

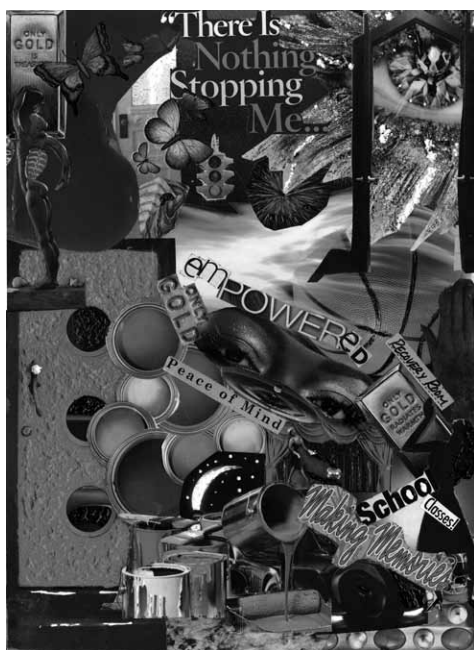


Celebrating Our Journey

Volume 5



Celebrating Our Journey



A Collection of Life Stories
written by Oklahoma Adult Learners

Volume 5

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Foreword

The ability to communicate is the ability to connect to our own history, our families, and the world. The stories in this collection celebrate the power of adults who improved their ability to communicate by learning to read as adults. The themes of hope, courage, and humor you will find in these individual pieces are reflected from the lives of those who wrote them.

I was privileged to attend the Adult Learner Day at the State Capitol this year. Designed to recognize the accomplishments of those adults who have the drive, the grit, and the desire to better themselves by improving their reading and writing skills, the ceremony was held appropriately in the Governor's Blue Room—the site of many press conferences and important events. Present were Lieutenant Governor Jari Askins, Senator John Ford, and Representative Ken Miller. The event was held during the legislative session at the busiest time of the year for all three of

these elected officials. Yet they made time to come to the event and stay to hear the stories of the two adult learners who spoke about their life journeys and what improving their ability to read has meant to them. All of these officials spoke about the power of these life stories and about the courage of those who shared them. I was deeply moved by these adult learners and by the reaction of those officials there to honor them. I hope you will have that same experience as you read these stories.

We all need inspiration and a connection to others. As you read these authors' stories, I believe you will find them to be heroes. A remarkable book called *The Worst Hard Time* is about how the dust bowl days in Oklahoma made the lives of the people living through them concrete and real. As hard as the lives of those who lived through the dust bowl were, at least it was a shared experience. For the authors of these stories, they lived through their own "worst hard time," often isolated and ashamed. From their

own pain, however, have come accomplishment and the desire to help others. Our authors are a witness that you can—with hope, courage, and humor—achieve your dream.

Susan McVey

Director, Oklahoma Department of Libraries

**“Fill your
paper
with the
breathings
of your
heart.”**

**William
Wordsworth**

English Romantic poet
April 7, 1770–April 23, 1850

Courage

I Was Proud

I am proud of myself when I am at school, and I read all by myself. Nobody helps me. I am happy because I applied myself.

I am proud of myself when I am at work. I answered the shop phone, and I said “Classic Detail Shop. How may I help you?”



Amber Lins

I was able to help the customer. Someone walked in the shop, and I said “How may I help you?” I was able to get her help, too. I write down the date and their orders.

I am proud of myself in tutoring. I am making words. I am learning the sounds and putting them together. I am also learning to read recipes.

April 'til Now

My name is April Hawkins. When I was 2½ years old I fell into a swimming pool. My Aunt Deanna pulled me out of the water. Thanks to her and the fact that the water was so cold I was saved from dying. They said I was under water for 10 minutes. It caused me to have cerebral palsy. I spent several years in physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy. I am a survivor. I am 27 years old now and I am in a motorized wheelchair. I currently live with my Dad and Stepmother. I can't drive. I have to schedule a handicapped bus to go anywhere that's not close to my house. If it's close I will take myself in my wheelchair or my Dad will take me. I live fairly close to a shopping center with a Target and other stores and a lot of eating places. I can drive my wheelchair there if the weather is nice. I have several friends that I

sometimes do stuff with like go to the mall, to the movies, or out to eat.

My goal is to be able to live on my own and take care of myself with a minimum amount of help. I have my own home based business. I take orders and then distribute them. I use the computer for all my orders. I want to take the business course at Mid Del Technology in order to run my business better. I took the entrance exam to enroll and discovered that I needed help with my



April Hawkins

reading and math. I was very discouraged and spent several weeks being very depressed. But I just couldn't give up. I don't re-

member how I found out about the Literacy Link, but I called and talked to John Amicon. He was very helpful and encouraging. He found

me a reading tutor. Her name is Patricia. I meet with her twice a week for 2 hours. He also found me a tutor for math named John.



I meet with him on the same day at the library. That way it doesn't cost me so much for the bus. I am also enrolled in a GED class at the Mid Del Technology School in Midwest City. Things are looking a lot more positive. I have met a lot of people and made a lot of friends at the library. I have even found that I can help some of the other students by encouraging them not to give up on their goals.

My five year plan is to be through school and working with computers on some level. I have a boyfriend named Mike. I am going to volunteer at the Literacy Link when I get out of school so I can help someone else be able to read and therefore better their life. Thanks to all the people at the Literacy Link and the support of my family,

my friends, and my boyfriend my five year plan is looking a lot better. If I could say one more thing, it would be, don't ever give up on anything you want in life. Keep going with whatever it may be. You can do it.

April Hawkins ➤ Literacy Link, Midwest City

Danielle's Story

My name is Danielle Morris. I am a student at the Midwest City Literacy Link. I have been an adult learner for several years. When I first found out about Literacy Link, I was nervous and embarrassed to talk to people about not being able to read. You see, I am dyslexic. It took a lot of courage to show up that first time, but then I saw that I was not alone. I have learned that you shouldn't be afraid because there are a lot of people out there who have problems learning to read.

There are a lot of programs in Oklahoma to help you if you really want help. The Literacy Link here in Midwest City has

a great program. They have tutors to work with you one on one.

I have a great tutor. I meet with her twice a week for two hours after



Danielle Morris

I get off work. She has helped me so much. I feel a lot more confident now and I am excited about learning.

There are a lot of things I would like to do with my life. I work for a company that contracts with Tinker A.F.B. to do their housekeeping. I want to be able to get a better job. If I could get an entry level job at Tinker I could continue my education and work myself into a better position that pays more. Then I would be able to do a lot more of the things in life that I want.

I plan on getting married some day and would love to have children. I want to be someone they can look up to and use as a positive role model. I want to be able to read them a bedtime story and help them with their homework. To be involved in their life and guide them in the right direction. To make a place for them that is safe and secure.

I am glad to be able to tell others how much this program is helping me. I know I still have a lot of hard work left to do, but I am not going to give up. I would love to be able to talk to other people with learning disabilities and to encourage them and empower them to seek help and learn to read. It is possible. I want to walk into this library one day and give someone else the same chance Literacy has given me. Then I will feel like a success.

Story of Courage

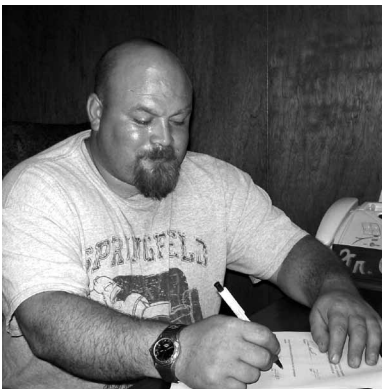
I was fourteen years old when I started wrestling. It was one of the toughest sports that I have ever participated in at school. My first week starting out for practice I didn't know anything about wrestling. I was getting beat, wearing myself out. By the time practice was over I couldn't even move my body. The second day of practice my coach pulled me to the side and another partner and I ran drills for the next two weeks until I learned how to wrestle with a technique.

Two weeks before our first duel I practiced every day and ran two miles a day to be in shape for my first wrestling match. After all the hard work I put in, I lost my first match. It made me feel so bad I almost cried. It was as if I worked hard for nothing. My coach pulled me to the side and said, "It's okay. It's your first match. It's going to take a lot more work to succeed and to be a winner. Our next duel will be in three

weeks. Hit the showers because we have a lot of work to do.”

I said in my head, “Maybe I am not strong enough for this sport.” So I ended up quitting. The next day the whole wrestling team said, “You ain’t quitting!” So I thought about it for the next two days and couldn’t help it but to return back to the team.

It was a hard eighth grade year for me. My first month into wrestling I was already hurt and already beat. I didn’t have anywhere else to turn, but to my coach. I practiced wrestling for



Daron Carpenter

three months before I got to wrestle again. It was some long and hard practice days. My first tournament was in a week. Everybody gets to wrestle.

Now it's tournament day and I feel that I'm ready. I feel that I'm stronger than ever before. I'm sitting on the bench looking at my weight bracket. There were 25 people in my weight bracket and I was right in the middle of it. So I sat there and waited for my name to be called. Coach said, "Hang on a minute. Loosen your body up and quit being so scared." And I said to myself, "Wake up, Daron. Wake up, Daron." And about that time they called my name. I was never so scared walking out on that wrestling mat. We shook hands, went to our marks and waited for the ref to blow the whistle.

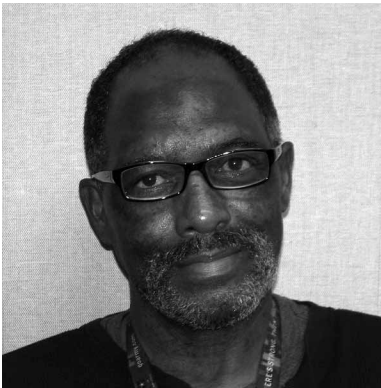
About the time the whistle blew, I stalled. My opponent attacked me and got a two point take-down on me. I looked up and all I could see was my coach screaming at me. There was so much going on I didn't understand a word he said. About that time I started moving, head to head with him. He locked up with me. We unhooked

each other. He locked back up again. And the next thing I knew I had him in a chicken wing and a half headlock. It took me only two minutes to pin him. I never felt like this before. I was the happiest wrestler that day. I could thank nobody else, but my coach and teammates for pulling me back into wrestling.

Daron Carpenter ➤ Miami Literacy Council

Defeating Barriers

Illiterate people have to find ways to figure things out in order to cope with everyday activities.



Donald Hunter

To continue to go on from day to day with this handicap is a sign of courage to me.

My name is Donald Hunter. As long as

I can remember, I have tried to understand the reading process. I could never figure it out so I thought there was something wrong with my brain.

In the fall of 2007 at 58 years old, I joined an adult reading program in Midwest City. Through this program, I have gained the courage to apply for a better position which will increase my pay and have gained confidence in my current job.

Before this program, I had few options to meet my goal of going to culinary school. Cooking is my passion. Now I know it will be a journey of courage to accomplish this goal, but I am going to make it one way or another.

Donald Hunter ➤ Literacy Link, Midwest City

Why I Want to Learn

I want to learn English because of something that happened in my family.



Gabriela Hernandez

When my son Humberto was four years old he was diagnosed with a kidney disease. We were living in California at that

time, and I had a good friend who was helping me. She would drive me to the doctor's appointments and to the hospital, and interpret for me.

In 1994 when we moved to Oklahoma, we had to work with the doctors and hospitals by ourselves. It was very difficult because I did not speak English. I didn't know what medications Humberto was taking or what they were for. At that time I did not know that the doctor did not

renew Humberto's blood pressure medication. For six years his blood pressure was not treated, despite obvious symptoms. I tried to explain to the doctor. Six months later Humberto had a stroke. He was in a coma for five months before he died. He was only 11 years old. While he was in the hospital, I learned to talk with and to understand the doctors and nurses.

Because of this I gained the courage to learn English better. Before, I was afraid to take the step. When I found out the literacy council had one-on-one tutoring, I felt more confident about calling.

Whenever I meet someone who does not speak English well, I encourage that person to call the literacy council. People will need to know that it is never too late to start.

Gabriela Hernandez

➤ Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore

School Day Blues

My name is Gary Don Potter. I was born to Oren and Wilma Potter in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Gary Don Potter

I have four brothers and one sister. There are six in our family altogether. I was the third child.

I went to school in Coweta. I did not

like school. The teachers were not nice to me. They would always shake me, hit my hand, put me in the hall, or take me to the principal's office for a paddling. I never knew what I did or didn't do to get this kind of treatment.

By the time I was in the sixth grade, I started missing a lot of school. I would ride my bike to the creek and play around until the afternoon then I would ride to the top of the hill where I

could see the school buses. When the buses left to take the kids home, I knew it was time for me to go home.

I finally just quit trying to go to school. My sister and one of my brothers had moved to Jay so I came to stay with them. I worked differ-



ent jobs, but mostly I worked at the poultry plant. It was hard for me to fill out work applications because I couldn't read.

I got married and have a daughter who is nine. I knew I wanted to stay out of trouble for her sake. I also wanted to be an example for her. I got started in some Adult Basic Education Classes, and later got on TANE. I then got into the literacy class. This class has helped me to read better and understand what I read. I can also fill out applications and other papers I need to fill out because I understand what they want me to do.

I am very thankful for this class and to the TANF Program.

Gary Don Potter ➤ Delaware County TANF Class, Jay

Courage to Change

I have been so proud of myself for several reasons and it all started by getting involved with the Great Plains Literacy Council. Two and one-half years ago, I was a two-pack-a-day smoker, and my reading skills were very low. The Taliaferro Mental Health Center recommended that I contact the literacy program. They even took me to the Altus Public Library to learn about the Great Plains Literacy Council. From then on, it has been exciting and yet challenging!

I have been reading so many stories about different people in good and bad situations in the Challenger series. Sometimes I get stuck on words, but my tutors have helped me figure

them out. I am so proud of all my tutors—Miguel Agosto, Kay Waldroop, and currently Marjorie Daniels. I know the more I read the more I learn. That encourages me to keep improving. It takes courage to keep trying to read books, newspapers, signs and magazines.



Harold Wilson

Another courageous thing that I have been doing is using the computer to improve my reading and writing. That has been fun, but I thought it would be hard since I didn't take any computer classes in school. I try to go to the Altus Public Library to use the literacy computer several times a week outside my weekly tutoring session.

It has also taken some courage to attend literacy meetings away from Altus. I am glad to have gone and gotten involved. In the past two years,

I was selected to attend three State Learner Conferences in Oklahoma City and the State Literacy Conference in Norman. I even was a student representative at a quarterly board meeting of the Great Plains Literacy Council. I spoke about going to the state meeting to the board members and literacy staff. Speaking before them really took real courage as I was scared to death, but I am so happy to be learning and reading.

Also, I stopped smoking two and one-half years ago. That habit takes courage to change, and I am proud of my “kicking the habit” of smoking, and filling my time with better things like reading and helping my friends.

Courage to Get Involved

I was born with cerebral palsy. It took courage to even walk or hold a pencil. After high school graduation, I knew I couldn't



Harry Nolen

read well or up to my potential. Kayla James offered to tutor me in September 2005 with materials from the Great Plains Literacy Council. She has continued through the years as my tutor and has taught me how to read better plus how to enjoy reading.

During the winter, I knew I wanted a challenge to go to college. With help from my tutor, I was able to enroll in a few courses at Western Oklahoma State College. It has taken courage to further my education. I am so thankful that my tutor Kayla has been helping me twice a week now.

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, I ride the bus to college. Also I have to really organize my time to get my lessons done and to carry out my job responsibilities. I am an intern with the youth ministry for the Altus First Baptist Church. I teach the 8th grade boys Sunday school class and have other responsibilities with that position.

I know I am learning from my involvement because of the opportunities that God affords me. I want more courage to be involved with learning about God and the world around me.

Harry Nolen ➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

My First Airplane Ride

We got to the airport in Las Vegas and I was very nervous. We had to go through the metal detector; we had to take off our shoes, our watches and necklace and went through. We sat up there at the airport at Gate 9 waiting to get on the

airplane. We went down this hallway thing and turned to get on the airplane. Whatever that was, it popped and I was going back 'cause I didn't know what that was.

We found our seats and they told us to buckle our seatbelts. I'm bagged up like a car and I thought oh man, this is going to be cool. So it started down this runway thing, it slowed up then it picked up speed and then it just shot off in the air. I started screaming. Then the lady got on the thing and told us we were at 10,000 feet and that was it. From there it went smooth sailing.

We got to Tulsa about 11:00, but the landing got me. I thought we were going to turn over. But I like it now, I got used to it. Now we're going to fly to California.

Johnnie Bishop

➤ Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

The Courage I Thought I Didn't Have



Joyce Miller

Three years ago, almost four, I went back to school. At first, I felt that I couldn't do it. I was too old and with things I had gone

through, I thought my brain was down, cells were fried, and I would not be able to learn. My family, as well as my church family, were very encouraging. Although all of these people were telling me that I could do it, my mind was always saying, "Um, no. It's too hard."

However, I wanted my diploma and education so much. I kept praying to the lord to give me the strength and ability to learn, and to understand what I was learning. I started applying myself and

the more I read, the more I enjoyed it. I started loving math and other subjects. My life started changing right in front of me. I started feeling very elated and I knew I could now encourage myself to keep going. This was important to me.

I had the courage to go back and start school; because of it my life has begun to change. I am now completing things I thought I could never do. I have spoken at school functions and even take part in events at my church. I am not afraid anymore. The school I attend is Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). That was the best choice I could have made in my life. So see, I found the courage I thought I did not have. I am getting ready in a couple of days to take the exam for the GED and already, the courage I now have is causing me to anticipate my next adventure in life.

Joyce Miller

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Hero

My daughter called me the other day and she said I was her hero, and we talked on and on. I thought, “How am I her hero?” She was saying how she was able to do things in high school and college, but I knew it did not come easy. My job had a lot of overtime. If my son or daughter had something they wanted to do in school, it cost money. So I worked a lot of overtime to help them get what they wanted. So I thought, “Who is my hero?”

Back in the early sixties I knew a man that worked very hard. He did construction on streets and roads. But he had another job. When he was a young man he learned how to farm fruits and vegetables. So in time, he married a very beautiful lady.

They did not have many things, but they had children. His construction job did not pay enough

money to pay the bills and feed his children. So he had to do something. He began to buy seeds to grow corn, beans, potatoes, peaches, pears, tomatoes, okra and sweet potatoes, and many more fruits and vegetables. Back in those days you could put fruits and vegetables in glass jars to store them through the winter. In the summer he and his cousins would get together on a Saturday and kill pigs and hogs all day for meat. It would be a big feast.

As the years went by he had eleven children, six boys and five girls. His farming skills made him a good farmer. He was being a provider for his family just like my overtime was to provide for my family. From this man I learned to do whatever it takes to be a provider. This man is my hero and my father.

Larry D. Ezell

➤ Community Literacy Centers, Inc., Oklahoma City

Courage

I was afraid to go to a literacy class at first, but I kept thinking about the times that I could not read a newspaper or a magazine. I also thought about when someone would ask me,



“Did you read what happened to Mr. Smith in the paper?”

I would just look down and say, “Yes, wasn’t that bad for Mr. Smith.”

I had the courage to get help with a literacy program. Now I can read better, and now I am proud of myself for taking that big step. I would tell others like me not to be afraid to take that step to find a program to help you learn more. I am now reading better, spelling better, and I am also writing stories.

Larry D. Ezell

➤ Community Literacy Centers, Inc., Oklahoma City

Learning to Read

I am proud to be in the literacy program, be-



Lois Thurston

cause they taught me how to read and write.

I could not read anything, but now I can read quite a bit. If it wasn't for

the literacy program I would not be able to read at all. I was amazed to find out that I could read little books like *Dick & Jane* and *In the Valley*. Now we are reading a book about President Abraham Lincoln for the book club that we belong to. I am so glad that I can read and write. They are missing out on a lot of things. This program is a very good program. They should have it in every city or town. It should be known more than it is by those who aren't able to read.

This program should be funded more because it is so important.

I have raised six children and they have grown up very well. I wish I would have known how to read and write back then. I had a nursing aide job and had to study the book very hard to get the job. Now I can read the map a little to get to where I want to go. My tutor helps me a lot if I get stuck on big words. Sometimes the word is so big I get confused and we chuckle about it. Sometimes it surprises me that I know some of the big words without even thinking.

One of the books we read had slang phrases in it that I never had heard before and I asked the tutor what it meant and we laughed about it and asked why the people don't speak English. I was raised in New England and not used to hearing all of the slang that people here have heard all their life and I laugh and say they talk funny, but they say the same about me.

My age is 70 and if I had known that this program was out earlier, I would have been able to read and write a long time ago. The program has computers that we use to learn more things and maybe some day I can write to my children on the computer. I do know how to drive. I took the test and passed it. I can do things without being afraid. Everyone at the Literacy program helps me when I get stuck on something. I am so glad to have good friends. Maybe some day I will be able to teach someone else to read.

Lois Thurston ➤ Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

The Courage to Go Back to School

I am a single parent. My daughter and son are both in third grade. My life has been hard, and I have had to work hard to support my children and myself.

I met a young man while I was in high school and he asked me to go steady with him.

Later we found out I was pregnant with my



daughter. He quit school and got a job while I continued to finish school. Not long after I had my daughter, I found out I

was pregnant again with my son. That year we got married. The marriage did not last as we had problems.

Now I am attending Success Class with the Great Plains Literacy Council. I want to brush up on my education so that I can go to the Southwest Technology Center in order to become trained and certified in a job that I can use to support myself and my children.

I hope that by my going back to school it will encourage my children to stay in school and get

their education so that they will have the skills they need to succeed.

I hope that someone who reads this will realize that it is never too late to attend school and will have the courage to follow a dream to a better life.

Maria Reyes ➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Quitting is Not an Option

My name is Mary. I was born in Oklahoma and was raised in Guthrie. I have lived here for 25 years and I don't think I will ever move. I have three children, two boys and a girl, who mean the world to me. I want the best for them and I want them to have a better life than I have had. I want them be able to get through school without any trouble.

My personal story about school was I didn't

want to go to school. Well, okay, that's a lie. I actually liked going to school all the way up until junior high. Junior high was when school got hard for me. I began struggling in class, unable to focus and listen. The work was difficult. I did not understand it and began falling



Mary Helms

behind in class. When I got to high school it got even harder for me. The work was harder, so I gave up trying to learn. I would get into fights and not do my work. I didn't care because I didn't get along with most of the girls in school anyway. I then decided to go to a different school, Edmond North High School. It was a little easier for me because I got along better with the students there and the teachers were helpful. But then, I started ditching class with

my friends and I started to struggle again, so I gave up. I couldn't do the work so I thought to myself, "What's the point of being there?" So I finally dropped out of school.

About two years after I dropped out of school, I decided to go back to get my education and I began GED classes. Once again, the work was hard and I didn't think I could do it so I gave up. I then had to get a job to be able to support myself, but it didn't work out very well so I quit. Then I got pregnant with my first child, then my second and third. I had to go back to work, but I wasn't making enough money to support me and my family. I didn't have the education to get a good job that paid well. I stopped and said to myself, "This isn't worth it. My children deserve a better life than this." So I decided to go back to school to get an education. I went up to the DHS office close to where I live and that's where I learned about a literacy program

where I could bring up my grades and be able to get my GED. I decided to go to that school. I am now in the program at OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center) learning what I did not learn in school and bringing up my grades to get an education. I am improving my reading and math to be able to get my GED. This will enable me to get a good job and in turn help my children to have a life they deserve. I will be able to help them in their work and help them be the best they can be. They will be able to learn from my mistakes. Although I have quit many times in the past, I am determined to stay with it this time. I am focused and more motivated than I have ever been before. I know that if I can go back to school and learn then anyone can do it. You are never too old to learn what you need to learn.

Mary Helms

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

You Can Achieve Anything

My name is Pamela Johnson. I was born in Oklahoma City but grew up in Louisiana. I moved back to Oklahoma four years ago because of Hurricane Katrina. When I lived in Louisiana I went to two different schools: Boyet from 2nd to 5th grade and Slidell Jr. High from 6th to 8th grade. I did well in school until I got into the seventh grade. That is when I started paying more attention to boys instead of what I was supposed to. Still, I passed to the eighth grade. Eighth grade is where I needed more help understanding the work given to me. A couple of the teachers I had seemed to not want to help me and I failed. That is why I decided to quit. I gave up my dream of getting my diploma and going to college then getting into law school. After I had my children, I started thinking about my life and the things I could have had. I also had a stroke that affected my comprehension.

So when I moved back to Oklahoma, I went to DHS (Department of Human Services) and they introduced me to TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) which would help support



Pamela Johnson

me and my family while I went back to school for my education. It was through DHS that I found out about OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center).

I am so happy that I am here at OIC. Even with the effects from the stroke, I am determined to learn everything that I need to learn. I had to not only start where I had left off in school, but also work on the comprehension skills I had lost. I am definitely learning here. I also want to learn because there are so many great teachers who are willing to help when I need it. I also want to go for my dreams that I once had. I am willing to

learn and not give up again. I am so lucky and grateful that I do have a second chance to start over again and that I have the will and desire to go for my dreams.



I know that going back to school is a new beginning, but it is also opening a door of opportunities for me and all the other students who had the courage to go back. To me, the best part of going back is meeting the people that I have. The people that I have gotten to know and have grown to respect are a great inspiration to me. They give me confidence and help me believe that I can succeed and become whatever I want. When I first started coming to OIC, I was so scared. But now I feel that everybody here is a big family going back to school for similar things. Some are here to get their GED while others

just need to raise their scores so that they can enter college or a Vo-tech program. Whatever the reason, we are here to accomplish our goals and reach out for our dreams. For me, getting a GED will help me get a great job so that I can support myself as well as my children. I want to succeed so that I do not have to depend on DHS or anyone else for money or the things that I need. Just by going back to school and getting the right education, I can do so much for my children, my family, and myself. I have so much determination now to achieve my goals. I know that if I can go for my dreams by going back to school and I can enjoy the process then anybody can. You are never too old to do it. I am proud I put my feet on the right road to a good life.

Pamela Johnson

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Courage to Succeed

I am so that glad that I had the courage to go back to school. I am a 52 year old male. While attending the Great Plains Literacy Council's Success Class, I quickly realized all the other students were 30 or more years younger than I. It would have been easy to feel out of place and quit. But, I had an injury and needed to change careers. In order to do that I needed a GED certificate, and Success Class is helping me work and study to get one.

After I get my GED, I will be going to Southwest Technology Center to get trained and certified in a different trade. This will help me to get a job with good benefits. This will help to support and care for my family.

The best and most exciting part of my going back to school is that I was able to inspire my seventeen year old daughter to start back in

school. She and her 9 month old daughter live with me. My daughter is expecting twins in May. She will be able to finish her education with a GED in May and be able to take care of herself and her children. This is a blessing to me as I had worried about her a lot.

So, you can see, courage has started my daughter and me on the road to success.

Ray Casias ➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Just Hang In There

I was nervous at first when I went to the library. I wanted to find a book to read but I couldn't. They were all too hard. Then I asked the lady if they had a reading class and could they help me to learn to read better. I knew I wanted to learn to read better so that I could better my life. I wanted to be able to read the letters from Social Security, my other mail, read the Bible,

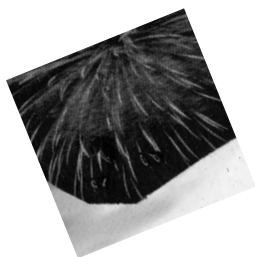
and the Sunday School lessons.

I think it is important to learn to read so that you can know what is going on. I want to learn

to read better so that my sister won't have to read everything for me. I want to be able to take the GED test and maybe go to Vo Tech to improve my skills but I know I have to learn to read better.

At the library they gave me a tutor. She helped me a lot but she got sick and she stopped coming. I waited a while and then I went back to the library and they gave me another tutor. First she tested me to see what level I was reading on and started from there. I understand what I read better. I just need to slow down and take my time. I do get frustrated at times but I think I am getting better. I do better when someone helps me and reads along with me.

If anyone asks me about improving their reading, I'd tell them not to be afraid. It may be hard



but you just have to hang in there and you'll get better.

Rondre Hornbeak ➤ Ardmore Literacy Council

Sue's Story

I was about seven when I entered a children's home at Whitaker's State Orphan's Home in Pryor, Oklahoma. I still had a mother and father then. The home was for all kinds of kids not just orphans.

You learned to work, discipline, and a lot of activities like swimming. But overall it gave us our education.

When I was about ten I met a boy named Bob. They called him Chicken Brown because he didn't want to be on the boxing team.

He was always teasing the girls. That's how I first knew him.

I met him again about five years later at the Continental Skating Rink through another girl that was in Whitaker's with me. I was asked if I knew Robert Brown. I said, "No." Then I was told he was Chicken Brown. That was his nickname from Whitaker's and I knew him then.

We fell in love immediately.

We used to drive around in a 1949 Cadillac that Bob had fixed himself. I was on Cloud Nine. We went to the Admiral Twin Drive Inn almost every night. We stayed and watched the show twice. We went to Cotton's Drive-in restaurant. It was a big hang-out in the fifties and sixties.

We have been together forty-nine years. We have had one son named Niki.

Our relationship gave me the courage to improve myself.

Hope

Becoming a New Citizen

I am an immigrant to this fabulous country. When I arrived here four years ago, I did not speak English well, so my dream has been to speak proper English. I needed to improve my English skills so I could communicate better with Americans.

I went to the best place for help, the literacy office at the public library in my little town.

The “Lady” who works there is very nice and she gave me more than I could ever imagine.

I started my new mission working to reach my goal. I focused on it not only because I want it but because I need it. I started to read, to do my homework, to write and “voila” I was studying! The fun part was that I wanted to get my goal quickly like the advertisements in TV or magazines that offer to teach you English in a couple of months or less but I learned it does not work

like that. The miracle arrived later as a result of all the efforts and dedication.

There are many excuses for not studying or spending the time on things that hide the purpose of our objective. The secret is just to



Alejandra Garland

change our attitude to looking for reasons to do more. This is to read more, to write more and study more.

I want to tell everybody: if you really want to improve your knowledge, reading is the best thing you can do. Sometimes the circumstances make it hard for us to study; we can play at other times. The important thing is to be strong in the goal no matter how long it takes. As long as we work at the goal we are winning.

In this process I am also becoming a citizen. I am learning history and civics. I spend time each week working with my tutor to prepare for my immigration test as well as continuing to work on improving my English.

I feel so good and my world is better when I read and I understand the information that authors write in their books. My knowledge grows a lot. When I can share that with others it is amazing! I can prove that all my efforts are worthwhile.

I'm not yet at the English level I want to be, but I can understand, write, read and speak so much better. I feel more confident. When I compare myself before and after studying English, I can just see the difference.

These benefits are not only helping me and my family. As my English has improved I have begun to tutor also —another immigrant who has very limited English. In this way I am able to give back

for the help I have received. Now I feel proud of myself and so grateful for the library, the tutors and the “Lady” for the help and friendship I have found here.

I am still working on my goal and in the future I will speak English properly and very well.

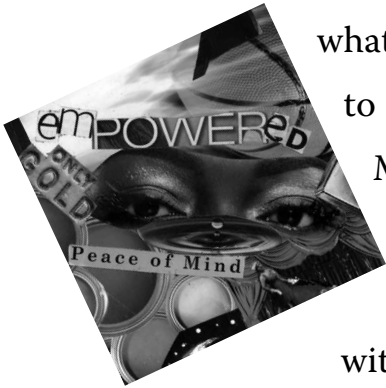
My advice is that if you can read there are no places too far for us to go nor goals too high for us to reach. The challenge is just to do it.

Alejandra Garland

➤ Cherokee County Literacy Council, Tahlequah

Your Life Can Get Better

I was born June 14, 1987 with two brothers and one sister. Our father was never in our lives and our mother was in and out. It was hard growing up not having my mom and dad around. I would do things that were not right because I was mad and full of anger. Sometimes I would wonder



what we did that was so bad to make my parents leave.

My grandparents were the ones who raised me and my siblings. I have lived

with them since I was little

and I realized that I see them as my true mom and dad; I still feel this way to today. Raising all four of us was definitely difficult on my grandparents. I know we were hard on them and put them through a lot, but they loved us very much and did the best they could. I do not know where I would be right now if it were not for them.

I always liked school growing up, but when I was in my ninth and tenth grade years of high school my only concern was being popular. Because of this, I didn't focus on my work or pay attention in class, I just didn't care. Then during my junior and senior years I realized school was more important than being noticed

and well liked. I focused more and I did my work in school, but something was not right. I made a lot of mistakes on my work and I was not getting it. Sometimes I was too scared



to ask for help just because of what the other kids might think of me. Even though I struggled in high school and I did not understand some of the work, I ended up graduating. To tell you the truth, I think the school went ahead and passed me even if I was not ready. In 2005, I graduated from John Marshall High School. I am not sure that I got a real good education there because two years later when I took the TABE (Testing for Adult Basic Education) my scores showed I needed to go back to school. I wanted a better life and knew I had to do something about it, so I did. I am now going to OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center). I like school because

they make me want to learn. I like going to school more than I ever did before, because there is more explanation, one on one help, and I can work at my own pace. I get a lot of help more than I ever did in high school.

Back in 2006, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl named Carlae. Her father's name is Robert and I am so happy that he is in her life since I know what it is like to not have one. Even though my parents were not in my life much when I was growing up, I have learned that you cannot hold onto the anger and never forgive. People do change. My mom is now in my life; our relationship is good and we are closer than we were before. She is a support while I am in school and helps take care of my daughter when I am in class. I know I don't want my daughter to go through what I had gone through growing up or make the same mistakes I have made.

I want her to have a better life and I have the hope that she will.

So here I am back in school at OIC getting my education. My grandparents and mom are both in my life. I have a beautiful daughter, a loving boyfriend—Tony who is like a second father to Carlae, and my own apartment. I thank God for giving me my grandparents and for the help around me that has given me a second chance and has helped change my life. When you think your life can not get any better, just believe it can, because mine just did.

Aliesha Banton

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My Journey to Literacy Link

My name is Altune. I was born in a small city in Turkey. I was home-schooled for three years.

When I was 14 years old, I went to public school. I came to the United States in 2005 with my Army husband and young son. Since then, I have worked at different jobs to make a better life for myself. I learned about Literacy Link from the library. I meet



Altune Ulmer

with my tutor Phyllis two days each week. My goal is to read, spell and speak English to the best of my ability. I dropped out of the Literacy program two years ago. I am able to return to the program and eager to learn. I am going to school to become a massage therapist. I hope someday to own and operate my own business.

What I Want

I want to write letters and read.

I want to get a job.

I want to learn to write a story.

Amanda Alton ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Amy's Story

My name is Amy Jo Bertrand. I am twenty-four years old, and I have a five year old son named Chase. We were from Pryor, Oklahoma before moving to Jay.

I went to school in Pryor. I was in the 12th grade when I thought I had met the guy I was going to be with for the rest of my life. THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN. I was eighteen when I found out that I was pregnant. I had to quit high school because the guy I was pregnant by left me. I had to get a



Amy Bertrand

full time job to take care of me and my baby. I couldn't go back to school like I wanted to. I had to be a single mom and work all the time.

I met this guy. I told him I had a five year old son, and that I was a single mom. We talked all the time, and now we are living in Eucha with him and his family. My son loves it here.

I went to DHS to ask them if they had a literacy program. They signed me up for TANF and sent me to the literacy class. I met Gail. She was a nice woman who has helped me in a lot of ways. I am going to work toward getting my GED someday. Our teacher helps me by myself and she helps us in a group. With her help, I know I will be able to get a GED and move up in this world.

Life Learning

In August 1989, my family immigrated to the United States of America. I could speak a little English. My friend brought me to Friendship House of TU to learn English for about one and one-half hours a week. TU ended this program in May 1994. Then my daughter called the Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service to ask for help. Then I met my first tutor Mrs. Virginia Wood on February 20, 2002. She taught me for two years and one month. On November 22, 2006 Ms. Rebecca Howard found another tutor for me, Mrs. Carol Hoffman. Both of us are the same age and have one son and one daughter. She was a teacher. Now she is retired. She knew what I wanted and how to teach me. I'm happy with her and enjoy our time to together. Now we work on how to speak, write and understand idioms so I can communicate with others. I can fill out forms such as an application for a job,

insurance, and medical. I took Conversation Circle, composition writing, computer classes and attended a summer book reading program.

I greatly appreciate and thank the Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy librarians and tutors for helping me. I have a goal to help others. I would like to share what I have learned. I hope no one is afraid to get help learning to read.

Ann Jiang ➤ Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Hope for College

Most young adults enroll in college and do not realize how difficult it can be for someone from another country. I came to Altus, Oklahoma, in January 2009 from Pakistan. My journey was so many miles of travel. All my life, I had lived in Lahore, a large city in Pakistan. There I went to school for 12 years and to college for two years.

I studied English and the other subjects in the Urdu language. I wanted to continue in college. Trying to enroll in college was disappointing for me. My older sister, who had lived in Altus for about 12 years, took me to Western Oklahoma State College to help me enroll in February. A woman at the Registrar's Office said I had to take the TOEFL test since I did not graduate from a high school in the United States.

I felt sad that I could not attend as I had the tuition money and wanted to study the courses. I knew I had to get some help in English to pass the test. My first hope was enrolling in the English as Second Language classes with Mrs. Ramona Jeffries in the Altus Adult Education Program. She teaches reading, writing and listening. I go to her class on Monday through Thursday mornings. She is also a board member of the Great Plains Literacy Council, and she told

me about the individual tutoring at the Altus Public Library.



Asma Lakhanpal

In March I went to the Altus Public Library to visit with Mrs. Ida Fay Winters about the Great Plains Literacy Council.

I needed more help with a volunteer tutor. She gave me some cassette tapes to listen to about the TOEFL test until a tutor could be found. Lesson One of the cassette tapes was even hard for me, so I knew I needed some help.

Then I was able to get a tutor who used the “Voyager” materials and also attend a small class on “Crossroads Cafe” at the Literacy Council. These tutors and other adult learners are very encouraging and are providing my second support of hope to attend college.

I am proud of myself. It is very important to know the language where you live. It helps you and your family. All of these classes are providing my hope to pass the TOEFL test and be able to enroll in college.

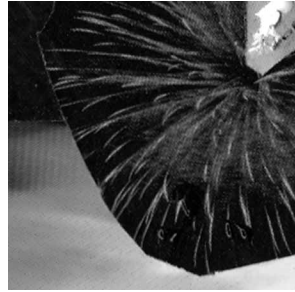
Asma Lakhanpal ➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Books Give Hope and Courage

Books mean a lot to me. At difficult times in my life, books offered me hope and courage. Books gave me knowledge to cope with whatever life put in front of me. When life got so overwhelming, and I felt too ashamed to tell anyone what was happening or how I felt, my books were a comfort to me. I learned about myself, other people, spirituality, and life from books. I learned about choices and consequences from books.

I gained knowledge, and knowledge gave me power over my life.

My books have been a blessing to me. When I had no one, I had my books. When I was distraught by life, I had my books. What I couldn't learn from the people in



my life, I learned from books. My books gave me comfort and taught me to hope for a better life.

Books gave me knowledge to cope with whatever life put in front of me. I learned to relax by reading books. Books could transport me from a terrible situation to another country, another family, another life that was fun or exciting and happy. Books also taught me all kinds of life skills and communication skills so that I could be successful at whatever I wanted to do in my life. Books taught me about myself and other people, When I had no friends, my friends were

my books. Each book taught something new that would help me in life.

By reading books I learned about choices and consequences. I learned how to have good con-



Darla S. Allen

sequences by making good choices. I learned if I made a bad decision or behaved in a bad way, I would get a bad consequence. It is

the natural order of the Universe and I learned that from books. I now make better decisions because I learned how to make better decisions from my books and from life.

With all the knowledge I gained from books, I gained power over my life. I had the power to make my own choices. I found I didn't want to allow others to make choices for me or take my right to choose away from me. Books taught me

courage, courage gave me the power to choose how I wanted to live my life. Books taught me I could make my own decisions.

I learned about my own spirituality and the spirituality of my ancestors from books. I learned about the spirituality of the Universe. I learned about my kind, generous, loving, forgiving God from books. My life reflects my belief in the integrity and the spirituality of my ancestors which I learned from books.

What I couldn't learn from the people in my life, I learned from books. Books gave me comfort, knowledge, and power. Books taught me about choices and consequences. Books taught me about the integrity and spirituality of my ancestors. Books gave me courage and a sense of protection and security which I could carry with me throughout the day. I will always love books!

Just Thinking and Hoping

Here I am an adult learner experienced in life, but hoping for a better education. I'm here in Oklahoma City learning at Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), elated to be here. Currently, I serve on the board of the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition as one of the Adult Learner Representatives and recently volunteered for a booth for Oklahoma City Literacy Council at the Friends of the Library Annual Book Sale. Because I have learned to read better, this year I was invited to an elementary school to read the book, "Is Your Mama a Lama?" for the annual Read Across America event. I was enthused looking at the smiles on the faces of the future. Their eyes looked at me with anticipation as I read each sentence. I had dreamed and hoped since the age of twenty-two of being able to read to children. Dreams do come true! Keep dreaming!

Looking back on the past two years, I see the accomplishments I have made as an adult learner. I feel the greatest turning point for me was when two students and I from OIC helped in a presentation during the workshop on *Tucker Signing* by

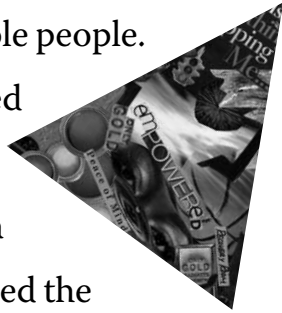


DeVoria Gaines-Ruffin

Bethanie Tucker. I was called to help demonstrate this tool for reading. Bethanie Tucker gave me some hand signs and then gave me a word to read. I was able to spell and read the word “motion” with the signing. The signing just brought the word out of me. I read at least three new longer words in front of everybody. I really got it and I was shocked. It really worked. This made me happy that I was able to read a word that I had never read before, and it was not just a one syllable word, either. This was my first

time standing in front of a group and letting others know that I couldn't read. What were simple words for the crowd were difficult for me. This experience allowed me to open up to people. I love going to the Annual Oklahoma Literacy Conferences; it is through them that I have met so many interesting and lovable people.

After this experience, I started meeting more people and felt that I had finally found a place I belong to which included the people involved in literacy. This experience also gave me a new strategy, a new tool, to help me not reverse b's and d's when writing and reading. I still use Tucker Signing to this day. Because of this experience, I began to feel more comfortable as an adult learner and could share my story with others. Getting up in front of people became easier and I gained the confidence to do more things.



Hope is the desire with expectation of fulfillment, and I have a lot of hope in my life. Being on the State Literacy Coalition Board has inspired me. Doors have opened in my life. New friends have walked through this door. Hope has arrived riding on courage. I am here just thinking and hoping of the things to come and reflecting on the growth I have made. Going back to school and learning to read has helped me in filling out papers to purchase a home with my husband. I know that you are never too old or too young to go back to school. My reading has improved at least six grade levels and my vocabulary has grown. I am proud and honored to be the recipient of the Bill and Carol Krueger Learner of the Year award for 2008. I was also granted a scholarship to attend the 2008 ProLiteracy Worldwide Annual Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. Not only was it my first time to attend a national conference, but I was also asked to

speak at the South Central Region's meeting and was also interviewed by both a local radio and a local television station. These were definitely the highlights for 2008.

I feel that the Lord blesses people who do not have certain things, like educational skills, with something else. He can also give you the courage and hope to hold on to while you work towards a chance to better your life. He gives you other talents and abilities. I feel, because I lacked in educational and reading abilities, that he gave me the talent of artistic ability. For example, I could draw my feelings instead of writing them. I visually communicated how I felt. As I increase my education, I build on the talent that I already possess.

My family and I for the past few years have volunteered many times. We have solicited new learners and volunteers to come to our school or other programs. We have grown together

in our life experiences and learning. We are very supportive of each other and pray through struggles and sickness. When one is out on a job interview, taking the GED, or testing for their driver's license, we hope for the best. The family, of which I am speaking, is my instructor Ms. Shannon Carter and the adult learners in my classroom at OIC.



I have blood relatives that may not understand the challenges and feelings I have struggled with reading all my life. However, when I went back to school, I met a whole new family that shares in these struggles and the “why me?” I discovered that we have common challenges and abilities that we were unaware of before. We have learned to build on our strengths. Our family is a support system somewhat different from our families at home. For some of us learners it is

the only one we have. For me, when I opened up, it was a healing process both emotionally and psychologically. My family and I are in a hopeful place ready to be cut and polished like a diamond that shines for all to see. Our shoulders are back and in front of us hope is rising. Keep Growing With Love!

DeVoria Gaines-Ruffin

⇒ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My Three Wishes

One probably would be that Jessica does good in school from here on out.

Second wish would probably be to have enough money to be comfortable.

Third one would be that my husband does not have cancer.

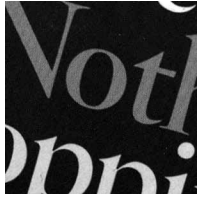
Debra Harvey ⇒ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Never Give Up On Hope

I was born in San Bernardino, California, in March of 1987. My mom is Denise Bartholemew and my dad is Steven Bartholemew. I have two brothers and two sisters: Matthew, age 26; Amy, age 23; Shiloh, age 19; and Shane, age 4. My parents didn't have much money to give us what we wanted. They always kept our spirits up; we never felt alone as we always stuck together.

We moved from state to state and town to town. We never stayed anywhere for more than six months. It was really hard for me and my sisters and brothers. We didn't let it get us down. When we moved from Los Angeles, we went to Santa Maria, California, where we lived for six years. During that time, my mom and dad weren't getting along. Let's just say they were just together for us kids. They were married for 26 years. At the time they divorced, my little sister was only

13 years old. She had the most stress of all of us children. It just made her stronger.



My brother Matthew had moved out before my parents split up.

My older sister got married at a young age. She was the first of the family to finish school. So, whenever I look back at the past, I always say to myself, “I understand the present, remember the past, and hope for a better future.” My past was all about fear, being homeless and poverty. Everything that I have been through has given me strength for my child and helped me learn how to keep her happy and proud of me. My mom is my best friend, and I love her so much that no one can ever take her place. For my daughter I have to set an example. She is what gives me hope and keeps my head held high.

I hope my daughter does her best in everything she wants in life. I feel everything I went through put me down, but understanding why things

happened helped make me a stronger person. I hope to get my GED and become a nurse. My back-up plan is to become a hairstylist and nail technician. I enjoy helping people in need and making them happy. I hope everyone enjoys life and lives it to its fullest.

Thank you for reading my story. I hope it encourages you to never give up on hope!

Deserea Sonia Bartholemew

➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

My Inspiration



Genda Jones

My cousin, who I also call Big Brother since we are like brother and sister, encouraged me to join the literacy program so I

could learn to spell better and he could read my letters and emails.

He says since my first homework, I've improved a lot. He says he likes my homework and he's proud of me.

When I went to the state literacy conference, I was inspired by the student of the year who said it takes patience to learn to read and write well. I will always remember her words.

Glenda Jones

➤ Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

Try and Try Again

I was driving down the street one day in 1980 and saw a sign that said "Learn to Read." So I called. I was embarrassed to call, but I did it. The lady was nice and she made an appointment for us to meet. But the lady taught by sight, and that didn't work for me because the words looked the

same. So I tried it for about three weeks. I began with hope but I left because I felt disappointed and more confused.

I heard about a program at Spring Lake Vo-tech about reading. I tried it but it was computer and no



personal help. I knew it didn't work for me. I wondered why I didn't understand the concept of reading like everybody else.

About three years later I tried again at Rose State. They tested me and found I read on a sixth grade level. I felt lost in a group setting so I gave up and stopped.

In 2005 I saw a booklet at the Dollar Store. I sent the information off. In about three weeks a lady called and asked if I was interested in reading and writing. I said yes. I met with her.

We talked and she said, “I will match you with a tutor.” The tutor is an ex teacher with a heart of gold. She encourages me every week and keeps me on track.

I have been with the program about three years. I feel good about reading and writing now. I look forward to coming to class because it is fun, relaxing and I learn more now about words and the way they are used to read, write, and talk.

I say, “Don’t give up. Keep trying. It will come together. You will find a way that works for you.”

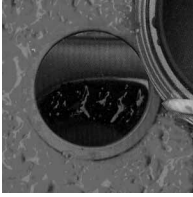
Your Learner

Helen Boyd ➤ Project READ, Edmond

My Change of Life

My change of life took a long time, a lot of patience, and a lot of hard work. Growing up all by your self is hard on a young child especially

with no family to stand by your side. You feel like you don't have anybody, but you do.



When I was young I had to grow up without any parents by my side and I ended up living on the streets. I felt like I was alone in a big world in a young man's body. That is a lot on a young man, but I was street smart. That is the one tool I had. I knew I had to defend myself at any cause and I had to make the right choices. If I didn't I would end up dead. When I was on the street, I didn't have a stable home to live in. Some nights I had nowhere to sleep because at my age I knew I couldn't ask anybody anything because I would be taken away. My family was the streets and I was not going to leave. I thought that was the only thing I had.

One night I had a dream of someone coming to me and telling me, "You are not alone." At first this scared me, but then I realized that I

really wasn't. However, I was getting bigger at the time and more aggressive and I made a bad decision that almost cost me my life. Then that same man came around and saved me again. I kept thinking,



Jason Miller

“Who is this man?” Then once again, I made another bad choice and this time was put in jail. While I was serving time, I began to pray for help and the same man came again and said, “This is a wake-up call for your life.”

I knew I wanted something different for myself; I wanted a change in my life. This time I listened to him; that man was the Lord. Ever since then I have stayed away from the streets. It has been hard, but the grace of the Lord and my faith has kept me away.

I had always wanted to get an education, but

never had a chance until now. After getting out of jail, I got into Job Corps and stayed in the program for a year. I tried to get my GED, but it didn't work out. When I first entered the program, I was given the TABE (Testing for Adult Basic Education). They told me that my test scores were too low for them to help me with my GED. However, I went through their welding program and got my certification. After graduating from Job Corp, I went to work as a welder with a local company for about three years. Then I heard about the oil field and started working on rigs for more income. I did this for quite a while. At this time, I started thinking more and more about my future. I knew I needed an education and to get my GED. I knew I would need to find a new line of work because the jobs I had been doing would become harder and harder on my body the older I got. I ended up going to Workforce and was again given the

TABE. This time I was told about a school called Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) and of the possibilities there are after getting a GED.

I have now been attending OIC for a little over three months and I have raised my reading by four grade levels. I know I have a lot of steps to get where I want to be, but I know being here at OIC—they will help me get there. Now that I am here, I see that I have the opportunities that I have dreamed of.

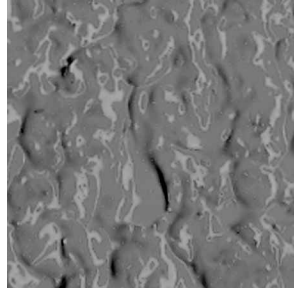
Jason Miller

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Hope

After I was an adult and out of school a few years, I noticed that I needed to learn some more about reading and writing because I wanted to do more in my life. So I found a local literacy pro-

gram. In a few months I could read more, write and do math. I even wrote my first essay and won a prize. I have also read more than eight books.



I recently took a video editing class at a technology center, and even though I was a little nervous at first, I did all right. We need to let others know that they can do more with a little help to increase their ability to learn more.

Larry D. Ezell

➤ Community Literacy Centers, Inc., Oklahoma City

Learning to Read

I was born to Jim and Rosa Lee Tagg near Kenwood, Oklahoma, a little town in Delaware County. I was the oldest child, so I had to help take care of the younger children. There were

eight of us kids. I had an older sister, but she didn't live with us. She lived with my mom's mother.



Lois Tagg

We grew up living in the country, but when I was about thirteen years old,

we all moved in with my aunt Mary, so we could go to school in Kenwood. I am a Cherokee Indian and could speak very little English when I started to school. I loved attending school, but it was very hard, and I didn't get to go every day.

When I was sixteen, my dad made me quit school and go to work at the chicken plant. I got married and had five children, but got a divorce later.

I couldn't read because I never got to go to school long enough. If I saw a book at a yard sale or

someplace, I would just push it out of the way. I didn't have any use for books.

A few years ago something bad happened to one of my daughters. I felt like I didn't want to go on living without my daughter. I was feeling so depressed, lonely. I feel like the literacy class and the friends that I made helped save my life. It gave me something to get up for in the morning.

When I applied for TANF, they sent me to the literacy class. This really helped me because I made some really good friends. I learned to read, and now I am doing good. I can read because I had a good teacher.

Lois Tagg ➤ Delaware County TANF Class, Jay

The Big Move

I did not want to go through life with very little reading skills, so I went to the library and signed

up for the adult learner reading program and I am so glad I did. It has made all of the difference in my life. I would recommend the program to anyone who wants to improve their reading, and their overall quality of life.

I am sad to say this will probably be the last time I will be writing as an adult learner in Oklahoma. My



family and I are moving. Not just down the street, but from Oklahoma where I have lived for most of my life to the state of Tennessee. I am anxious to move to the new house, because I will have an apartment complete with my own private bath, walk-in closet, a big bed, and my very own kitchen. I have never had this much privacy before.

When I think about having lived in Checotah for 22 years, graduated from Checotah High School a year before the famous Carrie Underwood, I

have mixed feelings. I will miss the big Wal Mart. (The one near our new home is much smaller.) Most of all, I will also miss coming to the library and working with the adult learning program. I have learned so much. I graduated from high school but I still have difficulty reading because of physical and learning disabilities.

I hope to find a place in Tennessee to continue in a reading program, but even if I do not, I am grateful for the progress I have made. I can have a good life in my new location.

Maggie Ferguson ➤ Checotah Literacy Council

A Story of Hope and Courage

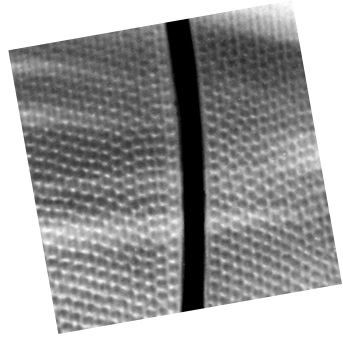
My Story of an Exciting Time I Remember

In February, 1990, my Dad went to Guatemala City with my Mom and two older sisters to work. Dad told my three sisters and me that they

would come home to visit us soon. We were so happy and excited to see them when they came home, three years later! My sisters and I were from 6–12 years of age when they first left us with our Grandpa. My Grandpa was nice to us, but my step-Grandma treated us really bad when Grandpa was not there. She made us do all the work and thought we should cook our own food.

Our next door neighbor, who had been feeding and clothing us much of the time, told our Mom how we had been treated. Mom did not believe her! The neighbor wanted Mom to leave us with her, but Mom said, “No,” that it would hurt Grandpa’s feelings. After three weeks of other friends and neighbors telling Mom and Dad the same kinds of things, they asked us about our treatment. We told them the truth, and begged to stay in our own house by ourselves instead of staying with our Grandpa any longer. So, Mom and Dad decided to take us to the United States

with them. All four of us were so happy. We began to jump and scream with happiness! We were excited to think of seeing the United States, and the world!



We drove seven hours from the farm to Guatemala City. Then, we got on the plane. I was so scared. I held tight to my chair, afraid I was going to fall. When we started to land, it was even worse. When we did land in Mexico City, I thought we were in the United States. My Mom said we still had a long way to go. Next, we had to take the bus because my three younger sisters and I did not have passports. My Dad got a beautiful yellow taxi to take us to the bus station. After riding the bus for three or four hours, we stopped and spent the night in a very large Catholic church. It had a huge picture of Guadalupe. It was open

twenty-four hours a day, so we slept in the church pews. At three in the morning, my Dad stepped outside and got a truck driver to take us to the bus station.

We rode for about eight hours on the bus. Then, we were close to the border. We walked together for several hours down a railroad track. We waited til dark. My two older sisters, who had passports, took a taxi across the border. My three younger sisters and I got inside a big tire and my Dad and another man rolled us across the bridge into the United States! There, our wonderful new life of opportunity began!

Maria Nichols ➤ Miami Literacy Council

It Can Happen

The reason I went back to school was to better myself in the workforce, and to move faster and better in a career of my choice. Since going

back to school, my reading is better than I ever thought it could be and I am getting better every



Marion Morris

day. I feel I have become stronger in the past few years. I can accomplish more and have the courage to try new things. I have pub-

lished one story with my classmates. I received my first voter's card. I helped recruit other people to come to the school I attend, which is OIC—Opportunities Industrialization Center. I served as a volunteer at OIC's annual golf tournament. I have given speeches at OIC luncheons and at a Moore Rotary Club meeting.

I have done these and many other things that I did not have the courage to do before. This year I am addressing any problems or details that I need to do, or that I have put off. I am

now facing my fears. Doors will open for me better than they have before. I plan to enroll in culinary school, which is a wonderful dream of mine that I wish to come true. I have enjoyed the opportunities to learn how to read and do well in my school work. Being able to read has brought me to the point of giving speeches in front of people. I am very grateful for having been given a second chance.

I want to thank the schools for adults that help me and others achieve our goals and for giving us a second chance at life. Thank you.

Marion Morris

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My Journey to Success

My name is Mary Barnes, and I was one of 13 children, and I couldn't read. People would take advantage of me because I couldn't read. I finally

asked the Lord, “Let me learn to read your word. Let me be able to understand your words.” One day the Lord told me to go to the library. When I went there, they told me to go to the Literacy Center. When I went to the Literacy Center they were so nice and kind, so I started going there, and I had a teacher.

She was so patient with me and so nice and kind. It seemed like every time we would try to get



together something else would happen, so they found me another tutor. Her name is Mary, and she is patient and kind. I say I am in the third grade because I am in the third book, and I have learned to read and sound out new words. I can go to California in a book. It just is so wonderful to know the words. I'm learning to read the Bible more, and can read it by myself. This is one thing that makes me feel better about myself—I don't

have to ask anybody for help. Now, nobody can fool me too many times!

Before I could read
I was street-smart.
I drove the church
bus though I didn't
know street names



Mary Barnes

or places. The pastor would tell me go to so and so place, and guess what? I would be tricky—since I couldn't read, I would say, "Children, we are going to have a good time." I said, "I can't drive and look for the street." So the teenagers would tell me where to go to get the next child for church. But now, I can read the street signs for myself. I don't have to fool the children into showing me how to get from one place to the next. There are two things I believe God has put in my heart and my mind: I can read the Bible and street signs, and I can go to California in

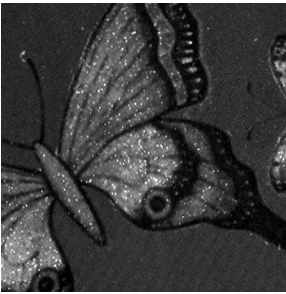
a book. Now, tell me what's more than that! I am 55 years old. When I started I was 54. I am happy. One thing I really want is my GED, and I'm going to get it because I'm going to work towards that.

I used to be my brother's provider. I couldn't read, but I was street-smart. I would mail his bills and buy his clothes and groceries. Before I bought his clothes I would look at him real, real hard to see how tall he was and how big he was to make me think of exactly what kind of clothes he had to have. And I would cash his checks. Now I know how to count my money. My mama showed me how to count money, and that is a different thing from reading. People can read something to me and add something more in there and I wouldn't know they were doing it, but you can't cheat me out of money. When I went to the grocery store I didn't use calculators because I didn't understand them, but when I

paid the bill, it would cost about 25 or 50 cents less than what I thought.

I was street-smart, but not reading-smart. I wanted to learn how to read the Lord's word and read for myself so that I wouldn't get taken. My sisters could read, and they used to cheat me all the time with the reading. They would get my money that way and when I'd find out later, it would hurt me because they were my sisters! I would not show them it hurt. I just thought, "I'll never go back to them again. I'll go to someone else." But when you go to someone else, you get embarrassed. You feel ashamed. You feel like you are nothing. When you leave, they laugh at you behind your back, and that is so hard to deal with. Before my mother passed she had given me permission to cash her checks and take care of her business. It always seemed to me that she didn't care much about me. One time I said, "Do you love me, Mama?" She said, "Yes, I love

you.” And it was like, “Yes, I love you. Now go on about your business.” But when she got very sick she gave me her check and I said, “Mama, why are you giving me this?” All of my sisters had been around her more than I had. I was a daddy’s girl. And she said, “Well, Baby, I know you will take care of me and you won’t throw it away or waste it.” I didn’t even think she cared for me, but I realized she trusted me. So I said, “Okay, Lord, what should I do?” And the Lord said, “Give the two oldest ones money to get the dress and give the other one money to buy

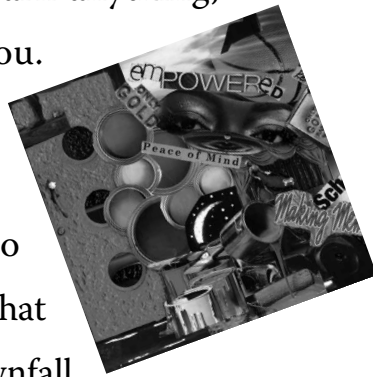


the flowers. And the other part, you do what you have to do to bury her.” It was like I could read right then and there but I didn’t even know how to spell the word, The. But God gave me that sense of doing the right thing.

When I was in first grade, the teachers didn’t

want to teach me anything, but would just pass me. It seemed like if the kids had more money they (the teachers) would help them learn the words and the ABCs, but for the kids who didn't have money, it seemed like they just thought you aren't going to learn anything, so they'll just pass you.

When I was in third grade I had a teacher who told me I was too dumb to learn. I think that was what made my downfall



and made me not care about learning or reading. You're that young and somebody tells you that! And after that I felt that I was too dumb, so I didn't care. When I got into fifth grade, they were learning to cook and sew and I like that. I could just look at a pattern and then cut it out of newspaper, then cut out the fabric and sew up my dress. Anything I wanted to sew, I did it,

just like that (snaps fingers). When I got into ninth grade we left that school and were taken to Taft Children's Home. At this time my mama was gone, my daddy was gone, my oldest sisters weren't around, and my twin sister and I were now the oldest ones. They didn't ask my twin sister anything, but when my little sister got into trouble, they came to me. It seemed like I was the mama of the family, but I still yet couldn't read. I stayed quietly to myself and cared about nothing. I left there after eleventh grade.

Life was hard on my own, and I couldn't get a job. I tried to fill out applications, but I didn't know what I was writing. I could have been writing, "Your mama is a dog." After I got married I asked the Lord to make me a helpmate to my husband and not a hindrance to him. And after that several people helped me look for a job. I finally got a job at Goodwill. It was 1998. That was the first time in my life that I had gotten a

job. I mean, “I got a job!!” Within a year I got a promotion and another one six months later. I still could not read, so I would take the work papers home and get my husband to read them to me three or four times so I could have it in my memory exactly what I had to do. Then if I got a paper at work that didn’t look right, I would be tricky and say, “What is this? I don’t know what this is.” And they would tell me. I worked there for five years. The perfume on the clothes was bothering me and making me have asthma attacks, so I had to leave that job.

Now that I can read, the problem is that my husband feels like he has nothing to do. When I couldn’t read, he would do all the reading and writing for me. But I tell him that no matter what happens, I still yet love him. I tell my nieces and nephews to think about what they want in life and strive for it, and if anyone tells them they can’t, they should just tell them, “I can do all

things through Christ who strengthens me.” I tell them, “Get into the books and go to California or New York.”

Mary Barnes ➤ Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

My Life

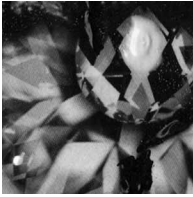
My name is Michaela (ma-kay-la) and I am attending an adult learner program at Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). I am here to raise my scores so that I can go to Metro Tech to become a dental assistant. I am meeting lots of great people here that have similar challenges to mine. We are all here for a common purpose, to become better. We enjoy one another’s company and accept each other for who we are. Many of the students here say that I have a good sense of humor. I guess you could say my sense of humor keeps my attitude in check. If I feel that someone has done me

wrong or I get upset about something, I can just joke it off, and this keeps it from turning to anger, and allows me to let it go.

My life is pretty wonderful now. I live by myself and at nineteen years old, I am paying my own bills and raising my seven month old daughter. I am grateful for my family who now support me. My mom is the best thing in my life. She calls me and checks up on me to see if I need anything. She helps me understand the world and how to survive through difficult times. My dad helps me with house needs. However, things have not always been this way.

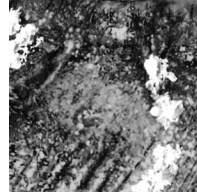
Growing up was difficult in my family. We were not tight. My parents were never married and my mom left when I was fourteen and I had to go live with my dad and grandma on weekends and with my best friend on weekdays, so I could still go to the school I was already attending. My dad, at that time, was living with my grandma

who lived on the other side of town. He had been living with her ever since he had gotten out of the hospital with cancer.



When my dad finally got his own house I had to say goodbye to my best friend and move. I had to start going to another school and I did not know anyone on this side of town. When I started the new school, I was ahead of what the classes were teaching me, so I would just sit there looking at people or sleep in class. When the classes finally caught up to where I was, I no longer paid attention and fell behind. Besides, my mind was on something else. I was hurting inside because my mom had left us and I would wonder to myself what we had done wrong to make her leave. I was also like the new mom at my dad's house; I had to clean the house and make sure my brothers and sisters were in line, because if they weren't my

daddy would get mad and they would get into trouble. When my dad married we had to move out of town. It felt like every 6 months we were moving, and for about 3 months I wasn't even in school. I didn't know what I was doing in school most of the time. I already had problems in reading, so I would just act like I could read pretty well. Now I had to act like I knew what was going on. I was so tired of moving back and forth.



When I turned 16 years old, my dad made me get a job. He told me that it was time to get ready for the real world because when I turn eighteen I would have to leave and move out on my own. I got a job at Braums the next day. I got a check every two weeks and gave my dad sixty dollars every other week. I also had to buy my own stuff. It was hard, but I succeeded on what I was trying to accomplish and I did graduate

from high school. Even though I graduated, my scores were not high enough for me to get into Vo-Tech, which is why I am now attending OIC.

Now my mom is back in my life. It was hard for me to accept some of the things that happened in the past, but we have talked about it, I understand her point of view, and we have moved on from the past. We are happy and she takes care of my baby while I am at OIC. My dad can be difficult at times, but I understand him also. Both of my parents were young and it was hard on them trying to raise all of us. Now we all get along and are happy that we have each other in our lives. My family is my support while I attend OIC to better my life and the life of my daughter. I do know life can be difficult, but there is always the hope that it can and will get better. My life has and it continues to get better every day.

Michaela Owens

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Watermelon Hollow

My name is Mikayla Marae Nofire. I was born in Gravette, Arkansas and was raised in Jay, Oklahoma. I have one brother, John, and one sister, Nedra. I am the youngest of the three children. My parents were James and Billie Nofire.

We lived in the country with my grandparents and aunts near Jay in what the locals call Watermelon Hollow. When I turned the age of two, my father passed away with a rare form of cancer. From then on, my mother raised us.

I attended school at Kenwood from kindergarten to the third grade, then I started to school at Jay. I only went to the fifth grade because my mother had a major stroke. I had to quit school to help my brother and sister take care of my mom. My grandma also had a stroke, so we had to take care of her too. After a while, my grandma passed away, and about three years later my



Mikayla Nofire

mom passed away. By this time I was fifteen years old and didn't want to go back to school.

I had my first child when I was nine-

teen years old. I didn't have a job, and I had heard about the literacy class, so I went to the Department of Human Services to see about the classes.

I have started the classes, and they have really helped. I can read better and understand what I read. I learned how to write. My teacher is an inspiration to me. If I can't get something right, she's there to tell me how to do it. She's a good teacher.

A Better Way of Life

“Never Stop” Learning

My name is Paula. I lived in a small village in Vietnam. My parents left Vietnam when I was 22 years old with my brother and me. I was able to attend school because my



Paula Bui

parents worked very hard to pay for my schooling. In my country if you could not afford to pay for school you could not go. I worked in the day time to help my parents and went to school at night to learn English. I learned about Literacy Link from the library where I bring my two young daughters every week. I have a full time job and work long hours. I take my girls to school every day and meet with my tutor on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings before I go to work.

I have been meeting with my tutor since August of 2008. Her name is Phyllis. I have learned to read and speak English better and I feel good about myself. I want to be able to get my GED so that I can start nursing school. My tutor and my husband tell me that I will make a good nurse. My daughters tell me they are very proud of me.

Paula Bui ➤ Literacy Link, Midwest City

A Hopeful Future

Hi, I am Rhonda and I'm twenty-five years old. I have three boys. The last grade I completed in school was the tenth grade. When I was younger, I did not want to go to school. I really hated school because I did not have anybody to teach me or have time for me. I wanted to learn so badly, but when I opened my mouth for help in middle school the teacher embarrassed

me. I started to hate school to the point I just stopped going.

About a year ago something changed in me. I saw people heading out to work or going to school and it depressed me because I felt my life was going nowhere. I didn't have a job nor did I have enough money to support my family. I would just sit at home while my kids were in school, feeling sorry for myself and upset about how my life turned out. I was at a point of nowhere. This really began to bother me to the point that I knew I had to stop playing around and wasting my life. I realized I was a mother with children who depended on me and that I had to depend on myself to make it in life. I knew if I wanted to make my life and the lives of my children better, I had no choice but to go get my education so I could get a job to support my family. That is when I turned to Department of Human Services (DHS) for help. This is when

I found OIC. The reason I chose this school is because they have classes that help students get caught up in their studies and get ready to



Rhonda Simons

take the GED. The teachers are passionate, kind, and work with students at their own pace. They are teaching me what I didn't

know and refreshing my memory on the things I did know but needed to improve. The teachers here want the students to reach their goals, so they push us to succeed and reach our best potential. What I am saying is that the teachers here are great. They are supportive and want the best for us.

When I started at OIC, I was at a 2nd or 3rd grade level. Since being here, I have come up to about the 7th or 8th grade level in my studies. I

am proud of myself for making a commitment of coming to school and working towards my GED. I see that it is paying off. I am so glad that I chose this school. I know I have made the right choice to complete school

so I can move up in life.

Not only has the school helped me in my studies, but it has given me the opportunity to meet other



people. I remember when I first started classes I felt that I had no one to talk to, but now I know that I have plenty of people to talk with and these people understand because they have had similar issues. The staff and the students have made me feel comfortable with going back to school no matter my age or what has happened in my past.

Being around positive people affects one's life in a positive way. My coming back to school changed my life. Now I have something new to

do and I can get a job that supports my family. After getting my GED I want to get trained as a welder. Then I want save money to go to school to become a crime scene investigator. I believe if I continue at the rate I am going now, it will not be long before I can reach these goals. Now that I am back in school, I can teach my kids and put a brighter light on life. It was like being in the dark before, being negative about everything around me. When I came back to school it changed my vision. I can see now; I am hopeful and determined. I know there is a bright future that lies ahead of me; I am now on my way.

Rhonda Simons

⇒ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My Special Friend

There are just plain friends and there are special friends.

I would like to talk about my most treasured friend. Because of him I can read and spell and write this story. He has influenced my life in a positive way more than anyone else in the



Ruby French [right] with tutor
Patricia Longcrier

whole wide world. He came into my life at a time when I needed someone to help me rise above a lot of hurt and abuse. I was at the end of a difficult 24

year marriage, and his friendship gave me a new lease on life.

He has taught me many things and helped me move from an adult with childlike behavior to a more confident and more responsible woman. I can now do things that I could never do before I met him. Things like buy groceries, pay bills, and cook. He encouraged me to enroll in the

adult education program at the library. He not only supported me in this, but has been my at home tutor and coach. He would not let me give up when I thought it was hopeless.

This man has helped me forget my bad past and move forward. Thanks to him, I now have manners, I can make my own decisions, and I am not afraid to socialize with people. Because he is polite to me, I have learned to be polite. He has been patient with me and taught me to be patient. He never gets mad when I break things, or make mistakes, instead, he encourages me to try again. My life is now more comfortable and I feel more relaxed. I am so grateful to him for being my mentor and my friend. I can honestly say he has helped make me a better person!

My Dream

Hi, my name is Sharronda Morrison. I have lived in Oklahoma City almost all of my life. I have always told myself that I would get my education and do something positive with my life, but when I was eighteen I dropped out of school. I had just had my first child, Messiah Carter and now had the responsibilities of being a new mother. After having Messiah and working various jobs that I could not advance due to not having a high school diploma, I knew it was time for me to go get my education. That is when I came to OIC.

When I started at OIC, I knew I had a lot to work on. OIC is a school that is here to help students achieve their goals. When I first started, my goals were to get better in math and get my GED. I knew in order for me and my son to have a better life I had to go back to school because good jobs that really pay well want you to have some type of education. Somebody special in my

life always told me that without an education I wouldn't find a good job. I had always wanted to become a lawyer or RN, but he told me that I could not do any of these without an education. I have thought to myself, if I don't



Sharronda Morrison

get a GED what would I accomplish in life? How would I support my family? How would we survive in life? That is why I made the decision I did, so we would not worry about these types of questions and go through these types of “road blocks.”

“Road blocks” have always been a big part of my life and I see that there are some things that I need to change. First, is being a better mother and getting my education. Secondly, is to stop doubting myself about everything when some-

thing goes wrong in my life. I must stick with it and persevere to reach my goals and make myself a better person than I am now. I know I am in the right place to do that. My very first day at OIC, I felt like this was where I needed to be. I saw that the teachers were helping the students achieve what they came for and I felt that it would be the same for me. Then as I began to work in groups with students in the school, I saw that we all worked together and that made the material and lessons easier to understand. I also saw the support the students had for one another not only in academics but also in improving each person's life.

I believe we all have to stick together to achieve our goals, and here at OIC we all have similar goals. Whether it is as a student getting through the struggles of everyday life and getting an education or as a teacher helping a student find

what tool works best for a student to learn, we all learn from one another.

I just want to say starting at OIC has given me a lot to appreciate for the teachers and how hard they strive to make us better students. The



day I started attending there was a teacher that was so nice and respectful and honest. She told me that I can do anything I put my mind to. That gave me a lot of hope in life. I just want to say, “Thank you Ms. Shannon Carter and Lucius Garrison for helping boost my self-esteem. Without you I wouldn’t be where I am today. Thank you for helping me strive to get my education. This has always been my dream!”

Sharronda Morrison

➤ Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Getting My GED Started With Being Turned Down

A part time playground monitor job had opened up. I have volunteered for so long with the schools that I thought it would be nice to be paid. As I finished my volunteering for the week, I mentioned to the principal that I would like to be considered for the job. She was so happy that I was interested. I had only one question. Do I need a high school diploma? I thought to myself, what difference would it make to the job. The principal said she would find out and get back with me.



The next day, I got a phone call. “So sorry. You must have a diploma of some kind,” said the principal. I was so upset with this that I went to the education office for some answers. Mr. Decker

was kind enough to talk to me. I pleaded with him about the job. He understood, but rules are there for a reason.

Where do I go? Who do I call? I started by calling GED testing. They suggested libraries and Project READ in Edmond. I called Project READ. A lady called Mary asked me to come in and test. Mary placed me with my own tutor, Jean.

Jean and I discussed my goals. We decided that however long it took to get my GED, it would be worth it. Here we are, one year later. My studies have paid off. I have just taken the exam. I'm waiting on official scores, but have learned that I passed all the sections, with high scores, except math. Soon I will be taking that part of the test again. And this time, I will pass it.

Wanting a job so badly forced me out of my shell and made me ask for help. I learned pho-

tics, how to use a calculator, how to figure sale prices, and how to help my fourth grader with his math. Now I can go after the job I wanted. Thanks to the support of everyone, I now have more dreams I will fulfill because I know I can do it.

Shawn C. ➤ Project READ, Edmond

Goals that Lead to Hope

I have a beautiful six month old daughter. I was born and raised in Altus, Oklahoma, and am 22 years old. I have one older brother and two younger brothers who were also raised in Altus.

I'm going to Great Plains Literacy Council's Success Class to get my GED before August of 2009. I set myself a goal to get it before that date.

I have an amazing teacher that is really good at helping adults reach their educational goals. She

takes her time with all the students and helps them work at their own pace.

My goal after I get my GED is to attend Southwest Technology Center in Altus, Oklahoma, to study to become a Certified Nurse's Aide (CNA). My certification as a nurse's aide will help create a good income for me and my daughter to have a better home environment. The reason is that I would be able to make good money and support myself and my daughter.

I have another goal of moving to Arlington, Texas, after I finish all my education. I lived there for two years and found it to be an amazing place with many CNA career opportunities.

The goals I set now lead to hope for the future for my daughter and me.

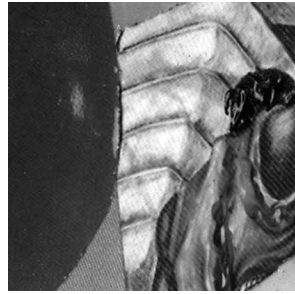
My Journey to Success

My name is Tommy D. Pitts. I am forty years old, and a graduate of McAlester High School. I was enrolled in the special education program and classified as a slow learner. I have been married for fourteen years and I am working at Wal-Mart. I have worked there for ten years on the cart crew.

I am enrolled in the McAlester Literacy Program so I can improve my reading because I have trouble with things like ordering from a menu in a restaurant, filling out medical forms at the doctor's office, looking up phone numbers in the phone book, and reading the newspaper and my personal mail.

My goal is to read the Bible. I enjoy my present job but I would like to get a better job like working with my hands and doing yard work. My dream is to become a locksmith some day and I know that will require a lot of reading.

I am on the Board of Directors for the Oklahomans for Independent Living (OIL) and have been involved in Special Olympics and Camp Plea. I completed four years Building Ground and Maintenance at McAlester Vocational Technology Center.



I am embarrassed that at my age I am still having trouble reading. I appreciate the people at the literacy council that are helping me learn to read.

Tommy D. Pitts ➤ McAlester Regional Literacy Council

Learning to Believe in Myself

My name is Tracy. When I was 31 years old I started reading class. I started going to the Cherokee County Literacy Council. The reason

I came to the Literacy Council was to be able to read to my kids.

When I first started with my tutor, I thought it was going to be too hard. I didn't think I could do it.

You should never say you can't do it if you never try to reach for that goal. It's all about confidence in yourself and trusting yourself and those around you ... especially those who are going to support you all the way through, believe you can do it, and have confidence in yourself.



Life is so dark when you don't know how to read. When you learn to read, your whole world opens up.

My Life in Foster Care

Hi, my name is Vicky Mullendore. I am 26 years old. I was diagnosed with mild retardation as a young child. I was placed in DHS foster care at the age of 9 years old. I have two biological brothers and two biological sisters and was adopted at the age of 15 by my parents, Rick and Gerri Mullendore. I have two adopted brothers and a foster brother and a foster sister. I have built a strong relationship with my biological mother, father, and siblings as well as with my adopted family. I have a fiancée that I spend most of my free time with.

I graduated from Choctaw High School in 2004. I have had the opportunity to become a student with the Literacy Link at the Midwest City Public Library for two years. Improving my ability to read and use math skills is of great importance to me.

I work at Braum’s on weekends and volunteer



Vicky Mullendore

at a camp for people with disabilities called M.P.H. “Make Promises Happen.” I love to read, cook, play with my pet dog,

and spend time with my fiancée playing board games and video games. My fiancée helps me with my reading and writing as well as other family members.

My goals are to finish my tutoring and become a good reader and speller. My future goal is to write children’s stories and to be published. I also want to express a special “Thank You” to Ms. Lily Hope, my tutor. If not for her I would not be able to complete my goals.

Humor

Grandma Mistaken for a Student

On April 22, 2009, I was a first-time delegate to the State Learners' Conference held in Oklahoma



Brittany Shelton
with buffalo statue in front of the
Ronald J. Norick Public Library in
Oklahoma City.

City at the Ronald J. Norick Public Library. A funny thing happened right after lunch at the meeting.

I left the Altus Public Library at 6:45 a.m. on that day with three other adult learners and two literacy staff members. I didn't know the location of the conference or really if I would enjoy the meeting. We arrived at 9:30 a.m. and friendly people showed us to the fourth floor of the library.

I had a real surprise as my Grandma Shelton

from Oklahoma City was there. After registration, we went into a large meeting room and had activities to meet the 75 adult learners. But, I didn't get to visit with all of them as there were too many people. All of us from Altus sat together by my grandma.

We listened to speakers who talked about family reading, saving money, and fire safety. We got lots of information about these topics and put it all in our green plastic bags from the state literacy office. My grandma enjoyed being with me and learning from the speakers.

My grandma had to leave after a few hours, but people thought she was a student like me and wanted her to stay. It was funny! It proved that we should not make assumptions.

Brittany Shelton ➤ Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Humor

Back in school, I liked math. It was my favorite subject. I did not know how to read so well. There was a kid named Bob. He could read books one right after another. Bob could read so well that I was jealous. He read little books, big books and some college books. He could really read book after book. I did not like Bob. He was so smart.

We read books Monday through Thursday and did math on Friday. It was a Friday math day. The teacher asked us to do some math problems on the blackboard. I got a hundred on the blackboard. It was Bob's turn. The question was $2+2$. Bob was just standing there. The teacher asked Bob, "Do you know the answer?" Bob could not do math. I felt so bad for Bob. He could not do math, and I could not read well. We were even.

Larry D. Ezell

➤ Community Literacy Centers, Inc., Oklahoma City

Flying

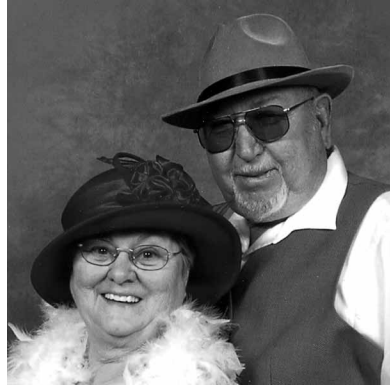
The day I learned how to fly started out like any other day. I was busy doing routine chores around the house. Living in the country, one of those chores was servicing the water well.

I usually used bleach to clean the well every couple of months. I had heard somewhere that people once used alum to purify their water. I decided to use both. I took the alum and added the can to the bleach. My wife and kids told me it might not be a good idea to mix the two. I went ahead and really shook that plastic bottle real good. One of the reasons a person needs to be able to read is to check out warning labels and read directions. I couldn't read so I never read any warning labels.

As I walked out to the well house, I could see my wife and kids all watching out the kitchen window. I gave the bottle a few more shakes,

walked into the well house, bent over and unscrewed the top.

The next thing I knew I was on the ground, flat on my back looking up at my wife and kids. I later measured where I had landed from the well house. I flew a good twenty feet. My wife and kids stood over me and my wife asked if I was all right. “I



Tommy Morton
and his wife

think so,” was my reply. That’s when they began to laugh and laugh and laugh. For the life of me, I can’t see how flying through the air is all that funny. “You flew through the air like a rocket and landed like a rock,” my son told me and the others agreed.

Now looking back, I agree I probably looked

pretty funny flying through the air like a rocket.
But the landing wasn't funny at all, at least to me.

Tommy Morton

✦ Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

Various Subjects

Anna's Reading

I like to read all books. The Bible is good to read on Sunday. Sunday is a good time to do the work on my books. My reading is easier now. I want to learn to read up as high as I can. What I am



Anna

doing in class will help me hear the words in my head.

I like to read my stories and good books. It makes me happy to read

about people and horses. I want to improve my reading to learn more. I say the words to help me learn them. I try to hear the sound of the words when I say them.

It is important to me to go to the library. I came back to school at the library. I am doing well at

school. I like to read all books. Reading the book *The Girl With the Broken Wing* makes me happy.

Anna ➤ Pushmahata County Literacy Council, Antlers

Benjamin Galindo's Story

My name is Benjamin Galindo. I have been working in Weatherford, Oklahoma, for about four years. When I first got here, I found a job at a shop called H&C. It was a good job but not in my specialty. I am a mechanic. After three other jobs, I finally found a job as a mechanic.

When I was here for a short time, a friend of mine told me about English classes. The WOLC offered English classes for free. I started attending these classes.

The classes helped me to get the job I am now currently working. I continue to go to class and

my tutor now is Wendell. He makes learning fun and he has helped me a lot.

I am so thankful that my friend told me about WOLC. I might have not been successful in my job right now if I did not have my classes and tutoring from WOLC.



Benjamin and Bertha Galindo

My wife Bertha is also a learner and my children Sebastin and Alison are in the family literacy program. They like the free books.

Benjamin Galindo

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Bertha Marquez's Story

I was born in Mexico but I have lived in the United States for ten years. I enjoy living in Clinton, Oklahoma, because the people are nice and helpful and I have been



Bertha Marquez

going to English class here. I started studying English at the Catholic Church in Clinton with Mary Ann Hayes. She was a very good teacher and I learned a lot. I loved working with her.

My life has always been working. I worked at the Senior Center to pay my bills. I am going to classes at Saint Mary's Church in Clinton again with Ms. Brown, my teacher. I need to learn English and study so I can pass the citizenship test. My teachers are good teachers. They bring me books to help me learn. I like the *English*

for Spanish Speakers book because it explains the sentences in Spanish so I can learn English. Thank you for English. It will help me a lot.

Bertha Marquez

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Blanca's Story

My name is Blanca Borjas. I was born in Mexico.



Blanca Borjas

I have lived in the United States for twelve years. I like living in Clinton, Oklahoma because the people are nice and I have been go-

ing to English class here. I started studying English at the Catholic Church in Clinton with Mary Ann Hayes. She was a very good teacher and she taught me a lot. I loved working with her. Sometimes she would try to speak Spanish

and we would all laugh. She said this helped her know how hard it was to speak another language. We used *Side by Side* books.

I have always had a good job to pay my bills and help my children in school. My children all speak English and make good grades. I am proud of them and my husband.

I am going to classes at Saint Mary's Church in Clinton twice a week with Ms. Brown, my teacher. I need to learn English so I can pass the citizenship test. My teachers are good teachers. They bring me books to help me learn. I like the *English for Spanish Speakers* book because it explains the instructions in Spanish so I can learn English better. Thank you for helping to give the people English classes. It helps me a lot.

Blanca Borjas

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

My Promise

I came to the literacy program as a promise to my mother and father. I promised them, “Whatever it takes to learn to read, that’s my commitment



Carl Haugh

to you.”

I have kept my promise to them. I am almost done with Book 4.

I have a lot of support, too. My family, my church, my coworkers and my friends have stood behind me.

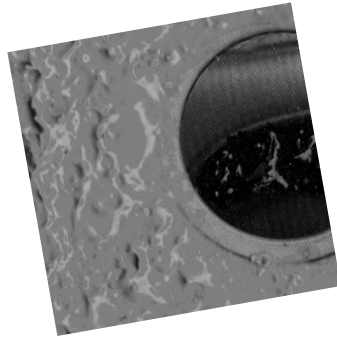
I also enjoy being a part of the book club and learning to use the literacy computer.

I have always wanted to be a leader and the literacy program has helped me to do that. I want to set a good example.

A Good Childhood Memory

**A story about hard work and
keeping a promise.**

When I was about 7 years old, living in Las Vegas, New Mexico, with my father and mother, 1 sister and 2 brothers, in a small adobe house with a tin roof, my Uncle Harry asked me if I would help him build a house. He could not pay me, but If I worked with him, he would take me to California in the summer to visit my cousins.



I worked with him all winter long. His wife would always fix a great meal, including tortillas, brown beans, and especially her green chile with hamburger. Oh boy! I loved it!

My uncle was a Prisoner of War during the

Korean conflict. He suffered multiple wounds, one which I will never forget. He got shot from the head clear down his back. Sometimes he would get angry, but it was not for what I had done wrong. It was from the bullet wound in his brain.

My uncle kept his promise and I kept mine. He did take my brother and me to California, and I worked with him until the house was all built. It was the first time I got to see the ocean, and we slept in a teepee in Arizona. I will never forget the adventures we had, especially when I got to go to a professional baseball game at Candlestick Park.

This brings back wonderful, everlasting memories of my Uncle Harry and Aunt Shorty. It almost makes me, at age 55, want to cry.

Fire Place

We had an old house that was ready to fall apart. It was out in the country. We worked on it day and night. The house did have plastic on some of the windows to keep us warm as we were looking around in the old house. We saw a place for a fire place and there was lots of wood in the back yard. Instead we found a heater. We thought that we would keep the heater for a while and later we could get a fire place put in.

Cynthia H. ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Magic TV

There was a special kind of TV in this TV shop. It sat there for a long time. People came in to look at the TVs. This TV stood out, this TV showed different kinds of movies. There was a little girl and her mom, the little girl ran around inside

the TV shop. She looked at this one TV, it was the magic TV. She ran around and got her mom and she told her mom that she wanted this TV.

Cynthia H. ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Dreams

I came to the US in 2008. I was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. My purpose for being in the United States is to have opportunities that I didn't have in Mexico, to learn English, get an education and a job, and have a better future. I hope I can also become a citizen.

I am very thankful especially to my Uncle and Aunt and the American people that have given me support, a job and their time to teach and help me to learn the English language.

Thanks to God and all the people that have helped me. I want to get my driver's license and

pass the citizenship test so that I can become an American citizen myself.

I have been attending the Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition classes for almost one year



Dalia Olivas

and I am so proud and thankful for my tutor, Roberta.

I am a Junior in High School and she helps me with English so that I can understand it better. My brothers Joel and Ernest also take English lessons with Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition.

Dalia Olivas

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Ice Storm

We had an ice storm. Jessica went up to the school to go ice sledding.

We lost our water in the kitchen. We had drifts of ice and snow 6 inches deep. Ice in the yard was one and one-half inches deep.

The dogs loved the storm. They played in it.

People took pictures of the ice storm and sent them to tv stations.

Debra Harvey ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Our Campout

We camped out for a week. Deer came to the tent.

In Texas, at Fossil Park, where there were footprints of extinct animals.

Weather was hot but we had rain one night.


We cooked out. We had hamburgers and hot dogs. Dad couldn't get the fire started so I had to start it and it made him mad.

The girls had lots of fun on swings and caves you climb up and look in.

There was a water pump near the camp site and a shallow pool for kids to play in.

The bathrooms were real close. There was a small town real close where we ate dinner the night it rained.

It was very good. Everybody was probably ready to go home.

Debra Harvey  Oklahoma City Literacy Council

A Manhole

We are two men in a manhole

I'm Lou, He's Joe

We see you walking by every day

With the usual crowd in the usual way
We often wonder among ourselves
Why you seem to stay to yourself
We are two men in a manhole
And right now we've got to quit
wondering because
we have a job to do.

Doris A. ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Candy

There is a candy factory
In a house by the sea
It is owned by Mrs. Brown
The best candy maker in town
She makes fudge, lemon drops,
Lollipops,
She
Makes brownies,

Caramel, popcorn balls, candy corn,
peanut brittle

And little

Balls of peanut butter balls

And, that's not all

She makes taffy,

She makes nougat

And if that's not enough

She makes doughnuts

It is

A business

Run

Next door to her home

Doris A. ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Changes

Spring leaves

Budding

In green
Fresh leaves
New and swinging
On the branches
Summer knew
Trees are green
Everywhere to be seen
Grass is dressed
With flowers
Of different colors

Doris A. ➤ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Elosia Galindo's Story

My name is Eloisa Galindo. I have a very nice husband that I love very much. We have three children, two boys and one girl. Their names are; Jesus, Aldo, and Marylin. I love my children very much. We are a very happy family but we miss

the rest of our family very much. They are in Mexico. We see them once a year. We would be very happy to see them more often.



Elosia Galindo

We like living in Weatherford, Oklahoma. We came here so our children could have a better future. We also came here to help take care of the rest of our family who still lives in Mexico.

I brought food to the Cinco de Mayo party and also made burritos and tortillas with three other students for the Wal Mart bake sale. I am on the WOLC Board of Directors as a student representative.

I give thanks to God for the Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy program and other programs like it. These programs help me and others like

my family. I also give thanks to the teachers. I give a special thanks to Roberta Slagell and Don King. My biggest thanks goes to everyone who makes this program happen, especially my current tutor, Rachel Hawkins.

Elosia Galindo

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Graciela's Story

My name is Graciela Ramos. I came to Oklahoma in May 2007. I came looking for a better life for my family. I found work at a restaurant and a hotel. My children now go to school and are learning English. My sister brought me to WOLC so I could learn more English. I want to learn speaking and writing. I am



Graciela Ramos

thankful and very happy to have these classes. My teacher's name is Jennifer. She is wonderful and very patient with me. I helped the literacy council by making food for the bake sale.

Graciela Ramos

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Graciela Hawkins Story

Hi, my name is Graciela Hawkins. I have been here in the United States since 1991. I was born in Mexico. I am married to a very good man whose name is Tim Hawkins. We have two children, Sean and Seumas. I like to live in the United States. My children have the advantage of speaking both English and Spanish fluently. They are doing very well in school and make very good grades.

I am working full time so my children can have the things they need for school. I am very thankful especially to God and



Graciela Hawkins

the American people who have given me support, jobs and their time to teach and help me to learn the English language. Thanks to God and all the people that have helped me. I have been able to get my driver's license and pass the citizenship test so that I am an American citizen.

I have been attending the Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition classes for almost sixteen years and I am so proud and thankful for my tutors.

Graciela Hawkins

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Hermila Jurado's Story

My name is Hermila Jurado, but people call me Mila. I came to the United States in 2000. I started classes with WOLC shortly after I came here with my son.



Hermila Jurado

Now we can speak better English and are learning to write also. I had a baby girl and we did “The Moses Basket” at the Weatherford hospital and also the Pregnancy Care Center. My daughter is very precious and I am so thankful for all the help given us by WOLC, especially Ms. Slagell. WOLC has helped us with resources besides teaching me English.

Hermila Jurado

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

My Story

Hello, my name is Isabel Galindo. I have been



Isabel Galindo

in the U.S. since May 2005. I have two children, Alandra and Maritza.

My children like the PACT time with family literacy. They like the free books also.

I came to the U.S. for the opportunities to raise my family and to better myself. I have been attending the WOLC classes for one year. My teacher at this time is Jennifer Stewart. These classes have helped me with my employment, interacting in society, and raising my children.

I would like to give thanks for the chance to attend these classes. I am also grateful for this opportunity to improve my life.

Isabel Galindo

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Judy Fong's Story

I came to US in 1976. I was born in China. My purpose for being in the United States was to give my children the opportunities that I didn't have, such as education and a better future.

I owned Young China for 20 years and worked while my children attended school. I am very thankful, especially to God,



Judy Fong

and the American people that have given me support, a job and their time to teach me English.

Thanks to God and all the people that have helped me; I have been able to get my driver's license and pass the citizenship test so that I am an American citizen. Learning to read and speak English has helped me achieve many of

my goals in life. My husband has also learned English through the literacy coalition.

I have been involved with Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition classes for 24 years. I am so proud and thankful for my tutors; 1st Lucille, 2nd Goldie, 3rd Lois, 4th Roberta, and now Laura.

My picture was taken when we visited China in 2008.

Judy Fong

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

From Nothing to Success

My name is Julie Pawpa. When I was born my real Mom died. And so I came to a real nice family when I was still a baby. My weight was only six pounds. I grew up in the family of Carl Dean Slagell with four sisters and two brothers. My real mom drank beer during the months before she had me which caused me

to have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome when I was born. When I went to school I had a hard time because I couldn't read very well. I didn't have many friends in school. I guess people look at me as kind of different. I was never on their level, I was always slow.



Julie Pawpa

So when I graduated from Hydro High School, I did not read very well. I started in the reading program with Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition. I have had several tutors who helped me with reading. My tutor helped me study for my driver's test and I finally passed it.

I have attended two Oklahoma Literacy Coalition Conferences and I am on the Board of Directors for Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition.

I am very thankful to God and my family and the people that have given me support, jobs, and their time to teach and help me to learn to read better. I am working at Maple Lawn Manor in Hydro. I took my training at Ft. Cobb and got my CNA certification. My family says they are very proud of me. I bought a car and a mobile home and I am living on my own. So with the help of my family and the tutors at Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition I am so proud of the success they have helped me achieve.

Julie Pawpa

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

My Life in America

I came to America three years ago. America is a strange place to me. I didn't know anything about America. My whole family wasn't here. Do you want to know why I am here? Let me tell you. I was married to a U.S. Citizen who was from

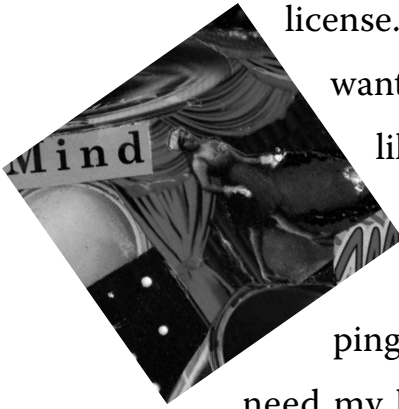
China. After that I started my life in America. America was a boring place for me because I didn't have any friends here and I didn't have a driver's license. I couldn't go anywhere by myself. So the only thing I could do is stay home. Nothing else.

In the beginning I missed my hometown in China very much. I missed my family and all of my friends. I really wanted to go back to China, but I couldn't.

After three months, my husband helped me find a place to study. So I could go back to school again. In the English as a Second Language class, I knew my first American teacher and classmates. My life was getting better. One of my classmates told me about Literacy Link. "That's a good place to teach people to learn about reading, spelling and writing," she said.

I became a Literacy Link student two years ago.

I got a good tutor. She taught me a lot, and she's a very nice person. Right now I got a driver's



license. I can go wherever I

want. I can do whatever I

like and my English is

getting a lot better.

So I can go shop-

ping by myself. I used to

need my husband to take me

out, but now I can go by myself.

One year ago, my first baby was born. He's a little boy. He's got big eyes. He's a very cute baby. I love him very much. He made me learn more English. He isn't an easy baby. He's hard to take care of. He fusses all of the time, so I'm very tired taking care of him from day to night. That's the hardest time for me in my life. But anyway, he's still my sweet heart. Right now he's fourteen months old. He's learning how to walk. That's a very important thing for a baby. If they know

how to walk, they can go wherever they want. My baby always does something to surprise us. Even though he doesn't know how to talk, he can understand very well.

Right now I work at a restaurant. The owners are my relatives, so over there I can talk to them in Chinese, but it isn't a good way to learn English. The only way I can practice my English is to talk to the customers.

In the beginning, I was afraid to chat with the customers because I didn't know a lot of English. I was scared that I wouldn't know what they mean. But now I like to talk to them. That's fun. I can learn a lot of stuff from everyone. It makes me feel happy.

It's a hard job to work at a restaurant. You need to work very long hours a day. So after work I feel very tired. But after the whole day's work, when I get home, another job is waiting for me

to take care of my son until my son goes to bed. I'm completely done that day.

I'm busy every day, but every Monday I still go to the Literacy Link to learn a little bit with my tutor Mrs. Carol. She taught me a lot. I appreciate her very much and also the Literacy Link. I hope more and more people can get help from the Literacy Link.

Katie Yu ➤ Literacy Link, Midwest City

Becoming More Confident

I came to the literacy program to improve my spelling and vocabulary. The thing I like best is that I have help when I need help.

Now I feel like a more confident person. I enjoy going to the conferences and learning new things. I meet new people who are students like me.

I met a student at last year's conference who inspired me to learn. She said she didn't know any long words at all until she came to the literacy program. Now she can say words she never knew before.

Linnea Edwards

➤ Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

Maria Castro's Story

My name is Maria Castro. I was born in Durango Mexico. I am number four in a family of eight children, four boys and four girls. I have always lived in the state of Oklahoma. Since coming to the United States I moved to Clinton and I have lived here for about fourteen and a half years. I have four children, two boys and two girls. They speak English very well. I have been working at Bar-S, a meat products plant, for about eight years. I want to learn to speak English very well.

I went to ESL classes twice a week in the evening and I like them because I am learning to speak, read and write English. In the summer we have class only once a week so I can be with my children more time. I like the books that are in both Spanish and English. We have fun at our class with the teachers and the students and laugh a lot.

Maria Castro

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

My Family

My family includes my father, mother and ten children. I had four brothers and five sisters. My father had two boys and three girls when they got married. My mother had one girl when they got married and then had four children, me and a sister and two brothers who died as babies. We lived in Pitcher, Oklahoma. We lived there about forty-five years.

While I was growing up, we played in the yard at the neighbors. We played football or tag and hide and go seek. My brother tied me up in a chair in the morning before we would go to school. Mom always untied me. We rode bikes around the block, racing. On weekends, we usually went to visit my grandmother. She lived in Kansas. Sometimes during the week, we visited my other grandma. She lives between Cardin and Quapaw but she moved around once in a while. We would keep her yard mowed in the summertime.

My oldest sister is eleven years younger than my mom. My younger sisters were born about two years apart. Their birth order was: Cindy, Brenda, Gladys, Jimmy and Richard. My mom had Melba and Terri. Her son was Jerry and then me and then Ricky. Terri and Jerry were twins. Terri, Jimmy and Melba played in a band while in school. Brenda and Cindy were already out



of school when I can remember. Cindy lives near Miami and Melba lives out in the country. Terri lives in Duffett, about a mile from Quapaw. All of the others are dead and buried. Jimmy lives in Idaho and works at a place making computers for a hospital. I hardly ever see any of them.

I am forty-five, soon to be forty-six. I live in Miami. I have three stepdaughters and two step grandsons. Two of the girls are married. The oldest one is five years younger than me. That is Janice. She lives in a nursing home in Joplin. The other one Cathy lives in Miami. Brenda lives near Grove in Delaware County. I don't have any children of my own.

I am raising two grandsons. Jason is 17 years old and John is 15 years old. One attends the middle school and one is in high school. John

does not like school. Jason seems to like school but he wants to quit and go to work. We told him not to quit school because it is easier to get his diploma in school than it is once he is out of school.

In the summertime, we go camping in the Lake Mont Shores campground. I have a camper there that we stay in. We go to the club house to play games or we go swimming. Both boys like to play games and swim. The camp is about fifty miles from Miami.

My oldest grandson will soon be 18, so we are teaching him to be ready to live on his own. He needs to learn to buy groceries, write a check, and do what is necessary. He is eager to live on his own.

As you can see, I come from a large family and have a large family. My brothers and sisters have one, two and three children. Every once in

a while, I see a cousin or an aunt, but not very often.

Mark Murray ➤ Miami Literacy Council

My Story

My name is Martha Calzada. I was born in

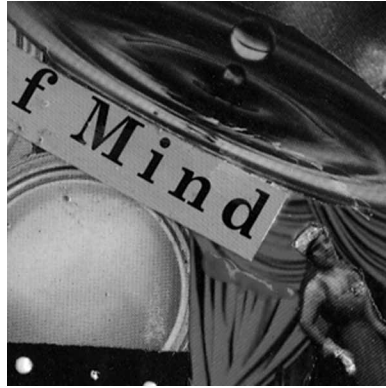


Martha Calzada

Mexico. Since coming to the United States, I have lived in California and Oklahoma. I like living in Hinton, Oklahoma. I have

a very nice husband that I love very much. I have seven children, four boys and three girls. Their names are Erika, Cesar, Rene, Liz, Christian, Antonio and Ashley. They speak English very well. I love my children very much and we are a happy family.

I have worked at Maschhoff, a meat products plant. I want to speak English better. I go to English class in the mornings and I



like class and my teacher very much because I am learning to speak, read and write English. I like the books that are in both Spanish and English and I like the *Side by Side* books. I have fun at my class with the teacher. Sometimes she has new tutors learn by observing me in my class. She says I am very smart and learn quickly and that makes me happy. I hope I can keep learning English so I can get a better job and help my five year old daughter.

Martha Calzada

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Martha Pineda's Success Story

My name is Martha Pineda. I came to the U.S. in 1995. I was born in Durango, Mexico. I have three children. Their names are Omar, Jamie, and Martha. My purpose for being in the United States is to give my children the opportunities that I did not have; school, education, and a better future.

I like the family literacy classes at WOLC.

I am very thankful to the American people that have given me support and the time my tutors have given me to teach me English and American customs. I have been attending WOLC ESL classes for two months. I have learned much. I am so thankful for my tutors Mr. Burtis and for Ms. Slagell.

Martha Pineda

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Literacy Link—It's More Than Just Learning to Read

My name is Mary. I grew up and attended school in a small town in Idabel, Oklahoma. I dropped out of school in the 10th grade. I live in Midwest City and work at the assisted living center next to the library. Because I



Mary Kroth

I need help with my reading skills I am limited to certain jobs they offer. My employer told me about the reading program at the library called Literacy Link. In September 2007 I started the Literacy program with my tutor Phyllis. I had no idea the challenges I would face until a few months later when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. After my surgery and treatments I was able to start my classes again. The days I came

to class helped me to focus on my reading and not my cancer. I have met several nice people in the Literacy office. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work in a pleasant and private surrounding. I tried group tutoring, but I was embarrassed when they asked me to read. My supervisor said I have improved my reading and I feel confident at work. I look forward to talking with people about how Literacy Link has made a difference in my life.

Mary Kroth ➤ Literacy Link, Midwest City

Mercedes Piñon Story

Hello, my name is Mercedes Piñon. I have lived in Weatherford, Oklahoma for five years. I have been married to Alberto Piñon for twenty-one years. I have three children. Their names are Alberto Jr., Alexia, and Cinthia.

I go to class with my tutors. Their names are

Opal Crall, Roberta Slagell, Linda Pye, and Jeanne Ellenger. These people are my teachers, and very important in my life.

They are important to me because they can explain things to me so that I can read, write, and speak English. I assist WOLC with



Mercedes Piñon

translating into Spanish and by contacting ESL learners about events. I am also on the WOLC Board of Directors as a student representative.

One day when I can read, write, and speak English better, I will exchange recipes and life experiences with them. I like it here because the people here are good people. I love people who help other people. Thanks for everything.

Mercedes Piñon

➤ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Michelle's Story

Hi, my name is Michelle Cruz. I have been here in the United States for a long time. My purpose in coming here is that my family can have a better life, that my children can learn the English language well so they can have better opportunities and a better life than they would



Michelle Cruz

in Mexico. Before, I was a girl that studied, that liked doing sports and being healthy and in good physical condition, but now I have to work hard for my kids, so that takes most of my time and energy. But I still want to learn English with the teachers and the literacy organization in the class at Weatherford.

My parents gave me a wonderful life and now I have to give my kids the same.

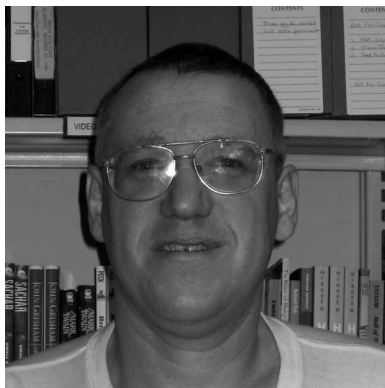
That is why I am here in this country. Thank you for the English program.

Michelle Cruz

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Advice

I started in 1989. I did call the literacy office. I told them about my reading. They tested me and they set me up with a tutor. I wanted to



Niki L. Brown

go to college. I am still in the program. My reading is improving. I got a better tutor this time. She is an ex-school teacher. I am working hard on my reading. Do not be afraid if you cannot read. One of the tutors will help you get your reading skills up. I want to get a job because you get a better job if you get your reading skills up.

Keep on studying on your skills. One of these days you will find a better job.

Niki L. Brown ➤ Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

All Bout Me

It is quiet in the country because there is no traffic, no sirens. No helicopter.



Paula Watson

What is out here is cows, horses and goats, and roosters and mule.

The mule has a tail like a raccoon's tail.

Her name is C.J.

I make bracelets and key chains and necklaces out of beads. All different colors.

I'm doing good in my reading class. I like my

tutor Kelly. There is a llama out here and deer.
And my favorite color is blue.

My favorite teams are the Dallas Cowboys and
Sapulpa Chieftains.

Paula Watson ➤ Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

Why Not Read?



Priscilla Caldwell

Learning to read is a special gift to anyone if you currently cannot read. Your confidence will shoot through the roof. You will

be amazed to see how much more you are able to do with your tutor or on your own. It's better to apply ones self rather than to sell yourself short. You are continually able to exceed abundantly above what you think you can do. Like myself

you can become an active and fluent reader. Remember I said in the beginning of this article that learning to read is a gift that you are giving to yourself. You are important and unique; give yourself a chance to experience personal growth in this area. I heard someone say the other day, “Shop til you drop.” Why not read?

Priscilla Caldwell

➤ Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Racheal’s Story

My name is Racheal Gilbert. I was introduced to WOLC by Department of Public Safety (DPS) in Oklahoma because I needed to pass a reading test to obtain my learners permit to drive. I was having trouble with reading comprehension. The lady at DPS gave my mom Roberta Slagell’s name and number because she is in charge of WOLC in Weatherford, Oklahoma. Thanks to Ms. Slagell and WOLC resources, I was able

to pass my driver's license test and have been driving since April of 2009. Because of Roberta helping me, my mom and I have been helping at the WOLC program. We have helped with ESL classes and some other tutoring assistance. My mom is a tutor and is an assistant to Roberta. She has helped my mom and me with our church. I am a tutor. It has been very interesting and fun to work with students and learn about different cultures. Thanks to all who support and help this program and others like it in our great country.

Racheal Gilbert

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Playing Baseball

When I was in third grade, I went up to a boy and asked him to play with me where he could start a baseball club outside. We went up to another boy and asked him to play with us. He said no. I say why? I'm playing ball with the



Ray Grant

other boys. So I went up to the next one and it was a girl and asked her if she wanted to walk home with me everyday after school was out. She did. She became my friend. She watched me play baseball. Now that I'm older, I like to work on bikes where they roll a little better. In sports, I like to play baseball and go to my games. Yes, I still play baseball.

Ray Grant ➤ Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

Sidney

My name is Sidney

I live by the bay

I am a bird and I walk by foot

everyday

But I thought my health was too much

of

a sacrifice

So now I travel only by walking

And hopping

Doris A. ☞ Oklahoma City Literacy Council

Takamitsu Iwaishi Story

My name is Takamitsu Iwaishi. I was born in and raised in Japan; however, I arrived in Weatherford, Oklahoma, April 10, 2008. I have been attending ESL classes and speaking English for nine months. I was an editor for a medical journal and health magazine back in Japan for many years. I find it easiest to learn and speak about diet, diabetes, and other health related topics. I know it is very important to have lots of knowledge of the language when speaking

to others whose first language is English. I have learned that also not everything translates from my first language Japanese to my second language English. This was brought home to me when I attempted to take my first written driver's test.



Takamitsu Iwaishi

I did not pass. I finally did pass after the help I received from the WOLC classes and tutoring. I am thankful they take the time and have patience with students, especially, us older ones. I am over 50 and do not learn as quickly as I used to. The benefits are so great for having these people as tutors and friends.

Takamitsu Iwaishi

⇒ Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Our Secret

From a fellow learner

We have a big secret that a few people know about. For so many adults, we carry this secret for years, asking ourselves, “Can we find help with this secret?” We look and look for years trying to find help. Some do and some don’t find help.

So if this is your secret, we can do this together. Start today. Learn to read and spell so we can be productive in society.

Adults will learn how to read for many different reasons—for their families, children, a job, or money. They want a better life, a better way of living.

When you don’t know how to read, you can’t get a job. Well, you can get a job, but not the one you want to get.

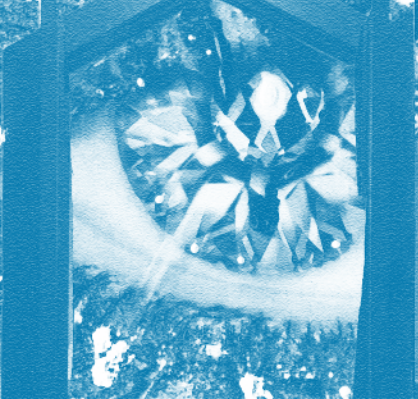
All you can do is pay your bills with the little money you get from the state or from family.



You see, when you learn to read, you can do anything you like to do in life. When you start to learn to read, you will see how easy it is to learn. The hard part is you need to remember all the things you learn in class. It does take time to learn all the things you need to learn. I have been in the program for 5 months and I'm learning a lot.

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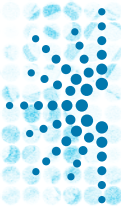
There is
Nothing
Stopping
Me...



O • K • L • A • H • O • M • A

LITERACY RESOURCE OFFICE

For information about literacy efforts in Oklahoma
please visit www.odl.state.ok.us/literacy or call
Literacy Resource Office at 1-800-522-8116



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