

Celebrating Our Journey



Volume 7

Celebrating Our Journey



A Collection of Life Stories
written by Oklahoma Adult Learners

Copyright © 2011 by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries

This book is printed and issued by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries as authorized by 65 O.S. 2001 §3-110. 750 copies have been printed at a cost of \$4,810 [sw]. Copies have been deposited in the Publications Clearinghouse of the Department of Libraries. 8/2011.

Contents

Forward	xi
---------------	----

Celebration and Tradition

A Celebration of Stress and Love	3
A Day at the Zoo	5
A Family Tradition	7
A Fine Family Celebration	9
Celebrating Different Birthdays	11
Celebrating Family Achievements	13
Celebrating the Little Things of Life	15
Celebrations and Traditions	
of Different Cultures	17
Cindy	19
Custom of Hospitality	21
Day of the Death in Janitzio, Michoacan, Mexico	23
Every Country, Original and Unique	25
Fourth	26
I Like to Celebrate	28
Immigrants, Not Americans, Must Adapt .	30
It's a Small World	32
I Want to Celebrate	
My New H.T.S. Helper	34
Love Distance	34

Lunar New Year	36
Mark’s Celebration	38
My Beautiful Daughter Ivy	39
My Egg Adventure	41
My Family Tradition	43
My Favorite Celebrations	45
My Favorite Time of Year	46
My New Year’s Resolution	48
My Son	50
My Traditions	51
My Very Special Christmas Memories	52
New Years Celebration	54
Oklahoma Football & Daddy	56
Panama: Center of the World, Heart of the Universe	58
The Race Is On	60
The Sacred Recipe	62
The Special Day	63
Third of May, Day of the Holy Cross	65
Traditions: Bringing Families Together	67
Unforgettable	69
What I Like to Celebrate	69

Poetry

Festival of the Lantern	75
-------------------------------	----

My Greatest Victory	76
My Struggles	
Have Made Me a Better Woman	78
Surge	80
The Wisest Person I've Ever Known	83
Six Haiku	85

Struggles and Victories

A Better Me! A Better Me!	91
A Second Chance	92
A Second Chance: To Be Alive	94
Because I Believe In Myself	96
Being Positive	98
Choices Matter	100
Commitment, Sacrifice, and Perseverance	102
Continuing Education	104
Dark Hole	106
Defeat or Victory?	107
Difficult Decisions	110
Don't Give Up!	112
Education Is the Key	113
Experiences <i>Not</i> Needed	115
Finding Purpose	117
For Me and My Family	119

Gaining Victory	121
How I Became a Driver	123
How I Learned Two Languages	125
How Learning English Changed My Life ..	127
I Am a Winner	129
I, Too, Am Worthy of Good Things	130
Learning From Mistakes	132
Life is a Choice	134
Life Struggles	136
Molded For Success	138
My Education	140
My Victory	141
My Greatest Victory Is	143
My Life	145
Never Give Up	146
On the Right Path	148
Overcome	150
Overcoming Struggles	152
Reaching for Dreams	154
Responsibility	156
Responsibility in My Life	158
Setbacks to Victories in My Education	160
Setting an Example	162
Setting Goals	164
So Much Blood	165

Stepping Stones	167
Struggle and Victory	169
Struggles and Lessons	171
Struggles and Strength	173
Struggles Lead to Victory	175
Struggling On	177
The Power Within Me	179
The Rodeo I Call Life	181
The Struggle to Catch Up	182
Turn for the Better	184
Victories	186
Victory After Struggle	188
Who I Am Today	190
Why Being a Young Parent is Hard	191
Winning!	193
Winning the Language Struggle	195

Travel and Adventure

A Lady Named Lisa	201
A Trip Worth Taking Again	202
An Afternoon Adventure	204
Fishing Trip I'll Never Forget	206
From Mexico	207
Hamburger: Destiny or Coincidence?	209
Leonor's Story	212

Longest Journey	213
My Adventure	215
My American Journey	217
My Exciting Journey	218
My Journey in Life	220
My Life Matters	222
My Literacy Journey	224
My Traveling Adventures	226
My Travels	228
Never Stop Dreaming	230
Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained	231
On the Road to California	234
Our Trip to Hannibal	236
Reaching the Top	238
Strong and Powerful	240
The Adventure of Football Camp	242
The Best Trip of My Life	244
Travel and Adventure	246
Traveling and the Races	248
Visiting Countries	250
Visiting Family	251

Wisdom and Learning

A Wise Woman	257
As I Age	259

Becoming a Young Wise Woman	261
Changing Lanes	263
Doing it Differently	264
Education in Colombia Is Not Free	266
Freedom	268
Gaining Wisdom	269
Growing Wiser	271
Higher and Higher	273
Hope to Learn with a Disability	275
I Am Wiser Now	276
In School, Learning English	278
It's Never Too Late to Improve Your Knowledge	280
Knowing a Great Country	281
Learned From My Struggles	283
Learning Every Day	284
Learning Takes Time	286
Learning to Change	287
Life Is a Good Teacher	289
Life Lessons	291
My Daughter's Financial World	293
My Driver's License	294
My Father, My Hero	296
My Goal	298
My Son	300

One of the Most Important Lessons I've Learned	301
Opening My Eyes	303
Ready to Read Without a Standstill!	305
Special Thanks	306
Step by Step	307
Thankful For Everything	309
The Lesson of Life	311
The Most Important Lesson I've Learned	314
The Most Important Lesson	316
Thirsty to Learn	318
Travel to United States Leads to Learning	320
Uncle Mark	322
Vietnamese Teachers' Day	324
When Speaking My Mind	325
Wisdom and Learning	327
Wiser Over Time	328
You Can Teach Old Dogs New Tricks	330

Foreword

It is my honor to welcome you to this Seventh Edition of *Celebrating Our Journey*, another inspiring collection of writings by adult learners from across our great state.

This book is a true celebration for these learners. They have worked hard with instructors and literacy tutors to improve their language skills, and they have reached the stage where they are able to express themselves through the art of writing.

It is a pleasure to see this success. It is also rather humbling, because many of these newly published authors have had to overcome odds that would seem insurmountable to many of us.

Some of these learners lived through difficult situations that impeded their education. Some found themselves in a new land with a new language they could not understand. Some had learning styles that did not fit the traditional educational model. In

their fearless writing, others tell of past mistakes and wrong roads taken that kept them from mastering their own language.

Whatever the reasons may be, these students made the decision to confront the challenges before them in order to improve their lives and the lives of their family.

The 177 stories and poems in this book are diverse, yet there is a common thread through all of them: My husband is worth it. My wife is worth it. My parents are worth it. My children are worth it. *I am worth it.*

These learners have demonstrated great courage and determination, and we are all the richer for it.

Let the celebration begin!

Susan McVey

Director, Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Celebration and Tradition

A Celebration of Stress and Love

A wedding is a celebration, but when it is your own it is stressful. My fiancé and I have been



planning our wedding since he proposed on July 19, 2010.

We are trying to plan the wedding, involve families on both sides, and follow some traditions.

LaDonna Brodnex

I watched a lot of TV programs on weddings and read some bride magazines. Planning the date was easy as we wanted to be married close to the proposal day. But the hard part was finding a chapel, reception hall, deciding on a gown and all the arrangements. The cost was overwhelming.

We wanted to be married and invite all our family and friends. My fiancé's son will be our ring bearer.

Getting the announcement of the wedding out to our families and all of our friends takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of time to get current addresses. It also takes time hearing everyone's opinions and listening with patience.

We will be having some traditions at the wedding. Jumping a broom will be part of the ceremony as that represents the old way that slaves used to show getting married. A unity candle will be used. I want to find something to symbolize my mother's love and care as she died when I was 15 years old. Now, I'm 25 and want to remember her at our wedding.

There is so much to do to finalize our wedding. After our wedding on July 23rd, I might become a wedding planner because I will know all about the hassle of planning a wedding! I know that our wedding will be special because of our love.

LaDonna Brodnex
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

A Day at the Zoo

It was a hot sunny Sunday in April when I took my girls to the Oklahoma City Zoo. We arrived just before lunch. The first thing we did was walk to the picnic area. Thirty minutes later, we finally found a



Sue Perez

good spot. We were already getting tired and bored, so we were all relieved once we sat down to eat. We ate peanut butter sandwiches. Even though my girls were upset because they really

wanted pizza, they forgot about it. Everyone was happy and full of energy once we finished.

After we packed up, I pushed the double stroller (thank goodness for that stroller) towards the seals. We wanted to see the aquarium. We stopped and watched a dolphin show. The girls were so excited; they wanted to jump in.

Next, we went to the children's zoo where we spent most of our time. We took off our shoes and put our feet in a stream. The girls petted sheep and goats, even though they were scared. They also fed chickens. We even had our faces painted. The kids loved it.

When my two-year-old started getting bored, we left and headed towards the birds. Then we went to see the elephants which were taking baths. It was a long, steep walk and both my oldest and I had to push the stroller, but it was nice.

While walking down the trail, we stopped for drinks and ice-cream. We were tired, but I wanted our monies' worth so we kept walking. My daughters' favorite animals were the monkeys, because they looked like they were picking on each other which reminded my girls of their own selves.

Finally the zoo was about to close, so we started

walking towards the exit. We were ready to go home.

Sue Perez

Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

A Family Tradition

I like to celebrate my traditions because I teach my family how traditions are done in Mexico. One annual holiday, “Day of the Dead,” is celebrated every November 1st and 2nd to unite family and friends in remembering the dead.

When I was a child in my village near the Gulf of Mexico, my mom and her kids would be very busy making flowers from colored paper for wreaths. My brothers cleaned weeds at the cemetery and helped us make an altar at home.

November 1 is the day that children of the deceased put a feast on the table. We covered a large table with a tablecloth. Then we start putting candles, flowers, photos, and favorite foods of the deceased such as

candies, bread, fruit, oranges, bananas, apples, sweet limes, glasses of water, several cups of coffee, chocolate, beer, wine, sweet rice with milk, pumpkin turnovers, tamales, sweet bread with raisins, and pudding.

On November 2, my mom taught us how she made rice with mole, chicken in



Elsa Castro

tomato/chili sauce, tamales in banana leaves and pork ribs. All neighbors do the same and share all that food the next day.

But, in my home, my bothers and sisters like those days because when my parents go to bed and start snoring, all the kids jump out of bed to run to the table and eat all the food and drinks. It was a big party for us twelve kids.

When my mom woke up in the morning, she was so happy. She thought her deceased family mem-

bers visited the home and ate the food. Now I do the same by teaching my daughter and granddaughters about my traditions. I invite you in November to try this family tradition.

Elsa Castro
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

A Fine Family Celebration

At a Fine family gathering, about 250 people show up at Broussard Harris Recreation Center in Louisiana. We get out of our cars and start hugging, kissing and talking about how long it has been since we last saw each other. The family is always so excited to see each other. Then we go help and get food dishes out of our cars and bring them inside.

Uncle Paul Ray and Cousin Tank guard the grills and check the meat. The smell of the food hits people as they show up with dishes in their hands. They fall into a trance and travel with the aroma like hungry

animals. My aunties stationed at the food tables have to bring them back to reality by waving them over. Then my aunties arrange the food in order. They match-up dishes and put them beside each other.

The recreation center gets louder as more people walk in the door.

Music plays and everyone is talking and shaking their heads to the music. Kids run all around—some outside and some inside—all over your toes. About 4:00



Ida Fine

we start lining them at the food tables and filling their plates. The kids walk back to their tables and the older members are brought their food. Everyone else will now get in line for their food.

Suddenly it is silent; Cousin Rickey's voice says the blessing. As soon as he finishes all you hear is smacking, talking, and laughing.

After we are finished eating, the family is back to playing games, dancing, and talking.

The sun is going down and the mosquitoes start to bite. People's arms are full with empty dishes and they walk down to the cars. We start telling family members goodbye, giving hugs and kisses, and saying, "See you soon."

Ida Fine

Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Celebrating Different Birthdays

Everyone likes to celebrate good things. Celebrations can be about anything. Three things I like to celebrate are my sons' birthdays, my husband's birthday, and the birthday of Jesus Christ.

One of the celebrations I observe is my sons' birthdays, and I appreciate the privilege and honor

that God gave me when he let me have them in my life. On their special day, I awaken my children with a kiss. The family eats at a restaurant, goes shopping, and then goes home for cake and the



Thelma Kennedy

“Happy Birthday” song. I always tell my sons how proud I am to have them in my life, and I am so glad they are good people.

Another thing I like to celebrate is my husband’s birthday. I get up early to make a cake for him. I decorate the house with balloons and signs. I try my best to cook a meal for my husband. The family usually gathers for a birthday lunch with singing and hugs and kisses for all. I tell my husband that I love him and am thankful for the good things he gives to us and the way he demonstrates his love for us. He is a blessing that God gave my family.

Jesus Christ's birthday is another celebration I observe. My family and I go to church and thank Him for all the blessings we have in our lives. We pray, eat, sing, and set up the nativity scene with the Baby Jesus in it. We visit friends' homes and watch family movies. I truly love this day.

These are only three celebrations that I observe. There are many more. I will continue these celebrations all my life.

Thelma Kennedy
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Celebrating Family Achievements

There are many things I like to celebrate. I celebrate in many different ways. Three things I like to celebrate are my children's good report cards, my children's graduations, and my children's school awards.

One achievement I celebrate is my children's good

report cards. I usually make a cake with their names on it with a fantastic phrase or something saying that they are doing great. We also make time so we can watch a family movie or just sit and read books. I let my children tell me how they got the good grades, so my younger children get an idea of what needs to be done to get good grades.

Another way I celebrate is with my children's graduations. When my children graduate, the whole family goes to the graduation ceremony. We all laugh and express our feelings and make the graduate feel very special. We usually let that child choose what we do as a family on Saturday. My older children praise the younger children for the accomplishment with lots of hugs and high-fives.



Theresa Abrego

School awards won by my children are celebrated.

My children bring home awards in mathematics, reading, and behavior. The child who brings home the award doesn't have to do their chores for that day. My children's accomplishments may seem like small things to other people, but I try to make the children know that I see how hard they work at getting those awards.

These are only three ways I celebrate different things in my life. There are many more celebrations that I observe. I am glad I have the chance to do these things for my children. When they smile and laugh, it means more than any words can say.

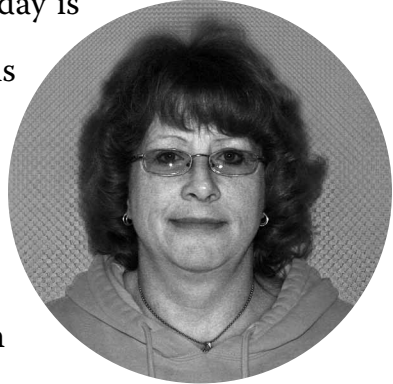
Theresa Abrego
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Celebrating the Little Things of Life

There are many things I like to celebrate in my life. These things include what we often take for granted.

Three of the things I celebrate are waking up in the morning, having a second chance in my life, and having my father in my life.

One thing I celebrate each day is waking up in the morning. As my eyes open widely, I thank the Lord for this day. As I sit on my porch with my cup of coffee in my hand, I take in the very early, peaceful morning.



RoDonna Carter

In the distance I can hear the birds singing as the stars and moon are shining down upon me. This is the time when I celebrate having a brand new day.

Another celebration I have is receiving a second chance in my life. This second chance I am very grateful to have, and I deserve to celebrate it well. Here I find myself being able to mend and correct my ways and to propel myself forward. I will spend the rest of my time in a good way.

Having my father here beside me is one of the biggest celebrations I could ever enjoy. It fills my heart with such warmth. It is a pleasure to know that he is here and to be able to reach out and grasp his hand and see him smile. I do deeply believe that having such a father as I do is a celebration in itself.

These are just three things that I celebrate in my life on a daily basis. There are others. These three, however, establish how my life will begin each day!

RoDonna Carter
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Celebrations and Traditions of Different Cultures

Celebration: “People do(ing) something enjoyable or memorable to mark such an occasion.” What kind of things? People always like to celebrate. People, no matter what nationality, like to celebrate new life. That is why we have holiday celebrations. People

do like new things. “New” always inspires freshness, life and hope.

Tradition: an “inherited or customary pattern of thought, action, or cultural continuity in social customs.” I have observed that traditions can last so many generations. Does that mean that people like to keep their old customs? I think people would rather keep old things, because it is hard to change their old habits.

Actually, human nature is contradictory. We all have the knowledge of what is good or bad but find it difficult to put into practice. In my opinion, each nationality always has its own good culture and/or tradition from which we can learn. To benefit from each other, we should learn good customs from others and examine our bad traditions.

Westerners are more civilized in many ways, probably due to religious influence. As a result, I have always enjoyed the good customer service here in

the states. On the other hand, Westerners should learn from Asian food culture, which promotes a more healthy diet and limits junk food.

We celebrate so many festivals in the U.S. every year. Do Americans notice that each celebration is accompanied by many sweet things such as candy, cookies, ice cream? Because these are traditional festival foods, people find them hard to resist. Can we imagine how these bad customs will influence people's health, especially how harmful they will be to our next generation?

In conclusion, celebration festivities are always good, but sometimes they come back to harm us.

Sheree Tso
Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Cindy

Cindy is a good friend to me. Cindy came down to stay with us in September. She came on the bus and

it took three days. Gary got her at the bus stop. She got here at 9:30 PM that night. We were happy to see her. We have good times together. Sometimes we just have fun at the lake. We want to go fishing.

Wednesdays, she helps me clean the house and four cabins. Cindy helps Gary and me make the beds, sweep the house, and do the wash. She also likes to wash the dishes. Cindy cooks our deer meat. It is good. Gary likes it. I am happy for her to come see me. Cindy is good to me in my heart.



Anna Trozera

Fridays, Cindy helps Gary clean house and wash a load of bed sheets again. I have a class. Cindy helps me with my homework. She is good to me and we have fun. It is good to talk with her. She is funny. We play cards and Yahtzee. We watch *Survivor* on TV. We downloaded and

play *Hooey* on the computer. Cindy also got to see my brother Russell, on the Internet.

Cindy made some pies that we took over to Sandy and Aaron's house for Thanksgiving dinner. We went to their house again on Christmas day. We took some presents with us. Cindy made the potato salad for dinner.

We love her and want her to stay for good. I told her she can stay here for good today. She is happy to be here at home with us.

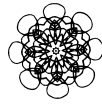
Anna Trozera
Pushmataha County Literacy Council, Antlers

Custom of Hospitality

I started my new life journey when I came to the US one year ago. I have so many sensitivities about my life here. I faced a big culture shock from many different things in my life. For example: in China, if a friend visited you in your home, the first thing

you did was make a cup of hot tea for them. The tea should be green tea, jasmine flower tea, or something similar. Then you sat there talking and enjoyed a good visit. This was a welcoming ceremony for anyone who visited you in your home.

In contrast to this, I find in the US that when you visit family or friends in their home, they don't make tea for you. I asked my husband, "Why don't they make any hot tea for their guests?" He said, "Usually people here like iced drinks." People do not often drink green tea in the US.



I thought this was not a good thing. I really miss this tradition. I told my husband that I didn't think I really wanted a cup of tea to drink, what I was looking for was that warm feeling when you visit someone.

He agreed that people from my country do better at welcoming guests. I think my husband understands what I think, even though I don't commu-

nicate well yet in English.

His friend told him that the Chinese are so nice after visiting us. In fact, everybody likes this warm feeling. They like Chinese tea as tea has a long history and culture.

Now that I am learning many customs from life here, I feel more and more comfortable and easy as we learn each other's cultures and customs.

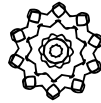
Lifang Fisk
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Day of the Death in Janitzio, Michoacan, Mexico

My state has many traditions, but one of the most important ones is the Day of the Death. This is celebrated every year on November 1st and 2nd. This celebration is on a small island named Janitzio which sits in the middle of a lake. The people can be transported to the island in a small boat.

The natives go to the cemetery on November 1st and clean the tombs of their dead family members. They decorate with many yellow chrysanthemums, and make crosses out of these flowers. They put meals; tequila, bread, wine, or anything that the person liked, on the grave. They also put candles on the graves. The people stay all night praying and singing traditional songs in their native language.

They wear traditional clothes.



On November 2nd, they continue celebrating. The island has many restaurants where the people can eat delicious and traditional meals. One dish that I like more is white fish cooked in many different ways, because this fish is native to the area. The celebration finishes late in the afternoon, and the people that do not live on the island take a small boat to return to their homes.

Every Country, Original and Unique

My name is Edith Garcia. I'm from Mexico. My family and I moved here almost three years ago. All these years have been difficult for me because I left behind most of the important things in my life: part of my family, my friends, my culture, and my traditions.

One of the things that I miss a lot from where I used to live is the San Marcos National Fair. This fair takes place in the city of Aguascalientes, Mexico and is a precious tradition. Every year for three weeks from April to May, thousands of visitors go to this fair to enjoy all the happiness that fills the streets.

This fair is actually one of the biggest in Mexico and has a lot of activities. The most popular among these is the bull and cock fighting. They also organize folkloric dancing, cultural and religious events,

spectacular fireworks, and mechanical games. They are all open to the public.

Another important event that they have in this fabulous fair is the beauty contest. This event consists of choosing the queen of the fair. The candidates must be sympathetic and beautiful and have courage, determination, and dedication.

Definitely every country has a lot of interesting traditions, celebrations, and ways to distinguish itself from others. This makes every nation on this planet original and unique. I am really happy to be part of a country that preserves and grows the important things like customs and traditions.

Edith Garcia
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Fourth

When I was a little girl I loved the Fourth of July. My whole family would get together and have a huge

barbeque. Everyone would bring their special dish, and by the time everyone arrived we had an abundance of summer favorites to eat.

Looking back is funny because I remember we would all be talking and laughing. We were very loud. That is, until it came time to eat. Then, all you could hear was the sound of serving spoons and forks hitting dishes. That's when someone would realize how quiet it was and say or do something to make the whole family laugh again.

After we ate, all the kids would get together down by the creek to swim and play in the sand. My brother would always try to scare us by throwing firecrackers. But, after the first time, we would watch for him and throw buckets of water on him. I will never forget the look on his face when the water hit him. It was hilarious! After the shock wore off, he would chase us back to the house just in time for dessert.

After stuffing ourselves with fresh fruit, we would get ready for the fireworks. We started with little fireworks and then would move to the pasture for the main show. We had at least a truck load every year. I loved seeing the fireworks light up the sky with colors of red, blue, and green. It was beautiful.

I feel like my childhood was another world. I still love the Fourth of July because it reminds me of that life. That life was not about bills, work, or money; it was just about family, friends, and happiness. I guess the Fourth still reminds me to have fun and to enjoy life.

Melanie Chapman
Ada Adult Learning Center

I Like to Celebrate

I like to celebrate Easter. It's a fun time to dye eggs, spend time with family and friends, and have a cook out. Easter Day only comes once a year. There are

many different kinds of celebrations throughout the year, but Easter Day is the only one that lets you have an egg hunt.



First, you get to dye eggs with your kids, then decorate them; however, there are plastic eggs you can fill with candy, money, or tattoos. They also make eggs that have confetti inside them and you can bust those eggs on top of someone's head and run away.

Next, you get to see relatives, friends, and other family members you have not seen in a while. It's nice to get to visit. This year was special to me; there was a new family member born on Easter Day. It made it more special to remember.

Finally, at every celebration, there is always a great cookout and some good food, music, and fun. We make hot dogs, hamburgers, and different kinds of Mexican meats and salsas. It's so delicious! Towards the end, dessert comes; and there are so many different kinds of sweets to make the meal finished.

Then, when you are so full and you feel so relaxed, you're ready for a nap.

At last, you get to spend time together with family and friends. You get to have a nice egg hunt and the kids have so much fun finding the eggs, cracking the eggs, and eating the candy. There's a great cook out and you get so full and happy. So, this is my favorite holiday to celebrate, even though throughout the year there are a whole lot more holidays. This year, it was the best.

Abby Jaramillo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Immigrants, Not Americans, Must Adapt

I am tired of our nation worrying about whether we are offending some individual or their culture. I am not against immigration, nor do I hold a grudge against anyone who is seeking a better life by com-

ing to America. Our population is almost entirely comprised of descendants of immigrants. However, there are a few things that those who have recently come to our country, and apparently some born here, need to understand.

The idea of America being a multicultural community has served only to dilute our sovereignty and our national identity. As Americans, we have our own culture, our own society, our own language, and our own lifestyle. This culture of being “American” has been developed over centuries of struggles, trials and victories by millions of men and women who have sought freedom. We speak English, not Spanish or any other language. Therefore, if you wish to become part of our culture, learn the language!

“In God We Trust” is our national motto. This is not some Christian, right wing political slogan we adopted. It’s based on the fact that Christians

founded this nation and that fact is clearly documented. If God offends you, then I suggest you consider another part of the world as your new home because God is a part of our culture.

We are happy with our culture and have no desire to change it. This is our country, our land, and our lifestyle. Our First Amendment gives every citizen the right to express their opinion and freedom to do so. But, once you're finished complaining and whining about our flag, our pledge, our national motto, or our way of life, I highly encourage you to take advantage of another great American freedom: the Right To Leave.

Carl Holland
Ada Adult Learning Center

It's a Small World

The first time I met Carl was at the dollar store. I asked Carl if he would like to go out. I was holding

my breath and he said yes!

Later, I asked Carl where he was born and found out we were born in the same place. We were born in the same hospital, the Shawnee Medical Center. And we—Carl Haugh and Glenda Jones—were delivered by the same doctor. I was born October 2, 1954, and Carl was born October 24, 1952.

My mother's name was Pauline Hill Jones, and



Glenda Jones

Carl's mother's name was Evelyn Haugh, and both of those ladies worked at the same hospital. They both worked in the emergency room during the night shift at the hospital. We don't

know if they knew one another or not.

Glenda Jones
Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

I Want to Celebrate My New H.T.S. Helper

Paula is not my H.T.S. (Habilitative Training Specialist) helper anymore. My new H.T.S. helper is Erin Archer. I just met her today. She's nice. I do not know much about her. I would like to know her favorite color. I like to tell her about me. I'm excited to go to the movies, go bowling, and go have fun! We are going to do fun things together that I want to do. We go shopping together and go out to eat. When I'm with Erin, I learn how to count money. I'm happy when I'm with her.

Paula Jan Watson
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

Love Distance

There is a place in Mexico I will never forget called Aguascalientes (ah-gwahs-kah-lee-EN-tais), a city northeast of Guadalajara, where my parents were



born and reared. Traveling by car though Mexico, I remember seeing giant cacti, mountains, and a large never ending desert. I also recall the first time I saw a roadrunner.

Ana Reyes

As we approached the city, the smell of fresh guava filled the air.

My family was waiting for our arrival with a big welcome and warm food. We had tortillas, tamales, and gordas, all handmade. The different foods were made just for us. All of our family was there to welcome us, even the smallest member of the family. Surrounded by so much love makes you forget about missing home. This has taught me that no matter how much distance separates families and culture, the bonds of love still remain strong.

Ana Reyes
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

Lunar New Year

My husband and I returned to Vietnam after twenty years. We wanted to celebrate the Lunar New Year with our family. We arrived in Vietnam at midnight after a twenty-hour trip. We were very tired, but we were with our family.

Lunar New Year is known as Spring Festival, celebrated on February 3, 2011. This is a very important holiday for Vietnamese people and other Asians. One week before the New Year, people clean their houses. They replace broken things with new things, decorate rooms, doors and windows. It is important for Vietnamese people to have a big jar of yellow forsythias in the house. Most houses have forsythia growing in the gardens because it means good luck for the whole year.

All of the family members gathered on New Year's Eve. We had a variety of food for the feast: meat stew with eggs, bamboo soup with duck, BBQ meat slices



Lyn Vuong

rolled with rice papers with fish sauce salad, egg rolls, and beer. We went back to the old time with all the talking, forgiving, and wishing. We had fun, and I enjoyed it a lot.

Since my husband and I are the eldest in the family, all of my siblings, nieces, nephews, and others came to visit us on the morning of the New Year. My husband and I gave the lucky red envelopes with money inside to the children and young members of the family. We gave them our wishes for prosperity and happiness in a long life.

I stayed home ten days for the New Year because all of the stores and shopping centers were closed. Then, I went to the temples and visited my friends and family members.

Lyn Vuong
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City

Mark's Celebration

I like to celebrate my family. I lived in Picher, Oklahoma, with my Mom. In 1999, we went to Miami to visit my Mom's brother, Uncle Buster. I met Donna at Uncle Buster's house. We went on our first date in 2005 to the Picher fair. I bought her an Indian taco. We also watched his house together while Buster and Luanne went on a trip.



I asked her to marry me at the fair. She said, "yes," in June. We got married on August 2, 2005. We got married in Buster's front yard. We lived in Picher in my Mom's house. We moved to Miami in 2007, one month before the F4 tornado hit and destroyed Picher. Donna got me to join the Miami literacy program in 2008. She wants me to go.

We like to go to the movies and to the park and sit at the picnic tables. We also go to swim in the pool

or to Grand Lake where we have a campground to stay at.

We live in our house in Miami with our daughter, grandson and lots of dogs. We got our first dog at Afton after we got married. We got two more dogs for our son and daughter, then friends from Grove gave us two more. We bought a dog for our grandson and we had a puppy from one of our dogs. Including my daughter's and husband's dog, we now have 8 dogs that live with us. That's a lot of family to look after!

Mark Murray
Miami Literacy Council

My Beautiful Daughter Ivy

I have a four year old daughter whose name is Ivy Heavenly and she is the most loving child. She was born in Missouri, where we lived until about five months ago. We had to move to Oklahoma when

my mother got sick and passed away. It was really tough on us, but Ivy kept me going from day to day. She would hug me and say, “Mom, it’s going to be okay. She’s with God in Heaven.” One day Ivy told me, “When I get old like you, mom, I’m going to work for God so he can have a day off, but he has to work nights because it’s my bed time.”



Maple Burch

Ivy is beautiful because she’s so loving and smart. She has the most beautiful color of green eyes I’ve ever seen. They are green with little bits of brown specks in the middle. She also has a good attitude and a great sense of humor for a four year old.

Ivy is very helpful in many ways. From picking up the house, or going to town and seeing someone that needs help. Ivy will tell me, “Momma, we need

to make them some food.” I don’t think I could ask for a more caring and helpful daughter. Another day, Ivy told me, “When I grow up, I’m going to be a doctor so when you’re sick, I’ll make you soup and rub your tummy.” She never stops wanting to help.

I am so glad that Ivy is turning out to be so loving and compassionate. I don’t get to spend as much time with her as I want to because of school. Watching Ivy grow into this loving and compassionate person is a very big deal to me.

Maple Burch
NEO Adult Learning Center, Miami

My Egg Adventure

There was a time, a long time ago, we were on an adventure to Mexico. I was so excited to go! Our journey seemed like it took forever; or maybe I was just so anxious to get there.

The trip was around Christmas time and that is a

fun time of the year in Mexico. Christmas visions include seeing baby Jesus and people praying the rosary. You can smell the tamales in the air.



For some reason, that year, all the animals had babies; and for some odd reason I got this idea in my head that I could hatch a chicken's egg. So everywhere I went, I took my egg. I even took such good care of it that I carried it around in my purse with a little warm pallet to stay warm. Somewhere in that little head of mine, I really thought that my egg would hatch.

My mom didn't pay too much attention to what I had in my purse. When it was getting closer and closer to go back home, my mom still hadn't noticed the egg. You are not allowed to bring any kind of animal or fruit back into the United States. We were close to the border when mom finally noticed my purse and asked me what I was hiding. I said nothing! She

took my purse and threw my egg away.

I didn't think an egg would matter; it was not an animal yet. I was so upset that I cried all the way home.

In the end, I really thought that my egg would hatch.

Camila Avalos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Family Tradition

I love to celebrate the Fourth of July. On this day, my family comes together and we go to Stars and Strips Park at Lake Hefner. We play games and take the children to the playground while my dad barbecues. He puts hotdogs, hotlinks, chickens, hamburgers, and ribs on the grill. I bring the sides and the cakes.

After my dad is finished cooking the food, we all come together. We pray over the food and begin to eat. We eat and eat until our bellies pop. Then, while we wait for our bellies to go down, we talk

about what we have done or are doing in our lives.

After a while, we head back to my dad’s house to watch movies until we are ready to go to a field to pop “a thousand dollars worth” of fireworks. We go to this same



Michaela Owens

field every year; there are always many people there. We all pack into our cars and head to the field early, so we can get a good spot. We set up a tent for the little children to sit in while we pop firecrackers.

Then as we wait for the sun to go down, we watch other people pop their firecrackers. After the sun goes all the way down, we get our fireworks out for our own grand finale.

I love celebrating the Fourth of July. It is the only time my family really gets together.

Michaela Owens
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My Favorite Celebrations

My favorite celebration as a child was when I had birthday parties. I played games with my friends, ate ice cream, and opened my presents. We had a lot of fun. When I was young, my large family would come to my birthday parties. As I have gotten older, only a few family members and my parents come to my parties.

Family traditions are very important to me. It helps keep my family together, and keeps us in touch with each other. Getting together with my family on special holidays and Sunday afternoon after church are ways to help my family stay together as a unit. It is important for family to make memories because we will have each other in our hearts forever.

I like to celebrate Christmas, because it is my favorite time of the year. It is the time to put up the decorations outside of the house, decorate the inside

of the house, and decorate the Christmas tree. My Christmas routine consists of finding the perfect gift for the people on my list, driving around town and seeing the Christmas lights, and attending Christmas Eve services. On Christmas morning, we get up at the crack of dawn, open presents, and enjoy each other's company.

Holly Herring
New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

My Favorite Time of Year

As a child, I used to love the beginning of Ramadan. Every Muslim celebrates by starting to fast and continues this for the entire month of Ramadan.

Why do you think this was my favorite time of year? It is because it is a special time for small kids to act like adults and receive a lot of care and respect. It shows that you are big now by fasting the entire day and praying at night as well.

I used to like the special routines of the entire month. There is good and special food at night, especially the sweets and candy we had every night. Families and friends spend the time together as one big family. The grandparents read stories and the Quran to the kids, which keeps them busy so they don't think about food and being hungry. There is a competition between the kids to see who can fast for the entire day and complete the whole month.

And, of course, the best part for the small kids is preparing for the most special night, which is the last night of Ramadan, called Laylat al-Qadr. On that night, you can offer a special prayer and ask whatever you wish for. You spend the last days before this preparing for the Eid and the end of the month. You wear your Eid clothes and celebrate the end of the month. It sure was different when you were a small kid.

My New Year's Resolution

We all tend to make New Year's Resolutions. Many times, it is very easy not to follow through on them. This year my New Year's Resolution is to get more focused on my children, myself, my schooling, and my employment. I feel these things are most important this year to me.

My first step is to start spending more time with my children in their after school activities, and spend more quality time with them also. I would love to start taking them to the aquarium and zoo again.

My second step is to focus on myself more; it seems as if I don't get enough time to myself. I want to get more involved with my schooling. I plan on getting more involved with my education by studying harder to prepare myself for the big test, and also by looking for employment that I'm satisfied with.

My third step: I know I have to get proper transportation in order to fulfill these needs properly.

By pacing myself to do better on my school work, in order to complete my GED exam, I know I will have to study harder in my five subject areas; and after I complete my GED exam, I will enroll for further education, probably in cosmetology.



In order for me to achieve my New Year's Resolution, I know I will have to be serious about my goals, and I want to enroll in cosmetology because I love to make people happy and feel better about themselves. I know I can only start and finish one task at a time and I don't want to overwhelm myself with too much to do. I know if I follow my goals they should be completed by the end of October, 2011.

Shanie Harris
Union Public Schools Adult Learning Center, Tulsa

My Son

On March 24, 1984, my son was born at the hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. I was there to see his birth. It was wonderful. Wow! I had chills. And, I still get them when I remember holding him in my arms and kissing his little pink butt.



Ray Verhoeven

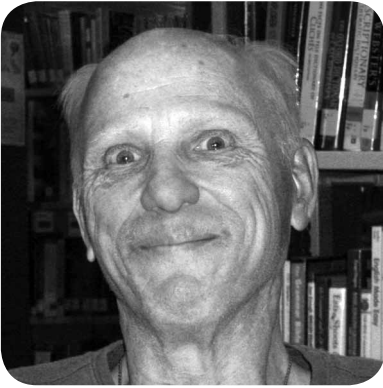
It wasn't long before that pretty little boy found his voice box.

Back then, I rode a big, shiny, black Kawasaki. Jesse got his first ride when he was 4 months old. He was teething, crying and wouldn't shut up. So, this time, I held him to my chest, mounted my bike, and revved up the motor. Surprise! The crying stopped. Peace! We drove around the block in first gear. Today, that same little boy rides Kawasakis too. It's in his blood.

Jesse just turned 27. He's a grown man. But when I see him, I see that little boy. When I hug him, I'm holding that little boy. That will never change.

Ray Verhoeven
Community Literacy Centers, Oklahoma City

My Traditions



Carl Haugh

I am taking literacy classes to be able to read and write. This is a promise I made to my parents before they passed away. I am working with Hooked on Phonics material to improve my reading.

I come from a large family and we always celebrated Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. I love family reunions where I get to see all my cousins, aunt and uncles. I enjoy attending my church, where I am an

honorary usher and part-time security person.

I am willing to help others in my family when they need help. My dad and I were very close and traveled to Utah and California in his truck.

Carl Haugh
Pottawatomie County Literacy Program, Shawnee

My Very Special Christmas Memories

When I was younger, I liked to celebrate Christmas Day because it's the day when all the family members got together. My grandmother, my aunts and my mother brought all types of food like tamales, carnitas, turkey, fruit punch, champurrado, bunuelos and tamales de dulce.

I really enjoyed those moments, especially when we shared dinner. We set a big table so we could all be together. Everybody was happily enjoying food and sharing special moments.

The most exciting time for me and my cousins was when it came time to open presents. Then the whole family was happily taking pictures. My mother made games for the kids and adults to play. We also had a piñata with a bunch of candies and oranges inside. They used to make us cover our eyes to make it more fun.



After all that fun, we got together in a circle and prayed. We gave thanks to God because we were all together. Then everybody gave each other a hug.

When the music started playing, the adults would start dancing. This was my favorite time because I danced with my father. All the cousins would be playing around with their new toys, running or dancing. In this way, I celebrated very special Christmases.

Now, I share these special memories with my children. I teach my kids to enjoy family being together

and to remember all the special days and moments they have in their lives. I try to make Christmas very special so my children will have happy Christmases to remember like I do.

Brenda Secundino
Community Literacy Centers, Oklahoma City

New Years Celebration

The Chinese New Year is one of my most favorite celebrations. The Chinese New Year is also called the Lunar New Year. It is important and full of meaning to Chinese people and other Asians as well. People clean their houses, buy new clothes, and get a haircut before the New Year. These activities mean throwing away bad luck and receiving good luck. We see a lot of red decorations on the streets, stoves, and houses during this season. Red is a traditional color for the New Year. It means good luck and blessings.

On New Year's Eve, all the members of the family go back home and have a feast at a round table. A round table means full of happiness. We wake up early on the first day of the New Year. We wear new clothes and greet our parents. After that, we visit other family members and greet one another. At this time, all the children are very happy because they get "hong bao" from married relatives. "Hong bao" means red envelope, and inside the red envelope is money.

At night, we play cards, eat, and have fun together. We wait until midnight to invite "wealthy God" to our home. After that, the fireworks begin. The people believe the noise of the fireworks scares away the bad spirits. During Chinese New Year, there are a lot of performances. The most famous one is the lion dance and it is also my son's favorite performance. During the New Year season, everyone feels warm and happy towards others.

They forgive each other for any bad things. I think this good tradition of courtesy should be spread to the next generation. It will let them know that this special New Year time is very meaningful.

Kelly Teoh
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Oklahoma Football & Daddy

Everyone has a childhood memory they are fond of and that brings a smile to their face. My favorite celebration memory occurred in 2000. It involved my daddy and the University of Oklahoma's winning football team. Three reasons why it is my favorite childhood celebration are because my dad and I spent the day together, he counted on me to wave the OU flag, and I got to grill with him.

One childhood celebration I enjoyed was the winning of an OU football game. It is my favorite memory because I got to spend all day with my dad. Every

Saturday was “our day”—a special time for both of us. Even though he is not here anymore, I still think about him every “Football Saturday” during playing season.



Another reason why the winning of an OU game is my favorite childhood memory celebration is because my dad counted on me to wave the OU flag. I loved how he would ask where his baby girl was and say that he needed me in the back of the truck with the OU flag. I really loved everything about that day. Waving that flag was the best thing I could ever do.

Grilling out with my dad during an OU game is a favorite childhood memory of mine, too. I got to be his “side man” next to the grill. I got him everything he needed, and I did it with pride. To this day, I miss my Saturdays with my daddy.

These are only three reasons why OU Football Saturdays are a favorite childhood celebration of

mine. There are many more. I can only hope that someday my children will feel what I feel for a true father figure.

Shanda Arndt
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Panama: Center of the World, Heart of the Universe

I was born in Panama. I will tell you about my country.

The Republic of Panama is a small country (with an area of only 29,762 square miles), and an estimated population in 2008 of 3.4 million. Its capital city, Panama City, founded in 1519, is also the largest city in the country. A mountain range runs through the center of the country, with coastal plains on either side. A diver can dive in the Caribbean and in the Pacific Ocean within two hours, since

Panama is so narrow.

Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903, and signed a treaty with the United States allowing for the construction of the Panama Canal and control over a strip of land ten miles on either side of the structure, the Panama Canal Zone. The Panama Canal was built by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1904 and 1914. On September 7, 1977, an agreement was signed for the transfer of the Canal from the United States to Panama by the end of 1999. The entire Panama Canal was turned over to Panama on December 31, 1999.

Because workers from many countries came to work in the construction of the canal, Panamanians are mostly of mixed descent—indigenous Indians, Afro-Caribbeans, Italians, Spanish, Arabs, Jews, and Asians. Many Americans, Chinese, and others are now moving to Panama and building houses. My family is now prosperous and many people in

Panama are benefitting from an expansion of the canal. My country is small, but very beautiful; and it is a place that brings together many people from all over the world. That is why Panamanians say, “Panama is the center of the world, the heart of the universe.”

Mitza Johnson
New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

The Race Is On

On a Sunday afternoon in April, my family and I went to Remington Park to watch the horses, camels, and ostriches race.

Shortly after we arrived, we watched a few horse races. Then we went inside to get snacks. After eating, some of the family went upstairs to play games while I stayed with the kids. We went to an outside waterfall and watched the birds play in it.

Later, we all met back up at the race stands. We

watched trainers get ostriches ready to race by putting them in individual cages, so jockeys could mount them. The jockeys had to climb on their backs and hold on to their necks. Some were able to do this with ease while others kept slipping off.



Then the race began. From the start, one ostrich kicked its jockey off. It bolted to the finish line, stopped and then jumped over the barrier. The trainers had to chase him down. We all laughed and laughed!

Next, we watched trainers get camels ready by putting cage-like devices on their backs. During this time, one trainer kept getting squished against the fence by a camel. This trainer wasn't very happy; he kept swatting the camel. Finally, he was able to move it and finished preparing it for the race. The camels were then lead to the starting line. When the race began, they scattered everywhere. It was so funny to see: there were camels running to the finish

line, camels going the opposite direction, and camels just standing in one place. After the race ended, we watched the trainers slowly corral them. Then we went home.

We all had a great time. I can definitely say it was a very memorable first-time experience for us all.

Melanie Gardner
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

The Sacred Recipe

When I was eight years old, I went into the kitchen with my Grandma for the first time. I was so excited to be there with her. She told me, “I’m going to tell you a secret of the family. It is a sacred recipe.” I got choked up when she told me that. It was me she picked to cook with her and not my cousins. Cooking with grandma is very, very special. I was so happy when we started to get out the different dishes. We took out a lot of different food.

I looked at my grandma and smiled. She asked me, “Are you ready to cook?” I smiled and told her, “Yes, I am ready to cook with you.” “This is a sacred recipe in the family,” she told me again. We started cooking. The room started to smell so good. Mmmm, it smelled so good! “Grandma, it is making me so, so hungry.”

Some other similar dishes prepared by others are just not the same. I am so sorry that I cannot give you my grandma’s recipe because it is a family secret. Just like my sister always says now when she is cooking, “This is a sacred recipe.”

Erica Calzada
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

The Special Day

I want to share the way that we celebrate Saturday as the Special Day of God. We are Seventh Day Adventist, and we believe that the Saturday starts

from Friday at sunset. We stop working usually around 6 PM on Friday because we start preparing for the next day, which is a special day for us. On Friday, I start cleaning my home and I like to make the beds, because that gives it a different touch. (This is not a rule, but I like to do it.)

At the beginning of Saturday (Friday afternoon) we meet with family to worship. On that Day, we don't work in our own businesses, but we spend time with family, and we go to church. From Friday, we cook special food for that day, usually vegetarian food, but not necessarily. It is very special and healthy and if it is possible, we eat it on special dishes. We don't watch TV just in case it's an unfit program and finally, we wear our best clothes to go to worship. We finish our celebration Saturday at sunset. This celebration is written in the Bible and had been a blessing for all that practice it. I love to do that very good spiritual experi-

ence because I want my kids to do that when they have their own families.

Ninett Campos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Third of May, Day of the Holy Cross

In my town, Cd. Manuel Doblado, Gto, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross. The feast starts on April 25.

Inside the church is a statue of our Father Jesus. The priest takes the statue down from the niche and puts it on the side of the altar where it stays for the next nine days. During this time, people are coming from neighboring towns, along with the people of my town. We meet at the outskirts and then we walk to the church.

When all the people arrive at the church, mass

begins. We celebrate the feast of our Father Jesus for nine days. On the last three days, May first, second, and third, we have music outside the church and we also celebrate with quema de castillo. This is similar to fireworks, a tall wooden structure with different figures. At night the quema de castillo is lit for everybody to see.



Silvia Reyes

There are also food stands and games, and people sell clothes, and there are also amusement rides. On the last day when all is over, we finish the feast with dancing.

I have lived in the US for 14 years and I still miss my traditions.

Silvia Reyes
Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore

Traditions: Bringing Families Together

Traditions are a way for a group of people to show their heritage and culture. These are trademarks that distinguish each culture as unique. They are very special to me because celebrating traditions usually brings my family together.

During these days I get to see family members whom I have not seen in a long time.

One of my favorite traditions is “Las Posadas.” This is a Mexican tradition that represents the journey that Mary had to take to get to the place where she gave birth to Jesus Christ. I enjoy these days because my family sponsors one of these Posadas, which consist of making an altar for the figures representing Mary and Joseph during the journey to Bethlehem. They go from house to house for nine days until December 25, when Jesus was born.

The person who sponsors one of the Posadas also has to make a dinner to thank the people who went to pray. One of the traditional foods served during a Posada is tamales, which are a kind of Mexican food that is also very popular around the world.

For me, these are special days because they remind me of my hometown. I was born in a part of Mexico where this tradition is really big. Many people throughout Mexico celebrate this day, and now we are bringing it to the melting pot of the United States. With traditions like these, diversity grows even more.

These traditions are and will always be part of my life because I grew up celebrating them. They are a way for me to keep my culture in mind and know that when I am celebrating these traditions, someone in my hometown is also doing the same thing.

Adriana Salas
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Unforgettable

My birthday celebration when I was eleven was unforgettable and the best. My parents made an effort to give me many happy feelings by inviting friends and family to my party. My mother cooked Mexican food. She liked to cook molé and tamales. I had a big piñata, cake, candies, and gifts to give to kids who participated in the games. Every kid came with a different costume on. I dressed in a large dress with big colorful flowers typical of my country and red high heels. I was excited, and I received many gifts from my friends, neighbors, and family. That party was the best of my childhood.

Letty Guillen
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City

What I Like to Celebrate

I like to celebrate me just being alive. I like to celebrate me being in the world. I like to celebrate

me being a mother. I like to celebrate me being a woman. I like to celebrate me having a good auntie, who has taken me into her home. If it wasn't for her, I don't know where I would be. She taught me how to take care of myself and not depend on anyone else.



Keneca Cleveland

I like to celebrate my kids.

I like to celebrate God for giving them to me. I like to celebrate my kids' birthdays. I like to celebrate them for being alive. We make each other laugh and enjoy each other's company. I learn from all four of them as they grow and develop as individuals. I like to celebrate God blessing me each and every day.

I like to celebrate food because I love to eat. I cook spicy foods and bake chocolate chip cookies with walnuts. Fruit salads and chef salads are two of my favorites.

I like to celebrate animals because they are such cool and unique creatures. When I was a child, I had a pet cat named Tigger, who did tricks, such as prancing and dancing.

I like to celebrate me going back to school. I like to celebrate me having good classmates because if I didn't have good classmates, I would probably be mad all the time for coming to class. I like to celebrate having such good teachers.

I love to celebrate all of the holidays, especially Christmas and Thanksgiving, because those are the times my family really comes together.

Keneca Cleveland
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Poetry

Festival of the Lantern

Many Europeans and Western people believe the tales that full moons are caused by witches, wild wolves, ghosts, etc. In my country, the full moon means prosperity, especially on the Lunar Calendar for Chinese people and other Asians. They make good wishes and eat vegetables for that day.

We celebrate the full moon every year in September, but in August for the Lunar Calendar. We eat the moon cakes with tea and admire the bright moon. Meanwhile, the children hold the colorful lighted lanterns. They walk in small groups through the streets and sing the moonlight song. I loved this song that I sang as a child, and it is in my mind forever:

Moonlight, moonlight

Please night come out

With your brightening light

So I can see the woodcutter

Aside by the tanian tree.

He missed his land; he missed his house.

What is he wishing? What is he dreaming?

Phuong Ly
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City


My Greatest Victory

My greatest victory is my child. I was terrified when I first found out I was pregnant. Now, I am proud to call myself a mother. My son has inspired me to accomplish other victories in life that I would not have attempted before. My fear was a struggle, and my victory is my son. To my greatest victory in life I give this:

At first word of your existence, there was fear.

Now that I look into your eyes of sapphire-blue, I
catch a joyous tear.

On my days that I start early, while you are still
asleep in bed, I come and watch you before I
leave to go to class.

When I come home angry and full of hate, I
 cannot wait to see you smile at me and
hear your voice call, "Mama."

I find strength in your hugs and kisses.

I find joy in all of your new discoveries.

Your eyes of blue are filled with innocence that I
find myself eager to protect.

Your touch and presence inspire me to
accomplish more.

You are a part of me, the most important part.

Keaigon, my son, you are my greatest victory
in life.

As you can see, I owe a lot to my child. I have strug-
gled a lot in my life. For my son to come along and
change all of these things, I must call him my great-

est victory in life. With the help of my greatest victory, I can accomplish many more things that are to come in life.

Alex Steed
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Struggles Have Made Me a Better Woman

My life has been a whirlwind of ups and downs.

I had lost my children but I turned it around.

I've had plenty of loss and not much gain.

Even then it seemed

all the same.

I have three beautiful little girls and that is a

struggle,

But without them,

I would truly crumble.

My family and I were on the outs;

I felt like such a slouch.



Crystal Hayes

But now that we are one,
Nothing can stop me from
getting my GED done.

It fills my eyes with tears
to think I wasted all these
years,

But now, I'm getting it done. I will not stop at just
this one.

I will be going on to college and getting a career

As the sky is my limit, and, thank God,
it's so near.

Crystal Hayes
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Surge

Born and raised in New Orleans

Had some struggles

Just turned eighteen

Found out I'm pregnant

Was starting senior year

Thinking it is going to stop me

Then clouds got darker

The winds got stronger

Rain began to come down hard

Hurricane Katrina destroyed my city

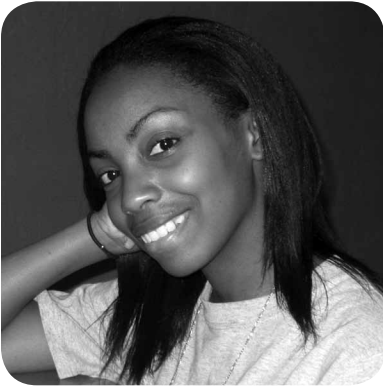
Was pregnant

Trapped for days in the Superdome

Wondering when the next meal would come

A week went by

Buses came to take us to safety



Jamika Wheeler

Reached the destination

But was told no room

Now stranded

Still no water, no food

No place to go

Finally taken in

Treated as part of another family

Now we have

A place to call home

Tried to finish school

But had no help

The hardest decision was made

My own education was sacrificed

The condition of dropping out

Three years go by

I'm pregnant with second child

Things beginning to be on bumpy roads

No job

Living from house to house

Time to make better choices

Daughter is born

Came to Oklahoma City

Applied for assistance

Now back on track

Things a little easier this time

Got back into school

Preparing for GED

Daughters now have stability

We're on the right path

Victories are coming soon

Jamika Wheeler
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

The Wisest Person I've Ever Known

Walter Joseph Edward Jesuit was the wisest person I have known. This Polish man is my dad. He lived an adventurous life. He travelled all over



Sherrie Jesuit

the world. He was a hard worker, always caring about his family. He was a smart old man, he knew everything. His family called him “Mr. Peabody.” My dad died on February 6, 2010, from heart and stomach problems. The following poem is about him.

My dad is dead and gone,
Away forever; I wish there was something I could
have done.
I hate that he is gone.

I hate that sadness is in my life.

He was my best friend and a dad.

You left me for good.

Why do I feel this way?

Why can't my sadness go away?

I miss you so much.

My life is not the same without you.

I hope someday I will be with you up there in
heaven.

He once told me that he wanted me to do better in
my life, not to do worse, to take care of his grand-
kids and that he loved me. Those were his last words
to me.

Sherrie Jesuit
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Six Haiku

Hefner Park

walking with small dogs

white boat going to sail

blue birds singing song

Oklin Lee

OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

birds chirping tweet tweet

flying diving hunting fast

colorful feathers

Guadalupe Lutts

OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

the parakeet sleeps

the monkeys ate bananas

the mouse laughed at them

Guadalupe Lutts

OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

blue sky morning clouds

green sea swimming boy wears red

twinkly sand, sun smile

Young gi Jung

OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

girl looks beautiful

slow walking on the green grass

leaves are falling down

RoJoni Liliavn Baori

OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

heavy wind is coming

grey leaves falling in autumn

weather dryness is windy

Adelard Mongu
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

**Struggles
and
Victories**

A Better Me! A Better Me!

My name is Le, Trang Dai Pham. I wrote this story on a beautiful sunny morning, when I'd just passed over my darkest hours. Twenty three years ago, I was born in a happy family; every memory was so wonderful that I will never forget. As people



Trang Dai Pham Le

say “too good to be true,” it was true, but it could not last any longer. A few days before my 11th birthday, something had happened to my family that made us move from property to poverty life. And the worst thing is I had to stay far away from my mother for a long time. I was not mature enough to understand what was going on, but I had to accept it as true. I lost my familiar house, I lost my mother’s warm hugs, I lost the sound of happiness, I lost everything and couldn’t see my future.

My life was covered by darkness and sadness. I had to choose who I wanted to be. Instead of being disappointed in life and letting time go on in vain, I decided to stand up, and then fight. I tried to study hard, find some jobs, and open my heart to welcome the miracles in life. The only thing that was never lost is my belief in God, in love, and in life. Last year, my mother and I were reunited. How happy we are together! Everything is gradually being settled down. Now, I see the sunshine, I hear the laughter, I touch the happiness. After all, I realize that my life is a race. With love and belief, every day I become a better me!

Trang Dai Pham Le
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

A Second Chance

As a teenager, I always loved school. I was involved in sports and after school activities. Then my life

changed. At seventeen I was pregnant. When I took that pregnancy test and it came out positive, all I could do was cry. My dreams and goals, even hopes for a better life seemed to be all gone.

Soon after, I dropped out and started working. I packed all my dreams away. My hours at work became longer just so I could make ends meet. I soon found myself drifting from my family and from myself. I was losing everything when I thought I was gaining. Soon I started to think, “This is it for me,



I’ll never become what I’ve always wanted, so why care anymore.”

More hard times came, and the good times would come, but leave even faster. The stress and financial problems became unbearable. Something finally hit me. It felt like an unexplainable push of encouragement; where it came from only God knows. I was fed up with where I was. I gained what energy I had left and made a life changing decision.

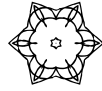
That change brought me to Workforce Oklahoma where I am now preparing for my GED. This, to me, is my second chance. I realize I can't pass up this opportunity. My selfish thoughts and needs are no longer a priority for me. Getting a higher education so that I can truly influence my kids has become my motivation. To me, actions always speak louder than words. So, telling my children that school is important and that it pays off isn't enough for me. I want to show them and lead them. I want to be their special somebody, and this second chance for an education will do just that.

Donetta Stewart
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

A Second Chance: To Be Alive

My name is Maria Bermudez. I have five children—three boys and two girls, and a wonderful husband.

My family is the most important thing that I have in this world.



I am an ESL student. I'm taking the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) class at this moment. I moved to Oklahoma three years ago. Since I moved here, I have had more time for myself. I started taking computer classes. Then I decided to take ESL classes to help my younger children with their homework and to be able to go to the meetings and talk to their teachers.

Struggles in life have made me a stronger and better person. I have learned that life is not easy and that I have to fight for what I want and be positive no matter what. Tomorrow is always a new day.

My greatest victory is to be alive. I was in a close call twenty years ago. I was shot three times and everybody thought that I was dead. The doctors kept asking me if I could move my legs. They couldn't believe that I was able to move them. I couldn't move my

arms for a long time. They said that was one of the miracles they've seen and that just one of those bullets could have caused my death. They also said that someone up there has to love me so much for me to be alive and be able to move.

I believe I am a winner because I had the chance to start a new life and I learned how to live with pain. I don't know a day without pain, but I always say that is nothing compared with the gift of being alive.

Maria Bermudez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Because I Believe In Myself

The struggles in my life are raising children and furthering my education. First, when I was fourteen years old, I started having children which was hard because I was a very inexperienced parent. I thought I knew it all and moved out, so I had no one to give me advice. My daughter Kendra became my

practice child, and I made quite a few mistakes. I treated her more like a doll than a baby and even sat on her one time. I started taking parenting classes



Tonya Brashear

after I nearly drowned my ten-month old baby. I had another child at the age of seventeen, and I didn't want to make the same (or different) mistakes. My second child was born with asthma, so I learned from the doctor how to administer breathing treatments and what to do during an asthma attack. Because of my hard work, my children are now happy, healthy, and successful.

Second, earning my GED is harder than it would have been to just stay in school. When I dropped out of school, the only job I could get paid minimum wage, so I needed more education. With the help of my literacy class, I have dramatically raised

my skill levels. I recently took my GED and scored a passing total of 2280, but I still lack ten points in the science section.

After I receive my GED, I want to go to college to be an accountant. I love math; I became interested in math by studying for the GED, and now it is my best subject. Getting my GED is challenging, but I know I can do it. I just keep reminding myself that it will improve my life and my children's lives. I will pass because I believe in myself.

Tonya Brashear
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Being Positive

I'm a single mother of four, and like most I struggle with my childhood memories. I never had moral support. In fact, I often heard more negative words than positive. My own mother always talked down to me; she never encouraged me. In fact, she once told

me I would amount to nothing. This put a damper on my spirit. I gave up on myself. From that point on, I decided I would be the best role model ever for



Shelly Jefferson

my kids. I would not repeat the cycle.

I spend time with them. Saturdays, we take trips to the library where we sit and read. I encourage them to get involved in the story

and we talk about what we have read. Afterwards, they play a game on the computer while I watch. Before leaving, I allow them to check out a book with their own library cards. They really enjoy this because they believe that their cards are credit cards. I find this hilarious and enjoy every moment.

Every Thursday night is skate night. The look on their faces when I say “are you ready to skate?” is priceless. We have fun together. We dance, sing,

limbo, eat, and talk. At the end of the night they say, “Thank you, mama. We had so much fun.”

By my children feeling good about themselves, I feel good about me. Every day that I teach them, they are really teaching me. It’s amazing how much of an impact you have on your children’s lives. Children need to be surrounded by positive people and know that they are loved. They should be taught to maintain a positive and respectful attitude, to always work hard, to enjoy life, and to always strive for their dreams because they are our future.

Shelly Jefferson
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Choices Matter

Struggles in life have made me a stronger, better, and wiser person. Life, in general, has all kinds of unexpected turns. Most people’s problems do not really start until the teenage years. In my case, struggles

started right when I was born. I was born with a cleft palate. After all the surgeries, my lip still appeared imperfect. So I learned quickly in life that I had to be strong because I was different, and people did not understand and were frequently spiteful.

So through the years of taunting and dealing with people, I also had to learn how to be the “better person.” It was a hard lesson to learn. I just did not understand why or how people could be hateful and rude. However, thankfully, I had my grandmother to help me through that struggle of life. She told me that people would be cruel because they know little about a cleft palate. She taught me to walk away or, when possible, explain my imperfection.

Like all things in life, wisdom comes with age. When I was a child, I did not understand what the expression “better person” meant; but after everything I have been through in my life, I have become wiser for being unique. I have come to realize that we all

have some kind of imperfection.

So in my opinion, life places all kinds of obstacles in one's way. What matters is how one chooses to handle the obstacles. Having to struggle a little in life helped me become stronger, better, and wiser. So I feel I am victorious in life because I learned from my difference. One chooses to be successful in life or to let life take him/her down. For myself, I have chosen happiness and success.

Constance Dimick
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Commitment, Sacrifice, and Perseverance

I met my wife when I was standing on a street corner late one night, watching cars cruise. I caught the eye of a beautiful blonde driving a bright yellow Chevy Love pickup. I wasn't sure if it was the truck or the girl that made my "motor rev," but I'm

pretty sure it was the girl. She came around a second time and stopped right in front of me.



It was a quick encounter. She asked for my number and then drove away. Wow! She was great! I was very surprised the next day, when she called me. Her name was Rebecca Jo and she was older than I was, so I tried to play it cool. I told her I was 18 when I wasn't quite that old. From that point, it was a whirlwind romance!

That was 28 years ago. These last four years have tested our commitment to each other more than ever. While I was going through four different surgeries for serious work injuries, my mother, aunt, grandmother, cousin, and uncle all passed away. Recently, my sister-in-law died as well.

I have realized the most consistent things in life are God and my wife. Looking back, they have always been there. It turns out, meeting my wife on that street corner 28 years ago was for the best. I discov-

ered love is about making sacrifices for one another. There is a history we have made together, which is irreplaceable. We will persevere into the second half of our lives together, not knowing what the future holds; but by believing in a higher power and each other, the best is yet to come.

Rodney Cozens
Pauls Valley Adult Learning Center

Continuing Education

I was born and raised in Mexico. During that time, education was something families had to pay for. I was one of twelve children, so my mom and dad could not afford to pay the teachers. I used to ask to go to school. I wanted to learn. Yet, my mom and dad could not pay for all of us to attend school. As a young girl, I milked cows and made cheese for my family to eat. I learned from the adults around me. Hearing them speak Spanish, I learned to understand and speak Spanish fluently.

When I was twenty-three, I moved to Altus, Oklahoma, in America. Here is where I started learning to speak English. It was hard at first, but I was able to pick it up little by little, mostly from co-workers at my jobs.

Several months ago, I came to the Literacy Council in Altus. I wanted to learn to speak English better. Since I can speak Spanish fluently, I want to be able to speak English fluently as well. I have learned a lot since coming to the literacy council. I spend an hour a day, three days a week with my tutor. I spend time at home studying English with videos, books, and writing words for practice. I have decided to attempt to only speak English at work and at home with my family. I plan on continuing to learn to speak English, plus read and write English as well. I like being a part of the tutoring program. Thank you, literacy council and tutor Carrie.

Leonor Martinez
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Dark Hole

When I was eight, my parents split up and I thought it was all my fault. I was sad and started smoking pot to ease my pain. It was the greatest feeling ever and it led to other things. The first time I got drunk it was on whiskey. I can still remember how I loved the burning feeling as I swallowed it. When I drank, I didn't have to think or feel; I was just numb.

My mom met this man and he moved in with us. He was nothing more than an abusive meth head. He would hit my mom, and when we tried to intervene, he would turn on us. I started failing school, so I skipped to hang out with the big kids because they had plenty of pot and beer. After all, what more did I need?

My home life kept getting worse and I kept using. Eventually, I went to live with my grandparents. My life was in a shambles and I wanted to die. I remem-

ber sitting in my grandpa's workshop with a loaded .22 thinking how much I hated my life. I closed my eyes, took the safety off, put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. It didn't fire. I felt like I couldn't even succeed at killing myself.

I went to the lake and watched the sunset. It was so beautiful and peaceful. I remember crying and remembering when I was a happy little kid living in a loving home. I continued struggling with my demons and with addiction until I was 23 and was put in a program that literally saved my life. I don't regret my life; it's made me a stronger person and I finally feel like I am crawling out of that dark hole.

Veronica Paredez
Ada Adult Learning Center

Defeat or Victory?

It was April 6th, 2009, the day after Parliament's elections in the Republic of Moldova. Again, the

Communists got the majority of seats in Parliament and they could elect the President and legitimize a new government. April 7th for many Moldovan citizens was the last chance to make their voices heard. Some of my friends and I received phone messages, e-mails, and Facebook messages. They all contained the same message: “If you disagree with the election results, come with a candle this evening to the Stefan cel Mare statue to protest.” We sent the message to other people, and there were five of us that decided to go to the meeting.



The next morning, on our way to the capital of Chisinau, we called friends who said there were a lot of people in front of the government building. When we arrived, the crowd was moving from the government building to the Presidential Palace. I never saw so many people at a meeting in our country. The majority were young people with Moldovan flags and different pro-democracy and pro-Euro-

pean Union signs. Within twenty minutes, the central street from the government building to the Presidential Palace was full of people.

Things happened on this day that, even now, I can't understand. Five young men were killed, cell phones didn't work, Moldova based web sites were blocked, and parts of the Parliament and Presidential buildings were destroyed. After this, the Communist Party couldn't elect a President, and Parliament was dissolved. Parties opposing Communism won in the following elections, and for the past two years, democratic liberal parties have governed Moldova. They never found who killed the five protesters or who organized the destruction of the two administrative buildings. The Moldovan youth made the first social-media revolution and changed Moldova's government.

Difficult Decisions

When I was at school, I thought and heard about what an extraordinary country the United States was.

My dream was to come and live here. I wanted the best for my family, and I dreamed that this day would come soon. But when the opportunity came to me, believe me, it was the most difficult decision I've ever made.

I felt great joy, but also an immense sadness. At that time, I didn't know the best thing to do. Not only was this going to change my destiny, but also that of my son. This made me feel guilty, because I was also deciding for him—and this was not easy.

I knew I was leaving my roots, traditions, and friends—a whole life that I had already built.

I didn't make this decision (to come to the U.S.)

lightly. And so, I decided to come here, but with a real fear that perhaps I was making a mistake.

And, now that I'm here, I see that much of what is said about this country is true: the United States has a great economy and infrastructure. I also know that America is the most powerful nation on earth, and I feel safe and at peace here.

My child here has many more opportunities to study and so do I. Despite my age, I can do a lot of things professionally; and I can have what in my country, economically, would take me much longer to achieve. Clearly, this is going to take a lot of effort, but it will be worth it in the end.

And now, although I miss everything I left behind, I think this decision, though difficult, was a good decision. Always Forward!

Cristina Páramo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Don't Give Up!

When I was younger, I did not like school so much. So many kids made it hard to go to school. They used to make fun of the fact that I did not have money like others and didn't act like others. Sometimes, it was hard to learn. They did not have a lot of cool things out like they do now for learning. So, I didn't want to go.



Tina Burell

Mom was always at work so she couldn't help me with my school work. So, when I got older, I saw how much I needed school. But I had children and I didn't want them to grow up without a mother in their lives. It was bad enough that their dad wasn't in their lives. So, to have me working and going to school would have given them too much time without me, I felt.

One day, my oldest said to me, “Mom, you need to go back to school. We’ll be okay.” We all talked about it. So, I started at the LeFlore County Literacy Council-TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program. I feel good about myself. It’s kind of crazy in a way. I feel like some of the things I want to do in my life can happen now. Looking back, I feel that it is very important to have a good teacher—someone who makes learning fun and one who cares. Good peers around you make you feel good about yourself.

Tina Burell
Leflore County Literacy Center, Poteau

Education Is the Key

Struggles in my life have made me strong. I have learned from my mistakes. I always say, when you fall down, get right back up. Nothing in life is easy; you have to fight for what you want.

I am a very busy person. I have a full time job, I have my family, and I go to school. Even when I am tired, I keep going because nothing is going to stop me from getting what I want.

I grew up in a different country, which made it more difficult because English is not my primary language. I had to learn how to speak, write, and read English, which made me more eager to learn.

My greatest victory in life is having my family. I love my family very much; I'd do



Esperanza Martinez

anything for them. That is the reason I went back to school. I want them to see how important it is to be prepared.

Education is the key to open any door. I know learning can be difficult, but it is not impossible. Even when you have a family, children, a husband, or

wife, you can make time. If I can do it, anyone can. I am in the beginning stages of my education and I love it! It makes me feel more powerful, more in control, and smarter.

I believe that I'm a winner because I decided to go back to school to better myself. I'm not saying that I don't like my life. I just believe that I can learn more. I am hungry to learn. I know that there is a world of knowledge out there waiting for me. I know I can do anything I want.

You can do anything if you believe in yourself!

Esperanza Martinez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Experiences *Not* Needed

My greatest victory in my life is that I am still alive. As a kid growing up, no one paid attention to me, so I would do things that would get me into trouble, like hanging out with bad people. I even joined

a gang to get back at my mom and stepdad for not paying attention to me, and paying so much to my brother.

It seemed to me like my parents did everything for my brother and nothing more than they had to for me. For example, my mom and stepdad always took him to the mall shopping for clothing, but they took me to Wal-Mart for my school clothing.

The gang I was in almost killed my mom. I saw them put a gun in my mom's mouth. The gang even did drive-bys on my house when I was not home to get the point across to my mom that the gang was my family now. I knew I had to get out of the gang, but my family and I could get killed if I tried to leave the gang.

Eventually, our family moved to Mustang to start a new life and to get away from the gang. But somehow, the gang found out I was moving. I went to tell my boyfriend I was going because he was going

to move to Mustang in another two weeks to be with me. The gang showed up right after I got to his house. I had to watch the gang members kill the man I loved.

I can safely say my greatest victory is growing up. I now have two great kids and a good man to keep me where I need to be in life.

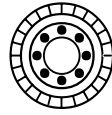
Anonymous
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Finding Purpose

One of my struggles, which I believe is an amazing victory, is finding my religion. When I was much younger, I always felt lost; there was emptiness in my life.

In 2006, I met Aaron and his mom. She pulled Aaron away and told him she saw an all black aura surrounding me. She wanted me out of their lives, but after I got pregnant everything turned around.

As we grew and matured individually, we learned to tolerate one another's religious differences. I learned her religion wasn't evil or bad; a person's energy depends on the soul and heart at a specific time. She ultimately helped me find what was missing in my life.



As months passed, I learned how to control my anger. When God calls me and I stand before him, he will not be too disappointed in me. In the past, I wanted to harm people, but now I choose not to because of how it will look for me when I stand before Him. As long as my soul and heart are right and my mind positive, I won't have anything to worry about. Knowing there is a purpose for this life, I no longer have that emptiness and lost feeling. Now, I live my life in a positive way, seldom lose my temper, and have a positive attitude. I don't believe in having hate in my heart because Jesus never had hate in his and never judged people. I do mess up

and judge, but I'm always correcting myself. I'm not as perfect as my Lord.

My struggle was missing purpose to my life. My great victories are finding God and purpose to my life. Loving my neighbor and making the world a better place for everyone is my purpose.

Christina Casillas
Lawton Area Lifelong Learning

For Me and My Family

My husband and I decided to travel to the United States, because the economic situation is very tough in Mexico, and it is very hard to find employment. We arrived here very happy and with many objectives. We soon found out that the job situation is just as hard as it is in Mexico. We found that the job market was not what we expected. My husband took a long time to find a job. But thanks to God, he has found a steady job and is steadily progressing.

Blessed be God, we have been here in the United States for 10 months, and we are very happy to have saved enough to buy our first home here in Altus, Oklahoma. We are working very hard to make the house livable so we can move in.

It is a major accomplishment for us because we now have our own home to offer to our four children.



Lorena Castro

Even though it is very hard to be in a country that does not speak your language, we are a family and very happy to be here. When I had my last baby in Jackson County Hospital, I found out how hard it is to communicate with people. I have vowed that I will learn English, and that is why I signed up for English classes. It is very embarrassing and difficult for my three older children. They have found it very hard in school because hardly anybody there speaks our language.

They are learning just like me. I want to thank my teachers from the Great Plains Literacy Council for their help and for their support. Little by little, I will succeed and continue to learn.

Lorena Castro
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Gaining Victory

I have lived in Oklahoma City all my life. I went to Douglas High School to the eleventh grade. I got married at the age of eighteen. I have been married for fifty years. I have three children. They are girls, Brenda, Linda, and Janice. I have ten grandchildren and have been a foster parent for ten years.

I have been struggling with reading all my life. When I was in school, I did not get what I needed to learn to read. Reading and spelling are very hard for me. I am attending classes now to improve myself by learning to communicate better.

Not being able to read has caused me some lonely times. It makes it difficult to participate in many group activities. I am embarrassed when I can't order off of a menu or read a street sign. I avoid any situation that might require me to read or write. Even a party can be scary if games are played. I just want to be able to relax and have fun.



Frances Alexander

Instead, I stay at home a lot to keep from facing the possibility of anyone knowing I can't read.

This is a struggle, but I am getting better every day, and I feel that it is worth all the hard work. As my reading and spelling improve, I realize that I am gaining victory over this problem in my life.

Frances Alexander
Literacy Link, Midwest City

How I Became a Driver

One of my greatest victories was learning to drive and getting my driver's license. It was very hard for me because I was fifty-two years old and had never driven before. I'm Russian, and my city has good public transportation. In the beginning of my lessons, I always felt that everyone on the road wanted to hit my car! I will never forget those feelings.

I practiced driving every evening with my Russian girlfriend Galina. She was very brave and determined. One day, I was ready to take the driving test. My first time wasn't successful, so we continued to practice. After a time, I decided to try again. My friend and I went early in the morning. Once again, it was very busy, and we had to wait a few hours before a test spot was open. Finally, I got my card with a number and had to wait again. Before the test, I practiced driving again. When I drove back to the parking lot, we heard a strange sound in

the car. When I left the car, I couldn't believe my eyes! The muffler had fallen off! We only had fifteen minutes to solve the problem. I was in a panic! Galina looked around and saw some men



Tatian Calvery

talking near a truck. She ran to them and asked for help. They were very understanding and nice. One man crawled underneath the car, and the other guy cut a rope and told the fellow on the ground how to tie up the muffler before my instructor arrived.

I passed my driving test and was really happy! These kind people shared the joy of my victory with me. I'm sure there are a number of good people in the world!

Tatian Calvery
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City

How I Learned Two Languages

I am Chinese. Thirteen years ago I left China with my family to go to Japan. We lived there for nine years until we came to the U.S. in 2007. My first challenge in Japan was to learn to speak Japanese. I started from the basic and then went to words and sentences. It was very hard to speak Japanese well, even though there are some letters similar to the Chinese, because the grammar and pronunciation are very different. Finally, I was able to speak Japanese fluently.

I didn't expect to have another challenge! My family had an opportunity to come to the United States. Now, I needed to speak English. My English was not fluent even though I had studied it many years in China. Sometimes I mixed Japanese and English together when I tried to speak. I was very anguished during that period of time. After I moved

to Bartlesville, I started to learn English in Teacher Ann's class. I enjoyed the class because it wasn't boring at all. There was a lot she did to add variety to the daily learning. We often practice by playing fun games, doing crafts, working on computers and having parties. Now, I can communicate with my kid's teachers, my family doctor, and my friends.



To think back to my experiences overcoming language barriers, it's been very hard with some bitter memories. But on the other hand, I feel gratified as I have had the opportunity to be able to speak two foreign languages and learn their cultures. This has also broadened my horizons. I want to keep improving my English. I like being able to contribute my knowledge to the community, making life fulfilled and colorful, and not only being just a housewife.

Qingwei (Cathy) Hou
Bartlesville Family Learning Center

How Learning English Changed My Life

At first I used an interpreter to communicate with my husband, Jerry, on the Internet. After communicating back and forth for about seven months, Jerry said he was coming to China. At that time, I started an English class in China.

When Jerry got to China, he went to my English classes with me. Sometimes, Jerry would read a story to the whole class. At first it was very hard to learn English, but I was determined to learn it because my English was not good. I would often just say “yes” or “no” when Jerry asked me something, not knowing what I was agreeing or disagreeing to. When I came to America, I didn’t understand much when people spoke to me, nor could I speak very good back to them.

We found a school in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, which

I have been attending for the past year. I started in the intermediate group. It took a lot of hard work and study. After I got my sixty hours in, they retested me.

Now, I have moved to the advanced group. I feel this will motivate me to learn even more. During this time I feel my English has improved considerably with the teaching of Teacher Ann. She takes the time to explain words and put them into sentences, where I can understand the meanings. By learning English, I have been able to communicate with people a lot better and understand what they are saying, and I don't need to just say "yes" or "no" now. I hope someday I can speak and understand English as well as Teacher Ann does.

Lanmin Hensely
Bartlesville Family Learning Center



I Am a Winner

I believe I am a winner because I am on the road to success. I used to be strung out on drugs until shortly after I became pregnant. Now, I am going to school to get my GED and make changes in my life.

A year ago, I was using illegal drugs, and had been for six years. I had stopped for only about six months while I was pregnant. As I started using drugs again, I began some other bad habits; for example, stealing. I started stealing and lying to my family and friends for money and other desires.

I have started construction on a new life track. I am now taking GED classes as part of changing my life. I am about to take my final GED test, which is something I never thought I would be able to do. I am taking one day at a time and every day step by step.

When I get my GED diploma, I am going to attend college to become a drug counselor in hope of help-

ing someone else change his or her life. I know that if I were able to change my life, there is somebody out there who wants to change his or her life, but just needs somebody to talk to.

In conclusion, I have made some choices in life that I regret. Although I have made horrible choices in the past, I am working to make only good choices now, which has led me to getting my GED. Coming from my bad choices and experiences, I now know that I want to spend the rest of my life helping others get drugs out of their lives.

Jan'na Heffley
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

I, Too, Am Worthy of Good Things

My struggles in life have made me the strong woman I am today. I'm the mother of eight who I love dearly. I'm a recovering addict. I know what it feels like to

lose everything—kids, homes, and almost my life. But I bounced back, and with a lot of praying and crying, I realized I am somebody.

My kids let me know I am somebody by calling me in rehab and saying, “Mommy, I love you. Mommy, I need you. Momma, I want you to come home so we can come home.” They had been in seven different foster homes while I was in rehab.

I had to learn to love myself again and release the scared child in me who I kept in a cold dark place. She was comforted by her own misery. I let her out, let her feel again, and I cried and cried because of years of being on drugs. I was numb, and I was finally able to feel the pain I was putting my family through. With a little help from others, I realized that I could break free from drugs, agony, and poverty.

I am worthy of good things; happiness is not a fairy tale. Happiness is a real emotion that I captured

by putting my family back together. Now, I'm the mother my kids deserve. I am stable, going to GED classes, have all my kids at home, and love to see their smiling faces. Struggles in my life made me the strong woman I am today. I wouldn't change anything because all the struggles have made me the strong woman, mother, student, and "somebody" that I am.

Jessica Stewart
Lawton Area Lifelong Learning

Learning From Mistakes

Struggles in life have made me the person I am today. I have had many obstacles to overcome in my life. Growing up for me was not easy. Statistics always say you grow up following your parents footsteps and turn out to be just like them. Well, statistics were wrong in my case, because I chose a different path. I chose to do the opposite of my parents.

Unfortunately, my parents' lifestyle was one of my biggest obstacles. I wasn't always headed in the right direction. Instead of focusing on my education, I dropped out of high school, got involved with the wrong choice of people, and partied a lot. This led to having my first child when I was still a child myself. Even after giving birth, I still wasn't on the



Erica Gonzalez

right path. It wasn't until I had my second child that I woke up one day and asked myself if this is what I really want for my family.

From that day forward, I began to change my life. I put myself through school, found new friends, and started my new life. I now have three beautiful girls who are my life. Sometimes, I wonder if it wasn't for having kids, where my life would be. Would I be just another statistic?

If it wasn't for mistakes that I made, how would I learn and grow as a person? I learned to use my mistakes as a tool for growth and maturity. Now, as my kids are growing, I can lead them by example. I believe that I am a winner.

Erica Gonzalez
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

Life is a Choice

Life is what everyone makes it. It brings joy, pain, victories, and struggles. Life is all about our choices.

I came from a large family. Mama was proud, black, and single in her thirties. She dealt with racism and injustice; however, she inspired me to not accept negative or evil ways. She expected us to respect others, no matter what. She taught us the importance of going to church, receiving grace, learning to love even in the most frightening times, and choosing to always accept a new way.

I was born in 1969, in the heat of some of the same struggles during Mama's time. Some of life was still repeating from before, but changes were being made around us. Even though there were still riots, rapes, and beatings near our doors, we were safe in our neighborhood, and the doors were left unlocked.

Then, a turn-around happened in our world. As a



Cynthia Bruner

proud black mother of four, I could sit anywhere on the bus, work anywhere, and eat in the front of a restaurant while holding my head high; but I had to start locking the door. The neighborhood had changed; it was no longer safe. My children were given responsibilities and opportunities, but danger was still there. Gangs, drugs, and drive-by shootings in the neighborhood began taking away our youth and are still doing it today.

I have passed on the lessons from my mamma—love and grace. Now, my children are grown, living with their choices. My grandbabies are at my knee looking up for hope, love, and opportunity. The lessons of old are returning to the young; old words are breathing life to the next generation. Joy, pain, victory, and struggles still remain around us.

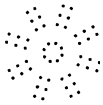
Cynthia Bruner
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Life Struggles

My life struggles have made me a stronger person. I believe every struggle that I have had has taught me a lesson. In my eyes, life is about trial and error; and sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. I look back and realize that I have learned so much and I am proud that I am no longer the person I used to be.

Sometimes, I think back and wonder what made me

want to do the things I did. Maybe it was because I was always under the influence. Being under the influence helped me deal with a lot of issues about abandonment, anger, lack of ambition and no self-confidence. However, I am now starting to realize



that I don't have to show off to be noticed or self medicate to be happy.

When I was fourteen, I had my first child, a son. I wasn't ready to be a parent. Two years later, I had my second son. It was then that I started to realize that friends and late nights partying weren't everything, and that I was a dad now and had responsibilities. I was already in trouble with the law and under the jurisdiction of Juvenile Drug Court. Still, after I finished that, I re-offended. I was put in Adult Drug Court and started getting my life together.

My life is not just about me. I am finally a family man and proud of it. It took a lot of years and struggles to get to where I am now. I've learned to

have better influences in my life and to make better decisions. I could not be happier. I love my wife and kids, and now I live my life for them, not just for the moment.

Justin Graham
Ada Adult Learning Center

Molded For Success

After dropping out of school at age 15, and going down a road of drugs, abuse, and despair, I felt useless. I believed it was my fate to live this life forever. Boy, was I wrong!

At the age of twenty, I found myself sitting in the Oklahoma County Jail again, except this time I was five months pregnant. I finally made a decision to become the woman I always wanted to be. Inside that jail cell, I found the strength to ask God to guide me.

When I got out of jail, I was eight months pregnant.

I did not want to lose my child, but drugs were all I knew. I found a rehab for mothers with children. It was there that I learned about myself and my addiction. I had my baby and learned to be an effective and loving mother. I also learned to face my fears, effectively cope with stress, and start loving myself.

With a newfound confidence, I realized that the



Raequel Winston

world was at my fingertips. At age twenty-two, I enrolled in GED classes. I never visualized myself going to school every day and reading stories to my son every night. It's been

amazing. I no longer let the bondage of self-doubt hold me down.

I am so grateful today. Not only am I taking the steps to better myself, but I'm also giving my son a good example of what strength, wisdom, and grati-

tude look like. I can now use my struggles as a stepping stone instead of a crutch. I consider myself an instrument of God. I share my struggles with others, giving them hope, through a women's group. Now, instead of despair, I have hope and a future that I will mold for success.

Raequel Winston
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

My Education

I am 31 years old. I dropped out of school in the ninth grade. I thought I knew everything like most kids.

I knew it was time to work on my GED because I have three kids; Jayda, Haley, and Ethan. Jayda was bringing homework home, and I couldn't even help her with it. Now that I have started the Leflore County



Stacia Mills

Literacy Council-TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program, I have been more helpful to my kids and feel so good about myself. My kids tell me everyday that they are proud of me because I am reaching for my goal. I thank God everyday for my second chance.

Stacia Mills
Leflore County Literacy, Poteau

My Victory

When I was 16 years old, I started college for nursing, which was difficult for my young age.

It took 6 semesters to finish my studies. The first half was the hardest. There were seventy students that started, but only forty-two by the second semester; but I was determined to succeed, and I did.

After graduation, I had two important final steps: social service and my final exam.

I did my social service practicum in a town called Jimenez Chihuahua. There I learned to live alone and in the present moment. I also had experiences that left permanent marks on my mind and soul; some good, some painful.



After my practicum, I returned home to prepare for the final exam. I was so nervous and afraid. When the exam finally came, I panicked. Sometime later, they called to tell me that I needed to study more—I hadn't passed the exam. I went to tell my parents, fearing their disappointment as well as mine. I was beside myself, realizing this was not just a bad dream; but was consoled by the fact I was only 19 and had plenty of time to still realize my dream.

After taking a much needed vacation, I returned to Mexico. After a year, I got a call from my school saying I could return and take my test. While studying, I would say to myself that this was just one more class and I would succeed. Once again, the big day

came and finally I gained the victory; perhaps a little late, but I was happy.

I have no more to say. I got my nursing title in February of 2010 on my second attempt, and am proud to have achieved this victory with the support of my parents.

Sara Gomez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Greatest Victory Is

I am 24 years old and I was born in a city in Mexico named Zacatecas. My family and I moved to Oklahoma City when I was two years old. I am a mother of three kids, two girls and one baby boy. When I was nine years old, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease.

There was a tumor in the middle of my chest that was spreading roots all over my body. This caused me to have two big lumps on each side of my neck.

The tumor was so close to my heart, the doctors told my parents that if they had waited any longer the tumor would have attacked my heart and I would have died. I lost all my hair and the kids at school would make fun of me. My doctors came out to my school, Tulakes Elementary, to talk to the kids.

I can remember like it was yesterday when my mother took me to the doctor and they had to do emergency surgery to remove one of the lumps I had on my neck. From that day on, they started the chemotherapy and radiation therapy. I would be sick most of the time. This went on for 6 months. There were many times when I would stay in the hospital for two weeks, then go home and have to come back because I was still really sick. My whole family stayed with me. It was hard for my mom to see me get so sick.

Sixteen years later, I thank God for everything that happened to me because having cancer made me a

stronger person. If it ever comes back, I will defeat it again. This has been one of my greatest victories in life.

Jessica Olivo
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

My Life

As a child, I went through a lot of things. I was



Kimberly Shelton

12 years old when I started taking care of my brother. Our mother was alive, but it was left up to me to take care of my little brother. I prayed and prayed for God's help, but saw nothing.

Other kids laughed at me because I really had no clothes. I was very slow in school, so I started doing drugs and drinking. That sent me to prison as a pregnant teen.

I still didn't care; I just said "forget about life." Everything was going down for me. Just when I was about to give up on life, God picked me up. While I felt like I was weak, God was making me stronger. People can learn from their childhood, or stay the same. I have learned from mine.

I am Kimberly. I have two little girls. I am going back to school now.

I am the best mother I know how to be. It makes me sad to think about my childhood, but it helped me to become a stronger woman, which helps me to become a better mother.

Kimberly Shelton
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Never Give Up

Forty years ago, a smart teenager (who already knew everything) dropped out of school, got married at fifteen, and started a precious family at seventeen.

Divorced at thirty, I remarried and still never finished the one thing I needed the most in life: my diploma. Now, I am ready and determined to accomplish my GED.



I'm a wife, a cook at work, a teacher at church, and I stay busy with my grandchildren. Hectic, but unwavering, I'm driving ninety miles round trip to class two days a week. I study at home, leaving little personal time for my husband. Then, I developed a medical condition that caused my brain to malfunction, causing me to, in mid-sentence, forget what I was doing. I would black out, faint, or stumble and fall. The doctors said "no more driving, no more working." Feeling challenged, I told myself that I was not going to let this keep me from obtaining my diploma.

I went home and prayed, "God, please give me the will to fight this battle, Amen." I had already passed four out of five tests at this point. I have come too

far to quit now. The struggles in my life have made me realize I can do anything I set my mind to. I continued to work even harder, and my husband drove me to class once a week.

My greatest victory was walking into that classroom and passing a test that allowed me to acquire my GED. I know I'm a winner, because I am not a quitter. I have accomplished what I felt was the ultimate "impossible." Graduating with my GED has made me realize (at 56 years old) that you can accomplish anything in life. So don't give up, and always give your best.

Cathy McMurl
Idabel Adult Learning Center

On the Right Path

I am thirty-two years old and have two children. My son Mikel is thirteen, and his sister Darreon is two. I've been through a lot in thirty-two years.

I was raised by my mother and father, but my dad left when I was ten because my mother was using drugs. This caused me to rebel. I've been in and out of group homes since the age of fifteen.



Chiquilia Ball

My life has taught me to be a responsible parent. Both of my kids' fathers are incarcerated—my son's for life and my daughter's for five years—so I'm just putting the puzzle back together. My biggest victory would be learning to love myself no matter how I feel about the way I look.

I chose to get my GED because I would like to further my education and start my own business. My biggest struggle is math. I have been to Job Corps, an adult learning center, and a GED class in my apartment. I gave up for a couple of years and have started praying, asking God to put me on the right path,

and so far He hasn't steered me wrong. I started attending Greater Grace for a high school diploma; I still attend and understand everything more. I also learned more about God, which is good because people don't learn about God in schools anymore. I would like to finish what I've already started, so I'm not going to drop out this time. I want my children to have something to look forward to, and it will be a personal victory. I'm learning to have patience like God has for all of His children. I believe, with hard work, I'll be able to achieve my goals.

Chiquilia Ball

Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Overcome

I have had many struggles in my life, from growing up with no dad to having kids at an early age. These struggles in my life have made me think about others and their lives. Overall, my struggles have taught

me to be strong, forgiving, and patient in any situation, no matter what it may be.

I am stronger because I have had to go through something to get to something. Having pain in my life is hard. I was a young child growing up with three brothers; my oldest brother raped me. This pain hurt me more than anyone could ever imagine. Also, what hurt me even more is that my loved ones did not believe me. My strength comes from the fact that I have learned to trust myself when others doubt me.

My greatest victory out of my childhood trauma was to forgive others and move on because, at the end of the day, I still love my family more each and every day in spite of my heartache. Also, my forgiveness has led to patience with others. These two, forgiveness and patience have made me who I am.

If one never gives up and continues to live his/her

life one step at a time, he/she will feel as if the struggles that he/she has been through only made him/her a better person—stronger, more forgiving, and more patient. So, the journey that I have taken only bettered my life and made the persons who put me in that situation look more at themselves. Everything happens for a reason, and if a person takes two steps back and thinks about what just happened, or what he/she has done, he/she will actually understand what is what; he/she will overcome.


Alaiesha Jessie
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Overcoming Struggles

My name is Malisia Brewer-Brown. I'm a GED student in Idabel, Oklahoma and the mother of five children. My life has not been easy. I chose to live the wrong way twenty-five years ago.

My struggles began when I became pregnant at fif-

teen. I had my first child, Charlie Jarome (C.J.), on March 29, 1991. My second child, Rodneshia, came two years later. She was a beautiful little girl. It's so hard having children when you're young. I quit school and started doing drugs; I just didn't care.

I was with their father for about thirteen years. He was a cruel, evil person. Though  he did what he had to do to take care of us financially, he beat me severely for over thirteen years. Finally, he went to jail in 1995 for robbing an E-Z Mart at gunpoint. He got fifty years in prison. That was the only thing that saved my life.

Our children have suffered through the mess he and I caused, but I raised them as best I could. In spite of it all, my son is in college and playing football for Southern Missouri. My daughter is a high school senior and will be signing with Murray State College to play basketball. They are living their lives right.

I had many struggles as a young person. Even though

I'm grown, the struggles still go on for me to this very day. If I could choose to live my life differently, I would; but things like this happen all the time. I'm just glad that I'm able to do something with myself and enjoy life.

I thank God every day for the good things in my life. I'm happy about the outcome. I've learned the hard way and I don't wish that on anybody.

Malisia Brewer-Brown
Idabel Adult Learning Center

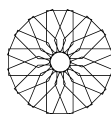
Reaching for Dreams

It all started in 1972, when my Dad was 14 years old. He was one of the best motocross riders in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

Later, something good happened. My older brother was born and my Dad started teaching him how to ride motocross. When I was born, he showed me as well, and I liked it. Now it's something very special

to me. I now believe that motocross is a family tradition. My dream was to be one of the best female riders in the state, but my mother was opposed to it. She said motocross wasn't for me.

But the story is not over yet—the best is yet to come.



I have two nephews. They started motocross when they were eight and nine; now they are fifteen and sixteen. They now have the opportunity that I didn't have when I was their age. They are living their dreams here in Oklahoma City. Every season they race, they qualify—and this is something very special for me.

The most important thing in my life happened when my daughter was born. Today, she is seven years old. She reminds me of myself when I was little. She asked for a dirt bike before she had turned three! This made me very happy.

I know that I will support all her dreams and do my

best to help them come true. My Mum didn't want me to ride dirt bikes for a living, so she sent me to beauty school. I loved it, and I'm good at it, too. My greatest victory, however, will be when I see my two nephews and my daughter in the world of moto-cross, and for all of them to reach their dreams; dreams that weren't apparently for me.

Adriana Melissa Rubio
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Responsibility

Struggles in my life have made me stronger, wiser, and more mature. When I was a child, I went through several traumas that have made me stronger as an adult. When I was nine years old, my father shot himself. His suicide was very hard for me because I was so young, but time has made it a little easier for me. When I was ten years old, I was taken away from my mother because she was using

drugs. I went to live with my grandma, who was very strict but caring. I was disobedient and rebellious because I missed my parents. When I was twelve, my mother straightened up her life and regained custody of my brother and me.



Sabrina Jones

Another struggle was running away from home and getting pregnant at thirteen years old. I had my first baby at fourteen, which was very hard because I was a child myself trying to raise a baby. I had no job and no education, so I was forced to become wiser about how to be a good parent. It was difficult to learn how to deal with having to stay up all night when my son was sick, holding him and trying to feed him. This was very stressful for me, especially after I had two more babies.

My first victory was separating myself from my

children's father because he was abusive and was involved in drugs. My next victory was enrolling in the literacy class. My teachers and my fellow students have made me realize that I want more for my children and myself. I have started taking responsibility for my own actions, which has really changed my life and helped me deal courageously with my struggles.

Sabrina Jones
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Responsibility in My Life

Struggles in my life have made me become responsible, wise, and strong. I know that by having my oldest son I became responsible. I became wise when I had my second son. Then, when my youngest was born, and his father broke my heart for the last time, I became strong.

Responsibility comes when most people become

parents. I know that when I had my oldest son at the age of 18, I had to stop acting like a teenager and raise my son, Thomas. I had left his father, Robert, because my child did not need a father figure in his life who drank a lot. Consequently, I had to make sure Thomas had a roof over his head and food in his belly.

When I was in my mid-20s, I thought I had met the man of my dreams—Phillip. While pregnant with my second son, Zachary, I started noticing that my “dream man” was not showing up for my doctor’s appointments. So, I became wise and began having doubts about him.

I became strong when Jayden (my second son by Phillip), was born, and I found out that my “dream man” was cheating on me. Certainly, I found out that Phillip was not the man of my dreams. He had broken my heart. With three children and my broken heart, I definitely became strong.

I have had many struggles in my life that have made me responsible, wise, and strong. I know now that life is not easy. So, going through all these struggles has made me the person I am today.

Heather Cooper
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Setbacks to Victories in My Education

Growing up was a struggle. Witnessing abuse and being abused affected me and the decisions I made when it came to school and my life. My son's father was very abusive to me; a year later I got pregnant with my son.

My struggles didn't end when he went to prison. I was a minor, so my son and I were put in foster care. Later, I went to Job Corps, but my son stayed with my foster mother. I thought my dad would get custody, but he didn't. I got upset,

tried to commit suicide, and got kicked out of Job Corps. Getting kicked out was a major setback, so I gave up on schooling and getting a job. Giving up was a major mistake.

After leaving Job Corps, I bounced from place to place, job to job, and school to school. I was doing well, but over the years I began to look back on all my struggles and it made me want more. I moved to Oklahoma, with school and bettering myself in mind. When I began, I wasn't doing well at first, but it didn't stop me.

In September, my cousin passed away, and I had to take some time off. When I went back, I was focused and determined to get my GED. I worked very, very hard and it paid off! I got my paper to take my GED; it was the happiest day in my life, since the day I met my soulmate.

My victory is never giving up on my education. I'm going to take my GED test and enroll in college.

I thank God that my dedication has paid off. I've never given up on my dreams.

Tiffany Young
Lawton Area Lifelong Learning


Setting an Example

I've managed to overcome some big struggles in my young life. I'm only 17 years old. I started doing illegal things so I could provide for my little sister. I'm not proud of what I did.

As a child growing up in a drug addicted family, you're expected to become an addict. I wanted to prove everyone wrong. I knew my little sister looked up to me and I didn't want her to be like the rest of our family. But as I got older, turning down the invitation of trying it just one time began to get harder. It didn't help matters that it was my older siblings offering the drugs to me.

At age fourteen, I finally gave in, becoming the

person I never wanted to be. I set the bad example for my sister that it is okay to do drugs. After I got hooked, I started selling drugs to support my cocaine addiction. At age fifteen, I learned how to rock up cocaine and triple my money. So now, I could buy a lot more things for my sister. But with the selling came my being locked up most of my teenage years, leading right up to present day.

Now, after all of this, I've come to realize that the best way for me to help my sister  is by helping myself. So now, I'm getting the help I need in hopes of one day being able to take care of my little sister again.

I know I didn't always make the right choices. I am changing that. I am trying to be a better person. It's a struggle, but I still want to set the right example for my little sister.

Michael Wright
NEO Adult Learning Center, Miami

Setting Goals

I moved to the United States when I was 20 years old. I lived part of this time in New Hampshire, where I had two wonderful daughters. Five years later, my husband and I decided to move to Oklahoma, where I had my third daughter. I basically got tired of the way I was living, constantly struggling and doing back-breaking work.

Three years ago, I decided to continue with my education. I started going to GED classes while, at the same time, taking English classes. Before I began these classes, I set myself an important goal. This goal was to pass the GED test. After a lot of study and many classes, I took the test. Waiting for the results seemed like an eternity! When the good news finally came, it was worth the wait. I had passed!

I then realized that I could be a better person in life,

so I set another goal for myself. This time, it was to go to college and be an example for my daughter and my husband—to make them proud of me and, later on, for us all to have a better life.

I realize I still have a long way to go before I reach my goal, but I am not giving up.


Emma Esquivel
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

So Much Blood

In 1998, I returned to our farm to teach the peasants. I wanted children and youngsters to have a teacher to teach them the basic subjects. I always instilled in the peasants our position against any guerrilla action.

In February 2001, we held a political meeting at the school. I had invited the peasants to support our candidates for the Colombian Liberal Party, showing them it was the best thing for our region.

Around 6 PM several men arrived, wearing military uniforms and bracelets of the FARC—Revolutionary Armed Forces Of Colombia. One of them told me, “Teacher, you are using the peasants. You are recruiting our future guerrillas.” They compelled us to leave the school and then they dynamited it.

Many of the peasants who were outraged encouraged me to go ahead. I continued to  teach the classes. My hallway had become a classroom where youngsters from far away arrived to receive instruction. In May of 2001, I invited the women and mothers of the children attending the classes to celebrate mothers’ month. Suddenly, several FARC men arrived. I heard screams and shots. One of the mothers helping that day told me, “Leave, Teacher, because they will kill you.”

As I ran, I could hear the screams of the women. I did not know what was happening; I was just running. I was full of terror. I heard a vehicle. It was the

owner of a neighboring farm who recognized me and helped me get to where I informed the police.

I fled with my heart broken for seeing so much bloodshed, but I thanked God to give me a second opportunity to live. I was very afraid and left the country for some time, with the idea that the situation would cool down.

Elsa Charry
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Stepping Stones

Sometimes we see life as being extremely difficult, but in our hearts there is a quiet voice that says, “Yes, we can carry out our dreams.” We dream about the perfect life, and the perfect love, but we forget that with dreams come struggles.

In my life, I have had many struggles as a single mother. I have worked hard for the last few years, because I had to provide for my children. Every

struggle I have overcome became a victory, because it forced me to continue forward. I thought I would never love again, but I met the man of my dreams. My husband taught me to believe in love and to have confidence in myself.

We had our struggles because he lived in the United States, and I lived in Panama. Our love was growing everyday, and the distance made us struggle to maintain our love. The greatest struggle was the language barrier. I spoke Spanish and he spoke English, but this did not matter. I feel love can break any barrier. Now I live in the United States with my husband. The greatest struggle for me is to get used to a new culture, and a new language.

The greatest victories in my life are to believe in love, to have faith, have my children with me, and to have my wonderful husband.

Don't think of your struggles as being bad.

Think of them as stepping stones to a bright



future. I Am A Winner!

Osiris Burgy
New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

Struggle and Victory

Life is full of changes and decisions. One of those decisions was very hard for me to make because it affected my family.

I wanted to finish high school or get my GED. So I asked my family what they thought I should do. They supported me in my decision.

The reason I decided to ask them was because I was already taking ESL classes and I had a full time job. Also, because I would have to get more help around the house since I was going to be gone four days a week. I didn't want my family doing everything, so on weekends it was really hard for everybody around the house.

I usually did everything around the house; but now, on top of that, I would have to study and do homework. My daily drive from home to school was one hour. I had less time with my family. We didn't have family dinner together anymore. When I got home everybody was already asleep, but my husband was always there, waiting for me. He would look exhausted, but wouldn't say anything.

Sometimes I got home thinking to myself that I wasn't going to pass the GED test. I had this conversation with my husband all the time, and he would always encourage me.

Then testing time came. We went to take the test. I say "we" because my sister and two good friends of mine started together; and also, we made an agreement that if one got behind, the others would help.

Finally we took the test, and after three weeks I received the best call of my life. I passed! I was so excited, and after another two weeks, received

my diploma. Next month will be my graduation.
I am very thankful.

Adriana Esquivel
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

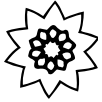
Struggles and Lessons

In life, many people have struggles they can't deal with. In my life, growing up until now has been really hard. As I look at myself in the mirror every day, I think to myself, "Hey, I'm still here, standing strong!"

My childhood wasn't great. We moved from place to place. Mother left when I was four years old. My father couldn't afford to feed my sister and me. Sometimes we had only pancakes and mustard to eat.

My sister and I moved in with our older sister, who did what she could to raise us. We both started hanging out with the wrong crowds. I would stay gone for days, do drugs, and do wrong things in

exchange for money. I wasn't proud of myself. I knew then, it was time to grow up, change my life, and do better.



When I was in my early twenties, I settled down, got a job, and had a child. I didn't want her to grow up the way I did. So, I had to step my game up and do whatever it took to give her things I never had. I wanted to be a good mother and set a good example for my child.

Now, I'm 26 and bearing my third child. I earned my GED high school diploma, am enrolling in college to become a pharmacy technician, and I'm raising my children in a good home. I am happy and satisfied with my life and thankful for all the wonderful people I met during this journey.

I went from doing drugs, being suicidal, and being in abusive relationships, to being a good parent to my beautiful girls. One lesson in life that I've learned

is to never give up and stay strong!

Linsey Davenport
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

Struggles and Strength

Struggles in life have made me a strong and caring person. My first struggle was when I was eleven years old and found out that I was pregnant with my first son. Although I was just a baby myself, we grew up together, and he is a blessing to me. I love him so much that it has given me a new outlook on life. It has made me stronger and wiser because I realized I had to be there for him. Now, I have two other children who are also blessings to me. If it were not for my mother helping me to be a good parent, I don't know what I would've done with three children to raise by myself.

My second struggle was when I dropped out of school at sixteen years of age. With only a tenth

grade education, I knew I was not going to be content since I have three children to raise. I want more for myself and my kids. I also realized, because of my mother, that I would be the most important role model for my children; so I am going back to school first to get my GED. Then I plan on going to a community college to pursue a career in nursing.



Anaye Cole

My struggles have made me a more appreciative and patient person. The more I learn in my GED classes, the more I want to learn. My kids see me going to school along with them every day, and I stress to them daily how important getting their education is. It feels very good becoming a role model for my kids and knowing that they see me as someone who not only takes care of them, but also as someone

they can look up to.

Anaye Cole

Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

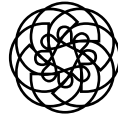
Struggles Lead to Victory

From Mexico, I came to the United States with my husband and little baby girl when I was about 21 years old. I was pregnant with my second child and felt very scared and sad as I knew no one in our new home in Altus, Oklahoma. I even went hungry many days, even though we were working in the fields as migrant workers. That involved a lot of hard work in the heat, chopping cotton. This job lasted only three months out of the year. I went back to Mexico to give birth to my second daughter. I returned to Altus after the baby was one year old.

Then I gave birth in 1991 to our third daughter. I even did the hard physical work in the fields while I was pregnant. My fourth child, a son, was born

three years later.

Then, I got a better job at a meat-packing company. I had to clean the big machines on the production line. I worked there 11 years. It was very hard on my shoulders, and I had to quit.



After 18 years of marriage, I divorced my husband and raised the four children by myself. It was a struggle for a working mother. I finally got a job doing housekeeping at a nursing home. That is my present job.

Now, I am 51 years old, and am learning how to pass the US Citizenship test in Spanish. I have a literacy tutor, Elsa, who is teaching me to read and write in English. I have had lots of struggles through my life, but overcame them. When I pass the citizenship test, I will have another real victory!

Martha Martinez
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Struggling On

I have had many struggles in my life, including my childhood at home, my years at school, and my time as a parent. When I was a kid, my dad would get drunk just to abuse us, and he would get mad at my mama because she did not do what he said. My mother, my siblings, and I escaped all the fighting when we moved to Oklahoma.

When I was in elementary school, I had to learn not to listen to people call me names, which helped me be victorious over the bullies. In high school, I met my kids' dad, who abandoned me and my baby when I was fifteen. When she found out I was pregnant, my mama was mad. She insisted that I learn how to take care of my son, and she said she would only watch him for me if I was in school.

My next struggle was getting pregnant again during my second year of high school. I made the mis-

take of falling for the same guy again, and it turned out that all he was interested in was sex, and he took no responsibility for the children. When I got into the TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program, I knew that I had to step up and be Mama and Daddy for my kids' sake, but I did not continue with it at that time.

Another difficult time was when DHS tried to take my kids away, claiming I was an unfit mother. I kept them



Laquida Perkins

because I successfully completed parenting classes and proved that I was a capable parent. I have also returned to the TANF program, and I want to get my education and prove to my kids that I am a good role model.

Laquida Perkins

Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

The Power Within Me

The struggles in my life will not break me, for my Lord Jesus Christ fortifies me. I refuse to yield to financial, health, family, or educational issues in life. As I progress with endurance and learn to advocate for myself, it is not an option to quit. I will also seek guidance from my instructors. I refuse to yield despite the physical problems of going without. Even though I do not have much, I have been blessed with more than enough. For this reason, I am able to bless others.

Now, I am embracing input on healthy living and allowing a change to manifest in me. I am learning from others; and through research on computers at school about foods such as fruits, vegetables, and herbs and the importance of water, I am learning methods of healing the body without always relying on medication. Not only am I focusing on my physical health, but I am also focusing on my emo-

tional and mental health. I think positive and do not let negative comments get to me, especially in family situations when my family tells jokes and laughs at me. They say I am only in the first grade and mockingly ask when I will be finishing my education. I do not ponder on what is said. Furthermore, I know that I am a steadfast person; I will accomplish my goals and get my



Elia Perez

GED even if my family does not believe that I will go on to the “second grade”. Hahaha! I am proud of myself for coming as far as I have without throwing in the towel, although many times I have wavered back and forth. Until now, I seem to have been in a fluctuating place; however, all my perseverance through all these storms has made me victorious.

Elia Perez

Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

The Rodeo I Call Life

Life throws many things in our path, but what makes us who we are depends on what we take away from the situations. I'm a firm believer that obstacles are what we see when we take our eyes off our goals. All our lives we're tested. Everyone has dreams, but few people achieve them. Living life is hard enough on its own. Living life and working on achieving your goals is doubling the difficulty. But, if you want it bad enough and you work hard enough it will happen.

I have competed in rodeos for 15 years. I feel that it has taught me many things. The sport of rodeo is very similar to life. If you want to be good at an event, any event, you have to work hard. Every day, you must practice. Just like life, every day, you must go to work or school to better yourself. When you get bucked off, you have to get back on. In life, as in a rodeo, you'll take inevitable falls. But, no matter how bad you want to quit, you have to keep on

going. Sometimes in rodeos, I'll have a bad performance; but, it's just like in life when you have bad days. It just reminds you that it's time to practice more and keep your eye on your goals. After all, you can't be the best every time.

Emily Farrow
Ada Adult Learning Center

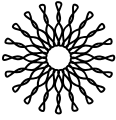
The Struggle to Catch Up

There was once an incident between a student and a teacher. The teacher was usually fairly nice and liked by most of the kids. The student was quiet, shy, and bad at her studies.

One day in class, everyone was taking turns reading aloud—something that made the shy student very nervous. As it became her turn to read, she rose from her seat. She could feel the fleeting glances of her classmates rise and fall on her back. She stood there speechless. The teacher, now glancing at the

clock, was clearly becoming agitated. She still managed to mumble a few words of encouragement.

The clock was ticking. No words came. The teacher, in anger, shockingly said something that ought not to have been said, especially in front of the other students. The teacher was suspended, but quit and quietly moved to a new school.



The student, however, stayed and endured a strong feeling of embarrassment.

The following year, the student found it more and more difficult to complete her studies. She asked her new teachers for help, but being understandably busy, they suggested she seek advice from her peers. Unable to gather the courage to do so, the student did what she could. Soon another year passed, and the student felt more lost than ever. Fearing that she'd never be able to catch up, she eventually dropped out of school.

Years later, the now much older student has found a

great need and want to learn and experience a new and broader life. She studied hard and earned her GED. With newfound pride and knowledge that nothing is beyond her reach, she still struggles, but she's hopeful that she can build a better life. She continues on her path of learning and discovery.

That student was me.

Tammy Perez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Turn for the Better

Struggles and victories in my life have made me a more confident person. My first struggle was when I was put in a foster home at the age of two. The state took me away from my mom and dad because my dad was abusive.

I stayed there through all of my childhood. I had struggles with my real family while growing up, and I saw them only on holidays and weekends. I never



LaTasha Oliver

had a mom to talk to when I had problems. I felt like my foster parents didn't understand some of my feelings. The good thing is, though, they introduced me to the Lord at the age of ten.

When my foster grandmother passed, it was a tragedy because she was the only woman who understood me. My foster sister was a good influence. I learned from her to never give up. She acted and sang in high school and won awards for it even though people told her not to sing because she was sick. She was always ill, but she finished high school and started college. The Lord took my sister away when I was thirteen.

Currently, my life has taken a turn for the better. I am studying in the literacy class now. Miss Lindee and Miss Janet have told me that things are not

impossible, even though they may seem to be. My main goal is to finish what I start and to make sure my kids have good lives. The Lord has blessed me and helped me to become a woman of God and to be thankful for everything I have in life.

LaTasha Oliver
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Victories

I was born and raised in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. My mom died when I was only eight years old and left behind my dad to care for three children. He worked hard to support us and we always had what we needed and even some of what we wanted.

However, things weren't always wonderful. As a child, I didn't understand why my dad punished us the way he did. I was the hard-headed one and I got hit a lot. I started doing drugs, running the streets and going to biker bars at a young age. When I was

sixteen, my dad decided to get remarried and make us into a family again. For me, that was like trying to cage a wild animal.

I quit school in the twelfth grade, got married, and had a son. Since then, I've survived one abusive marriage, another failed marriage, and a car wreck, with a boyfriend, that left me disabled for life and killed the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

I have been to prison twice myself; however, that didn't deter me from using or selling drugs. In 2010, I got busted again. This time, I was looking at fifteen years behind bars. But, by the grace of God, I was offered Drug Court.

That's when I turned my life around and decided to focus on my victories, and I refused to be defeated. I consider myself a successful person. I have raised four wonderful children and I am now a proud grandmother. I am getting my GED and going to

college so I can help others. I know now that my life is on the right track and my biggest victories are yet to come.

Charlene McNeil
Ada Adult Learning Center

Victory After Struggle

There have been many struggles and victories in my life. I've lost my mother and grandmother, and was on my own at sixteen. However, I have worked through my struggles and found victory with my husband and life with my children.

My mother said I was her angel. She loved me with all her heart and soul. She did everything she could for me. She passed away from cancer when I was five. I've always felt like she was watching over me. Not only was I her angel, she was mine.

My grandmother took me to raise. She taught me many things and spoiled me rotten. She was my

very best friend and was my world. When I was in the ninth grade, she became ill with breast cancer. I stayed home a lot to help her; which means I missed a lot of school. That summer, my grandma passed away. It really hurt me. I was on my own at sixteen. I dropped out of school and started partying. I was trying to block out the pain. I was afraid to love anyone in fear of losing them.

But, at seventeen, I met the love of my life, Seth. We have three children; Silas, Jasper, and Ariel. My heart is so full of love. I would do anything to not lose my family.

At age twenty six, I'm taking GED classes. I would like to get my degree as an ultrasound technician. Life had been a "struggle" after losing my mom and grandma and being on my own. But, there is "victory" in the love of my husband and children. Soon, I will have other victories, like hanging my degree

on the wall next to my high school diploma.

Stephanie Hart
Norman Adult Learning Center

Who I Am Today

I believe I am a winner because of all the struggles I have gone through in life. They have made me realize I have to be strong and believe in myself.

When I was five months old, my mother noticed that I wasn't using both of my hands correctly and I couldn't crawl. She called Children's Hospital and they set an appointment for me. They told her I would never be able to walk because my ankles didn't have enough strength.

Children's Hospital gave my mother the number to the Shriners, and they set an appointment for me. They said I had a disability known as Right-Sided Cerebral Palsy. They put a brace on my leg and I walked the very same day. However, the

x-rays showed my hand had something wrong with it. They said that the Cerebral Palsy had affected my hand also. They made me a special splint to keep my hand in place because it turned to the right, and I had no control over it.



At the age of twelve, they did surgery on my right hand and leg, which gave me more support in my ankle and loosened the muscles in my hand. Now, I am eighteen years of age. I walk perfectly fine, and I doubt anyone notices there is anything wrong with me. I have a strong state of mind and I believe anyone in the world can do anything as long as they stay confident and do not give up.

Chelsea L. Castle
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Why Being a Young Parent is Hard

Being a young parent is hard. I wish I had realized

how hard it really would be. After I had a baby when I was only 16, I learned how hard being a young parent is. I had to drop out of school, I never had enough money, and I had to grow up way too fast.

I had to drop out of school when I became pregnant. Parents have to make sure the baby is well taken care of, especially the first couple months of life. You have to get up through the night to give the baby a bottle or comfort the baby to go back to sleep. When you are dealing with all of this, it is hard to concentrate in high school.

Parents can never have enough money for a baby. Babies need formula, diapers, wipes, and clothes. If you don't have enough money, you can't provide what the baby needs. Most importantly, you have to make sure babies have a stable home, and that the bills are paid.

When you have a baby at a young age you grow up too fast. You have to focus on what is best for the

baby. You can't go out and have fun with friends like you used to. The baby needs as much love and support from that parent as possible. How do you have time for fun when you have to go to school, go to work, and come home to responsibilities?

Having a baby at a young age is hard. I had to drop out of school. Young parents never have enough money for a baby's needs. You can't go out and have fun. You must grow up fast and look to the future for you and the baby.



Brittany Carpenter
Union Public Schools Adult Learning Center, Tulsa

Winning!

There are many ways you can be a winner in life. When you look back at your personal knowledge and experiences, you will see a winner. Three ways I have become a winner are by getting an education, by overcoming obstacles in life, and by hav-

ing a personal relationship with God.

One way to be a winner in life is by getting an education.

When you get an education, you are achieving something valuable. When you reach that goal, you are a win-



ner. When you share that goal with your family, they will be very happy for you. You can finally say you have completed a hard task in your life.

Deborah Northrip

Another way to be a winner is by overcoming obstacles in life. I am going through one of the most difficult obstacles in life because I have just lost my husband, James. When you are with a person for thirty-one years and they pass away, it is very hard to carry on without them. You ask yourself, “What do I do now?” You have all the memories you can share with others, however, and you are overcom-

ing obstacles by facing them head-on.

Having a personal relationship with God makes anyone a winner! My late husband and I shared a special relationship together with God. James loved to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ to anyone who would listen. When you have a relationship with Jesus, you can lean on Him when you lose a loved one. He will guide you through all the rough times.

These are three ways I am a winner. There are others. When you use your personal knowledge and experience, you can understand life and be a winner in all areas.

Deborah Northrip
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Winning the Language Struggle

I am trying to learn English because I came from

Guatemala four years ago. I did not know any English, so it was a struggle for me. Now, I am learning English by having tutors, having a job, and with my friends.

I wanted to get a job when I came to Altus. The business told me that I must learn English to be hired. I went looking at the college for a teacher that could



Jose Domingo Rosales Reyes

They told me to go to the Great Plains Literacy Council at the library and get help. I went and left my name and phone number. The ESL Outreach Facilitator, Aleida, called me to come back to the library the next day. A friend went with me to that meeting, and Aleida set up tutoring with Hector on Wednesday evening. Then, I was able to get another tutor, Pedro, who helps me on Monday evening with sentences and writing. I

like their teaching and try to learn a new English word every day.

Now I am working at a food processing business making wieners. My supervisor is Hispanic, but he speaks in English. My co-workers also try to help me at my job.

My Hispanic friends have been helping me learn English. They explain in Spanish and English. That helps me understand better.

My dream is to read, write, and speak English very well. All these people have helped me be more successful with my language struggle.

Jose Domingo Rosales Reyes
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Travel and Adventure

A Lady Named Lisa

There once was a lady by the name of Lisa. She loved to travel. In five years time, she and her family moved from Oregon to Washington. Her mom, Therisa lived in Oklahoma so she decided to move to Oklahoma. Lisa and her kids were traveling in a car to Oklahoma. On the way, their car broke down in Wyoming. They bought tents and supplies and stayed at the lake. The lake was close to where they broke down.

Then Lisa met some people who owned a café that was closed down. They let Lisa and her family stay there for a while until she got the car fixed. Then the family got their car fixed and they got back on the road again. They made it to Oklahoma around April 9th. Then a few weeks later, there was a tornado, the May 3rd tornado. The kids were scared. They had never had any part of a tornado before. The kids went with their grandma under the house.

They lived in Oklahoma City. The tornado didn't hit them. They were so sad when they found out what happened. The family was scared of the weather in Oklahoma but they continued to live in Oklahoma and are still scared of tornadoes.

Katie Richardson
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

A Trip Worth Taking Again

On June 27, 2010, our Twenty-Fifth Wedding Anniversary, we took my mom, Jo Bevill, my aunt Betty, and my cousin Heather to our daughter Mary Lou Utley's house. She had a party for us. Gary, my husband, wrote me a special song which he gave to me as an anniversary present. It brought tears to everyone's eyes. I was a little weak at the knees and embarrassed, but that's a good feeling after twenty-five years of marriage.

The next morning, we went to Chattanooga,

Tennessee. We went to the Aquarium first. There were sharks, stingrays, and sea turtles—too many to name. We also went to Ruby Falls, the world's



Darla Taylor

tallest and deepest underground waterfall. Another attraction is a bungee jump. I wanted to jump, but Gary said, “You can go with the kids another day.”

The next day we went to Rock City. I stood and saw seven states. Man-made tunnels contained nursery rhyme scenes such as Hansel and Gretel, each breathtaking. Later, we went to Raccoon Mountain Caverns. I watched kids have a blast and heard them laughing.

On our way back, we stopped at an unmarked gravesite. Unlike the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, it was a small place with unmarked graves that we stumbled upon. Later, Mary and Aaron and

Cameron—we call him Big Man—wanted to take us out. We laughed, joked, and enjoyed teasing Aaron.

The next day we went to a museum and walked the trails with Aunt Betty, Mom, and Cameron. I have over 1000 pictures and would like to go again; at least I can visit these places through my pictures. Someday I want to take the grandkids and let them watch me bungee jump.

Darla Taylor
Duncan Adult Learning Center

An Afternoon Adventure

I live in Oklahoma City with my mom Sharon, my dad Jerald, and my sister Felina. I am also named Sharon after my mother. We live with two dogs, Snowflake, a short-haired male Chihuahua, and Nickie, a long-haired female Chihuahua.

We have an electric scooter that I like to ride. The electric scooter will go several blocks on a charge.

The other day, my cousin and I were riding scooters on the sidewalk. I was riding along when my phone rang. It was my boyfriend Auggie. I tried to



Sharon Townsend

answer my phone without stopping. My cousin was in front of me, moving slowly. I told her to go on, but she just sat there. I tried to stop, but my brakes didn't work. My scooter ran off the curb.

I didn't want to stay on the scooter, so I got off. I dropped my phone and hit the ground. My shoe went flying off my foot. I landed on my back and scraped and bruised it. Parts of the scooter fell off when it landed and my daddy had to fix it.

I learned not to answer the phone while riding my scooter. It wasn't fun.

Sharon Townsend
Literacy Link, Midwest City

Fishing Trip I'll Never Forget....

My dad asked my brother and me if we wanted to go fishing early the next morning. He said we were leaving early—4AM early. So, I set my alarm and rolled out of bed. We got ready and loaded our fishing poles and tackle in the truck to start our excursion.

On the way to the fishing hole we stopped to get live bait. We chose worms because we were going to the spillway. We parked, walked about a mile and cast out our line. Nothing happened.

My dad decided to move to another spot. We found a little water hole no bigger than two cars and no deeper than a bathtub. He cast his line out and as soon as it touched the water it snapped. My dad got excited and decided that my brother and I needed to jump in and noodle the fish while he went to get a bucket.

By the time he made it back, I'd caught a five pound drum, but I knew that fish hadn't snapped my dad's line. Suddenly, I felt something big hit my leg. I grabbed it. Boy, it was strong. I yelled at my dad for help and he jumped in and helped wrestle it. We pulled it out of the water and realized it was a huge flathead catfish that weighed at least 20 pounds. We jumped back in the water and ten minutes later we caught another 20 pounder.

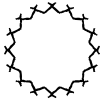
In the beginning, we were afraid that it was going to be just an ordinary day fishing; maybe even a boring day. But, that wasn't the case at all. It turned out to be a day I'd never forget and a wonderful memory I have of time spent with my dad.

Dusty Caudill
Ada Adult Learning Center

From Mexico

My first trip to the United States was with my baby

daughter and my mom. In February of 1995, we decided to go to Oklahoma City for the first time. It was in the morning, and we took a bus.

When we arrived, my mom and I decided to call the lady that was supposed to come  for us. I called her and she told me to wait in front of the pharmacy. When the lady didn't come, we went to find a hotel to stay overnight. The next day, I called the lady again. She answered and said she was sorry that she didn't send the person the day before. She told me to go to the front of the hotel and not to move from it. I did exactly as she said.

We were sitting on a bench. A person arrived and asked if I was Lupita. I thought maybe it was the person that was supposed to come for us. It was. I felt so relieved and said, yes. He told me to come with him. I took my daughter and baby brother. They were too small to understand. We followed him and we took a bus to his house. Two days passed and we

were still there. On the third day, three men came to the house. I realized they were the ones that were going to help us cross the border. They said we couldn't cross the border by road and that we had to cross the river instead. My mom was very nervous. I was too, but I stayed strong and refused to cry in front of her.

I was very afraid because they said we had to separate from the children as we crossed the river.

Lupita
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Hamburger: Destiny or Coincidence?

Exactly 18 months ago, I took the flight to Tulsa, Oklahoma, which would change my life forever. Destiny or coincidence? I do not know.

In 2009, I came from Brazil to the USA to participate

in the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians conference in Tulsa to present my master's degree results.

During the conference, I met people from around the world. Two days before my oral presentation, my new international friends invited me to try the famous American hamburger. I hesitated for a while because I wanted to review my presentation, but I could not resist this interesting experience.

When we were in the restaurant, my friends told me that there was a Resident of Veterinary Pathology from Oklahoma State University (OSU). We started to talk, and I told her that I was applying for a PhD in Veterinary Pathology in several American universities. Unfortunately, due to the world's economic crisis, the positions available had decreased, but I was still trying and did not give up.

Then, she invited me to go to the OSU Veterinary

College in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and introduce myself to the professors.

After my presentation in the conference, I went to Stillwater and talked to all veterinary pathologists there. Because I was so amazed by the physical structure and faculty, I asked for the possibility of an externship.

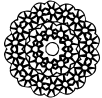
Five months later, I came back to Stillwater to do this training, and I decided to apply again for the PhD position. Fortunately, I passed and here I am!

Was it just a coincidence of time or more than coincidence? What do you think? I still do not know. However, I learned that we should enjoy all life's opportunities. The simple things can be the most extraordinary and transform our lives forever.

Patrícia Coutinho de Souza
Stillwater Literacy Council

Leonor's Story

My Pop had gone to Brownsville, Texas to work in the import/export business. I lived with my mother in Mexico City with my five sisters and one brother. After I graduated from high school, my Pop asked me to come to America to help him. He was very sick and his doctor felt he might have only two to three years to live. Pop said that if I would come, he would send me to a school for English as a Second Language.



I agreed to go and I rode a bus to Brownsville all by myself. I was hopeful to better myself in America. In Mexico I would receive maybe \$3.00 to \$4.00 for eight hours of work. I really wanted to stay in America. I was able to go to the school for almost six months.

After becoming sicker, my Pop and I went back to Mexico, but he died there. I stayed for a time with

my family. I had a small seasonal business making hand-made Christmas stockings. I once surprised myself by getting a contract with J.C. Penny Co. to make one thousand stockings.

A friend who lived in Commerce, Oklahoma told me there were good paying jobs there. I flew from Harlingen, Texas to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I now work at the J & M Mushroom Farms in Miami.

My pastor once gave me a book written in English but I couldn't read it. Now that I can read, I am able to read that book and more. That makes me happy. I have more security and more friends in America. I love to come to the library where I find such nice people. That makes me very happy, too.

Leonor Hernandez
Miami Literacy Council

Longest Journey

When I was a little girl, I always dreamed of travel-

ing and seeing new places. When I was seven, my mom said we were going on a trip and moving from Ohio to Florida. I was so excited. We were going to travel by Greyhound since we had no car. I thought I was finally going to get to see some of the world. However, it turned out to be the longest journey I ever took.

The morning we left, my mother said we could only take what would fit in one suitcase. I didn't like that since I would be leaving all my treasures behind. Being only seven, I didn't understand why I couldn't bring everything with me.

There were three kids, my mom and my stepdad. When we got to the bus station, it was very crowded. My mom said to stay close to her. When we made it on the bus, every seat was filled. I knew then it wasn't the journey I thought it was going to be.

On the first day, I loved looking out the big windows on the bus. I saw animals in pastures and different

vehicles going down the road. When it was dark, I tried to sleep, but spent most of the time awake and staring up at the night sky full of stars.

By the second day, we were all tired of the bus. I kept waiting for the driver to say we were in Florida, but it was always some other town or state. On the third day, I started seeing palm trees and sandy beaches. Finally, Florida!

Riding on the bus was not the adventure I had hoped for or dreamed of. To this day, I still believe it is the longest journey I've ever taken.

Andi Collins
Ada Adult Learning Center

My Adventure

I've been in many countries in the world that most people don't get a chance to experience. The most exciting adventure that has impacted my life was traveling and living in Okinawa, Japan. I was fortu-

nate to live there with my family for 4 ½ years. Not only did I observe its beauty, I was able to live in the community. This adventure allowed me to get to know the people and their customs.

Okinawa is a small island by the coast of Japan. It's a tropical island that grows enormous amounts of coconuts, bananas, and bamboo. The island's waters are also very spectacular with shades of blue and green. These glass-like waters contain a lot of coral reefs, which help protect the island from going completely under water. I discovered many trails and paths which led to waterfalls that would make a person just want to stay there forever. These falls looked like someone took a piece of heaven and put it right here on earth. There were three-tiered flowers draped down the waterfalls. This just magnified its beauty.

The Okinawans are very polite people. The women are very submissive to their husbands. They're

shorter than the Japanese people. They are very kind, caring, and mild acting. The Okinawans don't like violence, but prefer living in peace and harmony. They are very delightful to get to know.

God truly blessed me as I experienced this adventure. I would highly recommend traveling to Okinawa, not to stay just a few days, but as long as it would take to see its beauty and get to know the people. This adventure was truly an experience that enhanced my life.

Tina Hoque
Duncan Adult Learning Center

My American Journey

My American journey started two years ago as a new immigrant to the United States. When I came to the United States, I didn't know the English language.

18 months ago, I started to learn English at Oklahoma City Community College as a beginner

English student with Mrs. Anderson. She started by teaching me the English alphabet.

This year, in January, I began studying in an intermediate ESL class as a new student. The first day I went to class, I was fearful because I didn't know how this class would be, and I didn't completely understand when someone spoke English to me. But, I wanted to understand when someone spoke English to me. I knew that I needed to go to class.

My new ESL teacher has taught me how to read the newspaper and how to speak English with my classmates and others. Now, my English is getting better, and the real adventure is just beginning for me.

Thao Nguyen
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Exciting Journey

I came from Vietnam in 1994 to Canada with my family. In the first week, I was very homesick and

I knew little English in that time; then two weeks later my sister and I started going to school.

We got lucky. In just over 2 months, we got a job. That was not bad, and we could work and study. The first thing I bought with the money was a brand new car. I was very excited. The years passed quickly until one day I got a call from my friend to come



to her birthday party. It was at that party where I met a friend who had come from the United States; now, he is my husband. His name is Kit. Now, we have two children, both boys. The older one is Andy. He is in third grade now and is an awesome student at school. Cody is the little one. He is in first grade and is the smartest in the class. Of course, I am so proud of them both, but I am their mother!

Every year in summer, we go to Canada to see the grandparents—my mother and father. They live in Toronto, Ontario. They always take us to CN Tower

in Toronto; it's the super high tower in Ontario.

We always have a lot of fun.

Lan Chan
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Journey in Life

I had a hard family life growing up. At age six, I was held back and put in special classes. Later, I was sick with chicken pox and measles causing me to miss more school and fall further behind in my school work. My reading level was not getting any better and I was giving up on school. My twin sister and I had occasional foster parents from age four to fourteen who taught us good manners and to always be polite to others. My foster dad, Bob, taught me some learning skills. I kept getting further behind. I managed to graduate but other people always had done my homework for me.

In June 2011, I will be starting my 34th year with

my current employer. I met my wife Nita while on the job. I did not tell her I could not read or write until the night before we were to be married. She said she already knew but she still married me. Years later, she told me she wanted me to learn



Billy Colson

to read. She made me an appointment to meet with a tutor from the literacy program at the library. I did not want to go and was not happy with her for doing this. Because I was taught to be polite, I decided to go and see what the program was all about. I have had three tutors in my eleven years with the literacy program. I was even named Oklahoma's Adult Learner of the Year in 2006. I am so glad my wife made me go.

Without the skills I have learned I may have lost my job. I highly encourage other students to con-

tinue their learning. When you are out in the real world things can be extremely difficult if you cannot read or write. Now, I am able to do both with much more ease.

Billy Colson
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My Life Matters

In the Vietnam War, I was an artillery officer. When the North Vietnam Communists took over South Vietnam, they concentrated all South Vietnam officers into prisons. I became a prisoner for five years and two months. There were too many changes in my life. I didn't see my family for a long time. I lived in privation. The Communists treated me badly and contemptibly. In August 1980, the Communists released me. I went home with a skinny body and illness. I continued to live my life confined at home for three years.

In America, after the Civil War ended, all of General Robert E. Lee's officers were permitted to keep their arms and their horses. The soldiers were given rations of food to return home. In Vietnam, when the war was over, the Communists avenged their countrymen. All of the officers were imprisoned for 3–25 years. Hundreds of thousands of wounded soldiers were put out of the hospitals!



In February 1996, the United States government allowed my family and me to come to America. It was dawn as we left Vietnam. We were happy because we knew that we would have a good life in a new country. However, we were sad because we were going to be very lonely.

When I arrived in America, the most important thing for me was to study English. I went to OCCC and enrolled in an ESL class. I would like to thank my teachers for being patient with me and teaching me to become a new person who knows how

to read, write, and speak English. I was especially proud when I became a U.S. citizen. I am thankful to the United States government for giving me freedom and happiness.

Kiem Le
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City

My Literacy Journey

I have enjoyed being involved with the Great Plains Literacy Council for several years. Being an adult learner has given me a wonderful journey and has given me lots of places to go. I have been able to participate in many activities at the library, such as the Adult-Learner Conference and at the State Literacy Conference.

Every week, I try to make it to the local library for tutoring. It helps me get out of my house and I am learning more every day. I have been watching the “TV411 Series” and the “News for You” com-

puter programs. I feel like I have been around the world after seeing the special locations, articles and



Harold Wilson

stories. I have been active in my community's literacy program by helping build a parade float, being a student representative to the literacy board, assisting with appreciation luncheons, attending book reviews, plus so much more.

Another travel for me has been going to the State Literacy Conference. I have been to three conferences in Norman, Oklahoma. I like meeting my old friends as well as meeting new ones. Workshops with the other learners have given me lots of information and have helped me learn.

It has been another adventure to travel to the State Learner Conferences twice. These were held in the Metro Library and the Opportunities

Industrialization Center in Oklahoma City. After attending these meetings, my literacy council staff put an article and my picture in the newspaper.

All of my travels have been a learning adventure for me. I encourage others to get involved with their local literacy tutoring and attend the State Literacy Conference and Adult Learner Conferences. You will definitely have a true adventure.

Harold Wilson
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

My Traveling Adventures

When I left Rhode Island to come see my sister in Oklahoma by myself, I didn't know how to read or write. I had to take three buses and that was one journey.

My next trip was flying in an airplane to Vermont with my girlfriend. When I landed, we went to find her car. It was covered in snow and we had to dig it

out to go to her house.

My next trip was to Florida. I flew by myself. My son and daughter-in-law were waiting for me at the baggage pick-up and I was upstairs waiting for them. I said to myself, "Oh shucks, they forgot me." Then George came upstairs and there I was waiting for him.

My next trip was from Oklahoma to Pawtucket to go to a family gathering by myself. I had a good time while I was there. When it was time to come home, I got on the plane and we had to sit on the runway for an hour before we could take off because of a big storm. When we arrived in Detroit, the plane I needed to transfer to had already taken off, so I had to stay overnight in a motel myself. After breakfast, I went back to the room for my suitcase, but it was too early to catch the bus to go back to the airport. Then I called to the office to find out what time the bus would be there to pick me up. I

wanted to be sure I wouldn't miss the plane again. Don't ever be afraid to travel. Even though we can't read that good, we can do the same as everyone else. We are no different than anyone else.

Lois Thurston
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

My Travels

I had lived in Arkansas all my life. I went to Memphis and Little Rock a few times, but that was all. I moved to Blackwell, Oklahoma in 1953 because my mother and father lived there. My husband couldn't find work, so we moved to Oklahoma City after a month. I hadn't seen a big city before. I wanted to get back to the trees.

My husband went to work in a junkyard. My kids were little, so I didn't go out much. When my baby was five, I went to work in a laundry for 50 cents an hour. My husband died in 1988. We had little money



Mattie Black

and times were hard.

After some time, I married again. He died in December 2008. My daughter said, “Mom, we should go on a trip.” So we did. We took two of my grandkids.

We went to Colorado first. We stayed a few days there. We went to Pike’s Peak—a big mountain. We went on horse rides.

We went to Wyoming next. We got a motel in the mountains. It was so pretty that we stayed a week and had a good time.

In Yellowstone Park, we saw Old Faithful. We had to stop for buffalo to get out of the road. There were five or six at a time in the road. They were so big that a cow would look little. Then, it was time to go home.

A month after we got home, we packed up and went to Kansas. We went to Boot Hill where we saw a lot of outlaw graves. It is where the TV show *Gun Smoke* was made.

This is the end of the story. I hope to see you next year.

Forever yours...

Mattie Black
Literacy Link, Midwest City

Never Stop Dreaming

When I was a child, my dream was to travel to Disney World; but my parents said that it was a very expensive trip. I never stopped dreaming. I set out to one day travel to Disney World.

It does not matter how difficult the trip was getting there; it is a magical place. The entire time, I felt like a child again and, best of all, I got to share

this dream with my husband and my children. I will never forget this trip; it's one of the best experiences of my life up until now.

Never stop dreaming because one day your dream might come true.

My next dream to fulfill is to visit Cataratas Del Niagara, Niagara Falls. I hope someday to write about this dream when it comes true.

I thank my husband for helping to make my Disney World dream come true.

Rebeca Bolanos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

I could say that such a title might be the most important lesson that I've learned, as we should allow ourselves to take risks, because we can accomplish

wonderful things just being willing to take a chance.

Starting a new life abroad is not easy in the beginning. It means you are allowing yourself to face unprecedented risks and unexpected experiences.

Therefore, it is mostly up to us to make this enterprise a wonderful journey or a painful experience.

I came to USA almost 4 years ago, and I have been conquering wonderful things since then. By being very receptive since the beginning



Raquel John

to the experiences I was about to live, I could not be more proud of all my, and my family's, accomplishments.

Just by leaving one's own country, a person is taking a risk; hence, one expects a person to behave that way. By being open to exploring new approaches, making new friends, learning a new language, and

much more; one immerses oneself in a creative and marvelous process.

By coming to the U.S with pride and also aware that you should transform this opportunity into a wonderful journey, you will be certainly more likely to face different perspectives in a good way. However, if you choose to come, but are constantly complaining about the food, the people, and the cultural issues, I believe you might not be prepared for this experience.

In conclusion, it would be wonderful if all those who dared to live abroad came psychologically well-prepared and open to the amazing opportunity of being able to explore different perspectives and new approaches. This can make a big difference since it enhances one's own experience of the present and of the future.

Raquel John
Stillwater Literacy Council

On the Road to California

My most exciting adventure began on February 8, 2009, in Ringling, Oklahoma, with my mom, my sister, and me packing the U-Haul getting ready to make our move to California.

The next morning, February 9, 2009, Odessa, Texas—We stayed at a motel on the bad side of town near an interstate exit. I was babysitting three screaming, bouncing-off-the-wall little kids



Kelly Stephens

while my mom and sister were getting dinner. Later, I went outside to sightsee a bit; all there was to see were questionable people who scared me back to my room.

February 10, 2009, Albuquerque, New Mexico—It rained and flooded the parking lot, so my nephew

and I had a bit of a water fight until he ran and bumped his head under a semi-trailer. The skies there were mingled with yellow, orange, and red. In our confusion, my sister and I went the wrong way down an exit ramp.

February 11, 2009, Flagstaff, Arizona—The third motel had a bath tub with jets. The hotel room had a beautiful view of the mountains. Mom refused to dine at the Road Kill Café.

February 12, 2009, Tehachapi, California—After a short stay in a clean rest stop, mom surprised me by letting my sister drive the U-Haul and me drive the car. Finally, we reached Bakersfield, California, after a long and exhausting trip.

February 12, 2009, Bakersfield, California—Our cousin took us to our new house in Shafter. After fighting through traffic and stop lights, we arrived at Burger King, but then turned to do it again.

February 12, 2009, Shafter, California—It's late when we finally get to our new house. Our long adventure had come to an end; our new adventure was beginning.

Kelly Stephens
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Our Trip to Hannibal

Two years ago, our grandson Michael was getting married in Hannibal, Missouri. His parents, Eliase and Francis, live in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. Our daughter-in-law said they would take care of us after we got to Poplar Bluff, before we would go to Hannibal, which is a five hour drive from their home.

So, we left Tipton, Oklahoma, on Wednesday morning. We stopped in Lawton and ate breakfast. We drove all the way to our son's house and got there at 6 PM that night.

My other grandson, Brian, and his wife got there at



Frances Rodriguez

midnight. The next morning, we packed the van and all six of us headed to Hannibal, the bride's home town.

Friday morning we had a good breakfast in the motel.

We went to see the Mark Twain Riverboat by the Mississippi River and did a little shopping. We went back to the motel and got ready for the dress rehearsal and the rehearsal dinner.

On Saturday, we ate breakfast and had a good visit with our son Jose, his wife Vickie, their daughter Lisa, and Bryce, her 3-year old son.

The wedding was at 4 PM in the Baptist Church, and it was beautiful. After the wedding, we went to the reception and had a good time.

On Sunday morning, we headed back to Poplar Bluff. The next day, we drove home and arrived about

midnight. We were tired, but enjoyed the time with our sons and families. We are grateful to our son and daughter-in-law for taking care of us and paying for everything.

The trip felt like the honeymoon we never took. On May 4th, 2011, we celebrated our 59th anniversary. God has blessed us with children and their wonderful families.

Frances Rodriguez
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Reaching the Top

My most exciting adventure was when my husband and I went to Hawaii for my birthday. Oahu was the most astonishing island I have ever been to.

Waikiki beach was beautiful. The water was so clear. There were areas where the water was turquoise blue and other areas where it was light green.

Water sports are big in Hawaii. I went snorkeling, scuba diving, parasailing, swimming with the dol-



Rosa Medrano

phins, and more fun and memorable activities.

The most exciting activity we did was climb a mountain. The funny thing was, I did not have the proper shoes to climb a mountain.

I had worn sandals. We were wondering if this would be a good idea or not, but we kept walking anyway. On the way up other hikers kept telling us how beautiful it was at the top.

The beginning of the trail was concrete. It seemed so easy. Then, it turned into small rocks with brown nasty dirt. We walked a little more and the rocks became larger and started to hurt my feet. We became tired and talked about turning back, but we kept going forward. Finally, we thought we were fin-

ished. Then, we saw some long narrow stairs at the end of the trail. These stairs led to the top. I felt that I had come so far (in my sandals). I was so determined to reach the top, so I started running up the stairs as fast as I could.

We reached the top and were so elated because we made it. From where we stood, the ocean view was spectacular. We could see downtown Honolulu and huge mansions near the ocean.

This was the most exciting adventure I have ever experienced.

Rosa Medrano
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Strong and Powerful

My most exciting adventure was when we went to a family reunion to meet all the family in Mathis, Texas. We drove to my sister-in-law's house in Alvord, Texas and stayed overnight. Then we drove

to Mathis where the reunion was taking place. We talked to members of the family and ate lots of good food. Also, we played games like volleyball and went swimming. When the reunion ended, we had the ceremony to give away gifts and recognize family members.

The next day, we drove to South Padre Island to see the ocean. When we arrived at the beach, I was so excited to see the ocean for the first time in my life. I jumped from the truck and I dove in the ocean in my dress! The waves felt strong and powerful and the water felt good. We walked to the hotel to rent a room, went out to eat, and my husband and I walked on the beach together.

The following day, we went to ride on a boat. We walked along the boat ramp and saw fisherman, and I held a real hammerhead shark. It was dead. The boat went in the middle of the ocean and I saw a real whale jump out of the water. We went to another

boat to see the Army things on it. Before we got on the boat, we saw squid. There were a lot of them, and they were creepy. We walked around on the boat, and when we got off the boat, we went out to eat.

We went to my step daughter's house and talked, and I played with my step-grandkids. I really enjoyed it. My husband talked to his dad. We said our good-byes and left to go home.

Tina Crider
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

The Adventure of Football Camp

I'm not very old, so I have only had a few exciting adventures so far in my life. Surely everyone has had at least one exciting adventure to remember. My exciting adventure was going to team football camp. It was exciting because we played against Shattuck, we got to go out of town, and we got to

see how good our team could play.

One thing that was exciting about football camp was going up against the Shattuck Indians. That year, Shattuck was ranked number one in the state, and



Matt Harshaw

they had not lost a game in three years. It was intimidating going into their football stadium because they had a sign saying they were State Champions in 2003, 2004, and 2006. However,

we proved we were better than them, and that was exciting for everyone on the team.

Another thing that was exciting was staying the whole week in Shattuck. We slept on air mattresses in the classrooms at Shattuck High School. Their school fed us breakfast and lunch, but we were on our own for dinner. We usually went to the gas station behind the school for dinner. When we were

not playing football, we clowned around, watched movies, and played basketball in the gym.

Seeing how good we were going to be for the upcoming season was another thing that was exciting. Not many expected us to be that good except for ourselves. We had a new coach and were learning from him. We beat every team we faced at camp.

This is why football camp was such an exciting adventure for me. There have been a few other adventures in my life. However, this was a time that I'll never forget.

Matt Harshaw
Duncan Adult Learning Center

The Best Trip of My Life

I grew up in a very happy and loving family, but we were poor, and often I went to school hungry without lunch. I saw my parents work all day without rest. My father later told me that the only way to

make money was by working. He told me he was trying to make our lives better. One day, after school I went to my dad's work and I stayed with him all afternoon. When we returned home, I told my mother that I was going to get a job. And so, I did.



I was only six years old when I began working. My big brother came to America in 1986. My parents came in 1995, but I stayed in Tonalá, Jalisco until I was 28. I worked in Mexico for 22 years of my life and I was still in the same situation as I was when I was six years old. I was working a 48 hour week, but making only \$85.00 each week.

One day, my older sister told me that our father wanted to speak with me. He invited me to come to America. I was not sure if I wanted to make the trip, as it was far from home. I had never really traveled, so I was confused. Finally, I decided to do it. So I came to America, which was to be my new home. When I arrived in Oklahoma, I began doing the

same work that I was doing back home, but here, I've made in 3 years what I couldn't do in 22 years in Mexico. Making the trip to U.S.A. was the best decision I ever made in my life.

Salvador Garcia Coral
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Travel and Adventure

I love to travel. Very early, in Morocco, I discovered that I had a passion to explore new things. And then, I landed for the first time in my life in North Carolina where I came to live with my brother's family. Coming to the US has started my life all over again. In fact, I have always wanted to immigrate to America; the country I had already fallen in love with through movies, music, and literature.

When I first arrived, I was a bit terrified; I didn't speak a word of English. Lucky for me my brother was here. I settled in Willow Springs which is a

small town in North Carolina. I took a low-paying job in a restaurant, and from there things started to change for the better. I remember I was walking further every day, trying to find a better job. But there wasn't enough entry-level work for unskilled people like me.

Somehow, I made it through the year before I decided to head to Raleigh. I didn't stay long there, as the economy was not in good shape. After that, I headed for Oklahoma where my other brother had arranged for me to share his house until I got on my feet. It turned out that Oklahoma was a perfect place for me to start over again. I found a job, got free English classes at OCCC, and bought a car. I was thrilled. I had never had a car before.

I lived in North Carolina for one year; I loved it. The people weren't so friendly, but here in Oklahoma City, they are so much friendlier. They are open-minded and big-hearted, and this is what makes

Oklahoma great.

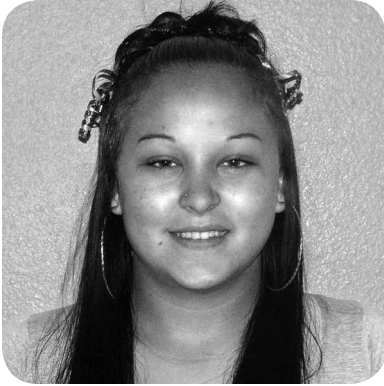
Tarik Salim
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Traveling and the Races

People can learn many things when they travel. While some people don't get to travel too much, I've been fortunate in that I've been several places. Three things I've learned through my travels are to be responsible, to gain confidence in myself and my horse, and to accept winning and losing graciously. You see, I barrel race.

One thing I have learned when traveling is responsibility. I travel to many competitions. My responsibilities include getting my entry fees sent in on time and dressing my horse. If I don't have the fees sent in on time, I don't get to compete in the main line up, and it costs me extra money. Dressing my horse involves putting protection on her legs and mak-

ing sure the saddle is on the withers of the horse to prevent the horse from developing back problems.



Alexandra Romero

Another thing I learned while traveling is having confidence in my horse. I must have this confidence to make a good showing in the competition.

When I run my horse, we have to become a team. We have to read each other's thoughts if we're going to win.

Accepting winning and losing is another thing I learned when traveling and competing on the barrel racing circuit. When I win, I'm very pleased. When I lose, I'm still fairly upbeat because I know there will always be a next time. I enjoy barrel racing, and I always thank God that He kept my horse and me safe during the competitions.

These are only three things I have learned when trav-

eling. Of course, I've learned many more things. I hope to keep competing and traveling to new and exciting places as I age.

Alexandra Romero
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Visiting Countries

I was born in a small country in South America called Uruguay. My family was extremely poor. When I was eleven years old, I had the opportunity to travel to Venezuela. I had the grand opportunity to learn about the Caribbean culture. The people in the Caribbean are so different. They listen to loud music; they wear spring colors year round, and appear to be happy all the time.

When I moved to Venezuela, I learned there was a whole new world out there that presented a multi-



tude of opportunities. Venezuela became the place I will be able to get a good edu-

cation and flourish as a woman.

Visiting different countries has given me the opportunity to appreciate what I have and decide what is best for my family. The most important decision I made was to come and live in the United States. I was willing to learn the language, culture, and laws of this great nation. Although I am a citizen of the United States, I will always be a citizen around the world. I want my daughter to be a citizen of this wonderful nation.

Sandra Esteve
New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

Visiting Family

Every year in April, I have to go visit my home and my family in Thailand for the Thai New Year. I am very happy at that time. I can spend time with my family and my friends. But, travel bores me because I have to spend all day and all night traveling. When

I come back to America, I hate that because the time is very different. I have to wake up at night and sleep during the day. This happens for about a week. I am happy to go visit my family and my home, though. I can't go this year because I have a job, and I have to keep it. I will have to wait for next year.



Alisa Derr

Alisa Derr
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

**Wisdom
and
Learning**

A Wise Woman

There have been many wise people in my life. I try to learn something from the people I know. My grandmother is the wisest person I have ever known. I have gained wisdom from her examples by learning to be respectful, honest, and persistent.



Jacinda Dobbs

One way I have benefited from my grandmother's wisdom is in learning to be respectful. My grandmother always said that she wanted people to see her family as well-behaved and well-mannered. My grandmother was quick to correct us if we were not respectful. She taught me that being respectful is a trait that is important to have in life.

Another way I benefited from grandmother's wis-

dom is in learning to be honest. My grandmother could always see through the lies I told. I can still hear her say, “You get in less trouble if you tell the truth.” The consequences for not being honest were always the worst. Being honest and truthful is an important characteristic to possess. It says much about the kind of person you are.

Being persistent is another lesson that I have learned from my grandmother. She was always an influence on me in her own little ways. When I was a child, she made sure that when I did something, I did it correctly. Her persistence made me realize that anything worth doing was worth doing well. She also taught me to not give up on something just because it may be difficult to achieve. As an adult, I find myself being set in a persistent way the same as she was.

These are only three lessons I learned from my grandmother. The woman taught me so much!

Now, I can't imagine life without her knowledge and wisdom.

Jacinda Dobbs
Duncan Adult Learning Center

As I Age



Shannon Grant

There are many things I have become wiser about as I have aged. It is common to gain wisdom as we grow older. Three things I have grown wiser about with age are relationships, friendships, and child-rearing.

One thing I've become wiser about with age is relationships. I have been in two main relationships. My first relationship was with my children's father, and I did learn from my mistakes with him. Looking back now, I have blamed him to make myself feel better. I had to let go of him and the situation in which we

found ourselves. I gave up hope until my second relationship. I repeated the same mistakes as in the past; however, we both learned some things. The relationship progresses.



Another way I have become wiser is in my friendships. I have lost a few friends because I have chosen to live my life differently. My old friends wanted to keep on living the wrong lifestyle. That's not for me anymore. Here I am now with very few friends, but I'm "living it up" the right way.

Child-rearing is another way I have gotten wiser with age. When my son, Isaiah, was starting to eat table foods and learning to crawl and walk, I was always worried about him getting dirty. I was constantly cleaning him up. With my second child, I am not so uptight. Yes, I am still slightly obsessed with cleanliness, but I'm not constantly worrying about it and what others might think of my children and me.

These are only three ways I have become wiser in my old age. There are many more. I will start today to continue to improve. I have a lot of faith in myself.

Shannon Grant
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Becoming a Young Wise Woman

I'm wiser now that I've learned there comes a time in life for change. On October 24, 2009, my family and I made a new start. There was more sharing, caring, loving, and most importantly, self-respect and values in our lives.

My family values and self-respect caused me to better myself, and made me value my life more. The birth of my child made me wonder about my education. I honestly thought it was over. Birthing my baby girl when I was fifteen, living under my mother's roof, and having to drop out of the tenth grade

was the most depressing stage of my life. My baby's father was killed two years after she was born.

My wonderful mother advised me to move on from my mistakes, get my education, take care of my newborn, and become successful in life. My situation was depressing. I decided to put my faith and trust in myself; to move on and accept my mistake, but also my gift from God. So, I turned to D.H.S for help to care for my daughter and get my GED diploma. I went to Vo-Tech School and learned more than I expected. I took the GED test and passed everything but math, which stressed me out. I put it on hold; took a nail tech class and graduated from it. This gave me a mindset that I could do anything if I put my mind, faith, and trust in myself. I enrolled in another class, preparing to pass the GED test the next time.

Now, I'm wiser and staying focused on passing. I'm also in a better learning environment, where I

think I will better myself by learning and becoming a young wise woman!

Dominick Holmes
Oklahoma City Adult Learning Center

Changing Lanes



Savannah Mcgee

Before literacy classes, I had made a lot of bad choices and had been through a lot. I dropped out of school a year before I was supposed to graduate and that was where it all began for me—my mistakes.

I got involved with the wrong guy and he liked to hurt me and cause me pain. He liked to slap and hit me even while I was pregnant. I knew this was a bad situation, but I was scared to leave. I prayed about it and God lifted me up and I was able to get

out of that situation. There's always a light at the end of every tunnel.

I have totally changed lanes in my life. Now, I'm trying to get my GED and work on my math, thanks to Mrs. Barbara and Mrs. Hawkins. They have taught me a lot of things that I did not know before coming to the Leflore County Literacy Center TANF program.

Savannah Mcgee
Leflore County Literacy Center, Poteau

Doing it Differently

At the age of fifteen, I had a little girl. I thought I had learned everything needed to raise her correctly; but as I found out, I didn't have a clue what good parenting skills were. Because of this, I was unable to teach consistent boundaries; therefore, she always got her way. By me lacking the knowledge needed to raise my daughter properly, she has

now developed a bad attitude and a lack of focus in most areas of her life. She thinks it must be her way



Tacesia Thomas

all the time. Although she is an A/B student and will graduate a year early, she struggles with respect for authority. This is getting her into a lot of trouble and is affecting her opportunities.

Also by letting her grandmother be way too involved in her upbringing, my daughter and I lack the bond we could have with each other. We love one another, but it doesn't feel like a mother/daughter relationship should.

Realizing the mistakes I have made with my daughter, I am now raising my son in a different way. Now, I take the time out to get more involved in his development. We read together every day. I take him to the classes that are for kids and parents in our

apartments. We play and go to church. I am giving him structure in daily routines and in his environment. I take every opportunity to educate him by taking situations and turning them into lessons. I stay up to date on what is age appropriate and follow it as best as I can. I do what is needed for him to be a good responsible person when he grows up. Because of all this, we have a bond that I didn't have with my daughter.

Tacesia Thomas
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Education in Colombia Is Not Free

The most important lesson I've learned is education is free in the USA. In my country, every parent that cares for their children must find a way to pay for the education of all of their children, from pre-school to high school. It is very difficult for both

parents to work in order to provide clothes, food, a roof over their heads, discipline, and faith in God.

Education, home values, discipline, and moral val-



Gladys Campos

ues are a way of life for most families in Colombia. All people in Colombia value their education and strive to get ahead through education because this is the only way to get out of poverty.

Parents invest in their children and the end result is more educated families to excel in the different types of industries, government, and educational institutions requiring new educators, government officials, doctors, lawyers and state representatives.

Half of the population in Colombia excels in the job industry while the other half struggles in different types of businesses that don't require any type of education. There is no government assistance for

the poor. In other words, there is no welfare, no housing allowance, and no free lunch for any students—no state assistance of any kind.

The most important thing pointed out about education in Colombia is that it is not free. In America, education is free. It is true that taxpayers pay taxes for education. In America, anyone can make an excellent grade and be awarded a scholarship.

People in America don't take advantage of all of the opportunities that America offers. People of Colombia try to take advantage of what America offers, but America makes it so hard for members of other countries to advance in the land of the free.

Gladys Campos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Freedom

I spent almost five years letting a man control me every day of my life. Literacy is a way for me to pick



Pamela Craig

myself up after he beat me down. Getting my GED and going to college to become a nurse is a way for me and my kids to have a better life. That way, I never have to depend on a man again. Most of all, I want the freedom to live and raise my kids without anyone's help.

Pamela Craig
LeFlore County Literacy Council, Poteau

Gaining Wisdom

Experiences help us get wiser with age. Those experiences involve many different people and things. Three things that have made me wiser are my job, my friendships, and my education.

One way I have become wiser as I have aged relates to my job. I work at a day care center. I have to take

care of eight children. I have learned to be very patient with the little ones. You may have to tell them something five or six times before they get it. I have learned that if they are looking at your eyes, there's a better chance they are listening and will do what you say. Working there has made me wiser about children, and one day when I'm a mom, I'll be ready.



Karman Van Oven

Another way that I have become wiser as I have gotten older is in my friendships. I have learned you can't trust just anyone. When I had to leave school, all of my friends just stopped calling and talking to me. When I would see them in town, they ignored me. Therefore, it's very hard for me to think people are really my friends. Even though I have always tried to be a good friend to others, I know that

friendship does not come easily.

My education is a big part of my life that has made me wiser. I didn't go to public high school. My mother taught me at home. While being home-schooled, I decided to go to college. I never thought I would go to college. I know going to college will better my life.

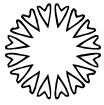
These are only three ways I have become wiser. There are many more. I know I'll gain even more wisdom as I age.

Karman Van Oven
Duncan Adult Learning Center

Growing Wiser

The most important lesson I've learned was when I was 17 and had my first child. I wasn't prepared or ready for the responsibility I had gotten myself into; but at the same time, I knew what I was getting myself in. Even though it played over and over

in my head that I was too young with no job or a high school education, I still made the decision to have a child.



Barely being able to support my child made times hard and stressful. I always had to depend on my mother to help me out with all the problems. I did everything I could to provide for my son. I stopped hanging out with most of my friends so that I could be there for my “little boy.”

A while after the pregnancy, my son’s mother and I decided that things weren’t working out between us, so we sat down, compromised, and decided that we weren’t going to be together anymore. We were both young and really weren’t thinking ahead of ourselves. We also talked about our son and how things were going to be as far as me seeing and spending time with him. We came to an agreement that we both would be there 50/50 for our little boy. So he could have the things he needs, we both decided to

go back to school or get ourselves jobs.

Taking care of our responsibility truly taught me a lesson to now always prepare myself no matter what the circumstances are, and to not just think about myself and how happy I can be. I also have to think outside the box to get a better perspective on things in life. Having my first child and deciding to be a part of his life taught and showed me true responsibility.

Jessie Robinson
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Higher and Higher

I have been coming to the Creek County Literacy Center a little over a year. I have a wonderful teacher named Sandy. She has taught me so much, and helped me with my math skills. Before I came here, I did not have any faith in myself that I could get where I am, but she has shown me I am capable

of learning anything I put my mind to. I am moving up higher and higher in life and it's exciting to have new skills. I am a better person because of coming here. I can help my children out better with their school work. I am glad I came here. I was homeschooled most of my childhood and struggled very hard with math and English. Because of these struggles, I have felt inferior, but Sandy has made me feel superior. I would encourage anyone who is embarrassed to come in anyway to seek help. Come in as you are no matter what level of learner you are. They are here to help you reach your goals.



Heidi Bewley

Heidi Bewley
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

Hope to Learn with a Disability

I have a disability. It's difficult for me to read and remember people's names, but it will not stop me to learn to read. I have a tutor from Latimer County Literacy Council to work with me on learning to read; so I know I can do it. My goals are to read my Bible and read ghost stories. I can write stories because my tutor keeps helping me.

I know my Mom will be happy for me to read to her. I love my Mom. She is in every thought I have and in everything that I do. I would like to read children's books to my twelve nieces and nephews. My four sisters are my best friends. A true friend is someone who knows you for you.

I attended the 2010 Literacy Conference in Norman with my tutor. I met other adult students. They told me to keep reading and don't give up. Reading

is hard for me. I like to read the adult student stories in the *Celebrating Our Journey* book. These stories tell me other people learned to read well, which lets me know I can do it too. I am 29 years old.



Christina Lovett

I was told I could not read. But my tutor knows I can learn and I know I can do it. I have faith in myself that one day I will be able to pick up any book and read it. I am happy to have Jesus and God in my life. I am a Christian, and I go to a Baptist church to learn more about the Lord. I know I can love life with them.

Christina Lovett
Latimer County Literacy Council

I Am Wiser Now

There are many people throughout my life that have

helped make me wiser. A lot of people and things have come my way and have had an impact on me. The most influential ones have been my wife, my God, and my teacher. They have been very supportive and reliable as I work to reach my goals.

My life has had its ups and downs. There have been times when I just wanted to give up. My wife has been by my side when others would just tell me that I couldn't accomplish my goals and just to give up. My wife would tell me that I could complete anything if I set my mind to it. She is my true supporter. Her encouragement has helped me jump the hurdles.

God has been my spiritual strength throughout my life. I know he'll always be there no matter what. He will never judge me. God will always believe in me. His love is unconditional.

My most famous leader is my teacher. She always makes me feel important in class. My GED teacher helps me without making me feel stupid. She has

encouraged me to get my GED. I wish I could have had a teacher like her when I was in high school. My teacher has helped me become wiser.

My wife, my God, and my teacher have helped me become wiser. They have helped me realize in life that my goals can be met. I will continue to better myself as I accomplish future goals. The “sky is the limit.”

Lester Allen
Duncan Adult Learning Center

In School, Learning English

My name is Dora Gardea. I am 47 years old and I am from Mexico. When I was a middle school student, I knew about English, but our teacher never taught us grammar or the alphabet, so I did not learn much. But, I really wanted to learn how to speak and read English!



In 1979, when I was 15, I came to the U.S and I tried to learn English, but it was years before I started formal school. I bought an English book to learn and practice grammar; I paid attention when people spoke; and I practiced speaking and listening with my friends and family (including some American friends). My English started to really improve, but my dream was to be in school!

In 1982 I returned to Mexico and continued to practice and develop my poor English by myself.

In 2000, I returned to Oklahoma City, married and with two children. Now, I am in OCCC Adult Learning Center. I am happy because I am learning English in a real classroom with a good, good teacher!

Dora Gardea
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

It's Never Too Late to Improve Your Knowledge

When I was a child, I didn't know how important school was. In my hometown, nobody learned because there wasn't a school.

I had to walk ten kilometers every day to another little town's school with two classmates. They didn't like to go to school. They just liked to play soccer or swim in the river. Every week we



Isaias Vargas

went to the school for just a day. On the other days, we spent time on the river. I lost three years.

I didn't pass the first grade until my fourth school year and that was because someone built a school in my little town. I got through the first, second, and third grades. After that, however, I abandoned

school for ten years.

Some of my friends pushed me to continue school, so I started to study with strong power. I got a Bachelor of Seminary. Now, I have my PhD in Psychology Thesis, and I can be an MBA executive. I will graduate in November of 2011 in Madrid, Spain.

Isaias Vargas
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Knowing a Great Country

I am from Mexico, a lovely country. I moved to the United States because I married an American citizen who was living in Mexico. He spoke Spanish well, so there was no problem for me about that. He loved Mexico, the culture, and the food.

The problem started when we moved to the United States, a new country, a new culture, a new everything for me. I was scared and embarrassed because I didn't speak English, and my husband translated

for me all of the time. The hardest time for me was when my husband was in the Persian Gulf during the war. I felt so alone. I didn't have my husband to help me; but, at the same time, I needed to be strong to be a successful person. I found English lessons at Oklahoma City Community College and started to learn. Also, my new family helped me by teaching me easy words.



Later, when I started to feel confident about doing things by myself, I started to learn more about this great country. I found out that I was not alone, because a lot of people are in the same situation. The United States is a country where immigrants from many different countries come to begin a new life. There are many different cultures, languages, and foods that make up this one country. However, we learn everything about this country and culture without leaving behind our own.

Imelda Thompson

Every immigrant faces difficulty when he or she comes here for the first time. The first barrier is the language. But, this is a great country full of opportunities and great people. I love this country like my own. This country allows us the opportunity to be successful, yet it respects our traditions and customs. Many immigrants want to give back to this country which has given them so much. Right now, I am still trying to give back the best that I can.

Imelda Thompson
OCCC Adult Education, Oklahoma City

Learned From My Struggles

When I was younger, I didn't think about anything but myself. I didn't like school. I didn't think an education was that important. I thought it was lots of work, so I didn't bother to learn or study. I decided to drop out of school. I didn't care about going back.

Then I became a young mother. I realized I couldn't

just think about myself anymore. I had a child to care about. I started to see that I did need my education to care for him in things like helping him with his homework and reading him a book.

Now, I also want to feel more confident about myself and be happier. With a better education, I can get a better paying job and have time to spend with my child.

I have learned from my struggles in life. I'm going to do my best to get a good education because it's important.

Nubia Sanroman
Community Literacy Centers, Oklahoma City

Learning Every Day

Every day, I believe people should learn new things. Since I am 22 years old, I know that I am gaining new ideas from my work, tutoring, and life in America.

I work at a fast food business and a nice restaurant. I have learned to ask questions from co-workers. I speak Spanish, so I am using English at work.

Tutoring is helping me with English. My tutor,



Valentin Alonzo Vasquez

Hector, knows Spanish and explains the new words and how to use them. For about one hour a week, I go to the Altus Public Library. I try to share with my friends what I learn.

When I came to Altus, Oklahoma, from Guatemala, I noticed how difficult it was. It is hard to have a conversation if you don't speak English

I am learning every day something new. Learning has no age limits. You can do what you desire.

Valentin Alonzo Vasquez
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Learning Takes Time

I am from Coahuila, Mexico. I married Javier Granado, and then I came to Altus, Oklahoma, in 1997. Now, we have three children. Their names are Belen, Javier Jr., and Angel.

The reason I decided to learn English is to help my children with their homework and to be able to take them to the doctor and be able to explain myself. In



Diana Granado

the future, I will apply for United States citizenship.

I started studying English by going to the Altus Public Library. The library sponsors the Great Plains Literacy Council where I have gotten help with books and materials to help me learn English. My husband and my tutors have helped me learn a lot.

My tutor Aleida reminds me that the best way to

learn English is to practice. I am grateful for the library for having such programs with tutors.

Diana Granado
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Learning to Change

Change is the best thing that has happened to me; it has made me a different person than I was before. I am not doing the things I used to do. I am still in school and I actually enjoy attending and learning.

When I was in high school, I only went when I felt like it; consequently, this got me kicked out. After that, I tried some other schools, but I didn't learn much. Then I came to OIC where it has helped me a lot. I have learned to control my attitude and how to communicate well with others. Now, I open myself up and allow people into my life. I surround myself with positive people.

I am learning at my own pace and I realize that I

can achieve my goals. I now even study at home. I have never done this before. I had always felt that homework took too much time away from me “chillin” at home. Now, I have overcome this feeling.



Alicia Berry

I have also become more independent. I am raising my one-year-old by myself. I have learned to spend more time with my child. I play with her more and now read to her, so she can develop her learning skills. I stopped drinking and going out, which was affecting my studies, participation in class, and quality time with my daughter.

Recently, I began to learn how to type and be professional. This is helping me change the way I talk, dress, and behave. I am learning how I should carry myself in a business setting. This is preparing me

for the career I want to take up—medical administrative assistant. All these changes are giving me wisdom and are making me a better person than I was before.

Alicia Berry


Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Life Is a Good Teacher

The most important lessons I have learned are about life. As life throws events at me, I have learned to take it and deal with it. I had a teacher that told me “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” Life is a good teacher. Life has taught me how to grow up, how to wise up, and how important my education is.

Life has taught me to grow up. Six years ago I was a different person. Each day since, I have grown so much. Having children, I can no longer be a child myself. I had to learn how to manage my life. I also

had to understand motherhood, and life in relationship to motherhood.

I had to wise up and learn how to ask for help: I moved back in with my mother. 

It was convenient because school was across the street. It was much easier for me to walk to school. My mother would watch my child while I was at school. I got a job and quit school, then moved out. My child and I had a decent house to live in. I still didn't get my GED.

Education is important so I went back to school and I am working on my GED. I put my three children in daycare each day, I hop on the bus, and I ride to school daily. I am proud I am trying. I care about my education, and I will earn my GED soon.

Life is a lesson and I look forward to each day. I am growing up, wising up, and I look forward to obtaining my GED. Everyone should learn from life's lessons and listen to them. From life's lessons we can

learn, grow, and plan our future.

Ruth Gardner
Union Public Schools Adult Learning Center, Tulsa

Life Lessons

Oh, the life lessons I have learned! Every mistake I have made has helped me grow into an adult. Three life lessons I have learned concern my relationships, my mistakes, and my friends and foes.

One life lesson I have learned is through relationships. I learned to never give yourself to another until you know who the other person really is. Girls and boys play games to see how far they can go to break you or use you. Young relationships are never about love. I used to play games with girls. Eventually, I grew up and learned that it's childish to play these games. Someone always gets hurt.

Another life lesson I learned is through my mistakes. One mistake I made was lying to make myself

look better to my peers. When it came time to follow through on the lie, I couldn't do it. My peers made fun of me and never allowed me to be a part of the group again. However, I'm glad I didn't follow through with my actions. Those people were not really my friends.

Knowing my friends and foes is another life lesson I have been taught. Most people think they make friends, but that's not necessarily true. Sometimes a friend turns into a foe, and recognizing the difference is difficult. Many times a foe starts out as a friend, but they turn on you when the going gets rough or when you're not looking. Making true friends can be a trying experience, but when you have a "real" friend, it's priceless.

These are only three life lessons I have learned. There have been others. I believe all people who make mistakes will be the wiser person when they get older.

My Daughter's Financial World

Once upon a time there was a little girl, named Jasmin, who liked to play with dolls. Rita, her mother, gave her a bag of baby clothes which made her happy. She liked to play dress up with her dolls.



Rita Lozano

One day, Jasmin decided to play.

She took out her baby clothes and laid them out. She was going to have a garage sale with them. After she got everything ready and out on

the table, she got her baby dolls out and went to the garage sale that she had created. She walked with her babies up to the table and was looking at the clothes. She was talking to her babies and asked them if they liked the shirt; of course, the babies couldn't talk. Jasmin asked the lady for the price of the shirt. The lady told her it was 10¢.

Jasmin got out her play money and gave her 25¢. The lady forgot to give change back to Jasmin. Jasmin told the lady, “You owe me 15¢.” The lady told her she didn’t have change, so Jasmin got to pick out two more items. Then the babies and Jasmin went home. She put the new clothes on her babies. She had a wonderful day, spending time with her babies.

That evening, I was shown that my daughter is very creative and knows how to use her money.

Rita Lozano
Community Literacy Centers, Oklahoma City

My Driver’s License

When I came to the United States, I was very excited. But after a while, I was very depressed because I didn’t know how to drive. Then I started crying and wanted go back to Korea. In Korea, I didn’t need a car or need to drive. I could go anywhere on a bus, taxi, or train.

One day, one of my friends told me, “If you don’t know how to drive, people will think you’re stupid.” I wasn’t happy to hear that. Since then, I started studying English and praying to God; I asked him to help me get a driver’s license.

I wanted to learn to drive so badly. One day, I took the car and just wanted to practice driving. I was driving to the park and the police officer followed me. He stopped me and said I needed to go to jail because I didn’t have a driver’s license. I was so scared and I started crying.

I asked him to please forgive me and begged him to give me one more chance. He felt sorry for me and didn’t give me a ticket. When I got home, I didn’t tell anyone about this incident until I got a driver’s license. After I got a driver’s license, I felt so good and I really didn’t want to go back to Korea.

Now, I’m glad I didn’t go back to Korea because I like living in the United States. I’m going to school

and learning more English now, and that makes me happy.

Jumsoon Evans
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Father, My Hero

I remember when I was kid at my parents' home in Vietnam with my older sister and my younger brother; time was flying by, you know, and we are now the adults and have our own families. My sister and I moved to the United States and my brother is in Canada, but my parents stayed in Vietnam.

My father was a defense department officer, and despite his hard work, he kept an eye on our education. He cared a lot about his children. My mother was always our sweetheart; on the other hand, my father was our guide. I was a curious kid and the only one who provided me the answer was my father. He explained to my brother about the first Apollo,

launched on July 20, 1969 by the United States; told my sister that *Doctor Zhivago* (1957) was written by Boris Pasternak, a Russian physician and poet; that Ray Charles Robinson was one of the first African-



Thi Thanh Le

American soul musicians of the 1950s using rhythm and blues, gospels, blues styles; that the Beatles were an English rock band formed in Liverpool in 1960, and so on.

One day he said: "You have the opportunity to get a good education, and if you know how to use it to enrich your life, it's wonderful. I wish you well."

Even now, when I have a decision to make, I wonder what he would want me to do.

He is almost 80 years old now and he usually spends his day reading. I'm proud of him and wish he could stay with us as long as possible. Even if he is not

beside us physically, he will be present in our hearts.

My father—my hero!

Thi Thanh Le
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Goal

I am 40 years old. I live in a group home at Cedar Ridge in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. I just returned from Stillwater, where I competed in the Special Olympics. I got a 1st place medal in the Meter Walk and a 4th place ribbon in Softball Throw.

I wanted to share my story with everyone because I am so excited about learning. I have been working with Gail Boe for a couple of years and just recently started my learning journey with Leeanna Ingram. Leeanna is a third grade teacher and loves teaching. She is a good teacher and I really like working with her.

My favorite thing to learn is math. I like subtraction,

addition, and learning multiplication facts. I also like learning to count money, it helps me when I go shopping and I really like shopping! Every week, we also work on learning to read. I practice every night.



Clara Moody

My favorite story is “Fran’s Fudge” because it is a good story. Leeanna records me reading out loud on a little tape recorder so I can listen to it and hear how good I’m getting.

My goal this year is to become a great reader. I think I can reach this goal because I am a really hard worker.

My advice to anyone that struggles with learning is to call your local literacy office and ask to be paired up with a tutor because you’re never too old to learn.

Clara Moody
Pawhuska Literacy Council

My Son

The best thing that I have ever done is my son. He is the greatest gift that God has ever given to me. I thank God every day for giving him to me.



I do my best to teach my son about God, people, and how life can be. Also, I teach him to set good goals in his life and to think very carefully about his future. I have also taught him to be very careful with whom he makes friends and whom he loves. That will all come in good time.

For now, I am teaching him to set some good expectations for himself, his loved ones, and his friends. However, I do not want him to set them too high because life can change for everybody. The smartest thing to do, I tell him, is to keep God in his life no matter what happens. I tell him that he should not lie to himself, God, and his family; and most of

all to know his Dad will always love him.

Charles DeHart
Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore

One of the Most Important Lessons I've Learned

Hello, reader, my name is Valerie Badillo; I'm 24 years of age. The year is 2011 and my story is about what I've learned through the years.

As a teenager, we want to fit in and be cool, but what I have learned is to be myself and make my own decisions. Not having many friends bothered me, as well as not being in a group. What matters most is staying true to yourself and not being afraid of who or what you are.

By being true to myself, I have become the person I am meant to be rather than what people want me to be. I say this because I have tried to fit in and be

cool. It got me into trouble with the law, into a few fights, and involved with boyfriends that weren't all that into me because I wasn't the person I had portrayed myself to be. My mom didn't understand what I was doing or what I was trying to prove.

I'm sure I've passed plenty of wonderful friends. So, as you grow and learn, I hope you understand that it is important for us as indi-



Valerie Badillo

viduals to be ourselves. Not only does it keep you grounded, but it helps you become a better person and adult. It feels great to wake up each morning and to be comfortable in your skin, having less regrets and just knowing who you are and where you want to be in life. This gives us confidence and courage. We are less stressed about what people's expectations are for us.

This wonderful lesson has helped me become who I am ... a strong, understanding, happy and well-grounded person with room to grow and learn.

Valerie Badillo
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Opening My Eyes

I think that I am much wiser now that I am divorced from my kids' father. I am wiser in the way that I look at the future and don't live day-by-day. I've learned that there are more important things in life than just making sure my husband is happy; like making sure I'm happy.

Thanks to divorce, I've learned what it feels like to really work and make my own money. Being able to work a cash register and learning the transactions needed—like learning how to run credit cards, WIC vouchers, food stamp cards, and learning all the codes for the fruits and vegetables—made me

feel valuable. Feeling valuable is something I had not felt in my 13 years of marriage. Receiving a check in my name made me feel even better.



Antonia Escobar

I also think of myself as wiser because I have entered college to make something better of myself. I thought it was impossible for someone my age. But I did it, and proved my ex-husband wrong when I passed my GED test March 25, 2011! It was hard work for me because I'm not a genius; but a lot of hard work, studying, and my wanting a goal accomplished made me do it.

I find myself wiser now because I had the courage to walk away from somebody who pulled me down instead of supporting me. I also am wiser because I have learned to push myself up.

Ready to Read Without a Standstill!

Before I came to the Leflore County Literacy Center TANF program, my life was at a standstill.

As a single mom without an education, not knowing which way to turn, and sick and tired of dead end jobs that got me nowhere except working two jobs just to make ends meet, I was left with no time to spend with my children.

Then, a friend told me about the TANF program



Sharrol Green

and that I'd be able to get my education, so I could have the job I really wanted and make more than just chicken feed.

Now, I am in the program and learning so much more.

Before literacy, I didn't want to read to my children

because I couldn't read very well. But all that has changed now. I read to my kids all the time thanks to my teachers, Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Barbara at the Leflore County Literacy Council TANF Program.

Sharrol Green
Leflore County Literacy Council, Poteau

Special Thanks

I am thankful to the RCLC (Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore), “Volunteers for Adult Literacy,” Executive Director Carol Round, and President Mike Gardner who are working hard. They gave me a tutor who has helped me to prepare for my citizenship and naturalization test. I started working with him in September 2010. Before that, I did not know any English. Now, I can read, write, and speak some English.

On November 18, I did my interview with an officer of Immigration and Naturalization Service. I



Ernesto Murillo

passed the test of English, U. S. history and government with good results, and I took the oath of allegiance on March 18.

I want to give *gracias especiales*, “special thanks,” to my tutor and friend, Oliver Walker. He helped me so much with his patience and enthusiasm. He gave to me his time and knowledge.

Ernesto Murillo
Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore

Step by Step

The most important lesson I have learned in my life is that sometimes life can move you from the top to the bottom. Coming from my country, where I had a professional status, I never thought that I was going to start from zero. In order to overcome the new

challenges that I was facing, I had to do three things: change my environment, defeat challenges, and start walking towards my professional field.



My name is Rossana Mas.

Rossana Mas

I'm from Cuba. I came to the United States 6 years ago. In my country, I have a Master Degree in Education, and I was a special teacher in Havana's University. I never studied English before, because as a socialist country, the idea of learning English was not very important.

Something that I learned was that having an excellent curriculum was not enough to get a good job, because the English was still a challenge. Then, life taught me to put the things in order. I had to improve step by step.

First of all, my family decided to change states. We

lived in Miami, Florida, where everybody speaks Spanish. Then we moved to Oklahoma City with the possibility to improve my English and practice it. This change of environment was really helpful for me.

I am a Christian, and I attend church regularly. For that reason, I challenged myself to start going to an American church. I also faced another challenge, and it was to take the American citizenship test.

The advanced ESL course, with emphasis in TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), has been an awesome help, because I have learned a lot of professional knowledge and vocabulary.

Rossana Mas
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Thankful For Everything

“Thou who hast given so much to me, give me one more thing ... a grateful heart.”—George Herbert

As a child, I always heard my mother telling us to be thankful for whatever we got. But, her message went in one ear and out the other. I learned that my mother was right when I became a mother myself. Now, whenever I hear my kids complaining about the stuff they don't have that their friends have, it makes me say the same words my mother used to say: "Be thankful for whatever you have, because there are so many kids in this world who can only dream about the things you have."



Recently, I realized that our younger generation is unthankful. They complain about everything in their lives. Usually, their Facebook status is about how their lives "suck" and how they had a bad day, etc. They are not happy with what they have. We, as grown-ups, have bad days too, but we don't complain about these things. If you only think about those things that other people have, it makes things in life more difficult for you. Life itself is complicated

and this kind of thinking makes it more difficult.

So, try to think positive and be happy. Happiness doesn't depend on material aspects of life. It depends on different things. For some people, helping others makes them happy. For example, Bill Gates donated so much of his money and knowledge to helping people in need. He is just one example; there are many others, too. There are many people who are happy when gardening. For me, having a good time with my family makes me happy.

Happiness comes when you are thankful. So, be a thankful person and be a happy person.

Abiha Taha
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

The Lesson of Life

Sometimes, God gives us mysterious ways to learn. Experiences of sadness and struggle can make people stronger.

Ten years ago, I lost two loving family members, my sister and father, in Japan. I was desperately depressed. Later on, my mother injured her head and was in a coma after a long surgery. A doctor doubted she would recover.

At that time, I just got married to my American husband. For a newlywed, it's a very tough tragedy, but we kept talking to her every day, praying with strong faith.



Kaoru Burkhalter

I realized that God gave me my husband as my new family to overcome this difficulty by supporting each other.

Then a miracle happened. Her finger moved and her eyes opened slightly. We encouraged her, and finally lived together with her, having lots of laughter and happiness.

Through this experience, I've learned important things. Life is short. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow so we should appreciate life now and live each moment. Also, money is not more precious than family, health, and love.

Now, I work as a teacher assistant, study at the TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) class to get a master degree, and volunteer at Red Cross, Humane Society, and church. I also take care of my lovely family: an old cat, two young dogs, and my supportive husband.

24 hours are not enough in a day. People ask me, "Why are you doing so much?" I always smile and answer, "I just want to do my best as much as possible."

Honestly, I promised myself after the tragedy that I would live hard every day for my father and sister's sake.

I don't want to regret anything in my life. Life is a precious gift. I've learned this through the lesson of life.

Kaoru Burkhalter
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

The Most Important Lesson I've Learned

The most important lesson I've learned is that it's never too late to go back to school. My name is Tammie, and I'm forty-four years old. My family and I lived in the country when I was growing up. I enjoyed going to school when I was younger. My favorite subject was art.

We moved to the city when I was twelve. I dropped out of school in the seventh grade. The last time that I attended school was twenty-seven years ago. A very special person came into my life and encouraged me to go back to school. I'm currently enrolled

in class at the OCCC Adult Learning Center. I've been attending classes for one year and have learned much in math and writing. I enjoy helping the other students, and they help me in return. It's very important for me to help others if I can.



Tammie Hise

My teacher, Susan Bernard, has helped me and encouraged me. I really appreciate her. I signed up for my test and am scheduled to take it soon. I've also been admitted to Oklahoma City

Community College and will start in August. My goal is to pursue a degree to be a Medical Assistant. Although my mom and dad are both deceased, I know they would be very proud of me. I'm very proud of myself and my willingness to accomplish my goals.

I would encourage all young people to stay in school

and get their education because you will need it throughout your life. And, if you're older and didn't get to finish your education, I encourage you to go back to school. It's never too late to get an education.

Tammie Hise
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

The Most Important Lesson

I grew up in a large, poor family. In 4th grade, the teacher told my parents I wasn't catching on. I was kept in 4th grade for a second year. Other children were mean, so I became a fighter. It became worse the older I got, and I never caught on. I quit school when I was 15.

I started working all kinds of jobs. My brother was a truck driver, so he taught me some. I became a truck driver when I was 25. I remember my grandfather passing on his wisdom about hard work.



Terry Terflinger

Even though I only had a 3rd grade education, I was a visual, hands-on learner. Through hard work, I learned more skills of the trucking trade and worked for bigger companies for better pay. I drove a truck for 28 years across this whole country and saw many places.

When I moved to Oklahoma two years ago, my daughter saw an ad for the literacy program at our library. Karen Kerr, the literacy coordinator, asked why I wanted to sign up. I told her I wanted to learn to read and spell. This has been the greatest thing in my life, and I have accomplished so much. I am 60 years old and still have the desire to learn to read and write better. Now, I work hard to learn about history, geography, and many other things.

I want to thank Karen, the people who volunteer

to teach (especially my teacher Catherine), and the State of Oklahoma for making this possible.

Terry Terflinger
Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Thirsty to Learn

I was born in Tayoltita, Durango, Mexico, a little mining town in the Sierra Madre Mountains. I only attended school one year, the first grade. Then, because we were very poor, I dropped out of school to help my mother sell items that she made, such as tamales and candy, so we would have money to live on.

I came to the United States when I was 16 years old, and I obtained my citizenship in 1986. My husband is an American.

I have been coming to Literacy Link since May, 2004. My first tutor was Mrs. McHugh. My next tutor was Tom Gray. Presently, Margarett Malone is my tutor.

I have a passion to learn the English language. I am continually trying to improve my skill in speaking, reading, and writing English. Someday, I hope to reach my goal by learning very well. Before I came to Literacy Link, I could not read or write at all.



Maria Emma Hamblin

Sometimes I think something is wrong with my brain because I cannot learn as fast as I would like to! But I am making progress. I study my classwork very hard and now I can sit down and read a book or a newspaper.

Another passion of mine is oil painting. I was featured in Literacy Link News in 2006, when I won first prize in oil painting at the Senior Citizens Center. I was very pleased, of course.

My tutor is a big help to me. I want to keep learning to read and write better in English so that I can

write to my grandchildren. I also hope to get my GED someday.

I am very thankful to Literacy Link for helping me learn to read and write.

Maria Emma Hamblin
Literacy Link, Midwest City

Travel to United States Leads to Learning

I came from a little town called Madero, Coahuila, Mexico. I traveled to the United States during Easter, or Holy Week, in 2008. I came with the company of my two children, Kasandra, who was six years old, and Cesar, who was one year old. My husband was already here in the United States for several months working in a restaurant called “El Plaza” in Borger, Texas. We stayed there for two years.

Then my husband was offered a job as a kitchen

manager in Altus, Oklahoma, where the same owners had opened a new restaurant. I had a new baby, born in Altus, and he is now six months old. I am working with my husband in the same restaurant.

I have been very blessed in coming to the United States. This country is marvelous and blessed with opportunities, and I have come to know a lot of people. I want to thank those who have helped us get settled and get ahead. I also came to know God and am learning from Him.



Isela Fernandez

I want to thank the Great Plains Literacy Council for their help in learning English. I have come a long way. I am so glad I came to find out about the program and learn a second language, since I speak Spanish. I am taking advantage of their tutoring classes. I thank my teachers

Carrie and Aleida, who have supported me.

Isela Fernandez
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Uncle Mark

The wisest person I've ever known is my Uncle Mark. He's the one person who knows how to fix just about anything and is willing to help anyone. He doesn't drink, do drugs, or smoke. One of the wisest things he did, that I wish I had done, is to stay in school and get a diploma. When someone in our family needs help with anything, they always call my Uncle Mark. He is a very dependable person and is always there if someone needs help with anything.

When his wife died, everyone we knew went to see him. Everyone that came by gave him a hug and said, "You're a good man, Mark, you'll get through it." He would say, "I know, but, it's going to be hard." When that happened, I saw with my own eyes how

good of a husband he had been. He cried for months after she passed and didn't care who saw him. The only ones he didn't let see were his kids because he was trying to be strong for them. His stepsons knew he loved them. So, after their mom passed, they wanted to stay with him instead of living with their real dad. He told them they could stay as long as they liked; but, they would still have to follow his rules. He assured them he loved them like they were his own.



I've always thought my Uncle Mark was the wisest man I've ever known. No matter how mad I get at him, I will always look up to him. He is the man I want my son to be when he grows up. Even though he goes through hard times, he always knows how to make wise decisions or how to do the right thing.

Sherie Wallace
Ada Adult Learning Center

Vietnamese Teachers' Day

In Vietnam, Teachers' Day is the special day to celebrate all teachers. It is held on November 20th every year.

When I was a student, I attended this celebration in my school. On this day, my principal read a speech to recognize the teacher who had been teaching in my school and was retiring. As a student, I loved and was grateful to my teachers with all my heart. They taught me both knowledge and values.

Besides, I visited my old teacher on the day before Teachers' Day. He taught me literature when I was in the ninth grade. Now, he is over seventy years old. He couldn't see me clearly, but he recognized my voice. We talked about his health and his students, and he asked me about my career, my family, and so on.

In addition, I would like to make a vase of flowers for

my special teachers. They are my parents. At school, my parents are the teachers of many students, and they are my greatest teachers at home, too.

Now, I live in the United States, a country very far from my hometown. I have always appreciated my teachers in this country as well. I am grateful to Ms. Theresa, my English teacher at OSU; and to Mr. Anthony, my English teacher at Oklahoma City Community College.

Thanks to all my teachers!

Nga Trinh
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

When Speaking My Mind

My journey began when I was placed in foster care. I was 11 years old and I felt all alone. So by the age of 13, I was on the streets and doing the wrong things. Then, I found out I was pregnant at the age of 14.

DHS sent me to Poteau and I straightened out my life. I started going to school, but by this time I was already so far behind on everything. The school just let me slip through the cracks. I could not even do any of the school work. I ended up graduating but I didn't know the materials.



Julie Brooks

So, I took a step and went to DHS and signed up for TANF. I took some tests and then I got placed in the Leflore County Literacy Council TANF program.

I have come so far. I feel I can do the work now; even though, sometimes, I ask my teacher how to spell something or what a word is and she tells me to get a dictionary. I have heard her tell me to get a dictionary so many times that I hear her voice in my sleep.

Julie Brooks
LeFlore County Literacy Council, Poteau

Wisdom and Learning

The most important lesson I've learned ... Life.

It doesn't matter if you're young or old, life is short and we never know if there's a tomorrow, so we have to live, to laugh, and to enjoy it.

In my own experience, I discovered this, and I realized that sometimes we're so worried about money, work, and material things, that we don't see that



Aracely Martinez

life goes fast. But we have to realize that, even though all these things help us, they are not the most important.

Right now, I'm studying in the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) class

at Oklahoma City Community College, and trying to learn more, because I think it's never too late. I'm trying to live life with enthusiasm, taking all the

opportunities that life is giving me, trying to be a better person.

The big lesson that I learned is that it doesn't matter if you're from a different country, different religion, or different culture; we all have to keep going and follow our dreams.

Aracely Martinez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Wiser Over Time

I'm wiser now that I have seen and experienced many different things in my life. For example, in 1997, I confessed Christ as my Lord and Savior. That was the best thing I could have ever done. Going to church and learning about the Bible have made me especially wise. Bible class is most helpful because on Wednesday night the pastor has the chance to break it down for me to get a better understanding. It is a smaller group, and I can ask questions about

things I do not understand and feel less shy.

I also gain wisdom from praying, reading my



Letha Parker

Bible, and asking God to give me

strength and understanding

for the things I face in life.

For instance, when I get up

in the morning, I thank the

Lord for another day that He

has made. I will rejoice and be

glad in it. Praying is always in order. It is commu-

nication with God, thanking Him for what He has

done, asking Him for certain things, and believing

He is listening. God has never failed me yet.

I was only fourteen when my daughter was born,

so I had to learn all about childcare. Even though I

was young, I was mature for my age and accepted

the responsibility of caring for my daughter. I had

to drop out of school until I was fifteen and able to

continue my education. It was a struggle because I

had to worry about finding someone reliable to care for my child while I was in class. When my son was born, I was thirty and ready to be a parent. I was married, owned my own home, and had a job, so I made a wiser decision with my second child.

Letha Parker
Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

You Can Teach Old Dogs New Tricks

I have learned many things about this maxim: you can't teach old dogs new tricks. Well, I came to find out over time that the saying is not true!

Many people don't realize that it's never too late to re-start something they left behind. For example, when I was a child, some teacher of the school I was attending told my mother that I would not be able to learn well. I came to find, now that I'm back in school, anybody can do it. I came back to school

and I have learned so many skills in writing, reading, and especially in math. Before, I would just excuse myself and put walls in my way because I was scared that if I tried something, I was not going to be able to finish it. Now, I can read better and comprehend what I'm reading. In math, I couldn't even divide simple numbers. Now, I can and I'm really proud of myself.

People with good judgment have inspired me along this difficult process in life. They have helped me change my mind toward more positive thinking. I want to be the same inspiration to communicate and help others go on. I would tell other students to never give up and keep going towards their future.

Vanessa Beltran
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City



Index

A

Abrego, Theresa 15
 Alexander, Frances 122
 Allen, Lester 278
 Ambrosi, Stefan 109
 Anonymous 117
 Arndt, Shanda 58
 Avalos, Camila 43

B

Badillo, Valerie 303
 Ball, Chiquilia 150
 Baori, RoJoni Liliavn 86
 Beltran, Vanessa 331
 Bermudez, Maria 96
 Berry, Alicia 289
 Bewley, Heidi 274
 Black, Mattie 230
 Bolanos, Rebeca 231
 Brashear, Tonya 98
 Brewer-Brown, Malisia 154
 Brodnex, LaDonna 4
 Brooks, Julie 326
 Bruner, Cynthia 136
 Burch, Maple 41
 Burell, Tina 113
 Burgy, Osiris 169
 Burkhalter, Kaoru 314

C

Calvery, Tatian 124
 Calzada, Erica 63
 Campos, Gladys 268
 Campos, Ninett 65
 Carpenter, Brittany 193
 Carter, RoDonna 17
 Casillas, Christina 119
 Castle, Chelsea L. 191
 Castro, Elsa 9
 Castro, Lorena 121
 Caudill, Dusty 207
 Cervantes, Miriam 24
 Chan, Lan 220
 Chapman, Melanie 28
 Charry, Elsa 167
 Cleveland, Keneca 71
 Cole, Anaye 175
 Collins, Andi 215
 Colson, Billy 222
 Cooper, Heather 160
 Coral, Salvador Garcia 246
 Cozens, Rodney 104
 Craig, Pamela 269
 Crider, Tina 242

D

Davenport, Linsey 173

DeHart, Charles 301

Derr, Alisa 252

Dimick, Constance 102

Dobbs, Jacinda 259

E

Elmi, Asha 47

Esquivel, Adriana 171

Esquivel, Emma 165

Esteve, Sandra 251

Evans, Jumsoon 296

F

Farrow, Emily 182

Fernandez, Isela 322

Fine, Ida 11

Fisk, Lifang 23

G

Garcia, Edith 26

Gardea, Dora 279

Gardner, Melanie 62

Gardner, Ruth 291

Gomez, Sara 143

Gonzalez, Erica 134

Graham, Justin 138

Granado, Diana 287

Grant, Shannon 261

Green, Sharrol 306

Guillen, Letty 69

H

Hamblin, Maria Emma 320

Harris, Shanie 49

Harshaw, Matt 244

Hart, Stephanie 190

Haugh, Carl 52

Hayes, Crystal 79

Heffley, Jan'na 130

Hensely, Lanmin 128

Hernandez, Leonor 213

Herring, Holly 46

Hise, Tammie 316

Holland, Carl 32

Holmes, Dominick 263

Hoque, Tina 217

Hou, Qingwei (Cathy) 126

J

Jaramillo, Abby 30

Jefferson, Shelly 100

Jesuit, Sherrie 84

John, Raquel 233

Johnson, Mitza 60

Jones, Glenda 33

Jones, Sabrina 158

Jung, Young gi 86

K

Kennedy, Thelma 13

L

Lee, Oklin 85

Le, Kiem 224
 Le, Thi Thanh 298
 Le, Trang Dai Pham 92
 Lovett, Christina 276
 Lozano, Rita 294
 Lupita 209
 Lutts, Guadalupe 85, 86
 Ly, Phuong 76

M

Martinez, Aracely 328
 Martinez, Esperanza 115
 Martinez, Leonor 105
 Martinez, Martha 176
 Mas, Rossana 309
 Mcgee, Savannah 264
 McMurl, Cathy 148
 McNeil, Charlene 188
 Medrano, Rosa 240
 Mills, Stacia 141
 Mongu, Adelard 87
 Moody, Clara 299
 Murillo, Ernesto 307
 Murray, Mark 39

N

Nguyen, Thao 218
 Northrip, Deborah 195

O

Oliver, LaTasha 186
 Olivo, Jessica 145

Oven, Karman Van 271
 Owens, Michaela 44

P

Páramo, Cristina 111
 Paredez, Veronica 107
 Parker, Letha 330
 Perez, Elia 180
 Perez, Sue 7
 Perkins, Laquida 178

R

Reyes, Ana 35
 Reyes, Jose Domingo
 Rosales 197
 Reyes, Silvia 66
 Richardson, Katie 202
 Robinson, Jessie 273
 Rodriguez, Frances 238
 Romero, Alexandra 250
 Rubio, Adriana Melissa 156

S

Salas, Adriana 68
 Salim, Tarik 248
 Sanroman, Nubia 284
 Secundino, Brenda 54
 Shelton, Kimberly 146
 Shepard, Kyle 292
 Souza, Patrícia Coutinho
 de 211
 Steed, Alex 78
 Stephens, Kelly 236

Stewart, Donetta 94

Stewart, Jessica 132

T

Taha, Abiha 311

Taylor, Darla 204

Teoh, Kelly 56

Terflinger, Terry 318

Thomas, Tacesia 266

Thompson, Imelda 283

Thurston, Lois 228

Townsend, Sharon 205

Trinh, Nga 325

Trozera, Anna 21

Tso, Sheree 19

V

Vargas, Isaias 281

Vasquez, Valentin Alonzo 285

Verhoeven, Ray 51

Vuong, Lyn 37

W

Wallace, Sherie 323

Watson, Paula Jan 34

Wheeler, Jamika 82

Wilson, Harold 226

Winston, Raequel 140

Wright, Michael 163

Y

Young, Tiffany 162

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



INSTITUTE *of*
Museum and Library
SERVICES

Oklahoma *of*
Department
Libraries

This project was made possible by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and
the Institute of Museum and Library Services.