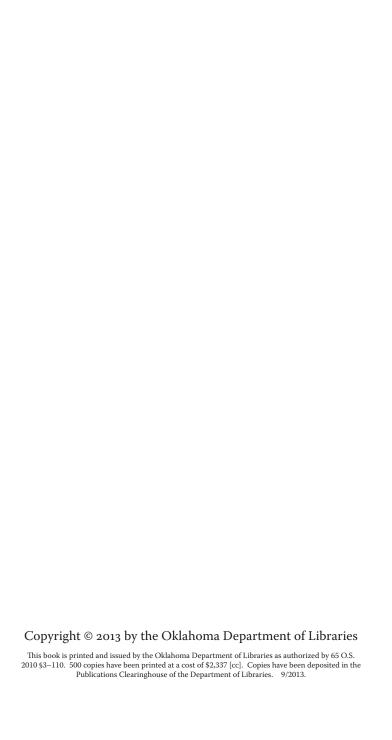
Celebrating Our Journey



Celebrating Our Journey



A Collection of Life Stories written by Oklahoma Adult Learners



Contents

Forward XII
Courage
Back to School a Big Challenge
American Dream
Destiny
Teachers and Hard Work
Courage to Learn
My Brave Family
The Dogs

Immigrants with CourageArmida Garcia	15
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	
Courage From Support	16
Hang in There! Ethel High Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	18
Our Courage Jina Keon OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	20
None of Us Is Perfect Mee Mee Kyi OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	21
A Conscious Decision	23
Until Good Is Better Jose Lopez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	25
Silencing My Fears Traneshia Mosley Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City	26
My New Life Took Courage Kimly Pang Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	28
My Favorite Person Philip Price Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa	30

Courage Has Helped Me	31
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	
Angels Ellie Rodriguez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	33
My Three Lives Christel Schilling OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	35
A Big Step of Courage Brittany Shelton Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	37
Unanswered Questions Aida Silva OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	39
The Bullet	41
My Story Drew Thompson Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	42
My Companion Word: Coraggio	43
Courage Is My Nickname Angelica Violeta OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	45
My USA Journey Viet Vu OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	47

Courage Maria Ines Wargin OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	48
Learning to Read Joyce Wind Opportunities Industrialization Center Volunteer Literacy Services, Oklahoma City	49
Hope	
Goals and Hope	55
Miguel Banuelos	
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	
My Dream	57
Elham Behbood	
Project READ, Edmond	
Нарру	58
Virginia Beatrice Brown	
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa	
About My Life	60
Diana Burns	
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	
Hopefully Better English!	61
Don Noppadon Chatnoppadon	
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	
Finding Hope	63
April Chavez	
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City	

Believe in Hope Sun Chung Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	65
On the Right Track April Cochrell Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	67
Now My Whole Family Speaks EnglishLidia Comer OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	69
My Journey in Life	70
Prayer Tonja Monick Cox Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	73
My Adventure In America	75
Teachers + Hope Silvia Gallardo OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	77
My Life is a Pie Dora Gardea OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	78
Second Chance Cassandra Garrow Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	80
Serenity and Hope Fabiola Gomez Western Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford	82

Following My DreamNancy Gomez	83
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City	
Hope is the Last to Die Irene Rubria Gonzalez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	85
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oktanoma City	
Moving Forward, With Help	86
A Beautiful Tale	88
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	
New Confidence Steve Hohler Miami Public Library Literacy Program	89
For the Future	91
Hope for Today and Tomorrow Rosetta (Rosie) Johnson Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	93
A New Friend Wilma Johnson Miami Public Library Literacy Program	95
My Parents' Life	96
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	
A Miracle Monica Lopez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	97

My Passionate Daughter Jenoveva Martinez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	. 99
To Live Without Struggle	100
Hopes and Dreams for my Future	102
My Origins Lulu P. Pedraza OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	104
Don't Be Discouraged Andrew Rains Opportunities Industrialization Center Volunteer Literacy Services, Oklahoma City	106
What We Need	107
Wasted Time Tammy Rodgers Literacy Link, Midwest City	109
A Better Future	111
There's Hope for You Terry Terflinger Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services	113

A Hope and a Plan Sharon Townsend Literacy Link, Midwest City	115
Going to College	117
Passed the Bridge Huong Vo OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	118
Blessings in Disguise Ashley Walters Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau	121
Hope of Compassion Albert Williams Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa	123
A New Passage	124
Living (Part of) My Dream	125
Humor	
The Rain Norma Carrillo OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	131
Party Time	132

True Communication	134
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	
An Expensive Trip Sabrina Kleinheinz OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	135
Finally Teresa Lopez OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	137
Never Try to Kill a Cockroach When You Wear High Heel Shoes Solangel Mindar OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	139
An Embarrassing, Funny Story Graciela Irma Ramos OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	141
Don't Worry, I Speak English	143
Good Humor Around Us Harold Wilson Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus	144
Various Subjects	
My Experience at Primary School Nidal Abdelsalam OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	149

My Second Country Clara Arzola OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City	151
My Two Dogs Crystal Breitengross Literacy Link, Midwest City	152
Princess Shellia Bynum Western Oklahoma Learning Center, Elk City	154
My Progress in Learning	155
In Trouble Again Maria Hamblin Literacy Link, Midwest City	156
My Journey to a Better Job Danielle Morris Literacy Link, Midwest City	158
Why I Like the Learning Center Michelle Ray Rowley Western Oklahoma Learning Center, Elk City	159
My Unforgettable English Teacher	159

Forward

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

John Lennon's "Beautiful Boy," the 1980 song written to celebrate the birth of his son Sean, includes the lyric above. The line captures the uncertain nature of life's journey. We will have dreams, goals, and plans; but we will also be confronted with challenges, opportunities, and roadblocks that can take us in different directions.

The authors of *Celebrating Our Journey* write about a diversity of challenges they have confronted in their lives, but they have one thing in common: they have all taken a detour to improve their understanding and mastery of the English language.

These adult learners have reached the point in their journey where they're able to compose their own

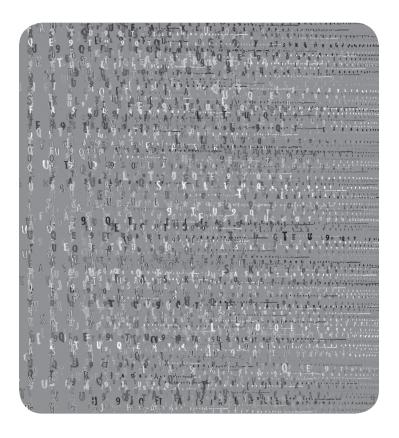
stories for our enjoyment and benefit. If reading gives us wings to fly, then the ability to write certainly helps us soar even higher!

These new language skills will be important tools as the authors make new plans and dream new dreams. Just as importantly, the skills will be there when "life happens" while they travel along the road.

The inspirational stories you read in this book do not just celebrate the importance of learning and literacy; they celebrate the new destinations that are now possible for these learners. We are proud and humbled to present this eighth edition of *Celebrating Our Journey*.

Susan McVey
Director, Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Courage



Back to School ... a Big Challenge

I started school about a year ago

after ten years of not attending a single class. I graduated from school in 1997, in Colombia. I came here in 2001, and I worked as a dish-

Juan David Arenas

washer for a Mexican restaurant.

Seeing that wasn't enough money and a very hard job, I decided to move on and start working at McDonalds. Being in there, I found out I needed to learn to speak English since every time my managers started talking to me, I didn't understand a word. Most likely, a sign language was more what we used in order to find out what kind of tasks I got assigned to do. Then, one of my friends told me that at OCCC was a class for people like me who didn't know the language. I started to attend those classes

but it was really hard for me to get to the college since I didn't know how to drive. Surprising for a 21 years old man not to know how to drive a car! So, I had to quit and start working hard to get a vehicle. I learned to speak street English from what I was getting from the job and my best friend taught me how to drive. Through the years, I tried to go back to school but I wasn't able to because I was only focused on work, but now I can see it wasn't worth it. Yes, I got money to buy stuff, but education makes you a better person with dreams and goals, and it gives you pride and knowledge. Now, I'm 32 years old and I have to start over like when I was in elementary school. I'm ready to take the challenge and succeed. To be an engineer is one of my dreams and I'm ready to make it come true.

Juan David Arenas
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

American Dream

I have lived in Oklahoma City for 22 years. We came from Delicias Chihuahua, Mexico. My daughter Claudia was 18 years old and my son Ever was 14 years old.

My husband came to Oklahoma

one year before we arrived.

He came for "The American Dream" because he wanted a better life for his family.

He didn't have a good job. He

Amada Borunda felt lonely and hopeless. My hus-

band asked my children and me to come live with him.

My children and I stayed in Oklahoma for one year to study English. They finished high school. I worked as a babysitter to help my husband pay the bills. At that time, we didn't have legal documents or money for the kids to go to college.

We stayed in Oklahoma. Ever studied to be an electrical technician and Claudia worked at a hospital as a Spanish interpreter. Together, we are here in the United States with the help of God.

Now, we are a happy family. My children are married and we have three grandchildren. My husband and I love to play with them! Daniel, my grandson, is 13 years old. Alek is 9 years old, and my princess Alexa is 4 years old. She is learning the violin.

Three days ago my son celebrated his birthday. Everybody went to a restaurant. We had a good time. I'm proud of my family!

Amada Borunda
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Destiny

When my sister was eleven, she used to play with the kids in the street where I lived. I was five at the time. They played jump rope, hopscotch, badminton, and something similar to dodge ball and the other Iranian games.

I was too young so they didn't let me play with them.

I was always standing on my toes at the window to see them. One of the kids was an eight-year-old blond American boy.

Oh, my God! I can remember every second that he was bicycling in the street. He had such shiny hair.

y mom was always talking to him because she was going to English classes and her English was so good. The blond boy would come to our house and we played with a toy that my dad had bought me earlier that night. It was something like playing with water and we had so much fun!

Every summer, he came to Iran to visit. When we became teenagers, we fell in love with each other. We got married after seven years. We had been so far away from each other.

It was so hard for me to leave my whole life, my family, and my friends; but I left them for my love. It took courage for me.

Now, I'm here with my child playmate, my love, my husband.

My plan is to get my TOEFL this year, so that I can go to university and study to be a dental hygienist. I really want to become a dental hygienist. For now, I have to improve my English.

Delaram Chehelnabi
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Teachers and Hard Work

When I first came to OIC, I was scared, quiet, and nervous. I came to OIC at a very low level. I didn't know how to spell or pronounce most words, and I was reading at 2nd to 3rd grade level. Now, I can spell and pronounce words and read at 9th to 10th grade level. In math, I knew very little multiplica-

tion facts. Now, I know 95% if not all of them. I have a good teacher that tries to bring in new material into the everyday lessons. I also work with a tutor that teaches me phonics. By working with them, working in all the material I have, and by paying attention, listening to lessons, taking notes, and studying at home, I am learning so much that will help me succeed.

y teachers give me tools that I can use to help my kids. I want them to have a good education like I am getting now. I will keep moving forward to do my best—work hard and study hard. This will show my kids that if I can do it then they can do it.

I feel that I have more confidence and courage to get up or to speak up in class now. I am learning so much and all my hard work is paying off. The other day I surprised myself when I was able to answer most questions in a language game. I remembered

what I had learned.

With the right materials, strategies, support, direction, and, most of all, the effort of "you" wanting to learn, you can actually learn something. But, it does take courage. When you are not so afraid, you can stand up and participate in class or wherever you are. You can show that you can actually do the work.

Virginia Crawford
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Courage to Learn

I grew up in Cambodia. When I turned 18 years old, I moved to Japan to work. I married an American man in 2002. One year later, we moved to Oklahoma so he could work at the Altus Air Force Base. My life since 2003 has been full of new experiences that have needed courage from me. I have been learning about the English language, American food, and a new way of life.

I speak, read, and write the Cambodian language. When I went to school, no foreign language was

taught. Now, I live where English

is spoken and I have felt lost and scared. I have met a few Cambodians here who are in the food business. They are too busy to talk to me in our native language as they

Kunthea Dresser

are with their customers. One of them told me to go to the Altus Public Library to enroll in English tutoring. I do not understand every English word, but I can talk in easy words. I want to learn more to improve my speaking and writing.

I know that the food in America is a lot different from food in Cambodia. I am used to lots of fish and rice. I am learning to eat more beef. There are too many desserts here than what I am used to. I still remember eating my first donut here in Altus. I still eat rice everyday at home, but I am trying to learn more about cooking American food.

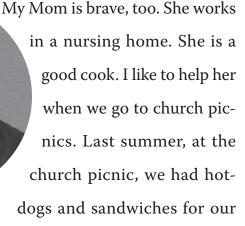
The lifestyle here is not the same as my country. No matter how we do things in Cambodia, I am in love with the freedom here.

Leaving a country to live somewhere across the world takes courage. The language, food, and culture are challenges every day.

Kunthea Dresser Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

My Brave Family

I come from a brave family. They all have courage. I think my Dad is a hero. He fixes houses up so families have nice places to live. He takes good care of his own family with the money he earns. On Sunday, he takes the whole family to church. Because he is strong and brave and kind, my Dad is my hero.



Cassie Dupree

meal. I was glad to go swimming after we ate. I can still remember how hot it was that day and how good the cool water in the pool felt on my skin. It still makes me feel happy to be part of such a good and loving church where we can have so much fun together.

My brother Robert is brave, too. When my brother Clinton died, everyone in my family was very sad. I was sad. Mom and Dad were sad. Robert was sad. All Clinton's friends were sad. His children were sad. He had two boys and a girl; Damon, Seth, and Katrina. Now, Robert and his wife hope to adopt the

children soon. They will give them a good home. That is why I say that my brother Robert is brave.

I can be brave, too. I know that I am brave when I work with my tutor to get better at reading. How could I not be brave when I come from such a brave family?

Cassie Dupree Hughes County Reading Assistance Program, Holdenville

The Dogs

The other day, I was walking at the park when I saw two dogs walking. I thought two dogs weren't a problem and I kept walking. Then, I saw more dogs and got scared.



Rosalba Escobedo

I looked back and saw the other dogs. I didn't know how to go back because I was scared. I walked away slowly.



My favorite hobby is walking, but this had never happened to me.

I hope this never happens to me again.

Rosalba Escobedo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Immigrants with Courage

I think all immigrants have courage because we came to this country without knowing the language, with no job, no car, and having to deal with a new culture.

It is a very big change that we have to adapt to, but we do it because we want a better life for us and for our families.

In this country, we have many opportunities. The ones who have courage can use these opportunities

to be better people in life.

Armida Garcia OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Courage From Support

The best thing about learning to read is having confidence in me. Now, I'm not embarrassed in front of a person. It feels good. I'm proud of what I have accomplished.

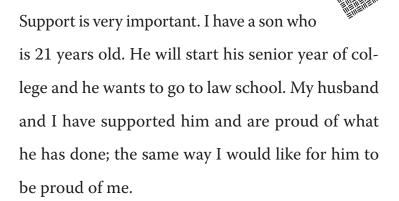
Now that I can read, I inspire my children by reading with them. It's great when I know that when I'm reading to them I'm making very little mistakes.

y life has changed in many ways and it will continue to change as I improve with my reading and writing day by day.

It gives me hope that in the years to come I will become a citizen and get my high school diploma.

It is scary to set these goals, but if I have the cour-

age, I will do it.



Having the support of the literacy program and my tutor Jerry Jones, I will succeed in my goals, and together we will make them happen.

It's not easy to make this happen being an adult with many responsibilities. It's complicated having a job 5 days a week, taking care of my family and a house, taking the kids to their practices and games, and taking care of a son with special needs. It's more than complicated! But knowing that if I call my teacher to change the time or the day, or even canceling and rescheduling my class, that she will be there no mat-

ter what. I make the effort to be there too.

Gabriela Hernandez Rogers County Literacy Council, Claremore

Hang in There!

Being a single parent isn't easy. I know from experience. I have raised six children. Three were mine and

ter-in-law had passed away in a car accident. All of the children attended Head Start.

My own children passed away at the ages of seventeen years, nineteen years, and three months. My sister-in-law's

three were my sister-in-law's. My sis-

Ethel High

children are now all grown adults and doing great.

When my children passed, I thought to myself, "That's it; I want to be with my children." I felt as if there was nothing else to live for here. I came from

a very nice family. My parents passed away when I was very young. I don't remember my mom, but I can remember my father. My older sisters raised me, and I thank God for them today. They made me who I am today.

When I felt all the depression from losing my children, I had to keep my head up and find something to keep me occupied. Working with children was the answer. I have worked at Head Start for thirty years now. I have taken some child development classes at Western Oklahoma State University in Altus, and now I'm in a literacy class to study for my GED. My tutor's name is Mrs. Gayla Smith. She is one of the best teachers who has ever helped me.

For those who are having a rough life and those who are struggling, I want you to keep your head up and lean on Jesus. Hang in there because you can change and receive anything you want to. Go

for it if you want it!

Ethel High Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Our Courage

My husband and I decided to move to the United States from South Korea for his studies.

We needed the courage to change everything. It was not an easy decision. It was an adventure for us, for if he failed his studies we would lose many things and lose time as well.

When we came to the U.S., we faced many obstacles. For example, we had to live in a small town for almost five years.

Jina Keon

That was the most difficult part for us. There was a small ESL class. However, it

wasn't as interesting as I expected. I went there for a while, and then I gave up studying English. Six years later, last December, my husband finally grad-



uated. He has also found a job already. I am very proud of my husband and I am proud

of our courage as well.

Jina Keon OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

None of Us Is Perfect

Since we are human beings, none of us is perfect. We have too many things which challenge us in our lives. As we are immigrants to the USA, this is our second birth. We have to face many challenges. We have to start learning in the beginning.

Anyway, I'd like to encourage you to never give up. When you face trouble, think positive and believe that you can solve everything in time. Whenever I face trouble in my life, I try to think positive

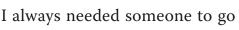
thoughts and read words that make me strong. The words that encourage me are, "Dear God, I don't ask you to make my life easier, but I ask you to give me

strength to face all my troubles."

That's my favorite thought—

asking for strength.

The first thing challenging me here is language. When I first moved to the US earlier,





Mee Mee Kyi

with me when I had to do something. But, I didn't want to rely on people all the time.

Then, I thought I would try to stand by myself. I tried to study in ESL class and thought that within a year my English would improve. I feel confident now that I can take care of myself. I tried to advise some of my friends to study ESL first, then try to move forward step by step for education. My goal is to get my GED. I believe in myself that I can do it.

I hope and believe all of you can solve any problem you face by thinking positive. Believe in yourself and know that all we face are good things. It will happen when the time is right.

Mee Mee Kyi
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

A Conscious Decision

I am from Vietnam. After high school, I went to military school. One year later, I became an army officer.

In 1954, my country divided into two parts under The Geneva Agreements. North Vietnam belonged to the Communists. South Vietnam belonged to the Republic and freedom, but the Communists always violated agreements. Their troops conducted secret activities and they were planning a military strike against South Vietnam.

The festival of the Lunar New Year, or Têt, is the most important of all events in the life of every

Vietnamese. It is an ancient celebration which has existed since the beginning of the country 4,000 years ago. Têt corresponds to America's Christmas and New Year and the date of Têt is based on the lunar calendar. It usually occurs in late January or early February.

During Têt 1968, the Communists took advantage of the celebration. They openly attacked South Vietnam. My company received an order from battalion headquarters to enter a village to defeat the Communist's troops there. After an encounter with the enemy, they were forced to retreat. My company took control of the village. We found an underground bunker. It was ten feet long, five feet wide, and five feet deep. We suspected that maybe the enemy was hiding there.

y soldiers recommended that we put grenades in the bunker, but I disagreed. I decided to creep into the bunker. When I turned on



my flashlight, I saw a family which included grandparents, parents, and six children.

They had been without food or water for two days. I reported to headquarters to move them to the safe area.

Today, when I remember this event, I am very happy because my conscious decision was to rescue ten people from certain death. Thankfully, God helped me.

Kiem Le OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Until Good Is Better

I was born in Jalisco, Mexico, in 1980. I'm the fifth of eleven children. When I turned six, I started to go to school and worked at the same time to give monetary help to my family. Of course, that wasn't enough.

In 1996, I came to the U.S. for the first time. A few

days later, after my arrival, I started going to high school. Months later, I dropped out of school and started working in construction. I needed to help my family in Mexico. I always dreamed of learning to speak English, but I couldn't because I worked until late afternoon. Just one and a half years ago, I had the opportunity to start ESL classes. I know it is not easy to attend work and school at the same time.

The first thing I learned from my teacher in my first day at ESL classes was, "I want to, I need to." The second was, "Good, better, best. Never let it rest, until good is better, and the better best."

Now, I'm doing my best to learn English; and if I can, anybody can.

Jose Lopez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Silencing My Fears

When I first came to OIC, I knew I did not have a lot

of education. I dropped out in the 9th grade because I felt like I was not learning anything. The teacher would just hand us papers with no instructions or explanations and just told us to do it. In fact, I feel like I didn't get a good education at all. So, when I came to OIC, I thought that I would be the dumbest student in the classroom. I had really low self-esteem. I didn't want to read out loud or do board work because I thought that I would be

laughed at just as I had before.

After a while, I stopped caring what people might say because I knew I had a goal that I had to reach. I started volunteering to read out loud and do board work. Once I did this, I found more confidence and found out that other students felt the same way. We understood each other. I noticed no one laughed. In fact, they encouraged me and themselves. I now have the courage to go the extra mile to learn new things and get more educated. My plans are to get

my GED, go back to school to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and get a good paying job. While I work, I plan to continue school because I think I can be more than a CNA. I want to be a doctor. While talking to one of my teachers about my career, he said that he could see me being a doctor. I used to think that, but I knew that it took years in school. But, years in school do not scare me anymore. I have the courage to go as far as life takes me.

Traneshia Mosley
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

My New Life Took Courage

In May, 2004, I left my native country of Cambodia to come to America. I was scared to live across the world where life was so different.

The first place I lived was in Massachusetts. I knew only the Cambodian language, but when I moved to Altus, Oklahoma, I knew I had

to learn the English language. My friend told me to go to the Altus Public Library to learn how to

read, write, and speak the English

words. I went in January 2012
to say that I didn't know the
sounds of the words, but I
am thankful for my Great
Plains Literacy Council tutor

Kimly Pang Daina Coppock, who has helped me once a week. I enjoy learning from her as she takes time to explain everything to me.

I started a donut bakery shop in 2009 here. It was hard, as I had to be at work at 3:30 in the mornings to fry all the donuts, seven days a week. Then, understanding the customers was hard for me. Now, I feel better in serving the customers.

But the most important challenge for me was getting the US citizenship. It took study of the history that I did not know. I am proud that all the study helped me become a US citizen. My older daughter also became a citizen at the same ceremony on April 26 in Oklahoma City. Our English tutor and her husband came to see us take the oath of citizenship.

I am no longer scared of living in a new country, learning the language, and working at a job. These have all helped me get the US citizenship. I am so thankful for all the help.

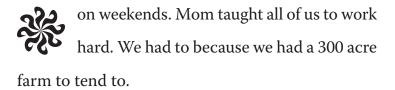
Kimly Pang Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

My Favorite Person

My mother is one of the best people I know. She pretty much raised 16 children on her own because my father had to work 180 miles from home. We only got to see him



Phillip Price



My mother is the most loving person I know. I can honestly say that she is the only person I know that truly, with all of her heart, really means it when she forgives someone. There is not one person she has not forgiven, no matter what was done. She says, "If I want God to forgive me, then I have to forgive others." It was really just that simple to her.

It is because of my mother that I am the person I am today. I love you, Mom. You are my favorite person.

Philip Price
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

Courage Has Helped Me

The past two years have taught me about courage. I am from Guatemala. Many people in my country are living in poverty as there are few jobs. Those who have jobs have very low wages from working on the coffee farms. I wanted to get out of

poverty, so I left my home and came to the United States on March 28, 2012. I wanted to better my future.

For me, it cost a lot to come to the United States. My family could not give me very many dol-



Bartolo Reyes

lars for travel. My uncle in Altus, Oklahoma, wanted me to come and complete my American dream. He is responsible for getting me to the Great Plains Literacy Council to learn English when I got here. I am learning English as I didn't know very many words. I have two tutors, Hector and Elsa. They are teaching me to read and write. They even showed me how to use the computer to hear English conversation lessons when I have extra time to study.

My uncle got me a job at a local Oriental restaurant

washing dishes. Then after one year, I got a better job at a food processing plant. I am learning English at my job, but I have to also learn how to do things in packing the food for shipping.

Courage has been a part of all my dreams for a better life. When I travelled to a new country, tried to learn a new language, and tried to do well at a paying job, I was scared. I feel better about my destiny.

Bartolo Reyes Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Angels



I came to the United States to see the snow.

We never had snow in Mexico.

I met my husband right here in Oklahoma City. One year later, we went to Mexico and got married. It was my parent's dream to see one of their kids get married. A year later, my beautiful princesses arrived. It was the most precious gift God could ever give me.

In 2000, I got my driver's license, and in the same year, I got my GED. Later, I studied at OU for my Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). After I got it, I looked for a way to work so I wouldn't have to leave my daughters with a babysitter.

My CDA teacher helped me get a job at Oklahoma City Public Schools. I worked 2 years part time and when my daughters got into first grade, I started full time.

Thank God, I always have someone who is there to help me. I believe in angels. They are here and we just need to pay attention. I got my credentials two years later. I've been working in the same place for 11 years. In 2006, I got my paraprofessional credential to work with children.

In 2009, I got my citizenship. After that, I got divorced after 7 years of separation. I bought my own house two years ago—a pretty safe and peaceful place to live with my daughters.



Almost two years ago, my family felt the worst pain. One of my brothers got killed.

It still feels like it happened yesterday, and the only thing helping me is to pray each time I miss him.

Now, I'm working on my TOEFL, and everything I have done is thanks to God and my daughters. They have always supported me even when I've had nothing else to offer them but myself. They are my light!

Ellie Rodriguez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Three Lives

Courage is very important in our lives. Without courage, I could never have changed my life three times. I say to everybody, "Have a little bit of courage and your dreams and hopes will come true."

The first time was when I got divorced.

The second time, months later, was when I met my

second husband. We married and bought an old house in northern Germany for our retirement. We worked very hard on this house and after eight months it looked very beau-



tiful. Just one week before we Christel Schilling moved into this "new" house, my husband passed away. I organized the funeral and I had to sell the house. After two years, I found a buyer.

This time was not easy for me, but I thought life must go on. I started looking for pen pal girlfriends on the Internet, found them in the U.S., and had fun.

The third time was in January 2011. I met my current husband online though a pen pal friend. He lived in Oklahoma. We exchanged hundreds of emails and we saw each other on Skype. He invited me to Oklahoma and in October 2011, we met in Oklahoma City. It was then that I knew that my new

life was to be with him. We filled out all my immigration forms and I left Germany in September 2012, and moved to Oklahoma. I left everything behind me. My family gave me a wonderful surprise and gave me an unforgettable farewell at Düsseldorf Airport.

They said to me, "Now, you have changed your life for the third time. You have a lot of courage." It was the best and most wonderful compliment for me.

Christel Schilling
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

A Big Step of Courage

After high school graduation in Oklahoma City, I wanted to get a job. But, I moved to Altus with my family and didn't know anyone. It took courage for me to find a job.

My dad worked at the Altus Air Force Base. He showed me how the Commissary on the Altus Air

Force Base had workers who stocked the groceries and non-food items on the shelves at

night. We contacted the Great Plains Enterprises to see if I could work for them. I was scared to fill out the appli-

rience, and it was hard for me



to read the long application. My dad helped me get over that difficulty.

When I got a call to go for an interview, I was nervous. I knew I needed the job. That helped me explain why I could do the work. The boss said he would train me, so I felt relieved when I got the job.

The next difficulty was trying to find transportation to the commissary. The public buses didn't go at night time. I had no driver's license or car. My sister and her husband took me to work at first. I finally decided to ask another worker who drove to work during my shift if I could ride with him to the

Base Commissary. I offered to pay some money each week. That has worked out well, but it took "guts" to ask the older man for help.

Getting a job definitely takes a big step of courage!

Brittany Shelton Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Unanswered Questions

I am from Mexico. I am one of ten children who grew up in poverty. I have had many struggles to overcome in my life, not the least of which was my divorce.

In 2004, my sister invited me to emigrate to the U.S. I didn't want to bring my kids to a different country that also had a different culture. I came, despite my doubts and fears. My kids started working and going to school at the same time. We worked really hard to help each other to pay rent and bills.

One cold night in 2006, I came home from my English class around 9 pm. My kids were

all out working, so I was alone in the house. I went to open the door, but to my great surprise it was stuck. When I tried to look behind the door—boom! Someone with

a scary mask attacked me with a



bat, hitting me with no compassion, trying to get money from me. I still have the scars on my body and in my mind as well from the attack.

I have three questions without an answer; Why me? Who did it? Why? The police have never been able to answer these questions. Because there was not enough evidence, they closed the case. My first thought was to return to Mexico, but with the help of God and my family I managed to move to another place and continued studying to get a better job.

In 2010, I obtained my GED certificate and went back to English classes trying to get a technical degree, planning on working until I retired and, of course, with the goal of becoming a U.S. citizen.

Aida Silva
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

The Bullet

In 1996, I had the courage to fight for my life because some people shot my cousins and me.

It happened when we waited for the green light to drive on the freeway in the city of Phoenix, Arizona. I didn't know who it was that shot us or why he did it. I received two shots; one in my neck and one in my shoulder.

I had the courage to talk with the doctors and with the police. After that, I was in the hospital for 12 hours. My life has not been the same since this accident. My hands started shaking a lot when the docfrom my arm. When it's very cold, I get pain in my arm and when it's very hot, I get pain in my neck.

Adolfo Sotelo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Story

Before entering literacy, I had only had a couple years of high school. I moved a lot when I was little so it was no surprise when I got pregnant with my first child. I moved to Oklahoma.

I was too young to be a mother. With no other option, I let my uncle adopt her. I was devastated. I moved to partying and bad ways of coping with my guilt and sadness.

When I got pregnant again, I promised myself I would never be put in that position again so I went to DHS to ask for help. They put me in the TANF literacy program. I am now 22 years

old. I have my Career Readiness Certificate and my GED. I decided to continue on with my education so I'll be starting college at Carl Albert State College this fall of 2013. I thank God for all the courage He's given me and continues to give me.

Drew Thompson
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

My Companion Word: Coraggio

In my life, courage became not just a word, but a tool that has helped me move on in difficult situations. It gives me a push over hurdles in life.

As a young girl, I lived in Nigeria. I became a nun and went on a missionary trip to Italy. I observed the Italians using the word coraggio (courage) a lot.

After 45 years, the challenges of life became overwhelming. Courage became my companion word. It changed my view of life in difficult moments, urging me to let go, turn things over to God.

Andrea Bocelli said, "Life is the most beautiful gift God has given us to nurture, cultivate,

and love." This is true if we take the courage to bear all that life holds for us in today's world.

It was courage that brought me to the United States and courage has helped me to stay these eight years.

Sister Maria D. Ugbe

Life is lived by courage. Each one of us sees the world through a unique lens. Unfortunately, that is why not all can survive. We need to be there for one another to have coraggio (courage) and not give up. We need courage to be another's keeper. I remain eternally grateful to friends and good people divine providence puts on my pathway in my life journey. The people in the United States have been a great support that enabled me to survive. And now, I am

looking forward to becoming a United States citizen. Among these special people are Ann McKelvey and Karen Kerr-McGraw of the BPL Literacy Services. I want to thank them and government programs that facilitated my knowledge of this great nation.

The Lord commands us not to be frightened nor be dismayed, but to be of good courage. With courage life is livable, sweet, and wonderful...Coraggio!

Sister Maria D. Ugbe Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Courage Is My Nickname

I have been through so many difficult things.

The first was the decision to come to the U.S. without my family—just my husband and me. Then my first two pregnancies were miscarriages. It was so difficult. But after that, I had three beautiful children who are my life.

When I had Evelyne, my first child, I thought that I had to improve in my English. The reason for my decision was this; when I went to the store, I saw mothers telling their own children to interpret for them with the salespeople since they didn't understand or speak English. I thought to myself, "I will never do that." That is why I decided to start learning English. At that time, my second child came, but I never gave up. I first got my GED, and then I decided to get my citizenship. After that, my beautiful daughter Alexa came along to give me another reason to come through.

Now, I feel more comfortable in my life. I have been involved in my children's schools and sports, but I still want to improve my life. That's why I'm taking English classes. I am grateful for these wonderful programs that help people like me to succeed. And, I thank Mr. Anthony for being a part of all this.

Angelica Violeta
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My USA Journey

I came to the USA on June 3, 2013. But, I began

this journey on June 2, 2012, at

Tan Son Nhat International
Airport. My parents, my
uncle's family, and I made
this trip together, a total of
eight people. We had to come
ten thousand miles in order to

Viet Vu

come to the city of New Orleans in the USA. This is where my aunt petitioned for us. However, I was the only one who could speak any English, so I was worried about the journey. I didn't know what would happen on the journey.

At Tan Son Nhat International Airport, everything was okay. Everyone spoke Vietnamese, as we did. I could easily fill out the customs forms on the plane. We had begun a new life.

Our journey had two stops. The first stop was

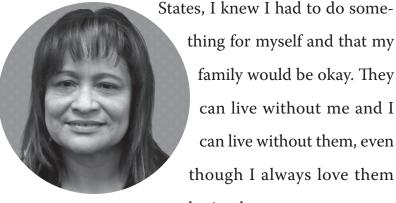
Taiwan airport and the second stop was Los Angeles airport. At Taiwan airport, I could see the gate on my ticket and we just followed the signs. But, At Los Angeles airport, we had to fill out some immigration forms. I really didn't know about it. However, I luckily saw a customs agent who could speak Vietnamese. He helped me to do that and then he told me how to go to the next gate. I really thanked him. I boarded the airplane to come to New Orleans and saw my aunt.

Now, I'm living in Oklahoma City. I'm studying ESL at OCCC. I hope I'll achieve English quickly so that I can return to the university.

Viet Vu
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Courage

The hardest decision I have ever made was leaving my family. When I decided to come to the United



Maria Ines Wargin and miss them.

Someday, I may go back to my country when my children grow up and have their own lives. However, I don't know how it is going to be going back after many years living here in the United States. Maybe it isn't going to be the same as it was before.

Maria Ines Wargin
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Learning to Read

When I first began my tutoring sessions, I was so excited to start learning how to read; and now eight years later, I'm still just as excited! It is such a good feeling to learn something new and then be able to use it in my everyday life. One of the very first things I learned from my reading lessons was how to use a phone book. I was able to then look up a restaurant name and number and order a pizza! Nowadays, if I don't want to order one, I can find a recipe in a cookbook, make an ingredient list, and go shopping for the needed items. I no longer need help shopping because I can read the aisle descriptions and product labels. I have also learned how to write personal checks and to use an ATM machine to pay for either my delivered pizza or my pizza ingredients.

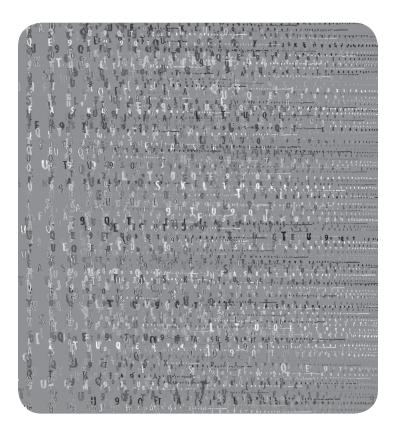
Being able to read has opened up a whole new world to me. It has given me freedom and independence from depending on someone else to read for me. There are so many wonderful things that I can do now, such as read a magazine or find a TV show on the channel guide; but my greatest

accomplishment is being able to read books. I told my tutor on our first day together that I wanted to be able to walk into the library, pick up any book, and read it. Reading always looked so relaxing to me. Now, I am a regular of my library and always have a book checked out with me. I love nothing more than to curl up with a good book, a glass of iced tea, and to get lost in the story!

Joyce Wind
Opportunities Industrialization Center
Volunteer Literacy Services, Oklahoma City

52

Hope



54

Goals and Hope

At the beginning of 2010, my oldest daughter, who lived in Oklahoma City, talked to me by phone,

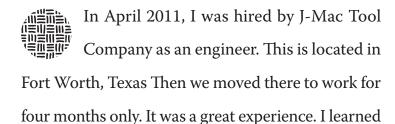
and she talked to me about get-

would be very difficult. First,
I hadn't enough money to
pay the requirements that
the immigration department

Miguel Banuelos was needing; Mexican passport, birth certification, and many other things.

Once I met all requirements, immediately I sent them to the immigration department. Six months later I received good news. I was accepted. I had to go to the American Consulate to the interview. It was successful. Everything was good. The interviewer told me, "Welcome to the USA, you can live and work here." I felt really happy.

tice every day.



several things to increase my engineering skill.

In September 2011, we came to Oklahoma City. My goal was to get a good job, but I had to learn to speak English well first. By the way, this is my current goal. I had a big opportunity to enroll in the Oklahoma City Community College. I hope to reach my goal soon. For it, I have to study hard and prac-

I'd like to get back to Juarez. Probably, I could get a job as an engineer there. For now, I have to make an extra effort to reach my goal. It is just around the corner to the next level. I'll be ready for it.

In order to achieve my goals, I have to think about my health first and my family too. I have to say

thanks a lot for their support.

Miguel Banuelos OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Dream

I would like to live in Iran. My family and boyfriend

in Iran. We go to the movie theater, to the pool, and to

the park.

Also, we go to parties. We dance, sing, and have a good time. Only girls come to the par-

ties. I feel happy with my friends at parties.

Elham Behbood

Now, I live in Oklahoma with my sister and her family. I work in daycare and at the church nursery. I like some American food. I like cheeseburgers, French fries, and pepperoni pizza. I really like to go to Ted's for Mexican food. I like to go to the

movie theater because the screen is big.

Someday, I hope to go to Iran. Today, I like the freedom of religion, to wear what I choose, and to go to parties with both men and women.

Elham Behbood Project READ, Edmond

Нарру

My name is Virginia Beatrice Myers Brown, but some people call me Ginny. I was born in California and was three years old when my mom moved back to Tulsa, Oklahoma. When I was six years old, my mom put me in Hissom. When I was 17, I went home but it did not work out so she put me in a group home and that didn't work out either. I was put in Hillcrest Psychiatric Hospital and that is where I met Treva and she asked me if I wanted to live with her. I lived with Treva and her family for 4 years. Then I decided to get out on my own

and live in Transitional Living, and it was nice, but they treated me bad. The next place was Bios

Corporation and it was good until my

then it went bad. I gave them many chances, but decided to go to Phoenix Residential Services, and they helped me buy my own home.

Virginia Beatrice Brown

When I was 27 I had my daughter and named her Barbara Marie Brown.

I went to the literacy program to learn how to read and do my math. I am reading a lot now but still need help with my math.

I am 43 years old now and happy with my life. We have a dog named Midnight, and we love him.

I have three sisters and two brothers. My sisters' names are Verna Mae, Barbara Joann, and Tina. My

brothers' names are Alan and Donnie. When I was 28, I married Albert and was married for two years.

My family calls me "Happy" or "Hap." I am participating in the Special Olympics.

I enjoy working at Iron Gate Food Ministry.

Virginia Beatrice Brown Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

About My Life

When I was a baby, my mom was going to give me up for adoption. My granny and grandpa took care of me. My grandpa passed away when I was four years old. My granny passed away when I was 21. At the age of 22, I found out I was pregnant with my daughter who is now three years old. I ended up in a relationship with a man that wasn't the father of my child and I let him control my life up until June 2013 when he physically put his hands on me. I told myself that I had enough. Now, I'm five months

pregnant with his child. I lost my mother at the age of 25. She passed away July 29, 2012, at the age of 44.

I am new to the TANF program.

My goals are to get my license and do what's right for my daughter.

Diana Burns
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Hopefully Better English!

I came to the United States of America from Thailand in 2000. My English wasn't very good to communicate with people. I was struggling, and it was embarrassing me when I spoke English. Nobody understood what I said, because my pronunciation was not quite right. I had to write the words down on paper and give the notes to them to read so they could understand what I was saying.

I had struggled from day to month and month to

year when I was working in a Thai restaurant in Florida while taking orders from customers. And then, I promised myself to improve my speaking, reading, and writing English. I wanted to do this by reading newspapers, watching TV, asking friends, and searching the Internet. These were a little bit of help, but that was not good enough.

I decided to quit the job, and I moved to Blair, Oklahoma, in February 2013, to visit my aunt and learn English all at the same time. I enrolled in weekly literacy tutoring at the Altus Library. In my English class, I have had a tutor to help me learn reading, writing, and pronouncing the English language. She would sit with me and explain how to say and use the words correctly. The teacher, Mrs. Johnson, gave me confidence, and that was important for me. Mrs. Winters would help me if Mrs. Johnson was gone.

I am moving back to Florida to work at the Thai

restaurant. I want to be a quality waiter with outstanding service.

Learning English has been my hope. I want to speak and write English fluently—as well as those who were born in America!

> Don Noppadon Chatnoppadon Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Finding Hope

I had lost hope when I was younger, thinking I couldn't go back to school and get my GED. When I came to OIC, I didn't know what to expect. I was a little nervous. But, I saw a lot of new people going to the board with confidence and a teacher who interacted with them. "We actually have a teacher," I told myself. I met a teacher who actually cared. She's always pushing us to do what we need to do to succeed in our studies even though some of us are hard-headed and don't listen. In life, we all need to

be guided to know what our options are. If we want to get our studies up and find a new job that pays better, the only way we can achieve this is by getting our GED. That's our way out of just getting restaurant jobs. I want to grow bigger in life and show my daughter that even though life gets hard, never lose hope because you will never succeed in a career or a good job.

Looking back, I used to think I was never going to get my studies up because my grade levels were so low. I thought I was just going to waste my time. I was a down person, thinking that I wasn't good enough. But, I am a different person now. I have raised my grade levels and built my confidence. I feel more positive about myself. I know as long as I study hard, I can accomplish things.

Balancing studying and raising a daughter is a challenge, but I will manage and handle things. I will continue to get my studies up and get my GED. I

know I can because I have hope and confidence in myself.

April Chavez Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Believe in Hope

When I was a young child in South Korea, I wanted

to become a preschool teacher.

But when I grew up, I studied architecture at the university. After I graduated, I realized my dream was to be a missionary.

Sun Chung

I married a pastor and worked with him. We had two sons. Suddenly, my husband passed away of cancer. That was 15 years ago. My dream was gone. I prayed for my future.

God led me to work at a preschool in South Korea. There I found another gift and talent, and I remembered my childhood dream. Then I studied Education and Social Welfare.



Two years later God sent me to the state of New Jersey. From there, I came to Altus, Oklahoma, to work with preschool children as a classroom teacher.

I had a hard time speaking with Americans. They talk fast! I went to the library to see if the Great Plains Literacy Council could help my conversational skills. The coordinator, Ida Fay Winters, e-mailed me this message: "I found a tutor for you and you can start to study with Jerrie." Jerrie taught me how to make sounds, how to read stories, and explained what words mean. She became not only my tutor but also my friend. As a result, my English improved smoothly.

I was selected by the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition as the Tinker Federal Credit Union English as a Second Language Learner of 2013. I want to keep being a learner.

I thank literacy supporters for encouraging me to achieve my vision through literacy.

My dream is not gone! I am hoping to work with children and senior citizens together in the future. I am putting my dream in God's hands.

> Sun Chung Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

On the Right Track

I got married at 18 to a guy I thought was my prince.

found out I was pregnant with my second son, my husband

We had a son together. After I

started cheating on me. I was getting abused. After

five years of marriage and two

kids, I finally had enough.

Within that year, I tried to commit suicide, but I failed. I met a guy on the Internet. He was sweet

April Cochrell

and was everything I was looking for. What I didn't



know was that he had been in prison and had a drug problem.

We got married a month later and he wouldn't get a job. I had to work full time and he told me he couldn't have kids. I did end up pregnant. While I was pregnant and taking care of my other two kids, when I went in the hospital to have my daughter, he kept sneaking off to go get high.

When my daughter was only a month old, he got upset with me because he didn't have any drugs and he hit me while I was holding the baby. The abuse and drugs kept happening for about two years. He then started forcing me to do the drugs with him.

I tried to leave him several times, but he would always board up the doors and windows. He went to jail and ended up being sent to prison.

With me being a single mom of three and not having

a job, my boys went to live with their dad. Someone told me about the TANF program. The teachers here are really great. I want to become a good role model for my kids. I owe all of that to TANF Literacy.

April Cochrell
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Now My Whole Family Speaks English

I worked as a machine operator for 11 years. I made different bottles, and I sometimes supervised people and production. I also taught my partners.

Now, I am a housewife. I get up at six in the morning, make lunch, and take my children to school. I clean the house, do homework, go to the grocery store, and pay the bills. I pick up my kids. Then, I go to my English class on Monday and Wednesday nights.

In August, my daughter brought home a flyer from

Council Grove Elementary School that said ESL classes for adults would be offered in the evenings. She wanted me to go to the class. I started English class in August 2012, and I never miss a class. I always listen in class, and I always do my homework. That helps me learn every day. I'm very happy because I've learned so much English. I feel more confident now. My husband and my family are very happy that I am learning English. My husband speaks only English. Before this class, I spoke only Spanish. English is not easy for me, but my husband helps me. I am always busy and very happy.

Lidia Comer OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Journey in Life

I am 27 years old. I have five wonderful children who are my pride and joy. Their names are Shawna, Veronica, Seth, Miah, and John.

I had Shawna when I was 14 and just enrolling in the 9th grade.

By the time I was 16, I was pregnant again with my second child. I had to do home schooling with these two children. I got to go to vocational school

where I became a Certified Nursing

Assistant.

When I was 17, I had my third child. I was put back in home schooling. That is when I finally graduated high

Ashley Cox

school and started working at the

Oaks Healthcare Center.

I worked for three years when I met my husband Jeremiah Cox. In February of 2007, we got married. I was 2 months pregnant.

We had a very good marriage at first. He worked and I stayed home through my whole pregnancy with Miah. I went back to work. Two months later, I found out I was pregnant with John.

Things were real good in life until my husband started using drugs and being real abusive to me and my kids, so I left him. He got put in jail.

I got my life back together, got my job back at the nursing home, and got a nice two bedroom trailer. Then, things started going downhill.

I got really depressed about my break up, and I began drinking and using drugs.

I was forced to quit my job and go to rehab to get my life back in order. I am preparing to go to college through TANF literacy.

I am getting a second chance to better my life.

Ashley Cox Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Prayer

I turn to you,

Asking of you just one more time

to show me my sign.

Just this time, show me my sign.

Please, Lord, easy as red, yellow, green.



Tonja Monick Cox

Please, Lord, just lead me.

You showed me my sign when I was on drugs.

You showed me my sign when I was lost in darkness.

You showed me my sign when I worked as a stripper.

You showed me my sign when I had my three kids.

Lord, you showed me my sign when I filed the charges on my brother that put him in the pen.

Lord, you showed me my sign when you healed my little boy from cancer.

You showed me the sign, Lord, when my husband filed for divorce.

Also, Lord, you showed me my sign when you called my daddy home to heaven this year.

Thank you, Lord, for showing me these signs.

Without you I would be lost in time.

Thank you for showing me which way to turn.

Thank you for those signs of red, yellow, green.

Thank you, Lord, for walking by my side and leading me.

Thank you, Lord, for showing me which path to take.

Thank you for the faith you give me each and every day.

Thank you for the grace you put in my heart, so I can be a good mother.



Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings when you healed my little boy.

Thank you, Lord, for the peace you gave me when you called dad away.

Thank you, Lord, for always showing me the "truth, light, and way."

But, most of all, Lord, thank you for giving me the words I needed to say

So that I could get my story finished by its deadline today.

Tonja Monick Cox Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

My Adventure In America

If you really want something in your life, you can do the best that you can and reach your goal. It makes me feel proud of myself because I left everyone whom I had known; my family, my friends. I came here alone without knowing anybody. I kind of started all over again—a new "life."

The United States of America is a great country, with a lot of opportunities. Everything is possible, everyone here is very friendly, and they are always here to help you. You never feel alone. I came here as



Maeva Euzenot

an au pair and I live with an American family with whom I spend most of my time. This has really helped to improve my English because I have to speak to them every day. I had no choice. At first, it was pretty difficult. I had to make them repeat what they said to me, and I was translating in my head. It was very frustrating.

I have travelled a lot and have seen so many places. I

have met a lot a people during my travels. My favorite state is California. I went to San Francisco and Los Angeles, and they were very beautiful cities. I am glad to live in Oklahoma because the life is very easy and the people are pretty laid back here.

I remember when I first got here. I said to myself that I wouldn't stay. I was very excited to go back to France, but now it is totally the opposite. I don't want to leave at all, so I am going to do my best to be able to stay here, not as an au pair, but as a future American citizen.

Maeva Euzenot
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Teachers + Hope

When I arrived in Oklahoma City, I wanted to do something to succeed, and I went to English School. They had very good teachers and they showed me how to take my GED. I had my math teacher

who was an encouragement to me. I had another teacher named Ranson. I learned many things with him. He was my computer teacher. I remember all of my teachers, especially the ones who pushed



Silvia Gallardo

me to make a good grade on my GED test.

I went to take the test only one time. I had classmates that went two or three times. I was happy when the teachers gave me the results.

My graduation was at OCCC. I have the newspaper to remind me of my happy day.

Silvia Gallardo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Life is a Pie

I have divided my life in four pieces, like pieces of a pie. First there are my spiritual needs, next my family, then my friends, and finally my education.

A lot of people have touched my life in different ways. For example, in education I have been learning English since 2009. I started in the beginning class with Mrs. Rady Foster. I learned my ABC's and the "big S" in present tense, like in "She dreamS."

In intermediate class with Mr. Anthony Tyrrell, I learned how to introduce myself, how to start a



conversation, and how to cooperate with others.

In advanced class with Mr. Tom Diggs, I learned to read big stories and understand them. OH!—and to sing English songs.

Now, I'm in TOEFL class with Mrs. Rady Foster and I have been learning a lot of grammar. She always tells us, "Do not forget to look at the context."

One of these teachers said to us, "When you dream in English, you can say now, you know English." I'm

dreaming of that day, but for now, I'm enjoying this piece of pie—my education!

Dora Gardea
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Second Chance

I am 23 years old. I have the three most beautiful kids which I love with all of my life and will do anything for them. I have a four year old little boy. His name is Dallas. I have another little boy. His name is Brandon. I have a little girl. Her name is Kaylee.

I really did not think that I would ever have kids, but God gave me three loving kids. When I was little, I never had anything nice at all. I had people talking about me all the time. When I went to school, it was really hard to go every day. It was not easy for me at all to be a kid.

My dad would never take care of us at all. It was hard on all of us because my mom always had to take care of us by herself. She went to work, came home, and did it

all over again. It was hard on her.

She did not know how she was going to feed us every day.

Cassandra Garrow

But, to this day, I am really happy

that I have a mom that loves me and never gave up.

My life has changed so much. I never thought I was going to ever graduate from high school. I did not know my math or how to spell at all, but when I moved to Oklahoma everything started to get better.

I can't thank my sister enough for telling me about TANF literacy. It has helped me so much on things I never knew. I would have never learned.

I want to say thank you to my teachers, Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Barbara, at TANF Literacy Initiative of

Leflore County Literacy Council in Poteau, Oklahoma.

Cassandra Garrow
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Serenity and Hope

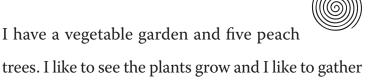
My husband Juan Galindo and I have three children: Rogelio, aged thirteen; Ginna, aged ten; and Kenia, aged five. I have a dog with the name of Billy. I have been living in Weatherford for five years.

I'm learning English thanks to my tutor, Linda Pye. I need to do more work on English so I can communicate better with people. Also, I need to learn more English to help my children with their homework in school.

to friends and family. In the future, I would like to open my own cake store business, and this is another reason I want to learn English better. Also, I like to bake cakes and other desserts for my hus-

band and children.

fruits and vegetables.



I like to dance with a folkloric dance group that I organized. We have performed at several community events in Weatherford and Clinton, including the Western Oklahoma Literacy Coalition enchilada supper fundraiser. I made the costumes for all the performers.

My job is cleaning houses and I like my work because the people are so nice.

Fabiola Gomez Western Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Following My Dream

When I first came to OIC, I had to take a test. It showed I was still low in math and spelling. I thought

to myself, "Going to OIC will help me. It will be the right place to be until I'm ready to take the GED test."



I really want to learn so I can get a better job to support my family and help my kids with their schoolwork. When I was younger, I didn't get the help I needed, so I dropped out of school and got a job to help my mother with bills and food.

I always dream of becoming a chef. I love to cook. I cook everyday for my beautiful family. I want to go to culinary school. If I put my effort to do this, I know I can. I need to be positive in all my work, come to class with a great attitude, and be ready to learn.

OIC is helping me with my studies, but I'm a hard learner even though my teacher explains to me more than once. I get angry when I forget, but my teacher is really patient with me. Miss. Shannon always pushes me to do all my assignments so I can really

learn it. I know that she's doing it to get us ready. She cares about her students and wants us to have good careers. My other teacher, Chris, does learning games with all of the students. It makes me want to work harder so I can do the problems. I know I have a long ways to go, but I will learn a lot from both my teachers. I am trying to do everything I need to do. I know I can do it. I'm a good person.

Nancy Gomez
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Hope is the Last to Die

My mom is a dreamer. For the last few

years, she has been buying raf-

fle tickets with the hope to win lot of money or another prize like a big and beautiful house.

My brothers and sisters always

Irene Rubria Gonzalez

tell my mom, "Don't spend so much," but she continues buying tickets and inviting us to buy tickets.

Once, my mother won one thousand dollars. She was excited and grateful, but she has not given up the hope of winning a bigger prize.

Irene Rubria Gonzalez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Moving Forward, With Help

Once I was out of school, things were hard. Reading and writing are what you need to achieve, to work, and to own your own business. Without reading skills, you cannot move forward the way you want to. You just cannot! The world goes on and on. If you have no skills, you will be lost or left behind. Reading and writing are very helpful in our lives.

I came to the literacy council to help improve my reading and writing, to help me move on through life better. I now read and write and I understand what I have read or written. I am not afraid to read in front of people. Every Sunday, I read out loud from the Bible as deacon in my church. I can keep on improving my reading and writing skills by going to classes. I want to better understand current events and keep up with all the things that are going on in our world.

I am retired now. I'm still able to work doing odd jobs and yard work. Reading and writing help me a lot. I can now read measurements and instructions and follow directions. I am starting my own business at home. I can keep track of my jobs on a calendar and write bills and receipts for my customers.

If you are not afraid to ask for help, the literacy classes are the place to go for help. I still have a long way to go.

Ronald Gordon
Ponca City Area Literacy Council

A Beautiful Tale

Once upon a time a boy and a girl found the most beautiful treasure in the world:
"Friendship." They shared stories, happiness, fears, sorrows, and loneliness. They



were best friends, but one day Maria Guzman a tragedy happened. He went to heaven and left his friend so alone and sad. She could not mourn because she didn't want to accept his death.

One night she was looking at the stars, hoping for a miracle to bring back her friend, and she felt a warm wind that caressed her hair, and the miracle came true. He returned to her side, not as her best friend but as her guardian angel, and she felt the peace that she only felt by his side. And the wind whispered that they would always be together. At that moment, a tear and a smile appeared on her face.

The pain was gone, and she accepted his death and realized that now she had a guardian angel.

Thanks Daniel, for being my friend and never leaving my side.

Maria Guzman
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

New Confidence

I laugh about it now, how I used to not read. I used to get so angry with myself, not reading good enough.

I have been using literacy to improve my bood beekeeping, but it is also improving my use of directions. I can read directions better and I am more confident in reading them and understanding them. We have an upcoming mission trip at church, out of town. I could always use maps. Now, I read the names of the towns. Before, I had to recognize them on the sign.

I can read in TV Guide about what is on. I can read the words to the hymns at church. I used be so self-conscious about this, but I don't have to fake this anymore. You can hear me sing out, not like I used to, mumbling or using other words.

hen I am working on my truck, I read a book now on my truck. If I have a question on it, I just look back for the answer, not just the pictures. This is all because of the confidence I have now in my reading ability, and my understanding what I read.

At restaurants, I am actually reading the menu. I am even reading junk mail now before tossing it.

The hardest part is sitting down to enjoy reading. I am still only doing it when I have to, when I have a need to know. But I want to be able to just sit down and enjoy reading for reading. I am not there yet but I think I will get there.

And this is all from literacy, the confidence in my ability to enjoy it.

Steve Hohler Miami Public Library Literacy Program

For the Future

I am forty years old. Thirty-five years of my life were spent in Mexico. My last five years, I have been living here in the USA. Every day I struggle to be a better person.

Carmen Jeong My time in Mexico was very good because I studied things like accounting in college. My job was very interesting too. I worked at Hacienda which is similar to the United States Internal Revenue System. I loved it. Torreon, Mexico, was a quiet and safe city. But one day, it all changed. The city became crazy, controlled by drug

lords, and very unsafe. I decided to come here with my three daughters and my grandson.

When I got here, I never thought it was important to speak English. I didn't know any words or wasn't able to put together sentences. I found out soon that I couldn't even eat in a restaurant or shop because I couldn't count money. People were nice and acted like they understood me and smiled, but I knew they really didn't have any idea what I was trying to say. I would go to a restaurant and couldn't order, so I would just leave. I would go to my daughter's school and wander around only able to say, "I am Chloe's and Elsie's mom."

As I am learning English, I know how important it is to speak, read and write English and how it is such an advantage to be a bilingual person. It is my hope that I can help other people that come to this country and make their dreams come true. I love this beautiful country, and dream that I can help

them by sharing the problems that I had and helping them learn English too.

Carmen Jeong New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

Hope for Today and Tomorrow

I believe in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. This has given me hope in my life. I learn about God and Jesus from the Bible, church, and my caring family.

I am a member at the New Hope Baptist Church in Altus. All my 41 years of life have included church in some way. I go to Bible classes and services on

Sunday mornings and evenings and

me happy to see others who attend there. Sometimes I am an usher to help people find a pew to sit in. At the church building, we have meals

Rosie Johnson

and parties. Going to church gives me hope for getting through life.



When I am not at church, I want to read my Bible. The stories show me how believers got through tough times and how to live a better life. I even try to memorize some verses to help me. One message that I like is this thought: "You are my Savior. I shall not want." I am going to the literacy tutoring to learn how to read and write better, because I want to read my Bible more.

My family also gives me hope. My dad, mom, sisters, brothers, and my son love me. We care for each other. Even though some live in other houses, they come together to help each other and give support.

Hope in the Lord is part of my life. I give thanks for my local church, the Bible, and my family. They all give me hope for today and the future.

> Rosetta (Rosie) Johnson Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

A New Friend

A new lady came to our church the last week of April. She was our pastor's sister. I decided to try to make her feel welcome, so I took her to lunch one afternoon. I found out that she is very funny and we have a lot in common. Her name is Michele, and she lives in Colorado. We quickly became friends.

She gave me hope without knowing it. I was trying to work out a problem and she said something that was the answer to my problem. She did not know it until I told her.

Michele is leaving soon and she has only gotten to see her son twice since she has been here. He is a truck driver. Yet, she said this trip has been a blessing for her. She has been here about 40 days. When her sister got sick, she was here to help her. Another lady in our church had surgery, and she stepped in to help her out, too. She serves like Martha in the

Bible. She has touched so many lives.

Michele and I have become good friends and we hope we can stay friends after she leaves. With our busy lives it is very hard to keep a long distance friendship that is so new.

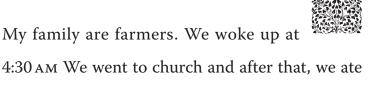
I met Michele for lunch today before she left. We exchanged addresses and promised to stay in touch, to call, and send cards. She said that it was so hard for her to leave because of all the new friends she has made here. I gained a new friend and was not even trying!

Wilma Johnson Miami Public Library Literacy Program

My Parents' Life

My parents got married in 1973, during the Vietnamese War. In 1974, the war was over and my dad had to go to prison for a few years. After he got freedom, he worked very hard to take care

of the family.



breakfast and we went to the farm. We worked from

7 am to 5 pm

My parents have about five hectares of coffee trees and we needed to wait about four years to get coffee beans. Today, our coffee trees have a lot of beans and my family is not poor anymore. We have money by selling coffee beans.

Quyen Lang
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

A Miracle

Fifteen years ago, I was pregnant and living In Chicago when, one day, my phone rang and my sister gave me bad news. My younger brother had been in a terrible accident.

He was in the hospital for about five months and in a coma.

When he woke up, he had amnesia and he didn't recognize my family.

This whole situation was very painful to my whole family, but



Monica Lopez

more for my mother because she was always crying.

After the hospital, he was in a wheelchair for about one year. My family played with him and we hoped, and we knew that God is good.

He started walking again. The doctors said that he was a miracle.

Now, he's 36 and he has good health, thanks be to God!

Monica Lopez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Passionate Daughter

Her name is Alondra. She is going to graduate in two weeks.

I remember when she was in kindergarten. She was a leader, and she still is. She learned to read very fast. When she was in first grade, she told me that she was going to change the world. I remember I told her that she could do anything she wanted to do.

Since then, her priority has been school. She spends hours doing her homework. She likes to do everything perfectly. She likes to volunteer at the library because there she helps children with their home-

work. She has been a volunteer at many other places also. I'm so proud of her.

Her best quality is how considerate she is of others. She is caring, and takes others into

Jenoveva Martinez

her confidence. She likes to hug everybody, and likes spending time with us. She is a hard worker. I remember she always had a vision of what she wants to do. She does everything with discipline, with passion, and with courage. Now, she is getting many awards. I'm so happy and proud to be her mom. She is going to reach her goals because she never gives up.

Jenoveva Martinez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

To Live Without Struggle

When I was nineteen I found out I was going to be a mother for the first time. I turned my life around and was straight for almost two years.

I met up with an old friend who helped me return to my old ways. I lost my three year-long job, my home, my car, and my self-control. I stayed high and numb for the next year. I wasn't able to buy my son's birthday or Christmas that year. I felt like the lowest scum on planet earth.

Then, seven months ago, I found

out that I was pregnant with my daughter. I started thinking back to my childhood and the life I never got to have. I never want that for my

Vanessa McGuire

children. They only deserve the

very best in life and that's what I intend on giving them. I have an opportunity to change my life around, and become the woman I was meant to be on the TANF literacy program in Leflore County, and make a drastic change in my life. Making more than a struggling cashier or waitress, I have the chance, the choice, and the opportunity to turn my life around to become the best mother I possibly can be—to make something of myself so my children can become something themselves. Children

tend to want to walk in their parents footsteps. I want to be the biggest and brightest footsteps for my babies to walk in.

Vanessa McGuire Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Hopes and Dreams for my Future

When I first started my tutoring with the Pawhuska Literacy Council, I just wanted to learn new things. I never thought it would lead me to new ideas and hopes for my future.

I am 43 years old and had lived with my parents most of my life until they passed away. At that time, I moved into a group home for handicapped adults. The people there always make sure I have everything I need. They take me shopping, on extra-curricular activities, and on vacations.

I appreciate everything they do for me, but after

attending classes and learning so much, my dream of becoming more independent was born. I would love to move into my very own apartment that's part of my group home community.

I started a job with Help Works making leather lines for antenna radios. I also took on a second job cleaning offices every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday mornings at the local Department of Human Services building.

I have been practicing math concepts that will help me with paying my bills. My tutor said we could start working on a budget to help me make my money last all month long, and practice reading different bills so that I will know how much each bill is and when it's due.

I'm not entirely sure that my dream will come true immediately, but I do know one thing. With hard work and determination, I will continue to work

towards my dream. One day it will come true!

Clara Moody Pawhuska Literacy Council

My Origins

I was born in Monterrey, Mexico. I came to the USA married with no children in 1985, leaving behind my family and friends.

Even though I visit my family every year, I still miss them dearly. One of the things that I really miss is the home-made food. I've always tried my best to cook for my kids and husband to preserve the traditions. I miss the bakeries where you can smell the aroma of fresh sweet bread from a distance, the smell of the tortilla factory where you can't resist to eat fresh tortilla just coming out from the grill.

Every year, on July 31 in my home-town, people celebrate the anniversary of a church named after a saint "San Ignacio de Loyola." People gather out-

doors to celebrate with traditional food, live music, and dancers. The dancers are dressed up as native Indians called "matachines." Their clothes are made with lots of feathers and lots of beads, a very unique costume. They also celebrate with mariachis, and it's a big celebration.

Leaving all this behind, I came to the United States with one thing in mind—the hope to be successful. Learning a new language is not easy, but you will need it sooner or later. I know it is hard to start in a new country, making new friends, where everything is new for us. But, I've always encouraged people to get involved in schools, in churches, or volunteering in libraries. It is always good for us to be part of our community just like I did. You will appreciate that for rest of your life.

Lulu P. Pedraza
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Don't Be Discouraged

For people who are discouraged because they don't know how to read, they should not be afraid to ask one of their peers a word. When I first started to

learn to read as an adult, I was not so sure about asking my tutor a word. When I first started, I was afraid to ask people what a word was because, at my age, I should know how to read! I felt embarrassed. Now

Andrew Rains

that I know how to read a bit, I realize that just because of my age it doesn't mean I should already know all the words.

It might take you a while to learn to read, but don't be discouraged. I am twenty-four, going on twenty-five, and I am just now getting to the point, that when I'm in public, I know what some of the big words are. When I first started though, I had no

idea. So, I had to ask people. But, now that I know how to read a little bit, it is getting easier to know what the big words say.

About two months into reading lessons, I learned what the word "exit" was. That really made a difference when I went places, such as a fast food restaurant, and could read that word!

For people who don't know how to read that have cell phones, I would encourage them to try to read a text message when somebody sends it. In my experience, I found that when I started texting with people, it was easier to learn to read.

Andrew Rains

Opportunities Industrialization Center Volunteer Literacy Services, Oklahoma City

What We Need

When I think about hope, it has several meanings to different people. The first meaning is that with hope in our lives we see a need to keep moving forward in our lives. The second meaning is that without hope in our lives people would just give up. The third meaning for hope is that it is an important part in our lives because it makes us feel happy. Finally, hope is that people want to help others in their life. Farmers in Oklahoma are in great need for rain. Every day they hope for rain so their crops will grow and make food for others.

hen there is hope, it keeps us moving forward in our lives. When you have hope in your life, it helps you accomplish everyday tasks. It helps us get through the rough patches that everyone has in their lives. If it wasn't for hope, many people would just give up. For many people, hope keeps them in the right frame of mind.

Hope is the important part of our lives that makes us happy. For some, without hope they would always have a frown on their face. In others, they would not have any feelings at all. This would make it hard for people to socialize together. We would always want to be by ourselves.

Finally, Oklahoma hopes to get more rain.

In several counties there is a restriction on the use of the water. All we can do is hope that we will get enough rain to solve these issues.

With hope in our lives we just don't stop doing what needs to be done. It is with hope we get up every day, put a smile on our face, and keep moving forward.

> Danny Raybrook Duncan Area Literacy Council

Wasted Time

When I first called the literacy program, I was afraid that people would laugh at me. I'm glad I called. I can read and write now.

I did go all the way through high school. I gradu-

ated from Harrah High School. When I was going to school, I could read a little and write, too.



Since I have been in the literacy program, I can read and spell a lot better. I hope one day I can go and get a job so I can be a better person. I want to make something out of my life.

I hope one day to be a nurse or a licensed baby sitter. I like to be around little kids. I want to read to them and sing to them.

hen I was in the eighth grade, I ditched school a lot, and it caused me a lot of trouble at school and at home. I got expelled from school for truancy. I remember one time the principal called and told my mom that he wanted her to come to his office to talk to him. He told her, for my punishment, he wanted her to stay at school with me, hold my hand, and take me to my classes. It was embarrassing to me because all of my friends

were there. I know the principal did it to teach me a lesson. The principal spanked me, too, with a paddle at school.

I remember one time I got caught smoking in the bathroom. For that, I was expelled for a week, and not allowed to attend the Special Olympics held in Stillwater, Oklahoma. My friends were allowed to go.

I did some crazy things when I was a teenager, but someday, I hope to go to college.

Tammy Rodgers
Literacy Link, Midwest City

A Better Future

Since I was 18 years old, I tried hard to come to America from Iran. I tried three times and the third time was successful

My first time was when I was 26 years old, but I did not have enough money and help to stay.

When I was 33 years old I came here again and after 9 months I found a job at OU Health Sciences Center. I was in heaven, but destiny was something else. The terrorists attacked the two trade centers in

New York City and all immigration laws and orders became tougher. I had to go back home, but I couldn't find a proper job! My age and no connections were the main

obstacles. I was staying at home



all the time with my old father. My mother had been here in the USA for ten years. She went through a lot to bring me back and give me a normal life.

Finally, after ten years standing in line, I got my green card at age 43. I've lived here for two years now. I work hard but still struggle with life and independence. I still hope that God and my hard work will help me succeed in this great country

like those liberal and open minded women and men who have already succeeded—like Randy C. Shugart and Mario Baca who gave me a chance to have equal opportunity with others at work. Yes, we are here like other strong women and men who have built this country. We are free and independent no matter who we are and which country is our home country—no matter which religion we have and which dress we wear. Yes, some people are mean and prejudiced, but angels are more than them. Let's stand strong, pray to God and have hope for a better future at any age.

Arta Shajiee
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

There's Hope for You

Hope is what we need to keep looking for as adult learners. There's hope for us each day of our lives. Take hold of it and stretch your mind. Look for things that challenge your mind each day. The mind is willing to be challenged and I'm living proof.

I have had three major head injuries in my life. Because of this, I had trouble all through school. At the age of fifteen I quit school and went to work.

t the age of fifty-six I became ill. After having an MRI, a neurologist told me that he had found thirteen dead cell areas on the outer part of my brain. I was then sent to a psychologist and was assessed at a third grade reading level.

I moved to Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in June of 2008. I saw a notice about the literacy program at the library. I took hold of my *hope* and signed on for the program.

My tutor is Catherine. She has gone the extra mile to teach me. She has given two hours a day, two days a week for a couple of years in order for me to succeed. This has changed my life. She has given me *hope*.

The assessments this year show much growth. My spelling is up two grade levels, my reading is at an eighth grade level, and my comprehension level is at a twelfth grade level. *Wow!*

I was asked to be a part of the Oklahoma Literacy Coalition as a student advocate. I serve on the board and represent adult learners.

The Lord God has given me *hope*. There's *hope* for all of you! I mean *you!*

Terry Terflinger
Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

A Hope and a Plan

A driver's license is about the most important thing you can have. It lets you go from place to place by yourself. About five years ago, I took the written test in Anadarko, Oklahoma. I failed, missing eleven questions. The instructor said that if you missed more than six questions, you failed. I was very dis-

appointed.

My goal was still to pass the test. To do this, I started doing several things. First, I went back to the book. I studied it every week and my mom and dad would test me on



Sharon Townsend

it every Friday. Next, I started bringing my driver's manual to my tutoring lessons, and my tutor and I are using it in class.

Also, my friend Michelle takes me places and makes me read the signs we see. She also lets me drive on back roads. That's more fun than reading signs or studying the book.

Reading better will help me pass the written test and get my learner's permit.

Sharon Townsend Literacy Link, Midwest City

Going to College

When I was in high school, my dream was to attend college. But, for some reasons, I couldn't. Now, my children are little and my hope is that they can go to college. I know the importance of growing up with the idea and desire to have a degree. I know that during the way there could be many obstacles,



▲ ▼ ▶ but if they are prepared and focused, they could overcome them. I want to inculcate

in them that in today's world, it is essential to go to college to be successful. When a person has a career, the labor field is open and it's easy to find a better job. I want them to have the job they choose, so they need to be prepared.

I think that if they keep in their mind the idea of going to college as a main objective, since they are still small, when they grow up, it will be easier to do.

When I am helping them to do their homework, I

always ask them questions about

what they want to be when they grow up, and when they answer me, I continue saying that if they want to achieve it, they have to study



a lot and have good notes. I'm Raquel Vazquez

focused to awaken in them the interest to study, to find their passion even if they are still young.

My children are six years old. They are twins. But I believe that it is not too early to start to tell them about going to college. I think that this is the first step of a long way.

Raquel Vazquez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Passed the Bridge

Three years ago, the doctor said, "Your mom is no longer alive." My sisters and I couldn't stand on our

feet. At age 54, my strong mom passed away in an accident.

I couldn't believe it. The thunder struck inside my head. Nothing was alive and bright, but dark. I started to have cold feet. I questioned myself, "Who would take care of my father, sisters, and brother?" My heart was broken in pieces. I have missed my mother very much. Day by day, I couldn't sleep for almost two years. I blamed myself that I didn't cook even one meal for my mother.

y mother was a good person. She helped a number of people that I couldn't count. I didn't think she would leave us so soon.

After we buried her, I resolved all financial issues. I was the only person in my family that had to manage everything. Things happened too quickly. I cried every day and wished that I could take care of my mom a few years before she was gone. But it was just a dream.

One day, I woke up looking at my poor children and wondering how my kids could grow up in happiness and success if I lived so despondent. Clearly, I believed my mother really crossed into the light and was living in peace.

In conclusion, my kids have motivated me to move on to a new page, and although I will never forget my best mother, I want to spend my time with my children now. They are the only bridge helping me to pass a difficult time. I realize my children are so important to me; they are new sprouts and need me. I hold them in my arms and I tear up. From now on, nothing is more valuable than my kids. I look at them to enjoy and to live. They give me everything that I need.

 $\frac{\text{Huong Vo}}{\text{OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City}}$

Blessings in Disguise

My story all started when my mother became pregnant and married my father. They both have always had bad drug addictions and mental health issues.

I was in and out of foster care and always being pushed from one family member to another.

As far back as I can remember, I was neglected and abused both physically and

Ashley Walters sexually.

At eleven, I witnessed my father cut my mother's throat while she was changing my youngest brother's diaper. I decided then I had to get out, but didn't know how, when, or where to go.

At fifteen, my parents moved from Oklahoma to Indiana without even telling me. That was a relief, but I had nowhere to go and ended up spending most of my time getting drunk at parties with older friends. I stayed at different people's houses from night to night.



At seventeen, my boyfriend raped me, and at eighteen, I gave birth to my son. His biological father has never wanted anything to do with him.

I eventually dropped out of school and Indian Child Welfare removed my son for four months due to instability. It was then I realized that I needed to get my life figured out.

I am now twenty-one and engaged to an amazing man who my son believes is his daddy. My fiancé has full custody of his three little boys, making me a very young but very proud mother of four sons.

I am enrolled in the TANF literacy program in Leflore County and my life is coming together. I am taking my GED test next month and going to college to become someone my children can be proud of.

Ashley Walters
Literacy Council of LeFlore County, Poteau

Hope of Compassion

I came to the Creek County Literacy Program to better my life so I can find a better job and buy my wife all the nice things she deserves. I also want a different job where people appreciate me more and will not make fun of me because I can't read and the way I talk. I think I would like to drive a wrecker truck and help people who are broke down on the highway.

When I come to the literacy program and read better, it makes me feel happy. People who can read and write do not understand how people feel who can't because they have never been in their shoes.

Albert Williams Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

A New Passage

As a little child, I didn't get much learning from home. I had to get all my learning from school. I have always struggled in academics. Growing up, I was embarrassed to ask for help, which caused me to be more behind and made me not like learning anymore. Sometimes I wish that I could have had the right person to push and support me.

I was in the 10th grade when I had my son, which turned my life around. Knowing what I went through as a child, I didn't want that for my son or myself anymore. I had to make goals for myself. I knew I had to take the initiative to get what I needed because I knew no one else would do it for me. So, I had to put myself out there to ask questions and started to talk. I then started getting the help I was lacking.

After finishing high school, I went to a vo-tech school for medical assistant training, thinking my

and began to go back to how I felt before. I did finish, but didn't get proper help. I left not knowing anything, not getting a job or having a steady career. This almost made me give up.

My goal is to become an RN. My academics are still off to meet that goal, so I was sent to OIC. On my first day there, my teacher told me to get a book. I haven't picked up a book in four years. I had forgotten how much fun reading could be. I then realized this is going to benefit me and my son to reach that goal I had been putting off. I know I can do this.

Ryanisha Wofford
Opportunities Industrialization Center, Oklahoma City

Living (Part of) My Dream

I am from Iran. I came to the USA in December 2005. Many people like to come to the United States and live here. Young people love the United States,

but many cannot come here easily.

I wanted to come see this country. I like to travel with my family by car, and I wanted to see all 50 states. These states are very beautiful, and Niagara Falls is special. I would like to have a house and a farm near Niagara Falls and enjoy nature. I would like to plant beautiful, colored flowers and many trees, including fruit trees. I would pick the blooms from the trees in the spring and share with many people. I would do the same with the fruit, but all of this is a dream.

y reality is that I did get to come to the USA, so I am living part of my dream. I started English class in February 2011 at the Midwest City Library. My teacher helped me a lot. Now, I go to classes at the Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC) Family and Community Education (FACE) Center. I have had two excellent teachers at FACE.

I never miss class because I learn so much English

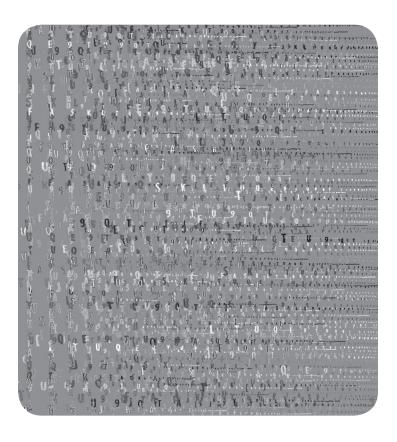


when I attend class. My teachers have all been very friendly, kind, and helpful.

I am happy about everything. Many of my dreams have come true. I am in the USA, and now I can communicate in English wherever I go.

Shahnaz Zarei
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Humor



The Rain

My son Jerry has a roofing company. Frequently, when he looks and sees that the sky is full of rain clouds, he says, "This weather is good for my com-

pany. We are going to have a lot of work."

One day, Jerry, his wife, his children, and I were going to a restaurant for dinner and that evening it began to

Norma Carrillo rain. At that moment, my son repeated the same words that he always says, "This weather is good for my company. We are going to have a lot of work," and I don't know what the reason was but I thought, "The rain causes many problems for the people."

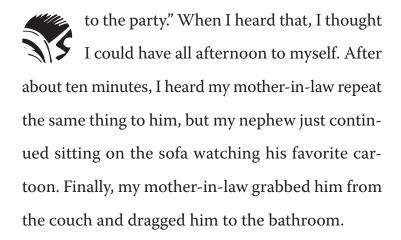
We were pleased to eat a delicious dinner and we were a little tired after it, although we had a nice time together, so we decided to go back home. When Jerry unlocked the door and went to his office which is behind his house, he saw that it had flooded. Suddenly, everybody forgot about the tiredness and all the family began to remove the furniture and important documents that got wet.

Finally, we finished cleaning up and drying the office and all of us were exhausted. But suddenly, all of us began to laugh because we remembered Jerry's words, "This weather is good for my company. We are going to have a lot of work." Then we told him, "No, Jerry, the rain is not always good for you."

Norma Carrillo
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Party Time

Since moving from Taiwan, I have been living with my mother-in-law. She often takes care of her grandson, my nephew. One day, when he was over at our house, she suddenly told him, "Quick! You have to go



Strangely, when they came out, I heard her say, "Okay, now let's take a nap."

"What?" I thought, "You said you were in a hurry to go to the party so I could enjoy *my* quiet afternoon. What happened?"

I built up my courage and asked her, "I thought Ethan had a party to go to because you demanded him to be quick. Why does he have to take a nap now?"

She was confused at first but soon realized what was going on.

My mother-in-law explained, "Shochan, I said potty, not party. Potty means to go to the bathroom."

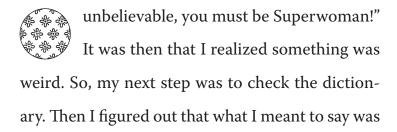
I learned a new word that day, but I also felt very disappointed.

Chih-Hsing Chuang
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

True Communication

My boyfriend is Mexican. I am Chinese. We have to communicate in English, but neither of us is very good at speaking English, so sometimes we misunderstand each other.

One day, I was going downstairs, but the stairs were very slippery. I fell down. That night, I was talking to my boyfriend on Skype. I told him I was falling from the third floor. He was shocked, and said to me, "Are you okay? Are you in hospital?" I said, "No, I am good. My feet are just a little bit sore." He said, "Are you sure you fell down from the third floor? That's



'stair,' not 'floor.' We both laughed.

Some people have told me that it's really hard dating a person who doesn't speak the same language as you. Yes, it's hard, but true communication is not only by voice and words, but also comes from the heart. If you don't like someone, even if you speak the same language, it still doesn't work. In other words, love can overcome all language barriers.

Yi Dingfei OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

An Expensive Trip

We were on the way to Texas for a big horse show. On board, we had seven horses, my dog Bailey, and my husband. After a five-hour drive, we arrived at the horse show area at Katy. We set everything up, fed and watered the horses, and went to the hotel. Ready to check-in, they told us there were no dogs allowed, so we decided to try somewhere else.

Everything was booked up. On the way back, we were deciding what to do with Bailey, so I had an idea. We wrapped a blanket around Bailey, and acted like he was a baby. As I started to do the check-in, I realized the lady totally forgot that we tried to check in an hour ago.

I had to stay focused so I didn't laugh. We got everything checked-in. After the second day, we got done earlier at the horse show and went to the hotel to get some sleep. It was still morning so the cleaning lady hadn't cleaned the room. My husband and I were taking a little nap. In the meantime, the cleaning lady was knocking on the door. Bailey woke up and started to bark and we both woke up.

Minutes later, the receptionist called us and asked if

we had a dog in our room. I said "no," that we were just watching a documentary about dogs. My husband started to laugh, I couldn't hold my laughter back, and the lady got really mad and told us to leave the hotel. We had to pay for the rest of the days, and move to another hotel. It was a really expensive trip.

Sabrina Kleinheinz
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Finally

When my husband was a kid, his mom told him that he should not listen to English songs because, as he did not know the language, he could not under-

stand the lyrics. As he was grow-

ing, he did not pay attention
to American movies or TV
shows. This country was like
a new planet to him because
he did not have any idea about

Teresa Lopez

the lifestyle here or how schools looked.

My family and I arrived here in 2002. We are from Peru and I was the only one who knew a little bit of English at that time.

My brother took us for a tour of the city so we would know it and we could move independently and he could continue with his routine. Soon, we were able to go to many places in the city and I was trying to see all, especially the stores, but my husband was always asking me for everything. He was starting to bother me and so I could not enjoy anything.

One day, we were in a Wal-Mart Supercenter; it was our first time in the store, and I was really enjoying it. My husband was interrupting me and he would not let me enjoy myself. Suddenly, I saw him very concentrated looking at a safe box for rifles and it had a note on it. He asked me to translate what it said. I do not remember what the note said, but I

translated it this way: "If you do not know the combination you'd better stay away because you are at risk of being shot."

Of course, he came back to me—that was enough! He stayed close to me and did not say anything else for the rest of the day. Finally, I could enjoy that afternoon in the store.

Teresa Lopez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Never Try to Kill a Cockroach When You Wear High Heel Shoes

When I was 22 years old, I was working for one of the most famous restaurants specializing in seafood. It is located in Bucaramanga, Santander, Colombia. It is an elegant and prestigious restaurant. It has two floors, and its main entrance is big with many stairs. I was working as a Social Hostess and Maître D' (the person who is in charge of the service and waiters'

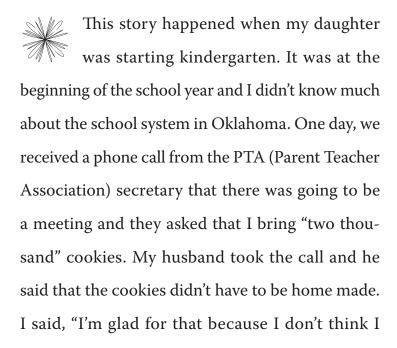
boss). I used to wear a beautiful classic uniform; a jacket, a mini skirt, and high heel shoes.

ne night, the restaurant was not crowded, and I made the decision to close the second floor. I was in the entrance of the restaurant. Everything was perfect until I saw a big cockroach close to me, and for me, it was so easy to try to kill it, but I never thought that the cockroach would be so quick. I slid, and because I could not hold on to anything, I fell down the stairs. The people that were in front of the entrance stated laughing. I couldn't stand up by myself. One of the waiters helped me to stand up but I was so embarrassed, I didn't want to see people. Also, I felt a lot of pain, and my right leg was injured and got a big swelling. From that day, I have never tried to kill any insect if I am wearing high heel shoes.

Solangel Mindar
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

An Embarrassing, Funny Story

I think of the obstacles we face as immigrants. Probably, the biggest one is the language. When my husband and I immigrated to the USA, it was difficult to understand the spoken English. Even though I had taken some English classes in Mexico and I could read and write basic English, I couldn't understand very much when people spoke because they talked too fast for my foreign ears.



have time to bake." Then I thought, "Why do they need so many cookies? Is everybody in the school attending?" So, I went on a journey to the grocery stores to try to find as many cookies as I could at the best price. Can you imagine how many packages of cookies I had to buy? The day of the meeting, I carried bags and bags filled with cookies. The PTA lady said, "You are very generous. We only need about two dozen cookies, but we can freeze the other ones and use them later." I was so embarrassed! So that is how "two dozen" cookies became "two thousand" cookies.

Now, when my husband and I remember it, we think it is funny, even though at the time it was not very funny for me.

Graciela Irma Ramos OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Don't Worry, I Speak English

When I came to the USA in July 2011, I came with my daughter. Her name is Itzel. She was 13 years old at that time. She was nervous because she didn't

speak English well. When we lived

in Mexico, she took an English class. On the other hand, I supposedly spoke English well, and I said to my daughter, "Don't worry if you don't

Miguel Angel Reyna understand something, you just ask me and I'll help you." But, when we were at the Dallas airport, the American Airlines' employee asked me different questions about our trip, so I was nervous and forgot my English when I tried to

When we went with the immigration agent, he asked me a lot a questions, so I was frightened. Therefore, my daughter answered the questions. I

answer the questions.

was very embarrassed in front of my daughter and disappointed with myself. Therefore, I thought, "I should study and practice more of the English language." I have been frustrated since that moment.

Miguel Angel Reyna
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

Good Humor Around Us

A good sense of humor is valuable and comes in

handy. Humor is defined as the ability to appreciate or express what is funny or amazing. I enjoy humor in reading, in everyday happenings, and in myself. Reading is one way to find humor. My tutor Jackie Henson and I use the comic strips in the newspaper to learn new words and have a laugh at the same time. We always laugh at Blondie and Dagwood and the B.C. cavemen series. At home, I have comic books about Richie Rich and Little Dot that are fun to read. Even in the newspaper, you can read col-

umns or stories that are entertaining and amusing.

I also find humor on the radio and TV shows.

Sometimes you can have laughter from everyday happenings. Funny situations occur

on the way to work or to class.

Comedians use skits or stories to tell jokes or silly stories. Eddie Murphy is one comedian that I enjoy for a good laugh about everyday

Harold Wilson

events.

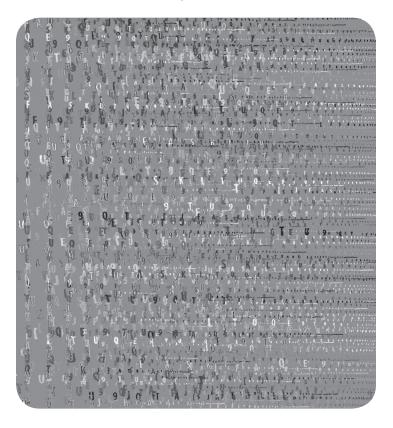
The hardest thing is to laugh at yourself. It has been said that laughter is the best medicine. When I make a mistake or blunder, I try to laugh after it happens. Laughing is like medication to the body and soul. Rather than being depressed, laughter can lift your spirits and make you feel better. Sometimes I make mistakes in writing and reading, but I laugh and realize that I get better with practice. Learning can

be so much fun.

Humor is healthy. You can find it in reading, in everyday events, and in yourself.

Harold Wilson Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Various Subjects



My Experience at Primary School

As you can't enter your house without keys, you can't deal with life without education. If you want to be a successful person, you have to be educated. That is why education is the most important thing in life.

Schools and teachers are the basic builders of generations. There is an old saying about teachers. It says, "Teachers are like candles; they burn to light darkness for others." And another one says, "Stand for teachers and respect them because they are like messengers."

That is why, when I was at the primary school, I learned that students have to be in class before the teachers. When the teacher is in class, no student is allowed to get out without permission.

For me, there was a wonderful experience. Our teachers lived in our neighborhood, and if you

didn't go to school, they would tell your parents. They treated us as one of their family. We used to hide from them if we saw them in the neighborhood wedding. We said to each other, "Look! Our teachers. Do you think they saw us?" We were very concerned not to be seen. If they saw you there, the next day they would ask you, "Did you finish your homework?" If you said no, they said, "Ah, you were at the wedding yesterday. That is why you didn't finish your homework." After that, we immediately got punished.

It was an enjoyable moment because we felt we were precious to our teachers. That is why we loved them. Even though they punished us, we understood because it was for our own good.

Nidal Abdelsalam OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Second Country

I came to the U.S.A. 20 years ago from Mexico with my husband, who was living in California before we

married. It was very hard for me to

family, my friends, everything. At my husband's job he worked more than

leave my country. I missed my

12 hours a day. I was alone

almost all day long. I didn't have

family here, I didn't know anybody,

and I didn't speak English.

Clara Arzola

When I got pregnant with my first child, I went to my first check-up. I had to learn to travel by bus. I called the bus station to check the bus route. When I took the bus, it was different from my country. Buses here use tokens. In my country, we pay with money. Buses from Mexico don't have specific stops. When you are ready to stop, you just stand up and

yell, "Stop, stop." and they stop. I believed that it worked the same here, so when I was ready to get off I stood up and yelled, "Stop, stop." Everybody in the bus looked at me and the driver told me, "Sit down, lady. You can't stand up while the bus is moving. Wait for the next bus stop." I didn't understand but somebody translated for me. I was so embarrassed. So, I went to school to learn English for free. That's why I love my second country. Here, there are a lot of opportunities for everybody who wants to learn English and go to college to have a career.

I am so thankful for this country, the land of freedom.

Clara Arzola
OCCC Adult Learning Center, Oklahoma City

My Two Dogs

I have two Chihuahua dogs, one male and one female. Baby Girl, the oldest is black and white while

Poppy, the male, is blond. Baby Girl is well behaved but Poppy is just a puppy. He chews on anything he can find. He has his own toys to chew on but would rather get the things he should not have. He knows when he has done wrong because he will run upstairs and hide under the bed.

Baby Girl stays right with us when we go for a walk but Poppy runs off and needs a leash. They play together a lot but Baby Girl gets tired easily and snaps at him until he leaves her alone. Sometimes he will lie down but usually he looks for mischief to get into. He is not completely house broken yet but he is getting better and Baby Girl is trying to help us train the puppy.

Baby Girl is really my mother's dog, but I love them both a lot. When Poppy does something really bad or makes a big mess, I get so mad, but my mom tells me it is part of having a pet. When you have a dog, it is your responsibility to clean up after, feed,

water, and train them, but most of all to love them, mischief and all. They are my babies.

Crystal Breitengross Literacy Link, Midwest City

Princess

The best thing about learning to read and write is that I have learned to write about things that are important to me. My tutor helped me write this poem.

P is for Princess

R she likes to run

I I love her

N she likes to nap

C she doesn't like cars

E she likes to eat

S she likes to sleep

S she likes to swim

I love my dog!

Shellia Bynum Western Oklahoma Learning Center, Elk City

My Progress in Learning

I have lived in Weatherford for 12 years. I started English classes with Roberta Slagell in 2002, and I am still taking my classes with Patsy Chasteen. I believe I can communicate much better. I was working as a dishwasher in 2002, and then I became a cook. I feel so happy because I can talk with everybody. I can also joke with people.

I now have a granddaughter. She is

learning Spanish and English.

Knowing English helps me to talk with my daughter, ter-in-law. My daughter, Mayra, is in ninth grade at Weatherford High School. She

Graciela de la Cruz

is so smart, and she is in honors classes. I am so proud of her.

I recommend to my friends to study English. It is very important to communicate well. I can communicate with people at my work, with my neighbors, at the doctor's office, at my children's schools, and at the post office.

Graciela de la Cruz Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

In Trouble Again

Tayoltita, Durango, Mexico is a beautiful town. The people work hard in the gold mines. Sometimes, they go into the mines and never come back.

My family would go on a picnic at the river. It was so clear, you could see the fish. Afterwards, all the family would find some wood to take home with us. On the weekends, father and all of the family picked wood for the next week for cooking.

My mother was a wonderful cook. I miss her. She had a difficult life, but loved to help people. Early in the mornings, around four a.m. mother would start breakfast and fix a lunch for father so that he

could be on time when he walked

the hour to the mine for work.

During the holidays, mother would make buñuelos, tamales, atole and a punch made of water, oranges, sugar and

Maria Hamblin tequila. One day, my cousins and

I were playing outside. We made some food and I said to my cousins, "Let's go make punch." My cousins said, "We have no tequila for the punch." I said to them, "I have a good idea." I remembered where mother put a bottle of tequila in an old trunk. So, I tell my cousins to bring oranges and some sugar, and I would bring the tequila. We were drunk. My aunt called Concha, my cousin, to watch her baby

brother. Concha was so drunk she fell down and hurt her brother and ay, ay, ay, I was in trouble.

One day on the way to school, my cousins and I were walking by the river and it was so inviting I suggested we take a swim. We were late for school. I was in trouble again.

Maria Hamblin Literacy Link, Midwest City

My Journey to a Better Job

I wanted to apply for a new job. I worked hard on my reading and spelling. I also began to take spelling tests to learn my word families.

I am proud of myself. I have a good tutor.



Danielle Morris

Danielle Morris Literacy Link, Midwest City

Why I Like the Learning Center

This is what I would tell someone who is afraid to come to the Learning Center: I like the Learning Center because it makes me feel better about myself. I'm learning how to read and write and I'm trying to get my license to drive. I'm trying to get my GED. I like the Learning Center because it gets me out of my house. I like to play games on the computer. My tutor, Jo Ann, is helping me learn to read. She is like my family and my best friend.

Michelle Ray Rowley Western Oklahoma Learning Center, Elk City

My Unforgettable English Teacher

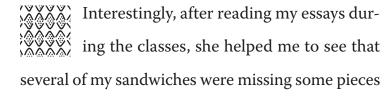
We never know why some people come into our lives or for what purpose. However, we know them straight away when they do. The effect on our lives is profound and we value every moment spent with them.

One such person was Judith Jenlink who was not only an excellent English teacher but a warm compassionate person with a heart of gold.

Judy walked into my life in September 2010. She was a volunteer English teacher at the Stillwater Public Library and for 15 months I had the pleasure of being her student.

Every class with her caused great excitement for me. I found it easy to talk to her about everything, including politics, family, economics, relationships, American and Brazilian Cultures, science, history, cooking, travelling, and even English!

I really enjoyed her way of teaching English and I had so many great moments in her classes! There is one piece of advice she gave me that I will never forget. Judy once told me that an essay is like a sandwich. The pieces of bread should be the introduction and the conclusion and its filling should be the development of the major ideas of the essay.



of bread or even part of their fillings!

She also helped me to release more of my potential and always gave great advice and guidance which I could apply to my graduate program, as well as in my personal life.

Unfortunately, Judy left us in February 2012; however, she will always be the most lovely, nice, kind, patient, confident, encouraging, and intelligent person I have met in my entire life. Judy is my unforgettable English teacher.

> Patricia Coutinho de Souza Stillwater Literacy Council

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



Oklahoma f Department **Libraries**

This project was made possible by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.