA in 2004. I decided to come here to change my life.

I grew up with my parents in a family with six siblings: five girls and one boy. I was the oldest daughter. My father was an alcoholic and a womanizer, who cheated on my mother every time he wanted to. For that reason he gave us a bad life when he was drunk and drugged. He was a very jealous male chauvinist and an overpowering man. He accused my mother of many false things. He thought she was just like him, and that's why he hit her. But my mother was and remains an honest and faithful woman.

Two of my sisters and I tried to defend my mother from my father's blows, but it was difficult because we were very small. We did not have the necessary ability to change things. Still, we did what we could. We were always afraid when we saw that my father was coming home. We started to shake. We were terrified. We already knew by heart the words he expressed that were so offensive and humiliating. The blows he gave my mother were a sickness.

My father always threatened my mother by telling her that one day he would end her life. Many times we preferred not to have a father. We didn't want to lose my mother. Because of him, we even told her to separate from him, but she didn't know if we could survive. We were six young children. She thought that she could pay our expenses and did not want us to suffer. Also, my mother loved my father and hoped he would change one day, especially since he always told her that. So she would forgive him and not separate from him. Above all, she stayed because of his threats. My father would tell her that if she left him he would look for her, and when he found her he would kill her. My father blackmailed my mother so she wouldn't leave him.

Our life was very sad. To escape from my father, we sometimes had to leave the house to spend the rest of the night, or

entire nights in the rain. Sometimes we left under the sun's evening rays and most of the time, without eating. Sometimes we asked to stay with the neighbors, but my father was very aggressive, even they were afraid of him. We tried to seek help with the authorities, but nobody did anything. In my country if you don't have money, it is impossible to get justice. I desperately wanted to find a solution to the problem. I didn't know what to do. I just wanted my mother and my siblings to be happy and stop suffering. I wanted my father to realize the damage he was causing us and change his activities.

I thought about killing myself to get attention, so that my father would realize why he had lost his eldest daughter. I decided to write a letter to my dad about why I was going to sacrifice my life so that he would stop making my mother and my siblings suffer. Since I could not swim, I thought of drowning myself in a pool of water near my house, but I think it was not yet my time to die because I could not drown or swallow enough water.

When I returned home, my mother had already found my letter but had not yet given it to my father. She was desperate, worrying that something had happened to me and had been looking for me. When she saw me, my mother was so relieved. I understood that because of me, and because of my despair, I had made a bad decision that made my mother suffer. I also realized that if I was dead my father would not have changed.

We were tired of living in that hell, and we wanted to escape from it. My two younger sisters decided to marry at an early age but I didn't want to do it because I hated all men, thinking that they were all the same. I wanted to go to a convent because I didn't want to spend the rest of my life living the same way. We seized courage where we could find it and tried to fight the hatred, resentment, and all his damage. The violence marked us psychologically. We felt very low and had problems expressing ourselves because he always took that right away from us – the right to speak the truth that would give favor to us and our mother.

When I finished my studies I decided to come to the USA to change my life. During this time my father tried to take my mother's life, but thank God – God did not allow it. I came to America in 2004. My two sisters had come in 2002. Another sister and brother came in 2016. My mother still lives in Guatemala with my youngest sister, Daisy, who is 19. My father came to America in 2009. He lives by himself.

Finally, our suffering has ended. Sometimes we fear that it will return, but most of the time we have confidence in God's heart. God's way of thinking has changed in us all the hatred and resentment we felt towards my father. God with his love healed our hearts. We thank him. We are happy now.

*~ Kenny Perez
Great Oaks ITCD*

Winter Turns to Spring

The winter of 2020 brought changing conditions
Full of rain and chilling temperatures
Day by day, the sky seemed to grow darker
As headline after headline, sorrow grew
The night felt so long as we waited for the sun

Then, at the cracking of the dawn
Winter and all of its perils
Suddenly gave way to a new kind of morning light
Full of all its delight
A gray sky began to transform into a new shade
As trees once barren started to awaken
And a proud blue bird flew to take its place upon the heights

Now, all the animals that have been sleeping
Come out to meet the new day's rays
Joining us who have been waiting for the bright warmth of a new day
And once again we see, almost as if by the flipping of a switch,
That the frost of winter, no matter how icy
Can see a new sun that warms even the coldest body

The first fruits of a great labor
The grace of God toward His creation
We who stand in wonder are brought to hope anew
That the darkest winter can come to life again
And even our bleakest night
Battered by storm upon storm
Can be a miracle by the dawn of the early morning light
As the harshest winter begins to turn to spring once more

~ Tracy Hardaway
Cuyahoga Community College

Destiny

Coming to America was a dream I had never dreamed before.

Eight years ago, I was like everyone at my age. After the end of high school, I was often confused about what next! But I was very interested in the legal profession, so I decided to go to university to study law.

I had to travel away from my family to another city, Agadir. At that time my family was suffering from difficult financial conditions. My father did not work because of his illness.

One year and a half after I went to university, it was very difficult. So I decided to look for a job. In the following year, my studies took a new turn. I left the university not completely, but only went to the exam times. I started studying at the institute in the secretarial division. In the same year, I met a friend, Abdo, who was also still studying at the university. He understood me, respected me, and supported me when I was frustrated, or I felt lonely. He was a decent and respectful man.

One day Abdo told me he wanted to fill out the American lottery form, and he asked me to accompany him. There was an association that did everything for you for a nominal price. I still remember that day as clear as if it was yesterday. It was a very hot day, there were a lot of people, men and women, some of them were our age, married, and also old people. It looked so strange to me, I had never imagined it to be like this, because I only imagined that I would find a few young men who did not have a job looking for an opportunity to escape from the harshness of life. But there were people with great jobs, including doctors, policemen, teachers, and others. I could not even imagine why they want to leave their country. I started to wonder what time had done to them to leave their jobs like that and seek to leave?

There was a large row of people, everyone wishing and asking God to be a winner. We were between them too. I didn't even

intend to fill out the form, but Abdo convinced me. When it was our turn, we presented our information to the responsible person, and he took a picture of both of us. Within minutes he gave us files bearing some information, a number, and the date of the lottery results. We took that and we left.

Seven months later, I woke up as usual after doing my morning routine. I sat for breakfast with my roommates, and then my phone rang. When I answered, a strange man's voice asked, "Are you Fatiha?" I answered, "who are you?"

He said, "I'm from the association responsible for helping to apply for the American lottery." I collected my words and I answered, "Yes, it is me."

He said, "Miss, I called to congratulate you. You won in the American Lottery." I asked, "Are you sure? Maybe something is wrong?" I didn't know what to say, so I just said, "Thank you." He told me I had to go to them to tell me what to do next. I answered, "Well, thank you again".

A few minutes later, my phone rang again. This time it was Abdo, to tell me he also won the lottery. I was even more shocked. I told him they called me too. We went to learn about the next steps. Only then I believed it. It's destiny! Months went by, and we started preparing our papers. It was very difficult for me because of my financial circumstances and the high costs for those papers, but my parents and my grandmother helped me a lot. I will never forget what they did for me. During this period, my friend and I were getting closer to each other. We became engaged, and this increased my happiness.

On January 19, 2019, my fiancé came to America. After he left, I finished the rest of my papers and got my Visa. I went to my family house to spend some time with them. I had mixed feelings between joy and sadness. How could I go away from my parents? I probably wouldn't see them for years. I felt my mother was sad too, but she always supported me and prayed for me.

Days went by quickly. November 2, 2019, was my first day in America. Life looks so different at first glance. A month later I got my papers here. My fiancé and I got married. My joy was incomplete for not having our families with us, but I was happy to marry the one I love. Then I went to school to learn English. I got a job, I helped and am still helping my family as much as I can. And I live happily with my husband.

My dream of studying at the university still haunts me. I will work for it to come true one day.

~ *Fatiha Idsidi Ali*
Great Oaks ITCD

In the Future

Technology and Humans' Jobs

Humans work to live.

Not only to get money, but also to get satisfying life.

Many people are proud of their jobs.

But will it continue?

Researchers say AI and robots will replace many human jobs
after 10 years,

accounting clerk, hotel clerk, bank teller, taxi driver

...about 100 kinds of jobs.

Of course, new jobs will appear.

But many jobs will disappear.

Until now

People have developed technology.

We got convenient life.

We got new problems like environmental destruction.

We faced and overcame problems again and again.

In the future

We will have to change how to work or types of work.

We will have to think how to get satisfying lives.

I think we can.

~ Mio Suzuki
Project LEARN of Summit County

Technology and Our Life

If we don't have technology,
 how does our life go on?
If we don't have many devices,
 how does our life go on?
If we don't have appliances,
 how does our life go on?
We can't think of our life any more without them.

If we have self-driving cars in the future,
 what will we do while driving?
If we have future transfer systems in the future,
 what will we do?
We shouldn't be too dependent on them.

We can work and create many things using our brains.
We manipulate technology, not be manipulated by it.

~Satoko Suzuki
Project LEARN of Summit County

A World Without War

Have you ever thought what life would be if there was no war? Everyone of us loves our homelands. But what if you lived in a country that was always in war? War is a choice. Do we really have to kill each other to be more powerful? Human beings are often considered to be the most selfish animals on the planet. We always want more than we have: more land, more money, more control. War is not the answer.

First, consider that international wars have killed approximately 108,000,000 people in the twentieth century alone. That does not take into consideration all individuals who died from injuries long after war. It is estimated that all deaths caused by wars through history may likely exceed one billion. Fortunately, I now live in the United States. More importantly, the U.S. is not engaged in war within this country. It feels good, as an immigrant from Africa, to feel safe from war. When there is no war, there is no fear. Peace exists.

Second, many countries require young adults to join the military. However, in the United States it is a choice. The young men and women who volunteer for military services give up their individual freedoms. Their lives are put on hold. Their educations, careers, and families wait. Moreover, their lives may be in jeopardy. Everyday, we must remember that close to half a million American soldiers have been killed in the twentieth century.

Furthermore, war not only takes lives, it takes years to recover personally and economically. War affects the economy, land borders, and people's lives. Is what is lost worth it? After WWI and WWII, the U.S. took years to recover. Families were starving, and jobs were unavailable. There are not only physical and economic results, but also psychological and mental results. Life never goes on the same.

In conclusion, war is always a choice. Instead of war, we must choose non-violence. This approach should be built into

society. Institutions must make mediation and peacekeeping an essential tenet of survival. If peace is spread through education in the forms of knowledge, beliefs, and values, cultures will prepare far in advance for a response to war. We will not live with perpetual insecurity. War is not the answer.

*~Abel Asmelash
Cincinnati City Schools*

My Life Changed

I was born in Vietnam into a family with 5 siblings. My parents and my siblings moved to the U.S. to settle down 14 years ago. I stayed back in Vietnam to live with my wife and 5-year-old daughter. I owned a small restaurant. I was with my wife and a few other people who did business every day. Life was also fine.

One year ago, my wife, daughter, and I settled in the U.S. and reunited with my family. Everyone was very happy and helped me with everything. But for myself, I still have a lot of worries and difficulties when starting a new wave.

The biggest difficulty is that my English is very poor. When I started studying English, I didn't understand what the teachers were saying. Then it took me a long time to pass the theory test when I took the driver's license test. Worst of all is the problem of employment. I applied for a job in many places, but I couldn't get one because I couldn't speak English. Another problem is that my arm is weak, so it is very difficult to get a job. I know there are many difficulties that I will have to overcome in order to live in America. It's all just the beginning.

Now, I still try to learn English every day. My teacher helped me a lot. My class is very fun. I hope to find a job. My dream is to own a small restaurant selling Vietnamese food in America. Maybe in 20 or 30 years I will do it. I will try to fulfill my dream.

~ Hong Phuc Nguyen
Columbus Public Schools

Possible

The dream,
Everyone dreams.
Success,
Not for everyone.
And the dream of success
is not enough.
Work, patience , optimism
self confidence.
With all,
Nothing is impossible.

*~ Fatiha Idsidi Ali
Great Oaks ITCD*

We Are at One with Technology

The word technology imagines civilization and the future.
We are surrounded by a lot of technologies.

The engineers are creative and eager.
We benefit from technologies.

The important point is experiencing success and failure.
We learn from mistakes.

The rapid technical advance is threat and hope.
We live with technologies.

Both are necessary
technologies and human skills.
A good relationship
should be able to complement each other.

~ Yumiko Yoda
Project LEARN of Summit County

Distance and Technology

*Technology, oh how I need you so!
Without you my life would be grey, but with it I feel OK.*

*Even though my family lives so very far away,
I know they are a simple video call, or text away.*

*Behind a screen, a telephone, or a computer, the distance is less. I'm so
very grateful I'm not sitting here missing my family.*

*I wonder what's next... flying cars, self-tying shoes?
I guess we will have to wait and just sit here and contemplate.*

*~ Laura S. Bline
Project LEARN of Summit County*

In My Culture

The Story of Shaimaa

My name is Shaimaa Bahar, from Baghdad, Iraq. I am married and have 4 children. I would like to talk about the best months of the *Hijri* year. *Hijri* year is the way we name our years in the Muslim calendar. This year is important to the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims. During this month, we all work on fasting, prayer, and worship during the day. When the sun rises, we stop eating. If we are in healthy condition, we will fast and refrain from eating and drinking until sunset. This is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every adult person must fast during the month of Ramadan for a period of 30 days. At the end of the 30 days, Eid comes, which is the joy of all Muslims. We put on new clothes and visit family. First, we visit the home of the grandfather and grandmother, and after that, we visit our other relatives and friends. We greet them with *Eid* greetings (we say *Eid Mubarak*), and the grandmother makes special cakes and sweets for us. She makes the most delicious food.

Would you like to learn more about Iraqi food? Iraqi cuisine is the first cuisine in Mesopotamia and has a history dating back 10,000 years to the Sumerian civilization. The most beautiful thing in my country is Iraqi food, which differs from other Arab countries. My country is characterized by eating delicious *biryani*, grilled fish and Iraqi kebabs, as well as sweets, including baklava. The most important thing is the gathering of family and friends at one table. My beloved family has unforgettable memories and adheres to them.

In a family everyone is there to support one another in everything. If my sister is having a bad day, it is my job to say a few words to help her. A few beautiful words calm the heart and bring happiness and joy to anyone. I learned this lesson from my mother. She was the one that taught me the values of family in daily life and what is right and wrong. Here I am now playing with my children as my mother did with me. I want to teach my kids the lessons that my mother taught me. Because there is nothing other than family, my husband, my love, and my children here in

this beautiful United States of America that embraces us. We have found security and stability.

Unfortunately, it is not the same for my mother, father, or sisters, who still live in Iraq. It is sad to think about how bad things have gotten in Iraq. Because what I remember about Iraq was all about sunshine and rainbows. This was because when I was living in Iraq, we were in a good financial situation, and our accommodations were excellent. My husband worked as an owner of his own shop, and we owned a big and beautiful house and a car. Unfortunately, things did not stay like that, so we came to a country of safety, stability, and freedom. Here I am proud of the family that I raised in the United States. This might be just a glimpse into my life that I love. I would like to thank you for taking the time to learn a little more about me.

~ *Shaimaa Bahar*
Columbus Public Schools

An Endless Adventure

If an egg...

- breaks because of an external force, life ends.
- breaks because of an internal force, life begins.
The big changes in your life start from the inside out...

Africa in the early 1960s was left with several young states as a result of colonialism ending. The new independent states were generally not homogeneous entities ethnically, socially, culturally, or even climatically and geographically. Porous and arbitrary borders were imposed on populations that once belonged to the same ethnic groups with the same language and culture. These populations were arbitrarily and tragically divided among several countries. Strangely, former settlers caused the balkanization of the African continent without consulting the people to whom they wanted to bring happiness. Because of this, after the first moments of pride and joy in the attainment of national sovereignty, the young states faced enormous challenges.

The problem with the education and training of young people, which should have supported the first Africans trained by the colony, was quickly detected by the “fathers of independence.” Young states began to develop socio-economic and community infrastructure in villages and urban centers to educate as many children as possible. Because of this policy, which popularized the education of young people, the village of Loulouni, located in the south of the Republic of Mali, proceeded to recruit children aged seven to eight for the start of the school year in October 1970. Thus, began the “endless adventure” of a young boy named Dakis from the Senoufo ethnic group.

The educational system of African states resulted from French colonization. It consists of three levels: the fundamental level that lasted nine to ten years, the secondary level that lasted three years, and the university level. In the 1970s and 1980s, education was not compulsory and was highly selective at all levels. The success rate at the secondary level was around fifty percent,

while only about twenty percent went on to attend university. The best high school students received scholarships in developed countries to continue their university studies.

Thus, the school career of young Dakis took place in Loulouni, a peaceful and very pleasant village, despite the absence of a power grid and a drinking water system. The village is located on the international road that connects the Republic of Mali to that of the Ivory Coast and is full of very fertile land. Agriculture, livestock, fishing, and handicrafts are the main sources of income for the people. Cereals, tubers, fruits, and vegetables are the main agricultural products. Agriculture is not mechanized and is done by hand with rudimentary tools resulting in low agricultural yields. While this lack of modernization penalizes farmers, it has some significant advantages. It strengthens social cohesion, on the one hand, as families assist each other to cope with rural work. On the other hand, the production system is based on healthy agricultural practices that preserve soil and promote organic products. A weekly market in Loulouni is held every Thursday. It has become a real crossroads of exchange and brewing by enabling producers from various villages around the area to sell their agricultural products and buy the consumer goods they need. Traders come from all the major cities of Mali and neighboring countries for multiple transactions. In addition to farming and trade, Loulouni is also a cultural hub. The end of the rainy season and time of harvest coincide with the village festivals. During these festivities, the *balafon* is the most popular musical instrument in the village, as in all regions inhabited by the Senoufo people. It is a percussion instrument similar to the xylophone.

It was in this beautiful village that young Dakis completed the ten years of his basic education in 1980, which prepared him for high school. He attended Badala High School, located on the hillside of the Badalabougou district in the city of Bamako, the capital of Mali. In the 1980s, this high school was one of the educational centers, renowned for the quality of its teaching. It was also the starting point of all the protests of students against the governing military regime. The high school education they received

molded young students to oppose corruption and bad governance by the military regime that ran the country. After four years in high school, Dakis graduated with honors in the mathematics and physics faculty in 1984. This success paved the way for university studies in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The young student's adventure continued at this time far from his homeland and outside the African continent. It was his first experience with flying, which can be exhilarating and terrifying. With about one hundred students, Dakis took his first flight assigned by the Soviet airline Aeroflot in September 1984. He was a bit fearful at first, but also amazed. After logging many flight hours and stopovers, it was at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport where the plane landed with three hundred and fifty passengers, the majority of whom were students.

The USSR, a huge country made up of fifteen federal republics with more than twenty-two million square kilometers and spanning two continents, was a major crossroads that welcomed thousands of young teenagers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America every year. This policy of welcoming and training the future leaders of third world countries was one facet of the Cold War, which pitted the USSR-led Eastern Bloc against the US-led Western Bloc. The first academic year was devoted to the study of Russian language and literature in addition to learning technical terms in Russian. After this phase of immersion, Dakis was admitted to the Institute of Civil Engineering in the city of Odessa on the Black Sea, and three years later in 1988, he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in hydraulics. He then continued his studies at the Institute of Civil Engineering in Baku where he obtained a Master of Science in Engineering, Option Hydraulic Construction in June 1991.

The seven academic years spent in the USSR were filled with challenges and discoveries in addition to physical and moral changes. Indeed, the initial months of wonder were followed by his first major challenges: learning the Russian language, integrating into the new society, and living in a country with a harsh winter.

The winter of 1984 was very severe in the USSR. The temperature was regularly -35 degrees Celsius, which caused some students to resign and return to their home countries. Fortunately, after this rigorous season, weather conditions eased allowing students to escape and have fun during holidays. It was also during these moments that students could explore the country including the mountain ranges of the Carpathians of Lvov in Ukraine, the Ural River on the border between the Asian and European continents, Siberia with Lake Baikal and its dense forests, the Caucasian mountains, and various geographical regions such as the taiga, tundra, and steppes. These regions, full of history and culture with amazing wildlife and climate diversity, were the incentive to explore this country-continent.

All these experiences in this huge country transformed the young African student. After completing his university studies and earning a Master of Science degree in engineering, the young engineer returned to his native country to serve the nation that enabled him to acquire this knowledge. However, new challenges soon arose, including finding work and starting a family. Professional and social responsibilities grew throughout his career. For a quarter of a century, he worked initially in public administration, then in the private sector, and finally in United Nations agencies. During this time, he contributed to the socio-economic development of his native country.

This man travelled extensively to discover other people and cultures. He is a citizen of the world, and his desire for humanism and discovery led him to immigrate to the United States in 2019 to face new challenges, experiences, and perspectives. America, because of its origins, culture, and tradition, has always been a land of welcome and protection for all the citizens of the world who are experiencing difficulties in their countries of origin. This wonderful country that has protected thousands of individuals persecuted for their political and religious convictions is now the home of Dakis and his family. Learning English and American culture remains his main goal to integrate successfully into his new homeland and make contributions to his community. He strives to

achieve these goals through the support of institutions like Great Oaks that provide several adult training programs specifically for new immigrants. The training received in this learning center will be a real springboard for Dakis to launch himself to seek new horizons in his “endless adventure”

*In recognition of the valiant teachers and mentors of Great Oaks
for their sacrifices and great contributions...*

*~ Moussa D. Konate
Great Oaks ITCD*

Dominican Republic

Democracy

Oh, the honor that I carry in my chest.

My freedom is the effort of fighting without ceasing.

Incredible, give me the flag.

Never never a slave again.

Immense joy it gives me.

Chains were broken with the national anthem.

Amazing moment that made us happy.

Nation that screams freedom, freedom.

Religion is our guide.

Eyes on the Lord.

People full of love

United as one people.

Bible in the center of our being

Loving land wherever you are

Incredible dedication to the flag and the homeland

Comfortable, is the joy of our freedom.

~ Keni Lara
Auburn Career Center

Mexico's Independence Day

September 16 is a very important date for all Mexicans since that day we commemorate the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1810.

Mexico's Independence Day is a celebration that begins a little before midnight on September 15 to receive the first hour of the holiday.

Green, white, and red, the colors of the Mexican flag, can be seen anywhere this celebration is celebrated. You can also see delicious plates and traditional drinks with friends and family, all while shouting "Viva Mexico" or "Viva la independencia" as a sign of celebration.

A Brief History of the Independence of Mexico

The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs and other Mesoamerican empires began around the year 1519 when the Spanish ships, commanded by Hernan Cortez, anchored on the islet of San Juan de Ulua, Veracruz, in search of wealth.

Independence Day in Mexico celebrates the year 1810, when it is believed that Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a priest and one of the main leaders who fought for the independence of the country, gave the cry of the country's independence (or cry of Dolores). This happened in the town of Dolores, in the north-central area of what is now the state of Hidalgo.

This call for insurrection by Hidalgo and the other revolutionaries helped mobilize the citizens of Mexico to rise up against the Spanish crown. Independence was eventually achieved in 1821. Juan Aldama, Jose Maria Morelos, and Ignacio Allende were some of the revolutionaries who helped Hidalgo secure independence from Spain. Their names are frequently mentioned on this date.

How do you celebrate independence in Mexico?

Many Mexicans celebrate at home with friends and family, and other Mexicans prefer to go to public places.

Mexican flags hang in public spaces, and some people wear traditional clothes and play traditional music. In the “zocalo,” the central square of Mexico City, a great celebration is held during the afternoon and night of September 15. Fireworks and musical presentations take place throughout the night and around 11:00 PM, the President of the Republic and his family come out to the presidential balcony to give the cry of Dolores. Not only is an original Hidalgo cry recreated, but also new characters in the history of Mexico who have contributed to the history of the country are celebrated. The president closes his participation with the cry “Viva Mexico!”

~ Diana Perez
Columbus Public Schools

A Traditional Wedding in My Country

Traditions have value for our lives, because they help us build our identity. Family traditions give us the feeling of belonging to a family. Families demand respect for customs including engagements and weddings.

When you are ready to get married, you must first propose marriage to your future wife. If she agrees with your proposal, she must report to her family. Once the family accepts the idea, the woman informs the man. Then, the man's family is authorized to meet with the woman's family to see how to organize the wedding preparations. Each family should be represented by an uncle. Generally they have three meetings before deciding the date of wedding, and for every meeting, the man's family has to bring cola nuts. A wedding cannot be organized without cola nuts.

How is a wedding organized in my family? First, a much-loved traditional event, called "Dinguè faré" (Dance of Mothers), is organized for the eve of the wedding. A week before the wedding day, the bride's family must organize this traditional dance for mothers while inviting the groom's mother. On that evening, women participate in traditional dances and enjoy the marriage of their children. It's a moment to explain to the bride how she has to manage and take care of her husband. It's also the moment to encourage single women to get married.

On the day of the wedding, the groom has to give a dowry or money in kind, as well as the traditional clothing, to his future wife and her parents. He must also give a beautiful traditional bowl containing pretty grains of rice and seven needles. The grains of rice mean that the future woman must be fed. The seven needles mean that protecting marriage is most important. These seven needles must be shared among the seven people involved in the marriage. In the bowl, there is also salt. This means that the home must be protected in difficult times.

During the wedding celebration, the wife is dressed in an amazing white gown. She has to give a bowl of cola nuts to a confident person in her family. This person will become the witness of the marriage. In the future, he alone is authorized to mediate in the problems of this couple.

For the week following the wedding, the couple is provided delicious and tasty meals prepared by the family. According to our tradition "This will allow the couple to have a child very early." The new life begins for the couple, and the customary rules should be essentials of their life.

Unfortunately, in my country, traditions are losing their value day by day. It is important for us to understand that traditions lived with conviction give the family and children happy memories. Traditions help children to have positive relationships with family members. We all need to find ourselves in a family space. These moments are also often a good way to share spiritual values.

In brief, traditions make us a united family with points in common and shared precious memories of childhood. It is essential to my community to pass on our traditions to the next generations, because this reinforces values such as freedom, integrity, a good education, and personal responsibility. It is also a great moment to meet the entire family around the traditional meals.

~ Mouloukou Soumah
Godman Guild

Yennayer: A Kabyle Holiday in Algeria

On the twelfth of January each year, we celebrate Yennayer. This is our traditional Kabyle holiday. Kabyle people are a Berber ethnic group in the north of Africa.

Yennayer is the first day of the year used by the Berbers across North Africa since antiquity. Its first day corresponds to the first day of January of the Julian calendar. The Berber year 2971 corresponds to the present year 2021.

Do you know how we prepare for this event in my country? We prepare a meal that is hearty and different from the everyday ones in my country Algeria, and in my city of Bejaia. On the day before the holiday, we prepare a big dinner for the whole family. We make a traditional meal that is couscous. We use free chicken and a wide variety of vegetables from the year. We dress the table with one big dish; there are many pancakes, cakes, dried fruits like figs, desserts, and especially virgin olive oil that we make at home. All members of the family eat together from one dish associated with joy and happiness.

After dinner, the children go out and play with the neighbor's children. Old family members spend time together, wearing traditional clothes and Berber jewelry. We make a good atmosphere at home waiting for the beginning of the Kabyle New Year. Our Kabyle expression to say "Happy New Year" is "Asseggas Ameggaz."

It's a very important tradition for me and my family because it's our history. It's our existence. I am so proud of where I come from. I appreciate this day because we have the opportunity to meet all family members and share a beautiful moment together that's never forgotten.

*~ Soroya Saidani
Columbus Public Schools*

Traditional Celebrations

When I heard the word Nowruz, I closed my eyes and was brought back to my childhood years. Memories came to life. I felt the excitement I once had as a child as I anticipated receiving Eidi, money which elders of the family give to younger members to mark certain occasions. I could also sense the lively energy of children as they played games and see images of brightly colored paper all around me. My nostrils were filled with the delicious aroma of smoked fish intertwined with the scent of jasmine from grandma's cashmere prayer mat. These ponderings allowed me to escape the boredom I had been feeling, and I reflected on the wonderful traditions of my culture.

Persians have many traditions and ceremonies throughout the year. The most important part of the year occurs near the end. Charshanbe Soori, which literally means "Red Wednesday," takes place on the last Wednesday of the year. Children run through the streets while banging on pots. Similar to Halloween, they knock on doors asking for sweets. Furthermore, families gather around the fire, jump over bonfires, and sing traditional songs. They also repeat the following phrase, "Fire, give me your beautiful red color and take my paleness and sickness away." Since fire symbolizes hope and purity, families wish for happiness and enlightenment for the upcoming year. In addition, fire was a central focus in Zoroastrianism, ancient Iran's religion. It represented an essential element for sustaining life.

Before the start of the new year, cleaning is a priority. Iranian families welcome the new year with clean houses and new clothing. The whole house and its furniture are cleaned with care and caution to prepare residences for hosting relatives and friends. This activity is called khaneh takani. During the first thirteen days of the new year, people visit families, friends, and neighbors and share sweets and Persian nuts, such as pistachios.

Nowruz is the Persian New Year. It means "new day" and falls on the first day of spring. Persian people have been celebrating

Nowruz for more than 3,000 years. As with most holidays, Nowruz comes with its own set of traditions. We have our own version of Santa Claus, Amo Nowruz, which means Uncle Nowruz. He appears during the early spring and brings good wishes along with his small assistants who are called Malijak. We always decorate our tables with Haft Sin, which roughly translates to “Seven S’s”. Haft Sin includes seven symbolic items starting with the Farsi letter ‘S’ including herbs, dried nuts, vinegar, and grass that is grown from wheat or lentils. They all represent various wishes for Persians for the New Year, including health, prosperity, and wealth.

Items on a Haft Sin Table

Persian Name	What is it?	What does it symbolize?
Somaq	A bright red spice made from crushed berries	Sunrise and the spice of life
Sekeh	Coin	Prosperity and wealth
Senjed	Sweet dried fruit of the lotus tree	Love
Seeb	Apple	Health and beauty
Sabzeh	Sprouted wheat or lentil grass	Rebirth and renewal of nature
Seer	Garlic	Medicine and health
Serkeh	Vinegar	Patience and acceptance of adversity

These seven items are a must on a Haft Sin table; however, there are optional items beginning with the letter ‘S’ that are sometimes included too, such as Samanu and Sonbol. Samanu is a sweet Persian pudding made from wheat that represents the sweetness of life. Sonbol is hyacinth and symbolizes the start of spring. Many families also place goldfish on the table for good luck and poetry books, such as those written by Hafez. Hafez is a very famous poet whose writings contain many valuable lessons. Some people who are religious put the Quran, Islam’s holy book, along with the works of Hafez on the table. These books individually symbolize enlightenment and the presence of God in the lives of Persian people for the upcoming year. Another item often

displayed is a mirror, a symbol of transparency and purity. Placing a mirror on the Haft Sin table establishes a promise to complete the year without telling a lie. The mirror also signifies self-reflection. A candle and an egg are also commonly put on the table. The candle is a symbol of light and brightness, while the egg represents birth and new growth.

When the final countdown for the Persian New Year arrives, instead of a ball dropping, Persian families sit around the table as they count down the final seconds. After this, they sing and dance to the traditional New Year song. When this day ends, one may think the celebration is over, but that is not correct. The celebration doesn't end there. Thirteen days after Nowruz, families take the wheat or lentil grass that had been grown and kept on the Haft Sin table and go outdoors. In Persian culture, the number 13 is considered unlucky; therefore, the grass is taken outside and returned to nature by throwing it into flowing water. By doing this, all the negative energy is absorbed from each house and is washed away by the water.

I am proud of these traditions and beliefs of my culture. They are a link to the past that continually reawaken precious memories of time spent with those I love.

*~Azam Khosravi
Great Oaks ITCD*

In Recovery

Overdose Awareness

Melissa, Velicia, Carly, Mark, and
Todd
Too soon they got their angel wings
and are in heaven with God

Too much alcohol, pills, heroin and meth
Can lead us all to our own “sudden death”
We can do one more shot and snort one more
Pill. We just want one more “high”
It won't be us that will die – but
That's not the truth, it's “Satan's lie”

A half gallon of Black Velvet Toasted Caramel
a buck fifty of crack
all the days we got wasted –
We can never get back!

To all our friends and family
whose lives were cut too short –
Now they can never even plea their
case in court

I know some of us in treatment
Have been close to knocking on heaven's
door
It's because we used our addictions
not to feel pain anymore

Days turn into months, months into
Years
Over and over we keep doing the same
Our minds become tired and very unclear.
How do we do this? We really want to
Stop-
I'll tell ya how, we all got busted
By a darn cop!

So here we are sitting at the CAC
When ya first get here ya better hafta
Pee
They take ya in an office and tell ya
What the results are –
What? Hell no – those aren't mine...
That's off by far!

Use the tools given at the CAC
Detox your body and mind to find
the better me

So here we are to do the "Sober Fight"
and are you 4 real? If I need toilet
paper...I gotta write a damn kite?

Here comes the withdrawal, vomit,
diarrhea, and the shakes
We gotta get sober no matter what it
takes!

In treatment, sharing stories
helps with our inner peace – as we start
watching calendars, counting down to
the day of our release.

We finally get out, mess up and
end up back in jail – now ya get double
the time –
There's no chance for bail!

Then someone finds out...and
her name is Mel.
Run the opposite direction – cause you're
about to catch some serious HELL

So to all our missed loved ones
who OD'd and died too soon –
We're here in your remembrance
Letting off these "Black Balloons"

Relax our latest angels it's
goodbye for just a short while
We'll soon meet again in Heaven
We can't wait to see your smiles!

So use what we've learned when
You're feeling down – don't go for a bottle or
your choice of drug
Reach out to friends and family for
love and just a simple hug!

And to our lost loved ones
You're missed this is true,
But we've learned how and gotta
stay sober
or we'll end up just like you

~ Tamara Spoon
Mansfield Board of Education

Sobriety

This journey started where the dead ends meet.
The borders of chaos and concrete.
The alley's edge, back alley streets.
Crumbling foundation beneath my feet.
I'm seeking sanctuary from there.
I found myself by coming here.
It took much strength to emerge.
From my sins, I wish to purge.
As my defects are washed away.
I feel much cleaner, day by day.
The smell – dirt, blood, and flames.
The feelings – hate, anguish and shame.
It trickles down my scarred-up flesh.
Every stream that leaves a streak that's fresh.
Much like the silent tears I've cried.
For once, I do not have to hide.
All that pain, I kept inside.
From the engulfment of my pride.
I stepped out of the shadows free.
From the brink of insanity.

~ Kimberly H. Lincoln
South Central Ohio ESC

The Power of Choice

This story starts when I was 22 years old, and I lived on the West Side of Cleveland. That is when I got into heroin. My oldest brother would take me to my uncle's house, and we would hang out there every day after work. I smoked weed, drank beer, and was into pills at this time. One day I went to the restroom, came back out, and my brother had a line out for me. I decided to do the line without really knowing what I was doing. I thought it was Percocet. It turned out that I was wrong. I noticed three months later that I was "dope sick" without knowing what "dope sickness" was. I asked my brother what he was giving me, and he told me I was doing heroin. I made the choice to continue doing dope.

For three years, I snorted the drug, became dependent, and had to use every four hours to even function. Surprisingly, I kept two jobs, and I gained a house and had three cars while on heroin. I rented rooms out in my five-bedroom house and made about \$1200 from each job per month. Eventually, the drugs took over. I was stealing water from the city and had a friend with the tool to turn it back on when they shut it off. I bought a generator and stripped an extension cord, ran it to the electrical box, and maintained power in the house.

Eventually the water stayed off and we always needed gas for power. I lost my rent from the rooms. I lost my jobs. I had quit one, but that one job took me back. I became the manager at a pizza shop. Eventually, the drugs kept me in a bad state, and I lost the house. Once I lost the house, my girlfriend moved back to Mansfield with her stepfather. I lived in my car for six months while still working at the pizza shop. I was in my car for Thanksgiving, my birthday, Christmas, and New Years. I was scared to leave because my brother stayed with me in the car, and he told me that if I left he wouldn't know what to do and might kill himself. Three years passed by.

My brother still uses, but I've been clean for three years now because I chose to move to Mansfield. I chose to move here

because I know the area and have friends here. I went to school here and lived part of my childhood here in a foster home. I threw myself in a basement and locked myself away. I stayed in that basement for seven or eight days with three Suboxones and the desire and will to be clean, at least from the pills and heroin. I didn't quit these drugs alone. I had the support of my friends, my girlfriend, and her stepdad.

It's been three years now since I've done pills or heroin. I've made bad choices that put me in a treatment program where I am now. Smoking weed on probation without a medical card wasn't my best choice. I now no longer use drugs and am learning many things about myself and where I stand. I still stay in that basement with my ex's stepdad, and I still have my job and three vehicles. Since I quit the drugs, I began building two engines for my trucks. I keep myself engulfed in my auto mechanical work and listen to music heavily. Music and my garage are my safe and free areas in my life now. I've always had work and learned new things every day. I love the way my life is, but the power of choice can change everything in a heartbeat. I keep telling myself, "One day at a time."

*~ Curtis Chaney
Mansfield Board of Education*

A Fight to Find My Purpose

I had my first child when I was 17. I had dropped out of homeschooling. I lived with my mother at the time I had my daughter. I was honestly so unprepared to have a child. I turned 18 two weeks after I had my daughter. Shortly after this, my mother got admitted to the hospital because she had a ruptured brain aneurysm. I was very nervous and overwhelmed.

At this time I did not get along with my mother's current boyfriend. When my mother was in the hospital, her boyfriend told me I had to go. The same day I found out that I was approved for my own apartment, Children's Services found me unfit to care for my child due to the current circumstances. I remember leaving the office so lost, hurt, and in complete shock.

There was no other pain that can compare to losing your child. After that I had to find somewhere to stay for 2 weeks until my apartment was ready. Being in the desperate situation I was in, I went to a place that was clearly not the best environment. I made some pretty bad decisions trying to cover up my pain.

When I finally got my apartment, I started back on the right path to getting my child back. But I messed the chance up not just once but multiple times. I was violating a no contact order with my daughter's dad. I truly did want my child, but I wanted to be with my child's father just as much. I was selfish and rebellious. I thought of the court as enemies. I started using drugs off and on. I would do well for a couple months, and then slip up and lose my visitation all over again.

Eventually my life choices caused me to lose my home. This is when I truly gave up. I spent time in and out of jail. My dad was fighting for custody while I was being irresponsible and making horrible choices. I have a lot of respect for my father; he stepped up when I was too dumb to do so. After I lost my home, I stayed with my grandmother. I was sober, and I got a job. I was able to see my daughter again. Then I found out my grandmother's cancer had

come back. I couldn't stay there any longer because I couldn't risk getting her sick. This woman was my best friend my whole life.

Since I was back on the street, I started getting involved with the wrong people again. My child's father was arrested. I was told to go to the courthouse that following weekday but I didn't. I went to my grandmother's house to see her before I turned myself in. Little did I know that would be the last time I ever saw her.

When I turned myself in I got arrested, as expected. Twenty-three days later, my grandmother passed away. My father and my best friend video-visited me to tell me she had passed. I remember dropping the phone and just feeling like my whole world got dark. I felt angry at myself. I felt broken. The judge let me out for her memorial.

I started drug court. Long story short, I never completed drug court. I ended up doing all my time a year after being non-compliant with drug court. I could still see my daughter when I was doing well throughout that year.

When I got out of jail I couldn't stay at my father's house when he had my child. I ended up back at square one – being careless and dumb again. This time it was worse. This time I felt like I had nothing to lose. I felt that even if I tried, it would be pointless. After a year of being on the streets, I started getting tired of living. I wanted to escape, and the drugs were no longer working. I remember being in the shower on my hands and knees crying, yelling, and begging for God to take me. I didn't want to be the horrible person I was. I didn't know how to get out of the dark place I was in.

Only a few days after that, I got a pop up on my phone of some Bible scriptures. Some may say this was a coincidence, but I saw it as a miracle. I started writing the verses down, looking them up, and writing them out. The next day my mother came all the way from Chicago and had me admitted to a psychiatric hospital. During my stay there I believe God helped me heal. God provided me a way out, and I was able to forgive myself. I got clean.

They say spirits can speak to you through other people. I remember sitting there looking at this woman. She was bald, and she looked like she was disappointed. She reminded me of my grandmother. The fact she looked so disappointed every time I looked at her really hit me. During my stay at the hospital, I talked to this woman. I gave her a shirt and told her that she reminded me of my grandmother. After being at that hospital for a few days, I felt lifted spiritually. I came to a realization on a lot of things. I truly believed this was my enlightenment.

On the day that I found out I was going to be released, I called my father who had custody of my daughter, who was now 3. Three years old; I spent 3 years of my child's life being careless and selfish. I begged my father to let me come home. He was very cautious, which I respected. But I explained to him I wanted to come home, I wanted to be a better person, and I didn't want to go back out to the streets and end up making the same mistakes all over again. Finally after a few hours I called my mom. She told me that my dad decided to let me come home.

My mother picked me up the next day and took me to my paternal grandmother's house to wait for my father and daughter. I remember being so eager to finally get to see my daughter again after several months of not seeing her. I couldn't sit still. When my daughter walked through that door, I dropped to my knees and she ran into my arms. At that very moment I told myself I would never hurt that little girl ever again. I would never do something to cause any kind of pain, I would never do something to jeopardize me being in her life.

I have stayed clean for more than 3 years now. I know that some people might be ashamed of their past. I feel comfortable speaking about my mistakes, because I want to give hope to anyone who has been where I came from. I now have a future. I've taken parenting classes, and I've worked on myself because I have a fire in me to prove to the people I've let down that I've changed, to earn their trust and forgiveness. Most important I want to give my children the best mother I can.

Five years ago I would never have expected to be where I am today. I now have two beautiful children, my GED, a three-bedroom house, and most important, I have faith. I have faith that my mistakes were forgiven. I have faith that I am where I need to be by the grace of God. I have faith that I finally found my purpose. As hard as it is to hear that people make mistakes when it comes to their children, it's the truth. I made mistakes that I can't take back, but what I can do is fight every single day to make a difference. People do change. We do recover.

*~ Lena Shuck
Ohio University*

Hidden Emotions

I walked around with a chip on my shoulder.
Rushing through life, quickly getting older.
Day after day, I tried to hide.
Buried my feelings somewhere deep inside.
All my emotions restrained and confined.
I'd do anything to stop the hands in time.
Walking through back alleys and streets.
Where the borders of broken and chaos meet
Doing whatever I could to survive.
The pain of addiction, swallowing my pride.
Like venom running through my veins.
It made me crazy and drove me insane.
My heart and soul left in despair.
It was my life; I knew I had to repair.

~ Kimberly H. Lincoln
South Central Ohio ESC

Mine

Thought I could manage as we all do
But before you know it the drugs start doing you.
“Friends” that I used with now, we ain’t cool
Suddenly alone and played for a fool.
Once more to the toilet I crawl
All by myself, I just lay there and bawl.
Just enough strength to try this again
Today is the day my life will begin.
This will be it. I’ll defeat it this time
Then I realize my life’s truly mine.

~ Holly Williams
Mansfield Board of Education

In the Time of Covid

*Pandemic Ponderings:
A Reflection of 2020*

Considering the Juice Box

My sister looked down at her phone. “This product cannot be ordered online.”

It was week three in lockdown for her, week six for me. She had just started to work virtually. I had the honor of watching my sister descend into the same madness I faced my first few weeks in lockdown: the stir-craziness, the frustration, the terror of everything and, perhaps the most criminal of all, the utter slog of daily life spent only in one house.

The push, of all things, was a juice box.

It was lunch time. We were spending a precious few moments upstairs escaping the dim existence of our life in the poorly lit basement. We sat there – talking of the foods and drinks we missed – when she brought up Ikea of all things. The Swedish store sold some foodstuffs, and she was craving a juice box. Elderberry, specifically. Driving two hours to Columbus just to get a juice box was so grossly unnecessary in the midst of a global pandemic, but our minds and bodies didn’t care (well, her mind and body). They just wanted that box of juice.

“Online!” I said. “We could check online.”

Looking it up, she was excited to see she could add it to her check out. She had been worried that food was not something that could be shipped. And yet, here it was in her cart. Going through the process, she came to the end.

“This product cannot be ordered online.”

Our dream, really her dream, was crushed. In the manner of a child throwing a tantrum she yelled, “no, no, no no no!” with her fist banging down.

Frustration reigned.

Or, it may seem that way to an outside perspective.

What could have been a real expression of grief was actually a moment of joy. There was real frustration in her no's, in the banging of her fist on the countertop. The laughter hiding in her no's, the performance in her fist, these things were also real.

We, my sister and I, threw tantrums in the safety of each other's presence. In the knowledge of ourselves, of being silly, of being a little selfish even as we sat within the immense privilege in having both a stable home and solid jobs.

We wanted those juice boxes. We couldn't have them. We threw a tantrum. We laughed.

What else could we do?

Now, almost a whole year later, we still haven't gotten those elusive juice boxes. (Even worse, we got Ikea juice boxes that were the wrong ones.)

We know we will though.

When this pandemic comes to an end.

*~ Anna Adams
Teacher, Canton City Schools*

Pandemic

I would like to talk about this period of pandemic and how it has affected my life and my household. This period has been very difficult for me.

Concerning myself, this period brought a lot of panic especially when my husband was sick with COVID-19. He was really in pain and crying all the time. He had no peace and no rest.

In those days, I couldn't go to work. My husband didn't want me to leave him alone, so I was with him in the bedroom. I stayed in the corner and I thought, what will happen next? I was exhausted and thought that I might end up becoming a widow. My fear was related to all deaths that the U.S.A. was recording during those pandemic days. Some other thoughts crossed my mind: if those who are sick and getting the best medical care can die, what will happen to my husband who is in the house? On the other side, I was comforted with the words of God that says: "A thousand may fall on your left side and ten thousand on your right side but that will not come near you." This happened to be my reality.

Our children approached him, but it was a separation between parents and kids in the same house. It was a difficult time. But praise be to God, no one else in my house got the COVID beside my husband.

I prayed for the mercy of the Lord to be upon us, and my prayers have been answered. Doctors did a good job. They gave him medicine that helped him to heal.

During that time, I saw how COVID was so dangerous, painful, and deadly. It is an atrocity. I wondered what was going to happen? People were dying every day.

~ Pauline Kalu Mukaya
Great Oaks ITCD

The Beginning of My Covid-19 Experience

What brought us the pandemic of Covid-19 has left us sad – patients stressed with fear and with the loss of some of our relatives. Not being able to visit them, not being able to hug them, not kissing them, not shaking hands, not touching anything, wearing gloves, masks, hand sanitizer, alcohol, chlorine to disinfect everything. You cannot go anywhere or take the children to the schools or to the parks. All this is horrible, and we do not know when it will end.

Well, I got sick with this virus called COVID-19. We took care of ourselves and our family. We took precautions such as not going out to places or parties. We only went out to buy food or medicine or something that we really needed, and my husband only went to work. We heard in the news that every day more sick people were dying and hospitals were full of people. Some did not have artificial respiration – this was terrible. Every day we became more afraid of getting sick.

The day the virus came home, how we do not know, I began to feel bad as if I was going to get the flu, but this was very strange because I started with pain throughout my body. The strangest thing was that my bones had very severe pain, and then I had a fever for three days, which did not go away with anything. I took some medicines and then the fever and bone pain stopped, but then I had shortness of breath. I said this is not the flu – maybe I have the virus. I was afraid.

I contacted a doctor to see what he could do for me. I could not see him in person because he said that I may have Covid, so we did a video call. I told him my symptoms and what I felt, and he told me that I probably had it but would have to be tested. He sent medicine and an inhaler for when I couldn't breathe and told me to go to the emergency room if I felt worse.

I went to take the test and they said in 24 hours we will call you to give you the results. I thought about my family, my children,

my two-year-old baby. I thought if something happens to me, what is going to happen to my family? Nobody could be with me, and they told me to be in quarantine so I locked myself in my room for two weeks with only some medications. I asked God that nothing bad would happen to me, for help to get out of this virus, and that my children and husband would be good.

My husband and two older children took care of the youngest ones, and they brought food to the door. Those were the worst days for me, my family, and especially for my two-year-old baby who could not be with me. He just looked at me by video call and he would stand by the door and talk to me, “Mommy, Mommy, where are you?” I didn’t talk to him because if he listened to me he just cried and cried. He wouldn’t leave the door and without being able to go out to grab him and hug him, that broke my heart.

Well, the days went by, and I felt a little better. The symptoms were passing, but then my chest started to hurt a lot. For a week I couldn’t sleep at all because I felt that if I fell asleep, I was going to die. They called me from the clinic and said that I needed a psychologist to help me because it was affecting me to be alone. I had to talk with my family and friends so I didn’t get confused and because I was getting depressed. I felt a lot of anxiety. They helped me with that.

After the quarantine ended, I was able to leave my four walls. It is traumatic to be isolated from the people you love the most. No one can be next to you at those times, and relatives were dying of Covid. This is what happened to me. Sometimes I do not feel well. This is a consequence of the virus. Thank God they have already found three vaccines that are taking effect so that more people do not get infected. Let’s hope with these vaccines this Covid will end.

~ Dellanira Valdez-Montes
Auburn Career Center

2020—A Complex Year

2020 is a very challenging year with complex issues, and the hardest one was the COVID 19 pandemic. I am very thankful for this crisis, which makes us consider the valuable things we had before in our lives. Like freedom, safety, and having an easy way to get what we need in this life. Moreover, this pandemic reminds and encourages us to have a healthy life.

Before 2020, we felt bored about our life's routines. In the morning, children went to the schools by bus every day, and adults went to work, shopping, or visiting each other without wearing masks or having to social distance. And, we were getting work easily. So, we felt comfortable and not afraid of getting sick or passing away. Don't forget, before COVID-19 visiting the doctor was easy. Now all hospitals are full of COVID-19 patients, and the doctor visit is remote by the zoom meeting. Now, we know the value of the blessings we had.

The biggest challenge we face right now is COVID-19. I think it is a lesson for all of us. We must change our bad habits, such as eating unhealthy food and not having daily exercise. We must think more about healthy eating at home instead of fast food at the restaurants. Also, we practice sports more than before. But the best thing is that we have more family time to listen to our kids and teach them good habits.

In 2020, we are grateful for what we learned and the blessings we have. In other words, we live in a healthy and calm environment without fear of tomorrow.

~ Sana Mrebet
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

COVID-19 Roller Coaster

As a child, I found roller coasters exhilarating.
My heart pounded as I ascended the steep inclines in anticipation.
Then the peaks and rapid descents,
Gusts of air whipped across my face and tousled my hair.
Screams escaped my mouth in an exuberant release of nervous
excitement.
Suddenly, the cart slowed, signaling the end of the ride.
A refreshing calmness eventually displaced the chaotic exhilaration.

As an adult, my feelings about roller coasters have changed
somewhat.
A nervous apprehension has replaced the eager anticipation.
Fear consumes me; my heart pulsates as the cart slowly creeps up
the hill.
It traverses a peak and then quickly descends.
Gravity and acceleration cause my frail body to be tossed around
like a ragdoll.
I grip the metal bar in an attempt to stabilize myself; my knuckles
whiten.
My head is jerked backwards; a sharp pain forms in my neck.
I now feel nauseous and question why I chose to subject myself to
this torment.
Suddenly, my tensions ease as the cart decelerates and comes to a
stop.
A peaceful calm eventually displaces this unsettling distress.

One particular roller coaster I dislike is the COVID-19 Pandemic.
I don't have a choice this time; everybody must get on board.
Passengers are placed in separate carts with protective shields
around them.
I begin to tremble in fear as I'm unable to see what lies before me.
I can't even grasp the hand of a friend for reassurance.
The cart begins to move and soon ascends a steep incline.
It continues upward – further and further. When will it reach its
peak?

I sense the vibration of the cart's rotating wheels as they begin to slow.
The gravitational pull of my body towards the back of the seat lessens.



Suddenly, the cart tips slightly forward and begins to spiral - around and around. I frantically try to grab onto anything that appears solid to stabilize - around and around myself. My body sways violently from side to side - around and around. When will it stop? When will I be able to get off? In a dizzy - so dizzy - illusion? I'm able to stabilize - around and around. I frantically try to grab onto anything that appears solid to stabilize - around and around myself. My body sways violently from side to side - around and around. When will it stop? When will I be able to get off? In a dizzy - so dizzy - illusion? I'm able to stabilize - around and around.

~ Dianne Benson
Teacher, Great Oaks ITCD

In the Name of God

We all know that 2020 was a difficult year. In those days, I often thought about my life, my death, my people, and my future. When I talked to my friends or colleagues, they also expressed concern. Some people have always talked only about their own problems and hobbies, but now there are common concerns.

Nostalgia came to us. We had a party, we laughed from the bottom of our hearts, we hugged and kissed each other. There was a time when we took deep breaths and fresh oxygen into the lungs. We hugged our child whenever we wanted. We used to use sunlight regardless of how good it is for health and preventing many diseases, but today with the advent of this epidemic, we have more information about the amount of sunlight (vitamin D) to reduce the risk of developing it. When we touched objects, we forgot that the sense of touch is the most beautiful feeling that God has created in us. Now, due to the epidemic, touching is withheld from us, even touching the gravestones of our loved ones.

But this cruel virus hunts fairly. Poor or rich, ugly or beautiful, minister or worker, famous or unknown—all are the same to the virus. This teaches us to be a mirror of each other. Know your health in the health of others, your pain in the worries of others, your happiness in the happiness of others, and your health in the favor of others. This warns us that human value and ability are very high, and the virus is very small. We must try not to let this incapable creature dominate capable humans.

I realized that the current situation in the world has made people pay more attention to life and the environment. It is very interesting that now if someone is careless about health and the environment, society considers him irresponsible and untrustworthy. I think that in these difficult times, people have paid more attention to the insignificance of race, class differences, or selfishness. They have realized the need for humanity and the importance of unity for the peace and security of society. In these difficult times when we work remotely at home and our children study

online at home, we have the opportunity to enjoy being together more.

Also, circumstances that make us lonely for others, even our loved ones, are an opportunity to think about ourselves, our strengths, our weaknesses, our mistakes, our past decisions, and our plans for a better future. At the same time last year, many people in this world had a completely different view of their right to life or social responsibility. But there are other notable points in this situation. The rich and the poor are in the same position of access to educational and recreational facilities; this equality feels good. Air and nature pollution have decreased with reduced travel and limited access to natural resources. Let us not forget that for thousands of years, mankind has been able to find a way to coexist among all threats. I believe that awake minds will find the right path.

~ *Hamideh Abdollahi*
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

The Worst Nightmare

The pandemic has changed our way of life. The world has become very pessimistic, and this is due to the pandemic. I personally am not so optimistic about the future.

If you ask me how I feel, my answer is thank God I am healthy, and I have my job, but I don't know about tomorrow. Before the pandemic got worse, I asked my teacher if she could imagine all the students coming into class with masks. She told me this would be the worst nightmare. Right now, I do not trust someone who sneezes or coughs near me. Before the pandemic, if you went into the bank with a mask, of course it looked like you were ready for a robbery. Now everybody is wearing masks. It's the law. It seems like it's normal, but it's not.

I wish that a cure is found soon. I hope for a better future for all of us.

~ *George Theodosiou*
Canton City Schools

A Class and a Pandemic :Three Bars Will Do

The doors to the class closed.
A town shut down.

State...country...world...
shut down.

You didn't let go of your dream...
From warm cars...
Kitchens...
Sitting on a molded plastic chair
 at the high point of a township road...
A top bunk bed...
An apartment building stairwell...
All classrooms.

You found a way to connect
A palm sized device
Three bars will do...

We learned a new language
Our texts...
...code?
...515 919 5059
tT5yqw
...K
...can you hear me?
...select allow mic
...

You learned
Algebra
Economics
How to make Google slides

We visited the past
The future
Together we visited Pompeii virtually.

A year on...
Subjects have been completed
Diplomas awarded
The world may have shut down
ASPIRE students kept on.

*~ Amy Guda,
Teacher, Ohio University*

Quarantine -

Quarantine –
lonely, scared
boring days, frustrating nights, zooming everything
loss of jobs
Covid

*~ Tommy Daugherty, Roman Jones, Tanja Ruano, Florence Sawadogo
Great Oaks ITCD*

Remember the Good, Forget the Bad

I will remember my good life.

I will forget Covid-19.

I will remember my healthy life.

I will forget my health conditions.

I will remember my family reunions.

I will forget bad news.

*~ Fabiana Flores
Auburn Career Center*

Teaching During Covid

March 2020

I'm wearing my lipstick under my mask.
When will I think to stop doing this task?

April 2020

We're Googling and Zooming, It's really a mess.
We're teaching online. We're doing our best.

May 2020

We take PD classes morning and night.
Just so we make sure we're doing this right.

June 2020

I miss all my students. How long can this last?
It's really not bad. I'm sure it'll pass!

July 2020

I think I've got this. I'm really impressed.
I'm teaching an extra class in Budapest!

August 2020

I made a Kahoot with my extra time.
Of course, I did this while drinking some wine.

September 2020

We're back in the classroom, so spread out those desks.
Sanitize, Lysol spray, wear those darn masks.

October 2020

We're teaching computers; a new language they're learning.
If you can speak Google, a credential you're earning.

November 2020

Registration online? You gotta be kidding!
I'm tired of being on a computer and sitting.

December 2020

Virtual Santa is visiting our class.
We saved this tradition. We couldn't let it pass.

January 2021

We're teaching in jammies. The kids are all home.
When I start a Zoom call, they won't leave me alone.

February 2021

I'm shopping online in between classes.
I'm eating too much. I hope Covid passes.

March 2021

A year has gone by and I've learned a lot.
Teaching is everything. I gave all I got.

A hug from a student and a, "thank you my teacher"
Is worth more than our paycheck. It's the biggest feature.

Keep working hard and strive for the best.
Our students are worth it, and they'll pass the test.

Although back to normal we never may see
I'm proud to be called Teacher. I'm proud to be me.

~ Martha Nukuto
Teacher, Canton City Schools



Artist Biographies

Gabriel Pereyra - Cover and Back Cover

A Man and a Book and Flying Away

My name is Gabriel. I like to draw in my free time. I'm a student at Scarlet Oaks. My teacher is Ms. Mohammad.

Parul Vyas - p. 128

Indian Bride

My name is Parul Vyas, and I'm originally from India. I moved to the US three years ago to join my husband. We currently live in West Chester, Ohio. I am attending ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Sharonville to improve my English skills, and so far, I have made a lot of progress. My hobbies are painting, music, and learning different cultures. While in the US, I would like to volunteer in the community.

Author Biographies

Hamideh Abdollahi - p. 119

Hamideh is enrolled in the College and Career Readiness Class for ESOL Professionals. She is from Iran, where she was a teacher.

Anna Adams - p. 111

Anna Adams is a teacher with Canton City School's Adult College and Career Readiness Center. She has been teaching ESOL students since 2017. She enjoys working with students and having interesting conversations. When she's not teaching, she's listening to music or podcasts.

Duaa Alzoubi - p. 15

My name is Duaa Alzoubi. I am from Jordan. I moved to the U.S three years ago with my family. I started English classes seven months ago and I enjoy living in the U.S.

Abel Asmelash - p. 71

Advanced ESL Student from Ethiopia. He has been in class and online for one year. He is here in Cincinnati with his mother and sister. Goal - to enter an electrician apprenticeship.

Shaimaa Bahar - p. 79

Shaimaa is a motivated student with a big heart. She is originally from Iraq and now lives in Columbus, Ohio. Family is very important to her. She is grateful for her life here with her husband and children. She also loves learning English and meeting new friends in class.

Dianne Benson - p. 117

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

Laura S. Bline - p. 76

Laura moved to Akron from Columbia a year ago just at the start of the pandemic lock-down. Laura worked as a nurse in a hospital and enjoyed helping others. Laura wants to improve her English in order to better communicate with her husband and his family. She is grateful that technology helps her to stay in touch with her family back home.

Chad Carlisle - p. 28

I wrote this poem in honor of my father Larry Carlisle who passed away on 8/21/19. He was my best friend and is my inspiration to remain clean from the drug addiction that has plagued me for the last ten years.

Curtis Chaney - p. 101

American in the C.A.C program.

Lorena Daniele - p. 9

My name is Lorena, and I'm 38 years old. I am the mother of two children: Matteo (9) and Laura (4). I am originally from Brazil. One and a half years ago, I moved to the United States with my family because of my husband's work. I live in West Chester, Ohio, and

have been attending Scarlet Oaks ESOL classes to improve my English.

Tommy Daugherty - p. 124

[Group submission] This small class commits 100% to all they do. They are quiet but mighty.

Fatoumata Diakhaby - p. 25

I am 35 years old and originally from Senegal. I have been living in Cincinnati, Ohio, for the past two years with my husband and son. I am attending ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Sharonville, Ohio, to improve my English skills. I am working to achieve my dream of obtaining certification in medical billing and coding.

Fabiana Flores - p. 125

My name is Fabiana. I am from Mexico and now live in Painesville, Ohio. I am learning English with the Painesville ASPIRE program. I love my life and my family.

Mercedes Flores - p. 51

Mercedes Flores is employed at MetroHealth hospital in Cleveland and is working to complete her GED.

Amy Guda - p. 122

ABE/HSE Instructor Hocking County

Tracy Hardaway - p. 62

Tracy Hardaway is a Tri-C Ohio Options that consistently writes and creates astounding work. Tracy is well read and participates in class discussion often. An aspiring journalist, Tracy has developed enriched research and written communication skills.

Nabila Hasni - p. 17

Nabila and her husband came to the US two years ago from Algeria. He is working on a PhD from OSU. She has a Masters degree in Economics. In her country, she has worked in university administration, and as a primary school teacher, which she loved. Nabila loves learning English and works hard to improve.

Radhia Hemadou - p. 55

Radhia demonstrates a strong work ethic and has been a highly committed student in the ESOL program. She comes from Algeria, along with her husband, and they had their first child since they arrived.

Chanel Hernandez - p. 11

My name is Chanel Hernandez. I was born and raised in Columbus, OH. I am 29 and have 3 awesome kids. I am currently working on my GED to further my education. My goal in life is to raise my kids the best way I can. I'd also like to live life to the fullest, while I have the opportunity to do so, because life is too short.

Fatiha Idsidi Ali - p. 39, 63, 74

My name is Fatiha. I'm from Morocco. I came to the U.S.A in November 2019. Before I came, I was studying at the university. I used to write stories in the Arabic language. This is my first time to write in English. I'm trying to develop my English.

Roman Jones - p. 124

[Group submission] This small class commits 100% to all they do. They are quiet but mighty.

Karima Kerboua - p. 27

I am Karima. I am a new resident in the US. I used to live in Algeria before I came here. I used to be a biology teacher in middle school. Now I am retired and I devote my time to reading and writing about different topics.

Azam Khosravi - p. 92

I was born in Iran and have been in the United States for a year and a half. I live in Blue Ash with my husband and daughter. I learned about the ESOL program at Scarlet Oaks through a friend. I am really happy to be attending English classes here where I have experienced humanity and empathy. My dream is to see peace throughout the world.

Noor Khozayem - p. 12

My name is Noor. I'm from Egypt, and I have been in the U.S. for 3 years. I'm a wife and mom to two kids. I love traveling and doing

handmade crafts. I have a small business from home for handmade wood crafts. My favorite place is by the beach.

Moussa D. Konate - p. 81

My name is Moussa, and I am 58 years old. I am originally from Burkina Faso, a West African country. I'm married and the father of three boys: Philipp (29), Cheick (21) and Sherif (18). I moved to the United States fifteen months ago and currently live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am attending Scarlet Oaks Career Campus to improve my English with the hope of making a positive contribution to my community. I dedicate my writing to my wife and my children for their presence in my life. I would like to thank all the instructors and aides at Great Oaks for their support and willingness to teach adult students.

Keni Lara - p. 86

Keni is from the Dominican Republic. He is married to Lilliam Reyes. He works as an assistant pastor for the Seventh-day Adventist church. He studies English and he would like to be able to preach in English.

Randall Leicy - p. 57

I wrote these poems as an expression of how I feel. I hope these poems will give you encouragement to write down how you feel as well.

Fernanda Lima Marques - p. 5

My name is Fernanda Lima Marques, and I was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. My husband and I have two amazing boys who are 13 and 7 years old. When my family and I moved to the United States, it was very important and difficult for us, but it changed our lives. We came from Brazil thinking we'd stay here for five years. Now that we've been here for two years, we have learned to love the USA. I currently take ESOL classes at Great Oaks and am very grateful for the opportunity to learn the language and culture through the excellent teachers and classmates who are now a part of my new life. I really appreciate them for everything.

Kimberly H. Lincoln - p. 100, 107

Nanae Maruyama - p. 19

My name is Nanae Maruyama, and I'm originally from Japan. I've been in the U.S. for almost four years with my husband and two daughters. I have attended ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Cincinnati, Ohio, for three months. I enjoy cooking and doing yoga. I also like learning and being challenged with new things. I want to improve my English skills, so I appreciate the opportunity to write this story.

Jamie McAllister - p. 3

Part-time Writer, Full-Time Christian

I am a new climbing writer/poet ready to hit the skies soaring. I am best known for one already published poem: I was But now I am. I have other non-published works, but I am moving ahead. Right now I am in the midst of writing my first bestselling book, horror genre. I am pleased with my works, but I am more pleased with my Gift that comes from my Heavenly Father.

Sana Mrebet - p. 116

Sana is enrolled in the College and Career Readiness Class for ESOL Professionals at Miami Valley Career Technology Center. She is from Libya, and has a Bachelor's degree in Physics.

Pauline Kalu Mukaya - p. 113

My name is Pauline. I study English at Scarlet Oaks.

Marina Ngatsing - p. 37

Advanced ESL Student from Cameroon. Bachelor Degree. She has been in class for two years. She is here with some of her extended family. Goal - find a job and perhaps go to college for advanced studies.

Hong Phuc Nguyen - p. 73

Hong is originally from Vietnam. He came to the United States about one year ago. He is a hardworking student and hopes English will help him accomplish his goals. He owned a small restaurant in Vietnam, and his dream is to open a small Vietnamese restaurant here in Columbus, Ohio.

Dorine Nienkark - p. 8

Dorine is a long-time resident of the Hocking Hills region in Ohio. She enjoys artistic projects and has begun using writing in her art.

Judith Nonato Guijosa - p. 34

I am a cheerful and hard-working Mexican woman trying to achieve my goals. Like many immigrants, I have dreams of becoming successful and pursuing happiness. My family comes first, and I work hard so that my children can live a prosperous life.

Florentina Nosaci - p. 49

My name is Florentina. I'm a student at Scarlet Oaks. I'm here for four years. I'm a mother for a beautiful girl. I'm so happy to live here.

Martha Nukoto - p. 126

I have started teaching ESL over 25 years ago in the Ukrainian Village in Chicago. We have moved several times since then and we landed in Canton, Ohio, just 5 years ago. I started teaching intermediate ESL at The Adult College and Career Readiness Center. I love getting to know my students and forming our school family. When I'm not teaching, my three children keep me very busy running from music lessons to baseball to school events. This Pandemic has been tough but it has really made our lives slow down and enjoy family.

Maria del Carmen Ochoa - p. 31

Maria is a student in the Level 5 and 6 ESOL class at Godman Guild. Her joy in life is her family, which she writes about in this essay. Maria is full of positivity in spite of the difficulties she has faced. She lives in Columbus and is a full-time mom.

Rosalia Pablo - p. 21

My name is Rosalia, and I'm from Mexico. I'm a full time house-keeper. I enjoy writing and spending time with my family.

Diana Perez - p. 87

Diana is a motivated student who lives in Columbus, Ohio. She is originally from Mexico. She values education and learning English is

very important to her. She makes time for class even though she is a busy, hardworking mom.

Kenny Perez - p. 59

Kenny Perez lives in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area with her husband and four children. They have bought a house and Kenny is enrolled in the ESOL program at Scarlet Oaks. Kenny made a decision to leave Guatemala and to emigrate to America, and it changed her life.

Graciela Ramirez - p. 16

Hello. My name is Graciela. I am from Mexico. I like to listen to music.

C. Samuel Reymer - p. 7

I am a 41-year-old male who has been struggling with addiction for over 20 years.

Tanja Ruano - p. 124

[Group submission] This small class commits 100% to all they do. They are quiet but mighty.

Kateryna Runkevich - p. 35

My name is Kateryna Runkevich. I am from Ukraine. I'm married and I have two children. In September of 2019, I started ESOL classes at Canton. Thanks to all who have helped us learn English.

Soroya Saidani - p. 91

Soroya is originally from Algeria and is very proud of her Berber culture. She is very motivated to learn English and loves practicing conversation. She is curious and asks many questions and is always looking for more opportunities to grow. She likes her new home in Columbus, Ohio.

Florence Sawadogo - p. 124

[Group submission] This small class commits 100% to all they do. They are quiet but mighty.

Lena Shuck - p. 103

Lena successfully earned her GED during the Covid 19 Pandemic. She plans to enter college this fall.

Aicha Soumah - p. 45

Aicha Soumah arrived in the US in 2017 from Guinea Conakry in West Africa, along with her husband and oldest child. A daughter was born in the US. Aicha has artistic flair and is a hard-worker. She has worked as a home health aide and was recently hired to work at the front desk in a hotel in Columbus.

Mouloukou Soumah - p. 89

Mouloukou Soumah is a student in the Level 5 and 6 ESOL class at Godman Guild. He comes from Guinea Conakry in West Africa and has been in the US for nearly four years. He has a Master's degree in Management Control. He was recently hired as night auditor of a hotel chain in Columbus. He is married and has two children.

Tamara Spoon - p. 97

I have been an addict since I was 13 years old. I'm now 52 years old and went to jail for the first time for failure to appear in court (an honest but silly mistake due to covid 19). I went to drug/alcohol treatment and have been sober for 60+ days! I believe it was God's divine intervention that I am alive and have a second chance in life. I wrote this poem for Drug Overdose Day and we wrote peoples' names on black balloons for our friends that overdosed. May God bless those who read this.

Angela Suriel Abreu - p. 43

My name is Angela Suriel Abreu. I am Dominican (born in Dominican Republic). I have been living in Columbus, Ohio, for almost 18 years. I have been studying English at Tolles Career & Technical Center (now called Aspire) since October, 2010. They have great teachers that have helped me a lot, especially Meghan Paulien, my actual teacher.

Mio Suzuki - p. 69

I am Japanese.

Satoko Suzuki - p. 70

I had worked at a bank for five years and at a trade company for five and a half years in Japan. I had studied abroad in Missouri for one year in 2004-2005. After that, I went back to Japan, and lived there for twelve years. I moved to Ohio in 2017. I have been studying English again for two and a half years.

George Theodosiou - p. 121

My name is George. My country is Greece. I moved to the U.S. in December 2012. I have already lived nine years here. I have been studying English about one year. I am married with three children. I enjoy watching movies on TV.

Dellanira Valdez-Montes - p. 114

Della is studying English with the Painesville ASPIRE ESOL program.

Parul Vyas - p. 29

My name is Parul Vyas, and I'm originally from India. I moved to the U.S. three years ago to join my husband. We currently live in West Chester, OH. I am attending ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks in Sharonville, Ohio, to improve my English skills, and so far, I have made a lot of progress. I also hope to become more familiar with American heritage, history, and culture. Most importantly, I want to make some new American friends. My hobbies are painting, music, and learning different cultures. While in the U.S., I would like to volunteer in the community.

Holly Williams - p. 108

I am 28 years young. I have lived a long life though. I'm always doing things the hard way, and I am ready to try them the right way!

Yumiko Yoda - p. 75

I moved to Ohio from Japan 2 years ago. Before that, I had lived in Connecticut and California for 4 years. There are four people in my family, husband, son, daughter and I. I had worked at a trading company for 10 years, then I went to the Nursing school; I worked at a university hospital. The reason why I study English is that I'd like to communicate with neighbors and friends.

Honorable Mention

Artists

Sadeel Alhawamdeh
Sunitha Devi Bommana
Noor Munder
Dorine Nienkark
Carlos Nila
Maria del Carmen Ochoa

Authors

Lilia Acosta
Sadeel Alhawamdeh
Lamia Ben Amar
Alicia Cortes
Edgar Franco
The Lam Ly
Carlos Nila
Estela Ralios
Angelica Ramirez
Gregorio Rodriguez
Nadida Sabirdjanova
Neetu Kumaripra Sing
Fatima Zagaoui



