

BEGINNINGS 25

silver anniversary edition

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Foreword

I imagine that **Beginnings** was born out of a desire to showcase the incredible diversity and creativity of adult learners across Ohio. What continues to astound me is the courage that comes through the page. There are times when adversity and perseverance are directly examined: illustrating the vulnerability of leaving one's home country, losing a loved one or struggling to find the support needed to succeed. And there are other pieces that reckon with the simple beauty of the natural world, or human connection. While the individual pieces communicate what memories or desires characterize the hearts and minds of the authors, the collections in their totality almost feel like a magical composition. Powerful in the sense that all those writers came to be published as a result of choosing to put themselves in a place where they could flourish. Twenty-five years later, this book is animated by self-determination, self-actualization and collective education. The collection comes to have a life-force of its own, and it is healing an ache caused by our societies' refusal to hear, hold and honor our stories before.

The 25th edition of this anthology is not relenting. These authors speak to the privilege and potential that we all carry just by being alive—even when we have traversed the deepest darkest depths of the hard parts. Their writing encourages us to examine whether we are doing our best to show up in our relationships. Asking us about whether we lend our conscious awareness to our neighbor's wellbeing. Who do we consider our neighbor to begin with? How can we be better? Here, the complexities of the human condition become a symphony. Coalescing into a song that answers the call to be open.

One of the things that strikes me most about the themes in this volume is the arc between grappling with identity and personal strength through pride and scars. This internal investigation leads to a cultivation of courage which harnesses us through struggle and pursuit. The panorama, the big picture is a vision only allotted to those who do the work through the first parts. It is only with a strong internal dialogue and sense of self

that we can sustain, pushing through the barriers to the life that we desire.

To the writers featured in this collection: I want you to remember that your voices matter. Your stories are important, and they deserve to be heard. Keep writing. Keep sharing. And never forget the power of your words.

Jennifer Adjua

GED earner

Kent State University graduate

Writer, Poet

Community Educator



Embrace This

You are a force of nature.
Pure. Foul. Arriving yet in between
Emboldened by a desire
to create a better place
to nestle your intentions.

There is an open window
allowing you to move through—
sensing, seeing feeling
for minuscule moments
And you are here; but grander

Like the air, expansive—
holding hands and
swishing through high fives
releasing when it rains.

We have a wild way of wandering
in and out of our awareness
of the eternity
in our fingerprints.

I, too, am a force of nature.
And I can choose to move through
or blow down
Whatever I perceive as standing in my way.

~ Jennifer Adjua
GED earner
Kent State University graduate
Writer, Poet
Community Educator

Acknowledgements

For 25 years, 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 25 – Silver Anniversary Edition 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.

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Pride

My Two Countries

What we love most about our home countries is
The people are so polite;
The snacks, the traditions, the music, the food;
Traveling to the north desert;
The main river is special because it rides from south to north and
flows into the sea to the west.
During Ramadan everyone is so happy.
And I love hanging out with my friends.

What we love most about our new country is
Freedom;
The people are so kind;
The safety, the schools;
The roads are built well. They are large, permitting people to move
safely and securely.
There are a lot of opportunities for jobs and
Everything is possible.

~ Group submission from Sulphur Grove Book 3 Class:

Jacque Mukalayi

Souleyman Adam

Jeanine Furaha

Tomoko Tsubogami

Miami Valley Career Technology Center

For the Man Who Never Knew

For the man who never knew
An oak in a child's eyes
A loving father he'd become
One fatherhood was realized

For the man who never knew
What it meant to be a son
To be part of a father's pride
'Til he himself became one

For the man who never knew
What it meant to be a man
Was shown throughout life
As only a father can

For the man who never knew
The endearing nobility offered
That in his son's own heart
Would lie his greatestcoffer

For my father, Alan R. Wagner
And myself, Craig A. Wagner
Because of my son, Liam C. Wagner

~ *Craig A. Wagner*
Lima City Schools

My Moon and Sun

I had a dream. In a dream, a white angel appeared to me. Angel took the moon and the sun from my hand and ascended into heaven. I couldn't do anything and continued to cry. My face was wet when I woke up. I knew that I really was crying. I couldn't forget my dream for a long time.

One day I found out that I was pregnant. It was a great gift for me and for my husband. We planned to do a gender party at about 16 weeks. I felt very good. I didn't have toxicity. My husband was also very kind to me. He really wanted our child to be twins.

My pregnancy was at 16 weeks, and I went to the hospital for an ultrasound. The doctor asked me if I was expecting a girl or a boy. I said, "I want a girl, but my husband wants twins."

"Congratulations to you and your husband. Your fetuses are twins. A boy and a girl", the doctor said. I was very surprised. We were waiting for our children with great joy. One day my husband came home from work, hugged me and asked if I had a fever. I had a fever 39°C that day. And I thought I just had a headache. After two days my condition worsened. I went to the hospital. Doctor told me that I have the Corona virus and my fetuses were affected by the infection. After two days I saw blood and I lost consciousness.

When I woke up, I was depressed, having lost my children. I remembered that dream I had 6 months ago. An angel came and took away my Sun and Moon. I realized that The Sun in my dream is my son and The Moon is my daughter. I'm relieved to think that my twins are in heaven with the angels.

~ Kamolatkhon Tuychieva
Great Oaks Career Campuses

My Black History

My hair type and texture put on spot,
My afro beauty in natural expression. Judge me not.

Brought up with respect, church lessons given.
Whooping when out of line. Teachings to give understanding.

Family fun and togetherness, dinner time and love inside.
Safe from a world where we didn't know we would be denied.

Protected from the cold world we never knew
was out there patiently waiting for you.

Macaroni cheese, collard greens, pound-cake, chicken, ribs and
cornbread,
Prayer ending, in Jesus name, amen. Always, before we were fed.

Gospel R&B, funk and hip-hop gave us truth that hit the spot, that
grew so many generations through soul and sound.
Who would take that from our culture, our country, our town.

Speaking and how things are said with so much insight,
my different words, deep intellect (not ignorant),
also very well mannered and polite.

Rocking a doo-rag, scarf, hoodie or cap
you could be victim to non-security neighbors, bored, licensed to
carry a strap.

Moans from lives lost and wrongful brutality and death we
continue to face.
We stand strong together and protest against all who hate, with
humility and grace.

The fight we fight for freedom, the respect that we are due.
When will this be an equal America for me as well as for you.

Two body parts, one mouth, one nose,
hair, hands, teeth, eyes, ears, tongue and toes.

I am a human being, in the land of the free.
Why am I questioned about what my skin color means?

A movement where one month is not enough time
after struggling to get a part of the timeline.

My black history.

*~ Tonya Holliday
Academy for Urban Scholars*

Grand Papaw

Sleepovers in the living room.
Stories from when you were young.
Teaching me to drive young so I'd learn from you.
Replaying "Check 'yes' or 'no'" until the CD quit.
Trips to Kiser Lake every weekend.
Drive-ins were always fun.

I thought we had it made having you as our grandpa.
...until I had kids...

The way you lit up when you saw them.
The excitement they had at the mention of their pawpaw
William still loves talking about the nerf gun wars.
The twins still hold tight to their baby dolls.
We all loved pushing you around the splash pad in your wheelchair.
You got out to the parks and started coming to holiday dinners
again.

You were a great papaw
But an even greater great grandpaw

We all miss you.
Until we meet again...
...watch over us
Much love

~Tennell Mathis
Upper Valley Career Center

Black History Tribute: Being EXSEPSHANLE (EXCEPTIONAL)

To become successful in America before civil rights was damn near impossible to be honest. The chances of failing were astronomical. These strong, smart, beautiful people succeeded with everything and I do mean everything, even when things were working against them.

For instance, Ruben Hurricane Carter was falsely accused and worse, falsely incarcerated for crimes he never committed. Yet, he proceeded to become a champion boxer with every referee trying to cheat him each step of the way. He is no doubt the definition of determination.

Chuck Barry, the true king of rock and roll. He was a stellar guitar player, phenomenal singer, and awesome song writer. He paved the way of a completely new genre of music, revolutionizing the industry we enjoy today. We have been embellished with notes and sound of jazz, rhythm and blues, and rap.

One of my favorite people is Neil de Grasse Tyson. He was a nuclear physicist astronomer, and above all else a teacher. Just a fabulously wonderful person, who enriches our lives with his intellect.

Barack Obama, our former President, was one of the best speakers in our generation. He was an exceptional president. He listened but was firm, with his resolve being second to none. President Obama moved forward as he helped the poor and taxed the rich. The word ‘integrity’ should have his picture stamped under it.

I could go on and on, but the bottom line is African Americans have given till it hurts to a selfish country that takes with both hands. In closing, I thank you for all the countless things African Americans have given. And I am truly sorry for your endless struggles.

~ Ricky Mullins
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Strong and Beautiful

It's so easy for one to say the person they look up to the most is their mother. Some would beg to differ. From the ages of twelve through sixteen, my mom was a mother before even being pregnant. She didn't have a regular preteen or teenage life. My grandpa was not her father; she would never give him that title. He did nothing a father would, but he did everything a horrible man would. She had to deal with him so she could raise her brothers and sister. My grandma would be there but not really there mentally. She witnessed all those horrible acts and continued with her day as if there was nothing to do to stop it.

As my uncles and my aunt grew and matured my mom was able to leave at the age sixteen to live with my great grandma. She was comfortable with the fact that her siblings could take care of themselves. She was finally able to focus on herself. My great grandma was her blessing. She was her way out and her way to breathe. My mom was working and eventually living on her own. She met my dad and had me and my sister, her biggest blessings. She wasn't worried anymore. There wasn't anything bringing her down, making her feel less of herself. She only had a thirst for growth. And grow she did! My mom is successful, strong, determined, and beautiful. There's never a moment where she isn't trying to hit a new goal. Every horrible thing that has happened to her made her the way she is. I almost wish I went through the same so I can connect mentally with her and understand more, but I don't need to go through those past acts to connect with her. She doesn't hold back a detail or feeling. I put myself in her shoes and I feel just as strong and beautiful.

~ Mickel Archer
Upper Valley Career Center

True Friendship Exists

Does friendship exist? In my opinion YES! I have a lot of friends, from my childhood and my school days in the Dominican Republic. I studied at the same school from kindergarten to high school, and many of my friends attended the same university I went to, even though they had different majors.

In 2015, one of my friends from high school in the Dominican Republic created a WhatsApp group to keep in touch. Many of my friends are now married with kids, and a few even have grandkids, but I feel the same about them. We lost a few, but the one that affected me the most is one who was in school with me from kindergarten through high school. He was very close to me. We grew up together and had a friendship despite the distance. I miss him a lot.

The basis of the duration of a true friendship is respect regardless of religion, political parties, baseball team, etc. The same happens with my neighbors from my hometown. I am in contact with them by Facebook and WhatsApp too.

I have very good memories from my childhood. It was different in my country because we played a lot of games outside. My youth and some of my twenties (I came here at 29 years old) were amazing too. We always had reasons to get together. We used to go to the beach, river, towns, discotheques, restaurants, and people's houses to have cooked spaghetti and drinks. Last year I reconnected with one friend I had met in 1995, and at first sight, I didn't like him or his friend. He was born the same day and year as me at the same hospital at different times. In 1996, we celebrated our birthday together, and it was amazing.

Since I came to Columbus, Ohio, I have met very good people who mean a lot to me. We share our Catholic religion. I've also met people from other religions. As long as they respect my beliefs, everything is okay.

In my English class, I have met a lot of people from other countries. Some of us share the same language, Spanish, but others do not. For example, some people speak Arabic.

In conclusion, my opinion is that real friendship exists, but you just have to connect with the right person and always be respectful, honest, loyal and reliable.

~ Angela Suriel Abreu
Delaware Career Center

My Son's Graduation Day

Today is one of the best days of my life. Today is my son's graduation day from high school. It's my dream day. After eighteen years of effort and fatigue, sadness and joy, fear and reassurance--all these feelings and more--this day has finally come. His dad and I worked hard to make him achieve the best education and good grades, starting from his critical pregnancy until now.

To my son: You and I stayed without your dad for three years in Egypt before coming to America in 2010 to start our new life together. In the morning, during kindergarten you went to school, and then I helped you on your homework. In elementary school you started going to taekwondo classes every Tuesday and Saturday. I shared with you every single class and now you have your black belt. Also, you went to Arabic classes in the Mosque every Saturday. In middle school you started taking music in school and had a concert after school. I loved it! Watching you, I felt like it was myself who was playing. In high school, the years flew by. You joined the marching band in school, so I had to take you to the school and pick you up several times a week. All this hard work, I did it with love and care. Your dad sometimes helped but most of the work fell to me. But you also worked and studied hard. We are so proud of you, my son.

Teachers and others also helped you succeed. I can't forget the support of my family and friends for us. Thank you to everyone who shared this beautiful moment in my family's life. I sincerely wish all the happiness in the world to my older son, and I hope to see you one day with your wife and children.

With all the love from me and your dad.

~ Enas Ismail
Delaware Career Center

DIAMON in the Rough

I finally found me
In a substance
I finally found me
In a way
They will never understand

I finally found me
In a substance
That is not man-made
That others will scoff at.

I finally found me
I can now focus
I finally have confidence
Hope and faith
More strong and brave.

My depression
My anxiety
Is taking flight.

I finally found me
I'll tell the world
A substance
They won't understand.

I finally found me
They'll lock me away

I finally found me
A Diamon in the rough.

~ DIAnne MONique Harriell-Blair
Upper Valley Career Center

Who Am I?

Sometimes I am happy,
Sometimes I am sad,
More often I am friendly,
Quite rarely I am mad.

I am sleepy in the morning,
I am active in the afternoon,
I am hungry after training,
I am peaceful in the swimming pool.

I am a caring mother,
I am a loving wife,
I am a beloved daughter,
I am in love with life!

I am a dreaming romantic,
I am hard as a rock,
I am shy when I sing,
I am sure when I cook.

I'm good at friendship,
I'm shining in the fall,
I'm lucky forever,
I'm working hard to reach my goal.

I am crazy a little,
I am clever a lot,
I'm a beautiful woman,
I'm fine, thanks to God!

~Yara Kulchitskaya
Warren County Vocational School

Words

Didn't you know what I'd gotten?
Your words turned to be

a thorn in my heart
a stone on my throat

I don't want you to become rotten
So I hope my words would be

a light in caves
a boat on waves

May the seeds in my words bloom inside you

~ Tam Ogura
Delaware Career Center

Mom

How does love look?

Love is a pair of wrinkled hands with flawless unpainted long nails. Love are the sunglasses you used on your head to do your hair when you went out. Love are the good morning texts I miss getting from you. Love is a pair of beautiful green eyes looking at me proudly. Love is the elegance you passed on to me. Love are the family pictures you would hang up every year. Love is the pendant around my neck that carries part of you with me. Love is a full plate of food with my name on it, even when yours was missing some.

How does love sound?

Love is the sound of your laughter, love is your feet dragging across the floor when you wake up. Love is the certainty in your voice when you would say that I could do anything. Love sounds like dominos shuffling on the dining room table on a Sunday afternoon. Love is how you said my name. Love is when someone says I'm just like you. Love is your name.

How does love feel?

Love is a tight hug after a long day. Love is the sun hitting my face as I watch you enjoy a beautiful day. Love is sometimes painful, like when the doctors called the morning you passed. Love is the push I feel every morning to keep going even though you're not here. Love feels like home.

How does love smell?

Could love be when you used to make my favorite food? Or maybe that old perfume you always wore. I think love were the hot lattes and sweet bread we used to have together on Sundays. Love smells like the birthday candles you'd make me blow out on my birthdays at midnight.

How does love taste?

Love tastes like homemade banana bread, like lentil soup when I was sick. Love tastes like potato salad on Christmas. Love is bit-

tersweet, like the last time I held your hand. Love is salty, like the tears I shed for you every once in a while. Love is sweet, like the chocolate you would bring me every time you came home. Sweet like the kisses you would leave on my forehead.

Love is all these things and more. But, most of all, Love is the result of the ones you raised. Our families, our success, our new lives were built on the foundation of the love you showed us. Love is what fuels me to make you proud.

~ Barbara Rivero
Penta County Vocational School

Struggle

Father's Land

After spending a lot of years in the city, David decided one morning to bring his family to know where he came from. “Uuurah!” replied the kids. “Finally! We can make it.”

“Ana, Eda, where are you?!?” yelled David. “As you know, we must be prepared for our trip. I want the boys to check and prepare our truck to make sure everything is perfect for tomorrow. Also, girls, you can make some delicious dishes for the road, because we'll need that.”

The girls cooked some food and packed it for their trip. On the contrary, the boys went outside to play with their friend and didn't check the vehicle.

The next day, all the family wore their best dresses and nice shoes. They looked gorgeous. David, for this special day, thanked his ancestors for making his dream come true. All his kids were excited to visit their dad's village.

“Vroooom!” the motor of the truck started, and this was the departure. “Be prepared, the road will be long,” said David. And all of them yelled, “We are ready!”

Little by little, the truck disappeared. Everybody was happy, and they were talking about the beautiful countryside. Suddenly, the vehicle began to slow down. “No, no, no, no,” said the family. The truck stopped after 70 miles, and it was still very far from the city. They were in a remote place with no wifi and no signal to call for help. They had no other option but to push the car to the next mechanic store. The boys realized that they had made a mistake not checking the vehicle before they had left. The girls were scared, and even David didn't know how to resolve the situation. Pushing little by little, they finally arrived in the next city and found a mechanic store.

“Hello! How can I help you?” asked the mechanic.

"We need your help," said David

"Let me see." He checked the motor and said, "Hahaha. You are out of gas."

"Gassss," replied David and asked the boys, "How is that possible?!"

"Sorry," they replied to David with a fearful voice.

The mechanic filled their tanks and now they were ready to continue on their way.

Finally, David and all the kids arrived very tired to the village by sunset. Surprisingly, they were welcomed by the sound of drums, dance steps, and cries of joy. Soon after, they forgot about the worst of all the days. David said, "My dream came true. We made it!"

Everybody was happy to see David, and David and his family went to bed with joyful hearts. The next day, they went out to see the village sights, including the National Independence Square and the traditional market where they bought some local drinks and food. Also, they visited the kingdom, and the king was kind to them.

Finally, the last day of their visit arrived. At this time, David had checked the truck by himself to make sure it was perfect. Now they left the village with a lot of souvenirs.

And they said, "We will come back soon!!!"

*~Adjovi Houndjo
Godman Guild*

Overcoming Our Struggle

I came from Vietnam when my husband and I got married in 2008. After marriage, I determined that I would follow him to the United States. I had to leave my country, my lovely family, and my friends to start a new life. The first year was very hard and challenging. I tried my best to overcome and stand up. Over time, I had 2 daughters who are now 12 years old and 11 years old, and a son who is now 8 years old.

My son is sometimes easily distracted and finds it hard to focus on learning. I got a lot of complaints from his teacher. My son felt so sad. He cried and said that he didn't want to go to school. His teacher wasn't nice to him. Hearing that, my heart was broken. I couldn't sleep that night. The next day, I brought this matter to my ESL teacher, Mrs. Mairi Wilkins, who helped me to write an email to the school. With her help, we had a virtual meeting with the school due to the COVID pandemic. They set a plan with 10 weeks to help him. Meanwhile, I had to fill the form and follow up with Nationwide Children's Hospital. Almost a year later, my son met a psychologist. He was diagnosed with ADHD. I brought all the documents to school and asked them to set up the meeting. One month later, Mairi and I attended the meeting in person at school. They finally set up an IEP plan to help my son for learning. And his teacher this year also treats my son nicely. That makes him happier. I don't mind how hard I worked to get him the help he needed as long as he got what he needed.

I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher, Mrs. Mairi Wilkins, the person who helped me on my journey. She is the best teacher that I ever met.

~ Julie Nguyen
Delaware Career Center

Living in the Ghetto

Living in the ghetto is making sure you are in the house
by a certain time.

Living in the ghetto is making sure all doors and windows
are locked.

Living in the ghetto is hearing gun shots every night.

Living in the ghetto is sinking to the floor
when those gun shots terrify.

Living in the ghetto is praying you can finally escape.

*~Tiffany Smith
Penta County Vocational School*

The Cat and the Dog

The cat and the dog lived in a poor house. Their owner was unable to provide enough food for them, and the two always shared one meal.

"It's time for breakfast," the owner said and left.

"This is mine, hee hee hee..." the cat said, and she took the food to a higher place.

"Hey! We have to share," the dog said, but the cat pretended not to hear. And during lunch and dinner, the cat continued to be mean to the dog.

One day, it began raining heavily early in the morning. The cat was mean to the dog as usual, but the rain got stronger, and the water reached the cat who was in the high place.

"Help me!!" the cat cried, but no one heard it because of the sound of the heavy rain. "Somebody! Please help me! I can't swim." the cat cried again.

Just then, as he was swimming away from the flood, the dog heard the cat's cry. "I'm here to help you!" the dog shouted and went over to the cat. The dog put the cat on his back and swam to a safe area.

The cat thanked the dog for saving it and apologized for all the meanness so far. The dog forgave the cat and the two became friends.

After that, the cat not only shared the food with the dog but also climbed to the apple tree and gave the dog an apple. The dog also gave fish to the cat who couldn't swim.

The cat and the dog are full of stomach and heart too!

~ Mayumi Kameyama
Godman Guild

Crying Out

Alone in a world, it's just me and You. I feel so alone and afraid. I don't know what to do. Now what if I choose the wrong things to do? I don't know how long my strength is going to last. I am afraid of disappointing You.

So, I need to talk to You and ask for Your guidance...especially today when my mind feels cloudy. I know You're able and willing to help me through.

So, I am crying out to You. I am opening my heart up to You to show me how to do things Your way. I'm asking You, please help me to keep from doing the same mistakes over and over again. Guide me until I'm sure.

Your will be done, and I'll be the one to make sure of it. All I need is to hear a single word from You, Lord. I open my heart to You.

~ Dianne Monique Harriell-Blair
Upper Valley Career Center

Alone

Being alone in one's eyes is a nightmare. You feel no protection. You feel like a small object in the middle of a dark, big, and open space. There's this sharp hunger pain in your chest, but you're not hungry for food. You're hungry for a space or void to be filled. There's a silent ringing in your ears and it grows louder. You can't stop your mind from bringing up every tragedy that has happened and every scary film you've seen. Perhaps this is your first time being alone. You're so used to being surrounded by easy distractions.

Being alone in another's eyes is a dream. You're craving for that peaceful moment to stretch your arms and legs out with nothing and no one in the way. Time is nonexistent when you finally are able to do this. There's not a single thought because you're soaking in the fuzzy feeling of silence filling in your ears. There's no noise to bounce echoes off of anything to ruin your trance. You feel every bone and nerve relaxing. Perhaps this is your first time being alone. You're so used to being surrounded by easy distractions.

~ Mickel Archer
Upper Valley Career Center

Lock Down

If you have a bunch of problems,
I feel bad for yo.
I just have one
for violating a CPO.

In and out of lockdown,
I ain't got a job now.
The COs don't mess around.
One false step and get locked down.

The food makes you frown.
Surroundings get you down.
Spend your time on a toilet
During mid-day lock down.

Young guys are ten times harder now.
Hey, can we talk it out--
while we walk around?
Heck no, come to my cell and let's lock down.

~ Norman Angle
Upper Valley Career Center

The Young Lady's Dream

When I was young, I lived a normal life in Brazil. I worked in a private school as a secretary, but then I quit the secretary job. I had a cousin who worked for their boss, Adriana, cleaning houses and babysitting her son. My cousin told me that their boss was going to the US and she asked me, "Do you want to go too?" I thought it would be a great opportunity to see something different so I said, "I will try it." I decided to go to the US to see what life was like there.

Well, finally I arrived. I worked and worked, all the time. Life in the US is different: the food, the fashion, the weather, the people. I felt alone. I started going to school to learn English. I started to know people and make friends. One day Adriana told me, "You have to go to the grocery store to buy some food." I finally had enough. I told her, "This is not my job. Why do I have to do everything? I'm tired. This is too much for me. I want to go back to my country right now." She got angry with me. I just knew I didn't want to be in the US anymore. Then she said, "It's okay. I can't buy your ticket to fly today. You have to wait three days."

I told my new friend what happened. She picked me up, and I slept in her house for the three days. My friend asked me "Why are you going? Do you have money?" I suddenly said, "No." Together we made a plan for me to stay in the US. We decided that instead of getting on the plane, I would take a taxi to my friend's house in Detroit and just leave Michigan where I was staying with Adriana.

Finally, it was time to travel. Adriana picked me up from my friend's house which was nearby her house. She had my passport and told me, "Don't try to escape. I'm watching you." She watched me until I went to catch the plane. Then a lady spoke and told everyone the airplane was changed. My plan was now going to change. I just got a taxi and went to my friend's house.

I lived with Guatemalan people. I didn't know the language, but I learned step by step. Now my life is changed. I have more money to send to my family in Brazil. Now I'm married and have a beautiful family with seven children. I forget the slave. I don't know anything about Adriana anymore. I don't know if she stayed here or went back to Brazil. I have a beautiful family in Brazil too. I miss them so much, sometimes I'm happy and sad. Happy because I'm in the land where everyone has opportunities to grow, but sad, because I can't go back to my country to see my family. One of my dreams was to see my family in Brazil.

I just thank God for being here and I continue to look forward. God has me come this way for some reason. I love my life here, because in my country it is so difficult to live. Crimes, drugs, fights. I know the US has that, but I had these things happening in my face, in front of my own house. In America people respect and listen to each other, and we have laws to help prevent violence. I'm grateful every day to be here. Parts of my life are a dream come true.

~ Ivoneiva Bareels
Great Oaks Career Campuses

The Story of an Immigrant in the USA

I am from Venezuela. I am married and have two daughters. I am a doctor and general surgeon specializing in laparoscopic surgery. I immigrated to the USA two months ago because in my country I have a very difficult economic and health situation.

I think no person should have the power to destroy the lives of others with their actions. I feel that the government of my country and its actions have had and still have the power to damage the lives and dreams of many people and their families.

The most painful and unfortunate thing is to have this situation in many other countries in the world. In my beginnings as an immigrant, I have had so many mixed feelings: anxiety, frustration, sadness and a lot of pain. You feel that you are in a cruel world and indifferent to the pain of people where values lose meaning over time.

However, I have faith and I know that there are good-hearted people who want to help others and want everyone to be able to achieve their dreams.

My biggest goal is to be able to get certified as a doctor in the USA and to be able to help sick people. My greatest dream is to live in a world where all people help each other and are willing to sacrifice themselves for others without conditions and where the best reward is being able to help someone in need.

~ Laura Lapanula
Project LEARN of Summit County

New Restaurant

I had to sell my Chinese restaurant in Mason, Ohio.
It was difficult to find employees.
I worked so hard in my restaurant.
I even had nice customers.
I so miss it.
But I have goals for the future.
I will find another good job.
I will learn better English.
I will find a good friend to help me.
I will open a new restaurant with my husband.
Maybe an easy stir-fry.

~Yanjin Jiang
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Perfect Imperfect

Starting from scratch is not easy, but who said it was? Life is not easy in any way. Many times, problems blind us, and we don't know which decisions are the best. We fail every day because we are not perfect beings and we will continue failing, for sure, when we realize it. But it is so, and we must do the best we can to live.

Living intensely and loving, that is--being happy. That is what moves us as human beings, what fills the heart and meets expectations to be happy. And to be happy is to love. The truth is that we exist for a reason, and it is that mission that we must discover. We will not discover it from one day to the next, we must discover it every day.

The key is to not give up and try again. If we must start from scratch once again, well, we do it but always with a better attitude. Willing not to make the same mistakes, on the contrary learning from them. Do not be discouraged, each one of us is important and valuable because someone believes in us like this and believes it because it is so. That someone has numbered our hair and gives us the courage to be his children.

No, we are not alone in this battle. We must strive to keep Him more present in this life in order to grow in perseverance. Stop focusing on ourselves because it is more obvious that we are weak and fail every day. However, HE helps us, and He gives us that strength and perseverance that we need.

It is not that you will not fall, but believe me: the rise after that fall will be faster and you will get ahead in another way. Don't be discouraged! Let's go, it's possible. I also fight battles, and many people around you too. Don't be blind, you're not the only one, don't think only of yourself. Pain and anguish only surround us when around us there are people who are also going through their own challenges, perhaps worse than ours.

Starting from scratch then becomes our new opportunity, not looking back and living that opportunity the best we can do. Surely, there will be many starting from scratch or maybe just getting up and going. The trick is not to give up.

This moment is your start from scratch. This is what you have now, because the past is over and the future is still uncertain. Take advantage of your moment. Do not complain anymore, do not worry, do not give way to anxiety, or pay attention to the imagination. The future is uncertain, and you can't control everything, but the present, the now, that's what you have. Do not give up!

~ *Melissa Sosa*
Owens Community College

Timelapse

I live in a house of rot.

Twenty cameras sit on tripods wherever they'll fit. Centered to face tens of chicken wings, bananas, avocadoes, and McDonald's cups in various stages of decay. Sometimes I wonder where the cameras came from; they showed up at the door one day with a letter reading *To help*, signed with a neat, clean R. Its letters were so angular, refined gray-black ink that looked calligraphic on clean white envelope. I've tried to write like that, to have that elegance whilst sinking into bed next to the dead crane on my nightstand, to tame the mess of me so I can look pretty on my deathbed. I see myself: long hair covered in dainty flowers, upper body sprawling off a mortuary tray, looking miserable but beautiful. Inexplicably, the flowers are alive, and a sheet covers me, and I look dead but only in a peaceful way.

R could have been any initial. I receive letters a lot, and they're always signed with different initials. But R brought the cameras, the cameras whose use I've tried to decipher for the longest time. They're always snapping pictures.

I take careful strides through the maze-like hallways of my house. Boxes tower above me and they lean like an archway over the narrow paths. I see the indents in the walls, the tables where the food lies, blocked by the tripods. It's rank, but I'm used to the smell. I let it rot to gain some sort of knowledge only available to the omniscient. If you walk for long enough, you start to notice the way the tourmaline mold crawls up the walls, the way it puffs into clouds and covers the floor.

Three-hundred sixty-five days. This is my job. At the end of each cycle, I approach with gloved hands, picking it all apart. I take jars full of bananas and water, open them and stare at the zombified fruit. I pick off the peel and the insides are a slimy, dirty beige that falls apart messily. I watch it ooze—these mushy remnants—and the cameras bear witness. The water is cloudy and stained.

The timelapse is overlaid with swingy, soothing music. People like that the video is there. This cavernous house closes in on me, the spores weigh down my lungs, and I think that maybe breathing mold should be therapeutic.

~ Cain Ayers
Project LEARN of Summit County

Courage

Hello Self ...

Yes! YOU! I have been trying to get your attention for some time now, but situations keep blocking my way. You know, like, life sometimes, even painful death, that's the one right there. It really throws you to the back.

But hey, that's part of life and now that I have your attention, I'm not gonna waste any more time because life's journeys be lurking for opportunities to get in the way.

Come closer, get out the back of the line of importance and priorities, because you are the head and not the tail. Step up to your dreams and take control. Stand firm and move.

Yes, it's hard. But you've taken the hardest step. Now reflect on this moment. What's that? I didn't quite understand you. I need you to open up and shout, "I'm coming out, it's my time!" That's it, keep pushing through. You're almost there, you can do it, and that's ok. That's just life knocking you down.

Stand up and continue on. I know it hurts and you see those hurdles in the distance, but you've got this. You're almost there. Just keep moving forward.

I can see you and you're beautiful. That shine is really growing. Yes, I know it feels amazing because you're awesome and unique. Because you're the main character in your story and you made it. Now, accept your flowers at the front of the line of your life story and take a bow.

~ Melissa C. Hill Nance
Seeds of Literacy

It's Time!

You spent enough time sitting down....it's time to GET UP!
No more victimizing. Use your story to help another soul RISE UP!
See, you're not a victim. You're a conqueror...
You made it through the pain, those blockages, and those obstacles!
It's time to GET UP!
Beautiful, I see you... and it's time TO HEAL!
Those emotions will get deep but those feelings....You must feel!
I know it's easier said than done, but it must be done!
Because this victory race you're on takes a strong run!

It's time to GET UP!
YOU WILL GET UP!
It's time to GET UP and set your soul free!

And when you do it, do it fiercely and
UNAPOLOGETICALLY!

*~Chalisa Rocker
Penta County Vocational School*

A Funny Guy

It was another day at Ramon Bastidas High School. It was a rainy day; there was a cool breeze, and even though it was January, it felt like it was November. We were in science class, and my teacher Melany entered with a guy in a wheelchair. She said, "Let's welcome a new student, Tony." He was handsome, and I didn't notice the wheelchair. He sat in front of me, so I approached him and whispered, "Welcome." He smiled at me...

The bell rang, and we went to the cafeteria. I invited Tony to our table. We spent the whole lunch time between jokes and funny sayings. This guy was so hilarious and entertaining that the time flew by. Meanwhile, between laughs, Tony told us about his dream of wanting to become a famous stand-up comedian.

Suddenly, someone pushed his wheelchair, throwing his food to the floor. It was Marco, who was well known for being mean to students at school. "Hey," I said, "What's wrong with you?" He replied with evil in his voice, "Tony, you need your girlfriend to fight for you,ahaha." Tony didn't say a word. The Principal popped up and grumbled, "What's happened here?" All of the students took their stuff and headed to the classroom, and I helped Tony.

When the school day finished, Tony and I went together all the way home. We'd just arrived at Tony's house when immediately the door opened. "Helloo," someone said. To my surprise, it was Marco!! "What are you doing here?" I asked. Tony entered, and then turned and told me, "He is my cousin." Marco slammed the door like it was a haunted house. All the way home, I wondered, "What was that?" I was so confused.

The next day, while the math teacher was in the Principal's office, I asked Tony for an explanation. With tears in his eyes, he told me how he had lost his family in a crash accident. He survived but got paralyzed from the hips down, which is why he was in a wheelchair. He had moved in with his aunt's family a month ago. He felt alone. His cousin made his life miserable, and his aunt was

too busy. She couldn't see his suffering. I felt sorry for him, and I wanted to help. In the following days, I heard about a comedy contest in town. I decided to enroll Tony. I encouraged him to participate. He wasn't sure, as he didn't have a lot to laugh about these days, but he decided it was a good idea.

The great day finally came. Tony won the contest, and everybody was joyful for him at school. Then, for no reason, Marco started a rumor that Tony had only won the contest because he was in a wheelchair, and that he wasn't really funny at all. Tony didn't let this situation get him down, so he went to another contest in a big city to prove that he was a good comedian. It was a tough competition, and all the competitors were really good. Despite this, he won the contest again. The whole school was thrilled. They had a welcome back party to congratulate him. Meanwhile, Marcos realized that his cousin was a great guy and didn't want to cause him more pity. He finally said "sorry" to Tony that day. That was so nice, and I felt a huge relief.

The year carried on between jokes and laughs. It was a wonderful time. Tony had made his dream come true, and he even performed a stand-up show that graduation day.

~ *Lilidoxy Versekaitis*
Godman Guild

Having an Open Mind

I grew up in a conservative society in a large family. In my community neighbors, friends, relatives, knew each other and cared for each other. We primarily associated with each other.

It was very difficult for any stranger to enter our society, and we always had to be very careful in dealing with strangers. I would define a stranger as another group of society with their own customs and traditions.

Anyone who was different from my society should be respected while remaining a stranger. I believed that idea as right because it provided safety in my community for my family, my friends, and my relatives. I should be in their lives and they should be in my life's decisions. I gave them my opinion and they gave me their opinion.

When I got married and moved with my husband to the United States, I found myself in a large and diverse community. I met many people from different cultural background, including the Libyan community in Ohio. Each Libyan sub-group has their own customs traditions and beliefs.

At first, I got confused and a little scared to have any relationship with these strangers. I spent a long time looking for people who were similar to me, have the same customs and traditions. It was difficult, but at one point I decided to give myself a chance to meet new people from other cultural backgrounds, and at the same time maintain my privacy and security.

After that happened, my beliefs changed. Now, I can accept others as they are, and that all societies have their privacy, beliefs, and convictions like me.

It is very important that we respect each other and not judge others. This changed my beliefs and gave me more freedom in my old and new relationships.

Now my focus is on good social relationships regardless of cultural background that depend on respecting each other and preserving privacy. In this I feel happy, free, and satisfied.

*~ Nadia Lthrm
Delaware Career Center*

Some Reflections from a Born-Again Venezuelan Living in the United States

Some people think that starting over is not such a difficult process. In reality, it is; and even more so when you do it in another country, where they speak another language and have another culture.

Well, I see it as a challenge that I have to overcome every day and actually, I do not dislike it. I'm fascinated by challenges, since they test my knowledge. Of course, the physical effort is considerable, that's what exhausts me, but we will deal with that later. On the other hand, after four years in this wonderful country, it has been difficult for me to find a business alternative that I can develop. I recognize that I must maintain my focus and not deviate from my objectives. I must apply all the knowledge acquired in more than 30 years of professional experience, together with my university studies in Business Administration with a major in Material and Financial Resources. Also, in the Postgraduate of Management in Integrated Marketing Communications.

About 7 years ago I met an Argentinean business consultant in a management workshop. He used to say the following: "The mind is like a monkey; it jumps from branch to branch." In other words, it is very easy for the mind to get distracted and direct its attention elsewhere. This is why it is so important to maintain focus and to measure the progress made each day in relation to the achievement of each goal. Regarding the general dynamics of life, I recognize that sometimes I still think that I am here on vacation. Although, that thought has been fading with time.

Indeed, migrating to another country at the age of 30 or 40 is not the same as migrating at the age of 50. Let alone before. Especially when you have to do physical labor, be it in a factory and carrying bags of food or cases of water for 10 hours or more a day. This has been my case in two well-known companies in the United States. They are not exactly intellectual jobs such as advising end customers and corporate clients in the financial area, training sales teams, commercially directing advertising companies,

among other things. It is worth mentioning that I have some experience in these areas.

Our family's untimely move was bewildering. My mind was living in the future with an anxiety disorder. But we needed to start all over again, because Venezuela is a socialist regime with a Machiavellian adaptation of psychological terror in process, where they apply effective techniques of mass manipulation through the media, dominated by the Venezuelan Madurist regime. In a perennial scenario of control of the people through public services, with frequent cuts in the supply of electricity and water. With hyperinflation and a mega devaluation of the national currency: "the bolivar;" always at the door. It is very difficult to coexist without some side effects.

Not all of us react in the same way. Some are more resistant than others, but there have been many years of struggle, demonstrating in the streets and psychological pressure, more than 20 years. To complete this unhinged phase, one day a leader of the then Chavista regime (Hugo Chavez) showed up at my office with a group of delinquents who were anonymous members of the Bolivarian circles. They wanted to take some products in the name of the revolution. They called me by the position I held in order to talk to them. I worked in a well-known telecommunications company in the commercial area as a business unit manager. At that moment I had a verbal confrontation with them and they did not like it. Then, from that moment on, I was exposed to persecution, intimidation, and threats. I feared for my life and was paranoid.

The immediate consequence was that I suffered from anxiety disorder for almost two years. That was the breaking point for me, the hardest moment of my life. I believed I was being chased by some criminals, and I started to think that they were going to come to our apartment to hurt us and take everything from us. As a result of this altered preoccupation, I was all the time accelerated (thinking more than I could think), I was unable to sleep, I suffered from tachycardia, I lost weight about 29 pounds (13 kilograms), I suffered from suicidal thoughts,

I had all my organic functions altered, that is, I went more times to the bathroom than necessary. I thought I was going to die. I first saw a psychiatrist with a superior IQ with whom I could not synchronize strategies to cope with my illness. Then I did a Mindfulness certification with a woman clinical psychologist to learn to meditate. She told me: "Miguel everything will pass. This has a beginning but also an end. Have faith in your abilities." I never imagined how those words would help me. I also applied meditation in my healing process as best I could. It helped me to minimize my catastrophic thoughts as well as to fall asleep better, decreasing the consumption of anxiolytics.

During this complex stage of my life, I learned to know myself better, to understand that life must start from the moment we love ourselves before everything else. For me now there is a perfect love and it is called "self-love." When we live traumatic experiences like these, we get to touch the bottom of human decadence. This was a hard blow, because I fell from the top of my ego straight to the ground. I learned to put my feet on the ground. I feel I have been reborn from the ashes like the phoenix of Greek mythology.

This illness and the political situation of my country, generated serious economic problems and forced us to leave Venezuela. We longed for a new and better life. We decided to migrate to the United States to Columbus near Gesmar Cañizo and her husband Ricardo Sandoval, sister and brother-in-law of Mary, my wife.

Resilience is the insignia of every Venezuelan, both those who leave and those who stay. This terrible process of ideological domination of a people with the title of "Socialism of the XXI Century," has made us stronger. We understand that we should not be guided by emotions and sold caudillista image to elect a ruler.

I am taking advantage of my own idiosyncrasy and resilience to move forward in a different country. Those are the keys for me.

I am acting with determination and academic structure, stepping out of my comfort zone. I continue to find my place in this new country, combining my talents with whatever activity I get to serve others with passion in my heart and faith in my spirit.

*~ Miguel Angel de León Beaumont
Delaware Career Center*

In Transition

Five long months have come and gone since I have seen what seems to be the “real world.” How do I transition myself back into society? In just a few short days I will be starting this new journey that Jesus has paved for me. I couldn’t be more blessed.

I will finally be able to walk with some freedom, eat better food, and take longer showers. You never really know what you have until it is ripped away from you at once. Freedom is an amazing thing; something I took for granted. I will finally be able to make my own decisions again and wear my own clothes.

While I am very nervous for all of these upcoming changes, I am blessed. I’m ready to be myself again. I’m ready to face my fears and conquer goals that I never have before. I’m ready to transition from an institution to rehab, then back to society.

~ Brittany Hatton
Upper Valley Career Center

What Is Something You Thought You Could Never Do, But You Proved Yourself Wrong?

It was around the summer of last year that I began to feel that feeling. Last summer, about eight months after I came to Ohio for my husband's job, I had been deeply depressed by the stress of living in a foreign country and the disappointment of my own inability to speak English. I was shocked by the gap between my ideals and reality. I wanted something that I could be proud of for my hard work in America. I thought that I had to change something, so I asked my tutor if she knew any places where I could practice speaking English. Then she suggested for me to volunteer at the nursing home in my neighborhood. I was nervous because I had never worked in a nursing home before. Also, the area where I live has a very small population of Asians, so I was worried that if I volunteered as a Japanese person, I would be discriminated against. However, I had the courage to go to the interview.

The nursing home manager was very welcoming when I expressed my interest in volunteering. He also understood that I had no such experience and that I was still learning English. There were many kinds of jobs, but I was told that the lunchtime hall was the best place to practice speaking English. The job was to take orders from the residents and serve them. I didn't think I could do something that difficult, but I decided to volunteer once a week under my motto, "Getting out of my comfort zone."

On my first day as a volunteer, the staff members I worked with were kind and reassuring, but after a short while, I was suddenly told to take orders without any training.

There was a daily menu and a grand menu, and the residents were able to order whatever combination they liked. Also, some of them ordered things that were not on the menu, and others made their own menus and ordered them. The hardest part was getting the right information to the chef after taking the order and getting the right dish to the right person. Some people had allergies and dietary restrictions, so I definitely couldn't go wrong.

Matching the faces and names of about 40 residents was more difficult than I imagined. One day, I brought the wrong dish to the wrong person. Another day, I made the residents angry because I didn't understand the name of the dish they ordered. Another day, I served 40 residents with just two of us, and I was told that the food was slow to come out. These things kept happening and I was very depressed. It was often difficult to leave home because going to volunteer made me nervous. I thought many times that the level of the work was too high for me, but it was frustrating to give up what I started, so I kept trying. I thought of them as my Japanese grandparents and talked to them a lot in my clumsy English.

After a few months, I started to feel some changes. Every time I brought a meal, I got residents to say "Thank you for volunteering." "I love you." No matter how many times I asked for their names and order, they patiently answered me. There were also residents who shared their stories about their families and recent events every week. No one was racist, and many people were interested in me coming from Japan. Communication with the staff members became smoother than before. I was able to confirm the division of roles one by one with another wait staff member, and convey orders to the chef with confidence and deliver the food. Half a year ago, I thought I would never be able to do it, but now I proved myself wrong. I am who I am today thanks to the tutor who gave me the idea of the nursing home, the people at the nursing home who welcomed me, and the ESOL teacher who taught me the phrase "Getting out of my comfort zone."

I will return to Japan next month. Before that, I will be given an opportunity to make a presentation about Japan to the residents, and I am preparing for it now. I will explain Japanese culture, food, and sightseeing spots in English in front of a large number of residents. Half a year ago, I would have said that I would never have been able to do that, but now I believe I can.

~ Shiho Kubota
Delaware Career Center

January 9, 2023

Dear 16-year-old Ikumi,

Hi Ikumi! I hope you enjoy your high school student life. I'm writing this letter to you because I have something that I would like to let you know.

First of all, I would like to ask you to appreciate your friends around you. They are your lifetime friends. They are so important, and they are always there for you.

Second, it's really good for you to study World History and Geography. You will visit many countries and meet many friends in your business and your future life. I know you like history and don't like geography so much, but both of them will be a great help in your future life to understand cultures and people all over the world.

Finally, please do what you want when you want to do it. I know you always think too much before you do something, but just try to do it first. Time passes so fast and you don't have enough time for yourself when you grow up, so do what you want as much as possible.

I hope I have been some help for you, and I hope you enjoy your teenage life!

Love,
Ikumi

~ Ikumi Sano
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

Living with Kidney Disease

I have been living with kidney disease ever since I was five years old and under the care of my great-grandparents. My great-grandma noticed when I used the bathroom, I would cry loudly because of the burning sensation. When my parents picked me up, my great-grandma told them they needed to immediately take me to the doctor because something was terribly wrong.

Later, the doctor told my parents that I had an extreme, chronic kidney disease. In this disease, the urine flows back up into the kidneys and eventually destroys them. I was rushed to the hospital, and the day after, I had my first surgery at a mere five years old. My second surgery occurred when I was seven; this operation was followed by my third surgery at sixteen. For all three surgeries, my urethra tubes had to be shaved down to the size of a baby's tubes.

In between the surgeries, I endured many challenges. At this time, my dad was often laid off from work. Despite that hardship, I still needed to have the surgery done. My dad and I have an inseparable bond because even though finances were difficult, my family always put me first.

I remember the locations of all my surgeries. My first surgery was at St. Vincent's, and my favorite nurses were Bert and Ernie who presented me with a pair of Bert and Ernie earrings. My most remarkable memory there was my great-grandma giving me a coin pouch full of quarters so I could call her anytime. My second surgery was at Children's Hospital in Michigan. The only thing I remember there was my dad staying at the Ronald McDonald House which offers housing and food to parents of children in need of hospitalization. My third surgery was at UTMC, and the only thing I remember is for some strange reason throwing a wash cloth at my mom.

Before my kidneys failed, I was terrified to fall asleep. Going upstairs to my parents' bedroom, I told them something was

wrong. My mom didn't think it was serious, and said, "Just go back to bed, and you will feel better in the morning." Because I was still frightened, my dad decided to call the rescue squad. After examining me, the doctors told them had I not come, a delay of even one night would have been fatal.

My kidney disease persisted into my adulthood. Both my kidneys failed February 28, 2003, and I was put on dialysis. After my discharge, I had dialysis for a month and a day before a donor was found, and the transplant could be scheduled. When I was 29, a man I knew offered me one of his kidneys. After finding he was a perfect match, the doctors scheduled April 1 for the surgery. Unfortunately, the date was rescheduled when I developed an infection. With deepest gratitude, I rejoiced that the transplant was successful.

To this day, my kidney is functioning at 100 percent. Perhaps I will still need medication to assure my body does not reject the kidney, but I remain grateful. If it were not for my great-grandma telling my parents what she did, I would not be here today writing my story of living with kidney disease, and I would not have my beloved daughter.

~ Kathy Pena
Penta County Vocational School

Unforgettable Trip

In 2018, my children and I decided to go on summer break to our country Palestine. My father had come to visit us before the summer break, and we decided to go all together back home. Our trip was from Chicago airport to Paris, then from Paris to Jordan, then from Jordan driving to Palestine.

I knew at that time it was a long trip, but I didn't expect that something bad would happen to us. We began the trip by leaving our house in Columbus, Ohio, driving for 6 hours to reach the Chicago airport. In Chicago, while we were waiting for the airplane, I went and bought some food. I gave the children some, but my dad refused to eat.

I looked at him and I asked him if he was okay. He said: "Yes, I'm fine, but I don't feel hungry."

A few hours after, the plane flew. The lights were off, and everyone was asleep. I felt like someone woke me up. I looked around me but everyone was asleep. I looked at my dad's seat which was across from mine. He was leaning his head on the chair in front of him, it seemed to me that he was tired and could not move. I quickly got out of my seat, and ran to him.

"Are you okay?" I asked him in a trembling voice.

He told me "no." I looked for his handbag to find the blood thinner. I opened the blood thinner medicine bottle. I took about four pills and put them in his mouth as fast as I could. Then I started to scream for help. The flight attendant turned on the lights, and rang the emergency bell asking people to stay in their seats due to a medical emergency. They helped me lay my dad down on the floor.

Suddenly, a man came to us, and said that he is a doctor. He started to take his blood pressure and his pulse. It was 55/48. He told me it was a heart attack.

I was holding my dad's hand so hard, crying so badly, and my whole body was shaking. Suddenly, my dad opened his eyes, squeezed my hand, and said, "I am fine, don't worry."

At that moment, the doctor looked at me and said, "His blood pressure is getting better. Did you do something? Did you give him any medicine?"

I said, "Yes. When I felt he was not well, I gave him the blood thinner right away."

The doctor looked at me proudly, and said while smiling, "You saved his life."

After his blood pressure and pulse stabilized, the flight attendant took him to the first-class seat, and kept him laying down with oxygen on his mouth until the plane landed in Paris. At the time of landing, the emergency crew talked to the emergency services at the airport, and they were prepared for his situation, and the ambulance was waiting for him at the gate.

They asked people to stay in their seats until they took him to the airport emergency room. The doctors over there did the necessary tests to make sure that he was in good health so he could continue his trip. He was fine after that.

So, in an emergency situation it requires a quick reaction, but the most important factor in dealing with emergency situations is to maintain calm. You need to take a deep breath and remember that staying calm in a stressful situation is required. You must be patient and deal intelligently with the situation.

In the end, I think that I handled this situation successfully.

~ Ayatallah Alqaraja
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Becoming the Real You

Discovering the real you will mean you need to be honest about yourself. Accepting the real you is the hardest part of seeing yourself for who you are. It won't happen overnight. But do not be discouraged. You will see yourself changing, and you will love it.

Yes, you are going to be challenged at times, but do not give up. Remember, you are on a journey to discover the real you. Now you can begin the process of changing your life.

My struggle was self-image. It was the most difficult challenge to overcome.

When I first started my journey, the only reason was health related. But as my journey progressed, I started to see myself for who I really was and who I could be. Before my journey started, I wallowed in self-pity. It took me seeing my grandchildren playing and not being able to join in. I had to make a decision that it was time to change.

I took the initiative to take care of myself. I convinced myself that this was not the end. I can do this. I made notes and put them around my house to remind myself that I am worth it. I can do this!

I had to admit that I was overweight with health problems. I had high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and a sleep disorder. Not just that, I had low self-esteem. I was afraid to speak up and ask questions. I thought that it would be a stupid question, so I never asked. It made me feel embarrassed. I didn't feel attractive because of my weight, and the clothes I wore didn't help either.

Once I started to process these changes, I saw that my weight was going down. Because of the changes in my eating habits and exercising more, I got around better, my energy level was better. It made a big difference, and it gave me confidence in what I was doing to improve my self-worth.

As a result, my health has improved. I can participate more fully in family functions and enjoy life that was once difficult for me. Since I have lost weight, my clothes fit better, I look better and feel more attractive. People even compliment me. I feel energized.

I am more assertive and now respect my own opinion rather than meekly accepting someone else's ideas. For the future, I'm discovering the real me. I will continue to strive for new goals and look forward to achieving them. You can do this too. Don't be afraid of what you find. Just know that you can change your outcome in life. For we all are in a journey.

~ *Denise Sanders*
Seeds of Literacy

Scars

The Beginning to the End

Here I sit once again wondering,
when is this going to end?
As I sit in this cell,
these four walls are cavin' in.
If I knew then what I know now
I sure the hell would never begin.

So here I sit all alone,
no one to talk to, not even via phone.
So I sit and wonder why.
Then it all starts, and I begin to cry.
I can't change what I've done,
but I promise I'll be more fun.

But in the end, let's not pretend.
All we have is those we call friend.

~Amanda Koehler
Upper Valley Career Center

My Life Is a Miracle

I am truly grateful for God and his majestic powers. He woke me out of my nightmares and set me on a path to the straight and narrow road. This is the road of my mother's prayers. I remember her praying for me, even as I used drugs in her living room. I invited men into her house whom she didn't know, and that I hardly knew at all. That is the life I lived for forty years, and it was a nightmare.

I forgot who I was raised to be, and I didn't care. I began my life as a girl of means who wanted to go to school every day and graduate. But at fifteen, I was pregnant. Without knowing what to do, I gave up on myself.

I turned to reading for answers. I read books like The Purpose Driven Life, but I couldn't find what I needed in them. I eventually returned to the Bible that was a part of my early family life. I was desperate to find strength. I tried to read a chapter each night and prayed to change myself. I wanted to make my life have meaning, not only for myself, but for my family. Life as it was was empty and unacceptable. It was not the life I was meant to have. Unfortunately, I continued my downward spiral.

I used drugs, and they used me. I no longer controlled anything in my life. I didn't feel emotion, even with those I had loved, and I was numb to affection. I only thought of how to get more drugs, but deep down, I didn't want to destroy myself. The void I felt was horrible; my life was on a merry-go-round.

I thought that I had to come out of this by myself. I continued to pray and asked God to help me and my children. I loved my children in spite of my condition, and only wanted the best for them. Unfortunately, I made horrible decisions while my children were growing up. The girls had to take care of themselves because I couldn't stay sober. There was no way I could express love or affection for them. Even today, it makes me cry when I think about

how they must have suffered because of the mother I was. I am still trying to find the courage to forgive myself.

I learned that a child can not only be loved but has to be shown love every day. From the age of fifteen on, I forgot how to love myself or anyone else. Even before that, I remember that my mother and father would have fights, and that my mother was hospitalized because of her injuries. Love and affection were not always there for me.

Drugs became the driving force in my life, and money was what sustained my addiction. I fell into a life of crime. I committed felonies and went to prison two times. When I could hold down a job, I would work all day, and sell myself all night to support my addiction. The drugs kept me going. I became a shell of a person. Each time I tried to stop using drugs, there was always a relapse. Off to the races again!

The road I sentenced myself to had no end. I couldn't stay sober for minutes or hours, let alone for months or years. I had to stop this merry-go-round! My first attempts at treatment centers didn't work. I went to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous, but I was unsuccessful. Yet I still knew that there was something better for me to experience on my life's journey.

In spite of my weaknesses and mistakes, my daughters always loved me and prayed for me. One of them, who received a college degree and achieved success, helped rescue me. She placed me in a Lutheran Hospital program. I was sent to a treatment center. I entered the Hitchcock Women's Treatment Center for 90 days. The time was right. With the love and support I had seldom shown others in my adult life, I learned to love myself and continue to become the woman God wanted me to be.

I have struggled with my faith in the past, but I read the Bible daily and go to church. My faith is strong. My children love and respect me and are with me on this life's journey. I am finally a positive example for them. Instead of the victim, I am the victor! I have changed, and the change was in me all the time. I am a miracle!

I am 71 years old, but today I'm still growing and changing for the better. I stayed in Hitchcock apartments for two years. I am clean and sober now and on my own. My goals are set. I have been attending the Aspire Greater Cleveland high school equivalency program at North Star and will soon be finishing the testing process. My hope is to go to an accredited school in the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction and become a counselor. I pray that the 40-year journey I continue will help others. I want to be a miracle in someone else's life.

~ *Cathy Rias*
Cuyahoga County Public Library

Never Love

Never love a
Broken heart
Your seed
Will never grow
The pain
of your
Emotions, will
Crumble
For her scent
Will remind
of what was
to be
So quick it came
But faster it went
You will grow
Cold in time
So much effort
was spent
You will
Tell yourself
It's ok
just to darken
your heart
But if she call
You will answer
Just to feel that spark
Disappointing
Yourself again
Never love
A
Broken heart

~ Andre F. Williams
Project LEARN of Summit County

To the Hilt

To feel those eyes of the past time upon me--
they cut through me just as cold as ice.
I know what you're thinking without a word.
Years of let down and hurt.
Conditions upon conditions.
One-sided expectations will never change.
A life of regret and words left unsaid
 like a river of blood under a burnt bridge.
It all ends the same.

~ Dustin Hiltz
Lima City Schools

Time

Time is something that you cannot buy or bypass
So why ask?
I am the peddler, a very good hustler.
Twenty-seven years in the game and didn't have to worry
about a thing.
I was very untamed.
Time, oh how time passed me by in the blink of an eye.
Now I sit in the county jail waiting to take my time.
Time is passing me by.
Time waits for no one.
Check!
Dig!
I should have reneged, but I still let you in my biz
And you told on the kid.
Time has been stolen.
Now I'm in jail being controlled with time.
Oh time, how time keeps ticking.
I never stood on corners
I conduct business in a parlor where my people waited
for their orders.
Back then, my time was money.
I have been very penitent showing sorrow for the people
in my past.
I'm glad I got my time, and I will be free at last.
I have a lot of making up to do for the time I have lost.
You do the crime, you pay the cost.
No time for friends, I have been double crossed.
Time to rescind!
No new friends!
I said, "No new friends!"
I'm not dealing with simpletons.

Oh time! How time can be so shrewd and very dangerous too.

But I pay my dues from breaking a lot of rules.

Oh time, how time made me so stoic that it has removed

my joy in the system.

Played like a toy.

Oh time, how time slipped past me in the blink of an eye.

Supercilious is hell when you're sitting in the cell,

when you don't have a bail.

It is time to think of new ways to live.

Your heart pounds like a pendulum living blood

on your timberlands.

Do you really wanna live like this?

Time to stop and rethink again because

Time is something, we can never get back!

~Terrence Burt
Great Oaks Career Campuses

My Terrifying Story

I survived a shooting. Never did I know what it felt like to be in a serious win-lose situation until I experienced this terrifying event. I have seen things on television, even dreamed of things before, but never did I think it would be me. I am here today and blessed to have the opportunity to share my story.

This experience was traumatic. When I was hit, I must have been in shock because I did not feel pain; instead, my skin became very hot, and my heart sped up. I did not even realize if I could be dying at that moment. Doing everything in my power not to panic or freak out in order to save my blood from gushing everywhere, I tried to calm myself.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Keep your friends close but your enemies closer"? That was my way of trying to protect and save a friend from the people I thought were my closest friends; I risked my life for those very people that night, and the consequence was their turning their backs on me. In addition, they even hung with the person who committed this horrible crime.

My experience in the hospital lasted eight days. The surgery consisted of repairing both my small and large intestines. Determined to get better, I left the hospital in only eight days. Later I learned that the first surgery was done too quickly, and my body did not heal properly. At 20, after delivering my son, my intestine twisted into a ribbon creating a blockage. Thankfully, my aunt rushed me to the hospital where I had emergency surgery. Although I was afraid to go through another surgery, I realized it was important to save my life. I remained in the hospital for ten days so that I could recover completely.

I am most grateful to be feeling better and being able to once again eat normally and to enjoy my life.

~Tattianna Hood
Penta County Vocational School

With

Bargains with the Devil
Instead of having conversations with God
Ego-driven nightmares
With one-night-stand affairs
Still haunted by the memories
Clips in my head that would make a grown man drop to his knees
Hearing voices
Making wrong choices
Walking through dark alleys where the demons roam
Hearing their laughs as I make them my own
Clenching a map with no idea how to get home.
Trap houses
Hotel rooms
Revolving doors with no faces
Having battles with my faith as I am stuck in these places
Eyes in the mirror, but I can't see my own.
Near-death bodies as I hear them moan
Chills down my spine as I write you this poem.
Soul tied up with ropes
Making it out of here alive is my only hope.
Gray skin, empty shell
Glorifying actually living in Hell
Track marks with loaded guns
Trying to convince myself I'm having fun.
Sirens with shots
Chasing the thrill of not being caught
Handcuffs with court cases
Looks of disappointment plastered over my loved ones' faces.
Ambulance rides with hospital stays
Praying I get this right one day
Realizing my soul is slowly fading away.

Suddenly, with God's help, something happened
that I couldn't do for myself.
My druggie lifestyle was knocked off the shelf.
Shaking my head as I look back and grin.
No longer filling my life full of sin
Looking to God asking if I've earned a life living with Him
All for nothing? Or all for something?
Asking for a better understanding
Soul glowing with pupils showing.
The only way to escape evil is to live with the words reversed,
Refusing to live with the Devil's curse.
Knowing I'm human made to make mistakes
Working hard to undo my internal wrongs with whatever it takes
Asking and begging to be blessed with His grace
I pray I'm shown mercy when He meets me at the Gates.

~Ashley Spencer
Penta County Vocational School

My Blessing Was My Worst Nightmare

There was a girl from Africa. Her name was Setou. She came from a very religious family where women were not allowed to wear pants, and women were not allowed to be alone with any man unless he was family. They saved themselves for marriage. When their family moved to America, her father was very worried and afraid that they would lose their African values, and that they wouldn't follow their religion or rules. She was close to her father, and her family always said that she was his favorite child. She always tried to follow all the rules, and she tried not to disappoint her father. She never stayed out late. She didn't ever talk to boys. She always dressed up in a way that she knew her father would approve of.

She was working with her sister. They went to school during the day, and they worked a night shift. Their father told them when they were taking the job to always walk home together. One dark night, the boss asked Setou to close. Her sister wanted to go home because she hadn't finished her homework yet. Setou told her sister to go ahead, and she would stay and close by herself.

As she was walking home alone, she had a feeling that someone was following her. She was very scared and when she was about to run, someone grabbed her from the back. She tried to fight him off, but she couldn't, and then he violated her. She was there, hopeless and like her soul had left her body. When she got home, her father was worried and was yelling at her. All she could say was sorry. She went upstairs and started crying. She was too afraid and ashamed to say anything to anyone. She was depressed and quiet. A month passed and her mother noticed that she didn't have her monthly cycle. Her mother then grabbed her hand and dragged her to the living room. She threw her on the floor and told her father.

"Your daughter is pregnant!" she said. The father started yelling very aggressively, "Do you want to bring shame to this family? Who got you pregnant? So you have a boyfriend?" She

was sobbing and told her family that she had been violated, but her father didn't believe her. He called her all kinds of names. He then told her, "You're no longer part of this family, and don't ever come back to this house."

She left the house that night not knowing where to go, feeling alone, afraid, and with nowhere to turn. She had never been on her own. She slept on the street in a very dangerous neighborhood. She was thinking that no one would ever want to marry her because she was pregnant without being married, and she was no longer living at her parent's house. She thought, how could someone ask for her hand in marriage?

Months passed. When she was walking, she saw a familiar face, a guy from her neighborhood. They said hello to each other. She then asked him, "Why haven't I seen you around?" He said that he had been traveling and had just gotten back. He was always cool and charming. And he asked her, "So you've moved out?" She was ashamed. She told him everything that had happened.

He then promised that he would do everything in his power to help her out. She didn't want to accept it, but he insisted. After one month of him helping her, they got married and moved in together. They were happily married. She had three more kids, and he didn't treat her daughter any differently from his. She felt so blessed and happy again. Everything was going right. That is until her first child got sick. She had kidney failure, and they needed a donor. Her siblings and her mother were no match. They couldn't find a match and she was dying. Her husband volunteered and he was a match.

But then everything changed. He was drinking a lot and he became very violent towards her. He became abusive and controlling. She didn't know why he had changed. He lost his job. She was working and taking care of everything. There was fear and guilt eating him up.

One day he came home drunk. He was as cold as ice, and he violated her. She was telling him to stop, but he didn't. She

was traumatized all over again. Then she remembered the night she got violated and put everything together. Her blessing had become her worst nightmare, and her savior was the devil himself.

Her world started falling apart. She then took her daughter's DNA and his. She got a phone call, and the results came back that he was the father. She dropped the phone and blacked out, before running to the kitchen and getting a knife. As he was passed out, she stabbed him multiple times.

After that, she ran to her father's house. Still in shock with the knife in her hand and her bloody clothes, she fell to the ground and was shaking. Her family was asking her what had happened. She kept on saying it was him. "He violated me. He's her father! I killed him, I killed him." Her father fell to his knees. He took the knife from her. He was crying as he hugged her tight and asked for her forgiveness.

The jury found her not guilty. She was a victim. They welcomed her back and she reunited with her family.

~Asiya Touray
Godman Guild

My Life Story

This is the story about my life and my experiences growing up being a Santos child. When I was 11, my mother, my sisters, and my brothers were all outside playing. I was in the house getting myself together. My mother came back in the house for something, went back out, and slammed the door. When I heard the door close, I thought, I'm safe and sound. Then while I was in the shower a friend of the family came into the house and asked me, "Where is your mother?" I said, "Outside with kids." He said, "Okay, Sharon. I'm leaving." I said, "Okay, lock the door behind you when you leave." Then he said, "Okay Sharon. I got you." Then as soon as I came out of the bathroom, he grabbed me and took me to the room and did his thing on me.

My mother has eleven children, and we didn't have the guidance we needed growing up. She was more into her men and her drugs than her children. She would beat us and leave us in the house for weeks and months at a time – sometimes with no food in the house. At 12 years old, we were taken from my mother and placed in a group home.

I had my first child at age 12 – he was a result of the rape. My mother used to help me with my son as I was still in school. I graduated from junior high school. Then I dropped out and didn't go back because of what I went through being raped. None of my family believed this happened. I was emotional and depressed. I just didn't care. I lived in different homes and my son did too. All my siblings were in foster care. I still needed help getting my emotions in place. I haven't cried since my mother died. I missed having a father that I did not know or even if he was still alive. I have a lot of pain that I keep inside. I hope I can help someone one day with my story.

All the good things that my mother and I have done with each other are good memories to me. We had water fights and played hide and seek and card games. The bad thing is that my mother got her children taken from her over men and drugs.

When I turned 18 years old, I was no longer in foster care. I got my own place and raised my children. Now I talk to my kids about everything. I do not want my children looking for love in the wrong places or doing the wrong things in life. Because what you put out there, you cannot take back. Words and actions hurt if you don't take care of your life.

I learned to listen to my kids, understand and trust what they are saying to me. I guide them to the right place, teach good not bad, let them know that I love them with all my heart and soul. They are my world. I get my strength from my kids and more patience. Even though I had a bad childhood, I still got back up and found my power to go on with my life for my kids. I feel good that I go to school and soon will own my motel and share it with my family. I'm so glad that I'm in the right place in my life. Thanks to our Father, the Lord.

~ Shkisa S. Santos
Penta County Vocational School

The Cries of Lies

A father's lie made the child cry.
Who turned into a boy with a fire in his eye, hate in his heart
and a mind that will never trust again.
The cycle stays the same until the end of time.
For the child who cried all because of his father's lie.

~ *Dustin Hilts*
Lima City Schools

Pursuit

The Dream of My Life

I grew up living with my grandmother. She was very kind, encouraging, and a hard worker. I told my grandmother that I wanted to become a nurse. She encouraged me, and I was so determined to make my grandmother proud. Sadly, my grandmother got sick and died. I moved back with my parents. My dad was not there for us, so my mother raised me and my siblings on her own. She tried to help me with my dream, but she could not do much. My grandmother, who I thought would be there for me, was gone.

I ended up going to a vocational school. I always remembered what grandmother and I dreamed for. One day, a co-worker told me about a program where Americans helped immigrants to come to the United States. I applied and I was blessed in 1999, for my family and I moved to the United States. It wasn't easy to start a new life, but I was determined. I went to school to become a nurses' aid. I wanted to further my education, but I needed to improve my English. A friend told me about an ESL class that would improve my English skills and make them better. I started the class and I'm still in the ESL program. I'm working hard to support my family also.

The dream that I thought was lost forever wasn't. My dream became even greater when my son became a nurse and my daughter an MD student. I was blessed to have met very good people who gave me advice and encouraged me to fulfil my dream. America is a great country. I'm so thankful to be here with my family. God bless America!

~ Elizabeth Minta
Delaware Career Center

If I Could Change Something About the World...

I would like all of us to worry more about taking care of our planet earth, the environment, and animals. (Katherine)

If I could change something in the world, it would be that there would be less crime and insecurity. (Eva)

If I could change the world, I would make my best effort to keep the world peaceful. (Alice)

If I could change one thing in the world, it would be no violent video games because they damage the minds of minors. That's one of the causes of shooting. (Fatima)

If I could change one thing in the world, it would be racism. My wish would be that everybody would be treated the same because we all are equal. I just dream of a world where my kids can be happy without worrying about racism. (Martha)

If I could change something in the world, it would be to achieve gender equality. (Nancy)

If I could change something in the world, I would like to have the opportunity to take care of all the children who don't have a home, family, or food. (Arcelia)

If I could change the world, I would want to get rid of the guns, stop wars, and have all the races get along. (Shifeng)

~ Group submission from Auburn Career Center Advanced ESOL Class:

Katherine Zambrano

Eva Galiano

Alice Lane

Fatima Vazquez

Marth Casillas De Alvarez

Nancy Rocha

Arcelia Preza

Shifeng Wang

Humanity Is Almost Dead

Humanity is the name of care, affection, love, no discrimination, human values, etc. Yes, these are the big words which we use in our debates, but, alas! We forgot our basic values and with the passage of time it changes into words.

One day I saw from the window of my house that some people were walking by and they had a casket on their shoulder. I shouted and asked, "Who are you and whose funeral is this?"

They looked at me carefully and smiled. After some time one of them spoke, "You don't know whose funeral is this???"

"No," I said.

"This is Humanity."

"Humanity? Are you joking?" I said.

They said, "No, look around yourself--you will know the answer to your question easily." And after that they walked away. I stood there for a long time. I was really astonished, and then I started thinking about what they said...

Then I had to decide. I should be observing around myself keenly. It is true that humanity is almost dead from society. We are very busy in our lives. We have no time to think about anyone, not even for our relatives. When it comes to our neighbors, we don't know whether they have eaten, slept well, or have clothes to cover themselves.

Alas! We are running for our career and for our life goals. In this rat race of success we forgot everything, even the motive of birth of all human beings.

Oh, I feel embarrassed when I think about who I am and the purpose for which God sent me in this world. I realize then that I should be analyzing myself. It is time that I start thinking about my childhood. My parents always taught me values and even told me that charity begins at home. I thought when I was a child I never knew the difference between a poor and rich man. I never

knew who was good or bad. But, from whom did I learn all these differences, which creates negativity in me? I was like a lamb, a very little innocent lamb. Who made me a wolf? Why have I forgotten my values and my basic purpose as a human being? I have decided that I should think about it.

I have read my own life book, and then I knew the greediness of success, career and wealth changed me. I focused on my life goals but neglected God's orders. I ignore my basic purpose of birth. Suddenly, I woke up, but I felt tired and my body was fatigued. I wanted to get up but my body did not support me. I thought about lying down, oh! Is it a dream? But this dream opened my eyes and mind. I got up, rubbed my eyes, and went outside. When I sat in my car, I felt I was in a bed of thorns. For the first time in my life I felt things that were scattered around me wholeheartedly. I saw beggars, homeless people, and so many kids who were wearing torn dresses and had no shoes on their feet.

I observed that no one stopped for them, no one cared for them, and no one thought about them, everyone was busy. Everyone is in a hurry. Then I remembered my dream, the funeral.....Yes! Humanity is dead.....I whispered.....

Oh God! Please forgive me, I thought and felt tears running from my eyes. I have decided to help them and try to do my best for their future. Although, we can't do much for all persons who are around us but we can try for some.Yes, for some.....

I went to a mall and purchased some food from there and distributed it to poor people. It gave me satisfaction and pleasure. I felt a huge change in myself because I knew the purpose of my life, and I knew there was a better reason why God sent us to the world. Now I knew it well that our basic purpose of life is humanity, kindness to others, and respect for others without any discrimination.

After doing that I felt inner satisfaction. It gave me real happiness and pleasure. It was only the first step, but I felt very light and easy from my heart and soul. It gave me comfort and confidence to help others. I realized that it is a blessing of God who chose me and guided me towards the right path. I felt that I

spent my life in ignorance, with no concern for others. I realized that true pleasure and satisfaction is hidden in humanity, not in that life which I spent before. Then I thought if God does not choose me for this and I spend my whole life in ignorance maybe I will never forgive myself. I really thank God who helped me to choose the right way. It is a time when I can see all the objects around me clearly, like when I see the trees in winter, all the leaves down, but nests of birds are always there. So when trees never forget their duty, how we can forget everything? We are human beings.

~ Syeda Jabeen
Columbus Literacy Council

Lemonade Affirmation

There will be trammel when the path I take is scenic
When I crash and burn I can learn to be a phoenix
 Pick myself up and be reborn from my ashes
Knocked down 1,000 times and get back up like Cassius
 Sting like a bumble-bee, float like a butterfly
I'm a ruler of my time. I refuse to let it flutter by
I'm the captain of my ship and life is like an ocean
 I'm the sensei black belt master of my emotion
On days I can't go forth, I'll go anywhere but back
Won't compare my life to others' cause its anything but that
 One man's valley is another man's peak
 One man's trash is another man's treat
 Yesterday is dead, today's a different day
Tomorrow I'll do better than what I did today
 Not perfect but worth it in so many ways
So when life gives me lemons...I'll make lemonade

~ Cameron Harris-Johnson
Lima City Schools

To Survive Here

I came from South Korea seven months ago. My husband was sent to the US, so I came here with my kids. It wasn't easy to decide to come to America, because I had to quit my job. But there's only one reason I chose to come here. It's for my kids. I chose to go to the United States only because I thought it would be helpful for children's English education and various cultural experiences. Of course, even in my country, my kids can learn English, but in Korea, English education is centered on grammar and reading. I also grew up with such an English education. As a result, I can't understand and speak English well now.

I have completed my master's degree and had a professional job in my country, but now I can't say what I want to say or communicate properly here because I can't understand their English. Higher education or a job in my country means nothing here. I had to find a way to survive. Only when I can hear and speak can I live. Only then can I achieve my goal of educating my kids.

With the help of people around me, I learned a lot about ESL classes, and I knocked on doors wherever I thought I could learn and take care of my kids. I drop my kids off at school and go to class. I pick them up after class. I have to do everything myself here, even make food that I could buy already prepared in my country. Going to the grocery store took a lot of time, too. I was getting tired. I knew the goal that I was going to achieve in six months was a very simple idea. After a lot of trial and error, I found a class that could achieve my goal. Virtual class. The class was more systematic than I thought, and the teachers and students were passionate. Above all, it was so good that I could take care of my kids, do a lot of housework, and learn English. Of course, when I go to places like hospitals, restaurants, and children's academies, I go with my friends or my husband. This is because I can't yet understand and speak on my own. But I believe. I've found the best class through Project Learn, and soon I'll be able to understand what I hear. I'll be free to say what I want to say. I will not regret coming to the United States with my kids.

I imagine the future. I see myself talking to my kids' teachers, going to the hospital, and talking naturally with my neighbors. I look forward to talking to my family in English. I am not afraid of encountering native speakers and laughing and talking in English.

So I turn on my laptop for class today, too.

~ *Eunyoung Song
Project LEARN of Summit County*

The Good Wizard

This story happened when my family was on vacation in Destin, Florida. Every day we went to the beach. We swam, sunbathed, looked for shells, built sand castles, and listened to waves.

One day the weather was especially hot. My son ran to me. “Mom, I want an ice cream!” my son said.

“But I don’t have any ice cream,” I answered. He looked so unhappy. Suddenly we heard music. It was unusual music.

“What is the music?” my sons asked.

“I don’t know.” I answered.

Soon we saw a man. He was walking along the coast and pulling a boat behind him. His boat had four wheels. My sons and the other children ran to him. When I got there, I saw that the man was the ice cream seller, and his boat was a fridge filled with ice cream. All the children were excited.

We didn’t have any money and cards with us, but the man said that we could pay later. He gave us his cell number. When he left, my son looked at me. “Mom! He is not an ice cream seller!” my son said.

“Why?” I asked.

“I wanted ice cream so much. I was wishing for it. He must have read my mind and brought me an ice cream. He must be a good wizard!” my son said.

“Maybe you are right.” I answered. I smiled and hugged both of my sons. We were all happy!

Thank you, Good Wizard!

~ Yara Kulchitskaya
Warren County Vocational School

Dear My 16-Year-Old Self

I see you walking in your white and gray suits, always dreaming. I can see your mommy making sure you are always her focus so that nothing can interrupt your dreams. I know you are angry that you do not have time to play with your friends because your mom always drops you off and picks you up every single day. And your father, your dad worries about you a lot. He often lets his worry out as anger towards you, but little do you know that he is doing his best to protect you and ensure you will be the best. You are the last of their dream.

I see you entered high school and began your journey with Jakarta's Soaring Club. It is exhausting and I know you are exhausted. But it is worth it. The times you wake up at 5am every weekend and start the lesson from 7am to 5pm, I am proud of you. All of the struggles pay off, believe me. No struggle betrays the result.

I see you; I see you writing all your goals and praying that it would all go your way. Trust me, it worked! I am thankful you did what you did but please, don't be as angry towards your mom and dad. You will do good.

Sincerely,
Yourself, 19 years later

~ Melati Dewi Safitri
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

Peace, Piece by Piece

Give me Your peace, piece by piece, at the start, when life begins
fully dependent on others' care, filling my need when it never ends.
Give me Your peace, piece by piece, as I grow and as I learn
filling my days with fun and games, unaware that for me you yearn.
Give me Your peace, piece by piece, when I rise and when I sleep
finding myself and who I am and trying to excel with every leap.
Give me Your peace, piece by piece, as life's journey builds and
wanes
fearing a future I do not know, but wanting the best with fewest
pains.
Give me Your peace, piece by piece, through my best and through
my worst
finishing strong with my dreams fulfilled, was where I started, but
now feel cursed.
Give me Your peace, piece by piece, through every stage of life I go
future musing and life anew, it's Your perfect peace that I must
know.

~Travis Townsley
Upper Valley Career Center

A Day to Remember

It was an ordinary day in May. I woke up in the morning and saw that it was raining. In spring, it's rain in Kyrgyzstan and everything is green. I remember this day. It was a Sunday. In the afternoon, it slowly stopped raining.

I called Kanykey, my girlfriend, and I asked her to take a walk after the rain stopped. I met up with her, and we went to the mountain where the sanatorium is located, and where people come to rest and relax. The weather was still cloudy and a little cooler. We walked, made plans for the future, and dreamed of creating a happy family.

When we walked along the path among the trees, an idea suddenly occurred to me! I took Kanykey firmly by the hand and stopped under a young tree were the branches leaned to the ground from the weight of the drops accumulated on the leaves. As she stood next to me, she was slightly confused. I watched her carefully, and noticed she was distracted. Without letting go of her hand, I suddenly began to shake the tree with my other hand. A huge amount of cold water fell on us from the leaves on the tree. I was momentarily breathless and Kanykey started screaming because she was startled by the falling water. She tried to escape from under the tree, but I didn't let her go while I continued to shake the tree. In that moment, we were soaked. Kanykey asked me in surprise, "What are you doing?" I just laughed in response. We had lot of fun. We laughed loudly and continued to shake rain-drops from the other trees. I remember when we were leaving, it was as if we were wet to the bone. Kanykey's cheeks were red. Water was dripping from the tip of her nose. Since we didn't have a change of clothes, we got the car wet on our drive home.

When we stopped in the city, I saw my best friend Altynbek, and we stopped to say hello. When he saw us, he just froze. It was clear from his expression he was shocked. When we explained everything to him, he said that we were really crazy! As a good friend, he encouraged us to return home as soon as possible to prevent catching a cold and getting sick.

This day taught me how to turn a bad day into a good day, a cloudy day into a sunny day, and an ordinary day into an extraordinary day. This day taught us to enjoy the little things in life. This day taught us to stick together in any situation.

Now, as we planned, we got married and created a marvelous family. We have four wonderful children. Since I moved to the US, I really miss my family. I really hope that soon we will all be together.

~ Mairambek Zhusupbekov
Great Oaks Career Campuses

New Life

I quit my country on the seventh of September.
On this date it was the first time I saw my father cry.
Immigration is very hard--the people who immigrate know that
feeling.
When I think of my city, I think of my family.
Before, I lived in my city, but now my city lives within my heart.
The life in America is different than life in Western Sahara.
Different Weather.
Different People.
Different Culture.
Different Time.
It is my new life in America.

~ Aliyou Hamdja
Great Oaks Career Campuses

What the Grass Teaches Us

“The grass is always greener on the other side.” I was about to burst into laughter when I heard this proverb in class. Wow, English has the same saying as Japanese! Maybe people all over the world are jealous of others?

People whom I envy. For example, those who...

- have many friends
- are knowledgeable
- have confidence
- are fit
- speak English fluently, and so forth

In the first place, why do we feel jealous of others? Sometimes they can actually be better than us. It is very easy to just complain about our situations. On the other hand, we can learn from our jealousy. Although we think the grass is greener, it is actually composed of various colors. Everyone is different.

Because I was jealous of people who had a lot of friends, I tried to make more friends myself, but that only exhausted me. I realized that it wasn't for me and that it didn't really matter how many friends I had.

Something else I learned from the people whom I envied was that when I talked to them, they all had a very positive way of thinking and were always working hard. I found out that their knowledge or confidence were the results of their efforts.

Therefore, although “being jealous of someone else” sounds negative and sometimes makes us feel depressed, it will be a good opportunity to think carefully about what we like, or what kind of people we want to be. Furthermore, it will motivate us or help us find our strengths. Our future is up to us. We should listen to our hearts. The grass will teach us something.

~ Michiyo M.
Delaware Career Center

Paths

How far I walked
There were many paths to choose
How long it has passed
Since I began to walk in my shoes

Sometimes I wonder
What if I'd chosen another way
It might be better
If I'd chosen the path along the bay

Another path never stamped
It might have changed me
I'll never know what I missed
What I was able to see

It's too far to go back
No time for regretting
Still roads ahead, so I can't get stuck
No choice but to keep going

~*Tam Ogura*
Delaware Career Center

Hello Paulina!

I know it will be hard for you to hear and accept what I will tell you now but please take a minute to think about this.

The most important thing that I want to tell you is always invest in yourself and take every opportunity to learn and grow. Don't try to be like your colleagues, friends or boyfriends. Make life everything what you want. Don't listen to opinions and comments like, "You don't need this," or "You will waste your time." Follow your dreams because you will regret giving up on your dreams.

The second thing is to be more careful with people. Not everyone is your real friend; people can be bad, too. They will use you, your kindness, lack of life experience, and your need of acceptance.

The third thing is don't run so fast to adulthood. Enjoy every aspect of being a teenager and a young woman. Go see places, travel, dance in the rain, meet new people, taste life.

And last of all: You are enough. You don't need anyone else to feel complete. You are smart and you know how to work hard. Use these skills to grow your future.

You will have a lot of ups and downs, but don't give up on yourself. There is always sunshine after a rainy day.

Love,
Paulina from the future

~ *Paulina Agier*
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

Rely on Myself

I got married at the age of eighteen. As a girl in my culture, my parents were responsible for me. Then after I got married my husband became responsible for me. My life went on like this until I traveled and left my homeland.

I traveled for the first time at the age of twenty, with my husband and two little children. I arrived in a country where I didn't know anyone except my husband and my children. I was walking in the streets, looking at the faces of those around me and those different details which take my mind and my heart to another world, to my family.

This is a feeling of alienation; everything is strange and everything hurts. The story started when my husband went back to his job. He was leaving the house in the morning and coming back in the middle of the night, leaving me alone with two little children.

After a period of time. I decided to overcome my loneliness. I couldn't keep my life like that, just sitting at home and waiting for my husband to get home, so we could go buy the necessities for the house and the children.

I had to take a step forward. First I got a driving license, which made my life much easier. I started to rely on myself. I started to go grocery shopping, taking the children to their doctor's appointments, taking them to the park, and paying the bills. Things I've never done before. I realized that a women in exile should be a mother and a father at the same time.

I found that relying on myself should be for everything, and taking on all responsibilities is a really good thing. It makes me think independently and achieve my goals bravely.

Now I can solve my problems and make my own decisions. I can decide who I want to be and how I can get there.

Basically, if you believe in something, and consider it worthy of an advantage after thinking well about it, you should express it with confidence.

Life taught me to value the people who love me and make the most of each day. To take care of my family first, to focus on what makes me most fulfilled, be patient and understanding, and to enjoy every moment with my family.

For sure there are a lot of difficulties. But our love for living the best life with our lovely people is greater than all these negativities. I hope that I did all I could for my family, and I will continue to make strides for them and myself.

~ Ayatallah Alqaraja
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Staying Alive

Now is the time for true healing.
Mending the bridges I've broken along the way by my own doing
 Taking responsibility for my actions and choices
 Learning how to decipher my own out of all these voices
 Recognizing what belongs to me and what belongs to my past,
 Digging deep, having uncomfortable conversations
 so this new me will last.
 Taking a look in the mirror and finally making eye contact
 Protecting myself in times of spiritual attack
 Kissing the scars I've left on my skin
 Mentally hugging the ones deep within
 Learning to love myself has come with a price:
 Letting go of my romantic relationship with pain,
 the ultimate sacrifice.
 It wasn't easy; I was stuck in my ways.
 Craving its sick affection on the darkest of days
 Once I was able to examine the obsession,
 Awareness of self left quite the impression.
 Elevating myself to a higher state of consciousness,
I finally understood when it's said the true value of self is priceless.
 Challenging myself with each step I take,
 Reminding myself when facing hardships, I don't have to break,
 Knowing ultimately my life is at stake.
 Telling myself to always remain teachable
 Not closing my mind so the lessons are irretrievable
 My journey isn't over; it's only just begun.
 No longer having to convince myself because I am now
 actually having fun.

~ Ashley Spencer
Penta County Vocational School

Panorama

My Vacation in Quito Ecuador

My name is Milenny. I am from Venezuela and have lived in Columbus, Ohio, for 3 years. I like to travel. In November 2014, my cousins Yhana, Liliana, and I talked about going on a trip to South America. We wanted to travel to Argentina, Chile, or Ecuador. Finally, we decided to explore Ecuador. This trip was the first time that I traveled alone without my family. My husband and my three children stayed at home. My younger daughter was 10 years old. My husband supported me in taking this 15-day vacation. It was great!

I was 37 years old, but I felt like I was in the time of my youth when I used to go out with my cousins and friends. I missed my family so much, but at the same time I was happy to know this country.

We went to visit many emblematic places such as Independence Square, Lagoon of Quilotoa, the Teleferico Cable Car and my favorite place, the Middle of the World City. The Middle of the World in Quito, Ecuador, is a monument of more than 98 feet high. It marks the equatorial line that crosses the country from east to west. Quito is in the middle of the two hemispheres.

In this place you could experience various phenomena of lack of gravity, for example, when you walk on the equatorial line, you felt like you were going from side to side. Also, you could place an egg on the top of a nail and it would not fall. There were many interesting experiments, and I hoped that my children and my husband could have that experience one day.

~ Milenny Gimenez
Delaware Career Center

Marigold

The shimmering blacktop looked like a winding river cutting through the green grass as it disappeared into the blue sky.

Highway marker 23 the sign said as she changed the music on the radio to something with more of a beat to it. She had been putting off this little trip for some time now. But when she opened her green eyes this morning, she said to herself. "Today is the day," so she got up and dressed in her favorite faded blue jeans, the ones with the holes in the knees, a yellow checkered flannel shirt over her T-shirt, socks, and old worn-out cowboy boots. Heading to the kitchen, she grabbed some coffee, a piece of leftover chocolate cake, and headed towards the door. She grabbed her keys and overnight bag on the way out.

Stepping off the porch, she stopped suddenly as she caught a glimpse of something out of the corner of her eye. She stood for a moment and watched. There was nothing there. She tossed her bag through the passenger window of the old Ford pickup truck that used to belong to her father and walked around to the driver side. She turned the key and the old Ford roared to life. She grabbed the shifter, put it in first, and headed off.

She had not gotten very far when she thought she heard a noise coming from the engine. She pushed the thought aside and blamed it on the old truck. Soon, the noise grew louder. She pulled off to the side of the road and cut the engine. She reached over and grabbed the hood release and unlatched the hood.

As she walked around to the front of the truck, she heard a tiny meow meow. Feeling suddenly panicked, she quickly unlatched the hood and threw it up. Curled up within the truck motor was a tiny orange kitten. A little wet, dirty kitten who looked very frightened. Amelia reached down into the truck engine and grabbed the tiny orange fuzzball as it meowed again. Poor thing. With nothing but skin and bones shivering from the cold. Amelia pulled off her yellow flannel shirt and wrapped it around the wet kitten enveloping it in the shirt's warmth.

She was not sure if the tiny little thing was going to be all right or not, but at least she could see everything on the outside seemed to be OK. Four tiny white paws, two little ears, and one very long tail. She settled the kitten on the seat beside her and drove to the next exit. Taking a small detour from her trip, she got off the highway to find a little diner just off the road. She checked on the kitten to make sure she was still snuggled up in the yellow shirt. Amelia scratched her tiny little head and said, "I'll be right back," and gently closed the door. She walked up to the diner, went in, and ordered her something to eat and asked for a small cup of warm milk.

She paid the nice lady, climbed back into the truck, and set her food on the dash. Amelia picked up the tiny kitten and offered it the warm milk, which it drank very quickly. The poor thing was starving as she sat eating her food. The tiny kitten all full of warm milk. The kitten started to nose around. She watched her as she stood up on her tiny back legs and looked around. She sat back down and looked at Amelia's face. Then she hopped around on the seat beside her. She did not seem to be hurt in any way. She muzzled under the flannel and snuggled down for a nap. Amelia studied the kitten as it slept. She was a dark orange striped with a lighter orange and four pure right feet. Amelia remembered the kitten's eyes were the greenest eyes she'd ever seen, like two shiny emeralds. The kitten was all curled up like a tiny ball on the shirt as she napped. She looked like a little orange flower, like a little orange Marigold. That's how she got her name, Marigold.

The kitten slept on the seat of the truck beside Amelia until she turned her truck and drove down the long lane. As a big farmhouse came into view, Amelia parked in the driveway, picked up the kitten bundled up in the yellow flannel shirt, and went up and opened the pretty white door and closed it behind her with a quick click.

~ Dorine Nienkark
Ohio University

Eye of the Storm

I could swim in your eyes in deep seas of blue.
I feel I never want to see land again, lost in a ship wreck of love.
A million nautical miles as far as the eye can see.
There is no other for me.
Capsized by your touch.
I am lost at sea.

*~ Dustin Hilts
Lima City Schools*

Adelita La Margarita and the Envious Sunflower

Once upon a time, Adelita La Margarita lived along a neighborhood road with other wildflowers on the coast. Margarita got up very early one morning to take her usual morning bath. As if they were crystal pearls, the fresh dew drops refreshed the beautiful flower. She trembled like a tambourine after taking the cool bath, but her friend the sun hugged her and Adelita la Margarita stopped shaking.

Adelita la Margarita was eager to greet her friends with overflowing joy on this brand-new day. She stopped on her way to greet her friend Coqui, who greeted her with the song “coqui, coqui, coqui.” As the hen passed the flower, she sang “cluck, cluck, cluck, cluck” to greet her. Mrs. Duck approached Margarita and greeted her excitedly saying “quack, quack, quack, quack.” She passed by the playful chicks singing “cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep” as they chirped. “Good morning Margarita” said the Foodie Dog, with his “woof, woof, woof, woof.”

Adelita La Margarita did not stop, greeting neighbors and friends, the ones who came and the ones who went. “Good morning, Margarita, you look gorgeous today. You are the most beautiful flower in all the orchards.” Adelita la Margarita smiled with a humble face and said, “thank you very much for your kindness.” The Sunflower listened to the whole conversation and felt indignant that she was not the most beautiful flower.

The Sunflower looked at Margarita, frowned and murmured, “I already have a magnificent plan to be the most gorgeous and beloved flower of the place. I will ask Mr. Gale to blow on Adelita la Margarita-- whoosh, woosh, woosh-- so her petals come off.”

Adelita la Margarita’s sneaky friends listened to her and stood awake waiting for Mr. Gale, snitch, snitch, snitch. The terrible day came when the Sunflower chose for Mr. Gale to blow on Margarita, whoosh, woosh, woosh! When her friends heard the strong wind blowing, they covered her with their petals of love,

stopping the evil intentions of the envious Sunflower. The wind continued to blow, although the friendly sun shone and the petals that flew were those of the envious Sunflower.

*~ Monica Chambers
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

BAR!!SH...RAIN

Rain, one of God's beautiful blessings for mankind and for nature. It means rain when the clouds become overcast, and it slowly starts becoming dark. The clouds look like cotton balls racing in the sky. The storm sounds and then the drops of water come from the sky like crystal onto the earth.

Just by hearing the word rain, it brings a peaceful smile to my face. It brings a sudden change in my mood. If we are tense, we forget about our worries, and sometimes we forget the reason for the tension in the first place.

Watching rain is nostalgic for me. It brings me back to my childhood where we enjoyed rain by making paper boats and sailing them and dancing in the rain. Sometimes we even skipped school and watched cartoons at home.

Sometimes it makes me want to grab a cup of tea and sit beside the window or balcony and enjoy the tea while watching the rain and weather around me. The drizzling. All of it feels like someone has poured some drops of fragrance into the atmosphere, which soothes my soul.

When it's cloudy, and the trees are waving slowly because of the wind, and when the rain is drizzling, I feel like going for a long drive and stopping the car where I can enjoy the beautiful weather, listen to music, and enjoy the beauty of nature around us.

We should enjoy and respect this beautiful blessing of God-- Rain.

~ Kanchan Thakuwani
Delaware Career Center

Kitchen

Low and slow, the pan on the heat
Low and slow, your eyes on me
Sweet like sugar,
Warm like honey;
Cooking is
My favorite hobby.

Hot and fast, a rolling boil
Hot and fast, forever loyal
Flour and yolk,
Sweetness and hope;
Bound together
With twine and rope.

~ Cain Ayers

Project LEARN of Summit County

Fall

Fall is one of my favorite seasons. You know fall is coming when everywhere you go, you can smell the pumpkins. The leaves start changing colors to a beautiful combination of warm colors preparing for a new beginning. Animals migrate to find a place to survive and create a new life.

In my hometown, our trees never change the color of their leaves. But eight years ago, for the first time, I had the beautiful experience to see this process change from green scenery to warm colors.

When the leaves fall off and you feel fresh air, you know it is now fall. That it is time to enjoy the last fresh air before winter. It is a time to check back on your new year's goals: what have you done, how much have you grown up, and what can you change? It is never too late for a new beginning, to be a better human, our world needs us. Be like the trees, change your leaves, and when it is time to fall off, fall off gracefully and grow up stronger.

~ Maria Garcia Noriega
Delaware Career Center

The Angel of the Gate

“Gooooood Moooooorning daddy!!! Let’s go outside!!!” said Peter, running to the door.

In 1940, on a beautiful farm in a small town in Brazil, lived Peter, a little boy who was eight years old. He loved his dog, called Snoopy. His mom, Madeleine, was always concerned about her son’s health and bringing along all sorts of medicine, a jacket, an umbrella, and a little Bible, asking for divine protection. She prayed every single night to Holy Mary to protect her sweet son against any kind of danger. Peter woke up at 5 a.m. every day to help his father, Mr. Antonio, open the huge gate on his farm. This gate separated his fifty giant bulls and cows that he raised on the farm.

“Your cup of coffee is already on the table, honey,” said Mrs. Madeleine at 5 a.m. to Antonio. “Look, Peter woke up with me again,” smiled Antonio. The little boy loved to open the door for his dog Snoopy to run outside. Peter climbed on top of the huge gate and shouted, “Let the bulls go there, daddy!!!” The sun had not risen yet. The wind was blowing strong, and when his daddy positioned his horse in front of the gate, it was time for fun and pure emotion! “Open the gate, daddyyyyy!” screamed the boy.

At the same time, looking through the chicken coop windows, his mom was absolutely scared, because when the gate opened, all the bulls were running desperately outside, looking and fighting for space, exploring all the fields around the farm’s boundaries.

Snoopy also helped Mr. Antonio. When the smart dog ran and barked, all bulls ran in the same direction. Even the bull called “Bad Ox,” the strongest and most dangerous bull ever, obeyed Snoopy. Every day was the same. A lot of work for Mr. Antonio, a funny morning for Peter, and a scary moment for Mrs. Madeleine!

That night, Mrs. Madeleine had a nightmare. She couldn’t sleep well and had a bad feeling. She prayed to Holy Mary again.

When she prepared Antonio's coffee, she felt bad and something weird in her chest.

Peter woke up a little sick, with a fever, but still excited to open the gate. "My son, I think it is not a good idea for you to shadow your daddy today. Go back to your room and sleep a little more, please."

"Don't worry, Mom. I love you."

That day, Snoopy ran ahead of the horse and smelled something strange behind a big pine tree in front of Mr. Antonio's tool house. The bulls were already spread out in the pasture, feeding on the fresh grass. Mr. Antonio was on his horse looking out at the horizon. Peter, as usual, was on top of the gate. And his mother was looking out the window.

Suddenly, the worst happened. Snoopy saw a snake behind the pine tree. By instinct, he started barking desperately, which scared some of the bulls. In a herd of bulls, when one bull becomes scared and runs, like a cascade effect, all the others start running. Unfortunately, they ran towards the main house, trying to return to the gate that was still open.

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Mr. Antonio, already foreseeing the worst. Little Peter was standing in front of the gate and not knowing what to do. Completely frozen by fear, he just joined his little hands and started to pray.

Mrs. Madeleine looked out the window and felt that her premonition was real.

The bull that ran in front was the Bad Ox, the strongest and meanest of all. Mr. Antonio, unable to do anything, fell to his knees and began to cry. Fifty bulls of almost 600 pounds each, raised a cloud of red dust and ran towards the small body of his son, only eight years old.

All the bulls passed through the gate except one. Bad Ox was standing where the boy was. When the dust began to settle,

Mr. Antonio and Mrs. Madeleine, crying, already expected to see the worst scene of their lives.

“My God and Holy Mary, have mercy on us,” cried Mr. Antonio. When he got close to the evil bull, he saw a miracle had happened. The bull had saved the boy. And the boy, still scared and smiling, said: “Goooood Moooooorning daddy!!! I’m fine! Bad Ox protected me!!!”

It turned out that Mrs. Madeleine’s prayers were strong enough. The big and powerful bull, leader of all the others, stood on top of little Peter, protecting him from the others.

This incredible story spread throughout the region. The farm was renamed: Good Ox’s Holy Mary Farm.

Unfortunately, the boy Peter died at the age of fifteen due to health complications, but even today, his story is known as the beautiful story of the “Angel of the Gate.”

~ *Silvio Fernandes
Godman Guild*

Visiting Las Coloradas

In December 2022 my family and I visited a wonderful place called Las Coloradas in the state of Yucatan, Mexico. It is a unique place in the peninsula of the country. It has a natural beauty; the vegetation of this place allows the famous mangroves to grow. It also has very beautiful fauna among which certain birds standout such as: pelicans, seagulls, and the beautiful pink flamingo. The flamingo's diet consists of algae, larvae, insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and small fish. The color of this bird is very beautiful.

In Las Coloradas there is a small fishing port where ships dock to load the product produced there. Las Coloradas is also well known for the salt-producing plant, which is one of the most important in the country. Something that draws attention in the process of salt production in this region is the pink color of the water. It is within that process where pools are created to retain the saline water from the sea and wait for a certain time for the water to evaporate and the salt to be harvested. The newspaper El Universal in the August 25, 2020 edition wrote the following: "The pools in the salt region are several kilometers long and are generally shallow. Its pink color is due to a combination of several factors: the high concentration of salt in the water, the proliferation of microorganisms called halobacterium, and sunlight. The hue can vary from pale pink to deep, almost reddish."

Salt is very important for life and human existence and especially for food, since salt gives food flavor so that it can be enjoyed. There are many stories and anecdotes about salt, but the truth is that in the Bible we find a verse in Matthew 5:13 where Jesus mentions it and says about it: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." If salt loses its properties, it would no longer be useful, that is, it would no longer fulfill its function. I understand from this biblical verse that God considers us very important and that we have something to do to make this world better, where people can find faith, hope, and above all they can

know the love of God (God is love). Don't forget to make a better world every day and give meaning to your life, just as salt gives flavor to food. Remember to visit Las Coloradas, Yucatan, Mexico soon.

~ Roman Lopez Dominguez
Delaware Career Center

I Have a Hobby

I like to sing karaoke. When I am alone at home and I feel a lot of energy, I like to look for my favorite songs on my phone to sing. I have a microphone and a Bluetooth speaker with lights that move with the rhythm of the music. I really love to sing Shakira's songs; she is my favorite singer. I also like to sing other singers' songs, but pop is my favorite kind of music to sing. Singing karaoke is something that I really enjoy.

~ Elena Rodriguez
Auburn Career Center

Otis

Momma birds watch the babies fly
As we walk on by, walk on by
The cool air slips in real sky
But we walk on by, on by

The sun is out in the great blue sky
We just walk on by, walk on by
The kids cheer and the birds cry
As we just walk on by, on by

The air is crisp and the leaves are dry
But we just walk on by, walk on by
The brooms and rakes do the people ply
But we walk on by, on by

The ground is white and the sun is shy
But we still just walk on by, on by
The wind blows fierce and the trees sigh
As we walk on by, walk on by

The grass grows back, and new life is spry
When we walk on by, walk on by
Pollen is thick with water in my eye
Though we walk on by, on by

The cool air and the warm air vie
It's just me walking on by
My little guy had to say bye
I can't walk on by, on by

My heart knows I gotta try
To walk on by, walk on by
I hope I see him when I die
For now I walk on by, on by

~ Seth Seamon
Owens Community College

Artist Biographies

Neha Dadhich - p. iv***Upbringing Compassion***

Neha was born and raised in Rajasthan India. She achieved her master's degree in Visual Arts and completed a Ph.D. degree in Folk Arts from MLS University in India. She has been actively working in the fine arts field for 18 years and exhibiting her paintings in numerous art shows. After relocating to the USA 7 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.

Dorine Nienkark - Back cover***Seeking Sunshine***

Dorine enjoys exploring and expressing herself in the visual arts. She is always interest in improving. Dorine feels she has ideas in her head and she can't get them out -- "Art is a way for me to get things on paper."

Gabriel Pereyra - p. 131***Vanished***

My name is Gabriel and I'm from Mexico. On my free time, I like to draw and paint. I like to travel and explore new places.

Alex Vazquez - Cover***Pursue***

My name is Alex, and I am 18 years old. I like working out and riding my bicycle to GED. My sister Karina is now taking classes with me. We are pursuing our goals of graduating together.

Author Biographies

Angela Suriel Abreu – p. 11

My name is Angela Suriel Abreu. I am from the Dominican Republic. I have lived in the U.S. for 20 years. I started taking ESL classes in 2010, and I have learned so much about the English language. One of my favorite parts of learning English is writing.

Souleyman Adam – p. 3

Hi, I'm Souleyman, I'm from Chad. I have a bachelor degree of geological science from N.djamenia University. I'm an open person with anybody, love joking, learning new things and languages. My favorite things are soccer, investigation films, comedy shows, reading stories, and walking. I would like to be an engineer of petroleum sciences and help the people in poverty.

Paulina Agier – p. 97

Ayatallah Alqaraja – p. 55, 98

I'm a student at ESOL Scarlet Oaks and a mother for five wonderful children. Writing is my favorite hobby. This is first time I'm writing my stories and sharing them with everyone.

Martha Casillas De Alvarez – p. 82

Martha is a hardworking mother of 2 originally from Mexico. In addition to regularly attending Auburn's Advanced ESOL class, she is working on her GED while working full time.

Miguel Angel de León Beaumont - p. 45

I am passionate about studying self-improvement techniques and the qualities that improve the life of any human being. My dream is to become a lighthouse for thousands of people who wish to evolve towards their best version. I love teamwork and organizational leadership. I am the father of a smart 17-year-old teenage girl and the husband of a woman with a big heart. I long for a better world living in peace. Blessings to all!

Norman “Jamie” Angle – p. 28

My family calls me Jamie. I’m from Martinsburg, WV, have two boys (age 15 and 20) and a 2-1/2-year-old little girl who exposes my softer side. I enjoy coaching and both metal and wood working, and fresh and saltwater fish tanks, but enjoy the most being a dad. Hope you enjoyed and had a few laughs reading my poem.

Mickel Archer – p. 10, 27**Auburn Advanced ESOL - p. 82****Cain Ayers – p. 35, 110**

Cain Ayers is a recent GED graduate who spends nearly all her days reading and writing. Don’t be fooled by the grittiness of her work: when she’s not writing dark critiques, she’s at her keyboard typing up a romcom!

Ivoneiva Bareels – p. 29

I’m from Brazil. I’m a mother of seven children. I start my life in USA and I’m very happy. It is a challenge to write in English. Thanks to my teacher who encourages me to write.

Terrence Burt – p. 67

I’m bringing nothing but positive energy and I love to write. Hopefully, readers of *Beginnings* enjoy my writing. Thank you.

Monica Chambers – p. 107

My name is Monica Chambers. I come from Puerto Rico. I was a head start teacher for 30 years. I moved to Ohio 13 years ago. I enjoy writing stories for children.

Melati Dewi Safitri – p. 90

I am from Indonesia, taking an English class. I’m a wife and a mother to two beautiful boys with challenging questions. I have a bachelor’s degree in Management Communication, specializing in Marketing. I am always passionate about creating writing and love reading English fiction books. I have a quote that inspires me, and that is, “If you never try, you will never know.”

Roman Lopez Dominguez – p. 115

My name is Roman Lopez Dominguez and I'm from Mexico. I am a Pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. I studied Theology (2005) and I did a Masters Degree in Pastoral Theology (2014). I was working in Mexico for ten years, and since 2016 I work in Columbus, Ohio. I'm a husband and dad. Currently my family and I live in the city of Columbus.

Silvio Fernandes – p. 113**Jeanine Furaha – p. 3****Eva Galiano – p. 82**

Eva is originally from Mexico. She has been part of Auburn's ESOL program for several years, working her way up from intermediate to advanced. She is very creative--making jewelry, crafts, and knitting. The students love her as she is very encouraging, and she is a lot of fun.

Maria Elena Garcia Noriega – p. 111

I am from Mexico, from a border city with south Texas called Matamoros. My family and I settled in Columbus, Ohio, eight years ago. I enjoy learning every day from new experiences. I'm happy and grateful when making new memories.

Milenny Gimenez – p. 103

My name is Milenny. I am from Venezuela, and I have been living in Columbus, Ohio, for three years. I like to travel and learn about other cultures. I grew up in a small town and always dreamed of seeing the United States. I have had the opportunity to visit other countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom. I want to tell you about my trip to Ecuador.

Aliyou Hamdja – p. 94

Aliyou Hamdja is a hard worker who came to America from Cameroon. He is a student at Great Oaks Aspire.

Dianne Monique Harriell-Blair – p. 14, 26

Cameron Harris-Johnson – p. 86

Cameron is from Lima, Ohio, and his writing was completed while a resident at Western Ohio Regional Treatment and Rehabilitation Center.

Brittany Hatton – p. 49**Melissa C. Hill Nance – p. 39**

Melissa is a wife, a mother, and cares very much for others. Her passion is children and embracing them and teaching them new things. She also cares for seniors, giving them comfort in their later years.

Dustin Hilts – p. 66, 77, 106

Dustin Hilts is a student in the Lima City Schools Aspire Program. He grew up in New York and that nickname of NY still remains with him today. Dustin is married to his childhood sweetheart, Candi, and they have two daughters, Mea and Elika, and one son, Brody. His family has been a huge inspiration to him. Most of Dustin's poetry depicts his journey toward sobriety. Dustin's goal is to publish a book of poetry.

Tonya R. Holliday – p. 6

Tonya is an adult student at the Academy for Urban Scholars. She is inspired by her experiences and will to graduate this year.

Tattianna Hood – p. 69

My name is Tattianna Hood. I am a student in the Penta County Aspire. I chose to write this story so I could have the chance to actually face my emotions about the most terrifying experience of my life.

Adjovi Houndjo – p. 21**Enas Ismail - p. 13**

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.

Syeda Jabeen – p. 83**Yanjin Jiang – p. 32**

Yanjin Jiang came to America from China. She and her husband had a restaurant in Mason, Ohio. Yanjin is a student who shows leadership at Great Oaks Aspire in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mayumi Kameyama - p. 25

Mayumi Kameyama studied early childhood education at University and worked in a preschool in Japan before moving to the US in 2016 to accompany her husband on a business assignment. Currently, she lives in Columbus and is raising her daughter and attending ESOL classes at Godman Guild. She will return to her home country this spring.

Amanda Koehler – p. 61**Shiho Kubota – p. 50**

Shiho Kubota is an ESOL student in London, Ohio. She came from Japan in October 2021. She loves baking, eating, traveling, and studying English. She wants to work in Japan using English and is studying English hard.

Yara Kulchitskaya – p. 15, 89

My name is Yara. I live in Maineville. I arrived in the USA in August 2021 with my husband and two sons. I have been taking ESOL classes in Lebanon since January 2022. I enjoy learning English and writing stories. My hobbies are reading, writing and sketching. My main interest in my life is my family. I plan to get a new profession and start working.

Alice Lane – p. 82

Alice is from China, and she is part of Auburn's Advanced ESOL class. She formerly taught English in Vietnam, and she is helpful to the other students. She keeps busy taking care of her family, and cooking them delicious Chinese food.

Laura Lapadula – p. 31

My name is Laura Lapadula. I am from Venezuela. I am a physician

and general surgeon, specializing in laparoscopy. I am married and have two daughters. I came to the United States three months ago. I am studying English at Project Learn.

Nadia Lthrm – p. 43

I am from Libya. I live a very simple life, and I like to take care of my family. I like to enjoy my time learning about different cultures.

Michiyo M. – p. 95

Michiyo M. moved to the US from Japan in 2022 due to her husband's job. She has been in ESOL class for 5 months. She really enjoys studying with her wonderful teacher and her energetic classmates from all over the world.

Tennell Mathis – p. 8**Elizabeth Minta – p. 81**

My name is Elizabeth Minta. I'm from Ghana. I came to the United States in 1999, and I'm an ESL student. I'm thankful to all my teachers at school. Without their help I would not be able to learn English.

Jacque Mukalayi – p. 3**Ricky Mullins – p. 9**

I have a good heart, but I bump my head every step of the way. I haven't gotten a handle on this thing we call life. I put my best foot forward and do the best I can but fail gracefully.

Julie Nguyen – p. 23

My name is Julie Nguyen, and I come from Vietnam. I have been in the United States for 14 years. I have 3 kids: Emily Trinh (13 years old), Evelyn Trinh (12 years old), and Eric Trinh (10 years old). I love to learn English with my classmates and our teacher, Mairi.

Dorine Nienkark – p. 104

Dorine likes to explore the past, present, and future. She is a natural storyteller and is sharing more of her ideas in written form. She enjoys writing about the world around her, good and bad.

Tam Ogura – p. 16, 96

Tam Ogura is an ESOL student in Dublin, Ohio. She came from Japan with three sons and her husband, Eiji. Living in Ohio brings her great pleasure because she loves peaceful, quiet, and rich nature. She also enjoys traveling with her family, reading novels, and learning English with her wonderful classmates.

Kathy Pena – p. 53

My name is Kathy Pena, a student at Penta Aspire program and a kidney transplant survivor of 20 years. If you would, I ask you to please consider becoming an organ donor. You would be saving a life.

Arcelia Preza – p. 82

Arcelia is working to improve her English in Auburn's ESOL program so she can better communicate with her co-workers and her daughters' teachers. She works full time, and takes care of her family of four. Arcelia is originally from Mexico.

Cathy Rias – p. 62

Cathy Rias is a student in the High School Equivalency Program of Aspire Greater Cleveland. Her goal is to receive certification as a counselor for those with addiction problems.

Barbara Rivero – p. 17

She is originally from Venezuela. She lived in the US for 10 years as a child but has now moved back permanently. She has also lived in 5 other countries and speaks 3 languages.

Nancy Rocha – p. 82

Nancy recently began attending Auburn's Advanced ESOL class. She is originally from Mexico. In addition to taking classes, she works full time and takes care of her family.

Chalisa Rocker – p. 40

My name is Chalisa Rocker. I was inspired to write this poem during "Domestic Violence Awareness Month". I am a poet who writes poetry and was invited to use my writing skills to speak at an event for domestic violence victims. I once was a victim turned

into a conqueror. I love writing; it's a beautiful way to express yourself!

Elena Rodriguez – p. 117

Elena is an ESOL student in the Aspire program at Auburn Career Center. Elena owns her own business and takes care of her family while working hard to improve her English.

Denise R. Sanders – p. 57

My name is Denise Sanders. I live in Cleveland, Ohio. I'm a student at Seeds of Literacy. I am a proud grandmother of thirteen. I believe that it's never too late to learn.

Ikumi Sano – p. 52

Shkisa S. Santos – p. 75

She is a single mother getting her GED. Her goal is to own her own business -- a motel. Her children are who bring it all together.

Seth Seamon – p. 118

Seth is a GED student through Owens Community College.

Tiffany Smith – p. 24

Eunyoung Song – p. 87

My name is Eunyoung Song. I study English at Project Learn. I live in Ohio with my husband and two kids. I was a Korean language teacher, but I'm a housewife here. My goal is to speak and listen in English well.

Melissa Sosa – p. 33

Ashley Spencer – p. 70, 100

My name is Ashley, and I am 29; I have been battling addiction since I was 16. Traveling many dark, winding roads in that journey, I have now found help at a treatment center, Racing for Recovery, in Holland, Ohio. Since I have been able to identify the traumas in my life as driving forces in my addiction, I am learning how to heal from

these events. With recovery, anything is possible. The best roads are yet to come.

Sulphur Grove Book 3 Class – p. 3

Kanchan Thakuwani – p. 109

My name is Kanchan Thakuwani. I have completed my Master's in Computer Application from India. I am learning English in an ESOL class in Dublin, Ohio. My husband and I moved to the US in 2022. My hobbies are cooking and listening to music.

Asiya Touray – p. 72

Travis Townsley – p. 91

At 41 years old, I'm currently incarcerated, which has been a very traumatic journey in my life. It has disrupted everything. My writings have provided comfort in this very difficult season.

Tomoko Tsubogami – p. 3

My name is Tomoko Tsubogami. I am from Japan. I have lived in Ohio since 2021 with my husband and three children. I love to travel with my family. I want to visit all 50 states in the USA, and I also want to see many views.

Kamolatkhon Tuychieva - p. 5

Kamola is a student in the Great Oaks ESOL Blue (high intermediate) class at the Northstar location. Her home country is Uzbekistan. She lives with her husband and two sons. She has been in the United States for 6 years.

Fatima Vazquez – p. 82

Fatima has been faithfully attending Auburn's Advance ESOL class while working full time and taking care of her family. She is an amazing artist hailing from Mexico.

Lilidoxy Versekaitis – p. 41

Lilidoxy is a student in the level 5 and 6 ESOL class at Godman Guild. She's from Venezuela and has been living here for 2 and a half years. She's married with two kids. She enjoys baking delicious

cakes and cookies. She's hard-working and dedicated to pursuing her goals. She makes friends wherever she goes and is a pleasure to have in class!

Craig A. Wagner – p. 4

Craig Wagner is a student of Lima City Schools Aspire program. He grew up in Connecticut and came to Ohio in 2015 to help his mother. In 2017, while walking down I-75, he was picked up by a woman who would become his wife and mother of the inspiration for this poem. He is grateful for the opportunity to submit his writing.

Shifeng Wang – p. 82

Shifeng came to the U.S. from China knowing very little English. She is now in the advanced class at Auburn--working her way up from the beginner class. She lives with her husband, and she has a job working in a hotel.

Andre F. Williams – p. 65

Andre F. Williams was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. He went to school in Alabama and Ohio. He started writing poetry when he was 18 years old, on and off. Many people who've read his poetry say he is very talented and needs to share his work. Andre is currently a student at Project Learn and enjoys correcting the class about American history.

Katherine Zambrano – p. 82

Katherine comes from Colombia. She has a beautiful little daughter who works alongside her mom during the Online Advanced ESOL class at Auburn. Katherine owns her own business, and she is involved in the local community.

Mairambek Zhusupbekov – p. 92

I'm Mairambek Zhusupbekov. I was born in May. I'm a father of four children, and a happy person. I'm also currently a student at Scarlet Oaks.

Honorable Mention

Artists

Nicole Groves
Nathan Lumami Mashika
Sitora Niyozova
Yukie Ogawa
Miguel Rodriguez
Dinara Ysakova

Authors

Alaa Al Samman
Noor Aldawoodi
Naelah A. Althamra
Luis Arguello
Imene Atailia
Koryn Banas
Lauren Barbecho
Julia Beganovic
Miranda M. Bridget
Prosper Bryant
Neha Dadhich
Rosa Daniel
Cafar Elisov
Latisha Ford
Janice Foster
Viktoria Georgieva
Naimeh Haymoun
Patricia Gervacio Hernandez
Dahjanique C. Hill
Yusra Javad
Grace Jin
Sanja Jovicic
Tamari Kevlishvili
Mokhigul Khakimova
Nozигул Kholbekova

Asuka Kondo
Fernando Lugo-Cabello
Aziza Makhmudova
Isaias Mendez
Darion Moreland
Sitora Niyozova
Yukie Ogawa
Veronica Osorio
Thanh Phan
Nilaxi Rajguru
Jean Claude Rushimisha
Amelia A. Saddler Belle
Donnell Saxton
Austin Schwaner
Ansha Shabbazora
Lili Sosa
Satoko Suzuki
Lorena Tapia
Deepika Tripathi
Juana Francisco Trujillo De Rivera
Galiano Mejia Vasquez
Nini Young
Dinara Ysakova
Shiori Yuzuri



Discussion Questions:

1. After reading **Being Exsepshanle (Exceptional)** by Ricky Mullins (p. 9), what more do you want to know about the leaders mentioned in the story? Do some online research and write about what you have learned.
2. Barbara Rivero uses the five senses in the submission **Mom** (p. 17). Write your own piece about something familiar to you using the same five senses.
3. Nadia Lthrm's piece **Having an Open Mind** (p. 43) talks about experiencing people from other cultures....what have been your experiences with people from other cultures? Why do you think that was so?
4. Shihō Kubota answers the question “what is something you thought you could never do, but you proved yourself wrong?” in the story on page 50. Write about a time when you proved yourself wrong.
5. Paulina Agier (p. 97), Melati Dewi Safitri (p. 90) and Ikumi Sano (p. 52) write letters to their 16-year-old selves. What would you say to your teenage self?
6. In Tam Ogura's **Paths** (p. 96) we learn about the choices the author makes. Imagine it is five years from now and think about your school, or work, friends, neighbors, and family. What would you want those people to say about you? How does that affect the choices you want to make today? Write a poem about your path.
7. The Auburn Advanced ESOL class (p. 82) wrote about what they would do if they could change the world. Ask your friends, family and classmates what they would change about the world and write down their answers. Are the answers similar? Choose one change that you think could have the biggest impact.

8. Syeda Jabeen's piece is entitled ***Humanity is Almost Dead*** (p. 83). Do you think humanity is dead? Write a persuasive essay to convince someone of your position.
9. ***Staying Alive*** by Ashley Spencer (p. 100) is a poem that discusses taking responsibility for actions and choices. Write a "Dear Diary" entry for an action or choice that you had to take responsibility for.
10. Pick a piece from the chapter **Scars** and respond to the author in a personal letter. Be sure to show empathy and understanding in your writing.
11. After reading the writings in the chapter **Struggles**, write about something that you are currently struggling with.
12. ***BaR!sh...Rain***, by Kachan Thakuwani (p. 109) focuses on the blessing of rain. Describe something in nature that you enjoy.
