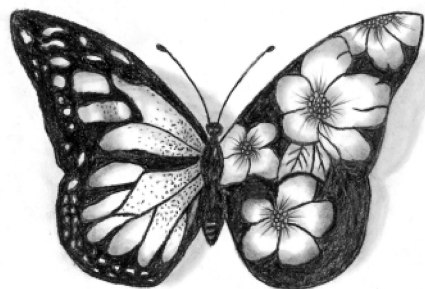


BEGINNINGS XXVIII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING

Ohio Literacy Resource Center

*This 28th edition of Beginnings
is dedicated to the memory of
Jody Angelone.*



Foreword

Congratulations to *Beginnings XVIII* authors! You are a part of history!

As we observe and celebrate 250 years of the United States of America, we also applaud and commend the authors of *Beginnings XVIII*!

Ohio was one of the first states to implement adult education, recognizing the need for adults to have workplace education, English language classes, and training past the common compulsory age of 14. Beginning with the larger cities in the mid-1800s and becoming more common by 1875, Ohio's adult students have always been at the forefront of education. This information comes from the research done by a student named Richard Dale Pepple at Ohio State University for his master's thesis that he completed in 1967.

I'm sure that Pepple didn't have an inkling that 60 years later, his work would be read and the information used for a forward in a compendium by the very adults that he wrote about. Your writing will be immortalized not only in the print version of *Beginnings*, but will also be maintained online for generations to read and appreciate.

At some point in the future, someone will find your writing and it will speak to them in a way that makes them appreciate their own journey more; it may make them smile; and it may touch their soul. And their ability to do this will be because you chose not only to continue your education, but also to submit your writing. These steps have led you to being a published writer in this volume of *Beginnings*, and the future is yours to write.

Marty Kopog
Ohio Literacy Resource Center Director

Pepple, R. D. (1967). *A history of adult education in the Columbus, Ohio, public schools 1847-1960* (Master's thesis, The Ohio State University).
OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center.

Acknowledgements

For over two decades, 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 XXVIII 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.



Aspire

Learn more. Earn more.

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Ohio: A Love Letter to Home

Round on both ends with a warm Hi!
Hello from the heart in the middle of it all.
OHIO is simply for lovers.
I've traveled to many different places but I can tell you home is
where the heart is, and my heart is in Ohio.

Today, I assist in managing a gym in Ohio. Every day I watch transformation happen not just in bodies, but in spirits, minds, and the emotions of my community. My heart is helping others rediscover themselves after catering so long to their loved ones and their jobs. I love helping others rediscover their strength as they transform their lives through fitness. Rebuilding your body can mean rebuilding your identity. And becoming someone totally amazing and totally new.

Ohio works because Ohio workers care.
We show up for each other.
In gyms. In schools. In neighborhoods.
Work here isn't just about earning a paycheck. It's about building each other back up.

In Ohio, service is woven into daily life.
Churches open their doors. Food pantries stock their shelves.
Community programs step in quietly, without fanfare, to make sure families have what they need. From neighborhood drives to state-wide initiatives, there is a safety net made not just of policy but of people of community and care. I've seen how quickly Ohioans mobilize when someone is struggling. There is dignity in the way help is offered here. Not pity. Not performance. Just raw compassion. Two hundred and fifty years strong because we take care of our own.

I went to school in Ohio, all Ohio public schools, and in those classrooms I learned more than math facts and grammar rules. I learned *myself* and the curriculum. In high school I attended CSA (Cleveland School of the Arts). We frequented Wade Oval Lagoon (what we called the "duck pond"). My high school teacher would take us outside with notebooks in hand. We were told to silence our inner critics and just write. Trust the gush, she said. Let it spill. No judgment. No erasing. No stopping the flow.

There, under Cleveland skies and with the ducks waddling across the water, I learned that my voice mattered.

Ohio didn't just educate me, it gave me space to hear myself.

And that is what Ohio means to me.

A place that teaches its children not just facts, but freedom of thought.

And let's not forget art and nature.

Art raised me too.

At Cleveland School of the Arts, creativity wasn't extracurricular, it was the essential. Later, my love for the Cleveland Museum of Art became routine every season and birthday. Walking those galleries reminds me that beauty belongs to everyone. Art is a divine expression, and there is magic and majesty everywhere you look if you have the eye for it. In one city alone, you can wander from ancient artifacts at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to the electric pulse of music history at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. To sports events and some of the best restaurants and gathering spots.

Ohio creates because Ohio believes imagination is infrastructure. Museums. Music. Theater. Family art spaces. Places where children discover their spark and adults remember theirs.

Creativity is not rare here. It is accessible.

It is alive. Other states have mountains. Others have oceans.

But Ohio has heart.

And also the Metroparks,

and unless you've lived here, you don't understand how extraordinary that is. The Cleveland Metroparks stretch like an emerald necklace around the city. Each park is different. Each trail a new conversation with nature. And it's free. Completely free.

When the Metroparks took over Edgewater Park, it transformed into something magical: a beach in the middle of the Midwest.

Families catching sunrises. Kids building sandcastles. Joggers tracing the shoreline of Lake Erie.

Nature here isn't a luxury. It's a birthright.

I have traveled to two other countries. I have visited thirteen states. I have seen skylines and coastlines and cultures beyond my own.

And still, there is no place like home.

Ohio is for the dreamers writing beside duck ponds.

For the mothers reclaiming themselves through movement.
For the churches serving quietly.
For the artists filling museums.
For the families walking forest trails before heading to the beach.
Two hundred and twenty-three years of learning, working, serving,
creating, and exploring.
I love living in Ohio.
Because Ohio, in all its seasons and stories, has loved me back.

~ *Monica Kasandra Seiling*
Seeds of Literacy

Ohio Explores

Do Not Give Up Exploring the New World

Living in a different country is exciting. I can discover the real culture and lifestyle that I cannot experience when I just go sight-seeing. Why do people here smile at me in the grocery store even though they are not my friends? Why are they so kind to me yielding the way in the parking lot? My curiosity is always fulfilled when I communicate with new people and share about our different cultures with each other. But why do I like it so much?

I learned about World War II how tragic it was in my school. It brought Japanese people tremendous trauma, and its history must be taught through ages and ages.

My Japanese grandmother was a preteen when World War II occurred. She lost her beloved uncle during the war with America. She told the story about it through posting a newspaper article. My grandmother did not tell me much about the war directly, but I am sure that she believed people could have a good relationship despite the fact of the fighting history. I heard no hate of America from her but instead her fascination with cultures that she admired from the movies or other media. She never gave up the curiosity she had. That brought her to travel the world after the war, even though traveling overseas was not as common as nowadays. I was afraid to start a new life in this country for the first time, but her curiosity and experiences embolden me in my day-to-day life here in Ohio.

There are numerous things to learn from history. People fail and make mistakes sometimes. However, I do not believe that should be a reason to shut down communicating with people who have different cultures and history. I am grateful that I am living in Ohio now because the people who share life here always give me new perspectives, and my worldview becomes broader and deeper. Even if I encounter a tough situation in the future, I will keep following my curiosity like my grandmother did.

~ Emi Ishikawa
Delaware Area Career Center

Family Fun in Ohio

I have explored a few amazing places in Ohio. One of the most beautiful places I visited was Brandywine Falls in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The waterfall is tall and very beautiful. I enjoyed the view and taking pictures there. It is a quiet and peaceful place.

My family and I also visited Cedar Point. It was very fun, especially for kids. There were many rides and games. We went to the water park and enjoyed the slides and the pool. It was an exciting day!

In the winter, we went to the Hinckley Reservation. There is a big snow hill there. We had fun sledding and playing in the snow. Ohio has many wonderful places. I am happy that my family and I can create beautiful memories together.

~ Tetiana Arabadzhi
Project LEARN of Medina County

My Favorite Place

My name is Samba. I'm originally from Mauritania. I have lived in Cincinnati, Ohio since 2023. I was born on December 12, 1990, and I work as a machine operator. I'm happy to live in United States, because I feel free and I have many good friends. My friends invite me to many different restaurants like KFC, McDonald, Dunkin Donuts and other places like the zoo, museums, or Walmart.

I liked Walmart more than other places, because at this place I can find many different things, like food, clothing, tools, electronics, and everything in between. Everything is organized. For example, if I want clothes I can head to the area where the clothes are, if I want food I can go to that area. I feel happy and surprised at the same time when I visit there for shopping. Because everything is clean, organized, and has a good smell. I like their team workers in their blue uniforms, it's my favorite color. They always smile and welcome the customers.

Since I came to the U.S., every Sunday I go shopping to the Walmart with friends from Mauritania. They also like Walmart because almost every time we can get an opportunity to buy something cheap with their continual promotions, specifically on holidays like Black Friday and Thanksgiving. For me Walmart is the best marketplace for shopping and enjoying in my free time. Walmart reminds me of a place named City Center in Qatar. I would go shopping with my brother over there. One day I wondered who created Walmart. I knew for sure he should be a smart person. After a Google search I found it was created by the Walton family heirs of founder Sam Walton who control approximately 45% to 50% of the company's shares through Walton Enterprise LLC and individual holdings.

What a wonderful place to visit and buy what you want.

*~ Samba Diallo
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

Lifelong Journey

Journeying through nature is a happy way to slow down, discover, and relax. Many people might be surprised how close we are to the parks, trail roads, waterfalls, wild animal habitats, and the natural environment. I have been exploring Ohio with my family for four years now. I would like to describe my favorite places and provide some ideas for you to explore in our rich state.

I would like to start with our Brandywine fall tour. It is part of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. The Boston Mill Visitor Center offers lots of things like brochures and maps for the tours. I love walking through their exhibits and learning, so I recommend this fall season experience. The color of the trees is amazing, and when you stroll and step on the dried leaves, hearing the crunchy noise under your feet while smelling the change of season, it feels like a soul rehabilitation. Through the hills and forests, the hundreds of plants and animals' scents freshen the air. The hike from this location is approximately four miles and includes hundreds of small inclines. Stepping on the rocks and finding our balance gives us a new challenge and makes us proud to get closer to the falls as we walk down the wooden bridge. How beautiful is the view around the trees, river, and breathtaking overlook! This is where you can see the falls with pleasant fatigue.

The roar and bluster of the water is full of force! You just enjoy the time and the nature to which we belong: we who are so fragile to nature's power. My youngest child was four years old when we made this trip. She walked by herself and explored what she saw around us. So don't hesitate if you have little ones, jump into the adventure.

Our absolutely best trip was to Hocking Hills State Park. That park seems to be painted with incredible colors and views. Unwritten feelings abound in the place. Every single tree, bush, and rock radiates calmness and peace. All people want to rest and relax in this gem, I'm sure. I truly believe this is Ohio's treasure chest. And I would like to open these riches and valuable treasures to the people. Some areas have beautiful, comfortable lodging made of real tree trunks. It makes the cabin a charm in the middle of the forest. In the morning, emotions are full with love. Just close your eyes and imagine that you are on the cozy lodging's porch. Sitting on

the hanging swing. Your legs are covered with a furry plaid blanket. Your hot coffee mug warms your cold fingers, and when you take a deep breath, you can smell the mixed fragrance of coffee and forest's scent. The view is incredible. The sleepy sunshine comes through the boles, and lands on the dewy leaf. It is nature's marvel. You have lots to explore, but let's say, you don't have enough time. If you step into this park, it's like a different world. Everything will open for you, like a treasure chest with tons of golden coins and jewelry. Discovering the caves and the old history--what a speechless experience! I highly recommend this park.

And now, Nature Explorer, we understand the deep connection between people and the natural world. After observing the beauty of nature, we respect the environment and feel a sense of responsibility to protect it. The forest is no longer unknown, but familiar and welcoming. The sounds of leaves, flowing water, and distant birds stay in our memories as reminders of nature's quiet beauty. We returned home tired but peaceful. The journey taught us that nature is not just a place to visit, but a living world to protect and appreciate every day.

~ Bernadett Boksay
Project LEARN of Medina County

The Pink Store

When I arrived in the United States, I was 19 years old, and everything was completely new to me. I was still getting used to so many things: the language, the streets, the weather, and even the simple fact that I was starting a new life. It was a time when everything intrigued me, but it also made me nervous.

One day, we went to the mall for a walk. I was with my boyfriend, who is now my husband, and my mom. The three of us were looking at stores and getting to know the place, because for me, everything was the first time to see. Suddenly, as we were walking, I saw the pink store, and my face lit up, I couldn't help it. I turned to them and said, "I want to go into the Pink store... will you come with me?" They both followed me, without complaining, as if they understood that it meant more to me than it seemed.

We went inside, and everything was pink, neat, and just like I had seen it so many times online. I felt a very special emotion, because it was like being inside something I had only ever seen in photos. I touched the sweatshirts, saw the backpacks I had always loved, and simply enjoyed the moment. I remember thinking, "I can't believe I'm really here."

At that time, I still felt a little lost, as if I were trying to find my place. But that day, with my mom and my boyfriend by my side, I felt a sense of security. It was a simple moment, but it was very meaningful for me.

We left without buying much, but I left happy. From that day on, Pink became my favorite store and color. Not just for the clothes, but for what it represents in my life.

At first, I bought things at regular prices, without paying much attention. For me, just being able to go in and buy something was an achievement. Over time, I learned. I started looking for deals, waiting for discounts, using coupons. Little by little I learned to manage my money better and to value each purchase more.

Until this day, I still wear my Pink and Victoria's Secret leggings, T-shirts, and sweatshirts. They're very comfortable clothes, but they mean more to me than that. They remind me of my beginnings, my

fears, my dreams, and everything I've built since I arrived in this country.

I'm no longer that 19-year-old girl who arrived full of uncertainty. Now I'm a more confident woman, with a family and a life I've built through hard work. But every time I walk into that store, I still feel a bit of that excitement like the first time I was there. Plus that always reminds me, although the beginning was difficult, it was also full of hope and dreams.

~ Alejandra Tinajero
Great Oaks Career Campuses

My Journey from Bhutan to Ohio

I was born in Bhutan in 1983. Bhutan is a beautiful country. Unfortunately, due to civil war in the country, I moved to Nepal with my parents. We had such a hard time when we had to leave our country of origin and live in another country as refugees. Yes, we lived in the Bhutanese Refugee Camp in the Eastern part of Nepal for more than 18 years of difficult times.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, many Nepali-speaking people lived in Southern Bhutan. During this time, the government introduced strict citizenship and cultural policies. Many Nepali-speaking families felt they were treated unfairly and were not recognized as full citizens. Reports from that period say that some people were arrested, beaten, and treated harshly by authorities. Families described being threatened, forced to leave their homes and living in fear. Because of this situation, more than 100,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese left the country. These families became refugees and moved to eastern Nepal. They lived for many years in seven refugee camps. Later many refugees were resettled in countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia where they worked to rebuild their lives.

We came to the USA in 2008 when I was 24 years old, through the International Migration Organization (IOM). Catholic Charities in Cleveland, Ohio, helped us when we were new to the country. They helped us to learn how to earn a living in the USA. They helped us to pay our rent, buy food, and enroll in studies. I went to Max Hayes High School through Catholic Charities. After high school, I worked for different companies. I also volunteered at Building Hope in the City (Hope Center) helping Nepali older people learn English as a second language and helping them to pass the USA citizenship test. Through a contractor, I am a translator at Cleveland Clinic for Nepali seniors to help during their hospital visits.

After a while, our family life became a little easier because we got such a good mentor (from the Hope Centers) named Ellen. She taught us every small to big idea to live well in the USA. Through her inspiration, my three brothers went to college. Eillen Wilson, who was a manager of Hope Center, taught us a lot about American culture and helped me a lot when I was down several times.

At first I lived in Cleveland, OH and later I moved to Fairview, OH. I lived there for a couple of years, and then my brother bought a house. We moved to this house in Parma, Ohio. Yes, all of my family, including my parents, live in our house in Parma.

I started coming to Seeds of Literacy when a Somalian woman from the Hope Center directed me to Seeds to get my GED. At first, I felt uneasy. Chris and other staff members at Seeds of Literacy convinced me to stay at Seeds and told me not to worry. They directed me to take a practice test at first just to know my level. I thought that I would not qualify for the school (Seeds). But Kara and Chris told me and not to worry about it, so I felt excited.

Now I myself feel inspired to study here at Seeds, and I tell other people to do the same. I hope everyone can benefit from working toward their GED here at Seeds of Literacy.

Before I came to Seeds, I didn't have any specific goal. My life changed after I came to school here at Seeds. Here I study language, science, reading, and math with good tutors. They also give me a lot of information about health and faith. All of my tutors are volunteers - they don't get paid but still help with the effort of my school.

Here in Ohio, I wake up every morning with a thankful heart. Back in our county, everything is different from here in Ohio. Now I have started helping new immigrants from Nepal to adjust to life in Ohio. I teach some Nepali speaking people who do not speak, read, or write English to study to pass the learner's permit test. I also teach them how to pass the Ohio driving test.

They don't know which bus goes where and which bus they can take to come back home safely. I give new immigrants rides to the hospital or to the grocery store. I also help them to pick up medication from the pharmacy and help them to take the medications as prescribed.

Back in Nepal, our life was totally different, different from our life here in Ohio. Back there, we didn't have a lot of opportunities. But we have a lot of opportunities here, such as working opportunities, free schooling, and medical benefits. We feel lucky to come here to Ohio and become citizens.

~ Mokchiya Nanda Nepal
Seeds of Literacy

My Life in Ohio: Adventures I'll Never Forget

I really like Ohio, especially Hocking Hills, because it is a beautiful place where you can breathe fresh air, listen to the birds, and be in direct contact with nature. There, I discovered some very beautiful caves filled with birds and a mysterious history that made the place even more special. While we were walking, I found some big, gorgeous trees. I hugged them to recharge my energy and felt a very special connection with the environment.

I enjoyed the day a lot with my children, although we also had an unexpected adventure: a storm surprised us on our way back. We had to take shelter under a huge tree until the rain passed. Even though it was a bit intense, it became a unique experience that we will always remember.

I would love to return to Hocking Hills many times because I love the peace I feel there and the way it connects me with nature.

~ Sandy Vidal

Project LEARN of Medina County

Whispered Symphony

Twelve pistons wake with a velvet roar
A measured thunder, refined yet raw
Silk and fire in perfect time
Each flame barks a verse, each rev a rhyme
They breathe like kings of steel and flame
No rush, no shake, just whispered strain
A symphony spun from torque and air
The V12 hums, power made fair.

~ *Rahsan Roberts*
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Being Brave and Traveling with a Backpack Full of Dreams

How is it that after being used to taking many buses and hardly ever driving, you suddenly realize that having a car is a necessity, almost like eating, and you no longer see public transportation at your doorstep? Hi, my name is Brenda and I'm a Peruvian exchange student. I arrived in the United States six months ago, and to be honest, from the beginning it has been a welcoming country, from its towering buildings to the farm areas with wildlife.

I always remember my first days driving. I think this experience I'm about to share was crucial in learning to drive in two months. I didn't use GPS much, but I wanted to go to the gym to exercise. My GPS said I'd arrive in 7 minutes. I started walking, and after almost 2 hours, I knew there was no turning back. But I kept wondering where the gym was. So the question was, what had happened to my GPS? Wasn't it supposed to take 7 minutes? Haha, I hadn't realized that was going 50 mph, and I was walking at 2 mph. What a "small detail," right? It seems funny, until your legs start to hurt, and you know you'll also have to walk 2 hours to get back... you can imagine.

And that's how my adventure in the USA began. I visited great museums, saw raccoons and squirrels, and traveled long roads. I talked with the residents of Huber Heights when the little canine officer, Adu, crossed the rainbow bridge, seeing the respect they had for his great police work. I experienced for the first time all the climates I used to see on TV. I got to know snow. But at the same time, I missed those gestures that were part of my day, like a hug from my mom, a plate of food from my grandmother, and the meows of my cats.

We are not always ready to make these big kinds of decisions; we are just brave, and we make them a reality. I won't deny that I live with a wonderful host family, "The Saylor's," who, with their characteristic way of being, make me feel like I am part of their family, sharing countless laughs and great experiences. I know I will always carry them in my heart.

Thank you, United States, for making me believe I can achieve anything I set my mind to, for making me more resilient every day—I

just try to live one day at a time. I never understood the meaning of that phrase until July 19, 2025, when I decided to pack my bags full of dreams and hopes, leaving behind the most precious thing in my life—my family—but living the life I dreamed of as a child, enjoying and appreciating every moment.

These lines are dedicated to my family and to those who have supported me on this journey, not only in Peru but also here in the USA. Thank you because you are also part of this crazy experience.

With much love, Brenda

*~ Kimerly Brenda Alvis Cuba
Miami Valley Career Technology Center*

Summer Near Lake Erie

My favorite place to explore in Ohio is Lake Erie. I like to spend time with my family in the summertime near Lake Erie when the weather is warm and sunny, not humid. It's perfect for hiking, fishing, swimming, or a picnic with my family and friends. More fun activities for the kids near the lake include building sand castles, floating small boats, and mud baths. At Lake Erie, all the people we are with are relaxed and eat ice cream. I like to explore this amazing place!

~ Zhanna Zhuvak

Project LEARN of Medina County

Where Do I Feel Good in Ohio?

Ohio has surprised me with how calm, diverse, and family friendly it can be, especially for short trips that don't require a big plan. That's why I can confidently name three favorite places I enjoy exploring the most.

The first place is the Brunswick library, which I appreciate for its quiet, welcoming atmosphere where it's easy to focus and spend time in a useful way. The library isn't only about reading. It feels like a comfortable space where everything encourages learning and calm. The second place is the water park in Sandusky, which is a completely different kind of experience: louder and more energetic. It's perfect for a fun day with family and kids. And finally, I love our local parks, because they give us an easy way to take regular walks, breathe fresh air, and enjoy nature without traveling far.

I'm sure there are many new and interesting places still waiting for us: new towns, museums, lakefront walks, festivals, and family-friendly destinations that will leave strong memories. But even now, it feels good to know that I already have gone to places here that I want to return to.

~Vitalii Arabadzhi
Project LEARN of Medina County

Ohio Serves



The Legacy of Sharing: A Seed for Ohio

A woman was born in Korea in 1926. She went through war and poverty, yet she always shared what she had with her neighbors. Extending a warm hand to those in need was the very essence of her life.

My grandmother often said, “One person’s sharing leads to the sharing of a million.” True to her words, that spirit of giving was passed down to my mother, to me, and now to my children. Thanks to her kind teaching, our family believes the world is still beautiful and full of hope.

Now, as a preschool teacher in Ohio, I plant these same seeds in the hearts of my students, especially those navigating the challenges of a new culture. Drawing on my background in early childhood education from Korea, I strive to provide more than just lessons. I offer the emotional warmth my grandmother once gave to me. Sometimes it’s just a comforting word. Other times, it’s a small handmade gift. But seeing a lonely immigrant child’s fear turn into a bright smile is my own way of following the spirit of serving. I believe that by nurturing these children with love and stability, I am helping the next generation grow into the happy, resilient future of our community.

This is the heart of “Ohio Serves”: using the gifts and talents we have been given to help our community. I hope my family’s story becomes a seed of hope for the lonely, the sick, and the new immigrants in Ohio. May my grandmother’s legacy of sharing spread across Ohio, helping to build a warmer and happier world.

~Yeji Kim
Delaware Area Career Center

A Chain of Kindness

I gave birth to my daughter two years ago in the United States of America. I already had a son and hoped to have a second kid for a long time, but I could not. I had undergone infertility treatment for several years in Japan, but unfortunately, I was not able to continue the treatment when I moved to the U.S. Because of that, I almost gave up having a second child and decided to enjoy my life with my son and husband instead.

Surprisingly, however, I found out I was pregnant right after we moved to the U.S. It was a miracle for me because it never came true during infertility treatment. I was on cloud nine but also a little nervous because I did not have any relatives and close friends in the U.S.

In 2023, my daughter was born safely, and her first cry filled me with happiness. My mother had come to help me from Japan for a few weeks, and my ten-year-old son was also a big help. Not only that, but the mothers of my son's friends supported me. They delivered meals, took care of my older son by letting him stay at their home, and listened to me to help release my stress. Thanks to them, I did not feel lonely. Despite having just come to the U.S. themselves and struggling with an unfamiliar life, they provided me with tremendous support. I deeply appreciated them, and it warmed my heart. They are my best friends now.

And now, my other friend will deliver her second child soon. Her family in Japan will not be able to come to support her, and her older daughter is only one year old. I know how tough it is through my experience. Now it is my turn. The time has come for me to pass on the great kindness I received. I believe that one act of kindness will inspire another. I hope my service will connect to the next person who needs help, and it will inspire the chain of kindness to continue.

~ Saki Aono
Delaware Area Career Center

The Magic of Origami

Origami is part of traditional Japanese culture. When I lived in Australia, I taught origami to elementary school children and elderly people. We made origami together on a weekly basis. Origami is a remarkable, engaging, therapeutic activity using your hands, and it helps to improve concentration and exercise your fingers. People were very excited to engage in the creation process of turning square sheets of paper into three-dimensional creations.

Once I made a dog with an elementary school girl. I chose to make a dog because I thought it was the easiest one. However, it was difficult for her to match the corners, and folding required careful use of her fingers. If the first fold was not done correctly, the final piece would be uneven. By slowly modeling the steps and folding together, she was able to understand the key points. She said many times that she could not do it, but because she really wanted to make the dog, she stayed positive and enjoyed the process. Her feelings changed from frustration to concentration, and she became full of confidence. When she finished and the dog was folded neatly, she was very happy. The next day, she brought one she had made at home.

Now that I live in America, I would like to connect with people through origami and serve the community in this way. Through my experience in Australia, I realized that origami is a way to connect with others and create many kinds of artwork, even with a language barrier. So, I call the simple square sheets of paper “The Magic of Origami.”

*~ Etsuko Takahasi
Delaware Area Career Center*

3 Months

A distance that will test our relationship. It won't be a romantic departure but a real absence, a silence heavier than screams. Staring at my phone, staying inside your old messages as if the words could still breathe.

3 months of longing. Even our tensions are missed. Silence is crueler than conflict, and indifference hurts far more.

Trying to fight within myself between emotion, sorrow, emptiness, longing, and love but I respect.

You didn't leave for pleasure or to escape yourself but out of duty despite the raw reality. You wear that uniform facing rules that leave no room for feelings.

And here is the ambiguity

I'm proud of you yet angry at the distance.

I respect the uniform, but I hate what it takes from us.

You--a man of discipline, a soldier.

Me--a woman of deep emotions, with only my pen.

Three months of me learning patience and you learning rigor.
Am I also your refuge somewhere behind that discipline?
Above all, I know our love will overcome. Our arms will find each other again.

See you soon,
My soldier, My heart.

~ Pricylle Jean
Mid-Ohio Educational Service Centers

The Power of Listening

“The best way to help others is by listening to them.”

Someone once told me, “I feel comfortable talking to you.” My friends and family often say that I am a good listener. They say that my attitude makes them feel comfortable and warm. Because of that, when they have problems in their lives, they like to talk to me about them. Whenever I do that, I feel thankful and happy to help other people.

When I was younger, I was entirely focused on myself. It felt important to express my own thoughts and emotions, and I expected others to understand what I wanted. However, something changed in college when I took a psychological counseling class. That class had a big impact on me. I realized that there are two different ways to see the world. One way focuses on oneself, as I did. The other way focuses on understanding other people’s feelings and inner thoughts. This new perspective fascinated me. I became interested in helping others in a meaningful way. So the next semester, I decided to study psychology and family therapy as a double major.

These studies helped me reflect on myself and made me empathize with others’ feelings and suffering. Following that path, I got a master’s degree in marriage and family therapy and worked as a psychological counselor for fifteen years.

While working as a counselor, I learned one important lesson: People already have the answers about their own problems. My role was not to give solutions or advice, but to listen carefully to their stories.

After moving to the United States, I couldn’t work as a counselor anymore. At first, I felt lost because that job was an important part of my identity. But I realized that even without the title of “counselor,” I could still listen to people who need support.

Looking back on my journey, I realize that listening changed not only my career but also my life. It helped me grow from a self-centered person into someone who tries to understand others. Even now, I believe that listening with an open and sincere heart is one of the greatest gifts we can give. The best way to help someone is to truly listen.

~ Minji Park
Delaware Area Career Center

A Box of Kindness

God gave us money to survive, but it is not the same amount for everyone, so poor people should get a share of our wealth to build a good community. Sharing means donating something to help a needy person. We could give money, food, or clothes.

I remember when I was a child, my mom would always clean our closets and let me help her collect clothes we did not need or wear anymore. We would arrange them in a cardboard box and put the open box in the front yard of our house so any needy person could take whatever they wanted without asking. The next day, I would run in excitement to go check the box, and I would find it empty every time. Watching my once-loved clothes be used to help someone else in need made me feel warm inside. I ran straight to my mom to enjoy our good deed together.

Inspired by my childhood, I try to continue my mom's tradition of helping needy people today. Every season, I collect clothes and my kids' books and toys that are no longer used and donate them to poor people. I want my children to know the value of helping others just as my mom taught me.

I remember one day I was driving my kids to the park. It was a very hot summer day, and on our way, we saw a poor lady holding a newborn baby and sitting under the shade of a stop sign. My kids asked me if they could give the lady a water bottle and their snacks. I was extremely happy to hear that, so I pulled over and gave the lady a small plastic bag, and we celebrated their noble deed together. I believe that helping poor people is our responsibility to build a happy, healthy, and balanced society. This responsibility starts from your own family.

~ Chaima Zribi
Delaware Area Career Center

We Are Not Alone

I moved to the U.S. about 2 years ago due to my husband's job. At first, I didn't know anyone, and my English level was very low, so I was scared to start a new life here. But everyone was kind to me, not only my neighbors but also people I met on the streets or at the supermarkets.. Because of that, I was able to enjoy my life in America. I'm also grateful to everyone in this ESL class, especially my teacher. They talked slowly and clearly to me many times since I couldn't catch what they said. They made a real effort to understand my poor English. Thanks to that, at first, I was so nervous that I could barely keep up with the lessons, but now I feel that everyone in this class is close to me, like siblings and family.

I have had many hard experiences in unfamiliar places, not only in America but also in Guatemala. Actually, I worked in Guatemala for 2 years as a volunteer when I was young. Working in a foreign country with a different language and culture was challenging for me. It was about 25 years ago, so unlike now, it was a time when social media was not yet developed. Smartphones and laptops were also not widely used, and I lived in a developing village, so there was no internet. Furthermore, many houses didn't even have telephones, so it was very difficult to contact my family in Japan.

When I was in Guatemala, I stayed with a local Guatemalan family as a homestay. My host parents would always say, "This is your home, and we are your parents in Guatemala." So, I felt that I was not alone. My Guatemalan family, coworkers, and neighbors were kind to me. I had a lot of good memories there.

The number of foreigners in Japan has been increasing year by year. There are tourists, but although not as many as in the United States. Recently, there are also many immigrants. And I often see foreigners who are struggling, especially train stations that have many lines and are complicated. It is tricky for foreigners to choose trains and to arrive at the train platforms, I think. I also know very well that living in an unfamiliar place with a different language is challenging. When I was in Japan, I volunteered to teach Japanese to foreigners, and I found that it was very tough for them to learn Japanese. When I return to Japan, I want to support their efforts. I want to help foreigners who are having a hard time in foreign country, Japan.

~ Miyako Hoshina
Delaware Area Career Center

Unity in Diversity: Spreading Kindness Across Cultures

To me, unity in diversity means that although we may all come from different unique backgrounds, we still share one important commonality: We are all created the same by God. Our color, age, or ethnicity do not change this. This is an idea expressed by the Arabic word “zay-bad,” meaning the same despite external differences. My experiences living in Egypt, Canada, and the United States have helped me gain cultural understanding and a new perspective on life, allowing me to empathize with people from all backgrounds and foster peace among them. This is something I consider a special gift.

It gives me purpose to spread love and peace when working with people who are different from me. Often my coworkers and I have very different outlooks on life and look different on the outside, making it difficult for us to relate. However, this does not stop me from trying to share kindness. Sometimes I bring food and tea to share with them, and this connects us.

Outside of work, God has given me the opportunity to be a light for others through motherhood. I’ve been blessed with five daughters who I get to care for and nurture in hopes of raising good citizens of this earth, and from them even more righteous offspring. Oftentimes I find myself becoming a mother to more than just my daughters though. Sometimes I help other women who are having problems within the family or with their children.

It is with kindness that I approach people of all cultures because I believe that we are all the same inside. Each day I look for new opportunities to help others in need, whether by cooking food, preparing tea, or sharing the love of a mother with those who need it.

*~ Amal Mohamed
Delaware Area Career Center*

My Journey of Living in Ohio

Living in Ohio has served my family in many positive ways. Ohio has good medical care, and we feel safe knowing help is available when we need it. Ohio is also a calm and family-friendly place. Living here helps our family feel stable and supported.

Since coming to Ohio, I try to serve others in simple ways. I care for my family and show kindness to people around me. I believe that helping others, listening, and encouraging people is an important way to serve the community and build strong connections.

I especially appreciate the libraries and parks in Ohio. The libraries are welcoming and very helpful for families and children. They offer books, learning programs, and safe places to spend time together. Ohio also has many beautiful parks and a lot of nature. The parks are clean, peaceful, and great for families. I am thankful for the green spaces, fresh air, and places where children can play and explore. Ohio truly supports families, and I am grateful to live here.

*~ Iryna Opetiuk
Project LEARN of Medina County*

Ohio Works

Building a New Life in Ohio

Living and working in Ohio has been an important experience for me and my family. We like everything here. Ohio has given us better job opportunities and stability. When we first arrived in Ohio, we were able to find jobs quickly. With tough hard work and dedication, today we are proud to work as general managers at Popeyes. It brings peace of mind to know my children have access to good schools and safe neighborhoods. My children attend a school near my house, and the teachers are fantastic! Living in Ohio has helped us feel safe and secure. We are building a better future together in Ohio.

*~ Frank Montano
Project LEARN of Medina County*

Life Project: Mirror

I look in the mirror, what do I see?
No one important is around me.
So many travels and projects were done,
plenty of people, but I always run.

I look in the mirror, what do I see?
My house, my money, housekeeper and me.
Where is my mother? I want to talk.
Ten years ago she did her last walk.
Always so busy, always so brave,
these words you can read also on her grave.

I look in the mirror, what do I see?
My mother saying, "Don't be like me.
Work is important, but you need a goal.
Look at your life, find a long-term role.
One stage you closed and reached company skills,
now you can pay family bills.
Next role is coming, it's not yet done,
you need to be a good mom."

I look in the mirror, what do I see?
Important people are around me.
My husband, my children – protected zone.
I feel right now. No more alone.
When life is running, my projects too,
family members are linked like glue.

I look into the future, what do I see?
My husband, children, grandchildren and me.
You are my hero if this is true,
your children are calling and taking care of you!

With dedication to all working moms

~ Anna Beata Marvin
Auburn Joint Vocational School District

The Heart of Ohio Work

Ohio gave us a beautiful opportunity to experience the heart of Ohio work. Why am I saying this? In 2001, our family moved from New York to Ohio. When my husband was finished with his medical school in India and a residency program in New York, he got a job at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. He was happy to work at such a well-known hospital with good doctors in a pleasant work environment.

When we moved from New York to Ohio, my son had just finished elementary school, moved up through middle school, and then graduated from high school as the valedictorian. He found the school system to be a good environment, safe, and invaluable in preparing him for his dream to become a doctor. It came true! After my son finished medical school in Ohio, he joined the residency program in Syracuse, NY and worked in Connecticut as a doctor.

While my husband was working at Cleveland Clinic, we found that the cost of living in Ohio was less expensive and the weather, with its four seasons, was most enjoyable. We also discovered that Ohio has the best of the best hospitals and universities.

In my opinion, Ohio is very cozy, safe, amazing, and beautiful to live and work in. Plus, it's close to where my brother lives. It gives us excellent work and living conditions for my family. I am so happy!

~ Krishna Kumari
Project LEARN of Medina County

Busy Life, Happy Life

My name is Nathalies Martinez. I am from Juncos, Puerto Rico.

I work at Walmart and have been working there for four years. During that time, I have done different jobs in the store.

My hobbies are art and salsa dancing. They help me relax, relieve stress, and have fun.

I am learning English to continue my studies and to get a better position at work. My first language is Spanish, and I wanted to learn a new language to communicate and navigate better in my daily life.

I also enjoy cooking and experimenting with food. I like trying recipes from different countries, and it is something I really enjoy doing.

In my free time, I like reading books. I enjoy exploring different perspectives through books from different genres.

~ Nathalies Martinez
Auburn Joint Vocational School District

Cooking in the Hood

Hi. My name is James Thomas Garrett III. I grew up in the Mt Pleasant community in the 60s. We came from Boston, MA, after my mother and father separated. I discovered I had a passion for cooking. I grew up with a family that loved to cook and prepare food items, I would watch my mom while she prepared dishes for our dinners. Working with my grandmother, I learned how to pick beans, clean catfish, and other skills.

I truly enjoyed tasting food as my mother prepared items such as German Chocolate cake. I watched all the ingredients go into the recipe and after mom mixed it up, I licked the bowl clean. While growing up in Cleveland, OH, great events took place. In 1976, at the age of 14, it was the Bicentennial Year.

I started a summer job with low wages, but it was a great way to earn money as a youth. I enjoyed my city. Cleveland offered enjoyments in the park: soft ball games, food trucks, hot dogs, great American fun. Summertime was everything at our neighborhood parks. I went to Woodhill, now called Martin Luther King Park, to have fun. I lived in a time where Ohio offered a lot, like great department stores like Higbee's, the May Company, and Halle's. It was so crowded and you could get lost in the crowd.

Here is my take on Cleveland Ohio: I can only go back 63 years of my life. I was able to go to movie theaters in Cuyahoga County. I was able to go to restaurants downtown where they had hot dogs that only cost 3 for \$2.50, popcorn, peanuts, oh my! Going downtown was like another world! On the weekends, hundreds and hundreds of families met downtown to go to places like department stores or, on 9th Street and Prospect, there was a place called the Forum Wow! It was a place where families would enjoy themselves. Then it turned into Lord's Burger, the most famous burgers downtown. There were also the Embassy movie theater and the Hippodrome. Downtown, what a place to be. On Easter they would have the parade. They would also have the Saint Patty's Day Parade with green beer and everything. I could not wait to grow up and take a job in a restaurant.

Cleveland was a growing automotive city. My family worked for the automotive industry, so we had a chance to attend amusement

parks because Ford Motor purchased tickets for the families. We went to parks like Cedar Point and SeaWorld. Cincinnati had a great amusement park called Kings Island.

I started working at restaurants at an early age and I had a great experience. I got to meet many people of different cultures and learned how to create different foods. I shook hands with so many different people. I watched the flats turn into restaurants. Tower City, which once was an underground city railroad transit system, had nothing but stores and outlets, all under ground. Today it's still underground, but it's a mall that goes above level.

I have grown in my culinary field by learning from other chefs and applying my skills. I started at a restaurant on Shaker Square called Our Gangs All Here. I learned all the operations of being a Line Chef. I continued to grow by opening other places like Bravo's, Brio's, P.F. Chang, and many more. I had a breakdown for some years, but the passion of cooking brought me back. I came back strongly and advertised my newly found business called Chef Jay Le Soul Cooking in the Hood Show, where I've had the opportunities to cook for the stars, senators, Playhouse Square, The RNC. The list goes on. I love to cook Italian food such as pasta primavera, stir fry vegetables, chicken marsala, spaghetti bolognese, and Italian wedding soup. I also like to cook Asian food: Sushi, bok choy, salmon ginger-garlic teriyaki sauce, and bimbob bowls with rice and vegetables. I like cooking Soul food the most: pig feet, BBQ neckbones, collard greens, corn bread, yams, and more!

Today, I have returned to school at Seeds of Literacy to obtain my GED and go to college to get my Chef's degree. I want to train kids in Hospitality Management because I love helping others enjoy this passion. It's my gift to them. My life has changed thanks to all the wonderful people in this city I live in.

*~ James Thomas Garrett III
Seeds of Literacy*

Taking Up the Torch and Continuing the Legacy

When I was a child, I admired how my mom showed passion, integrity, and dedication in her work. She was a nurse in a mental health center in Venezuela for 25 years. She dedicated a lot of time to caring for and serving the patients. Sometimes my sister and I would go there with our mom, and we would spend time with some of the patients, playing games or telling them stories. They were very happy.

Now I live in Ohio, and I have the opportunity through my job to visit nursing homes. When people who live there need groceries, food or medicine, I go to the grocery store and shop for everything that they need. This service gives purpose to my work because I know that they really appreciate every act of generosity and kindness.

When I arrive at the building and walk inside, it reminds me of my mom's work. It has the same atmosphere, the same sounds of the nurses visiting each patient, and the same playroom and TV room. I can imagine myself participating in different activities with the residents there just as I did with the patients at the mental health center as a kid.

My mom inspires me, and this service motivates me to take English classes so I can communicate more effectively and share words of faith and hope with the elderly residents at the nursing homes I visit. I want to give my best to the people who don't tell you how they feel, but you can see it in their eyes. I want my life to have a purpose of service and to inspire those around me. I'd like to continue my mom's legacy of working with love, compassion, and integrity. That's what makes my days meaningful and encourages others to take up the torch of service.

We can do it!

~ Milenny Gimenez
Delaware Area Career Center

Ohio is a Place Where Dreams Come True

Moving to Ohio allowed us to start a new life. It is a new living and working experience for me and my family. Although I do not work right now, I am looking for a job. I would like to have work experience in Ohio. Also, I can go to college and learn a new job as I did in Poland. In America you can become ANYONE at any AGE.

For me and my family, living in Ohio means having a stable and secure home. We like the people here and the opportunities this region offers us.

But it is not just about work. Exploring various industries in Ohio has given me a new dream. I want to find a profession that I really enjoy and in which I can grow. That is why I am looking forward to the future. After all, I want to build a good life here and make my family proud of what we have achieved in our new home.

~ Aliaksandr Yastremski
Project LEARN of Medina County

Ohio Grows

Beginnings

Starting over keeps my mind moving forward.
Moving forward leads us into the unknown.
The unknown inspires us to begin again.

Beginning again can be difficult,
But it is often where growth occurs:
 Personal growth,
 As we rediscover who we are;
 Professional growth,
 As we rebuild our purpose; and
 Emotional growth,
 As we learn to heal, adapt,
 And rise, stronger than before.

~ Karine Inês Bolson Moro
Wayne County JVSD

Blooming Despite the Thorns

This morning, while weeding the garden, my gaze rested on the rose plant I was tending. It seemed proud of the blood-red flower it had grown, standing tall, radiant, and alive. Then my eyes drifted to the thorns beneath the bloom, sharp, pointed, and dangerous, capable of harming anyone who approached without care.

How remarkable nature is in what it creates and continues to create. Within the same plant exist both flower and thorn, yet the plant is known only by the beauty of its bloom. No one speaks of the thorns, though they are just as essential as the flower itself. What is curious is how rarely we notice that these two, so strikingly different in nature, coexist on the same stem, bound together as one.

As I watched, I began to wonder about the soul of the rose, and every flower that bears thorns. What thoughts might such flowers hold within themselves? Are they truly like their thorns, sharp, cold, and dangerous, or are they like their blossoms, soft and gentle at their core? When someone touches the plant, what does it feel in that moment? Would it wish to respond with tenderness, or would it instinctively raise its thorns to protect itself?

Even in the simplest sense, it is easy to understand why flowers have thorns. They exist for protection. Thorns are a plant's weapon, much as humans have their own means of defense. Plants rely on these small, sharp tools because they cannot create more advanced ones, even if they wished to. After all, who does not want to protect their life, their family, and their kind? In this way, every living being shares the same instinct when it comes to self-preservation.

I continued to watch the plant, thinking about the cycle of its life. If I were a poet, or even a philosopher, I might say that this thorn-filled flowering plant is a symbol of human life itself. It teaches us that to reach our destination, to achieve something meaningful, we must pass through many obstacles.

We, too can learn from flowering plants. Though they are armed with sharp and dangerous thorns, they still offer soft, beautiful flowers to the world. The thorns never seek to harm unless someone chooses to disturb them. Strength and gentleness coexist, quietly and naturally.

Success and failure walk together, just as flowers and thorns share the same stem. It is up to us which one we choose to see. We are drawn to the beauty of the flower and rarely pause to notice the thorns that made its survival possible. Perhaps the very essence within the seed, destined to become a flower, must climb countless steps of thorns before it can finally bloom.

And speaking simply, as an ordinary person, I would say that we human beings are much like these flowering plants. We carry both sides within us, the softness of petals and the sharpness of thorns. Even when we wish to be known as kind, our harsher side sometimes reveals itself.

So why should we not try to do what flowers do? Why not soften our thorns by letting our better nature bloom? Let kindness, patience, and grace rise above what is sharp within us, just as a plant allows its beautiful, tender flowers to gently cover its thorns.

~ Rajendra Gyawali
Lima City Schools

Dear Little Me

Hey Little Me,

I am writing to you from the future! I am sure you are probably asking yourself the typical questions right about now: “Why are you writing to me?”, “How did you send this to me?”, “What is it like in the future?” While I would love to tell the tales of our future, I am afraid the T.P.S (Timescale Postal Service) states I am not permitted to do so. What I can do, however, is give you a few pieces of advice that I have learned along the way. These are lessons that I think would have come in handy at the time you are reading this.

A good piece of advice I can give you now is to not give up on school. Not only are there teachers and counselors that truly care for your success, but your friends and family wish nothing more but the best for you. It feels pointless now and it may continue to feel pointless time and time again.

Another important thing I can tell you is to stop playing an act for everyone else and play an act for yourself. Even if people around you now do not seem to like the person you truly are, you will come to find people who adore your personality more than you can imagine.

I really wish I could give more advice. As I ponder on it more, however, I cannot help but hear the Lord say to me, “Every stone you have walked upon, I have placed for you.” No matter how rough the road gets for you, keep moving forward. When you make it past the rough patches in the road you will learn not to thank God for making the smooth pavement. You will learn to thank Him for giving you the strength to make it there.

Forever Yours,
Triston Acevedo

*~Triston Acevedo
Penta Career Center*

Beginnings

- B** Be bold enough to start it and do it.
- E** Even if it is not what you expected at first.
- G** Don't be discouraged .You are gaining experience.
- I** Imagine that you are sowing
- N** Nourishment, irrigation.
- N** No matter what, don't give up on those seeds.
- I** In time, they will grow.
- N** Once you have sown the seeds you will definitely reap the harvest if you continue to care for it.
- G** Let's get started and plant the seeds of kindness, health, and beauty. Let them grow roots.
- S** Let's wait together for the flowers to bloom!

*~ Meihua Ren
Wayne County JVSD*

Cooking with Love

I like to make food for family and friends. I especially like to make food for and with my children.

So, I bring you my recipes and their history.

In the early 2000s, I learned from a co-worker how to make cream cookies with guavapaste. They are delicious!

The cream cookie is from Brazil. German and Italian immigrants started using cream to replace butter in their traditional cookie recipes, because, at that time, they did not have butter in Brazil. For them, it was easier to use cream (the solid part of milk).

Traditional Cream Cookie Recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup cream (the solid part of milk)
- 1 cup granulated white sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- approximately 4 cups all-purpose flour
- guava paste

In my lifetime, I have made cookies using this recipe many times. After I had my children, I started to make it with them; but I modified it, because my children, Anna and Benício, don't like guava paste. We, my children and I, changed the shape of the cookies and removed the guava paste. To be fun, we started using plastic cookie cutters with animal shapes, like dolphins, giraffes, and cows, as well as basic star and heart shapes.

After these minor changes, we changed the recipe again, but, this time, instead of removing something, we added something: chocolate chips. We would only add one or two; for example, to represent an animal's eye.

We frequently bake these cookies because my children love to eat cookies, and my daughter is very picky about what she eats.

When we came to the U.S., though, we had to change the recipe again. Now we replaced the cream with butter, because we couldn't find the right kind of cream in Wooster, Ohio.

Original Cream Cookie Recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 eggs
- 8 oz unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- approximately 4 cups all-purpose flour
- chocolate chips as desired

How to make

1. Mix the eggs, cream or butter, sugar, and baking powder.
2. Add all-purpose flour, little by little, kneading the dough until it reaches the right consistency (i.e., when your hand remains clean of dough after working it).
3. Create the desired form.
4. Add guava paste or chocolate chips.
5. Place on greased baking sheet.
6. Bake at 400° F for approximately 20 minutes, or until the cookies appear golden.
7. Allow to cool, and then eat with moderation.

We always make this recipe because, for our family, it tastes like home — even when we are far away from Brazil!

~ Alessandra Fagioli da Silva
Wayne County JVSD

Daddy Still Here

Percy "4" Ever

Gotta start takin' some time
While raising my kids
Cuz the love that I give
They'll never forget
I'll never regret
That time I spend
Cuz I love all my kids

Imma put in that work
To be a better Dad
Don't want my kids growin' up
Acting bad
Cuz I wasn't there
Most of their years
Elijah, my youngest
Asked Mommy
If "Daddy was Dead,"
Nah, I'm alive
And I'm here
I was in the wrong
So Daddy wrote this song
For you and Moms
While I was gone

Anytime I hear your voice
It fills up a void
That I was missing
From home

Boys, Daddy still loves you
No matter what you do
I'll still be here missing you
That's the truth

~ Tracy H. McNelly
Lima City Schools

Family Home

The family home is located on Forest Hill Avenue in Cleveland, Ohio. Our house was in the middle of the block. The house was a three-bedroom home with a patio and a big backyard.

There were ten people in the house - two adults and eight children. I am the oldest in my family - I have 5 brothers and 2 sisters. Our house was never dull. We did chores, did homework, played outside, and ate all of our meals together as a family.

Our house was about ten minutes from my auntie's house. She had nine children. When we got together, there were enough of us to play kickball, baseball, volleyball, and basketball. There was a set of twins in each family. Four of my cousins are now gone.

In those days, we had neighbors that cared about you. They treated you like you were one of their children with love and kindness.

We had family picnics at Forest Hill Park. We always invited our friends and neighbors. The park was beautiful. The air smelled so fresh and the grass was green with beautiful trees. It had everything you needed to enjoy the day.

We played football in the neighborhood, and we played baseball during our family time and family reunions in the park. We also played kickball. We loved to play these games in the Forest Hills Park - a park that we could walk to. We'd cook out and have ribs and hot dogs. The men did the cooking/grilling of the meat, and the women would bring the sides and desserts.

I was "in charge." I helped my parents with my siblings while we were at the park. We played all evening and went home by dark. We learned a lot of lessons in the park: how to referee, how to figure out teams, and how to leave problems on the field. We were really ACTIVE as kids - we had fun.

All five of my brothers played football and basketball. They played when they were younger, and then they played when they got older, too. Often they played in the neighborhood. While the boys played, the girls would try to put on a talent show. I liked sports and would play sometimes but would prefer to sing with the girls instead.

My first real sport was golf. I played in Highland Heights. At first, my old boyfriend played, but I used to think it was boring until I actually got on a golf course! I was 19, and I was really bored wondering where the ball was going when it went up in the air. Then I played a little; I learned how to hit the ball and learned all of the golf terms (like birdie). Every year, I played in a tournament / contest where if you got a hole in one, you could win a car.

I played golf at Highland Golf Course. The greens were beautiful, smooth, and soft. I loved the fresh smell of the air, green grass, and the beautiful trees. I liked when they picked up the pin with the flag. My friend gave me "putter practice" so I could get better. People were watching, and they were very serious. Golf calls for concentration and focus. Once I learned about it, I came to like it. I loved watching the other golfers play, too.

Although our immediate neighbors felt like our second parents, attending Murray Hill School was hard at times. The school was in an Italian neighborhood, and in those days the Italians did not accept Black people. Other kids called me names. I never thought I would experience being called bad names. But the school did have good teachers and it had a swimming pool. This is where I learned how to swim. Once my teacher gave me a ride home because I had to stay late at school; she knew the other kids were not nice to me and my family.

I loved taking the short cut home through Lakeview Cemetery that runs through the back of my home. I was never scared. I remembered the saying that you don't have to worry about the dead - it's the living you have to worry about.

Our neighborhood had the best pizza in this one Italian restaurant. We used to run in, pick up the pizza, and run out as fast as we could. That was the only place we went into in Murray Hill.

I moved out of the family home when I was about 18 years old. I got married early and moved in with my husband in Shaker Heights. When my husband passed away, I moved back in with my mother on Forest Hill into the family home. She passed away in 2023.

Now is the time for me. Time to move out and find an apartment, just for me. Make a new home for myself. I took care of my mother and moved back home to tend to her. After she passed, I stayed and live there now with my two brothers. But it is time for them to be on their own. I don't have to be "in charge" of them any more; I get to be in charge of me!

~ Renee Golphin
Seeds of Literacy

To My Kids, To All the Kids in the World

I'm walking the street.
I see many kids.
Kids are-
Riding the bus alone.
Taking the subway alone
Kids are-
Standing in line properly
Wearing backpacks rightly
Holding phones calmly.
Their calm behavior is simply beautiful.
Where are you going, kids?
To academies?
Back home?
Meeting friends?
I wonder-would my kids be just as calm, too?
They walk so bravely and confidently,
I hope no bad people ever get near them.
I hope they don't follow the adults jaywalking.
I'll try to live as a slightly better adult.
To my kids,
to all the kids in the world,
I cheer you on through one day—every single day and today's
growing up journey.
Keep going!!

~ Eunae Lee
Project LEARN of Summit County

More Than English

When I first came to the United States, I realized that the language barrier is not just about English. It is about understanding a different culture. As a Korean, I felt that the rules of respect I grew up with did not always apply here.

Understanding social roles was also challenging. In Korea, we usually ask each other's age when we first meet. Based on that, we decide how to speak and behave. For example, when people eat together, younger people usually wait until the oldest person starts eating first as a sign of respect. At the table or even in a car, the best seat is often reserved for the oldest person.

I also struggled with how to address people. In Korea, we use titles to show respect, so at first, I thought calling a teacher "Teacher" was appropriate. However, I later learned that in the United States, using a teacher's name is more natural. Eye contact was another challenge. In Korea, looking directly into an older person's eyes can be considered rude, while in the United States, it shows respect and attention. Even now it still feels uncomfortable, but I try to do it.

I also worried that I might unintentionally behave rudely because I didn't fully understand how Americans show respect. However, I gained the confidence to join a conversation, and thanks to my teacher and the volunteers, I felt welcomed and encouraged to keep trying. I truly appreciated their kindness and support.

Because of these challenges, I sometimes avoided social gatherings with Americans and spent more time with Korean friends. It felt comfortable, but at the same time, I felt frustrated with myself for not being able to connect with others easily.

At first, I thought I should wait until my English became perfect before making American friends. But I realized that day might never come. I learned that I could understand language and culture only by trying and experiencing them.

Now, I try to accept my limits and just do my best. I try to join conversations and not to worry about making mistakes. In the future, I hope I can feel more confident and comfortable. I believe that these experiences will help me grow and understand both myself and others better.

~ Jihae Lee
Project LEARN of Summit County

Bucket List

When I welcomed the New Year of 2025, I made a new bucket list. One of the items was “Living abroad someday.” The opportunity to try it came much sooner than I expected because my husband started working in the United States.

However, I only had a dream about living abroad; I was not prepared. As soon as I arrived in the U.S., I got sick and had to visit the hospital. Also I had to send my children to daycare. I needed English for everything in my daily life. Out of necessity, I relied on translators and interpreters. One day, while sitting at home watching TV, I realized something: just being in America doesn’t mean English automatically becomes my second language. I began to change myself.

First, I decided to leave the house and face the environment directly. I went to cafes to order coffee and to the grocery store to ask for specific cuts of meat. I registered for group Pilates and followed other people’s movements by watching them closely. Most importantly, I handled most things on my own without depending on my husband.

Second, I had been studying through online lectures, YouTube, and the Speak app, but I felt it wasn’t enough. So, I looked for a place where I could learn English in person. Since I had no one to ask, I asked AI and registered for “Project LEARN.” It is a place where people from various nationalities study with the same goal. Since it is a face-to-face class, it was perfect for me because I sometimes lack self-discipline. Now, I am doing my best to attend classes three times a week.

Third, I decided not to be impatient. When I started comparing myself to others, I felt very small. It felt like everyone knew everything except me. Even during class, I would sit blankly because I didn’t understand, and my head was full of distracting thoughts. When I snapped back to reality, I felt so hateful toward myself and miserable. Now, things are a little different. I tell people first that I am not good at English and ask them to say something one more time. If I don’t know something, I try to understand it by looking it up in Korean. It is slow, but I am moving forward at my own pace.

In Korea, people say that forty (40) is a turning point in life. In 2026, I am experiencing a new environment, new people, and a new culture. At this turning point in my life, I have been given a chance to start everything fresh from the beginning. Until the day I can say I have fulfilled my bucket list, I will continue to refine this “second life” bit by bit.

~ Jinsuk Kim
Project LEARN of Summit County

Ohio Learns

Better Life in Ohio

Ohio has helped create a better life for me.

I left my busy life and found peace.

I can enjoy nature and the weather every day.

I can spend more time with my family.

It is opening a new world for me and gives me the courage to learn.

I am still learning and growing.

I am thankful for the new life in Ohio.

~ Sejung Oh
Project LEARN of Medina County

I Did Not Give Up

Before coming to the United States, my life was simple and comfortable. I was surrounded by my family, my language, and food. I felt safe and happy. But deep inside, I wanted more. I wanted to build a better future for myself.

The first time I got on a plane, my heart was beating fast. I was excited but also very afraid. When the plane landed at the big airport in New York, I looked around and felt like I was in a movie. The buildings were tall, people were walking quickly, and I could hear English everywhere. I did not understand most of it. In that moment, I realized my life was changing forever.

At first, I stayed with my family. After one month, I received my legal documents and started looking for a job. The hardest challenge was the language. I felt shy when I spoke. Sometimes I was embarrassed because I could not express myself well. Some workplaces did not accept me because of my English. But I did not give up. Finally, I found a job. At the beginning, it was very difficult. I made mistakes and asked people to repeat what they were saying. Many times, I went home tired and sometimes discouraged. But every day, I learned something new. Slowly, I became more confident in my job, I found a school and started to learn English.

Six months later, I decided to learn how to drive. I failed the driving test twice. I felt disappointed and cried, but I did not stop trying. The third time, I passed. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. After that, I looked for my own apartment. It was another step toward independence. I also applied again to a job that had rejected me before because of my English. This time, I was ready. My English had improved, and I believed in myself. They accepted me.

Today, when I look back, I see how much I have grown. Moving to America was not easy. It was very difficult, but it made me stronger. I learned that success is not about being perfect; it is about not giving up.

So, I decided to never give up.

~ Khadija Atire
Great Oaks Career Campuses

English

Learning English is....

- very difficult.
- important.
- growing and improving.
- communication.
- education.
- fun.
- practicing.
- talking to other people.
- better for talking to everyone.
- better for getting a job.
- connecting.
- the best.

I want to learn English ...

- because it's important for traveling.
- because it's the world's language.
- for a better job.
- because I need more money.
- to further my education.
- because it's important for going to the doctor.
- to go shopping.
- to speak better.
- to learn about other people.
- I want to teach my children.
- I want to understand my children.
- because if I live in the U.S., life is no good without English.
- to be understood.

Beginnings

In August, 2022, my husband and I accepted a job opportunity for him in the USA. That decision changed our lives completely.

I never had the desire to leave Brazil and build my life far from my family and friends, but I always wanted to have the opportunity to experience a new culture and learn English.

I believed that, if I wanted to live in another country, speaking the local language correctly is very important for being able to connect with people and build healthy relationships. So I decided to start studying English through movies and Duolingo before I moved here.

When I arrived here, I met Teacher Becky. She is a very good teacher, and I am a very good learner, so I thought that I might be capable of doing this easily, but I was wrong. I never imagined the difference between being a tourist and living here. It is totally different, because the tourist usually needs only a limited vocabulary to have a good experience during travel.

As an immigrant, the challenge is different: it is the search for a real life, building on real relationships. In the beginning, I felt like a stranger to myself because my true self was hidden behind words I did not know yet.

Different from someone who comes only to travel or study English, my whole life is happening at the same time as my learning. College, home, work, husband-- everything needs attention. Learning English is a goal, and I need to focus on it, even when life is busy.

With resilience and dedication, each step brings me closer to belonging. I am still on the journey, but now I know that, with every word I learn, I am building a place that one day I can call my second home.

~ Natália de Oliveira Neves Silva
Wayne County JVSD

Home...We Go From Our Home to Our Home

We go from our home to our home.

Yes, it is a strange and difficult sentence, but it is the story of a girl.

A girl who lived among her family, in a loving and warm family atmosphere. She had many dreams, but she always believed that her country was her home.

Until fate wanted her to meet a person who opened his heart to her and made her decide to leave everything: her family and her friends, and go with him to another continent.

Here, the vision begins to change, and the dreams begin to be different. She gathered her entire past into a suitcase and left. She believed in her love and in her decision, but she carried with her fear of the future, fear of change, fear of her ability to adapt, and a feeling of loneliness and longing for everything.

Here, a new chapter begins.

From a little daughter, spoiled by her father,
to a responsible wife.

From the family house to her own house.

From a big family to a small family.

She began to set her foundations and build her home, with a deep feeling of responsibility for her decisions.

A new chapter of life, with more responsibility and wiser behavior.

A chapter in which she shares the joy and sadness of her family through a phone call.

She became happy when the phone rang,
and afraid of it at the same time,
afraid to hear news of the death of someone she loved.

But everything has positives and negatives.

In her new home, there is also love and tenderness of another kind, a different safety, but similar to her father's safety, and tenderness toward her like her mother's tenderness.

She is happy with her choice of the right partner, and she thanks God for his presence and for his supportive positions.

Through her experience, she discovered that home is not a country and not walls.
Home is the place where you feel love, safety, and happiness.
The place where you love to be, the place where you are yourself.

To every immigrant who reads my story:
“Shape your home through your choices and the relationships that support you.”

Choose your environment.

Learn to be comfortable with yourself.

You may not be responsible for what happened to you yesterday, but you are fully responsible for what you will create tomorrow.

Your past may have been written without your will, but your future will only be written by your hands.

You were not always the one who made the decisions in the past, but you are certainly the one who will make the decisions in what is to come. What lies behind you may not have been your choice, but what awaits you ahead is shaped by your choices.

The past may be imposed on you, but the future is the result of your awareness and your decisions.

And always know that you are not alone and not a victim.

You are the result of your choices and your decisions.

So enjoy them, take their positives, and try to change their negatives.

Life is a collection of habits, so create the most beautiful ones.

~ Soukaina Sal-hamy
Owens Community College

A Challenge I Face While Learning Something New

A Memory from School

Growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, school was not always easy for me. As a child, I struggled with reading and understanding, and I was placed in learning disability classes. I remember sitting in classrooms feeling like I was behind and trying not to be noticed.

I also remember sitting in class and being scared that the teacher was going to call on me to read. I always got lucky. Maybe the bell rang, or something else happened, so I didn't have to read. Those early school experiences in Cleveland made me doubt myself for a long time.

When I was about 25 years old, I tried to go back to tutoring at Sylvan Learning Center in Cleveland, Ohio hoping that it would help me catch up. I wanted to learn but quickly realized the program was designed for children, not adults. I felt out of place. As an adult now, I decided to return to learning because I want more for myself and my future. This time, I understand that learning looks different as an adult, and I no longer see asking for help as a weakness.

As an adult, I am still learning here in Cleveland, Ohio, but in a different way. I'm moving at my own pace, and my experience in life gives me more confidence now than I had as a child. I'm freer now. One challenge I face while learning something new is pushing past the fear that I am not smart enough. I can learn. Going back to learning as an adult while working and raising a family is not easy.

In the future I hope my story touches someone else. I hope to be a motivation to others. Each new skill I learn helps me rewrite my story. My experience proves that no matter where you start, growth and education are always possible.

*~ Chermere Johnson
Seeds of Literacy*

The Beginning of My Second Language

It was the year 2022, and my husband and I had arrived in Wooster, Ohio, the small town that would become our home for the next thirteen months. From the very first day, I felt that something in me was beginning. The city welcomed us the day after a heavy snowfall, and all the streets were covered in white. In Brazil, my home country, we don't have snow, so that first image has stayed with me, as if it marked the opening of a new chapter in my life.

I arrived in Wooster with a clear purpose: to learn how to communicate in English and make it my second language—not just in theory, but in real life. During my first month, I enrolled in English classes, believing that immersion would teach me what fear and insecurity could not.

I still remember the day I took the placement test. It was the most difficult moment of my journey so far! I cried, struggled, and generally felt quite disappointed in myself. Language, at that point, felt like a wall I could not climb.

The days in class were demanding and exhausting, but I was fortunate to have patient and dedicated teachers who helped me face my fears, and I slowly began to trust my own voice.

In my sixth month, I started working as a research assistant at The Ohio State University. This new beginning brought fresh frustrations, insecurities, and moments of silence, but also small victories. Each day at work required courage: to listen, to speak, to be misunderstood, and to try again. Over time, I noticed something changing: my English did not improve all at once, but it grew quietly, day by day.

My husband and I returned to Brazil in March, 2023. After only a short time there, my husband received a job offer, once again in Wooster. The thought of returning filled me with frustration, because I knew how difficult the beginning had been before. Still, together, we made the decision to return.

In December, 2023, we arrived in Wooster for the second time. Once again, the city welcomed us with snow.

Two years have passed since our return.

I resumed my English classes, carrying a silent fear that I had lost all that I had learned during our previous stay in 2022. Instead, something much more wonderful happened. I had the privilege of having the same teacher as before, and, one day, during class, I began to cry. This time, I was not crying because I didn't understand, but because I understood everything! In that moment, I realized that my second language had never left me. It had been only waiting for me to give it the chance to be used.

As the days passed, my confidence grew. Words came more easily; my fear went away; and my voice felt stronger every day. What had once felt impossible had now become a part of me.

Today, in 2026, I can say this with certainty: Wooster, the county seat of Wayne County in the United States of America, will always be part of my story. It is the place where I began to learn my second language; it is where I discovered that every true beginning leaves a permanent mark inside us.

~ Karine Inês Bolson Moro
Wayne County JVSD

Never Give Up

Hello everyone. I'm Panny. I'm from China and Mandarin is my native language, so my English is not very good. I wrote a poem about some of my feelings when I first came to the United States. This poem is called "Never Give Up." Maybe I don't have any vivid words or touching language, or some profound life maxims. I describe my story with the simplest language!

No one's life journey is smooth sailing. We all encounter difficulties, setbacks, and challenges, and I'm no exception. Like many people, when I first came to the United States, I felt a great deal of stress because of the unfamiliar environment. Many things had to start anew. For me, who didn't know English, this was definitely a challenge. At first, I thought English was very difficult and was afraid to speak because my grammar and pronunciation were unfamiliar, and I did not feel confident. Sometimes I couldn't even say a simple greeting, which was very discouraging and made me very anxious.

I know that some people choose to face difficulties and setbacks head-on, while others choose to give up. Giving up is the easiest thing to do because it doesn't require any effort or the taking on of greater pressure. But, if you don't even try, how can you know that you can't do it? So every morning when I wake up, I give myself some encouragement, "It's no big deal. It's okay if I make mistakes. I can do it!" Then I start learning short English sentences and words. Sometimes I also watch some TV dramas about life. I try to communicate with others. Sometimes I find that I can understand a little bit, and I am also starting to know the meanings of some words. From knowing nothing, at the beginning, to knowing a little now...it's very interesting. I'm making progress and growing!

As you read my story, you will find that true success doesn't come from a sudden breakthrough, but from countless accumulations, from never giving up!

I hope everyone will decide not to give up when facing difficulties and setbacks. Be brave enough to try. No matter what the result is, at least you won't have any regrets!

~ Pan Yun (Panny) Huo
Wayne County JVSD

The Journey

My name is Felipe Cofré. I'm a Chilean engineer, married and without children for now, currently exploring new stages of life. I'm a curious person who enjoys learning about new cultures and connecting with different people. I believe every new experience helps us grow.

I live in the United States with my wife. We moved from Chile to Ohio to begin a new chapter. This decision was not easy. I left my family, friends, and my comfort zone. But I also found new opportunities.

Everything is new for me: the language, the culture, the people, and the lifestyle. Simple things like shopping or taking the bus felt different. At first, I felt nervous, especially with English. Sometimes I didn't understand people. Sometimes I didn't know what to say.

I practice English every day. I listen, I read, and I speak when I can. I make mistakes, but I keep going. Every small conversation is a victory.

I meet people from many countries. I learn about different cultures and ways of thinking. This helps me see the world in a bigger way. I value simplicity, respect, and deep conversations.

Living in the U. S. teaches me to be independent and patient. I learn to adapt. I learn to be brave. I learn to leave my comfort zone. This experience is good but sometimes uncomfortable. It needs courage and effort. But it also brings growth and new friendships.

Now I understand that moving to another country is not only changing places. It is changing yourself. I'm still learning, and I'm grateful for this journey.

~ Felipe Cofré Quezada
Wayne County JVSD

Acrostic

Beginnings are usually difficult.

Errors appear before meaning.

Grammar becomes a habit.

Information is partially understood.

Nothing sounds natural yet.

Nothing is easy in the first few days.

Intent matters more than accuracy.

New skills arrive through repetition.

Gradual fluency replaces translation.

Speaking starts before confidence.

~ *Felipe Cofré Quezada*
Wayne County JVSD

Ohio, Land of Opportunities

Many years ago, when I was very young, I dreamed of driving cars even though that seemed impossible for a child like me. However, that desire remained in my heart until I turned twelve. I faced a few difficulties in making my dream a reality: My father didn't own a car. I was too young. I didn't even know how to ride a bicycle.

When I turned twelve, my dream was about to come true. Although I was no longer a little child, I was still a minor. So, practically at the very start of my adolescence, I had the opportunity to learn how to drive. In those days in the small town where I grew up in southern Mexico, it was not as easy to acquire a vehicle as it is today. My father did not have enough money to buy a car. The only person in the family who owned one was my sister's husband. He was kind enough to give me some driving lessons; he was willing to let me use his car so that I could learn to drive. The experience of sitting in the driver's seat and placing my hands on the steering wheel was incredibly thrilling. With great joy and enthusiasm, I learned how to handle the car very quickly. My brother-in-law made sure that I learned thoroughly, but even after some time had passed, he never let me take the car out on my own.

When I turned 18, I applied for my first driver's license. Upon passing the tests and achieving a passing score, I was filled with great joy and happiness at having succeeded. Subsequently, I renewed my driver's license several times to maintain the legal right to drive within Mexico. When I arrived in the U.S. my wife and I needed an Ohio state driver's license in order to drive and use our car. Consequently, we sought information from the BMV regarding the application process. In addition, we began studying the guide for the knowledge test and gathering the required documents; we also practiced the specific driving maneuvers that the BMV required for approval. Although the signs and questions on the test were not entirely unfamiliar to us, we did have to learn several specific traffic signs to ensure we were up to date. When the day of my test finally arrived, I went to the offices with confidence to take it. I completed the theoretical or knowledge exam regarding traffic laws and had no difficulty passing it.

The second part of the exam consisted of demonstrating that I knew the essential parts of a car. When the moment arrived, the

Ohio traffic officer asked me to point out the specific car parts required by the test. Of all the parts I was asked to identify, I correctly identified almost all of them except for one. I realized that I simply didn't know the English word for it. They asked me for it five times, to the point where the Ohio traffic officer began to lose patience. After four failed attempts, the only thing that occurred to me on the fifth and final try was to press the horn icon; immediately afterward, the sound rang out. And just like that, I managed to pass the car parts section of the exam. I finally understood that I was supposed to press the car's horn, located on the steering wheel. The word I failed to understand was "horn."

The third part of the exam consisted of the Ohio traffic officer sitting inside the vehicle to observe me maneuvering the car forward and backward without knocking over the cones that marked the boundaries. I passed that test without any problems as well.

The final part of the exam involved a traffic officer riding along with me to conduct an evaluation on the city streets. As we were leaving the parking lot, I received instructions on how to drive based on the commands the officer gave me. Unfortunately, I did not fully understand them due to my limited English proficiency, and as a result, I did not achieve the expected success on this final test. I was not issued a license, but I was encouraged to prepare better and try again. I spent a couple of weeks learning the specific driving commands so that I would be ready to retake the test. Finally, I returned to the BMV, and this time, I was ready to pass the exam. The Ohio traffic officer got into the car and gave me the directions to head out onto the evaluation route. And that is how, on my second attempt, I successfully passed the remaining parts of the exam.

From this experience, I have learned three lessons. First, everything in life follows a process and has its own timing; things do not always happen exactly when we want them to but rather require patience and a readiness to act when the opportunity arises. Here, I am reminded of the wise King Solomon, who said: "To everything there is a season under the sun." Second, I learned that everyone deserves a second chance in life, for we are not born with innate knowledge, and we are all capable of making mistakes or missteps at some point in our lives. A new opportunity grants us the blessing of becoming better in all things-- overcoming difficulties, facing

challenges, improving and healing relationships with others (including family members with whom we have had disagreements), passing exams, and so on. Finally, I learned that if I move from one country (Mexico) to live in another (the USA), I must prioritize learning the new language (English) in order to communicate, work, travel, and handle matters related to health and government, including obtaining a driver's license for the first time. The State of Ohio has provided me and my family with many resources and opportunities. Attending ESOL classes has helped us improve our English as a second language. I am very thankful for the opportunities I have been given in moving here.

~ *Román López Domínguez*
Delaware Area Career Center

My Journey with English in America

When I first came to the United States, I didn't know a single word in English. When someone said "Hi" I didn't know how to answer. I felt lost, embarrassed, and very small inside. But my husband always encouraged me. He kept telling me "You are smart. You can learn fast. You already speak five languages." Everyone I know used to compliment my intelligence, but English was very hard for me. After a few months I got a job in a warehouse; they didn't ask about languages. That job became the beginning of my journey. I faced a lot of difficult moments with a coworker who blamed me for things I didn't do. I couldn't defend myself, and I cried almost every day. When my husband picked me up after work he would tell me, "You must be strong. This is America. You must build a strong personality and never show weakness."

One day, I decided to start from zero. I went to YouTube and found a teacher named Mourad. He helped me understand the basics. I start watching movies I love in English, listening to podcasts and music to train my ears. After three months I began to understand a little better than before. Then I went to school to learn English twice a week. The teachers were kind and patient, which made me comfortable. I felt safe to speak and learn. After this I realized not everyone is bad and not everyone is good. This understanding made me feel more relaxed. I never knew all of this before because I never mixed with people from different cultures.

After about seven months I got the job I have today. I made friends with Americans, and little by little I started to understand more, speaking more and defending myself when needed. Today I can say I speak six languages. My English is not perfect, yet I have improved so much. I keep learning. Now I go to Scarlet Oaks to learn more English.

I thank the man who was with me, supporting me in this journey, who believed in me and never let me give up.

I only have been here in America for one year and six months. From this experience I have learned one thing: Nothing is impossible in our life. Everything started with a decision and determination.

~Aminetou Diah
Great Oaks Career Campuses

From Failure to Flourishing The Girl Who Turned Pain into Power

When I was young, I hated school so much. I used to beg and cry and make up any excuse not to go. School was hard for me, and I would get bullied or harassed for not conforming to others' standards. I knew I was meant for more, but my social anxiety would tear me apart. I experienced moments of heartbreak, disappointment, and failure.

I dropped out of school and over the next few years, I struggled with finding myself. I threw myself into other things and ended up finding refuge in modeling. It helped to give me confidence in myself. I have been attending GED classes to relearn skills. I want to go to college to study business. This road has not been easy, and I'm still working on improving myself. My advice to you is to never give up on yourself. Keep moving forward! Turn your fear or failure into the flourishing person you are destined to be!

*~ Jennifer Herminia
Penta Career Center*

Ohio Hopes

Hope

I have spent most of my life joyfully embracing and moving with the tides, no matter where they take me through strife, pain, and loss. I found my strength in simple, indescribable joys of my youth, wrapped in family movie nights, deep talks where we cry openly allowing all the pain to be exposed and caught by one another. This feeling lets me know I am not alone and my sorrow is not too heavy for another to carry.

There were moments where we laughed so hard no sound was heard and moments of running so freely my body could barely carry me. I continued to look forward with the hope I won't fall, but if I do, I have faith I will be caught.

All these moments have been embraced and become a part of my heart's tapestry. At times I am weathered and changed by the wear and tear of time and loss. Yet I still look forward with hope remembering the words from my untainted young heart, "Things will be okay in the end." People much older than me uttered these words in moments when I did not have a place to call home, moments when my next meal was a question mark rather than a warm end to the day. That mentality began slipping away with the accumulated burden of life, which was not often kind. However, I refused to let the hopeful part of me die. The small child that fought to survive and discovered laughter despite the pain and loss still lives on in my adult self. I will continue to cherish that spirit and fight against the barriers that life presents.

~ Ariel Penelope Harter
Penta Career Center

Choices

The mind blew, and the clouds disappeared.

Beautiful day inside of me, just like sunshine on a warm day!

I think that is the correct mood to correspond with my
real situation.

I don't wanna pretend to be fake.

Inside that, let's keep going to find the place that corresponds
with me inside.

Many things in the present are silent echoes of the past.

Now I understand I cannot be afraid.

Follow the dreams that live in the mind.

Life is a choice.

Short and sweet.

Even on unexpected occasions, you decide what can be.

Follow your thoughts.

Grow in the beautiful and the wonderful.

That way is the only way you can disperse the noisy world we
live in.

*~ Veronica Ramires Lima
Auburn Career Center*

Safe Through the Fog

I woke up today, and when I opened the window, I saw that there was fog—very dense fog.

This happens often on this side of the country, so it comes as no surprise.

After getting the girls ready, we headed out for school; we could see very little because of the fog. So I said to the girls, “Look, the fog won’t let us see anything beyond this point,” and they replied in amazement, “Everything is covered, Mommy!”

Upon returning home, the Lord Jesus suddenly spoke to me: “Can you see anything in the distance?” I answered, “No, because the fog obscures everything that I would normally be able to see on a sunny day.”

The Lord replied, “Very well. The future is like that dense fog. You can see as far as the STOP sign (which, in my case, was just a few meters away), but nothing beyond that—because you simply do not know what lies ahead.”

And so it is in life. You cannot know what lies beyond today—or even beyond this very second—because, to our eyes, it remains shrouded. When we ask ourselves, “What will happen tomorrow? Or next week? Next month? Next year?” we clearly cannot provide an answer, for we cannot see past the fog. This situation often leaves us feeling anxious or desperate. That is because we have plans: to travel, to get married, to graduate from university, to buy a house, to have children, and countless other plans we formulate as we journey through life. Furthermore, we tend to crave control over everything. Yet, in truth, we do not know what lies beyond the fog, and we cannot possibly be in control.

Let me be clear: There is nothing wrong with making plans. There is nothing wrong with looking toward the future, nor is there anything wrong with taking action now in order to reap the rewards later. Indeed, doing so is essential. However, I believe that we have lost our way. Life moves at such a frenetic pace that it causes us to live without truly savoring the things God has created specifically for us.

As we go about our daily lives, we often fail to notice the beauty in seeing our children smile, or in simply walking outside and enjoying the sunshine, the breeze, or the rain. In fact, many of these very things have come to annoy us. We have even forgotten how to feel our own breath—either because we are constantly rushing through our days, or because something else, like a cell phone, has taken control of our attention.

Now, let us return to the conversation I had this morning with the Lord Jesus. He said to me: “Since you cannot see beyond the mist, you must believe completely in Me and trust that I alone hold control over the future—that your plans are safe with Me. And even though I may often tell you that a certain path is not right, I will surely bring forth a better plan or project for your life.”

God is the perfect Master Planner. Moreover, He is the only One who always desires what is best for us.

Today is a good moment to reset our lives and say to the expert Master and Creator—the God of our lives: “I surrender my life and my plans to You, for they will be safest in Your hands.”

Thank you, God, for teaching me this morning that while I may not be able to see beyond the mist, I can trust that my future rests in the very best hands—Yours, Beloved God.

Sincerely,
Paula Mangas Peralta

~ Paula Mangas Peralta
Four County Career Center

My Second Hometown

How do you define “home”? For me, home is more than just a geographical area. It is a symbol of warmth, growth, and a deep sense of belonging. At the beginning of my journey here in Ohio, I never imagined how much this place would eventually mean to me.

When I first arrived in 2019, everything felt unfamiliar – a new country, a new life, and a new identity. I transitioned from being a teacher to becoming a full-time mother. I moved from independence to responsibility, and from familiarity to uncertainty.

But slowly, the “cold and icy” environment around me began to thaw. Every greeting and friendly interaction from my neighbors warmed my heart. Each English class helped me grow, not only in my language skills but also in my understanding of love and the world. The church community offered me unconditional support and a sustaining inner peace, allowing me to build deep sister-like friendships. It was within this community that a true sense of belonging was finally established.

Therefore, if you ask me, “Where is your home?”, I will tell you that my hometown is not only in China, but also in Ohio, U.S.A. For me, home is less about specific map coordinates and more about the warmth in my heart, the challenges that help me grow in my life, and a steadfast refuge for my soul. Today, I can say with certainty that Ohio is not just where I live– it has truly become my second home.

~Yanan Cang
Delaware Area Career Center

The Life of a Deer

Nothing ever in this world has fascinated me as much as the life of a deer. Unlike dogs or cats, humans don't take them in as pets.

They endure sub-zero winters, year in and year out. The mother deer raises her baby deer outside year-round. My parents had a house in the city of Twinsburg. A pregnant deer gave birth to three baby deer in my parents' backyard. Mother deer and her three baby deer would leave the backyard sometimes for one to two days, then return to my parents' backyard. Mother deer was nursing her three baby deer one day, and my father said "don't bother my deer."

They and their offspring are always enduring (even sub-zero temps.) Even yesterday as I was driving, a mother deer and her one baby deer were both getting soaked (it was raining very hard.) I wonder about their immune systems. Do they get the flu like humans? When I get wet and cold it is a good recipe for me to catch cold.

As I gaze in fascination at the mood of the deer they always seem calm, comfortable, and most of all at peace with the changing seasons from God. This also has a spiritual effect on me, making me more appreciative of all seasons and of all things from God.

As I ponder the many mental and also spiritual effects the deer have on my life, I wonder if my fellow human beings are affected mentally, and how. What do they see in the fascinating life of the deer?

*~ Tony Stovall
Cuyahoga County Public Library*

My New Life in Ohio

Since we moved here after my husband got out of the military, Ohio has given us a fresh start. Being close to his family has truly been a big blessing for us. It has given our children the chance to grow up surrounded by love and support. Also, we are building new routines and new friendships. Here, we finally feel confident about building a strong future for our family.

The slower pace of life here has helped us focus more on family time. And we've found comfort in the community and kindness of the people around us. Ohio has given us space to dream about our future. For our family, Ohio truly feels like home.

~ Primavera Miguel
Project LEARN of Medina County

Grandmother's Love

In 1983, two months after my birth, my dad and mom filed for divorce. As a result, my mother decided to live at my grandmother's house. I grew up surrounded by love, but with few opportunities in my country, the Dominican Republic.

When I turned three, my mother met someone who respected her and she started to build a life with him. My parents decided I should stay at my grandmother's house for everyone's sake. In the end it wasn't a bad decision because my life didn't change. I was always able to be a happy child receiving all affection and love from my grandmother.

My grandmother was a very good cook. She got me used to eating syrup and dessert. My grandmother was from a town in the south of Santo Domingo called Barahona, a parasol-shaped place full of rivers, a lake, and beaches. Every so often, she would take me with her to visit her friends and spend quality time together. We would go by bus, and all way she would tell me the names of the rivers, streets and share the history of each place. I can't forget her smile.

My grandmother took me to school every day and looked after me, and then she would go back alone because she had to cook. I always felt that my grandmother was proud of me, and I did everything to make her proud. She loved to watch me dance and said I was the best thing in her life. As time went on, she started getting sick, and I always went with her to the doctor. After many tests, the doctor determined that she had cancer. We never told her, thinking that if she knew, we might lose her joy. My mother had to take my grandmother to live with her, and then our lives changed. We were doing well, but Grandma's health was getting worse. But with her spirits high, she would tell me, "Don't worry, my daughter, I'm not going to die now".

I would joke with her; "Grandma, don't die on a holiday or one of your birthdays", and she would laugh and tell me, "Don't worry, I'm going to die on a day that isn't important," and that's what happened. She died on a day that wasn't on our calendar of activities, she died on June 16th, which wasn't an important day until now. The day we lost her laughter was a very painful day. My heart was broken. I still remember her soft hands, her smile, and in some ways, I can still smell her scent. If I could speak to her, I would say,

“Oh, Grandma, thank you, because today I am who I am because of you.” She left me a great legacy, and more important than money, she taught me to cook and make desserts like her.

I know my grandmother is proud of me. I would love to have her near so she could celebrate some of my achievements with me and use her hands to dry my tears during my sadness time. And even though it's selfish, sometimes I wish that she was with me, even with her pain.

I want to tell her, my beloved grandmother “you were very strong and a very resilient woman. And even though you are no longer here, you will always live in my heart. I believe that only those who are forgotten truly die. I will always love you. A kiss to heaven.”

~ Indhira Duarte
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Created This Way

Sometimes life puts us in harsh circumstances far from our dreams, making us lose our way, but this does not affect the essence of a person. No matter how harsh life is, there is a good seed inside all of us. That belief defines who I am as a person. I love goodness and peace for others and for myself. Neither place nor time will change me.

I remember when I first came to the United States. I didn't know anyone, and I went through some tough times. But none of that changed me or stopped me from doing good and helping the needy and the sick. God planted mercy and helping others in my heart. I don't look at appearance or color. We are all human beings, and we all carry the same feelings.

I was born and learned from my family and my culture that if you sow evil, you will reap evil, and if you sow good, you will reap good. And for every deed I do, I will reap its fruits, even if after a while. In the end, we are not different. When we choose kindness and mercy, we bring everyone together and make the world better. This is who I was created to be.

~ Nadya Jasim
Delaware Area Career Center

Hope

This morning, the moment my eyes opened
Anger instantly filled my chest
From the breathtaking trials of my past
That has forever had me stressed.

And tho I keep going,
for I know to go on is best,
Forbidden to give up
Now has become the greatest test.

But as I continue going,
My demons and ghosts are laid to rest
A small grain of hope shines through
And now my life somehow seems blessed.

Symbolic Meaning: If you feel that you have lost the will to live, and you have been through so much, that you are tired, just keep pushing. Something's going to pull through and things are going to work out. Just have faith.

~ Benjamin Warner
Lima City Schools

What is Connection?

So, what does one do to connect to one another? We talk, and we listen to each other. The truth is that we all crave attention and connection. What's a fear that keeps your heart closed to friends and family members in your life? I would say mine is that I'm scared to be or feel that betrayal again. Life with kind or mean folks can be hard some days. Are you ready to choose again the difficult conversations, or will you continue to die in sadness of being unknown?

You know who you are, and you know what you've done. Why lie about being you; that's like pretending your DNA isn't real. Life is so much more-- the kindness of a stranger; the warmth of a hug, or the hope in your heart. We all could learn from our ancestors. They carry our own DNA, and without learning from them, we will lose our future. Hope is just enjoying the beauty of tomorrow, but it's also about seeing our history with true eyes of hope.

If you don't have any friends, then can I be yours? Why, you might ask; well because I truly value you. You are created in the Image of God. Your story matters. Everyone has a story, and yours is super special. Thank you for sharing a bit of your humanity, the tears you've cried, the fears that keep you up at night, and the dreams you have for the future. They're vital for humans, and for hope.

Life isn't just breaths of fresh air, or the sweetness of a cup of agua! It's your voice resounding over the silence of peace, and it can either breed life or death. I hope you choose life! I want you to choose love! Will you be that person that chooses hope? Life has a plan for you, and Jesus is His name. Death has a plan for you, and the devil is his name. May you choose wisely in the grayness of life, and all its decisions. Love you, kind folks. I wish you a beautiful today, a nostalgic past, and a hope-filled future. Bye for now!

~ Monroe Joel Landis
Auburn Career Center

A Place That Feels Like Home

When I think of a place that gives me peace and comfort, it's not just one specific location. It's a collection of memories and moments that bring me feelings of safety, happiness, and love.

The first thing that comes to my mind is my grandmother's house. When I was a child and a teenager, I spent many happy days there. Life was simple and I didn't have many worries. I felt free and enjoyed the little things: the smell of her cooking in the kitchen, the sound of her voice, and being surrounded by family. These are memories that are still warm my heart today.

In my university years, I found comfort in friendship. I met people who truly cared about me, and we supported each other. That time was exciting. I was growing up, learning, and building my future. After graduation, when I started working, I experienced a new kind of peace. My job gave me a sense of purpose. I was responsible, committed, and proud of what I was doing. I enjoyed helping others, and that gave me a strong sense of satisfaction.

After I got married, my husband became my greatest source of peace. He is someone who makes me feel calm and loved. Whether he is beside me or far away, even a phone call with him gives me comfort. It is a beautiful feeling to know there is someone who truly understands you and gives you strength.

For me, home is not always a physical place. Home is the feeling I get when I'm with the people I love, doing what matters to me. It's where I feel safe, peaceful, and truly myself. Home is also the place that, when I close my eyes, the good memories surround me. Sometimes I long to return a place to so I can relive those memories. And that feeling stays with me wherever I go.

*~ Azadeh Ebrahim
Delaware Area Career Center*

Her

When I think of her
This face comes to mind
Appearing in and out of my dreams
As I sleep at night.

And though I been searching until now
And from the beginning of time
The soul and beauty of her existence,
I still have yet to find.

Merely sketching her portrait
Barely scratches the surface of the beauty I'm trying to define.
With every perfectly placed shadow and scarcely placed line
A little more of her perfection I slowly bring to life.

And though this image lies dormant deep within my mind,
For that's all I have of her, from her reality I am deprived.
But the day this beautiful angel walks mysteriously into my life,
I will cherish her forever, for her I will change my whole life.

~ Benjamin Warner
Lima City Schools

Hope

Hope is a seed we plant together

Opening our hearts can make us strong forever

People lift each other with small acts of care

Each heart can show love everywhere

~ Juliana Prazeres Amorim
Project LEARN of Medina County



Ohio Dreams

Dancing Through Tides

To simply say I love you would not be enough.

To say that my sun rises when you awake and my true rest comes in your arms would be too simple.

To say that our union as one is like the sound of a hundred feet dancing in celebration when I am in your arms would still not be enough.

Love is born in both pain and indescribable joy, through moments of sorrow and strife.

I look at you as a life-long partner, a partnership that is not broken by hurt but grows and thrives regardless of it.

Love is the persistence to follow through, heal, and change with the joyful flow of what's to come.

If a day arrives when my heart should be broken, then I will remember the moments we shared, laughed, and loved as one; the moments where you took joy in my joy; the moments where our shared spirits beat as one.

~ Ariel Penelope Harter
Penta Career Center

Relapse

It's been a while since I last wrote to you,
It's been a while since I had been waiting to
It's been a long time since I allowed
My heart to love you again.

I don't deny feeling afraid
Of showing my vulnerability
I don't want to suffer again
And once more forget myself.

My body wants for the night
Because your arms my skin desires
If only you knew
You were just mine.

Today I feel that I love you
But maybe I could hate you tomorrow
And yet, only the moon and God know,
That always, I return to love you.

~ Sofia Gonzalez
Owens Community College

Yes, Lord

My life is in shambles because of the sins I've done.
Nowhere to turn, so I turn to the One.
I drop down on my knees, and I begin to o plea
Come into my life Lord, save me.

And I mean every word as I begin to say
Like Samuel, He came and said, "here I am."
I lean on him with all my faith
He disciplines me. He fills me with the oil of grace.

I could never get enough as I continue to fill my cup
And I said, "Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord!"
He said to me, "From this day forth we walk hand and hand
But take heed of my words and follow my commands,
Do not do the things thou has done before
Stay deep into my words and prepare for war.

For you are a child of God, born again.
But beware of the wild one. Do not let him slip in.
Trust in me with all thy heart
See and lean not on thy own understanding
And I said "Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord!"

He said, "Temptation may come but you must have faith,
Believing that I am always on time, never late.
So when the world sees, it will offer me no slack
Call on me and I will lift the weight of the world off thy back.

Do not fellowship with wicked, stay wise.
Forever seeking knowledge with thy eyes for thy prize.
For I have joy, peace, and love to give.
But stay forever skeptical of the life you live.

Remember your true life has just begun.
And I am forgiving; that is the sole reason that I sent my son,
So if you should ever slip, stumble, or fall,
Repent and remember I am here.

For I will take upon my soul
The things your heart can't bear
Now follow these rules and you'll be in fellowship with me.
Now go my son and prepare for eternity."

~ *Anthony Hardesty*
Lima City Schools

It Remains, Always

When you hung up the phone,
the beep of goodbye
lasted longer than your arrival.

It still beats in my mind.
It was too easy to say goodbye,
but living it weighs on every breath.

I must let you go,
I tell myself again and again,
but your photo still rests on my shelf,
and your memory slips into every window,
like the faint light
that winter extinguished that February.

Yesterday, I saw you again;
the rays slipped in,
unexpected and shy,
and yet I felt them.

Darkness tried to devour them,
to tear away your light,
but light occurs,
even in the most inhospitable places,
and in the deepest silence,
it remains.

~ Karen Castillo Vargas
Auburn Career Center

Life

What a gift it is to grow old,

What a gift to look at your hands and see the wrinkles of time.

What a gift to see your hair turn salt and pepper and the tapestry of life on your skin.

What a gift to see the laugh lines in your eyes and around your mouth.

These lines tell a story of late nights with family, friends, and lovers.

What a gift to remember nights filled with exuberance and joy.

What an amazing gift it is simply to live.

*~ Ariel Penelope Harter
Penta Career Center*

Ohio Heals

My Beginning

It almost didn't happen. As I came into the world, I couldn't breathe, couldn't cry, couldn't make a sound. The same cord that I shared with my mom almost stole my life. It was tightly wrapped around my tiny neck. I was clinically dead for about 8 minutes. Of course, I'm telling this story, so I did make it back to this world. I'm very thankful for that.

But my challenges didn't end there. My early years were spent in a town called Unity, Ohio. My dad and mom had a very rocky relationship, and that made my young life very stressful. Seeing how badly my dad abused my mom was traumatic, and I ended up being diagnosed with PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Also, my mom struggled with addiction. It was so sad to watch. It broke my heart. My mom finally decided to leave my dad, because of all the abuse. Then we moved to Toledo, Ohio. That was not good. Not for us.

There were so many bad influences around us there. Drugs and addiction were all around us. So, my mom just got worse. She was heavily influenced by the drugs and bad people around us.

I was tired of it, so I ran away from home. I had my own experiences with some lighter drugs and crime. I ended up in jail. But that was a turning point for me. When I got out I was sent to Galipolis Developmental Center.

I was afraid at first, but I adjusted rather quickly. I made good friends and now have a boyfriend for about 6 years now. I'm 23 years old and very happy now. I'm attending class and working on my diploma. My life has changed so much for the better.

*~ Keila Brandenburg
Gallia-Jackson-Vinton JVSD Aspire*

Healing

I would like to write about a topic that has been very common in women's lives, but usually nobody talks much about it. Many women keep it like a sacred secret. For this reason, I decided to write about my personal experience of losing an early pregnancy, known as a miscarriage.

My intention is to share this with you, brave and beautiful women who may have lived through the same situation as I did. When I had my miscarriage, I had many questions without answers. I asked science, medicine, technology, the internet, my relatives, and even my close friends. Through them, I learned about experiences that I had never known about before.

Today, I would like to tell you: breathe in, draw courage from deep inside your heart, and let it go. It may sound light and easy to say, but I was able to find a path to face that grief.

I cannot lie to you, every day comes with a new challenge. But I would also like you to know that coincidences don't exist. Difficult situations happen for a special reason, and there is always a greater good.

In the middle of the silence that follows these kinds of situations, when your mind feels almost overwhelmed, you may discover that it is because a new opportunity is coming into your life. It can transform your relationships, your family, and even your friendships. It teaches you to look at yourself and care for yourself with love and respect, to value your mind, soul, and spirit, and to include your body as well. Above all, it invites you to take a great step in faith.

For this reason, I can say that Emili@ came to us for a short time to strengthen our patience, to help us trust in God, to face our fears, to look at ourselves with compassion, to correct ourselves, and to grow as a couple, as a family, and most importantly, as human beings.

So at this moment, my dear reader, I simply want to heal through these words. Let me tell you something: If a hard challenge arrives in your life, as difficult as it may be, open your heart in the middle

of the pain and pray to God, the King of the universe, so that you may receive understanding and begin to discover the mysteries of life.

With all my love, to my beloved husband and our unforgettable Emili@.

*~ Ana Doncel Vasquez
Owens Community College*

Between Strength and Weakness, Courage and Cowardice

I have lived my life walking between countries, carrying my own dreams, my own thoughts to guide me, building a life alone in places where no one knows my name. While others had hands to support them, I learned to support myself. I walked in airports with nothing but a passport, a heartbeat, and the quiet promise to build a life I deserve, even if every step felt like walking through a storm on a frightening rainy day.

In every challenge I faced, I taught myself how to survive. Studying alone, working alone in new places and facing every challenge without a voice to guide me. I learned to be my own protector, my own teacher and my own witness.

Despite all of this, I'm the eldest daughter, the one who must always know what to do, even when I had to figure out everything by myself. My family looks to me for guidance, for answers, for the calm voice, and for the wisdom I gathered from every country I walked through alone. They see the strong calm surface, not the storms I went through to create it.

But I know the truth: My strength shows in the way I keep going even when doubt whispers louder than confidence. It grew in the spaces between fear and bravery, between weakness and toughness.

And still, I rise, balancing the weight of expectation on my shoulders and the memory of my own lonely battles in my heart. I rise because I have learned that true courage is not the absence of fear, but the decision to keep moving despite it.

I live in that space between strength and weakness, courage and cowardice, where real bravery is born.

*~ Sally Ayesh
Owens State Community College*

Native Blood

If I say now that I'm lucky, it won't be enough to express my feelings. I'm lucky, and so are all those people who have a sister. It doesn't matter if she's younger or older, the main thing is that I have her. She is my support in everything. This is my own flesh and blood. She has helped me out so many times. She is always extending a helping hand.

I do just as much, if not more, for her. She had a difficult life. At age of 31, she buried her husband and she was left alone with a small child. And during that terrible time, I couldn't be there for her, to support and help her. We lived on different continents. She was here in the U.S.A, and I was in Russia. There was an ocean and thousand miles between us. I still regret it.

When I remember that terrible time, my heart aches. Her husband, Rayn Whitaker, was an officer in the army. He was in intensive care for 12 days, and then she had to make the decision to turn off his life support. On the day the doctor disconnected him from life support, she grabbed his body in her hands wanting him to wake up, but he did not. I don't know how she survived that difficult time by herself.

Eight years have passed since then; she suffered a lot during those years. But she has finally met a man; she is now expecting a child with him and she is happy again. I'm so blissful for her.

This event in our family influenced the decision that we should live close to each other, so that our children can grow up together, because we are blood relatives.

Now I'm in the U.S.A, and I don't regret anything. I had my own life there, friends, a job, a home. But in return, I gained something far more. My family and my beautiful sister.

*~ Alena Buchaka
Great Oaks Career Campuses*

Grateful for a New Beginning in Ohio

My family moved to Ohio in 2023 because of the war that began in my country. It is impossible to put into words how grateful we are for everything our community has done for our family. Ohio has given us a safe place where my children no longer hear the terrifying sirens warning of another attack. We have food and warmth. In addition, our new community in Ohio has provided me with wonderful English language courses that I truly enjoy attending, so that I can find a better job in the future. More importantly, my children are able to attend daycare, where they have fun, learn new things, and feel supported and cared for every day. We are deeply grateful to live in Ohio and to all the people involved in providing this support to my family.

~ Halyna Telenova
Project LEARN of Medina County

The Destiny of a Survivor From Goma to America: A Story of Faith, War, and Courage

Introduction

“La grandeur d’un homme ne se mesure pas à l’absence de difficultés, mais à son courage de continuer malgré elles.”

Some lives begin in peace.

Mine began with hope... and then passed through war.

I did not choose exile.

I did not choose fear.

But I chose not to give up.

This is not a fairy tale.

It is the testimony of a survivor who decided to turn pain into destiny.

In order to understand my story, it's important to know what destiny is. Destiny is the unique plan that God lays out for each human being. It is not a chance, but a specific mission that requires courage to fulfill. Many young people confuse dream and destiny. A dream is a desire we carry in our hearts, but destiny goes further: it is the path that God has already prepared for us, even if this path is fraught with obstacles. Understanding one's destiny means accepting that each stage of life, even the most painful, has a meaning and a place in God's overall plan.

Chapter 1: When War Knocked at My Door

In August and September 2010, my hometown of Goma was invaded by the M23 rebellion.

The streets became silent.

Gunshots replaced children's laughter.

Fear entered every home.

The rebels went from house to house, forcibly recruiting young people my age. Refusing meant risking your life.

I lost friends.

Some were killed.

Others disappeared.

I remember the nights I slept hidden under a bed, holding my breath, hoping not to be discovered. Every sound made my heart race. Every knock on the door felt like it could be the end.

At an age when a young man should be thinking about school and dreams, I was thinking about survival.

On October 10, 2010, I reached my limit.

With my three younger sisters and my aunt, we fled.

We left our homeland without knowing if we would ever return.
But even in the chaos, God protected us.
We arrived in Kampala, Uganda, where we registered as refugees
with the UNHCR.
That day, I left my country.
But I did not leave my faith.

Chapter 2: Seven Years in the Desert

Being a refugee is not just about moving to another country.
It is starting over with nothing.
It is living with uncertainty.
It is fighting every day to survive.
For more than seven years in Uganda, life was a daily struggle.
Providing for myself was not easy.
But I made a decision:
If war took everything from me, it would not take my future.
I trained in tailoring and sewing to create income with
my own hands.
Then I studied entrepreneurship, determined to understand how
to build something sustainable.
Later, I completed training in basic computer skills, knowing that
the world was changing through technology.
Every skill I learned was a weapon against poverty.
Every class was a declaration: I refuse to give up.
After a long season of perseverance, I secured my first job at a
company called Techno Barain.
It was not just employment.
It was dignity restored.
It was the beginning of a new chapter in my working life.
And in the middle of that difficult season, God gave me
another gift:
I met the love of my life, Justine Mbunsu.
In exile, I found hope.
In uncertainty, I found love.

Chapter 3: America — A New Beginning

When the opportunity came to immigrate to the United States, I
saw it as another open door from God.
But America was not easy.
New language.
New culture.
New system.
In Cleveland, I realized that if I wanted to grow, I had to continue
learning.
So I made a humble yet powerful decision:

I returned to school to earn my GED diploma at Seeds of Literacy.
Working while studying in a language that was not my first required discipline, humility, and determination.
There were nights of exhaustion.
Moments of silent doubt.
But I remembered where I came from.
I remembered the nights under the bed.
So an exam could not intimidate me.
The day I earned my GED was not just about receiving a certificate.
It was proof that war had not destroyed me.
It was confirmation that exile had not stopped me.
It was evidence that a refugee can become an inspiration.
This diploma was not the end of my journey.
It was the beginning of a greater destiny.

Chapter 4: What Pain Taught Me

War taught me the value of peace.
Poverty taught me the value of work.
Exile taught me the value of faith.
I learned that:

- Small beginnings should never be despised.
- Struggles are invisible classrooms.
- Destiny belongs to the persistent.

Chapter 5: A Message to the Youth

If you are reading this and walking through a dark season, hear me clearly:
Your pain is not your end.
It is your preparation.
If I — once a refugee hiding to survive — could rebuild my life in America...
Then you can write your own story too.
Do not let your past define your future.
Your destiny is greater than your wounds.

Conclusion

I am not a hero.
I am a survivor.
And if my story can light a spark in even one young person's heart, then every hardship has a purpose.
Destiny does not belong to those who never suffered.
It belongs to those who refuse to quit.

~ Guylain Ali
Seeds of Literacy

Sick of Sinning

I got sick of writing raps about wrongs.
I put drugs on the streets and drugs in my songs
I was sure of myself
I thought I was strong.
My heart was deceived for so long.
It was peace that I needed.
But how to achieve it?
My habit, I'd feed it
And my future, I'd see it
The hate in my heart was so deep
I'd sow and I'd reap.
I was searching for a love I could keep.
A hope so happy that I'd weep.
Thank God that he saved me
Where did we meet?
Water street.
In the home with my family, I was finally beat.
Tired and weak, but complete.
I had food to eat, shoes on my feet
I had learned of defeat, but this feeling, so sweet.
I finally looked in the mirror and recognized me.
Now I think.
I'll give back to the world what was so freely given.
Trust, hope, love
Courage and winning
Done with my old ways of sinning.

~ Ashley Keiser
Canton City Schools

A Change- A New Beginning

Our lives changed forever in 2022, when my husband suffered a severe heart attack. In that moment of uncertainty, we asked doctors in my country where we could find the best care in the world. Their answer was immediate: Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. And that is how our journey began.

We came to the Cleveland Clinic for the first time in January of 2023, holding on to hope. After all the evaluations, the message was clear: we needed to be here. It wasn't just a recommendation; it was necessary for survival. From that moment on, we knew that somehow, we would make our way back to Ohio, trusting that God would guide every step.

At the end of May and throughout June of 2025, my husband and I returned, searching for a home. It wasn't easy. There were moments of doubt, moments when we felt vulnerable, starting over in a new place. We looked in Chagrin Falls, Solon, Shaker Heights... trying to find where we belonged, while also discovering more of everything Ohio had to offer.

And the, one simple question changed everything:
"Have you considered going a little farther out?"
That question led us to Medina.

In July, we arrived as a family, not knowing that this small town would welcome us with such warmth.

Medina is more than just a place; it's a community where kindness is felt in every conversation, in every helping hand.

Today, we know we are exactly where we are meant to be.

Here, our children will grow up safe, surrounded by values, and supported by a community that truly cares about them. And just a short distance away, we have something invaluable: the peace of mind of being close to one of the best medical teams in the world. And for that, we are deeply grateful.

*~ Maria Tejada Polar
Project LEARN of Medina County*

Broken but Beautiful

I have been broken and bruised so many times
I have been hurt and held back over and over
Some time ago, I stopped and
When it hit me hard--
All the hurt
Has been done
But it's over.
The past is all behind me.
I cannot stay there.
I can't have a foot in both worlds
They are moving apart now.
If I try to balance in both
I will fall.
My being is now beautiful.
The fear has faded.
It is an old address
Where I do not live anymore.
I live a better life now,
But I have a story
The title is me:
"Heather's Title"
And that's just the beginning
And it has no ending
I never give up
Knowing that pain is pure like beauty
And beauty only meets the eye
I am beautiful and strong
I am all of this story
Broken and beautiful

~ Heather Knepper
Gallia-Jackson-Vinton- JVSD Aspire

Divine Intervention

I was born here in Cleveland, Ohio, as a preemie baby. I was born at 31 weeks, very early. I weighed only 4 lbs. I had a lot of medical problems as a young child - delayed childhood developmental milestones, frequent infections, and several febrile seizures when I was three and four years old.

At the age of 9, I had surgery, and I was out of school for a while. That was when my mother found out I needed special education classes. I was diagnosed by school staff at the Cleveland Municipal School District and by doctors at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital. They gave me an IEP, and then they put me into separate classes.

I have ADHD, so learning was always hard for me. I always felt behind. When I got to HS, it was even harder. I was in the same grade as my younger sister, was teased a lot, and I ended up getting in a lot of fights because of it. At 16, I signed myself out of high school, and I kind of ran away. It was all too much. I put myself down a lot constantly. All through my school years, it was very hard for me just to be there.

I have always been a small person - even as an adult. I can't gain weight, I am not very hungry, and I have had a lot of issues with my stomach. I went to see doctors and doctors and doctors... I felt like I was dying, I was in so much pain.

I lived this "my whole life" - feeling like I was in pain. It was really hard. I did not know what I could eat and how it would impact me, or if I was ever going to gain weight. It was hard to find clothes that fit my small body.

It was a long road to know what to eat and what not to eat. I had to change my diet and change everything I was cooking for my kids. Even though I was sick, I took care of my four kids and our home. I also worked to earn money, all while in an abusive relationship with someone who would not help out at all.

I had to go to a lot of doctors to find out what was wrong with me. I spent a lot of my life in Cleveland area hospitals (Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals and Metro) as doctors tried to help me. The doctors were not connected, so I had to talk about my symptoms and trauma over and over and explain it again and again. It was exhausting.

I saw 2 or 3 different doctors before I went to my mom's doctor, who diagnosed me (finally) with a rare condition called MALS (Median Arcuate Ligament Syndrome). I felt relieved to finally have a name of what I had, but I was still scared since I had to have surgery for it (a surgery done by a robot cutting into my body!). A one-hour surgery turned into a three- hour surgery.

I was alone in the hospital during my surgery and recovery. Even my mom could not be with me - she would not go into a hospital since she saw her husband die in a hospital. The doctors started telling me about what happened during the surgery, and it was a lot of information that I was not prepared to hear. It was very hard to be alone and learn it and deal with it. When I was alone - it gave me a lot to think about.

At some point as an adult, (around 2019/2020), I started having seizures again, many seizures - over 100 episodes over a year or two. The seizures affect my whole body, my brain and speech. I have a lot of brain trauma from the episodes.

The first time it happened as an adult, I thought I was having a stroke. My body tensed up. It was like an out of body experience. I felt like I was looking at myself and looking at everyone around (my kids and my significant other at the time). I could hear them but could not move; words could not come out of my mouth. They had to carry me downstairs and call EMS who took me to Metro Hospital. It was very scary for my kids; they thought I was dead. This happened out of the blue. I was in and out of consciousness, and it took maybe 5 or 6 hours for it to stop.

Although I do have epilepsy, doctors have told me these are pseudo seizures - seizures that are caused by stress and anxiety. Being in an abusive relationship took a toll on me, him being abusive, putting his hands on me and my kids.... I was also assaulted at work. I had my job for over 10 years, and then my place of employment kept letting this customer come into the store, even though he continued to assault me. The store I worked for didn't care.

I had seizures often, back-to-back. I had to stop driving and move in with my sister because I could not live alone with kids. During this time I had to leave my source of employment and I left my abusive significant other.

I was definitely depressed for a very long time. Life was hard as a kid and still is very hard as an adult. Constantly back and forth to doctors made it hard to get out of depression. I don't have seizures very often anymore, but I feel like I space out sometimes instead. I have constant headaches, and a lot of things affect me like PTSD, depression, and anxiety.

Even though I was going through everything with not being well and not being in a good situation or relationship, my four kids made it so much better. It took until 2020 to feel like myself again. Even now, I can't be in a hostile environment; if there is yelling, I feel threatened. It's hard to express my emotions, and every time I do, the shakiness of my body and voice occurs. It's still hard for me now. I feel like this is a big aspect of why I can't find another job.

I feel like I missed out on a lot in my life feeling trapped as a sick kid and in my adult situation. Now I have overcome obstacles, I feel like I am finally free to explore my surroundings and learn at a higher level.

As a single mom, not having a high income, due to education and circumstance, it was hard to raise my kids. But we get out more now than we did before.

I am now able to drive (it took a long time to get my license back - after each seizure you have to wait 6 months). We like to go to the Cleveland Metroparks a lot, and we are going on a camping trip this summer vacation. I want to go to Cedar Point in Sandusky; I have never been, and riding roller coasters is one of my favorite things. We took my mom to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; we went with the kids (but I had to avoid all of the lights to avoid having a seizure!).

We also like to go to the Cleveland Zoo as a family, this is always fun. I like to walk around in the zoo. I wish I could go to the Akron or Columbus zoos, but I always avoid the freeway. I loved the Cleveland Botanical Gardens as a kid; I want to go back as an adult. I am in a better place in life - able to explore more horizons.

I am also an artist, and I want to build a photography business someday. I bought a laptop, a camera, and a printer. I love abstract art, and I take photos of sunsets or clouds, trees, statues, or even another portrait (I find it inspirational). I love taking photographs

all around Cleveland. I like to photograph the statues in downtown Cleveland. I love to go to the beach and photograph the lighthouse and the lake. I also like to go to the Tremont area: there is a swing you can sit and swing on, and I like to photograph the bridge when it lights up in different colors. When I was younger, I wanted to have my own fashion line - I love fashion, anything to do with fashion, like putting colors together or making the perfect outfit. This passion expanded into drawing and painting, and now I love photography. Now I am trying to get back into art; it always made me feel good that I have the talent.

I have been through a lot, but I have to let it go. It's better for me to try and let it go as best as I can. I feel like now I am a better person and a better mom after all I have been through. Also, I came to Seeds of Literacy to get my GED. I try my best to keep everything together. One day at a time makes a difference. Being around good people also helps me a lot.

I have many tattoos all over my body - (getting them helps release the pain sometimes). One day I will get them all connected. There is one on my back of angel wings inspired by art I saw on a t-shirt. It is soul-freeing to me because an angel always has its wings, and I feel like when I do eventually leave this world, the wings will carry me to the next.

Author's Note:

I want to end by thanking the doctor (John E Hanchek) who finally diagnosed me and the Cleveland Clinic for saving my life with my MALS surgery. I feel like I owe him my life - he was persistent in finding out what was wrong with me, was not going to give up, and still asks my mom to this day how I am. I have never had a doctor who actually cared for a long time. Thank you.

*~ Jacqueline Smith
Seeds of Literacy*

Choosing Life

Sitting here alone tonight
I have decided to continue to fight
Taking a long deep breath
I decide I will no longer wish for death
I stare alone at the night sky
And promise myself I won't die
I will surrender these pills
This has to be God's will.

*~ Kelsey Dockery
Penta Career Center*

No Love, No Hope in Life

Liyana is a sweet, lovely lady.

Before she got married, her husband promised he would do everything to keep her happy, and that she would have a million smiles in a whole life.

But after 2 years, everything changed.

Happy and a million smiles turned to a million tears.

He always yelled at her. He told her he hated her.

He said he wanted to leave her.

He always wanted to divorce.

She tried to stay with him, but he still argued badly with her.

He hurt her feelings.

Her heart was deep in pain.

She said, "Marriage is not making both of us happy, when we are not getting along together."

So, the marriage will come to an end; it will be better.

She feels herself sink in the deep ocean,

No love; no hope in her life.

~ Ravuth Veung
Great Oaks Career Campuses

Golden Eye

When I was 23, I was living in a small three-bedroom apartment with two of my best friends (at the time). We were all single and each of us had rather lucrative jobs in the service industry, all located within the upper middle class neighborhood our apartment complex was in. Three young bachelors with expendable funds meant one thing. Buying a lot of material things that were not of necessary.

One week, one of the boys decided he wanted to buy a puppy. So he went right and did just that. He brought home an adorable brindle pitty pup that he named "Jameson" (after his favorite whiskey.) Not long after, my other friend went out and acquired his own baby canine buddy that he dubbed "Cannon" which was a fluffy shepherd mix.

Two day after I received a hefty check, it was my turn. Around this time, a girl I went to school with was running her own rescue program. She typically always had quite a selection of gorgeous little guys and gals that needed loving homes. Only when I got around to asking her what she had available, the selection wasn't as impressive. She sent me a slew of photos of nothing but bug-eyed Chihuahuas. Needless to say, I was not a fan...until...after scrolling a bit, I finally spotted the perfect guy for me. He was a very peculiar mix. He had big floppy ears, the colors and fur of a Corgi, and a slim, long legged physique of an Italian Greyhound. But his defining feature that undoubtedly solidified my decision was his eyes. In the right light, they glittered a striking golden hue. Reflecting the bright sunlight like tiny honey discs, I knew right then and there, he was the one for me. He reminded me so much of a comic book character I admired, I had derived his name from him. Remy.

For the next 15 years he was my number one buddy, my little Pokemon. We shared adventures and escapades together. Whether it was getting him riled up in a field somewhere or launching his favorite toy off for him to chase, we always had a great time. When he was around two to three years old, I bicycled around town a lot. Of course, I couldn't just leave him alone at home. So I had fitted him perfectly within my backpack. With his cute head and big Yoda ears poking out of the top of the bag, we certainly turned plenty of heads as I peddled through the city. He soon also became the best wingman ever. So much so, that he was the reason I met my (now) ex-girlfriend. Remy and I spent the next 5 years with her. But that's another story for another time.

The majority of Remy's earlier years, my mother had been living and working on a ranch with her (now) ex-husband. They had many fur babies from goats and cows to roosters and chickens. But my mom had four dogs. The two males were their cattle herding dogs, and the two considerably smaller females were the inside pups. Having the pleasure of meeting them all myself. I adored all four of them. My mother and I have always been alike in the way of loving animals.

Unfortunately, as we all know, doggy years are significantly shorter than ours. Over time, one by one all four of her babies reached their times to cross the fabled rainbow bridge that I call "the Bifrost" (mainly because I'm a fan of Norse mythology.) At this point in my life I was struggling with substance abuse issues. I had signed up to attend a rehab in southern Florida, but because of this, I couldn't bring my little guy with me. Since my mom's pups all passed away, I could tell she was suffering with loneliness, as she had also gone through a divorce shortly afterwards.

Naturally, I approached her with the task of watching over Remy while I traveled, and naturally she was elated with the idea. I had told her it could be a six-month ordeal but that didn't deter her at all.

So I kissed and hugged my bubba good bye, told him I'd be back and gave him to his "gammy" as my mom called herself. As expected, Remy and his magnificent gold gilded eyes lit up her world the same way he did mine. Since life tends to happen upon its own terms, I ended up staying in South Florida longer than six months. I made a new life in recovery for myself there. Eventually I would move to where I am now in Ohio for a more stable and permanent career. Nothing ever stopped me, however, from calling home and check in on them both. To our dismay, on August 24, 2025, the time came for Remy to cross "The Bifrost" into the Great Hall of Valhalla himself.

At fifteen years old, he had lived a very comfortable and lavish life. Mom had him cremated, and from that day, his little paw print and urn will remain safe at home with her. Though I may have other pets in the future, I will never forget my bubba boy...My Golden Eye, Remy.

*~ Joshua Fuentes
Lima City Schools*

Realize

The moment the truth smacks you in the face, unavoidable.
There's no excuses not even a trace,
And tho the realization of this matter leaves you breathless,
stuck in place,
whether it be good or bad, these feelings you cannot erase.

You strive to do better, you have no choice,
For you fear the end of the race
Keeps you on your feet and going
As if it were an endless chase.

To take a break would be okay,
But this burden cannot be replaced,
For if it gets the best of you
The consequence shall be great.

Tho this will not happen because
You know everything's at stake,
Pushing you through this challenge
Hoping not to break.

Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel makes you feel so great.
You burst with energy, careful not to make a mistake.
And now this challenge is over, conquered and laid to rest
You move on to your next challenge, being your best.

~ Benjamin Warner
Lima City Schools

Broken but Beautiful

I have been broken and bruised so many times
I have been hurt and held back over and over
Some time ago, I stopped and
When it hit me hard
All the hurt
Has been done
But it's over.
The past is all behind me.
I cannot stay there.
I can't have a foot in both worlds
They are moving apart now.
If I try to balance in both
I will fall.
My being is now beautiful.
The fear has faded.
It is an old address
Where I do not live anymore.
I live a better life now,
But I have a story
The title is me:
"Heather's Title"
And that's just the beginning
And it has no ending
I never give up
Knowing that pain is pure like beauty
And beauty only meets the eye
I am beautiful and strong
I am all of this story
Broken and beautiful

~ Heather Knepper
Galia-Jackson-Vinton JVSD

Artist Biographies

Prince Otchere - Cover

Me and My Book

My name is Prince Otchere. I am an artist. I like painting and drawing

Meihua Ren - Back cover

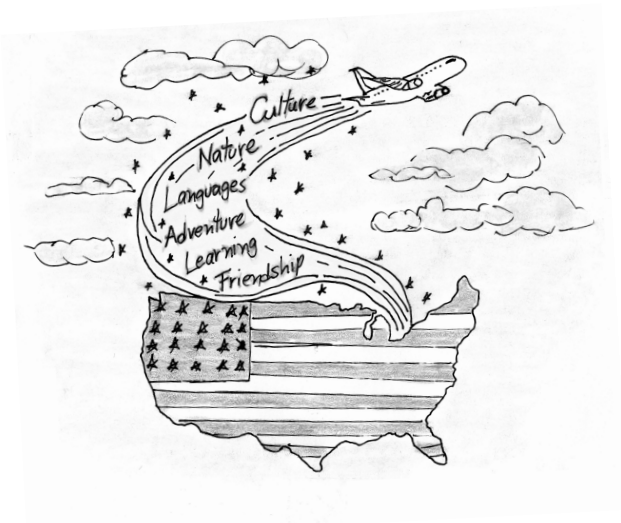
My Home Plant

My name is Meihua. I am from China, and I am a mother of three children. I have been in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) for a few years. I always enjoy the class with my classmates and my teacher. Continuing learning English is a part of my life now. In my spare time, I like to stay at home watching movies, reading magazines, and tidying up my house.

Felipe Cofré Quezada - p. 128

The Journey

My name is Felipe. I'm from Chile and my native language is Spanish. I have been living in Wooster for 15 months, because my wife is studying at The Ohio State University. I'm thirty-eight years old, and some hobbies I enjoy are jogging, watching TV, listening to music and enjoying nature and its wildlife.



Author Biographies

Triston Acevedo - p. 46

I am a wildlife enthusiast. I work part-time at the Toledo Zoo in the merchandise department. My ambitions are to get my GED and get a further education in wildlife conservation.

Guylain Ali - p. 113

Guylain is 29 years old. He was born in The Democratic Republic of Congo. In August and September of 2010, his hometown was invaded by the rebellion, and in October of 2013, he fled his country as a refugee to Uganda. He then resettled in Cleveland, and began to study for his GED at the Seeds of Literacy.

Juliana Prazeres Amorim - p. 95

My name is Juliana. I am from Brazil. I enjoy exploring new places everywhere. I would like to buy a beautiful vacation house to enjoy with my family someday. I am thankful for my house, my family, our health, our union, and for all love and care I receive.

Saki Aono - p. 22

I am from Japan. I have been living in Dublin, Ohio for three and a half years with my two kids and husband.

Tetiana Arabadzhi - p. 4

I grew up in Ukraine, but now I live in the USA. In my spare time, I like to watch a movie, cook for my family, and walk if I have free time.

Vitalii Arabadzhi - p. 17

Three words that best describe me are funny, kind, and hot-tempered. In my free time, I like to watch movies, play soccer, and go on trips. Someday I would like to attend the World Cup final and Grand Prix.

Khadija Atire - p. 62

I'm from Morocco. I currently live in Ohio. I'm a person how likes to learn new things to improve my live. Here is my first story.

Sally Ayesh - p. 110

Sally is a hardworker who brings determination and care to everything she does. She takes pride in her learning, puts in steady effort, and continues to grow through each challenge. Sally's positive attitude and dedication shine through in her work.

Bernadett Boksay - p. 6

I am from Hungary. I enjoy exploring the nature around us and being with my family.

Keila Brandenburg - p. 107

Keila is a 23 year old, who lives at Gallipolis Developmental Center. She is in Aspire class working towards getting her GED.

Alena Buchaka - p. 111

My name is Alena Buchaka. I live here with my family. I'm a happy person and this is my first time to write a story in English.

Yanan Cang - p. 85

Yanan Cang is from Shenyang, China. She is a wife and a mother to a son. With a passion for reading, music, and sports, she embraces life with curiosity and warmth. Following her initial arrival in 2019, she decided to settle permanently in the U.S. in 2023 to begin a meaningful new chapter.

Kimerly Brenda Alvis Cuba - p. 14

Kimerly Brenda Alvis Cuba is a Peruvian Materials Engineer currently living in Ohio, USA, as part of a cultural exchange. Interested in exploring new ways of life, she balances her technical background with a passion for art and an active lifestyle. Through her writing, she shares her process of adaptation and resilience when facing the challenge of living in a new environment.

Aminetou Diah - p. 76

I'm here in America for one year and six months. I'm writing a story in English.

Samba Diallo - p. 5

I'm from Mauritania. This is my first time writing a story in English. I was a math teacher in my country.

Kelsey Dockery - p. 122

I grew up in Defiance, Ohio. I faced many challenges coming to terms with my identity, but I conquered them by writing and being my true self.

Román López Domínguez - p. 73

Román López Domínguez is an ESOL student with the Delaware Area Career Center. He is from Mexico and he lives in Ohio with his wife and son.

Indhira Duarte - p. 88

I am from the Dominican Republic. I like to watch TV, cook, and write.

Azadeh Ebrahim - p. 93

I am originally from Iran and live in Dublin, Ohio. I am learning English to communicate more confidently in daily life and work, and I enjoy writing.

Joshua Fuentes - p. 124

I am a student with Lima City Schools Aspire. I am originally from Houston, Texas, but have been traveling the country since 2020. I enjoy cooking, making music, and writing. Eventually I will return home to the deep south, but for now, while I can, I'm exploring the world.

James Thomas Garrett III - p. 37

I was born in Boston Massachusetts in 1962 and came to Cleveland, Ohio. I started a cooking business for personal dining services in 2015 where now I'm growing. I live in the westside community and I have been happy. My business is called Cooking in the Hood Show with _Chef Jay Le Soul_ (216) 673-7299. I cook food for all different cultures, banquets, and table-side cooking.

Milenny Gimenez - p. 39

I'm from Venezuela, and now I live in Ohio with my family. I'm an ESOL student at the Delaware Area Career Center, and I really enjoy writing and sharing my stories. I'm grateful for the opportunity to write this article about the value of service and giving your best to make the world a better place. Thanks to my teacher who encouraged me to write.

Renee Golphin - p. 51

Renee Golphin was born in Cleveland, Ohio and has lived there all of her life. She grew up in a big family of 10 people. She started work at an early age. She has one daughter. Renee came to study at Seeds of Literacy in October of 2023. She is hoping to get her GED soon and then start volunteering somewhere.

Sofia Gonzalez - p. 99

Sofia Gonzalez came from Mexico in 2023. She started as a ESOL student at Owens Community College, while learning English and growing every day, through her dedication, she was selected for

the position of her teacher's specialist. Now here in Ohio, writing helps her share her life experiences and build confidence. She is a loving wife and mother of two boys and a husky.

Rajendra Gyawali - p. 44

My name is Rajendra Gyawali, though I am commonly known as Raj in the workplace. I was born in Nepal, and hold a Bachelor's degree in History, with a focus on Indian and European history, as well as Economics, from Trishuvan University, Nepal. I worked as a journalist in Nepal for approximately twenty-two years, during which, several of my articles, short stories, and poems were published in various Nepali magazines and newspapers. Since 2019, I have been writing in English and continue to develop my skills.

Anthony Hardesty - p. 100

Anthony Hardesty is a student of the Lima City Aspire Program.

Ariel Penelope Harter - p. 81, 98, 103

I am from the south side of Chicago, and I spent most of my youth surviving abuse, kidnapping, homelessness, and severe health issues. I did not have family except my mom growing up, and she became my best friend. I now have my step-dad, my fiancé, and a few close friends who have become my chosen family. I did not have formal education past the second grade, so my goal in the Penta Aspire program is to achieve my GED.

Jennifer Herminia - p. 78

I have lived in Ohio my whole life, but I travel around the world for work. I live in the spotlight, but I want more for myself. I am working on getting my GED. I'm not letting my failures defeat me, instead I'm using them to help me grow and change my life.

Miyako Hoshina - p. 27

I moved to the United States from Japan due to my husband's job. I have been living in Dublin, Ohio, for about two years.

Pan Yun Huo (Panny) - p. 70

I am from China. I came to the United States last April. I have been learning ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) about six months. I live in Wooster, Ohio.

Emi Ishikawa - p. 3

I was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan. My family and friends inspired me to open my eyes towards international culture and English. My journey with English as a second language has never

ended since I started learning: participating in an internship program in the US during my college degree, working internationally in the travel and leisure industry, then joining the ESL class in Ohio now. I'm sure this will continue because the more I learn English, the more new perspectives and life-changing experiences will be there.

Nadya Jasim - p. 90

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

Pricylle Jean - p. 24

I've been living in Ohio for a year now, and I'm always motivated to learn new things and experience new cultures. I am an open-minded person. I am an intense person and I love to transform my emotions.

Chermere Johnson - p.67

Chermere grew up in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. She came to Seeds of Literacy in August of 2025 to brush up on her skills and get ready for college. Chermere loves decorating and family.

Ashley Keiser - p.116

I am 27 years old and have three children. I have a special place in my heart for writing poetry and music. I mostly write about the trauma I have gone through in life from losing people close to me, or about how I am switching my life around from what it used to be. I also enjoy spending time with my kids, nieces and nephews, and close friends. I was born in Canton but grew up in Orrville Ohio. My goals are to become closer with my family, get my GED, become a published writer, and work in the music industry. My biggest goal is to work on making it out of the tough lifestyle I have lived for many years and to remain sober and teachable. Hopefully, my writing can make a difference.

Jinsuk Kim - p. 57

I am from Korea. I have been living in Ohio, USA, since late 2025. While my family is my top priority, I am also working hard every day to achieve my own dreams.

Yeji Kim - p. 21

Originally from South Korea, I hold a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and previously managed my own daycare center. Now a mother of two living in Ohio, I continue my professional journey as a preschool teacher by day. By night, I transition into my role as a creative entrepreneur, running my custom balloon and gift business, Loven Studio. I am dedicated to both my passion for advanced education and my growing business.

Heather Knepper - p. 127

Heather is 27 years old, and a resident of Gallipolis Developmental Center. She was born in Ukraine. She came to the United States as a child. She is attending Gallia-Jackson-Vinton Aspire. Her goal is to earn her GED.

Krishna Kumari - p. 35

I am from India and a homemaker. My hobbies are cooking and listening to lectures on TV. I am interested in mythological books and biographies of well-known people. I always speak politely, love others, and share good thoughts. I would like to travel to ancient temples in the future. Thanks to my teacher, Project Learn Medina, and BEGINNINGS XXVIII for giving me this opportunity.

Monroe Joel Landis - p. 92

Monroe is a 29 year old student finishing up his High School Equivalency Diploma. After he completes the GED test, he will attend his recognition ceremony in June here at Auburn Career Center Aspire program. Monroe loves to write and has a wonderful knack at seeing life and the people in it with a lens of wonder and amazement. He is very giving and enjoys spending time with people. Monroe comes from a large family of seven children. He is somewhere in the middle. In his future, he plans to continue writing.

Eunae Lee - p. 54

Originally from South Korea, I'm a mother of two sons who sees the world through fresh eyes since embracing motherhood. I enjoy imagining the future over a cup of coffee. My dream is to share my unique sensibility and bridge hearts through the English language.

Jihae Lee - p. 55

I am from Korea and have been living in the United States for about 2 years. As an ESOL student, I am learning not only English but also how to understand and adapt to a new culture. This journey has helped me grow and become more open to new experiences.

Veronica Ramires Lima - p. 82

I'm Veronica from Brazil, studying English as a second language and working as an IT consultant. I have been living in Mentor, Ohio for less than one year as I pursue a better life in the United States.

MVCTC - St. John's ESOL Level I - p. 63

Riziki Asukulu, Roylandy Martinez Cordon, Dina Salgueron Cuellar, Ahmat Daoud, Ali Abdalla Gaber, Greysi Diaz Martinez, Suliman Adam Mohamed, Karim Moussafri, Salim Adam Salim, Nail Serag

This diverse group of writers hail from all over the world and include refugees and immigrants to our country. They are working hard to learn English.

Nathalies Martinez - p. 36

I am from Puerto Rico. I work every day. I like to relax and have fun. I am learning English for my future.

Anna Beata Marvin - p. 34

Anna Marvin was born in Poland and grew up focusing on school and sports. She earned degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, and Psychology and built a career working for international companies in human resources. After many life changes, she decided to start a new chapter in her life. She moved to the United States in 2025 and now lives in Ohio with her family. She believes it is never too late to change your life and that home is where your family is.

Tracy H. McNelly - p. 50

I am a budding rap music writer and artist. My artist name is Percy 4 Ever. Percy stands for Piercing the valley with great perseverance. I have been through multiple trials and tribulations in my life, but I am still here fighting to live one day at a time. 4 stands for my four children. I am very proud to be clean and sober since November 21, 2025. I am a student in the Lima City Schools.

Primavera Miguel - p. 87

I am from Philippines. I enjoy working out after my kids go down for a nap. My big dream is to have my own salon. To achieve this goal, I want to go to beauty school and get my license first.

Amal Mohamed - p. 28

I am from Sudan, and I have lived in Ohio for twenty years.

Frank Montano - p. 33

My name is Frank. I grew up in Cochabamba, Bolivia, but now live in Strongsville, Ohio. I would describe myself as empathetic, motivated, and honest. I spend my free time playing with my kids and going to the gym. Someday I would like to create a real estate company and get my pharmacy license in the USA.

Karine Inês Bolson Moro - p. 43, 68

I am a 34-year-old Brazilian woman. I have lived in Wooster with my husband for four years. Living here has given me the opportunity to learn a second language.

Mokchiya Nanda Nepal - p. 10

Mokchiya Nepal was born in Bhutan in 1983 and moved to the United States in 2008. He is a student at Seeds of Literacy in Cleveland, Ohio. He started with Seeds of Literacy in 2009, and then returned to Seeds in 2023 to work on his GED.

Sejung Oh - p. 61

I am from South Korea. I enjoy traveling. Someday, I would like to go to the Western part of the United States.

Iryna Opetiuk - p. 29

I am from Ukraine. I enjoy spending time with my family and learning new things. My hobbies are reading and walking in nature. I am thankful for my family and new opportunities. My big dream is to build a happy and peaceful life for my family.

Minji Park - p. 25

Minji Park is from South Korea and has been living in the United States since December 2023. She lives with her loving husband and their son, who has a lovely smile. At first, she felt lonely adjusting to life in the United States, but now she feels happy and eager to take on new challenges. She is also grateful to have met her ESOL teacher and classmates.

Paula Mangas Peralta - p. 83

I am 43 years old and I am from Bolivia. I do not work in a company but I do the best work in my house taking care of my daughters. In my country I worked in human resources for many years. My husband and I have two daughters. Our life changed when our daughters were born; they brought much happiness. I am writing my first book and this is a challenge for me, but I will be happy. I always say, don't give up.

Maria Tejada Polar - p. 117

I am from Peru, and now I live in Medina, Ohio. I enjoy baking traditional Peruvian desserts. I am thankful for my family and the opportunity to learn English. My hobbies are baking and painting. My big dream is to grow my dessert business and help others.

Felipe Cofré Quezada - p. 71, 72

I'm from Chile and my native language is Spanish. I have been living in Wooster for 15 months, because my wife is studying at The Ohio State University. I'm thirty-eight years old, and some hobbies I enjoy are jogging, watching TV, listening to music, and enjoying nature and its wildlife.

Meihua Ren - p. 47

I am from China, and I am a mother of three children. I have been in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) for a few years. I always enjoy the class with my classmates and my teacher. Continuing learning English is a part of my life now. In my spare time, I like to stay at home watching movies, reading magazines, and tidying up my house.

Rahsan Roberts - p. 13

I am from Cincinnati, Ohio. I am very obsessed with high performance.

Soukaina Sal-hamy - p. 65

I am from Morocco and I came to the United States in April 2025. I used to work as an accountant in Morocco. I am a creative person who loves writing, drawing, and handmade crafts. I enjoy doing different activities and staying active in my daily life. I also like being around positive people who see life in a good and optimistic way. I prefer to be with ambitious people who have clear goals and always try to improve themselves and achieve success.

Monica Kasandra Seiling - p. vi

Monica Seiling was born in Ashtabula, OH but was raised in Cleveland, OH. As a young woman, she left Ohio to work on a traveling sales crew. At the age of 18, she returned to Ohio; then at the age of 19, she moved to Baltimore, MD. She now lives in Cleveland with her 3 beautiful children. She came to Seeds of Literacy in August of 2025 to study for her GED. Monica loves to help transform others through fitness and positivity.

Alessandra Fagioli da Silva - p. 48

I am from Brazil. I have two children. We are living in Wooster, Ohio, for one year because my husband is pursuing his post-doctoral degree.

Natália de Oliveira Neves Silva - p. 64

My name is Natália. I am 37 years old. I'm from Brazil, but I have lived in the U.S.A. since April, 2024. I am a nutritionist, and I love to work specially with women. I help them to lose weight and learn how to eat healthy. I love sports. I used to be a gymnast. Today, I work out and run, but I really want to find a new sport that I can do, no matter my age!

Jacqueline Smith - p. 118

Jackie Smith is a student at Seeds of Literacy. She came to Seeds first in September of 2008, and then she returned in May of 2023 to continue working on her GED. Jackie grew up in Cleveland and has lived there her whole life. She is also an artist - currently her focus is on photography. She has 4 children. She says that even though she has been through a lot, she is much stronger now.

Tony Stovall - p. 86

I was blessed with the honor to help nationally known jazz vocalist Miss Evelyn Wright perform a Smokey Robinson song (titled "Ooo Baby Baby.") My vocals are hereditary. My mother sang spiritual songs in churches in Alabama before she moved to Cleveland. I want to keep performing as long as I can.

Etsuko Takahashi - p. 23

I am from Japan, and I have lived in Ohio for one and a half years. I have worked in early childhood education in Japan and Australia for many years. I am taking ESL classes to improve my English, and I hope to continue my career in the United States.

Halyna Telanova - p. 112

I am from Ukraine. I would like to travel freely across Europe and see beautiful places someday. I am thankful for everything I have, for my family, and for all the help the USA has given my family.

Alejandra Tinajero - p. 8

My name is Alejandra. I was born in Mexico in August 10th. I studied high school in Mexico. I came to Ohio at age of 19. I find myself like to write in English, and this is my first story.

Karen Castillo Vargas - p. 102

I am Karen Castillo from a small town in Colombia. I am currently doing a cultural exchange program as an au pair. I am passionate about art in all its forms. I studied photography. I would like to improve my English language skills because it will help me get a better understanding and more opportunities in the future.

Ana Doncel Vasquez - p.108

I am from Colombia, and I am the older of my twin brothers. I studied Law in Colombia and specialized in Administrative Law and Civil Procedure. I also completed a master's degree in advanced legal sciences in Barcelona, Spain. I worked in different government institutions in Colombia. I came to the United States to build a family with my beloved husband, and I am currently improving my English at Owens College.

Ravuth Veung - p. 123

Ravuth Veung was born in Cambodia. I like to write stories or poems to share to people. I always help, my family and friend around when they need some help.

Sanddy Vidal - p. 12

My husband Frank, and I are from Bolivia. We have two children. Ohio's nature is beautiful and brings me so much peace.

Benjamin Warner - p. 91, 94, 126

Benjamin Warner is a student in the Lima City Schools Aspire Program.

Aliaksandr Yastremski - p. 40

I am from Belarus. Words that best describe me are cheerful, kind, and tall. Every evening, I drink a hot tea with my family. Someday I would like to visit two states at one time and go to the White House.

Zhanna Zhuvak - p. 16

I grew up in Western Ukraine near Poland. I would describe myself as cheerful and friendly. I like to read books, walk in the woods and talk to friends. Someday I would like to learn to sing and learn how to make my favorite dessert, macaroons.

Chaima Zribi - p. 26

My name is Chaima Zribi, and I am from Tunisia. I am living in the USA with my husband and two kids.

Honorable Mention

Artists

Asghar Ali
Melany Graciela Coj Aqueche
Keila Brandenburg
Indhira Duarte
Tristin Galbraith
Pan Yun Huo
Heather Knepper
Tracy H. McNelly
J.D. Nixon

Authors

Metin Aladag
Nergiz Alisanoglu
Mary Alonso
Amal Assi
Moses Awombang
Zarife Burkhanov
Yessenia Calel
Sherrie Calvert
Emily Campbell
Cui Hui (Mia) Chen
Daouda Diop
Jhonatan Duarte
Hagar Eldebeisi
Alicia Ruiz Gomez
Kaiana Green
Noensa Joseph
Weaam Kalel
Anna Kharatyan
Chihiro Kikuchi
Augusta Kugbe
Zhanna Malinovskaia
Lina Melnikava
Youssef El Moutaoukil

Maria del Refugio Guel Infante
Teresa Veronica Caceres Morales
Stefani De Bettio Nesi
Nwaugo Cynthia Okoye
Gerard Paul
Lindsey Pitcher
Patricia Rojas
Ester Samaan
Lola Shodieva
Iryna Yastremskaya
Franck Yemegni
Neda Zaghisaroukolaei
Stephanie Zamor
Ney Zamora

Discussion Questions

1. In the poem *Wind Symphony* (p. 13) Robert Rashan describes the controlled explosion that happens in an internal combustion engine. It is both chaotic and controlled. Describe something that has two conflicting traits that coexist to make it work.
2. Maria Tejada Polar author of *A Change - A New Beginning* (p. 117) talks about starting over in a new place and how she was feeling about moving. Have you ever “started over in a new place” ? What feelings did you experience during this time? How did you manage them effectively?
3. Reread *Cooking with Love* by Alessandra Fagioli da Silva (p. 48) Now think of a family recipe. What history does it have for you? Is it reserved for special occasions? Who taught you the recipe? What memories does the recipe evoke?
4. In *The Destiny of a Survivor* (p. 113), Guylain Ali recounts his harrowing escape from Goma to the USA and reflects on the lessons of what pain has taught him. What lessons has pain taught you?
5. Krishna Kumari the author of *The Heart of Ohio Work* (p. 35) discusses the benefits of job opportunities in Ohio. What jobs have you had throughout your life and how have they benefitted you and your family? What skills were you able to transfer from one job to another?
6. In Ariel Harter’s piece *Life*, (p. 103) she reflects on the process of aging and finds joy in the memories of wrinkles, grey hair, and the marks on the body we accumulate over time. Think about yourself and where you have been throughout your life. How does your body carry that experience? Do you have scars that tell a story? A tattoo to commemorate something significant? How do you feel about getting older?
7. Vitalii Arabadzhi author of *Where Do I feel Good in Ohio* (p. 17) talks about the places he enjoys in Ohio. Where do you feel good in Ohio? Write about a place that makes you feel calm or a place where you feel energized.