

BELIEVING THAT YOU CAN



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

Believing That You Can

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and those of Florida's Adult and Family Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based organizations with their training and development needs.



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This book is dedicated to Florida's adult learners and the teachers, tutors, managers, and programs that support them. Thanks to all of the adult learners who contributed to this book.

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Preface

This book was designed to give adult learners the opportunity to build confidence while also improving their reading, writing and critical thinking skills. Adult learners enrolled in adult education, literacy, ESOL and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing, reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. The editorial committee chose to minimize editing of submissions and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or other affiliated organizations.

We congratulate the authors who contributed to this year's publication and hope you enjoy reading and learning about their journey.

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Someone or Something I Admire

A Daughter's Choice

When I think of someone I respect and love, my mother always comes first. We were born in Colombia and despite not having much money our mother raised six children. She always cooked good food for us and gave us a clean place to live. My mother and father always tried to teach us good values: honesty, hard work, and responsibility. My mother lives in Colombia part of the year-and here in the U.S. with me part of the year. She helps me in my business and at home. Not only do I greatly respect my mom, I deeply love my mom and dad.

Adriana Bolen studies at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. She is in Vicki McDonald's ESOL 4 class. She is from Colombia, and now lives in Fort Myers with her husband and son.

The Nicest Thing in My Life

The nicest thing in life is being a mother. I begin today's story with this statement because since I have memories, my mother is the person who I admire and love the most with all my heart. I never heard my mother complain about the difficult economic situation we had in our country; or about how hard she needed to work to get the things we needed. I never saw her crying or sad, she probably didn't want me to ask her why was she crying or the reasons for her sadness.

Now that I am older and able to see the things that happen around me, I realize that my mother is a fighter. She has always fought for me and for what she believes in. Last year, when we finally left Cuba and came to an unknown country, she demonstrated to me that she is still fighting to survive; and to give both of us freedom and a better future. This is the reason why my story begins by saying that the person I admire and love the most is my mother.

Amaya Canals studies at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center. She attends a child care vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

My Parents

My name is Astrid. I love to write about my parents. My parents are the people who I admire and respect totally. They are living in Colombia. They are elderly, but they give all their love to their grandsons and their sons. In family gatherings, we always remember when we were children and the mischief we made, like the falls from the horses, the falls from the trees, and the jokes with our cousins and nephews. But the people who are most excited and enjoyed this the most were my parents. We all laughed and remembered those great days.

They are the light in my eyes and the guides of my life. They are the constructors who made me who I am today: the person with good ethical principles, with kindness and sincerity. They have my admiration, respect, and deep love!

Astrid Correal is from Colombia. She came to the U.S. with her husband and three sons in December 2011. She is a student in Vicki McDonald's ESOL 4 class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. Both Astrid and her husband worked in a medical clinic in Colombia and they hope to continue in that field in the U.S.

Raul

Raul was born in a small town in Hidalgo, Mexico. He was the youngest of seven brothers. When he was four years old his mom died. He grew up with his step mom, who was also his aunt because she was his mom's sister. His aunt had seven other children. This boy was neglected and grew up in poverty. He only went to elementary school and got to fourth grade. When he got out of school his father made him work hard in the field until he got tired and decided to immigrate to the United States. When he got to the United States he worked in the field, in factories and in construction. He married a woman named Irene. Soon afterwards, she got pregnant; but because of health and economic reasons, Irene had to go back to Mexico.

His daughter was born in Mexico and when she was a year old Irene had to move back to the United States and left her daughter with Raul's sister. When the girl was four, Irene and Raul decided to go back to get their daughter, but Raul's sister did not want to give her back. After a few days they finally got her back and returned to the United States. When they got to the United States, they sent their daughter to school. The girl is now in High School and Raul and Irene are working in a restaurant to achieve the American Dream.

Cira Garcia is studying in the Clearwater Adult Education/ United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Roseann Segura.

Isabel Cristina Perez

In this world, people are admired for their personality, wealth, popularity, and talents. The reasons are different from person to person, of course. I think one should admire people who are special to them. Having said that, the person who has motivated me in my life is my mother because she has been someone who has always fought against adversity. She has been a mother and father to my siblings and me; in fact, she has demonstrated strength and great selflessness to the point of having three jobs simultaneously to provide a better life for us. She has tried to be optimistic by looking at the good side of things; she has never let fatigue, stress, or the routine of her hard life interfere with her role of mother. She was outstanding in meeting our emotional, spiritual, educational, and physical needs. From our childhood, we grew up with much love and care, and she did everything she could on our behalf. She is my teacher, my friend, my mentor, and my guardian because she taught me to keep moving even though I am close to giving up. She believes that there is always something wonderful waiting for me: "You just need to fight and believe in yourself," she says. She is my hero in a lot of ways; she helped me realize that all I need in life is toughness and education.

Someone or Something I Admire

My mother has always thought education is the most important aspect in life, even though she did not have the opportunity to finish her own career. She believes an education can make dreams a reality, develop personal growth, and improve quality of life. She said, “Without an education, it is hard to succeed.” For this reason, she pushed me to study when I was in my country, Honduras. She always stood by my side to encourage me to achieve my career. She has shown me that with determination, discipline, and perseverance, I can realize my goals. She put me on the right pathway to continue my studies and seek opportunities and experiences that could open the door for me to continue being successful. According to this, people like my mother inspire me to go ahead no matter the obstacles that may arise in everyday life in my new country. My mother has given me the best tools that an individual could hope for in order to overcome some of the hardest stages of my life.

Claudia Elizabeth Lemus, a native of Honduras, is currently an Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, FL.

Someone I Admire

I’m writing a brief story about my life. I grew up in Puerto Rico with my wonderful grandmother and my beloved brother. At the age of three, I experienced a very painful situation in which my parents tragically died. Thank God that He put a special person in my life who raised me along with my brother. My grandmother Carla put away her suffering for the loss of her daughter and raised us like her very own. She did not have the best life as we were growing up. Her marriage was very hard but she remained a warrior and worked hard to give her children a better life. Now I can understand her big sacrifices of the love she had for us. She taught us to love God. I remember going to church, shopping and eating at restaurants with my Grandmother. I didn’t understand why she told me no or didn’t allow me to do certain things, but now being a mother I completely understand! The fear of something happening to one of our children is unimaginable and the

love we have for them is indescribable. There are many things that can express about my grandmother, but I would not have enough words or paper to express my love for her. I wish that she knew my sons, but God called her to his side. I say to her, I admire and love you with all my heart. I know you are in better place, but always you are on my mind. Always you are the best model to follow. I miss you.

Diana Santiago is a student at Dunbar Community school. Her teacher is Ms. Chaney.

My Mother

My Mother's name was Branislawa Juzczyk. She was born in Poland in 1939. She was a very pretty and very smart woman. My mom gave birth to five sons and three daughters. When she was young she worked at the hospital. She worked there for thirty-five years. My mom's number one teachings were independence, love, and sensibility. She always was friendly with everyone and she helped people a lot. Our house was always happy. My mom never was nervous acting and she was always talking to us and she always had time for our family and me. My mom taught me how to pray to God for a good life, and how very important it was to be good to everyone. My mom and dad, his name was Adolf Juzczyk, were together for more than forty years. They created a very loving family. I miss my mom and dad every day and I pray for them too.

Dorota Knovac is originally from Poland and now is a USA Citizen. She is in ESOL Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck

Someone I Admire

I came from a poor family in Brazil. I am the youngest son of a large family of seven: four brothers and three sisters. Unfortunately, my mother passed away when I was a one-year-old baby so I was educated by my entire family and friends close to us. One of my oldest sisters, Marli, took special care of me. She used to hold me in her arms and treat me like I was her own son. I received so much love from my Marli, and that made me feel very special.

During my childhood, I was loved by so many people. One of them was an elderly lady, Milza Amorim Barbosa, for whom my mother worked as a housekeeper.

My sister Marli started to work while she was a teenager, so she did not have as much time for me. In spite of that fact, Miss Barbosa adopted me as her Godson. I was only five years old when she took me to her house. I stayed with my family each summer because Miss Barbosa used to take a vacation. My friends used to tell me that I was a very lucky boy. Even though I had so much love from both families, I was and still am sad for not having my real mother in my life. When Marli got married, I cried a lot; but she told me that she would take me to live with her, which quieted me. However, she could not take me with her. I understood because life does crazy things sometimes, and I had to settle for seeing Marli and her family.

When I had this dream to come to the U.S., she would encourage me. I applied to work in the US and very soon, I had all my papers in order and a job offer. Sadly, Marli got sick from breast cancer. I felt so bad, but she told me not to worry about her and to follow my dreams. Moreover, her doctors spoke to us and said that we had to live our lives normally. That was the only way we could help her.

When I first came to the US, I called her every week. Eight months later, she got really sick; but I called her and she said that she was getting better. That was a lie--she did not want to see me worried. She died, but before she died, she made my family promise not to tell me while she was not buried in the grave. When they finally told me, she was already in the grave and I realized that I had now lost two mommies. I miss Marli, my sister, and my mother so much. She was my hero.

Edson Sousa is currently an Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, FL.

Saulo Cortes, Youth & Wisdom

Someone whom I greatly admire is my brother and best friend, Saulo Cortes. When my parents came to the U.S. in 1990, Saulo and I unfortunately had to stay in Mexico with my uncle and his wife. My other two siblings, Stephanie and Apner, had not been born yet, so it was only he and I. He was 10 years old and I was 11. My uncle's wife was not kind at all: she forced us to do different duties like making tortillas or doing their laundry by hand. During vacations my brother, usually positive and full of good humor, and I planted corn with my uncle. Saulo and I learned to take care of each other. For instance, he was very smart so he made and sold plastic necklaces so we could buy something to eat at school because school snacks are not free in my country.

To be honest, my brother and I were always together, so it was natural for us both to come to Florida and be reunited with our parents. God blessed him; at only 23 years of age he was a manager of a construction company, and what a good job it was! He never acted with arrogance; on the contrary, he was humble and considerate of others. In fact, when the wife of one of his workers had cancer, my brother tried to do the man's job for him when the man had to miss work because of his wife's appointments. Saulo also visited them many times. Also, because his wife loved classical music, Saulo always persuaded my father to play the violin for her.

Not only was Saulo an amazing person, but he was also generous and compassionate. I remember one freezing day while we were outside of a store and saw a homeless man with no jacket. Suddenly, my brother took his jacket off and gave it to the man. I was surprised, so I asked him why he gave the man his two hundred dollar jacket. He answered, "If you want to give something, you give your best." He was teaching me a lesson, like always.

As a final point, I admire him because he was so mature for his age. As I mentioned before, he was a good person and a good role model—even though he was younger than

I! I miss his wise words and solid advice. It's a pity he is not here for me to thank him for everything he did for me when we were growing up.

Elvia Cortes is from Mexico, and she is grateful to be a Brewster Technical Center student.

The Person I Most Admire

The person I admire the most is my mother, Sofia Cerrato. She has always been my hero because she made me feel safe and protected all the time. Her priority was working hard to accomplish her goal of giving my sister and me a better life. My mother worked very hard all her life trying to visualize how she could find a way to get out of Cuba and raise her family in a free country, the United States.

To leave Cuba, there were many applications to be filled out in government offices. It took us about eight years before we were able to come to the United States. The Cuban government made us work on a farm for two years before they would allow us to leave the country. Finally, we were notified that we could leave Cuba and enter the United States legally. We were very happy, but at the same time it was emotionally very sad for us. We were leaving our family and friends, which we knew we might never see again. In fact, we never did see them again.

Getting here was a blessing. We found good people that made us feel at home. They also helped us find a job and an apartment. My mother and I started working in a sewing factory and my sister also started working in another factory. In about a year, we were doing well. We arrived here in June and in December I met the person who would become my husband. He was in the Army and he came home to spend Christmas with his family. Three months later he finished his time in the Army and came back home. Four months later we got married. Now, after forty years of marriage, two grown children and two grandchildren, we live very happy together.

I am very grateful to this country for giving us the opportunity to make a new and better life. I thank God for giving me a mother with so much courage, for making the decision to make such a big change to move to a new country and the challenges she had to overcome to give us the opportunity to live in freedom and have the better life that she was seeking. I admire her for being so valiant. Without her we would have never made it. God bless her forever.

Fanny Naranjo is from Cuba and has lived in the United States since 1971. She is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

The Person I Admire the Most

There comes a point in life where we just end up admiring a person for all the hard work they have done. There is one person I do admire and that is my mother, Samara Sanchez. I admire my mom so much just because of the woman she has become, the fact that she has supported me for 19 years already and has built a friendship with me. I couldn't be any more grateful than I already am. My mother is one of my biggest blessings.

The woman my mom has become has been a huge influence in my life. Seeing my mother trying to be the best mom out there is something so beautiful. She has succeeded in being a great mother. She never gave up even when times got rough. She stayed on her two feet and sought the Lord, who gave her peace, love, happiness and wisdom. Not only has my mother been great, but she's been my supporter. I remember it like if it were yesterday when I was turning one! Being a supporter has been one of her best qualities. She encourages me to do the things that I like. For example, I want to study teaching, special education to be exact, and my mom is behind me one-hundred percent. She's amazing!

There is nothing more important than building a friendship with our parents. My mom is not only my mother but my best friend. She will always love, will always give

Someone or Something I Admire

me advice and never let me down because she is a real friend. She plays many different roles in my life and her being able to be my friend is the most important one. Without her being there, I would be lost. To admire someone is to appreciate everything that person has done for you. In my case, I admire my biggest blessing, my mother. She has become an amazing woman, she is always there for me, and we have built an outstanding friendship. I thank God every single day for letting me have such a wonderful person in my life.

Jennifer Blanco is a student at The English Center. Her teacher is Mrs. Elena Jakubowicz.

The Person I Admire

The person I admire the most throughout my life is my mother. She has always been a strong woman and did the best she could to help me become a better person. I appreciate her first of all for being my mother and being there for me through good times and bad. I am very grateful for having a great mom who understands me and loves me for who I am. This is priceless. She means the world to me. She really means the world to me. So I try to keep her happy with a positive attitude. When she is happy, I feel the same way. One of the best feelings for me is to see my mother happy and excited. This really pushes me and drives me to be a better person. She is really my inspiration and my queen; without her, I wouldn't be in this world.

My mother is a wonderful woman. She is the best mother that I could ever have. She is the one person in my life that I can trust the most. I can tell my mother anything in the world and she'll understand me. I'm glad that she is my mother. I feel like I have the best mother in the whole world. She is my queen and hero at the same time. She always pushes me to do the best of my ability; this is what keeps me going. I know my mother wants the whole family to succeed in life. She always believes in everyone in the family and never gives up on us. A matter of fact, she keeps

the family going. I am really grateful and love my mother for keeping the family together and at peace.

My mother is very special to me and always will be because she loves me and has always been there for me through thick and thin. I will always love her and appreciate her for being a great mother. At one point, I was stressed out; didn't know what to do until she sat down with me. My mom and I had a conversation and she encouraged me to stay positive and stay strong at a very difficult time in my life. It seems like she is the only person who understands me at times. She is my idol, my role model, and my everything. I really admire her for being the best mom in the world. She makes me smile through the hard times and she makes me understand life more. She explains to me the important things in life and has always tried to help me become a better person.

Jesulien Fondrose is a student at Dunbar Community School.

I Most Admire My Mother

My mother is the person I most admire. I admire her so much because she was a good example for me and our entire family. Mom was a simple woman with only a basic education, but she had read a lot of books. My mother could speak about many topics. She loved music and playing piano. She was a woman of strong moral fiber. Sometimes she made major decisions for the family. My mother was a very good cook. My grandmother taught her how to cook Italian food. The food was delicious. She prepared lunch very early each morning. Her most special dish was Eggplant. It was delicious for us. The family loved it when she prepared this meal. Her other specialty was macaroni. She prepared it with a special sauce. Early each morning she went to the kitchen to prepare meals for her family. She was a very special cook, because she cooked all of her meals with love. I never became a great cook like my mother, but I still think that she was a great example in my life.

My mother taught me to be honest. My mother taught me to be disciplined. My mom also taught me to tell the truth. To be honest and to always tell the truth is not easy all the time, but these rules are the most important things in my life. I taught my daughters the same things. I never saw her do something bad. She loved her family very much. My father asked her advice on all sorts of things. My brothers did the same. I recognize and appreciate all of her virtues, and I strive to do the same things in my life. My brother and my sister admired her too. They recognized her love for them. I'm very proud of my mother. She was a good example for us.

Liliana Zambelli is from Argentina and has lived in the United States since April, 2011. She is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

Strength from Many Angels

I'm 31 years old and a single mom of two wonderful girls; Elizabeth age 7, and Gracie, age 5. They are the light of my world. I've been through a lot in the past three years: a divorce, a custody battle, going after my ex-husband for unpaid child support, my health, and my kids health too. Life, as some people might say, isn't all fun and games; it's a battle. When life happens, we can choose to grow from it or to retreat from it.

Now, if you had known me six years ago and see me now, you would know I have grown in countless ways. My life experiences have strengthened me to become a better mother. I'm stronger and wiser and I thank God every day for the two blessings in my life, my girls. If it wasn't for my kids, family members, and my church family, I would not be where I am now. I'm in school finishing the math part of my GED, I'm a troop mom for Girl Scout Troop 789, and I volunteer with my kids' school activities.

It hasn't been an easy road as a single parent. But I have had wonderful support and help along the way. One strong support is my outstanding church family who continue to support me, Parkview Baptist Church. The church has been

there for me and my girls throughout my adult life struggles. They have helped me in countless ways whether it was gas to travel to and from school or doctors' appointments, car rental to get to the hospital with my child with health issues, or fees for school. They have even helped me with food or money for bills at times. They assisted in getting Christmas dresses for the girls as well as many more things. Just recently the church gave me a three bedroom and two bath house. All I have to do is move in. Yes, a house, you heard me right. I couldn't ask for a better church family than Parkview.

Life has its challenges. I know God is with me along my life's journeys and I know He uses my church family to pick me up or prod me along. They don't give up on me and they actively work to promote my family's well being. I know I am blessed to have God and my church family in our lives and very thankful for both.

Lisa Kinney loves being a mom and works to provide her girls with wonderful opportunities for developing a strong sense of community. She is a student in the Columbia Career and Adult Education and the Columbia Family Literacy Academy.

A Portrait of My Grandma

There are many people in the world that I admire: interesting people, successful actors, writers, presidents, and my parents. But there is a simple woman who I think is the best person in the world, she is my Grandma. She is one of those humans who never die because she still lives in every person who had the fortune of meeting her. Maria was her name. She was born in a little town in my country of Peru, in 1904. She had a happy childhood playing in the mountains, riding her favorite horse, and harvesting vegetables and fruits. Her parents had a big farm with many animals.

She only had an elementary school education because at that time women didn't have the opportunity to study in high school and go to the University. When she was 18 years old she got married and had six children. Soon she

was widowed and two of her children passed away. She worked hard to support the family as a seamstress. A few years later, she decided to move to the capital, Lima, for better opportunities for the children. In Lima, Maria decided to start a tailor shop. She worked long days and late nights to have a successful business.

I grew up living next to her and she impacted my life tremendously. When I was a child I played with buttons, pieces of fabric and mannequins in the store. It was magical and fun. She taught me the importance of work, love and charity to others. She always shared with poor people and helped everyone in the family. I remember with great nostalgia her stories and advice. Although she didn't have a high level of education, she encouraged her sons and grandchildren to study and get a degree. She always told us to stay together because family is the most important thing. She told us that our unity is our strength. She lived to be 98 years old, and we continue to celebrate her birthday with a big party, with happiness, and with a lot of food as she would have liked. I don't miss her because I feel she is still with me.

Maria Reynaldo was born in Peru and has lived in the United States since 2003. She is currently studying with TLC Online at the English Center. She loves kids and she wants to become a teacher. Her teacher is Tim West.

A Mentor

The person who I admire would be my teacher. She has every quality for being the perfect teacher. She goes out of her own way to encourage others to meet and master their own dreams in life. While there is no one who could ever fill her shoes, I'm hoping that someday I can become a glimpse of what she represents. Not only did she open doors to further my education, she also never gave up on me. Up until this point she is still guiding me. She is there every step of the way mentoring and believing in me as I strive for my goal to finish my bachelor's degree in education, in the near future. I am so grateful. I can't imagine myself ever taking that first step in a classroom if it wasn't for her

encouragement. For all I have accomplished I must give her credit. Without my mentor's support none of it would have ever been possible. Going to school has changed my life. Educating oneself sure has its advantages. I see it through the children I teach and in my own children. I can't thank you enough for all that you have done. For giving me the tools needed to succeed in life. Thank you Mrs. Dee!

Maria Segura is a student of the Family Literacy Academy of Immokalee.

Someone I Admire

I would like to talk about my dad because he is one of the people I follow and listen to every day. His name is Juan Carlos, a man who was in good shape until 2006. My dad, whom I greatly admire, has never waited for anyone to help him around the house. He was the one to fix a table, mow the yard, and repair our bikes. -However, from an early age my dad started to suffer from diabetes. This illness has caused a lot of physical problems with his circulatory system and his insulin level.

In 2000, Juan Carlos Garcia came to the United States with his parents. After his mother died in 2001, he felt depressed because his father could not understand why she had died; consequently, he returned to Cuba. By the time his father went back to Cuba, my dad had already been alone for two years, as my mom and I were still in Cuba. As a result of all of the above he began to feel depressed and he lost about 100 pounds, which caused various problems then.

Two year later, my mom came to the United States, and within a few months dad had to go to the hospital because he had a little bruise on his right foot that the doctor said was caused by bad circulation. A couple of months after that it was worse and the doctor had to amputate his leg under the knee. After that he continued working normally, but his problems did not stop there. In 2009, my parents came to Cuba to visit me before I came to this country. During this trip the doctors in Cuba had to amputate his other leg below the knee. Finally, his diabetes was under control for a while.

Someone or Something I Admire

The real reason I admire him so much, however, is that he has not stopped doing things in our house. In spite of his disability, he walks the same as any other person does; he drives his car and fixes everything in our house almost as well as he did in the past, with my help though. We now do everything that anybody in the world can imagine. I also admire him because when I see him I see his high self-esteem. That helps me to forge ahead with all my goals in life because if he did not stop achieving his goals why should I? I believe he is the light that illuminates my way every day.

Nestor Williams Munoz Ferrer is a student in the Academic Skill program at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida.

I Love Music

Music is something that I admire. I cannot go a day without listening to music. I listen to music when I am sad or happy. Music is a part of my life. I listen to fast music when I am glad and when I want to dance; but I like slow songs more. When I am happy I enjoy the music, when I feel sad I understand the lyrics. I can show my feelings with music. Music is one of the best things to relax my mind. I do not know how my life would be without music. I might go crazy without music. My life is lighter with music. When I listen to music I feel like I am far away from my problems and I start to live in my dreams. If I am in a bad mood I feel better after listening to music. I can listen to music all day. I imagine the story of the song while listening to it. I think the singers share their feelings with us. I listen to music every day, that is why my headphones are always broken. I will listen to music until my last breath. Right now I am trying to listen to more English songs because it will help me learn more English.

Nigina Tokirova is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The U.S. Government Helps Many People

I am from Thailand and I have spent five years in the U.S. I am impressed with the U.S. government that helps American people and the immigrants by giving a lot of good assistance programs such as Education, Health Care, Food, and Housing.

Children in the U.S. have the opportunity to go to school from kindergarten to high school without paying any fee or a very small fee. For higher education the government provides funds that students can apply for. In addition, foreign students have a chance to learn English through classes that are available from the government such as ESL class.

Health care in the U.S. is complicated and expensive. Most people receive health care from their employer or through a family member. For people who need medical treatment the government also provides free health care, which people can apply for in the county they live. Also, low-income families can have low cost health care from the community clinic.

Free food that the government provides is in the form of a food bank or a food pantry. People that cannot afford to buy groceries can get free food from a food pantry near their home. Food stamps are another program that the government has to try to help low income people. A government homeless shelter is a place where people without a house can live until they can get on their own feet. Also, the government housing project is a good program that provides a house with low rental fee for low-income families.

Many people in the U.S. are fortunate to have access to a lot of good assistance programs, which are available by the government. Many people that get assistance from the government later on can depend on themselves, get a better job, and pay taxes, which can be used to help other people.

Pirada Charoenchit is improving her English skills at the Clearwater Adult Education/ United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

A Person I Admire

A role model is someone you take as an example in your life. Everyone has a person that he or she admires. For me, the person I take as my role model is my mother. My mother has many qualities that I admire in her. The first one is her courage, because she is not afraid to face bad situations and always finds a way to overcome them. For example, I remember that there was a strike in the street. There were so many people who were protesting. The street was almost blocked but, my mother decided to go to work after all.

She is also compassionate, as well as attentive. If you need some advice about anything she is there for you. She will pay attention to what you are saying. Then she'll help you by giving you good advice and tell you what you should, or should not, do in that kind of situation. I remember a day I needed some advice about how to prepare for my presentation on French literature. She helped me all night and when the day had come to present my presentation, I was very confident. It has changed me because my mother helped me find a way to overcome my stress and speak with confidence in front of my class. Moreover, she is hard working and never gives up. For example, she began to work as a young girl and did many jobs such as teaching and interpreting. After many years, she became a secretary and coordinator. Now, she is an assistant manager. All this showed me that in this life you should work hard to achieve your dream.

Another reason that I admire her is for her mood. She is very entertaining. She always finds a way to amuse you either by telling you a story or a joke. When I am sad, it is not for long because she will speak with me, give me some advice, tell me about her own experience, and make me laugh. Furthermore, the quality that I admire most is her

wisdom. She teaches me that in this life you should be a wise person and that you should act intelligently. In conclusion, I think that there are a lot of qualities that I admire in my mother. In fact, I want to say that I learned a lot from her and will I continue to learn from her.

Primerose Emile is a student of the English class at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Katie Mominee.

I Admire My Cousin

Though celebrities and famous people are very admirable people, I choose to write about my cousin, Williams Blanco. I admire him because he is somebody I know firsthand. I watched him and interacted with him when I was living in Nicaragua. He is a respectful man and he respects every person whom he comes into contact with. He scored excellent grades in high school. He is a good sportsman and the best player on his baseball team. In spite of his busyness, he helped his father at work three days a week. He studied to become an economist. Now he has a good job in Nicaragua.

Williams is being blessed with two daughters and one son: Ana Iris, Maria, and Nelson. Besides his work as an economist, he opened a natural juice business that it is doing well. Helping others is what he likes to do. He helps find work for many people. One of his daughters has a profession in administration, the other is an economist, just like her father. Nelson is studying mechanical industry at a university in Nicaragua. He, also has followed his father's footsteps – a very smart young man. I do not think that my cousin's well being is based on luck. I think it is 80% hard work, 10% proper upbringing, 5% inherited traits, and 5% thanking his shining stars. Two years ago in December he came for vacation to the United States. I invited him to my house in Key West. We had a good time catching up with news about each other all through the evening.

Ramiro Saenz is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Incredible Survivor that is 104 Years Old!

How does someone survive 104 years? I am Sue's caretaker. We go shopping, to her doctor's appointments, and I clean her house. I will tell you how she survives. She's remarkable, outstanding, and exceptional. The woman that I take care of is very independent, on-top-of-things and pretty sharp. The feisty woman gets in and out of the car by herself. Sue says, "I can do that myself." Walking to the convenience store is no problem for her. We go to the liquor store and the clerk knows exactly what she wants. This lady has a 4:00 drink everyday and that may be why she is 104!

I love the stories about the old days in New York. Her mom and sisters in the family canned fruit and vegetables and also baked bread. The family was also down in the cellar making wine. Sue would also watch the horses and buggies clopping down the street. On snowy days she remembers trudging to the subway.

Sue's style is what you would see in New York City today. She was a seamstress in the garment district in the 1920's. This wonderful woman is a great dresser: her scarf matches her outfit. She tries to also match her shoes and purses. The lady also repairs all her clothing by hand. I hope you enjoy this story that I wrote about my lady friend. She is so incredible. I enjoy being around her a lot. She is a very important woman.

Robin Lewis is a student at the Seminole location of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg and her tutor is Ann Vermillion.

Someone I Admire

Everything that we do in life has a purpose and all of us should have a special person who loves us and supports us our whole life until we pass away. I feel blessed receiving support from that special person; she doesn't ask for any explanations. She just responds to me with compassion, comprehension, advice, mercy, and wisdom. She's full of love because I am an extension of that special person.

Sometimes, that person couldn't realize her own dreams and goals. Trying to find a solution, my angel sometimes was humiliated by people who should have minded their own business. There were those who questioned my angel's judgment, but she just kept on being there for me despite what others said. That special person is my beautiful, loving mother – my angel.

I want to recognize my mother and honor her for the great job she's done and continues to do in my life and everyone's life she touches. In the past, my mom denied herself many things just so that my dreams would become a reality. My mother became a widow and struggled to raise a family in a foreign country. That kind of person is unique in this world. I admire her strength, values, and total devotion to her family. I hope everyone in this world receives this kind of blessing like me because when you have a caring mother who is strong and courageous, you will walk on to victory. She instilled in me the purpose of Jesus Christ's plan for each child. "Where the Spirit of God is, there is freedom!" I am thankful and feel blessed every day for that special person in my life that God gave me: my mother!

Rosa Reategui is hardworking, studious pupil who believes in the power of positive thinking and spirituality. She studies with TLC Online at The English Center. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Being a Caregiver

I work as a caregiver. My job requires me to care for people of all ages, races, and genders. Many of whom suffer from illnesses like Cancer, Dementia, Paralysis, and other various disabilities. They all have different needs and attitudes. However, they all deserve great care! Presently, I am caring for a 37 year old male. He was born with a medical condition and he was not expected to live past his first birthday. He beat the odds. Thirty-seven years later, Benjamin is alive but is legally blind and deaf. He walks with the aid of braces on his feet and a cane. He also wears a hearing aid. Despite his abnormalities, he is one courageous person. His appearance often lights up his

surroundings. He likes to talk and he enjoys meeting and greeting others. He often extends his arm for a welcome greeting. He will ask, "What is your name?" When told, he will address you by name. He will say, "How are you today? My name is Ben, and I am very happy today. I am doing outstanding!" Benjamin is a remarkable and special person. I am privileged to be his caregiver!

Rosemarie Carnegie is a student at Lee County Adult & Career Education.

Mom's Back Home

My mother, Sonia, was in the hospital for three months fighting for her life. What a stressful experience we had. I was sleeping by her bedside praying every day, wishing that a miracle would happen and my mom would recover from her illness. One month went by and I decided to adopt a positive attitude. I was hopeful that I would see my mom's full recovery very soon. Thank God everything started going well and, finally, she came back home! I've had a successful experience with my Mom's recovery. She is fulfilling "her place" in the apartment. Although, for a moment, I feared that it might not come true. My mom has an incredible spirit and lots of energy; she is a good soul. She always keeps me on my tippy toes; she expects me to please her at all times. My mom is adorable and unique. Her amazing personality makes me laugh; every day she is full of surprises. I always learn from her imagination and from the good ideas that she gives to me. That's Mother! I love and care for her. She is so fragile and needs so much love. Thanks again, Mom, for coming back home to me. I love you, Mom. Your daughter, Sara.

Sara Milgram is a devoted, cooperative student with TLC Online at The English Center. Sara also takes vocational courses. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Who I Admire The Most

The person whom I most admire is my mother, Bibiana Escobar. She is my confidant and role model. She was and still is a strong woman. She was a single mother of four

kids: Diana, Jesus, Lucia, and me, Sheila. I was only one month old when my father decided to come to the United States. He told my mother that he would only be in the US for four months, and then he would return to us. However, the date approached, and he did not return to Mexico. My mother, being a single parent, had to leave us in Mexico with our grandmother for more than seven years. She struggled to come to this country, to give us a better life. My mother worked for over 12 years in the field and continues to do so. She never says, “No” to heavy or hard work. I am very proud to have a brave and responsible mother. During the time she was working, she was saving money to bring our family back together.

I still remember when I arrived; my mother worked in a nursery. She had to change the plants from a small container to a larger one. I remember telling her, “This is so boring,” and she answered, “This is what I have done for 8 years to bring you here.” It was then that I said, “I am going to study for a degree, so you won’t have to work so hard.” When I was 13 years old I decided that I wanted to meet my father. My mother allowed me to realize this great desire that I had. She did everything that she could for me so that I could meet my father. When I was 15 years old, I met him. I am very proud of my mother for being a single mother who never gave up. She fought for us to have better lives. Thank you, Mom, for giving us a better life!

Sheila Martinez is a student at The Family Service Center.

My Mom’s Sacrifice

There are many people in my life who have influenced the way I am now. I got influences from movies and books, too. However, my mother is the one who has influenced me the most because my mother showed me and led me how to live and which way I should turn. I admire my mother. Therefore, I am going to tell you a story about how my mom became a great mentor to me.

When I was a middle school student, my mom was delivering yogurt. Also, she sold yogurt on the street. In

fact, I was ashamed of what my mom did. I was afraid that my friends would find out about what my mom did. Therefore, I didn't even go close to where she was selling. One day on the way to the piano academy with my friend, my mom (wearing a yogurt company uniform) asked me "Suk, did you eat yet? Where are you going?" However, I pretended not to hear and walked away fast from her because I was ashamed and I was with my friend. A few minutes later my friend asked me "I thought I heard that woman call your name. Didn't you hear?" Then I replied, "Called my name? I didn't hear. I don't know her." That night mom called me and asked, "Why did you pretend not to hear?" Then, I said "I was afraid that my friends would find out what you do." My mom said, "I was trying to give you better clothes and buy you delicious foods. There are rich and poor in this world, but being poor is not something you should be ashamed of." When I heard that, I cried.

From that day onward I did not feel ashamed of my mother anymore. I studied more eagerly. I owe a lot to my mother because she has sacrificed so much for me and my brother. That is why my mother is the most important person in my life. No one can take her place.

Suk Ha is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Power of a Song

Music has the power to change the brain and affect the way it works. It has the potential to help and heal people. We associate music with memories. When we hear a familiar song it can evoke strong emotions, both happy and sad. Songs can be a reminder of loved ones that we have lost, and help us reminisce about the times we shared together. The power of a song can be a moving tribute to an American Icon, such as "Candle in the Wind" sung by Elton John or Princess Diana. A song can be a powerful reminder of past tragedies like Hurricane Katrina or the Twin Towers. A song can draw people closer together in difficult times and give us renewed hope. A song such as "We are the

World" has great power. Music is an effective way to regulate moods during sports, both before and after the game. The song "We are the Champions" by Queen, is often played at basketball games. It energizes the crowd, and motivates the players. Through time, the power of music has proven to be soothing to our souls, bring healing to our bodies, and keep our memories alive.

Ting Yue is an ESOL Student from Hong Kong at Leon County Schools Adult & Community Education. His teacher is Matt Gowens.

My Experience in Adult Education

Patience, Perseverance, Practice

My experience in adult education and literacy has been terrific. It takes me just seven months to be able to communicate in English with people from different countries. Honestly, during the first month in class I thought that it was impossible to learn, because I did not understand the language. I only understood the English that my boyfriend spoke but not too much in the beginning. We are together and we are a solid couple just because of the power of love and Google Translate. My hearing is not yet tuned to understand how others speak.

I have improved tremendously, because this program for adults has very good teaching methods and a very professional educator. My teacher does an excellent job. She is an incredible woman who tries to help everybody of different nationality with different concerns. She motivates us to study hard. Without a doubt, she is a valuable asset for us to achieve our goals, because she does not only teach English, she encourages us to be a part of this society. I remember one day I had to prepare myself for an interview. It was my first interview in English and I called her for help. After the interview, I got the job!

Studying and working are two difficult tasks. Many mornings when my alarm rang, I did not want to get up, because I did not have enough hours of sleep. The work was difficult, because I did not have the English skills. This is my first reason to continue studying English very hard. With good English skills I should be able to get a better job. Thus, this would equate to becoming a better team player and having a better quality of life in general. Beside attending class at the adult education I also receive assistance from the Literacy Volunteers of America. I have a very good tutor who helps me with my pronunciation and reading. He is a retired doctor.

Now, I have a good job with benefits. My advice to everyone is that if you want to succeed in America, learn English, stay focused, and sacrifice your time to do it. In the long run you will receive the reward. I am going to continue studying, because my ultimate goal is to be an accountant one day.

Alina Castro is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

School Life

During my school life, I have had many ups and downs in school. I have gotten in trouble and I have had struggles but most importantly, I have always had good grades and great friends. Grades were never the problem. The problem was when I got bored; I would talk and it would lead to me getting in trouble. I also felt like some of the teachers didn't like me but also I felt like most of them loved me.

During my Elementary and Middle School years, I did very good and never got into trouble and had good grades. I also participated in different programs and different events that kept me busy. In those school years, I always had something to do for school before I even thought about getting in trouble. I don't know why but when I hit High School my whole mentality changed and I started getting in trouble. I think my whole mind frame changed the summer before I started my first year of High School.

When you're in school, the main thing people try not to do is not get in trouble. Well in my case, I got in trouble a lot. Not because I was bad and did major things but mostly because I was either talking or I was sleeping. The school work most of the time was self-explanatory and not hard at all. I would always get finished with my work early and then have nothing to do for the rest of the period, which was very boring. I used to lie my head down and fall asleep.

Don't get me wrong now, I did have some struggles with the schoolwork to the point where I got frustrated and took a break. My hardest subject was Math; it was just difficult and would always get me mad because I always did

My Experience in Adult Education

badly on the work. Once I left high school I decided to get my G.E.D. I enrolled in the adult education program and took the TABE test. After the test, I found out that I had gotten good scores on the TABE test. In fact, I got one of the highest scores in the whole G.E.D class. So no matter what happens, you always have to remember that education is very important. Education is the key to success. Without education you cannot go anywhere in life. So what I am doing now is one of the best decisions I have made in my life, which is to get my G.E.D. at Dunbar Community School!

Chris Estrella is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Experience in Adult Education

School was never easy for me. In fact I hated school most of the time. The reason I am writing this essay is to say that I have a learning disability. I am attending Clearwater Family Literacy Program. I am working with a wonderful teacher who is helping me with my special needs. I want to continue my education because I have a little boy and I want him to know it is never too late to get your education and to set goals for yourself. I am truly learning a lot of different things. For instance, I am helping my son read and improving my reading as well. I also enjoy the parenting classes because it helps me read to my son. We also sing and listen to special songs that help him learn. I truly want to improve my reading comprehension because it is very hard for me to understand what I read. I love to bake. Two of my main goals are to obtain my GED and get into a culinary program so I can someday be employed. I feel like I am finally making progress and getting the help I need. I am already reading better to my son. I love school.

Damaris Antonetty is a 34-year-old mother to her three-year-old son who is the light of her life. She attends the Clearwater family Literacy Program.

My Success through Education

First and foremost, the reason why I feel successful in this class is because it taught me how to help my

husband. He doesn't know any English at all. He never went to school and cannot read or write. From the confidence I got by coming to school, I took the job of being his teacher. When he doesn't go to work, he always says to me, "I want you to go to school instead of staying home because you are the leader of our family, and helping me and our children." Even though I knew some English, I wanted to develop my English even more. That is why when I heard that they were going to offer English classes; I couldn't wait to attend. I knew by learning more I could help my children with their homework and become a successful parent. I am very happy that I am taking classes because many people have told me that I have improved my English. Now, I can translate Spanish to English for people that need help in translating. It also helps me to write better and I know how to fix my own mistakes.

Additionally, I can continue my love of learning. Ever since I was a little girl I have always liked learning in school. But, unfortunately, I never got the chance to graduate from high school or go to college because of health and financial reasons. I love my teacher very much because to me she's like my friend and a member of my family. I hope God gives her a long life to help me and help all of my friends in the classroom. I know when this year ends everybody will speak the best English that they never dreamed they could!

In conclusion, I feel successful because I now have the chance to use everything that I am learning at school. Going to school is the best thing ever, because I learn something new every day. Also, the classes offered at the Family Literacy Academy are free. Now I have the chance to have a better future for my family and me.

Erlinda Flores is a wife and mother of three children. She attends S. B. Idea's Family Literacy Academy at Greenacres Elementary. Her teacher is Julia Clark

My Experience at the Family Service Center

It began six years ago when I decided to go back after several years out of school. The reason is: one needs an

My Experience in Adult Education

education for better jobs and a better life. I attended six months of adult education classes at night. Personal reasons as to why I was incapable of finishing were that my girlfriend and I broke up then and I moved back to my home town of West Palm Beach FL. In my second attempt at adult education, I took the TABE test but didn't attend any night classes. At that time in my life I thought I was ready to challenge the GED test without any preparation. I was visiting the town of Arcadia FL but wasn't living in town. I felt more confident at this particular adult education center. However, I stopped attending once again.

Now, I have decided to come and try again. This is my third attempt at the GED three years later. I feel confident about it this time. Important things in my life have changed for the better; things like me being more stable, highly motivated, and mature minded in my decision making process. I believe that I'm making progress now because of the scores I receive in my workbooks and pretests. Also, I have completed career assessments on the computer. I'm more focused and have my priorities in order. Now I'm even doing volunteer work at the Habitat for Humanity.

As for my future at the adult education center, I plan to remain focused and disciplined in my studies. I made a vow to myself to continue to attend all classes until I am truly ready to challenge the GED. I will be very proud of myself for working hard to receive my diploma here. In conclusion, I have had quite an experience here and although I've had my ups and downs in school, I wouldn't let the circumstances stop me from achieving my goals in education. I wish to make a better life for my family and me. The only advice I have for an adult that is considering attending the program here at the Family Service center is not to give up due to the situations we face in our adult lives. Keep fighting for your dreams my friends! You have to believe in yourself first, and then go for it.

Frank Berry is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia.

Education, You Must Have It

To me education is the key for our life in a society. It is the learning of skills, from fundamental to advanced level that we all need without a doubt for our future in the community. Without an education, we cannot move forward. We need to make an effort to learn. Basically, everybody must go to school to learn how to read, to write, and to understand how to do math.

Education, in the broad sense, is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the character or ability of an individual. I think that the culture of a person in a country rests on his or her educational experience. It is not only teachers who should encourage the students to get an education, it is also the responsibility of parents, the community, and every adult. It is true for me that if I have more education, I will get a better job. The best way to become somebody in life is to prepare oneself. I remember when I went to school, my heart was full of hope to do something. If we are bored to learn when we are in school, we will get nowhere. Be mindful that there are many people living in the U.S. and they come from different countries. Several of the people I know are earning minimum wage because they do not have enough education or no education at all. I am very happy that at the moment that I am in class. I meet many different students who do not speak the same language. My instructor teaches only in English to everybody. Every time I go to school, I learn more new words. It is good for me because it is applicable for my work. I would like all students come to class and get an education. We will be better prepared to serve this country.

Jean Francklin Faustin is a student at Adult and Alternative Education.

The Experience

Trying to make a difference in my life is so hard these days. To experience being a single mother while having no parents around to guide me and tell me how things work has been an extreme challenge. They are both gone and I miss my mom so. I have been strong, I always say, "Don't give up!" So I've tried several times to finish high school

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through GED classes. I didn't do very well there. I've noticed in these places that they don't understand what it is like to be a single mother. They don't understand my experience. They didn't take me seriously about getting my GED. Instead of talking *to* me, they would yell *at* me. They would yell and take things in a different way. Sometimes my child is sick or I may not have child care. It's so hard to find a babysitter in the first place and secondly you have to pay the baby sitter. This can be difficult when my job doesn't pay a lot and the rent is also due. The last thing I need to add to my stress is to be yelled at or criticized. I have tried a new place that I feel good about called Clearwater Family Literacy Program.

My teacher is amazing! She is very helpful and knowledgeable. She understands my situation and has helped me so much in such a short period of time. Most of all she has faith in all her students and is like a mother to us all. I am very lucky because this year I *will* finish and graduate with my High School Diploma at age 22. I will also start college this year. Thank you Mrs. Cheryl Shaver for giving me a chance and most of all for having faith in me and making this the best possible experience!

Jennifer Lanphar is a student at Clearwater Family Literacy Program.

Life in Adult Education

My experience in adult education and literacy began soon after I left high school. I didn't have the required credits to earn a high school diploma. So, I enrolled in G.E.D classes. Before I enrolled in Dunbar Community Adult Education program I was not motivated to learn. My test scores were low. My self-esteem to learn was gone. In my high school years, I didn't have the love for academic knowledge. My freshman year went well. I passed all of my classes with a 2.0 average. In the following three years, I only had fourteen credits, which were very low. I needed a new start. A friend told me he earned his G.E.D. from a school close to where I live. I enrolled myself and began to work hard. It was a journey of many years. At times I quit. I

struggled to motivate myself. It seemed to be a long learning process. There were five subjects. I kept running the race. After five troublesome years, I took the G.E.D. test.

When I saw my scores, I was glad to know I came close to passing. I started to focus on the subjects I scored low on. My heart is full of joy that I can soon enjoy having earned a G.E.D. Now, I am ready to embark on a journey to learn and practice passing the G.E.D. test. I started new and made it a goal to obtain a G.E.D. I went through some difficult times. I even gave up several times. My journey was changed when I became motivated and took the test and came close to passing it. I am currently working harder to bring up my scores. I am also very glad to be at a great school with awesome people and classmates.

Jorge Islas is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Adult Education

I am an Asian woman, from China, east to west, half a world away. Coming to the United States was hard. The culture, and the language for me was a challenge. I have had some exciting experiences shortly after arriving. We came to Boca Raton first. The only way I could get about was to ride my bicycle. I rode my bicycle to explore the neighborhood. One day I lost my way. I could not get home. A gentleman stopped to help me. We communicated with our hands and our body language to find my way home. It worked! Ten years later I drove a car. It stopped in the middle of the street. It would not work. A gentleman stopped his car to help me. While I appreciated his effort, he was unable to start the car. A mechanic came and he did start it. I was so grateful and happy for their help.

Finally I want to tell you about the ladies at Miramar Library, Gloria and Sandy. They are volunteers who teach English Café class. Gloria is 88 years old and Sandy is also retired. Gloria speaks to me each morning to help me with my job. At the Sheridan Library there is Ann, who also teaches the English Café. I really do appreciate all the help these people give to me. I want to help others as a result of

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the help I have gotten. My English is not as good as I want it to be, but I keep practicing.

Joy Zhang (Huili Zhang) is a student at Miramar Branch Library English Cafe-Broward County Libraries.

My Experience in the Family Literacy Program

I've always been one of those people who just didn't like school very much. I have tried and tried finishing school. I dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade. I had a baby, which inspired me to go back and do something with my life. I wanted to make my child's life better so I chose to go back to school and better our lives. So I eventually became motivated and went to a WorkNet campus. This is when I was referred to the Clearwater Family Literacy Program. I took a few tests on my first day and at that very moment realized that I was at the beginning of path that would give me and my daughter a better life.

My teacher Ms Cheryl is a phenomenal woman. She never gave up on me. She is just like a mother to her entire class. She is just always there for me. She makes sure we do our best with our work and works hard with us to make sure our scores go up so we can pass the GED. Even when I was going through some difficult times in my life she always tried to keep me on track. She would let me know that everything is going to work out. She would smile and at me on the back and say, "You can do it Kacia! Don't give up honey!" I really know that if it wasn't for having the best teacher, I don't think I could've done it.

I love this program because it has taught me so much more than just getting prepared for the GED. Ms Cheryl has also taught me to never give up on myself no matter what I'm going through. I have also learned how to be a better mother to my daughter. She has taught me about the simple things, like how to love myself and be the best mom I can be. She inspired me to want to always do my best and to never give up. This was my biggest issue. If I couldn't get it perfect then I would give up. Not any more though. Now I just keep trying. Having a wonderful teacher like Ms Cheryl

by my side the whole time made me push forward and I never letting me gave up on myself. Her encouraging words telling me "it's okay, you can do it, don't give up, try again" and, "it's never too late" kept me going. I have accomplished my goal to get my GED. Writing this makes me want to cry. I would still be sitting in anger with nothing accomplished if I hadn't found this program. Now, I'm off to nursing school in a few months. I have become a better mother and woman. I know I've grown!

Kacia Gibson is a student at the Clearwater Family Literacy Program.

Why I Want To Learn English

I want to learn English because I am learning about a different culture and I need to understand the language of this country. I am grateful I can go to school. I am also grateful for my teacher because at my job, my supervisors Mr. and Mrs. Muriel understand my English now.

My family is very happy because I am learning English. My children understand me when I speak English with them. I understand when I listen to the news and the English television channels. When I go to the store I can find everything I need, because I can read a little more of English. When I go to the doctor's office, no one speaks Spanish to me anymore, they all speak English to me, and I understand exactly what they are saying to me. I can now help my child when he does his homework in English. Each day my English improves. I am learning a lot of difficult words as well.

I am very happy now because I only went to school for six years, and I never thought that my dreams to learn English would come true! I am happy when I go to the cafeteria at Greenacres Elementary because when I volunteer there the boys and girls tell me a lot about their families. When they are sad, I cheer them up. I always try to help anyone who needs me. The people I work with have told me how much my English has improved. I need to learn and understand English to improve every aspect of my life. I feel proud of myself and more confident every day, because my English just keeps getting better and better!

My Experience in Adult Education

Maria de la Luz Garcia attends S. B. Idea's Family Literacy Academy at Greenacres Elementary. She is married and has three children. Her teacher is Julia Clark.

Columbia County Adult Education

During my years of experience in adult education, the literacy program has been challenging. I have to be smart and separate time for my family and school. Sometimes it is really demanding and frustrating, but I will keep going because for me, being an educated person is very important. I am from Mexico and I immigrated to United States seventeen years ago. When I got here, the first thing I did was start working in a factory because my dream was to work to have a better life. For a long time I focused on hard work. Soon, I had fulfilled my purpose. Before too long my house and my car were paid for in full.

I was happy because I had reached my dream, but then something tragic happened. My husband had an accident and he was in the hospital for two months. Those months were a nightmare for me. I did not speak English. Although I never had problems communicating in my job, now I had to communicate with doctors. I didn't understand what they were saying or speak the same language. During that time I understood why it is important to go to school. Through that experience I thought, "It's never too late to start studying." I started from nothing, but I'm progressing a lot. Being in Columbia County Adult Education's literacy program in Lake City, Florida has been a great experience for me. What I have learned has helped me to be a better wife and mom. I have three beautiful children and I want to encourage them to stay in school. Also, I would like to be a role model to motivate them to become educated adults in the future.

Maria Rodriguez has great dedication to persevering in the face of life challenges. Her attendance is praiseworthy. She keeps on "keeping-on" and has many successes to prove it! As a student with Columbia Career and Adult Education, we thank Maria for being an outstanding role model of the benefits of persistence and her devotion to learning.

I Believe In Me

My experience in Adult Education at Clearwater Family Literacy Program has been the best G.E.D class I've been in. I have a learning disability & I was in SLD/EH in Elementary School. At the time I would get embarrassed because of my disability. Ms. Cheryl, my teacher, changed all that. She made it very comfortable for me to learn and understand what I'm doing. I have been in two other G.E.D classes since I dropped out of school. Neither of them fit what I needed. I couldn't go that fast and I can't learn working on computers or out of a book all the time.

My teacher, Ms Cheryl, is so amazing. She helps us with our parenting and research. She makes things seem easier than they are and before you know it you are doing it very well. It can be about anything and all things that we need. What makes this program so amazing is that we learn about things in life that can help us like how to budget, use coupons, cooking, our health, and nutrition. She makes it very easy for us to deal with life's problems and she is not judgmental. She let us know things happen in life so you must pick yourself up and keep going. That's why I feel I made it this time with my G.E.D. A lot of things came my way while I was here in this program. I lost my best friend to cancer. It was very difficult and was a lot on me. I didn't let it hold me down though. By the end of the day I never give up on anything that was going to make my life better.

I'm so happy and proud of myself at this time in my life. I maybe thirty-two years of age but I know it's never too late to go back to school. I'll be enrolling in Cosmetology soon. I enjoy doing hair. That's my experience at Adult Ed Clearwater Family Literacy Program and that is why I believe in me!

Mary Bowie is a student at Clearwater Family Literacy Program.

The Effect of a Passionate Teacher

I would like to share some of my life's history. At age 44 I'm going back to school to get my GED, and I plan on

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getting it. Going back to school now seems to be more important and interesting at a later age than it was at a younger age when school was not a top priority on my list of things I needed to do. I really believe experience has a lot to do with how I look at life and the opportunity of getting and bettering my education. Over the years, I've come to realize that if I want to soar in life, I have to learn how to fly first. I realize that one of the things that really helps is having a passionate teacher. Mrs. Timmons is my passionate teacher. A passionate teacher really helps the student to become better in all the areas that the teacher may be teaching. I am so blessed to have a passionate teacher whom I know will always go that extra mile to help her students improve. To anyone out there who has decided to get a better education or just go back to school to get a GED: recognize when you have passionate people in your life who push you in a gentle way to do better so that you can soar and be all that you were created to be.

Michelle Evans is a Lakewood Community School ABE/GED student at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Pinellas County, FL. Her instructor is Ada Ward-Timmons.

A New Person in Me

It's really a pleasure to me to talk a little about my experience in Adult Education and Literacy. I enrolled in Adult Education in July 2011 because I wanted to learn and improve my English. With this, I also would like to get a better job. My goal is to never stop studying because education is the key to success.

I remember the first day of class was not easy for me because my English was bad and my culture is different from the American culture. That is why I had so much difficulty in adapting this new system. Sometimes my behavior was not so good toward my teacher. When someone talked to me I did not make eye contact because in my country we don't do this. It is really disrespectful to look into the eyes of your elders. I used to walk with my head tipped to one side. My teacher took notice of me and

she spent a lot of time educating and molding me to be like an American. At the beginning I felt very uneasy but gradually as I began to listen to myself talk and watch my walk in my life, I realized that the change I needed to make was for my own good. By and by, I followed my teacher's guidance, paid attention to her instruction, and took note of her advice. Slowly, I saw the change in me. I am now able to look into the eyes of those who are talking to me. I feel strength within me. I am confident in my speech and my steps in my daily walk. I am much happier now than before. I see good energy in my class. It makes me think about going to college and planning for my future. I am grateful to my teacher.

Miguenson Trezalus is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience in Adult Education

The reason why I'm writing this essay is because I have Special Learning Disabilities (SLD). I have struggled in school as a result of this. I never felt like I was going to pass. I never felt like anyone cared either. I was lost. I left school when I was in the 9th grade. Now, nine years later, I'm going to GED school Mondays-Fridays at Clearwater Family Literacy Program. I want to get my education because I want to show my son you can do anything you want, you just have to set your goals and work hard. I am working with my teacher so I can pass my GED. I have already passed three subjects: Reading, Writing and Social Studies. This is a major accomplishment for me and it has given me even more motivation to finish.

I wouldn't have gotten this far if it wasn't for Ms. Cheryl. When I first came to Clearwater Family Literacy Program, I didn't think I could do it. I would leave early all the time and I just gave up. My teacher wasn't going to let me quit so easily. I actually could tell I really was improving in Reading and my other subjects. We do a lot of parenting and I knew I wanted to show my son his mom could do it. I also realized how his life has also gotten better because of the kind of parent I have become. My son loves

it when I read to him and reading together is something we look forward to everyday.

I know someday I really want to work with animals. I want to volunteer at the SPCA. I also want to take courses so I can work as a vet tech when I'm done with my GED. I'm glad my teacher never gave up on me. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you how Clearwater Family Literacy Program helped me become the person I am today.

Nichole Harper is a student at the Clearwater Family Literacy Program.

My Good Fortune at the Leesburg Library

I've never been a very lucky person! I've had plenty of ups and downs when it comes to education. So, when I moved to Florida for a fresh start I figured everything would be the same. As always, I knew I wanted to get my GED (General Education Diploma), but I knew I needed help getting there. Then I found the Leesburg Library Adult Learning Program. That's how I met my tutor, Carl. When I first walked in, I was pretty scared. I thought he would think I was hopeless like the last one. Then something happened. Even after I did the tests and scored pretty low, he still said I did a good job. Right off, we got to work. My worst subjects have always been math and English, so I always figured I'd never understand them. To find a tutor that could help me understand them made me feel like one of the luckiest people in the world. No matter how much or how many times he has to explain something to me, Carl will.

I've never had a tutor that believed in me as much as Carl does. He manages to explain things in a way I understand. There's no better feeling than when something that you never understood just clicks. He has been the only one that has made me want to do homework. That says a lot right there! I just turned 28 not that long ago and, thanks to Carl, I finally feel like getting my GED is not as far away as I thought. I am forever grateful of Carl and the Leesburg Library Adult Learning Program for everything I have accomplished. I am not be ready just yet but when I am

I'll know it's because of them. I only wish more people got the same help because it's worth it in the end. I know all my test scores are way up, and that's because of them. So at the end of the day I know I'll get there to get my GED, then who knows what I'll do next?

Peggy Lee Perrin is a student at the Pre-GED program in Leesburg.

My Experience in Adult Education

How important is adult education? In the entire world education is the key for success. People go to school to have a better life. This is the reason it's never too late to learn, no matter what the age of the person. In a few words, I'll explain the value of adult education. It's a pleasure for me to talk about my experience in adult education and literacy. As an adult, going to school to learn English has demanded a lot of effort from me to improve my English. If I would like to have a limited accent in English I need to practice every single day. Practice is the only way one succeeds. When I was in class with my teacher and the other students, we considered ourselves as a family. Each of us always tried to help other students. The teacher is always ready to help us improve our ability to have better skills with our speech and grammar. In my way of thinking I can suggest to every adult not to be scared to go to school, no matter what your age because education is very important for your success.

Reginald Charles is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Adult Education and Literacy

Literacy refers to the ability to read and write. Along with reading and writing, an educated person with at least a high school diploma should be able to critique and determine the pros and cons of a situation. Since we live in a world in which most people judge a person's capability by his or her level of education, I think getting an education is a crucial matter. Many people who used to play hooky decided to go back to school because the world has changed. They may have dropped out for various life situations, such as raising a family or financial difficulties.

My Experience in Adult Education

Everyone can see that almost all workplaces require at least a high school diploma. The government takes the first step by supporting them in offering grants to help people be competitive in the workplace. Because of this support, there is no reason for all adults not to have at least a high school diploma.

For adults, getting an education has become more important than ever before because the world has changed. Even though most adults have jobs, they somehow manage to attend school. Some go to class at night and work during the day or vice versa. Some reasons for returning to school are, to get a GED, improve English to pursue a college degree, or train for another career. They always keep in mind that learning is a lifelong process. Once they set their minds on doing something new and increasing their earning potential, they will invest in themselves because they deserve it. Nothing is more important in one's life than education, and adults show this through their interest in learning.

Smay Saintilma is a student at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach taught by Ms. Nancy Gardner.

Don't Fight Literacy

My family always pushes me to make something of myself. Because of this, I started going to Adult Education classes. Ever since I was young I've had a problem retaining literacy skills. When I learn new things it seems I forget the old things I've learned. This is why I think being able to learn and being taught is a privilege. Being in Adult Education has made learning fun and easy. Here, I've learned how to correct my work. I learn things like FANBOYS which stands for the words: for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so. It's a grammar tool to help me to remember where commas should be placed. Things like this have been instilled in my head forever and have encouraged me. Encouragement and success motivate me to try my best to make something of myself. This is what my Adult Education classes have taught me.

Teacher input helps me learn if I let it. As a part of accepting help, I have learned making corrections is necessary to get things right. Getting something done the first time was hard enough for me but having to redo it was a nightmare and usually didn't happen. I have learned to work hard and to be sure of what I write down. I don't need to stop writing, just stop playing around. We all need "a kick in the pants" at one time or another to get us on the right path.

For me and well, everyone else, literacy is a key part of life. Our brain is like a tool: you need to use it wisely and often. It does not matter how hard you work if you're working in the wrong direction or on the wrong things. That's where Adult Education classes are a huge help. I think all the things I've learned are special. Now I can tell myself I have conquered lots of literacy-related skills and that's the happiest thing in the world.

Stephen Reed is a student with Columbia Career and Adult Education in Lake City, FL. Hunting is one of his favorite hobbies and he enjoys the outdoors.

How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in The U.S.

Life in the Philippines

Life in the Philippines, my home country, is very different from life in the U.S. The United States is more advanced in all aspects of living than I am used to in my country. For example, in the United States I had to learn to drive for myself when I wanted to go to somewhere. In my country if I wanted to go to a mall or somewhere else, I had to wait for a bus that sometimes never came or was already filled. When the bus was crowded, I looked for alternative transportations. So having a car in U.S is convenient unlike in my country. In my country, I lived in a rural area where I saw all the rice fields and farmers who were prepared to work in their fields all day. In the United States, I see people in nice suits driving their cars to work. In the United States they have more to offer than in my country in education. The schools have all the equipment to help you in your studies. You can borrow books from a library and use a computer to research online. Unlike in my country, only people that can afford a computer have accesses to it. If I have to research or borrow books, there is no library to borrow books and I have to go to an Internet café to do my research. Living in the United States is an eye opener for me. There is more to learn about life in the United States compared to life my country, the Philippines.

Carl Chavez is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Life in the Dominican Republic

I was born and raised in the Dominican Republic until the age of eleven, when I was in 6th grade. While I was there I had a pretty good life compared to many others. I was attending school on a daily basis and I kept my grades in between 90% - 100%. I was an “A- student” as they call it here. In the Dominican Republic, I felt like everyone was family. The attitude of most people was, “I’ll help you today and, hopefully, you’ll help me tomorrow if I need it.”

I know in a lot of Latin countries this philosophy of life is common. I am not saying there are not bad people in my country, because they are everywhere you go. I miss running barefoot out in the middle of my “barrio” (neighborhood) with my cousins and playing “hide and seek” or “tag you’re it” or anything that we could think of. Christmas time is fun. There are lots of lights, food, music, drinks, dancing, singing, and laughter-- something that any child would not forget. When families come together on December 31st it is something unforgettable.

We celebrate “El Dia De Los Reyes”, which is “Christmas” (the day when kids open their toys). That day is amazing! I remember when my neighbors didn’t have enough money to buy their kids toys, my mom would go and buy them toys. I was happy over there. The familiar quote applies to my feelings “There’s no place like home.” Because that’s a feeling that I haven’t felt here, even though I’ve been here for quite some time. When I arrived here in Miami, at the age of eleven, I didn’t know English. I attended Miami Lakes Middle School where I enrolled in ESOL classes and learned how to write and speak English within a year. After a short while, I noticed how different people were here. Kid’s minds are ten years or more than their age and they have a “you’re on own “philosophy of life. However, don’t misunderstand, I always say I’m blessed to live here in the United States of America, where I’m able to progress and expand my knowledge far more than what I thought possible. This is a place where I can get a job or get a great career. In the Dominican Republic, there are not a lot of job openings and when there are, they don’t pay the amount the employee deserves. Additionally, violence is as bad, or worse than here. There are a lot of pros and cons when it comes to the Dominican Republic, but there’s no better country than United States of America.

Carmen Dorval is from the Dominican Republic and is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

Life in Mexico

Mexico is a country with native roots, such as the Toltec culture, Mixtec culture, Maya culture, and Aztec culture. More than 67 native languages are still spoken in the outskirts of the big cities. After the Spanish conquered Mexico, the Spanish language was established as the mother tongue and today's first language. The physiology of some Mexican people also has native roots, such as black or brown hair, brown skin, and small height. Other Mexicans are mestizos, a mixture of native and Spanish. It is very rare to see white people or black people. If someone sees white or black people, this person takes it for granted that they are foreigners. Mexican cuisine is a fusion of native and Spanish cultures. The native food consists of corn tortillas, beans and an extraordinary hot chile flavor, which is also called the king of Mexican food. The Spanish people introduced meat from domesticated animals (beef, pork, chicken, goat and sheep), dairy products, and various herbs and spices of Mexico. When people eat at their homes, corn tortillas, beans and the king of the Mexican food, are always served on the tables. The most popular Mexican dishes are tacos, tamales and mole.

On the other hand, the United States is a multicultural country where people from all over the world live and share their customs. This country has different traditions because of the multicultural influences. The first language spoken in the United States is English followed by Spanish as the second language. In the United States, people can hear different languages such as Italian, Mandarin, French, Hindi, and Spanish. A lot of people think that hot dogs and hamburgers are examples of traditional food in the United States; however, there is no traditional food in the United States. Because of the multicultural influences in the country, everybody has a chance to taste different kinds of dishes. Also, it is very easy to get condiments and cook international dishes or go to international restaurants and taste every flavor of the world. These restaurants have the most traditional dishes of their countries on their menus. For example, if one visits an Italian restaurant, he or she

will find pizza as a traditional dish. Also, Chinese buffets are very popular in this country, and people can eat a variety of Chinese dishes, such as fried rice, lo mein noodles, General Tso's chicken, wonton soup, and spring rolls. The crepe is a popular dessert that French restaurants offer to their customers. Finally, Indian restaurants have spicy flavors in their dishes, such as chicken butter, tandoori chicken and naan bread.

Claudia Melendez is a student in Academic ESOL at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.

Summer Time in Jamaica

Exams were over in June and our results have been revealed. Now, it's summer time. Summer time is fun time; it's time when we explore our culture, nature, and games. Usually we start off by doing our community service, which is always cleaning the riverbanks, as we will be spending a lot of time there. Going to the river is like an everyday activity. At about noon, we will swim for hours then run to a nearby cane field to get some sugar canes or to the apple tree for some fruits while waiting for mangoes to ripen and fall from the trees, yummy! Whenever I remember these days I get home sick. Sometimes we would go on a hike to see what's behind a hill going through bushes with our machetes. We explored our nearby surroundings, as nature is a big part of our lives. We would never get bored as we change up our activities to have fun filled days, playing marble, cricket, soccer, track and field, and much more. I still remember the roast breadfruit, guava, star-apple, guinep, mangoes, night camping, and most of all: our entire trip to the beach for our Independence Day in August. Going to the beach is always a treat. A day full of fun and eating from KFC! That was the biggest thing. Summer time is always fun time in Jamaica especially if you are living in the country parts.

Denzel Green is a hard-working student who loves to push buttons and enters into debates in our program. He works hard and is successful, and makes us so very proud.

How the United States Can Change My Life

I am from Haiti. I have lived in the United States for three months. I live with my parent's two sisters, and one brother. I am going to share with you how life in my home country is different from life in the United States. Let me start by saying that life in the United States is much simpler than life in my home country. I would worry sometimes in my home country of being attacked or killed by gangsters. The opportunities back home are less privileged. The children of Haiti don't all have the same opportunities to attend school; or even go to college. If you are not well educated, jobs are limited. The pay is below minimum wages, and jobs are very hard to get. The pay in Haiti is unfair, so it's very difficult to live and raise a family on such a low income. Here in the United States, I have been given the chance and opportunity to have an education. I am attending Dunbar Community School to earn my GED. My teacher is very patient with helping all the students reach their goals. Once I earn my GED, I will be attending Edison Community College. I want to become a mechanical engineer. With my education, I will get paid more than minimum wages; and be able to take care of my family when I am married. Here in the United States, I don't live in fear.

Even though, there might be some bad things back home; my home country has beautiful beaches and mountains. The food is great and natural. Things are more affordable in my home country; and I had a lot of fun with friends and family. Overall, I am glad that I am in the United States. It is beautiful and it provides a secure place to live. I still love my home country, because it's my birthplace.

Desinor Waygain is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Cultural Differences between Brazil and the USA

Certainly there is a huge diversity of culture around the world. We can notice these differences when we read about it or travel. Even within one country, we can find a lot of diversity between two different regions from south to north,

east to west, or even from one state to another. There are always some habits, food, music, drinks, language, etc. that are new to us. When we go to another state or city in our home country it is not as easy to identify these differences as when we travel to another country. I lived in Brazil for seventeen years and I've been living in the U.S. for about eight years. There are a lot of differences between these two countries, even if they both are tremendous places to live or to visit. Of course there are similar things but the differences are much more noticeable. The first difference that can be noticed is the language. Brazil is the only country in the Americas that doesn't speak either English or Spanish. Portugal colonized Brazil so the original language is Portuguese, even though nowadays there is a difference between Portuguese from Brazil and from Portugal. On the other hand, the U.S. has been colonized by England, so the official language is English. In terms of the weather and climate, Brazil is tropical, and even in the winter time Brazilians don't suffer so much from the cold. In the U.S. this is different; in some regions the summers generally are extremely hot and in the winter it is the total opposite. Here we also have hurricanes and others natural phenomenon that we don't have in Brazil.

In Brazil, the variety of food is very significant. It is deeply connected to the people that colonized the country, and with the slaves that were brought by the settlers. The Europeans (not only Portuguese) that moved to Brazil brought huge amounts of diversity. Even from one state to another we can always notice the several options that we have. In the U.S. we can see that the food is connected to other countries. But in the U.S. we have much more influence from Latin and Asian peoples than we have in Brazil. However, we can always find something from anywhere in the world here in the United States. Of course if you go to big cities like Miami, LA and NYC, you will find a bigger diversity. It's hard to describe every little difference in just a few words. We still have a lot of things to talk about, for example music, religion, politics, tourism, education, and much more. The fact is, the life in these two

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countries sometimes can be totally different, but I am sure that in both of them life is completely exciting and unforgettable.

Divino De Oliveira is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL Program. Julia Sura is his tutor.

A Substantial Move in My Life

Some decisions can change your life completely. One of them is when you desire to move to another country different from where you grew up. My family and I made that decision, and, I knew it was right. We moved to this beautiful country, but we left behind many things that I remember with homesickness. It was not easy, but I am happy to live here now I know it is a God's blessing. Since I was a little girl, I grew up with the idea that someday I would move to this country, because several of my family members were living here.

I am from Cuba. It has a complicated government. It gets worse every day, and the poorness grows. Therefore, we needed to get out of there and the process took a long time. Finally, two years ago, when I was 17, I first left home and came to the United States. My family and I got very happy, because we and the other family members that had been living here for a long time finally were together. I met several cousins, aunts, and uncles for first time. On the other hand, I found everything beautiful and greatly different to the town I was from, where I could walk everywhere and the neighbors always greeted me with a "Buenos dias" on the way to school. I found different people, places, foods, ideology, government, culture, and the new language, which was the hardest thing to get used to.

Having a new beginning in life can be hard, even more so if it comes with the difficulty of not being able to communicate. I came without finishing the 12th grade, so I started High School as a senior. I studied like a maniac and got good grades, but I could not pass the FCAT. So I started studying English at "The English Center" and taking GED classes.

I want to start college and get a career. This is one of the best things that this country has; a person can take advantage of the opportunity to study, be a professional, and have the life that he or she dreamed, but effort is required. Sometimes I stop what I am doing and take the time to remember how my life was before I came here. My friends, my house, my little dog Melissa, and the simple people with beautiful smiles are treasured in my heart. Besides, I feel grateful because I have lived in two countries, and that made me the person I am today. I found simplicity and gratitude where I was born, and prosperity and future here in this huge country which opened its arms and welcomed me as its adopted daughter.

Elisabet Valverdi is a student at The English Center

Living in America

I came to the United States about seven years ago from Aguacatan, Guatemala. I started working shortly after I arrived. After seven years of working hard, I decided to better my life and study English. I am very proud of everything I have accomplished in this journey of my life. Through this hard journey, I found God. After all of these events that have happened in my life, God has been a blessing to me. He has allowed me to help and provide for my family who is still living in Guatemala. Living in the United States has allowed me to have a lot of opportunities and I am very thankful. I give a lot of respect to this country.

As of right now, I enjoy working and helping the people in my church. Through church, I have learned that God helps anyone that is loyal to him, so I try to do the same with others. I try to do my best to set an example for the young adults in my church. By doing this, it has taught me and helped me to become a better person for them and myself. I do these things because growing up in a country like Guatemala was very hard. I had to struggle with hunger, education and liberty. I had a lot of responsibilities as a kid and my education was very limited. Due to all these experiences, I really appreciate all the things that this

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country has to offer me. It provides me with great opportunities to better my life. I will always look back to the way I was raised back in Guatemala. The experiences that I had make me a better and stronger person preparing me for my future. God Bless America, the land that I love.

Evaristo Baten Tum is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Glad to be in the USA

I left Cuba 30 years ago because my father was a political prisoner. Three major ways life in my home country differs from my life in the USA are the political system, employment, and health care. The political system in Cuba is communist. The present constitution approved the legal vote. A person can vote at the age of sixteen. This was promulgated in 1976. In the USA people can vote at the age of eighteen. In Cuba, citizens are not free to talk badly about Castro's dictatorship. They have to be careful of any comment they make because they can go to jail if the police think they are doing something bad. The police do not need proof. It is completely different here in the USA. U.S. citizens have the right to speak and law enforcement needs proof to send someone to jail. Another major way life is different is that work in Cuba is for nothing. Citizens cannot see progress in the economy because the government owns everything. Citizens cannot buy all that they need. They have to use the black market and can go to jail for this. To buy food, the government gives citizens a small notebook and this is what they bring to the grocery store. However, the food is limited. For example, the Cuban government gives citizens four ounces of meat monthly, if it arrives. Sometimes citizens do not see meat for years. This is why the people have to use the black market.

Everything is different in the USA. People work and they can progress. They can buy anything they want, travel freely, and can own a business. A person can work for himself. When someone works for the United States government, they have many benefits. To qualify for work benefits in Cuba a person must be in the army. The last major difference is in health care. Cuba has free health

services. Many tourists use the health services because the cost to them is low. They can go see different specialists. All of this sounds good, but the big problem is that the Cuban people cannot find medicine in the country. All hospitals are in a deteriorating condition. Only a few hospitals are in good condition and are used for the Cuban government employees and tourists, who have to pay in the Cuban currency. In contrast, United States citizens pay for their health care and medicine. Everyone is treated the same and all hospitals are in good condition. In conclusion, the political system, employment, and health care are the major differences living in my home country of Cuba compared to living in the United States. I am glad to live in the USA where I have liberty to do, to speak, and to travel while my rights are respected.

Fernando Su has been a student at St. Joseph's ESL classes for the past four years in Lakeland, Florida.

Haiti is Different from America

My name is Jean Isaac. I am from Haiti. I have been in the United States for two years. In English, I am going to do my best to tell you the difference between Haiti and the United States. In Haiti, there are no jobs, no opportunities to go to college, and living conditions are not always good. While living in Haiti, there are no opportunities to have a good paying job; but here in the United States, jobs are available if you're educated and willing to work. This is why I have enrolled at Dunbar Community School; so I can earn my GED and be able to attend college. My family loves me because of my dreams and ambition. Someday I will be able to help them come to the United States.

I can remember everything about my country, and the place where I was born. I have dreams for my country. I promised God always for my dreams. My life is most important in this world. It gives me the opportunity to not only to live in the United States; but also attend college one day. In Haiti, if you don't have the money you can't go to college. I am going to return to my country where I was born one day. I love my country so much. Even so, it is a

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privilege to live in America. I thank you God, that I am still alive. "God bless America." I often think about my country on a nice sunny day, here in America. And how I can return and help all the people there. I am determined to return to my home, Haiti, and help everyone have a better life. Sometimes, I like to spend some quiet time with myself and think about my future. It is sometimes difficult for me to understand why some countries are poor and some are rich. The living conditions in America are nice and pleasant, with clean surroundings. In Haiti, the living conditions are poor, and some parts are unsafe to live in. If given the opportunity, the people of Haiti could have a better life.

In conclusion, some of the responsibilities were different about my future. I am going to do my best to make a difference in my country. I will be able one day to provide jobs, good living conditions and opportunities for a college education. How life in my home country differs from life in the U.S.

Jean Isaac is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Coming To America

My name is Jeanne Bredy. I am from Leogane, Haiti. I had a happy life, as a child in Haiti. When I was nine years old, my father wanted me to be a nurse. I finished my high school and went to medical school, Pedodontic D'Haiti, for three years. After that, I graduated as a nurse and my father's dream came true. I had to go to another city, away from my home, for my work. My father used to visit me every month. I was the nurse who took care of my whole family. Three years later, I got married and my first child was born. Few years later, I got another job and my second child was born. My husband was a good person and we had a good time together. However, later because of some problems, I had to divorce him. During that time, I met one of my old friends at the church. He lived in America, but always used to travel to Haiti to see his family. He married me and filed the visa application for me. That is how I came to America.

I came to the United States in November, 2010 seeking a better life with my new husband. I have been here for almost two years. Before I came to America, I knew it is a very big and a rich country compared to Haiti. I also knew that it is the best country in the world because it gives lots of opportunities to the people for their education. After I spent some time here, my views and thoughts have changed. Now I see America has high unemployment rate like other countries. After I came here, I had to face many problems. The major problem was I missed my eldest daughter who was in Haiti. I thought of her all the time. It was very difficult for me to understand English, so I could not communicate with the people. For the first time, in my life, I was unemployed and it was very stressful. I like America because I can use electricity 24 hours a day, not like in Haiti. America has many schools and universities with the best education. The streets are clean and there are many beautiful places to visit. If I can change anything to have a better life in America, I would make French as a primary language. Then I could speak much easier. I would also make the laws to accept all the transcripts from other countries and then we can find jobs easily. I would also decrease the taxes for everything such as property taxes. However, I miss my daughter, my family, my friends and my job in Haiti. Most of all, I miss the beautiful beaches I used to visit regularly in Haiti.

Jeanne Bredy is an ESOL student. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Life in Cuba

I'm from Cuba, a communist country controlled by a dictator and murderer named Fidel Castro. In order to understand the difference let's start with the characteristics of the political system that controlled my country for more than forty years. In my country people don't have human rights; you can't have any initiative or any opinion, unless it coincides with the governmental agenda. It doesn't matter how hard you work or how good your idea or initiative can be. You never can use or put it to work, because everything is controlled by the government. Here in the United States, even before knowing the language, I started working by

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myself as carpenter after saving some money. I started buying distressed houses then fixing and remodeling them. I sell the homes for some profit investing some of it for the next one. Right now I'm working on one here in Fort Myers. My objective now is to learn English because I know that it will help me to overcome many of the limitations I have in my work. That's is the big difference between my country Cuba and the Unites States. Here, with hard work, you can make a future for you and your family. In my country you never can obtain that; no matter how hard you work. This is a great country. With hard work and dedication we can make it better for the next generation.

Jose Mato is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Different Ways of Living

Life in my country, Haiti, differs from life in the United States of America for three reasons. The languages are different, the cultures are different, and the statuses are also different. First, the languages are different. In Haiti we speak Creole and French. In the United States of America they speak English. Next, the cultures are different. In Haiti Voodoo is very popular. Even though some people are Christian Baptist or Catholic, most of them still practice Voodoo. The foods are also different. The American people like fast food while the Haitian people enjoy eating rice and beans and other different kinds of food. Last, the statuses are different. The United States of America is much richer than Haiti. In the United States of America there is a plethora of opportunities. The American precepts are different from the Haitian precepts. For example, in the United State of America at 18 years old a child is no longer under his parents' control, but in my country it is completely different. In conclusion, life in Haiti differs from life in the United States of America.

Kettia Simon is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

How Life in my Home Country Differs From U.S.A.

Since I moved to the United States with my family 6 years ago, my life has completely changed. This country offers many opportunities for people who are looking for a better quality of life, education, health, and freedom. Thanks to my effort and dedication, I adopted English as my second language. Now I am able to communicate with other people. I got a job and with the money I earned, I saved and bought my own car. I'm still attending school because I want to get my high school diploma, then study medicine and become a doctor. This country has its doors opened for those who dream big and want to reach their goals by always moving forward. All you need to do is approach the facilities and benefits that this country gives and not waste your time. On the other hand, many of our countries in Latin America are poor or in the process of developing with fewer resources, jobs, low education, health and basic services like drinking water, electricity, and a poor justice system. I'm very thankful to live in this powerful country, and I'm sure that one day I will become someone important for this community.

Kevyn Pacheco is a student at The English Center.

The Difference!

My name is Maribel Sangines, and I am from Mexico. I was fifteen years old when I moved to the United States with my husband. I have lived here for ten years. I will share some of the differences between having a job and the foods we eat. In my country, people take things slowly. They are not always in a rush or hurry to do things. However, they will get the job done. On the other hand, in the United States people are always in a hurry. Driving fast, blowing their horn because you're driving too slow. This country is nice to live in; but life here is very fast for me. The food in Mexico is always fresh because it is grown in your back yard. No matter what dish you are cooking, you can get fresh vegetables right out of your garden. Even your meat is raised in your yard. If you want chicken tonight for dinner, you just walk out to your yard and you have chicken. Beef

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is the same. We raise our own cows, sheep, and pigs right in our very own back yard.

Our foods are always fresh and taste so good. The food here in the United States has to be purchased from the grocery store. So sometimes, it's not always fresh. The vegetables are over ripened, or their shelf life does not last long. The beef and chicken is tough because it is raised too fast with chemicals. The United States is a great place to live. It offers all types of opportunities to have a better life. You can earn your education and have a better paying job to support your family. However, the food is different. I like to grow my vegetables in my yard for freshness and for good taste. I also like raising my beef, pork, and chicken in my yard without chemicals. Oh, the food taste so much better this way, you should try it.

Maribel Sangines is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Life in My Home Country is Different

I was born in Haiti but grew up in Guadelaya (a French Island) which I call my home country. I left Haiti when I was 5 years old and spent all my life in Guadelaya. I went to school there and had my first job, my first boyfriend, and learned how to live an adult life. In other words, I became a woman. By the age of 29, I decided to change my life around and wanted to see something else, other than the usual. At home, it was always the same day: go to work, go back home, and spend time with family and friends. That was my life, boring maybe, but life was good.

I decided to come to the U.S.A. for something better. Life can be better here, that's what everybody was saying. I came here with no family, no friends, all by myself. I had to start all over, make new friends and find a job. At this point, it wasn't perfect and I missed home. The time passed; I learned the language, met new people and met my boyfriend. Now I have two beautiful boys that I am very proud of—and they are the best thing in my life. But my professional life is a disaster because I never had my legal papers to make a good life here. It is a struggle! I can't say my life is better here, but it could be if I have the

determination to make it work. I love it here. It is not better than home; it is just different.

Marjorie Compere is a student at The English Center.

Life in Honduras

My country Honduras is one of the most beautiful Central American countries in the world. In my country there is much natural wealth, beauty, and it has beautiful places for tourism. Cohabitation is very nice because in your community everyone knows, greets, and shares much with the neighbors. Life is slower there and everyone has time to live with their family. However, we also have the sad side which is life in my country is very different from America. Starting with the economy, Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is an undeveloped country, where the rich have their big monopolies, causing the poor to have less. There are very few sources of work and that there pay is very low. The cost of living is very high; therefore it is very difficult for the majority of the population to have adequate nutrition, healthcare, and education. In my country the education is supposedly free because parents do not pay a monthly fee so that their children can receive education. Unfortunately the state does not have the ability pay teachers; much less deal with the materials that are essential for quality education. The infrastructure of the educational buildings is improved and sustained by the educational community (parents, teachers, students and community) since the State also has the ability to have them conditioned where the learning environment is the best.

The aspect of health also suffers very much, since most people do not have an opportunity to receive necessary medical treatments. This is because the public health is at its worst moments. Sometimes there are not enough drugs in hospitals to treat diseases. Therefore the lack of medicines is forcing the patients to purchase medicines outside in the healthcare market where the cost is very high. The U.S. also has great natural wealth. In Honduras, people in general are more connected to each other. Life in America is faster and

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practical. Everyone has an opportunity to work and move forward. The education is provided by the State in quality schools and it has educational tools, more novels and higher technology. For the development of healthcare, there is no comparison because the U.S. offers more opportunities to fight certain diseases. For these and other multiple reasons the people of my country want to come to America because the American dream is real.

Neyci Alvarez is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Life in Haiti

It's a pleasure for me to explain how life in my country differs from life in the U.S. First of all, I am from Haiti which is a beautiful country. Its Capital is Port-au-prince. When I first came in U.S., I was very surprised to see how people live. In my country when you go to a super market to buy some things, the price you see on the things you want to buy is exact; you are not going to pay tax to the cashier. In U.S., you are required to pay tax on anything you buy.

In my country, when you finish with your studies it's very difficult to find a job, even though you are qualified. Sometimes two people can apply for a job and the most qualified person doesn't get it because he doesn't have a friend in the government who can promote him. I think it's different for U.S. people who have more opportunities to learn. When they finish, they have more opportunities also to find a job. In my country, parents don't worry too much when their children go to school because it's very difficult to see a man go in school with a gun and shoot pupils. I never heard something like that happen in my country. In the U.S. very often you hear people go in school and shoot students.

In my country, when you buy a car you pay insurance every year, but in the U.S. you have to pay every month. In my country the credit system is not common. People can find credit if they have lots of money. In the U.S., if you have a job and you are able to pay every month, you can buy a car or a house if you didn't destroy your credit before. When I think of the differences between life in my country

and life in U.S., I believe it's like day and night because people have more opportunities to succeed in U.S. than in my country.

Pierre Osner is a student at Dunbar Community School.

I Live in the United States Because of Cuba's Problems

My name is Raquel Carcases. I'm from Cuba. I have lived in the United States for nine years. I am going to tell you the difference between living here in the States, and living under a communist regime in Cuba, the country where I was born. I am going to talk about the transportation, the bad food, and most importantly, the economy. Having your very own transportation is difficult in Cuba. The population doesn't have a means for private transportation. Although there is public transportation, it is very problematic to ride safely. There are people standing, and holding on for long periods of time. Therefore, the most popular transportation is the bicycle.

The government controls the food. They make available to each home a rationalized notebook that tells each family what foods they are allowed to buy. Also, the amount of food they can buy. All families have to buy the exact same amount, type, and quantity of food. The economy is deteriorating. Did you know the average Cuban worker only makes 250.00 Cuban pesos in one month? In America 250.00 pesos only equals \$10.00 a month. Could you live off of \$10.00 a month? In conclusion, it was my family that persuaded me to move to the country that is the most prosperous nation in the world. Life in the United States is a privilege. Here, I am working and studying for better opportunities to help my family that is still under communism, so they can also have a better life. Here, my transportation, food and economy are guaranteed. It is truly to me, the land of the free.

Raquel Carcases is a student at Dunbar Community School.

A Wonder I Can't Explain

I was born in a beautiful country named Haiti, which was called the pearl of the Caribbean. This country has

How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the US

historic monuments and a wonderful story. The cultural point of view was a terrific thing. It had pretty places, museums, and also many public places including good beaches with many seaside activities. While I was growing up I saw that it was a glorious life for all the people in our country. However, when I came to the United States I discovered a true story of a very different political structure and I saw it is as a wonder that I can't explain to you. Normally I'm not usually confused. However, this large country the United States, which represents the first power in the world, compared with a small country that is underdeveloped showed me a different picture. There is such a contrasting difference. I believe everyone would like to live in the United States of America. It's a better life for many who live in this country. It provides peace, security, respect, and justice for all. Finally this country gives us opportunities to realize our dreams and the hope of reaching all of our goals. God Bless America.

Rodrique St. Marc is from Haiti. He is a student in the ESOL Level Class at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck.

As a Tourist

I was in this country as a tourist many times before I decided to stay to work. I was very surprised, because in the United States there was no discrimination towards people over fifty to get a job. You can see elder people working anywhere. In my country a person who is fifty could not work because they are considered too old and prefer young people to work for them. I could see that in the United States I could study, because there are a lot of places in which we can learn if we make that decision. This is the country of opportunities, if you work and study hard, your dreams can come true. It all depends on you.

Silvia Quiroz is a student at Miramar Branch Library English Cafe-Broward County Libraries.

Living in the United States

Living in the United States is easy and difficult at the same time. Why do I think living in the United States is easy? It is because I have machines working for me. I do

not wash clothes or dishes by hand like the way I did in my birth country. In the old days, I dried my clothes by hanging them on the clothesline. I could not go too far from home because my clothes would get wet if it rained. Then I had to wash and dry them again. In the United States, I dry my clothes in a dryer. I can dry them any time I want, no matter rain or shine. I do not need to go fetch water from somewhere to use.

The water rushes out endlessly when I turn on a faucet. When I lived in a small village in my hometown, I carried water from a community well a quarter of a mile from my house and stored it in a tank for everyday living. Living in the United States can be difficult, too. Before I can own all machines to help me do my chores, I must work very hard to earn enough money for these robots. After that, I have to pay fat bills for electricity and water to the electric company and the city forever. I cannot hang my clothes to dry outside. Some neighbors might write a letter to me if I do that. In addition, it will not look nice for our beautiful scenario of the neighborhood. The experiences from living in a different county help me to appreciate living in the United States. I enjoy the easy part of living in the United States, but still I am aware of and prepare for the high cost of this life style.

Tueny Wittman is studying English as a second language at NWFSC in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

What Does the American Dream Mean to Me?

Following the American Dream

Every day, many people have the opportunity to see the American Dream come true for them. In my case it was in 2006 when I decided to follow my dream, get my family together, and live a good life. The American Dream meant more to me than just coming to the U.S.A. It was the opportunity to make my dreams come true. My father had been living in the United States for many years when I asked him when he would bring me to America. He answered, "When you save 3,000 pesos, you will be able to travel to America." After that moment, I started saving money. I did many things to earn the amount I needed to pay for my ticket to come to the U.S.A., and after four years, I was able to have saved that amount of money and follow my dream to this country. Coming to the United States was just the beginning. My father and my sister were living here, and my mother and older sister were in Mexico. When I first arrived, I was confused and scared.

My emotions and feelings were so strong, and the thought that we were separated by many miles made me sad. However, after a few days, my father told me that my mom and sister would come soon. Many months passed while we waited to know if they would get a visa to come here. Finally, after a year and a half, my dream came true when my family arrived. Having my family together was the best gift God could give me after arriving in the United States. Seeing my family happy and blessed helped me work hard to have a better life. My parents and I started working in a company. We worked very hard, and within two years, we bought a new home, a car, and a computer for my sister. After that, we started our own business selling fresh produce. Today, we have two houses, four cars, and two businesses; we have a good life. Making dreams come true is very hard, but it is not impossible. It was a big

challenge in my life to succeed. The American Dream means to me that no matter how far away my dream seems I will go after it with courage. I will keep my family together through happiness and sadness, and I will continue working hard to improve my life.

Alma Miranda is a student at ACE- Leon County Schools.

What the American Dream Means To Me

My name is Christiana Nwagbuo. I am from Imo, Nigeria. One day when I was little, my sister took me to the beach. When we were swimming at the beach a big wave took me to the sea. I survived, but it was scary. I still remember that incident. I have eight siblings but two of them died at a young age. My father did not want to pay for my high school; therefore, I could not continue my education. Then I went to a fashion design school for sewing. During that time I met my husband, and six years later we got married. My husband owned a business, and there were some people who worked for us. Then I joined my husband and worked with him. We have five children: ages 20, 18, 16, 14 and 8. We came to the United States in May 2009. We never thought of coming to America until my brother-in-law filed the documents for us.

He has been in America for many years. Before I came to America, I thought it was a heaven and the most beautiful country in the world. I also thought if I went to America one day I can become rich. After I spent three years here now, I know that America is not the country that was in my dream. It has more crime than I thought. Living in America is very difficult, because everything is very expensive. It is hard to find good jobs without a good education. I need to go to school to get a better job. Most people in America discriminate against immigrants like us. If I could, I would stop all the taxes that the government charges the people in America. However, I like America because everything is well organized. Students get free education from elementary school to high school. Another reason I like America is people cannot drive without a driver's license. In Nigeria, people can drive without a driver's license at their own risk.

What Does The American Dream Mean to Me?

I still miss beautiful beaches in Nigeria. I also miss my family, my friends, my house, and my business over there. Most of all, I miss my native food.

Christiana Nwagbuo is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School in Tampa. Her teacher's name is Renuka Karunaratne.

What the American Dream Means to Me

According to me, the American dream means a lot of things such as opportunities, freedom, and the ability to improve a better life. But as a non-native American, I know that achieve this dream will be harder. The first thing you think about before you go to United States, it's the opportunities, but it's not the same thing for everyone because each Immigrant have their own goal, it can be a great opportunity to go to college, or to work. You already knew that, this country can improve your chance in the prosperity and success you want to accomplish. It's a dream and also a right that anyone can achieve it, although you must work hard to build your own American dream.

It's also about freedom in different ways like religion, politics and many ways, it's one of these reasons, people find interesting in this country. It's maybe not perfect, but a lot of people try to make it better, and sometimes they fight for this right. When you live as a free men with the possibility to be whatever you want for example you could be a star, a doctor, an engineer, or be completely different and still be accepted by the society. It's unbelievable, for a lot of countries it's impossible right now. There is something else this dream means to me for example you know that, you can get a better life and you can also improve this life in many ways if you work as hard as possible. There is something I really like to think about, it's when someone who was poor for a long time then he finds or creates something new or interesting will make him a rich man. And also if you only do what you like such as cooking, you maybe can be the chef at White House if you are really good. So, that's what it means to me The American Dream like a lot of opportunity for everyone, a freedom unbelievable in different ways and a lot of prospect

who can help you to grow up economically and make better your life.

Davie Emile lives in Immokalee Florida. He has been studying for six months at Immokalee technical center but has been studying English for over a year.

My American Dream

I am from Europe and I heard a lot of times about the “American Dream.” I was thinking that America is some kind of unique place, where people are happy and smile all the time. I knew that America is similar to Europe – we have a similar culture and religion. But something had to be different. After all, it’s not a “European Dream” but an “American Dream.” The first time I came to the USA I was 29. I was not a child any more, but I was still curious what the American Dream was. I couldn’t see money lying on the streets. There were no golden apples growing on the trees. You couldn’t see anything special at the first look but when you spend some time here, you will start to see some things that make you feel here like home. Why? I think is because America is a friendly country with friendly people. It all starts from the people; they are relaxed and nice. They want to be happy and they want you to be happy, too. I don’t know why; it’s just like that. Maybe when they came here some years ago, someone else was nice to them.

Maybe when their grandparents came here a hundred years ago, someone was nice to them. I don’t know. Maybe. The second thing is the political and economic system. It’s democratic and liberal. You have the right to work, to vote, to develop, and to decide about your life. This is because the government believes in people and in their creativity and good energy. Thanks to this you are free to do everything for your better future just like hundreds of years ago when the first settlers came to America. They were also free to build and create. They knew exactly what was good for them. No one needed to tell them this. I think this tradition continues. Just let people be free. Let them build their country. Let them be happy and proud of what they did. It is very simple, but it’s quite enough to make a great

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place to live. This is what we call the “American Dream.” It seems so obvious for me right now.

Dominik Dymecki attends the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Family Literacy Program at the High Point YMCA. He is married with two children and his teacher is Brigita Gahr.

The American Dream

All of us emigrate from our countries to the United State of America with dreams, desires, and expectations in our minds and hearts that we will improve ourselves. This is what the American Dream means to me. It is all the wonderful opportunities this country gives to us. However, this is not easy! It is possible and we must make every effort to realize our dreams and desires. Here in the United States, if you want something, you can get it. It takes effort, valor, persistence, honesty, and responsibility. If you want it – you can get it! My dream was to become a professional. This would not have been possible in my home country of Peru. While I lived in Puerto Rico, I completed training in both Nursing and Psychology and earned my permanent nursing license. At the end of my training, the United States Air Force sent me a big envelope with materials requesting that I enlist with the rank of Captain.

Dora Montes is an ESL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Dr. Patricia Capps.

What the American Dream Means to Me

I was born in Tela, Honduras. I left my country in 1988 to come to the United States because of the situation over there. It was not easy living there. I had many dreams to be with my family, go to high school and graduate from college but that was impossible. My country is beautiful, but it is also poor. I couldn't finish high school because I had to get a job to help my parents with the bills. I have two sisters and four brothers in my family. One day I heard about North America and the opportunities I could have if I lived there. I didn't think twice about leaving Honduras because I desired to come and live the “American Dream.”

The “American Dream” means ambition, reality, persistence, and the courage to survive. We know that every year, thousands of hopeful new people come to United States in search of a better life. I believe that with hard work and determination we will succeed and are guaranteed a better future for our family. I believe in the “American Dream.” I believe that everyone can achieve a goal if he or she works hard enough. Now thanks to God and thanks to my dream, I’m studying English at Dunbar Community School so I can improve my life. However, the American Dream is more elusive that it once was. It’s harder now than it ever was before for people to move from one country to another. However, I think the “American Dream” is still alive but it is not easy. You have to work hard and keep looking for the opportunities. You need to go to school to try to learn more every single day so it can help you improve your life. If we work hard our “American Dream” can come true. For me, the “American Dream” means happiness, many opportunities, and a better life.

Gladis Lopez is a student at Dunbar Community School.

American Dream Tickles Me

Before I came to the U.S., I had no idea what the American dream meant. I guessed that it had something to do with a happy life. My favorite character, Homer Simpson, says: "The American dream is to be fat and lazy". For laughing out loud! Only after being here and having worked for a couple months, I got to know what the real meaning is. Everything in the U.S. is really possible. From absurdities to important things. Just work here and everyone can have almost anything. It doesn't matter if you work as a busboy, housekeeper or construction worker. Nobody will crimp and nobody will envy. This is the good side of the coin. Believe it or not, everything is wasted here too.

The United States is a big consumer society. Think about the strength of the dollar here, would it really make your life simpler? The first banknotes were covered by gold. Today on the banknotes it is written: This note is legal tender for all debts public and private. Do the American people have

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any idea what this sentence means? Is it not an American dream built on debt? A simple example: The bank lends \$10,000. The bank has 10 clients and everyone does not have any money, so everyone borrows \$1,000. Then everyone returns \$1,100 after one year. So, the total amount the bank receives in return is \$11,000. Where does the \$1,000 come from? How does this actually make new money? Sometimes I think that I should move to a place where there is no western civilization. A place where I do not have to use money and where there is absolute freedom. So, I will move to the jungle. What do you think?

Jiri Sedlacek is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What a Dream to be An American!

The American dream has been around since early settlers came to America; amongst them are immigrants and the poor. As a child, my father said he left his birth land so my sister and I could have a better future. He wanted us to have the hope of the American dream. What that dream means to me is freedom, justice and luxuries that many others don't get to enjoy. The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4th, 1776, making all men equal, which is a freedom I enjoy. This country has many perks I love, such as our freedom to practice any open religion as well as our right to openly speak our minds and give any opinion to the government; this is something that in other places you can get hurt for.

Another thing I appreciate is the justice in this country. The fact that everything is fair is very amusing. We have a very safe nation where rule and peace co-exist to form a nation of tranquility for all who search for a fresh dream, The American Dream. Just imagine a hot steamy shower after work with fresh, crisp washed clothes waiting for you. Many people in other places don't have that, and we take that for granted. This country provides utilities and various material things that would seem like a luxury to many foreigners but in this country, for us, it's the most basic thing. The American dream is a great motivator for millions

of people in other countries, as well as our own citizens. The concept of achieving, overcoming and reaping from our ambitions and thirst for a better life is what every human being deserves. Why wouldn't you choose The American Dream?

Luis Jover is a student at The English Center.

America Has What You Need

I am from Cuba. To me the phrase "American dream" sounds so enticing. I am now in the United States where people talk highly about this country. They say anything is possible here. I am discovering this for myself. I must admit that it is easier to go for higher learning in the United States. But the catch is that one has to work hard to succeed. An American dream will not be achieved unless you know how to go about getting it. We should do our part in order to receive what America can provide. I am very happy and grateful that my son is being raised in this land of opportunity. With the assistance, facilities, and education available to everyone in this country my son, among all other people, should be able to reach for our American dream. Thus, the American dream is to be successful through achieving your goal in this country using all the means that it provides. Thank you America and long live the USA.

Mariela Araujo is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The American Dream

The American Dream means to me to have the opportunity for a better education and career by choosing to have a better life and contributing in the society. In fact it depends on one's ideas, abilities, and hard work to achieve one's goals. One must also work in the society to build a better community. The American Dream is the opportunity to chase and to accomplish my dream. It is based on hard work and determination and also creating opportunities for others who don't have the opportunities right now. I realized that, without any opportunities, I couldn't have a

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better future. If you have the right opportunities then your future will include having a better life.

Mario Garcia is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Chasing the American Dream

A lot of people arrive to the U.S. chasing after the American Dream. For several reasons they left their past behind and began their new life with ambitions and goals to reach. They want to see their dreams become a reality. I am one of those people who came to the U.S looking for freedom and hope, and this was my American Dream. I would like to become rich, to be a successful business man, to buy a mansion on a beach, to drive the latest model car, and to travel around the world and see many different cultures. I would like to think that even if I had millions of dollars that I would help the poor. Maybe even continue to live in my modest home with my lovely family. All of these are small and big dreams that almost everyone would like to have.

The most important things about the American Dream are not the material things you can get. You can get those in any country. But for me the foundation of the American Dream is freedom, without it nothing can be accomplished. It also means the possibility to dream freely, the freedom to live in a country without racial or religious discrimination, and the privilege of having freedom of expression and the peace to enjoy my civil rights. The U.S. was built by interesting people looking for a dream. We cannot stop dreaming. There should always be a new target to keep our eyes on. The possibilities are all in our minds. As we reach our dreams we should replace them with new dreams. This is the only way to feel alive; seeing all the opportunities the real American Dream affords us.

Michel De Armas is a student at Miami Dade College.

What the American Dream Means To Me

Almost 13 years ago, love brought me to this country; now my beloved country. I came from a third world country where I had the opportunity to study and work, but it wasn't

easy. Over there you have to fight and prove that you are able to keep a job all the time. One day, my husband was deployed to Bosnia and I was living with my mother-in-law in a small city. Everything was new to me, so I wanted really badly to keep myself busy and had an idea to go to the State College in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There I spoke to the director of the language department and asked her to take me as a volunteer to teach Spanish or do something. I knocked on a door and a woman told me to come in. I told her that I was a professional, new in town, and I wanted to keep myself busy while my husband was completing his mission overseas. She listened to me and wrote my name and phone number. One week later I got her call asking me to come and work for her teaching Spanish with pay. She never asked me for my social security number nor did she ask for my diplomas, she just trusted me and believed my words and gave me that opportunity. This is why I love this country, my country. When doing my best, good things happen in return.

Sandra Calsetta is a student at Miramar Branch Library English Cafe-Broward County Libraries.

My Unexpected American Dream

The American dream has a different meaning for everybody. However, for me it means the opportunity to be whomever I want and the feeling of being safe. I clearly remember the day when my mother and my uncle said, “You have to go the USA because you deserve a better future.” When they said that, I started hating them because all I wanted was to stay in my country (Honduras) with my friends and my family. It’s difficult for anybody to come to a country where the language, the culture, and the people are completely different. When I came here, all I did was cry and cry and hated my mother for what I thought she did to my life. But after the time passed, I realized that what she did was the best for me. Now, I have five years of being in this country. It is not easy to have whatever I want, but who said it would be easy? I thank my mother because all she wanted was her daughter to succeed. The beauty of this country is that it brings you a lot of opportunities. The

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American dream is freedom for many of us, too. So let's take advantage of its freedom and the opportunities and make our American Dream come true.

Skarleth Herrera is a student at The English Center.

An Encounter That Changed My Life

An Encounter that Changed My Life

My second marriage has changed my life! I never realized I could be this happy and comfortable. My first marriage was mentally abusive; even though I was unhappy, I had to put up with him for seventeen years because I had four children to look after. I just could not leave them behind; they were too young and could not help themselves. One day my daughter said to me, “Mom, if you’re not happy please do what you have to do! Do not worry about us!” After that I made my decision to leave my first marriage.

In my first six years after my divorce I just could not move on with my life, because I was afraid that someone would hurt me again. I was concerned as a single mom with four kids. It was not that easy to find someone with a good heart who was willing to take care of you and your children. Again a couple of years ago, my daughter said to me, “Mom, if all of us are gone who will take care of you?” She must have been right about this; it was a reason to move on with my life! In August of 2011 my sister and my husband’s sister introduced us. That’s how we met. He impressed me because he was smart, sweet, and had a good heart. We just got married ten weeks ago. He made me so happy, because he treated me like a lady!

Amphone Phravorachit is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Open Up and Bleed

I am 28 and serving 44 months for drugs. I share this experience today in hopes my story will touch lost hearts, saving their souls. It's not even the drugs; the needle. It's actually the blood that was my release. As it beats out, everything runs down. The peacefulness it brings, it's almost heavenly. To me that meant being addicted to the syringe. I was a form of a cutter. Even though I'm not, I'm scared. I'm strong. Faith is with me to push beyond.

Would it make me active again if they were to contain water or air? Or would this make me a lunatic form of a cutter? More like a poker, I declare. Please do not worry; I'm venting the past thoughts of me that linger. Oh Lord, this was life. In color, all mine. Sometimes I cannot imagine another kind. Some days the past feels nothing more than a mere dream: a prisoner of my deceitful demise. This world is a vacuum, taking away any form of reality. What or who is real? The meaning of a real expression this deadly weapon does conceal. You pass by seeing smiles, yet they only hide the truths. But what is the truth in such a dark place? Am I being too much right now? How can I be too much when too much is never enough? Are you following me?

I can only hope because I've already lost myself, somewhere from December to December. How do we even define ourselves in such a state of confusion? Are we weary and oblivious, or fierce and serene? Slipping into a coma everyday is the same. Watching helplessly, the empty souls, for their hearts that are no longer beating. Can you even begin to grasp what I say? Too much pain; it needs to escape but has no way. Who are these people we see? Are they only reflections of you and me?

This is no ordinary questionnaire. I understand this to be true. All these things I'm trying to eradicate. Now you understand my dilemma. Was this my destiny all along, to be frozen in every mistake I've ever made? How can I truly express the wonders of my heart, forfeit my deepest secrets. That would be giving the power to unlock my very kindred spirit. I am a delicate flower trying to grow, trying to be whole. To touch my silky petals is impossible because no one in my life is what they seem. Can you read any further into the invisible words I do not write, be one with me in the unseen? Does this knowledge of me burn your eyes, scorching that same emptiness of a hole.

So, I ask you again. Would you also take the needle just to stick it in, to feel the tearing, the ripping of the skin releasing the black and blues from within? You ponder

what's in store as this satin warmth trickles to the floor, you realize nothing more.

Ashley Penniman is studying at ABE III Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Unfulfilled Love for Gina

Fifteen years ago I knew Gina, an 8 year old girl from Colombia. She was a pretty girl. Though she had big beautiful black eyes, they were very sad. All she wanted to do was to please her family. She had a difficult time with them. Her mother did not treat her nicely. She wanted to be a doctor when she grew up. One night Gina became sick. She vomited. She had a fever. It finally dawned on her mother to take her to the hospital. At the hospital they were surprised because they had to wait in the waiting room for seven hours. Gina could not wait that long and she gradually gave up her life in her mother's arms. When the doctors came to attend to her they were too late. Gina had died.

On the day of her funeral she was dressed in white raiment. I helped carry her coffin to the church. I felt sorry for not giving her much love. I could still see her sad eyes always begging me for love. From that day I learned to always be loving and loveable towards children. From this incident, I always treat people especially children very nicely because I never know what they are going through. I believe that we all should love one another. It is not easy but we must try harder. Children should be always be embraced and loved unconditionally.

Betty Artundaga is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

New Life

In 2011, I was sentenced to 11 months and 15 days in the Escambia County Jail. I was in my WRAP class when a guard entered and said, "Jones, special visitation." I was like, "My mommy is in town, yeah!" So I went in and had a seat to wait for her to come up. When she arrived I could see the stress in her face. I said, "Mom how are you doing?" She shook her head and said, "I'm fine baby, how are you?"

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I responded, "I'm good, but you don't look good." I noticed she kept looking behind her like she was waiting for someone. So after the second or third look, the elevator door opened and my daughter came out. What I was looking at was the shock of my life. My 14 yr. old daughter was coming off the elevator, with a very large stomach in front of her. I was speechless. She walked up to the glass very slowly like she was about to faint. I was sitting there like my heart was stuck in my throat. It was a very emotional visit. I had less than two months left to go home to my daughter. I didn't want her to go through this alone. I was released December 9, 2011. When I walked in the door I was so happy to see my whole family there waiting on me.

I grabbed my daughter and son and held them tightly and assured my daughter that I was going to be there for her. I would watch her around the house and cry just thinking that my baby is about to have a baby, and that I'm about to be a grandma at 33. My feelings started to get the best of me. Sometimes I'd get so upset when looking at her, but at the same time I felt like it was my fault for not being there like I should have. I've been in and out of jail for the last 2 years. My family, friends, and I got her prepared for the delivery and waited anxiously. A month later on January 10, 2012, my wonderful child delivered my beautiful grandson. It was so special to her because that was the day she turned 15. Yeah, she had him on her birthday. I told her that's the best gift she could ever get. Not only was it a great gift, but it may have changed her life for the best. Since my grandson has been here, I've had to change my life because my daughter needs me as much as I need her. I believe our relationship has become closer as mother and daughter. I tell her every day that she can still be whatever she wants to be. She just has to work a little harder than the next person.

Jamie Jones is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Ray Gentry.

Moved Out of My Country

The United States was an encounter that changed my life. One of the things that changed my life was having to

separate from all my family, especially my mother. I had to do things on my own. I also had to get used to a new culture and language. Separating from my family was difficult. When they first told me that I was coming to the U.S., I was like I don't care, it is not a big deal. The first couple of days when I got to the U.S., I remember that I cried because I missed my mother and other family members. I just wanted to go back to my country. Those days of being in my room and doing nothing just made me think of my country. Although being separated from my family members was difficult, having to do things on my own was hard too.

In my country, my mom used to do everything for me. I had to learn how to do things that I had never done before like cooking, doing laundry, and going to school alone. I had to do some cooking for myself because I was starving and no one was here to do it for me. I called my mother to ask her how to cook an egg. As for laundry, I didn't even know how to fold my clothes. The United States is a big encounter to anyone and for me it was extremely hard. Its language was hard to learn and get used to the culture and the way of living was the hardest. Coming to the United States was a turning point in my life, but in the end, it was all worth it.

Jose M. Carmona is a student at The English Center

How Jail Changed My Life for the Better

I see things differently now than when I did in August of 2012. I was incarcerated in the Santa Rosa County Jail for a probation violation. I went to court for final sentencing on September 25, 2012. At that court appearance I was given an option to take a sentence of 11 months and 29 days county jail time or 18 months in the Florida Department of Corrections. I chose to do county time because I have never been to prison before and did not want to start then. Since that time, I have had no contact with my family for 8 months.

In addition to no family contact, I have been housed with inmates who had charges ranging from driving with no

license to murder. I have seen some brutal things, including fights that resulted in serious injuries. I have seen a correctional officer use excessive force on an inmate. These are just some of the reasons why I'll change so I don't have to come back to jail. In order for me not to return to jail, I will be a more upstanding citizen and become socially responsible within my community. I hope that reading about my experiences will encourage you to take the right path through life so you can avoid coming to a place like this.

Joseph Creamer is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School.

Predestined: How My Life Changed

I believe God chose me to be the main caregiver for my eighty-four year old mother. She was diagnosed with moderate Alzheimer's Disease in December of 2012. My mother is a strong woman of faith who is a retired domestic worker. Despite her illness, she continues to clean the house, wash clothes and cook. So Mom is an inspiration to me. But despite all this, Mom increasingly needs help.

Taking care of Mom has been a big change in my life but not the only one. My two marriages lasted a total of 15 years, and both ended in divorce. This led me to believe that I had to make changes in my life. Plus, I thought about the fact that many people I know have divorced. And so, for these reasons, I'm also led by God to start a marriage ministry. I have a friend who encouraged me during my separation to do just that.

When I first learned of Mom battling Alzheimer's, I didn't understand what was going on with her. Then I prayed and asked God to help me be more patient with her. And then I read about Alzheimer's Disease to help me understand what was happening to Mom. Alzheimer's affects not only a loved one but also the whole family; in fact, it changes one's life a lot! And now I know what to expect with my mother. I expect to see her memory loss and mood swings continue to get worse. In some cases, a person with Alzheimer's Disease may need to be in a nursing home. I hope this never happens to her. She deserves the best care and love, and that means being at

home with family. Seeing what Mom is going through has made our relationship much stronger. On some days, I want to cry and feel like giving up. Then there are days when we have good laughs!

Then there's my marriage ministry. Because of my divorces and the pain they caused me, I turned to God in prayer. It was in prayer that I learned from God that I was to start a marriage ministry. I believe we all should follow God's will to the best of our ability. I always desired to be a good wife, but like everyone, I made mistakes. I've learned from those mistakes and want to share my knowledge with others who are divorced, or married but having difficulties with their marriages. These ministries often challenge me. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed, but my faith sustains me. With God there is always hope. God loves and guides me no matter what I face. Every sunrise brings renewed hope and joy.

Kay Johnson is a student at Northeast Polk Literacy Council.

America Has Changed My Life

When I was in my country I never imagined that one day I would leave and go to another country, but that is what happened. One day my dad asked me if I wanted to go to the United States to live with him. I was happy and sad because I had lived with my mother for eighteen years. I cried a lot because I knew that I was going to leave my sisters and my brothers but especially my mom. She's the only one who took care of me since I was born. When I came to the United States my life changed completely. Even now, though I'm not working, I'm still happy with my life. I am in school and I'm working on my goals to pass my GED and go to college. I remember when I was in my country my mom always told me how important school was and to always try my hardest. She encouraged me to not only be a good student, but a good person too. I am trying to do both of these things. I love America because when I left my country things were difficult. Living with my dad, I am able to go to school and fulfill my goals. America is the best country for me.

An Encounter That Changed My Life

Marlene Severe is from Haiti. She is a student in ESOL Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck.

America, You Have Changed My Life

My name is Roberto Gabriel. I'm from Guatemala. I've been living in the United States for about five years. I studied in College when I was in Guatemala. My dream was to work in a big corporation until I decided to migrate to the United States. When I told my mom about it, she got mad at me. She said that I was crazy. I called my brothers who were already living here to find out if they could help me. The first thing they told me was to keep studying and that they were going to give me money to finish college. I never believed what they said. For a month, I was trying to get my mom to loan me some money. My sister helped me, too. The day I left Guatemala, my mom burst into tears, which left me without words to say. When I came here everything looked different compared to my country. For example, in Guatemala we get paid daily, not bimonthly. Nobody speaks English at home, but at least here some people speak Spanish so I'm able to understand what's going on.

I couldn't communicate with my coworkers, because I couldn't speak English at all. I bought some English books to study, and then I went to an English class for about eight months. I left the class, because I found a part-time night job in a restaurant as a dishwasher. After a few weeks working in that restaurant, I asked the manager whether I could learn how to cook. He gave me the opportunity, because someone had to leave to go back home to his country. Since then I've been working as a cook. Now I can cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I used to hate cooking breakfast. It took me a while to learn how to flip an egg, but now that's what I like the most. I returned to Ms. Josephson's English Class about ten months ago. She is nice and is also a very good teacher. I have been learning a lot from her to help me do well with my life in America. Though I work almost every day, each time I have a break I go to class.

Living in the United States has taught me to do things on my own and to take care of myself. “Being independent” is the key to living in the United States, which I was not used to when I was in Guatemala. This does not bother me anymore. I kind of like it.

Roberto Gabriel is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Strength, Faith, and Hope

I’m Sharon and I’m from Mexico City. My life as a young girl was normal. When I was in college I had friends, parties and good grades in my career studies in marketing. Everything was going well until one day my brother told me he would be leaving for the United States. My brother Isaac and I had never been separated and we were very close. My Mama took it very quietly. She’s been like a tree that still stands in spite of the storm, but in the bottom of our hearts we wept alone. With the passage of time life returned to normal. However after a couple of years, in November of 2006, my brother called and said that there could be new horizons for me and he convinced me to come to the USA. By November 28 I had started my journey to the place where my dreams could come true, not realizing that a nightmare would be realized before the dream. We met at the border, my cousin Carmen and I as well as 26 other men, women, and children. We were given instructions.

I knew that we were taking serious risks, but it was impossible to turn back now. It was dark by 9:00 p.m. We were tired from walking all day and finally fell asleep. During the night I was awakened and someone with a strong arm. He grabbed me and put a knife to my neck. I was terribly afraid. The fear started to paralyze me, with the knife at my neck he pulled me away from the camp and he sexually abused me. For the first time in my life I was afraid I was going to die. Courage took over and I was able to escape and run back to the camp. The noise caused a lot of confusion; people ran everywhere. My cousin and I were able to stay together. This situation has changed my life completely, but it did not stop me from living. We arrived

An Encounter That Changed My Life

in Florida, on October 3rd. The irony of this was that it was my birthday too. The illusions of joy were replaced by a heart in many pieces and darkness deep in my soul. I felt that little by little I was going to die despite my escape. However, because of the grace of God, after seven years, I have been working at making my dream come true. I have started writing my new dreams. I am stronger and I have a family of my own and wonderful people that God has given me. I'm living in this country where the renewing of my life and dreams is really true.

Sharon Nieves is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Dream

I was born on July 6, 1983 in San Juan Puerto Rico. My father's name was Jesus Manuel Nieves, and my mother's name is Alma R. Perez. My father died when I was seven years old, and from that moment on my whole world had changed. I have three brothers, two older, and one younger, but I don't have sisters. I am fine with that. When I was 16, I had my first son. He was born on April 26, 1999. After him, three more boys were born. Then in 2007, I had my first daughter, those 5 kids I lost for using drugs. When my baby boy was born in 2009, my life changed again. I decided not to keep using drugs, because I didn't want to lose him.

One year later, in 2010, my baby girl was born. After that, I made another decision and came to USA. I started working as a housekeeper and as a cashier, but now I don't work. I started school because I want my diploma to be a medical assistance to help others. Now I am proud of myself, I am clean from my drug addiction, and I have my babies with me. I also have a stable home and a good relationship with my family. Among the five kids I lost, I communicate with three of them, but I am not going to stop until I have all of them with me. For others, I would like to say don't stop achieving your dreams. You can achieve them any day; you only need determination.

Surely Nieves recently moved to Spanish GED from ESOL. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

An Encounter That Changed My Life

Prison changed my life. I can truly say that now. I sit on my bunk and stare at these white walls for hours. I cry and I laugh. I close my eyes and I can see the face of my love, my husband. He's been there through all of this. He has never judged me. He has never turned his back on me. When I'm down he knows what to say to make me feel better. I'm so proud of him. He is taking care of home and me. I love him dearly. It's true; prison has made me appreciate the good things in life. Before I met my husband I was lost. I was with someone that abused me in every shape and form. Seven years of abuse. He knew my past and he used that against me. Many times I wanted to dig a hole in the ground and bury myself. I told myself no one would miss me. I thought I couldn't get away. Then, I did get away with God by my side. Since I met my husband I feel different about life. He shows me that life is beautiful, that I can be loved without being hurt. I thank him for the patience and loyalty he has for me. But I thank God for all my blessings, for always being there for me when I most needed him and for sending me a good man. Thank you Lord.

Sylvia Sierra is a student at ABE III Gadsden Correctional Facility.

An Encounter That Has Changed My Life

I am a proud volunteer at the United Way. What does community service mean to me? It has been said that people could be compared to lamps. "Pocourante" ones, who prefer complaining to being constructive, are like green lamps, the light of which makes faces seem tired and unhealthy. On the contrary, volunteers are like red lamps, providing bright, cheerful light, making faces seem happier and fresher. People helping others by their own volition, without anticipation of a reward, are usually people of a strong personality, full of fun and sparkle, firing up everybody around them. I really enjoy being around these proactive people. Following their example, I stuck to the idea of making this world a better place, as intimidating as it might seem. There is nothing better than to give love and to

An Encounter That Changed My Life

get love in return. It is why I like to volunteer at a retirement home, spending time with lovely seniors who rarely have a visitor or don't have visitors at all. Some residents of the retirement home feel lost, lonely or even worthless. I try to cheer them up holding their hands, giving hugs, having talks, and playing board games with them.

It is so important to have somebody beside you and feel needed. I have a heart for seniors. Volunteering at this place gives me hope that in many years when I will be like them, there will be somebody to hold my hand and cheer me up. In addition, working at a nonprofit job that provides me the opportunity to go behind the scenes at my favorite sites, like a zoo or aquarium, become a part of the staff, and be responsible for many functions. Therefore, it is an opportunity to get new skills, learn some professional words, and make some connections, which may lead to employment one day. Besides, it is a fun time! Petting zoos inhabited by adorable chubby goats, well-groomed ponies, and incredibly fluffy lamas bringing smiles to children's faces are only part of one big exciting experience. The idea of changing the world seems *daunting*, and volunteers are heroes to challenge it, even if not all of their deeds are big. One act of generosity and kindness can do a little to a whole world. Sixty-five billion such acts can definitely change the face of this planet. I'm happy to be committed, for it gives me a sense of purpose and makes me feel more content with life.

Victoria Morgan is currently an Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, FL.

My Favorite Place

Dunbar Community School

My favorite place is Dunbar Community School. There are three reasons Dunbar Community School is my favorite place. It is my favorite place because it is where I can learn and get my GED, it is a historical building, and it has a great principal. First, Dunbar Community School is my favorite place because it is where I can learn and get my GED. My teacher helps me with my reading, language, and math. The school has reading books, computers, and SmartBoards to educate me. Second, Dunbar Community School is my favorite place because it is a historical building. There are displays of old photos of past students, teachers, and principals. Inside the auditorium I was amazed to see old bricks from the school's original wall. Third, I like Dunbar Community School because it has a great principal. He believes in his students. His generosity and kindness speak for themselves. In conclusion, Dunbar Community School is my favorite place because it is where I can learn and get my GED, it is a historical building, and it has a great principal.

Annie Thompson is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Favorite Place Is School

I enjoy going to school because I get the opportunity to learn a new language. When I first started going to my English class at the Immokalee Technical Center it was difficult for me considering the fact that I didn't know as much English except for a couple of words. As time has passed I've learned not only how to speak it, but I'm also learning how to write it as well. I enjoy when my teacher puts us in small groups of three. In those groups, we play games. For example, when we play Scrabble crossword we have to find different letters and make words. Meanwhile, when one group is playing Scrabble crossword the other group is on the computers.

My Favorite Place

When we get on the computers we use different programs like Angel, Burlington, and Ellis. We can choose any program we want to use, and if we get tired of using a certain one we can switch websites. Also, when it's time for lunch all of my classmate go to the cafeteria. My friends and I get some food, sit down and eat together. In the mean time we have different conversations, and make jokes. After we're done eating we go outside the cafeteria to feel the fresh air, and relax until it's time to go back to class. Thanks to the games we play and the programs we use, I seem to improve my English little by little every day. I enjoy every moment I spend in class because I learn new words and how to put those words in sentences. I hope by the end of the year I have learned more English then I thought I would have.

Aracely Penaloza is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Ms. Mominee. She feels very happy to come to school to learn English.

Key West: Where Paradise Begins

Presently, my favorite place is Key West. This is my first time in the USA. I am thankful that I have the opportunity to see this place. I did not know about this city until my sister decided to do a tour and then decided to live here. Three years later, I came to visit her. I arrived for Christmas and immediately fell in love with this island. Key West is a small and beautiful island. It is a great place for relaxation and a slow-paced life. The busiest place is Duval Street where tourists do the 'Duval crawl' day and night. There are many restaurants, shops, and discos for the tourists. Personally, I like to go to Bottle Cap and Rick's Bar. I enjoy the music and love doing karaoke.

Another thing I like about Key West is that it is such a small place, two by four square miles. I love to be able to ride my bicycle around the island. Also, the people are friendly and there are many mixed cultures. Here, you can find many Latin, European, Asian, Spanish, and Haitian people sharing their cultures and religions. I would like to

learn more about them; and how they adapted to this country.

Key West is full of festivals and events. Recently I went to the Seafood Festival and the food was delicious. I also went to Key West Craft Show and liked it because there were many original artists. For relaxation, there are beaches to enjoy and watching the sunset. The Sunset Celebration at Mallory Square is a daily spectacle for visitors and residents. Nature lovers can visit the Butterfly Museum, Key West Botanical Forest and Garden, Ernest Hemingway House or walk and explore the history and architecture of the old town. I love this city. I can work, go to parties, take the pleasure of the beach and enjoy life in general. What more could I ask for? If you haven't visited this place, I recommend that you do.

Camila Rodriguez is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Place

My Favorite place is the movie theater. I get to watch funny movies, eat lots of popcorn, and drink ice cold Coca-Cola. I like the theater because it's fun. You could watch any kind of movie, for example: serious movies or very funny movies, action, and even sports. Sometimes you could meet new people, like Haitian, Spanish, Mexican, Jamaican, all kinds of generations. Well, I don't really like sad movies. The reason why is because it's very emotional and makes people very anxious.

Funny movies are my favorite. You feel tears running down your cheeks. You laugh so hard you can't see anything. I like action movies the most because there are lots of fighting, guns, blood, crime, games, explosions, shooting and investigating. Sports are my favorite because you can select the team you feel will win. My favorite food is Popcorn at the movies, hot buttery, and crunchy, with a little salt. Big size bowls and everything. Even though, sodas are not good for you. I don't really care because the soda is so refreshing, cool, and very tasty. You can have many refills, share your super sized cup and no one cares.

My Favorite Place

So these are reasons why the movie theaters are my favorite place.

Cassamajor Jemson is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Garden

My favorite place is my garden. There are three reasons my garden is my favorite place. My garden is my favorite place because I enjoy working there, watching the plants mature, and the reward of sharing crops with others. First, my garden is my favorite place because I enjoy working there. I have to cultivate the land to prepare for the seeds. Then I have to place the seeds into the soil, cover them, and next start the process of irrigation. Every day, twice a day, I water my plants with a rotary sprinkler. Second, my garden is my favorite place because I enjoy watching the plants mature.

I search for the seedlings to sprout and then for the sprouts to grow into mature plants. As I watch the mature plants grow, a colorful bloom comes to life. The blooms are colorful as well as beautiful. Next the blooms die off, and a little vegetable is formed. I love to see the diverse plants. Third, my garden is my favorite place because I enjoy the rewards as well as the benefits. The rewards are sharing the crops with others. It's a good feeling to share with others. I enjoy having conversations with other people about different types of plants and the soil. In conclusion, my garden is my favorite place because I enjoy working there, watching the plants mature, and the reward of sharing crops with others.

Dwayne Peterkin is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

My School

My favorite place is my school. My school is Gary Adult High School in Tampa. When I came to the USA last November, I could not wait to go school to learn English. I like to learn new things every day and I can do it at my school. At my school, I can make new friends and it is very nice, because I meet many friends from different countries

in the world. I really enjoy working with them because I can practice my English every day. My English teacher is very nice, and she takes her time to teach us new things every day. I really appreciate it. I want to be a mechanic one day. To achieve that, I need to learn English to go to the university and learn about mechanical engineering. I know it is not easy to learn English because there are many new words to know. The grammar is difficult because it is not the same which I learned in my language.

With perseverance and determination I know I will succeed to speak and understand the English language. The school is my favorite place because it is the ideal place for anyone who wants to become successful in their future. Any country that wants to develop needs educated people. With education, people can do amazing things such as discovering new things and advance technology and even more. A person without education is looked down upon by the society. The school is the best place for anyone who wants to be excelling in education. I love my school, because that is the place I can achieve my goals.

Emmanuel Derrissant is from Haiti. He has been in the United States for four months. He is an ESOL student at Gary adult High School in Tampa. His teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

The City I Would Like To Visit

I like France, especially Paris. It is a city with wonderful historic places, amazing buildings like Eiffel Tower, and wonderful nature like the Champs-Élysées and Seine River. Paris is also a romantic city at night. It has a lot of lights, cafes and restaurants. Paris is the perfect city for me to travel. Paris has many historic places such as Notre Dame Cathedral. It was built in 1163. The Eiffel Tower is another interesting place that I would like to visit. Its height is 324 meters; and the view is spectacular. You can see the entire city. The Arc of Triumph is amazing; it is one of the most famous monuments.

Nature in Paris is beautiful. The city has a lot of gardens, trees and a long river. The Seine River is more than 700 kilometers in length. Another special and romantic

My Favorite Place

place is The Champs Elysees. It is a street with many trees and a big place for artistic presentations. Also, the Garden of Luxembourg has many kinds of flowers and plants. Paris has many romantic places where people can enjoy at night.

The streets have beautiful cafes and restaurants with many lights, candles, and music. The French cuisine is famous for the exquisite food and original taste. All these factors make a perfect romantic night. I am sure Paris is a special place to take a good vacation. This city has different kinds of entertainment. In addition it has an interesting culture and history.

Erika Blandino is a student with TLC Online at The English Center. When she finishes her English studies, she plans to start studying at the university. Her teacher is Ms. Mariani.

The Most Beautiful Thing I've Ever Seen

Back in the early 1960s, before integration was established, I was roughly 5 years old. My mother and I would stroll through the heart of downtown on Clematis Street in Palm Beach County. We enjoyed shopping at Woolworth's and Burdine's on a clear, sunny day. Mother was fair-skinned and blended well with the crowd. Downtown was very busy with people. I was the girl who spoke to everyone who passed by and Mom would swiftly move me along. It was the time when whites and blacks lived in their separate neighborhoods and went to different schools. On our way home, I enjoyed the car rides. I used to tell my mother that I would live in the white neighborhood because the houses were the most beautiful houses I had ever seen. Mother replied, "Forget that. We can't never live there. It's not for people like us." I said, "Mom, I'm going to live there and get a truck." Mom said, "Women don't drive trucks." As the years passed, time has brought about change. I bought that house! It took a lot of hard work and tender loving care, but it's now *the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.*

Gail Hartfield is a student at DePorres P.L.A.C.E., Inc.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Key Largo. I like it because I have a lot of fun. When I get up from bed, we go on the boat to fish the whole day. We catch a lot of fish and we go swimming in the ocean. Then we go to the pool to refresh from the sun and look at the beautiful sunset. Later, I play Xbox with my brother and friends, eat pizza, and watch a good movie or play dominos. This is why Key Largo is my favorite place.

George Lachapelle is a student at The English Center.

Naples

My favorite place is Naples, Florida. There are three reasons why Naples, Florida is my favorite place. It is my favorite place because of the restaurants, block party, and shopping. First, Naples is my favorite place because of the restaurants. All of the restaurants that are on Fifth Avenue South have very good Italian food; even the pizza restaurants have Italian pizzas. Virginia's is my favorite restaurant, because while eating at Virginia's, the Italian food is so good you can smell its aroma. While eating at Virginia's you can also enjoy the entertainment, like singing.

Second, Naples has a block party every second Thursday of the month. The party consists of people walking from block to block. They are listening to music and mingling with each other and just having plain old fun. Third, Naples has a lot of shopping stores. There is one store that I love to shop at the most. The name of the store is The Willows and it's not an expensive store. There are lots of sales going on in Naples downtown Fifth Avenue South on clothes, furniture, jewelry, etc. In conclusion, my favorite place is Naples, Florida because of the restaurants, block party, and shopping.

Gloria German is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

A Place of Peace

I relax when I'm there. I forget my problems completely. Time stops to let me think. Every time I'm there, I find an answer for everything. Everyone has their favorite place. For some people, their favorite place is a restaurant. For others their favorite place is the movie theater, a clothing store, a park, the fair, or a theme park. My favorite place is a place where there are not many people. It is a lonely place. The wind caresses my skin and the feeling lets me relax. It lets me breathe deeply and lets me think through everything. The moonlight illuminates my path and lets me see just where I'm stepping, so I can focus on what I need while my tracks are imprinted in the sand. As wet leaves caress my feet, I have a feeling of calmness. When I look at the city full of lights, it is so far, but so close. It is a big city full of people.

I think that my problems do not matter. I think there are people in worse situations than me. This is when my problems magically disappear. I know I will find solution to each of my problems, but sometimes the problems stay in my head until the next time I return to this magical place. The waves have their own music, which completely calms my spirit. I sit on the sand and watch the stars, I think of how small I am in a big world. My hands touch the wet sand helping to me to relax while I watch the calm sea and the moonlight shining on their dark water. My favorite place is a small beach, where I have the city behind me and the sea in front of me. Walking along the sand makes me feel good and lets me calm down and think about everything around me. The beauty of the place helps me find the peace I need and makes me turn into another person--a person full of calm and peace.

Jessica Carnala is from Mexico and has lived in the United States since 2005. She is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

My Favorite Place in the World

To me the most beautiful place in the world is my country, Cuba. This island is so special that when

Christopher Columbus arrived on our coast in 1492 he said: "This is the most beautiful land that human eyes have ever seen." I was born in 1988, when my country's economy was on the verge of a collapse due to the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the tightening of the economic "embargo" of the United States. I was a very happy child despite of all the problems with the food scarcity, the electricity, and all kinds of commodities. Besides all this, I grew up without any kind of worries. I enjoyed being spoiled by my grandparents. I went to a school with my neighborhood friends and I played in the streets without fear of being a victim of violence. Cuba is a unique country with an incredible history, culture, and people. The world knows few things about Cuban history. For many people in the world, Cuba is only a tropical paradise where the cane grows and Castro dictates, but it is more than that. My country was one of the first places conquered by the Spanish and the natives suffered colonial exploitation.

The typical Cuban rebellion led us to fight against Spain to achieve our independence. Our national hero, José Martí, was the principal fighter to achieve unity and independence for Cubans. He devoted his energy to exalt our greatness and to make his country on a nation where everybody was treated equally. The Republic was born with many problems but Cubans soon began to be known in the world for their carefree way of dealing with problems. In recent decades, Cuba was the scene of a nuclear conflict in 1961 when Russian missiles were installed in our land, we joined the struggle against apartheid in Africa, and we are contributing to the peace process in Colombia.

A particular element of Cuba is the cultural diversity. There has been a vast influence from Spain and Africa. Cuban music is heard all over the world and the diversity of genres is one of the most distinctive features. On the other hand, visual arts have been developed through the centuries to the present. Cuban literature has a distinguished place between the greatest books of the world. In spite of Cuba being an underdeveloped country, it has one of the most

My Favorite Place

prestigious ballet schools in the world, as well as Spanish dance companies and folkloric ballet schools. The most precious treasure of Cuba is her people. No one in the world can equal our sacrifice and our strength; this is why I am so proud to be Cuban.

Jovann Silva is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

My Country is My Home

My country, Palestine, is my favorite place in the world. It is a great, beautiful, and holy country. Its location is strategic. It is located in the middle of the old world. It is bordered to the east by Jordan. It is bordered to the west by Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered to the north by Lebanon and Syria. It is bordered to the south by Umm Rash Bay. My country contains a lot of holy places like, The Dome of the Rock, Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and The Church of The Nativity in Bethlehem. That was the place where Jesus was born.

The Dead Sea is located between Palestine and Jordan. It is a famous place. People visit it from all over the world. It is the lowest point in the world. It lies at 1,312 feet (400 meters) below sea-level. Its water is too salty. Because of this reason nothing can live in it. The Dead Sea's water cures a lot of diseases. The origin of Palestine was Canaanites. They built the culture of Palestine. They built a lot of cities like Jebus (Jerusalem now), Jafa, Haifa and Hebron. The currency of Canaanites was shekel and it is still in use now. Palestine was occupied by lot of people like the British and Israelis.

In 1917, Britain paved the way for the Jews by Balfour. The Jews occupied Palestine in 1948. They killed thousands of innocent people and expelled others. Now, millions of Palestinians are living in camps in Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The first president of Palestine was Yasser Arafat. He founded the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). He was a great man. He worked hard to liberate Palestine. Unfortunately, he died in 2004. The

current president is Mahmoud Abbas. I miss my country because I miss my friends, my town, and my grandmother. I want to visit my country next year.

Lina Nawabeet has been in the United States for only two months. She wants to be a doctor. She is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

My Favorite Place

Barcelona is a wonderful place. I feel fortunate to have lived nine years in this unbeatable, seafront, full of lights, historical, and artistic city. Barcelona is a multicultural city where people of different races, religions, and cultures enrich its history in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. The works and buildings of Gaudi, The Baltlo House, La Pedrera and the magnificent Sagrada Familia endow a magic that surrounds you and makes you travel around admiring Barcelona's beauty. People from Barcelona and Catalonia are known as Catalans. They are very nice and love their city. On Sundays they like to go out on their bikes with their children or go to the beach.

The Mediterranean Sea is quiet, clean, and warm. Barcelona's cuisine is world known and appreciated; there are highly renowned chefs that bring up the level of the wonderful Mediterranean diet. The most beautiful experience of my life was having my precious son and I was very fortunate that he was born in Barcelona. In honor of this city I named my son Pol which is a Catalan name. Our family circumstances now have led us to come to the United States of America where we hope to be as happy as we were in Barcelona, Spain.

Luz V. Koll is a student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center, Miami Dade County Public Schools, where she attends a vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

My Favorite Place

I have many favorite places, but I am going to choose Tunquen, in my home country of Chile, because I have amazing memories of that place from when I was a kid. I have known this place for more than fifteen years when my father bought a beautiful, wooded piece of land with a river,

My Favorite Place

majestic views, and large fields of tall grass and wild flowers, where he built a big house with a huge kitchen. I spent all my summers in Tunquen with my friends and cousins from the time I was around twelve years old. But because I decided to come to the USA I am no longer able to spend summers there. Chile is divided into fifteen regions and Tunquen is located in the fifth region of Valparaiso. It is on the outskirts of Algarrobo near Casa Blanca. The weather is spectacular because it is warm during the day and cold at night. I remember every night all of us making a fire and singing different songs and eating queso al picholco, baked potatoes, or candy. (Queso al picholco was a name we created for putting a piece of cheese on a tree branch and melting it over the fire).

The nicest thing about Tunquen is its location. We could enjoy both country and city lifestyles. There are abundant beaches such as Yeco, Las Cadenas, and Tunquen where the water is cold. The ocean is really fun because it has waves and the sand is different colors. Some beaches have black sand and others have white sand. We had so much stuff to do, for example, fishing, walking, eating typical food, and participating in adventure sports. Basically enjoying what nature gave us. Tunquen has an ample variety of flora and fauna. You can find native plants such as Boldo (a medicinal herb), Rosa mosqueta (wild roses), and wild fruit similar to apples, pears, plums, and blackberries. Also we saw many wild animals on our long walks; some examples are foxes, hares, snakes, and different kinds of birds.

We also saw farm animals such as cows, pigs, horses and sheep. The people who live there use the farm animals to make cheese, milk, and meat to sell. Also there were horses to rent. The heart of the city of Algarrobo is ten minutes from Tunquen. This is a small town where we could find the same things as in any big city (pubs, restaurants, stores, and a super market). The gorgeous thing about Tunquen is that we could enjoy all that nature has to offer us and also we could participate in city life, but the

most attractive attribute of Tunquen is that it permitted us to relax in a beautiful atmosphere filled with peace.

Marcela Cabrera is an advanced student in ESOL at Sheridan Technical Center in Hollywood, Florida. Her teacher is Suell E. Scott.

That Special Place

Far, far, away there is a place that I think that is the nearest place to God on earth. It is a magical place where waves crash and the ocean is so clear that you can see all the way to the bottom. It is a place in the coast of the Pacific Ocean. That place is called Los Molles. It is the greatest place on earth. My mom took me to this place when I was little and even today I think there is no place that makes me feel that way. I really can feel how the world was made and what God was thinking of when he created us. I think that way because that was how I've learned to live. Just enjoying the small great things that life gives us. I remember the day when I first saw that place. I had the feeling that I had found the place where I can find myself. I stayed there for hours just looking at the sea. I couldn't think about anything else, only that the place was awesome and I didn't want to go back to my house. I wanted to live there. When I was a little bit older, I started thinking about my life. I realized that I didn't have a big or perfect family, but they really were the perfect family for me.

I don't need more money, more love, or anything else. My mom was alone with my brother and me, but I can't think of a better way of being so near to each other. We enjoy being together just sitting near the chimney with marshmallows and others things that we like to eat. We laugh all the time remembering the old times and the new happenings of the day. Day by day, that time, that place, that special feeling, is what makes me the happiest girl in the world, and that place, definitely, my favorite place in the world. I don't understand why people are so sad when they don't have money or why they are so stressed. I think that they don't enjoy life. They don't enjoy their families or perhaps they don't know how to enjoy themselves. For me, it all seems so great. We have so

My Favorite Place

many opportunities to be happy in one day or to make someone happy, why not do it? Why not enjoy your day? We have to stand up, think less, and do more instead of just thinking about it. We have to think of reasons to accomplish things instead of excuses not to do them. You only live once. Why waste time being sad? I wish you could all see the great things in life and be as happy as I am.

Maria Jose Garcia is a 17-year old Chilean student at The English Center. She lives in Miami, Florida.

My Special Place

Naples is my special place in the U.S. I love to live in this city because a long time ago when I came for the first time, I liked everything. "It is a wonderful town for me," I thought. The most important part was I could live near the beach. Every Saturday I enjoy swimming and walking on the beach for a long time. Sometimes, I prefer to read while resting in the sunshine. No matter what happens around me I feel very happy. Now, I can enjoy everything more because I am learning English and I feel confident when somebody asks me something. Communication with others is the most important thing around the world. I love this paradise.

Maria Justiniano is a student in the ELCATE program at LWIT in Naples, Florida. She plans to enroll in the accounting program within the next few months. Maria is from Bolivia.

My Favorite Place

There are so many interesting places I have visited, especially in Asia. My family loves traveling, so I have traveled to China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Macau among other places. But my favorite place right now is Japan. Five years ago, I went to Japan with my family during the winter. The snow was falling down from the sky. The sweet smell of Sakura trees was all over the place. That was my first time seeing real snow and Sakura trees. I always wondered if I would see the real thing, it was amazing. And I did it! I saw it with my own eyes and touched with my own hands. My father said, "Japan is famous because of food, language, and places." Every place has its own style of food and tone

of language. Japanese people usually speak Japanese and not English. That was the only bad thing for me because I could not understand what they said. I understood some of the words that I remembered from reading manga, but not the whole sentence. Japanese food was awesome. I've tried sushi and sashimi and they were really delicious.

There is also a pudding made with real milk, sweet potato ice-cream, and green tea jelly for dessert. If I can go to Japan, I'll go back to eat them all. Japan is a land of toys. And the reason I went to Japan is toys. Japanese cartoons of people known as manga are huge in Japan. People from different countries love manga, especially children. There were a lot of famous characters like Gundam, Detective Conan, One Piece, Fairy Tail, Black Butter, Dragon Ball, Ranma, Digimon, Pokemon, etc. Parents bring their kids to visit this place because children will enjoy watching, learning, and shopping for collections of their favorite cartoon. For me, I want to go to Japan because I want to see One Piece Museum. One Piece is a cartoon about the boy named "Luffy" who wants to be a famous pirate. His dream is to get One Piece, a mystery jewelry, and become King of Pirates. When I went there, it was like I am the luckiest person. I loved this place. I enjoyed being there, not only me, but also my sister. We had a good time staying there, and we hope we can be there again soon. Japan is a country of good culture. If you don't know where you want to travel, I have a choice for you. Go to Japan, and you won't forget it. Believe me, it will be your best trip ever!

Phitchapha Phoonkate (Jai) is a student at The English Center.

Detroit

My favorite place is Detroit, Michigan. There are three reasons Detroit is my favorite place. Detroit, Michigan, is my favorite place because of the history, the parks, and the riverfront. First, Detroit is my favorite place because of the history. I can walk downtown and go to the Motown Museum where you learn about legends in Motown music. Joe Louis was the greatest boxer in Michigan history. Second, Detroit is my favorite place because of the parks.

My Favorite Place

Belle Isle is my most favorite park in Detroit for the giant slide, ice cream trucks, and the zoo. Chandler Park is another favorite park in Detroit for the waterpark and swings. Third, Detroit is my favorite place because of the riverfront. You can get on the people mover and go to the Renaissance and see the clear green water and boat racing. In conclusion, Detroit, Michigan is my favorite place. It is my favorite because of the history, parks, and the riverfront.

Scott Hunter is a student at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Anna Franta.

The Best Place to Visit in Tallahassee

I have been living in Tallahassee since August of last year. I like to hang out so almost every weekend I go somewhere in Tallahassee or somewhere nearby. I have visited many places including parks, beaches, and caves, but my favorite place is Tom Brown Park and the dog park there. When it is a very warm and sunny day, I go there with my laptop, sit under a big tree, and either watch a movie or listen to music. I feel like I am in paradise.

When I feel bad, going to the dog park makes me feel happy. The dogs are really cute, and they look so happy playing with each other. Watching them, I think they must become friends very easily. My second favorite place is Bald Point State Park. I have been there five times. It is very close to Tallahassee, very quiet, and the water is incredibly clean. I fell in love with Bald Point State Park the very first time I went there. The scenery is amazing, and I feel very comfortable and happy there. I like my country, South Korea a lot but I also like Tallahassee because it is very calm and quiet here. Moreover, I can go to beaches whenever I want which always makes me happy. If my family or friends visit here, I will take them to visit Tom Brown Park and Bald Point State Park.

Sun Joo Kim is a student at ACE-Leon County Schools.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place on earth is Haiti. I was born and raised in Haiti, and I spent the best times of my life in Haiti.

It has the most exciting, amazing, bluest, relaxing beaches. As soon as you step out of car you can already feel the breeze on your face. The water has amazing waves that make you want to come and join the fun. The food there is amazing; I mean where do I start? From fried plantains, to fried chicken, and fried vegetables, even the sweets are amazing. In Haiti the fruits are very fresh.

When I am in Haiti I can go in the trees and pick out the fruits that I want to eat. The vegetables are organic and fresh. I grow fruits and vegetables. I have a lot of mango trees; I have guava, papaya, limes and many more. The history of this place is written everywhere and it is beautiful. La Citadel is a fort that was built by Henry Christophe when Haiti was fighting. It has bullets, guns, cannons, and cannon balls. It is very amazing. Another thing that would make this my favorite place is the temperature in the day and night. It is cool and breezy which is perfect for me to sleep. I love having fun, relaxing, and also spending a lot of time with my children and my husband. Finally, another thing that I like about my country is that most of my family is there. My sister, my nephews and nieces, my aunt, and my uncles, and many more still live there. When I go to Haiti, I enjoy going and visiting them. In conclusion, Haiti is a small country in the Caribbean. I always hear people say that it is a poor country. In reality it may be poor economically, but it has a lot of riches. It has beautiful beaches and good and healthy food. The people in Haiti are very talented. They use what they have around them in nature to make very beautiful accessories. I love my country and it is my favorite place in the world. I will always come back to my country.

Sylfida Lebrun is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place would have to be my bedroom. My bedroom is the hot spot where I like to go to escape reality, where I can be myself and do all of my thinking. Whatever problems or issues I have going on in my life, my room is the place where I meditate and soothe those issues out. One

My Favorite Place

of the reasons why my bedroom is my beloved place is because it is where I go to relax and listen to lenient music to ease my mind. While listening to music in my room I am given a sense of privacy where I can sing and dance along to the music. It's also a place to release all the negative energy that I had within.

My room is also place of business. Since I'm a hairstylist, my friends and clients come to me to get their hair done. I style their hair beautifully; we have one on one conversation just to make the time fly by. When I finish their hair, they reward me with money. Spending hours on the phone in my room is another reason why I love my room. I can spend hours talking to my friends about the latest trends, gossip, and even have personal intimate conversations. In Conclusion, I pretty much do everything in my bedroom: listen to music, do clients' hair, and even talk on the phone. My room is my favorite place.

Thamar Damier is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Favorite Place

There are many places I would like to visit in this world but my favorite place is Mexico. There are many beautiful places to visit in Mexico. There are famous places where famous people live, like Cancun and Acapulco. I can enjoy the foods, music, and places to have fun. In the United States, I find Mexico. I enjoy eating different kinds of foods in Mexican restaurants. I know that many of the cooks in these restaurants are from Mexico because of the foods. Tacos, burritos, Mexican pizza, sopes, menudo, tamales, flautas, ceviche, tostadas, gorditas and other great foods are accompanied with rice, beans, and salads.

One day, I will experience the real Mexico. Famous people from Mexico make Mexico more authentic in the United States. The music is great to listen and dance to. Some of the music I can enjoy is Mariachi, Cumbia, Duranguense, Tejano, Pop Latino, and other mixed music. There are beautiful places to see and enjoy in Mexico. There are waterfalls that are in Cancun and other parts of Mexico along the beaches and rivers that I can enjoy. There

are tourists that travel to Mexico to have fun and enjoy the ocean sides. I can imagine most of the people are hard working and friendly. I see that here in the United States. They work very hard. People, food, and music are what I enjoy of the Mexican culture in the United States. I will definitely satisfy my emotions with the songs and music of Mexico in the mean time. It is my hope to visit and experience my favorite place.

Wanda Lee Roblero is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Goals and Ambitions

Accomplishment and Commitment

During winter of 2012, late in the year, when students are excited because of winter break approaching, I received a Certificate of Participation Award for attending the Adult Education Program (also known as the G.E.D Program) in Lee County. The certificate is based on being recognized for my accomplishment and commitment that I put in the program. My commitment towards attending the program to get my diploma came earlier in the year around summertime. Once I made the commitment I knew sacrifices would have to be made, like being away from my family. I'm the type of father (daddy) that always wants my kids around. So this sacrifice, really, was what led me to attend the G.E.D Program.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get my regular high school diploma but as strange as it may seem, I see it to be destined. I say destined because growing up attending school I really didn't have the support from my siblings to finish school or to pursue a career. So now that I'm older and wiser, I know what the value of completing school and getting a diploma is all about. Being a father with kids attending school I encourage them to complete their high school years and get a diploma. By attending the Adult Education Program I'm showing my kids that I'm committed to attend school to achieve my diploma so that I could get a good paying job.

As I talk to my kids on the phone during class break, I let it be known to them that I'm at school and that school is very important. I don't want my kids growing up like me, without any support, encouragement, or motivation. *Brandon, Jelena, and Alex, Daddy wants you to get a good education and finish school. Set your dreams big and shoot for the stars. You all can do and be anything you put your minds to. Daddy LOVES YOU! ☺* Come May 2013, as I walk the stage and the diploma is handed to me, my kids

will see the accomplishment and commitment I put into completing school and getting my diploma. I hope then that they get motivated to do as I did.

Adrian Herrera is a shining star in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. He works hard in class, stays focused, helps his peers in class, and bakes the World's GREATEST pineapple upside down cupcakes.

My Goals and Ambitions

Three of my goals are to improve my English, get my high school diploma and start my own business. One of my goals is to improve my English. I study English to help my children with their homework. I also advise them that education is very important to reach their goals in the future and have a better life. Another goal is to take my GED test and look for other jobs. It is not easy for me because I am dad and mom at the same time, but it is not impossible for me because God always stays with me. My third goal is to have my own business. I pray so that God helps me to reach my goals. This is my American Dream and my ambitions for now and in the future.

Ana Cortes studies at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

My Educational Goals

It is important to me that I reach my goals. My goals are to receive a High School diploma, go to college, and start my career. I am currently enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. To be successful in these classes, I must be prayerful and stay focused and determined. Studying can be difficult at times but I must remain focused in spite of the work involved in the process. I cannot let anything distract me. I must listen to my teachers and study as much as possible. It takes hard work. Dropping out of High School was not a wise thing to do. I was in my twelfth year of school when I dropped out of school. Now I'm back in school studying to get my diploma. The thought of giving up is not in my vocabulary. Getting my diploma is something I have always wanted.

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God and my teachers here at Dunbar Community School are helping me to accomplish my goals.

Once I have received my diploma, I plan to attend a local college in town. A Community College for me would be sufficient for right now because tuition is on the rise. It would be a wise thing for me to do. After enrolling in college, I must be very attentive to why I'm there. Going to college may be hard, but hard work always pays off. Anything that is too easy is sometimes not worth having; I have experienced that. I will get my Bachelor's Degree first and then obtain a Master's Degree in Political Science. As for me, to get a college degree would be a blessing from the Lord. Hopefully, I would inspire others as well. Right after receiving my college degree, I hope to become a career politician. A career in politics will be a big step. I hope to be in a position to give back to my community. I will serve the people with integrity. Finally, by all my hard work, dedication, and determination, and with God's help, I will have achieved my goals by receiving my high school diploma, going to college and starting my career.

Annette Massey-Brown is a student at Dunbar Community School

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to get my GED, go to college, and get a career that best fits my standards. I want to succeed and I also want my family to be proud of me. Meeting my goals and ambitions will give me a better life. I am enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. These classes will help me to achieve and succeed with my goals and ambitions. Now that I'm in school, I set time aside to study and prepare for my classes, reach out to my teachers for more help if I need it, and ask questions if I get confused or frustrated about something that is too hard for me. Being here in these classes will also help me to be prepared for the test and so I can obtain the scores I will need to be successful and get my GED with an educational experience that will get me into college.

Once I reach my first goal of getting my GED I won't just hold onto it. I will take my life to a second level and go

to college. When I get accepted to college I will not know what I will need or what classes I will need to be in because I have no knowledge on how it works. As I get more information about the colleges, and the things that I will need to get started, I will be prepared to study and finish my goals and ambitions.

As I continue ahead to find a career of my choice, I will need to be prepared to take advantage of any opportunity. I must take time to sit down and apply online to find the right job/career for my experience. Searching for a career will be very difficult without a diploma/GED for most jobs. As I sit back and wait for an opportunity to call, I will be very excited to know that I made something of myself and now have a chance to get the best job I have been waiting on my whole life. In conclusion, I will continue going to my classes to get my GED and be successful, go to college, and find a career that I can rely on. Once I have my goals and ambitions successfully completed, I will feel good about my life knowing that I have accomplished my ambitions and goals.

Antoinette Shanks is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Getting My GED

I dropped out of school when I was sixteen. I was arrested and went to jail. It was in jail that I learned about GED classes. There, I learned the importance of getting an education. I know I cannot go anywhere without my GED, it is very important to have these days. My three reasons to obtain my GED are to get a better job, have a better life, and publish my poems. By obtaining my education today it will land me in a better place tomorrow. If I get my GED I can do what I love to do which is being around little kids. My GED will allow me to do anything I want to do. It will show that I didn't give up on life. It will show that I did everything I was supposed to do and what I love to do.

Owning a car and a house is very important me. I will look back at my past and see how far I have come. I will have a great job that I enjoy, my own house, and a vehicle. Getting my education today will give me a better tomorrow;

My Goals and Ambitions

a life that I truly want. I would love to get my poems published. I love to write how I feel. I love when people ask me to read my poems and they tell me how much they really like them. Writing is my passion. I write many poems every day, so I can get my feelings out. Today I have so many poems and don't know what to do with them. I keep writing because that's what I enjoy. Getting my GED is the most important thing in my life today. My GED means the world to me. I can do many things if I have my GED. Today is the day I start my new life with my education. I can get a better job, have a better life, and get my poems published.

Aysha Tyeryar is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Successful Future

My successful future includes getting a job, passing my GED, and buying a vehicle. First, I would go get a part time job so I will have income coming in and so that I can have money to save up for a dependable car and college tuition. With a car I will have transportation to go to school and work. With a job I will have money for gas for my vehicle. With a dependable car, my worries about my vehicle messing up or breaking down on the way to school and home will be a lot less. Secondly, I would keep up the hard work that I'm doing so I can pass my GED, then I will have a vehicle so I can start college. I will have good transportation to go to the college that I want to go to, which is the best welding school in the state of Florida. They do hands-on training at the college. Lastly, after I graduate from Tulsa Welding School, I want to go to work in the shipyards rebuilding big ships and repairing them. Then I will buy my own house and everything. Hopefully, I will be settled down, not be stressed out, and not have so many worries in my life. I will be on my own and not have anyone to bother me or cause problems with me whatsoever!

Brent Leguire is a student with the Columbia Career and Adult Education program. He has his focus on getting his GED and then "spreading his wings" beyond his lifelong community.

What Do I Want To Do?

My name is Carlos Chisco. I am from Colombia. I am 16 years old. My main goal is to speak, read, listen, and write in English. I want to go to California and New York, and I want to speak English very well. I would like to go back my country to do a career in economics, and play soccer over there. I want to watch the World Cup. After I finished with college, I want to work at a great company in Colombia. Few years later, I would like to visit Europe, Spain, England, Italy, Germany and France, to see the famous places there. I also want to visit the famous soccer stadiums, and their architecture. In addition, I want to study a Master's in Finance in any of those countries.

When I return to Colombia, I want to buy a house and a car for me. I would like to buy a home for my parents. I want to meet a girl, fall in love, and marry her. I also want to have four children, two boys and two girls. I would like to travel with my family, and maybe live in another country such as England or France. Furthermore, I want to learn other languages in addition to English and Spanish. Also, I would like to go to Africa, to see its flora and fauna. In conclusion, my goals are to study, learn different languages, and travel around the world.

Carlos Chisco has completed his GED in Colombia and moved to the United States two months ago. Currently, he is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School. His teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Change Of Life

I was born on March 3, 1986, in Zimapan Hidalgo, Mexico City. All my childhood and part of my youth, I lived in Mexico. I studied until I was 18 years old, studying accounting in a technical school. I had many dreams to further my studies, but my parents did not have the economic resources to continue supporting me. So I decided to work to continue my education. I got a job, but did not earn enough money. Little by little my dream of studying nursing was falling apart. On June 2, 2008, my dad gave us the news we had been granted our resident visa to travel to the United States. At that time my feelings were of joy and

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sadness, because I had to leave a part of my family, my birthplace, my friends, and all. On September 18, 2008, my first trip to Florida, I arrived at my brother's home. It had been three years of not seeing him. It was a great joy seeing him again and meeting his family.

When I came to this country, I was filled with illusions to work and further my studies. But over time I realized everything is very different in United States. I started to feel despair. I felt bad when people saw me and treated me differently for being from another country. I wanted to communicate with other people, and I was not able to. It is very difficult to adjust to another life in a new country. I missed my family, my city, and my friends.

Seeing that my dad worked very hard, I thanked God and my dad with all my heart for the opportunity of living in this country. I decided, and promised, to continue to help my family. My family is the most valuable and most important thing in my life, and they want me to fulfill my dreams. On February 3, 2010, I started working in a factory, and they have been very good to me. I am very pleased to share my achievements with my family. This year I want to travel to Mexico to hug my family and say, "I love you!"

Carolina Torquemada is studying in the Clearwater Adult Education/ United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Roseann Segura.

My Long Term Goal

Today, I'm very happy to talk to you about my long-term goal. I have a lot of goals, but I'm going to tell you about one. Good morning. Now I'm learning English because I am living in the U.S. and I want to go to college. I want to get my B.A. degree and teach math in the U.S.A. Then if I have time, I can go further. And I would like to own a good school in Haiti because I believe in education. I think it's very important in society. That is my long-term goal. But I know if I get sick, if I have more than one job, or if I have children, these could slow my progress towards my goals. If this happens, I will work with my wife and find

solutions. So I would like to succeed at my goals and I believe that: Yes I can! Yes I can! Yes I can!

Clausel Denis was a teacher in Haiti before coming to the U.S. He is a student in Vicki McDonald's Level 4 class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers. He hopes to teach in the U.S. as well.

Hopes for the Future

I am currently in the GED program because I would like to make a difference for myself and my daughters. In fact, *I am* going to make a difference in my life. I want my girls to be able to see a mother who they are proud of. There are so many things in this world to become, and there are so many things in this world I would like to achieve. Getting my GED diploma would be a great accomplishment for me. To be able to look at that certificate on a wall in a frame would make me smile every day. It will help me get into a college as well.

Once I've gotten into a college, I will have so many opportunities. I feel that if my girls see me graduate, it will be more motivation for them to want the same for themselves. I want them to be able to say, "If my mother did it, I can do it." Life is what you make of it, so I ask you all to take a look in the mirror. What do you see? I tell you, I see a bright, beautiful woman who can be all she wants. Remember that the company you keep can influence you, so be around positive people and you will be positive. Believe, and you can achieve. I want to tell everyone not to give up on your hopes and dreams because they all can come true.

Crystal Prickett is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Why I Admire My Goals

I really admire my goals in life. I want to have a lot of money. My goals in life drive me to try to have a lot of things that I want. Also, the things that I want to do are part of my goals. I like striving to do the right things that will help me to achieve my goals. I don't take anything for granted. I am concerned about having good things and taking charge of my future. I want to own a lot of things so

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I won't be bored and so I will be able to have good activities to do. Having the things I need for my activities is something that I rely on. This will help me maintain a grip on my life. I just want to maintain what is necessary. Being able to succeed will be my greatest accomplishment. Having things will motivate me to accomplish more. I feel I am destined to find the right career and that is what I want. In conclusion, my destination or my goals is what I admire. There are goals in my life that I want to feel determined about. Little by little, I will achieve my goals.

David Travieso is studying to take his GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. His teacher is Tim West.

My Goals and Ambitions

My one year goal is to be self-employed by owning my own company in the State of Florida. I would like to have the opportunity to hire employees and be financially secure. I would like to give my wife and children a better future. After living here for fifteen years I am reaching my goals by studying for the G.E.D. My ambitions are to meet professionals in the field of site development and underground utilities. I also would like to get my children involved in education, sports, and academics. I also would like to help my wife further her education. This will set a better example for my children that will allow them to achieve great things in the future. I believe that only God, my wife, and my children will help me reach my goals and ambitions.

Ervin Navarro is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Goals and Ambitions

When trying to reflect on what my ambitions and goals would be, I realized at the age of sixty-one, I had already accomplished most of my goals. As a young woman growing up in Haiti, my ambitions and goals were to get an education, start a family, and then come to the United States in that order. It seems to me that everything does not always happen the way you planned, but it happens the way it supposed to. It's something I would like to call fate. I was

born in St. Marc, Haiti where I also attended High School. I loved school and went every morning from Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 3 PM. I was good at spelling, mathematics, and reading. My goal was to get good grades in High School, so I made sure I did well on my report card. My craft in high school was sewing dresses and embroidery. My ambition was to continue my college to become a big designer, but I was not able to finish my education because I now had a child to think about.

My goals now are to think about a family. I have three children, two boys and one girl. When I came to U.S, I had two more girls; in total I had five kids. With much ambition and the chance to stay in the U.S, I would try my best to make sure my children grew up healthy and received a great education. After my third child, I decided to come to the USA. My goal was to go to immigration services for my visa, which they gave me to come to New York City. After two years, I got my green card and in eight years, I become a US citizen. With my ambitions, I got a good job, a big house, and a car. All in all, I am an accomplished woman. I am a United States citizen and I have raised beautiful children. At my age, all that I have left to accomplish is my education, which I am happy to say I am working towards that goal. I thank God for everything he did for me and God will continue to give me more and more in my future!

Esther Dieujuste is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL Program. Lusi Hong is her tutor.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Eunice Gonzales. I was born and raised in the Dominican Republic. I have been in the U.S. for twenty-three years. My goals and ambitions are to speak, read, and write-English fluently. In order to complete my goals, I have enrolled at Dunbar Community School to complete my education. Earning my GED is a major part of achieving my goals. My ambition is to teach my children and grandchildren the importance of education.

When I left my home country, I moved to Miami Florida. I lived there for twenty-three years. I was given the

My Goals and Ambitions

opportunity to open my own business as a sales person, selling expensive jewelry for sixteen years. One day, my home was burglarized and all of the jewelry was stolen. It was my daughter who said I needed to move to Cape Coral Florida, in a more settled neighborhood. I packed what was left and moved in with my daughter for a while. Having my children close by has allowed me to continue my education. I always think positively about achieving my goals and ambitions. When I earn my GED, my goal and ambition is to teach my children and grandchildren to make a commitment to achieving their goals and ambitions for a better life. The opportunities are here for success and all it takes is committing yourself to something positive.

Eunice Gonzalez is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Dentist: It Is a Big Challenge

My name is Fariza and I am from Uzbekistan. I want to be a dentist. In my country, a girl does not get the privilege to go for higher learning. So I was afraid to think that I would never be a dentist. After graduating from high school, I decided to come to America. At first I thought it was all a dream, but it was not. I am here now and I really like it. America opens its door to anyone who wants to learn. I am happy that I am able to pursue my goal. Meanwhile, I am learning English, the language that I need to have to be fluent in. I know that it is not going to be easy, but I am confident that I can do it. Slowly but surely I will get to my destination.

Fariza Adilova is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals and Ambitions

Haiti, once called the “Jewel of Antilles” and the richest colony in the entire world, is now one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. As a Haitian native, I have seen and experienced firsthand the devastation that poverty, lack of education, and oppression can cause on individuals and the country as a whole. My dreams and ambitions have always centered on government reform. I

hope to one day return to Haiti and bring change through the political arena. Some people that have walked down a similar path as my own have given into despair and given up on their dreams because they lack resources.

However, the United States of America offers unlimited resources that make my goals and ambitions possible. Attending Dunbar Community School is the first step upon this exciting journey. Learning and understanding English is a tool that can unlock many doors that were once closed to me and never seemed like a realistic option. The next step is to attend college for Political Science. I would like to gain experience in politics while in the United States through employment and volunteer efforts. I would eventually like to use my acquired schools and resources to help those in my homeland. One of my goals is to open an orphanage and English school in Haiti. I believe Education is the key to Liberation. The English school would be free and community funded. I would also like to get involved in community development projects in Haiti and eventually become a politician. I hope that one day Haiti will experience the same resources and opportunities as the United States of America such as free education, free housing, food, and medical for those in need, and employment.

Gardy Elizaire is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Playing Music for God

My goals and ambitions are to become a musician, because I would like to play music for God, for all of the things he's done for me. With God in my life; I have security. When I was a younger boy, I didn't know anything about my life. Now, I'm older and know more about life. I want to stay connected with Jesus. This is the reason I have chosen to play music for my God. I have always had ambitions that I wanted to fulfill. On the other hand, there were things happening to me that I didn't understand. I didn't know why I was being punished. I thought that I was a good boy. One day God came to me and said that I will protect you and help you to have a better life.

My Goals and Ambitions

At the age of nineteen I was able to leave my hometown in Haiti. I moved to the Bahamas with my mother, brother and sister. I didn't like the Bahamas, so I got a Visa to come to the United States. Here in the states, I feel I have the life that God wants me to have. I am able to attend Dunbar Community School to earn my GED. I will continue to be connected with God for he is truly the one friend that I have. I will thank God in my music, my prayers and my way of life for all that he's done for me. I know now what God has for me and that I am able to accomplish all my goals and ambitions through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.

Guimary Alexandre is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Future Dream

My name is Jania Delgado. I came from a small town in Puerto Rico called Juana Díaz. It is located in the middle of the island, and it is very close to the beach. Ever since I was a little girl I wanted a lot of good things in my life. My childhood was beautiful I grew up with a big family. I have two sisters and a brother who lives with my mother and my stepfather. We all live together. I always wanted to help people so after I finished my high school I decided to study to become a pharmacy assistant. After completing my studies, I had to take a test to get the license to work behind the pharmacy counter and dispatch. In work at the pharmacy, I learned different kinds of measurements for medicine and their medicinal purposes. After working for six months in a pharmacy, I realized that is not the line of work that best fits my personality. When I moved to Florida I realized that I had to learn English first to achieve my goals and dreams. That is why I decided to enroll in Gary Adult High School and learn English as best I can.

Lately, I also thought to become a beautician. After I complete my English classes I will enroll in a school to become a beautician. Then I can learn all the treatments that I have to do with hair, nails and skin. Once I am done with that I will start working in a beauty salon to get the experience, and later I will open my own salon. The main

goal in my life is to be a good mother and provide the best childhood experience for my daughter. That is why I want to work really hard in life to give her all the things that I did not have. The most important thing is to give her good education for a better future.

Jania Delgado is an ESOL student at Gary Adult High School. She has a nine year old daughter. Jania's teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

My Goal to Become a Doctor

My long-term goal is to become a doctor. The reasons why I want to be a doctor (specifically a surgeon) are for my career, my family, and to help my country. First of all, we live in a world where the number of sick people increases every year, and the need for doctors to provide care to those people is enormous. Having a career in health care will allow me to give my participation in the battle to keep this world healthy. Second, working as a doctor will not only be a career for me, but it will give me a plethora of opportunities, too, such as meeting my financial and familial needs. Also, becoming a doctor will allow me to spend time with my family. Third, as in most emerging world countries, there is a lack of doctors in my country, Haiti.

My Haitian fellows need some medical specialists to provide care for them; therefore, having a career in medicine will help me to assist them in their health. Perhaps in the future I will be able to build a hospital for them with my personal financial fund and support I will receive from other colleagues. In conclusion, my long-term goal is to become a doctor. I want to be a doctor, especially a surgeon, for my career, my family, and to help my country.

Jean Woolio Paulin is a student at Dunbar Community School, and his teacher is Anna Franta. He is originally from Haiti, and he works as a volunteer at Lee Memorial Health System.

My Goals and Ambitions

I worked in the construction field as a sub-contractor in my early twenties. I chased the dream or should I say, I was obsessed with making money and acquiring possessions that

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mounted to nothing. I was practically semi-retired by the age of 30. I became a landlord and lived off my rental property's income. I had it all, but in reality, I was missing everything that was really important in life, like real happiness and real love, something that material things could not give to a human being. I have to say that it was a blessing losing everything after the economy went sour. My houses, cars, a hefty bank account were all gone. I was homeless without a dime to my name and riding on bicycle. For anybody else it would be a loss, a tragedy, but for me, it was a new beginning. It took away all the things that blinded me and drowned my heart. It forced me to look deep in my soul and find the real me and the things that were missing in my life. So I have found myself and have learned about what is really important in life. I have changed. I have changed dramatically and so have my goals and ambitions. I'm going back to the basics.

My first short term goal is to get my GED. I am blessed to be in school with the teachers at Dunbar Community School. They are wonderful people. They give me help, hope and encouragement me to keep going. I thank the Lord for putting me here. He is always in control and knows what is best for His children. As long as I persevere in my studies and keep my eyes on the prize, I will reach my goals. I'm working hard for a good foundation, especially in Language Arts. I need to master this subject to be able to achieve the biggest goals of my life. My second goal is go to college. So I can become a counselor and help others to find there right path. To become a writer is my third and greatest ambition. I want to be able to touch people's heart, open their eyes through my writing, and bring hope to a world in need.

Love and compassion are my motives. I can really say that this time around, I am obsessed with loving others. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul and to never have truly loved. Now in my early forties, I will be working in the field as a caregiver serving others. The saying is true, "It is better to give than to

receive.” It brings joy to my life. Now, I will truly live happily ever after.

Jose Gonzalez is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Goal

My goal is to get my GED. I want to get my GED for three reasons. I want to go to college, I want to get a better job, and I want to demonstrate my strong qualifications. First, I want to go to college. I want to go to college to prepare for a better future. My diploma will make me very proud of myself later in life. Next, I want to get a better job. In fact, I work very hard every day and my pay check is not sufficient enough to pay all my bills. With my diploma, I could manage doing the things that I want to. I want to get a better job, mainly to help my family in Haiti, along with those around me, so that they might understand the actual definition of education. Last, I want to demonstrate my strong qualifications. There is nothing more beautiful than to enter into a business place with positive proof of your qualifications in your hand, such as my diploma and courteous behavior. In conclusion, my goal is to get my GED. I want to go to college, I want to get a better job, and I want to demonstrate my strong qualifications. I want to make a difference in this world by pursuing my goals and dreams.

Joselande Regis is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Will I Ever Get It?

My name is Jose. I am from Nicaragua. I have been in the United States for 12 years. One of my goals is to get a high school diploma. Sometimes I wonder how long it will take me to get it. I am trying to study very hard every day. My problem is English. It is not an easy language to learn. Imagine trying to learn it fast at my age. It is possible, but it is going to take a long time. I am not giving up. Though there had been obstacles in my life, I think in the long run I should be able to do it. Three years ago I was electrocuted and received burns in many places of my body. I am

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recovered now, but I lost my left leg. I am happy to be alive and able to walk with the help of a prosthesis. When I was released from the hospital, I went back to class immediately to complete my English coursework. I believe that education is very important regardless of age. It is especially important for the non-English speakers who reside in America. Though I can speak some English, I need the academic part of it. I have so much to do in such a little time. My other goal is to open my own mechanic shop. I also want to educate the community on how to keep their vehicles in good condition. Knowing this can save them time and money.

Jose Navarette is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Ambitions and Goals

My ambition is to always move forward and never give up. Getting my GED will help me achieve my goal. Being successful is important in life. My education is the most important thing in my life. Having my GED will help me get into college. Furthermore, it will allow me to continue my education, and will help me become a better person. Sometimes when I am weak and I don't understand something, I feel like quitting. I then think about my ambition and what it means to me. For instance, when I took the GED and I felt nervous I thought about my ambition and it made me feel strong and confident. I know I will make it!

Kasheem Moore is a student at The English Center.

Goals and Ambitions

Everyone should have goals and ambitions for their life. I have many short and long term goals for my life. Some of my short terms goals are moving out of my apartment, passing my G.E.D, and staying focused on my goals. Moving out of my apartment is one of my exciting goals. In order for me to accomplish this goal, I must cut back on expenses. Moving can be costly. I would also need to open a bank account strictly for moving purposes. Getting my

G.E.D would help me a great deal. To reach this goal I must dedicate an hour of study every day. The plan is to complete my G.E.D by the end of this semester.

Life is not easy. Staying focused does not come naturally to me. It takes a decision. Staying focused is a lifetime goal. The goal is to keep growing as individual and to live life with ambition and purpose. My goals are realistic and balanced when it comes to my life. This gives me the confidence that I will accomplish them with no worries. Moving, obtaining my G.E.D, and focusing on the things that matter are my goals.

Keila Lee is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Goals and Ambitions

The keys to my life are my goals and ambitions. My short terms goals are to get my GED, become a hair stylist, and be a role model for my son. These are my important goals and ambitions. Once I accomplish these goals, my life will be complete. My first short-term goal is to get my GED. I am enrolled in GED classes at Dunbar Community School. I was told that I needed to take the TABE Test to find my strongest and weakest areas. I will practice three months on math and reading for the GED test. My goal is to successfully pass the GED. Being a hair stylist is my second short-term goal. It has always been my desire to style hair.

In order to further my desire as a hair stylist, I will have to look for a vocational school or a tech school of cosmetology. By doing so, it will allow me more opportunity, better pay, and doing what I like best: hair styling. Knowing that I am my children's biggest role model, I am motivated to further my education and be the accomplished role model that they can be proud of. I want them to see that when you fall, you pick yourself up and keeping working on your goals and ambitions. I will be able to show them that hard work will pay off when goals are set and met. My goals and ambitions are important to me. I ask myself where would I be today, or what my life would hold for my sons and I if I did not have goals. What type of role

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model would I be for my boys? This is why it is necessary that I set goals and reach them.

Kendrieka Smith is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Ambition

Ambition can mean so many things to many people. Ambition to me is priceless. It's something that's in your veins. It's easy to dream a dream, though it is harder to live it. Someone asked me once to, "Define Ambition for me." I said, my ambition is to win in life, to get myself a good job, to live a good life, and when I grow up to help my mom with her bills if she ever needs it. Also, I'll look out for the people who were always there for me when I was down and those who helped me get back up. I have learned from my past that family is everything and that money is less important. As long as your mother loves you, don't ever love a woman. I learned that I had to get my priorities straight and that my family meant everything to me. Anybody can dream big and hope for the best, but ambition is what makes those dreams come to reality. Everyone can have those big dreams, because it's so easy to do, but very few can make them a reality. That is why I told myself if I want something, I have to go out and get it. Ambition is free and everyone has a little ambition in them. Ambition comes from within yourself and flows throughout your body. It's within you. You have to want it.

Some people think ambition is just a make believe thing, but it is a way of life or a mindset. It's a desire for some type of achievement or distinction, such as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment. In some people, ambition is stronger than others. My ambition is stronger than anything. I say to anybody trying to knock me down, "Well, good luck and good wishes to you." I've got nothing against people who try to hurt me or try to make something out of nothing. I just wish well to my foes.

That's what ambition is to me. One thing to always remember is that ambition is something priceless. It's

something that's in your veins. It is easy to dream a dream, though it is harder to live it.

Larry Bermudez is an 18-year old student in the ABE program at The English Center, Miami, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Arriete

Goals

Many people have goals they want to accomplish throughout their lives. My three goals I want to accomplish are getting my GED, going to college, and owning my own business. First, I want to get my GED, so I can have a career. This is my first step I have to take to accomplish my goals so I can get a better job that pays good money. Without my GED, my goals would be impossible. Second, I want to go to college to get my associate degree in CSI homicide. I want to be a private investigator and solve unsolved crimes, such as murder. Last, I want to own my own business. I want to open my own dog clinic, which I will run in my spare time. I want to help dogs that need the care they deserve. I want to take care of dogs, which were mistreated, abused, or ill. In closing, getting my GED, going to college, and owning my own business are my goals I want to accomplish in life.

Leanna Clark is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Goals and Ambitions

My first goal in life is to get my GED because when I was younger I didn't realize the opportunities I had and dropped out of school. So, this is a fresh new start for me and this time I'll take advantage of that. I have other goals in life that I haven't yet fulfilled but I will soon in the future. My next goal would be to go to Miami Dade College and study music. When I was a little kid I always had a passion for music and the passion has grown stronger. My next goal to accomplish is to have motivation and dedication for music because, without having those two things I would never go anywhere in life. I will have to work hard to earn it because in life nothing is easy. You have to work for it. Then, after I accomplish all of my

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goals, I'm going to become a rapper and make music for people.

I always love to write rhymes in my notebook; it is like a hobby for me, but I am kind of shy when it comes to rapping in front of other people. I would worry about what they'll think of me or if they would make fun of me, but I overcame that feeling while I was growing up. When I finally accomplish all of my goals and am rich, I'll still be a thoughtful person—who is humble to other people and help out the poor because when I was growing up, I didn't have it easy. It was hard for my mom to take care of three children, but she was an independent woman and she raised me well. So when I make it, I'm going to give my mom a huge house, and I'll take care of her so she won't have to work anymore. These are my goals and ambitions for the future.

Luis Ortega is a student at The English Center.

I Have Amazing Goals

I remember growing up with my family. It wasn't an easy life for me. My father left my mother when I was one year old. It was a sad atmosphere. At the age of 5, I started going to school and tried to learn everything. As we all know, every morning when kids go to school, they always have something in their pocket. For me, most of the time I went to school without having a penny and on my way back home I dreamed of getting something to eat but there was nothing. One day, I took some time to imagine what I would become in the future if I kept on living. Suddenly, something just popped up in my mind. What about being an educator so I could help people, build schools, and provide food for the hungry all over the world by giving them an education?

My goals and ambitions are to help the helpless and the broken hearted. To stop the violence, and encourage people by teaching them that they can become whoever they want to be if they go to school to learn and believe in themselves. Our generation needs us to encourage them to dream big and help them realize they can accomplish their dreams. For

me, I wasn't a rich kid but I had a solid moral education from my mom that helped me to be who I am today. After all I've been through, I learned a lot of things that have built my character. Today I had an opportunity to share my goals and ambitions with everyone in the State of Florida! I want to demonstrate how you can live a better life if you keep trying, believing, and standing strong in your beliefs in what you are doing. I believe one day I will accomplish my goals and my dreams. You can too if you put all the words I've written here in your heart.

Mackenson Sylvain is from Haiti and has lived in the United States since 2008. He is currently studying to take his GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, His teacher is Tim West.

My Goals and Ambitions

I came to the USA for a better life. For many reasons I could not study beyond the 8th grade. My mother had many children, and the most important thing was that we had food and shelter to live. My father died when I was six years old, and she had to be both mother and father for us because she was left with the responsibility of 12 children. Thanks to her work we never lacked food, and always had a roof over our heads where we slept. I studied until the 8th grade because my mother said that knowing how to read and write was sufficient since she didn't have the fortune to study.

I didn't understand, but now I am aware of the difficulty that she experienced. Nevertheless, now I know that reading and writing is not enough. I have dreams and ambitions, and that is why I'm in this country that is so different from mine. There are different customs, foods, and languages. I want to take advantage of opportunities for me and my children. For this reason, I'm in school to become fluent in English and pass the GED test. These are my goals and ambitions.

Maria Moreno is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education/United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

My Ambitions for the Future

The relationship between goals and ambitions is very close. I think many people have ambitions, but to achieve them, it depends on the strength or disposition of the person. I have ambitions in my life, and every day, they grow a little more. It can be hard to achieve goals, but without ambition, life would not make sense. It is said that ambitious people go further in life, and that is what I want. One of my major ambitions regards my son's future. I hope that he will become a doctor or pursue another career that he prefers. It is exciting for me to think that his future involves being a successful man. I push him every day at being honest, a good student, and at creating goals. My son is one reason why I have to work hard and save money, and I hope he will be able to achieve his future goals. Another ambition I have is to learn English very well. Not only will this give me the opportunity to help my son and be involved in his needs, but it will also improve my life. Once I feel more comfortable with English, I want to take GED classes and later pursue a technical career. When I feel discouraged and have little energy, I tell myself to do my best even when I feel tired. I know that every day is another step forward to reaching my goals.

Mariela Calderón is a student at ACE- Leon County Schools.

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to finish my GED and go to Miami-Dade College to get a nursing career, then keep studying to become a pediatrician and help heal kids. My first goal is to finish my GED. How can I do that? Well, first, I'm going to study hard in Math, Language, Reading, Science and Social-Studies. In order to try and get a good score in My TABE test, I'm also going to do homework and study at home really hard to be able to pass and get a higher score to get my Diploma. Then, after I get my GED, I will apply to college in a nursing career and try hard in all my subjects. I'm going to start by attending school every day and going home and doing my homework. I will take extra

books to study, do my work in class, and pay attention to the subjects the teacher gives.

After I have graduated, I'm going to get my nursing license; I will start working in a pediatrician clinic because I want to learn how to help kids. I want to give a hundred percent of my effort to the kids because I want to be able to heal kids with cancer and find a cure and help them so they won't suffer. When I see those kids my heart suffers so I want to be the person to find a cure, not for the fame and fortune but for God's will. In conclusion, I know that I will be able to become a pediatrician because that's my goal and ambition. With the help of God and my own effort, I will help the kids that are in need.

Mariela Marquez is a student at The English Center.

My Dream to be a Pharmacist

All my life I have wanted to become a pharmacist and have my own pharmacy. I lived in Haiti for 25 years, but it was not possible to become a pharmacist. Thank God for my dad, because he gave me the chance to come to this country where they have all kinds of opportunities. After I get my GED, I am going straight to college to take some courses. I think if I work hard I will do what I want to do in my life. It's been over a year since I have been trying to take the GED test, but I will not give up because my goals are to get it and pursue my dream of becoming a registered nurse. Someday I will go back to school to become a pharmacist because that's really my dream job. I want to do something to make my dad proud, but also for myself. I want to start a family, too.

When I was growing up I watched my parents struggle to make ends meet, so that's why I want a good career. I need it, so I can have peace of mind not to worry about my family's needs and so I will be able to help my dad out a little. In conclusion, my goal is to get my GED because I know if I put my heart into it I can accomplish my goal. My cousin used to tell me, "If you put your heart and a little determination into it, that's all it takes." By going one step

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at a time, pretty soon I will complete my goals. I know with God's help all things can be possible.

Marie Registe is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Future Job

Nearly every person has an ambition to become something, or they have a goal they are trying to reach. Some people want to be celebrities, while others just want to make money. My ambition is to make money being a computer tech. When you find that you can perform a certain skill, and you know how to do it well, then you can make a profit while doing it for other people. I would like to be involved with fixing computers and eventually retire early, if possible. About 4 months ago I was on my laptop when it locked up. There was a virus on my screen. I thought to myself, "I have to fix this." So I just started reading instructions about the problem. This taught me to regularly back up my computer. Once I figured it out, I discovered that not everyone knows how to fix computers.

I find myself fixing my laptop all the time. Since I do this a lot, I have become pretty good at it. Fixing computers will be a great job for me once I finish my high school education and then get a certificate from a trade school like Locklin Tech. It is always beneficial to be good at a specific trade. The case may come up when I have to use this skill under a specific guideline that requires me to know all about it. I will be a computer tech expert that people can call on for help when their screen freezes up. Finally, when a computer job does become available, then I will have the knowledge and instructions to navigate towards a great career in the field of computers. So, that is my goal I am working toward.

Michael Wimberley is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Goals and Ambitions

Having goals and ambitions has been one of the most important characteristics in my life including the desire to

become an educator. I remember that when I was little I loved to play teacher. I made my brothers and our friends sit in the living room to take classes. My first preschool teacher, Ms. Amelia Jauregui (RIP) gave me the inspiration to become a teacher myself. Ms. Jauregui was the best teacher I have ever had. My goal to become a teacher came to reality in the year 2004, when I graduated as a Pre-School teacher in Guatemala. I had the opportunity to work as a teacher in my country for five years. It has been a wonderful experience and it has helped me develop into a better person and as a professional as well. I want to teach young children to create a better future for them.

I came to Miami, Florida over a year ago with the main goal to validate my teacher degree and learn English. Currently I'm attending a Child Development Associate (CDA) vocational class at MDCPS where I aspire to continue with my dream to become a teacher in this country. It is my belief that the most important things in life are to set goals, to be ambitious, to improve as a person, and to be a role model for other women, citizens, and most importantly for other educators.

Mirma Mayorga is from Guatemala and she is 26 years old. She is student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center at Miami Dade County Public Schools where she attends a vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez

My Goals

When I was in Haiti I had a goal to go to school. I would study hard and complete high school because I wanted to be a cosmetologist. I knew I would have to work harder because I had an obstacle in my way: I didn't have enough money to pay for my education. At the same time I was trying to find a way to get out of Haiti. Finally I came to the United States. Now I'm going back to school. I am studying hard. I plan to get my GED and after that I am going to a school to become a cosmetologist. After I get my certification I want to open my own business. I have a family to take care of and when I have my business I can make enough money to do what is necessary for them. I know I can take care of my family and now I am more than

My Goals and Ambitions

happy. I am closer to my goals. This was a blessing from God. I'm thankful for everything.

Nadine Charles is from Haiti. She is a student in ESOL Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mr. Judy Peck.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was in Haiti, I had a dream. My goal was to become a pediatrician. After I finished high school, for some reasons, I didn't have a chance to go to the University. During those years, I always asked myself: "what can I do"? I knew my ambition could help myself and also others. I didn't want to get married and have children before I achieved my objective. The important thing is how good it will be for me if I do reach my goal. While I was living in my country, the dream became stronger every day because I have ambition. Last year, I decided to come to the United States where I'm pretty sure I can have an opportunity to continue studying. From now on, I'm going to work very hard to be more focused on my English lessons so I can express myself well. Particularly Mrs. Chaney is a very good teacher. She articulates in class so perfectly and because of that, I will be more interested with her help. Later I can go to college. It will be a great privilege for me to follow my dream.

Nahomie Youth is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Raising Good Children is My Priority

In life we have many goals and ambitions that we want to achieve. It becomes part of our life that directs our daily activities. No doubt this is part of being human and it helps develop a better society although some have neither the slightest idea of what is good and bad for the world in which we live. Like everyone else I have goals that I want to meet and I aspire to do many things, some very distant as a dream. So do not stop me when I get up every day with positivity to advance one step on the long road. One of my desires is to create a family that guides all my kids on the right track to become good men and good women. Thus, when I am old, I would be proud of the family I created. I

think there is no better achievement for men other than that. The most important thing for me right now is to learn to speak English so that I can get a job. It is my responsibility to provide a good economic stability for my family. My other ambition is to create songs that reach all people and to convey a message of peace and joy.

Otoniel Lescaille is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson

Sacrifices and Mountains

Everybody should have an ambition or a goal that they would like to accomplish in life. My ambition is to finish with my education at Dunbar Community School by receiving my GED. In addition, I will continue my education at Edison State College in order to obtain a degree as a nurse. In everything in life there is some sacrifice. If I want to have a successful life I need to make more effort by spending more time and energy studying. To fulfill my goals (as I have mentioned earlier) I know that, as a foreigner, it is going to be a high mountain to climb but with faith I will do it. I will reach the top. I do need a good job in the future where I can make an adequate amount of money for the future family I hope to have. To be able to speak English well will be a big part of the success I want for myself.

When I am married and have children I would like to own a nice house, a decent car, and nice furniture. However, these items will not come without a good job. Without a good education I will never be able to succeed with these ambitions. In conclusion, my goals and ambitions are to follow the path for this reality through education and to do my best to continue the progress to achieve the goals for a secure future. This is also the advice I would give to others.

Rachelle Clervil is a student in ESOL Level 5 at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck.

Roselene's Goals and Ambitions!

I am from Haiti, I came to the USA to reach my goals and follow my ambitions. I have two important goals to

My Goals and Ambitions

reach. My first goal is to complete my English class at Dunbar Community School. Then I will go to college and become a Reregistered Nurse, get a job and make lots of money. This will allow me to complete the goal that fills my heart the most. That goal is to help the children, the children who don't have the same opportunity as I have; the children from Haiti.

Once I reach my own personal goals and ambitions (completing my English class, earning my degree in nursing, and getting a good paying job) I will be able to help the children in Haiti. I will teach them that having goals and ambitions will lead to wanting a better life and education. We must remember that the children are the ones who will take our places. My goals are to help children, because they are the ones who will replace us for tomorrow. My ambitions are to help children who don't have the same opportunity, to have a better life as I have. If the children are not helped, their chances of having a better life will be worthless. Education is the first thing that a child needs in his or her life, other than love. It's by education (for example, reading and writing) that they can learn so many things.

My goal and ambition are to complete my education so that I can help the children of Haiti have a good life by helping them set goals and ambitions. They need those things in their life. This way the children will have a choice to live a better life.

Roselene Philmonor is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Hello Friends

My name is Yajaira Morales. I came here twelve years ago and these are my goals. I want to be in a great profession. I want to be a judge. I am working and studying very hard. I study English because I will be starting my GED in several months. I also want my children to be good citizens, great professionals, and especially to love God. I want them to respect, love, and serve their country, which is the United States of America. I love this country and its

people. I want to die here because being here has taught me to love God. Bless all of you.

Yajaira Morales is from Mexico. She is student in ESOL Level 5 at Dunbar Community School. Mrs. Judy Peck is her teacher.

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are numerous. One of them is to become a US citizen in America and live here for the next couple of years. I would like to attend Hodges University and take the opportunity to learn and study to become a nurse here. I would like as well as to have a happy family. Moreover, I love to travel to other countries such as Canada, Italy, Brazil, and France, just everywhere, and possibly learn other languages too. Also, I want to help the orphaned and sick people around the world. I want to be a citizen in America because of the great fresh air and the hard work everyone puts into everything. It's just beautiful. The technology is magnificent, like Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, etc. I would love to study to become a nurse for the patients. I would help them and help myself accomplish that goal of helping others. I want to get my G.E.D. so I can go to college and have money, buy a house by my own, and create my family. I like the fact of learning other languages such as, English, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. I am currently studying English at second level at Dunbar Community School and I love it there.

Valmy Sainil is an ESOL student at Dunbar Community School.

A Dream for Success

I have a dream for success, just like everybody. When I was a child, I wanted to become a teacher because I believe all teachers are great people. However, that was just my childhood dream. As I grew into an adult, my dream changed. I have been in the United States for almost three years. I want to quickly blend in with society, but this is very difficult for me because I cannot speak English very well. So, I am still working hard to learn English because I know that if I want to achieve success, I must do this. Right now my dream is very simple: I just want to be independent.

My Goals and Ambitions

I plan to pass the GED exam in one year. Once I have a high school diploma, I want to continue to college. I study English at ACE and take a GED class. Every day, I wake up at 5:00 a.m., practice English pronunciation, and memorize some new vocabulary. When I arrive at school, I practice conversation with my classmates. I believe if I keep doing this, I can improve my English. I will not give up my dream, so I continue learning English. At the same time, I am trying to find a job because I need money, and I want to get work experience. When I finish college, I can find a better job. That is my goal. I know that everyone who wants to achieve success must work hard to make their dream come true.

Xiuli Shen is a student at ACE-Leon County Schools.

My Goals for the Future

I grew up in a small town in Cuba named Holguin. My family encouraged me to be focused on my desires. My desires are to set my goals, which are to obtain my GED, get a better job, and give my son a better future. First, I am prepared to continue with my education. Getting my GED will make me feel very proud, and at the same time set a good example for my three-year-old boy, Marlon. Second, with a GED I could get a job with better pay and benefits. I want to go to the university and study nuclear medicine. I want to get a master's degree. I know I can do it. I know I can push myself as far as possible. Third, I want a better future for my son. I want to give him a good education, a place where he can feel at home, and he can enjoy it. I want Marlon to go to the best university and be whatever he wants to be. In conclusion, I will achieve my goals because I want to get the best for myself, which is to obtain my GED, get a better job, and give my son a better future.

Yoelkis Noble is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

My Goals

I'm Cuban and the mother of two wonderful children of 16 and 20 years old who are my greatest pride and

inspiration. I came to the United States of America seventeen months ago. I came because I wanted a better future and opportunities for me and my children. My main goals are to learn English, learn to drive, and find a job. At this moment, I am focused on achieving only two of those goals. I'm currently attending an adult ESOL class and a child care vocational class thanks to the SAVES program at M-DCPS. I chose to study child care because I love children and I am delighted to teach and watch them grow and develop properly. In this course, I have learned the rules and regulations that govern child care centers; health, safety, nutritional and developmental appropriate practices and how to recognize and report child abuse and neglect. Now, I just need to start learning to drive. And I know I will, because when you put forth your best effort in everything, you succeed. Stay positive!

Yucimy Felipe is from Cuba. She is a student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center, Miami Dade County public Schools. She attends a vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

Miscellaneous

My Country Thailand

Thailand is known for being called the Land of Smiles and it has beautiful temples. The most famous temple in Thailand is the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Thailand has very delicious and healthy food made from fresh vegetables flavored with many herbs and spices. Thailand is a beautiful place. If you visit, you will fall in love with the kindness of the people. Everywhere you go, you will always meet friendly, helpful people who also have big smiles on their faces. If you visit, don't forget the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok. The temple is both a sacred structure and the heart of the spirit of the entire Thai people. Not only is it a site where royal ceremonies are performed nearly the whole year round, but it is also a place to which the people visit for many purposes such as to listen to sermons on Buddhist holy days and Sundays to enjoy delicious Thai food.

Thai food is very famous. For example, Tom Yam Guin is shrimp and lemon grass soup. Many people love fried rice. Fried rice can be made with shrimp, pork and beef. Thai food is very healthy because they cook with all kinds of herbs and fresh vegetables. In Thailand, you can find fresh fruit and vegetables all year round. Many people also like noodles called pad Thai. Pad Thai is stir-fried noodles with meat and vegetables. It can also be made with all kinds of meat. Most people think Thai food is very spicy; that is not true. It can be made to suit your taste. Just remember when you order, make sure you tell them not too spicy. Thailand is a land of beauty and friendly people.

Bunsuan Monwet is an ESOL student at NWFSC in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

You are Strong

Never forget who you really are. Push for what you want and you'll go far. Success is created when you eliminate the fear of failure that could have been. Instead of

being afraid of the possible cruel laughs, you'll prove that you are NOT an outcast. You will shine, like the sun burning ever so bright, fiery, red-hot, burning down obstacles along the way. In reality, or honestly, who is your true friend? The ones who stuck it out until the end? It's the definite knowing that through it all, they're the ones who are there for you when you fall.

So stand true to who you are, stand proud and tall, because no one could ever be as beautiful as the one you are. The person you are today in every possible way. I will excel, I will do well, and I will succeed because I've given heed. I'm doing my best, not giving any rest, trying harder each time and not falling behind. One day, when I look back in time, I can say, "Look how far I've made it since that day. Progression all the way!" Never give up, even when life gets tough. That's when you prove that through it all much can be achieved, simply because: You are strong.

Carissa, "Crissy" Blank, is a student with Columbia Career and Adult Education in Lake City, FL. With one of the best attendance records of all our programs' participants, she is making significant strides toward obtaining her GED. We look forward to seeing her walk in our upcoming June graduation ceremony.

A Positive Childhood Role Model

A child's healthy development is supported by being aware of the feelings and thoughts of a child. Teaching children the importance of respect, integrity, and appreciation are key components for positive development. The need to feel important, encouraged, respected, and loved on a daily routine is essential. Being strict in a child's life can make or break a child's ego. Teenage children often rebel against authority. Becoming and remaining a highly respected parent, who displays positive morals, often raises respectful children. Unfortunately, many children suffer from neglect and abuse. I often wonder if the effects of poor guidance lead to difficulty and lack of trust in life. Children interpret issues much differently than an understanding adult. It is our responsibility as parents to guide them and explain step by step the complexity of the world.

Getting involved in your child's life can mean a lifetime of respect, trust, faith, and love for many generations to come. Be the first hero in a child's life for all we are is who we can be; but becoming the best you can be for someone else is a true blessing to God. There are no greater feelings than knowing the reason someone can keep their heads up and fly to the stars with you in mind. Thank you, God for I have a purpose in life to inspire the lives of others. Guide us Lord for some do not see. Take them to my world, my images, and thoughts. They must see to be free. I stand up for you today, as I won't be there in future tomorrows. I will vow to inspire for many years to come, but far after my memory could survive.

As a student with Columbia Career and Adult Education, Crissy Buchanan works to do her best and is dedicated to getting her GED. She also is very kind in her association with others and we commend her for helping to make our morning program a better place to be.

My Country Germany

In Germany, tourists can enjoy visiting many interesting places. For example, visitors can tour our cathedrals and castles. Our culture is different to life in the United States. A very famous cathedral is the Cologne cathedral. It is very huge and impressive. Cologne is a city in the western part of Germany by the river Rheine. Neuschroanstein Castle is a castle you have to see. It is in Bavaria and it is very interesting and beautiful. It is completely restored and fully furnished. You can see how the people lived during this time. I think it is the most known castle in Germany.

The German culture and way of life is different than Florida. In my opinion, the German people are not as relaxed like here. Most of the people are stressed and the lifestyle is very hectic. Apparently, the German people are unfriendly, but I think they are too busy to notice how they appear. A huge difference in our culture is how we celebrate Christmas. In our culture, the 24th is the most important evening. On this day, the families go to church in the afternoon and after that the families celebrate together. Santa Claus comes and gives the presents to the kids. I am enjoying visiting in the United States with my family.

Daniela Flemming is studying English at NWFSC in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

The Chase

A gunshot goes off, then a scream. With my heart racing, I look all around me trying to pinpoint the location. “RUN!” He screams. I look to my left to see my brother heading for me. “GET TO THE CAR!” He shouts. Without thinking I turn around and start running. With my heart pounding, I sprint for my life. I round the corner to see my car ahead “Hurry” I think. I hear more gunshots behind me as I reach the car. I jump in the driver’s seat and crank it. “Rur-rur-rur” the big motor slowly turns over but doesn’t crank. “CRANK!” It thunders. I look to my left again to see my brother almost to the car. I try to crank it again and the old car roars to life, just as he reaches me. He jumps in and yells “GO!” I slam it into gear and stomp on it.

It comes as no surprise that Kylan M. Loch chose to write an essay that includes an automobile. He is passionate about having a career in the automotive industry specializing in work on “classic” models.

Things I Think Are Beautiful

The sea is beautiful. When you see it, you have a very good feeling. It has a magnificent color and you can go to the sea to be relaxed and think. The movement of waves is truly extraordinary. Most importantly, the sea gives us food such as fish. There are wicked sharks but they are not very close to where we have fun. You can float in the water, lying on your back, or go into the water for swimming. Finally, the sand is very special.

A dog is beautiful. It is a protective and true friend. A dog brings an inexplicable capacity for love even though it is an animal. It is able to distinguish other people from its master. It can play or make you feel that something is wrong (and save your life). It also is a good companion and can make you happy. Sometimes, you feel alone and it comes for you to play. A dog is really cute because of his back, his hair, his cheerfulness when he is playing, and shaking his tail for fun. It can establish the difference

Miscellaneous

between good and evil. To be honest, this is a very intelligent animal.

The reason I say that the pen is beautiful is because without it you can't take notes and you cannot learn because you will not store all of the information and then you can't study. If you do not study, you will fail and you will not have a diploma. You will not find a job. If you do not have a job, you can't have the money either and you cannot buy food. When you can't buy food, you get skinny and then you get ugly. If you are ugly, then you can't find a lover to marry. If you are not married, you're alone and depression comes. When there is depression, there is disease and you can die from disease. To prevent all disasters, there is the pen. That's why I think the pen is beautiful. These are the three things that I think are beautiful: The sea because it is a perfect place, a dog because it is an animal endowed with love, and a pen that can make my life easier.

Mayange Thessy Seymour is a student at Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center.

The Best Me is Drug Free

The best me is drug free because when I do drugs, it affects not only myself but also the people around me. The important people in my life are my family, my friends, and my girlfriend. These are my three reasons why I should be drug free. First of all, my family is always there for me no matter what - in the good and in the bad times. For example, when I was in the hospital, my family was there for me during my bad time. In the good times like my birthdays or special days, my family was there to celebrate with me. Second, my friends are part of my family, and I choose them carefully. They are a good influence for me. All my friends are drug free. This helps me to keep out of drugs.

Finally, my relationship with my girlfriend means a lot to me. She keeps me out of the environment of the drug world. We plan to have a lifetime together without bad habits like drugs. Let me tell you something, I choose to be drug free to have a better life and spend time with the

people that I love most; my family, my friends, and my girlfriend. I know that the best me is drug free.

Milton Carballo is a student at The English Center.

The Best Me is Drug Free

Why consume poison? Why get your own body sick and unhealthy? Why would you do harm to you own body instead of keeping yourself healthy and running? Drug free is the best way to be, believe me. Drugs are not an escape of reality; it is unsanitary and most of all dangerous. Some drugs may lead to permanent addiction, and possible death. My health is very important to me. If I'm not healthy physically and mentally, I know for a fact that I'm not living my life to its full potential. Avoiding drugs is key to keeping my mind and body healthy. Drugs may have a very negative outcome on your life and your loved ones.

No one could ever have enough strength to withstand seeing one of their loved ones go through the consequences of drug abuse. Remember, some drugs may cause heart-attack, loss of teeth, cancer, and last but not least: death. Now, ask yourself: Are the drugs worth your sanity? Your own life? They are not! The dangers that drugs bring into anyone's life are life threatening and dangerous. Don't ruin your life over it; it will never take the pain away for that long. Remember what your life is for: your family, your kids, and your friends. Are they worth losing for drugs? Please take what you just read into consideration. Thank you.

Sebastian Serrano is a student at The English Center.

Original Poetry

The Old Man of the Sea

Come sit at my hearth for here I have a tale to tell. For here at my fireside I told many a tale to many a folk. May they be king, peasant, or merchant; all are welcome at my fireplace. For I am but a humble story weaver; I tell my trade may it be myth or truth. This is the story I tell tonight; it's the tale of the old man of the sea. Long ago in ages long past, there was an old man who lived at the bottom of the sea. He lived there singing his song of times long forgotten, of when the sea was young and clean. Until he was caught by a young seafaring lass and in that instant he fell in love with her. But their love was doomed for the old man of the sea could not die, but still he loved her. So as the years passed and the lass grew old, the old man felt helpless as he watched her die. As she took her last breath, he whisked her away to his kingdom at the bottom of the sea and entombed her in a tomb of pearl. So as he went back to her ship and sang. A song of the time he spent with her. This is the song he sang: "Long ago in ages long past, long ago on a ship's mast. There sat a man forgotten by time, there sat a man playing a rhyme. Here and there, there and here sang the man. Here and there, there and here danced the man." So he sat there atop the ship's mast singing his song, forever in sorrow and in memory of his one true love. So this is the end of my tale. All ye who sat here listening to my tale I thank you and so I bid you farewell from but a humble story weaver.

Adam S. Brown is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

To Whom It May Concern

To whom it may concern, I wish this was easier for me.
But over the course of my life, I've lost a few pieces of me.
To whom it may concern,
I think I'm drowning in my thoughts
And I believe I've lost my faith

to all the demons that I've fought.
To whom it may concern, I can no longer stand on my feet.
I've let my knees hit the floor and I've tasted defeat.
To whom it may concern, I've given all that I got
And even though I've forgiven, I haven't forgot.

Alexa Lopez is the brilliant, shy, quiet force in our program. She is the strong mouse who battles the elephant and wins! She makes us so proud.

The Daughter

A baseball star always crowded by many friends,
A Fashion student always dressed to impress.
Both had Dreams set so up high,
yet habits they couldn't control.
They Crossed paths and a month later they got the news.
A Daughter to call their own, Half of him and half of her.
The happiest day of their lives,
When they heard their little bundle start her first cries.
Still their dreams vanished, disappeared.
Lives crumbling down slowly, but surely,
They just couldn't take control.
Their child would take on becoming something more than
they had become
Shoving their hopes and dreams down her throat every
chance they could.
Not knowing the pressure they put on her
would also tempt her and she would fall astray.
Feeling the pain flowing through her veins,
Their broken hearts and failed dreams.
They say it was never supposed to be this way.
Now 20 years later, a life of her own.
She cautiously looks back at her past mistakes and regrets.
Remembering her parents suffering,
with tears sliding down her cheek,
She whispers to herself: "I will not fail, I will not suffer
I will not continue to follow their footsteps.
I will be true to myself."

Alexandra Hernandez is a 20 year old student. She was born in Arlington, Virginia. She now resides in Miami and is an ABE/GED student in Ms. Arriete's class at The English Center, Miami, Florida.

In Her Arms

Everyone has a place that is special to them.
A place where they can feel safe.
A place that makes everything go away.
A place where they feel at peace with themselves.
Mine is in my mother's arms.
When my mom wraps her arms around me,
I feel like no one in the world can hurt me,
And everything bad around me just disappears.
All my problems are fixed with just one hug from her.
My whole world goes silent and it's just her and I.
All the craziness in the world is muted and no one can
change that, no matter how hard they try.
The world is at peace and so am I.
There's no other special place like my mother's arms.
No place in the world can compare.
No landscape or sight can make me feel as special.
Those arms have seen pain. Those arms have seen death.
Those arms have seen happiness as well.
And it's those arms that give me guardianship from all the
Harm of the world And give me the harmony I need.

Allison Gaitan is a student at The English Center.

I'm Sure You Know

If I could do one thing over, I'd give more time to you.
I'd tell you that I loved you more,
In my actions I'd show you. I'd take the time to ask you
"How's your day?" and "How have you been?"
Instead of wasting all my time in the world I was living in.
I'd tell you thank you for all the sacrifice and all the help
you've given me. I'd let you know just how important you
are and you'd see that even though I've wasted so much
time, You've made my world a better place. And I'm going
to do everything possible to keep a smile on your face. I'm
tired of wasting moments that are more precious than gold.
I'm tired of wasting time; the future is untold. So, with
these final words, I just want to let you know that I love you
more than anything, And now I'm sure you know.

Amber Smith is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida (Gadsden County), where Ms. Deon Lee is her GED Instructor. This poem was written to Amber's grandmother Betty, mother Carol, and daughter Kali.

Heart of Gold

Baby, you're my warmth in the cold.
Your heart is like fine gold.
When you hold me, I can feel our souls connect.
I don't think you realize the effect.
When I hear your voice, my heart skips a beat.
We lay together; I can feel the heat. You're gone; I weep.
But when you're here you sweep me off my feet.
Your kisses are so soft and sweet.
When you're far, I can hear your heart beat for me.
Tonight I feel you back in my arms,
But I know you were never really gone.

Andee Spears is an adult learner in the Pathways/High School Equivalency Program at Florida State College at Jacksonville/Downtown. She hopes to publish more poetry in the future.

I Am

I am unhappy. I wonder why I'm here. I hear voices
Calling my name. I see my future on front of me.
I want to get away as far I can from this place
I am unhappy
I pretend to be someone I'm not
I feel like I'm alone sometimes
I touch my chest and feel my heart beating fast
I worry about how I'm going to end up
I cry just thinking about it I am unhappy
I understand that I'm here for a reason
I said things that I never should have said
I try not to think about it
I hope my bad thoughts will go away
I am unhappy

Angela Orellana studies with TLC Online at The English Center. She is the proud, loving mother of a 19-month-old son. She plans to get her GED and pursue a career in nursing. She really is a happy person; her poem is not based on her life.

Love without Rest

I would like to love without rest,
Love without suffering, Always be with you,
Always fall in love with you,
I'm content with knowing only,
That great heart within you.

Antonio Sosa is a 19-year old student in the ABE/GED program at The English Center, Miami, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Arriete.

Crying Heart

My sky is a dark blue, a child with no structure.
I'm like a large bear, Lost in the forest.
Crying like crazy, but no one hears or sees
The rain falls on me. Sometimes I wonder,
When my sky will be clear again.

Ben Caldwell is a student at Lee County Adult Education.

Renaissance

I am from the worthwhile struggles and sweat
that made me the man I am today.
I am from courage, consistence, adaptation,
excellence, and strength for survival
so I cling to these traits as I would to my own life.
I am from bumpy roads, ups and downs but,
I don't let my life slip through my fingers by living in the
past. I am from living for every single day and surviving
like the phoenix rising from the ashes
with a fire-red-orange, glowing color.
I am from courage and consistence
that will keep me on my path to success.
I am from endurance and my motivation to excel.
Now, I am determined to survive.
Now, I am not afraid to encounter risks
because only then will I be able to be brave.
Now, I realize everyone has different rules to live by;
nevertheless, choose wisely because that will mark
the difference between success and failure.

Carlos Portobanco is a student with TLC Online at The English Center. Carlos works in the hospitality industry. His teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

I Am

I am a man who will never understand the world.

I wonder will I ever find heaven at mind.

I hear my daughter's laughter from miles away.

I see the better of me -- looking at both my sons' faces.

I am a man who will never understand the world.

I pretend to be stronger than I might appear.

I feel better days are not far from here.

I touch my fiancé so strong yet dear.

I worry *her* heart when *I'm* in fear.

I cry my ocean and set my sail.

I am a man who will never understand the world.

I understand faith doesn't come with a set of eyes.

I say I understand but can't help but question why.

I dream of being free from the world and its lies.

I try to mature -- a word from the wise.

I hope my lessons are learned when tested.

I am a man who will never understand the world.

Devin Harris is a dedicated student with TLC Online at The English Center who plans to have his GED soon and go to college. His teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

I AM THERE FOR YOU

No matter the struggles we go through, thick or thin

I AM THERE FOR YOU

No matter who you have lost, family member or friend

I AM THERE FOR YOU

If you end up really sick and have to go to the hospital, I
will be beside you and let you know

I AM THERE FOR YOU

If you are having a bad day and need
someone there to cheer you up

I AM THERE FOR YOU

If you end up on the streets with no money so you can eat

I AM THERE FOR YOU

When you need a helping hand,
always know I am the man with a plan.

I will be right by your side and will try to be your guide to
always bring you through whatever life throws at you

I AM THERE FOR YOU

Eric Hicken enjoys writing original poems. He is a student in the Florida State College at Jacksonville Learning for Living Program at the Arc Jacksonville. His instructor is Lawanda Brooks.

The Nature of Nature

You have trouble getting to sleep because of the heat
toss and turn because you are cold.

Wake up to birds chirping and roosters crowing
Look out the window, see the palms and mango leaves
Hear water crashing, feel the urge to walk about
Step outside, you are greeted by the warm, tropical scenery.
You feel the grass between your toes, walk towards a hill
curious as to what is on the other side the crashing water
sounds closer and louder. The hill turns out to be a cliff
overlooking a large river and a towering waterfall.

The water seems to be pulling you in
The world suddenly turns upside down
hit the water like an arrow hitting the ground
that is The Nature of Nature.

Gabriel Severino is a 16-year old student enrolled at The English Center's GED program. His teacher is Ms. Arriete.

Mentors

We come into this world not knowing
For these people, our mentors are showing
They love us, they trust us, they guide and hug us
As our spirits and minds are still growing.
We struggle, we laugh and we cry, our mentors do try
To teach us, to show us, although they might not know us
Their passion for caring is why.
Our knowledge, our wisdom we use
To teach others around us to choose
What is right, what is wrong for them to be strong
These people, our mentors we do use.
We are leaving this world not knowing
For these people, our mentors are showing
That there's much more to learn a new chapter we'll turn
With these people, our mentors are still showing.

Gale Greene is a student at GED of Lee county.

Life

Life is like a beautiful painting.
Sometimes it's hard to explain.
The colors of life flow together like trees blowing
in the wind with every stroke of the brush.
The painting of life comes together like memories that
are planted indelibly in your mind.
Each painting has its own unique style
each color of life tells different stories with every
color of the rainbow; each color expresses its own emotions.
Whether it's good or bad,
we must paint our own beautiful painting, called life.
We hold the brush and life is our canvas.
We must live life to its fullness and remember
we can make life beautiful; we must cherish it for ever.

Georgette Philpot is a student of Columbia Career and Adult Education and the Columbia Family Literacy Academy. She is a dedicated mom to her son, Jacquez and with her beautiful smile she strives to brighten the days of others she comes in contact with.

Rebirth

You...consumed with hurt
Who lived in the dirt, who took a breath and only saw death
tried to fly, but learned it was all a lie
You born out of love now stained with hate
suffer with pain and hide your tears under the rain
You took the blame, look in the mirror and see only shame
Wake up and be reborn Take that road and deliver you soul
Either way someday you'll have to let go
Emerge from that mud and bravely grow
Open your petals all over the wind
And be like a lotus that Blooms, shines, and sings.

Glenda Diaz is a student at The English Center.

I Am

I am the five letters I've been given.
The questions I ask, the words I have written.
I am the memories of my past, lessons I've been taught.

Original Poetry

I am whatever I make myself out to be. The tears for
which I have fought. I am the words you speak of me,
I am Harry.

Harry Osman is an intelligent, affable student with TLC Online at The English Center. Harry is an avid sports fan who also loves to write song lyrics in his spare time. He plans to have his GED soon and study sports management. His teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Endurance

Someday everything will all make perfect sense.
But for now laugh at the confusion, smile through the tears.
Keep reminding yourself: everything happens for a reason.
There's a mountain before you, one you tried to climb and
failed. I know the struggle is frightening,
And that mountain ahead looks high,
But I know you can make it if only you will try.
Face that challenge and climb with all your strength!
If it looks like you're alone, Don't be fooled.
You're not alone. You are loved.
You have a heart that beats with compassion,
A mind of endless curiosity and a spirit of great generosity.
The hard work will pay off when you see the beautiful vista.
You'll know you've conquered that rocky terrain.
You will succeed. I have faith.
I am a better person today because of you!

Hector Meija has been attending Lee County Adult Education and is working diligently on earning his GED. His teacher is Laura Neal. His post GED goal is to be a fashion designer.

Don't Be Silent

Don't let them tell you that you can't be all you strive to be.
Stand up and shout, overcome and tell them, "This is me".
Do not conform into what they want you to be,
stay true to the real you.
We must conspire and work hard until our dreams transpire.
If you've got talent, don't be silent.
You are not alone. Not everyone is a mindless drone.
We are the last of a dying breed, and if I can't be me,
I'd rather slit my throat and let them watch me bleed.

Jacob Vittoe is a student at Lehigh Senior High School.

I'm a Fiery Soul Who Loves Music

I'm a fiery soul who loves music.
I wonder how the world would be without it.
I hear the daily soundtrack of my life.
I see how music can change lives and hearts.
I want to serenade the world and make them feel alive.
I'm a fiery soul who loves music.
I pretend that I'm in a silent movie where
actions are expressed through pace and rhythm.
I feel that I should move through the sound of music.
I touch a faraway memory -- just listening to a song.
I worry that not everyone appreciates the gift of music.
I cry a sad melody. I pretend I'm in a silent movie where
action is expressed through pace and rhythm.
I understand that life can be upbeat or downbeat.
I say a song could help you heal your pain.
I dream that I'm synched up in an old-fashioned animated
melody – dancing and singing.
I try to solve my problems while listening to music.
I hope music can be a safe haven for others -- as it is for me.
I understand that life can be upbeat or downbeat.

Jean Mursuli is an animated, bright young man who loves technology and movies. He is studying to get his GED with TLC Online at The English Center; his teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

My Addiction

As I lay here in bed, all alone
I can't help wishing, I could go home
I remember being scared, nervous, and depressed.
I blamed anyone and everyone, but I must confess:
I am guilty, this much I know
But they've turned this all into a really big show.
I tried to fit in with all the rest
That decision turned out not to be best.
My friends were not real, this much I found out
Now I'm doing time by myself, without a doubt.
We all make mistakes, this much is true
I just hope you don't let your mistakes define you.
So I'll use this time to change my outlook

Original Poetry

And try to get back what my addiction took.

*Jessica Rose is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida.
Her teacher is Ray Gentry.*

Counting

To go through each day to second guess one's self
To realize each day that we are able.
Able to accept, to look forward
And see our dreams come true and alive.
Take every second of every day and create anew
With the ability to find a love we never had
To see within one another to take ourselves as we are
That is truly a gift. Because all we are
Is all we have ever done. Cherish life and loved ones
Because one day we too will be just a memory

*John Brown is a student at Lee County AE. His teachers are Mrs. Neal
and Mr. Hill. In the future he wants to be a biochemist.*

A Loss of Two Brothers

The pain of the loss of two brothers can be deep. We are left with a feeling of sadness that seems to never go away. Until you wake up and have faith in God. He will always be with you in the darkest to happiest moments.

The pain of the loss of two brothers can be deep, but now with faith, I pray and remember the happiest moments instead of being down, like a failure. Family is the most important thing in life; they will be with you in the happiest and saddest moments. Enjoy them! If you didn't have time to say goodbye, start showing some love to those nearest.

The pain of a loss of two brothers can be deep. I hold my tears and God keeps me from the loneliness and sadness to happy moments, when I realize that my brothers have become the angels of my life.

God gave me these angels that I will love forever.

Joyce Granger is a student at Lee County Adult Education.

I Am a Mother Who Loves Her Children

I am a mother who loves her children.

I wonder if the world will ever be a safe place for them.
I hear my heart beating fast as I fret over *my angels*.
I see their beautiful faces all around me.
I want to hold and protect them all day long.
I am a mother who loves her children.
I pretend to be strong in front of them.
I feel myself tremble when I hear sirens and they're not home. I touch their smooth chocolate caramel faces while they are sleeping. I'm afraid of one day not being here.
I cry when they are hurting.
I am a mother who loves her children.
I understand I must one day let go. I say no, never!
I dream of us always being together.
I try to instill good values in them.
I hope I have. I am a mother who loves her children!

Leann Thompson is an inquisitive student with TLC Online at The English Center. She has a very serious attitude towards her studies and plans to have her GED soon. She is a caring mother of five children including a newborn.

I am not the Same Man

I'm not the same man I used to be
 since I changed my ways.
Now everything about me has been changed.
See, I'm glad I'm saved and filled with his precious grace.
I'm not the same man
 anymore.

I'm
 not
 the
 same man anymore,
 since I changed my ways.
Now everything about me has all been changed.
See, I'm glad I'm saved
 and filled with His precious grace.
I'm not the same man
 anymore.

I started my day

Original Poetry

with my feet on the floor,
I'm already thanking Him for the Holy Ghost.
I'm not the same man I used to be.
Lord, you have saved me.
I'm not the same.
I'm
not
the
same man I used to be.
since Christ has come into my life.
I have changed.
I'm not the same.

My life is not the same,
so changed.

I thank you, Jesus,
you've been so good.
Yes, I am changed.

Lee Stephens, a native of Jacksonville, is a successful business owner who always felt like not having a diploma held him back. This is Lee's first attempt at changing his song lyrics into poetry.

You are a Flower

You are a flower, a very beautiful flower.
Your smile is like when a flower blossoms.
You are the flower that lights my way.
You are the flower that perfumes me.
You are flower which shines in the spring
You are my love.

Leosdan Avalos is an 18-year old student in Ms. Arriete's ABE/GED program at The English Center, Miami, Florida.

RUSH

From the time I was young to where I am now,
Oh, how I despise you for following me around.
You're with me always in the back of my mind.
I can hear your whispers of hurry, hurry,
I'm not far behind.
You are no good for me it's time to say goodbye!

I've realized my time here is not forever and you will
Not RUSH me straight into the ground.
Time here is too valuable, I'm gonna slow down
And enjoy my ride.

Michelle Gwinn entered our program a bit shy and reserved. Boy were we lucky she did! She brings such great experiences and perspective to our learning adventures. Thank you Michelle for being a part of our program and allowing us to share in your learning.

Parents Will Be There

When you felt like breaking down or crashing in,
who did you turn to, to forgive your sin?
When you cried your lonely tears,
who was there to fight your fears?
And when it felt like no one would understand,
who was there to hold your hand?
They are people whom you can't replace;
they're the ones who gave you your face.
They'll love you through thick and thin,
they show you the light from deep within.
And if by chance, you happen to die,
they'll be the ones who will really cry.
You see, my friend, there's no one who can love you more
than your very own parents, that's for sure.
Always remember that this is true,
that wherever you go, your parents will be there for you.

Miguel Pauli did not let severe cerebral-palsy stop him from getting his diploma at 50 years young. He is now pursuing his college degree, serving as a true inspiration. GED Prep Online, Miami Dade College, Karin Miller

Still Here

Journey with me through the past.
Stare into the eyes of a killer in a mask.
Standing over me, he appears to be the "Grim Reaper."
Listen to my story because it gets a little deeper.
The orchestrator of death, in the form of a dealer, Satan's
paparazzi pulling the trigger.
Feel the heat of the iron penetrate my flesh.
Watch my blood drain across the floor and leave a mess.

Original Poetry

Watch my killer wait to hear my final breath,
And watch me crawl across the floor to save myself.
Hear the voice of the Lord whisper in my ear,
“Have a little faith, and I'll save you from despair.”
It's because He loves me that I'm still here.
I'm here today, I wonder how or why.
See, bullets riddled my body and I still did not die.
7 years ago, 3 men killed my friend before my eyes.
I see now the Savior has a plan for my life.
Lord, what is wrong with my troubled soul?
You delivered me, and still I won't let go.
My confession is of depression from within.
I go to sleep and tango with the demons of sin.
My knees are bruised, and my palms drenched with sweat.
Lord, I know you forgive, but do you forget?
“Love,” is the face card the Bible tells me to play.
I'm calling on you at night, and looking for you by day.
I reminisce looking back at my past.
You tell me I'm a jewel,
Even when the world says I'm trash.
You've got a funny sense of humor, I can't help but laugh.
You were always there now that I'm looking back.
Satan tried to put me in my grave,
You put Satan in his place,
and made the death angel behave. I guess you do love me,
And all I can say
Is thank you Lord for you Mercy and Grace.

Miranda Bentley is a student at ABE III Gadsden Correctional Facility.

I Persist and Believe in Goals

I am a person who persists and believes in goals.
I wonder if I can achieve my dreams.
I hear stories about outstanding people.
I see that some day, I will be a successful person.
I want to believe in my capabilities.
I am a person who persists and believes in goals.
I pretend I am always in control of what I want.
I feel like I am flying when I think about my dreams.
I touch the sky when I believe enough in myself.
I worry when I think about impossibilities

Of reaching my dreams. I cry because there are problems
That are out of my hands to resolve.
I pretend I am always in control of what I want.
I understand that I have to face many difficulties.
I say that life is a metamorphosis.
I dream about all I could accomplish.
I try to overcome all obstacles to reach my dreams.
I hope for a better future for mankind.
I understand that I have to face many difficulties.

Olivia Mauricio is industrious and eager to learn. She plans to get her GED as soon as possible. Olivia is a student at The English Center; her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

I Am From Two Places

I am from a place in the South
that opens the door to the North.
I am from the boulevard near the Orinoco River which
smells of sand, water, fish, and wind.
I am from the people with skin burned from the sun.
I am from the sound of the music of black people
who dance at carnivals.
I am from students who love reading and think
that a book is their best friend.
I am from a country where the people
always live a happy lifestyle.
I am from the group that one day decided to travel to the
United States for love of this country.
I am from the part of the community that is labeled
"Hispanic," "homeowners," "parents," and "voters."
I am from the strength to fight
for what I believe in and speak out without fear.
I am from the group of housewives that think we should
exchange the kitchen for a new room.
I am from a country that I left behind
because it suddenly changed to
no more democracy or civil rights.
I am from an organization that is documenting
human rights violations.
I am from the group of people that are listening
to the immigrants who are telling their sad stories.

Original Poetry

I am a part of the Venezuelans who are
working to restore the democracy in my country.
I am from a group that doesn't know the answer to the
question, "Where are you from?"
I am from a new country, and my heart is divided
between my love for Venezuela and for The United States.

Patricia Andrade has a positive attitude toward her studies. She has a strong sense of responsibility and civic duty as she strives hard to do her best academically. Patricia studies with TLC Online at The English Center, and her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Paintbrush

I keep my paint brush with me wherever I go.
In case I need to cover up, so the real me doesn't show.
I'm so afraid to show you me, afraid of what you might do.
That you might laugh or say mean things.
I'm afraid I might lose you, too.
I'd like to remove my coats of paint
Show you the real true me. Accept what you see.
Please be patient and close your eyes.
I will strip off my coats real slow.
Please understand how much it hurts
to let the real me show.
Now that my coats are all stripped off
I stand here naked, bare, and cold.
And if you still love me with all you see,
you my friend are true gold.
I need to save my paint brush though,
and hold it in my hand.
I want to keep it close in case someone doesn't understand.
So, please protect me my friend
Thanks for loving me true,
But please let me keep my paintbrush with me
until "I love me too!"

Patty Bigbee is in ABE III classes at Gadsden Correctional Facility. She wrote this poem to describe how she feels about herself and her life outside these walls.

THE WOMAN

This great person we call a woman

Is difficult to compare with a man
This person is a good sister, friend, and wife
She suffers too much in this life.
Why did God invent first Adam and not Eve
Why can't the man conceive?
Why did God send his son and not his daughter?
Why doesn't God have a mother?
The woman is important in this life
Without her it is impossible to be safe
She knows different things
To care, to clean, and to cook beans.
She is a wonderful creation in this world
With her you feel warm and never cold
Not on the inside or outside
I am warm with a woman by my side.
Where would we be without her?
Worse off than a dog without fur
She is the one that brought us here
We should never make her shed a tear.
The woman is a main source
Of survival to the human being
She gives the beautiful gift of life
She has pain, loves, different feeling inside.
Life reminds her every month
Being a woman sometimes can't be fun
That's the difference between a Man
And the person we call a woman.
She is sometimes soft as a rose
And hard as a rock
She works hard, is willing to accept responsibilities
Nice, cool, sweet and has many abilities.
She knows how to face problems
She is never broken, but strong; she is awesome
When somebody hurts her
She stands up and she's still there.
I would like to be a woman
For the satisfaction to give life
But no, I'm just a man
And only have the blessing of the person called "woman."

Original Poetry

Pedro Morales is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL Program. Bob Pause is his tutor.

A Crazy Thought

Gray skies are darkening as I walk down the alley
I see roaches crawling, hear big dogs howling
I think I've seen a ghost walking behind me.
I see the street light at the end of the alley.
As I get closer the light gets smaller.
I start to walk a little faster then
I start jogging then I start running
trying to get away from this disaster.
While I'm running I'm trying to
figure out what I'm doing here and how I got here. Then I
hear a voice say my name "Peter."
I thought it sounded familiar.
Then I started to see signs saying,
"Stop, don't go on, quitter, quitter."
Every sign I pass I run faster.
Suddenly I hear the voice again running with me
Whispering in my ear saying,
"Keep going, don't look back, run, run!!! You're almost
there." I trip over some rocks.
I feel two hands under my arms giving me a boost and
telling me, "Don't stop, go!!!" I start running faster
Running out of breath My heart is pounding I look up I see
the light getting closer. I can see the light hitting my
fingertips as I'm reaching out to it.
I hear the voice for the last time and it says,
"Winners never quit, quitters never win."
Right before I get to the light I turn around and I see the
ghost . Then I realize only one person tells me that so I yell
"Dad!!" My dad turns around and says
"Good job son" as he points to the light.
When I get to the light I see a mirror.
I look at myself and say "I made it." I never gave up.
Then I realize another thing:
My father never left my side.

Peter Callazo is a student at Lindsey Hopkins Tech Education Center.

The Beginning of an Exciting Day

The beginning of an exciting day
I can see people around me clapping, laughing
full of fun, excitement, and entertainment!
As I bicycle along the beach I can see and feel vitality
People are skating, bike riding, surfing,
collecting seashells, and building sandcastles.
The beginning of an exciting day
As I bicycle along the black sea sand,
I can see a circus of balloons floating my way.
Colorful kites scarlet, lavender, starburst yellow, ocean blue
shaped like elephants, Chinese dragons, and ice cream
cones drifting fitfully in the wind. I hear music
African bongos and flamenco guitars are a soulful rhythm
I smell popcorn, cotton candy, and caramel candy apples.
The scent of hotdogs and shish kebabs
waft through the salty air.
I stop for a minute to sample a bite of that savory,
appetizing shish kebab and relish the flavor.
As I approach a crowd, I can feel
the intensity of people dancing around me.
As I push my way through the noisy multitude,
I can see a clown before me dressed in colors
red, yellow, and blue.
As I continue my way through the crowd
at the end of the beach, my eyes grow with anticipation.
The circus lights conjure up images of
the man on the flying trapeze,
magicians pulling rabbits out of hats, monkeys swinging on
ropes, talking parrots, and lions
jumping through hoops of fire.
The beginning of an exciting day.

Rachel Tutson, an online student with TLC Online at The English Center, is ambitious and courageous. She plans to get her GED in a few months. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

The Words of a Drug Addict

I did drugs because it made me feel free;
I didn't care about what people said about me.

Original Poetry

I did drugs because it helped me to forget
All the bad things that had happened to me.
When I did drugs I was carefree.
I didn't care about how people looked at me.
Some people talked and there are
Those who just sat and stared.
But to tell you the truth,
When I did drugs, I really didn't care.
But now, you see, I am DRUG FREE.
I DO care about what people say about me.
I walk with a stride
Because God gave me back my pride.

Rose Burlles is a genuine role model for many of our students with her candidness about her life choices and her encouragement to pursue dreams. She often shares her amazing talent for singing with student groups and at our graduation.

These Eyes, God, and Me

Why is life so insane?
These eyes have seen so much pain, day after day..
It's just been the Devil's game:
Broken homes, shattered dreams.
These eyes have seen death in so many ways...
They've seen rape, such a craze
I'm still in a daze It's no excuse
These eyes have seen these prison walls
From deep inside, Looking out...
When vowing never to return, but it just seems like I'm
always up in jail, somehow...
Broken home, broken relationships, broken souls
Why do we continue to live in this world
full of hell's grace?
We then turn to drugs when all else fails.
My eyes begin to cry,
As the tears roll down my face,
I asked a tear, "Where are you going?"
The tear replied, "There's somewhere far more important
than your eyes. There is no room here for me"
These eyes want to see his great praise.
The Lord says to pray.

He tells me his love exceeds the deepest pain...
So then I dare
To give the Lord my every care; this pain I cannot bear.
Time spent with my father is worth the loss.
Surrender the fruits, it's worth the cost.
Oh, these eyes will see a better day.
Thank You Lord for blessing me, loving me.

Sandra Spear is a student at ABE III, Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Our Amazing Journey

Once we were ambitious, easygoing, strong, driven, impressive out-of-the-gate team players. We would do/did do anything for anyone. We were full of laughter, life, love. We were used, abused, shattered, hopeless, faithless, living-in-fear women. Now, we play the lead in our life stories, live on the edge of reason, show off our strengths and purposes, defying anything. When we are in doubt, we always take the high road, We are living life to its fullest potential. Somewhere, somehow with renewed focus, we have made it from living hopeless, faithless, fearful, lives to living in hope, faith, with no fear. We found our “perfect partner.” This “perfect partnership” is being built in our spiritual lives, faith to faith with God. What’s in store for our lives now? We are triumphant over tragedies, standing strong. Understanding when we trust and obey God, knowing that He is the only Source we need. He will show us how to get done, what we need to do. We have perfect faith. We know God is the true, whole solution. When we believe in God’s Word, standing in faith, sometimes we find ourselves wondering what is going to happen next or if God is going to help us through this next obstacle course.

Remember: It is impossible for God to do nothing!

Shannon Taylor is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida (Gadsden County), where Ms. Deon Lee is her GED Instructor.

Sunny Day

It's beautiful outside
Looking at the water on the bay

The white reflection of the boats
Rising high on the tide
The sky is blue like a pool
Wind blowing through the trees
While the sun hides behind the clouds
Calming the heat of the day with a cool breeze
Sitting out on my patio
Taking all the fresh air in with a smile
Loving the view before my eyes
Music playing on my radio
Drinking sweet tea with ice
Sight of people walking by
Hearing the sounds of nature
This sunny day just feels nice
Sun golden like a crown
Setting on the shore
The glowing light
Dims as the sun goes down

Shantavia Curry is a capable and talented student with TLC Online at The English Center. She is the loving mother of six children who still manages to find time to study. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

I am a Woman who Enjoys Life

I am a woman who enjoys life.
I wonder if you value life as I do.
I hear the birds sing in the morning.
I see how life goes on.
I want to believe in my world.
I am a woman who enjoys life.
I pretend that I'm finished getting my degree.
I feel that everything will change for the better.
I touch the sky with my hands – in my imagination.
I worry because I care.
I cry when my world suffers.
I am a woman who enjoys life.
I understand the frustrations of the world.
I say everything is going to be perfect.
I dream big. I try to be good.
I hope you always find a reason to smile.
I am a woman who enjoys life.

Steffi Bermudes is a student with TLC Online at The English Center. She plans to take vocational classes at The English Center, and then earn a degree in International Business. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Addiction

Pills spilling tears dropping
Families crashing independent
stopping. Bang. Bang. Blood
shed they are all dead
lives lost from a bullet to the head alcohol
pouring shot that goes
soaring through the vein
they think that takes away
their pain Jesus Jesus
they cry into the night
the way the truth the
light that saves me from
the demons plague me inside my heart.
This poem is from the heart.
I hope it gives you a brand new
start.

Stephanie Royal is a student at Learn To Read Jacksonville.

Goodbye Mr. Blue

Saying goodbye and letting go is so hard.
Taking one day alone hurts inside and outside.
You've made me feel good for so long. I depended on the
needs, yours and mine. Your need was me and mine was
you. A match in heaven, I thought, but I came to realize it
was hell. Don't you ask me why? You took everything. I
should be the one to ask why?
But guess what, I had some thoughts in that also.
No blame, just shame. Shame of the control you had over
me. I thought I was in love with you. I was at once, but that
turned into hate after I realized you had my head scrambled
up. No more! Can you hear that?
No more! I'm at peace with my life.
The turn over is awesome. Maybe one day I'll thank you for
letting me go in a wrong way. Why? Because someone else
had a say in my life and he took you away from me. Until I

Original Poetry

can say thank you to him, I can tell you how much I hate you, and hate is such a harsh word. But I do. So, hey, I can let you go and I can say it turned out just fine. My life I can control. I don't need you at all. I'm building the things I need to keep all of the negative out of my life. Guess what? My family still loves me, even after all the things I've done to hurt them with lies, stealing, hiding, and running away from the help they offered. Their love overrules you, so, goodbye, Mr. Blue.

The writer is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida (Gadsden County), where Ms. Deon Lee is her GED Instructor.

Ready to Thrive

It seems like just yesterday I was just Verna Sealy:
Mother of six, wife, and grandmother.
I could only exist with some kind of drug in my system.
I never dealt with my life, just put it aside and numbered it.
Now I'm Verna Sealy, convicted felon,
serving ten years in prison.
This seemed to be the worst thing that ever happened to me.
Looking back at where I was in life,
living in the dark, masking all that I was,
I now see that this was the only way
I could come out of the darkness I existed in.
For the first time in my life,
I opened a Bible and met my creator.
I'm getting to know me with all my hurts and dreams.
It feels like I've never known myself. Finding me is a wide
ocean of unexplored territory but I'm doing it without a
drug or cover up. I'm giving forgiveness.
I never would have before. I'm understanding emotions I've
been running from for years. Not only do I understand these
emotions but I'm learning to cope with them
in a positive and productive way.
All this time, I was just living to survive.
Now I'm living to thrive. So when I look back
I wouldn't change one thing because I wasn't really living.
I was passing down my destructive ways to my children.
Now I will be able to change things for my next generation.
That to me is worth the ten years I will sacrifice.

I found God

The God in me is something I can be proud to pass on.
I was rescued, not arrested, and I pray others don't have to
come this far to take the blinders off and live.

This prison's better than the prison that I existed in.
Yesterday I was lost. Today I am basking in God's glory
Ready to thrive not just survive.

Verna Sealy is studying at ABE III, Gadsden Correctional Facility.

I Am From Two Places

I'm here, alone with my thoughts. I have started a journey through my life, exploring my memories. I'm in perfect connection with God, the universe, my spirit, my soul. I close my eyes reliving every instant of my life -- never mind if it's sad, difficult, weird, or happy. Suddenly, I hear the breeze whispering in my ears, and I remember the pure air of my mountains -- and in seconds I'm there, far from here, in the place where I'm from. I am from a loving mom, cooking us typical foods like a tasty *pabellón*, rice, plantains, meat, and black beans. What a special person my mom is; she is everything to me. She is so tender and brave; she is my role model. I am from a cultured father, teaching me reading and writing -- a man who gave me a great education and a lot of values. I am from a united family, with strengths and weaknesses. They have always given me protection, security, and support. I am from innocence, believing in baby Jesus. I am from the memory of a sweet baby girl waiting anxiously for her gift on Christmas Eve. I am from simple games like flying kites, playing marbles, riding bikes, or running happily with my brothers and their friends.

I am from special friends or "blessed angels" from my childhood and adolescence that permitted me to enjoy adventures and experiences, and who taught me to appreciate the importance true friendship.

I am from a place where the rain sounds like a song, falling down throughout the trees. I am from my amazing hills where my thoughts flew to diverse lands. I am from the comfort of loving the simple little things that seem to say

Original Poetry

nothing to others, but to me, say a lot. I am from a simple house with high ceilings and large windows where I would contemplate beautiful shapes in the clouds -- and at night, I would stare at each star shining in the sky. I am from a diverse land with mountains and savannas, forests and rivers, snow and sand dunes, beaches, peaks and falls. I am from Venezuela that I love with all my heart. I am from deciding to spread my wings to fly far away and settle in another place with my husband and our dreams. I am from the United States of America where I'm learning about other cultures and opening to other ways. And, for that, I must say: Thank you Lord for everything because today I can say that I'm a member of two amazing worlds. If anyone asks me "where are you from?" I would like to say, "Oh! I belong to two places; I am from Venezuela, and I am from the USA."

Xelaynhe Mecias is a hardworking, dedicated student taking multiple literacy classes to improve her academic skills. She has a terrific sense of humor and lots of drive. Her teacher is Ms. Pruitt.

Personal Story

What it Takes to be a Good Parent

I have lived in Florida since September, 1999. My life is similar to other people's lives. When I came to this country I had many dreams; the time has gone by and now I have my own family and my dreams have changed. My children are the most important ones to me. I want my children to go to college and have a good career. I know that many things exist such as drugs, alcohol and bad people. I feel worried, so it is important to talk to my children about the good and bad things in their lives. When I feel something is not right, I talk with them. I hope that when they're grown up they will be good people. Now the most important thing is to save for their college expenses. I also want to learn more English so I can help them. This country has many opportunities for my children. -Since they were born here, their lives can be better than ours.

I almost forgot to talk about my son's life. It is sad but he makes me stronger. He is autistic. He needs language therapy and goes to the doctor frequently. I have a dream that if I can study and get a GED diploma, I would like to go to college to learn about autism and find out why some children have this problem and how to help them. Presently there is no cure for autism and the cause is not known. In the future I hope to continue to help my son; as well as other autistic children and their parents. Sometimes I glare with my eyes when other children or adults say mean things or make fun of autistic children. This makes me mad and sad, and I am inspired to do something for them. I hope to stop the bullying for those children and have a conference for parents and children twice a month where I can share my personal story and invite guest psychologists.

Alberta Leon is studying in the Clearwater Adult Education/ United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Brigita Gahr.

A Life Changing Experience

Being a volunteer Candy Stripper at the Veterans Administration Hospital changed my life. My grandma taught me a lot about nursing. She wanted me to be a nurse like her. We lived in Alaska for four years while my dad was in the Army. While there, I took a course in CPR and learned the Heimlich maneuver. When we returned from Alaska, I volunteered at the VA Bay Pines Hospital as a Candy Stripper.

One night, after a nice dinner at a friend's home, I went to my Candy Stripper job at the hospital. I went to one of the rooms to take care of a patient. When I went in, I found him sitting in bed choking on a piece of chicken. It wasn't a good situation. I put my arms around him two times and gave him the Heimlich maneuver. The chicken came out of his mouth. After it was over, he called the nurse and told her I saved his life. The VA gave me a certificate for saving his life at the VA Regional Office. The VA officials, doctor, nurses, my parents, sister, and other volunteers were there. I was very happy that I knew what to do. Learning is a good thing. I am studying for my GED so I can learn more and become a teacher.

Amanda Mattingly is a Literacy Council of St. Petersburg's student. Amanda wants her GED. She and her tutor Jackie are working on it and won't stop until she gets there.

Life Lessons of My Childhood

At times everyone looks back and sees things that they would like to change about their life. Sometimes I look back and see things I would change. Most people would prefer to change their weight or something physical about themselves. Personally, if I could change my childhood, I believe my life would be totally different. I learned lessons from my parents the hard way about choosing the right or wrong paths in life. They made choices during my childhood that showed me that if you make wrong choices and decisions, it can be life altering. And it will not just affect your own life, but others around you too. To be fair to

them, I admit it is sometimes hard to tell if you are making the right decision at the time, so you just pray that you have made all the right choices to be a good person.

As I was growing up, my father felt like he had to hide me rather than just let me enjoy life. He always thought someone was going to do something bad to our family. The reason he thought this is because he had taken a wrong path in his past. So, he lived with the fear that someone would take revenge on our family because of what he had done. And in this town, everyone is either related or knows each other. So instead of playing with the neighborhood children, I had to stay at home. If I was caught outside, my daddy would beat my tail. My mother worked long hours at the hospital, and it seemed like she was never there for me. To live, to laugh, to love and adore every moment was probably someone else's childhood, but my childhood was dark and lonely. I choose to look forward and make a better future for my children. I will teach them to see life with love and affection. I will teach them to love and laugh and be their own person. I choose a different path than my parents, so that my children will not feel overprotected and under loved.

Planning My Daughter's Wedding

Brian proposed to Patrice on December 18, 2012. They came to the house for Christmas. Then he pulled me to the side and asked if he could marry my daughter. "Lets see what Dad says about that," I said. Then Dad and I sat them down and asked, "Are you sure this is what you want?" They both said, "yes." In January, Patrice, Allana, and I went to David's Bridal to find a wedding dress. We looked at lot of dresses and she found the right one. Allana looked at the bridesmaid dresses. Patrice picked a purple one for Allana. We could not believe we found the right dresses and we put them on lay-a-way. The next weekend Allana and I went to Hobby Lobby to look for flowers and champagne glasses. Later that week Patrice, Allana, and I went back to Hobby Lobby to buy the flowers. Patrice found roses that were pink, purple, red, and white.

Patrice, Grandma, and I went back to David's Bridal to pick up the wedding dress. When we got there Patrice tried her dress on to show Grandma. While we were waiting for Patrice to come out of the dressing room we found the flower girl's dress. Brian and his best man Joe had to go find their suits. Patrice said, "Can I go?" Brian said, "Ok." Patrice and Brian found suits that looked perfect. The suit was black, the shirt was white, and the tie was purple. Patrice said, "I like that" It will look good for the wedding." Brian is a good man for Patrice. He is doing all that he can for their wedding. He is working very hard to help me. I feel that Brian is a good guy. He likes to be included with the family and we like to have him around too. I cannot wait to know him better. Now we have all the things Patrice and Brian need for their wedding, and we are waiting for their special day, June 8. I would like to say thank you to all of the Learn to Read Team. Without them I would not have been able to write this story. They have worked very hard to help me. Learn to Read is a very good program for adults who do not know how to read.

Betty Caldwell is a student at Learn to Read Jacksonville.

My Story

I am from Guatemala; I came to the United States in February 2006. I remember when I went to the store for the first time to buy groceries. When I was ready to pay for my stuff, the cashier asked me, "Do you need anything else?" I stayed silent and said in my mind "What is she saying to me?" She asked me again, "Anything else?" I did not speak any English those days and so I didn't understand what the cashier was saying to me. Then my friends and I found an American woman that taught us the English language, we paid her for that. She taught us for three months. Later we went to a church to get English classes also was for three months. I was so happy because I was learning a lot of English. Finally I found Dunbar Community School. I gave thanks to God because I was praying for that.

The first year I passed the first grade and I got my certificate. I could read something. I was so happy and I took a video that day. When I went to the store or somewhere else I could read the street signs. Now I can talk to my boss of work and my partners in English without having problems with the English language. Thanks to God and the people who do their best to have this beautiful program. I love and appreciate this school so I am very proud of my teachers that teach so well. Now I am thinking to improve my English and get my GED. When I finish the GED my plan is go to college and study to be a policeman. May God always bless this nation and heal our land.

Bilzon Avila is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Personal Story

My name is Brittany. I am sixteen years old. Even though I am so young, I have been through a lot. I have been in an out foster care my whole life. When I wasn't in a foster home, I was tossed from family member to family member. My parents did a lot of drugs. They were not really fit to be parents. Together, they had three kids. They didn't really take care of any of us. Of course, I still love them; they are my parents! At age 14, I became interested in drugs and boys. One month after turning 14, I became sexually active. Five months after that, I became pregnant with my first child. At age 15 on September 8, 2012, I gave birth to my son Joseph. From that day and for the rest of my life, he will be my inspiration. I am going to be the best mother a child could ever have. I will be nothing like my family. I am going to strive for the best. I came from the bottom, but I will make it to the top! I will be a good role model for him and nothing less. Just because you fall down doesn't mean you can't get up and try again!

Brittany Postell is a student at Dunbar Community School

Happy At Last

My name is Bu Nga Deeyoo. I am from Thailand. I came to Key West in 2006 with my husband whom I met in Thailand. He was on vacation in my country and was

visiting my friend's family who happened to live in the same village where I lived. My friend introduced him to me and after a year of courtship, we got engaged. Then he brought me to the United States. My husband became sick two years later of throat cancer. Then he died. I was very sad. It was a terrible time in my life. Losing someone very dear to my heart is very hurtful. I was alone for four years. Unexpectedly, in 2012 I met someone at Outback Steak House during happy hour. About a year later, we were engaged. He fills the gap in my life. I am very happy now.

Bu Nga Deyoo is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Vacation at Stella Lake

My caregiver took me to Jacksonville International Airport to go to Michigan to spend my two-week summer vacation with my grandparents. After spending one night at their house, we drove to their cabin at Stella Lake, which is located in the Hiawatha National Forest. Grandpa built the cabin himself. He also brought in sand and developed a beach. I stayed in my own trailer next to my Grandparents' cabin. Everyday I got to go swimming in the lake; the water was nice and warm. I did many fun things such as shoot a BB gun at a pop can, go on a four-wheeler ride through the forest, take Grandma's paddleboat and paddle around the dock, feed the chipmunks and squirrels, catch a lot of fish, and skip rocks over the water. Grandpa also took me to see his deer blind. I sat in the green house and gazed out on the lake where I saw an eagle fly by. I even watched fire works across the lake. I helped my Grandpa rake the trash off the beach and helped him clean out his tractor shed. We did lots of fun things together. He even let me drive his new boat. After one week, we came back to town so Grandpa could cut the grass. We went to church that Sunday then met my two great aunts for brunch.

During my last week at the lake I went fishing with Grandpa on his pontoon boat. I caught 24 fish, but had to release them back into the lake. The Saturday before I

returned home I had a very emotional experience when my grandparents took me to see the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Escanaba. I saw the names of all the military people who were killed in that war. It was sad to see so many names written on the wall. Grandpa was crying as he stood there looking at the Memorial Wall. He hugged Grandma and me and said that it could have been his name on that wall. I am blessed to have my Grandpa. We left and went home to drop off some food and clothes. We then went to the Moose Lodge for supper. Grandma told me someone was coming to the Lodge to surprise me. It was my aunt. We all sat down and had dinner and she gave me a beautiful cross. After supper, we went home and Grandma helped me pack. Later that evening, I went out in the woods to help my grandpa haul some wood. Then, my grandparents took me to the airport and waited until I boarded the plane. I really had a very cool summer with my grandparents. Actually, I had a blast!

David Woodard loves writing poems and short stories. He is a student in the Florida State College at Jacksonville Learning for Living Program. His instructor is Carolyn Floyd.

My Life

I was born in Eritra and raised in Germany. I went to Germany from Eritra when I was about 12-13 years old. I was on my own. I asked for asylum in Germany. I grew up as an orphan with other kids. To live as an orphan made me strong, direct, and a helpful person. I do not like people that lie or pretend. I am a family person. When I was an orphan in Germany, I started school in the 6th grade and went to the 8th grade. Then I had to choose a vocational school. I chose the carpentry school for 3 ½ years. I completed my school with a lot of problems related to attaining my citizenship and being homesick. But I made it.

I joined the work force, but because I was a refugee and did not have the right to work anywhere I wanted, I started work at Burger King (BK). I could work at BK, because it was an American company, so I started there. At first I cleaned floors, but because I wanted to do better in life and

learn more things, I became very noisy and got many ideas on how to move to the next level. I was a very hard working person, and I aspired for more in life, so I decided to get trained for a management position. After I passed the test, I became the manager of the restaurant where I was working. Years later, I met a wonderful man who became my husband. Together we traveled around the world and enjoyed life. We have a beautiful daughter who is now 3 years old. We came to the United States in 2010, and the only thing I can say to you is that God has really blessed me.

Elsa Workman is a student at Northwest Florida State College.

A Simple, Happy Life

I am my father's third daughter. We emigrated from China to the United States in 1989. While my family was not affluent, we were comfortable enough. However, my dream was broken when we learned that my father was very ill and could not go to work. He spent the last of his money for his care in the hospital. Life became very difficult and we were no longer comfortable. Life was no longer fine; instead I was looked down upon because my family had become poor. Even though my father said that we must go to school and study English, I had to leave school and look for a job. I had no training or experience, but I worked so hard. I learned that money was not easy to get and I began to cherish life more and more.

At the time when I felt the most helpless and that life could not get much worse, I met a nice man. He taught me so much and I was able to get a better job. I lost touch with him. A few years later, we were reunited. Now he is my husband and we are very happy together. Now I understand that life can be simple and happy if you have enough to eat, to wear, and to live comfortably. My hard work held much worth. Life is short. Good health is more precious than possessions.

En Guang Lin is an ESL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Patricia Capps.

My Heritage

My first name came from one of my great uncles. He came from a country town in Georgia. We know now most country folks immigrated from the South. I was raised in Jacksonville, Florida. We don't know too much about my other folks from other places like North Carolina or New York. I know a little about their history. They were mostly farmers and they were African American. My people have told me little bit about my granddad and what he did to make his living. He was a man who took pride in creating his unique blend of cooking and baking. I'm here today because of what he valued and because he took time with his grand kids to talk with them, let them know that the sky is the limit and that we can make it if we try.

He told us to keep on moving, have a motive or reason for doing what we do, and to carry on our legacy. We learned to hold on to our faith because it will carry us to places we would not believe and we have never been before. What makes a man be a better man? How will I impact the lives of others around me... not just my generation, but also everyone around me? Others can learn and benefit from knowledge of my people who were here before we were. I hope people will be inspired by my writing and try learn more about their history and what make us stronger and tougher individuals. What has put you in this place and made you want to be here? Where do you want to go? It's your choice. Know yourself and have a positive impact that your generation will want to follow. We are all that we have and we must be examples for one another.

Ernest Jackson has lived in Jacksonville all his life. He has been an adult learner at Florida State College at Jacksonville's Downtown campus for about two years. He is a peacemaker in his family and his community who wants to be an example for younger people.

Fate, Faith, and Fulfillment

My name is Ewelina and I am of Polish origin. I was born in a small town near Warsaw. I grew up with my grandparents because when I was five my parents died in a

car accident. Immediately after that my grandparents moved into my house. This put my grandpa in position as dad for me. My grandparents gave me strength and they tried to replace my parents. They gave me love. They bought everything I wanted. I knew that my grandparents are not my parents. They did all this so that it was not so painful for me to be without my true mom and dad. I was generally a very happy and loved child. My cousin Yvonne helped me through the difficult period of adolescence.

My grandparents were already in their 70's. It was difficult for them to understand a teenager. Yvonne always pushed me forward and said that even if I fail at something I have to try again and never to give up. Thanks to her determination I finished high school. She believed in me and I did not want to disappoint her. The biggest shock and pain for me was the moment when my grandmother died.

I had to be strong for my grandfather who was without a companion. He was devastated after the loss. With the support of my aunt and cousin, we survived the critical period. I had no idea that this was just the beginning of my suffering. A month later my grandfather died. I was 21 years old. I was terrified. I was alone in the house full of bitter and sweet memories. That was too painful for me. Although I had family support, I could not face the challenge. Two years later I decided to sell the house and bought a small apartment.

My cousin Yvonne had a great idea. She told me that I should get a Visa and fly to the United States. I was afraid to leave because Poland was my home. With her gentle persuasion saying that home is where we are, I went to apply for a Visa. The next month we left for America together. I am grateful that she persuaded me because now my dream has come true. Over time the pain of losing loved ones became smaller. I know my grandparents are smiling at me from above and they are glad for my happiness. Finally I am living the fullness of life and enjoying this

beautiful place, Key West. The peaceful sunny place eliminates the darkness in my heart and illuminates my life.

Ewelina Bajerska is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

When I Grew Up

I grew up in Bowman, South Carolina on a sharecrop farm. It was a big farm. There was lots of work to do. I lived with my mother, my father, and 10 children. There were four boys and six girls. On the farm we had cotton, corn, beans and every name of foods. We did canning, cooking, baking, sewing and quilting. My dad had a wagon, mules, hogs, and chickens. My mom bought food in colored sacks. She made us pretty colored sack skirts for school. We did not go too much because we had to work in the field and help on the farm. We went to church in the wagon some Sundays and sometimes we walked.

Sometimes, when we got there, Sunday school was already over. We worked Saturday in the cotton and bean fields and in the peanut patch. I can say thanks to God we had plenty to eat; lots of fruits and vegetables. We raised chickens and hogs, cats and dogs. My parents were very good parents. They had a lot of love in their hearts for others. As for the education that my mom had, she only had third grade schooling. The good Lord has been good to me. I have so much to be thankful for. I can say I received the Lord as my personal savior and it was the best thing that ever happened to me in my life. I thank him every day in prayer.

Frances Rhymes is 77 and has been attending class at Lakewood Community School in St. Petersburg. She is very dedicated, works all day and rides the bus to school every Monday night.

Taylor

Taylor is a macaw with many colors. Some people call them flag macaws; it has red, blue, and green feathers. Its name originated from a cartoon called Pinkidu, where there was a girl about eight years old with her brother Taylor, who was in preschool. He was very affectionate, friendly,

and cute. According to my daughter Anita, the macaw had the same qualities that Taylor had, so she named it Taylor. The bird came into my hands when it was only a few months old. I figure it was about four months old. It just had short delicate feathers and cotton-like ones called "down." He ate every three hours, day and night, which was exhausting the first few months until, like human babies, it stopped calling at night and got up early.

Raising an animal with these characteristics has no holidays, Saturdays, or Sundays. The food it ate was porridge with banana powder and grains like corn, rice, oats, and wheat, diluted in warm water. I had to feed him using a syringe. Taylor eventually learned to speak and sing a preschool song. It even learned to imitate the sound of chickens. He had his favorite foods, like scrambled eggs with sugar. When he didn't get them, he got angry and protested saying, "@!*\$," a word that I certainly did not teach him. One day Taylor injured its leg, and I took him to the doctor's. In the waiting room a young woman, who was a little overweight, greeted him. Taylor responded saying, "Hello 'gordita.'" The lady was embarrassed and said "Hey, you don't have to be so honest!" Everyone in the clinic could not stop laughing. In May, Taylor will be nine years old, and he is still a wonderful pet.

Gabriela Rodríguez Morales, who loves both macaws and English, was born in Chicago, Illinois. She studies in the Adult ESOL Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert Kelso.

The Power of Love

I am from Kazakhstan. I am 17 years old. By this age I think I kind of know what love is and I want to share it with you. To me, this subject of love is inexhaustible. Each person throughout life needs love. Some wait for it patiently while others aspire to love impatiently. From my culture's point of view, love means to lead the life of the one whom you love. The female is to be along the side of her man who is the head of her life. I believe that all men who are good want to make other people happy. Love itself cannot

overcome neither fear, greed, nor anything. It is the love through us that helps overcome these unpleasant things. Love is an aspiration to an ideal that makes it idealistic. When a person falls in love, it is in the darling he/she sees and appreciates the love. Also, the person does not notice the shortcomings of his/her beloved. Having been inspired by an ideal love, people write poems, music, create paintings and images. The optimal of love clears away roughness, platitude, and cruelty. Love, this excellent feeling is one of the main values of life. Love is a power that can do many splendid things. Be loving and loveable. We all need it.

Gaukhar Besbai attends the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Working in America

Coming from Jamaica to work in America is very hard. When I came to America, the first place I started working was a hotel on St. Pete Beach. I didn't like my work hours because my shift was very long. Sometimes, I had to go to work from 6 A.M. to 7 P.M or from 12 noon to 11 P.M. When I got home from work, I didn't have time to make dinner. I just had time to shower and go to bed with an empty stomach. I often asked myself the question, "Why do I do this job?" But I did it just to get money to pay my bills and to send for my children in Jamaica. It was difficult to get home from work. The city bus came every half hour. It took me three buses to get to work from where I live. It was difficult to share a seat with some people on the bus – they don't smell pleasant! I didn't like the type of work I was doing one bit! I was a lobby attendant.

My job was to keep the lobby and the restrooms clean. Some of my coworkers weren't nice to me. They didn't want to do their jobs. They told me to do their work. That made me upset, but I did it anyway. Sometimes, it was difficult for me to go to school because some of my coworkers wanted to change days off with me. They also wanted to have Wednesdays and Thursdays off, which were my school days. I had to put my foot down and say "no", to

Personal Story

get my days off. I didn't have the opportunity to go to school every day in Jamaica because sometimes I had to go to the farm with my father. My father grew things like yams and vegetables. On Fridays, we had to take a donkey to collect the produce. On Saturdays, we took the produce to the market to sell. I go to Tomlinson Adult Learning Center to pursue my education because I want to get a better job. I am studying for my G.E.D. at Tomlinson. My teacher gave me a tutor to help with my reading. I improved my reading a lot with the help of my tutor, hard work, and determination. These things also helped me to achieve my Nursing Assistant License. I am not stopping there. I am on my way to getting my R.N. license. You can achieve anything you want if you work hard.

Giselle Marshall is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center.

Gregoria's Life

I am 26 years old. I was born in the state of Hidaigo, Mexico. My story is long and complicated. In 1998, at 13 years old I moved to Oklahoma City. I got married and had two wonderful daughters. Later I found out that my marriage was not legal. There were no papers signed or notarized stating that I was married. In the year 2006, I moved to Florida, a foreign place for me. I didn't know how to work. I had to work in a Mexican restaurant as a waitress. I got annoyed, because my pay was only \$2.50 an hour. It was not enough money to pay my bills and support two little girls, ages 12 and 11 years old.

Everyone asked me where my husband was. It was difficult for me to say that we got divorced. It was my husband who said really bad things to me. It hurt me when he said those things, and it wasn't easy to go along with him. But everything worked out for the best. I had to get a job working in a bar to support me and my children. This is not the type of job I wanted but I had more money and was able to support my little girls. If you haven't guessed by now, I am not a legal citizen in this country. My girls are scared that one day we are going to get separated. But I am

not going to give up until I reach my dreams. My dreams are to become a US citizen. This is why I have enrolled into Dunbar Community School. To study English, reading and writing. I am studying very hard to accomplish all my dreams. This will give me the opportunity to have a better paying job, and offer my girls a better way of life. With hard work and dedication, I know, I am going to be who I want to be: a good mother, and a vegetarian, with my own home, and my very own business.

Gregoria Ponce is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Challenge

I am from South Korea. My family has been in the United States for only two years. I have three children, two daughters and a son. They are all in elementary school, 5th, 4th and 2nd grades. They are learning English very fast and they learned a lot during the first year here. But my husband and I are learning very slowly. My children read a lot of books at school. My eldest daughter went to reading competitions and won prizes. Next week she will get another prize from the mayor of Tampa City, Mayor Buckhorn. She is invited to have a breakfast with him and my daughter will get a \$250 gift card. I want to learn English very well. That is why I am in ESOL program at Gary Adult High school. Since I am working, I can't stay all day. But I will try to do my best. In the future, my husband and I both want to work for the church. For that, we need to learn more English.

Gyoung Aee is an ESOL student at Gary adult High school. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Personal Story

I am from Mexico. I moved to the United States ten years ago with my husband when I was expecting my first child. Now, I am a single mother of two children, because of domestic violence. My story is sad because as a young girl I always wanted a happy family. I want to be loved and I wanted my children to be loved and to grow up with their father. Ten years later, I have enrolled into Dunbar

Community School. Here is where I planned to learn to speak English, read and write. I picked up my boot straps and moved forward with my life. My first day of class was February 26 of this year. I was very nervous. However, the teacher Mrs. Savage and the other students made me feel welcome. This is my third day and already I am writing an essay for the Florida Literacy Coalition – Adult Learner Essay Book. I have a lot I want to say.

Sometimes it's difficult to put the words into English. My teacher and my classmate Raquel are very helpful to me in reaching this goal. I am fortunate to be here in the United States because of the opportunities that are available. For now, I am working at a Columbia Restaurant as a cook. I enjoy cooking. Someday I will have my very own business and I will be able to teach my children that education is very important. Without education life can be trying, and the choices we make without and education are hard. This is my story; I am prayerful for the changes in my life. Although being a single mother is hard, I love my children and I wouldn't change a thing. Now, I am not so sad. The United States has been good to me.

Herlinda Flores is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Life between Honduras and America

I was born in La Lima, Honduras on July 25, 1959 to Abraham Ortez and Maria Yrbina. I have three brothers and three sisters. We all lived in a small banana plantation owned by the American Company. My father was the captain of the Chiquita Banana Company and my mother stayed home. My sisters, my brothers and I went to school in La Lima together. However, when we get older we all went to separate directions. I came to the United States and one of my sisters went to Panama. When I was in Littlerock, California I met Albert, later we married and had three boys and one girl. They all went to school in Littlerock and came to Miami to finish their schools and later went to college. Now, they all have careers in the army and navy forces. After my all children left I thought to go back to school to

learn English and get my GED. That is why I am in Gary adult High school. Later, I divorced Albert and started working in a restaurant where I met Simon, an African American man. I used to travel with him a lot. He has been to many different places and I enjoy being with him. He is a very caring and lovable man. I am planning to marry him soon and hope I will be happy forever.

Iris Washington is a student at Gary Adult High School who recently moved to ABE class from ESOL. Her teacher is Renuka Karunaratne.

Nothing is Accidental

I want to share with you my conviction that nothing is accidental, and everything happens for a reason. I'm just a regular person who had dreamed about visiting the U.S. since I was a little girl. It seemed to be, if not impossible, at least something extremely hard for me to realize. I lived my life in my poor country in Eastern Europe. I tried to make my parents proud of me, and I hope I did that, at least sometimes. After I'd finished my studies, I moved to the capital and started a new life. I thought it was for good. I worked for a few companies and had different positions, including marketing manager for an advertising agency. Having a degree in marketing, making good money and having a nice job, I was sure that I had found my vocation.

One day, the economic crisis came to my country, and this was the beginning of the collapse for many companies, and for the one for which I was working. The company was closed and there I was, at a moment in my life when I had to start again, to try something new. Then I accepted a job that a big real estate company offered me. Everybody said that it wasn't the right time to start this kind of job; everybody asked me, "Why? Why now when the market is so unsecure, why not years ago when you could have made a lot of money in real estate?" The answer was simple: "Now is my time!" I worked very hard.

I used to work twelve hours a day without feeling tired and became one of the best brokers in my company. I was happy and knew that this was the job that I would love most in my life. Last year in my country, I met two men on two

different occasions. From one of them, a client of mine who “randomly” lived in Florida, I found out that the annual *Real Estate Conference and Expo 2012* would be in Florida. It could have been anywhere in the U.S., but it was in Florida. Even though I had tried years previously to visit the U.S., and I had been rejected for visa, this time was different. I registered, applied and was accepted. I took advantage of this and attended the Conference in Florida. Besides the facts that this was a big important step in my career and that I fulfilled my old dream to visit the U.S., the most important thing, something I didn’t know then, is that the other man that I had met that year in my country, another man who also “randomly” lived in Florida, would become my lovely husband.

Iuliana Dumitrescu is a student at Dave Tomas East, Community School North.

Thinking about the Future

My name is Iwona. It is a fairly common name in Poland. I found out that my name has a different meaning in other languages. This is the first word I learned how to spell in English when I came to the United States. I never thought that one day I would learn much more. Though Poland is a beautiful country, the economy is not in good shape. It is a big challenge to be in the labor market. Competition is tough unless one has the knowledge of a foreign language and indeed two or even three are much better. This fact triggers me to think about the future of my daughter.

I decided to educate her to be multilingual. In my opinion, the best way to master a foreign language is to reside in a country in which the native language is spoken. Also due to the fact that my brother lives permanently in the United States, we could live with him, too. It did not take long for me and my daughter, Patricia, to fly to Key West where my brother has established his home since 2004. At that time Patricia was in preschool only for four months. In 2005 she was in kindergarten full time. We left and came back in 2012. Presently, my daughter is in middle school. In

addition, she also learns more academic subjects in Polish because they are not being taught in the middle school here in America. While I was thinking about the future for my daughter, I am inspired to do the same for myself. Though I already know how to speak English, I have problems with grammar and understanding the Americans when they speak. It is never too late to learn another language. It is an advantage for me. We will be sad when it is time for us to return to Poland. Nevertheless, I am grateful that we have the opportunity and experience to learn English directly from this country. We definitely will be bringing home the wealthy exposure we have in this language. Perhaps we will come back for a visit again.

Iwona Okrasa is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Family

The love of my family goes deep down in my heart. There is nothing I wouldn't do for them. If they wanted me to go to the moon, I would because that is what families do for one another. When the kids at school would pick on me, my sisters and brother would be right there to defend me. No matter what, my family will forever be in my heart. There were times when I got into an argument with my sisters and brother but at the end of the day, we would be back laughing and carrying on, as if nothing happened. My mother and father tried their best to raise us to do what is right. I think they did a very good job. Even though they made some mistakes, we all turned out ok. Now that we are all adults, we don't get a chance to see one another.

We live in different cities and states; however, we're always on the phone. Whether it's with my oldest sister in Georgia, my baby sister in Ft. Lauderdale, or my brother in Lauderdale, we always make it our business to keep in touch. We're in different areas, and have a lot going on but we always make time for each other. Between the four of us, we have seventeen children. I can't go into names, it's just too many. Out of the children, there are ten girls and seven boys. We are very proud of our children. Even though we

didn't have everything growing up, we're trying our best to make sure that our children do. They really do deserve it.

Education is very important in my family. I have been to three high school graduations, of the three graduations; two are now enrolled in college. I didn't get my High School Diploma; therefore, I'm staying on top of my kids to see that they don't make the same mistake I did. I got one in college, and my eldest daughter is graduating from high school in 2014. So, I guess I'm doing something right. My nieces and nephews are doing the same. We are a very tight knit family and are always there for each other no matter what the situation might be. Saying I love you is a must before leaving to go somewhere or when hanging up the phone. I want to say thank you to my mom and dad for teaching my siblings and I a lot. If it wasn't for them we wouldn't be the mothers and fathers we are today. We're hardworking, caring, outgoing, giving, good listeners, firm, and most of all, a very God loving family. Without him, we wouldn't be the family we are today. Thank you Lord for keeping a hedge of protection over my family.

Jennifer Jones is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Special Day

My special day has to be the day my cancer disappeared. I can't remember the exact day because I was only five years old, but it was a great day for many reasons: I became a miracle, my family was happy, and no longer did I have to be caged in a hospital. For starters, I became a miracle! Most people that get cancer don't survive, but God made an exception with me and gave me a second chance. I proved that with a lot of faith anything is possible. In other words, doctors can only go so far, but then there's God who can go further. Also, my family was happy. My mother was always worried and did not know what would happen; nevertheless she never lost hope. When the doctors came to my mother and family with the great news about the miracle I had never seen my family that happy before! For example, they looked like they won the lottery. Last, but not least, no

longer was I caged in a hospital! When I was sick, I remember being at the hospital in a small dark room for months at a time. I've always been the type to run around and play no matter what, ha,ha,ha! For instance, once I got so bored at the hospital that I ran all over the place. In conclusion, my special day was the day God made my cancer disappear for the rest of my life. I became a miracle! All I can say is that life should be lived like if tomorrow was to never come because you don't know what can happen tomorrow.

Jesua Morales is a student at The English Center.

My Story

My name is Jing Chen, an ordinary woman born in a middle-class family in the south of China. In Chinese culture, a boy is considered more important than a girl. So, my gender disappointed my parents and pushed them to have another child, even in the one-child policy. Then, I had a sister. When I was a kid, my mother dominated my whole life. I was sent to the best local high school and expected to go to some outstanding college in China. Unfortunately, I did a bad job in the College Entrance Examination. Then my mother chose a college nearby and the major for me, wishing that I could return to my hometown and find a job. In her opinion, she must arrange things to save my future. However, after I finished 4 years' studying in college, things began to change. The Institute of Modern Physics in China gave me an offer to continue my studies in my PHD. The tuition and living expenses were provided by the Government. My mother supported me to go, but insisted I should be back after 5 years.

During the first year in Beijing to learn some fundamental courses, I met my husband. He belonged to another institute and was also starting his PHD as I was. At first, my mother didn't like him as he was from northern China. That means I would not return home (south of China) to work if I married him. The life of the next 4 years was tough. We were separated from each other. In order to keep in touch, we called one hour a day sharing the joy,

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excitement, sadness, grievances, or even anger. Our love did not fade away with the passage of time. Finally, my mother gave up and we got married before graduation. Since then, my life had completely gone out of her control. Now, I followed him to America as he found a Post-doc position in FSU (Florida State University). For me, I did not prepare well for a new life in this country. Maybe I can have a child, which is what I am doing now. So far, my mother doesn't expect that I will return to my hometown, but I will go back to China at least, so that we can see each other more easily. I am not sure about the life ahead. You see, my life today is out of my mother's plan, even though she made efforts to keep me. The future is not ours to see. Whatever will be, will be.

Jing Chen is in Matt Gowens' ESOL class at the Leon County Schools Adult Community Education (ACE). She is from China.

Anything Is Possible

Even though I have a disability, nothing is going to stop me from doing what I want. My wheelchair is not part of me; it is just something I use to get around. I can get a job and work just like everyone else. I just have to do things differently. I worked as a volunteer at Shands Hospital for 15 years. They saw me for the person that I am on the inside and gave me a chance. My message to anyone out there with a disability is "Once you put your mind to it, anything is possible."

Jhonna Mack is a student in the Florida State College at Jacksonville Learning for Living Program at New Heights of Northeast Florida. Her instructor is Carolyn Parker.

Moving Forward

My name is Alexei but everybody calls me Alex. I am from Havana, Cuba. My mother was a policewoman and my father was a military man. Thus, I grew up with discipline and organization. When I was small, I always liked many sports. So, I got involved with baseball, tae-kwon-do, softball, volleyball, and track. At school, I was a good student. I went to a military high school. When I finished, I

started to study at the university. I was studying to become a lawyer. It is a good career and I like it. While at the university, I knew my daughter's mother. She is a good person. At that moment, we loved each other very much. Then she had plans to come to United States. She asked me to come with her, so of course I did. In 2005 I made a sacrifice and left my country. I did not complete my studies. She flew to America first and I came a little bit later. As time passed by our relationship broke. Though I was broken hearted, I pressed on because we had a baby girl. Her name is Isabella. She is 6 years old. She is my life and I love her dearly. I hope to realize my dream to be a lawyer in the future. I cannot turn the clock back and I wish I had completed my studies. Anyway, I must move on and make the best of this time for my daughter and me.

Alexei Rodriguez is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Haitian Earthquake

My name is Jean-Francois Junior. I'd like to share with you my experience in the Haitian earthquake. It was a calm Tuesday, January 12, 2010. I was getting ready for a week of exams at school. The day before was a good first day of exams. I mention this because on Monday night, I dreamt that I lost one of my legs, but I didn't say anything to anybody. On Tuesday, I left home early without eating to go study before my exam. I even forgot to pray before I left the house. I went to class to take my exam. I heard a voice whisper in my ears to leave that classroom. I left and went to another classroom. Suddenly I heard a loud and scary noise come from the ground. In less than a few seconds all the walls cracked and fell on us. The whole school collapsed, many of us died right away. All I heard was, "Jesus, Jesus! It's the end of the world!" I was surrounded by dead bodies. Three-quarters of my body was okay, but my left arm was stuck between the walls. I couldn't go anywhere and the earth wouldn't stop shaking. I thought that life just ended; my face was covered in tears because nobody could help me out.

Several hours passed. Some people passed by and didn't even look at me because they were looking for their own. I tried to help myself out, but it was in vain because I was weak. I lost too much blood. Finally an old guy arrived, and came over me. "It's like a voice told me to come save someone here." I told him to look for a hammer or something else to hit the walls. Luckily he found a long iron bar. I told him to try to cut the rest of my arm that was stuck between the walls. He started. I yelled because it was painful and he confessed that his heart could not allow him to cut it. After a couple of hours around 9 P.M. he pulled my arm out. I couldn't walk. I was carried and put on the ground. I was tired and hungry. My parents, my friends thought I was gone, but God took care of me. My arm got infected and started smelling badly. A few days after that, my arm was amputated. The story is a little sad, but I want to say everything happens for a reason and for the will of God. He favored me; he saved my life through all of this. He was with me since my birth, through the earthquake, and until now. My life had changed since then; right now I'm living in a better country (Miami, FL). I have hope and dreams like many others.

Junior Jean-Francois is a student in Ms. Will's class at Lindsey Hopkins Tech. Ed. Center working to improve his English so he can take a computer repair course.

My Story of Salvation

I am 35 years old. My hometown is Columbiana, Ohio. My first experience in education was the best; I attended a parochial school in Pennsylvania. I attended two public high schools where I had the opportunity to play baseball. Because of my athletic ability, I could've attended college on a scholarship, but I began using drugs and dropped out in 12th grade. To make money, I worked laborious jobs in the milling industry. On my first day of employment (10/05/2001), I was about to punch out from my assignment on a milling machine when my shirt cuff became entangled in a machine motor. My right hand was severed. The

doctors did restore the circulation in my hand, but I will never have use of my right fingers again.

In 2003 I decided to move to Florida because the weather was warmer for a homeless man such as me. I was about to find out what a royal mess I was in. I quit my job and took the money I had. I was now completely addicted to crack cocaine. I was on a self-destructive suicide mission. I was oblivious to everything except for what made me high. By “working under the table,” I was only making enough money to support my addiction. I did this for another three years until I was unable to function; not eating, showering, and even sleeping in dumpsters. I once forgot to wake up while sleeping in the dumpster and got dumped in the truck! This was a first! I had to get out, so I climbed on top of the moving truck and jumped off, shattering my knee-cap and breaking my left wrist. My addiction landed me in Orange County Corrections for 18 months on two counts of burglary of connivance. I was able to obtain employment in work-release. I got a job washing boats for a marina in Orlando, Florida.

Moving to Florida was like awaking from a nightmare. I am currently living out a good dream in St. Petersburg, FL. where I attend the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center. I did not realize I could change myself. I graduated the program and attend GED classes. I plan to take my GED test next month. I have accepted Jesus Christ through my church and fully understand it is only by His doing that I can forgive and be able to help other addicts. I attend a substance abuse, twelve-step program, have a sponsor, and attend church every week at the Salvation Army. I will be enrolling at St. Petersburg College for summer classes. I hope you have been inspired by My Story of Salvation.

Justin Knopp is a student at Dixie Hollins Adult Education Center.

People as They Are

While we are young, we are in the paradoxical situation of not tolerating different personalities; this seems to be because of our inability to understand that there is no single thought that defines us. The downside of this is that by

taking this attitude we often make the mistake of doubting decisions others make and believe them inappropriate. As a result, we may hurt those we love the most. In my particular experience, pride and arrogance managed to come between my lifetime buddy, my brother, and me. As I got older, I began to doubt all the actions he took because I believed it was not the best thing for his life, to the point of my disliking his every step.

At one point, I felt that my dogmatic posture took me to the edge of a cliff from which I began to distance people from me without even being conscious of it. After a while, I realized that I was alienating myself from my loved ones. That was when I decided that I needed to make some changes in my life. As time passed, I began to understand and admire the hidden beauty in the diverse thinking of society. We are unique as people because of our differences, but we complement each other; it allows us to coexist effectively and makes us beautiful as essentially social beings. Otherwise, we could not even conceive ourselves as a society, but as a group of monotonous people without goals or horizons to reach.

Once we have been down that road, we begin to love different personalities and temperaments that come our way. We applaud the agility of some and gently laugh at the awkwardness of others. We understand that the decisions of people are just that, their decisions, and we are external observers willing to support them unconditionally. Naturally, this is a journey that is under constant construction and renovation to enrich us as human beings.

Laura Romero Salcedo is a Mass Communications professional originally from Venezuela. She is currently an ESOL student with Ms. Niedbalec at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, FL.

My Life Story

I was born on September 13, 1976 to Jolinda Harmon and Willie M. Peterson. I grew up in the projects with three siblings. My mother worked a lot so we often were taken care of by our great grandmother who lived with us.

Growing up in the projects was not always easy. I constantly had to fight just because someone didn't like me. I was always a shy person. When I was in the sixth grade, my great granny passed away. It was a very hard and difficult time in my life. I spiraled out of control; getting into fights in school and out of school. I felt as if my whole world was tumbling down. I gave my mother such a hard time at the age of 13. I became pregnant with my first child twelve days before my 14th birthday. After having my son, I stopped going to school and I continued to be out of control and disrespect my mother.

I was looking for love and attention in all the wrong places and felt as if I wasn't getting it from home at the time. When I got to the age of 28, I finally decided that it was time for me to get myself together and back on track. After I had my 6th and 7th babies who are twins (a boy and a girl) I was tired of not doing what I needed to do as a mother. My kids are my biggest motivation. They keep me wanting to strive to do my best at everything I do. Next is my husband who has been so patient with me, and also my church family who continues to shower their love on me. To make a long story short, I am so happy to say that I have turned my life around and I am now a wonderful mother, wife, sister, friend and Christian. I am a student at Dunbar Community studying to get my G.E.D. so I can be a good example for my children.

Linda Maybin is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Life Story

I was born on August 4, 1987, at MCV Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. I only weighed 1 pound and 6 ounces. I was born prematurely. It took me a long time to learn things like crawling, walking and talking. My mom and dad really worked with me. I moved to Florida when I was 5 years old, and I began school. In school, I did not make a lot of friends and I did not like to study. School was difficult for me. I got into trouble sometimes, but I stayed in school and graduated! When I was 21 years old, I decided to go back to school so I could become a Massage

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Therapist. I knew I needed to improve my writing and reading. My friend Ashley told me about the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. I'm studying and getting better at my reading and writing. I am happy to be in school and learning. Today, I have just applied to a Massage Therapy school!

Lorraine Eggleston and her tutor Nancy Brown are at the Northeast Community School and are members of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. They have been working together almost one year.

Personal Story

In my short life, I have experienced so many things that might not be important to you, but for me they have been important because I have made good changes in my life. Let me tell you why. First of all, I have changed my way of thinking about life and started to do the right things; I am grateful for the less or more that I have. When I was 19 years old, I thought that my life was not great until a friend told me about a place where God speaks through the gift of prophecy. He spoke to me about the secrets of my life and promised me that my life will change. He was going to help me to change the wrong with the right and teach me how to live with his guidance.

He kept his promise! I say that because I started to do the right things. At first, I changed what my mother wanted me to change, and I decided to be a good example as a daughter and student. I wanted to let my parents see that I was going the right way in life. I went back to school; I know that a diploma is only a piece of paper, but it is necessary. In these times, if you don't have a good level of studies, you cannot expect to have a good paying job. After a while, I started to be grateful because for some time I had money, a job, and a car. Before this time I never gave money to my family, I never valued my job, and I never cared for my car. As a result, I lost everything. Now, I appreciate the things I have. Today, I apply what I learned, I give money to my family and I walk one hour to my school. As has been noted, sometimes we have everything,

and we lose it for not being conscious for what we have. Now, I am 22 years old and every day I try to do my best, and I always give thanks to God for everything that he gives me.

Mariam J. Acosta is a student at The English Center.

A Personal Story

I was born in Haiti in a Christian family. My father passed away when I was eighteen years old but my mother is still living. I was the only child in my family. I eventually got married and my husband at that time was a pastor of a church in Haiti. After my marriage, I had a dream of having a baby. After waiting a very long time we saved enough money to see a doctor to see what the problem was for not having a child. We waited for seven years and finally I became pregnant. I was very excited at this time. I couldn't wait to see the baby born. Every day I thanked God for the pregnancy. After eight and a half months the doctor told me it was time to deliver the baby, because he was so big and he was in the wrong position. I had a C-section. I remember the date, it was August 16, 2007. I lost my baby after two days. I can't tell you my sadness. I was crying. Every day, I couldn't handle the loss, but one day my husband comes to me and says, "Honey, do you remember the promises of God? Do you know the Lord is good? He knows everything. It is true". It helped and life continued.

Pastor Monfiston, a friend of my husband, heard about my health situation and invited my husband to come to America. I could get better medical care and my husband could apply for Divinity School. Applications were made and visas granted in January 2008. My husband went and was starting his Master's Degree in Divinity at the Pensacola Christian College in Florida. I went in March and became pregnant a second time but this baby had a very serious birth defect. I lost this baby too. But this time I was not afraid, I heard God had a plan for me. I soon became pregnant again and God gave me a baby boy on September 17, 2009. His name is Nathanael "Gift of God." By December 2010 God gave me a baby girl. Her name is

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Shekainah, “the Glory of God.” I bless the name of God for his grace and mercy. I thank God every day of my life because the Lord is good. The Lord is faithful. I want to tell you God has a plan for each of us. God is good.

Maria Lourdes Jacques is from Haiti. She is a student in ESOL Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. Her Teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck.

Personal Story

My boyfriend is someone in my life that I truly admire. I admire him the most because he’s been there for me through thick and thin. I’ve told him my whole life story and my situation that I am now stuck in and he has never judged me. My boyfriend works hard just to take care of my little sister and me. At the age of 12, I was sent to foster care because my dad didn’t want me anymore. My sister has always been the favorite in the house and he chose her over me. Now, my sister is in the same predicament as me. So, I took her in. It’s pretty hard trying to take care of her because I am only 17 and I have no job and I am still in school. My boyfriend is the love of my life and I couldn’t do this by myself. I’ve been in foster care for the past 5 years now and I am still struggling. My mom kicked my sister and me out at the ages of 4 and 3. She threw us on our dad’s front lawn and just left us sitting there when no one was home.

I basically have no one to go to when I have a problem or really need someone to talk. Everybody who was once in my life and I trusted the most has walked out on me. There would be some nights when I would just cry myself to sleep. It’s really hard trying to forgive those people who would just up and leave me when I needed them the most. They weren’t there. Since I’ve been in foster care, I have had people tell me that I would never succeed in my life because I have so much hate towards the people that I should love the most. The way I think, I’m not going to let these words bring me down. I am a smart girl. In a few months, I’ll be the first person in my family to actually graduate school and start college. I have always had this

empty feeling in my heart because of the pain that I have been through these past 13 years. Ever since my boyfriend came in the picture, my life has gotten so much better. I finally feel loved and cared for again. My boyfriend has filled in that empty space in my heart and has filled it with so much love. If it weren't for him I wouldn't be in school right now. I thank my boyfriend so much because now I have someone to talk to, someone to go to when I am stuck in a situation, and best of all, someone who loves and appreciates me. I love him with all my heart.

Megan Judy is a student at Dunbar Community School.

From Struggle to Success

I am from Haiti and I am 23 years old. I grew up in a nuclear family. Luckily for me, I was able to complete high school while I was in my country. It was not easy because in 2010 my life was upset by a terrible earthquake that hit Haiti. It was really painful for me. I helped to release many survivors trapped in the rubble. Every time I think about this earthquake it makes me sad. After two years of suffering, I left Haiti to go to America. What a relief. Things are well organized here. What I mean is that there are resources for the community.

My first step is to continue my studies. I am looking for a change in my life. This is why I need to learn English. Then, I want to go to college. My goal is to become a doctor. I want to provide health services to the community. When I become a doctor I want to build a medical center for everyone so that they can come to the center when they are not healthy. I believe that my life also depends on me. It is I who can change my own life. For this reason, I commit my life to education. Making a change in my life requires effort, education, awareness of where the resources are, and a drive to go and get it.

Michee Tertulien is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Happiest Day in My Life

The happiest day in my life was when I became a mother. I felt different. Everything changed because someone came into my life for me to take care of and to protect. One day I woke up in the morning. I felt sick. I called my husband at work. I told him I'm not feeling good and he made an appointment to see a doctor. After the doctor checked me he said to me that I'm pregnant. This was a happy day in my life. After I came back from the doctor I called my mother and father. I told them I am having a baby. This was the happiest day for the whole family. Week after week the baby grew in my stomach. I know this will be hard and so much pain but I'm happy because I can see him grow in front of my eyes. This baby was going to be my future. How can I raise him? How can I be a good mother? I know this will not be easy, but still I'm happy.

After a few months the baby grows more and starts moving. This was a happy day in my life. When I felt him and finally I saw him from on the ultrasound screen I could see the baby and how he moved, but I didn't know if the baby was a boy or girl. But I was happy when I saw the picture on the ultrasound. The doctor told me that at the end the month I would go into labor. Finally, I went to the hospital. I had a baby boy. This surprised my husband and me. We didn't know this before. Thank God for everything. This is my first son. His name is Omar. He is beautiful. He has a lot of black hair on his head. After the nurse saw Omar she took him to show him to another nurse. This was the happiest day in my life.

Najat Kiwan is originally from Jordan. She is a student at Cooper Memorial Library, Clermont, FL. This is her first experience writing an essay in English. She is married and is the mother of four children. Her tutor is Wanda Klaas.

My First Half-Marathon

It was the first thirteen-mile run of my life. I'm talking about a half marathon! I did it, and I'm proud of myself. It

was not easy, but damn, I did it! I started the sport of running few years ago. In the beginning I was unwilling to do it. It made me so tired and breathless. I could only jog for less than one mile. I continued to encourage myself and I began to be more successful day by day. Key Biscayne is a wonderful place to start jogging. It has a nice view, a fresh breeze, but the best part is the bridge. The bridge rises up over the bay and from the top I have a nice opportunity to enjoy seeing the ocean, some dolphins, some manatees, and sometimes some pretty birds. Training for this event was the hard part.

Having confidence that you will finish the race depends a lot on how you train. The eating is the best part. My diet had to be rich in carbohydrates. Eating pasta three days before the marathon will help to maintain the energy. Pasta is yummy for me! Shoes are also very important. They have to fit well. People could get hurt even up to their knees if they don't have the proper shoes. They have to be a pair which are not too heavy and not used for the first time the day of the marathon. I don't call it a competition, I call it a completion! The sensation of finishing is great. It is like completing a goal. The spectators encourage the marathoners with posters and also with all kinds of noise-making devices. I know I will do this again and I look forward to running the New York Marathon!

Nathalia Menicucci is from Venezuela and has lived in the United States since 1999. She is currently studying to take her GED exam with TLC Online at The English Center, Miami. Her teacher is Tim West.

How Did I Get Here?

I am Nelirys Sánchez, Civil Engineer Trainee at USDA Forest Service, National Forests in Florida. I am from another country, transitioning from college to the workplace. One day, in 2008, in my third year of college at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, I saw a sign from the USDA Forest Service for an internship. That sign invited undergraduate students to interview. As soon as I saw the sign, I decided to apply. Once I got the interview, I was so nervous because it was my first one and it was in

English! Yes English, my second language. After awhile, I received a call from the USDA Forest Service in Olympia, Washington, to congratulate me on being selected for the internship. Nervously, I accepted the internship.

When I arrived there, I met more students, who also spoke Spanish. Yes, translators! To my surprise, working there was not bad because my co-workers were very helpful. I made good friends there. I have to say thanks to them, and my family too, because they motivated me and inspired me. After that, I worked in 2009 and 2010 for the USDA Forest Service as a summer intern first in Washington, then in Puerto Rico. After three summers working for the Forest Service, I graduated, and got a job in Tallahassee, Florida, where I live now. It is my first time living away from Puerto Rico for more than two months. Being here has been a challenge for me because of the different culture and language. Every day I am exposed to more English. The number one reason why I have to know English is because I have to be able to communicate with people with whom I work. My accent is the challenge for them. They have probably thought: “That girl with the accent! I could not understand a word she said.”

They do not know, that for me, each of them has a different accent, and I have to adjust my ear before I understand anything they say; but that is not an obstacle. I may miss being in Puerto Rico, speaking Spanish and hearing it all around, and I miss my family and friends, and my culture, especially the food; but I have to grow professionally and personally. I have been here in Tallahassee for more than a year, and I have been meeting great people. Speaking a foreign language can be difficult for me and I am still working on it, but I always think that nothing is impossible if you believe! It is just the matter of doing something and looking for resources.

Nelirys Sanchez is a learner in the Leon County Schools Adult & Community Education ESOL program. She is from Puerto Rico. Her teacher is Matt Gowens.

My Dream Came True

I am from Moldova. When I was little I wanted to come to the U.S. My wife and I made a great effort for this dream to come true. We were married in Moldova. We had a beautiful wedding and I came together with my wife to the USA. We have been here for almost 2 years. First, we went to Orlando. We visited Disneyland. My friends said it is one of the biggest attractions. We enjoy Disneyland. It is a very happy, impressive, and unforgettable place. I made many friends in Orlando. I spent a long time there.

Then I decided to visit Key West. I heard that it is a very beautiful island. One day we went to Key West. It is a small island. We like it and so we stayed there for a while. Until today we are still in Key West. It's a tourist place. The weather is always sunny. It feels like summer all the time. Here people can have fun, relax, and rest. Every day my wife and I go to work. After work we go shopping. We enjoy going to the beach to get tanned and spend time together. I am attending an English class now because I need to speak good English. I would like to study in college and have a good profession for my future. I want to be a businessman. I hope to have a successful life.

Nicolae Marusic is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Person I am Today

Many people change throughout the years and many people stay the same. I, for one, feel that I have changed. I am not the same person I was ten years ago. Some people mature and others just take a little longer to reach maturity. Ten years ago I was forty years old; married, with two beautiful daughters. I was very dependent on my husband. I counted on his opinion for everything that I did. I did not know how to drive back then. Whenever I wanted to go somewhere with my daughters, I would have to ask him to take us. I remember wanting to take my daughters to my sister's house in New Jersey and he refused to go. I could have taken the subway or the bus, but I chose not to. I was not an independent person.

Personal Story

Today I am fifty years old and very independent. I moved from New York City to Florida and so, I had to get my driver's license. You need to have a driver's license when you live in Florida. Wow! I couldn't believe that having a driver's license would help me gain my independence. I remember one of the first things that I did was take a road trip to Miami with my daughters. I could not believe that I did it, but I did. I have changed my way of being and learned to trust my own instincts. I do for my daughters and myself.

I am very proud of myself in what I have accomplished. My change from ten years ago was a positive change. I value my independence, unlike before. My life before my independence was boring, because I always counted on others to do things. Now I don't have to. I can do whatever I want, whenever I want and I don't have to rely on anyone but myself. In conclusion, my life has been very fulfilling. I decided (on my own) to go back to school. I am very proud of myself and what I have become. I have spoken to both of my daughters about their independence and hope that they gain their own, when the time is right.

Noemi Vasquez is a single mother of two, Arielle 22 and Brieanna 16. She attends the SW Florida Works Adult Learning Center and her teacher is Ms. Susan Chastain.

Personal Story

When I was child I wanted to make all my dreams become a reality. I remember that my father wanted me to be a teacher in my country but when my father died my life changed. I remember the day when I saw my mother in tears because she was out of money even when she was working from 5am to 7 pm every day. The money was not enough to support my other 2 brothers, her, and me. I saw her suffering more than the soul can hold. I promised her that I would come here, work hard, offer her a better life and reward her for all the sacrifices that she made for me and my brothers.

It is difficult for me to say that after 5 years I was still dreaming about this and I have been called to school here in Florida to start a good education and have a better life. I failed many times. All the places I have called asked me for resident card, student visa or social security number. Because I'm an immigrant person, it's not easy. Maybe the common people don't understand that we just come here to fulfill our dreams.

I would like to thank Dunbar Community School for giving me the opportunity to start my education without asking me about my status. I wish all the schools in the USA could provide education to everyone regardless of gender, race, or status in USA. One of the last words of advice I remember from my father was: "No matter what you want to be in life or what you want to do, be the best at anything you are doing and become the best!" I will continue to fight for my dreams because I will never forget the promise I made to my mother. Life is hard, but it is harder to stop dreaming.

Noruel Diaz is a student at Dunbar Community School.

To My Kids

Oh my dear kids it has been a roller coaster since mom has gone back to school. Sometimes I feel selfish by leaving you at home crying because you want to spend time with me and even just go play when I am studying for a test. However, do not think for one minute that you are not my first priority because you are. I need a better education for all of us. I do not pretend that you understand my reasons but my dreams were put away when I decide to have all of you. When I leave my heart stays at home. All my effort goes to be a better person and someone that you can be proud to call mom. I will be ready to help you in all aspects of life if I am better educated. I want all the information I can get to be all you need for a mom.

Rosa Anaya is a dedicated and hardworking student. Her strong sense of perseverance is encouraging as she refuses to stop until she has mastered a concept. You make me proud Rosa!

My Dreams Are Coming True

I am from Pakistan. Until I was 10 years old, I lived in the city in a large house with my uncle and his family. There were 13 people living in the house. We all had a good time. When I was 11 years old we had to move to the country because of a family tragedy. Our home was taken away from our father and uncle. We were left very poor. Then I found out my dad had lung cancer. I was very sad. We became very close. We always ate lunch together after school. I started to be a tomboy. I ran the family bakery when dad got sick. We did not have electric power. My mom cooked outside on a charcoal fire. At night I pumped a pail of water for the family. I was the second daughter of seven children. My mom was very strict. If you did not follow her rules she would hit you. Hitting is normal in Pakistan. Even teachers can hit the students. When I was 16 years old, my parents arranged for me to marry. Three families were interested. I was shown pictures and told about the men. I chose the man who was well educated because he could change my life and my family's. Marrying him made my dreams come true. It didn't bother me that my husband had polio. I still wanted to marry him. We have four beautiful children, one son and three daughters.

Coming to America 24 years ago was a big change because I didn't know the English language. As a child we weren't forced to go to school. I stopped after middle school because of a head injury. I always dreamed of becoming a doctor or nurse. America gave me the opportunity to read and write. I am proud of myself because now I have my drivers license, I am a U.S. citizen, and I have my CNA. Since becoming a CNA I have qualified to draw blood and pass out medications. My supervisor listens to me and respects my opinion. My residents stand behind me. They love me and I love them. I am in literacy school and I have the best tutor: Connie. I finally have started reading and writing sentences. I feel I am a lucky woman. Two of our children have moved out but they are

still close. My two younger girls still live with us. I am very close to my kids. They are very proud of me. They always tell me “Mama, it is your time.”

Sameena Khanam has worked with her tutor, Connie Darnell, for two years through the Clay County Literacy Coalition in Orange Park, Florida.

Unbelievable

My name is Seidi. I am from Honduras. I work as a babysitter for Mrs. Pamela who came to visit Honduras for three months. After three months Mrs. Pamela had to return to America. I was out of a job. I was sad. Mrs. Pamela asked me, “Do you want to come with me to America?” I was so happy because it was a great opportunity for me. I asked my mom for her permission and she said okay. I had a difficult time during my journey to America. Mrs. Pamela came to my rescue and I am grateful for that. Mrs. Pamela claims me as her goddaughter. She gave me the responsibility to take care of her children. Then we moved to Miami five months ago. After a month in Miami I met my boyfriend. He really cares about me. With his kindness, I am attending the English class at the Adult Education Center in Key West. Because of him, I am thinking seriously about studying so that I can get my high school diploma. Then I want to find a job because I want to help my family in Honduras.

Seidi Cruz is a student at the Adult and Alternative Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Personal Story

I have so much going on in my life right now. My daughter is not doing too well in school. My son is misbehaving in class. My little sister has surgery this week. My stepdad just got out of the hospital last week and I’m feeling like I’m about to lose it. I close my eyes and take a deep breath as I remind myself I can do this. I have studied so hard to take this test and the fear of failing is really getting to me. I take a look around the room searching for a little more motivation after I hear that little voice in the back of my head whisper, “You’re not going to make it.”

Personal Story

My palms have started to sweat and my heart is beating faster. I close my eyes and drop my head saying to myself, “Dear Lord, I need You. I ask for strength, knowledge, and for You to calm my spirit. Lord, I know with You by my side, anything is possible.” I lift my head, open my eyes and take another deep breath. My instructor places the test in front of me. I grab my pencil and I start to think about what my sister used to say to me, “Decide that you want it more than you are afraid of it and when you feel like you can’t, just repeat it to yourself: You got this!” I put a smile on my face as I start to laugh inside, Ha! Ha! Ha! Fear, you will not get the best of me because I am the master of my capabilities!

Shaqueta Bogan attends Columbia Career and Adult Education in Lake City, FL. She demonstrates a strong work ethic with consistent attendance, diligence in “staying with it” as she learns difficult skills, and thoughtfulness of others here at school.

Home

I was born in Frankfurt, West Germany on December 6th 1946 which is St. Nicklaus Day in Germany. St. Nicklaus is said to bring toys, apples, nuts, chocolate, oranges, and cookies to children on that day. My parents’ names were Georg and Elfriede Dick. My father died in 1949 when I was 2 ½ years old. My mother worked at a cosmetics factory from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. I grew up at my father’s parents’ house. My great-grandfather had a female cat that had kittens twice a year. I loved cats and they were my lovely play toys. I had a happy childhood. I attended kindergarten and an athletic club when I was 4 years old. At the age of 6, I started school in April 1953, and finished school in March 1961. I went to work on April 1st 1961. For nine years I worked at a bank. Then I went to work at an investment management firm for 28 years until my retirement in 1998. I got married in 1980, but my husband died in 1998.

As a child my dream was to live in the United States. At the end of 1991, my husband and I built a house in Milton, Florida for our vacations. We came twice a year in the

spring and fall. I lived in this house for 10 years. In 1998, I won the Lottery for Immigration into the US. I arrived in the United States in December 1998, and became a permanent resident on May 25, 1999. I got my driver's license in June 1999, and I bought a car in August 1999. I started to attend language class at PJC in 2000. In November 2007, I was sworn in as an American citizen. I have learned a lot about life and customs in the USA, but I *have* trouble perfecting the language. Having an out-going personality, I am in contact with people every day and making friends along the way. The home is there where the heart is happy.

Ute Feuerbach is an ESL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Dr. Patricia Capps

The Love of My Life

In the year of 2002, I lost the love of my life. I was 11 years old when my mother passed away. It was very hard for me. My mom has six kids. At that time my oldest sister was 28 years old. I was about to give up. It was a cold October weekend. Me, my sister Sheree, and my brother Kardale were at home when my mother asked if we wanted to go for a ride. We all said, "Yes!" so we went to a friend's house. On our way there my mother said, "I bet I will be gone by Thursday." We didn't know what she was talking about. Later that night, after a long ride, we went home to eat dinner. We ate fried chicken, beans, rice, and cornbread, and her favorite: grape kool-aid. Then it was bedtime. Everybody went to sleep. We all had school the next morning. At 4 o'clock in the morning I jumped out of my sleep hearing my stepfather yell, "Aye Bea, aye Bea." I thought they were fighting. I ran in the room and all I saw was my mother, lying on her back, eyes to the ceiling, waving bye. I didn't know what to do. I ran in the room where my brother and sister slept. I woke them up, tears streaming from my eyes yelling, "Y'all get up, momma dying!" Before I finished saying that, my little sister got up with cold still in her eyes running very fast to the room to try to save her.

Personal Story

I walked in the room, my sister was trying to fix her mouth. By that time she was having a stroke. My stepfather was in the living room on the phone with 911. He threw the phone to me and said, "Finish talking." I picked up the receiver and told the dispatcher my mother is dying, "Please hurry." I dropped the phone on the floor and hurried into the room. My brother was in the chair with a knife to his throat just sitting there. I looked confused around the room wondering, "where did my mind go?" I snatched the knife. He was looking lost. I really didn't know what to do. After about an hour or so, no one had arrived; it was hard to get in touch with my older siblings. At that time it was 8 o'clock in the morning and the ambulance finally arrived. They told us to go next door. We already knew what that meant. The love of my life was dead, and my world was crushed.

Vernelma Black is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Ray Gentry.

A Turning Point in My Life

The Turning Point of My Life

I had to hit rock bottom to realize that I was on a dangerous road. I was going clubbing a few times a week. I started socializing with the wrong crowd. To top it off, I was introduced to drugs. My life was spiraling out of control. When I first started to hit the nightclubs, it was exciting. The nightlife in South Beach almost felt like a whole different world. In the beginning, I would maybe go a few times a month like any normal young adult, but that quickly changed. I fell in love with the nightlife in South Beach; I went from going out occasionally to going out almost every night. I would go to Mansion, Dream, and Cameo. My personal favorite was LIV, on Sundays. Nikki beach had the most delicious mojitos. Every club was within my reach; there wasn't a club I couldn't get in to. I was introduced to a lot of high-end promoters. At this point, everything was at my fingertips. VIP was an everyday thing; I was partying with celebrities and high-end businessmen. I got so wrapped up in this life style; I started to abuse drugs and alcohol so I could keep myself going each night. I was hanging out with the wrong crowd but my life was so foggy, I couldn't see or think straight half of the time. My life was beginning to spiral out of control.

I completely lost myself within a few months. I changed into this sad, depressed party animal with no self-control. My family abandoned me; the people I once called friends turned their backs on me. I was alone. I guess I had to lose everything to find myself again. I stepped into a world that I once called a dream lifestyle. In reality, I was walking in a dangerous path, from socializing with the wrong crowd, to picking up a drug habit, "All in the name of "a good time." At this point, I needed to escape. I needed a way out so I made the best choose for myself; I moved out of South Beach. I changed my number so I wouldn't have any contact with the so-called friends I once knew. Most importantly, I asked my father for forgiveness. I finally got

A Turning Point in My Life

my drug habit under control and have been sober for the past month. I decided to go back to school and get my GED, the best choice I made by far. I'm finally finding myself again and changing to a respectable individual that my father and family can be proud of.

Alexandra Iturria is a student at The English Center

Crossroads

Sometimes I feel like I'm standing at a crossroad. I glance up both ways and struggle to see the light at the end of tunnel. Everyone says keep your head up your life has only just begun, but if that's true why do I carry so much baggage? Through all of the challenges I'll face down either road, can I truly walk with my past problems and insecurities? Just as soon as I give into the weight of it all, I realize that these things, these bags, -this past of mine doesn't define me. It can't break me, and it will not hold me back anymore. All of the people that tell me to keep my head up are right, because it's much easier to make the right decision when you can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I realize the only reason I couldn't see it was because I wasn't truly looking; I was just watching myself put one foot in front of the other. Now that I'm walking with my head up I know where I'm going and that the journey really has only just begun. I can't wait to find my light.

Amber Palfalvi's radiant smile beams from the back of the room as she breezes through our work. Don't be mistaken, she has worked hard for her success and she makes us so proud!

Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

This year was different than the others because I found the help I was looking for for so long that will change my life. Everything seems brighter and peaceful because I found a literacy program that offered a personal tutor. Finally, I met my tutor who has many years of experience teaching and who I can trust without any doubt about English. Working with my tutor has helped my confidence and self esteem. My tutor, Sister Merita, couldn't be any better. I appreciate the time and dedication she's been

giving to me. My skills are improving and my fears are vanishing. The simple fact of my tutor correcting my flaws and praising my success means that she really cares about me and she never gives up on me. Before my life turned better with English, it was difficult to know if I showed improvement. When I came to this country my life turned upside down because I was struggling with English.

In addition, I had to deal with school and work. My grades were mediocre, but I knew I could reach higher. Moreover, I didn't want my limitations in speaking and writing put an end to my dream to be a veterinarian technician. I still don't want that to be the case. Books alleviate my concerns and I always use them as a good source to learn new vocabulary and grammar. However, reading books wasn't enough for me. I was looking for more interaction with someone that would guide me in the right direction. My motivation to do something about it helped me to find the adequate way to learn English. The person who I am now is possible with the help of my tutor. I am thankful that in this country the citizens care about other people who really need help.

Andrea Fuster is from Peru. She is a learner in the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas ESOL program at the Dunedin Library. Her tutor is Sister Merita Straher.

Looking For God

Today, I woke up and felt everything differently, I felt that the people who don't know me, now are my family, I see more love in the world than I can imagine. And this is "God." Today, I understand not belonging to a country, family or group, that we have much to know, live, explore and assess, that we don't have limits. Today, I woke up and see things differently, Other languages, new avenues, different cultures and opportunities! This morning, I realized what I always read in the poems of Gabo, On our minute in this instant of life, don't stop smiling, don't worry so much, Help others, give love. To live is easy, there is only one life. We need to really enjoy, give, share, and look forward to feeling better every day, because we come into

A Turning Point in My Life

this life to feel happiness. Today, I felt my spirit of life, see my poor pockets and feel God in the eyes of the people. Share this moment of my life

Angela Maria Gomez Duque is from Colombia, has a master's degree in Communications, and taught Humanities at Technology University in Colombia. She studies with Neva Blackstock's ESL class at Jacksonville Public Library.

A Turning Point

Beautiful to me is a moment in time when a new life changes everything in your life and the way you see things. It started the day I met Amanda. When we met, she was in a bad relationship, and I was not in a good place in my life. I was selling drugs and dealing with the streets, but we became close friends. One day she called me pleading to come and pick her up because the man she was with hit her when she said she was pregnant. I got in my car and went to her house. As I approached her parking lot, I could see them arguing. Getting out of my car, I saw him hit her in the face. Back then I had no patience, especially for a man hitting a woman. I reacted by shoving him into his apartment. I pushed him against the wall at the same time telling Amanda to get her stuff and go to the car. Looking into this man's eyes, I could see fear, sadness, and hate, and all I could feel was anger and sorry for him, and not the good kind of sorry. I told this man that if he ever laid a finger on her again that I'd be serving time in prison for his demise. As time went by, Amanda and I became more than friends. I loved her and from my understanding, she felt the same. She motivated me to do well and be a better man. I've never been a dad or a husband, so this was my first experience dealing with a pregnant woman. I did everything to make her comfortable from foot and back rubs, late night runs to the store, and trips the hospital for labor pains.

It was on July 25, 2009 at 12:59 A.M. when I cut the umbilical cord of De'Anthony Joel Nunez. He was born 7 lbs. 5 oz. and 19 inches. Whoever knew that someone this small would change my life forever? The life I lived, the things I did, the person I was, was no longer. When I looked

at him there was this moment of clarity where there was no one in the room but him & me. When I counted his toes and called his name, he opened his eyes and looked up at me almost like he recognized my voice. At that moment I realized he depended on me, that his life was in my hands, so I promised him that I would do right, work harder to make the right decisions, and be a better man than his biological father. “Any man can be a dad but it takes a real man to be a father.” That was beautiful for me.

My name is Angel L. Rios. I am a GED student at Lindsey Hopkins and Mr. Will inspired me to write and now it's a passion.

Life is Better When You Can Read

I never learned to read because my teachers kept passing me from one grade to another. I am not putting all the blame on my teachers because when I was in class and it was my time to read out loud, I would find an excuse. I had to go to the rest room. Even in Sunday school and at church I used the same excuse. I had to go to the restroom when it was my time to read out loud. My first accomplishment was going to Job Corps in 1967. I was fresh out of high school and had never been away from home. I was afraid - scared. I had never slept under the same roof with people that weren't kin to me. After being there for three months, things became easier. I was taking a course to become an electrician. I learned how to wire houses.

At the age of thirteen I was helping my second oldest brother wiring houses, so when I went to Job Corps I knew something about wiring. I became so interested in electrical work that I stayed in Job Corps two extra months. Thirteen months in all. After finishing Job Corps, I joined the Navy. I signed up for an electrical course. I finished boot camp in Orlando and was stationed at an electrical school in California. The course was three months long. I completed the course with a grade average of D. I was proud of myself because this was the only time in my life that I stuck to a book and kept up with the class. Remember, now, I could hardly read. I was left out of events that I wanted to attend,

A Turning Point in My Life

but shied away. It is hard to exist in this world if you can't read.

I missed out on a lot of simple things in life because I couldn't read very well. About fifteen years ago I was so embarrassed about my reading that I decided to improve it. For two years I met twice a week at the library to improve my reading. I continue until today in reading classes. Now I am 63 years old, and I am a better reader. At the age of sixty two, I read my first real book ever. It was The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass, and I read it from cover to cover. If I could only speak to school kids, to let them know if you can't read you will have a rough time in life. So while you're in school, pay attention. And if you don't know something, don't run away like I did. Ask for help because in the future you will need an education to make a decent living and to have a good life.

A Turning Point in My Life

My parents and I decided to leave our country behind. This affirmation might be short lived. It will really mean a lot for any family out there going through the same situation. In my case, I remembered everything that happened around the world. We the citizens never knew the real truth. We don't have the right to pick or decide who is going to be the next president or something as simple as expressing what we really think about the system of our government. I remembered being a really happy child who grew with my parents. As I was growing up, I started to worry about not just the three of us; I began to worry about other people, the community, and our society.

That's when I found out all of the lies in the system; all the missing and hidden information in the world, news that can affect the wrong revolution created for Fidel Castro in my beautiful country. The government restricted all kinds of TV shows, international channels, and the use of Internet. These tools were not allowed to be seen by the regular people; only those in high authority have access to the real truth. They changed the truth, to let you, the people know,

what they wanted you to know. Only what they said or taught at schools is what you needed to follow; if you don't agree or appear to be on the same path, you won't be able to stay in school or finish your career. You may be arrested as a political prisoner, die trying to make changes in the system, or leave your country behind.

We don't have the right to vote for a different president, or say the truth about what we think of the one in command. If we do say something in public, I guarantee that you or your family won't know what is going to happen but it will definitely be something really bad. The elections are faked. Seventy percent of the voters know that they have to lie to be able to watch over their family and parents. We the citizens, all of those who want a change in our nation, are not able to do anything to keep our family safe. That's why I'm out of that regime, and can express safely some of the reasons why my people are here, in this different and beautiful country; a nation, a system, a community, and a culture, that we believe in and fight to be a part of this wonderful liberty of expression. You are probably asking yourself, "Where I am from?" Well, I am from Cuba. This is why I call to these last years of my life, "a turning point in my life", an important and significant hard decision but it has made me happier than ever.

Asdiel Brunet-Carcases is a student at Dunbar Community School.

New Life

It was hard for me to decide to live in Destin. It was not easy to leave the big city life in Istanbul and to be so far from my family and my friends. I did not want to retire. To live in a big city was exciting. We had concerts, festivals, entertainment, good restaurants and many places to go. Besides, in a big city there is always a lot of traffic. One time we were late for the Bolshoi Ballet, so we watched the first half from outside the hall via projection. We could sit down for the second half. In Istanbul, I was with my friends and my family all the time. It is hard for me being far from them. I like using Skype and similar programs to talk with my family and my friends. I have a good time on the

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internet. I did not like the idea of being retired for some time. I thought that would mean being away from all life. Now I love being retired; I feel so free. Now, I have enough free time. I am trying to learn a new language and culture. I have more time with my husband and daughter. I love my home and Destin. It is calm, quiet, and beautiful. I am very happy in my new life.

Asuman Simal is a student at NWFSC in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida studying in an ESOL class.

A Turning Point in My Life

It is true that the future is uncertain. While still young, I never thought that I would be born again. Coming from a "life" in Cuba to a total life change in this wonderful country, the United States of America it is really like being born again. Now, we are in the adaptive process that is difficult, but not impossible. Not only my life has had had a new beginning, but also the lives of my husband and my children. Every day we encounter new experiences, and we learn from them. I'm joyful that only after four months of living here, we're moving forward. I never thought I would be back in school, but now I'm doing it and I like it very much. I'm taking a child care vocational class with Mrs. Lopez at MDCPS, and I'm happy because I truly enjoy the company of young children; and I'm learning to guide them into being good citizens and grow up happy. I'd like to thank all the people whom in one way or another have given me the support and confidence that I needed to face the unknown, something natural in such decisive changes. I look forward to the future and I wish my family stays together, always.

Aymee Cuza is a student at Miami Senior Adult Educational Center at Miami Dade County Public Schools where she attends a vocational class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

Metamorphosis

Part of my life I lived in the mountains, but one day we were chosen to go to a better place. Now I am in a big garden, in a new house in the city. I looked up and saw the

gray sky. I looked up, around and saw many flowers of different cities and countries that I never saw before. Some flowers were wilted and others were blooming. They are here for a different reason or maybe the same reason as me, “for a better life”. I can also see that all around me there is a barrier that prevents me from seeing further on and I wonder where the mountains are? Where’s my homeland? Where’s all my family? Days go by and I can’t get used to this big garden, everything is different from my homeland. The sun is very hot, I’m falling, the wind is very strong, pulling off my petals and my leaves, each petal, every leaf that falls, making me feel more hopeless and disillusioned, trying to survive in a new place. But some flowers, especially my family would tell me you have to be strong! You can do it. And they support me and protect me so I don’t fall. I was wilted and closed my eyes for a long time.

After a while, a light rain fell on me, every drop that fell was bringing hope, illusion, and joy. A slight wind pushed me to keep going and a sunbeam illuminated me. Then I could open my eyes. Once again looking up, now the sky is blue. I look around once more, I see new flowers, I saw some flowers that were wilted but now they are flowering, and some that were flowering, now are wilted. The flowers that gave me life, were still supporting me, but now they were wilted, and not because they were allowed to die, but for the life time they had. I thought now I have to fight to help and protect them and do all that I can to help, for my happiness, for my dreams. Now there is not a barrier because I put myself forward and I can see many wonderful things. Now I’ve started flourishing. It’s very hard to get ahead, but I know that I will do it!

Claudia T. is studying in the Clearwater Adult Education/ United Methodist Cooperative Ministries Program at the High Point YMCA. Her teacher is Ms. Roseann Segura.

How Black History Changed My Life

Black history changed my life for the better. One day I was in school, and I didn’t know my life was about to change all because of one movie that my principal Mr.

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Dailey had the entire school watch. The name of the movie was Martin Luther King Jr. Watching this movie made me want to be a quintessential black American. I wanted to say: “I, too, have a dream of getting my GED.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a benevolent African American who was a clergyman, activist, and leader in the American Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King traveled all around the world using the power of words and acts of nonviolent resistance, such as protests, grassroots organizing, and civil disobedience to achieve seemingly impossible goals. Dr. King risked his life so all Americans can be free. I made a lot of mistakes in my past. I always thought my skin is my sin. I knew change was needed in my life. Watching the movie on Dr. King motivated me to want to get my GED. It made me realize he opened doors for African Americans, so we can learn how to read and write to become doctors, lawyers, motivational speakers, and writers. If it wasn't for Dr. King having a dream I wouldn't be here today in this classroom reading, writing, and working hard to get my GED. It's my dream to become successful in my life. Black history changed my life for the better because of Martin Luther King Jr., a benevolent African American. His dream motivated me to get my GED.

Crystal Gary is a student at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Anna Franta.

Prison: A Turning Point in My Life

Though I would not know it for several weeks after my arrival, prison has become the turning point in my life. Prison has been my wake up call. Prison has not been a bottom to crawl out of. Rather, prison has been a stepping-stone onto a new foundation of becoming the woman I have always wanted and have been called to be. Prison has given me time; time that I more than needed to get right. Prison has given me time out to focus on myself, my recovery, and my relationships with God and others. Time to stop, time to see, time to listen, and time to learn. Prison has been the beginning of my walk on a new path; full of hopes, dreams,

faith, and goals. Prison, what first seemed to be the end of the road, has been a new beginning for my journey. Prison has made me clear on who needs to be in charge of my life, and it isn't me! Obviously, all my best being in charge brought me to this place, which I know now I needed to humble me. By the grace of God I am here, alive, and learning that there is more to life than what I want and what I think is important and I am so very grateful for all this place has given me, along with God's help.

Today, at forty-four years old, I am finally growing up, thanks to all the opportunities here. I have, by God's grace and much help, gone from a fourth grade education to preparing to get my high school diploma. I have been able to become compassionate and understanding, instead of harsh, prejudiced, and judgmental as I had always been. I am allowed to practice my faith, work on my recovery from drugs and alcohol, and also have many options on working on my physical wellness. I have changed from a miserable, angry, overweight, drunk, and drug addicted person. Prison has allotted me the time to really change, to become happy, joyous, and free! I am Free! Even behind the walls, I am free! Today, I am forty-four years old. I am in the best shape of my entire life, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically – by the grace of God, and the turning point that brought me to my knees: Prison.

Davi Carnevale is an adult learner at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, Florida (Gadsden County), where Ms. Deon Lee is her GED Instructor

I Am Different

I'm from Guatemala, but I came to this country in 2002. That is when my life changed. It was my dream to come to the United States. For me it is a great blessing from God. He helped me so I could come here to this beautiful country. I have opportunities to change the life of my children and for myself. My children will have a good future because in this country we can achieve our goals and those things we think are important for success. It would be a different life if I had not had a chance to get here to the United States. I would

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not have the privileges to go to school and learn how to speak another language so I can get a good job and maybe go to college. Everything we do is important and we must not surrender. Never say I cannot do something, no matter what the obstacles in the way might be. I have to remember that I came here for a purpose of something better. And I have to be strong. Everything is different here and so am I.

Julilana Sica is from Guatemala. She is a student in the ESOL Level 5 class at Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck.

Fisher and Me

I found a book entitled “Finding Fisher” by Antwon Fisher to be an inspiring story about a little black boy who is looking for love and cannot find it until he grows up as a man. Fisher tells about his life on the streets as a young boy and his feelings of emotional abandonment and physical abuse. I can say this is part of my life story. I grew up in foster care and group home, not knowing whose home I would end up in. This book created a lot of emotional feelings in me. I remember at the age of 12 I ran away from home and tried to find the love that I was not getting at home from my mother. I didn’t know who my real father was. My stepfather was the meanest person and I could not live with him; just seeing him fight with my mother and us made me sad. When I say “us”, there were 10 children and I am number 3.

At the age of 12, I stood alone still looking for love, but found myself hating everything and everyone. I have never stopped looking for love. Finally, I found love at the age of 16. That’s when I had my son Arthur. For once in my life, I found love because I had someone to love and care for. My son and I grew up together. I taught my son at a young age what love is and kept loving him. Fisher and I no longer stand alone, but we moved on to better days and never gave up on our dream. We can say, “Thank God for life.”

Frances Taylor is a student at the Adult Learning Center.

The Turning Point in My Life

I grew up in a neighborhood where all the people knew each other. We lived like a family. Because of the economic situation in my country of Haiti, most of the youth are jobless and some of them dropped out of school early. This may be the reason that, even though I had a profession, I didn't really push myself. I did not have any challenges until I came to the United States in 2011. That was a turning point in my life. I had never lived in a foreign country. I did not really know what an industrial country looked like. I have learned a lot since I arrived here. I have learned that I need to fight for a good living. If I want to reach my goals, I have to do my best. Every single day I try to learn some words, how to pronounce them, and in what context to use them. Even though I miss Haiti, I have no regret being here. I have more possibilities now to reach my goals. This is the turning point in my life.

Ifeta Tiresias is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Turning Point in Life

There comes a time in your life when you try to figure out what is happening, why your thinking is different than before, why you have some feelings you never had before. The answer to these questions is that your life is changing and you didn't see it coming or maybe you saw it but you didn't pay attention. When I was in high school in my country, Haiti, I wanted to become someone famous in my future like a doctor, a lawyer, or even the president of my country because every year my classmates chose me to be their leader; they believed in me. However, I was never an intelligent student, but I always thought I could change something in my community because I am someone who is responsible, who loves his family and his country; someone who never stops having new ideas. One day my French teacher saw an essay I wrote about my country in my free time. At the bottom of the page I wrote these words: "I just write because the ideas come and I play with them." After reading the whole text, he told me that I had great ideas that could help others and if I continued writing, I was going to

become one of the best writers my country ever had. I felt uncomfortable because I just wrote for my pleasure. After that, I put my essay somewhere, and I forgot about it after a week. Two months after the teacher's advice, I participated in a competition, and I won with the same essay that the teacher had read. After this recognition, I thought it was a message to begin writing. I wrote some poetry and stories when I had inspiration. After a few months, I became pessimistic again and gave up.

Last year, there was a prayer meeting at my home because my family is very religious. The person who led the meeting had the spirit of God, and she took my hand and prayed for me. After two minutes, she asked me, "Where are the writings you wrote before; those writings are your life. You will be someone famous if you continue writing, but never show your writings to people you don't believe in." After her words, I believed it was the voice of God, which taught me what I had to do. This day, I was very surprised because it was the first time I felt God talk to me in the body of someone else. I never closed my eyes all that night; I was thinking about what had happened. Nowadays, my paper and my pencil are my best friends. My first book and my collection of poetry will be published this year. I am very excited, and I thank God everyday for my talent.

Jacques R. Cineus studies Advanced ESOL with Nancy Gardner at Dave Thomas East in Pompano Beach.

My Last Chance

The turning point in my life was when I was retired from my duties as an employee in the Paper Industry. I had many different positions and with different companies. Ten years ago, I formed my own company with my own expertise as an entrepreneur. For many years part of my occupation or assigned services in business involved traveling to the U.S.A. These trips provided me many opportunities to focus on my personal interest too, regarding history, culture and to negotiate my own way in many of the towns and cities of the United States.

Now I'm learning English so I can achieve the American Dream; this American idea of social order, in which each man and woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable of and to be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. I want to do for others what has been done for me; to let them know they too can do many things. I want to share my knowledge, to encourage them and be interactive with other people like me who are senior citizens. I hope to travel more and, for the rest of my life, have happiness with my family and to support this country with my loyalty.

Javier Luna is from Mexico. He is in ESOL Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. Mrs. Judy Peck is his teacher.

A Turning Point in My Life

When I was young, my actions were very unacceptable to the wise people in my family. My words and behavior could produce a war with my friends and family. I often caused a lot of problems before I was eighteen years old. My parents were very tired with my bad attitude because I refused to go to school or to church.

While I loved to wonder with my friends, my mom would remind me that one day it will be me who will regret the many things that I have done in my life. She would compare me to a famous writer in Haiti. He was a very bad person and she would call me by his name, Francois Villon. Then one day, I was on vacation with my parents and I saw a girl, one of my mother's friends. We talked and the way she spoke, and thought, was very different from the way I thought about things.

I spent some time reflecting and I said to myself, "Why do I not take my time to learn instead of happily rejoicing in that pesky way of life? Why do I despise the principles of wise men and their philosophies?" After that talk with myself I packed up my regrets and sorrows with the decision to change my life. I was going to school and to church. I am different in the way I act and talk. I am a

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happy human being and I thank my mother for saving me from myself.

Jimmy Jean Louis is from Haiti. He is in Level 5 at the Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck

Keeping My Dreams Alive

I am a single mother with two children who depend on me. I work at night from two o'clock in the morning to six-thirty in the morning delivering newspapers to homes every day. Whether I feel sick or not, I take the kids to school. Then, I go to my adult education class. After school, I cook and clean my house, I go food shopping, help my children with their homework, and thank God for night time, so I can rest. It seems simple, but it's not. Going outside so late at night can be dangerous, because you don't know if you will come home safe and sound.

But, no matter what challenges I face, I have to learn to live with them. The police have stopped me five times in the last few months, not for doing anything wrong, but for having an expired license. At times I feel scared, not for myself but I worry about my children. I have to keep doing whatever is necessary for my family. This is our life and we need to survive. I have many dreams. I want to succeed and be recognized for all my hard work. With the help of God, I will achieve a good life for my children and for myself. Sometimes I think that life is very difficult. I'm still here though, surviving through the fears. I must believe that my tomorrows will be better. I try to be as positive as possible because that is what keeps my future dreams alive. I know I can do it!

Judid Zurita is a single mother with two children. She attends S. B. Idea's Family Literacy Academy at Greenacres Elementary. Her teacher is Julia Clark.

A Turning Point in My Life

Over the years, I always find myself at a turning point. However, the turning points that have changed my life are: the birth of my son, losing my job, and the death of my

mother and brother. The first turning point comes from the birth of my son. Most of all, I enjoyed the waiting period of watching him grow inside of me. From the moment I heard his first cry, I knew then that the life I had before was no longer. This little person is now looking up to me to love, hold, and to guide him in the right direction. I had everything up until the moment I almost lost everything; this may sound strange. However, my career was the second turning point in my life. After making some foolish decisions, the career that I had worked so hard for was gone. Bills and money became a situation of its own. Time became much more difficult and stressful. With this turning point, I began to understand the value of a dollar.

The death of my mother and brother took me by surprise. Truly, this was a turning point that I never saw coming anytime soon. Death is a reality, but it came too soon. To have a mother and a brother taken away all in a six months time period will make you live everyday like it's your last. This tragic situation broke me down but at the same time made me strong. Nevertheless, turning points are there to guide you in the right direction. They are also ways to open your eyes to see life mirrored and to understand life at its most precious moments. The values I have learned from all of my turning points are to never give up, always keep my head held high, and to know the sun will shine again.

Kimberly Michelle Seabrook is a student at Dunbar Community School.

That's Why I Changed That Day

One day, when I was 15 years old, I came home from school and saw my mother crying. I asked, "What happened?" "Your brother just got deported back to Haiti!" "Why?" "Your brother made all the wrong decisions. He's never coming back to America!" I broke down crying, remembering that he was my only brother and greatest supporter. Every time I had problems I'd go talk to him and he'd make me feel better. He always said, "Stay in school. I want you to become better than me." I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I fought in school and was

suspended. I didn't have anybody to control me because I had lost my brother and it took a huge part of my heart. My mother kept being called to school. I was in deep trouble. She was very disappointed in me.

My principal took us on a field trip. It was for the bad students who were getting suspended. We went to the jail. I saw people there with different colored jump suits. The correctional officer took us on a tour. I was so nervous because the inmates looked at me as if I was a girl and I knew what that meant. The officer told us not to go by the bars because it was dangerous; he made us walk to the other side so we wouldn't have to interact with the inmates. Then he had me sit inside a cell. It was disgusting. On the wall were blood stains, gum, and curse words. The smell was awful. After that we went back to the school. I was not affected by anything that I had seen. It didn't change me. I was still fighting in school, kept getting suspended and skipping classes. A couple of months passed. It was on a Sunday and I was about to go to church. My mother suddenly received a phone call from my aunt in Haiti. My aunt screamed, "People beat Herbert! He became sick! Your son has passed away!"

It didn't really hit me until my mother started crying. I broke down crying too. That day for me was very, very sad and it became the turning point in my life. I realized life was too short and I needed to get my act together. So I changed. I stopped having fist fights. I stopped getting suspended. Thoughts of my brother never being able to return to Miami and my mother never being able to see him again made me realize that every day was so precious. That's why I changed that day. Four years have passed. I've graduated from high school. Now my mother is proud of me. I am attending a refrigeration, air conditioning, and heating repair program and plan to become a successful entrepreneur.

Lincolson Paul is a student at Lindsey Hopkins Tech. Ed. Center.

How Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

Before I met Jessica, I went to English class. In the class, we learned grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. The experience in English class was great and my English really improved. But I always felt something was missing from the class. What's missing? Well, I was still too shy to talk with neighbors and I still had trouble shopping at stores. I bought a pair of Little Kitten shoes for my daughter which were really cute. When we walked down the street, a mom with a little girl from behind asked me where I bought those shoes. I told her they were from Wal-mart. "Which store again?" She asked gently. I began to sweat. I knew she didn't get me. Maybe I should have told her Marshalls, which I can perfectly pronounce. I asked a saleswoman in Macy's where I could find Levi's (le-vis), my favorite brand of jeans. "Levis , ah, never heard of it." She whispered. The next thing I knew, I was trying to escape from the store as soon as possible. Jessica is my first tutor.

If Jessica finds something interesting from a magazine, newspaper, or an article she wrote, or thinks it may be helpful for me, she brings it to our class. If I have some phrases or words that I do not understand from TV shows or the news, I let Jessica explain it to me. We also read from the textbook and we finished a quiz after reading it. When I watched the Weather Channel, the short phrase "small craft advisory" caught my eye. After Jessica explained to me, I understood much better. She taught me the correct pronunciations of the words Dunedin, Levis, and Wal-Mart. I've heard those lots of times. But when I said the words, people didn't understand me.

Time flies when I am with Jessica. She showed me her vacation pictures, her party pictures, and the "deviled eggs" Mark (her husband) made. From those things, I can see some aspect of American culture and how American people live. She said I could email her and ask questions even if she was on vacation. I feel she is opening a brand new world. Yes, what I learned from Jessica is very practical and

A Turning Point in My Life

pertinent. It is related to my daily life. It focuses on what I need. Tutoring has changed my life. It did not happen overnight. It smoothly fits into my life. I feel more confident when I talk to my neighbors, store staff, office clerks, and others. Now, I can even throw some slang at my kids, like “hold your horses” and “wait your turn.” I can see how that surprised them; they thought their mom would never know those kinds of words. Saying thank you is not enough to express my appreciation. Just like Jessica said, “It is time to move forward.”

Linda Ma is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

A Turning Point in My Life

I have been working in United States since February 2012, and since then I have been looking for my turning point as I have been experiencing difficulty understanding others or expressing myself during professional activities. Everyone says that it's a normal situation, but it's not that simple. Hence, increasing my language proficiency will be my turning point. My perceived lack of language mastery is embarrassing and makes me less productive. The energy it takes to run errands, prepare for meetings, and conduct trainings is very stressful. I'll reach my turning point when I am able to express myself without thinking about what I want to say before I say it and when I am able to figure out the subject of a conversation I wish to join in on. My turning point will happen when I can differentiate regional accents and when I cannot only laugh at jokes, but also make my own jokes.

My strategy to reach this consists of immersing myself in the English language and culture. My objective is to keep listening, speaking, reading and writing just in English and to continue attending night school. Once I reach my turning point, I realize that it will not be easy to stay there. It is very seductive to continue speaking or reading in my own language just to relax, but I realize that this will impede any progress that I have made so far. Many think just staying in a foreign country allows them to learn the language, but this

is not true. I could stay here forever and never learn about the principles or culture underpinning American English and its speakers. Thus I am focused on closing this gap, and now I realize that the four months I have spent here is just the beginning. I believe this will be an investment in the future of both my family and myself. This will then be our turning point.

Marco Magalhaes is a Brazilian business analyst who has worked for Nestle since 1998. He and his family arrived in Tampa in August 2012.

A Turning Point in My Life

Even at seventeen years old, you still come across those moments where, just one little decision or choice, can be a turning point for you. The turning point I am facing now is making the decision to finish my high school education and get my GED. Some people have turning points that turn out unsatisfactorily, but I believe my turning point is marvelous. Several things have changed for me since I've made the decision, and I'm sure completing my education will open more doors for me in the future as well. Obviously, every decision can affect someone one way or another. Before I made this decision, I was depressed. I'd lost contact with most of the friends I had while in school. Furthermore, I had no real drive to get up and go out of the house to make friends and do something with my life.

It wasn't until years after I had left school when a friend of my sisters was over that I made this decision. He mentioned the GED program that the nearby college had, and before I knew it, I was at the college registering for the program. Making this decision has changed me for the better, and I refuse to go back to how I was before. Of course, now that I have made this decision it has changed me in various ways. Where before I was depressed, now I am energetic and happy. I'm enthusiastic about doing simple, everyday things. I'm excited about studying, and working on tests. I am working hard; more so than I have for any other thing I have ever done. Now that I've made this decision, I am looking more toward the future and what is best for me.

Additionally, this decision has affected my future. With an improved education, I have the chance to go to college. As a result of this, I can study the subjects I adore, such as psychology and English literature. I can do things that before I would only have dreamt about doing. This gives me a better outlook on life, as I can see the accomplishments I can achieve in the future. Making this decision and crossing this turning point will be an amazing task for my future. Overall, I believe that making this decision to complete my education and get my GED is an unbelievable turning point for my life. Plenty of things have changed for me since I have made this decision, such as my attitude. Instead of being depressed, I am now ecstatic about the simplest of things. Moreover, it has made my future look brighter. This goes to show that any one decision, whether it be small or enormous, can become a major turning point in your life within the blink of an eye.

Maryann Rose Greenwell, at 17 years old, knows her goals, which include earning her degree as soon as she earns her diploma from passing her GED test.

Don't Blink

Some people around this world don't understand how grateful I am to be a loving mother. Yes, being a mother has its ups and downs, but it's a life-changing experience and I honestly know I love my daughter more than words can say. It's hard to believe that almost a year ago when I became pregnant I thought about abortion and adoption numerous of times, telling myself "I'm too young. My life is over!" I was 16 years old, going to Columbia High School, and felt as if everyone was judging me. I lost all my friends. People kept telling me an abortion or adoption was a viable option for me. But I began to tell myself, "This is my child. I love her. And no one is going to tell me what to do with my daughter." I am very, very happy to say my daughter, Malia, is in my life. I didn't listen to anyone but what God told me to do and to my heart and I am so thankful I did. My pumpkin is now almost a year old and I'm glad to say we have started our new family life without negativity or

judgment and with the cultivation of genuine friendships. This is the best feeling in the world.

Now, I have learned that I don't need anyone but my daughter, my family, and myself. Being a mother has matured me a lot from my past. I would hate to see what position I would be in today without my beautiful daughter. I can't blink, or I might miss something; life's too short to not be a big part in your child's life. Children need you to love them and show them you care. I'm not saying abortion or adoption is a bad thing; just make sure you listen to what your heart tells you. Don't let the people you love bring you down, because I promise you will not be disappointed. So, once again, don't blink. Life's too short for all that. Don't listen to anyone but the wonderful "Man above" and what you know in your heart.

Megan Nitsche is a full time mom and a student in the Columbia Career and Adult Education. She is dedicated to the task of getting her GED.

A Turning Point in My Life

It was very hard for me when I first came to this country at the age of 7 years old. I had to leave my school, my friends, and the things that I was used to. For example, playing soccer or basketball in the afternoons with my friends, but I had no choice because my mother wanted to come here to have a better life and job. For me, it was very hard to be here in the United States and adjust to the new environment, school, people, and language. I was very afraid to go inside the new school on the first day I went. I did not know anybody, nor spoke the language. I was the "new kid." I didn't know where to go when it was time to go to class. All of sudden, there were people all around me; I got so nervous and started crying.

Nevertheless, I overcame all of this even though it was very difficult for me to do so. Also, during this time I had a bad experience with my grandmother. She had hit me hard, not once or twice, but many times. It made me feel bad, sad, and horrible because I didn't know why she had done it. On top of all that, my mother and I lived in her house. I was already dealing with being the "new kid" in school, I

just couldn't deal with this abuse on top of it all. Finally, one day, I told my mother what was happening to me. I told her that I did not want to live in my grandmother's house anymore. She didn't give me an answer, instead she just started crying. Everything stayed the same for a while, and we had to work together to try to move on from this traumatic experience. Eventually, we moved out of my grandmother's house. I was very happy that day. It was one of the best days of my life because I felt free and relieved of a bad situation. My mother and I were finally happy. Happiness had finally returned to our lives. We even looked different because we were smiling all the time. To conclude my story, all I have to say is that life without changes would not be life. The harder the changes are for me, the more I have grown as a person. You have to make changes in life in order to grow, even if they are very hard to make.

Michael Bermudez is a student at The English Center.

Literacy Tutoring Has Changed My Life

Since childhood I have been mentally ill. I am not retarded. I guess that you would say that I am a slow learner and I have trouble remembering what I learn. I have always been in Special Ed. I was a premature birth at 6 months. I weighed only 3 pounds, 3 ounces. Look at me now: 171 pounds and 51 years old! Literacy tutoring has taught me how to read. Now, I can read books that I like. Especially, I like to read scary mysteries like The Goose Bumps series. Literacy tutoring has taught me math, which helps me when I go shopping. I owe my reading and math skills to my literacy tutor, Vicki, who was my tutor for at least 3 years until she passed away in 2008.

Currently, I am working on punctuation marks, sentence structure, and paragraph formation. (I have learned when and how to indent.) I now know about periods, commas, question marks, apostrophes, quotation marks, parentheses, colons, and semi colons. (Have you noticed the use of them in this essay?) I know how to use nouns (person, place or

thing), pronouns (used in place of nouns), verbs (action words), adjectives (modify or describe nouns), and adverbs (modify or describe verbs). In the future, we plan to also cover: articles, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections. My tutor, Paul, and I are now working on a story about Vicki.

Mike Mathislives in a group home. He is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas program and works with his tutor, Paul Gualtiere, at the Dunedin Public Library.

Education Changes You Inside And Out

This English class has helped me in many ways. Not only to improve my English, but with my inner self as well. Before, I used to be very shy. I had very low self-esteem. I was unable to start a conversation or to understand what they were saying to me. Even knowing some English grammar, it was very hard for me to speak and to express myself in English. Now, since I am taking English classes, I have more confidence to be myself. I have very good friends and I'm not scared to speak to others anymore. I can even stand in front of the class and speak out loud without being insecure. My self-esteem is higher than it has ever been. I understand now that everybody is special just the way they are, including me! I don't need to be different just to have others like me. I know now they like me just the way I am. My English skills have increased, but I know I still need more help.

Every day I learn something new. It is very rewarding when I understand my children's doctor or even better when the doctor understands me without using an interpreter. Helping my children with their homework is also easier now, and reading books to them has never been so much fun, because now I understand what I'm reading. Even my family tells me how much my reading has improved and how my pronunciation is better too. What definitely makes me especially happy is that my son is speech delayed and now I can help him with his therapy. I also learned that helping others is very important. Helping each other in our class is a priority. Helping and tutoring others is a better

A Turning Point in My Life

way to teach and to learn. I used to hide my knowledge, but now I use it to help my friends in class learn English. I've never felt so good about taking English classes. I always gave up at the first obstacle. Today, not only have I passed that obstacle, but plan to go further than I have ever gone before. I will not stop until I reach all of my goals!

Nadia Medina is a wife and mother of two children. She attends S. B. Idea's Family Literacy Academy at Greenacres Elementary. Her teacher is Julia Clark.

To My Son

Dear Ilandy: On August 4, 2007 you were born. I knew right then and there that my life would never be the same. My goal then was to provide for you and make sure you grew up happy and healthy. For five years I put myself last thinking it was best for you; I recall the day you asked me if I wanted to be a police officer and I answered yes. You also asked me why I wasn't one. That day I thought to myself and said "What you actually needed was a role model; someone that cared enough to further her education to set an example for you." I know right now you may be too small to comprehend what I'm doing and the fact that I got the courage to go back to school just so that in the future you can be proud that your mother never gave up on herself. Ilandy I know that sometimes I may be tough on you but I can honestly say that it is because I want you to succeed in life and go way beyond what I was able to accomplish. Please know that I love you and that there is nothing in this world I wouldn't do for you. If you ever get the chance to read this I want you to know that I am proud of you and everything you have done to enrich my life. Love, Mom.

Nancy Martinez is a hard-working student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. Even though she swore she hated math, her hard work and dedication have made even fractions become "not that bad". She is the epitome of the perfect student and brings so much joy and character to our classroom.

A Turning Point in My Life

When I was fourteen, I experienced prejudiced behavior. Segregation barriers were still practiced by many people. As a teenager in the 1960's, this was happening in my hometown. Picture this: my first job. I knocked on the front door and was met by a mean man. He said, "Go to the back door!" He kept yelling at me. When I got to the back door, he kept yelling and said, "Never come to my front door again!" His wife stopped him and said, "He was asked by me to work." At lunchtime the wife took food for me in a shed in back and told me, "Stay in here to eat, okay?" A courageous lady across the street observed all that had happened. As I was leaving to go home, she beckoned to me, "Come here, would you like to work for me?" With her influence on my life, she helped me believe in equality.

Nolan Alford is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia, FL.

A Turning Point in my Life

To come to the United States of America wasn't my own decision. I was married with 3 children in Peru. My now ex-husband has a sister who lives here and she asked us if we wanted to come to this country (The country of opportunities). We thought it could be a great opportunity for our children and us. We filled out all the papers and waited. After waiting for five years, the day came to leave Peru. We were only allowed to bring 2 suitcases with our most precious belongings. We were happy and curious to find out if everything we had heard was true. My husband and I had struggled trying to keep our children safe. Many years have passed since then and now we have 3 professional children. My husband and I got divorced and he returned to Peru and I stayed here. In conclusion, I would say that coming to the United States was a wonderful decision. We did have ups and downs but it was part of the process to start a new life.

Olga Gayoso studies at Miramar Branch Library.

A Turning Point in My Life

A year ago I cared for a patient with Parkinson's disease. Within that year I flourished and loved caring for my patient. Each day was a new day, never the same. In January 2013, he passed away, and that is when I made a determination to go back to school and get a degree. In January 2012, when I was asked if I would like to care for this patient, I had no knowledge what I was getting myself into. There were days he had no desire to get out of bed, eat, or drink. Certain days I arrived at 8:00 AM, and my day started with giving him a full shower.

Never, ever did I think I had the mental ability to get through the process or the physical strength to support him for his shower, dressing, feeding, and brushing his teeth. He was an adorable man. He had days when he was distressed, not willing to do anything I required of him, because he was not able to do things on his own. He had always been a very independent man. There were times when I contemplated if this was the right occupation for me, but I always looked forward to the following day, to arise and start again. When the days came nearer to his passing away, I was so heartbroken and I started to think, "Now what? What will I do for work? I don't have a degree in nursing. No one is going to give me a job just because I cared for a patient with Parkinson's." So that is when I considered, "Why not go to school and obtain a degree?" This wonderful man demonstrated to me that I was capable of starting a new career. I didn't know I had the ability to care for someone until this experience proved it to me. I never thought that I would be going back to school at age 50, but here I am back in school and studying for a new degree.

Olga Moreno attends class at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, and her teacher is Anna Franta.

A Turning Point

I've made many bad decisions in my life but the worst one is probably the one to drop out of high school. I still remember the disappointed looks on my parent's faces.

Back then I was pretty lazy and would usually only do the minimum requirements to get by. I didn't really think having your high school diploma was necessary. I had finally gotten a job with the help of my dad. The hours were long and the tasks were tedious. Then one night as I was working I couldn't help but start thinking about what my parents must have gone through when they first moved here from Mexico. They didn't have any of the opportunities that I had growing up and probably had even more dreadful jobs than what I had. Yet, they never gave up. I thought of all the long hours they must've spent working to give my brother and I a better life growing up.

I couldn't help but feel ashamed for nearly throwing away everything my parents worked so hard to give me. I felt like I let them down. Maybe it wasn't too late. Maybe I could still do something more with my life. It wasn't long before I'd decided that I needed to have a talk with my parents. I told them that I didn't want to do this for the rest of my life. I wanted to move on to bigger and better things. I wanted to get my GED and then go to college right after. They were speechless. I could see how happy and proud they were of me. I realized that they'd never given up on me. No matter what I did in the future they would always be there to support me. Now it was my turn to work hard. It's time to show them that everything they went through for me was not in vain. I'll become someone that they can truly be proud of. No matter what I face in the future I know I will get through it because I will always have the unwavering support of my parents and that alone is enough for me to tackle anything head on.

Osbaldo Garcia is a student at Lehigh Senior high school.

Becoming a Mom

Thinking of a turning point in my life is easy: it is becoming a mom. Becoming a mom is the best! You don't ask to become a single mom, but that is how life turns out for so many. Love is unconditional, that's what being a mom is all about. When the doctor told me I was having twins, I did three things at once: I cried a lot, I wondered

A Turning Point in My Life

what they were going to look like, and I wondered if I would be a good mom. I've been a mom for six years now. It's what keeps me alive and waking up early and tired day and night five days a week. There is nothing like coming home from a hard day just to see the most beautiful faces staring at you with whole smiles and hugs. My favorite words are, "Mommy, I love you." I will never be alone. I am a mom!

Rebecca Felix is a student at The English Center.

A Turning Point in My Life

My life took a turning point when I found out I was pregnant with my son at the age of fourteen. Two months before I turned fifteen, my whole life changed when I heard the nurse tell my mom she was going to be a grandmother. I thought I was dreaming. The next few minutes, or should I say, the next hour, I was in a daze. I couldn't believe it! I was going to be a mother! Was I ready for that? Absolutely not! My sweet fifteenth birthday party was still celebrated as planned, only now I wasn't just receiving birthday presents but I was getting gifts for my baby growing inside of me. By the way, being only 2 months pregnant, I was already showing. My dress had to be altered to fit my swollen tummy. Nevertheless, I was miserable on my birthday, feeling sick and aggravated with mood swings.

So the months flew by, I was as big as a house carrying a healthy little boy. I was preparing for his arrival and emotionally preparing myself that once he was born I would not only have to take care of my young self, but of a child. Scary! I was willingly devoted to do my best. Let the challenges begin. In conclusion, on August 17th 1993, I had a C-section done to deliver my 22 ½ long, and 9 lbs. 8 oz. beautiful baby boy! On that very moment I knew my life would never be the same! Thank God for this wonderful blessing!

Regla Cazanias is a student at Dunbar Community School.

Finding Me

A turning point in my life occurred while I was incarcerated at Gadsen Correctional Facility. Before entering prison, I was a very bad drug user. I was a fighter. I was very disrespectful. I did not care who I hurt; the only thing I cared about was getting high and doing whatever it took to keep my high. Dec.21, 2009 changed my life forever. I was sentenced to do 40 months in prison. I cried out to God. I prayed to God. I told him that I could not bear doing prison time. I also told God that he once stated that he would put no more on me than I could bear. All along God knew that I could bear it. I just had to find the strength that God gave me at birth. While I was incarcerated, I made a choice to have a better life and future with my fiancé. While being incarcerated I entered a drug program that lasted from 9 to 12 months. I did 18 months willingly. I attended AA/NA/CA/CR, which are all meetings that helped me in my process of recovery to become who I am today.

After being let out of prison, I learned to love myself; I learned to just be myself. I put God first in everything I do. I now attend my church, which is Church of Christ on Susan Street. I'm enrolled at Santa Rosa County District Schools. I'm 33 years old and planning on getting married this summer. I've been clean for four years now, and I've been out of prison for one year. Upon getting my GED diploma I'm thinking of going into culinary arts because I love cooking and eating. I've now reached this new point in my life, which is freedom from all things that had my life at a standstill. I am proud of myself, even if no one else is, because I have done what I thought I couldn't do, which is finding the real me. I finally found Me, Myself, and I.

Siobhan Trotter is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

A Turning Point in My Life

When we are young, we have the bad habit of criticizing our parents because they often complain about how difficult life is. In our minds, life is very easy and we do not know why they always complain about it. When I

A Turning Point in My Life

was in school, I did not have anything to worry about. My life was going to school, having fun with my friends, and going everywhere I wanted to go. Everything was a game to me. Then, we wake up and burst out of the bubble that we live in. Age and experience teaches us what life really is. The turning point in my life was when I found out that I was going to become a mom. I was only 16 years old and I felt that my world was falling apart.

I knew that my life was going to change a lot. Nothing would ever be the same. I was very scared of what my mother was going to say and do to me when she found out that I was pregnant. Finally, when I got the courage to tell her, she became very mad at me. She said that my privilege of going to school was over. That from now on, I had to work to provide for my child. At first, I was sad and mad, but I know now that she taught me a good lesson. I learned the meaning of responsibility and how to be responsible. My daughter is 6 years old now, and she is a very happy little girl. She is my life and joy. Sometimes we make good or bad choices that change our entire lives. In the end, we are responsible for the choices that we have made and the life we are living. I can say that I am happy with most of the choices I have made. It has not been easy for me to overcome some of them, but I have. In the end, they have been worth it. Now I know, and understand why our parents say “life is not easy.” If we knew what all the right choices were, we really would not be living life.

Yesenia Peralta is a student at The English Center.

I Once Was Lost, but Now I’m Found

Once, I lost someone whom I’d loved and was living under a condition like homelessness. I fled between China, Taiwan, Japan and Germany to find a place where I could stay permanently, like a lost ship looking for a harbor where it could lay anchor. Soon, I realized my struggle was in vain and meaningless due to the great disappointment and sadness I was feeling, so I decided to become a Buddhist nun. One day I met a Japanese woman, who told me about

Jesus. He might help me, she said. The most mysterious thing, which astonished me after this encounter was: why did a Christian come to find me when I was going to become a Buddhist nun? It didn't make sense. If God existed, he must send a Buddhist to me. Then I participated in a meditation training to discover the reason.

In a huge meditation hall in front of a pure white Buddha statue made of marble, I meditated and posed a question: Would I acquire salvation, if I continue meditating for my whole life? Suddenly, I understood that there is no guarantee to gain salvation this way. To oppress your tensions and desires by entering into an empty world the Buddhist way, either you will spend a whole life in this empty meditation hall, or you will be born again. It seems to me more evident that you need to desire the salvation, before you are saved. I didn't want to be born again into the same miserable life. I wanted be saved totally, immediately, and not gradually. I recognized I needed a savior and could not save myself by my own endeavor. Abruptly, a voice was talking to me: "I am the way and the truth and the life." Jesus had revealed himself to me.

After this enlightenment I departed for Japan. Before my baptism I dreamed of Jesus and He comforted me: "You should trust in this Japanese family and will spend a while with them." Eventually, I stayed one year with this family that I never knew before. I didn't pay them any money. They said, not we but God feeds you. With little money but a lot of hope, I returned to Germany and continued seeking a harbor to lay my anchor. Shortly after my arrival, I encountered my husband Markus. He was the answer from God. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Once I was homeless and now I have a family. Once I was on a pointless trip, but now I am traveling in America with a stable anchor in my life. More than a solution for my difficulty, He gave me the eternal life and let me know the ultimate solution in life is believing in Jesus Christ.

Yi-fen Flaig is a student at Adult & Community Education.

Why Voting is Important

Why Voting Is Important

Voting is a formal indication of choices between two or more candidates. It's also a responsibility, not a requirement. I always hear them say, if you don't vote someone else will do it for you and it might be against your choices. It's like you don't have a right to complain. Voting is not just supporting an idea. It's about supporting a peaceful solution to the way a country is governed. I don't think most people realize what an amazing thing it is that we can give power or we can take it away. We can limit authority or enlarge it. We must have a say in this because we know that too much power can absolutely corrupt a person or a group of people.

Elections bring a lot of important issues out. If you're watching all the debates you will be able to judge who did a good or a bad job or which of the candidates can do the job well with your plan. At the least, you can compare them. Before you vote you're supposed to be informed of the characteristics of the candidates to help you determine how they will perform in office. At least the candidate must be honest, moral, skillful, and willing to work hard representing you. Hopefully you choose the right one who can make decisions for your future and all the other citizens, too.

Mondyto Aristor is from Haiti. He is a student in ESOL Level 5 at Dunbar Community School. His teacher is Mrs. Judy Peck

Why Voting is Important

Why is voting important? Many countries in the world practice democracy. In these countries the people should elect a government after each period determined by the constitution in question. Many reasons can help us to explain the importance of each person's vote in a democratic society. First, running a country is not easy. The leaders who will take the destiny of the country in charge

should be persons responsible and qualified. This means, in political terms, leaders must be strong. Any leader can be chosen by a party to represent him in an election provided that the leader respect standards established by the constitution. You, as a person who has the power to elect your candidate, must make a good choice. There is internal and external policy of the government that's very important for a country. If you found that the general policy of one of the parties who are in the race represents nothing in terms of development for the country's progress, then you must prevent this party from becoming the leader of this country.

By using your vote, you must vote for those you think are good for your country. If you don't vote other people are going to make the decisions for you. For example: if you believe in education you must vote for the party you see who has the best program for education and so on. This is why it is important to vote. In a democratic state, voting is the only way to fight against the false leaders who wish to take the destiny of the country. I think voting is very important to the future of a country. Hopefully you can learn some of the history, reasons, and ways you can get involved with voting. You must learn how to use your civic voice when it comes to making decisions to elect a government in question.

Pierre Renold is a student at Dunbar Community School.

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