

Beginnings XXIV

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

*This 24th edition of Beginnings
is dedicated in memory
of Chris McKeon, former
Writers' Conference Coordinator
and champion of adult literacy.*



Foreword

I recently took a walk through the Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. Everything is blooming; a beautiful and magnificent sight to see. I'm encouraged by the colors and the fragrant aroma and the hope it gives to me about the beauty of life. And though every plant, flower, and tree I look at appears in the state of perfection, I know that there are flowers that did not bloom because they couldn't survive the change in season, or some invasive species prevented or delayed their bloom.

We go through ever evolving seasons and journeys. Some days filled with hope, encouragement, ambition, and motivation, ready to tackle any obstacle that we face. Other days, we want to hide from events we face, barriers, obstacles, or a dreaded phone call that might give us some harsh health news.

Everyone goes through seasons. Writing provides us that powerful tool to express those seasons and feelings. The journal, sticky notes, word pad, online document, blog, social media, email, allow us to share those seasons. We can write down that amazing cake recipe that we created, or jot down that experience of the person at the grocery store who blocked every aisle we were trying to shop in. We can talk about the progression of our journey in the Aspire program. Perhaps the journey from passing a practice exam to an official High School Equivalency Exam and then earning a short-term credential. Maybe you are writing about ½ a bloom. You earned your US Citizenship but still feel like you are struggling to understand English idioms. Our adventures, learning experiences, and writing will all go through seasons of blooming. All stages can be beautiful, no matter how long they take, and even when they don't fully bloom on the timeline you expect. Our journeys are unique and full of teachable moments. We have the power to write about our experiences and our story and to share with others the experiences that shape us.

Thank you for participating in *Beginnings*. Thank you for sharing your story, your thoughts, and your life with us. May you

continue to bloom and grow and know that we all go through life seasons. Remember, it is not always about a timeline. It is about learning and growth.

Stephanie Schab
Aspire State Director

Acknowledgements

Since 1997, Aspire students have written about their worlds through essays, poetry, short stories – printed words drawn from their lives and from their imaginations. Through the challenges of the past couple of years, Aspire students across the state persevered and rallied. They continued to attend classes, pass high school equivalencies, learn English, work, become citizens, and take care of their families.

Beginnings XXIV, continues to honor the students who made the choice to continue their educations by attending a local program and showcases the range of experiences and creativity of those students. It also pays tribute to all of the Aspire teachers who believe in their students' dreams and work with them every day to achieve them.

We continue to be grateful to the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Aspire Office for their continued support not only of this project, but also of the teachers, staff, and students at Ohio programs. This year marked the retirement of State Aspire Director, Donna Albanese, whose career with Aspire spanned more than twenty-five years. Although she avoided fanfare, we celebrate her dedication and service to Aspire.

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Blooming Minds



Driving My Grandsons in America

My name is Maria. My family is my life. I am from Mexico and am a mother to an adult son and daughter. I work at Chick-Fil-A six days a week and have five grandsons.

I once made a list of my joys in America: my job, helping my daughter, making time for my son, calling my sister in Mexico, my plants, driving for my grandkids, and my life.

To help my daughter, I drive my grandsons to school and after school to lessons, Monday through Friday. Their names are: Andres, Diego, Antonio, Santiago, and Jaden. I talk to them and we laugh together about stories from the past. We like to listen to music and “dance” in the car. Sometimes the one in the back fights with the ones in the front and I say, “You fight, I park the car--you get out. When you relax you can come back.” Me, sometimes, agh--my head! The boys like to play on their phones and try to get me to look. I say, “Tell me about it instead.” My oldest grandson, Diego, will drive soon and I tell him, “Don’t get on the phone when driving and it will save your life!”

~ Maria Alonso
Great Oaks Career Campuses

A Dinner Invitation

My teacher asked us, if we could invite anyone to dinner, who would we invite and why?

If I could invite anyone to dinner, I would invite my Dad, because I would like to see him in person and talk with him. I miss him and I would like to have his advice on many things. I learned a lot from him, and I would like to learn more: he is very wise and patient. I miss hearing his voice, and I miss his smile.

I would like to hear the old stories of my family. I would ask him how he met my mom. How he felt when I was born and why they chose my name, Manal, and what my name means.

I wish to have dinner with him and fix all of his favorite foods. I know he likes my cooking. We would gather as a family and share all our stories.

My mother died when I was very young and my dad took care of me. Now he takes care of my grandmother who is sick. I have not seen my dad for more than five years. I cannot travel to my country, and my dad is too sick to travel to the United States. Still, I wish to see him soon.

~ Manal Bali
Penta County Vocational School

The Love of Baking

Being able to create delectable sweets like cupcakes,
cookies, and breads

Adding all my ingredients like sugar, water, milk, and eggs

Knowing how great I feel when my sweet treats come
out perfectly

Imagining my friends' and family's faces when they take a
bite of that delicious, home-baked treat

Guaranteeing my winsome creations will invite you to
come back for more

Nothing beats the warmly exceptional feeling I get when
I bake.

~ *Brittney Loya*
Penta County Vocational School

Elena

Generous, considerate, thoughtful, trustworthy
Daughter of Jesus and Maria
Lover of God, family, and life
Who feels lucky, loved, happy
Who is afraid of loneliness, frogs, and high speed
Who would like to see my dad, my country,
and my grandkids again
Resident of Painesville, Ohio
Rodriguez

*~ Elena Rodriguez
Auburn Career Center*

Rosie, The White Horse

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Sara who lived with her family in the beautiful and quiet village of Taza in the northeast of Morocco. Sara loved animals, especially horses, and would spend most of her time playing and taking care of her favorite horse Rosie. Her father had taught her how to ride when she was young, and now she was an expert in horse riding.

Sara was a kind-hearted girl. She loved everyone around her. She loved to play with her friends, chase butterflies, pick beautiful flowers from the vast green fields, and, of course, ride her favorite horse Rosie. Rosie was white as snow, with a golden tail and wide black eyes. She was Sara's best friend.

One day, Sara noticed that her father came back from work in a bad mood. He went to his room and closed the door. She was wondering why. In the evening, when they had finished dinner, her father told them he would be transferred to another job in the city for two years. Therefore, they must prepare themselves to leave within a month. Sara froze. The news was a thunderbolt to her because she did not like the city. She thought the city was a busy and noisy place. She didn't like to go there even to visit, so how about living there?

"What about Rosie and the other animals?" she asked eagerly.

"Everything will be sold except the house. We will keep it."

"Please, daddy, don't sell Rosie. It's my favorite horse. Please, daddy," she pleaded.

"Sara, I know how much you love Rosie and how hard it is for you to be away from her, but we need to move from the village to the city so I don't lose my job," he said sadly.

Sara thought for a moment and then said, “Dad, didn’t you say this step would be for two years and then you’d go back to the village?”

“Yes, I did,” said her father emphatically.

“Dad, what if I stay at my aunt’s house, so you don’t have to sell Rosie. And I’ll take care of her and I won’t have to leave my school,” Sara suggested.

Her father looked at Sara’s mother in bewilderment, knowing that Sara did not get along with her aunt very well and then said hesitantly, “Sara, I can’t promise you anything now, but your mother and I will talk about this and see what we can do.”

For days, Sara tried to persuade her parents to allow her to stay in her aunt’s house, and after great urging from her they agreed, but on the condition that she study well and not cause problems with her aunt.

Days later, Sara’s family left for town after being assured that Aunt would take care of Sara. They promised to visit her every two weeks.

Sara was sad not to go with her parents, but at the same time she was happy to be with Rosie, her favorite horse.

Her aunt was an arrogant woman who lived alone and loved no one, but she agreed to let Sara stay with her because she wanted help with the housework.

Days passed, and Sara was trying to adapt to the new situation. She was trying to please her aunt in different ways to let her ride her horse, but her aunt was cruel. She made Sara do the housework and clean the stable when she got back from school. Sara never told anyone about the mistreatment, not even her parents. However, she told her horse Rosie about all her troubles. Whenever her aunt went shopping, Sara would take the opportunity to ride her horse.

One day, Sara rode Rosie as usual, taking advantage of her aunt's absence. Sara took a different route so that she could enjoy the scenery, but she did not know where the road would lead. While she was talking to her horse, her aunt's carriage appeared. Rosie flinched and ran through the trees, Sara tried to hold her back but couldn't. Rosie tripped and Sara fell to the ground. She had broken her leg. She was taken to the hospital for treatment. Her parents immediately came from the city. They were in a panic when they heard what had happened to their daughter. Sara was in the hospital for a week.

After that, her parents took her home. Sara told them everything she had been through: how her aunt treated her harshly and left her without food when she found her riding Rosie.

Her parents regretted leaving their daughter with her aunt, knowing the aunt's hostile behavior. Her parents promised never to leave her alone again. Her father told her that his boss had allowed him to return to work in the village. In three months the family would be together again. Sara was happy to have her parents back and hugged them while crying tears of happiness.

After a while, Sara's aunt fell seriously ill and asked to see her. Sara agreed and went to see her aunt. The aunt asked her to sit near her and told her how she regretted everything she had done against her and asked her to forgive her. Sara was surprised and did not know what to do. But she remembered what her father used to tell her: "Treat people with your morals, not theirs." So she forgave her aunt and hugged her. Then everyone lived happily ever after.

~ *Fatima Zagaoui*
Godman Guild

Visual Learner

Visual learners have many attributes that contribute to a valuable skill set. I will discuss three qualities that I have. First, learning from pictures and graphs. Second, observation. Third, vivid imagination.

I prefer learning from pictures or graphs instead of reading a lot of pages. One reason I prefer this way of learning is because a picture or graph can substitute for two thousand words. I love to observe others doing things, then coming up with something out-of-the-box and unique to me. When I am trying to think out-of-the-box, I start imagining making things differently than others do.

When I was in the eleventh grade, our physics teacher divided the class into groups to make an experiment showing the correlation between wavelength and frequency. I observed and took a look at all groups. My assignment was to create my own unique experiment. I went home and came up with the idea for my own project. I decided to build a projector.

I went to the library of the British Council in Amman, Jordan and also went to the library of the AMEDEAST to read about how to build a projector. I made a list of materials I needed and went to buy some of them. The ones I didn't buy I made myself. Finally, after many failures, I came up with my own functional projector. At the end I received a certificate of honor for my project.

~ Osama Al-Nasser
Great Oaks Career Campuses

I Feel

I feel most like myself when I wake up and thank God for another day that He has given me.

I feel most like myself when I am with my family having fun or eating a meal together.

I feel most like myself when I'm playing basketball at the gym, going to the bowling alley, or boxing at the ring.

I feel most like myself when I'm alone with my thoughts, pondering reflectively.

I feel most like myself when it is a warm, sunny day that refreshes my spirit.

I feel most like myself when I am not pressured because stress challenges my mind.

I feel most like myself when I am having a stress-free day.

I feel most like myself when I've accomplished a goal and become more competent.

I feel most like myself when at the end of the day, my family is home safe.

~ Curtis Gee
Penta County Vocational School

House Pets

Cats

noisy, small

listening, watching, running

walking, jumping, playing, relaxing

eating, drinking, sleeping

soft, big

Dogs

*~ Gregorio Rodriguez
Auburn Career Center*

Communicating with Confidence

I remember how nervous I was when I attended an event in my son's class for the first time. It was almost 9 years ago; I could not speak English and did not know how to communicate with others. None of the others talked to me; I was alone, but I did not feel so bad. If anything, I felt a little bit comfortable. Thinking about that time, nobody was avoiding me. If I talked to someone, I would welcome them. On the other hand, I thought there were parallel lines that I couldn't see. If I didn't take action to cross that line, I would never be able to cross it.

Everyone has heard at least once that English is just a tool to communicate; the most important thing is your heart. I believe that it is true, but reality is slightly different for me. If you do not know how to communicate or have confidence in your English, you would hesitate to take the first step forward. Even if I could speak my mother language in my home country, I think it is not easy to join a new community.

As my children grew up, I started asking myself, "I wonder if I will spend my life here without communicating with others?" regardless of society. I have realized that if I do not take action to connect with others here, nothing will happen. So it's time to move forward. Otherwise, I would miss the opportunity here.

I decided to take an ESL class at Project Learn three times a week to improve my English. I meet friends from other countries in the class. I am enjoying learning English with classmates. Also, knowing each other's backgrounds was valuable for me. I joined a book club with my neighbors. I cannot say I understand what they are talking about, but being a member of it has a big meaning for me. I can feel my improvement, and I can also achieve my goal at the ESL class. It is time to connect to the communities and move forward to cross the lines. Chances are not coming from the other side.

Life

Reality

authentic, true

working, planning, discovering

truth, effectiveness, imagination, delusion

dreaming, imagining, falsifying

uncertain, ephemeral

Fantasy

*~ Maribel Moncada
Auburn Career Center*

Moon and Sun

I don't know whether to start by saying that my story began or ended with the Covid-19 pandemic. But it was the end of long years of hard work and dedication to a company that could not withstand the crisis and went bankrupt. More than 2,000 people were unemployed.

Due to multiple circumstances, my son and I needed to travel to the United States to try to find a decent way to earn a living. The departure was very hard; we left behind our home, our family, and all our memories in Ecuador. The years of study, the constant updating of knowledge, and the years of university became useless. In the U.S. we had to start from scratch, without family, without friends, without even being able to communicate, until a job opportunity arose.

Time has passed, and we have learned to develop within our possibilities in the best way. We are also learning different and new things. As we spend time being part of that very large group, which works very hard every day, we embrace the qualification of "migrants" and all the dark that this implies...

Longing for the day to be able to return to our home, which we know is something insecure at least in the short term, but it turns into hope, a dream perhaps. As such it could either come true or not.

Life has definitely changed since that day. Now we are the ones who have given up our identities many times to be able to work, which is a delicate and uncomfortable subject known by several people in the same circumstances. Perhaps that is the cost of our honest life and our living wage.

Assimilating to the new reality takes time. The battle between wanting to return to our country and staying is difficult. This country gives us an opportunity to feeling useful, something we lost, something that the terrible disease took from us.

Now in the midst of uncertainty, we have the firm hope that things will improve and although the Moon here is more beautiful, the Sun still feels foreign.

~ *Stalin Pardo*
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Future Dreams

My name is Yukie Ogawa, and I am from Japan. I don't have a job now, but before I came to America I worked in my family-owned shop that sold wheelchairs for dogs with leg injuries. I did accounting for the shop. My family is my husband and my son, Subaru, who is six years old.

During the week, I take walks, clean the house, go to my ESOL classes and take my son to Kindergarten. I also study English with my friend on Fridays and take my son on Saturdays to Japanese school from 8:45 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

My joys are many. I love when my child hugs me, and I like to eat foods like chicken and tortilla soup. I love flowers and the fragrance of chamomile. I also love to watch and pet dogs and play tennis.

In my future, I hope to make a flower and vegetable garden and play music outside in the evenings at neighborhood events. I hope to exercise every day and eat sushi every week! There is an album by Paul Nicklen that I want to buy. I hope to improve my English speaking. And I hope there is love and peace in the world.

~Yukie Ogawa
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Sprouting Insight

Age of Magic

They're casting stones and chanting names,
screaming about how we'll go to hell.
But we live in an age of magic
where every cruel word fuels the spell.
To them we are witches and warlocks
whom they can blame for all this chaos.
The outcasts of society,
the colors they try to wish away.
So as the battle cry sounds, like knives piercing skin,
the hunters awaken and the war begins.
While looking for monsters and searching for horns
they'll never find what they're hoping for.
Because a road paved with fear isn't where they'll find us.
We don't hide from who we are or run from what we could be.
There is no dark, evil lair that they're expecting to find;
only hearts of fragile beauty, each with a soul that's one of a kind.

~ Alexander McNamara
Gallia Jackson-Vinton JVS

I Found Peace in the Middle of a Tornado

I found peace in the middle of a tornado. Some people say I'm crazy, but if you think about it, it's not too far from real. I guess to understand it through my eyes, you just have to go through it. And see exactly what I am trying to say. The world around me was falling apart. Everything was going everywhere in every direction like a tornado out of control. But at the eye of the storm, my life was at peace. In the center of the storm, everything is calm. My inner peace is always calm, but my anger was always out of control. But I'm finally learning how to control this. The eye of the storm is truly my peace.

*~ Jeremy McMurray
Lima City Schools*

Don't Give Up

This is my story about my life and my experience. I came from China. My husband and I got married in China in 2015. After marriage we decided to go back to his hometown to live. I had to leave my country and my family. This is why I came to the USA.

The first year I was depressed, because this was a new life in a new country. I didn't speak English. I stayed home with a new baby. We were new parents, and we didn't know how to take care of a new baby. I couldn't drive. I didn't have any friends. I couldn't talk to people. My husband had work and he couldn't stay at home all the time. So, I felt lonely. I wasn't happy to live here.

I wanted to give up and go back to my country. I needed help because I felt crazy. My husband wasn't happy either. Then he took me to see a doctor to ask for help. The doctor told us I needed to go out, meet people, learn English, and make friends. I couldn't sleep, so she gave me some medicine.

After that, my husband decided to look for an immigrant Chinese to help me learn how to adjust to life here. They told me I could go to The Chapel at the University of Akron. I started to learn basic English. I made a lot of friends. They came from all over the world. We shared the same confused questions; we felt how each other felt. We helped each other; we shared different cultures. I started trying to change myself.

Life is hard, but you need to be brave to try. Don't give up. You will find life is not as difficult as you think. I was trying my best; I made it!

I have already adjusted to life here. I like it here. Life is slowly getting better! The people here have healed my heart! When you want to give up, just keep going, and don't look down.

~ Ling Jiang
Project LEARN of Summit County

My Husband's Early Life Journey

My husband was born on January 1, 1976. He was a mama's boy. When he was between 4 and 5 years old, his parents took him to the city; like every child, he was playing around when suddenly someone kidnapped him. By the time his parents realized, it was too late. They looked everywhere, and they couldn't find him. The kidnappers took him to a jungle, and they kept him in there until he was around 10 years old. Since he got kidnapped at such a young age, he had no recollection of his previous memories. The kidnappers made him believe that his parents sold him to them for money because they didn't love him. They lied to him and to make it even more believable, they hired people to say that they were his biological parents and didn't want him. They took him with them to the city sometimes after he was 10 years old.

The years passed by with mental and psychological abuse. He never had a room for himself. His room was the front porch. When it rained, it was more difficult for him to sleep. When they went back to the city, they would leave him without food. When he was hungry, he would eat dirt, raw food, and drank alcohol to calm his hunger. He was abused and raped by people who worked for his abductors. Eventually my husband escaped, but the abductors found him and took him to a pond and forced his head under water many times. From that time on, he had nightmares.

When he turned 17 years old, he was going with someone else in a car and they had a car accident. One of his lungs collapsed and he had to stay 3 months in intensive care. My husband's abductors abandoned him there, but many people helped him. After he was better, his abductors came for him and took him back to the jungle again. They didn't give him any chance to recover his health completely. They just put him to work right away. His health was getting worse and worse. He had a friend whom he met when he was in school. His friend asked him to leave that place. One afternoon, he decided to leave and when he did, many people were there. He said in front of everybody that he was leaving them

forever. Then the man asked him to wait, so he could be paid for all the services, but he didn't trust what the guy said, so he just left. It was a 3-hour walk to the main road. Then a car stopped and offered to take him to the city. It was another 3 hours. He went to his friend's house and lived with him for one year.

One day, he met with his abductor face to face in a marketplace. His abductor was looking for him to kill him. He got so scared. At this point, his friend convinced him to find his real parents. One day they were drunk, and they went to the local newspapers to post his picture and that he was looking for relatives. Meanwhile, his older brother who immigrated to the U.S. was looking for him. His brother met a radio station person and talked about my husband's kidnapping. His brother asked this person to let him know if someone published that they were looking for their relatives. Suddenly, the radio station called him and said that they read a post and thought it might be his brother. His brother hurried to see that post and immediately he knew that the person in the report was the little brother that he had always been looking for.

The brother contacted a family member who still lived in the town and asked for his help. Coincidentally, my husband had met that exact family member through work but hadn't realized they were related. The relative immediately went where my husband lived and said that his brother was looking for him and that they in fact were related. But my husband lied to him and said he didn't have any family and the man must be confused. My husband lied because he was scared of everyone and didn't know who to trust. He didn't want to suffer again.

Later, my husband's brother called the relative to make an appointment on the phone. At first my husband resisted, but finally he agreed after many attempts. The first words his brother said were "Finalmente te encuentre mi hermano despues de todos estos anos que te he estado buscando ahora puedo vivir en paz" which means "Finally I found my brother after all these years that I was looking for you. Now I can live in peace."

After that, my husband's life changed forever. The relative helped him reunite with his parents. When his mom saw him, she started to check if a birth mark was still there, and she looked for the scar he got while he was playing with his brother. Once she saw the scar, she immediately went to hug him and they both cried. However, my husband was not sure until he got a DNA test. It came back positive that these were his real parents. In 1997, he moved in with his parents. He lived with them for two years. In 1999, his best friend visited to tell him that the bad people were looking for him again. He was in great danger, so he decided to immigrate to the U.S. He started a new life here. After one and a half years, we got married and we now have a beautiful family with 4 kids and a house, thanks to God. That's how we got here.

~ Gladys Yadaicela
Delaware Career Center

New Life in Recovery

I have been struggling with addiction for about 4 ½ years now. Last year my addiction got so out of control that I lost custody of my two children. My father gained custody for about a year until one day he was asked for a urine test – he tested positive for the same drugs that I struggled with. My kids were removed from his care and placed into foster care. At the time I was in treatment for my drug use. I stayed clean for a few months, but ended up using again.

Now I am 120 days sober and living in a sober living home where my kids can stay and visit me on weekends. I have been working very hard with Penta to get my GED and am grateful to say that I will be taking the tests May 4th and 6th of 2022. I say all this to say no matter what you have done or where you have been, you can always change your future and become someone important. And thanks to Penta and my amazing teacher, I have the courage to do just that.

*~ Be'Onka Fizer
Penta County Vocational School*

Dirt Road

I've spent many years in the darkness trying to hide from my own demons. No matter what I did to hide, my demons always found me. My demons are relentless. They never sleep. Every time I slip, my demons are right there wanting to take my hand and lead me to my grave.

Over the years, I've put my body through hell. There's no man, creature, or demon that could cause my body more pain and suffering than I have. Hands down, I'm my own worst demon. Most days I don't want to wake up, I don't want to talk and just be normal. I'm good at understanding others; I can listen and understand someone else. I also battle Bipolar, Schizophrenia and I'm a cutter. Hundreds of staples and 100s of stitches, so when I say my monsters are real, that's what I mean. My scars are half my stories, and I'll wear them the rest of my life. But they're my scars and I'll proudly wear them.

~ *Jeremy McMurray*
Lima City Schools

How I Felt During “The Deep Blue” Part of My Life

How to start writing these lines without taking a deep breath first? I'm going to go deep into a story that shakes the depths of my soul. It makes me turn back the pages of my life, back to a time when I fought with all my heart for the future of my daughter, my country, and myself.

I am from Venezuela, a country located on the northern coast of South America, whose capital and largest city is Caracas. It is bordered by Brazil and Colombia. Its population was estimated at 30 million people before the mass migration of Venezuelans out of Venezuela. Venezuela is rich with resources. Most people don't know that it has the largest oil reserves in the world. In addition, it is rich in gold, diamonds, iron, copper and coltan. Coltan is known as blue gold because it is a rare mineral indispensable for the manufacturing of cell phones and other electronic devices. Sadly, due to 24 years of exploitation, a group of criminals sick with power have bled my beautiful country dry. But this will become clearer a little later.

This story begins on February 4, 1992 when Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez Frias tried to overthrow President Carlos Andres Perez along with a group of army officers. There were two coup attempts: The first already mentioned and the second one, same year, on November 9th. On this occasion, civilians and militaries participated in the attempt. The goal was to remove the president from power and to free Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez, who was imprisoned after the first coup, from jail. These objectives were not achieved, but Chavez was released in 1994, and four years later he became president democratically by winning the elections.

His government and doctrine, “El Chavismo,” not only marked the history of the country but its present despite his death in March 2013. All this thanks to a gruesome strategy, planned several years before between Hugo Chavez and the Cuban dictator, Fidel Castro. During their 24-year partnership,

Venezuela gave Cuba their resources in exchange for Cuban spies and scientific exchanges. But in the process, our military and public figures were indoctrinated by Cuban communism. By virtue of this poor political choice of Venezuela in 1998, we entered a perverse political project. We began to lose civil and constitutional rights, the productive economy was destroyed, currency lost value, and the oil industry was destroyed. It is worth clarifying that the latter had been the engine of our economy for several decades. Chavez' disastrous ideological movement called "21st Century Socialism" has not only destroyed the country but has also separated families for differing in their ideologies.

There were many attempts by Chavez' opposition to oust him from power. In April 2002 there was a coup against his presidency with positive results. Although 48 hours later, he returned to power. There were peaceful marches on the different highways and streets in the main cities of the country. And there were national strikes that consisted of a paralysis of labor and economic activities, but none of it worked.

As individuals, we did our part to oppose the regime. We marched, we sat on the main highways, we played pots and pans in our homes, we turned off the lights in our homes, we blocked the streets. We stopped cars for several minutes to block the streets. All this at certain times of the day. Of course, in most cases there were clashes with the oppressive organisms of the state. Many people died, especially the young. We learned from evidence that Cuban spies were inserted into the National Armed Forces; they attacked the people in the demonstrations. Our demonstrations were peaceful. We all dressed in white. We always had faith that the world would see us on the news and help us, but nothing happened. The regime did not allow the press to fly over the demonstrations due to the overwhelming images of rivers of people walking in protest towards a point set in advance where there were platforms on which political and civil leaders gave hopeful speeches to the crowd.

We marched for about twenty years. At the beginning, we marched with a lot of excitement and hope. But we were risking

our lives due to the aggressive response of the repressive organisms of the state such as the Bolivarian National Guard and the police of the different Chavista mayors. The most emblematic march, for me, took place in the middle of 2018. We were marching along the Francisco Fajardo Highway, one of the main highways in the city of Caracas with a representative number of citizens including women, men, and the elderly. We were a certain distance from the tanks of the National Guard, when they applied water and fired tear gas canisters (most of them already expired) at the protesters. They fired pellets at close range even in our face. Many people died from this cause--a horrible way to die, by the way. When the bombing began, we began to run backwards, but on the bridge of the Chacao neighborhood, located in one of the opposition mayor's offices, some National Guard motorcyclists appeared and began firing more tear gas canisters. We found ourselves ambushed and fearful for our lives. In fact, my wife Mariluz suffered from a panic attack and hid behind the only car in the highway while I desperately yelled at her to run. I had to look for her, and we hid in a space between both flanks. I would not wish this experience on anyone. We were with my wife's family. Thank God nobody got hurt. We decided not to march anymore because of our daughter Sara Isabel who was a 12-year-old by then.

All these events, along with the economic and social crisis, were denting the psyche of all those who were fighting for a better future. I was an educated man with graduate-level experience, but with the worsening political situation, my experience was not valued. For 8 years, I had been working for an American company in Venezuela, offering services in the area of Financial Security. My income at the beginning was good enough to have a pleasant life. But as time passed, my economic situation got worse as a result the devaluation of the Bolivar (Venezuelan currency). My income remained the same in dollars, but the national currency was significantly devalued to make it appear that everything was fine internally. Unfortunately, I couldn't increase my income because I couldn't get more clients. I had no work although I continued studying to improve my situation. In this regard, I began to attend courses at the best business school in my country called the Institute of Higher Studies in Administration (IESA is its acronym

in Spanish) in order to obtain sufficient knowledge to get ahead in my profession as an International Financial Security Advisor. I began the certification of Organizational Ontological Coach on November 30, 2017. I was sure that the certification would help my situation, but I would later realize this would not be the case.

After finishing the Organizational Ontological Coach Certification, Mary and I decided to go to Margarita Island in the Caribbean Sea with dreamy beaches and small restaurants for a few days, in order to rest. While there, in August 2018, we learned of the latest devastating economic maneuver of Nicolas Maduro, due to the hyperinflation of more than 32,700% that existed at that time. The economic crisis made the International Monetary Fund compare the Venezuelan situation with the hyperinflation of Zimbabwe and with the one experienced in Germany after the First World War.

Sometime later, a leader of the Chavista government came to my office with a group of criminals, who were unnamed members of the Bolivarian circles. They wanted to take some products from the office on behalf of the revolution. They contacted me because of the position I held. I worked in a recognized company in the communications area as a Business Unit Manager. So, from that moment on, I was exposed to persecution, intimidation, and threats. I feared for my life, and I was paranoid.

Because of all this, I began to lose sleep, and my mind did not rest completely. I had sweating, palpitations, stomachaches, headaches, and I lost 29 pounds. My recurring thought was that the officials and supporters of the regimen were going to expropriate our home. It is worth clarifying that the expropriation of housing was becoming a common practice. I decided to look for professional help. The psychiatrist I chose was a recognized doctor and a friend of my sister. He diagnosed me with an anxiety disorder. Anxiety has the peculiarity of putting your mind on autopilot and generating catastrophic thoughts about the future. Many times, I did not understand what he meant. When the psychiatrist spoke to me, my heart raced. I didn't get along with him since it made me more anxious trying to understand what he wanted to convey

to me. I felt very bad. I didn't want to leave the house and asked my wife not to go to work and stay home with me. I was afraid at all times. The therapist prescribed pills, but I was afraid I would become addicted like what had happened to my sister.

One day, I was alone in the apartment; around noon I decided to go for a walk. There was no electricity. The regime used to cut off our electricity and water to intimidate and keep the population under control. I was forced to go down the stairs. We lived on the 10th floor. As I started down, I felt the need to stick my head out the windows. I heard a voice saying, "Jump so that all this ends." Without realizing it, I had had a suicidal thought, but I paid it no attention. It is worth noting that this is the first time that I have addressed this shameful and painful event in detail. This thought repeated itself at two additional times, but I paid no attention to it. Today, I thank God for not listening to myself. I'm still amazed at how the mind can drive you practically insane.

With these events occurring in my life, I made a decision, thanks to a conversation I had with my best friend and mentor Oscar Ledezma. He told me, "40% of your recovery depends on your therapist and the remaining 60% on you. If you don't get along with that doctor, change to another." Oscar found and suggested two additional psychiatrists. I listened to him and called the first, but could not make an appointment due to the rude response of his assistant. So, I called the second option and was able to make an appointment. But I still felt I had to do something else. The serious political and economic crisis in the country was suffocating me.

I began to investigate our options abroad-- Chile, Spain, and the United States. Each of these destinations had a reason. Chile was one of the most economically developed countries in Latin America, but Mary was afraid of the frequent earthquakes in that country. Spain was the next option because Mary and Sara have Spanish nationality, thanks to Mary's father who was born there. Unfortunately, the socialist system in Spain only allows you to work to cover expenses, but you cannot save money. In addition, the political party "PODEMOS" was taking power in Congress and

this party was financed by the Venezuelan Chavista and Madurista groups. So, we ruled out Spain. The United States was the last option since Mary's sister, Gesmar Cañizo had lived there for more than 15 years. She and her husband, Ricardo Sandoval, had a small restaurant and needed help. For this reason, we made the decision to migrate to the United States. This process was quick due to my illness and our economic situation.

We sold both cars and my motorcycle. In about two months, we bought the tickets and once the money was available, we left Venezuela on June 30, 2019. We came to Tampa to visit my sister Hilda Teresa de Leon. We spent a week with her and her family. I missed her very much, and she along with her husband Danilo Soto, had supported me a lot throughout my process. Both were brilliant doctors in their respective careers in Venezuela.

After that week, we boarded a plane to Columbus Ohio, where Gesmar, Mary's sister, was waiting for us at the airport. They installed us in their house. We stayed with them for a month. I was still dealing with my anxiety problem, but now on a smaller scale since I was not in the country, suffering from the terrible political crisis. In the meantime, we started working at the restaurant. They helped us and vice versa.

My condition stopped me from seeing things clearly. I had resistance to the work I was doing in the food truck. I had many work activities to do until late at night including some weekends. It was difficult for me to move forward and understand that this job was provisional. I had anxiety attacks that made me nervous, sad, and depressed. In fact, I had stopped taking antidepressants. I didn't want to take pills anymore. I kept moving forward with certain discussions with Mariluz because we were working with her family. Then, my mother died in Venezuela and I couldn't see her. I said goodbye to her on the phone. I recognize that it was the most difficult moment that I have had to live in life. My mother gave everything to me. She is the reason I am the responsible and educated person that I am today, and I owe it to her. Thank you, mother. God take care of you and have you in his glory.

A year after starting to work, I decided to let go of all the weight that dragged me down. I put love and will to work. This is how everything became easier and more pleasant for me. I learned that life has to do with the human will and the decision to leave behind the circumstances that hurt you. Today, I can say that I have faith in the future, without analyzing it too much, so as not to relapse again. I have a heart full of dreams and a mind full of ideas in relation to what God and life holds for me. It is worth clarifying that when someone gets sick with any of these mental illnesses, the family also gets sick. Anxiety did not leave forever. Sometimes she shows up to greet me, but I have learned to accept her and deal with her.

To end this brief journey through part of my life, I would like to thank my precious wife Mariluz Canizo, my dearest daughter Sara Isabel de León Canizo, my beloved mother Odaly Beaumont, my dear sister Hilda Teresa de León B., my brother-in-law Danilo Soto, my brother Alejandro de León B, my sister Lily de León B, my dear friend Oscar Ledezma, my dear friend Andres Lares, my dear friend John Miro, and my therapist Miriam Casique.

~ *Miguel Angel de Leon Beaumont*
Delaware Career Center

Choice

Pain's a strange thing.
Somehow it can both invoke growth and
give birth to self-destruction at the same time.
Leaving it up to our perception of it
to discern which we allow in our lives.
Because of pain we envy those who can grow
or have learned to tolerate it.
"The Strong," as we commonly know them,
inspire us to keep going and stay grounded.
But then there are those we ignore;
those who fade away when the hurting becomes too much;
like a single flame in a hurricane, they flicker till extinguished.

"The Weak," they've become white noise to us.
Noise that consistently grows louder with every passing second.
So, what's your choice?
How will you let what's hurting inside mold you?
Are you a thriver? Or a survivor?
Now I won't lie and say that thriving is easy.
It's a never-ending battle that you choose to fight.
Not for others' sake,
not 'cause someone said to,
but for yourself and all the silent glory that erupts
beneath your battle-scarred skin.
Infusing everything you do with
an untold form of potent passion.

So.....what's your choice?

~ Alexander McNamara
Gallia-Jackson-Vinton JVS

Power of the Pink

The strength of a woman is something you couldn't imagine. The drive, the courage, the beautiful passion.

There's something about a woman who wears her pain well, swell, no time to dwell, being so focused that they forget to exhale.

Breathe, you strong woman, better days are coming, better days are here. Never far, always near.

I see you, strong woman. Fighting those silent battles, crying on the inside, feeling like you're about to shatter.

Hold on, strong woman, you have a purpose to live, to give, to be, to testify how God has set you free.

I acknowledge you, strong woman, the power of the pink, the graciousness you hold, the amazing way you think.

I hear you strong woman, and you are NOT ALONE. Together we stand, one band, one sound, lifting each other up, so you will NEVER HIT THE GROUND.

SO I STAND WITH YOU, STRONG WOMAN. GOD IS WITH YOU, STRONG WOMAN.

Lift your head UP, stick your chest out.

BE PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE, THAT GOLDEN, SHINING STAR.

I LOVE YOU, STRONG WOMAN. A STRONG WOMAN IS WHO YOU ARE!

~ Chalisa Rocker
Penta County Vocational School

Always Positive

Positive, that is what I always try to be. Sometimes terrible things happen to me, but I want to find positive outlooks on every occasion. It helps me a lot, especially in an unexpected crisis such as the pandemic.

In the beginning of the pandemic, my daily life was completely changed, and I had to stay home. I was worried about getting depressed, so I tried to think differently like, "Oh, it is a great opportunity for me to read many books written in English and improve my reading skill." Also, I could not go to have my hair cut at the salon due to the restriction. So I decided that I would keep my hair as long as possible and donate it for kids who lost their hair because of diseases.

In reality, I have not always been a very positive person. It happened when I had just graduated from college, got a job, and started to work. In a careless car accident, I was seriously injured. I still cannot remember what exactly happened then. When I recovered consciousness, I was lying on a bed at the ER. At first, I didn't take it very seriously because I believed that I would be able to recover after my surgeries, but I did not. The doctor told me that I could recover, but not fully. Some aftereffects would remain with my right leg, so I would never be able to run or play sports. Also, in the future, I might need to have another surgery to replace my joint with an artificial one. The truth devastated me. Before the accident, I was perfectly healthy and tough, and I was kind of arrogant to think that I could do everything on my own. I had never thought about being physically disabled. I was totally broken and just lying on the bed for weeks.

However, a few weeks later, I suddenly realized that I was lucky to be alive. Although I lost some physical abilities, I still had a future. That was the moment I converted my point of view. I tried to be positive and find what I still had, not thinking about what I lost because it was useless to resent what I could not change. Furthermore, I realized that there were quite a few people with

disabilities. Despite their disabilities, they were trying hard to improve themselves and society. I would be able to do many things like them, why not? I also found that people around me were kind and willing to help me. I thanked them from the bottom of my heart. In those ways, I tried to find many positive aspects in my life.

I learned a lot from my terrible experience, and I can say that I like myself better than before the accident. If you convert to a positive mindset, your life will change. Life will be more interesting and wonderful for all of us if we are able to keep positive attitudes.

*~ Tam Ogura
Delaware Career Center*

Budding Memories

Sally's Caring Legacy

Sally loves to care for people. She came from a humble family; her parents were not wealthy. Her father was a cabinetmaker, and her mother was a tailor. They raised Sally and her siblings to care for others.

Sally's parents used to share with their community. Her mother always had extra dishes of food to give to the neighbors. People could stop by their home to ask about food, other care, and good advice. Her parents were very focused on people's well-being. Her parents saved money to buy food supplies and clothing to send to their village where people were most needy. Sally grew up with the spirit of sharing despite the meager resources of her parents.

She had a chance to be educated, finish college, and become a teacher. Sally inherited from her parents the kindness and good care of the others. She always dreamed about doing a job that would keep her close to people. Being a teacher was a blessing. She was very involved in her students' well-being and always available to help them.

Sally got married and had four kids. She raised her kids with the same spirit as her parents did. She had a positive influence on her community, Sally was always helping people by donating food and clothing and caring about others.

As a teacher, Sally was always affected by seeing some kids on their first day at school without a book pack. Some kids would spend a whole month without school supplies. It was heartbreaking for Sally. In Sally's country, many people struggled to buy school supplies for their kids and some people could not buy them until two weeks after the school opened. Sally and her husband bought school supplies to give to the children in their neighborhood and also those they met on their way to school. Her kids used to actively participate.

Sally always helped people without expecting something in return. Her husband and kids were big supporters for her devotion to donating. Sally got the nickname of “Modern Mother Theresa” because she always gave clothes, food, and cash. Her four children are involved now, and financially, their dream is to continue their mother’s legacy. Sally loves to see smiles on people’s faces, especially the kids.

~ *Aicha Soumah*
Godman Guild

My Love, My Destiny

Two women were pregnant in April of 1992. One of those women was born in a rural area of Fergana, Uzbekistan and knew nothing about the city. The other woman was born in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, to a wealthy family and grew up without any difficulties in life. This woman did not want to have another baby and thought early about having an abortion. Her neighbor said to her, "give me the baby, I will raise it as if it was my own, no matter if it is a boy or a girl, no matter how it is born." She agreed and on April 23, 1992, the love I was destined to have was born.

On April 17, 1992, I was born. I was a long-awaited baby for the family. I had a very large family, and they were all delighted. Everyone raised me, caressed me, and took care of me with great love. Despite the fact that I was young, my aunts took me to various parties and proms. I grew up to be a very stubborn girl who could do anything I wanted.

My family and I moved to Tashkent when I was five years old. That is when I met a five-year-old boy in kindergarten class. Even though we fought a lot, pulled each other's hair and scratched each other's faces, I still liked him. We entertained each other with sweets, always taking pictures next to each other. Even then, he always said to my mother, "I want to marry your daughter someday." As difficult it is to remember things as a child, I still remember him saying that I was his wife. He always protected me from others.

After kindergarten, we started studying at different schools. We would sometimes see each other on the street and talk a little. I didn't see him for a long time once I turned 11 years old. I remember wondering if a little girl could have so much love, just like adults? I had a picture of us. I missed him so often I would hug the picture of us together. This picture would make me remember him more clearly and miss him even more.

Five years later, when I was 16 years old, he came to my school to see me. It was the last day of school. I will never forget this day! If he hadn't come that day I probably would never have seen him again. I gave him my phone number. We stayed up talking for hours, from night until morning. He told me he couldn't stop thinking about me and he always missed me. I felt God had given me back the love I had been waiting for and dreaming about. Three months later he gave me a ring and we got engaged. Those were the happiest days of my life.

We got married four years later and now have two sons. I believe I was born for him and he was born for me. My mother was born in a rural village. His mother was born in a capital city, unsure of keeping her pregnancy. But we were born in the same year and the same month, brought together by school and then separated by it, and then brought back together by it years later when he came to see me there. I don't think I can doubt my love was my destiny.

*~ Kamolatkhon Tuychieva
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

My Daughter, My Interpreter

Two years ago, my family came to America from the DRC. My spouse and daughters were excited to see the new country, the different meals, and the new culture. The first week of school, my daughter told me, “Daddy, don’t return to Africa.”

Being in America is not easy because I have to sleep during the day. Every night I go to work, sometimes six or seven days a week. I work 12 hours at a time. I need to go to college but my English is not good. Now I am taking classes at Great Oaks ESOL in Cincinnati, Ohio. Every day I do homework, and sometimes I use Google or ask my oldest daughter to help. She is my interpreter if someone calls me on the phone or if I go somewhere. Her name is Majoie and she is 14 years old. Majoie means “my joy.”

One day I called the doctor’s office to refill my medicine, but I didn’t understand the English from the receptionist. So I called my first daughter Majoie to help. She interpreted everything for me. Though my first difficulty in the United States is the language and the culture, the American people are sympathetic and friendly.

I’m happy to have my family in America but sad we are still apart from our whole family. Now I have the goal of learning a new language.

~ *Jean-Papy Biakudia*
Great Oaks Career Campuses

To My Love

From the first day to today
time has passed. I still
feel the same today as the first day.
Every heartbeat reminds me of your
love today, as it did the first day.
And so it shall be forever still the same
forever yours, my love.

*~ Pauline Kalu Mukaya
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

A Mother, A Heroine

In African society they say that a woman, especially a widowed woman, cannot raise children alone without the help of a man. But my mother, Julia Nchama, is an extraordinary woman who defied cultural beliefs with determination. She is a virtuous woman, capable of transforming graves into gardens.

My mother was 42 years old when my father passed away in 1992. I lived on the west coast of Central Africa in Equatorial Guinea at this time. At only 42, she faced the challenge of providing education and caring for her six beloved children including the youngest, who was just two years old. She decided not to marry again, a decision that I still don't understand to this day.

I never saw her take a nap; I don't think my mother knew what one was. She never even slept for more than 8 hours. She woke up early and cooked donuts, brown beans, and spaghetti to sell. I was able to help her after school. It was a blessing that we lived two meters from a student complex. In this way, she earned money so that we could cover our expenses including our studies, by God's mercy. This has been my mother's routine for three decades.

I remember a phrase that she always told us when we had devotionals. "I am going to fight to get you ahead!" Based on effort and sacrifice, a life of work, including sleepless nights and many illnesses which cost her health, she still smiles as she has achieved her life-long dream. Her six children are amazing people, honorable with many professions. And all this was done because a mother's love and a woman's determination are beyond what one can imagine.

~ Maria Asuncion Manana
Great Oaks Career Campuses

An Hour with Nona

If I were able to take an hour and spend it with whomever I wanted, only one person comes to mind. Frances Yolanda Croce, whose maiden name was Stabile, was my grandmother. Known to the family as Nona, which means "grandmother" in Italian, she was notorious for lighting up any and every room with laughter and joy.

I would like to imagine the hour being like the many we spent together. First, she would make a delicious cup of coffee accompanied with some sweet Italian pastries. With Frank Sinatra playing in the background, we would play cards as I listened and took mental notes on the wisdom of life she would share with me. She always said that laughter is the best way to pass the time and always the best medicine. To conclude the hour, we would swap funny stories and riddle the atmosphere with giggles and our love for one another. To top it all off, we would start snapping our fingers to some classic tunes and have at least one dance before we would say farewell with a hug and the famous pinch on the cheek from Nona.

*~ Camille C. Croce
Auburn Career Center*

Last Day of Life

This day is one that I can't forget. On this day my grandma died. She was on my father's side. I was 31 years old, married and had two little children. That day I was at home with my youngest son, he was seven months old, so I did not work. My husband was away, and my elder son was in the kindergarten. My husband and I lived near my parents' house. Closer to dinner time, I decided to go to my mother's house. It was January. It was snowing outside, so I wrapped my son in a warm baby blanket and put him in a baby stroller. I also put on a warm coat and a winter hat.

When I entered my parents' house with my son, my mother met us. She hugged me, took my son in her arms, and kissed him on both cheeks, and then told me, "Your father brought your grandmother here this morning. She wants to live with us now. She doesn't want to return to her house." I was shocked! And I asked, "Why?" My mother answered me, "I don't know what happened, but she is very upset. Please, go to her. She is in a living room, sitting by the window. Leave the baby with me; go and talk to your grandmother."

I entered a living room. My grandmother sat in an armchair and looked out the window into the yard. I went up to her, hugged her, and kissed her on both cheeks. She smiled, then looked out the window again. I said, "Look, how beautiful it is in the yard now; it is snowing, the ground and trees are covered with white snow."

I sat down next to my grandmother and took her hands in mine. Then I asked her, "Grandma, what's wrong? Tell me, what happened?" She started to cry, then she said, "Why are they doing this to me.....? When your grandpa was alive, they treated me well. Only one year after grandpa died, my son and his wife and children began to treat me badly! Your grandpa left the house and all his property to them; he bequeathed everything to them!" She sighed and said, "I won't go back to my house. I will live in the house of my eldest son, in the house of your father!"

I began to reassure my grandmother, asking her not to cry anymore! When she stopped crying, we both started looking out the window. It was really beautiful in the yard. It was snowing. After dinner I returned home. Late in the evening my younger brother came to my house. He lived with my parents together, and he said that my grandmother's blood pressure had risen sharply one hour ago, but the doctor did not have time to help her! She died!

I was shocked, sad, and couldn't believe that. I was with her today. Why had she left us? She wanted to live in my father's house. I spent all night and days to come crying and thinking "Why grandma?"

That day was the last day of her life.

~ *Shahodat Bozorova*
Great Oaks Career Campuses

My Wish for 2022

In 2022, I hope everybody will be more empathetic and care for each other more. Now no one respects each other's life. I want there to be more gun control, even by the police. They especially need to be more careful using guns. It isn't fair that another family loses a kid or other family member due to a lack of gun control. The same problem happens with shootings at schools, universities, and churches. I'm not a psychologist or mother; I'm just a human worried about the world my nephews and other kids will live in.

Something else that bothers me is the bullying and lack of acceptance for other races, ethnicities, religions, and sexual preferences. We need to be more respectful of people and understand that God gives us free will. In my opinion, here are some suggestions that will be helpful.

First, parents need to use good communication at home, and ask their children about their days at school. For example, they should take time to hear how their school day was and find out if something new happened to them. Second, parents should teach their children to pray. For example, they should take their children to church and introduce them to the life of God. It doesn't matter what religion you practice.

Third, parents should control the time children spend on video games, TV, and computers. For example, if they use these devices only after they finish their homework, they will start to manage their time and learn how to be responsible. Fourth, they should teach their children to be reliable, honest, and loyal. That will help them to be successful adults. Fifth, they need to talk to their girls and boys about drugs, smoking and alcohol, and the damage that can cause if they use them irresponsibly.

Sixth, parents must talk to the girls and boys about immature youth engaging in sex. That can have consequences if they don't act responsibly. Kids need to be responsible. For if they

aren't, they could have an unwanted pregnancy or get a sexually transmitted disease.

In conclusion, respecting and communicating well is the best way to live and create a happy society. This is my humble opinion.

*~Angela Suriel Abreu
Delaware Career Center*

The Turning Point in My Life

In 2001, I got married. Due to my marriage, I now have four great parents, not just two. I have learned a lot of things from them. From my parents-in-law, I have learned about having a positive attitude and cheerfulness. From my parents, I have learned about honesty and patience.

In 2003 and 2005, I became a mother of two children. They created in me a lot of emotions that I felt for the very first time, and watching them grow has been a very happy time for me! It has been a busy but fulfilling time, and I have come to realize the greatness of my parents.

In 2016, I came to the United States due to my husband's work. I was surprised and anxious about the sudden change. However, through my husband's dedicated support, positive attitude, and cheerfulness, my fears soon disappeared. And even now, he continually strives to challenge himself to reach his goals. I have a great deal of respect and gratitude for him. I hope to continually support him with honesty and patience.

What we gained from our parents, my husband and I have passed on to our two children. Our son has inherited a positive attitude and cheerfulness, and our daughter has inherited patience and honesty. They are trying to adjust to life in the United States while enjoying this experience. I am proud of them and would like to continue to watch over them and provide guidance.

It is now 2022, and I don't know what the future holds yet. However, I would like to move forward to courageously face my future without stopping.

~ Ayano Shoda
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Fertilizing Thoughts

The Beauty of Spring

Spring is here, and the birds are active. The cool, gentle breeze rushed through the trees as the chirps of song birds filled the air. My kids are eagerly waiting to go to a park. It had been a long wait throughout the winter. Surprising them...I took them to nearby waterfalls one evening.

We were out to drop off books in the library. I slowly took back the vehicle and started. My daughter asked me, "Mom, can we go play somewhere?"

"No dear. You have to complete your homework," I exclaimed. She was saddened. "Hey, sweetie, are you ok?" I asked.

"Yes Mom," she said miserably.

My kids had no clue that we were going to the waterfalls. I stopped in the parking lot, and it was not too populated.

"Yay! We are going to the waterfalls!" Both my kids jumped out of their seats. They exclaimed with wonder looking at the place.

We started walking in the small trail to the park. We could hear the soothing sounds of the water flowing in a small stream. The place was composed, and the water was a warm bluish-green color. We came upon a dark and firm bridge, and as we walked across it we could see the stream that led to the waterfall below. My kids ran down the bridge and rushed towards the cascading waterfalls. The smooth sound of water free flowing by the river rocks was relaxing. Kids began climbing up and down the rocks across the river.

It was fun to watch the squirrels playing and chasing in the trees nearby. My son fed them with some nuts we brought. We spent the rest of day there, and after all, we were exhausted. What a day!

“This was a good evening, Mom,” said my daughter.

~ *Sudha Yeleswarapu*
Godman Guild

One of Our Winter Break Trips

I came to America from Japan about 6 years ago because of my husband's work. My daughter was three and a half years old and hadn't mastered Japanese completely, so I spent everyday teaching Japanese and simple English words to my daughter.

In the winter of the second year, after we had come to the United States, we planned to go to Key West. If we used the airplane, we could arrive there fast, but it costs a lot of money, so we decided to go there by car. But Key West is very far from Ohio so we stopped in Atlanta, Orlando and Miami. Not to let my daughter get bored, I planned to eat sushi in Atlanta and to go to Disney World in Orlando because I expected it to take about 9-10 hour per day driving.

On the first day, my daughter was very excited to arrive in Atlanta because there was an interesting sushi restaurant where sushi plates came to us on the conveyor to our seats. She asked me several times, "Mom, it isn't bento box sushi, is it?"

"No, it is a circle sushi restaurant that you liked in Japan," I answered. The restaurant had a game for every 5 plates of sushi we ate, so finally we ate 25 plates for her favorite game.

On the morning of second day, my daughter said, "I don't want to eat breakfast because my stomach is not good." I thought it was due to eating too much sushi but she also started coughing. She didn't have a fever and looked fine, so we started to drive to Orlando and watched her for a while. We didn't have any trouble and slept early to prepare for the next day.

The third and fourth days were in Disney World. My daughter felt good and enjoyed the park but she didn't eat much because her stomach still felt bad. On the second day of Disney World, after finishing the Frozen ride and meeting with the princess that she was looking forward to the most, she fell asleep early and woke at midnight. She ate a few apples and fell asleep again.

The next morning, we left Orlando, but as we drove to Miami, my daughter vomited every time she ate something. We looked for urgent care, but it was not easy to find because of the holiday season. Finally I found one in the shopping mall where all stores were closed. The doctor didn't know what had happened to my daughter, but thanks to the medicine the doctor prescribed, my daughter recovered quickly! I'm just thankful to the doctors who worked at the hospital during those times.

After that we arrived at the Seven Mile Bridge and Key West. It was different from the pamphlet I saw. The city was full of driftwood and the sea was also muddy. This was due to the impact of a big hurricane that came in the summer. We couldn't see the beautiful blue ocean but we enjoyed searching for shells around the beach and walking the island.

I didn't like the taste of fresh coconut juice, but the pineapple juice was very delicious!

The next day, we went back to Orlando and arrived late at night. We were shocked because our hotel was not booked for us! It was the holiday season, so the hotel was fully booked. My daughter was so exhausted, she slept in the hotel lobby while my husband called a hotel nearby. We checked in at midnight. I was very tired so I wanted to sleep soon, but the bathroom was broken. We had to wait a long time for repairs.

We have visited various place in the United States, but it seems we always have some trouble. But in the end, we made fun memories.

~ *Mayumi Kameyama*
Godman Guild

Trust

Trust, to me, is white roses
being handed by the person I love.
It's walking through a flowery field with a picnic basket with my
favorite food –
 the “everything sandwich”
while the sun shines on my face and light reflects off my dress.
I smile.
Today is a great day, I tell myself as I put my basket down.
The beautiful scenery catches my eyes.
Wow, the world made something beautiful!

~ Ashley Rivera
Cuyahoga County Public Library

A Trip to Egypt

If you are planning to go to Egypt, you have to make sure you do a few things to make it an enjoyable trip. I would suggest going during the winter because Egypt is too hot in the summer. When you visit Egypt, you will see Pharaonic, Romanian, Coptic, and Islamic historical monuments. If you visit Egypt for one week, you will not be able to see all the beautiful places that await. The most important place to visit is the Pyramid of Giza. You can also go to the Luxor Temple. It is one of the largest temples in existence. In Egypt, the people are very friendly. The food there is delicious. You can try the most famous Egyptian dish, Kochari. There is another famous dish called Molokai. Before you leave Egypt, don't forget to take a cruise on the Nile, which is the largest river in the world. In Egypt you will be surprised when you see most of the shops are open 24/7. In conclusion, this trip will be one of the best decisions you will make in your life.

*~ Enas Ismail
Delaware Career Center*

Advice for Visiting Palestine

There is a lot of advice when anyone plans a vacation to Palestine. First, you should make sure to carry cash because the credit card system is not available to use in the markets, stores, and most popular shopping places. In addition, you must wear comfortable clothes and shoes, and do not forget your hat.

Second, I recommend you visit historical and holy places such as Al Aqsa Mosque, the Church of Nativity in the city of Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity in the city of Bethlehem, Hisham's Palace from the Umayyad period, and the Dead Sea in the city of Jericho. This city is the lowest land below sea level in the world, so you must chew gum so that you do not feel pressure in your ears when entering this city.

Finally, add in your plan to visit several beautiful places in Tabariya Lake because it has very stunning views and is a peaceful place. This lake is continuously provided with water from the Jordan River. From there, visit Haifa city, which is called "the sea bride," located on the Mediterranean Sea. To summarize, you should visit my country Palestine.

~ Sameera Tamimi
Delaware Career Center

My Favorite Thing

My favorite thing is enjoying the seasons in the great outdoors. Each season has its own beauty and fosters opportunities for open-air pursuits. Coupled with my hobby in photography, the seasons create warm remembrances.

I admire winter's whites and grays. They're the perfect backdrops for quiet landscapes of untouched snow and frisky wildlife at play. They heighten the glow of holiday lights. Likewise, winter is great for bundling up and playing in the snow. My children and I enjoy sledding down hills, brawling with snowballs, and shaping snow figures.

Spring brings a re-birth of nature. I photograph my children among blossoming flowers. Pastel pinks and pale greens provide a wonderful palette for happy, smiling faces. As well, colorful birds and young animals animate my photos. It's the anticipated opener to summer.

With nature in full bloom, summer is my favorite season. Bright colored flowers are mixed among abundant greenery. Further, my family enjoys summer recreations: playing in the water, trekking through the zoo, cheering at ballgames, or exploring in nature parks. Additionally, we love pool parties and cook-outs with family and friends. Summer's sun-kissed days provide these pastimes.

To me, autumn represents crackling bonfires and crisp nights under the stars. Crimson and gold leaves are magnificent props in photos of my children. Besides, my kids enjoy jumping into leaf piles.

The seasons weave our lives into nature. They add texture and color to our daily routines. My life is enriched by the great outdoors and, through the seasons, filled with happy memories of time spent with family and friends.

~ Taylor Jewel
Penta County Vocational School

True Friendship

One sunny day, a butterfly flew around a beautiful flower. Her name was Lisa. The flower smelled good and looked nice. She wanted to get down into the flower, but a ladybug was already in the flower.

Lisa said, "Hi, can I get down there?"

The ladybug said, "No! Who are you? I've not seen you!"

She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm Lisa. Can I ask your name?"

The ladybug unavoidably answered, "I'm Jun."

Lisa asked him, "Jun, do you often come to this area?"

He said, "It's the first time. Leave me alone!"

She thought for a moment and said, "We can spend time together."

He said annoyed, "What?"

She said, "I like flowers and their nectar. You like aphids, don't you?"

He said, "What do you want to say?"

She smiled. "We are not enemies. We can spend time together!"

He thought a little and smiled, too. "...I see."

Then, they spent time together. She had nectar, and he had aphids. They flew from flower to flower. She asked him, "Do you have friends or family?"

He said, "Nobody."

She said, "Me neither!"

When they were in a flower, she said to him, “Ants, aphids, and bees have communities. But we don’t have them. Do you know what that means?”

He was silent. He didn’t understand that. She told him, “It doesn’t matter if we look different. We can get along well even if we are different.”

He said, “I agree. Thank you for becoming friends.”

They were both smiling.

*~ Yuki Iijima
Godman Guild*

Water Is the Source of Life

What would you do if the water in your home was suddenly turned off? Most people do not appreciate how important water is to their lives. They forget how often they use water each day. Each living thing on Earth needs water in order to survive. In nature, all living things are composed of water including humans, animals, plants, and even insects. Up to 60% of the adult human body is water. It is an invaluable resource and is the basis of life. Because of its importance to our survival, it is necessary to ensure plentiful and safe sources of water for all people.

About 97% of all water on Earth is found in the world's oceans, and the rest is found in glaciers, rivers, lakes, the atmosphere, and underground. However, clean and safe water in some places is scarce due to poor irrigation practices, pollution, and climate change. An example of this is the Aral Sea in Central Asia which has personal significance for me. When I was a child, we used to drink canal water in the village. At that time, the canal water was clean and potable. Due to the drying up of the Aral Sea, the canal water has become very salty and unfit for drinking. In addition, it has become very polluted with fertilizers and pesticides. For this reason, people have stopped drinking the canal water, and the health of people living around the Aral Sea has been impacted. The population no longer gets a good harvest from the land. People have also developed illnesses due to the contaminated water and dusty air created by the dry lakebed.

Unfortunately, many other sources of water besides the Aral Sea that have similar problems. Millions of people around the world die each year due to poor sanitation and an inadequate supply of safe and clean water. Drinking impure water can lead to many possible health problems and diseases. The diseases can come in many forms including bacteria, a virus, or a parasite. All are the result of dirty water. The main disease caused by impure water is diarrhea. It can be a disease itself as well as a symptom of other waterborne illnesses including Salmonella, cholera, and dysentery. Diarrhea causes infections in the body and will lead to

dehydration. If left untreated, a person will usually die within a few days. These diseases can be prevented by using clean, safe water and proper sanitation.

In conclusion, there is no life without water. Therefore, we should not waste or pollute water. Maintaining and preserving our water resources should be a priority of everyone.

~ Zebo Jumaboeva
Great Oaks Career Campuses

You Are My Sunshine

Kay started singing again, while lying in the yard looking at the clouds with her daughter. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine."

"Mommy?" interrupted Suzie questioningly.

"Yes my love?"

Suzie smiled, "Why do you sing us that song so much?"

With a grin on her face Kay happily explained for what felt like the millionth time "When you and your sisters came along mommy was always sad, mommy was dark and lonely, mommy had no one and felt no love. Then mommy felt you kick for the first time. From that moment on mommy was always happy, mommy was no longer alone, mommy had you girls, and I had started to feel so much love! I was scared but you beautiful girls had shown me the light, and I knew I could do this crazy thing called life now. Just like how when a sunflower is down the bright sun shines and the sunflower is up and beautiful again. Mommy is the sunflower and you and your sisters are the sun, baby girl."

Suzie smiled "I love that story." That's when Suzie and Kay heard the screen door slam and Suzie's sisters Lea and A.J. came happily running out of the house.

"It's time to water the flowers!" they yelled in sync with each other.

Kay smiled and stood up while helping Suzie up. "Okay babies," she replied with a huge smile on her face.

They all went to their garden where Kay had planted 3 beautiful sunflowers, one for each of her beautiful daughters. While they watered the flowers like they had done every day for the past year, Kay admired the beauty in her children, especially in the sunlight where they seemed to glow and look angelic.

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine” they all started to sing together as they did every time they watered the flowers. Kay smiled and happily thought to herself about how happy her life was now, since her daughters had come along.

~ *Clotella Baldwin*
Springfield City Board of Education

Pruning Consciousness

Innocent Boy

This is the true story of an 11-year-old named George*. It took place in 1944 in South Carolina before the end of World War II.

In this year of war, the bodies of two young girls were found in a pit, next to an area where the Black community lived. The bodies of the two girls showed no trace of sexual aggression. After an investigation, little George and his 17-year-old brother were arrested and imprisoned unjustly. George's brother was released but George was found guilty of the murder of the two girls.

During the interrogation of several hours, they deprived George of food and the bathroom. The judgment of his guilt was made quickly, in 10 short minutes, without a good lawyer or the presence of his parents or any of the Black community. George was declared the murderer, and news spread quickly through the town. George's father and mother lost their jobs. George was executed in the electric chair a few days later without appeal.

In 2014, two lawyers revisited George's case. They proved that George was innocent. Finally, evidence showed that the son of a rich and powerful man of the same city took the life of the two girls.

George was the youngest person in history to be sentenced to death. George died an innocent boy. The only thing he was guilty of was having black skin.

~ *Abdourahamane Fofana*
Delaware Career Center

* George Stinney. Say Their Names - Spotlight at Stanford. (2020, August 6). Retrieved June 7, 2022, from <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/saytheirnames/feature/george-stinney-jr>

The Kidnapping

My eyes slowly opened - everything was blurry. My head was banging, and I had an excruciating headache. I sat up at the edge of the bed. Something felt wrong. I looked around the room, but nothing seemed unusual. Then I analyzed the room again and realized something was definitely off, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I examined it once more and my heart dropped.... this was not my room!

"Where am I?" I thought to myself. I ran to the door to see if I could open it, but it was locked. I banged on the door and yelled for help. No one came, so I yelled for help a second time. I heard footsteps approaching the door. I slowly backed up and stumbled onto the floor. I looked up and a tall pale man with a scar on his left eyebrow was standing over me. I sat up. "Who are you?" I asked. He just silently stood there. He handed me pictures of him and a lady who looked a lot like me. "Your husband," he responded. "This isn't me! I don't even know who you are!" I said. Ignoring me, he walked out and locked the door behind him.

I looked around the room to see if I could find anything to escape with. In the closet hidden in the back top shelf, I found an old and dusty box with pictures of me and a newspaper from 5 years ago saying that I was missing. "15 Year Old Kierra Johnson Missing!" is what the headline said. Five years ago, I had run away from home because my stepmom treated me like trash. My dad was in the hospital most of the time, so he never knew or could do anything about it. "This guy has been stalking me for years," I said to myself.

I heard him approaching the door, so I hurried and put everything back where I found it and sat on the bed. He walked into the room and held up a bright red dress. It looked very old. "Put this on!" he demanded. I grabbed the dress and started getting undressed, then I noticed that the door was ajar. I quickly grabbed the lamp on the nightstand, hit him with it, and ran up the stairs to another door. It was locked.

The man got up and followed me. He grabbed me by my leg and dragged me down the stairs. "STOP!" I screamed. He violently threw me on the bed. I fought him like a crazed tiger, but he was too strong. He grabbed my hand and broke one of my fingers. The pain was outrageous, and I almost passed out! He threw the dress at me and stalked out. I stood there crying and struggled to put the dress on. I was afraid he would kill me if I didn't do as he commanded. Afterward I lay down on the bed curled up holding my broken finger.

It was about 5 minutes later when he walked back into the room with some hair supplies. He wanted to make me look like the woman in the picture. He started combing my hair out and told me his name was Jeffery Wilson. "How did I even get here?" I asked. He chuckled and said, "I had a friend slip something in your drink last night at the club."

He pulled out the straight iron and plugged it in. Once it was hot, he sat it back down. I grabbed it and burned his eyes with it, then threw the nightstand at him. I snatched up his keys, found the key for the first door, and unlocked it. He was starting to get back up after he passed out. I raced up the stairs to the last door but struggled to find the key for that door. I finally found it and stumbled out. I ran to look for a way to get out of the house. All of the doors were locked from the inside, and I didn't have time to look for the keys. So I climbed out of the window and ran as fast as I could.

He was getting close. I tried to stop the car that was about to pass me, but it kept going. The next car that came up stopped and let me in. "GO!" I yelled. I gave the driver the address of my best friend's house and he drove me there. I ran up to her sitting on the porch and told her everything that happened.

"Who was the man?" she asked. "He told me his name was Jeffery Wilson," I replied. She sat there in silence with a look of shock on her face. "Jeffery Wilson died 40 years ago," she said.

Now I know what he is and what he looks like, and I know that he's going to keep coming after me....

*~ Jessica R. Bishop
Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

Why Won't It End?

It happened again.
Another careless man touching my skin.
The breath of death in my ear.
Why won't it end?
Am I a target for them?
Is it really my fault?
Why won't it end?
The voices, the silent cries, and the sleepless nights caused by men.
Why won't it end?
It happened again!
This circle of trauma is my only friend and the only thing that
won't end...

~ Keaira Baxter
Lima City Schools

The Crazy Woman

The Palm is a small coastal town in Mexico. Among so many people living there, I am going to tell you about a couple of youths, Angel and Soledad.

Soledad worked with her mother in a sewing workshop, Family Seams, the family business. At the same time, she was studying to be a designer. She was so happy doing the things that she loved to do.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the town lived a handsome and friendly guy named Angel. He was living with his parents. He was not studying because he did not have enough money to pay for his education. He planned to join the Marines to make money to be a botanist, because he loved trees and plants.

Soledad was working one morning when the door opened and a tall, handsome man entered. "Good morning. Could you help me to fix this suit? It does not fit me," the handsome man asked. "Bum, bum" Soledad's heart started beating so fast. She couldn't speak. She agreed to fix Angel's suit

"Could you give me your name and phone number? I will call you when I finish it," she said.

"Of course," he answered, "My name is Angel."

When Soledad finished fixing Angel's suit, she called him.

"Hello, this is Angel. How can I help you?"

"Hello, Angel. It is Soledad from Family Seams. Your suit is ready."

"Okay, Soledad. I will be there in fifteen minutes."

Angel arrived at Family Seams, and Soledad gave him the suit. Angel didn't leave. They spent all day talking, finally admitting

that they had each fallen in love at first sight. The days passed. One day, Angel received a letter from the Marines. He was accepted and had to join the Marines as soon as possible.

When he explained the situation to Soledad, she cried inconsolably. Angel promised to come back alive and marry her. The day to board the ship came. Angel was so excited, but his happiness was not complete because he was leaving behind the love of his life. Suddenly, Soledad arrived, running toward the port, to say goodbye and wish her love good luck. "I will come to the port every morning to see if your boat has arrived."

"You are exaggerating, just wait for me. You do not need to come here every morning. I promise that I will come back to you," Angel answered. Then, he gave her a tight hug and kissed her cheek.

She started to cry as he left and sat there until she lost sight of the boat. She returned to her home so sad. Soledad's mother was worried about her daughter's behavior. Soledad spent all her time visiting the port and making her dress for the wedding.

Time passed and there was no news from Angel and his crew. Soledad started to get depressed; her sadness was as deep as the waters of the ocean. One day a rumor spread through the town--his boat had wrecked. When Soledad heard it, her grieved mind began to confuse reality with fantasy.

Each day as the sun was setting, Soledad arrived at the port wearing her beautiful long white dress with a v-shaped neckline that made her look divine. She stood by the side of the dock. Her eyes were looking to the horizon, hoping to see her love come back. The years passed; her hair started to look white like a cloud. There were wrinkles by her eyes, but she still looked beautiful, wearing her white dress. Her mother, who cared for Soledad, got sick and one day passed away, leaving her alone. But in the confused mind of Soledad, the time has not passed. She was still waiting for her love, Angel.

The people of the village named her, “The crazy woman with the white dress.” They even tried to put her in a mental hospital, but this plan was not successful. During the nights the moon looked at her, standing by the dock, waiting for her love. The moon felt compassion for her and decided to illuminate her nights and accompanied her in her waiting. During the day, the sun saw her standing in the same place. “Poor woman. Such a long time waiting there. I feel so bad for her. I will try not to touch her too much, not to cause damage to her skin,” the sun said.

One cold night, Soledad was in the same place waiting for her love. She was tired and her body was getting cold. She started to shake. Her heart started to beat more slowly, and suddenly she saw a bright light in the water coming straight to her. She could not believe her eyes. Angel was there holding out his hand and calling her. “Come with me. I promise I will never leave you alone again.”

Soledad took his hand, and they walked together across the water and disappeared into the horizon. The moon and sun watched them, both crying, sighing, and wishing them happiness. The next morning the body of Soledad was found reclined on the sand next to the dock, with her hand stretched out in the direction to the sea. Her ashes were thrown in the sea, because the sea took away the love of her life. What the people didn’t know was that the crazy woman with the white dress was with her love again, never to be separated.

~ *Maria del Carmen Ochoa*
Godman Guild

The Tallest Abyss

I stand alone in this overcrowded street
Walking around trying not to wander
I stop in my spot and I plant my feet
Noticing small businesses and how they launder

Realization hits me and I start to think
There is no way out. I am simply stuck, and I am damned
But I must not succumb to a pack or a drink
I must choose another path unlike the programmed

I try to stay in my bubble away from the people walked over like rugs
And I will not fall for what they call bliss
I wake up in my bed that my nightstand dresser hugs
And the answer is clear--do not fall into the tallest abyss

~ Bjorn G. Hesselring
Penta County Vocational School

A Scary and Confusing Situation

My niece is 8 years old. She lives in New York. One day, my mom called me and said that a social worker came to the house. My niece had told the teacher that her grandma and her mom hit her. The social worker checked all three children's bodies, took photos, and asked them questions one by one. I believe they wouldn't hurt any children. My mom said, "I won't hurt my grandchild." She loves them. I understood there are a lot of different laws between China and America. Also there are differences in education and culture.

My niece is a little naughty and dramatic. She is the middle child in her family. My sister-in-law told me that she was shocked by this situation. She was confused when the social worker came. I believe all parents give a little tap to the child for correction when the child doesn't listen or follow the rules. In my country, even since ancient times, these are normal procedures.

Certainly, the child protection department could protect children who have been abused or hurt by their guardian or other people. I am thankful no charges were filed against my mom or my sister-in-law. Since we are in the United States, we must follow the rules. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. The scary and confusing situation turned out okay in the end.

*~ Meihua Ren
Wayne County JVS*

Transplanting Knowledge

My Mexico, My America

Mexico, I miss you.
I miss your food, your music.
I want to return
smell your land
and see my family.
I miss playing in the park.
Every night I dream of returning
to my Mexico.
I have a deep affection for your culture.
I am happy for you, Mexico.
You are a great country.
Guadalajara Jalisco
My city, my state.

I have a fondness for America
because it is a country of opportunities.
I delight in the language.
The people are very warm.
I thank God for giving me
the chance to come
to this country
where I know how to work
and develop as a person.
I love you, America
and the children I have
will be great in this country.
Cincinnati, Ohio
my new city and state,
you are amazing.

~ *Sonia Huerta*
Great Oaks Career Campuses

A New Life Started...

I was born in Morocco into a big family with 5 siblings. I have three sisters, one brother, and my parents. I lived a simple and beautiful life with my family who loved each other.

In 2015, I got my high school diploma. I studied two more years and got a diploma in Business Management. After that, my life changed forever when I realized a dream I had never thought would come true. This dream was living in America. It all started when I met my husband, who is from the United States. We loved each other, and we got married. We had a beautiful traditional Moroccan wedding. The wedding started at nine o'clock in the evening and ended at seven o'clock the next day.

After our wedding, I was to move to the US with my husband. I waited impatiently to get my visa delivered. I was excited for this new beginning but at the same time, I was sad because I was leaving my country, my family, and my friends to go to a new country, a new life, and an unknown fate for me.

Finally, the promised day came when my husband came to Morocco to take me to our home in Ohio. The trip was tiring and too long, but I loved America so much. The people here are very friendly and always quick to say "Hello" with a big smile. Here, I am living my life with its sweetness and its bitterness, trying to integrate into this amazing country, but it is not easy to live here without speaking much English. It is difficult to become independent myself without English. I always describe English as a "magic key" that can unlock all the doors for me. That is why I decided to learn it. I searched a lot and finally found the place with all the specifications I was looking for. I am very happy with this step that I have taken, and I am very optimistic that I will have good English skills and a good future. I will achieve my dreams in the country of opportunity, America.

*~ Imane El-khaloui
Delaware Career Center*

Coming to America, A Life Changing Journey

If I were to compare my life before and after I came to the United States of America, I would say it is two different worlds. Moving here at the age of nineteen, I never expected my life to take a turn like this.

The changes in my daily routine have been fun and adventurous. As a child growing up in Africa, I did not attend school. Instead, I would wake up early each day and go buy fresh baked bread for my mom and siblings. After a joyful breakfast, I would go to a friend's house until it was time to come back and eat lunch. My mother loved making us eat together even when we were not hungry, so we could share some family time.

When I first came to the U.S. three years ago, I was so nervous even though I was not alone because my dad had already been here for a long time. It was all new to me, and I did not know anyone else besides my dad. I could not speak the language. In addition, I didn't know who to talk to or what to expect of this new world. Then I signed up for English classes. I was excited and nervous at the same time. I told myself that I would focus on my studies and try to learn the language as fast as possible so I could communicate with people, and that is exactly what I did. After a while, I got a job, and months later, I got my driver's license and bought my first car.

Coming to America has changed my life for the better even though I really miss my family and the time we spent together. America has opened its doors to me and given me endless opportunities to take care of myself and my family.

~ Mouhamadou Sow
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Coping with Changes

I would like to change many things in my life, but there are many things that do not depend on me. I'm currently alone here in the United States of America. I had to come against my will due to the insecure political and economic situation in my country.

My family is the biggest and most beautiful thing I have in my life, and they live in Venezuela. I have two children there, a great mother whom I love with all my heart, and seven brothers who have given me many nephews.

In America, I keep myself happy by working as a hair stylist, learning English, exercising, and traveling. One story I can tell you about my work is that I style hair for brides and bridesmaids. They are mostly happy when they leave me. They say, "Thank you Ovilia. I am very happy you have this job in America."

~ Ovilia Landaeta
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Living in a New Country

In 2013, my children and I moved to the United States from Egypt to live with my husband. At first, I was happy to gather my family together and give my children a better education; moreover, I was excited to live in a new country and meet new people. However, after a couple months, I found out that living in another country was a tough experience which involved much challenge and needed much patience to overcome.

As it turned out, nothing happened as I anticipated. My husband had to work a lot to get money for our needs; moreover, not only did my children spend a long time at school, but they also spent much time at work. Furthermore, I had few friends. Therefore, I felt lonely and homesick; I missed spending joyful time with my siblings and my friends. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to adjust to the new country and language. I couldn't speak English to get a job or even to communicate with my neighbors and make friends. I was extremely bored and disappointed. I thought about going back to Egypt many times even if it meant I had to leave my children with their father. Nevertheless, my responsibility towards my family prevented me. I decided to endure and try to adjust to this new life. We decided to move to another home, and that helped me.

One month later, my life became better. We had moved to a new area with neighbors who spoke the same language as me. Then, I had many neighbors who stood side by side with me to learn the language, especially, an Iraqi woman whose name is Shima. One day, she knocked on my door and said, "Good morning, let's go to the library, there is a free ESL class today." At that moment, I was very enthusiastic and optimistic. I began my first step to adapt to the United States. Then, I studied Basic English classes at Columbus State Community College after I had attended a number of free classes. In these classes, there were many people with different ethnicities such as Latino, Asian, African, and Arabian; it was highly amazing. At the end of every class, we had a lunch party. Every student brought a delicious dish that reflected their culture. Moreover, our teacher turned on beautiful songs from

each country, and we enjoyed listening to the music. At the end of the day, she took photos for the whole class.

The most exciting event that made me happy and helped me to continue on my way was an invitation from my Moroccan classmate Nagwa to her baby shower. Everything was from the Moroccan traditions including the furniture, the clothes, the food, and the music. The home was full of colorful flowers with wonderful smells. The food was not only decorated but also luscious. Also, the music sounded festive. There were both American women and immigrant women. We all enjoyed the Moroccan dance, and we taught the American women the Middle Eastern dance.

I was extremely excited and happy, especially, when I saw how the Americans and the immigrants celebrated together as if they were one family. Also, I met a Palestinian woman who told me about her experience in the United States and how she struggled and studied until she became a very successful doctor. She encouraged me to study again and acclimate to the American culture. Suddenly, she said, "You should take the placement test and start a serious study at the college." Her advice encouraged me to go to school.

After that party, I gained a new perspective on my situation. I thought of this as a new beginning and a second chance. I decided to assimilate into American society and become familiar with the English language. I passed the placement test, and I started studying at Columbus State Community College. In addition, I volunteered at the library and at my friend's son's school. I enjoyed volunteering and helping the kids. After that, not only did I have many Arab friends, but I also had friends from everywhere. I felt like I had become a part of this country. Moreover, when I went to Egypt, I was actually looking forward to coming back to the United States. This experience taught me how to view things in a positive way and challenge myself to succeed.

~ Nevin Hassan
Delaware Career Center

One Little Green Card Changed My Life

It's difficult to express how much my life actually changed after coming to the United States of America. Yes, for some, it's not a big change, but for me, it was a tremendous change.

I was born in a small town without many resources, a place where people find it difficult to imagine big change. When I was born, my mom had been hoping for a baby boy, but God gave her a baby girl instead. My mom later gave birth to five more girls as well as one baby girl who died shortly after she was born. Over the years, my mom's busy days of caring for my sisters and me became very challenging because she developed many health problems. These issues strained her relationship with my dad, especially in situations involving family income.

Seeing my mom struggle hurt me a lot, and because I'm the oldest child, I really wanted to help her. Money was always tight. Since my father worked in construction, he could not find work during the winter months. My mom could not work since she had health problems and needed to care for her young daughters. I worked when I could find odd jobs, but the money I earned was not much. With the limited amount of money we had, we often bought vegetables or rice to feed our family. Sometimes, we bought flour to make bread. All this time, I hoped my life would change for the better.

As a young girl, I would often walk past a particular building in my town and look in the window where I saw people learning English. I dreamed about going to university someday, but my dad told me my family would not be able to pay for my studies even if I did pass the entrance exam. Despite this, I never gave up my dreams and continued to look for ways to accomplish them.

As a student in high school, I learned about the green card lottery from some fellow classmates who were applying for the program. Applying was free, so I applied too. After one year, I learned that I had been chosen to receive a green card. It was

the most memorable day of my life! The change I had been waiting for had finally come. Who knew that a girl like me would ever be able to go to the USA? Most people didn't even believe that I could finish school through ninth grade and then go on to complete three more years of high school while working weekends to help my family. Despite this good news, my family did not fully understand what a green card was. In addition, they were afraid to let me go far away. The green card agent told me that in order to complete the documentation, I needed a lot of money. After discussing the situation with my family, they finally agreed to allow me to travel to the United States, but first, I needed to get married. Once I did this, I was able to go to the USA.

The excitement began when I first boarded the airplane for my trip to the United States. It was the first time I had ever ridden on a plane; however, the experience did not scare me at all. After twelve hours, I arrived and quickly realized a big difference from life in my home country. Everywhere there were all kinds of people with different clothes and hairstyles. A friend helped my husband and me find an apartment to rent. I was in awe of the large building and the beautiful city. In the USA, I am able to find everything I need and want including a job, English classes, good teachers, and schools for my children--my dream life. And one more thing, everybody has a busy life in this country, working and going to school; however, they find the time to help each other.

Although I lived in a small town, I was fortunate to win the green card and come to the United States of America. I now have many opportunities and good things in my life. These big changes are all due to one little green card.

~ Shakhlo Juraeva
Great Oaks Career Campuses

My Life

Hello. Welcome to America. Everything here is very different and difficult because I don't know English and can't drive. In America it is different and strange from my country of Vietnam.

I always think about my home and everyone in my family. When I lived in Vietnam, I had everything – work and family. When I came to America I had nothing. I am beginning everything from scratch. I will try to learn everything and adjust to life here. I am determined to learn everything in my power.

In the summer, I will try to learn to drive and learn English. I will study hard and do everything no matter how difficult it is. I will try to overcome it. I will read newspapers, listen to music, watch TV, and meet people to learn and improve English. I will not stop learning because knowledge is endless.

I am starting to eat American food and meet and communicate with my husband's friends more. I will keep the memories of the teachings and sharing of teachers, friends, and people who always help me.

I will share what I learn and do with everyone to make my life better while here.

*~ Trang Nguyen-Slusser
Auburn Career Center*

Difficulties in the U.S.A. Can Change

I had many difficulties when I first came to the United States from the DRC. At first, I couldn't understand English or speak it. I couldn't drive a car, and I had two children in high school with no transportation. I paid \$50.00 a week for transportation! Secondly, I had no medical insurance. It was difficult for us to go to the hospital.

Today, my life in America is different because many things have changed. Now I can understand English and speak it a little better. I drive a car, and everyone in my family has medical and car insurance. In my country, I worked as a bank teller, but now I work in sanitation. I would like to have a better paying job.

My wife, Evelyn, is beautiful and cooks every day for me. She is taller, and I love her so very much. She has a job at Koch Foods at night and her favorite color is black. Evelyn is a good mother and takes care of our family and me. Difficulties in America are less because of Evelyn.

*~ Willy Ibolame Sambey
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

The Best and Worse Times of My Life in America

My name is Munteha Mahmud, and I came from Ethiopia to the United States of America on December 8, 2011. It was the longest trip I've ever taken. It was so cold and snowy. I remember this because it was the first time I had ever experienced cold weather and snow. It was also the first time my husband saw our newborn daughter. He couldn't wait to see her and was so happy when he finally had the chance.

After my arrival, we started a new life in America, but life was not easy at first. I was confused by the culture and lifestyle in America; it was so different from my own native culture. American neighbors do not usually gather socially or share meals as we did in Ethiopia. In addition, most people do not defer to the elderly like at home. Another difference involves making eye contact. Avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect in Ethiopia, but in the United States, a person who avoids eye contact is often considered untrustworthy or unconfident. All these cultural differences have made raising children very difficult. Our family's standard of living has also changed since we had to start over from scratch.

Among all these difficult experiences, one stands out in my mind as being the worst. It occurred when I had a car accident and did not know enough English to talk with the police. The accident happened when it was dark and raining. Four of my children were in the car with me as I drove to pick up another child from an after-school activity. The car was totaled, and my young son and I had minor injuries. In a panic, I first tried calling my husband, but when he didn't answer, I called my son and then my cousin's daughter. Unfortunately, no one was available to help me. My daughter waited so long at school before we were finally able to pick her up.

Despite all these difficulties, many good memorable events have happened during my life in America. Following the first few days in our new country, my two oldest children started school. They were so excited to tell me about their day when they

returned home. Another special memory involves a trip my family and I took to Washington, D.C. where we had the opportunity to meet people from my home country and enjoy cultural celebrations. We have also enjoyed the Eid celebrations with our mosque community.

My best experience occurred when my oldest son graduated from high school. We had a wonderful get-together with friends and family to celebrate this event. My son has helped our family in so many ways over the years. He often translated English for us and even got a job to help pay expenses. I am so proud as he now attends college in the hope of achieving his dreams.

I have learned much from the difficult times I experienced while living in this country, and the good times have given me hope and excitement for the future. I currently have a lot of plans for my life in America. My whole family hopes to travel more, especially to see Disney World. My children are growing, and I look forward to celebrating their birthdays and more high school graduations. My husband is busy working. I am currently taking an ESOL class to improve my English in the hope of becoming a nurse. My first, long trip in the cold and snow was just the beginning.

*~ Munteha Mahmud
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

Staying Positive

This is the second time I have come to America. I like it because it's a different culture with another language. I like the different weather. The people are helpful, and there are many, many choices for jobs. I have been a waiter in a restaurant for seven years and I like it. Now, I want to learn English better and talk with more people at my job. I love the English language.

I can help my family back in Mexico. Right now, it is difficult because I don't have my family here. I miss my mother, my brother Oscar, and my sister Sandra. If I went home for one day only, I imagine I would hug my family. I miss my dad too, but he passed away from Covid last year. It was hard when I went back and didn't see him, but that's life.

Each day, I wake up and thank God for a new day. I make my coffee and think about my girlfriend and about the day starting. I see the news and sometimes it's bad, but I always end the day with something funny and happy. It doesn't matter if it's raining, cold, snowy, or hot. I always wake up to something new. I love the mornings and black coffee!

~ Luis Ortiz
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Harvesting Perception

Going to School to Learn

I have always wanted to finish school since I was a little girl. My biggest dream was to achieve a high school diploma and then go to college. Unfortunately, my mom became severely ill when I was a teenager. She had to be hospitalized, and we didn't know how long she was going to stay there.

My school ended because we had to leave our home and go live with my grandparents in a different city. At first, I kept dreaming of going to school almost every night and waking up sadder and more devastated. Growing up in a country with fewer opportunities to accomplish my ambitions was difficult. Despite things being hard for me, I gained an interest in watching Hollywood movies for entertainment. I used an Arabic translation because I didn't know a word in English or what the actors were saying. Before I knew it, I found myself falling in love with America and its beautiful language. Clearly, I was envisioning myself living in America and following my dreams.

After what I went through, I considered myself lucky to have had the opportunity to come to the United States in 2003 at the age of 19. After arriving in the United States, I wanted to pursue my goals. Obviously, I was enthusiastic to learn English as soon as possible. Even though I didn't have the chance to go to school to learn English, I started teaching myself at home from scratch.

I began memorizing the English alphabet. I watched cartoons and TV shows with closed captioning to practice my reading and work my way up. I was learning to read English and gaining confidence when a relative came up to me and said, "You cannot learn English by yourself because you dropped out from school so early and didn't finish. You will never be a good reader of your second language." I knew she was trying to put me down and didn't want me to succeed. I did not let that stop me. In fact, instead of hearing her say "you cannot," I heard her say, "you can." To a 21-year-old, her negative talk was like a booster of encouragement.

After that, I became more motivated than ever and wanted to prove to myself that I could learn English. I believed that anything was possible if I put my mind and effort into it.

I have never given up on what my heart desires. I have worked hard to reach my goal in less time. After learning how to read and write, I feel confident and delighted to be called a self-taught student of this beautiful language. Learning a language that is being used globally feels tremendously great!

At this time, I am married, have wonderful kids, and live in the land of opportunity, the United States of America. I am forever grateful for this! I am also grateful to my husband for providing me with every book and program that I need during my learning process. I am 38 years old now and recently decided to get my GED. I am working harder than ever to fulfill my purpose.

*~ Hanan Maliki
Auburn Career Center*

Now It Is Up to Me

My family has two good friends in America named Aziz and Sitora. This husband and wife helped us very much when we came into the U.S. from Russia. First, they gave us one room in their house. After three days we got an apartment and moved into it. Next, my friend Sitora and I went into an elementary school and gave them documents for my children. Then my husband, together with Aziz, went to a car dealership and for the first time, bought a used car. Next, my husband went on a job interview at a hotel.

In Russia I had a university degree in accounting, and I worked for many construction companies being an accountant and doing documentation. I hope soon to get a job in America in an office doing computer and paperwork.

I have three children. My son, Timur (11), helps me study sometimes at home. We speak in English together. I tell him to correct me with the right words. In the evenings, I read books to my children in English. My second son, Arthur (6), really likes this because it is good practice for both of us. He is in first grade. My daughter, Aleena, is two and stays home with me. I want to be a good example for my children.

Immigrating to the U.S. is very hard. Many people can't speak English and can't work where they want to. Sometimes, people could be professionals in their home country (doctor, artist, teacher, or accountant) but because they don't speak the language they might only work in a hotel, a restaurant or construction.

But friends can't help you all the time. Every person needs to have a goal and only by going step-by-step and being strong inside can you achieve this goal. My goal now is to study the English language. My friends can't help me, and only I can do it. I need to go to school, do my homework, read books, and practice writing. With hope, I can pass ESOL this way, get my diploma translated, and find good work to do in America.

~ Ekaterina Achilbaeva
Great Oaks Career Campuses

We've Got to Work It Out

We've got to work it out.
People are always in some war.
One human lost brings shame to us all.

We've got to work it out.
Believe in the Creator's Plan for us to survive.
Unity, sacrifice, then we stand tall.

We've got to work it out.
We need to break down our barriers,
Break down our walls.

We've got to work it out.
Stop sending rockets to Mars,
When all of mankind seems as if it might fall.

We're all in this together.
We've got to work it out.
To survive, we must answer this call.

*~ Terry Lewis
Penta County Vocational School*

Hard Times

I was born in Toledo, Ohio. I grew up and spent most of my life in a small country area called Liberty Center. Soon enough, I moved to Kendallville, a small town in Indiana. This is where I learned how to raise animals, including rabbits, chickens, peacocks, and geese. I learned and appreciated the value of my newfound skills, and I wouldn't change it for all the glamor and excitement of a big city any day. Honestly, it made me the person I am today, helping me develop and grow strong from my roots planted there. The skills I learned have given me the strength for my journey, the wisdom, and the ambition to keep seeking what my heart most desires.

My dream is to become an animal assistant and rise up to the challenge of becoming a veterinarian. I will have to master my GED, gain experience, and face the hardships and joys so I can continue on my life's goal of working with animals. I am currently fostering a 7-year-old dog and a 2-year-old cat. Additionally, I raise my own rabbits and take care of the animals that pass by and are forgotten in the neighborhood I live in.

I have three young children ages 2-9, who occupy so much of my time, making it difficult to follow my dream. But alas, my heart beats for my passion and I find myself spreading even more love, hope, and help than I ever thought possible. I would never ever change anything I have been through, not even my darkest times that are the hardest for me to even think about. My family is the light in the darkest of beauty in the world. If I can spread even one ounce of that amazingness that I see, the hard times and struggles will be a mere second in the vast amazing future I see.

I have learned to face the hard times because they show me a different side of myself and prepare me for the wonderful blessings to come. I will succeed with my depression, anxiety, and bipolar issues. I will not let my battles overcome my obligation of being a good mother to my three children. I have been told my dream is something I won't be able to achieve, but God placed

me here with a purpose and will see me through it. I will be an example to others that I can achieve my dream of becoming a veterinarian just like many others before me have done. I will earn my GED because I will not give up! I believe in myself and am certain great things lie ahead for me. Life has provided me with many wonderful opportunities. My struggles have shown me who I am and what I am capable of doing. I am very excited to see my future. Despite my hard times, I am so grateful for where I am at this moment in my life. I will never give up on achieving my dream.

*~ Amber Munk
Penta County Vocational School*

Changes

Everything changes,
Whether we want it to or not.
Sometimes the change is slow
Giving us time to adjust,
While other times,
The change happens before we even realize.

We've all had it happen.
One day we're young,
Hanging out with friends,
Not a single care in the world.
The next, you've grown up,
Being thrown into adulthood
At full force.

No matter what is said to the contrary,
The truth remains the same.
Nothing can ever stay how it once was.
We will never stop changing.

Some of us miss it,
The simple days of our youth,
When time seemed to stand still.
Yet others embrace life
And the ever-changing world around us.

All we can do is accept and adapt
Then maybe one day those big changes
Won't be so big at all.
Because everyone and everything changes,
Whether we want it to or not.

~ Leah Pyles
Canton City Schools

I Am

A mountain who
sticks to the ground
to hold the earth
with my
height.
I contribute
beauty to the green
land below me.
With my
Caves and lakes,
I accommodate and save
Lives in storms and
wars when there is nowhere
to hide.

*~ Hamad Saad
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

Life Is Worth the Journey

I am afraid to rest because I have no savings. I dare not say that I am tired because I have not achieved anything. I dare not be lazy, because I still have to live.

I can give up the choice, but I can't choose to give up. Being strong and working hard is my only choice.

I have to move forward no matter what! No matter how tired. No matter how broken. No matter the obstacles.

I don't have the word "quit" in my vocabulary. What I do have is a strong support system that believes in me. I must do it for me and the ones who depend on me.

I am only a student of life. Therefore, I am learning every day to move forward and never to give up! I am worth it. Life is worth the work needed to finish this journey!

~ *Joseph Fine*
Seeds of Literacy

Accept Your Story

Would you be able to appreciate my words
if my paper weren't so perfectly lined?
Or could you love me if my body wasn't fairly designed?
Never mind.

Growing up too fast in reality is like
trying to find oxygen on ocean floors.
Trying to give myself permission to let go
because old ways don't open new doors.

It's funny--you start to learn
when intuition keeps hitting you with 'I told you so'.

Push yourself enough, not MORE.

Pour into your deepest passions but don't overdose.

I heard there was a reason "listen" and "silent"
were spelled with the same letters...

It's easy to be ignorant when you can't truly hear,
so be silent while your mind unfetters.

I fear no man but God,
so judge me when you understand me.

The past is practice.

Please believe me when I say I'm not perfect. I can't STAND me.

Though I know for a fact that emerged from suffering
are the calmest of souls.

All it takes is for your heart and mind
to find that common goal.

Which is way easier said than done, of course. I'm sorry...

Being easier done when you grow to accept your story.

~ Alizi Ranae
Four County Career Center

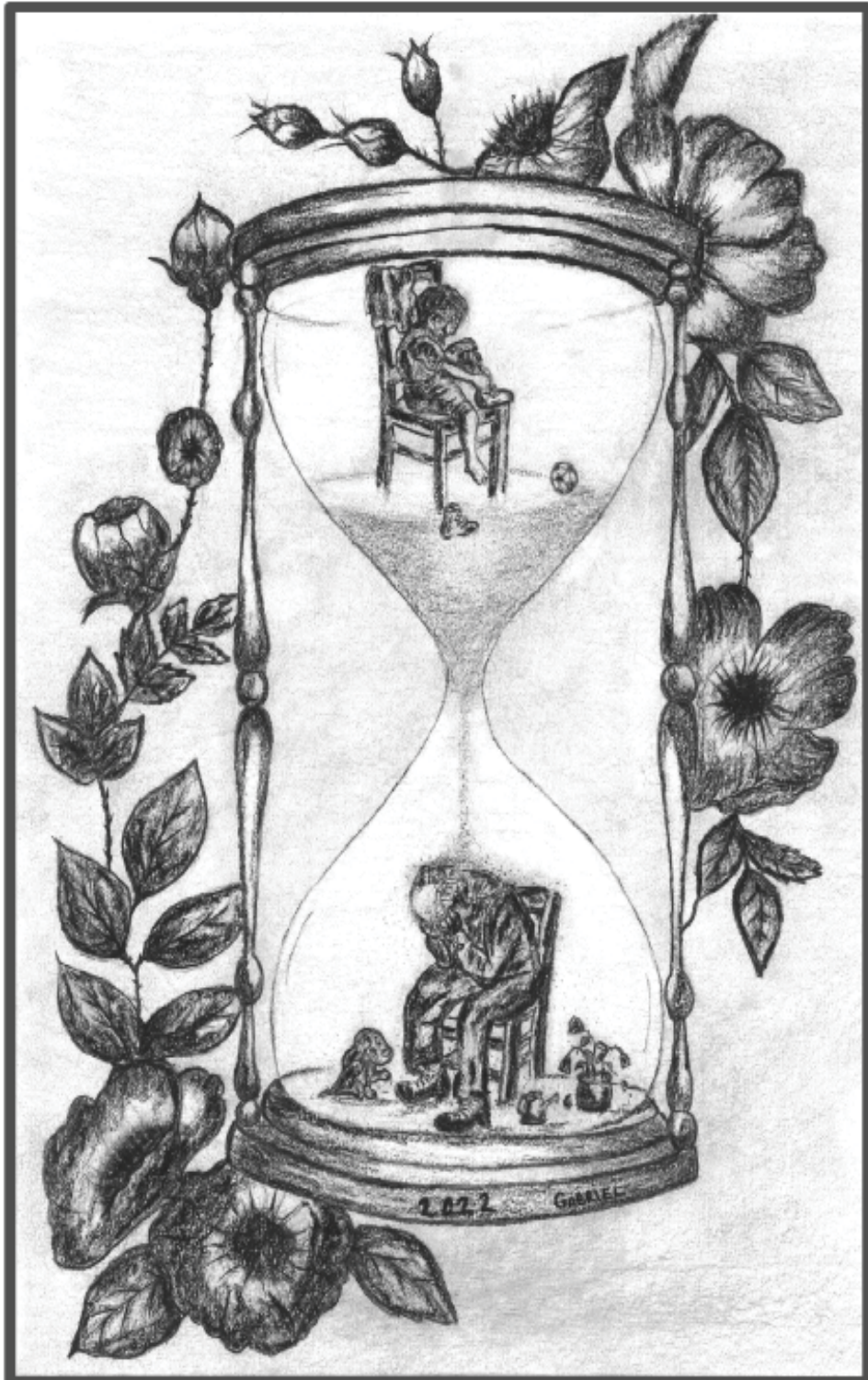
We Can't Go Back

We can't go back. As much as we want to, we can't go back. We wanna go back to the first time. We wanna go back to the smiles and the hugs and the kisses. We wanna go back but not right now. We gotta go forward. But we are stuck. We are stuck in the past. We wanna go forward, but we are stuck. But we are not stuck. I am stuck.

I want to go back. I want to show you that this was true love for me. I want to go back to the first time we had a date, sat and talked from across the table, and made the decision to become "us" instead of a "me and you." I want to go back so I can fully trust you without worries. But I'm stuck now. I'm living in the now where questions won't be answered and boundaries are made. I'm stuck seeking help from someone who knows nothing about me, when the person I loved may be helping somebody else. I'm stuck by myself.

We couldn't get it right. We kept negative thoughts steering in our minds as motivation to do better. We kept fighting until I threw the fatal blow. But we want to go back. But I can't go forward. I can't go from seeing you every day and kissing you to being given an alternate decision on what I have to do. I have to accept a friendship where I know nothing my friend is doing. I know nothing my friend is feeling. But we have to move forward. This is what we have to do to move forward.

I have to endure the pain—we don't. I have to get help—we don't. But I'm doing it for me. We built up a relationship on sour fertilizer, and weeds grew while I tried to grow flowers. We wanna go back though. I want to go back. There is no "we" or "us" anymore. There's you and I, so I guess we ended back where we were. We live in the now, waiting on the future based off the past. But I'm stuck in the now, punished for my past and watching my future walk out my life with no problem doing it. All that is to say we wish we could go back.



Artist Biographies

Neha Dadhich - Cover & p. ii

Blooming Minds and Ohio Sunflowers

Neha was born and raised in Rajasthan India. She achieved her master's degree in Visual Arts and completed a Ph.D. in Folk arts from MLS University in India. She has been actively working in the fine arts field for 17 years and exhibiting her paintings in numerous art shows. After relocating to the USA six years ago, Neha has been practicing as a freelance artist and has joined local art groups to promote arts in the community. She loves to travel and goes hiking with her family.

Sewar Aboul Hosn - Back cover

Untitled

Sewar recently moved to Ohio from Lebanon. She studied at the University of Lebanon. Her hobbies include fashion design, drawing, reading and spending time with her husband.

Gabriel Pereyra - p. 114

Beginning and the End

My name is Gabriel Pereyra, and I'm from Mexico. I have been playing guitar in a band for ten years. I like music and to ride a motorcycle with my friends – plus I like to draw. I try to follow my goals and learn as much as I can.

Author Biographies

Angela Suriel Abreu - p. 53

Angela Suriel Abreu is an advanced ESOL student from Dominican Republic. She has been in the U.S. since May 6, 2003. Some of her favorite hobbies are reading, writing and listening to music.

Ekaterina Achilbaeva - p. 105

My name is Ekaterina. I'm from Russia and came to America in 2018. I have a husband, two boys and one beautiful girl, and I love them very much. When I came to the U.S., I didn't know English very well. I set myself a goal to learn and went to Great Oaks ESOL in Cincinnati, Ohio. I like my teacher, Donna, and assistant, Cindy. I am very grateful to them for helping me.

Osama Al-Nasser - p. 10

Osama Al-Nasser is from Amman, Jordan. He has a BS in Computer Science from the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) / Amman Campus, Class of 2008. He has over 35 years of experience covering Software Development, Training, Stock Exchange, and banking.

Maria Alonso - p. 3

My name is Maria Alonso. I am from Mexico, and I came to America on April 15, 2000. My hobbies are cooking for my family and playing and dancing with my grandsons. My teacher for my English class is very good, and my family is so very important to me.

Miguel Angel de León Beaumont - p. 29

Miguel Angel De León Beaumont, Venezuelan by birth and heart, was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on November 3, 1969. He has a degree in Administration, Mention in Material and Financial Resources. He also has a Postgraduate Diploma in Integrated Communications Management. He is certified as an Organizational Ontological Coach in the best Business School in Venezuela. He loves helping others with his knowledge. He likes martial arts, reading and motorcycles. He has solid principles of family and

education. He is kind, affectionate and empathetic. He considers his daughter to be his best legacy for humanity.

Clotella Baldwin - p. 71

Manal Bali - p. 4

Manal is from Zarga, Jordan. She has been in the United States for five years, and she studies English as a Second Language at Water for Ishmael, and she is studying to take her Citizenship Test and her GED through Penta Career Center.

Keaira Baxter - p. 79

Keaira started GED classes in winter 2021 after dropping out of high school in 2018.

Jean-Papy Biakudia - p. 47

My name is Jean-Papy. In 2015 I came from the DRC Congo to America. My family is important to me, and my hobbies are reading and sports.

Jessica R. Bishop - p. 76

My name is Jessica Bishop. I'm 21 years old and a devoted mother of a 2-year-old boy with another baby on the way. I am working to improve my life for my babies.

Shahodat Bozorova - p. 51

My name is Shahodat Bozorova. I study English at Scarlet Oaks. I like to write stories. I'm a mother for one son and a grandmother too.

Camille C. Croce - p. 50

My name is Camille Croce. I was born and raised in Chardon, Ohio, and spent a few years in the Carolinas in my late teens before moving back to be closer to my family. I am currently enrolled in Auburn Career Center's Aspire program and close to achieving the goal of my Ohio High School Equivalency. Outside of the classroom, I work a full-time recovery program and am always willing to volunteer and help with the community as well as with friends and family. In my spare time, I love playing the piano, something

I taught myself to do, by ear, at a young age. I also enjoy reading novels, watching period dramas, and learning some of my mother's and grandmother's delicious cooking recipes.

Imane El-Khaloui - p. 88

My name is Imane El-khaloui. I am 25 years old and from Morocco. In 2015, I got my high school diploma. After that I studied two years and I got a diploma in business management. My hobbies are cooking, gardening, baking, shopping, and traveling....Thats all about me.Thank you.

Joseph Fine - p. 111

Joe Fine was born in Hawaii and traveled with his parents and siblings to California, New York, California and finally Ohio. He left school at 18 without a diploma because his dyslexia was never addressed. Joe's goal was to become a police officer, but the lack of a diploma prevented him from achieving that goal. Joe has worked as a bounty hunter for 20 years, was a licensed private investigator for the State of Ohio and is still a first responder. Joe and his wife (Kim) are celebrating 38 years of marriage and have two sons and three grandchildren. Joe promised his sons that if they got their diplomas he would go back and get his GED. Joe registered for classes in 2016. He attended as often as work allowed, but he sustained a severe burn during COVID. After four surgeries he suffered a below-the-knee amputation, but he did not allow any of those challenges to prevent him from keeping his promise to his sons. Mr. Fine graduated from Seeds of Literacy on March 20, 2022.

Be'Onka Fizer - p. 27

Be'Onka is a young mother of 2 with another baby on the way. She is working on her addiction while working on obtaining her GED.

Abdourahamane Fofana - p. 75

Curtis Gee - p. 11

Nevin Hassan - p. 91

My name is Nevin. I am from Egypt and have been in the United

States since 2013. I was a Social Studies instructor when I was in Egypt. I studied at Columbus State Community College for two semesters but unfortunately, I stopped studying because of some circumstances. Now, I wish to resume my studies in order to be a teacher in the United States.

Bjorn G. Hesselning - p. 83

Bjorn is an Aspire GED student who joined the program in December 2021. He is extremely motivated and passed all 4 of his GED tests by February 2022. Bjorn's father was born in the Netherlands, and Bjorn will be returning to visit and work this summer. Bjorn is capable of college work and has many options. He is a delight to work with.

Sonia Huerta - p. 87

My name is Sonia Huerta. I was born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico. I came to the U.S. 13 years ago and have two children, a boy and a girl. I am a server at a Mexican restaurant. I study English at Great Oaks ESOL in Cincinnati, Ohio, and like watching movies on Netflix and dancing.

Yuki Iijima - p. 67

Yuki Iijima moved from Japan in 2020, along with her husband and three children, and they currently live in Dublin, Ohio. She studied social work at university. Since they will live here for five years, she is eager to communicate better.

Enas Ismail - p. 64

My name is Enas Ismail. I am from Egypt and moved to the U.S in 2010. I live with my husband and my two sons. I have a Bachelor of Science degree and I love to improve my English.

Taylor Jewel - p. 66

Ling Jiang - p. 23

Ling is an ESOL student at Project LEARN of Summit County. She likes cooking, traveling, making friends, and enjoying time with her family. Ling is from China, and she also speaks Mandarin.

Zebo Jumaboeva - p. 69

My name is Zebo Jumaboeva, and I am from Uzbekistan. I am so happy to be living in the United States. I have three children. I am currently studying English at Scarlet Oaks. I really enjoy the class since I not only learn about the English language but the culture as well.

Shakhlo Juraeva - p. 93

My name is Shakhlo Juraeva. I am originally from Uzbekistan. I'm 28 years old, and I have two beautiful kids. I am taking ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks. I am grateful for my teachers at Scarlet Oaks who have opened the world for me through English classes.

Mayumi Kameyama - p. 61

Mayumi Kameyama arrived in the USA with her husband and daughter in 2016 from Japan. She studied early childhood education in Japan and worked in a preschool. She studies in the ESOL program at Godman Guild and wants to improve her communication skills.

Asuka Kondo - p. 13

I have been in the United States for 9 years. I live with my husband, son, daughter, and two dogs. I like reading, gardening, shopping, and making things with my hands. I have been studying English at Project LEARN. It is fun for me to learn.

Ovilia Landaeta - p. 90

My name is Ovilia and I am from Venezuela. I worked in Venezuela as a hair stylist for 22 years and have many certificates and training. Now I work in Cincinnati, Ohio. Right now, I am learning English at Great Oaks ESOL. I love to exercise and go to the beach. My story is dedicated to hair stylists everywhere.

Terry Lewis - p. 106**Brittney Loya - p. 5**

My name is Brittney Loya. I am the mother of three beautiful children. One day I hope to own a bakery somewhere tropical.

Munteha Mahmud - p. 97

My name is Munteha Mahmud. I was born and grew up in Tigray, Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a country found in East Africa. In Ethiopia, more than 80 languages are spoken by different ethnicities, and I speak four of them. While I was a high school student, I worked in my family's clinic business as a receptionist and patient registrar. I later opened my own business selling building materials. I also had a boutique. I came to the United States at the end of 2011. The biggest challenge has been language and communication. I am currently taking an ESOL class at Scarlet Oaks to improve my English.

Hanan Maliki - p. 103

I was born and raised in Iraq and now I live in Northeast, Ohio. I enjoy reading in my spare time.

Maria Asuncion Manana - p. 49

My name is Maria Asuncion. I'm 34 years old. I'm from Equatorial Guinea. I'm married and have two children. I moved to the United States in 2018 and live in Fairfield, Ohio. Currently, I am learning English at Great Oaks because in the future I wish to become a family doctor in the United States.

Jeremy McMurray - p. 22, 28

Jeremy McMurray is a student in the Lima City Schools Aspire program. Many of his poems are dedicated to the memory of his mother, Hilda McMurray. He is working on improving his life in all aspects. Many poems describe the turmoil of his life.

Alexander McNamara - p. 21, 36

Alexander McNamara was born in Marion, Ohio, in 2002. He has lived in Ohio except for spending 2 years in Texas. He and his family moved to Meigs County six months ago. He and his sister, Madison, started at the Meigs County Aspire Center in January. Alex has six sisters and two brothers. He likes to write, sing, act, cook, and talk!

Maribel Moncada - p. 14

Maribel is a hardworking student with the Painesville ASPIRE ESOL program.

Pauline Kalu Mukaya - p. 48

Pauline Kalu Mukaya was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and is a graduate of Rhema Bible College in Zambia. Pauline is married, mother of five, and pastor of a Pentecostal church in Cincinnati. Pauline loves God and supporting community members. Currently Pauline is studying English at Scarlet Oaks Aspire program.

Amber Munk - p. 107

Amber Munk is currently attending Aspire GED classes at Penta Career Vocational Center. Her dream is to earn her High School Equivalency and become a veterinarian. She loves animals and currently fosters many stray animals. Despite having 3 young children, Amber is very determined to achieve her dream.

Trang Nguyen-Slusser - p. 95

My name is Trang and I'm 50 years old. I was born in Vietnam in a city of the province of Dong Nai in South Vietnam. I like to study English and learn at home, too. I love children and I always enjoy helping everyone. Sometimes I feel sad and bored because I don't know English well.

Maria del Carmen Ochoa - p. 80

Maria del Carmen Ochoa came from Mexico many years ago to help provide for her family. Here, she met the love of her life and now cares for her own family of two children and her partner.

Yukie Ogawa - p. 17

My name is Yukie. I came from Japan in January 2021. I am studying English at Great Oaks ESOL. In my free time I like to practice and learn beginner piano, read animation books, take care of my vegetable garden and study English on YouTube. I dedicate my story to my husband and son.

Tam Ogura - p. 38

Tam Ogura is an ESOL student in Dublin, Ohio. She is from Japan with three sons and her husband, Eiji. Living in Ohio brings her great pleasure. She loves the peaceful, quiet, and rich nature environment here in Ohio. She also enjoys traveling with her lov-

ing family, reading novels, and learning English with her wonderful classmates.

Luis Ortiz - p. 99

My name is Luis Ortiz. I am from Mexico, Guadalajara, Jalisco. I study English at Great Oaks ESOL in Cincinnati, Ohio. I dedicate my writing to my dad, Reyes Ortiz. I came to the U.S. in 2016 and I want to learn better English to help people around the world. I enjoy learning about different cultures. Everything is possible.

Stalin Pardo - p. 15

I'm Stalin Pardo from Ecuador. This is my first time to write my story in English. Thanks to my teacher Sameera who encouraged me to write it.

Leah Pyles - p. 109

Alizi Ranae - p. 124

My name is Alizi Ranae. I'm 18 years old and I love reading and writing. I'm the oldest of five children and I want to be a train conductor when I get older and more established.

Meihua Ren - p. 84

I'm from the South of China. My city is rich in seafood. I arrived in the United States when I was 18. I quickly assimilated into this new environment and adapted to it because of my cheerful and optimistic personality. Then I started working in the next few years. My husband and I are from the same hometown in China. We have 3 lovely children. The only thing I regret is that I didn't choose to continue my studies when I came to the United States. Now, I am glad I can study here again.

Ashley Rivera - p. 63

Ashley loves animals and would like to pursue a career in veterinary medicine.

Chalisa Rocker - p. 37

I am Chalisa Rocker and am 30 years old. I am an upcoming motivational speaker and a guidance counselor. I currently run my

own catering business. I was a cashier for six years and decided to follow my dreams. I've been self employed for two and a half years. God has been wonderful to me, I've come a long way from an immature woman to a woman with love, patience, and confidence. I was inspired to write about breast cancer by my two grandmothers, both cancer survivors. One was a survivor of breast cancer and the other a survivor of kidney cancer. They both were strong and courageous women who fought a disease gracefully. The power they had, the strength they carried while battling a severe sickness, keeping a smile on their face, gave me hope and a drive within myself. Another inspiration I had was myself. I like to write a lot. I write poetry as a second talent. I thank Penta Career Center and Ms. Pattie for giving me the opportunity to express myself.

Elena Rodriguez - p. 6

Elena is an ESOL student in the Aspire program at Auburn Career Center. One day, she would like to own her own business. For now, she is busy taking care of her family and working part time.

Gregorio Rodriguez - p. 12

My name is Gregorio and I am from Mexico. I enjoy working in the United States.

Hamad Saad - p. 110

My name is Hamad Saad. I am from Sudan Southern Kordofan (Nuba mountains). I studied welding & metal shade in vocational training in Khartoum, 1983-1986. Also, I studied catering & hotel management in Lagos, Nigeria, 1996-2000. I am a student of Scarlet Oaks Aspire program.

Willy Ibolame Sambey - p. 96

My name is Willy and I'm from the Congo DRC. I came to America in September 2019. In 1997, I received my diploma in Economics, and in 2010, I worked as a bank teller. I need to read more books in English, and I appreciate my family so much.

Ayano Shoda - p. 55

I am originally from Japan. I have been attending ESOL classes at Scarlet Oaks for six months. I appreciate my teachers for all their

help. My hobbies include baking bread and cakes as well as playing tennis with my friends. I am enjoying my life in the United States.

Aicha Soumah - p. 43

Aicha Soumah, from Guinea Conakry in West Africa, lives in Columbus with her husband and two children. She had a bachelor's degree in financial counseling. She has been in the US for nearly 5 years.

Mouhamadou Sow - p. 89

My name is Mouhamadou Sow, and I am 22 years old. I have been in the United States for three years. I have been taking English classes since I arrived in the United States. I really enjoy this country.

Sameera Tamimi - p. 65

Philip Thomas - p. 113

Philip Thomas is an Adult Ed student at the Academy for Urban Scholars in Columbus, OH. While attending, he became FANUC certified. The FANUC program deals with robots and coding. Philip is excited about learning and plans on taking college courses and helping in the community.

Kamolatkhon Tuychieva - p. 45

My name is Kamolatkhon. I'm from Uzbekistan, and I have lived in Cincinnati for about three years with my husband. I'm learning English at Scarlet Oaks. I love my teacher and classmates. I am very happy to be in the United States.

Gladys Yadaicela - p. 24

Gladys is from Ecuador originally but has lived in Columbus for 22 years. She has four children and enjoys spending time at her church and going to her ESOL classes.

Sudha Yeleswarapu - p. 59

Sudha Yeleswarapu first arrived in the US from India in 2017 and moved to Ohio two years later. She has a masters in organic chemistry and worked as a senior research associate in a research

and development firm in her country. She currently resides in Dublin with her husband and two children.

Fatima Zagaoui - p. 7

Fatima Zagaoui came from Morocco nearly four years ago. She has attended ESOL class at Godman Guild and loves to write, whether in English or Arabic. She has a bachelor's degree in Arabic Literature. She lives in Columbus with her husband and two daughters.

Honorable Mention

Artists

Ekaterina Achilbaeva
Orany Coronado
Nada Elnagar
Amy D. Holderer
Aliyia Jackson
Carly Meeker
Dorine Nienkark

Authors

Enas Abduljabbar	Brenda Olvera
Cordine L. Anderson	Laila Othman
Magali Banales	Graciela Ramirez
Miranda M. Bridget	Vanessa Rios
Julie Burns	Iasia Rubio
Maria Elena Calderon	Belkys Sanabria
Herminia Cardenas	Yuko Sato
Fatoumata Diakite	Theresa A. Scott
Sevara Ganieva	Mouloukou Soumah
Omer Garcia	Mavjuda Uzbekova
Viktoriya Georgieva	Veronica Valentin
Daylesha Hampton	Janice Williams
Ehnee Htoo	
Elyazid Jday	
Ghazwaha Kraishan	
Shiho Kubota	
Mustapha Legzouli	
Qiao Ling Luo	
Fabian Martinez	
Mimie Tomboka Mayamona	
Evelyne Dimbenzi Mbandila	
Dorine Nienkark	
Alicia Nunez	

