

# **Beginnings xxvii**

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING

Ohio Literacy Resource Center



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# Foreword

Aspire learners around the state amaze us daily with their academic efforts and growth, but it is their journeys that truly inspire all who hear them. *Beginnings* is our yearly opportunity to showcase their unique experiences.

Ohioans benefit from the diversity among us, creating stronger communities because of what every individual brings with them. In my twenty-two years in adult education, I have had the honor of working with students directly, sharing in their struggles, celebrating their successes, and learning from their experiences. These are the words directly from the source.

The talented students from Aspire programs around the state have produced powerful poems, unforgettable short stories, and priceless pieces of art. The works contained herein lay bare the resilience through hardship, the pain of war, the power of hope, the sense of community and country which help us to push forward. Beautifully depicted are stories of loss, perseverance, and love. Without further ado, it is my privilege to introduce you to *Beginnings xvii*.

*TJ Armstrong*  
Aspire State Director



**Aspire**

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**Learn more. Earn more.**



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# Acknowledgements

For more than 25 years, Aspire students have told their stories – both real and imagined – to countless readers through *Beginnings*. Their short stories, poems, essays continue to inspire with creativity, vivid language, and perspective on the world in which they live. Their writing showcases the power of perseverance, creativity, and lifelong learning.

*Beginnings xxvii* honors all Aspire students who choose to continue their education while balancing their time at home, work, and in the community. Their dedication and life experience bring a unique perspective and resilience to the classroom, and their success is a testament to the idea that it's never too late to share your voice and make an impact through writing.. We also honor the teachers and their unwavering commitment to students which leaves a lasting impact that reaches far beyond the classroom.

We continue to be grateful to the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Aspire Office for their continued support not only of this project, but also of the teachers, staff, and students at Ohio programs. Their sponsorship empowers voices, fuels creativity, and helps bring important stories to life.



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# ***Where I'm From***

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## Whispers of the Ancients

In sacred lands where rivers weave,  
And mountains rise like stories told,  
The heart of nations, once believed,  
Now carries burdens, heavy and old.

With feathers lost and voices dim,  
The drumbeat echoes through the years,  
Each heartbeat a reminder, grim,  
Of laughter turned to silent tears.

The spirit of the wolf and bear,  
Once roamed these plains with noblest pride,  
Yet sorrow shadows every prayer,  
As culture fights to turn the tide.

From stolen lands to broken treaties,  
The threads of justice fray and fade,  
Yet in the hearts of the defeated,  
A fire burns, unbowed, unstayed.

Resilience flows like rivers deep,  
In tales that rise like morning sun,  
Through trials vast, the pain we keep,  
Yet hope, like seeds, is never done.

With every step on sacred ground,  
We honor those who came before,  
For in our hearts, their truths are found,  
A spirit strong, forevermore.

So let the whispers of the past,  
Guide us through the stormy night,  
And in the bonds of love steadfast,  
Together, we reclaim the light.

~ Rayshiaun Mann, Sr.  
Mansfield City Schools

## **Egypt Is a Beautiful Place**

My home is Egypt.

There are beautiful places in Egypt that tourists from all over the world come to see, such as pyramids, museums, castles, and the one and only zoo. There are many other beautiful places, too. I have visited most of these places in Egypt.

My mother is a teacher. She spoke with her friends, who had already visited the pyramids, and they told my mother that this was a beautiful place. They had a trip there, and my mother said we should try visiting this place, too. She took my sisters and brothers and me on this trip. We packed some food and drinks and went to the bus. When we arrived, we walked around and seen horses and camels. Then, we entered the pyramids.

Having experienced these sights firsthand, I can say that the pyramids of Giza still reign supreme among the seven wonders of the world. Despite thousands of years, the pyramids still manage to amaze visitors, especially the Great Pyramid of Khufu (built around 2570BC), the only surviving wonder of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In addition to visiting Khufu and its neighbors, we visited the Pyramid of Khafre and the Pyramid of Menkaure, as well as the Sphinx and a number of smaller tombs.

In Egypt, anyone can carve an unforgettable journey into your memory and catch a glimpse of a feature of ancient history, whose construction still baffles us to this day.

*~ Hagar Eldebeisi  
Wayne County JVSD*

## **Heroes in My Country**

My family in Taiwan are my heroes. They help me when I need help.

When I was young, my parents taught me a lot and protected me. They still do. My older sisters always help me solve problems. They give me good advice and tell me how to do things. My older brother also. If anyone asks him to do anything, he always says "OK." In my country, I can still be a kid. Here, I need to do everything for myself. I miss my family, my heroes.

In my heart, they are heroes forever.

~Tzuchi Tsao  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## Mother

Mother, Mother, where are you?

I can't see.

Come sit, please talk to me.

Sounds strange, I'm sure it does

Never happened before now, I wish it was.

Give me a chance and you'll see

I'm not the person you thought I'd be.

Confused, hurt?

Yes, that's me.

I don't want hate or envy.

I'm full of that, it's tearing me apart

I'm tired of holding it in my heart.

I have love, lots to give,

55 years is what I've lived.

There's lots of things you don't know about me.

Don't judge - look, listen, and you'll see

I can be the daughter you want me to be.

Love is a strong word, one you don't have to say.

Just give me a chance, and you will one day.

I love you, Mother.

~ Renee Mays  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

## An Inspirational Journey

Since I came to the United States, I experienced many impactful influences. First, when I pass people, even if strangers, I greet them, smile, and make eye contact. In Japan, we often avoid eye contact with strangers.

Second, it is very interesting to learn various ways of thinking by communicating with people from diverse backgrounds. From this, I learned the importance of expressing my own opinion.

Thirdly, I have always felt embarrassed, and it took me a long time to relate with people. I lived in a culture where hugs and hand-shakes were not very common, but after coming to the United States, the speed at which I was able to get to know people became much faster.

Lastly, I came here because of my husband's work, but I am very grateful to him and the people around me for giving me the chance to come to the United States. All of these experiences have been transformative. Looking forward, I would like to study English so that I can say what I think more often and communicate with many people.

~Yuki Sawada  
Delaware Area Career Center

## My Story

My name is Rabia. I am from Syria. I have a daughter and a son. I have been in the United States with my husband, his son, and his daughter for more than two and half years. I grew up in a large family consisting of my mother, father, and eight siblings. I spent most of my life in Damascus, the capital. I used to walk to school, which was close to my house.

When I finished high school, the university was far away, so I used to take two buses to get there. When I saw the nice weather, I would rather walk than take the second bus. I used to walk in the streets of Damasus until I got to the university. I remember now the branches of the jasmine bush that used to hang from the houses overlooking the street. It smelled very nice. I used to pick some of it to smell it while walking. If it wilted, it was easy to find another hanging bush in one of the houses. I miss that jasmine. And of course I miss walking in those streets.

Here in America, I rarely walk because of the cold weather and also because any destination I go to is far from my home. I had never thought before of leaving Syria to any place in the world. But because of the war, I found myself forced to do so. It was difficult for me to understand what was happening at first. I wondered why some people wanted to create a mess in my country! We were living in peace, there was security in Syria. I thought that the president at that time had the right to stand up to those people to restore the security and peace. But I could not imagine that he would prevent them from saying what they wanted.

My marriage was at the age of thirty, and it coincided with the beginning of the war. I moved to live in my husband's village, which my parents also belong to. My stay there did not last long. It was only seven months because of the war, as there were those who rejected the continuation of Assad's rule and demanded his departure. So, we had to leave it, towards the border of Turkey, because Assad's forces were heading towards those villages that opposed him and began attacking all their people.

I stayed there for about two years. It wasn't easy for me at all. The scenes of destruction were increasing and the smell of forest fires from the bombing reached us.

We had to go back to primitive life without electricity and difficulty in getting water, as well as getting bread and food. I learned how to make bread there. It might be fun to eat fresh bread, but it's hard work if it continues.

There in that village we could see the lights of Turkish villages at night. It was very close. Many families went to Turkey. I didn't want to because I wanted to go back to see my family.

During those two years I got pregnant with my first daughter. My husband finally decided that we should move to Turkey. It wasn't easy; I was in my ninth month at that time. We went to a place where we had to cross the river that separates the Turkish lands from the Syrian lands. We headed to a city in the central part of Turkey. At first, Turkey was calm, organized, and safe for us, and that was of course the most important thing.

My daughter Areej was born in the hospital. There, the difficulty of dealing with doctors and nurses began. It was difficult to understand a language I knew nothing about. It was very important to me to learn it. I did so by talking to the owners of the house we rented; they were kind. I gradually realized that the Turkish language contains many words that are originally Arabic, but they pronounce them differently, so it was easy for me to learn and remember them. It also contains many English words; you can also find some French words.

I memorized what I needed to communicate with them. This was very important, especially when I went to get treatment for my eyes, as I needed a corneal transplant. This seemed impossible to me and painful memories because it was difficult to transplant corneas for foreigners in Turkey. So, I had to think of another country, it was the United States of America. The wait was very long, perhaps it lasted about seven years. During that time, I had another boy named Jawad.

On July 5, 2022, we arrived in the United States. The journey was very long and tiring with an active three-year-old boy who wanted to learn everything. As for the language, it was less difficult for me. I am trying to be better at it, so I am studying with a wonderful online teacher named Lori, also with a volunteer named Amy who has an amazing teaching style.

My children are studying in schools that respect them and provide them with education, and they receive care in the hospitals and so do I. I feel happy that I was finally able to reach here. Here, where it is possible to set goals and achieve them later by work and well. I feel that it is the right place for us to continue. I hope in the near future I will be able to visit my family in Syria.

~ Rabia Abdeen  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## The Person I Most Admire

My grandma is the person who I most admire. She is a friend, a mom, and a secret keeper. Sometimes I feel like we are connected by our souls. Something silly I know, but I really feel like we understand each other perfectly. The reason why I admire my grandmother is because she lived a pretty hard life. She technically was a single mother and by herself raised seven children. Her children never lacked anything. They all managed to have successful careers, and she knew how to raise them with love, despite the circumstances they lived through. In the future, I would love to be like her- kind, strong, and brave.

~ *Martha Domingues*  
*Auburn Career Center*

## Beginning Again

My life began 40 years ago in my native country, México. I spent 38 years there with my relatives, my husband, my children, and my friends. I experienced some very important life stages there: I completed a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in pedagogy, I got my first job as a special education teacher, and I worked in that field for 15 and half years. I met a man, and we got married. Our three children were born in México. Every day, my children and I went to school together in the same car, because they studied at the same school where I worked. The classroom was different, but the building was the same. I even used to help them with their homework.

Everything was normal, and I didn't imagine that life was about to surprise us, but suddenly, one day, a job offer came for my husband to work in the U.S.A. Making the decision to move was hard, but we have been here for around two years, with a new beginning, facing many changes, and trying to understand how things work here. It has not been easy. Fear and frustration have appeared at times, for example, when I didn't know a lot of people here or when I was not able to communicate with other people because I didn't know anything about English. Fear also appeared when I saw my children go to school alone for the first time, not knowing if they would be okay, because they didn't know anyone and they didn't know English either. Frustration also arose when I couldn't help them with their homework because I didn't know how to do it or simply when things didn't happen the way I wanted, but that doesn't matter anymore, because now we are focused continuing to try, continuing to learn, and continuing to work hard to achieve our goals. This is a country of dreams, and we are going to achieve ours.

~ Ariana López Hernández  
Wayne County JVSD

## **My Father is Great**

In a small, beautiful village in India, when I was eleven years old, I spent a lot of time with my father. He was a unique, excellent, and handsome person. My father gave his all when we had problems. He was a good supporter of his family and also, a wise man. Father was a caring, giving, and helpful person. Always, he gave me good strength and had time for his family. He was a good thinker and advisor to his family and friends, too. That's why my father was a strong pillar. This is the relationship between a father and a daughter.

~ Krishna Kumari  
Project LEARN of Medina County

## My Family

I'm a regular man from Guatemala moved from my country to America with dreams and goals. I have been here since 2004. I lived for one year in Georgia. I worked there in construction, but my boss didn't pay me well, so I moved to Ohio.

When I came to this state, I found a new job building basements for new houses. They paid me better. Since then, I have been here. I like the climate in this state, and I enjoy it to the fullest with my family.

I have a wife and three children. I have one son. He is eleven years old; he likes to play soccer, and he feels happy practicing his favorite sport. Also, I have a daughter, she is nine years old. She likes to draw when we go to the park, she is inspired by nature, she observes everything around her then she starts to draw. I feel happy seeing her loving this art and I encourage her to continue practicing it. My youngest daughter is Yamileth. She is six years old. She likes reading books and I see that she enjoys reading them. It is her favorite hobby. On weekends when it is summer we usually go to the park. We feel happy exploring nature and listening to the birds singing that can be heard around us. Along with that I also go to church with my family. We feel happy to do this in our simple life.

Living in this country gave us hope and made us feel safe.

~ Naalicio Bartolon Bravo  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

## Crazy December

***“It’s the most wonderful time of the year”***

*-Eduard Pola & George Wyleing*

It's December, and all year long we wait for this month. Nine years ago, when we decided to move to Columbus, we promised every holiday we would travel to Mexico to celebrate Christmas and New Year with our families. We drive 3000 miles round trip which sounds crazy thousands of miles, but our target is treasured. The journey starts by preparing our house to be alone for two weeks, buying presents for our loved ones and packing. Finally, the departure day arrives. 5am, it's time to wake up. My daughters and dogs are getting in the car while my husband and I do the last check up to see if the doors are locked and everything is unplugged and ready to go. On the radio, Christmas songs are playing, and we are happy because it's time to see our family. We see the first sign. We are leaving Ohio, entering Kentucky and driving, making our first stop. The rest areas are our best friends these days. Second stop, fast food; we do not want to waste time going to a restaurant to sit and eat. Tennessee here we go. After more than twelve hours, finally, we are in Texarkana, Arkansas, and it's time to sleep. On the second day driving, our daughters start to get stressed, bored and tired and the dogs barking. More than twenty hours in a car with two dogs, one kid and one teenager it's a big challenge. Lastly, we are in Texas. Crossing Texas is an eternity, it's the largest state we ride. When the palm trees start to appear we know we are close. Welcome to Mexico signs at the distance, and we start to get excited. Crossing the border, we drive to my parents' house. Finally, we arrived and the feeling when I see my parents' house and the moment they open the door are priceless. I start breathing again and all the stress during the trip vanishes.

The days fly, and it's time to go back to Columbus. I wish I could stop the time and never have to go back, but we decided to be here. We are happy here in Columbus although half of my heart stays in Mexico. Our daily routine starts, but we are always waiting for our next crazy trip to Mexico.

~ *Maria Elena Garcia Noriega*  
*Delaware Area Career Center*

## Arranged Marriages

In the past, arranged marriages were very common in Indian culture. Two families would meet and decide if their children would marry. The groom and the bride would meet each other for the first time on their wedding day.

My mother told me that she didn't see my father before their wedding. Her family went to my dad's house. They met my dad and said, "Fine - we like this boy and his family." Then they fixed the wedding date.

There were no cell phones at that time, so they couldn't talk. My Mom was nervous – she was only seventeen. She wore an Indian dress on her wedding day, and her face was covered with a veil, so she couldn't see my dad's face. That night, there were 3 or 4 boys standing there and she was trying to figure out which one was her husband. Finally, everyone went home, and my dad was the last person in the house, so she knew he was her husband. Luckily, my dad was a handsome and tall man.

Now things have changed in India. People can marry who they choose. In some ways, my marriage was similar to my mother's. My family and my in-laws met first. After that, my husband and I got together and talked. We could do that because we had phones and the internet. Before the marriage we had the choice to reject the wedding proposal. However, we liked one another and decided to get married. Thank God times have changed because it's hard to marry someone you don't know.

~ Gagandeep Kaur  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## **Mother +**

When you have only one child, you are a Mom. When you have two, you have to be a judge, a referee, and a mediator.

One day, my kids wanted to eat ice cream bars. I checked in the freezer, but unfortunately there was just one left. I decided to cut it in half. The kids thought the pieces were not equal, and they started to fight.

My husband had a good suggestion - the next time we have only one of anything, tell the kids no one will get it. Problem solved.

*~ Jaruwan Hangsungnoen  
Project LEARN of Summit County*

## You Can't Make Progress Without Effort

Life is full of unexpected twists, and sometimes things unfold in ways we never imagined. I lived in Kharkiv — one of the most beautiful cities in Ukraine, where every day brought joy, and the future seemed stable and secure. Higher education, a master's degree, a successful career in international companies, a cozy home full of life and laughter, and travels around the world — all of these were part of my daily life. The country was developing, improving, and it seemed that the future would only get brighter.

Years of hard work, striving for the best, and investing in our future made my life rich and fulfilling. However, the world I knew suddenly collapsed. Everything that seemed solid and reliable was now at risk. War burst into our home, destroying everything we had worked so hard to build.

Russia started a brutal war against the peaceful people of Ukraine. War came to take lives, seize land, erase cities from the map, and change the fates of people. A life that had seemed stable and secure was replaced by chaos and uncertainty. Our loved ones were in danger. Everything we had built and hoped for was destroyed. At that moment, when the future became unpredictable, we had to make a difficult but necessary decision — to leave our homeland and start a new life, anywhere.

America became a wonderful opportunity for us to start over. The move opened up a chance to leave behind insecurity and loss, offering new horizons and prospects for growth.

Here, in the new country, everything turned out wonderfully. My husband and I found excellent engineering positions at prestigious companies, which allowed us to continue our career growth and enjoy the comfort of our new life. However, one difficulty did arise — in the team where I worked, most of my colleagues spoke Ukrainian. This created a sense of staying in a familiar, native environment, but at the same time, it limited my opportunities for full integration into American society. I realized that for successful development in this new reality, knowing English was not just a useful skill but a vital necessity. So, I made the decision to leave my job and fully focus on learning the language. It was a difficult but necessary step. I knew that only in this way could I open up all the opportunities that knowing English would offer and move forward confidently.

Meanwhile, our child quickly mastered the new language. He adapted to kindergarten and school with ease, made friends with his classmates, and communicated freely with them during lessons, sports practices, and events. Knowing the language opened up many opportunities for him and made his life much simpler and more exciting than it might have been. Children, as a rule, learn a new language more easily, and our son was no exception. He actively participates in school life, freely attends activities, and easily connects with other kids.

With each passing day, we felt more and more satisfied with our new life. In our free time, we traveled around America, explored new cities, and enjoyed nature. Bike rides along scenic routes, fishing, and our interest in new technologies and books have always been important parts of our lives. These passions didn't leave us even in this new reality — they continued to bring joy and filled our days with meaning. Our attention to the world around us and the desire to help those in need remained unchanged, and meeting new people brought us joy. Americans turned out to be incredibly kind and helpful, making our integration significantly easier and more pleasant.

Learning English became an important step in creating a new life. It was a natural progression for improving our quality of life and opening up new possibilities. It became the foundation for our integration into the new society and a key tool for building a confident future. The English language became an integral part of our new reality and plays a crucial role in our socialization.

Looking back, I realize that for us, it's not enough just to survive the difficulties, but to learn to act, strive for the best, and not stop on the path of development. The desire to learn, adapt, and improve ourselves remains our guiding principle. And I believe that, despite all the hardships, the future can be better if we are ready to work on ourselves. The saying “”You can't make progress without effort” is a Ukrainian proverb that means that to change something in your life, you need to take action. You can't just sit and wait for something to happen by itself. We decided not to stand still, not to let circumstances dictate our lives. If we hadn't taken steps to make a change, we wouldn't have found new opportunities. I hope that our story will become a source of motivation for those who are afraid of change or doubt their strength. Sometimes, to change something, you simply need to take the leap and start acting.

Unfortunately, the war still continues. We, like millions of others, continue to live with its consequences. The pain of loss and destruction stays with us. Even being here, we cannot forget what is happening in our native Ukraine. All the events connected to the war remain in our hearts and remind us of the importance of peace and stability. Each of us must do everything we can to preserve peace and prevent such catastrophes from happening again in the future.

~ *Ievgeniia Martynenko*  
*Project LEARN of Summit County*

## The Struggle with Achievement in My Life

I felt everything was new and different. I didn't understand much English. I didn't have a job. I didn't have a driving license. I felt very nervous at that time because I didn't know anything here. I was terrified. How could I start my new journey and my career?

I am blessed to be learning the English language. I felt very nervous when I came here. Everything was new and difficult for me. I didn't know how to start my new journey here. It was hard for me here. I didn't speak English very well.

Everything is different and new for me. I got my driving license. Now I feel easier about my daily lifestyle. I felt different like, different city, different culture, different lifestyle. At that time, I missed my country, my friends, and my family. Now, I have my own car. I feel very happy. I am trying very hard to achieve something. At this moment I am less stressed.

I was born in Nepal. I grew up there, and when I was 5 years old, I joined the school. When I was 16 years old, I completed my school level study in my country. One decade ago, I moved to Kathmandu, Nepal, and I joined college. When I finished college, I started my own business. I stayed there almost 10 years. After that, I moved to the US in April 2024.

There was so much stressful life when I came here to the U.S. There was a lot of confusion when I came to the U.S. from Nepal 8 months ago. There were moments when I felt lonely and sad because I didn't know English and I didn't understand anything. There was a time when I was hurt and frustrated trying to figure out a job. There were surprises every day, from unfamiliar food to different clothes. There were kind people who helped me, and there was happiness when I finally started understanding things. I was amazed at how much I had learned in just a few months.

~ Chudamani Basnet  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## **I Am Cecilia Uriostegui, and This is My Story**

In Mexico, I worked designing gardens, which was one of my passions. Another of my great passions is my family: my daughter Ximena and my husband Nigel. In Mexico, we used to enjoy hiking, camping, and spending time with our friends.

My husband grew up in Ohio and always dreamed of showing us his country. As a family, we made a decision that filled us with excitement: moving to Ohio.

In 2020, I began a migration process that took three years to complete. Finally, on April 9, 2024, I arrived in the United States with great excitement. However, the first challenges soon appeared: the language barrier, the loss of my community, and the need to adapt to a different culture became part of my daily life.

Like with any new beginning, I felt excited but also overwhelmed. I missed my family, my friends, and the community I had left behind in Mexico. I knew that, to adapt successfully, I had to integrate into the community. I made the decision to look for a job, even though I didn't feel ready. I went to my first job interview, and although I understood less than half of what was said, I tried to stay calm and show enthusiasm. Despite my doubts, I received the news that I had been hired. At that moment, I was filled with joy because I knew I was taking an important step.

Since it was my first time working in a restaurant kitchen, I had a lot to learn. During the first week, a coworker taught me basic tasks.

I remember a particular moment at work that made me feel much more connected to this new life. A different coworker noticed that I looked worried. I was struggling to understand some instructions, and when she saw my frustration, she approached me, and with a smile, offered to help. Not only did she explain what I needed to know, but she also gave me some tips to improve my English. She made me feel that I was not alone in this process, and this small act of kindness made a big difference.

At that moment, I realized that even though everything was new and challenging, there were also people willing to help me.

I know that I still have a lot to learn, but I feel stronger and more confident that, with effort and patience, I will fully integrate into this new stage of my life!

~ *Cecilia Uriostegui Gutierrez*  
*Wayne County JVSD*

## Japanese Characters

I sometimes see people wearing the clothes with designs that have Japanese words or tattoos of Japanese characters. There are three types of characters in Japan; Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji. Hiragana and Katakana each have 46 characters, while Kanji has more than 70,000 characters. But people usually use about 2,000 of them.

Kanji came from China, while Hiragana and Katakana were created in Japan a long time ago. Japanese people use Kanji together with Hiragana and Katakana to write sentences. Kanji are mainly used for nouns and verbs. Hiragana are mainly used for particles and auxiliary verbs. Katakana are usually used for loanwords and onomatopoeia. It is possible to write every sentence with only Hiragana because Hiragana shows just sound like alphabet letters. However, to make it easier to read, Japanese people usually use Kanji together.

I am so happy when I see Japanese characters who wear the clothes with Japanese texts or when I find them in towns in the U.S.

~ Ryu Yamada  
Auburn Career Center

## **My Childhood Memories**

I spent my childhood in a small town called Piedras Negras in Mexico where I was surrounded by nature. I didn't have any technology at home except a TV and a radio. In my free time, I would go out and play outside my house with my friends. We'd play with a ball or hide and seek. A nice memory I have is that during the summer my friends and I would get together to go for a hike in the mountains near our town just to enjoy the view. We'd bring something to eat like chips, juice, cookies, and a sandwich. We had a great time talking and joking. The view was very pretty. We listened to birds and felt the fresh breeze. We felt very lucky and free. I remember those days because they are memories that will remain in my heart forever.

*~ Fatima Vazquez  
Auburn Career Center*

## My Mom

It's hard for me to talk about the person who I most admire, because I have trouble not crying when I remember my mom. Her name is Ana. She was small like I am. We both have the same eyes. She used to wear a short cut hairstyle- different than I do.

My mom used to be a seamstress. She was an artist. She designed all my clothes. I remember I got compliments when I wore dresses that she used to make for me.

She had seven siblings. She was the oldest one. My mom had a hard life because my grandpa died when she was a girl. As the oldest one, she had to become an adult. She took care of her seven siblings. My mom worked a lot and she loved taking care of others, leaving aside her own dreams. I am very proud of who she was. Actually, I can say she is my hero, and now she is my angel too.

Anita encouraged me to study new things each day. She was a strong woman, even in her last breath. I respect her memory a lot. She never complained and I didn't see her cry, even though she might have had reasons to do it. She is a good example to me, and I will love her forever.

I will always be grateful to her for her care and my wonderful childhood. I miss my mom a lot.

~ *Mariela Ruiz*  
*Auburn Career Center*

## **Love Is a Verb**

When nobody wakes you up in the morning, and when nobody waits for you at night, and when you can do whatever you want, what do you call it? Freedom or loneliness? The answer depends on whether you have LOVE in your life or not.

She was a mother of three, and every day was a whirlwind of noise, demands, and little hands tugging at her shirt. She often found herself yearning for silence, wishing she could be alone. But when the house finally quieted down and she was alone with her thoughts, the silence was almost unbearable. Her LOVE for her children gave her life meaning.

He was important, or maybe he wanted to be. He was always surrounded by people - assistants, clients, colleagues. His life was full of meetings, flights, and deals, but at night, sitting in his hotel room, he felt alone. Even with all his success, there was an emptiness in him that neither money nor power could fill. He wanted a deeper connection, something simple and real that could only be found in LOVE.

They were a couple who built a life together, a home, children, shared dreams. They woke up together in the morning, their arms close, but the emptiness between them seemed enormous. The silence was deafening, their closeness seemed like the deepest loneliness. LOVE had long since left the walls of their home.

She was a lone traveler, waking up in a tent to the sounds of nature, far from people. Freedom was inspiring - she could go anywhere, and she liked it. She loved life, she loved herself, she was ready to share her LOVE with the world.

In the end, it all comes down to love. When no one wakes you up in the morning, no one waits for you at night, and when you can do whatever you want, what do you call it? Freedom or loneliness?

LOVE is a verb, something you do that fills the void and turns loneliness into connection and freedom into something more.

~ Olena Nikitina  
Project LEARN of Summit County



# ***Where I've Been***



## Teenage Rantipole

Excited to be me, sometimes.  
Other times, I really don't feel as real as I could be.  
I learned to run down the freeway  
At that ripe age of thirteen.

The scars I have, little burns and indecisive days,  
Campfires where they shouldn't be  
Down by a river under an old bridge path.  
The memories there will forever last.

I gained my freedom by the age of fifteen,  
Really learning what it meant to breathe and how to be me.  
To love life for what it could be.  
I dashed, swam, and ran into adventurous trouble,

Some stuff you would not believe:  
Homemade torches, ripped shirts,  
Wrapped in my own flammable concoction.  
Rationalizing my decisions was not a frequent option; I just did me.

Spur of the moment, savoring the heat,  
Sometimes, I regret it.  
Other times, I stare feeling incomplete.  
Dancing among the lights down the old freeway

Learning to become me, I was a teenage rantipole. Nobody could  
take that from me.

~ Johnathon Larrison  
Penta Career Center

## Choices

I realized I was to blame  
Everything I was experiencing  
The good, the bad, the ugly

Twenty-one years  
In my own mental prison

I had an epiphany  
I could no longer blame others  
For my experiences

My choices were unhealthy  
Unaware  
I'd been sabotaging myself

Always doing what others expected of me  
While sacrificing myself  
Sacrificing my needs

I had an epiphany  
A dose of hope

It was my responsibility  
To show up and provide  
For me

I took back my power  
Began making healthy choices  
With intention

Aligned to what is true to me  
It's not too late  
To create new dreams

An epiphany  
Finally free from my own mental prison

~ Glenda Elmore  
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools

## Alone & Broken

my life was a mess until i met you that day  
i was in the wrong lane until you showed me the way  
some said i was insane but i paid them no mind  
because hey i figured i be dying soon so i don't have much time  
people think that i don't feel all that hurt n pain  
or that i'd rather be shot by a bullet than to burning in flames  
the nightmare called reality has arrived and i'm still not ready  
memories of when i was three i had a bear i named freddy  
my daddy gave it to me before them ##### took him to jail  
i was scared that he had life when they sent him into his cell  
i prayed and i prayed for them to send him back home  
he never did arrive so stuck out here in this world alone  
now i'm back in the wrong lane wishing i had cherished my time  
with him better  
i don't get another chance because my best friend  
my team my dad forever

~ Jessica Lynn  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## **The Most Important Day of My Life**

My story is about my family and how we lived separately. It was twelve years ago that my husband won a green card, and we moved to the USA without our four-year-old daughter. For a whole two years, we were waiting for documents and got through a lot of problems. My daughter was unhappy, and many times I wanted to leave and move back to her. After two years, we got documents, and I flew to my child. My meeting with her was unforgettable and I could not believe that I could hug her, kiss, and hold her. It was my happiest day in life.

I think family should be together: parents with kids, when they grow up, husband with wife, when they love each other. Family does not exist when everyone is separate.

*~ Zoriana Guseinova  
Project LEARN of Medina County*

## My Next Door Hero

The first thing I did when I heard about my husband's overseas appointment was worry. I was so afraid of adjusting to another country.

When I moved to America for the first time, I met her – my next-door neighbor. She greeted me with a simple “hello,” and I introduced myself. I told her that I had come from South Korea just two weeks earlier. Surprisingly, she seemed to know a lot about South Korea. As we talked, I came to understand why. She had a Korean friend and was already familiar with Korean culture. She gave me her Korean friend’s name and phone number. Through that connection, I was able to adapt well to my new life in America.

I’ve come to realize that small acts of kindness can mean a lot to others.

~ Aran Lee  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## Facing Life

Once my drug addiction had taken control of my life, the words facing life only brought one meaning to my mind. Jails, institutions, or death. Drugs gave me a life sentence. Whether it was a real prison or worse yet, a prisoner of my own mind. Drugs had vowed to be my best friend, yet the reality was that they only sentenced me to a life of turmoil.

My marriage, or more so my bondage, with the system began in December 2009. I was greeted at the door of the house of my “sugar daddy.” He spent a bulk of his money enabling my drug use. He opened his home for people to smoke crack. We also got other people crack to support my habit. Eventually, someone had wired up on me. I remember the first thing to come out my mouth, “I’m not a seller, I’m a smoker!” How absentminded my addiction had made me sound. I had played the blame-game my whole young adult life, which only contributed to my sickness. It was time to put my big girl panties on. I was facing a term of two years of my life at Ohio Department of Rehabilitation for Women.

Life is full of chances, choices, and challenges. Ironically, God had finally answered my silent prayers for help. At this turning point in my life, I had many chances. I successfully completed the WORTH Center. I wanted to be sober but wasn’t in surrender mode yet. Surrender mode to me, is where an addict gives up the destructive lifestyle. Every aspect of your old life has to change.

I was enrolled in college when the term, people, places and things showed their face in my life. This is when life’s challenges played a part in the battle for my soul. An old, using friend had heard of my progress and was waiting in the college parking lot. I relapsed that night. I was on the run again. After all my hard work and sobriety, I ended up in prison for a term of two years. The Lord forced me to sit my behind down. I was at my all-time low. God had taken me away from the things of the world. No one wanted to be there for me. My family had given up on me. Who could blame them? My actions weren’t representing the words coming out of my mouth. I was in complete surrender. I spent my prison time dedicating my life to opening my heart and mind to who God was and wanted me to be. I choose reform rather than revolt.

My constant negative in life always stemmed from my drug use. And continued up until the old age of 49 years old. I am a stubborn gal. I thank God for humbling me once again. In my past jail time was a tragedy. Today it is a blessing. I feel a must to share an experience in county jail. It may seem minute to some, but in my life today it is major. I was offered a coffee shot, which is a jail form of getting high. I made the choice to say no. My choice was based on the similarity of getting high. My choice was affirmed by the girls who had done coffee shots. They complained of the terrible hangover feeling. I silently patted myself on the back. My inner spirit burned with joy to have done something, and I felt good about myself. All of us addicts want to do well. We're just told or feel as if we are not good.

Today when I think of facing life, it is about making positive changes, taking the chance to do the right thing and facing life's challenges! My drug abuse makes me feel dead inside. It took death to bring me life. And I'm gonna live it by the Grace of God. Cest La Vie!

Thank you, God, and thank you to Ms. Ball and Mr. Garber for helping me believe in myself!

~ Darlene Torivio  
Lima City Schools

## Lost-and-Found

I lost my innocence when I lost my virginity. I felt guilty, dirty, scared, and ashamed. I went home acting as if nothing had happened, trying not to see or look different to my mother, grandmother, or my sisters.

We ate dinner just like on a regular day, but it wasn't regular; it was the day that I came to this dark road. Little did I know the seriousness of what I had done, the choice I had made to do what I wanted to do. I had not thought about the hurt it could cause me, and others. I didn't want my mother to know; I didn't want to see my innocence leave my mother's eyes. I didn't want to know what she would do if she found out.

My Heavenly Father knew; I didn't think that I would also lose my innocence in His eyes. I didn't realize that this dark road led to sin and death. I busted the door of sin wide open as I fell for the temptation that was before me, as my flesh took over. I was on this road for a long time. Thank God, He gave us the hope that shines light in dark places.

The day came when I saw a speck of light that began to lead me out of those dark places. I felt the Love and I began to love my self. I got my innocence back when I stopped giving all of myself away. I forgave myself as my Heavenly Father did.

When I lost my purity, I felt like I had lost a part of me. I can't get that first time back, but those parts that I lost along the way – that Hope, the Light, Love – gathered all the pieces together and made me whole again with a pure heart. To all the young girls, young ladies, and women on that dark road, forgive yourself. Look for that hope that will restore you and make you whole again, into the person you were created to be from birth, a King's Daughter.

~ Mildred Myles  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

## Man on a Hill

The story of a man  
A man without a plan  
He worked atop the hill  
Running his water mill  
One day the mill it broke  
The wheel lost its spoke  
No longer could pay the bills  
That got him his cancer pills.

He knew the end would come  
The day he pricked his thumb  
The bleeding did not stop  
Even to the last drop  
You can say the man had a curse  
As they placed him in that hearse  
His son felt a vile breeze  
Two weeks gone son on his knees

The son fell into some money  
From some gold he found, some honey  
So he fixed the mill's wheels  
The old man's Achilles heel  
But that breeze then returned  
The son's fortune did burn  
You could say it can't get worse  
Surely there is no curse

A few more years went by  
The grandson he did cry  
For now his father was dead  
A self-inflicted wound to his head  
Although his pain was great  
The grandson was not late  
To his father's funeral on the hill  
Right next to that old mill

For the mill still did stand  
The boy now a man  
Grandson's inheritance good or bad  
Does he have the curse of his grandad?  
Because when that foul wind blows  
And a man pinches his nose  
There will always be the mill  
And a story of a man on the hill.

~ *Jared Hummel Schools*  
*Lima City Schools*

# ***Where I'm At***



## **Who Are You? and Who Am I?**

I am the newborn and the deceased.  
I am the child and the adult.  
I am the good and the demon.  
I am the naive and the malicious.  
I am the educated and the ignorant.  
I am the realist and the dreamer.  
I am all that and more.  
I am a human being.

~Weaam Kalel  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **Persistence**

**B**eing brave despite feeling afraid.  
**E**nding is a way of starting over.  
**G**rowing always involves facing challenges.  
**I**magine that everything will turn out well.  
**N**othing is impossible.  
**N**o one can stop you.  
**I**f you believe in yourself, you have already taken the first step  
**N**ever stop trying.  
**G**ood times are coming!

*~Ariana López Hernández  
Wayne County JVSD*

## **Learning**

Learning is a twist and turn, and then it gets easy. It feels difficult, but it's only a way of absorbing knowledge in a positive way. You can see the outcome. There are multiple ways to learn new things, and with repetition you become good at it.

**L**- learning is a part of my identity

**E**- evaluate what I need as a student

**A**- achieve by studying, using resources, gaining background knowledge, being repetitive

**R**- reach as high as you can to achieve your goal

**N**- notice that education works

**I**- investing in my education gives me something that I will always have

**N**- nurturing your mind is very important

**G**- go get your education! You're never too old to learn!

I've got faith in myself, and I can learn!

~ Doris Ross  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## What Advice Would I Give My 16-year-old Self?

My advice is this: Believe in yourself; keep going on with your goal, work hard to achieve your dreams. You are young, think about your future in:

1. School and academics: Put in your best effort in school even if you don't love every subject.
2. Personal Development: identify your strengths and weaknesses, and work on improving both.
3. Time management: Learn to effectively schedule your time between school, activities, and personal life.
4. Communication: Practice active listening and express yourself clearly.
5. Positive relationships: Foster healthy and supportive friendships.

*~ John Billy Inelus  
Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

## Life!

Growing up we thought  
LIFE  
Was a piece of cake  
But, in all reality,  
It's what you learn and what you  
TAKE  
With all these trials and tribulations,  
It's time for your  
TRANSFORMATION  
So, stop playing it cool  
And keep your head in school,  
Start reading a book,  
Don't turn out a  
CROOK  
It's time for you to change  
Your way of thinking, and  
Become something  
EXTRAORDINARY and AMAZING!

~ Taressa Streeter  
Canton City Schools

## Learning

Teaching is one of the most rewarding things I have done to date. I have been in construction since 1987 and have mastered some of the trades which include concrete, block, rough framing, electrical, drywall, plumbing, insulation, finish trim, painting, and most importantly “Almighty White Glove Clean Up” after any project is completed. Each of these trades requires the ability to combine your mental knowledge and the physical ability to use finesse to complete any project. Being able to explain how to perform each task, and then watching another individual perform, understand, and succeed is extremely rewarding.

I have been told in the past that people love working for me because of how great a teacher I am. I never complained about how much money I was losing in this process because I looked at it as an investment in my employees and my company.

~Vincent J. Lattur  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## Demonic Possession

Driven to anger instead of peace.  
Pride and prudence on an increase.  
Evil thoughts, an abstract mind.  
Ongoing malice is all they find.  
Macabre visions a clouded view.  
Satanic speech makes perspective skew.  
Omitting sounds guttural inside.  
Sins of grandeur, and deadly pride.  
Negating positivity sliding away.  
Enveloped in fear, black, white, not grey.  
Isolation is safety to hide from pain.  
Slipping into lunacy, a deteriorating brain.  
Crushing all hope, beginning to cringe.  
Immolating flames engulf and singe.  
Omniscient being please save my soul.  
Nothingness, darkness, a deep descending hole.

~ Jared Hummel Schools  
Lima City Schools

## Value Yourself

*I want to start with a question for you: How do you identify yourself?*

1. Like a person unmotivated from life who thinks that the people around him do not appreciate what he does; someone victimized by life, who believes that everyone should do something for her.
2. Like a person who is worth what happens around her as long as she lacks nothing; who has no friendship, she only lives for herself; an apathetic, selfish unscrupulous person, who thinks she is always right even if she is not; a person who says that it is so, and that it will not change, although her way of being distances even her family.
3. Or that person who always finds the positive in life; who takes every difficult experience as a learning opportunity for growth; charismatic, who is interested in contributing to his community and enjoys good friendships.

Of these three people, who do you identify with the most?

I hope you have done a little reflection.

Sometimes we don't realize that our way of being harms the lives of others. We are so self-absorbed in living and obtaining so many material things that we become slaves of work and forget to live more fully with our loved ones. We think that money can buy everything, and we end up losing the most valuable things. That is, first the family, and then friendships, our inner peace, health, and the enjoyment of being able to contemplate and value everything that is around us as the beauty of nature and its splendor.

What about those who have left their lands, leaving everything, thinking that it is necessary to offer a better life to their family, and then end up losing everything? Because when they move away, they leave a void in their partner. And if s/he was not strong enough to endure the lack of affection s/he could very easily be distracted by another person. Where the children lose those feelings of love and respect. There is instead a feeling of love and respect. There is instead a feeling of abandonment because in the

most important episodes their parent was not present...

So here comes the question: Is it worth moving away from them? Away from those who one day you hoped to give a better life? But what does it mean to give them a better life? It would be convenient to take stock and value all aspects.

In every place where we live there are invaluable resources. These resources make people unique. And as human beings we have so much creativity and potential. Many times, these resources have not been tapped. They have not been used even though we are very well equipped. Well, let's remember Howard Gardner's theory. In the seventies he told us about the eight multiple intelligences such as: Linguistic intelligence (mastery of language - speakers, actors, etc.), Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to reason logically and solve mathematical problems - engineers), Spatial intelligence (observing the world and objects from different perspectives - painters, photographers, designers, publicists, architects, creatives), Musical intelligence (music is a universal art, ability to play instruments). And finally, we have bodily and kinesthetic intelligence (body and motor skills - actors, athletes).

Which intelligences are you most developed in? Did you realize that you have great potential in any of them? In every place where we live there are invaluable resources that make us unique as human beings. We have so much creativity and potential. Many times, these resources have not been exploited even though we are very well equipped.

So, I invite you to intentionally continue to develop both personally and professionally, as well as to have a good attitude. Because this will give you greater possibilities to enjoy a better life for you and your family. Remember that everyone makes the decision to select the color with which they will paint their day! Value yourself and value those around you and enjoy every moment of this beautiful life!

~ Rose Diaz de Leon  
Four County Career Center

## blue

sometimes...

I'm a bad version of me  
my heart and my mind  
are in a constant battle  
of doing wrong and right  
and I choose the decision  
which at times cracks my  
soul

and the inside of me cries  
because the outside  
has to be strong  
Love is Blind  
Addiction is Real

~ Makenzie Bell  
Canton City Schools

## **Everything was New and Different**

I felt everything was new and different. When I arrived in America, I felt it was difficult because of the language. My English was weak. Here I felt frustrated, but now I hope, and it feels less difficult. Also, here I find transportation difficult; I will try to make it less difficult.

One decade ago, I lived in Syria. I was scared of war and terrified of the shells until I came to the United States. Now I'm in safety. I arrived in America. I did not understand the language, and it was difficult to drive. I learned with Miss Lori. I enjoyed learning.

*When I was a child, I used to live in the city of Damacus.*

*I moved to the U.S.*

*I was good at the Arabic language...*

*Now, I like to use the English language....*

*I am good at learning!*

*In the future I would like to speak freely.*

~ Naimeh Haymoun  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## **Learning**

Learning looks like my treasure in life.

Learning sounds difficult to achieve because of my age.

Learning smells like a rose that clears a way to improve myself.

Learning tastes like melting chocolate in my mouth when I achieve what I aim for.

Learning feels like flying high with knowledge toward becoming educated.

Learning is accomplishable. I only have one more step to go to learn my diploma! I am almost there!

~ Joelle Choueiry  
Project LEARN of Summit County

# ***Where I'm Going***



## A Little's Dream

I love coffee. I love all kinds of coffee whether it's hot, iced, a frappe, a cappuccino, a macchiato, affogato, espresso, I love it! I remember the day I had my first coffee. I was waiting in the car for my mom to bring me to school and she made me my very own cup. I felt like a little business woman just like I would see in movies.

Growing up I've always had this drive to be my own boss. I was the kid that always had a side hustle. I would sell rainbow loom bracelets and duct tape wallets to my classmates. I've also held my own lemonade stands and bake sales. As I got older I discovered my love for animals. I started to walk dogs and pet sit to make my own money.

Everyone has dreams they wish to accomplish, but with dreams come fears, like the fear of failing, the fear of not making an honest living, letting others get into your head, not having anything to get started. I then set my dream on the back burner, but my love for coffee and animals have always been front and center. This is why I think owning my own animal friendly coffee shop would make "little me" so happy and proud. I would get to accomplish being my own boss, something I've always dreamed of doing. Who knows, one day maybe I'll wake up and smell the coffee from my own shop. For now I'll save the coffee beans life throws at me for my dream brew.

~ Sa'Kaii Williams  
Penta Career Center

## New Beginnings – Darkness to Light

A situation that I found to be very difficult for me to overcome was when I was sentenced to prison for five years for robbery. Before that, I had endured years of child abuse and trauma at the hands of those who should have protected me. Much of my life had been filled with darkness, but I thought I had overcome it. But the old me had made bad choices, I was misguided and lost.

When I started my sentence, I realized I was in the darkest hole I had ever been in. I didn't really understand what losing five years of my life would be like until it was too late. I was surrounded by murderers, rapists, and weirdos. I had to protect and fight for my life in ways I never imagined I would have to if I didn't want to die there.

To save my life I had to overcome hurting myself, to see life and death at the same time and to overcome the darkness within myself. I found God and giving all of myself to him saved my life. My life will never be the same, I see light in myself and what I can do. I am a healer and an artist, and I am blessed to have a second chance at life and a new beginning.

~ Miceala Gadic  
Penta Career Center

## My New Challenges

Before coming to the U.S., I worked as a preschool teacher. I loved supporting children and watching them grow. Seeing their “I did it!” moments and their beaming faces made me proud and touched my heart! After getting married, I moved to another city in Japan with my husband. Along the way, I also became a mother. Now, I live in Dublin, Ohio and have decided to take on two new challenges to continue growing and learning.

The first challenge was when I joined a puppet performance club for children. All the members were Japanese, and we performed traditional Japanese folk stories in English. We also introduced some Japanese cultures, such as language, clothing, and songs. On my first day performing, I was very nervous. However, during the performance, the children seemed to enjoy it and gave us great reactions! I felt so relieved to see their smiles. Also, I wanted to respond more flexibly to the children’s reactions.

The second challenge was volunteering as a childcare teacher while the other mothers took ESL classes at the church. Initially, I was an ESL student. There were 5 to 8 children and 3 teachers per class. Half of the children were Japanese, and the others were from different countries. My goal was to be a mediator between the children.

These opportunities were amazing, and I felt proud of myself as a Japanese person. However, I sometimes faced challenges in communicating with the children. For example, I couldn’t catch what they were saying when they were excited. Unlike adults, children can’t easily guess what I mean if my words aren’t clear. These moments were challenging, but they made me want to keep improving my English and enjoy more fun and meaningful time with the children.

~ Chihiro Kikuchi  
Delaware Area Career Center

## My Journey in America

When I first came to the United States, everything felt like a different world for me. Different people, new cultures, new traditions, and new food! Plus, no friends. I was excited but also a little bit scared. The biggest problem was, I didn't speak English. I studied French and Arabic in my country, but English was a completely new language for me.

At first, it was crazy. Everywhere I went, people spoke English, and I didn't understand a word. Imagine standing in a store, trying to ask for something, and no one understands you. The only thing I could say was "hello!" People talked to me, and I just smiled, hoping they weren't asking me anything important.

I started looking for a job. I walked everywhere asking for a job, but every time managers asked me for a Social Security number or work authorization. I had no idea what those things were. Some people gave me job applications, but as soon as they saw I didn't have those documents they said, "Sorry, we can't hire you." It was frustrating, but I didn't give up. With the help of God, I found a way to get my documents, but it took a long time.

Meanwhile, I kept trying to learn English. At first, it felt impossible. The words didn't make sense, and my accent was strong. But one day, I realized something important - I can't live here without speaking the language! So, I started practicing every day. It was embarrassing sometimes, but I learned that American people are nice. Most of them try to understand, even if you don't speak perfect English. And guess what? They don't laugh at you! That gave me confidence.

After a long wait, I finally got my work authorization. My first real job? Construction-working with a group of Mexican workers. It was tough. Some days, I worked in Columbus, other days in downtown Cincinnati. The worst part? I didn't have a car. Every morning, I woke up early, walked in the freezing snow to the bus stop, and took three buses just to get to work. Sometimes, the whole trip took two hours! My feet were frozen, my hands were shaking, and I asked myself, why am I doing this? But I had no choice. Then, I decided: I need a car! First step? Get a driver's license. When I started studying for my temporary driver's license, I decided to

take the test in English. People told me, “You speak French and Arabic, why don’t you take it in one of those languages?” They told me I was wasting my time. “You don’t speak English, they told me. “You are going to fail.” But I told them, “That’s why I’m taking it in English! This is my goal!”

The first time, I failed. They said, “We told you!” the second time, I failed again. But I didn’t give up. The third time, I passed! I was so happy and excited. not just because I passed, but because I passed in English. It was a big moment for me. After that, I started practicing for my driving test. I was nervous, but I passed! Now, no more waiting for three buses in the winter or hot summer days!

Today, I’m working hard and studying even harder because my next goal is college. I know it won’t be easy, but I’ve learned something important: if you work hard and stay smart, nothing is impossible.

~ Aly Dia  
Great Oaks Career Campuses

## Becoming a Citizen

When I first arrived in the United States, I felt like a stranger. The people spoke quickly, and everything seemed unfamiliar. I had studied English before coming but speaking it in real life was different. I struggled with words and often was too afraid I would say the wrong thing.

One of my goals was to become a U.S. citizen, but the citizenship test felt like a mountain too high to climb. The day of my citizenship interview my heart was beating too fast. I took a deep breath and walked in. The questions came, and although my English wasn't perfect, I answered them as best I could. The officer was patient and kind. When he said, "Congratulations, you passed," I was the happiest woman in the world, at least for a few minutes.

~Yolanda Ponce-Romo  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## Hope

Finding a meaning to the word seemed from the beginning an inner search for the meaning of life, or at least that's how it was for me. From an early age, I received an education from my parents based on discipline and effort. My parents were teachers, and within their possibilities, they devoted themselves to the development of skills for me and my sister. Although there were some bumps and difficulties along the way from their error-prone humanity, they always emphasized that effort and dedication would overcome talent and passion.

The topic of passion has always been controversial for me because I thought if there was something in life that awakens an incredible love and impulse to do it, that should be enough. But my mother explained to me in a masterful way that it was not like what I thought. She is a professional stylist with around twenty years of experience. Where she is most passionate about are the chemical procedures in the hair; dyes, lightenings, fantasy colors and other similar things. To explain her point she asked me "Do you think I am talented?" My answer was "yes." She concluded by saying "It turns out that fortunately I had certain skills in that area, and I really wanted to be in the world of styling and colorimetry. But beyond enthusiasm and desire I lacked knowledge and practice-fundamental aspects without which I would not be able to move forward." Knowing that, she took her impulse and passion and complemented them with discipline and commitment. Today she is the proud owner of her own beauty salon.

Having my parents' teachings encrypted in my head, I continued my life applying what learned and started to look for my place in the world. I went through my teenage years with the company of fantasy books, literature, and philosophy, finding adventures in them, experiences, stories, knowledge, companionship, and something that completely changed my perspective on life; hope.

In many stories, tragedy besieged one or more of the characters. In some cases, the characters knew where they wanted to go or what their goal was and while many others did not, there was always something, a feeling, a desire, an indescribable impulse that led them to surpass their own limits and those of whoever stood

in their way. At some point, I thought that the characters' boldness was just fiction. To clear that idea, I had an interesting conversation with my high school literature teacher Laura Echeverri, and she shared with me a wise conclusion she said "Although literature should not be believed because it is indeed fiction, the stories and characters are built and developed with features and characteristics of reality, historical events, emblematic people and many other factual elements, however, no matter how close books get to reality, there are real life heroes who go against the stories that occur in all odds driven by hope. There are billions of heroes in the world fighting for their lives and for their loved ones, seeking to make the world a better place and struggling to keep hope afloat within such a disrupted and catastrophic reality. Therefore, reality overcomes fiction."

Feeling uneasy about this new understanding, I began to wonder what hope was for me. I knew that to get where I wanted to go, I needed effort and discipline, but not yet where I wanted to go, how I was going to get there.

My interests led me to one of the greatest and most satisfying achievements of my life: I graduated as a professional in philosophy. Later I traveled to the United States of America, arriving in this new country on May 12, 2023, as a young girl with an insatiable hunger for knowledge, many dreams, and the promise of supporting my family. No matter what destiny had in store for me, I was determined to preserve my essence. And this is where the story gets interesting. As a foreigner, I faced fear, uncertainty, and confusion, feeling many times close to the end of this chapter of my life full of changes. My main concern was if I was doing the right thing and if I would fit in.

It turns out that when the darkest light shines the brightest. The light for me was the support of the people I love the most. That's when hope began not only to make sense in my head, but also to start to become a part of me. Hope for me is to have security and peace of mind that what I am doing honestly and kindly will take me to the places and people I should go and meet.

Today I believe that hope is a fundamental tool to be able to push oneself. God has been good to me, I am living an extraordinary life, and many wonderful things are waiting to happen. Regarding my

questions about the meaning of life, I believe that life must be given meaning every day with benevolent actions, that we must strive and nurture the desire to know, that the work we do in the world must be carried out with dedication and commitment, and that we must help those who need it without expecting anything in return most important though all of our actions should be driven by hope and supported by faith.

Hope brought me to another country, faith in God and in myself gave me the strength and desire to believe in my dream and make it a reality.

I am so grateful for all the people who have been a spotlight in my life and have guided me with love and patience. Thank you to my parents, sister, teachers, friends, and family in Colombia, and family in the United States. I love you all.

~ *Laura Sofia Zambrano Lopez*  
*Delaware*

## Coming to the United States

*When I came to live in this country, I felt everything was new and different. There was a lot of stress! We couldn't understand anything. I was often frustrated not knowing what might happen to me. I felt terrified at that time. But over time many things have changed for me. Especially when I learned the language a little and bought a car, I felt more and more secure. I was afraid of the different weather, but I got used to it and started imagining what the weather could be like the next day.*

*Since I came here to the United States a lot of things have happened that have made me feel more comfortable, happy, and strong. I speak and understand more English. I got married, had children, and bought a house. I have been able to travel by myself. I have worked at three different jobs. I worked at a restaurant, at a hotel, and delivered food. Working at these jobs has made me trust myself and I feel I can do a lot of things now.*

*I hope that soon I can start taking a class to work towards getting my GED. Before I start that I need to continue to get better at reading and writing English. It is important to get my GED because it will give me many more options and choices in my life. I look forward to creating these new opportunities for myself. Even though sometimes I feel discouraged I will make this happen for myself no matter what. Nothing will get in my way!*

~Yusra Jawad  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## Becoming a Citizen

When I applied for citizenship, somebody helped me because the form was in English and some of the words were difficult to understand. I studied 4 hours every week for 2 years to learn the history of the United States. After each lesson I spent 30 minutes every day to memorize 100 cards, to make sure I was ready for my test.

A week before my interview, I was excited and nervous at the same time. I couldn't sleep well at night, so I stayed up to watch some videos to improve my knowledge.

When the day of my interview arrived, it was perfect. I passed my interview, but now that I look back, I see that I shouldn't overthink simple things because I can handle them pretty well. I recommend that new students who are studying for the citizenship test shouldn't be too worried or stressed about it.

~ Nayeli Fierros  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## **My Life is Changed**

My name is Elimane Abdoul Ba, and I was born on March 2, 1998, in Bababé, a village located in the northwest of Mauritania. I come from a Muslim family, and I have three brothers and three sisters. I am an engineer specialized in logistics and stock management of petroleum products. I am married to my beautiful wife, Sally Dia. She is an American citizen, and she invited me to the USA.

In 2021, in my hometown of Bababé, something unexpected happened. It was there, under a starry sky, that I met the beautiful girl Selly. We exchanged just a few words at first, but there was an immediate connection between us, as if our souls had recognized each other. The following year, in 2022, I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. We celebrated our union in joy, surrounded by our families and friends. It was a magical moment, a turning point in my life.

Today, I am grateful to have her by my side, and I know that this story, which began in Bababé, and it will continue here in U.S.A, is far from over. It's a beautiful journey we've started together, and I'm excited to see what the future holds for us.

When I was young, I studied in my home country, Mauritania, with my classmate, my friends and cousins. I lived in my father's house with my family. Thank God, and I thank my mother too because she supported me in everything, taking care of me, like taking and picking me up from school, feeding me when I was hungry, doing laundry by hand. She gave me a lot of advice in life, like to be patient in life. My parents tell me all time everything happens for reason, I was able to pursue my studies. I also want to thank my hardworking father, who helped me and paid for my education, and for my rent. He also sent me money every month so I could cover my living expenses in another city in Mauritania.

My mother raised me well, and my father made me a good man. I am a curious and hardworking person who enjoys helping others. In my free time, I like to play soccer with my friends, listen to music, take care of my wife, and have fun.

My goal is to learn English and speak fluently with all Americans. To achieve this, I plan to study hard and practice every day, a minimum of two hours per day. Plus, I need to earn a lot of money to take care of my family and all people. To achieve this, I will work hard, seek good job opportunities, and manage my finances wisely.

~ *Elimane Abdoul Ba*  
*Great Oaks Career Campuses*



# ***Where I'm Inspired***



## **Beauty**

I had a conversation with a group of people from all over the world, and there were questions asked including:

1. How would you define “beauty?”
2. What are some qualities of a beautiful person?
3. What makes art or nature beautiful?
4. Is beauty important?
5. What is the most beautiful thing you have ever experienced?

Of course, everyone had a different view of beauty. For me, beauty is the beauty of the soul and the heart in people. There are many people who have beautiful appearances but are ugly inside and vice versa.

Then this idiom came to my mind: “Don’t judge a book by its cover” and the characteristics of a beautiful person: smiling, kind-hearted, and helpful. As for nature, everything in it is beautiful. God certainly created everything beautiful.

Then I ended my talk about beauty by answering the last question, which is that the most beautiful thing I have ever experienced was when I met my family in my home country of Iraq after five years of separation. It was the most beautiful thing my eyes have ever seen.

~ Nadya Jasim  
Delaware Area Career Center

## New Beginnings: About my Experience

There have been many new beginnings in my life, for example, graduating from university, starting a career, leaving Japan to come to the U.S without friends and family, going to schools in the U.S, landing a job, getting married, giving birth, parenting, moving to new cities and so on.

This time I would like to talk about my new beginning which I'm going through at the moment. It is English. It may sound odd, but I've been afraid of speaking English most of the time for a couple years.

When I first came to the U.S as a student, I picked California to live and study in because I had traveled there several times from Japan, and knew people were diverse there. So right after coming to California, I felt as if I could blend in, so I was never afraid of speaking English. There, it's normal for strangers to say hi with a smile or chat when they meet on the street, at stores and other places. Those experiences gave me some courage and confidence, and I could challenge myself to communicate with people without hesitating, for fear of making a mistake, and it was a good feeling to chat with strangers or make friends easily. Overall, I felt welcomed to live in California.

After years, I moved to New York and then came to Ohio. Right before I gave birth in March 2020, Covid 19 spread throughout the world, so a lot of things got limited. I stayed home all day with my baby without seeing my family in Japan, and my husband was extremely busy at work even on weekends. I was alone with my baby and had no chance to chat with anyone all day.

Believe it or not, I forgot how to speak English during these few years. Also, I noticed my listening skills got even worse. Before I knew it, I tended to avoid speaking to people in daily life, for example, I hardly talked to the cashiers or servers in grocery stores or restaurants, because I knew I couldn't understand what they said. I just bought or ordered what I wanted but I didn't feel like chatting. I felt that way because sometimes people don't like it when I ask them to repeat what they said to me. They are irritated or even ignored me. I don't want to annoy them, either. I felt I'd rather not speak to them unless it's necessary. This feeling continued.

In June 2024 when my daughter started her preschool, I finally realized that I shouldn't avoid speaking English. I felt like socializing, like making new friends with my daughter's friends' mothers to chat with sometimes, share information about school or parenting, and let our kids play together after school.

After that, I tried to listen to a Podcast while driving from and to preschool in the morning and afternoon. I liked it at first because it had a Japanese American who spoke both Japanese and English, so I completely understood each episode. However, I couldn't continue, maybe because I was listening but not participating in the conversation.

A few days later, I met my Japanese friend. I asked her how she was learning English. She told me that her listening skills got so much better after working in a store, but she was still struggling with grammar, so she recently started taking an ESL class in her area. She even told me that she had heard there was ESL in Huber Heights, too.

Coming home, I searched and found ESL in Huber Heights and immediately called and made an appointment for registration. I waited for a month and finally took the test, which I found pretty difficult after all.

Being nervous, I stepped into the classroom I was led to. I liked the class, and some classmates spoke to me during the break, so I felt welcomed and comfortable. Being in ESL class also brought back some memories from California. I even made some friends, too. Because I like the class, I feel like doing my best and improving my English. Some homework during winter break was a great idea for us to keep learning. I got a book for 2nd to 4th graders that was recommended, and now I make some time to read and take notes for all the words I don't know. I've been trying to use those new words with my husband and my daughter, believing that repeating new words will make me say them naturally eventually.

Lastly, I am grateful for my teacher for teaching us with good quality. I'd like to come to class as much as I can. My teacher told us once that coming to ESL makes us feel comfortable even when making mistakes because other classmates are also learning. This

line encouraged me so much and since then I haven't been afraid as much as before.

My new goal after improving my English is to work at an American company. To accomplish this goal, I knew I'll need to give so much effort, but I definitely will.

~*Tomomi D.*  
*Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

## The Dream

1963, the year where a dream was drawn with words in the inspiring speech “I Have a Dream.”

*The dream that many didn’t imagine possible.*

*The dream that some people needed to hear to fill their lives with hope.*

*The dream of a world that could be transformed into an oasis of freedom and Justice.*

*The dream for which everyone fought and persevered together holding hands, until it stopped being a dream to become a reality.*

We must defend the achievements of the past, keep drawing this dream is the way to ensure that it will never be erased.

~ Maria Fatima Mendoca  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **Beautiful America**

My first visit to the United States was in 2013 was a vacation. The first city I visited was New York. I fell in love with its beauty and its magnificent structures and with its totally clean cities and its beautiful landscapes. All this was a dream of mine, my family knows and admires how beautiful this country is. At that time, our vacation was attractive but short, because we had to go back and return to our work in our country. In 2017 we came to the United States and visited different places. Such as Washington D.C. We had a chance to visit the White House. We went to Chicago and saw iconic Sepulture Dubbel "The Bean" we went to Indiana too. It has always been admired by us how well the flora and fauna are cared for. We saw how animals can be surrounded by people and not fear them at any time. For us that was worthy of admiration.

On December 14, 2018, we decided to return to this country. It was my youngest daughter's fourth birthday. We decided to stay and live in this country due to a difficult situation that we were experiencing in our Country. We had three stores we went through arm robbery many times. We were in our car with three children during that time, and someone shot us and almost killed us. We moved, at first it was very difficult because we had to adjust ourselves to a new life. Our children had to adapt to new schools and new friends, which was a little complicated for them because they couldn't speak the language here and my husband and I couldn't teach them much either.

All these changes were very hard for us as a family, but we got through them. We fought very hard to start from scratch again and continued together and strongly as a family, as we had always been before. My husband and I have fought and worked very hard all our lives. We sold two of our properties in my country and we paid a lawyer here to be legal in this country. We have achieved all our proposed goals. One of our goals was to buy our own house and we finally achieved it in 2024. I know that with effort and a great desire to work, we will achieve many more things.

We are very grateful to this country for giving us the opportunity

to be here and feel free to be able to walk in the streets without having any fear that something bad could happen to us. That is what we as a family take as the most important thing about being here: Knowing also that this country opened its doors for us to start over and live with more peace and protection for our family, which I am deeply, grateful for and always will be.

~ *Ludia Alicia Doblado Buezo*  
*Great Oaks Career Campuses*

## **A Life Worth Struggling For**

Twenty-three year old me was careless. She chased drugs and a man who didn't even love himself let alone me or anyone else. I knew drugs were wrong because I was brought up by my Christian grandmother. My teen years weren't the greatest. My older sister and her friends used drugs in front of me when I was an impressionable 14-year-old. I learned how they could affect people and their behaviors. My mom was single and worked a lot of hours which meant I didn't have a lot of supervision. I dropped out of school and at 17 my boyfriend and I became parents to a beautiful baby girl. Unfortunately, at 19 years old, I unknowingly took heroin my boyfriend gave me. Soon I followed in my sister's path and began using drugs regularly. My boyfriend's choices landed him in prison. Here I was a single mom raising a 2-year-old daughter I loved alone and using drugs at the same time. I was a good mom, but I had a bad habit. I was clean for a couple of years but then picked it back up because of my bad choice in men. They always seem to get me. When you bring drugs into a relationship it is an automatic road trip to disaster. He was very angry when he got high and abused me mentally and sometimes it got a little physical. I didn't know what real love was. The only real love I ever saw was my grandparents. My mother and father were on and off for many years, so I had no idea that my relationship wasn't real love. He treated me like a dog. Every time we got high it would start out great. Then he would degrade me and hurt me with his words. He made me feel like I wasn't worthy of anyone. Whenever he got locked up, I still kept using. It started to get real old and I prayed that I would be able to stop.

One day when I was taking a drug induced nap, I had a dream that I overdosed. When I woke up, I decided that I was done so I flushed everything. Two weeks later I was using again with some people and I overdosed. When I woke up, I was so scared I knew that I was never going to do it again. My daughter was with me when it happened, she was so scared, and I felt like a terrible mother. She did nothing to deserve that. It was hard to quit but I did it. That boyfriend didn't leave me alone and I kept going back

to him time and time again. At this point my family had grown with the addition of two more daughters. At 27, I finally realized I had enough of him, and I didn't want to live like this any longer.

At 28 I found true love! He shows me love like my grandparents had. He has never yelled at me nor laid a hand on me. He goes out of his way for me. He is the best hard-working, loving person I know. He is very good to me and my children, and he helps me every day. He believes in me and works hard so I can be a stay-at-home mom and focus on my schoolwork so that I can earn my diploma. He just proposed to me and that was one of the best days of my life. I still can't believe that I have such an amazing man in my life, and I thank God every day for him.

I never thought I would make it this far. I have a loving home, healthy kids, and an amazing man. I am 6 years clean now thanks to God, my family and me learning to love myself and not drugs or unworthy men. Good things do happen. Sometimes it just takes a little time. Now I'm going to do whatever I can to keep the life that I have!

~ *Sierra B. Dalton*  
*Penta Career Center*

## **The True Love**

What is the true love?

If I did anything right in my life,  
it was when I gave my heart  
to my husband.

My soulmate, my best friend,  
my life partner.

His flaws don't matter,  
for me, he's perfect.

Sharing my dreams with someone  
who understands them is wonderful.

With some stumbles along the way,  
but always supporting each other.

With him beside me,  
for many more years,  
growing old together.

~ Alexandra Flores  
Project LEARN of Summit County

## The Path to Peace

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” (Martin Luther King Jr.) Justice is very important in our society. If a nation does not have rule of law, the people among minorities would not have their rights, and it would then make their lives harder. MLK wanted everyone to have equal rights; he did not want people to feel that they were different from others. He fought for people to feel that they were like brothers and sisters. During that time black people could not ride on the same buses with white people. They did not go to the same schools, churches, and supermarkets. MLK did not support violence to help spread his message. He encouraged people to use their voices to protest and have peaceful demonstrations. He continued these protests until things changed. A few years ago, we had our first black president Barack Obama. He used his opportunities to encourage students to continue their education, which helped the country to improve further.

Justice is essential for our lives and our society. If it was not for Martin Luther King, a lot of people would not have freedom to exercise their rights. Now we have a justice system that works better, but even though it has improved, there is still more work to be done for a better future.

~ Wilo Ali Shirdon  
Delaware Area Career Center

## Why I Love to Travel

When I was a little girl growing up, my country was closed to the West. I liked to read books about different countries and continents to learn more about the world. These books gave me a chance to explore and dream about traveling and learning about different cultures.

One of my favorite games was using a globe. My father and brother would give me the name of a country and I had to find it in the shortest possible time. Today, my native country is open, and people can travel freely. I am grateful for this.

Now, I live in the U.S. and have the opportunity to travel often. Traveling with my kids and my husband fills my life with interesting and new experiences. I am happy that I have taught them to explore the world and be curious.

On one of our family trips in the U.S., my son was six years old and had developed an interest in geography. He had learned the flags of all the countries around the world. We stopped at a rest plaza, and near us were people wearing flag t-shirts. I said aloud, “Where are these people from?” My son immediately responded, “Mom, their t-shirts have the Honduras flag.” I was impressed and pleased that he knows about different countries and can teach them if he wants.

I agree with the phrase, “Investing in travel and new adventures is an investment in happiness.”

~Viktoria Georgieva  
Project LEARN of Summit Count

## A Father's Love for His Children

*"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)*

As I read this quote from Dr. King's speech, I felt a beautiful sense of a father's love for his children reflected in how he takes responsibility for their life success.

First, a father has foresight for his kids' future and begins to envision it from the time they are born. Martin Luther King, Jr. conceived a vision where all his children are free from all judgment no matter the color of their skin.

Furthermore, a father plays a fundamental role in his children's education because he wants them to be good citizens. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught them that they should instead only be judged by what is inside, or their character, and not by their appearance.

In addition to this, a father stands up for his children with the desire that they have a better life and opportunities than the ones he had. Dr. King led the fight against racial discrimination for a better future not only for his children but also for every U.S. citizen.

As you can see, Martin Luther King, Jr. had a great love for his children. His deep affection was reflected through his foresight in picturing a better future for them, his dedication for educating them and the world about the importance of equality and justice. He was courageous in standing up for their rights and the rights of all people.

~ Mary Alonso  
Delaware Area Career Center

## The Elderly Playing Sports

Playing sports is healthy for the older generation. First, we can observe improvements in mental and physical health when we practice sports. The players start following good habits, for example, drinking fewer alcoholic beverages and eating healthier foods. Second, in old age, people tend to stay alone, and they are more susceptible to depression. The practice of the game provides encounters that are not just for the game itself: they often involve the family, promoting socialization, and distancing from loneliness. Finally, there are many championships for old people. Preparing for the competition increases healthy habits and the opportunity for socialization as well by creating a positive circle. In conclusion, because playing sports at an older age has so many positive aspects, people should take it more seriously.

~ José Luiz Lacerda Soares  
Delaware Area Career Center

## Would You Like to Write a Poem?

I studied Haiku in my ESOL class. Haiku is a uniquely Japanese form of poetry, and in Japan, all students learn it in elementary, middle, and high school. But I was surprised that foreigners knew about it, especially about Matsuo Basho who is the most famous poet in Japan. I never thought I would study Haiku in the U.S.

There are various types of poems in Japan, and Haiku is one of them. It has fixed forms. First, the number of syllables is 5,7,5. Second, it is necessary to include a seasonal word. If it doesn't include a seasonal word, it isn't Haiku, it's called Senryu. In modern times, not only Haiku but also Senryu is popular because the topics can be about anything, such as school life, friends, family, or romance. Even children can easily create it for various situations.

There is also a type of poem in which the number of syllables is 5,7,5,7,7. We call it Waka or Tanka. Among them, "One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each" is famous. Additionally, we have other poems that do not have a fixed form. There are many great poems in Japan.

We are always busy every day, and there are so many fun things to do, such as watching TV, playing video games, and watching movies. However, how about spending a day without our smartphones or computers when the weather is nice? We could go for a walk outside and look at the colors of the flowers and leaves, close our eyes and smell the air, listen to the sound of the wind, and feel nature. If we do that, we also may be able to create beautiful poems like Basho.

~ Miyako Hoshina  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **The Dew**

*Small drops let shimmer  
From the power of great God  
Covering the grass.*

**Explanation:**

When I wake up early in the morning and see the small drops of water on the grass, even if it is winter or summer, it appears on the grass, and I'm just thinking how God makes that.

~ Nadya Jasim  
Delaware area Career Center

## **Autumn Leaves**

The last autumn leaves  
Like the fighters in the breeze  
Fell gladly and proud.

~ Weaam Kalel  
*Delaware Area Career Center*

## Colorful Fall

*Same green gives away  
Red, orange, yellow all bright  
Fall welcomes us all*

I enjoy going to Starbucks, where each season comes with a new slogan displayed around the shop and on their cups. Last fall, their slogan was “Welcome Fall, Welcome All,” and it stuck with me.

When I first arrived in the U.S. during the summer, everything seemed the same - trees were all green, and people felt similar, making it hard to tell them apart. But when fall came, the leaves started showing their unique colors. Similarly, as I talked to people and got to know them better, I began to see their individuality and appreciate the beautiful diversity around me.

The slogan “Welcome Fall, Welcome All” resonated with me because it reflected this experience. Fall embraces all colors, just as people from different backgrounds can live in harmony including me. Since October is also Pride Month, the message felt even more meaningful.

I wanted to express this feeling in my haiku. While I couldn’t use the slogan “Welcome Fall, Welcome All” exactly due to its six syllables, I adjusted it to fit within the haiku’s structure.

~ Jieun Park  
Delaware Area Career Center

# ***Where I'm at Peace***



## The Frog in My Path

*A camouflaged frog  
Hopping, popping out, surprise!  
Grinning up at me.*

### Description:

Usually, when I am walking, I like to look around to see the sky, the birds, the trees, the flowers, and everything else in nature, but I have never before seen a pretty greenish frog right on my path. Suddenly, she appeared on the rough and dark asphalt—her perfect camouflage, splendid grayish splashes of spots. I saw her for an instant, and I felt joy in that brief moment. I put her on the grass. She will continue camouflaging in the green of nature.

~ Angelica Aguilar Casco  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **Story of the Mouse**

In one big family lived a little mouse! She lived in her cozy hole where she collected everything she could bring from this big house. One Christmas Eve, when the family gathered at a big festive table, the mouse crawled out of her hole, smelling a delicious cheese smell and went there to find a piece of a tasty treat. She quietly made her way under the table and collected so many tasty supplies for herself. And suddenly, she heard ....A LOUD SOUND .... her heart began to beat very quickly. Everyone began to get up and chairs began to move, she already thought that she would be caught now ... when suddenly there was silence. She crawled out from under the table and saw that the whole family had gathered around the old fireplace to sing songs about Christmas. She was so interested that she became brave, so she crawled quietly and sat under a branch of the tree near the fireplace so that no one would see her and listened to the family singing songs. It was her favorite time of year.

~ Zhanna Zhevak  
Project LEARN of Medina County

## **SNOWFLAKES**

**S**carf, sock, and sweater  
**N**eve means snow in Portuguese  
**O**hio in 2018 was my first  
**W**inter in USA  
**F**ireplace, fleece clothes  
**L**azy days with  
**A**mazing views  
**K**ids are outside playing in the snow  
**E**armuffs are funny and I will  
**S**tick around until the Spring shows up

~ Patricia Strelow  
Project LEARN of Medina County

## **Little Star**

When you look up to the sky  
Know mommy's looking up high  
Look for the brightest star  
When you spot it  
Just close your eyes  
As you make a wish  
Mommy's wish is already made  
A simple I love you sent from the moon  
As a star shines bright as it reflects back to you

~ Brittany Icenhower  
*Eastland Fairfield Career and Technical Schools*

## Spring Is a Love Song

**B**E**verything seems like just wake up today.  
**G**reen buds grow on trees so high,  
**I**n the blue sky, birds passing by.  
**N**ewborn squirrels jump up and down,  
**N**ature's party has just begun.  
**I**n the breeze, a whispered song,  
**N**ow, streams are harmony.  
**G**rowing life fills the world with sounds and love,  
**S**pring is a love song.**

When I see buds grow on dry branches in my backyard, I know  
the new seasons cycle is beginning

~ *Cui Hui (Mia) Chen*  
*Wayne County JVSD*

## **Sunshine Gems in the Forest**

*Forest after rain  
Twinkling sparkling sunshine gems  
Trees luxuriant*

When I visit forests or natural parks filled with tall green trees, I feel relaxed and refreshed. The day after it rains, the trees look greener and more vibrant. As I am among the green nature, green is soaked up into me, and I become peaceful and blissful. When I saw the radiant sunlight scattering through the leaves, it looked like jewelry inside a forest. And I thought that thanks to sunlight, the trees looked more abundant and rich.

~ Soo Yun Kim  
Delaware Area Career Center

## Farm Apples

*Double cheeked apples  
Rosy kissed by the sun rays  
Golden glowing cheeks*

Description of the Haiku:

At the beginning of the fall season this year, I went with my family to the apple farm and there we saw a breathtaking landscape of the parallel rows of apple trees laden with gorgeous colorful apples. I could see apples with every color, but the ones that astonished me were those ripened apples with two different colors on each side: a rosy side kissed by the sun and a golden one glowing under its rays.

~ Fazia Zemmouri  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **Snowstorm**

Back in the 20th century in Hungary, my story takes us back to a little village called Calmness Valley. During that time, there lived a fair maiden, Daisy. She was the only one who was not afraid of the snowstorm. She was even happy about it.

The story started in the early winter season. Everyone in the village was preparing for the winter. Whoever didn't have enough food in the pantry, the kindly valley inhabitants gave some to share. They were one for everyone and everyone for one. Everybody paid attention to each other. This little village's power was faith in God.

Like a little daisy, a flower in the field, she didn't talk with the people, just with the Lord. She always went to the church and prayed, sometimes cleaned in the church or put a few flowers in front of the main icons, Jesus and Mary. Her favorite time was Christmas. It was special because she helped decorate the church before the Feast. The three real pine tree's scent flowed in the air at that time.

This year was different than before. The chilly wind was blowing, and snow fell. First, the little snowflakes were flying, and then great big snowflakes fell faster and faster. Then it turned into a blizzard and gales. The Village's people said, "We are safe! Don't worry!" But this snowfall didn't want to stop. It went day after day. One night it was so cold it began to snow and thunder. "Brrr...Zzzz," said the people, but our little Daisy looked through the window with shiny big eyes and prayed, "Thank you God for the snow."

The men started to worry about the snow. During the night, they needed some extra blankets and made hot tea because of the freezing dark. By the next morning, residents looked out the window and every single man was shocked; they were stuck in their houses. The snow was like a wall reaching the roof. Nobody knew what they should do. The valley's people were scared and cried.

One girl woke up with a sleepy and grateful face. Her eyes wondered but she was super happy. "God heard me," she whispered. "God listened to me!" she said with a lifted voice. Her dad made a tunnel in the snow and then they got out into the fresh snowy air. "God saved us!" she said out loud. The alarm loudspeaker spoke from afar. "Dear Calmness Valley's villagers! This situation is very serious. I know we are strong together. Take attention to the children. They must stay home because the school is closed! Be safe and stay warm."

Our little Daisy stood in the huge snowdrift. She couldn't believe what she had heard. Her face shone with happiness. With a grateful heart she shouted, "God loves us so much! I love you so much!"

~ Bernadett Boksay  
Project LEARN of Medina County

## **The Orange Carpet**

The orange carpet is rolled out, telling us that a season has ended, and a new one has begun. This is life and this is how the days go by. The leaves fall one after the other in their beautiful bright colors. As soon as I look at them, I remember the people we have lost over the years. They are like leaves falling from the trees, but the trees remain standing.

This is how life continues. We bid farewell to a year with its joys and sorrows and welcome a new year whose secrets we do not know.

~ Nadya Jasim  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **SNOWFLAKE**

**S**hiny and beautiful  
**N**atural design  
**O**utside the window  
**W**inter time  
**F**ragile and fluffy  
**L**ittle snowflake  
**A**ir fresh and cold  
**K**ids love it  
**E**xquisitely beautiful

~ Vitalii Arabadzhi, Lina Melnikava,  
Iryna Opetiuk, Volha Sniazhytskaya,  
Zhanna Zhevak

*Brunswick ESL Class  
Project LEARN of Medina*

## **Discernable Nature**

Black capped chickadee  
On the branch of a birch tree  
Warbling songs sweetly.

~ Pavneet Kour  
*Delaware Area Career Center*

## Maturing Season

*Faded fancy leaves  
Sweet fragrance of fruitfulness  
Time ripening scent*

One day in October, it was cloudy after raining. I went to the natural park and had some me-time. The air was a bit chilly. There was less sunlight, so the inside of the forest was not bright. The leaves' colors were changing from green to various autumn colors. But they looked rusty and calm because the sunlight was not shining. I felt the mellowness of autumn. As I walked on the trail between the trees, a cool breeze came from somewhere. At that moment, I could get a dim whiff of something sweet and nutty. I thought it must be from some autumn fruit. Even though the trees get older, they become more mature. Suddenly, one acorn fell to the ground with a snap.

~ Soo Yun Kim  
Delaware Area Career Center

## **It Is Time**

*The sun sets gently  
Announcing the night is near  
The tiredness rests.*

**Inspiration Source:**

One day around 9pm, I felt a little tired; then I went out to the balcony. At that moment, I saw the sunset, and I told myself it will soon get dark. It is time to rest.

*~ Maria Fatima Mendoca  
Delaware Area Career Center*



# Artist Biographies

## **Olivia Duritsky-Haley - p.107**

### ***Indigo Girl***

I am 19 years old and have always created and enjoyed art. As a native to Toledo, Ohio, my twin brother, and I grew up going to the Toledo Museum of Art, which is probably where my love for anything artistic started. I love portraiture having both painted and sculpted my dogs, cats, and characters I come up with. I am planning on attending Bowling Green State University soon to study art and perhaps art education.

## **Emily Phillips – Back cover**

### ***Where I Want to Be***

I am from Denver Colorado. I was raised in a tough situation and always turned to art for comfort, whether it be physical or musical. Now I strive to grow in positive healthy ways while pushing to further my education. Your past does not define who you are and what you can be.

## **Elena Repina – Cover**

### ***New Beginning***

My name is Elena Repina. Before immigrating, I worked for many years in a large electrical corporation in Russia as an engineer. My husband and I moved to America in 2019. My life changed completely. I started drawing. Now I participate in many art shows as an artist. My husband is a pilot, and we have two children. This is one of my first works in America. The balloon is me, who has taken off from the ground and is flying in search of a new and happy future.

# Author Biographies

## **Elimane Abdoul Ba - p. 68**

I'm Elimane from Africa. I try to make my way in this life. This is my first story in English. I hope I win.

## **Rabia Abdeen - p. 8**

Rabia is an ESOL student at Project Learn of Summit County. She is originally from Syria.

## **Angelica M. Aguilar Casco - p. 93**

Angelica M. Aguilar Casco is from Honduras. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband Marcio Bonilla and two lovely cats. She studied Forestry Engineering when she was in university. Currently, she is taking an English as a second language class through the Delaware Area Career Center. She enjoys her life in the United States, meeting friends, visiting natural parks, and learning about the flora and fauna of Ohio. Also, she has learned about American culture and different parts of the world. She feels privileged to live here and takes advantage of every moment to continue educating herself.

## **Mary Alonso - p. 85**

Mary Alonso is from San Luis Potosi, Mexico. She has been living with her family in central Ohio since 2015. She is a homemaker, a mother of three kids, 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.

## **Vitalii Arabadzhi - p. 103**

My name is Vitalii. I am from Ukraine. I have been in Ohio for five months. I just completed a six week course in truck driving school and earned my CDL-Class A certification. I am now out on the road as a full-time truck driver. My dream is to go to the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the USA.

## **Natalicio Bartolon Bravo - p. 14**

First time writer.

## **Chudamani Basnet - p. 21**

My name is Chudamani Basnet. I am from Kathmandu, Nepal. I was born in Kathmandu, Nepal, and grew up there. I completed my school level in my hometown and for further secondary and higher secondary studies I moved to the different cities in Pokhara. I completed my higher secondary school levels, and I started my own business as an employer. I am here in the US in Akron, Ohio.

Now I am learning English at the Summit County Library. I am so glad I am learning a different language.

**Makenzie Bell - p. 52**

Mackenzie is 28 years old and on the right path to making positive life changes for a bright future. Mackenzie's warm heart, kind spirit, and love for her family, come through in her writing. She showed an immense amount of growth and confidence within herself while at SRCCC and has much success and happiness ahead of her. Mackenzie is very intelligent and has plans to attend college, start a new job, as well as make the most of every minute spent with her son and family.

**Bernadett Boksay - p. 100**

My name is Bernadett Boksay. I am from Hungary. My husband and I have been in the USA with our four children for 3 years. I like reading and spending time together with my family.

**Cui Hui (Mia) Chen - p. 97**

Cui Hui (Mia) Chen is from China and has a deep passion for learning English. She enjoys sharing moments from her daily life.

**Joelle Choueiry - p. 54**

My name is Joelle Choueiry. I lived in the Middle East where I worked as a teacher.

**Tomomi D. - p. 74**

My name is Tomomi and from Japan. I was an international student in California 10 years ago. Now I live in Dayton, Ohio with my husband and daughter. I started ESOL in Nov 2024 to improve listening skills.

**Sierra B. Dalton - p. 80**

My name is Sierra. I'm a mother of three beautiful girls, fiancée to a wonderful man, a grateful recovering addict, and a lifelong learner.

**Aly Dia - p. 60**

My Name is Aly Dia. I'm from Africa. My teacher encouraged me to write my story. I'm very happy I did. I hope you will like it.

**Rose Diaz de Leon - p. 50**

I am a woman of faith, and my greatest title is to be the mother of a beautiful princess. I always like learning and updating myself. I love to enjoy life and give thanks at all times. I am a resilient person who values and respects life and everything it offers me. I am currently a certified member in John Maxwell Leadership, in Youth

Certification, and in the DISC Methodology programs. I love being able to help others in their growth process.

**Ludia Alicia Doblado Buezo - p. 78**

This is my first time I write my story in English. I'm very thrilled and happy.

**Martha Dominques - p. 11**

Martha takes the advanced ESOL class at Auburn Career Center while taking college classes at OSU. She is originally from Mexico.

**Hagar Eldebeisi - p. 4**

My name is Hagar Kamal Eldebeisi. I was born in Egypt. My language is Arabic. I'm in Ohio for one year. I live at home with my husband and my daughter. I cook food and clean the house.

**Glenda Elmore - p. 32**

Glenda is an Aspire student who prides herself on resiliency, authenticity, integrity, and compassion. As a mother of four, she values family and spending time with her grandkids. She has a genuine love for life and is excited to create the next chapter for herself through accomplishing personal goals.

**Nayeli Fierros - p. 67****Alexandra Flores - p. 82****Miceala Gadie - p. 58**

I was born on Christmas in North Carolina but raised in Detroit. I am very creative, I like to dance, write, and paint. But I also enjoy sports, especially boxing. I grew up in a very ethnically diverse family, which has shaped who I am.

**Maria Elena Garcia Noriega - p. 15****Viktoriya Georgieva - p. 84****Zoriana Guseinova - p. 34**

My name is Zoriana. I am from Ukraine. I have been living in the USA for 12 years. I have two daughters. I like to spend time with my family, listen to music and watch TV. I attend ESL class because I want to improve my English.

**Cecilia Uriostegui Gutierrez - p. 22**

I'm from Mexico, I have lived in Wooster, Ohio, for one year. I'm married and have a daughter. I enjoy being in nature, reading, and running. I'm studying English because I want to be more connected with my new life in the U.S.

**Jaruwan Hangsungnoen - p. 17****Naimeh Haymoun - p. 53**

My name is Naimeh. I was born in Damascus, Syria. I have two daughters. I came to Ohio, USA. I am learning English, speaking, and writing.

**Miyako Hoshina - p. 87**

My name is Miyako Hoshina. I moved to the United States from Japan due to my husband's job. I have been living in Dublin, Ohio for almost one year.

**Brittany Icenhower - p. 96**

Brittany is single mother of two beautiful children. She describes herself as a strong, caring, and independent woman who likes to express herself through writing.

**John Billy Inelus - p. 46**

I'm John Billy Inelus, I'm quiet, brilliant, outgoing, and confident. I live in the US. I'm a photographer. I'm a musician. I like to play soccer, basketball and play station.

**Nadya Jasim - p. 73, 88, 102**

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

**Yusra Jawad - p. 66**

I am from Iraq. I have been attending English class for a few years. I'm married and I have children. I used to work all day long.

**Weaam Kalel - p. 43, 89**

Weaam Kalel is from Baghdad, Iraq. A wife and mother of two kids, she loves art and listening to music, and this is her first time writing a poem.

**Gagandeepr Kaur - p. 16****Chihiro Kikuchi - p. 59**

Chihiro Kikuchi is from Japan. She lives in Ohio with her husband and daughter. She has been learning English for three years.

**Soo Yun Kim - p. 98, 105**

My name is Soo Yun Kim. I am from South Korea. I have been living in the United States with my husband and son since 2023. I love nature and enjoy taking a walk in the forest. I have enjoyed learning English since I joined the ESOL class.

**Pavneet Kour - p. 104**

I am Pavneet Kour. I am from India. I have been living in Ohio for one and half years now. I have learnt a lot of things after coming to America. I started doing things on my own. I have become self-dependent, but still, I am trying to work on my weaknesses. I am learning to become more disciplined and organized. I hope in the coming years I will achieve my goals.

**Krishna Kumari - p. 13**

My name is Krishna Kumari. I am from a small village in India. I have been in the United States for many years and have a husband and son, both doctors. I enjoy reading and learning new things.

**Johnathon Larrison - p. 31**

My name is Johnathon Larrison, a student in the Penta Aspire program. I prefer to go by Johnathon Charisma. I grew up in an almost country village, did online school for most of my life, and helped to run a full-time golf course. I am passionate about life, every aspect of it.

**Vincent J. Lattur - p. 48**

I started my construction business as a seventeen-year-old senior and was quickly expelled for attendance. After 35 years of hard work, I endured 15 surgical procedures all performed over the past 31/2 years. I am unable to perform my past physical job due to my incurred ailments. No one wants to hire the disabled without a diploma.

**Aran Lee - p. 35****Ariana López Hernández - p. 12, 44**

My name is Ariana López Hernández. I was born in Mexico, so my native language is Spanish. I grew up there and lived through very important stages of my life: I finished a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in pedagogy; I got my first job as a special education teacher and worked in that field for 15 years; I met a man, and we got married. Our three children were also born in Mexico. My family and I moved to the United States about two years ago due to my husband's job. Since then, I have been learning English and taking care of my family. When I die, I would like to be remembered as a brave, resilient, and committed woman.

**Jessica Lynn - p. 33**

I am a proud student who refuses to give up.

**Rayshiaun Mann, Sr. - p. 3**

Rayshiaun Mann Sr. is a dedicated minister and the founder of the All Foundation of Light Mission Ministry. With a passion for service and community upliftment, he has made significant contributions through various initiatives.

As a record label owner and artist, Mann combines his musical talent with his ministry work, aiming to inspire and empower others through his art. In addition to his work in music, Mann is also the founder of several nonprofit organizations focused on critical social issues. His initiatives, such as "Shoes for Kids" and campaigns for pedophile awareness, demonstrate his commitment to the well-being of children. He actively participates in food donation drives to support those in need within the community.

Through his multifaceted efforts, Rayshiaun Mann Sr. continues to make a lasting impact, advocating for the vulnerable and spreading a message of hope and compassion.

**Ievgeniia Martynenko - p. 18**

Ievgeniia Martynenko is a water resources engineer, born in Kharkiv. She lived happily in her homeland but was forced to move to Akron, Ohio, in 2021 due to the war. She believes that war is the most terrible thing that can happen to people and nations. She is actively learning English through Project Learn, considering it the foundation successful adaptation and professional growth. She is surrounded by the support and love of her wonderful family, which inspires her every day.

**Renee Mays - p. 6**

My name is Renee Mays. I'm 55 years old and a mother of one. I'm from Cincinnati, Ohio, born and raised. I've always loved writing; it's always been my way to express myself. I'm in the Aspire program now, working to get my high school diploma.

**Lina Melnikava - p. 103**

I am Lina. I come from Belarus. My family enjoys travelling, baking cookies, and outdoor fun. We love our family time together. After the kids are asleep, my husband and I sit in the hot tub and eat ice cream.

**Maria Fatima Mendoca - p. 77, 106**

My name is Maria Fatima Mendoca. I am from Venezuela. I am married, and I have two children. I love living in Ohio. I am a home-maker. I have been in my lovely English class (ESOL) for a year.

**Mildred Myles - p. 38**

I attend Aspire classes at TLC in Mt. Healthy in Cincinnati, Ohio. I am a daughter of the King, striving to become the woman God created me to be. This Aspire class is helping me to become her.

**Olena Nikitina - p. 27**

Ukraine\ Ohio. A year ago, the war forced me to move to America. My children stayed in Europe — since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, they have been living independently from the age of 16. I'm proud of them and of the relationship we've built.

The war has divided families and erased the borders of past-achievements, but it could not take away the heart or the belief in love.

In my homeland, I built a career in marketing and creativity. In America, I am starting all over again. I'm learning English and truly believe that love will save the world. Because if not for this — then what else is all of this for?

**Iryna Opetiuk - p. 103**

My name is Iryna. I am from Ukraine and I have been in Ohio for eleven months. I enjoy reading books. It is my goal to continue my work in home interior design, but now I want to learn English to enhance my interaction with customers.

**Jieun Park - p. 90**

I am from South Korea and currently live in Ohio, USA. Six months ago, I became a homemaker and started taking ESL classes to improve my English. Becoming fluent in English will help me engage in small talk more easily and express my gratitude in more detailed and thoughtful ways. This has always been my dream.

**Yolanda Ponce-Romo - p. 62****Doris Ross - p. 45**

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 aide. 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.

**Mariela Ruiz - p. 26**

Mariela came to the U.S. from Costa Rica. She has been a regular member of the advanced ESOL class this school year.

**Yuki Sawada - p. 7**

My name is Yuki Sawada. I am from Japan. I live in central Ohio with my husband and have been here for one year and nine months.

**Jared Hummel Schools - p. 39, 49**

I have always wanted to get my name out there. My goal is to be successful in publishing my poetry and possibly bring inspiration to many.

**Wilo Ali Shirdon - p. 83**

My name is Wilo Shirdon, and I am from Somalia.

**José Luiz Lacerda Soares - p. 86**

José Luiz is from Porto Alegre, Brazil. He and his wife have been living in Hilliard, Ohio since June 2023. He is an ESOL student in Delaware Area Career Center.

**Volha Sniazhytskaya - p. 103**

My name is Olga. I am from Belarus and I have been in Ohio for four months. I like to draw and create designs with clay. My dream is to be able to speak and understand English to make a better life for my family in America.

**Taressa Streeter - p. 47**

My name is Taressa. I am 20 years old and will hopefully be a GED graduate by the time this gets published (high hopes)! I suffer from many different mental illnesses, but I am a recovering addict and I am moving forward with my life. I learned that life isn't easy, and for me to change my life, I have to put in the work, which includes staying focused and filling my time with prayer and meditation.

**Patricia Strelow - p. 95**

My name is Patricia Strelow. I am from Brazil. I recently became a citizen of the United States of America and voted in my first election.

**Darlene Torivio - p.36****Tzuchi Tsao - p. 5**

**Fatima Vazquez - p. 25**

Fatima is a long-time member of the Auburn Career Center Advanced ESOL class. She is a working mother and a gifted artist.

**Ryu Yamada - p. 24**

Ryu is from Japan. He is currently working in the U.S. for a temporary period. He has been regularly attending the advanced ESOL class at Auburn Career Center.

**Sa'Kaii Williams - p. 57**

I am from Denver, Colorado. I moved to Ohio and am building my future here until I decide what path to take.

**Laura Sofia Zambrano Lopez - p. 63**

I am Laura Sofia Zambrano Lopez. I am 24 years old. I am from Colombia. I was born in San Juan de Pasto, but I grew up in Armenia, Quindio. I am currently an Au Pair in Dublin, Ohio. I live with the Knueve family, and I attend ESL classes in Hilliard, Ohio.

**Fazia Zemmouri - p. 99**

Fazia Zemmouri is from Algeria. She has lived in the U.S.A. with her family since October 2022, and she is studying ESL in Delaware Area Career center (Hilliard Branch).

**Zhanna Zhuvak - p. 94, 103**

My name is Zhanna. I am from Ukraine. My husband and I live in Ohio with our two children. I love to be creative!

# Honorable Mention

## Artists

Cui Hui Chen  
Jessica L. Parson-Cook  
Glenda Elmore  
Rashiaun Mann  
Dayana Yorelli Nino Martinez  
Maisie Rudolph  
Christa Stanley  
Patricia Tello  
Jessica Wood

## Authors

Nurdan  
Rafael Alvarez  
Luis Angel  
Amal Assi  
Hakan Baksi  
Martha Casillas  
Oumou Diallo  
Noor Fazley  
Milenny Gimenez  
Tamela Hendricks  
Mika Hioka  
Witchina Inelus  
Jun Liu  
Berthony Louis  
Olga Madountio  
Ruzanne Mambetova  
Ahel Mazariego  
Lizeth Munoz  
Julie Nguyen  
Naoko Oe  
Laura Padron  
Liudmila Podoprigo

## Managers

Sona Rizaieva  
Mayumi Roques  
Shannel Rowe  
Rosa Ruiz  
Saori Sekiguchi  
Manjeet Singh  
Mayuko Sogawa  
Savannah Spears  
Grace Tabe Ebob  
Aranza Torres  
Mory Traore  
Xiao Wang  
Tina You  
Katherine Zambrano  
Chaima Zribi

# Discussion Questions

1. Chihori Kikuchi (p. 59) describes two challenges that turned into amazing opportunities. Write about your own challenge and how you turned it into an opportunity.
2. Viktoriya Georgieva writes about why she loves to travel (p. 84). What is your dream travel location and why do you want to go there?
3. Read the story **Beginning Again** (p. 12). Describe a time in your life when you had to make a big change. What was the situation and how did you handle the changes physically, emotionally, and socially?
4. Why do you think the author of **My Family** (p. 14) called himself a “regular man” and how did this description influence his writing?
5. Read **The Path to Peace** (p. 83) and compare and contrast the topics of justice and injustice. Create a T-chart with words or examples from your life that demonstrate these terms. Pick one injustice and problem solve a solution to this issue.
6. Create a timeline of events and locations from Rabia Abdeen’s **My Story** (p. 8), then create a timeline of your own life with important events and locations. Choose one of those items on your timeline to tell more about your story.
7. Sierra Dalton writes about **A Life Worth Struggling For** (p. 80) what things in your life are worth the struggle?
8. Read **The Elderly Playing Sports** (p. 86) and think about a role model in your life that has set a good example of “aging gracefully.” Interview them and share their tips with others.
9. Reflect on the pieces in the section **Where I’m at Peace** (p. 91). Do you feel at peace in nature? Why or why not? Write about a time that you did not feel at peace with nature.
10. Johnathan Larrison writes about being a **Teenage Rantipole** (p. 31). Look up the word rantipole, could this term be used as a title for your teenage life? Write about your experience.

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