

# BEGINNINGS XXVI



A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING

Ohio Literacy Resource Center



## **ASPIRE**

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# FOREWORD

This 26th edition of *Beginnings* carries the torch burning brighter than ever with a collective spirit of bravery, self-discovery, and drive from authors past and present. It fills the published authors of previous editions, such as myself, with pride reading these written works of art.

This publication provides many new outlooks on life, love, and acceptance while expressing the struggles and hardships that come with them. Admittedly, I have struggled to find adequate words to explain how astonished I am by all of the writers who chose to aid in conjuring up this masterpiece. *Beginnings* will never cease to captivate and inspire with its diverse cast of authors. Watch as they paint pictures of real-world problems many of us couldn't imagine experiencing. It is breathtaking to see how these many walks of life merge like many streams to form a magnificent ocean of human experiences. Join them as they discover new life-changing connections that have started healing the wounds past relationships have left behind. Learn what drives these authors towards better education and opportunities and embrace the pain of their struggles and the joy of each victory. I've found a connection with these adult learners. As a former GED student, I understand the need to grow both in mindset and wisdom. Whether it be a poem, narrative, or storytelling, you start to form bonds with each author that transcend the still words printed on these pages.

To all these gifted authors, I thank you for giving us this anthology.

When a person unsheathes their sword of ink and chooses to wield it to share, create, and discover, they hold the greatest strength known to man. I implore you to please never stop bringing to life your worlds for us to see. Never let the echoes of society smother your mighty voices. And lastly, never sheath your sword of ink, your fiercest weapon.

*Alex McNamara*  
Beginnings XXIV Author  
Aspire Graduate



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edition, nor the 25 others that came before it, would have been possible without the dedication and drive of Aspire teachers. Writing is a wonderful but messy process, and Ohio Aspire teachers are not afraid to roll up their sleeves in order to help students untangle their thoughts and get their words on paper. For each student submission, there is a teacher championing their student's writing and encouraging them to submit their work for publication. We thank you.

The Ohio Department of Education's Aspire Office not only continues to be committed to the success of this student anthology but to the support of each student and every staff member in Ohio's Aspire programs. We are grateful.

Sixty-six pieces of writing and two pieces of artwork were chosen for this year's publication. Each of the selected authors and artists skillfully and courageously crafted their thoughts, experiences, and feelings into the works that appear in this book. The hundreds of students who submitted writing and artwork for consideration should be applauded for their participation and for their perseverance in their education. We are proud.



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## A Word on the Eclipse

The spring equinox of 2024 was on March 19th. Spring equinox is a time for new beginnings; it begins to warm up, plants start budding, and birds move back home. Spring means hope. No matter what has happened in the past year, the seasons will always change, and everything will start anew. It's the real New Year. It's motivating.

During spring, we're excited for that familiar, inevitable warmth and light. But in the event of a solar eclipse, we're excited for the darkness. Spring and winter reoccur yearly, but the next time the eclipse will even be witnessed in this country is in twenty years. It's an unmissable marvel of nature. If you're in the path of it, it's a waste not to watch.

An eclipse isn't a struggle. It's not dark in a figurative sense. But there's something important to glean from understanding it within that symbolic framework. Darkness, literal darkness, low-light darkness, is scary because it's dangerous to us. We call struggles "dark" because the way they scare us is the same.

Imagine living as an early human in the wild. You'd never know if there's a predator lurking when you're in the dark, so you'd always have to be prepared for the attack, and it's probably better to avoid the dark altogether at that point. Your life depends on it.

We're scared of what we don't know. Which is difficult when there's no easy answer or explanation to something, especially because the ideas we've invented to understand the world better can take a lifetime to learn at a level advanced enough to be personally useful. There's a point at which things become so hard to understand that we would do anything to just not want to understand them. But we will never get rid of the fear by ignoring it. Never giving in to the urge to stop thinking is the most important thing you could possibly do.

Which brings us back to the eclipse. Who in their right mind would tell someone to ignore the eclipse? It's important. It's dark and it may hurt to look at it without eclipse glasses, but you have to watch it.

It's a reminder to not ignore the darkness or rush to get away from it. It will mean something just to get through it. Inevitably, you will understand things enough to stop being scared of them, and then you can add what you've learned to the batch of ideas that make the world less scary for everyone. Some think that this level of consideration is a sign of weakness, but it is true strength. You've taken the first step that many never dare to: thinking about something so much that you write it down. Because you've realized it's important. You've stopped and looked at the eclipse.

*Holleigh Ayers*  
Beginnings 25 Author  
(published as Cain Ayers)  
Aspire Graduate

# NEW MOON



## **New Beginnings**

My name is Kimber. I turned 37 years old this year, and I have four amazing children. I never graduated from high school and decided this year I was going to better myself. Not just for me, but also for my kids. I now attend the Aspire Program at Owens Community College on the Findlay, Ohio campus.

I want to show my children that it is never too late for new beginnings. My children and the rest of my family are very supportive of this decision, and I am so grateful for that.

By getting my GED I will be able to make more money and be able to take care of my family. I have always been crushed that I could not do more for my children. Like taking more vacations and doing more for birthdays and Christmas.

I did not want to be away from my kids more than I needed to when they were little. They just grow up way too fast. Now that my oldest is graduating and my youngest is 10, I have the time to attend classes and do schoolwork at home.

My hope is that my children will continue to look up to me and realize that it is never too late to better yourself. It is never too late for new beginnings.

*~ Kimber Patterson  
Owens Community College*

## **Never Give Up**

My life has good days, and sometimes it is hard. It depends on how I take it. With God's help and belief, everything is possible. I went through domestic violence, and at the same time I got news that my two youngest sons have autism. I made the right decision to leave the abuser. Nowadays, I live a free life with my kids without any fiscal or emotional abuse.

My advice is to never give up and believe in yourself. You are strong and deserve a better life.

*~ Julia Fender  
Cuyahoga County Public Library*

## **Eunyoung's Story**

### **Chapter 1 My Childhood**

My name is Eunyoung. I was born in Seoul, the capital of Korea. I was educated there and lived in a city all the time. I have an older sister and an older brother who have a lot of age differences. My sister is 7 years older than me, and my brother is 5 years older. My sister was a high school student when I was an elementary student, and she got married when I was in high school. With the help of my older brother and sister, I spent my childhood without any problems. My parents took me to many places, and they tried to give me everything I wanted. Thanks to them, I was able to play as much as I wanted, study as much as I wanted, and lived a life without lack.

### **Chapter 2 I Met Him in a Strange Place**

I majored in Korean language education at university, so I became a Korean language teacher. I went on a trip to India with my friend during winter vacation. It was my first overseas trip, so there was trembling and excitement. At that time, I couldn't access information through my smartphone or the Internet, so I went on a trip with a book in my hand. When I arrived there with little information about the country of India, I felt an unexpected sense of dread. Cows and monkeys wandered around the streets. Motorcycles and cars were tangled, ignoring the signals and sounds. Many men were sitting on the street or lying down, and the children were constantly rushing in and begging.

The second day of the trip, I was filled with wonder and fear. We went into a currency exchange. There, a man who looked like a Korean was exchanging currency, and my friend carefully asked for his nationality. As expected, he was Korean! He didn't have any travel plans, and he said he came on a trip as a gift for himself ahead of joining the company. After listening to our travel plan, he decided to join us. With only two women, he was very strong. We took a 10-day trip together, watching the city by train,

seeing the funeral of Varanasi, the cuteness of the small city, and more. My friend and I came back to Seoul first, and he returned home separately a few days later. His hometown is Busan, which is located in the southeast of Korea. But he didn't forget his memories in India and often came to Seoul to meet us. One day he asked me to be his girlfriend, and now he has become my husband. The place where we were born and raised, where the school is located, and the place where we work are completely different. The two of us would never have met in our lives. India, which was a scary and exciting place to travel, has now become an important country in my life, since I met my companion.

### **Chapter 3 I Made a New Family**

I have a lot of greed for studying and work. While teaching students, I thought that I should learn something more, and that's how I entered graduate school. I taught students, went to graduate school, got married, and became pregnant. As a teacher, as a student, and as a mother-to-be, I did all three things. My baby seemed to want to give the greedy mother more time to work and study. My baby in the womb did not come out of the world until after the scheduled date. The wait continued. The doctor recommended induction delivery. He said the baby could be in danger if he continued to be in my stomach. My baby did not come out after 30 hours of induction, and eventually I had to undergo surgery after two days of labor. Fortunately, my son, who I met with difficulty, was born healthy. Perhaps because he studied and worked together in my stomach, my son is smart. My daughter came to visit me during the three-year leave to take care of my son, and that's how I became a mother of two kids. That's how I created a new family.

### **Chapter 4 Starting a New Life**

I never thought about leaving Seoul and living in another area, a different country, a different continent. My husband was suddenly assigned to the United States as an expatriate. I had to worry. Because I would have to take time off from my job, be away from my parents, and have language difficulties. But in the end, I

chose to go to the United States. This is because I believe that if my family is together, we can overcome any difficulties.

So my family came to the United States a year and half ago and have been staying here together. As I feared, life here is not easy. This is an unfamiliar place where there are differences in culture, language, and education. My kids never learned English. They have to stay at a school where classes are taught in English for 7 hours every day. I pack lunch boxes for my family, drop my kids off, and pick them up. Hospitals, academies, and shopping are all unfamiliar and difficult. My husband also has to work with people of various nationalities.

But there are also good points. My family spends more time together. Conversations with my family have increased. We are learning together that we can overcome any difficulties. So today again we are trying to adapt better to life here.

*~ Eunyoung Song  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## Turning Point

The turning point has come.  
No matter where you come from.  
It doesn't matter how deep you've been in.  
You can change your life and start to win.  
You may be scared, thinking no one cared.  
But many do, they just haven't shared.  
We're all scared to be rejected, scared to be hurt.  
But if you get cold, come find me, I'll give you my shirt.  
Just let love grow, let time begin to slow  
Accept a turning point, and let your life flow.  
One thing to know is we all need to grow and  
Let the kindness inside us show.

*~ Jennifer Nicole Schrecengost  
Lima City Schools*

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## Sierra's Journey

My name is Sierra. Seven years ago, I began my important health journey. For twelve to thirteen years, I was a heavy smoker. I had attempted, unsuccessfully, to quit smoking a couple of times, but it took my father having health issues for me to realize it was really vital for me to stop smoking. Because he also was a smoker, I decided to accept his challenge to quit smoking around him so that I could remove that temptation. Then I decided no more cigarettes in my future!

After two to three weeks of not smoking, I gained an excessive amount of weight by an over-eating habit which is nearly as bad. After realizing how much weight I had gained, I knew my new journey would be one of weight loss. Therefore, I signed up for the YMCA membership and participated in many enjoyable classes. I also began following a meal portion control program. Although the program helped me initially because I did lose some weight, I was not satisfied with the outcome. I had heard about intermittent fasting, so I did my own research before actually diving in.

It definitely seemed worth my efforts. That's when I began fasting and seeing the results. There are many facets of fasting; I chose the 16/8 method which means one would fast for 16 hours from food. Drinks such as water, unsweetened tea, lemon water, and coffee are allowed. After the 16 hours, there is an 8 hour eating window. Individuals can choose their own eating/fasting window. For instance, I began my eating window from 1pm-9pm. I continued that plan for a month. However, I was not seeing the results I had hoped.

Consequently, I did more research. Discovering that the earlier people stopped eating, the better, so I switched my eating time to 11am-7pm. Weight began to melt off my body; I also exercised during my fasting period. By the time I was done with my workout, it would be time to break the fast with a healthy breakfast. The more results I began to see, the more results I wanted. My journey has had many ups and downs, but never did I give up, not even on the days I felt discouraged.

Each day, I became stronger mentally and physically; I felt accomplished with every workout. Although the journey began with a daughter trying to help her dad become healthier, it has evolved into a journey of a woman who has lost half of her physical self. More importantly, this woman has achieved a healthy lifestyle, great confidence, and a determination to persevere with this and other journeys. I am delighted to say that I am down from 204 pounds to a happy 115 pounds.

~ Sierra Henzler  
*Penta Career Center*

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## Honorable Armor

The goal in life is to prosper  
What happens when there is nothing left to offer?  
Hitting my knees, "God, please help me," at the altar  
You got all my faith, listening to the gospel  
My demons are our only imposters  
They're wrongfully accepting your hard-earned Oscars  
Thank you, you have helped me with all that I have conquered  
Acknowledging that it was you that made me stronger  
The only one helping me tame my monsters  
Guiding me, so I don't end up another on the jail roster  
You knew I wasn't going to make it much longer  
Even daylight had become much darker  
The devil created the best of charmers  
Every one of them was my stalker  
Understanding that you walked with me, honestly was my biggest  
shocker  
Knowing I could no longer stay proper  
You clothed me with the finest honorable armor  
The day I finally get to you meet you, my father  
I will apologize for being a bother  
And thank you for giving me the blessing of understanding trauma  
Releasing my demon back to the drama  
Seeing happiness is so much larger  
You are one hell of an author  
And I'm Blessed to be your daughter  
From now on, I'll be thankful to know and hear the sound of  
laughter  
All I ask is that you leave no man behind in the rapture  
And if you do, make them the best scrapper  
And I'll share my honorable armor  
So the world doesn't get any darker  
Until they realize the evil one is and was their only monster.

~ Mikala M. Bloomquist  
Marion Technical College

## Change in My Life

Hi, my name is Malachi. I come from the city that never sleeps. New York City -- it's a beautiful place to go with family to make new memories. It's a great place overall. When I left New York, it hurt me because I felt like a part of me was staying there while I moved to Toledo.

Moving to Toledo changed my outlook on everything. I feel like if I was still in New York, I would have been in a gang or dead. When I moved to Toledo, I felt like I didn't have to look over my shoulder as much because nowhere is all sunshine and roses. I can focus on my school and getting into baking -- just the right things in life. I don't want to be another statistic or another black male dying for no reason and that's how moving changed my life.

*~ Malachi Bartholomew  
Penta Career Center*

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## **Our Stories – Viktoriya and Eva M.**

### ***Viktoriya***

#### **Chapter 1 - My past**

My name is Viktoriya. I am from Bulgaria, a small country in the southeastern part of Europe. I lived in a town at the foot of a high mountain near the capital Sofia. I had a happy childhood with my brother and family. As a child I loved spending my summer vacations with my grandmother who lived in a small mountain town. I remember the fun games with many kids, the nice children's books, and the delicious food of my granny. At school I loved literature, geography, and history classes. This made me choose to study history at university. I graduated as a Master and teacher in history and I loved working in this profession.

#### **Chapter 2 - My present**

Today I am a resident of the USA, in the state of Ohio, with my husband and two kids. I try to learn English, and I am happy when I can express myself and be understood. My desire to learn and progress came with my teachers. I am taking two classes and have wonderful teachers: Lori and Joanne, as well as volunteer teachers: Amy, Kathy, and Lisa. I like the form of learning and my classmates, people from different countries united in their desire to learn and settle our lives in a new environment and country. In addition to the technological learning process, we can share life's problems and joys.

One of the interesting characters in my class is Eva M. She is a Russian woman who left Russia due to the war. Eva is an engineer, an intelligent woman with a developed sense of humor. Maggi is my classmate, too. She is a nice and beautiful Peruvian woman. I like to take class with her and to have conversations. We want to take a class for medical assistants.

Falling into the same class with Eva, we discovered each other, we started our friendship, and we also became friends with

Silvia and Jackie. Silvia is from Brazil and Jackie is from Guatemala. Our friendship from class carries over into life. We gather, communicate, and expand our knowledge. We also have our own agreement to improve our English by correcting each other.

Friendship helps us. We mainly communicate in English, but with some difficulties, we manage to help each other with our native languages, because they are close. (Eva and I share the Cyrillic alphabet and related languages, and Silvia and Jackie speak Spanish and Portuguese.) The feeling of joy from our communication is shared and makes our lives easier and more interesting with female friendship. I think our friendship can motivate more people.

***Eva M.***

### **Chapter 1 - My past**

For most of my life, I was an engineer in Russia. Almost 10 years ago, I had to change my job. I became a tour guide. I am the kind of reliable person who is still smiling.

I have a photo of my grandmother and my two great-grandmothers. They went to the photo studio and a photographer took some pictures of them. I'm not sure about the date. It was probably in the 1910s. They are sitting together, very close to each other. Strangely enough they are not smiling. Probably, it was a long time for them to sit in the same pose and wait for the photographer to take his best pictures. Also, it was very expensive at that time! It's really important for me because these are the only memories I have with me here.

### **Chapter 2 - My present**

I left Russia in March 2022. It was one of the worst times in my life. The war started between two neighboring countries, Russia and Ukraine. I couldn't believe that it was real. Unfortunately, it is real, and the situation is even worse now.

Now I live in Stow. I work hard to improve my English. I'm very interested in American history and culture. I'm not really

good at American politics because it is very different from the European political system. So, I would like to know more about the everyday life of Ohioans. Also, I desperately need new friends. The best thing that has just happened to me is that I met three beautiful ladies: Viktoriya, Jackie and Silvia. We are studying English together. Thanks to Project Learn I have new friends from different parts of the world: Brazil, Guatemala and Bulgaria. It's unbelievable!

I hope we will continue studying English together because it is very important for all of us. Our teachers are very different. That's why studying English is more and more interesting now. I am thankful to Lori, Joanne, Kelly, Josh, and Tim. Additionally, I have to say thank you to our volunteers Amy, Judy, and Maxine. They are always ready to help and to answer all our questions. Also, my friends and I are looking forward to joining The Book Club. Last, I also met volunteer Marcie, a lucky coincidence: we are both engineers, we play the piano, and we like yoga! This January we started our online meetings. Every time I discover something new because Marcie tells me a lot about American traditions.

I have a dream to be useful here in the U.S. It is not easy because I'm not young. All my lifetime experience is in the past, and it is not what I can do in my new country. My education doesn't help because I must prove my diploma here. So I need to find out what to do in the future. I have a lot of empathy for people, and I like studying. I still don't know how, but I have to realize my dream!

*Viktoriya Georgieva  
Eva M.  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## How I Feel

I wake up every morning  
I never stop surprising myself  
I look around me, and I still can't believe it.  
I still wonder - why me? Why do I deserve so much?  
And I can only say, "Thank you, life, for everything!"

*~ Alexandra F. Castaneda  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

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## **A Way I've Never Gone**

I look around and wonder: Is this really me?  
All the smiles have faded. Happiness is so hard to reach  
I wonder: is this the life that God chose for me?  
Watching out this window trying to find my sanity  
Been lost for so long in this shell of defeat  
Why, oh why can't I find my destiny?  
I know I hold the key to open up that door  
I don't want to live this crumbling life no more  
Ain't no good reason why I'm living wrong  
I'm looking up for guidance.  
Oh won't you help me Lord?  
It's a lonely, lonely road I'm traveling on  
I've been traveling down this road for far too long.  
I want to go a way I've never gone  
Without them hoes and them gangs and guns.  
So when I walk out of those steel doors  
I'm gonna go a way I've never gone.

*~ Jerry Cool  
Lima City Schools*

## **Have You Ever Heard about “Culture Shock”?**

Not long after I came here from Korea, I took an ESL class at Kent State University. I learned about “culture shock.” It’s about the emotional changes you experience between your home culture and new culture as you settle in a new place. Culture shock is typically divided into four stages: the honeymoon, frustration, adaptation, and acceptance. I’ve been here for about two years, and I think I’m in the adaptation stage.

### **Honeymoon Stage**

When I first came here, I think I was in the honeymoon stage. I used to work in my country, but I can take time off while I’m here. So, I was able to spend some time on my own. At first, I enjoyed the novelty of it. And I started to learn English. The new culture and language were interesting, the people were friendly, and everywhere was very beautiful. I felt like I could quickly get used to this place.

### **Frustration Stage**

As time went by, I started having some communication problems. For example, the first time I went to a restaurant here. The payment method was different from my country. I knew about the tip culture here, but I didn’t know how much was appropriate. Sometimes there were misunderstandings. I even got food that was different from what I ordered. Whenever I had big and small problems, I had to call my working husband and ask him to solve it. I tried to learn English, but I didn’t improve as fast as I thought. So, my confidence was getting lower. Second, after we moved here, my husband was always busy, so I had to spend most of my time alone, even on weekends. I was so lonely that I wanted to go back home. I missed my family and friends. I was not good at English. I was afraid to go out and meet people. I felt homesick.

### **Adaptation Stage**

But after some time, I realized the key to this whole deal was to keep moving. So, I woke up, went outside, and went any-

where. I've started taking English classes again. When I didn't have a schedule, I left the house and went to Starbucks or the library. I can't explain it, but it made me feel part of something. Now I'm trying to adapt to the culture and learn the language as much as I can. I think my English is better, and my life here has become more and more comfortable. Recently I searched the history of the United States on YouTube. I've come to understand the culture here more and more.

While I'm here, I want to learn about the culture and make friends with more people. That could be challenging to me. But now I think I can accept it with an open mind. I'm looking forward to all the experiences during my stay in the United States.

~ Sewoo Jin  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## Larissa's Story

### Chapter 1

My name is Larissa. I'm 44 years old, and I'm from Brazil. In my country I used to be a lawyer, but here in the U.S., I'm a full-time mom. I came to the U.S. because of my husband's work. My two children were born here. In August, my youngest child started kindergarten, and now I can search for a job.

### Chapter 2

To be honest, I don't know in which area I would like to work! It has been a long time since my last day working outside home, and now I'm a little lost. Maybe work with children is going to be a good start or working in a library (I love books!). It is not easy to be away from my family but I'm happy. I don't have plans to live in Brazil anymore. I don't know what the future will bring to me but I really hope I can find myself again as a person (don't get me wrong, I'm very happy to be a mom but, after 7 years, I need to find something that helps me to feel complete).

*~ Larissa das Neves Nogueira  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

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## Afghanistan

August 15, 2021, is a special day in Afghanistan for my generation. Why? On this day Kabul, our country's capital, fell to the Taliban. Since I was an official employee in the previous government, my family's life was in danger.

The Taliban is an extremist group. For example, they banned the education of girls. They arrested, imprisoned, and killed former government employees, journalists, civil activists, and women activists under various pretexts. I knew I could be one of the victims.

Because I had worked with one of the American cultural and civil organizations active in Afghanistan, our manager, who had left the country earlier than me, tried to put my family's name on the emergency evacuation list for America. This news was communicated to me through a phone call from America. I was told to deliver our passports to a certain person. After a week, my family was able to fly from Kabul Airport to Qatar, and from there, to America.

From my point of view, living in America has many advantages. I looked forward to equality of citizenship, non-discrimination between men and women, democracy, security, economic and job opportunities, and especially educational opportunities for my children.

Here, even if you don't have a permanent job, you can manage your life with a part-time job. With an American passport and even a green card, you can travel easily throughout most countries of the world. My family will be safe.

In conclusion, although the fall of Kabul to the Taliban was a very bitter and dark incident that ruined the lives of my compatriots, I feel happy and lucky that I was given the opportunity to immigrate to America. In this country, my children will have a good

and stable future. I hope my children will achieve their goals in America. We will not return to Afghanistan.

~ Qanbar Ali Tabesh  
Cincinnati City School District

## Beginning

**B**right horizons beckon,  
**E**agerly stepping into the unknown.  
**G**rasping dreams that have grown.  
**I**nfinite potential revealed,  
**N**ew chapters unfold,  
**N**ever hesitating to explore,  
**I**nspired by the stories untold,  
**N**urturing the seeds we've sown,  
**G**athering strength on our own.

~ Jessica Romain  
Wayne County JVSD



# ECLIPSE



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## Anxiety

Anxiety is like the color grey  
because it's a color but not a color.

Anxiety is like a big wide living room with no picture frames  
because it's such a big space with just a couch and a chair.

Anxiety is like B Mike's song "Anxiety"  
because it explains what anxiety does to people.

Anxiety is like a bowl of white rice where you stare at it for too  
long and your brain makes the rice look like it's moving.

Anxiety is like a temp of 54 degrees  
because you don't know if it will rain  
or get so cold the rain turns into snowflakes.

Anxiety is like being stuck on the very peak of a mountain  
with no way down.

Anxiety is like wearing white clothes you're trying not to get dirty.

Anxiety is like being in a fun house by yourself  
in an empty carnival.

Anxiety is like having a son playing football  
and finding out that's where most concussions come from.

Anxiety is like a hammer when you're hammering,  
and you don't know if you'll accidentally hammer your finger.

Anxiety is like when you're outside  
walking around at midnight all alone.

Anxiety is like the number 12345679810111213....infinity.

~ Nariah Washington  
Cuyahoga County Public Library

## Motherless Child

It's hard not having our mother  
We will be there for each other.

Dry those eyes, no more cries.

She's always with us  
Wrapping her wings around us.

I know I haven't been the best  
This quest has put me to the test.

I shall put this mess to rest  
Give life nothing by my best.

As I keep on trying  
Please no more crying.

I promise to give up doing dope  
Just don't lose any hope.

I love you Matheo

*~ André Woods  
Lima City Schools*

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## What Is Safety?

I haven't felt safe most of my life. Why, you might ask? Well I'm trying to figure that one out. I have not really felt safe much, sometimes at home and sometimes in public spaces. It's partly because I fear being used or viewed wrongly.

We humans have some serious problems. One is judging a person wrongly from first glance, first conversation, body language, or what somebody around us said. This judgment is so damaging because we don't know that person very well. Let me share some examples: we haven't seen them on their best and worst days, we haven't understood their brains, and also we can't just switch bodies and experiences for a week or year. So even when you have been a family member with a person, you still get surprised by what they might say or do.

How do we do this? We talk to people, we experience life through their eyes as best as we can, but we can't mind read. Example one can be a smart person who has lived with someone for a lot of years and still can't hack their friend's brain. Second, a person can be rude with a mean expression on their face and just be constipated for a day or two. We have no idea about others. We try to understand them, but we try too hard by thinking we know the solution and not asking the question first.

Even technology is flawed. For example the search engine has both correct and incorrect information on it, so if we don't understand how to navigate the truth and lies, we come out to flawed answers. Let me get to the point-- you, friend, are beautiful in your unique way and so are the people around you. We all have choices, and why not choose life? I chose God since that is why I'm here on planet Earth. With all the pain and good things I've experienced in my life, I hope that I've found a grounding in a shaky environment.

My question for you is what things or people or circumstances have made you face what's inside? Is there something big-

ger, deeper, more powerful than me and if so why and if not why not? We all can be better humans but deep down inside all of us judge, struggle to be kind, and want some type of change. So will it be the people around you who change first or you? My encouragement for you is to find something beautiful and something ugly in your day and see the hope in both. Love your friend or enemy.

~ *Monroe Landis*  
*Auburn Career Center*

## **I Am the Monster in My Mother's Closet**

I am the monster  
That lives in mother's closet.  
I am hidden  
Behind the dust and bones.  
Listen closely; you'll hear  
The anger that lives inside me.  
Busting the hinges off the door,  
Scratching the paper off the walls  
That is my curiosity.  
My satisfaction is my illusion  
But your delusions are yours.  
Can't you see the tear stains on my skin?  
The monster wants out.  
I beg you to print me a one-way ticket from suicide.  
I am the monster that my mother hides away  
In her closet with the secrets and truth.

~ Denise Andrade  
*Eastern Gateway Community College*

## Sadness

Sadness is like sitting in a dark bathroom  
on a rainy day in a black jacket.

Sadness is like looking at the blue sky  
after coming from a funeral home.

Sadness is like seeing your boyfriend with another woman  
while listening to Lana Del Rey.

Sadness is like lying in bed at night  
imagining close family members' funerals.

Sadness is like being stranded in the desert  
while trying to save a koala.

Sadness is like being a car jack trying to pump up a semi-truck.

Sadness is like going to a hockey game  
while watching player number 5 plead for mercy.

Sadness is like sitting in the house cold and hungry  
only having syrup sandwiches to eat.

~ Antasia Monroe  
Cuyahoga County Public Library

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## Too Young to Understand

Every day I wish I could go back  
Beg mom to drop the drugs and come back home  
But I was too young to understand.

Every day I wish I could go back  
Tell dad to stick around and help raise us  
But I was too young to understand.

Every day six of us suffered  
Suffered from the weight of our parent's choices  
But we were too young to understand.

Every day they picked the fast life  
Leaving us to wonder, questioning our worth to them  
But we were too young to understand.

Mom had her own demons  
Dad was scared. I knew they loved us  
But we were too young to understand.

Six years clean, mom is  
Dad has come around if only by text  
I'm nearly grown and beginning to understand.

Dad will understand the man that I am  
Mom will understand why I treat women well  
Now they'll understand.

They'll understand I grew up fast  
They'll understand me  
They'll understand.

I understand that life throws us curve balls  
I understand that our parents had to grow themselves  
I understand that they still loved us, despite their hardships.

I understand the toll that drugs take on a family.  
I understand the importance of a family unit.  
I understand.

*~ Slade Litteral  
Eastern Gateway Community College*

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## What If

What if I would have swallowed my pride and hit my knees and prayed.  
Maybe then God would have heard my cry, and showed me a better way.  
What if I would have swallowed my pride and put the drugs away.  
What if I would have apologized, then maybe she would have stayed.  
I'm sitting here in the prison cell, thinking about what could have been.  
I'm begging God for one more try. I promise I'll never be that man again.

So God hear me now, and don't turn me away. Shine your light so I can see the path you have set for me.

Now what if I would have stayed in church, instead of running around with friends.  
What if I would have stayed in school, instead of acting like a fool.

So God hear me now, and don't turn me away. Shine your light so I can see the path you have set for me.

I'm sitting here thinking about the what ifs and what could have been.  
I'm realizing how sorry a man I've really been.  
But I'm turning my life around. I'm giving it to the Lord.  
I'm gonna make my momma proud, so she doesn't cry anymore.

So God hear me now, and don't turn me away. Shine your light so I can see the path you have set for me.

~ Cameron "Radio" Adams  
Mansfield City Schools

## Make a Wish

*Dedicated to My Moon,  
Natalie Metzger*

If I could make a wish  
I would be where you are,  
Because without you baby  
I'm just a falling star.  
And you're my moon, and when I'm with you,  
We light up the sky, and the night comes to life.  
If I could make a wish

*~ Michele (Ita7y) Mantova  
Mansfield City Schools*

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## My Heart

My heart screams desperately. It is flooded with sadness at your loss. A silence floods my life. I had you for so many years, and maybe I wasn't the best, but I always loved you. I can't cry or scream, just a sob and tears. I try to act strong because there are many people who depend on me. I watch their cries, their screams, and I don't know what to do to console them. You left and won't come back.

When I saw you yesterday, I knew it would be your last day with life. I couldn't ask for forgiveness for those times that I hurt you, that my pride and courage prevented me from loving you, but today I understand that it was only sadness. I know that you loved me in your own way and made me strong and brave. I know that you never hugged me or told me that you prepared me to face life. I knew that if I felt I should give up, you always told me I'm your pillar. But today and always. I know you are my pillar, the pillar of the house of your children and grandchildren and the following generations. And every day we remember you.

I would like to see you one more time and tell you how much I love you and how much I miss you, but I can't. And being angry no longer matters. I lost my time and will never get it back. I love you Mrs. Polina. I love you mom. Every day is a reminder to tell my children how much I love them and to fill them with hugs and kisses. I want to remind them that you don't know when life is over, so do not waste it in anger. I don't want to leave one day, knowing that they dreamed of a hug from me, just as I dreamed of a hug from you.

~ *Maria Venegas Romero*  
*Great Oaks Career Campuses*

## Better Days

*To Lee & Cat as beautiful as daisies*

I know you're tired of crying  
Inside I'm dying

I wish I would have kept trying  
Instead of steady lying

I wish I could stay  
Now dad's away.

I wish I was on the outs  
Now I'm in jail with a lot of doubts.

Inside I'm dying  
Because I wasn't trying.

Dry them tears  
I promise better years.

Keep looking up  
Don't ever give up.

Be beautiful like a dove  
Dad will rise above.

Please don't lose hope  
As I'm done using dope.

Inside I'm dying  
Trying to keep from crying.

~ André Woods  
Lima City Schools

## Freedom

Freedom is like a bird escaping the cage  
And flying freely in the blue sky.  
When he looks down at the ground,  
He sees selfishness and ignorance  
Huddling like warriors on the battlefield.

Freedom smells like red roses  
And has a fragrance of love, kindness, and sharing.

Freedom sounds like the absence of bombastic war,  
Relief of distress, self-respect, and the pursuit of happiness.

Freedom tastes like the pure nectar of a red rose,  
Sweetness to quench your thirst of loving humanity.

Freedom feels like happiness over the moon,  
Just blooming lilies, cuddling in loving hearts  
And self-reliance.

I love to be free, free, free.

~ *Santa Tamang*  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## The Toll

The Drugs became  
Such a thug.  
Beat me up  
Stomped me down.  
Took my happiness and  
Gave me a frown.  
Like a fallen angel  
Stuck to the ground.  
Lost from home  
Trying to pick out the bad  
With a fine-toothed comb.  
Broken down and shut out.  
Only in myself I'd begin to doubt.  
So I try something new  
To make myself proud.  
Look up to the sky with  
A new glimmer in my eye.  
As time goes by  
I see that right now is my time.

*~Jennifer Nicole Schrecengost  
Lima City Schools*

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## Goodbye Addiction

Dear Friend,

I have seen your hurt and pain. My heart goes out to you.  
I know you have been through a lot. Let me help you.  
I will never leave you. I'll take your hurt and pain away  
If you give me a chance to prove it.

Dear Stranger,

I don't know. I've been worried about you.  
How you're not good for me, how you will destroy my life.  
I was told to stay away from you.  
But I'm hurting so bad, and it's hard to get through the days.  
I'm alone in this world. I wish it would just end.

My Dear Sweet Friend,

Please don't talk like that. Let me help you.  
I'll take your burdens away. I can numb that pain so you don't feel  
it anymore.  
I can make you forget those memories and feelings. I'll always be  
with you.  
You will never be alone.

Dear Stranger,

I know I shouldn't. I know it's wrong.  
As I sit here hurting and wishing for death, I begin to think  
"Why not?" "Nothing is going right anyways." "I'm so alone."  
Here you are promising to never leave me.  
I give up. We can be friends. Just keep your promise to never leave  
me.

Dear Friend,

I promise I'll never leave you. I did forget to tell you one thing.  
In return for my friendship, you have to give me all your attention.  
Money, values, morals, family, friends and your sanity.  
You have to give me control over your thoughts, feelings, and life.  
However, I will stand by my promise to never leave you.

Dear Enemy,

What? How could you leave that part out?

You lied to me. You are deceitful.

You tricked me. You have taken everything from me including my own will.

You gave me shame and guilt. You made me feel worse than before.

You took my self-love and self-worth. You said you were here to help me,

Not to destroy me.

Dear Addict,

You never would have become mine. I couldn't have gained power over you.

I couldn't control you. So I had to do what I did.

If you would have known, you would never have let me in.

I am a liar, destroyer, and a manipulator.

But just as I promised, I'll be with you forever. You are mine now.

Dear Addiction,

I beg to differ. I gave my life to God. He is bigger than you can ever dream to be.

He fights my battles for me. He removed those pains and memories for good.

He did not just hide them or add to them. He has me in the palm of his hand.

Good luck trying to get to me now. Goodbye destroyer of life.

~ Kristina Minch  
Lima City Schools

# ORBIT



## **My Favorite Vacation**

My favorite vacation was in the Maldives. In December 2019, my husband and I celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary. We booked airline tickets about a month ahead of time. After that, we prepared our travel bags. We were very excited about this trip! The days of waiting were very long but the day of travel finally came. We went to the airport, heading to the Maldives. The trip took about six hours. We arrived at Malé airport at 10am. The boat was waiting for us to take us to our island.

We arrived at the hotel, and it was very beautiful. We rested a little and went outside to enjoy the stunning views. We saw the most beautiful beach ever. The beach water was green, and the sand was white. After that, we went to have dinner, which was fresh seafood – my favorite! We spent five, absolutely wonderful days. We enjoyed this trip, and we hope to go to the Maldives in the future. This trip was my favorite trip ever.

*~ Maha Al-Qahtani  
Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

## The Blue of the Sea

The blue of the sea is a sight to behold,  
It's a color that's both calming and bold.

The blue of the sea is a symbol of peace,  
It is such a color, it can weariness ease.

The blue of the sea is a gift from Nature,  
It is something that we should all treasure.

Sea so blue, like a summer sky,  
Sparkling waves dance, worries fly.

Deep or shallow, calm and cool,  
Accept the ocean's embrace, send troubles adrift.

So, the next time you see the blue sea,  
Take a moment to appreciate its beauty!

~ *Jhonata Cantuaria Medeiros*  
*Wayne County JVSD*

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## My First Tabaski in the United States

Tabaski, literally called “sheep festival,” is celebrated every year by all faithful Muslims. Called Aid El Kebir among the Arabs, this religious festival recalls Abraham’s submission to God when he asked him to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Abraham accepted this divine imperative but, at the last moment the angel Gabrielle appeared and sent them a sheep which he sacrificed in place of his son.

At home in Senegal, the party is prepared weeks in advance. In the streets, the atmosphere is felt, the markets are crowded with people, the public spaces invaded by sheep sellers, and the tailors are overwhelmed because everyone wants to wear new clothes.

For this year, finding myself in the United States, the festival was celebrated on June 28, 2023. In the United States, it is not allowed to slaughter your sheep at home. So a week before I went to Winchester, Ohio, 1 hour 25 minutes’ drive from home, to order my ram. There, I met a real community anchored in their tradition, farmers not using telephones or credit cards, just paying cash, and choosing their sheep.

When the big day arrived, at 7 a.m. I went to the biggest mosque in West Chester, the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati. This was a strong Muslim community made up of people from different countries. After prayer, on the way to slaughter the sheep and return home for the grill, I arrived at the scene around 10 a.m. and found a lot of people there. I had number 131 in order of arrival. We were at number 10. In Senegal it took just 30 minutes to slaughter and skin a sheep, but here I am in 131st place and had to wait and wait some more. Finally, I finished around 6 p.m. So exhausted and in chaos, I arrived home around 8 p.m. I threw the meat in the kitchen to go take a bath and go to bed. Finally, the next day I celebrated the event with my little family.

I will never forget that day, I thought I would return home early and celebrate the holiday with the family as it happened in Senegal.

*~ Moussa Fall  
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

## Myrtle Beach

Myrtle Beach is located in South Carolina. It is one of the most beautiful beaches in the United States. My family visited it in the summer of 2019. It was the first time my kids saw the beach. They were surprised and excited when they saw the waves. They frolicked with the waves and built the sandcastles on the seashore. They drank sea water when they swam. They shouted “Why is the water here salty, mommy?” I laughed and said that is because it was the ocean. I explained that the water in the ocean should have salt so that the fishes can live in it. It was harder for them to swim in the sea than the swimming pool but more fun. I was surprised that my kids didn’t feel scared at all. They played the whole day until they were tired.

Then, we wandered along the seashore and watched the sunset on the beach. It was a peaceful and beautiful scene. I could hear the sea breeze and felt calm in my mind. We also visited the Upside-Down House, with rooms turned entirely upside down from the furniture to the light fixtures.

We spent 3 days having a lot of fun there. After that, they got sunburned and could peel off their skin. They loved it there and didn’t want to go back home. It’s a good memory in my life.

~ Julie Nguyen  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **Happiness**

The color of sunshine on a summer afternoon.  
It happens when you have a drink with coworkers,  
or go home for a nap and then cook for your family.  
It sounds like a good mood on a Saturday in comfortable clothes.  
It smells like barbeque ribs on a sizzling grill.  
Happiness

*~ Doris Ross  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## **What I Miss About Rwanda**

The most beautiful things I miss about my country are my friends and my grandmother. I miss playing basketball with my friends and spending time with them the way we used to before I came to America. I wish I could go back for one month to see the beautiful parks, lakes, and animals and to spend time with my grandmother and my friends. I miss the place my friends and I used to sit in the morning to see the beautiful sunrise.

*~ Ismael Manzi  
Miami Valley Career Center*

## **Giving**

Giving is a colorful thing.

It makes you enjoy life.

It smells like flowers blooming.

It tastes like melted chocolate in your mouth.

It sounds like happiness and love in your life.

It feels like doing something impressive for others and yourself.

It looks like life itself.

Giving

*~ Joelle Choueiry  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

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## Dah's Story

### Chapter 1 Myanmar

My name is Dah. I was born in Myanmar, in a small village in the jungle. I am Karen, and I have four siblings. My mom passed away when I was two years old. Two months later my younger sister also passed away. She was only two months old. Later, when I was older, maybe 5 or 6 years old, we had very little food to eat. We were a very poor family.

I went to school in the village. The building was built from bamboo and was very small. I did not have a pen, or a pencil, or a book because I was poor and couldn't buy them. We wrote on a blackboard with rocks we found in the river. We broke the rocks into small pieces so we could write with them on the board. I took a rock pen to school with me every day. We made the rock pen longer by attaching bamboo with a rubber band so we could write more easily. Sometimes when it was raining a lot I had to stay home from school, because the river was too big to cross.

We had a bamboo house and we made a cooking area inside. If I wanted something sweet to eat like candy, I couldn't buy it because I had no money. My father always taught me that we could eat bananas for something sweet. He would peel it and dry it slowly in the fire by putting it on a bamboo mat or shallow basket above the fire on the fireplace. It took a couple of weeks to dry. We could also dry meat and sometimes vegetables. The banana would become a little bit thinner and it would turn a dark red color. Then the banana would be like candy.

Some of the other children didn't like me because I didn't have a mother. I didn't have a lot of friends. My brother was my only friend. The children bullied me by saying, "You are poor. You have no mother. Don't come here and play with us." They would throw a rock at my bamboo house. This made me feel very sad. I cried a lot because of it. Sometimes my father would fight with other parents because of this. That made me feel better. He reminded me that it is ok because I still have my brother and my

father. I played by myself and sometimes with my brother. On my days off from school, I went to the rice field with my father. I was bored in my childhood.

### **Chapter 2 My Second Country**

When I was 8 years old, my father sent me and my brother to a refugee camp in Thailand. We lived with my father's friend. Living with people is not easy. Sometimes we had to work like slaves. In the early morning, I woke up and cooked for the family and fed the chicken, ducks, and pig. After that we could go to the school on our two legs every morning. It took 45 minutes, which I really hated during the rainy season. When it was raining, I was very muddy when I got to the school. My clothing was wet. After school we did the same thing as in the morning. When my uncle and aunt sold the animals, they didn't give us any money, they just bought a snake for us, but we were very happy.

### **Chapter 3 My Third Country**

I came to the U.S in 2014. I had never seen an airplane. When I sat in the airplane, I started getting dizzy and throwing up a lot. I didn't want to eat anything. Suddenly, one man talked to me in English. I didn't really understand him. He was a nice man. He told me you look so sick here is \$20 for you when you get out here, buy some food to eat, ok? I said yes, thank you so much. It felt like a miracle. When I got out of the airplane, I didn't see the man anymore. He was gone. I started to look for food in the machine refrigerator I didn't know how to use, and I let my stomach be empty. When I arrived in Akron my case worker took me to the emergency room. After I came home I picked up my medication at CVS. I had to pay with money; it cost me \$20, and I gave my \$20 away.

### **Chapter 4 Now**

When I was young I wanted to become a nurse, but I think nursing is very difficult to study because my English is not good. I just changed my mind. I want to become a medical assistant. Now I am studying English and working a part time job.

~ Dahku Say  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## **The World's Salt Paradise**

It was my first time visiting “the world’s salt paradise,” the Dead Sea in Jordan. The sea water was warm and salty; I could even taste the salt in my mouth. I couldn’t swim, but I was floating on the water. It felt like I was flying. It was thrilling but also scary. My sister held onto my left hand while my niece held my right hand. They were my anchors that kept me from floating away.

~ *Nadya Jasim*  
*Delaware Area Career Center*

## **Under the Sea**

I went snorkeling with my friends in Okinawa, Japan. The ocean reflected the sunlight beautifully. It was comfortably warm and so clear that I could see fish from far away in the water. The strong tide made me swim hard, though, while the colorful fish swam slowly and elegantly. I felt like I was relaxing and dreaming.

*~Yuki Sawada  
Delaware Area Career Center*

## Wall-e Ate the Key

One sunny day, I went for a run with my 1-year-old pit bull, Wall-e. When we got home, Wall-e played happily with his toys while I cleaned the kitchen. After a while, I noticed that Wall-e was quiet, which was very strange.

When someone knocked on the door, the house remained quiet. That was odd because Wall-e would usually run to the door to see who it was. I opened the door to be greeted by my mother, with no Wall-e in sight.

My mom said, "Go see if he is asleep." I ran to his bed but he was not there. I kept looking and finally found him under the dining room table playing with something. He was very quiet as if he knew he was doing something wrong.

I looked under the table only to find it sprinkled with black plastic. I went to grab it and realized it was a piece of the control for my car key! He had completely destroyed it!

I calmed myself down and looked for the other part of the key, but it was missing. Mom suddenly screamed, "He ate the key!"

I got scared and checked Wall-e's mouth but found nothing. Mom said, "We have to take him to the vet".

After a long time in the waiting room, the vet appeared and said, "We did an X-ray and indeed there is a key. I don't know how he ate the key, but he's going to feel better after a small procedure." Wall-e spent the night at the vet's office.

The next day, Mom and I found a locksmith. He sold me a new car key for \$270!! It was my only option, but I could use my car again!

Finally, we were able to pick up Wall-e at the vet. There he was with a cone on his head!

The vet gave us the key he removed from Wall-e's stomach, and Mom decided to keep it in a photo frame that now sits in the living room. The caption reads: "The day my daughter let Wall-e eat her key!"

~ Katherine Virginia Ulloa  
Springfield City School District

## **A Hidden Treasure in the Caribbean**

In a small town of Honduras lies a magical beach called Tela's Port. The water is a light greenish-turquoise hue that shimmers at noon.

The footprints in the soft velvety sand inspire me to go outside and enjoy the magnificent tropical rainforest.

Under the bright sun, I lie on the beach with fresh coconut water in my hand in the splendid Caribbean Sea, where the wind is salty but also sweet. It is a treasure that you must see!

*~ Angelica Aguilar Casco  
Delaware Area Career Center*

# **GALAXY**



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## Snapshots: A Time-Traveling Photo Album

***A snapshot is a casual picture of life as it is happening.***

*Here's what we did. Join in on the fun!*

*Imagine a moment when you first arrived in the United States or your past.*

*Imagine a moment from your life now, after you have lived in the United States a little while.*

*Imagine a moment in five to ten years.*

*We are a beginner ESOL class, and we described those snapshots using our recently learned present progressive tense and some feelings vocabulary.*

*We wrote them on post it notes and displayed them on a whiteboard separated into the three time periods.*

*As we read, we learned about each other, and it felt like we were flipping through a time-traveling class photo album as we read them!*

*I hope you enjoy our photo album! Each paragraph is a picture or "snapshot" from our lives.*

### **Arriving**

I am lonely.

I am in the airport.

My children are hungry.

I am tired.

My family flew to the US.

I am not speaking English.

My husband is going to a different room.

I am interviewing for one hour alone.

My children are crying.

I am very scared.

The interview is done. I am going to my husband.

It is snowing.  
The snow is stressing me out.

I like seeing the snow.  
Good.

I am happy and worried.  
I'm glad it's my home.  
I stay at my home.

### **Living in the now**

It's Saturday.  
I am eating fruit with my friends.  
We are going to play soccer with my family.  
I am going to play with another team on Saturday.  
Excited

I need to take pictures to weigh potatoes.  
I am working very hard.  
I feel hot.

My niece is cooking.  
I am singing and going to church.  
My husband is reading the newspaper.  
People are bringing lots of clothes to me and my family.  
They are nice to my family.  
Kind.

I have two nephews.  
In the picture we are bicycling.  
My sister is watching cartoons.  
My brother is dancing.

I am going to a big school.  
I am testing on computers.  
Everyday, I am going to class.  
Shy

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I am watching a movie with my husband and sons.  
I like to travel with my family.  
I am happy when I travel with my family.

We are talking about soccer.  
I like to exercise and practice soccer.

My sister is going to school.  
My brother is going to school.  
My father is sleeping.  
I like my job.  
I like shopping.  
I like walking.

My husband is reading his Bible.  
I am cooking.  
My daughter is playing with her toy Barbie.  
My son is watching dinosaurs on tv.  
My baby is playing with his toy ball.

My aunt is shopping in the store.  
Her husband is walking.  
I'm taking care of my cousins.

I am with my family.  
We are at Charlie's restaurant.  
We are celebrating that we bought our house.

My son took us to the Golden Corral Restaurant  
to celebrate buying his house.  
We are eating steak, chicken, and salads.  
Ecstatic  
Content

### **Thriving and Dreaming**

On Saturday I am going to work.  
I would like to go play soccer with my friends.  
Happy

I am happy I have a house.  
I am trying to buy a new car.  
I am happy to go to my brother in Liberia on a trip.

I am with my son.  
He is playing soccer.  
We are speaking English.  
We are joyful.

I am driving to work.  
I am happy.  
Today I will cut pizza  
But I will be full.  
I will leave work late.  
I will be tired.

I want to become a citizen.  
I want to buy a house.  
I am sitting in my house.  
I want to travel to my country.  
I am raising my hand (to take the oath).  
Happy  
Proud

My husband will take me to see my family in Laos.  
I am buying a big house (for my business).  
I am making clothes and bags in my house and selling them.  
I am studying to do nails.  
Ecstatic

~ Group Submission from Project LEARN of Summit County  
Taekyung Lee  
Jordano Gonzalez  
Bibi Naseemi  
Mi Win  
Elsa Lopez  
Xia Yang  
Nyan Lwin  
Julie Blanton  
Azbel Costillo

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## Japanese New Year

In Japan, new year holidays are commonly from January 1st to the 3rd. When I was a student, I had a long vacation for the new year holiday.

I usually ate rice cake which is called “Mochi” in Japanese. Mochi is so sticky to eat. My mom usually grilled or toasted it and often used it as an ingredient for “Zoni,” a kind of miso soup. This miso soup is based on white miso and includes many kinds of vegetables like carrots, radish taro root, etc. Also, I often ate “Osechi” dishes. Osechi typically came in lacquered boxes and contained various dishes that are believed to bring good luck. For example, shrimp is one of them. Shrimp have long whiskers and a curved shape. This means that by eating shrimp people live long enough to have long beards and a curved back.

I often went to the shrine with my family in these periods and wished to have a good year. There were always many people in the famous shrines, and we had to wait in long lines to make our wishes.

An interesting superstition is about dreams that make people happy. One of the best dreams is about Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan. The second one is the eagle, and the third is the eggplant. These sound like the Japanese words for “not dying,” “high,” and “accomplishment,” respectively. I have never had such a dream in the new year.

~ Ryu Yamada  
Auburn Career Center

## Family

**F**ar away from my hometown.  
**A**fraid to be lost and overwhelmed.  
**M**emories flashing before me.  
**I**nspire me to move on.  
**L**ifting myself through highs and lows.  
**Y**earning for the warmth, only family knows.

*~ Meihua Ren  
Wayne County JVSD*

## **Double Trouble and Blessing**

I will always remember my first visit to the obstetrician during my second pregnancy. I was still living in Mexico at that time. For my family, that experience was amazing and wonderful at the same time but also worrying for my husband and me. While the doctor was doing the ultrasound, he showed us his computer screen and told us that there were two. Immediately, my husband and I questioned, "Two what?" because all we could distinguish on the screen was a small embryo on one side of the image. Then the specialist told us, "Two babies." I rotated positions to look at my husband, and his face had turned flushed red when he heard the news. He was speechless because he had just quit his job the week before. I thought at that moment that my husband was very worried because he was unsure of how the expenses of the family would be provided for. Then, the time of uncertainty began.

After seven months of trusting in and waiting on God's provision for job opportunities, a door finally opened. My husband received a call inviting him to work in a company located in Columbus Ohio. As soon as we could, we took a plane with our daughter (Valentina, who was six years old at the time), my husband (Gabriel), and me (who was pregnant with my twins). After only a month of being here in the USA, I gave birth to my beautiful babies. A boy (Eric) and a girl (Mia) came into our lives. Now they are eight years old. People regularly call them "double trouble." They are also our double blessing!

*~ Maria De Jesus Alonso  
Delaware Area Career Center*

## **The Person I Admire the Most**

The person that I admire is my dad. He crossed the border to give his family a better life. My dad took English classes to become a U.S. citizen, and he worked up to three jobs to make enough money to bring us to the United States. He is a very responsible person and devoted to his family. He is a very strong man like a superhero, and that makes me admire him more every day.

*~ Nancy Rocha  
Auburn Career Center*

## **Naima's Story**

This is Naima.

For most of her life, she lived in Syria.

She first came to America a long time ago. She and her husband had a baby they named Deanna. The baby was a U.S. citizen. Then the whole family went back to Syria where they lived for a long time. Then the war in Syria started and Deanna came to the U.S. by herself.

Seven years ago, Naima's husband came to the U.S., but Naima and her daughter Alaa stayed in Syria. They did not feel safe in Syria because there was a war, so they also decided to come to America. Naima and Alaa came here a year and a half ago. They all have Green Cards except Deanna, who is a U.S. citizen.

Now that they are all in the United States everyone feels safe here. They are all living together here and are happy to be safe. Even though it feels safe, Alaa missed her country and that makee her sad. But it is getting better.

*~Naima Haymoun  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## **After Becoming a Mother**

After becoming a mother.  
The world that I want becomes small.  
Everywhere I look are children.  
Add one more responsibility as a first-time mother.  
Become an omnipotent super mom!

Even if I lose weight, back to my original weight.  
I grow my long hair again.  
Put on the dress I like.  
Walking fashionably on the street.  
I am no longer the girl who hangs out all day on the street.

Maybe I miss my past self.  
Actually, I prefer my current self.  
Because of caring.  
I have become more thoughtful and more mature in my mind.

Now that I have a family.  
I look forward to the warmth of home.  
Watching the little boy change bit by bit, every day.  
All the hardship and fatigue disappear.

I can still be a girl.  
I can still put on make up to look beautiful.  
Keep my hobbies and dreams.  
Grow into a better person with my child.  
Wish every mother can become a better version of herself.

~ Ling Luo  
Wayne County JVSD

## **My Cherished Memories Box**

I don't have a jewelry box, but I have a cherished memories box.

Let me introduce you to one of them. Since getting married, I have lived in three countries because my husband worked abroad. These are my home country of Japan, the United States, and Canada.

When my daughter was 5 years old, we moved to the United States. Before we moved, we decided to take a family trip. We knew that once we moved to the United States, it would not be easy to return to Japan. The destination was Okinawa Prefecture, which was known as Japan's Hawaii.

My daughter was so excited to go to the beach in Okinawa for the first time. As soon as we arrived at the beach, she frolicked in the beautiful white sand and emerald green sea. We were surrounded by the sea breeze, splashed in the waves on the beach, and competed to run in the white sand. Our family's footprints were clearly left behind, including my angel's tiny footprints. Although it was chilly in spring, my daughter and I decided to jump into the sea. We swam, dived and had water fights. I still remember her abundant smile from that day.

Before leaving Japan, I packed up a treasure box full of wonderful memories and headed to America. Incidentally, my daughter grew up heavily influenced by American and Canadian culture, and she is now a university student. She has completely left us and is independent, and we are on separate life paths now.

That is why I hope that we will be able to make many more cherished memories in our respective paths. And that those memories will be important to support each of our lives.

*~ Hiroko Kitazawa  
Delaware Area Career Center*

## Dear Grandma

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” The Chinese philosopher, Laozi, suggests that the steps we take through life may be unknown. I was born in a small city in eastern Mauritania named Selibaby. I was around two years old when my parents left me at my grandma’s home and moved to Nouakchott, the capital city of my country, Africa. At that time, I didn’t know that my life would change completely.

As a child, I grew up thinking my grandma was my biological mother because of the love, care, and tenderness she gave me when I was young. She treated me as if I were the most precious person in the world. She gave me everything I wanted, and no one dared harm me while she was there. Life was so simple and wonderful until that day.

That day was when my father came to take me with him to the capital. I remember that day well. It was 2002, and it was a big surprise for me and, especially, for my grandmother because she was not expecting him. She was crying as if she had lost me forever. I was confused. I was between happy and sad. I was happy to meet my father, and I would meet my real mother. Also, I would see my young siblings too, whom I had never met before. But I was so sad to leave my grandmother, the only mother I ever knew.

Sad but excited, I left with my dad that day to live in Mauritania’s capital, Nouakchott, where my parents and siblings lived. I started to go to primary school, and my life completely changed. I began to adapt to life in the capital city, but I missed my grandma very much. The most unfortunate thing at that time was we did not even have a phone to communicate with her. Finally, six years later, I visited her with all the family and my two cousins, Allassane and Abou. We spent three months with her. Then, I returned to the capital with my family to continue my studies.

What happened next was amazing. I began visiting my grandma every summer vacation until September 2022. Regret-

tably, before I could return for our next vacation, my grandma passed away in May 2023. I can't tell you how sad I was at that time. I had lost my grandma, whom I loved more than anything. Fortunately, my family did not want me living with that emptiness and gave me the love and support I had always gotten from my grandmother.

We may not know where our journey will take us. The unexpected ups and downs I experienced were difficult yet rewarding. But that's life! You never know where the next step will take you. Happily, from small child to adult, my family gave me the strength to build a life full of love and support...step by step.

*~ Adama Diallo  
Cincinnati City Schools*

## The Day I Became a Mother

The day I became a mother-- an unforgettable day where for the first time I felt the purest and truest love. It was an ordinary day like any other. I was working at Burger King in my country on a night shift until the store closed. When I closed the store, it was 2:00 a.m. Arriving home, I took a bath and when I went to bed my water broke. My husband took me to the hospital right away. By the time I got to the hospital it was 4:00 a.m. They took me to a room where they told me that my labor would be very slow, that I was barely 2 cm dilated. Everything was fine, I didn't feel pain, I was laughing, the only thing going through my head was, "This will be a piece of cake."

By 1:00 p.m. I began to feel unbearable pain. I realized that being a mother was not going to be easy, but it was what I longed for most. I tried for 16 hours to have my baby. Then my gynecologist told me that they had to do an emergency cesarean section since it was a dry birth. While they were doing the cesarean section, I felt weak; after an 8 hour all night shift and 16 hours of trying to have my baby I felt exhausted.

Suddenly I heard the sound of my baby crying. I started crying with happiness. I finally felt her; I finally had her. She was beautiful, so small, and fragile. I loved that moment more than any other. From that day until today's sun, I have known what true love is. A feeling totally different from any other. My little baby flooded my life with light just by looking into my eyes, minutes after she was born. And that was the day I became a mother.

~ Solivette Sambolin  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

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## **My Wonderful Godmother**

I just want to share the true story about my wonderful godmother, so people know what she went through in her life.

Her name is Chhel Leoung. She was born in 1938. She was a second child; she was a single woman. She had five sisters and four brothers. She was a farmer. All her sisters and brothers went to school except her; she never went to school because she helped her parents to earn money to support her family. She worked so hard in her life for the family. She was a nice person; she was a very special person. No one could make life about family like she did. I am very proud of her; she was nice and took care of me, also. We were so happy when we spent time together.

After I moved to live in the U.S.A. I always went back to see her every three years. In 2021, I could not go to see her because of the Covid 19 pandemic. In 2022, around June, she was very sick. She got a tumor, cancer. I called on Facetime; she asked me, "When are you coming to see me again," and I told her I was waiting to get the Covid vaccination done. "I will come see you."

I did go back to my country to see her; she was very happy, and I was so happy, also, but just for a short time only. The next day, she passed away. I talked with her about how good and special she was. I told her, "Mom, you are very nice to me; you are a special person in my life, and you always did so much for everyone in your family. I love you so much; you are important, and I will be your daughter in the next life, again."

She replied back, "Yes, daughter, I will be your mom in the next life; I loved you, also." We both cried and hugged each other like we never did before.

After I told her that, she was so happy. She held my hand until she passed away. I am so glad I told her what I was feeling. I wanted her to know how much I loved her and how thankful I was for everything that she did for me. If I could go to earlier days,

I would tell her a million times, “I love you. You are special, and you are my wonderful mom in the world.”

Finally, I just want to leave some messages to everyone. Tell what you are feeling in your heart to those you love, those who are nice to you, and those who are important to you. Please don't let days pass. No one can go back to those days again. This is my experience that I had with my wonderful godmother.

~ Ravuth Veung  
*Great Oaks Career Campuses*

## Home

Home is where you live,  
Home is where you rest, your harbor,  
home is where you grow up,  
Home is where you have safe haven.

She gives you warm love, care, encouragement,  
and self-confidence.  
You absorb her love and nutrition  
and become an independent individual.  
One day you are strong enough to leave it  
and build your own home.

Sometimes you are back to visit her.  
Sometimes you bring your loved ones to visit her.

When you were young, you wanted to leave home,  
When you grew up, you wanted to go back home,  
Lately, you realize that going home has become a luxury.

Home is where love is,  
Where love is, home is.  
I claim my home, I choose where I want my love to be!

~ Dongxia Raynor  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## **A Daughter's Thoughts**

Have you ever loved someone more than yourself?

And with all the love you show, they only show you that they love themselves.

Have you ever dropped a tear for that person for multiple reasons?

And all the times you ignored the betrayal signs they still show you? Your tears mean nothing.

Have you ever had to take unbearable pain and bury it because you love them?

Have you ever had a stepdad who never loved you but your mom loved him?

How do you cope with the pain?

When no matter how many times my mom apologized for her actions I knew nothing would change.

How can you not love me?  
When you made the decision to give birth to me.

How can you put me through everything?

How do you allow me to take on so much hurt?

When I never asked to be here, and I was born to love you first?

How can you love him more than me?

When it was hard times it was only you, my siblings, and me.

How can you try to make everything perfect now like the past never mattered?

How can you mistreat me because you chose to be with my father?

How can your husband ever equal up to your kids?  
Please explain to me why I deserve to go through this.

With all the questions I've ever had,  
Any answer you give me is "ask your dad."

But how do I ask my dad when you introduced me to so many possibilities?

Please tell me what am I missing.  
Why don't you understand me?

I grew up and am raising my kids on my own.  
I'll never understand you because without my kids my life would not go on.

I love them more than myself. I'm doing my best with no help.

I've learned to forgive you without an apology. Just don't read this poem and turn around and question me!

I have more answers than your excuses.

So I'm washing my hands of you until you can understand how I feel.

You broke my heart, mother. All I ever wanted was for you to love me as your daughter.

~ Casey Hughley  
Cuyahoga County Public Library



**ZENITH**



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## The Night Before the Equinox Day

It was a serene night. Occasionally, the cracking sound of an acorn falling from trees echoed in a forest. Bright moonlight penetrated trees and made a sharp contrast of shadows.

An owl, who was quite old but not senile, was sitting still on his favorite branch as usual. Then, he noticed a faint noise, like someone weeping.

“Hoo, hoo. Who is crying?” he hooted.

After a little pause, a trembling voice answered, “It’s me. Little Maple.”

“Little Maple?” He looked around and finally found a teeny-tiny little maple tree below his branch.

“Hoo, hoo. It’s YOU who is crying in the middle of night, Little Maple. I am Mr. Old Owl,” his tone of voice was dignified, but he couldn’t really remember when he started to be called “Old” Owl.

He continued, “Well, well, trees are supposed to sleep in the night, especially little saplings like you, aren’t you?”

“I... I know that, but I can’t sleep,” Little Maple hastily protested. Old Owl asked her why. “Because I’m afraid of losing all my leaves.”

“Losing leaves?”

“Winds swished around me and blew my two leaves away this afternoon! They are terribly mean!”

He looked at her tiny twigs holding some leaves. He could easily count them all. One, two, three,... Nine!

“You still have nine leaves, Little Maple.”

“ONLY nine!” she insisted. “This is the first year of my life, so I’ve been looking forward to seeing my leaves change to a beautiful scarlet color, you know. But the winds are cruel!! They want me to lose all my leaves miserably before changing their colors!” Little Maple cried out with tears.

Actually, Old Owl hadn’t known about leaves changing their colors nor the color named “scarlet” because all colors around him were a spectrum of blueish gray. But he cleared his throat and pretended as if he had already known all these things. Without noticing anything about his attitude, Little Maple kept sobbing.

It seemed to him that she could never stop crying. He gradually felt pity for the crying tiny twiggy girl and wanted to comfort her. On the other hand, he thought that he had to defend these clumsy winds’ honor, whom he knew well.

“I’m very sorry to hear that you lost your precious two leaves, Little Maple. But these winds are not intentionally harming you. They are just playful and pranky. I’ll tell them not to run too fast around you. I promise.”

Little Maple gazed at him for a while and asked him suspiciously. “Are you sure...that you’ll stop them from blowing my leaves away anymore?”

“Hoo, hoo, hoo. Don’t worry, little girl. I promise you because I am Old Owl, who is the wisest in this forest,” he declared proudly, which convinced her well enough.

Little Maple gave him a broad grin, then said, “Thank you, Mr. Old Owl. I am really grateful for your help ...because I...I...” She paused. Old Owl was waiting for her words for a while and noticed that she had already fallen asleep.

He mumbled, “Alas, it’s going to be the busiest season in my life... I should keep an eye on her all night long, every night.”

Despite his complaints, he was already determined to protect Little Maple from not losing another single leaf until she was satisfied with their colors. He knew that it was not going to be easy for him, but he was rather glad to do something to help others. Also, he began to have a desire to see the color “scarlet” on her leaves which he had never known, although he knew he was unable to see it literally. His eyes twinkled, as if he were a young owlet, and he hooted again with a little excitement. His voice melted away in the shadows of the forest.

It was the night before the equinox day.

Autumn was about to begin.

*~ Tam Ogura  
Delaware Area Career Center*

## **Broaden My Horizons**

I am in a small book club. We read one chapter at home and share our ideas in class. At first, I was very nervous and couldn't enjoy myself. I felt frustrated every time I struggled to express my thoughts. However, I am gradually starting to have a good time because of these two reasons. First, my classmates are all from different countries and from different backgrounds. Having discussions with them always brings me something I didn't know before. Second, I find it interesting that each student understands the story in various ways even though we are reading the same book. Our teacher always encourages us to say something without worrying about making mistakes. She never denies our opinions.

I joined this club hoping to improve my English. However, I am learning many more things, such as the importance of accepting others. I am very excited to keep reading with my teacher and friends who help broaden my horizons.

*~ Michiyo Maeda  
Delaware Area Career Center*

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## Wondrous Ways

My mind swirls a splendor,  
as a washing machine may swirl its load,  
as a blender may mix its contents.

May my mind never shut off its wondrous ways.  
May it keep me up at night with its constant whirling.  
It does not matter what type of splendor it stimulates,  
whether that be the angels of ideas come to bless my night,  
whether that be the demons that haunt the back of my mind.

If I am overwhelmed, it doesn't matter., May it swirl and whirl till I die.

May it continue to provide me with the anxieties bestowed upon me years ago,  
whether that be of the anxieties of my givers of life,  
whether that be the anxieties bestowed upon me by places of young scholars learning of the collective human knowledge so that society may have its torch passed to future generations.

Yes, indeed, my mind swirls a splendor with the batters of life,  
but also with ideas of writings and my own loves and hates, arts and passions.

May I say that this is human nature,  
we may laugh, we may cry,  
we all endure the batters of life in our own ways.

My mind swirls a splendor,  
as a washing machine may swirl its load,  
as a blender may mix its contents.

May my mind never shut off its wondrous ways.

~ Caylen Mosley  
Lima City Schools

## **The Path to Happiness**

The closest, most reliable friend is God.

The greatest legacy is education.

The greatest strength is patience.

The greatest treasure is knowledge.

The hardest work is to train the ego,  
to replace bad behavior with good.

The most beautiful thing is a smile.

The greatest wealth is intelligence.

The worst shadow is fear and depression.

The most frightening person is a liar.

The greatest blessings are hope and faith.

*~ Fotima Khodieva  
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

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## Gina's Story

### Chapter 1

My name is Gina, and I am from Belgrade, Serbia. I had a beautiful childhood and lived with my parents and older brother, surrounded by many friends and cousins. At the time I was born, my country was called Yugoslavia, and we traveled a lot across that beautiful and extensive country, either with my parents or with school classes. During summer breaks, we would visit the Adriatic Sea coast as well as my grannies and aunt in the mountain area with almost untouched nature. I still vividly remember the adventure I had trying to prove to my aunt that I could participate equally in everyday farmer activities, which led me to change my accent so I could fit well during the visit. It was such a fun and lovely time!

### Chapter 2

By the time I was 15, Yugoslavia was broken apart. Serbia stayed beautiful but faced a lot of problems and uncertainty. Everything was turned upside down overnight. There was always a lack of something during my high school and college education time. It began with one of the worst hyperinflations ever seen, the economic embargo on almost everything, an empty supermarket rack, a growing gray economy, and a lot of political turmoil, and ended with a horrible 78 days of bombarding across the country. Despite all obstacles, we kept our spirit up, and I am proud to be a Serbian. But it was a challenging time!

### Chapter 3

I met my husband in my country in 2006. We got married two years later, and I came to America. Luckily, I was able to start working shortly after my arrival and gain some experience in this beautiful and diverse country. The process of assimilation was not easy, but I am working hard on it. I feel blessed in many ways. Now, I am proud to be an American citizen!

### Chapter 4

I am currently a resident of the city of Stow. I am enjoying my life with my husband and nine-year-old daughter. She is a 3rd

grader, and I have a lot of spare time, so I joined an ESL class several months ago. I feel great to have the chance to meet so many wonderful people from all over the globe and learn English while I have fun. I want to thank all the teachers and volunteers who helped us to fit better in our new country: Lori, Amy, Kathy, Joanne, Myesha, Melissa, Timothy, Maxine.

*~ Gina Pokrajac  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## Life Challenges and Penguins

Penguins are a group of aquatic flightless birds. The 18 types of penguins live in the Southern Hemisphere. Penguins have the cutest walk, are great swimmers, and are loyal and hopeless romantics.

Penguins encounter many difficult situations during their lives. At the same time humans have similar processes to survive.

When a couple of penguins start the process of having a little penguin, the mother has to leave her egg with her partner. She goes to the sea to look for food while her partner stays alone with their egg for a long time. If the baby is born and his mother has not returned, his father must keep taking care of the baby until his mother arrives and feeds it.

Once the penguin grows up, its parents leave it alone because it needed to start its own life. It must look for food. At first, it is an overwhelming and complicated process. It doesn't matter how difficult it may be, the only thing it knows is that it must try because nobody will bring it food. So it starts walking to the sea being careful because many animals can eat it. It has to be independent, careful of those dangerous animals, and able to survive alone.

Life is a process where at first you are protected by your parents. They help raise you and during that process, they give you the best of themselves. They teach you how to treat others and many important values that will help you during your whole life. Some parents teach you how to start being an independent person. However, you will not know what it means to be independent until you have to be independent. Other parents wish you would never leave their side, but that is precisely the process of life.

Just as penguins must start their own lives, we also have a moment where we have to go out and start looking for things

that will make us happy. That is life's purpose, looking for stability and happiness. However, nobody talks about the search process, which can be the most difficult and painful part. I think the key to success is to keep fighting for things that you want, even if it seems impossible. When you know what you want you cannot give up. That is the last option on the road to success.

You also will have to deal with bad days and good days. I am sure that you will never forget the bad days because they make you grow and become a great person. When you are old, you will be proud of all the things you did to become that wonderful person. Another thing you shouldn't forget is how you started, so that if one day you are a successful person you keep being a person full of values and lessons that can help others.

~ Patricia Betancourt  
*Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

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## A Reflection on My Working Life

I started working in Kroger's warehouse with my husband six years ago. We worked five days a week from four in the morning until approximately three in the afternoon.

Our duties consisted of unloading all the trucks that arrived at the doors in the unloading area. There are about thirty doors. These warehouses are extremely cold. The job consisted of removing the merchandise from the trucks using a pallet jack or forklift. On one side of the unloading, all the meat arrived, and on the other side everything else such as fruits, vegetables, potatoes, and other varieties of products arrived.

We had to select them very well in class. For example, there were green apples and red apples of different varieties on the same pallet, and we had to select each class based on its wooden pallet and wrap the product in plastic. Over time I learned the heights and the number of the boxes that should go on the different pallets.

When my son graduated from high school, I told him we would get him a job at Kroger's, so he could collaborate with us to pay for his college. That is how it happened. Since he knew English, my son did very well at his work.

At the end of February of this year 2023, I stopped working at Kroger because I got bored of getting up so early. I wanted to close or finish that stage of my life and continue moving forward to other better things.

At this moment in my life, I am focusing on learning to speak English. It is a priority for me to make more friends and build relationships, as well as to find a better job and expand my opportunities in life.

~ Gianna Nunez  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

## The Best of the USA

I have been in the United States for 9 months. I am from Ecuador, a country that is currently being hit by drug trafficking and terrorism. My husband, three children, and I had to make a big decision about our lives. The idea of emigrating had never occurred to us before then. Ecuador had always been a country of peace, progress, and unmatched beauty. We went from living in paradise to living in hell.

A decision that changes the lives of an entire family is the most difficult decision in life to make. We thought about the circumstances our country was in, the dangers the situation presented for our family, and decided it was best for us to leave our beautiful country for the U.S.A.

A relative who lived in Cincinnati helped us settle here. We met many American citizens who lent us a hand. The U.S.A. is a country with well kept streets, excellent schools, and many opportunities to progress in life. I admired the way they treated us, despite coming from another country. They made us feel part of the community. I felt respected and valued. I felt the empathy of the American people.

Today I don't have a single regret about the decision that I made. It has taken a lot of effort for me to adapt to all of the changes. The language, the climate, and the work are all different, but there are many people who have helped make this path less difficult. That is why, without a doubt, I dare say the best thing in the U.S.A. is its people.

~Yesenia Villalta  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

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## Reflections on the Concept of Capitalization

In Malcolm Gladwell's concept of capitalization, he looks at the rate at which different communities leverage their human potential to achieve success. In his analysis he determines that there are three key conditions that constrain the capitalization of human potential: poverty, stupidity, and culture. I would like to reflect on the first condition, poverty, and dive into the significant omission of race in Gladwell's analysis.

Gladwell points out that poverty is a significant impediment to the realization of human potential. In researching some of the data, the 2022 US Census Bureau shows that the official poverty rate stood at 11.5%, with 37.9 million people living in poverty. The poverty rates differ among racial groups, with non-Hispanic whites at 10.5%, Blacks at 17.1%, Hispanics (of any race) at 16.9%, and Native Americans at 27%.<sup>(1)</sup> Gladwell's point that poverty limits human potential is valid, but it is also essential to address the role of race in this context.

When you look at the intersection of race and poverty, you can see that race plays a crucial role in determining the capitalization of human potential. I believe it's the top constraint, replacing poverty. I think Gladwell overlooks this key aspect.

For example, an impoverished white student in the public school system may face significant challenges, but they are still less likely to encounter the same obstacles as their counterparts of color. In the United States, the color of your skin often trumps your socioeconomic status, giving them a certain privilege. I think this is relevant, and here is where you have to add in Gladwell's third constraint of culture.

Students of color, especially those from impoverished backgrounds, find themselves battling not only poverty but also deeply ingrained racial stereotypes and prejudices. These things work against them, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and social support systems. Gladwell's omission of race as a

significant factor in the capitalization of human potential disregards the systemic racial disparities that persist in the United States.

I absolutely agree with Malcolm Gladwell's analysis that poverty is a significant obstacle to the realization of human potential, but it is essential to recognize how race intersects with poverty and influences the opportunities and challenges that individuals face. Acknowledging the role of race in this context is a crucial step toward addressing the systemic inequities that exist in our society.

~ Cynthia McKenzie  
*University of Cincinnati*

(1) <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2023/demo/p60-280.html>, tables A-1 & A-3

*Additional resources:*

<http://www.mutualresponsibility.org/science/malcolm-gladwell-explains-why-human-potential-is-being-squandered-poptech-video-2>

<https://theholmeseducationpost.com/what-is-the-human-capitalization-rate/>

## Silly Mistakes

It is okay to feel lost, confused, and to not know what choice to make.

What sense would it be if we never learned from our silly mistakes?

It is okay to accept it for what it is.

To feel right or wrong,  
and to go either left or right.

How are we to know what comes next if we don't take a chance on silly little mistakes?

Live more, be impulsive, don't be afraid.

Take chances.

Make your next move.

If you make a silly mistake, you'll know better next time.

Test your limits.

Try something new.

Go on a path that others might advise you not to follow.

If we don't make silly little mistakes, then how are we to know what is best for us?

Silly little mistakes are not necessarily bad.

They are hidden lessons, unexpected discoveries, and fundamental to our character.

I love silly mistakes.

~ Emily Phillips  
Penta Career Center

## I Want to Learn

I am from Guinea in West Africa. From early in my life, I always loved school. My parents taught us that education is one of the most important things to accomplish. I was educated with my five siblings to know love and to have strong principles including seeking knowledge to be a better person. I decided to write my story to show the importance of learning and its impact on life.

My parents are well educated. My father worked at the Prefectural Health Department, and my mother worked in a health center as a midwife. I am the first-born son. When I was younger, learning was fun, but I really dreamed of being a soccer player. As I got a little older, I thought I might study Computer Science.

While in Guinea, I was excited to begin my studies at the University for my Baccalaureate Degree. As I continued my studies, I realized I couldn't finish for personal reasons. That affected me a lot, but I hope I will have a chance to study in the United States, find a good job, and save money to start my goal of becoming a Computer Scientist. Goals change throughout life, and this is my dream now. I want to make my parents proud of me. I can already see them smiling with pride having taken care of me by providing everything I need to become a good person.

It is never a pleasure to flee from your country leaving your family behind. It's very hard, but I believe everything will work out and improve in the future. I will always be focused on my education and grateful for the opportunities I have now.

More important, I will continue to learn throughout my life. The impact of the knowledge I learn will help me reach my dreams. And my parents will forever be proud of me.

~ Kaba Konate  
Cincinnati City School District

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## **Beyond Limits: A Narrative of Love, Education, and Hope**

I remember the horrible day that education was banned for girls and women beyond the 6th grade in my home country. My wife and I were heartbroken-- thousands of women were not allowed to go to school and university. But I believe diamonds come from hardship. My wife was one of the top three in our college, and I felt that I should encourage her to pursue her master's degree. We both started searching for scholarships for women. It was a big decision for us to be far away from each other because of our family's traditional opinions. We found an opportunity, and I encouraged my wife to apply, but we were not ready to talk about it with our parents. If we had asked for their opinion, they would not have agreed to let my wife leave the country. My wife applied and got it, and then we discussed it with our families that my wife was going to leave the country and pursue her master's degree abroad.

My wife left our hometown to start her new journey for two years abroad. Being apart was tough for both of us. My wife wanted to give up many times, but I encouraged her via the "new" technology of being online. We talked every day (and exchanged opinions regularly). At that time we did not see a clear future of when and where to be together because my passport had expired. The government did not issue passports anymore, but we were hopeful for better days.

My wife pursued her master's and got a 4.0 GPA. She received many scholarship offers - Manchester University, Central European University, the International University of Applied Science in Berlin, Northern Colorado, and Kent State University in the US.

I was finally able to leave my hometown, and we are happy to be together in Ohio after two years apart. My wife has started her Ph.D. program at Kent State University. Inspired by my wife's academic journey, I am determined to enhance my English skills through Project Learn, paving the way for my return to university.

*~ Mohammad Reza  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## **I Know Now . . .**

I know now . . .

Regardless of what you might say . . . “I am intelligent.” Your words still stick today, twenty years later, burning a place in my being that will never leave. I am not “retarded.” I am not “stupid” or “slow.” I was not a “bad child.” I was a product of the environment that I was dealt as your child and you tried to hide.

I know now . . .

you should have protected me. As a parent, you should have been my safe place. Instead, you screamed at me during times of misunderstanding. I was punished for being ill and criticized for things out of my control. I needed help and not to be discouraged and kept in the dark. I needed my parent, not an enemy.

I know now . . .

I am not a bum. I am someone. I could never hurt those that I love with the demeaning words my grandfather said to me. He believed all the false things he had been told about me. My parent was willing to hurt me in order to protect themselves. I am someone. I work hard. I have a big heart.

I know now . . .

I am a fighter and a forgiver, but not a forgetter. I have a voice. I will advocate so no one feels alone. No one should feel living in a similar toxic situation is normal. We all deserve to feel loved, safe, and recognized.

I know now . . .

I will encourage my children. I will listen to them. My children will never question my unconditional love. They will always feel safe with me. I will never discourage them or make them feel small. I am the first step. I am the way to their future and who they will become one day.

To my children ...

“You are smarter than you know, stronger than you think, and my everything. You made me a better person. You saved me.”

~ *Emily Phillips*  
*Penta Career Center*

## **Why I Came Back to School After So Many Years**

I am 76 years old, and I have been out of school for almost 60 years. The last full grade I attended was my sophomore year, when I was 17 years old. I became pregnant, and pregnant girls did not stay in school in the 1960s, so I dropped out.

I got married when I was 18 years old. That was a big mistake. The marriage did not last long, but I wound up having another baby before it ended. I was a single mom, with no support from my ex-husband, so I had to work all the time to support me and my children.

I remarried 9 years later, but my husband was an alcoholic and did not provide for my family, so I continued working. In later years I cared for him when he became very ill. During all this time, I dreamed of going back to school to earn my GED and prove to myself and others that I was smart enough to do it.

Recently, my grandson dropped out of school. I tried to talk him out of it and tell him how difficult life would be, but he did not listen to me. I thought maybe if I went back to school it would give him the confidence to do the same. I started classes in October of 2023, and my grandson also went back and is finishing his GED.

I love going to school, I love my teachers, and I love learning. I am determined to earn my GED. I have some health issues, and I am hoping they do not interfere with my schooling. I am ready to walk across the stage in my cap and gown with my GED and prove that no matter how old you are or how long it takes, even if it is 60 years, it is worth it.

*~ Sharon Lindhurst  
Penta Career Center*

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## ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

**John Sipe - p. 116*****Freedom***

I am John Sipe, I am a small-time artist and I've been married with children for 19 years. I use art to release stress and to express my feelings.

**Brenda Torres - Cover*****NAMU***

My name is Brenda. I'm from Mexico and I'm 20 years old. I love art and writing. I want to thank all the people who are an important part of my life. I appreciate them very much.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Cameron "Radio" Adams - p. 35****Maria De Jesus Alonso - p. 67**

Maria de Jesus Alonso is from San Luis Potosi, Mexico. She has been living with her family in central Ohio since 2015. She is a homemaker and serves as a teacher of a kids' ministry at her Hispanic church along with her husband. She is living a happy and healthy life and is improving her English each day.

**Maha Al-Qahtani - p. 45**

Maha Alqahtani is a level 4 ESOL student at the St. Johns program in Dayton, Ohio. She is from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

**Denise Andrade - p. 31****Malachi Bartholomew - p. 12**

My name is Malachi Bartholomew. I am a 20-year-old African American male. I originally come from Brooklyn, New York. I currently reside in Toledo, Ohio, and have for the last 12 years. I am currently going for my GED so I can reach my goals of becoming a chef.

**Patricia Betancourt - p. 91**

My name is Patricia Betancourt. I am 21 years old. I grew up in Colombia in a little town called Samaca with my mother. When I finished high school I decided to get a Bachelor degree in English and spend a year in the US. I am currently enrolled online at UNAD in addition to studying English through the Aspire program.

**Julie Blanton - p. 61**

My name is Julie  
I'm from Liberia.  
I am married.  
I have three children.  
I live with my niece and my friends.

**Mikala M. Bloomquist - p. 11**

Mikala began her Aspire journey on February 1st, 2024. She loves spending time with her 7-month-old daughter and her mother. She also loves writing poetry. She is forever grateful to her fiancé for guiding her to Jesus, who has saved her, and to her parents, who have been supportive of her and her poetry.

**Jhonata Cantuaria Medeiros - p. 46**

My name is Jhonata. I am from Brazil. Currently I am a PhD student focusing on agriculture in Brazil, and in May, 2023, I started as a Visiting Scholar Researcher at Ohio State University and student at CCC WSCC ESOL in Wooster. Despite my experience in writing scientific work, this was the first time I wrote a poem in English. I am glad for the experience provided by the program in improving my English, having new experiences and friendships.

**Angelica Aguilar Casco - p. 58**

My name is Angelica Aguilar Casco. I am from Honduras. I studied Forest Engineering. I like nature (in all its presentations) and especially enjoy sunny days because I come from a warm climate. I am an ESL student. I admire the art of oil painting. I live with my husband, Marcio; my stepson, Cristian; and my two cats, Justin and Diana. I love the United States of America because it is the place where you can do everything, and now it is my valued home.

**Alexandra F. Castaneda - p. 16**

Hi, my name is Alexandra Flores Castañeda. I was born in Honduras and I got a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. I grew up in a very loving family with my parents. I met my beloved husband at College in 2000, and we got married in 2007. We now have two children. We moved to the United States in 2019 to start a new adventure. Now I'm trying to improve my English so I can communicate in a better way. I'm so grateful for my life and for each of the blessings I have received.

**Joelle Choueiry - p. 52**

My name is Joelle Choueiry. I am from Lebanon. My children were born in the United States. I have two children, a boy and a girl. Both of them are married. They do not want to have kids, but they have dogs. I worked in my country as a teacher for 25 years. My aim is to get my GED to continue as a teacher because I just love kids! I like to go swimming and hiking.

**Jerry Cool - p. 17**

My name is Jerry Cool. I'm 42 years old and have 3 children. This is actually a song, but I am submitting it as a poem. I love writing music and am happy to share it with you.

**Azbel Costillo - p. 61**

My name is Azbel.  
I'm from Honduras.  
I live with my girl friend.  
I have two nephews.

**Larissa das Neves Nogueira - p. 20**

Larissa is from Brazil. She used to be a lawyer but now works very hard as a mom of two.

**Adama Diallo - p. 72**

I am from Mauritania. I am an advanced student in the CPS Aspire ESOL program for a little over a year. I love reading, writing, and learning new vocabulary. My family, my classmates, and my teacher encourage me to do my best every day. I have learned to ask plenty of questions to become as fluent as possible in English. My

native language is French so it is interesting to me how many English words come from France. My goal here in America is to attend a university, get a diploma, and be a successful son, husband, father, and possibly own my own business in the future.

**Moussa Fall - p. 47**

My name is Moussa Fall from Senegal. I live in Ohio. This is my first story I write it in English.

**Julia Fender - p. 4**

Julia has been studying English through Auburn Career Center for one year. She is originally from Russia. She is a single mother of three sons, and recently welcomed her first grandchild.

**Viktoriya Georgieva - p. 13**

Viktoriya is from Bulgaria. She is a student at Project LEARN of Summit County.

**Jordano Gonzalez - p. 61**

My name is Jordano.  
I am from Chile.  
I am single.  
I have one son.  
I live with my friends.  
I like to exercise and practice soccer.

**Naima Haymoun - p. 69**

I am a married woman, and I have two daughters. I am from Syria.

**Sierra Henzler - p. 9**

My name is Sierra Henzler, a student in the Penta Aspire program. I am also a student of a healthy lifestyle as well as an advocate for a healthier lifestyle. Best of all, I am mom of two amazing kids.

**Casey Hughley - p. 78**

My name is Casey Hughley. I am 32 years old. I was born in Canton, Ohio, but raised in Cleveland. I'm a very outgoing person, but I have issues with opening ups, so I write poetry to express my feelings.

**Nadya Jasim - p. 55**

Nadya is from Baghdad, Iraq. Her family moved to the U.S. in 2016. She is an ESOL student in Dublin, Ohio.

**Seowoo Jin - p. 18**

Born in South Korea, Seowoo is an ESOL student with Project LEARN of Summit County.

**Fotima Khodieva - p. 88**

I am from Uzbekistan. I moved to the USA with my family 3 years ago. I have four sons. I also have a twin brother. I worked as a teacher for nine years teaching foreign language to elementary students.

**Hiroko Kitazawa - p. 71**

I am originally from Japan and my family consists of my spouse, daughter and son. My family has lived in Ohio and Canada for a total of 7 years. Living in North America with my family has expanded my world, not only for my children and my husband, but also for myself. I love living in the nature Ohio.

**Kaba Konate - p. 98**

I am from Mauritania. I have been a student in the CPS Aspire ESOL classrooms. I love learning. I want to study Computer Science at a university here in America. I am getting great support from my teachers here. And my family is proud of what I have accomplished to this point in life. I look forward to meeting the goals I have set for my future. Someday, I will be working as a computer scientist, and someday I will have a great job and a great family of my own.

**Monroe Landis - p. 29**

I am named Monroe Landis. I love humanity and animals. I enjoy eating good quality meat, vegetables and some sweet things too. I think that most people would do well if they had some hands-on experience. They should be well educated with books too. I believe that people would be healthier if they had a good foundation of truth and emotion. Saying and using truth without emotion can be mean or harsh. Saying and feeling emotions

without truth can make a person live unstably and easily controlled. I've lived a lot of my life with depression or sadness. I've found that a lot is linked to what I believe about God, myself and other beautiful humans. What I know is that if you have breath in your lungs there is hope for you. I am thankful for God, my family, my friends, school teachers, life, food, freedom, beautiful humans and other things.

**Taekyung Lee - p. 61**

My name is Taekyung.

I'm from Korea.

I am married.

I have two sons.

I live with my two sons and husband.

I like to travel with my family.

**Sharon Lindhurst - p. 102**

Sharon is a mother, grandmother and retired. She has dreamed of returning to school for many years and is determined finish what she started 60 years ago.

**Slade Litteral - p. 33****Elsa Lopez - p. 61**

My name is Elsa.

I'm from Guatemala.

I am married.

I live with my husband and my daughter.

I have one son and one daughter.

I like cooking.

I like to watch movies.

**Ling Luo - p. 70**

My name is Ling. I am living in the United States. I am a mother of 3 children.

**Nyan Lwin - p. 61**

My name is Nyan.

I'm from Myanmar.

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I live with my aunt and her husband and their kids.  
I like to read books.  
I like to drive emergency cars.

**Eva M. - p. 13**

**Michiyo Maeda - p. 86**

Michiyo Maeda moved to the US from Japan in 2022 due to her husband's job. She has been in ESOL class for 17 months. Her goal is to be able to speak English with confidence.

**Michele (Ita7y) Mantova - p. 36**

Michele is an up and coming entertainer (song writer/rapper/singer/author) coming out of the Mansfield, Ohio, area under the label 5th Szn Recordings and Bomb Squad Entertainment. He started performing with his first group GMB, which he is still a part of today. He has worked along side Digmata Dotti Lyne, A.P. The Kidd, and \$\$\$D\_Mon\_E\$\$\$. He still works in entertainment to this day, in memory of his brother Mark (Pak-Man) Harney. I thank God for my talent and everywhere he has taken me.

**Ismael Manzi - p. 51**

Ismael is a level 4 ESOL student at the St. Johns program in Dayton, Ohio. He is from Kigali, Rwanda.

**Cynthia McKenzie - p. 95**

Cynthia is a student enrolled in the Cincinnati Talent Acceleration Program funded by Aspire at the University of Cincinnati.

**Kristina Minch - p. 41**

My name is Kristina Minch. I am a free-lance writer. I want to encourage others and let them know they are not alone. Writing has always been a passion and an emotional outlet for me. My husband and kids support and encourage me.

**Antasia Monroe - p. 32**

Antasia grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and aspires to be an esthetician. She enjoys writing and other creative activities.

**Caylen Mosley - p. 87**

My name is Caylen Mosley and I am a student in the Lima City Schools Aspire Program. I have a passion for writing. I love reading books and paying attention to the different writing styles to inspire my own writing. One of my favorite authors is Anthony Doerr, mostly for his work "All the Light We Cannot See". My poem was written about me and my experiences in life and it's my hope that upon reading it, somebody will be able to relate to the work as well.

**Bibi Naseemi - p. 61**

My name is Bibi.  
I am from Afghanistan.  
I am married.  
I have four children.  
I live with my husband and my children.  
I like cooking.  
I like talking English.  
I like to watch tv with my husband.

**Julie Nguyen - p. 49**

My name is Julie Nguyen, and I come from Vietnam. I have been in the United States for 15 years. I have 3 kids: Emily Trinh (14 years Old), Evelyn Trinh (13 years old), and Erick Trinh(11 years old) .I love to learn English with my classmates and our teacher, Chrissy.

**Gianna Nunez - p. 93**

Hello, my name is Gianna. This is my first time to write a story in English. I'm so excited.

**Tam Ogura - p. 83**

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

**Kimber Patterson - p. 3**

37-year-old wonderful caring mom who thrives on the lessons

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that are beginning taught through the Aspire Program and is succeeding through each obstacle that comes her way.

**Emily Phillips - p. 97, 100**

Emily is pursuing her High School Equivalency Diploma in order to pursue a nursing career.

**Gina Pokrajac - p. 89**

I am from Serbia. I am seeking a job opportunity, and I am an English language student.

**Dongxia Raynor - p. 77**

I am Dongxia Raynor. I come from China, and I have been in the United States for about 10 years. I am married, have two children and a husband. We live in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. I was a nurse in China for a few years. I am interested in health care. I desire to be a nurse in the United States. It is my dream.

**Meihua Ren - p. 66**

I'm from China. I have 3 children. Mei is my name. I enjoy attending the ESOL class with my teacher and classmates. Studying English has impacted me gradually. I started reading books. I believe that little things can cause big ripples!

**Mohammad Reza - p. 99**

**Nancy Rocha - p. 68**

Nancy has been attending the Advanced Online ESOL class at Auburn Career Center for a year in addition to working full time and caring for her daughter.

**Jessica Romain - p. 23**

Jess is a student of nursing. She comes from Haiti and is learning English alongside her classmates in Wooster, Ohio. She wrote the following poem, which gives some insight into Jess's personality:

Joyful, the smiles she brings  
Energetic, always on the go  
Sincere, need I say more  
Special, no comparison to the rest

Imaginative, full of surprises  
Charming, warm and loving  
Affectionate, a delight to know

**Doris Ross - p. 50**

My name is Doris Ross. I am coming full circle. I am studying for my GED. It is a very good part of my life, because it IS my life. It is my identity. There were things I didn't know about myself that I know now since I have been studying. Learning does not come overnight. It takes time. I spent 28 years being a nurse's aid. I liked how I was able to help people. I desire to continue to help others by volunteering in an organization that treats mental illness after I earn my GED diploma. I want to give a shout out to Project Learn for being there for me. I want to be there for others also.

**Solivette Sambolin - p. 74****Yuki Sawada - p. 56**

My name is Yuki. I'm from Japan. I live in central Ohio with my husband. I have been here for almost one year.

**Dahku Say - p. 53**

Dah is from Myanmar, and she spent time in Thailand before she came to the United States. She is a mother and an English student. She works as a home health aid, and she hopes to continue her education and to work in healthcare.

**Jennifer Nicole Schrecengost - p. 8, 40**

My name is Jennifer Nicole Schrecengost. I am 26 years old and I live in Defiance, Ohio. I am a very kind and emotional person. I put many experiences into my writing and poems. I have three daughters, Adelina Rose, Ariannah Kay, and Arabella Rayne who are far away but the light of my world. I live to help those with less than me and hope to give and spread hope in my truth and experiences. When you let go to what is, you can move forward to what can be.

**Eunyoung Song - p. 5**

I'm Eunyoung. I'm from South Korea. I'm married and have two children. In my country I was a teacher, but I don't work here. Now I'm taking care of my family and studying English.

**Qanbar Ali Tabesh - p. 21**

My teachers and friends call me Tabesh. I am from Afghanistan and have been in America since 2021. At that time, the Taliban took over the capital of my country, Kabul. I knew I had to get my family out of our country so we started our journey to America. I have been very grateful for the kindness and security my family has received in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am now in the Advanced ESOL class at CPS Aspire. I received a great education in Afghanistan but there was always too much discrimination throughout the country. I wrote this story because my life changed dramatically and dangerously. I am very grateful to be in America.

**Santa Tamang - p. 39**

My name is Santa Tamang, and I am a student of Project Learn. I started my GED journey in January 2021. I am a dad of two children. Also, I have a wife. I live with my two sons and wife. I love to write poems, novels, stories, and to read the encyclopedia.

**Katherine Virginia Ulloa - p. 57**

My family and I arrived to the United States from El Salvador nine years ago. It was not at all easy to get to a place unknown to me, but we met many people in our lives who made us feel at home. Despite the difficulties of having to learn a new language, I promised myself that I would be able to do everything. I promised to show that with passion and effort, everything can be done. In 2022, I graduated from high school. I am currently studying to be able to pass the paraprofessional exam and work with children in schools. I'm an animal-loving person; that's why I wrote "Wall-e Ate the Key!" This story means a lot because I am able to tell you a little about the antics that Wall-e does at home.

**Maria Venegas Romero - p. 37**

**Ravuth Veung - p. 75**

I came from Cambodia. I live in Cincinnati, Ohio with my family.

**Yesenia Villalta - p. 94**

I am from Ecuador. I have a husband and three children. I have lived in the United States for 9 months. The people in America are very respectful and make me feel part of the community.

**Nariah Washington - p. 27**

Nariah grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and aspires to own her own salon. Nariah enjoys doing creative projects.

**Mi Win - p. 61**

My name is Mi.

I'm from Myanmar.

I'm single.

I live with my father and my sister and my brother.

I like my job.

I like shopping.

I like walking.

**André Woods - p. 28, 38**

My name is Andre Woods. I'm 28 years old and from Ottawa, Ohio. I have two beautiful daughters Aaleyah, 9 and Cataleya, 7. My parents are both gone but never forgotten.

**Ryu Yamada - p. 65**

Ryu is in the Advanced Online ESOL class at Auburn Career Center. He is temporarily in Northeast Ohio for a job opportunity.

**Xia Yang - p. 61**

My name is Xia.

I am from Laos.

I have three children; two sons and one daughter.

I live with my husband.

I like my job.

I like taking pictures with my children and reading my Bible.

## HONORABLE MENTION

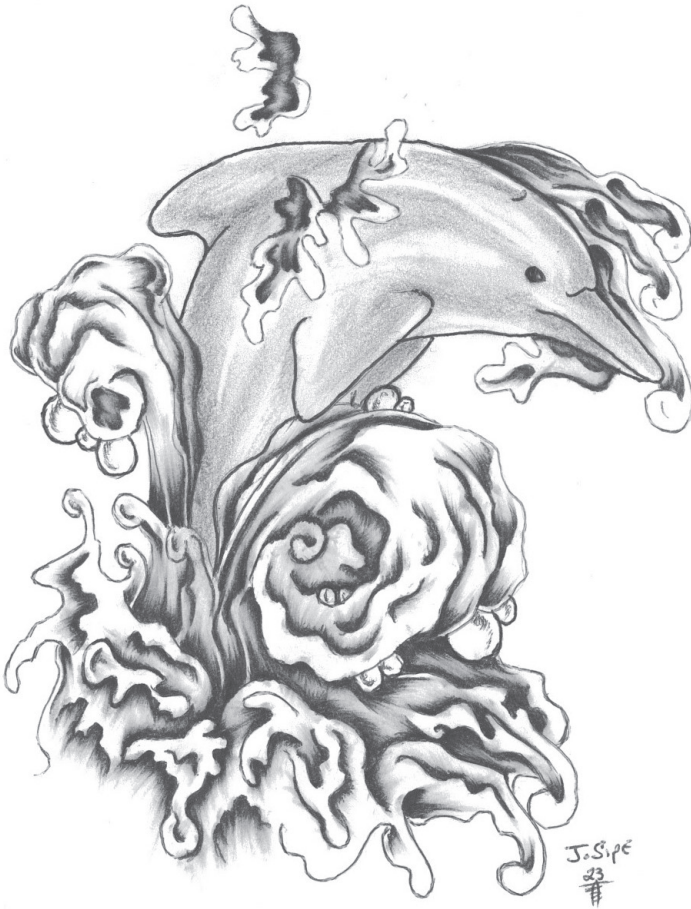
### Artists

Cui Hui Chen  
 Maria Izquierdo  
 Byrnie McKenzie  
 Abdur Rahmen  
 Jennifer Nicole Schrecengost  
 Karleena Souza

### Authors

Rabia Abdeen  
 Brenda Aguilar  
 Alaa Al Samman  
 Jasem Aljadaan  
 Nancy Anza  
 Nowar Ashkar  
 Amal Assi  
 Bernadett Boksay  
 Fatima Bouzidi  
 Erika Cabello  
 Elisa Cazin  
 Chloe Alexis Cerrado  
 Nezha Damoun  
 Beverly Deokarran  
 Phuong Do  
 Antoine Duval  
 Stewen Espana  
 Frank Gatewood  
 Marlene Guizado  
 Alexander Hodge  
 Shanice Hunter  
 Fatiha Idsidi Ali  
 Yusra Jawad  
 Ceciria Kadada  
 Pa Khang

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 Ariana Lopez  
 Manuel Jesus Mata  
 Jacques Mukalayi  
 Lizeth F. Munoz  
 Loveline Murat  
 Mikiko Nagasawa  
 Rene Naranjo  
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 Debra Randolph  
 Luz Milena Rojas Florez  
 Mayumi Roques  
 Jaylan Sanchez  
 Juan Santiago  
 Cassidy Schwartz  
 Shadi Shibli  
 Gabriela Soler  
 Melissa Sosa  
 Patricia Strelö  
 Aranza Torres  
 Brenda Torres  
 Franky Trujillo  
 Meng (Hannah) Zhang



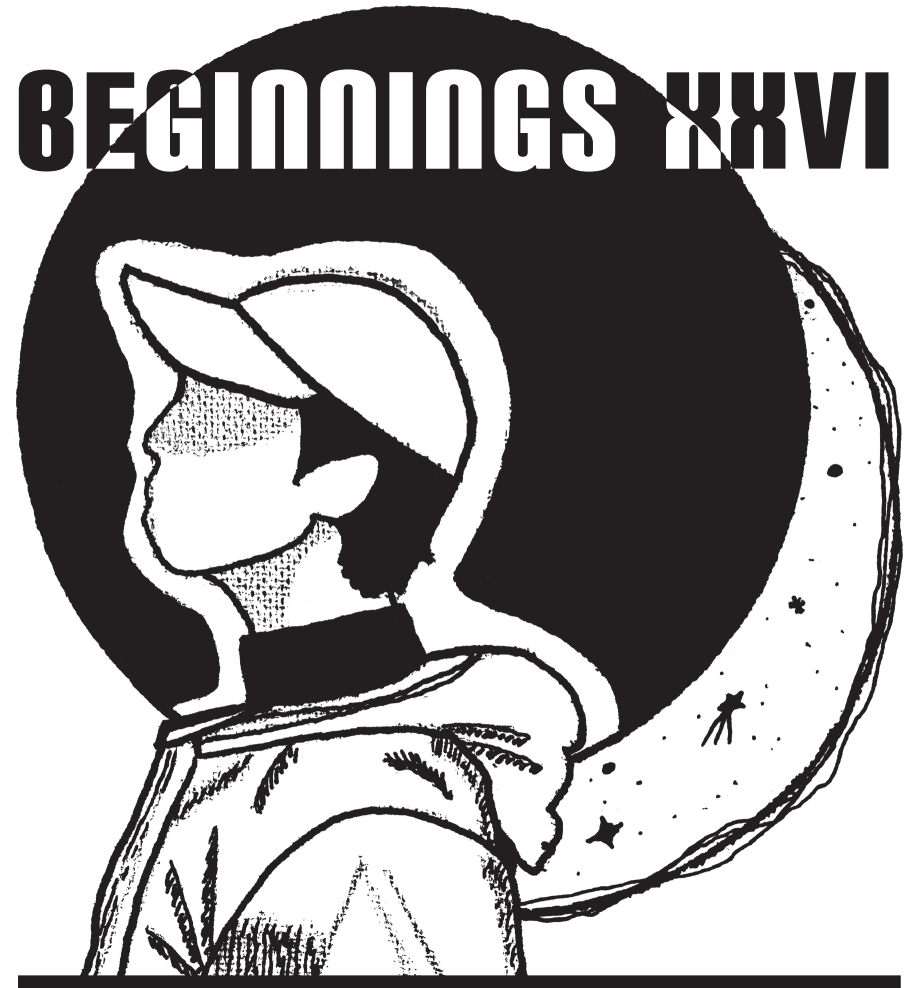
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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Project LEARN beginner ESOL class worked together to create **Snapshots: A Time-Traveling Photo Album** (p. 61). Using the project description at the beginning of the piece, create your own class snapshot in time.
2. Joelle Choueiry uses the five senses to describe “**Giving**” (p. 52). Using the same style, describe “taking”.
3. Katherine Virginia Ulloa tells a funny story about her pet in her writing **Wall-e Ate the Key!** (p. 57). Write a story about a funny experience that you had with a pet or a wild animal.
4. In **The Blue of the Sea** (p. 46), Jhonata Cantuaria Medeiros uses the color blue and the sea to describe a sense of relaxation evoked by the color and the water. Pick your own color and use it to describe an emotion and a setting or event.
5. Choose a piece of writing from the chapter **Eclipse** that moved you. Write a letter to the author and tell them why you connected with their words.
6. In the story **Sierra’s Journey** (p. 9), the author writes about a health journey. Think about your own health journey. What health goals do you have? Write them down to inspire yourself and/or others.
7. Dahku Say (p. 53), Eunyoung Song (p. 5), Gina Pokrajac (p. 89), Viktoriya Georgieva (p. 13), and Larissa das Neves Nogueira (p. 20) tell their stories in chapters. Think about your own story and write a short chapter about your past, present and future.
8. Emily Phillips tells us that mistakes are not always bad in her piece **Silly Mistakes** (p. 97). Write about a time that you learned an important lesson from a silly mistake.

9. In **What is Safety?** (p. 29), Monroe Landis writes about the pain one feels when people misjudge you. Write about a time that you felt misjudged or a time when you misjudged someone else.
10. In Moussa Fall's story **My First Tabaski in the United States** (p. 47), the author writes about how he continued to celebrate a religious festival in America. Discuss how you are keeping valued traditions from your family or home country live in America.
11. Sharon Lindhurst writes about being out of school for almost 60 years in her story **Why I Came Back to School After So Many Years** (p. 102). Are you in an Aspire program after a long absence from school? If so, write about your experience.
12. Kimber Patterson writes about her **New Beginnings** (p. 3). Write about something new that you started that will be an inspiration to others.

# BEGINNINGS XXVI



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