

Beginnings VII

A PUBLICATION OF ADULT STUDENT WRITING OF THE

Ohio Writers' Conference

OHIO LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

Foreword

Life's experiences are *rich*. Sometimes they are cumbersome, tragic, and devastating. Sometimes they encompass vivid memories that foster visual images in our minds that last forever. Often there are occurrences that we have never shared, but ones that we truly want the world to know. Such are the samplings of life experiences that you will read in this publication.

Welcome to *Beginnings VII* – the 7th annual publication of Ohio adult student writers. Here you will read reflective essays, poetry, and stories that demonstrate the power of words. First, the authors share viewpoints about the world in which we live; next, the writers offer tributes to various people in their lives, including family members and teachers; the third section captures issues of self-esteem in which the authors often write about situations that involve self-worth; and in the final section, you will read about powerful turning points in the lives of the writers.

In addition, for the second year, we celebrate the artistic talent of ABLE students in Ohio. Miguel Calderon created our cover illustration and the Honorable Mention page features artwork by Crystal Bolin. Both students attend Live Oaks ABLE in Cincinnati.

The authors of *Beginnings VII* and their teachers were honored during the 7th Annual Ohio Writers' Conference on May 21, 2004. The conference was held at the Wyndham Dublin Hotel in Columbus and was sponsored by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center. This year's celebration featured keynote speaker and renowned author Crystal Wilson Harris and award-winning storyteller Lyn Ford. Both speakers

shared thought-provoking ideas and entertainment regarding the power of words.

We acknowledge the writers who submitted entries that we were unable to publish; they are listed and recognized in the Honorable Mention section of this publication. This year we are pleased to say that we received well over 350 entries, and we thank all of the writers and teachers for their *outstanding* commitment to the writing process! We highly commend their efforts, creativity, and dedication to capturing words, thoughts, and ideas on paper, as well as their willingness to share their written products with us. We encourage all adult students to submit their original and powerful words next year.

The OLRC also recognizes and thanks the Ohio Department of Education – Adult Basic and Literacy Education Office, particularly State Director Denise Pottmeyer, for the continued support provided for this ever-growing project. We also thank the many hands and eyes that worked to review and select the best writings among all those submissions received.

We all experience life in different ways. The authors of *Beginnings VII* share their lives in creative ways in this publication. As you enjoy these sometimes humorous, often tragic, and frequently poignant submissions, we invite you to reflect on the ways in which the authors have used the power of words to craft their work.

Chris McKeon
2004 Conference Organizer

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Ohio Literacy Resource Center

Enhancing Adult Literacy

Research 1 - 1100 Summit St., P.O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001
Phone: (330) 672-2007 or (800) 765-2897 Fax: (330) 672-4841
<http://literacy.kent.edu>

At the Ohio Writers' Conference

Conrel told the story of Cleveland,
Growing up there sixty years ago:
How his Mom would take him downtown shopping
And his Dad to the Auditorium
To hear Charlie Parker and Dizzy play.
Ida recalled the home remedies
Her grandmother conjured and nursed her with
Seventy-odd years ago in the cold
Country of the Upper Peninsula.

We were lifted out of the ballroom
Into the muggy summer streets along
Lake Erie where we walked with
The wide-eyed boy eating an ice cream,
His mother holding his other hand,
Wiping her brow with a lilac-scented
Handkerchief and wishing for a cool rain.
We faintly heard from across the decades
Bird and Diz bopping "Koko" with fury;
Their music living still in the story.

We felt an old lady's callused hands
On our chests and backs as she slowly rubbed
The stinking soothing salve she concocted
Atop her wood-burning cook stove –
"You silly goose, don't hold your nose like that!
You gotta breathe Granny's medicine too
If you want it to get inside you
And work with this here rubbing I'm doing.
God, you're a puny little thing aren't you?"

We traveled north and then back again
To the banquet hall in Dublin, Ohio
Where we cheered the nattily-dressed man
And the woman with vinegar in her laugh.

The country of stories is a vast one.
Sometimes we are lucky enough to find
Companions who can show us the way.

*A poem by Francis E. Kazemek
2003 Writers' Conference Keynote Speaker*

The Worlds We Live In



UNSPOKEN LOVE

The sun has risen into the late morning sky. Fog gently lifts from the distant hills. Two wooden chairs rest upon the hillside, paint peeling from them, leaving the impression that they are without love. A small slanted table, splashed with the prettiest blue paint anyone can imagine, nestles between the chairs.

I stand behind the chairs. A smile forms on my lips, parting them slightly. I walk to the back of one chair, reach my arms over the top, and bow my head. I am hungry for companionship. I gracefully walk to the front of one chair and softly sit on its rough surface. I curl into a ball, extend my arm, and rest my hand upon the small table. I close my eyes.

Moments have passed and a scent drifts past me. I breathe deeply, tasting it as it passes. A hand touches my hand...a large, soft hand. I open my eyes to find my long lost love, kneeling before me. The wind has carried him to me; I am sure of it. My other hand runs along his cheek. I have to be sure it is him. I rise and look deep into his misty brown eyes and catch my reflection. His hand never leaves mine. His other arm circles my neck...a gentle hug. He stands, still holding my hand. We walk down the hill and fade behind the tall pine trees that clutter the valley.

Rebecca Mzik

MY TRIP TO THE OPTOMETRIST

My trip recently to the optometrist was like taking a trip without taking drugs. On the day I had to go to the eye doctor, I did all of the necessary things that I had to do to get ready. As I was preparing to leave, my husband asked me if I wanted him to go with me. I told him, "No, thank-you. I will be fine by myself." The only challenge I would have (according to the Receptionist-Pastor of the church) would be to climb up a flight of very steep steps.

I made it up the steps and gave the Receptionist-Pastor my relevant information and waited for the optometrist. When my turn came, the optometrist introduced himself as, "Dr. Durner, which rhymes with Turner." He gave me the standard eye exams and checked my eye pressure. When he gave me my examination, I knew I had made a mistake coming alone. He told me that he had one more procedure to do. This was when the fun began.

Dr. Durner told me he had to dilate my eyes so that he could check for glaucoma and any other problems I might have. I knew I was in trouble. I did not know beforehand that he was going to dilate my eyes. So instead of saying, "I will come back at a later date because I am alone," I let him put the drops into my eyes.

Dr. Durner told me to relax and to let the drops do their job. He left and came back about ten minutes later and checked my eyes with the microscope. He finished my eye exam, and I picked out my frames and left his office. I remembered that I had to leave his office the reverse way that I had in getting there. I had to go back down the same steep flight of steps.

When I finally got to the bottom of the steps, as I opened the door to go out to the street, I hit a homeless man in the back. I didn't even see him. He jumped up and apologized for sitting on the steps. He said, "I was sitting here trying to get warm since the sunshine was so warm,

pretty and bright." I felt so embarrassed. I didn't even see him! I apologized to him and found the way to my car. The sunlight was brighter than I had ever experienced. It was blinding and very big. Everything was extremely pretty and very, very intense. It would have been more so if I could have only kept my eyes opened long enough to see things better. It was so hard to keep my eyes open. I wanted to keep closing them, and I knew I could not drive with closed eyes.

I sat in my car for a few minutes trying to decide whether I was going to try and drive home by myself, or if I was going to try and make it to a telephone and call my husband to come and rescue me. I told myself, "Self, quit being a baby because you know that you can do this, so drive yourself home." So, I drove myself home, but I decided to stop and get a newspaper on the way. When I was in the store, it seemed like everyone was watching me, and I felt paranoid. I felt like they were watching to see if I was doing something wrong.

I got back into my car, then came to a conclusion. Since I could not see very clearly, but I could see colors, especially red, I decided to follow closely to the vehicle in front of me, paying attention especially to the brake lights. Every time the car in front of me hits the brakes, I told myself, I'll hit mine. I hit my brakes a lot of times. I looked in the rearview mirror, and I could see the cars behind me. They stayed way, way in back of me. What should have taken me about ten minutes turned into 20 minutes or maybe more!

When I finally did get home, my husband was on the porch looking for me. He said that he was sorry that I had to drive home alone, and he was very ashamed of himself for not going with me when I had my eyes examined, especially with the colors being magnified the way I described them. I told him that I did not want to go on an eye dilation trip by myself ever again. Good riddance to them.

So, the next time, if I, or you, or even someone you know has to go to the optometrist, get someone to go with you. Do not go alone or you will have a Dr. Durner, which rhymes with Turner, dilate your eyes and you will have to drive home alone on a trip all by yourself.

Patricia Shields

MUSIC IN MY LIFE

Music is my food, my water, my addiction...

Unbelievable to imagine living without it!

Sometimes I wonder how sad the world would be without music.

I love music, I breathe music! It feeds my spirit! It makes me powerful!!

Castles of dreams in my mind are made and destroyed by its rhythm...

I can go wherever I want. I have no fears. I can win battles, all my battles.

Nothing scares me! Nothing gives me such strength, such energy in my life.

Music is feeling, magic, fantasy, and always touches my soul deeply...

Yesterday, today, tomorrow, forever and ever...

Love, emotion, caring, affection, tenderness and inspiration...

Inspiration for love, inspiration for peace, inspiration

For remembering you, and for loving you wherever you are.

Especially because you are no longer here anymore...

Altair Costa

THREE WAYS TO CHANGE A TIRE

I want to teach you how to change a tire. Now, this is very different for different folks. For instance, for most men it isn't that hard of a job. But for some, who don't know the workings of a car or truck, it might be a real trip, to say the least.

For the adult man, the directions are pretty simple. First, try to find a hard, flat surface and set the emergency brake. It might take some time to find that emergency brake, especially on the newer models, but don't give up. Once it's set, get out the spare tire, jack, and lug wrench. Put the jack where the picture tells you to put it. Loosen up the lug nuts (why they call them that, I just don't know) and jack the car up off the ground. Finish taking off the lug nuts and remove the flat. Put the spare on, tighten the lug nuts and let down the car or truck. Put your tools, the flat tire, and the jack back in the truck, and you should be on your way.

For a woman to change a tire can be a real nightmare. This isn't a job for high heels and short skirts, but that might work to your advantage sometimes. Getting the spare, jack and lug wrench, and knowing what to do with them could be a challenge. My advice is: use your cell phone to call your husband, brother, or AAA for help.

Now, there are totally different rules for a twelve-year-old, whether a boy or a girl. Watching your dad change a tire, in a tux, while going to your aunt's wedding will be a real learning experience. You might hear words that you have never heard before! The best thing to do is to go to your local library and read a book on how to change a tire, so you will know a little bit about what goes on and then, maybe help a little bit, when you are older.

James Prohn

WINTER AIR

The darkness comes quicker in winter.
The days are shortened.
Time seems to be cut in half.
You get tired hours earlier.
You hope you don't have to step out into the
Blistering cold.
And it is blistering.
Your hair, if wet, will freeze in seconds.
Your body will begin to shiver.
Your ears and nose will turn red.
Your fingers will become numb.
If you step out into the winter air, the effects will begin.
This is why you must stay in.
In the house by seven o'clock.
In the warmth, the light.
Not *in* the cold darkness but surrounded by it.

Marie Davis

LOOK OUT THE WINDOW

I live in Powell, Ohio. I have lived here since August of last year. I lived in a very hot country, Venezuela, most of my life. We had only two seasons -- one of them is hot and the other one hotter. Because of that, I think that everything here is amazing and new. The seasons are special for me.

The first season is spring. A lot of rain is characteristic of that season. All the trees and flowers need rain to grow up and blossom. Soon, you will see all the flowers blossom and the green leaves on trees. You will see the hills covered with a giant green carpet. Nature is wise!

Afterwards, summer comes and with it the heat. Many people say, "it's too hot!", but I think it's not as hot as in the Sahara Desert. In fact, you need the heat to tolerate the coming cold. All of life needs a little bit of hot, the trees, flowers, and people too. Also special, flowers blossom more beautifully, and you'll smell their wonderful aromas. The view changes, there are many pretty colors everywhere your eye can see.

Then comes the fall. It's my favorite season. The wind blows very strong; you can feel the wind softly touching your skin. Soon you can see all the trees become a mix of multi-colors. You can also see trees become completely red, brown or yellow. I had never seen anything like that, only in a photograph.

It's awesome when you see a forest covered with a cloak of red and yellow colors. The trees move softly, and the very high trees seem elegant. The wind touches them and takes one by one all their leaves; they fall onto the lawn as if they were dancing with the wind as a partner, kind and gentle. Now the trees are bald. You can see a dramatic

change in the view. But if you know that the weight of winter ice could break and cause some pain to them, then you'll feel better. You accept them as they are, enjoy the sight, and remember: Nature is wise!

Finally, the winter, cold arrives, the snow and the ice too. When it's snowing you can see peaceful delicacy of the snowflakes. They look like cottonballs. When you look out of the window you feel peaceful; everything is white and seems to be very soft.

The lakes freeze. It's amazing -- they look like a big mirror. You can throw a piece of ice onto the surface of the lake, and when the piece of ice is broken it seems like a lot of tiny pieces of glass moving along the lake. It's like those pieces could be alive....

Many people say, "I don't like the winter. It's too cold!" But I think the best way to bear the cold and the freezing wind is to think about the greatness of nature and all the gifts that she can give us to enjoy.

Rita Perez Morales

MY SEASON'S GOLD

Tiny little flakes so cold
They twinkle like glitter and shine like gold

I love it when it falls so fast
I love it more when it does last

It fills us all with joy and cheer
Reminding us all that winter's here

When it appears outside I'll go
Because you see I love the snow

Heather Warner

MY FAVORITE PLACES

Two places around our old house are very special for me: the kitchen sink and the grass-covered backyard. I do not know exactly at what point in the last twenty years they became important for me. Maybe the kitchen sink was the first one. The backyard came later.

I think that my relationship with them is a strange feeling. It is some kind of affection. I know it is not love, but I know I do care for both, and occasionally I miss not having them with me.

I did not realize how important they were for me until we moved to another place. This new place has a nicer kitchen sink, but it is not as gracious as the old one. It seems to me that the new sink is not as friendly as the older one.

I like to spend time in the kitchen, enjoying all of those small things that kitchens usually have. I like to look at the various sizes, shapes, and textures found in kitchens. I love the countless aromas and flavors that by some magical chemistry become different when mixed together. Each time I discover new smells and mixtures of all sorts. I like the smell of fresh fruit and vegetables and the aroma coming out of the oven when some dish is being baked. It seems to me that during the night, in the darkness, the kitchen has kept and blended new aromas for me to enjoy the following day.

As for the sink, I can say it is my "thinking place." Many times, I do prefer to do dishes myself instead of throwing them in the dishwasher so as not to deprive myself of the pleasure of thinking and allowing me a time for myself, for me to be alone. Sometimes I do need only a few minutes at the sink to look inside me. It is like an interior mirror. I know for sure, that most of my best and worst thoughts have come out of my kitchen sink time. Although this new sink is not as friendly and sweet as my old one, I believe that someday soon we will become "friends."

My other long-time affection is the backyard of our old house. On sunny Sunday afternoons I used to grab a blanket and extend it on the backyard grass. It was so good to lay there facing upwards, staring at the sun, the clouds, or the intense blue sky. Other times, I just laid facing down feeling the grass and trying to catch the smell of humid, wet soil. If alone, I sometimes used to read; or if not, it was wonderful just staying there surrounded by silence, looking nowhere, just looking.

Occasionally, we were lucky enough to have a bright and clear night, with all the stars displayed as if on stage. In these rare occasions, my family and I would get our old plaid blanket. We would take it to the backyard and stay there for a while, facing upwards, enjoying stars, silence, and sometimes small fireflies, all of them embedded in an infinite sea of blackness.

As I write these lines I realize how much I do miss the backyard grass. One of these days, I might look for a house with a nice backyard and deep green grass. I also would like to meet a friendly sink. These too may deserve one day to be added to my list of favorite places.

Monica Pazmino

FALL'S BLESSINGS

I see the beautiful changing of the color of the leaves.
I feel the crisp cool air.
I hear the rustling leaves on the ground.
I smell the baking of apple pies and cider.
I say that fall is my favorite time of the year.

I see the orange pumpkins in the fields.
I feel the cool of fall in the air.
I hear the squirrels gathering food.
I smell fresh baked pumpkin pies.
I say Jack Frost is nipping at our nose.

I see the beautiful nature of the world around me.
I feel the warm sunshine upon my face.
I hear the waters flowing down the streams and water falls.
I smell the dew upon the lilies and wild flowers.
I say we are blessed with the nature of this world we live in.

*ABLE Class – Terry McMillan, Vickie Hargraves, Art Massengill
Live Oaks*

HOBO

The steel rails ring as the iron
Pony rolls along, putting miles between
Me and my troubles but yet bringing
Me closer to my problems.
As the box cars settle to a
Stop I slide the door open and
Quickly hop. The rail yard's busy
With old black men, breaking back
Labor till the day's end.
With campfire crackling I make
My bed and on God's earth
I lay my head.

Charles Ladd

JOURNEY TO AN UNKNOWN PLACE

When I came to Ohio on August 11, 1999, I was impressed with this beautiful state. Although my country of Colombia has beautiful mountains, a lot of vegetation, and fauna, I just said, "This is an amazing place!" The different sorts of flowers in the summer and the colorful trees in the fall make these seasons unforgettable.

Everything was strange to me: a different country, weather, people, and their customs. Despite my husband's support, and his family being very close to me, there were many sad moments. One of them was when I got sick. I could not express my feelings very well, and also was very frustrated in my daily life because when somebody talked to me or asked me questions, I was unable to answer anything because I did not understand.

Although the meals and supper time are also different, it is not a big deal to me because I can cook whenever I want. The food here is good, but some kinds are very spicy to me. Desserts are really delicious, but I am not very fond of sweets. In my country, we don't have many choices for breakfast like here, and I think they are delicious.

Customs are different here, too. In my country we have many parties to enjoy our friends or families. Even on vacation, we like to go in groups because we can have more fun. The people here are more serious and spend a lot of time working. Obviously, they don't have time to socialize.

I will not forget my country and the friends I left behind, but somehow I fell in love with this state and its wonderful people. To learn English has been one of the biggest challenges in my life. I feel very proud of myself and very thankful to my teachers because I can understand 80% and read 95%, as well. I look forward to further improvements. I have met many generous people with great values. Consequently, it makes my life better and gives me hope for the future.

The winter doesn't get along with me, but I will try to make it my friend because the snow is the winter's decoration. I could not believe my eyes when, for the first time, I contemplated the powerful magic of the snow. It seemed to me that everything had a cotton covering on it, and it brought back memories from my childhood when my grandmother showed me pictures in fairy tales. But this time, the tale was real. And as fairy tales always have happy endings, I really know the reward for me will be not far away when the birds announce to me that spring is here!

Emily Nutter

MY MEMORY OF THE LIBERTY CITY

Nightlights covering the high tall buildings.
The voices of every culture surrounding the city.
Enormous amount of traffic that never ends.
Movie theaters in every part of the Bronx.
The most delicious large slices
of pizza I have ever come across.
Food stands in every corner during the hot summer days.
Open water pumps wetting everyone
and everything that passed their way.
Never, ever to hear complete silence.
A small rubber ball always getting
slammed against this tall brick wall.
Swings that I thought could go as high as the sky.
Beaches that look like there were no end to them.
People knocking on doors, always having something to sell.
Using stairs in the winters to go sled riding instead of hills.
Feeling that night and day were one in the same.
Hearing this unknown voice on television
counting down from 10 to 1 every New Year.
Waking up every morning knowing
that there was so much to do.

Frances Dillon

SOUTH KOREA

Calm round mountains on the horizon.
Pine trees all around.
Winding roads in the countryside.
Peaceful lakes give us pleasure.
Kind people greet us wherever we go.

Eunjung Kim

MY KENTUCKY MEMORIES

My favorite place to visit is my family's farm in Kentucky. This farm can't be reached by any means of travel. It can only be reached if I think back on all the wonderful memories of my family and my childhood innocence.

If I sit and think long enough I can picture the main road that runs through a small town. If you look away then look back you will have missed the town. It's so small. As you come into the town on the left you will see Shoemaker's General Store. If you come during the summer, you will see all the lush produce sitting on the front porch of the store waiting to be taken home and enjoyed. On the right you will see the post office that also serves as the local jail and courthouse and blacksmith's shop. A few miles out of town, just before you get to the cut off that leads back to our farm, you will pass Harlan's Auto Repair Pool Hall and Bar where you can get your car or truck worked on and get drunk at the same time.

Now we come to the coal field cut off. Which way do you think we should go? If you go left you will take an old coal-hauling road that leads back to the old abandoned coal mine. So we want to go right, and in my opinion going right is the closest you can get to heaven without dying. If you have reached this spot at the fork you are on your way to the Hopper Family Farm where our motto is, "A stranger is just a friend of the family we haven't met yet." After a few minutes on the road you will see a big hill off to the left. And as we come closer to the crest of the hill, you will see a black and rusty iron fence that has kept people out and many generations in. You might be thinking, "What is he talking about?" When you get to the top of the hill you will see what I am

talking about: big black words that say cemetery. By now we should be at the top of the hill, and all you will be able to see is beautiful farmland in every direction you look. My people call it God's country.

As you come down our driveway you will see fields of corn and beans on both sides of the road as far as the eye can see. Now we have come to the end of the road, and ahead you will see a big farm house that looks like the whole state could live in it. All told there are thirty-some rooms in that house. As we get out of the car we will be met by an old man with a weather beaten face, salt and pepper hair, wearing a pair of faded overalls with patches on both knees and an old coal black pipe clenched between his stained teeth from years of chewing tobacco. This man would be my great-grandfather, Zebulon to the bank, Zeb to family and friends, and Paw Paw to the grand kids. The old lady with the stern look on her face wearing the old gray summer dress with the black stockings and the old-time lace-up lady's boots would be my great-grandmother. She was called Annie at the bank, Aunt Annie to family and friends, and to her grand kids she was Nan Nan. By looking at this little old lady you would not have known she had twelve kids. Don't be afraid of the mangy old hound dog. She's harmless. She doesn't have any teeth. By the way her name is Daisy.

If you look hard enough you might see one of the farm hands hard at work plowing the field or maybe milking one of our twenty-six dairy cows. There used to be seven farm hands, but now there are only six. The seventh was an old man named Mr. Jed. He was a kind old man. He had worked for my family for years, and one day while working on the old tractor that poor man died of a heart attack. My grandparents thought so much of him that they had him buried in the family graveyard.

Who knows, the rest of the farm hands might get buried on Hopper Hill.

Well, it's just about suppertime. We best get in there and wash up for supper because in our family, if you're late for supper you might just be eating with the hogs. As you walk through the big oak front doors, off to the left you will see the library. There are so many books in there it would take you twenty years to count them. Some of the books are over two hundred years old. Off to the left is the parlor. If you look on the walls you will see pictures of many of my late family members. The big picture over the grand fireplace is of my great-great-great grandfather, and if you are wondering why there is a black cloth draped over the top, it is because he gave his life for his country in the great Civil War. Straight ahead you will see the dining room. Off of that is the kitchen. By now you should be able to smell that big kettle of Nan Nan's famous soup beans and her big pan of corn bread, and if you listen you can hear the sizzle of the taters frying in her big old cast iron skillet. This will be a supper you will never forget for the rest of your life. After dinner, because Nan Nan always made so much, Paw Paw and I would climb into his old I.H. that he bought new in 1928 and take it to town to give everybody some of Nan Nan's home cooking.

After supper we'll sit out on the back porch and watch the sun go down and then turn into bed because 5:30 in the morning comes early for someone who is not used to it like you. We get to help with the morning chores. Ah, the feel and the smell of the fresh country air. Look, there's Paw Paw out there feeding the stock. That can be an all-day job because we have thirty head of hogs, two hundred head of cattle, and a handful of chickens, goats, and sheep. Who knows what else is around there? The old man out by the small barn on the

left of the big one is Ed. He is turning the tobacco that is hanging there to dry. The other big barn is where we keep all of the farm equipment that we need to keep this farm going. Over there in the high weeds is what to most people would look like a big pile of rusted metal, but to us is what is left of the some of the first farm equipment ever used on the farm. If Paw Paw had his way about it, he would still be farming with a horse and plow.

Well, after we eat lunch we will pack our things, say our goodbyes, and be on our way. This is the part that pains me so much, that I have to leave the place that I have loved for so many years. Now I have to leave my cherished memories behind and come back to the real world, but I know that when I want to go back the only thing I have to do is sit there and think and dream of a simpler time in my life. That, you see, is why my family's farm in Kentucky is my favorite place to visit.

Jesse Wilson

MY WORK EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE OCEAN

I was getting ready to leave on my first trip across the ocean. It was all the way from Seattle to Alaska. I wasn't traveling for fun, even though I had a lot of fun. I was among 200 employees who were assigned to work on a ship in Alaska. I could imagine how much it cost people to ride through the ocean so they could enjoy the attractions of the sea. I could even see the beautiful tourist ships cruising by and people taking pictures of us. But, for us, it was different. All the trip expenses were on our employer, even the food. We felt very lucky.

We leaned over the deck rails as the ship sailed smoothly. We watched in fascination as a group of humpbacked dolphins leaped above the water. We started telling strange tales about them and how they are as smart as humans and a lot kinder. We were watching the dolphins all evening until they all disappeared in the darkness of the sea. As we stayed out on deck we laughed and joked.

Then, for a moment, I was afraid when night came and it was too dark to see far. The world stretches far across the sea to where the ocean tide begins to lap back. I had to be careful. If I forgot that I was on board a ship, I could slide from the deck rails to the icy water. I shivered, then laughed at myself. "I had better get inside," I said.

Over the days we saw more and more fascinating creatures. As we sailed along the Canadian shore we saw dolphins, sharks, and gulls.

After five days of pleasant atmosphere, we bumped into rough weather. People started to get seasick. I saw some of my roommates throwing up and moaning. I tried to go to the galley to get some drinks for my roommates, but I staggered like I was drunk and couldn't move forward. It was miserable. All the happiness that was glistening in our faces faded slowly.

When we reached Dutch Harbor, Alaska, our final destination, the crew manager gathered us for a meeting. He gave us a brief explanation about the job. He told us that our pleasure trip was over and we should be ready for work beginning the next evening.

The next evening, when we started the job, the electricity went out. It was black. You could not see your hand in front of your face. We were reticent for a second with shock, then screamed and yelled, "Titanic! Titanic!" Some of us cried. We thought we would end up in the frozen sea. We were very scared. About 15 minutes later the lights came back, and we all cheered with ecstasy.

On the ship we processed fish and crab. We had to work 18 hours every day. People did different jobs. I was assigned to inspect fish fillets for worms, parasites, and bones. I stood next to the fast moving belt the whole 18 hours. I had to work fast; otherwise the defective fillets would pass through. It was a very challenging job. Every day we saw some people packing their stuff and going home, while others teased and made fun of them.

Even though we continuously worked most the time, we had some rare gaps between shifts due to the weather conditions. When the small boats couldn't bring the fish to us, we had a couple of hours or a full day off. We used to stay out on the deck to watch the sea and its wonderful animals that gathered to feed on the food remains we threw into the sea.

When I was about to finish my contract, which was four months long, I got a bad cold. The worst thing that can happen to you when you are in Alaska, and on a ship, is to get sick. There is no doctor to see or clinic to visit. Besides that, the managers never let you take one day off to get rest. I was feeling bad day after day. Then, one day I ignored all the rules and went to the safety manager's office. He had some basic first aid medicines. After a couple days, when I had already used half of the medicine, I noticed the date on the container had expired. I went back to him and told him

about it. He told me it was OK; everything they had was expired, except the fresh fish we processed on the ship. I tried to go to my manager to tell her what happened, but the safety manager who gave me the medicine snatched it from me. When I mentioned it to the biggest boss on the ship, she replied, "Medicine never expires." There were a lot of women on the ship and one of the ladies from Ethiopia made me a homemade remedy of honey, lemon and hot water. After a couple of days I felt better, and I could continue my contract.

After all these experiences I consider my work across the ocean a wonderful experience.

Farhan Farah

LIFE

Cold morning, Warm colors

Hard ground, Trees, Fragile sprinkles

Feel the throb: Nature

Hiromi Nabeshima

THE CAMPOUT WITH MY GRANDSON

My name is John; I am the grandfather of Daniel. He is in the first grade, which brings many new things like Cub Scouts, which teaches things like camping and working for pins, badges, and patches.

My grandson had an overnight camping trip October 17th. His father was unable to take him, so his parents asked if I could take him. I said, "Yes," not knowing it would be the coldest night of the month.

As we packed up the car the day of the campout, the day was sunny but cool. We were getting a late start because he had school that day. We left for the Cub Scout camp about two hours before dark to meet the other young men and their dads. We arrived at the campsite about one hour before dark and still had to put up the tent. We could tell it was getting colder. We finished just before dark.

Then it was time for food, hayrides, and singing around the campfire. As bedtime grew closer, the air was getting quite cool, but the campfire felt good.

About 9 o'clock we went to bed; by this time it was getting quite cold. We got in the tent and into our sleeping bags to get warm. We called my wife and then his parents to tell them goodnight. As we lay there, teeth chattering, trying to go to sleep, my grandson exclaimed, "Papaw, if I'd known it was going to be so cold, I wouldn't have come." Daniel scooted down into his sleeping bag where I couldn't even see his head at all. Suddenly, I heard a noise. I said, "Daniel, Daniel," but he was asleep. The sound I heard was coming from him. He was snoring. He slept well that night, but I tossed and turned all night.

The next day I got up early and ready to go, but Daniel slept until I woke him at 8 o'clock a.m. It was time for breakfast, then off to earn a badge. First he did archery, then air rifle, rock climbing, nature trail, and then a demonstration on dogs trained in hunting.

Then that afternoon, after a time of fun, he received his badge. It was then time to go home. We had fun and learned something new that weekend. This was my first, but hopefully not my last, campout with him.

John Berling

MY FAVORITE TIME OF DAY

My favorite time of day is the morning. I like to walk along the lake in the park in any weather. Throughout the year, I never go out without sunflower seeds. I feed squirrels in the park. They know me and run towards me. I meet lots of people with their dogs in the morning. I know them, their names, and their dogs' names. We often stop and talk.

I train my brain by translating Russian jokes into English and telling them. The people I meet walking like my jokes and laugh a lot.

When I became a citizen, they gave me a gift. On Easter they presented me with a bunch of pussy-willow flowers. These flowers are a tradition for our Russian Christian Easter like you have Easter lilies for your Easter. When they don't see me some days, they worry and ask where Alla is. I like them very much. These Americans are kind souls, well meaning and friendly. God bless them!

Alla Pilipenko

FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Some people crave wealth, prestige, and fame,
And their ambitions are difficult to tame!
Some of them eventually achieve those things,
Honestly or unjustly they satisfy their hankerings.
Wealth, prestige, and fame are blessings sent
From God alone, and they're temporary advancement.
Some people can't handle or mismanage their success,
By excluding God when he chooses to bless.
Immediately by Satan they're snatched then led,
And suddenly success goes to their head!
They become conceited, snobby, selfish, and foolhardy.
Some will isolate themselves and others excessively party.
They become spoiled, promiscuous, vindictive, and boastful.
Some of them become addicts while being social.
They abuse their authority over others boldly
And treat their relatives and friends coldly.
Some of them achieve a big promotion
And sadly believe they need no one.
Soon, all that they've achieved has crumbled.
Afterwards they are awakened, bitter, or humbled.
Soon they are painfully forced to choose,
Pleading help from those whom they previously misused.

Marie Young

HAVING GRANDCHILDREN

Does anyone know what it is like to have a child you can't
see--
wondering if this child is ever thinking of me;
being a grandmother of an unwed son,
when your so-called daughter-in-law thinks keeping him away
is so much fun?
I never even know if he could recognize me.
Does he even know that we are always praying for him and
Jesse?
It is not fair the way the world is today
because who in the long run is going to pay?
Every child deserves all the love,
and every grandparent can give him a hug.
If my child made this baby,
why can't I have rights to him, lady?
I want to see my flesh and blood, too.
why do I always have to be blue?
There are laws that say I have rights,
but I don't want to put Garrett through this fight.
Just let me see him once in awhile,
and then those charges won't have to be filed.
I don't want any problems with anyone;
I just want to see my grandson....

I love you Garrett Gillispie
From Grandma

Carol Helton



Tributes



DAD'S EYES DANCED WITH CANDLE LIGHT

Dad's eyes danced with candle light,
As children waited in pure delight
For tales he wove of his childhood years—
Of smashing pumpkins on Halloween,
And being chased by police
Through alleys and streets,
Of stealing pies from a neighbor's porch,
And scaling a water tower on a three-dollar bet.

Dad's eyes danced with candle light.

He slapped his knee as the
Room filled with laughter.
The children imagined
The boy they never knew.

Dad's eyes danced with candle light,
As children pleaded, "One more, Daddy,
One more story, please!"

Dad's eyes danced with candle light.

Lisa Holmes

A BOND BUT WITH REGRET – A 9-11 MEMORIAM

We went to work that day,
A day like all the others
But as the day would come to end
We would reach out to our brothers.

Everything turned upside down
As we saw those towers crumble
Our hearts were aching inside out
Our nation was made humble.

Ghostly figures in the dust
Darkness everywhere
Rubble, dust, and agony
A nation in despair.

Expressionless gray faces
Searching aimlessly through rubble
Searching, wandering, desperate
Buildings down to rubble.

We pulled ourselves together
And our freedom was relearned
And as the ashes cleared that place
The world watched in concern.

We have rebuilt that city
But never will forget
The day that our great nation
Found its bond
But
With
Regret.

Polly Baker

THE ROCKING CHAIR

My Grandma had a rocking chair, and she sat in it all the time. She got it from her mother and loved it so much that she wouldn't let anyone else sit in it at all. Then she got sick, and she wouldn't eat at all. She passed away, and so we put a candle in the rocking chair. We didn't know it, but she had written some poetry. We put it in the rocking chair with the candle. It just sits there in the window, and no one sits in it at all, but her spirit.

Sherri Flynn

PRAY

Each time I lay down to pray
I thank God that you want to stay

Without you in my life, it would be hell
I'd never want to leave this cell

If you weren't in my life, I'd cry
In fact, I might even want to die

My love for you is still strong
I want to love you forever long

Being without you now is all I can bear
So, please say that you'll always be there

I hope you'll be with me when I return
'Cause that's what love's all about

I'll say "I love you" so loud
That it can be heard in a cloud

My love for you will never shrink
And with you, I'm tickled pink

I know the wait may be long
When I return back to you, I'll never do wrong

Tracy Bodnar

MY FAVORITE HOLIDAY

My favorite holiday, to be honest, is my children's birthdays. They are the most favorite times for me. I remember when my children were first born and when I held them for the first time. Now I spend time with them each year on their special day doing special things to make each year more memorable for them. We celebrate their birthdays for four days straight. We usually have a day set ahead of their birthdays called a mother and son day or a mother and daughter day. That's where we spend time together doing what they enjoy even if it's just talking, laughing, and acting silly. That's what we do.

My children enjoy their birthdays with me. It takes us two days to prepare for the day of their birthday. First, I go to the store to buy their special foods. Then, I get the cake, balloons, and other gifts they might like. Also, I get their favorite movies. We play games and play music, and we dance for hours. It's so funny because the children are trying to teach me the latest popular dance steps. Later they start to tease me and imitate my moves. We laugh, sing, and play throughout the festivity. We stay up all night until the day after that person's birthday has passed.

Their birthday is also a day with little or no restrictions. My children can pretty much go crazy having fun. I cancel everyone out of this special day. I will not have any hindrance or infringements on our time together.

Also their birthdays are a time to reflect and share the moment and the previous year's joys, pains, and expectations. Sometimes we allow other people to join in the celebrations but not too often. My children like it when it's just us. Each year on my children's birthdays we get closer; our relationship becomes much deeper. It's not often children sixteen and thirteen can hang out with their parents and be open and free. It's a good time for me also because I

can act like a kid myself. I enjoy our discussions, the laughs, and the disagreements.

I really enjoy my children to the fullest and I enjoy their very different personalities and traits. My children are a treasure from God, and I never take my job of raising them lightly. We are each other's strengths, hopes, and dreams. I hope and pray our special birthday tradition doesn't stop when they both turn eighteen years old.

My children's birthdays are a favorite holiday for me. We build a strong bond each and every time they have a birthday. So I advise you to build a bond and create a memorable time with your children. "They will thank you later!"

Lori Clemons

WHO'S THAT PERSON?

Who's that person who stands before me?
Who's strong and courageous and full of love for God...
Whose face is very pleasing to look upon...
Whose eyes look wisely to see the problems of others...
Whose ears gently listen to every single word...
Whose mouth speaks words of praise to God and words of
reassurance...
Whose shoulders carry many burdens and take the weight off
others...

Whose arms caress so tenderly with hugs that lift your
spirits...
Whose hands have a special touch but also discipline...
Whose legs and knees bend constantly, faithfully in prayer...
Who is this person that God did make that stands before me?
I thank you, God, from the depths of my soul for making this
person my mother.

-- *Dedicated to Mary Watts*

Delores Wong

MY BEST FRIEND

My best friend is always there for me when I need her.

When I need someone to talk to, she is there.

When I need someone to listen to me, she is there.

When I need help with something, she is there.

When I need a shoulder to cry on, she is there.

When I need someone to have dinner with, she is there.

When I need someone to have fun with, she is there.

When I'm having a bad day, she is there.

When I'm sad and need someone to love me, she is always
there.

She is there whenever I need her, and I call her Mom.

She is the world to me.

Bobbi Sassen

DEAR MY FIRST ESL TEACHER

It has been almost 3 years since you've retired. I am still attending that ESOL class at the same site. This is my 5th year, and I'm still not confident with my English skill. Almost everyday I cross my fingers that Sarah won't bring hard homework for me to modify.

I want to thank you for asking about Sarah in your latest Christmas card. It has been 3 and a half years since you attended Sarah's IEP meeting. Speaking of the meeting, I can't thank you enough for being there and comforting me after the meeting. You weren't a direct teacher of Sarah, nor mine at that time. You showed up to help an old student whom you taught 10 years ago. I still remember vividly what you taught me when you saw me struggling with Sarah; "The wheel grinds slowly." This is one of a few American proverbs that I can always recall because I can feel it with my real life.

About Sarah; there is always bad news and good news. The good news is, Sarah HAS toilet trained! Yeah!! I am finally released from this burden. NO MORE data collections, NO MORE research, NO MORE toilet training ABA, NO MORE psychologists consultants and NO MORE smelly diaper pail! Well, I still need to see the psychologist for another issue though. To tell the truth, I rarely talked about my anxiety that I had about whether Sarah would be toilet trained by age 18. Thinking of her bio-neurological disorder, it would not be strange to hear of 20- or 30-year-olds still untrained.

The bad news is Sarah's AAC device is broken again, and who knows how long it will take to get it fixed. We determined at our last AT meeting that Sarah needed a new AAC device. However, we did not have time to discuss what kind she needs. Another meeting was proposed, but the school never

followed through. In other words, my struggles to ensure Sarah receives the best education continue to this day.

Sarah is now ten years old. She stays in the regular class. She goes to the resource room for mostly math, because she HATES the math textbook and throws it on the floor. She is learning the same 4th grade academic content as her peers, so she has homework. Most of it is makeup worksheets from attending OT and speech sessions. Sarah has a new aide (who is also a behavior interventionist) this year, and she's really good to Sarah. Sarah's old sign language interpreter left in the last school year. The school hired a new interpreter. Can you guess how long she stayed? – one day. No one could believe it. I asked Sarah if she was nice to the new interpreter. She signed "yes." I asked her if she hit, spit, kicked, ran away, or screamed. She signed "no" for each. I guess a regular interpreter has no idea how to manage a child with special needs.

Lately I started enjoying crafts again (mostly plastic canvas) because Sarah is interested in that. I have been stocking up on craft kits for her for age. Her fine motor skills and eye coordination are still very poor. So she needs my help for every stitch. She made Winnie the Pooh's picture and I made a recliner (TV remote control holder). Now I'm working on "Sofa" (a tissue box cover) to match it. She is keen to watch my hand movements to see how the project is done. I hope that someday she can do a craft kit all by herself. To think of it, it requires a lot of tasks such as reading comprehension, fine motor skills, eye coordination and perception, organizational skill, etc. I know you are a good crafter. I wonder what you are making now.

Last week I went shopping with a friend, and we talked about how beautiful it is where we are living. Snow covered everything in pure white, and the snow crystals on the tree branches were glittering to reflect the sunlight. It was like we

were in the world of the Christmas card or in a poetry photo book. Then this morning, our driveway and the front of our house were covered with frozen ice sheets from melting snow. Sarah was almost panicking as she walked, it was so slippery, and of course her snow boots were not much help. My back was hurt carrying Sarah to the school transportation van. I hope you won't have the same kind of trouble like me. Stay inside and keep warm!

Until next time,
Fumiko

Abbreviations used in letter:

AAC = Alternative Augmentative Communication

AT = Assistive Technology

ABA = Apply Behavior Analysis

OT = Occupational Therapy

IEP = Individual Educational Plan

Fumiko Adair

LIGHTHOUSE OF MY HEART

You're the one who lightens my dark places,
The one who's trustworthy, come what may.
On the roller coasters of my life
And the slow Ferris wheels
You walk and talk with me,
Lighthouse of my Heart

Your silence sometimes astounds me,
And yet I feel close to you even then.
When you whisper,
I stand listening with bated breath
For your next reply.
For you and only you are
The Lighthouse of my Heart.

If only I could be
Yet a candle in your window;
The winds could never put me out.
For you and only you
Are the Lighthouse of my Heart.
It never goes out.

Theresa Blanchard

MY BEST FRIEND, AND THE PERSON I USED TO KNOW

I have a little story to tell you. Everyone has a best friend, but a mother is usually not it. I grew up in a very small town where everyone knew you, and everyone talked. I also came from a large family of eleven. My dad was known as the town drunkard, and my mother was very sick. A lot of it had to do with her being married to my father. I don't even like to refer to him as that. Just someone I used to know. Which happens to be the name of a song. That just came to me.

I always wanted to be close to my mother but always felt she was too sick and did not have enough time for me. I was always busy cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the other children. My older sisters were out dating and trying to find a boyfriend, and the younger children couldn't care for themselves. So being in the middle, I had to do what I thought would make my mom proud of me.

My mother was around on and off. When she was around it was torture for her, from the person that I used to know. I knew him well you see because when my mother wasn't around, he would begin to abuse and torture me. So if you are wondering why I refer to him as that, you know now. He would beat all of us kids and sometimes hurt us bad. I can remember him pistol-whipping me. For those who don't know what that means, it is when someone takes a gun and begins to beat you with it.

The few times that she would be in a normal frame of mind, he would snap her back out of it. He used to stick loaded guns to her head with all of us children in the room and threaten to blow her head off. She would try to commit suicide to get away from it, then would be hospitalized for several weeks and even months at a time. Sometimes she would come out of there not knowing anything or anyone. It

was so sad always to see her like that. I knew I had to face life and go on, in order to make it.

As I grew older, I began to learn a lot, and I grew up fast. I had to in order to survive. It was up to me, and I had to make the best of it. I was leaving, never to return, and I didn't know what the younger children were going to do. Well guess what? They learned like I did and made the best of it.

I grew up, at least what I thought to be grown up. The children did make it, and I got out of there and started to live my life. After getting married, I wasn't permitted to go around my mother or family because they were all crazy, and it would be insane to do so. So I went 20 years or longer without being around my family or my mother – and sure not that ugly, mean person that I used to know.

I always wanted to see my mom. I missed her, and I loved her very much. As I grew up, I learned that it wasn't her fault, and she couldn't help it. I finally got out of a bad marriage and finally one day got up enough courage to call her and start a conversation. I began to have a conversation with someone I really never knew that well, but I also found myself wanting and feeling a need to get close to her. She would talk about things my sisters and brothers were doing and what was going on in their lives also. It became interesting. I began to realize that they couldn't help the way they were brought up, no more than I could.

My other sisters were always sending word to me that I thought I was too good and that I never did anything for my mother, that they were sick of always having to be the ones who took her to doctor appointments and to the store. They had to let her live with them and care for her. I tried not letting it get to me. I guess I felt more guilt than anything for not helping her. So I began to go and take her to the store and to doctor appointments and anything else I could

do for her. By this time my father passed away at Christmas time. I know that you probably noticed that I called him father.

There is a sad, but true ending to this. It makes me happy because for the first time I see my mother starting to live and come alive and almost be a little normal. I started to let her talk to me a lot when driving down the road. I kept quiet because I wanted to learn things from her. I did learn things I never knew; now I have a greater understanding. That is when I realized that I loved her so much and that she really was and is my best friend in the whole world. I had never had a friend like this before. I am so close to my mother now. I talk to her everyday and tell her how much I love her. I see her a lot, and we are best friends. I can tell her anything. My sisters and brothers know that I am now back in the picture and that I care for her. They are glad to be rid of her. As for me, I am glad to have her all to myself. I also have looked back, and I understand now why things happened the way they did. I guess it has been worth it all because I am a good cook. I keep a clean house. I love my children and have given them everything I never had as a child, which mostly was love and a mother. And guess what else? They too are my best friends, so my mother passed down a lot of good things to me.

So I have my mother and my two girls as my best friends. The most precious gift a mother could give. I also hope and pray that my girls grow up and realize that what they went through in life was only a lesson from life's experiences, and that someday they will learn to forgive me for my mistakes, understand the reasons for them, and love me as I have my mother. I also pray that they have me for their best friend.

Vickie Hargraves

TODAY

Today someone broke my heart.
They said the words that tore me apart.
This is only the beginning
But so far from the end.

Today someone gave me some bad news.
At this point I'm so confused,
I'm beginning to get scared.

The doctors said we've done all we can do,
And all he wants is to see you.

He said he was sorry
But he had to go
Because it was the end
Of his road.

Today was the day
That started the end.

Today I lost my best friend.

Dedicated to Bradley Lannum 1984-2002

John Skaggs

CHILD ABUSE

My story is about child abuse. There are so many crimes in the world today. But I think one of the worst crimes is child abuse. A child is a precious and loving human being. A child is a beautiful person. A child gives you unconditional love. A child cannot defend itself. You hear so many stories about children getting beaten to death or being sexually abused by a closely connected adult. An emotional type of child abuse is calling them bad names. Or finding other ways to kill them.

The reason this so close to my heart is because about ten years ago, my nephew was beaten by my niece's live-in boyfriend. But he was one of the lucky ones. They got him out before he was killed.

The man spent only 7 years out of 15 years in prison. And to me that wasn't enough time for him to pay for what he had done to that little boy. But that boy turned out OK. He graduated, and now he is in the Army. He is one of the lucky ones who survived a terrible crime. I thank God he did!

Linda Seymour

TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER

Thank you for reading stories and taking care of me.
Thank you for tying my shoes and putting bandages on my
knee.

Thank you so much for all your hugs and kissing me good
night.
I love you for the fun we share.
I love you for the things we do.
I love you because you always care.

Thank you for being my mommy but that's not all I have to
say.
Thank you so much for all you do.
God bless all the mothers of the world.

Georgia Tutu

CAN YOU LOOK DOWN THROUGH THE CLOUDS?
A Tribute to My Grandfather

Can you look down through the clouds?
Did you see me turn on that fastball?
The crowd was cheering loud.
The winning run made me feel ten feet tall.
As I rounded second base,
I watched it sail over the fence.
I looked up and saw your face,
Even if it was only a glimpse.

Can you look down through the clouds?
Did you see me in my suit?
Did you hear us exchange our vows?
Was I shaking in my boots?
I've never felt another love
Like I feel for my wife.
I only wish she had the privilege of
Having you in her life.

Can you look down through the clouds?
See my stomach full of butterflies?
Never felt any more proud.
When they laid her in my arms, I finally cried.
As I gently gave her face a stroke,
I realized the last time I cried was when you died.
Then as she awoke,
I saw she had your eyes.

Michael Ballentine

HEROES

Men and women of our land giving of themselves to protect our country and our beliefs.

Intent upon getting the job done.

Leaving behind their loved ones so they can make a safer place to live.

Infectious need to serve their country.

Training extensively so they are prepared to defend themselves and survive under hostile conditions.

Ambitious and determined to achieve their goal.

Ready for any situation that might arise.

Yearning to get back home to the family they have been away from for so long.

Carol Rudder

MATTIE'S COURAGE

There is a twelve-year-old person in this world who inspires me a great deal; his name is Mattie J.T. Stepanek. Mattie is a boy dealing with a rare disorder of Muscular Dystrophy, called Mitochondrial Myopathy.

Even though the odds are stacked against him, with death a very real part of his life, he still has this peacefulness about him. Mattie has had more hardships in his few years of life than most people experience in a lifetime. He's dealt with losing three of his older siblings to the disease, and his mother also suffers from an adult form of MD. Somehow he's acquired more wisdom in his short life than most of us do after decades of living. Mattie's an author of four best-selling books of poems. He also met his hero, Jimmy Carter. Oprah Winfrey had Mattie on her show as a guest.

Mattie has the courage to face death every day knowing the outcome. Through his bravery and strength, I find it somehow easier to face my own worries and apprehensions. My wish for my two sons, who have Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, is to have the courage and strength to face their own destiny. Mattie is a true-hearted person who seems to care more for others than himself. He along with God has taught me not to take for granted the small things in life.

Teresa Maynard

TIO TONY

My uncle Tony was very special, a very important person for me. Tony was the youngest brother of my mother, raised in the country. When he was little, in his childhood, he had an illness that prevented his walking. He never married. My grandmother took care of him until she died.

Tony was never a healthy man. He depended almost all the time on family for his simple needs. Yet he gave me a rich understanding of life. I learned so much from him.

He was simple in manners, never demanding anything. He accepted all the things that life brought to him. He never complained when his clothes were old, when he didn't have a breakfast, or when his food was cold. He was a kind, generous, patient man, and he had a smile on his face even when his heart was crying in pain and loneliness.

He taught me that we don't need material things to be happy and how to share our happiness. His actions talked so loud to me that they changed my life.

I got married, and I moved to another continent. Almost two years ago, Tony died, and I wasn't there. I never had told him how much he meant to me, but I'll keep the gift Tony gave me forever in my heart.

Maria Santos

A TEAR

A tear
Slowly slides down the side
of her cheek.
She closes her eyes
to silently say her last goodbye.
“Sweet love, I’ll remember you
Always and forever.”
She softly whispers in his
ear.
She gives him one last kiss
on his tender cheek.
His eyes never meet hers,
for he knows that he would cry.
He puts his cold hand
against her face.
She gently pushes it away.
Too much love
to end so quickly.
He reaches for her face
and wipes away her tears,
wiping the hair off of her face.
Her mind a million miles away
thinking of how everything
went wrong.
How much they were in love,
but now it’s all gone.
He slowly lets down his hand
wanting to hold her.
Not able to let go.
Her eyes leave his face
Hoping to lose the
memory of him.
Only knowing that she can’t
He softly says to her “I’m sorry

this is happening.
Where did we go wrong?"
But it's too late to find out.
For her heart is already gone.
He leans towards her
and looks in her eyes,
Tears streaming down his face.
He doesn't know how to tell her goodbye.
She creates a smile,
then pulls away,
and he is left there,
left with her memory,
Alone in the rain.

Brandis Patrick

CARING FOR AN AGING PARENT

Caring for an aging parent has become the norm in today's society. More people are living longer these days. Studies have projected that by the year 2040 there will be millions of people over the age of 60.

With that in mind many people are turning to their families for support. Oftentimes some turn to a nursing facility, but others find it difficult to turn away from those who cared for them in their early years.

Caring for those who can no longer care for themselves can be very stressful. Having to care for my own father, I know all too well the emotions that one can go through. It's times like these that I begin to feel helpless.

A typical day of caring for an aging parent begins with a blood sugar test. Then it's time for breakfast. Next it's time for a bath. Bathing aging parents can be time-consuming. Also the parents can be defiant. "Well, I'm your father. Don't try to tell me what to do." The next thing that happens is to get my own bath so I can go about my daily activities. But wait. It's time for my father to use the toilet, so I have to stop and take care of that. Now I can go back to what I was doing.

Now I can leave my father with other family members. They will help him to and from the toilet and give him his medications. When it's time for lunch, my sister or my mother will prepare his meal.

Now when I return home I'll prepare dinner for my father. Then it's time for more medication. Now it's time to relax and watch TV. But there's more work to be done. The steady trips to the bathroom, more meds, and another sugar

test. All evening there's much comforting to be done for the parent. "No, Dad, it's OK. You're all right. No one is trying to harm you." My father suffers from dementia. He has delusions that are common in older adults. Now the whole family will settle down for a good night's sleep. Maybe!

I love my father. I wish he wasn't sick. But with the baby boom generation entering middle age, one can only think that there will be a lot more elderly parents to care for in the future.

This is dedicated to my father, William F. Zuern. I love you, Dad.

Hyder Zuern

WHEN MY DAD DIED

Before my parents got divorced, my life was good. Sometimes things got bad, but we got through it together.

The last time it got bad was when my mom got a job and met some guy. She left us to go with him. A year later she asked my dad for a divorce. It killed my dad so badly that he got sicker and sicker. I had to help him. I was too young to do my mom's job, but I loved my dad so I did it. It was very painful to see my dad hurt and crying every day with a broken heart. I had to be strong for the both of us.

When I was thirteen, my mom got custody of my brother and me. We had to start living with her. I was not happy, but dad was too sick to care for us.

My dad died in 1997 when he was 55 years old and I was 14. He had talked to me about his illness and possible death but I hadn't believed him. One day he ended up in the hospital. When he came home, I took care of him until he died. That is when my life changed completely.

I had lost my best friend. There was a piece of me missing. He was everything for me. He had always understood me more than my mother did. He had always been there when I needed him. Being a girl, there were some things he couldn't understand, but he would listen to my explanation and all would be fine. When I lost him, my world fell down on top of me.

Until this day I wish he were here and could see his granddaughter. She is so much like him. He always told me I would one day have a little girl that would look just like me. My daughter is so wonderful, and he would be so proud of her.

I will always tell my daughter how her grandfather was a wonderful, happy man and how I will love her as he loved me. I wish he were with us, but he will always live in our hearts.

Brandy Charles

Self-Esteem



CONCERNED ABOUT DRIVING HOME

Concerned about driving home today.
On my way home, it may rain.
Never liked to drive in the rain.
From where I sit, I see clouds.
In low places along the road is water.
Down the valley is a rainbow.
Evening time brings darkness.
Nervous about driving home.
Change the rain to sunshine.
Even if it's only in my mind.

Arthur Massengill

I AM

I am an emotional person.
I am curious to look into the dark.
I hear the wind sometimes.
I see through the mirror.
I want to be just me.
I am an emotional person.

I pretend to be a better person.
I feel like the world comes to me.
I worry because I can't help everybody.
I cry because she left me.
I am an emotional person.

I understand the world sometimes.
I say I believe in me.
I dream to fly much higher.
I hope to continue with my life.
I am an emotional person.

Nelida Arroyo

IT BEGINS WITH AN "R" AND ENDS WITH AN "E"

How could you dare treat me like shit
Beating me down while calling me a bitch
I'm the mother of your child or maybe the
child of your mother.
Why did you take my innocence during the
thunder?
Left with bruises not only physically but
mentally too
Never knowing this is only the beginning of
the things you'd do
Am I cursed from heaven
Because I'm going through hell
I think my mom knows 'cause she tells me in every
thing I'd do I'd fail
"GOD HELP ME"
Take away the thought of death
Because I always cry at night when it was to
my room he crept
"DADDY NO" please leave me alone
"HELL NO" he said
"I brought you into this world"

RAPE

Latosha Stokes

LAUGHTER

Laughter is the best medicine,
This I believe is true.
When your life is turning upside down,
A hell you're going through,
Just hearing someone laugh can help you realize
That it is all you need through rough and trying times.

So when you're down and things look black,
Remember this is true,
Laughter is all you really need,
Especially when you are blue!

Brandi McDaniel

MY LIFE

As a child I grew up in an abusive home. My parents were not together. My mom remarried, and her husband was physically and emotionally abusive. My mother was never there when I needed her. All of the men my mom had relationships with abused me physically. I was raped continuously for many years. My mom never believed that I was raped. As I got older, it made me feel unwanted. Because of this, I chose bad relationships. I still have a hard time trusting people in general and falling in love.

I have four children and will have my fifth in the spring. Two of my sons live in Newcastle, Indiana, with my mother. My daughter lives with my father in Winchester, Indiana. My son, Darius, lives with me. He is one year old. When he was born, I was scared because he swallowed some fluid and had to be in the ICU for two weeks. Then I was able to take him home. He loves to listen to stories like "Winnie the Pooh." Darius is very active and loves to play with other children at the daycare center. I take him for walks to the park, and he enjoys it. He likes to see animals and watch the other children. He also likes to sit in the grass. I enjoy being Darius's mother.

Children make me feel happy and loved. I have always wanted to give children what I never had myself. I never got to be a child. I also had children at a young age. I was a mother at the age of thirteen.

Darius and the new baby may share life together as brother and sister. I have a high-risk pregnancy because I had a blood clot in my left leg the last time I was pregnant. Everything else in this pregnancy is fine. I just need to watch what I eat, like sugar, fat, soda drinks, and fast food. I am praying that I have a healthy baby girl. Girls are so much fun to dress. I

love to do their hair. My son does not have any hair. I did not get any hair until I was about two years old.

I look forward to being the mother of two children. In my free time, I will read stories to my children, take them to the park, and play with them on the swings. As my children grow older, I hope they finish school. I am praying that they will get some kind of college degree so they can get good jobs. I will put a good head on my children's shoulders so they will stay in school.

I was made to drop out of school when I was sixteen by my mom. She wanted me to work so she and her husband could take all of my money and spend it on drugs. My children have gone without things they needed, so I want them to understand how important school is. In today's work field, getting a job can be very difficult without an education. I know what it's like to be without an education. Now I wish I had not listened to my mother. I wish I had finished high school so I could give my family a better life.

I have been through a lot of pain with all the problems with abuse. I have had many years of counseling and treatment. I have bipolar and post-traumatic stress disorder. At times I have depression problems. Now I have fewer problems with my depression. I also have a sleeping disorder. There are many nights when I don't get any sleep. My doctor has shown me many ways to live with depression.

I have learned a lot of different ways to get all of the fear out of my life. I am studying for my GED, taking parenting classes, and trying to turn my life around. I hope to make a better life for myself and my children.

Julie Howard

TOP TEN REASONS TO GET A GED

10. To impress my girlfriend/boyfriend.
9. To make new friends.
8. To get a diploma to cover up the hole on my wall.
7. To be smarter than my children.
6. To feed my brain that's starving for knowledge.
5. To take on a challenging task.
4. To advance in the work environment.
3. To go to college.
2. To feel better about myself.
1. **To prove to those who said I couldn't do it that I CAN!**

*ABLE Class
Live Oaks*

I AM

I am a woman who loves her life.
I wonder if I can do everything I want.
I hear my thoughts in my mind.
I see my future in front of me.
I want my goals to come true.
I am a woman who loves her life.

I pretend to be the happiest person in the world.
I feel I have everything I want.
I touch my heart with my feeling.
I worry about discrimination in the world.
I cry when I miss my family.
I am a woman who loves her life.

I understand I am here just for awhile.
I say I believe in God.
I dream how my life will be.
I try to do and be everything I can.
I hope for happiness in all the world.
I am a woman who loves her life.

Adriana Cardenas Ramirez

THE BLACK WOMAN

I was created in love
So that is my calling.
And I was created in beauty,
So I was blessed with this face.
And I was given this voice
So quiet does not know me.
And I was showered in color
So royalty is my race.
I am black woman
I am her and she is me
I am her and she is me
Quite undeniably.

I was created a doll
So man's plaything I am not.
And I was given strength unbound
So I am ignorant of being weak.
And I was given an ample smile
So that all might see my joy.
And I was given ears to heed all
Whenever wisdom speaks.
I am black woman
I am her and she is me
I am her and she is me
Quite incredibly.

And all of the earth is my child
And my husband is the sun
And the stars my trinkets
Every last twinkling one.
And my father's spirit descends
Upon me
In the form of a dove.
I am black woman, the one and only goddess

The very moon sings of me.
I was created with feet of bronze
So onward I must march.
And I was given a vision
So it reality I must make.
I was given a mind to learn
And in turn to teach.
And I was created with a mother's heart
Sacrificing for my world's sake.
I am black woman
I am her and she is me
I am her and she is me
For all eternity.

Carole Jones

YO SOY UNA MUJER ... (FOR EVERY WOMAN!)

I am the one in the restaurant who waits on you,
I am the mother who holds you gently and sings to you,
I am the one who cares for you,
The sinner or the saint,
The lady on a stage that sensually shakes her hips,
The loving wife that softly kisses your lips,
So many things that I could be,
So many things that you may see,
But before all of those glorious things,
I am a lady,
A woman,
Yo Soy Una Mujer!

Melissa Perry

ALONE

Feeling alone is frightening and scary. You never know when someone or something is coming to get you.

It's like being in a long hallway and all you can hear are the echoes. Everyone is passing you by. You wonder what they think of you or even if they notice you at all.

It's like being in a deep depression and never getting out.

It's like the feeling of dark clouds all over you, never knowing if it's going to rain or shine.

It's like a long dark road that never seems to end until you're lost.

It's wondering if you can hold on at all.

Argiro Thimakis

LIFE LESSONS

The best piece of advice I would give to others would be to stay in school and not to drop out. Even if it seems hard at the time to stay in school, I have learned it only gets harder in life after you get out.

I dropped out of school at the age of 16 and got married to my husband while he was in the Navy. I went to live with him off-base, and it was the first time I was ever away from home. At the age of 17, I had a child. I was scared and had a lot to learn. I didn't have to work while I was married but worked a few jobs for a short time. The jobs I was able to obtain did not pay much because of my lack of education.

Later, my husband and I grew apart and became different people as we matured. We divorced after 11-1/2 years of marriage. After my divorce, at the age of 28, I had to live with my parents until I could get on my feet.

My first job after my divorce paid \$4.00 an hour. I was trying to support myself and my daughter on this meager salary. If I had received my education, I could have been independent, instead of depending upon my parents for financial help.

I am fifty years old now, and yes, you can learn from life's experiences. But in today's society, education is one of the most important things in life. And without it you will always struggle through life.

Terry McMillan

UNFORGIVING

Why is life so unforgiving,
Some people think it's not worth living.
But with my life it makes me think
Life is like quicksand. You begin to sink
Into a pit of burning hell because I'm
Trapped in this unforgiving cell.

Amanda McPeak

ABOUT ME

My name is Louise Nymann Hansen. I'm a Danish au pair in Cleveland, Ohio. On October 20, 2003, our community counselor, Laila Streza, prepared an unusual event for us.

We were going to have a mock trial which is a "play-trial" for our fall event. Prior to the event we were given a story and our parts in the trial. The mock trial was going to be about the fairy tale of "Goldilocks and the Three Little Bears." This is a very famous fairy tale which most people know. It might seem a little bit silly to have a trial based on a fairy tale, but it was taken very seriously by the judge and participating lawyers. Our judge was Laila's sister-in-law. She is a real judge, and we had real lawyers – only the basis for the trial was made up – nothing else.

I got the role of Mama Bear. I was given information about what Mama Bear did and saw at the Bear's house for the event "of the crime." All the other questions the lawyers would ask you, you would have to make up as you went along. Everything at the trial was like a real American trial – at least as you see it on TV. We – the au pairs from all over the world and foreign exchange students from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland – had all the parts like the jurors, witnesses, plaintiff and accused. So when I, as Mama Bear, was called to the stand, I was sworn in like at a real trial and questioned by both parties.

This was all a very interesting experience. We foreigners got to see how the American court system really works and the importance of every little detail. After all the witnesses were questioned and all statements made, the jury came back with the verdict. They unfortunately let Goldilocks go. Everyone knows that she is guilty from the original story, but if you don't have the evidence and proof for it, then she walks. Innocent until proven guilty, and in this case it wasn't proven.

The entire experience was very rewarding. I got a view of the American way of life and American culture.

My reason for coming to the United States in the first place was to experience the American way of life. I have been so lucky to have a great counselor who also has become a best friend for life. Laila Streza, who is Danish like me but has lived in America for almost 20 years, has given me the best possible view of the U.S. with its ups and downs and what it is like to live in America permanently. We have traveled together in the U.S. and Canada. We have talked night and day. Having the best counselor and friend that you can possibly have has just made my life and year much better.

My year, which is pretty much over now, has been very educational and rewarding for me. America has helped to make me more independent and to become a stronger person. I thank my au pair agency, EurAuPair. I thank them for my wonderful host family, for making me a better person, for giving me the opportunity to learn to speak fluent English, and for my best friend, Laila Streza, whom I owe more than I can ever repay. Giving thanks to you all here is the least I can do. Thank you.

Louise Nymann Hansen

Turning Points



MENDED HEART

I started with love
Ended up with sin
So sometimes it's hard to know where to begin
I wish I could explain it
But I just don't know how
I thought it would all be better by now
I thought all my fears would just vanish to dust
I didn't know all my scars could just turn to rust.
I've been living a life that's been meant for the devil
I don't want to be known as a holy rebel
I want to be mended, I want to be new
So Lord, please tell me what I have to do
I love you, God, with all of my heart
So with your love is where I shall start.

Joel Lawry

A HELPING HAND

I need a helping hand as I walk through this life. Can I count on you to help me out?

The laundry's piled up to the ceiling. The children are hungry, and the house is a total disaster.

I need your help. I can't do this all alone. One child needs to go to a football game, and one needs to be at cheerleading. One needs a hug, and one needs to be disciplined.

Will you give me a helping hand? Can I count on you to help me out?

I need a helping hand. Will you walk beside me, one step at a time? Can I count on you to stand by me?

If I couldn't walk, if I couldn't see, if my face was disfigured, if I was old or like a vegetable, would you give me a helping hand?

Will you hold my hand? Would you never let me go? Put your hand in mine and grip me tight. Can I count on you to stand by me?

Karen Smith

PULLING BACK THE CURTAINS

There once lived a bitter, mean, old man, who lived in a big dark house on a hill. His name was Paul. Paul was mad at the world because he was left all alone by the people he loved most. His wife died 3 years before, and both of his children were killed a year later in a fire. He trusted no one and used bitterness to hide his loneliness.

One day, Paul discovered a small pup on his porch while checking his mail. He paid the pup no mind and shut his door. The next day there sat the pup on the porch, and he was there everyday until the old man brought him inside his house. He grew quite fond of the dog, talking to him and even walking the dog.

One day the dog started pulling at the curtains. The man did what he hadn't done since the day of his wife's funeral, he opened them up. "I'm glad I did," he said to the pup. "The sunlight reminds me of my wife's smile."

And even though the sunlight brightened the house for days to come, Paul's life grew dark. He became very sick until he couldn't leave his bed. The dog stayed by his bed side all the time. Until one day, Paul died, and so did his pet. People say the curtains still remain open and sometimes they still see Paul walking and talking to his dog, whom he had grown to trust. Finally there was someone who never left Paul.

Ashley Christian

LIFE'S NOT SEE THRU

You best believe me when I say this to you, dawg
Life's not see thru
Whatcha wanna do, dawg?
You could be somebody walking down the street,
somebody ran up and punched you in
the mouth and took the shoes off your feet.
Like in New York, people during 9/11
watch 3,000 of their peeps take their seats in heaven.
Here's proof to you
Life's not see thru.

With our nation grieving we went to war over something we
believed in.
I wake up every morning thanking God that I'm breathing.
You struck first. We made it worse.
I'm a victim of the streets with no time to rehearse.
These words in this come out of my head like a curse
woke up by a nurse.
You've been shot in the leg
knowing you're walking eternity with a peg.
I said this to you once but I'll say it again
Life's not see thru
It's that way till the end.

Don't fall under, these demons are rebellious,
Just stand tall and listen to what they tell us 'cause
Life's not see thru.
I'm lost trying to find the passage, the way home.
I turn the corner; I'm staring down the barrel of the chrome.
I hope I don't catch one in the dome.
I do.
Now I leave my family alone at home.
Life's not see thru.

Livin' in the hood ain't no good.
They blast at you on sight, understood.
Walk down the street and get shot 'cause of the wrong color.
They do you in and go after another 'cause
Life's not see thru.

It'll eat at you, leave you physically and emotionally unable.
I spit the hardest lyrics to create my label.
Somebody could kick in your door and leave you
bleeding all over the table.
Life's not see thru.

Mark Simon

A RAINBOW IN THE SKY

A rainbow in the sky can show you light
on the darkest day.
It can bring you hope and promise.
A rainbow can show you the purest joy.
A rainbow in the sky once showed me life.

Kristy Young

THE DAY MY LIFE CHANGED

The biggest change in my life happened when my husband passed away. We were married for six years. I thought that my husband and I would grow old together, but everything changed on Oct. 3, 2002, when I got the call.

My husband's name was Cary. He was only twenty-nine years old when he passed away. He had heart problems. The nurse at Clinton Memorial Hospital called me and told me that my husband had collapsed at work, and he was on a breathing machine to help him breathe. When I got there, they told me that they were shipping him to another hospital.

They took my husband to Christ Hospital. The doctor there told me that the machine was doing all the breathing for him. They told me when he collapsed at work his heart had stopped, and he had gone too long without oxygen. They didn't know if he was going to make it. So, they did a test on him to see if there was any brain activity and there wasn't. The doctor told us we needed to decide what we wanted to do.

On Oct. 7, 2002, we, the family, decided to take him off the breathing machine and let him go. That was the hardest decision I had to make. It was really hard to say goodbye. Looking back now, I think the hardest thing was having to go back home and tell his three daughters.

It has been really hard to get back into our daily routine. My life has changed because my husband is never going to walk through the front door again. I just think of all the good times we had together. That's what gets me through each and every day.

Susan Fugett

WHAT KIND OF MOTHER AM I?

What kind of mother am I? I was a young mother, but that didn't give me a right to do what I did. I was a selfish mother; that was what kind of mother I was. I can't change the past, but I can make sure I don't do it again. I want to make a change in my life so that way, my boys will grow up and be good, caring, responsible, and successful in life. Every night I lay awake in bed and think, "What have I done to my children?" I have hurt them by putting my own wants and needs before my children's. Will they forgive me? I hope so.

I was always told that a mother has to take good care of herself before she can take care of her children, and now I believe that. I sit and think and think about my life since I have had my children. I haven't always made the right choices, but I always did love my children. I just didn't think about their feelings. I just kept thinking that my children needed a father, and I didn't want them to go through the hurt or to feel different and unwanted like I did when I was growing up without my real dad.

So, what kind of mother am I? I know what kind of mother I want to be: A mother who will do right with my children, Ryan and Bobby. I'll talk with them. I'll be more wrapped up with them. I'll put their wants, needs, and feelings first, before my own. I will close this with these words: I love my children, and I want them home.

Tonya West

MY STORY ABOUT AN ANGEL

1983... My daughter, Rhonda, came to me in tears with news of her pregnancy. I was heartsick. Only 16! I had so many hopes and plans for her. I didn't want her to have a baby at her young age. She was still a baby herself. I had two other children younger than Rhonda at home and a full-time job outside of the home. I didn't want another child to raise. I had married for the second time in 1978, and my husband had five children when I married him. Even though they did not live with us, we were paying child support and were barely making ends meet.

We decided to meet with the parents of the father of the baby, Paul, and see what their ideas were pertaining to this matter. I had decided to think strongly of adoption, but Rhonda wanted no part of that. When we met with Paul's parents, they wanted the kids to get married. That was the last thing I wanted to see happen. I had gotten married when I was 16, and it was a horrible experience. I had quit school and had regretted that, and then I had three children and an abusive husband. I wanted better than that for my children.

Paul's parents got the court involved, and because the kids were both only 16, the decision of marriage rested in the hands of the judge. The day of the hearing, all sides were presented. Paul's parents told the judge the kids could live with them, and they would see to it that they remained in school. They were both only juniors in high school. Paul's mother said she would watch the baby when it was born so Rhonda could continue her education. My protests were pretty weak in comparison. The final decision from the judge was that Rhonda and Paul would be allowed to be married. I had lost the battle. I put together a nice, simple wedding for them in May 1983. Life settled down, and Rhonda and Paul lived with his parents.

Rhonda had her baby daughter on November 9, 1983. Michelle Diane. I was there, and she was beautiful and perfect in every way. God had certainly been good to us. I was a grandma. There is no feeling in the world like being a grandma. It was like having Rhonda in my arms again. I was only 37 years when Michelle was born, too young to be a grandmother, but she became the center of my life. I lived for the times I could have her. Rhonda did graduate and on time at that. I held Michelle at the graduation and had a mixture of pride and guilt. Pride that my first-born child was fulfilling my dreams of her completing school, but guilt for not trusting that things would work out. Paul did not graduate, but they both found jobs and moved out on their own.

Paul was an only child, but my two children loved and spoiled Michelle. We had her a lot of the time while they worked. She became a big part of our lives. We would take her to church with us when we had her. When Paul's parents had her, they too would take her to church. They had a different religion than we did, but at least she was in church most Sundays. She learned the song, "Jesus Loves Me," and she loved singing it. She also learned the then-popular song recorded by the Judds, "Grandpa, Tell Me About the Good Old Days," and she would climb up on my husband's lap and sing it to him. His heart would melt.

I am about to move this story up to 1986, but first I must tell you that in 1984, a situation happened between Paul and my youngest daughter, Carol. When I found out about this from a school counselor that Carol had confided in, I filed charges against Paul. He was arrested and sent to prison for a year. Rhonda stuck by Paul, and for a time we were estranged. Paul got out of prison early, and eventually Rhonda and I got a relationship back. We agreed that she and Michelle could come to my house, but of course Paul was not permitted and I would no longer go to her house.

Friday, December 20, 1986... I am about ready for Christmas. This is going to be such a fun Christmas. Michelle

turned three on November 9, and she is really getting into the Christmas thing. This is the first time that Rhonda and Paul would have a Christmas tree. Paul didn't celebrate Christmas the way our family does, but he did allow Rhonda to have a tree this year. Every time Michelle would come to our house she would stand at the tree in awe at the lights and the presents. The silver icicles on our tree would reach out and cling to her clothes, and she would get so excited. Her eyes would dance and sparkle. My youngest daughter, Carol, now 15 years old, would put her up to asking me for a present. "Grandma," she would ask, "Can I have one present now? PLEASE?" I would pretend not to hear her, and she would keep asking until I finally would tell her, "No Michelle. You have to wait for Santa Claus." This went on every time she was at our house. We had bought her enough that it would not have hurt her to have a present early, but I wanted to keep up the traditions of Christmas. On this particular day, Rhonda and Carol took Michelle to the mall to see Santa Claus. I had already had Santa at my house to see her, and she was not impressed. She screamed and cried even though Santa had brought her presents. Rhonda told me she didn't like Santa at the mall any better. That day while there, Carol took money she had saved from babysitting and bought Michelle a beautiful new pink and black dress for Christmas. She came home, showed me, and was so excited to wrap it up for Michelle.

Saturday, December 21 ... Today started off great. Rhonda had to work until noon, so Paul was home with Michelle. But she was coming to my house later in the afternoon for a visit. I decided to bake cookies so Michelle would have homemade cookies to leave out for Santa on Christmas Eve. That was a tradition for my kids, and I wanted it to carry over to Michelle. Around 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Rhonda stopped by but left Michelle in the car. She was there to tell me that Michelle was sick, and she was taking her to the hospital emergency room because her pediatrician was out of town

until Monday. Rhonda said Michelle was crying and her teeth hurt. She was also running a high fever. Because she had just turned three, I assumed she was cutting teeth. I was still baking so I told Rhonda to go ahead but to let me know what the doctor had to say. Rhonda called me when she got home and said the doctor on call told her she had flu symptoms and to give her Tylenol and if she wasn't better by Monday, to call the pediatrician and get her in. At 7 p.m., Rhonda called to tell me that Michelle was not getting better.

I talked to Michelle on the phone, and she sounded very weak and was making rattling sounds. Because I was not allowed at their house, I sent my 17-year-old son, Mike, to their house with my vaporizer. Rhonda called me again at 9 p.m. to tell me she had Michelle in bed and she was going to sleep with her. She told me she would call me the next day after we got home from church. Christmas was Tuesday and I was sure Michelle would be well enough to come over.

Bill and I stayed up until 1 a.m. wrapping presents. My kids had gone to bed around 11 p.m. We were in bed but not yet asleep when the phone rang. It was Rhonda and she told Bill to get me and come to the hospital. Bill told me she sounded pretty calm. We got up and dressed. I didn't bother waking Mike and Carol. I knew at their ages they would be OK while we were gone. Bill and I joked all the way to the hospital thinking they were going to admit Michelle for overnight and that Rhonda wanted her mommy to be there with her. I assumed that Paul was not with Rhonda or she would not be calling me to come over. We got to the hospital around 1:30 a.m., and I told Bill I would probably stay the rest of the night there with Rhonda.

When we arrived at the hospital, I saw Jim, a man I know who is a medic. When he saw me, he dropped his head and didn't speak. I thought that was strange, but I didn't think much about it. I was in a lighthearted mood and was anxious to see Rhonda and Michelle. I told the receptionist who we were and she had us follow her. She took us to a waiting room and the door was shut. When we walked in, the first

thing I saw was Paul and Rhonda sitting on a couch together. Then I saw Paul's mom and dad. Rhonda stood up and said, "Mom, Michelle is dead." DEAD! What a sick, cruel joke to be playing on me. Then I realized this was no joke. My baby girl was gone. I can still hear my screams to this day. I remember beating someone with my fists. I later found out it was my dear sweet husband. A part of me died right then and will never come back. The doctor finally let us in to see my precious baby. She was on a big bed and she looked so pale and so tiny. A little slobber was running down the side of her mouth.

We got home from the hospital around 4 a.m. I had to wake my children to tell them. It was the only time I have ever seen my son cry since he was a baby. My next task was to call my family and tell them. No one could believe me because Michelle was so full of life and was so looking forward to Christmas. The next few days are pretty much a blank to me. My sister and I went to Rhonda's house while she and Paul were gone and took the Christmas tree down. We gathered all of her presents and took them to Children Services so they could go to another child.

Somehow, we got through the calling hours. Because she died at home, there was an investigation by the police. My precious angel was buried on December 24. It was so cold outside that day, but it was no match for the coldness I felt inside. Somehow we made it through the holidays, but it is all still foggy to me.

An autopsy was performed. Michelle died of bacterial meningitis. That was the reason her neck and jaw were hurting. A test at the hospital on Saturday afternoon would have detected that, but no tests were performed. She went to sleep that night and when Rhonda woke up around midnight, she was not breathing. They called 911 and the medics tried all the way to the hospital to revive her. Oh yes...My friend Jim at the hospital, he was on that squad run. He was one of the medics who tried so hard to revive Michelle.

Time helps to ease the pain. Between my children and my step children, we now have 18 other grandchildren. Rhonda and Paul divorced shortly after Michelle died. She was their only child. Both have since remarried and both have one child. Rhonda divorced again and has had many problems in her life. Her son is now eleven years old, and he talks fondly about the big sister he knows he had. Rhonda went on later and got a college degree and has a good job now. She also has a very caring, wonderful man in her life.

It has been 17 years since God took Michelle home. She would be 20 years old now, but to me she will always be my 3-year-old angel.

Sharon Russell

IF TODAY WOULD BE MY LAST DAY

If today would be my last day
I would give thanks to God for
all the wonderful persons
I met through my entire life.

If today would be my last day
I would find every person I hurt
and I would ask for their pardon,
I would really say I am sorry.

If today would be my last day
I would call up my mother and
I would tell her that she has been
an inspiration for me,
And I would ask for her blessing.

If today would be my last day
I would give a big hug and a big kiss
to my daughter on her smooth cheeks,
And I would tell her that she is a piece
of heaven to me.

If today would be my last day
I would kiss my husband good bye
every morning and I would tell him
that I am very grateful to God
for letting him share my life all these years.

Oh God! I would like to live now
as if it would be my last day.

Sol Ortiz

BABY ANGEL

My name is Christina. I have a little girl who is everything to me. Her name is Angel. Now when she comes home from preschool, I hug her and tell her that I love her. But this time last year I almost lost it all. I was on drugs then and didn't know what I was doing.

I was 16. I would do just about anything to get high. I would even sell my food stamps. One afternoon I was so high I dropped a cigarette, and the house caught fire. Little Angel was in her bedroom playing. She was not breathing when the firemen found her.

A couple hours passed, and I realized what had happened. My Angel was burned – not badly, but enough to stay in the hospital overnight.

My parents, Tom and Pam, took Angel for three months while I got help for my drug abuse.

I have felt many emotions about this time. Now I see Angel in a different view. I see her as a little girl, not as a doll. I want to hold her, and tell her that I love her as much as I can.

Now to show her how much I love her, I go to night school to get my G.E.D. After I do that, I plan to go on to become a nurse.

--A work of fiction by *Anna Cline*

LITTLE WORDS CAN GO FAR

As a little girl growing up, I was told I had to work
hard.

When I wanted to give up, I was told I must be
strong.

When I quit school, people would ask what was
wrong with me.

Now I am grown with a family of my own,
and still, those three words live on.

HARD – a word that means a lot when 3 young children
are all you got.

STRONG – the way that you must be to raise a family.

WRONG – a word I now regret, for I am me, and that is the
best I can be.

Three little words have carried me far.
Now 4 new words
lead me through each day.

I love you, Mommy.

Angela Long

YOU ARE NOT THE ONE

You are not the one I gave my heart to.
You are not the one who told me I love you.
You are not the one I swore I would love for life.
You are not the one that said, "One day you'll be my wife."
You are not the one I dreamed of all night.
You are not the one that would look at me with such delight.
You are not the one I would wait all day to see.
You are not one that made me believe.
Who is this man looking at me with such anger?
You are not the one I love. You're a stranger.

Aimee' Womack

SLAVERY

Sometimes I feel like a slave
Trapped in a deep dark black cave
Turn the page here I am alone and afraid.

Truthfully the truth can cut like a knife.
Unbelievably love can be as cold as ice yet so nice
Life is nothing but a big game the trick is getting someone to
remember your name.

The Man upstairs is the only one who can call any of us by
name.

Sometimes I feel a truth is a lie.
And a lie is the truth
I felt the devil boot me out of my youth into his world of
demons.

I felt my own kind scheming on me, so I'm pleading the
darkness will pass, and I'll see the light at last.
Slavery. Pray for me. It passes.

Nakia Thomas

MY BABY'S DELIVERY

I had a scary experience of delivering a baby. It was our second child. I felt I had to have more kids, the more the better. I did not understand what women went through to have a baby.

My wife was in labor at 2:00 A.M. during a snowstorm. I called the doctor hoping she would be at the hospital. We got stuck in a snowstorm on the way to the hospital...my wife in labor and my baby son in the car. I went to a factory and tried to climb the fence. The guard told me to stop or he would shoot. I told the guard to help me because my wife was having a baby in the car. He called for an ambulance and the police. My car was stuck in the snow bank. I went back to the car and the baby's head was coming out. What shall I do? I helped my wife and pulled the baby out.

A friend came out of a bar and stopped to help me. We tried to get the car out of the snow, but no could do. We saw the police coming down the road. The baby was born before the police came. She was wrapped in blankets. My friend went to the hospital with me.

I was shaken up at the hospital. After I saw my daughter I felt better. She had hair all over her body. She looked like a little monkey. The story of Vivian's birth was in the newspaper. It was front page news. I learned from that experience that the birth of a baby and the labor of a mother is painful and hard work. I also learned to respect women and children more.

Rudy Perez

FIRST DAY IN THE USA

I always remember September 10, 2003. It was my first day in the USA. It was a beautiful fall night.

When I left the Chicago airport, I felt worried and excited. This is a different country. Many people have different color skin and hair. They all speak fast in a different language; I do not understand what they say. I felt afraid. I asked myself, "What do I do? I will stay here for the rest of my life. What can I do?" I wanted to cry. I felt very bad.

I told my husband my feelings and my worry. He did not say anything to me. But he gave me a big hug.

My parents-in-law and three sisters-in-law were waiting for us. This is the first time I saw them. I am so excited. We hugged each other. They were all nice to me. They know I cannot speak good English. So, they talked to me very slowly. I could understand well. I thanked them so much.

They brought me to a red beautiful restaurant to eat dinner. At my first American restaurant I do not know how to order food. My mother-in-law helped me. Then she ordered pumpkin pie for me. This is delicious pie. But it was too sweet. I just thought, "No need long time. I will be a fat girl." American food can make people fat soon. But I like it very much. True. After 5 months, I am fat almost 10 pounds.

In the past 5 months, I feel good. I do not have my worry of the first day. I still miss my family and all my friends in China. I still miss my good old life in China. But I have new friends here now. I found a good job. I have a good school and teachers. They teach me how to speak good English. I believe my English will be very good. I am so busy now. I do not have time to worry about other things. I do not feel alone and afraid now. I love my life. I love English. I love America, and I love all my life in America. But I always remember my worry on the first day in America.

Yuan Hua

I DON'T WANT TO COOK!

Some day I think if I don't cook, what happens?
Maybe
My husband would be very hungry and he will look at me all
the time.
My daughter, she must cook for herself – only herself.
My son will open the refrigerator and drink milk or juice.
If I don't cook for more than one day
They will go out to eat.
Without me.
Sure!

Mi-Sook Ko

PAIN

I stand alone against the night sky.
It is asking me to cry out loud.
I can't bring myself out of the pain.
The sounds in my head play out a life,
Of misery and abuse. I can still taste
The blood in my mouth at times.
But I still cannot cry out loud. The sting
Of the strap still fresh on my legs,
Still after 24 years. From time to time
I can still feel the blood trickle slowly
Down the back of my leg.
As I wipe it off there is nothing there.
As I slip into depression, madness ascends on me.
As I plunge from the edge I reach out and grab ahold.
Knuckles whitening to hold on, fingertips bleeding.
I cannot let go. My mind screams out, please
Someone help me.

John Aleshire Sr.

UNDERSTANDING MY LIFE

The most difficult time of my life was as a child. I had received some very physical beatings from the age of six until I was ten. I dealt with the pain I was going through, thinking that I deserved what I got because I had done something wrong. But as an adult I have realized that no child deserves the kind of beatings I received. I believe this experience has had a positive side to it. I believe this experience has made me a good and protective father. I love my children dearly and would never want them to feel the pain and terror I have.

The age of six is as far back as I can remember. I can't remember what I did to make my parents mad at me. But I do remember always being caged up like an animal. Every day as soon as I got home from school, I was locked in my bedroom. It was a horrible, cold dungeon. There was no carpet, only a wooden floor. Both windows had plywood over them with a chain link fence over the plywood. I had a mattress, but no sheets and blankets. If I wanted to use the restroom, I had to go in the closet. The only light I had was through the heat duct in the wall where I received my food, and sometimes school was the only source of food for me. Sometimes I would get a beating before going to my room. If I came home and my parents were in an argument, I knew I was in for it. I would get slapped and punched in the head just like I was an adult. If I made the mistake of sitting down, I would get kicked right in the mouth, and it would get worse if I tried to defend myself.

The worst beating would come at the age of ten. I tried to run away, but I didn't understand the concept of running away. I ran down to a small convenience store and stole a box of candy, then went home to hide under the porch. I was so hungry I ate every bite of chocolate within minutes. Then dad pulled into the driveway with the headlights shining right on me. I was taken into the house

and stripped completely naked; my hands were tied behind my back. As I watched my dad rip the cord from the lamp, I was terrified. I was trying to beg and plead how sorry I was, but he didn't care where he hit me; he just started swinging. With every lash I received there was immediate swelling. Some lashes were swelling so bad that the next time I was hit, the spot that was swelling opened into a gashing wound that would need stitches. From my head to my feet was covered with lashes. I don't know when he stopped because my body eventually became numb. As I lay there motionless, I was picked up and carried back to my cell with no treatment to the open wounds. I lay in my room for a couple of days with no food. I wasn't allowed to go to school. I kept telling myself that it was my fault. I shouldn't have tried to run away, and I shouldn't have stolen the candy. I had received similar beatings to this in those four years. But that was the worst.

I had been out of school for a couple of weeks when Mrs. Farrie came to visit with a get-well gift. Mrs. Farrie was a kind and loving teacher. She was always full of hugs and candy. She made me feel special, always telling me how good a student I was, making me feel good. She must have noticed some of the scars on my face because after she left, some people showed up at the house with the police. These people explained that they were from Children Services and that they were going to take me to a safe place.

They took me to Hanna Neil Center for Children. I was scared, but I felt safe. I got a nice bed with sheets and blankets, three full meals a day, and I was surrounded by other children just like me. The staff there was loving and caring just like Mrs. Farrie.

This is how I lived my life for four years, and I believe that Mrs. Farrie saved me from something that could have gotten worse. Today, just thinking about that night I ran away and stole the candy, I can still feel those lashes with the cord. But remembering the fear and pain I went through as a child makes me a better father.

Back then I coped with this problem by thinking that I had done something wrong, that I made my parents mad at me, so I deserved what I got. But no child deserves a brutal, physical beating for any reason.

Today I deal with this problem by remembering the pain and fear I had as a child. Then I remember Mrs. Farrie and how she made me feel good about myself. I work with kids everyday. I coach two baseball teams at different age levels, a football team and a wrestling team. I try to make every child I work with feel confident and special, just like Mrs. Farrie did with me.

I have four children of my own, and I don't want my children to have to experience that kind of fear and pain. I love my children very much. I help them with homework and try to make them believe in themselves, to believe that they can accomplish anything they want. We play family games. I spend every moment I can with them because I want them to know how much I care.

Carl Foreman

GAINING A LIFE

The day my son was born was the most wonderful day of my life. It was a day that I had waited for all of my life, especially the last nine months! When he arrived that Saturday night, on August 2, 2003, it was the greatest feeling of love, excitement, and worry that I have ever experienced. I took him in my arms and just stared at his little red face, his full head of dark black hair; I admired his little button nose and tiny, squinty, blue eyes. I thought to myself about how amazed I was that I had created this beautiful, living, breathing life. I couldn't believe that he was really here and he was mine, all mine, forever.

The day we came home was also a very exciting day for me. I had my newborn dressed in an adorable Winnie the Pooh outfit with matching booties and a hat – he looked so cute! The first thing I did when we got home was show my newborn his bedroom that was painted bright blue and had a Winnie the Pooh border going all the way around the room. I didn't get much of a reaction from him, but I was still excited about it. We went into the living room, sat there, and the greatest feeling of fear ran through my whole body, from head to toe. I realized this is real, very real, this is my child, my flesh and blood, and he is one hundred percent dependent on me. At that moment I thought, "What if I fail as a parent?" and, "What does it take to be a good mother?"

The next few months were absolutely wonderful. I had overcome most of my fears about motherhood and finally was getting to know my son. He was learning to hold his head up, make noises, giggle, hold things in his hand, and eat with a spoon. Everyday was like a new beginning. He was always doing something new. I had such a wonderful time watching his little personality develop.

My son has changed my life in so many ways. He has inspired me to get my GED and do whatever it takes to get it, even if it means long hours of school and studying. This is a

goal that I had set for myself about five years ago, but I had not fought for until now. I'm determined to continue my education as an example for my son, and to prove that if you work hard you can achieve your goals. He gives me a reason to do better for myself and to try to achieve the goals that I have set for myself.

I am learning that being a parent isn't easy. It takes a lot of patience, energy, and most important, lots of love. I would *absolutely* not trade him for anything. He is my life, and he completes me. I love motherhood, and I honestly can't remember what life was like before he was born.

Rachael Fraelich

CITY GIRL VERSUS WHITETAIL

It is a cold December day as we patiently wait for daylight and the deer's arrival. I'm sitting in my cold, hard metal chair poised and ready to shoot at the first sign of the buck I had seen the morning before. Finally, after what seems like forever, they appear and they are magnificent. They walk slowly up the field, jumping at every sound like the crackling of the leaves and cars. I can see they are easily spooked. My husband whispers from somewhere behind me, "There he is! There's your buck. Are you ready?"

The buck comes up closer to the doe and runs her off, and he begins to sniff around, and finally starts eating, giving me a perfect shot. I put my finger on the trigger, being careful not to make a sound; I put my sights on him, line up the shot, and pull the trigger. Then I hear a big boom.

He runs up the field; I watch him go as far as I can, then I lose sight of him. I'm thinking to myself I missed him. There is a mixture of emotions swirling around inside me. I am shaking all over; I can barely get my legs to work as I try and stand up. In the back of my mind there is this nagging feeling as I finally start walking up the field to where he had stood just moments before. We start searching for signs of blood. There aren't any. I begin to panic, thinking I really did miss him. As the reality of that starts sinking in, I feel sick to my stomach. I start getting upset. We keep walking looking for signs, and just as I am about to give up, I spot him lying in a brush pile.

I am so excited I don't know how I get to him. When my husband gets to where I am standing, he says that I took off so fast he could barely keep up with me. I guess I ran all the way. I start jumping up and down and screaming. It is the most fun we have had together in a long time.

Phyllis Endicott

LIFE'S LITTLE LESSONS

Someone once told me that God doesn't give you any more than what you can handle. I guess that saying is true, because there have been a lot of bumps in the road of life for me. That same person told me that every bump in the road is a chance to learn a lesson.

I started learning life's little lessons at an early age and decided that I could overcome anything that is thrown into my road. I hit the first bump when I was diagnosed with an immune deficiency, and the doctors told me that I wouldn't live past the age of fifteen. At that time, medical professionals didn't know much about the immune system, and the life expectancy of a person who had an immune deficiency wasn't very long. Then, when I lived to be fifteen, the doctors realized that with treatment I could live a full and somewhat normal life. This treatment that I would have to get was very experimental and could cause some problems in the long run. The treatment was an IV infusion of plasma once a month; it caused my immune system to produce antibodies against illness. I thought this meant that I could grow up, get married, and have children. That is when I hit the next big bump in the road.

That bump was the most devastating news that I thought I could ever hear. The doctor told me that I would never be able to have children unless I wanted to take a chance of becoming very ill or even die. I learned that there is a lot more in this world than getting married and having children. That is when I threw myself into my studies and decided I would go to college to become a nurse to help others. Just when I thought everything was going great, I hit a huge bump in the road. It made me think that I had nothing else to live for because my hopes and dreams would be

destroyed. That bump I just hit was huge because all of my hard work would go down the drain.

My parents decided that they could not live in Ohio any more and needed to move back to Texas. But I didn't want to move. I had just settled in and was doing great because I would graduate in six months. My parents decided that I could stay in Ohio and finish out school, but when they left, I had to find a place to live and a job. That is when all my hopes and dreams were shattered because my assistant principal decided that I had missed too many days of school, and she kicked me out. So I threw myself into working two full-time jobs and trying to keep all of my bills paid and food in my stomach. But that all changed when I found the love of my life. That taught me that once you hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up.

Everything was going great, and that is when I started taking classes for my GED. I thought now I could fulfill my dream of becoming a nurse. After six months of classes I came to a crossroad that had a huge bump on one side and a little one on the other. I had an important decision to make because I found out I was six weeks pregnant. I thought that because I was taking the pill, I couldn't get pregnant. Then I found out that if you take certain medications the birth control wouldn't work. When my family doctor found out, she gave me two choices: I could be restricted to complete bed rest my whole pregnancy and carry this child to full term, or I could keep doing everything else and lose the child. I decided that I needed to be on bed rest and hopefully, carry this child to term. I took my doctor's advice, and now I have a beautiful daughter named Rosa who is healthy. She is seven months old and can sit up and crawl.

I learned that doctors aren't always right and that no matter what your health is like, you should live life to the fullest and never give up on your hopes and dreams. I haven't

given up on mine because I am enrolled in Even Start. It is a family literacy program that helps with parenting skills, and it also helps me get my GED. As soon as I get my GED, I am going to start classes at the local college so that I can become a nurse. God hasn't given me more than I can handle, but it sure felt like it sometimes. But I have taken all of these experiences in and learned from them, so that I can help someone else one day.

Nichole Cronenberg

WAITING

As I wait, I watch and listen.
As I watch and listen, I wait.
I wait for the love we'll share.
 I wait for you here.
 I wait under the moon.
As I wait, I watch and listen.
As I watch and listen, I wait.

Ginger Herman

MY BIRTHDAY

My birthday
Supposed to be a special day
My birthday
My God-given day
This is the day
My birthday
I have tried to find ways to
Celebrate
My birthday
I have been counting down the
Days to my birthday.
I've tried to find ways to
Celebrate my birthday,
My 21st birthday
I tried to plan this day
My birthday
Sad to say things didn't
Go how I wanted it to go
Starting with I had no calls
To announce my day was here,
From family members I keep
So dear.
(My birthday)
Left my days in tears

Latoya Spears

A LONG JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

The most wonderful and peaceful experience I have had in my life was when I decided to try to live my life for God. It all started out in Columbus, Ohio, in the month of June 2003. In previous years I used to pray and read the Bible because other people forced it upon me. But when I started learning to seek God for myself, I felt a sense of joy and peace.

Before I learned to seek God, my life felt totally meaningless. There were times when I felt like life was never going to get better for me. Sometimes I even thought about committing suicide. Whenever stress or depression came upon me, I would go out and spend my money on drugs and alcohol. Before I learned to seek God, I would do anything I could to please my flesh.

It wasn't until, in that month of June, on a nice, hot, sunny day, I started once again getting suicidal thoughts in my head and thinking evil. Finally I came to the conclusion that I needed some help. The next thing I remember is I sat down in a park and began to pray. As soon as I finished praying I started feeling relaxed, and I started walking home peacefully.

From that moment on, even until this day, I've been in the process of trying to put my faith and trust in God. When I first started to make the commitment, I still had my tribulations and my trials like I have now. When I first started to read the Bible, I read the book of Proverbs and then I started to study the four gospels. When I began to take my time studying about Jesus, I saw how he suffered, and then I started to realize why I sometimes suffer.

Even though I continued to try to put my faith and trust in God, I still had some tough issues in my life to deal with. For example, after 2 months in my walk I submitted to USA Search to try to find my family. The search cost 72 dollars. When it was done, I got the address and wrote to them. I received no response.

The next thing I knew, I was starting to fall back into my foolishness. Then I started to remember a verse I read in Proverbs (26:11) that says, "As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." I started repeating every ungodly and foolish thing I did before I knew God. I spent every last penny I owned on drugs and fleshly desires. I finally started to come back to reality, but before that I was so far gone it wasn't even funny.

Once I came back down to reality, I started going back to church and reading my Bible and to this day, I do the same. The most important thing I can say about my life right now is, as long as I try to put my faith and my trust in God, I can have a sense of peace, hope and joy. I have it now and hopefully I'll have it forever.

William Gideon

MY ACCIDENT

On June 19, 1976, Richard Gabbour (me) and my brother, Jeffrey, were invited to my best friend Raffi's birthday party. My mother told us to take a taxi, but I told her no, we can walk. So we walked and we had to cross a street. I let my brother go first, and then it was my turn. I ran and looked one way, then the other. It was too late; a car from nowhere came and hit me. I was still alive. My brother was yelling, "Richard, are you OK?" I was pretending that I could not hear him, and then I fell into the coma. My brother ran to my mother, Mireille, and said, "Richard is dead!"

My mother came every day to the hospital to read and listen to music that I liked. The nurses thought she was crazy, but she still came every day. Until one day, she heard of a well-known rabbi in New York. She wrote to him. He receives millions of letters. One day he picked one up, and it happened to be mine. He wrote back; my parents received it. My mother put it over my head and said to the nurses, "Do not touch it, just leave it under his pillow." The next day I moved my little finger, the next day the other one, and so on until my ten fingers were moving. I woke up blind and could not see.

My brother decided to invite me to his birthday party. My parents asked special permission so that I could leave the hospital. My dad, Charles, lit a barbecue. When the flame was on, I saw it! I was telling my mother and dad that I could see. "What a nice shirt they have, what nice pants they have, and so on." My parents brought me back to the hospital that night but did not want to say anything. My Grandma came to the hospital and pushed me in a wheelchair beside the window. I told her, "Nona, the sun is bothering me."

I was in a wheelchair for one year. I was doing physio (leg) therapy and ergo (hand) therapy. One day I pushed my wheelchair in front of all the nurses and said, "NO MORE!" I began to walk on my own.

In 1990, I was trying to find an activity I liked. I thought about running. I called one person who told me to phone another, until one day I fell on the right one, Cincinnati Recreation Commission's Donald Passonette. We began to train outside twice a week. Then we found some five kilometer races (3.2 miles), up to ten kilometers (6.2 miles), and up to mini-marathon (13.2 miles) races. I do these all year long, even if it rains, hails, or sunshine, I do it.

In 1992, I was called to Columbus to receive THE BEST ATHLETE OF THE YEAR award, presented by the Governor. I went there with my parents. There were over a thousand people; I was called last and they handed me a big plaque. The Governor shook my hands and said "Goodbye." I tapped the Governor on his shoulder and said, "Can I make a speech?" He gave me the microphone. "I thank God and then my coaches for training with me. I still run every weekend of the year."

Channel Twelve News interviewed me and I said, "I never gave up."

Richard Gabbour

IN THE WOODS

As I walked among the trees
one bright and sunny day,
I heard the Lord say, "Child, come this way,"
so naturally I obeyed.

A path was there, it seemed so clear,
I followed it and felt him near.

I walked and walked into the woods
and could no longer hear his voice.
I thought he had abandoned me,
and I had lost my way.

I got down on my knees and prayed,
and suddenly I saw a sunshine ray.
It led me from the cold dark woods,
back to the light of day.

I asked the Lord why this was so.
Why had I lost my way?
He answered me with gentle words,
"Child, I was teaching you to pray."

Jane R. Shepherd

LIFE IS SHORT

Having fun sitting around and partying,
Not thinking before drinking and driving.
Swerving off the edge of the road,
Just trying to be bold.
Over correcting,
Spinning 180 then finally impacting.
Giving up everything in just a moment,
Putting everybody in a world of torment.
All for their pleasure,
Instead of making it to her treasure.
Having everybody who cares
Just sobbing in a puddle of tears.
All for just a drink,
Before the driver could even think.

Paul Fisher

IN THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

When I was 18 years old, I joined the Army National Guard. One day Scott, Steve, and I went to the county fair. While we were walking around, we ran into an Army recruiter. We were approached by Sergeant Mark D. Federle, who asked us if we had ever thought of joining the Ohio Army National Guard. We both paused for a minute and then said, "No Sir." Then Sergeant Federle said, "Come over to our Army booth, and you can fill out some paperwork and answer some questions." We went over to the booth and filled out the papers so he could send us some information about the Army.

After about one or two weeks, I received a packet in the mail. My dad and I went over it and gave Sgt. Federle a call. A few days later he came over to our house where we talked about all the different jobs and duties in the Guard. It all sounded great to me, but my dad was not so sure about it all. He didn't believe that all I had to do was give one weekend a month and two weeks a year in exchange for a college education. About two weeks later, I went over to Sgt. Federle's office in Eastgate and joined. I went up to Columbus for my testing and physical. That same day I was sworn in. When I got home that night, I called all my friends and family to tell them I was in the National Guard.

That next weekend I met with Sgt. Federle, and we went out to my new unit in Felicity, which was the 216th Engineering Unit. When we got there, he introduced me to my new Sergeant. Sgt. Miller showed me around the place and introduced me to everyone. That day I just signed some paperwork and got my uniforms. The next day I had a blast! It was snowing, so we had a big snowball fight.

That spring I went off to Initial Active Duty Training on June 12, 2001. I was shipped to Fort Leonard Wood in Rolla, Missouri. My training lasted about ten weeks. Some of the things I had to take with me were civilian clothing, shoes, two locks, and socks. While I was there it was the hardest challenge I have ever had to undertake. For example, I had to wake up at 4:00 AM every day, do 71 push-ups, 92 sit-ups, and run 2 miles in 13 minutes. Oh yeah, I could not smoke! Ten weeks went by and I made it! I was finally a true U. S. National Guard soldier. My mom, dad, and friends were all happy for me.

After being in the Guard for one year, I made the mistake of dropping out of school. Nowadays, to be in the Army, I have to have a high school diploma or my GED. When I dropped out of high school, they gave me six months to get my GED. I didn't comply with the rules, so I got discharged until I do get my GED. That brings me to where I am today. I'm taking GED classes at Live Oaks so I can join the Army National Guard. I really hope I pass all my tests because I really miss serving my country.

YOU CAN IN THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

HSC 216TH ENGINEER BATTALION COMBAT HEAVY

William Joseph Smith III

Author Biographies

ABLE Class, Live Oaks (pp. 15, 73)

Fumiko Adair (p. 45)

With my ESOL teacher's great support, I have been fortunate to go to the OLRC [Writers Conference] since "Beginnings IV." My daughter (who is half-American, a high-functioning multiple disabilities) gives inspiration to keep me writing.

John Aleshire Sr. (p. 107)

I am 31 and married with two kids. This poem came out of a very hard time in my life. It has a lot of feelings in it from my soul.

Nelida Arroyo (p. 68)

My name is Nelida Arroyo from Puerto Rico. I am one of eleven children, and we came as a family to New York. Six years ago we came to Youngstown, Ohio. Now I work at the English Center and study English too.

Polly Baker (p. 38)

I am a mother of four young children ages 1 to 6 years and am currently expecting a 5th child! Our family is very close and we share a great love of reading, poetry, and the arts. The events of 9/11 had great impact on our lives, and it has carried with it a great sorrow and a desire to become more involved with our fellow man.

Michael Ballentine (p. 55)

I submitted three works. All of them are special to me, and are dedicated to people who are or were special to me. I wanted to thank my wife, friends, family, co-workers, and if

he can look down, my grandfather. I have a different love for each person listed, but I wouldn't know love without them.

John Berling (p. 29)

People say if they could have their grandchildren first, they could enjoy their children more. I have enjoyed my grandson and agree with them. I hope to be able to teach him many things and have lots of fun with him.

Theresa Blanchard (p. 48)

My name is Theresa. I am working toward my GED at the Lorain County JVS Adult Education. One day I hope to write the story of my life and share my short stories and poetry with the world. I love to write. "They say beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. I say it is in the sound of the written word."

Tracy Bodnar (p. 40)

My name is Tracy Bodnar, and I am 31 years old. I have three special needs children ages 8, 6, and 4 years old. I have been a divorced mother for approximately one year. I wrote my poems to inspire my children to grow and thrive in life.

Brandy Charles (p. 63)

I am 21 years old, and I have one child with another one on the way. My interests are reading and playing with my baby. I will help my children to know their grandfather.

Ashley Christian (p. 87)

I was born in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1983. I began writing around my freshman year in high school. I think my interest in music had a big influence in my writing because I started writing lyrics at first, and I still do. If I had to pick, poetry and songs would be what I enjoy the most.

Lori Clemons (p. 41)

My name is Lori Ann Clemons. I live in Columbus, Ohio. I was born in Toledo, Ohio. I enjoy my family and friends. I love to help people.

Anna Cline (p. 100)

My name is Anna Cline. I have one boy and one girl. I have been married to Rodney for 22 years, and I came to school to get a GED.

Altair Costa (p. 7)

I am Brazilian. I'm an ESOL student at Max Hayes School in Cleveland, Ohio. It's my first time writing poetry, and I'm enjoying it very much.

Nichole Cronenberg (p. 114)

I am a twenty-year-old mother of a beautiful little girl, and she means the world to me. So I wrote this piece to remind her to always follow her dreams.

Marie Davis (p. 9)**Frances Dillon** (p. 19)

My name is Frances Dillon. I am a mother of five children and the wife of a wonderful man. I am a 41-year-old woman who loves children and also works with them. I was born in New York City and lived there until I was 12 years old; then my parents moved to Cleveland. I've been here ever since.

Phyllis Endicott (p. 113)

I have been married for almost seven years, and I have two boys. I was born in West Virginia and soon after moved with my family to Columbus. I lived on the south side until I moved to Perry County in 2001, and I have spent the last three years trying to adjust to country life.

Farhan Farah (p. 25)

I came to the United States in 2000 after an endless civil war in my country, Somalia. I came with the intent of working hard, saving money, and hoping to become rich overnight. I worked in many warehouses in Columbus, Ohio, the first state I lived in. Then I went to work in Alaska, where I thought I could save more money. However, all that hard work encouraged me to go back and receive my education.

Paul Fisher (p. 124)

I am 19 years old and lost my sister when I was 11, and this is who I wrote this poem for.

Sherri Flynn (p. 39)

I just like to write a lot of stuff all the time.

Carl Foreman (p. 108)

I grew up in Columbus and always seemed to be in trouble. At the age of 16, I moved to Perry County and met some caring teachers, but I had to quit school three months before graduation to support my new family. I have been married since 1993 and have four children. Since earning my GED, I have enrolled in Hocking College and hope to become an X-ray technician. All the struggling will pay off.

Rachael Fraelich (p. 111)**Susan Fugett** (p. 91)

I am 34 years old, and I live in Blanchester, Ohio. I have 3 beautiful daughters. It has been really hard for me and my kids since my husband passed away. But thanks to my family and friends, I know we will make it. My challenge now is to get my GED.

Richard Gabbour (p. 121)

My name is Richard Gabbour. I was born July 18, 1966, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. My hobbies are bowling, running

5K, 10K, and mini-marathons. Someday I would like to do a marathon. Now I have lived 17 years in Cincinnati, Ohio, and have been married for 5 years.

William Gideon (p. 119)

I was born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1980. I spent most of my childhood in foster homes, jails, and group homes. When I turned 19 years of age, I moved to Columbus, Ohio, where I am now a resident.

Louise Nymann Hansen (p. 81)

I lived in America for a year. I was here as an au pair. I'm from Denmark where I live again now. The story I wrote is about my year here and a special event I had in my year in America.

Vickie Hargraves (p. 49)

Hello, my name is Vickie Hargraves, a mother of three. I have been published in the last five Beginnings books. I am a radio broadcaster, going after a goal to further my education in fine arts. Thank you Kent State for making this all possible.

Carol Helton (p. 33)

To my grandson Garrett--I love you long, long, time.
Grandma Carol. I live in Perry County and have been here 1½ years. With this poem I now see Garrett all the time.

Ginger Herman (p. 117)

My name is Ginger Herman. I'm a young mother of a little boy. I'm going to Fairhome GED/FT School in Lorain. After I get my GED, I'm going to go to the LCCC for Creative Writing and then try to get my teaching degree.

Lisa Holmes (p. 37)

In memory of my father who died in 1996. I miss him and his stories.

Julie Howard (p. 71)

I am 22 years old. I live in Dayton, Ohio. I am due to have my fifth child in the spring. I am a student at the LEAF classes at the Job Center in Dayton, Ohio, where I am preparing for GED classes.

Yuan Hua (p. 105)

My name is Yuan Hua. I am from China. I came here 5 months ago. My husband is American; we married two years ago. We take long time for each other so we love each other very much. America is new life for me. I need to learn everything.

Carole Jones (p. 75)**Eunjung Kim** (p. 20)

My name is Eunjung Kim. I'm from Korea (South). I have been here about one year. I was born in 1971, and there are five members in my family: father, mother, elder sister, younger brother and me. After growing up, I married and I have a daughter now. I'm staying just temporarily, but I won't forget all the memories in America.

Mi-Sook Ko (p. 106)

I was born in Seoul, South Korea. I grew up in the city. After I married, I moved to the country and had so many different experiences. Now I live in Copley. I'm very happy because I have had many different experiences while living here.

Charles Ladd (p. 16)**Joel Lawry** (p. 85)

My name is Joel Lawry. I am 20 years old. Poetry is my escape and helps ease my mind. I dedicate my writing to my love Ashley and my friend Natalie. I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoy writing it.

Angela Long (p. 101)

My name is Angie Long. I am a 24-year-old single mother to 3 adorable kids: Jacy, Rayna, and Malachki. Thanks to the Even Start/ABLE program in Adams County, Ohio, I am able to better my education, and they help me with my kids. I love to write when I get a chance.

Arthur Massengill (p. 67)

I am concerned about driving in the rain and storms, but when I see the rainbow in the valley, I know the rain will soon cease. The sun will soon shine again.

Teresa Maynard (p. 57)

I'm twenty-five years old with two boys with Duchenne's muscular dystrophy. People who are faced with challenges and struggle with day-to-day activities inspire me a great deal. We all should be thankful for the small things in life.

Brandi McDaniel (p. 70)

I live in a small town here in Ohio. Manchester, Ohio, has been my home since I was six years old. Before moving here in 1986, I lived in Georgetown, Ohio. I have two children, two and four, and am a single mother. God and the children he gave me have inspired me.

Terry McMillan (p. 79)**Amanda McPeak** (p. 80)

When I was little, my mom used to read poems to me all the time, and now I like to write poems to express my feelings.

Rita Perez Morales (p. 10)**Rebecca Mzik** (p. 3)

Someday I would love to see my book published.

Hiromi Nabeshima (p. 28)

My name is Hiromi Nabeshima. I'm from Japan. I live here with my husband and 7-year-old son. My husband is working in Tipp City, OH. My poem tells how excited I was to see the beautiful contrast of a winter morning become life and beauty. (Form: Haiku)

Emilly Nutter (p. 17)

I was born in Manizales, Colombia, South America. This beautiful city celebrates the Festival of Culture every year. I came from a humble family with good values such as honesty, work, and strong family unity.

Sol Ortiz (p. 99)

My name is Sol J. Ortiz. I am from Puerto Rico. I am a student at Max Hayes Vocational School. I am in the ESOL program, and also I am in the Computer Inf. Class. I love poetry. I think this is a good way to express our feelings.

Brandis Patrick (p. 59)

My name is Brandis Patrick. My written poetry reflects my journeys in life.

Monica Pazmino (p. 13)**Rudy Perez** (p. 104)**Melissa Perry** (p. 77)

At 30 years old, I have lived in Dayton, Ohio, for the majority of my life. Raised in a Chicano heritage, my inspiration had always stemmed from my love for the spoken word as well as the love for my race. I try to infuse a mix of reality and culture into every piece that I pen, and one day, I hope to have my works published.

Alla Pilipenko (p. 31)

I was born in the former Soviet Union Ukrainian Republic. I graduated from the university and worked as a teacher of Russian literature. I am a widow now. My only son works as a programmer. He has a wife and two children. We came to America in 1996. I live on Lake Erie now in Cleveland.

James Prohn (p. 8)**Adriana Cardenas Ramirez** (p. 74)

I'm Adriana Cardenas Ramirez from Mexico. I've been in the US for three months as an au pair and will only be here until the end of this year. I enjoy camping, walking, and photography. My goals are to learn English, meet people and to learn the American culture.

Carol Rudder (p. 56)

I have worked at Pierre for seventeen years. I have two children, four grandchildren, and one great grandson.

Sharon Russell (p. 93)**Maria Santos** (p. 58)

My name is Maria Santos. I'm from Portugal, and I am 34 years old. I moved to the US about 2½ years ago because my husband is military and working at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. I'm learning English as a second language, and it's very stimulating for me to write this tribute to my Uncle Tony.

Bobbi Sassen (p. 44)**Linda Seymour** (p. 53)**Jane Shepherd** (p. 123)

I am a mother of 5 children and grandmother of 12. I live in a small community of 500 people with my husband, Jim. I love

to read and enjoy my Bible as an example of how to live my life.

Patricia Shields (p. 4)

I am 52 years old going on 53, married, have three natural children and nine stepchildren. I am trying to get my GED to better myself and to make my family proud of me, especially my husband who is my strength and salvation. The only person first is God in my life.

Mark Simon (p. 88)

John Skaggs (p. 52)

My name is John Skaggs. I am 18 years old. I would like to thank God for sending this opportunity to me.

Karen Smith (p. 86)

I am a mother of Cynthia Marie Smith, age 13, and Angelica Christine Smith, age 7. My family has always been important to me. That's why my heart goes out to anyone whose loved ones had to fight at war.

William Joseph Smith III (p. 125)

A little about me: I'm now 21 years old and currently going to Live Oaks to get my GED. I'm from a small town named Goshen, Ohio. While I was in high school, I had a teacher named Miss Moscar. She got me into writing. All through school I loved to write short stories. Now that I'm getting my GED my teacher asked me if I would like to send one in. I love to write so here is one of my stories about my life. Hope you like it.

Latoya Spears (p. 118)

My name is Latoya. I am 21 years old. This is my second time in GED classes. I took the test once, now I'm back better than what I started off. Next, I'll be preparing for nursing school to take better care of my two kids and myself.

Latosha Stokes (p. 69)

I am a single mother of four beautiful children. I recently passed my GED in December 2003 and am now attending Stark State College. I am majoring in Human and Social Services. I am also taking a writing course (College Composition) to help me prepare to write my first book titled "My Autobiography."

Argiro Thimakis (p. 78)

Born in NY, I came to Canton at 15 years old, and have been here since. I have a 6-year-old son in first grade. I'm shy and mostly quiet. I believe strongly in family. I have good reading skills and enjoy it.

Nakia Thomas (p. 103)

My name is Nakia Thomas. I've been writing poetry for almost ten years. It brings me joy, and I hope it will bring you joy as well.

Georgia Tutu (p. 54)

My name is Georgia Osei Tutu. I'm 20 years old. I moved to the United States 18 months ago to visit my sister who lives here as a citizen. I'm learning English as a second language, and I wrote a tribute to my mom.

Heather Warner (p. 12)

Heather is from Windham, Ohio. She is a new student with the Even Start Program.

Tonya West (p. 92)

My name is Tonya West, and I'm a twenty-four-year-old mother with two children who are smart. Ryan is three and Robert is two, and together we go to Even Start at West School. I'm in Even Start to help my children through school.

Jesse Wilson (p. 21)

This story is about childhood memories that, no matter how old you get, you will never forget.

Aimee' Womack (p. 102)

My name is Aimee' Womack. I am 18 years old. I have been writing since I was 11, and I enjoy writing poetry a lot. I write from all my own experiences.

Delores Wong (p. 43)

I am a spiritual woman and have given God every aspect of my life. I am married with three children. I like to read, and my hobby is golf. I don't like writing, but God inspired me to write this poem.

Kristy Young (p. 90)

I am a 23-year-old mother of two. My inspiration for writing comes mostly from my children.

Marie Young (p. 32)**Hyder Zuern** (p. 61)

My name is Hyder Zuern. I am 39 years old, and I am very interested in improving my writing skills.

Honorable Mention Authors

Rogelio Abad	Pauline Culver
Carol Adams	Barbara Currence
Henrietta Adkins	Maria Davila
Melissa Albert	Becky Davis
Debbie Almaraz	Layton Dawes
Corida Armstrong	Adam Dean
Jerome Ayers	Katrien Dewilde
Lillie Bargainer	Michele Diaz
James Beatty	Stanley Domaradzki
Rah'munn Bess	Wayne Drda
Gina Blaise	Michael Dryden
Dana Bolojan	Vera Dunlap
Tina Botts	Tara Dunn
Faith Bowen	Tina Ellis
Latasha Breitenstein	Monica Estep
Linda Brettrager	Chante Evans
Claudette Brown	Fay Facemayer
Geraldine Brown	Maura Fernandez
Neiva Brown	Kirk Fleming
Rose Buckner	Janice Foster
Rosy Budny	Abdullah Frouh
Lana Buxton	Mildred Fry
Martha Callen	Erna Gaab
Kilcha Canfield	Oleksandr Galanin
Anna Cherynuk	Carlos Galdemez
Candy Childs	Genise Galloway
Joan Clark	Elizabeth Garcia
Amanda Cline	Gloria Meza Gonzales
Florinel Contiu	Jennifer Gore
Viorica Contiu	Edith Gramley
Anthony Cooper	Damon Gray
Britany Cooper	Antoinette Green
Sheila Crews	Melvin Griggs

Irma Gutierrez	Monte Mercer
Munir Hadzic	Joel Merise
Tim Haidet	Amy Metcalf
Agrawal Hari	Rodrigo Miranda
David Harriman	Dahabo Mohamed
Doug Harriman	Eula Moore
Khadar Hassan	Calvin Morand
Linda Haywood-Reis	Artisia Motton
Donna Hershner	Joyce Newton
Annette Horton	Vanessa O'Brien
Ebony Horton	Rowena Ogilbee
Gerald Huck Jr.	Maria O'Keefe
Daniel Hunter	Ida Osborn
David Hunter	Marco Patterson
Keith Huynh	Linda Perry
Sowzi Ismail	Raja Pipping
Gussie Lee Jackson	Marjorie Potter
Vera Jackson	Grace Randolph
Georgetta Jacobs	Crystal Reeder
Lucretia Jagger	Gregory Robinson
Shawn Johnson	Adelina Rodriguez
Lawrence Jones	Franciny Rodriguez
Stanley Jones	Anna Rokhlina
Milunika Jovanovic	Ronald Roseberry
Robert Justice	Sandra Rowe
Janina Kalinowski	Tammula Royal
Abdoul Kane	Mary Rudesill
Ihor Karpa	Janet Salisbury
Jennifer King	Zoran Savic
Karen Lane	Lan Thi Scherer
Jenn Lanning	Jean Scott
Min Li	Roberta Seidowsky
David Marshall	Nourou Seydou
Russell Mayse Jr.	Jimmy Slager
Bunjira McCoy	Charlsie Smith
Vashti McCullough	Darla Smith
Norma McFadden	Wendy Spear

Michael Spikes
Jaquanna Staley
Carrol Starcher
Megan Stephens
Teresa Stull
Bridget Style
Machiko Sugiura
Faik Sulaj
Julie Taylor
William Taylor
Candace Thomas
Shawnte Thomas
Brittany Thompson
Sudha Tiruveedhi
Roxane Underwood
Holly Vance
Paul Ward
Amina Warsame
Jessica Wheeler
Kenneth Williams
Richard Williams
Tanisha Williams
Tara Williams
Sheila Wolfe
Paulina Wolkiewicz
Zyggi Wolkiewicz
Derrick Woods
Dingjua Xin
Aleh Yamaletdzinav
Anastacia Ybarra
Heather Young
Tammy Young

