

Reflections

Voices of English Learners

Fourth Edition, 2021



LITERACY COUNCIL
FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

EMPOWERING ADULTS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

OUR MISSION

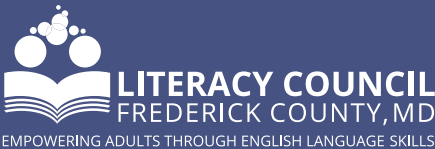
The Literacy Council of Frederick County teaches adults the reading and other English language skills they need to provide for their families and to contribute to the well-being and prosperity of our community.

OUR VALUES

- Sustaining our organization through responsible financial stewardship, sound management, and community engagement.
- Teaching a parent in order to educate a family. Educating our students in a learner-centered format with compassion, confidentiality, and respect.
- Producing a safer, healthier, economically stronger, and more vibrant community through adult literacy.
- Sustaining, empowering, and energizing a passionate, strong dedicated volunteer base.

OUR VISION

A community where literacy is attainable for everyone.



frederickliteracy.org

Literacy *lifts* Lives

FOREWORD

In reading these inspiring and moving stories written by the students of the Literacy Council of Frederick County, let's consider the work and effort it took to write them. These are people who are learning a new language. Think of the years of schooling and experience it took you to do something like this in your native tongue. Now look at what they have achieved in another language. These are truly exceptional people who are doing their best to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

These past few years have been challenging and difficult. We have been restricted on where we can go, what we can do, and how we do it. Instead of throwing up their arms in frustration these students have adapted to distance tutoring and online classes, becoming proficient in technology that many didn't understand initially. Instead of quitting, they persevered and faced these challenges head on. The Board of the Literacy Council of Frederick County is honored to assist these talented and dedicated students who have forged ahead through great difficulties.

So, enjoy *Reflections: Voices of English Learners*. This is their fourth annual edition and we look forward to many more. Be inspired and amazed. These folks epitomize the positive attributes that gives hope for the future.

Darrell Batson, President
Literacy Council Board of Directors

Literacy *lifts* Lives

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DEDICATION

We dedicate *Reflections* to our adult learners, their families,
and their volunteer tutors.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reflections: Voices of English Learners continues to be a unique publication. It originates from the minds and hearts of our student body and their perspectives on life in general. Submission is open to all the adult learners of the Literacy Council and we are always amazed at the excellence of writing we are fortunate to publish in this magazine at many levels of language acquisition.

This has been a year of metamorphosis as our country is in the process of emerging from the pandemic with the hopes of a better tomorrow. Some of the pieces came from the Writing Classes that we had online this past three semesters. Their insights into human nature and their own moments of revelation are quite enlightening. In these pieces students share their experience with culture shock, their moments of extreme happiness, as well as their sorrow and bewilderment in a year of great loss and momentous change. The artistic endeavors of our students explored the fields of travel logs, history, mythology, and some students were inspired to write poetry.

Our students are moving forward in their lives with their newly acquired English language skills and making a difference for themselves, for their families and for our community. Our adult learners represent many different nationalities, languages, and cultures. We are privileged to present to you the fourth edition of the Literacy Magazine of the Literacy Council of Frederick County. We lightly edit, maintaining the integrity of the individual voice in each piece.

We would like to invite those of you who are new readers of the magazine and students of the Literacy Council to submit your stories for *Reflections* 2022. Let's continue to be a place where many voices can come together and share their individual writing, ideas, and perspectives.

The opinions expressed in these essays do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Literacy Council.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This magazine would not have been possible without the generous support of the Literacy Council of Frederick County's Board of Directors, President Darrell Batson and Immediate Past President Jim Grissom, Executive Director Laurie Fisher, Program Manager Jennifer Szabo, and our sponsors Catherine Cox and Charles Murray, Curious Iguana, John and Jane Ketchem, and our graphic designer Betsy Maymon, editors Julie Heifetz and Catherine Coundjeris, first reader Catherine Cox, our dedicated tutors, and our contributing students. Reflections: Voices of English Learners was produced by Strategic Factory with photography provided by our students.

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MY FREE TIME

By Ala D.

My name is Ala. I am from Belarus. I have been living in America for 5 years and have made many friends. I study English and the Literacy Council helps me. I really need to learn the language to go to work. My teachers and friends help me with this. Thanks to all the teachers for the lessons that I am always looking forward to.

In my free time, I love to go shopping with my daughter. Every Sunday morning, we do yoga with the whole family. Also, on weekends we love to visit museums and walk together in the park. We spend all weekends together. We also have a new pass time – kayaking.

My free time on weekends is different from my free time during the week.
I spend more time with my family on weekends.

MY FRIEND

By Ala D.

I want to tell you about my friend Nelly. I met her in the U.S.A. in our library in Urbana. When I first saw her, she was happy and cheerful. Nelly, not knowing English, came in the store and did not hesitate to talk, using gestures! And I love her courage! We accidentally got the same tutor Irina D. and began to go to classes together and communicate more and more often. You can't even imagine what a wonderful person she is! She is very kind, and she will always support you in difficult times. Nelly will always listen and give the right advice. She will always cheer you up in difficult times, and soothe you if you are anxious. I even took her with me to the doctor, because I was embarrassed to speak English. And my friend, not knowing the language well, could introduce me and start any conversation. And I was ashamed to say something, although I understood a lot of things and could talk. I try to be a little like her. I really enjoy communicating with her. I always learn a lot of new things when we communicate. I am very grateful to the Universe for meeting her.



THE PATH TO MY MEMORIES

by Amilcar F.

I am Amilcar from APurimac-Chalvanca, in the Andes Mountains of Perú. For twenty-five years I served in the special forces of Perú's military. When I came to the United States in 2017, I was introduced to the Literacy Council by my wife, Silvia. I enjoy cooking, especially on the grill, and in the summer, gardening is my passion. I continue to pursue my first goal of learning to speak more English. My long-term goal is to one day develop my own company, Amilcar's Tree Service.

The cozy road made by our ancestors with its steps of stone, it keeps the memory of our childhood, adolescence, youth and senior years. And you see in other cases, the cozy road witnesses the funeral march of an infertile body of a local member that passed along the cozy road and can never come back.

That is the way I start to write my life, the destination to take. I make many decisions at dawn, walking, happy to hear the chirping of the birds, arising crazy with joy over their first good fortune next

to the dawn, a sign of their reign of peace they have in this world. Like me at dawn, along the stony and cozy road, surrounded by trees, decorated by colorful prickly pear cactus with the aromatic scent of the broom flower.

I made the decision to leave in search of a better future. I belong to my parents and to my beloved homeland. But the time comes for you to say goodbye to your parents, brothers, and to that beautiful mountainous green landscape that saw you being born.

Every step I take, they ask me when I will return. I look at the horizon. The sun rises and my mother gives me courage and hugs me, saying, walk quickly. It is already late. Tomorrow you have to travel early. You are strong, intelligent. Everything will go well for you. Your older brothers, that is how they turned out.

That is when she and I broke down in tears. Hugging, she whispers to me, I'm going to visit you every month. I knew

that was not going to happen because the distance does not allow it.

I didn't sleep all night thinking about my parents and brothers, but at the end, that moment of leaving came.

How unbearably painful to leave my home. Yet as the days away from my home and family passed, the pain mercifully decreased. At last, I can say to you, cozy

road, you were worthy to walk. You were a resource of happiness to me, a road that connected me to other towns, creating memories for me and for others who lived there for many generations. You offered hope that better places are ahead.

I might never return, or I may someday return as a better person. Cozy old road, it was worth spending my life with you.

NANCY MATTHEWS ELLIOT

By Berlufs G.



When writing about everything I could express in these lines, I would begin by saying that I am the mother of two wonderful children (Luis and Lauren) and the wife of a man we deeply love and who makes us proud with his work.

My greatest interest in learning is to be able to understand the English language, finding myself in a country where its language is different from my country of origin, it is essential to have mastery of the English language in order to continue advancing and evolving.

Among my personal goals are the measure of continuing to advance in my learning of the English language, both in writing and speaking and to be able to help and be a support for my children in all their learning. I would also like to continue advancing in the book that I am writing (in the Spanish language) about the life of my son Luis; I would like in reference to this topic to have basic principles of writing in English to have some knowledge when I want to present it in English. Also, to have the necessary writing tools for when I take my citizenship test.

The library writing course is fantastic! I must confess that at first, I felt a bit disoriented because I felt that I was a little behind in mastering the English language with that of my classmates, but the teacher was so great with me. She always gave me the confidence of moving on. The experience of reading my

first novel in English (The Barrio Kings) was amazing! Catherine was very professional with her methodology to give us her classes, always willing to teach and make sure we understood, also I really enjoyed the homework assignments because I felt that I could understand how to make that transformation from language to English with my writing. Thank you all very much for the opportunity, especially to my teacher Catherine C.

Nancy Elliot, formerly Matthews, was born on January 4, 1810, in Chenango County, New York. Wife of Samuel Ogden Edison Jr., and Mother of seven children including her youngest child, Thomas Alva Edison I. Nancy was a dedicated mother, firm and faithful, believing in her abilities to raise her youngest child.

In 1855, at the age of eight and a half, Edison entered school. After three months of attending, he returned to his house crying, reporting that the teacher had described him as a “sterile and unproductive student, a hyperactive child prone to distraction.” He was deemed “difficult.” Edison’s mother took the boy out of school and homeschooled him.

After housework she taught him to read and write correctly, as well as arithmetic, and began to read him some books that were not among the most common at that time: the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire, History of England, History of the World, Shakespeare and Dickens. Nancy Elliot was an accomplished school teacher and a major influence in Edison’s early life.

Her son Thomas Edison was considered a great inventor and influencer of the industrial era and the economy of the United States. Among his inventions is the phonograph, the development of the incandescent electric light system, electric lighting system, and the alkaline battery, among others, which provides the basics for crucial advancement for the modern industrial world.

Nancy Elliot is a woman who inspires all mothers not to give up in the training and the education of their children, thanks to her principles and the firmness of her actions her son will become a great man of all time and one of the great inventors of the United States of America.



SUBMITTED JOURNALS

By Carolina A.

Hi, I am Carolina; I am from El Salvador. I have been living in the U.S.A. for two years. I am married, and I have one son. I am so happy here with my husband. Right now, I can drive a car, I have a job, and I am learning English every week with my Teacher NiTosha B. She is a volunteer from the Literacy Council. Since the first month that I came here, I started to find a place to study English. All my friends and the people that I asked for the classes said, "The Library can help me." The most important thing to me was the classes are free because I can't pay if the classes are very expensive. I just have a lot of thanks for the Literacy Council for all the support they give me, and I still need all the people who voluntarily help us learn such a beautiful language.

My Retirement Plans with my husband:

I will probably retire in 2035 when I will be 55 years old, but my husband will be 62 years old.

We will move back to our hometown in El Salvador. We will have a house there. We would like to sell our house, and we would like to buy a house in the mountains. I want to have a coffee garden; I would like to put tables and chairs between the garden, and I want to

put a lot of lights and make it look beautiful. Vicente could have his old car as a decoration show. It's our dream. Right now we need to work hard for this dream.

I think of Blanca, who is my relative because she has the same dreams. I will see you in El Salvador, Blanca.

May 5, 2019

The first English Class face to face....

I am from El Salvador, and I came to the United State April 1, 2019. When I lived in my country, I watched TV, and I watched the Discovery Channel. I always like to know other countries and the culture of people, but principally all my admiration was for women who have their own culture than different from ours. For example, Pakistani women who cover their face, or Indian women who use a mole on their forehead. For me it's admirable. I never thought that I would talk and laugh with them.

Then on my first day of English class, I met a group of them and laughed and talked together. Such amazing women!

April 1, 2020

I love the flowers. I love the colors of life. I love Spring. I can believe a lot of colors that nature gives us; if I could, I would freeze time, or would make it longer. In this time, I look at the ground at the tulips, so I want to cut all the flowers that are not by houses, but my husband doesn't let me. In my country tulips are so expensive. Twelve tulips cost on average thirty dollars. This year I will be attentive to plant mine. I keep leaves of various colors, and I use them as bookmarks for my English book. I love Spring; it's the best time for me.

July 27, 2020

I work at the Daycare. I have been working there for five months. For this crazy time about the coronavirus the Daycare has a lot of rules about cleaning, clothes, mask, temperature, gloves, etc. Before the coronavirus hit, the atmosphere

was relaxed, but now it is different. I am confused because the Daycare director said that we need to add, and sign a new document made by a lawyer and it tells where all the places we are going; because if we catch the virus we will stay in quarantine and they won't pay us.

August 16, 2020

I have a crazy dog!!! My friend NiTosha knows that!

Last Sunday, he was running in the grass following some bees and wasps.

Finally, one or some of them stung his eyelid. He cried, and a few minutes later his eyes were very red and all his face was swollen. His face changed and in addition, his body had many stings all over and was inflated, and red with a lot of welts. He couldn't breathe very well, lying down, and breathing slowly. We gave him one of our allergy pills, and we thought that the pill helped him. After three hours he was better. I was really worried for him, but after the situation he was back to normal and his usual crazy self!

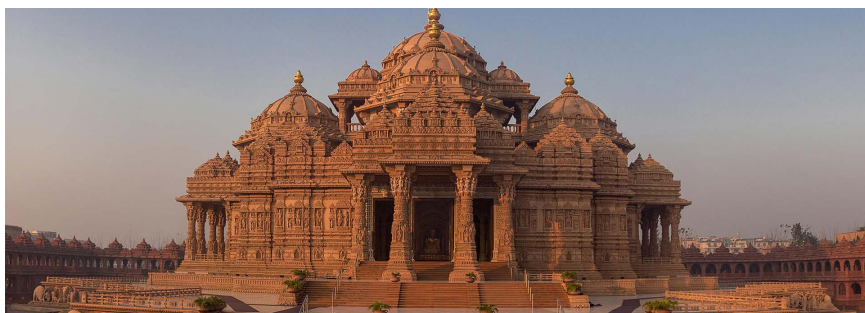
MY FAVORITE PLACE

By Ekata P.

I came to the United States long time ago and started working right away, but I didn't get a chance of learning English. That time was very hard to communicate with people. Now I can talk but I want to know more writing and reading. I joined the Literacy Council last winter for class and now I can reply to my messages and email. My tutor is very helpful, and I learned many things. Thank you so much Literacy Council.

Akshardham is the largest Hindu temple, mandir, in the world, and is a wonderful place to visit. It is located in New Delhi, the capital of India. The locals call it "Swaminarayan Akshardham." It is a representation of 10,000 years old Indian culture, traditional architecture and timeless spiritual message. It is a beautiful temple built without steel. The Temple is

made of pink stone and pure white marble. The pink stone is a symbol of devotion and the white marble is a symbol of complete purity and eternal peace. It was built by more than 300,000,000 volunteer hours, more than 8,000 volunteers and 7,000 artisans from around the world. It has been built in just five years. It has non-violence, prayer, vegetarian and family values in three different exhibits that have an important message. Akshardham Campus is dedicated to devotion, education and harmony. A lot of people are motivated and take a good path in life. It was made by my late spiritual leader his Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The temple is such a beautiful and great place, and it is my favorite place to be.





HOW TO SETTLE INTO A NEW TOWN

By Inok K.

My name is Inok. I'm from South Korea. It's been 6 years since I lived in Frederick with my children, my husband, and my cat and turtle. For many reasons, my family has lived in 5 states in the United States. Frederick is probably the best of all because there are good places like the Literacy Council. Thank you for always providing good teachers and being a meeting place for good friends. I worked as a social worker in Korea for 8 years. I was afraid to come to America and find a new dream and start over, but I decided to take the first step toward studying English. And if I keep walking, I believe I'll reach my dream.

Since 2012, my family moved to America from Korea. During that time, we moved nine times in five states in the United States. It was a really hard time for me, but I was able to learn how to settle into the new town. It is like finding and enjoying the beautiful treasures of each town and comparing them to the previous town I lived in. Therefore, I could get new ideas for living life in America. Let me tell you about how I was able to settle down when I moved to a new town.

First, I needed a positive mind before entering the new town. As everyone knows, it is easy to have a lot of stress when someone goes to a strange place. In this kind of situation, it is helpful to list the good things about a new town with

positive thinking. For example, Frederick is nearby Washington, D.C., or I like a suburbs area such as Frederick. Second, explore your new town and find your treasure spots. The first way to explore the city after I move in is to search the internet. Google search, "Frederick County", "Frederick map," "mountain or park nearby house," and "church nearby me." Then I drive myself to search places. If you take a few days and look around the neighborhood, you will find a shortcut and find a beautiful observatory. Last, join a group to get new friends. In my case, I needed to learn English, so I found ESL classes such as FCC and Literacy Council. I met many good friends and teachers from there. They give me a sense of belonging. Also, they offered me a lot of information about the local area. Now a days I join the Facebook local group. Some groups give information about Frederick's restaurant and the other groups ask and answer questions from each other about the Frederick area.

In conclusion, if you want to settle down well in the new town, you need a positive mind, a curiosity to surf the internet, an adventuresome spirit to explore the area yourself, and courage to join a good group for your edification. I hope these tips for how to settle into a new town help you.

THE HAPPIEST MOMENT OF MY LIFE

By Inok K.

The happiest moment of my life occurred when I had my second daughter. It was in 2013. I was so excited because my doctor decided to deliver by C-Section with partial anesthesia this time. It meant that I could wake up when the baby was born. My first delivery was not like that. I had a general anesthesia for my emergency C-Section. I did not remember my daughter's first moment in the world. I had a problem with the position of the placenta. My operation was not a choice. This time at 3 p.m., I packed my bag and went to hospital with my husband. My mom and my first daughter stayed at home. They said goodbye and wished me good luck. The weather was warm and the sky was clear. We were entering the

hospital; everything was perfect for me. I met my doctor and nurses. They were so kind and friendly. And then I moved to the operation room. There was one bed in the middle of the room, and many metallic tools nearby the bed. It made me nervous. The nurse asked me, "Can I hug you? When you got the anesthesia shot?" I was so happy to hear that. I said, "sure, please." She hugged me and held me tight. The anesthetic shot came into the center of my back. Soon I was put under anesthesia and lay in the bed somewhere between anxiety and peace. Few minutes later, my body was moving and shaking. At that moment! I could clearly hear my daughter's voice. It was the most beautiful moment in my life.

MY FAVORITE SPACE

By Inok K.

I like the study room that I share with my daughter the most. There are many things that I love. The room is painted in the shape of a pink cloud, and this is my daughter and my favorite color. My husband and I painted it ourselves. We were going to use it as my daughter's study and playroom. However, she usually does not stay in the room. Maybe, she prefers the living room with family. At that time, I did not have my own room except the bedroom. I made space for my study in the bedroom, but it was dark and there was no window near my desk. So, I decided my study area was going to be in my daughter's room. That way, there are two desks in the pink room. One is a wide, long, and smooth curved wooden desk. The other one is a long desk with two drawers. The bigger one is mine! Each of our desks are diagonally separated with

one window. The window is on my right side. There is a big tree with pink flowers in front of the window. When I sit in the chair and open the window, I can hear the birds singing, trees swaying in the wind, and squirrels chasing each other. Also, I can smell the changing seasons. This is the first reason I love my place. Second, this room is not only for me. My cat loves this room. She plays or rests in this room. Even now as I am writing, she is sleeping under my feet. My family loves this room, too. This room is cozy and bright. I used to study alone in the bedroom, and I was almost always alone. But here, my family is gathering every evening. We share the bible, conversations, play games together, even discipline is going on in this room. Therefore, I am not lonely. This room gave me much more than I expected.



AN INSPIRING WOMAN

By Jacqueline B.

My name is Jacqueline. I'm from Aleppo, Syria. I'm a retired physician. My husband and I moved to the United States because of the war, seven years ago. I learned English in school. I could read and write well, but I could not speak the language nor understand many essential daily concepts. So, I was frustrated and embarrassed because I needed someone to speak on my behalf. After attending the different classes in the Literacy Council, my spoken English has improved. I attained my driver's license, and got my citizenship. And now I'm certified as a Community Health Worker as well as a facilitator for multiple "Self-Management Health Programs." Besides I volunteer with the AACF and the Salvation Army. I am so grateful for the Literacy Council Organization (board members, employees, volunteers, and donors) that have impacted my life and helped me achieve those goals and immerse myself in my new community. God bless you!

Helen Keller was an American author, political activist, disability rights advocate and lecturer. She was regarded as one of the most powerful figures of the twentieth

century. Helen was born a healthy baby in June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, Alabama. When she was 19 months old, she had a high fever that affected her brain, leaving her totally deaf and blind. At the age of seven she had developed a few hand gestures to communicate with her family. But living in a dark silent world of her own, lacking the ability to see her beloved family and to express her feelings and needs, left her frustrated, isolated, as well as stubborn and wild. With the help of Anne Sullivan, a gifted instructor, who herself was visually impaired, and who became her lifelong friend and teacher, Helen was socialized and finally complied to cooperate with her.

She learned to read braille and communicate by finger-spelling letters, words, and phrases into the person's palm that she was communicating with. The first word she learned was water. Later she described her experience, "I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful

cool something flowing over my hand.” She also learned to speak, though it was not very easy for others to understand her unless they were used to hearing her. Keller attended Perkin School for the Blind, and she went to Radcliffe College and was the first person with deafblindness to earn a Bachelor of Arts Degree. She was also the first woman to be awarded an honorary degree from Harvard University and other universities in the U.S. and overseas.

Helen was an avid reader and follower of politics and world events. She published about 700 articles and authored 15 books of which “The Story of My Life”, her autobiography, was so profound and was turned into a movie. She worked for the American Foundation for the Blind for about 40 years during which time she toured the U.S. and traveled to 35 countries around the globe advocating for those with vision loss.

Helen Keller devoted her life and used her education and influence to help not only the blind, but the deaf and people with other disabilities, too. And she widely impacted their lives. Besides she fought for the worker’s rights and for African Americans. She supported women’s suffrage and was a strong proponent of birth control. She was also a strong opponent of child labor, violence, and war. She was one of the “American Civil Liberties Union” founding mothers. In 1932 Keller and Sullivan were each awarded honorary fellowships from Educational Institute of Scotland and other honorary degrees from Temple University. In 1953, Helen was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize after her visit to the Middle East to advocate for the rights of the blind.

In 1961 she suffered several strokes and spent her last years of life at home. On the 50th anniversary of her graduation from

Radcliffe University, she was awarded the “Presidential Medal of Freedom” by President Lyndon B. Johnson. On June 1st, 1968, she died in her sleep at her home in Arcane Ridge, Connecticut. After a private cremation ceremony, her ashes were transported to Washington National Cathedral, steps away from President Woodrow Wilson. Today the urn containing her ashes lies next to the remains of her teacher, Anne Sullivan.

In 1973 Helen Keller was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame and in 2003 her devoted loving teacher was inducted, too.

Helen’s birthplace and childhood home has been declared a National Historic Landmark honoring her life and it is now a museum open to the public. Helen Keller was and still is an inspiring woman who had lived at a time when there were no rights for disabled people nor for women. She was and still is a symbol of courage, ambition, and compassion. Her life story has pointed out that disabled people do not always fail, especially not when they have such strong minds, hearts and personalities. They are quite inspiring figures.

Keller was blind, but she used her vision. She lived in darkness but she shone as a brilliant light for others to see. And in one of her quotes she says, “the only thing worse than being blind is having sight, but no vision.”

She was deaf, but she learned to speak and became a lecturer. She had dreams that she pursued with self-confidence, optimism, and perseverance. And she did achieve them, but in a different way. Helen Keller died, but her memory is still alive, inspiring us to seek knowledge, believe in ourselves, learn from our suffering and experiences and to never give up on our dreams.



MY NEW TEACHERS

By Jamila T.

My name is Jamila. I am from Aleppo, Syria. I have four children and seven grandchildren. I am a civil engineer. In 2016, I joined the Literacy Council to improve my English language. It was a fortunate turning point in my life. I met great teachers and wonderful friends. I joined conversation, civics, reading and writing classes. I love reading. I used to read in my language, but now I am enjoying reading and writing in English. I hope to continue to read and write in English and I thank the Literacy Council and the teachers for helping me to do better in English language.

We humans are in a continuous and endless process of teaching and learning ever givers and receivers. This is how our lives go on, but certainly, mothers are the first teachers in everyone's life.

From the first day a child is born, his mother begins teaching him the first principles of life. Teaching him to take his first steps, to hold a spoon for eating, to pronounce letters and words for the first time, holding his hand when he starts writing letters and words for the first time, and helping him discover what is going on around him. While a child

is growing up, mothers plant in their children good morals, integrity, patience, respect, especially for the society in which they live, and I like any other mother was the first teacher for my children, in addition I tutored them, and helped them in exploring and memorizing their lessons, and doing their homework. Of course, they no more needed me as tutor after they grew up and went off to high school, but I will keep all those memories, as they were among the most beautiful memories for me.

Moving to this country was a turning point in my life. I became dependent after I was independent. In my country I was able to run the house affairs on my own, going through the officials' offices, preparing and paying taxes, buying household supplies on my own, but in the United States I became dependent. First, because of my lack of knowledge about how things worked here. Second, many things here are being managed online, so I needed teachers to make it easier for me to live here. Those teachers were my children.

My eldest daughter is my social services teacher. She taught me how to do medical or insurance paper work. She helped me to apply for Obama Care. She was with me every time I had interviews. She taught me how to do online banking. How to compose professional emails or answer them. She is my book club friend sometimes we read the same books and then discuss them.

My son is my civics class teacher. He is always there to answer my questions concerning geography, history, and civics as he keeps track of the latest local and international news. He is always ready to tell me about updated election news in this country as well as the COVID-19 news and about the war that is going on in our country.

My other son is my marketing teacher. He is my guide when hunting for the right quality and price especially when buying

smart devices. In addition, he fixes and teaches me how to fix our devices when there are any problems. He is my cooking advisor, too. He teaches me cooking tips I don't know. He is a good cook.

My youngest daughter is my computer teacher. She taught me typing on the computer and how to create a power point

for presentations, but I still am not good at doing it. She keeps telling me: I will do it for you - I am much faster than you.

These are my wonderful new teachers. I am thinking about sending them greeting cards on Teachers Appreciation Day to thank them. Do you think it is a good idea?

BLUE MOON

By Jamila T.

The moon in the sky is one of the most beautiful scenes that make a person feel calm and comfortable. Many poets describe it with the most beautiful words. No element of nature was given such a high position of honor as the moon in paintings. We find the moon in most of the children's drawings and children's books when they draw nature or even many depictions in greeting cards.

When ancient man needed to know the time, the moon was his best assistant. He realized how this moon disappears and then reappears as a new crescent. Then it increases in size and light as days pass it becomes a full moon before it shrinks again until it disappears from view. It was easy for these people to stay watching the sky and counting the days to know this phenomenon is constant, and repeats itself in 29 days, and that it is called the lunar month, which some cultures adapted it to become their calendar.

People who live in the Mediterranean region are optimistic about seeing the new crescent moon. A lot of people including me pray, wishing God to give us a coming month full of good luck. Usually, the color of the moon is white, pale gray, or golden yellow, rarely it is seen in other colors, but seldom it is bloody red, and that when a lunar eclipse occurs on a full moon. This

happens when the earth lies between the moon and the sun. Sometimes smoke and ashes from large forest fires or volcanic eruptions turns the moon blue.

The definition of blue moon says it is the second full moon that appears in the Gregorian month. The first full moon is at the beginning of the month and the second is at its end. The average time period between the two full moons is 29.5 days. This full moon is not blue. It is either white, or pale gray, but it is called blue to indicate its rare occurrence.

This past year on October 31, 2020 was Halloween day. The blue moon was seen all over the world. It happened for the first time since World War II. Halloween fans were excited. They were full of fun and fear, because ancient legends say the blue moon which appears on Halloween nights are linked with terrifying images, ghosts, scary souls, and werewolves who try to show up, and go out on the Halloween night and howl. Others go farther and believe that some turn into wolves on the night of the full moon of Halloween.

The blue moon is one of the most wonderful scenic views in the universe, and the most beautiful moon. I advise you to watch the beauty of the full moon, and praise God for the beauty of nature.



WHAT IS TRUE FRIENDSHIP?

By Jenny C.

My name is Jenny C. I come from China. My first language is Mandarin. I like speaking English very much, because by learning English I can communicate with more people from different countries in the world. I am very grateful to the Literacy Council. My teacher Catherine helped me to improve a lot of my vocabulary, reading and writing skills. I am very happy and enjoy all my classes at Literacy Council.

People become friends for many reasons. Understanding each other, loving each other, trusting each other...

For me, if you are without any jealousy when your friend succeeds, then that is true friendship because some people have too much selfishness and jealousy. My life experience is that it is difficult to have true friendship in the workplace. Although in writing an essay, the reader often expects

positive teaching experiences as much as possible, but what I am sharing now is negative. Because the pain was so deep, it took me a whole year to heal. I am a foreigner, and I need to work harder than others in the American workplace. When I got the certificate for work, my “best friend,” a colleague in my office disappointed me. She was so jealous, and she let my boss know something I had accidentally said wrong, and destroyed my relationship with my superior. Since then, I have become reticent in the workplace. In the end, I forgave her, I understand that jealousy can make people irrational. So, my personal view about the true friendship is to have no selfishness. It is important as a friend to be proud of each other’s achievements.

LOSING WEIGHT

By Jenny C.

A healthy way to lose weight is very important. I used to want to lose weight as quickly as possible, and I hurt my body after taking weight loss pills. I also used to exercise too much and hurt my knee. I started to lose a lot of hair because I took too many weight-loss pills. I couldn't walk for a while because of inappropriate

exercise methods. I learned two lessons about losing weight. There is no shortcut to do anything. Many things need to change slowly and progress slowly. Otherwise, you need to take a lot of risks. In addition, I learned that I should find the healthy way to lose weight. You shouldn't joke about health.

LEARNING ENGLISH

By Jenny C.

Learning English is especially important for anytime and anywhere. I come from China. After graduating from university, I lived alone in Canada for two years, and then came to the United States. Due to my limited English level, I went to school during the day and worked in restaurants at night in the first two years when I just came to the United States.

Later I met my husband. Because of his low salary, I had to work non-stop. During my busiest work period, I gave birth to my son and my daughter. I feel like I am a superwoman. In order to survive in

America, I have to work non-stop.

Then day after day and year after year, finally the children have grown up. I can have my own time to continue learning English now. Through the recommendation of a neighbor, I was introduced to the Literacy Council.

I am very grateful that Frederick County can provide such a good opportunity like the Literary Council to learn English. I know that improving my English ability can take my life to the next level. This is also my motivation for learning English.



MY JOURNEY TO LEARN ENGLISH

by Jinjin C.

I have been living here for four years. I passed the patent bar exam. I am being trained in a law firm now and have a part-time job in Poochon Scientific at night. I hope to find a job as a patent agent. Now, I have good listening and spoken English skills. I am happy to see my improvement in English. I will be a better version of myself.

Have you ever been to another country where you have to speak a second language? Four years ago, I came here

and had to use English. There was no way around it. Although I learned English years ago, I was not good at using it. I made a lot of mistakes.

In the grocery store, there were many detergents in different brands at different prices. I chose the cheapest one. When I did laundry, I was wondering why there were no bubbles in the washing machine. Guess what I bought? After I rechecked

the label, I found it was a bottle of fabric softener! I had to go shopping again.

In McDonald's, I had a question for the cashier. I said: "May I have two forks?" Because of the way I pronounced the word "fork", they didn't know what I was saying. After a while, many of the staff members were around me. They were trying to figure out what I needed. One man wearing a frown said, "Do you mean fox in the zoo?" I waved my head hard. I don't use an animal to pick up the food! I finally got two forks.

I felt daily pressures to improve my English. I restarted learning English again by taking many classes at the Literacy Council and FCC. My tutor at the Literacy Council teaches me twice a week. She supports me in many aspects, from life to work. There is always a background sound of English because I listen to YouTube videos that teach English while getting things done around the home.

Whenever I have a chance, I initiate small talk with a native speaker. While I talked, I would worry about running out of my words. I only knew so many words and so many ways of putting them together. I felt like running away from my neighbors who were talking with me. I was busy with how I was going to respond and express myself correctly. No matter how slowly I spoke, they would wait for me. If I made mistakes, they would repeat that sentence in the right way. I appreciate that I have kind neighbors.

Because of my efforts to listen to

English, it is as if my ears have been opened. In the past, announcements in a store were like white noise. But now I understand them. The more often I speak, the better my spoken English has become.

However, I've discovered a surprising truth! We do not need verbal communication at all!

My mom bought toothpaste from the grocery store. She neither knows English nor the value of bills. I asked her: "How did she check out?" I had no idea until she explained it to me. She saw the same toothpaste as hers and gave the cash to the cashier. She believed that the cashier wouldn't make the wrong change. She didn't have to use words!

I had a similar experience at the grocery store. While I was waiting beside the seafood counter, the fish cleaner was working. As he was walking towards us, he pointed at me and then pointed at the other client. I immediately knew he wanted to make sure who came first. I pointed at the other client. The other client gave me thumbs up. The fish cleaner solved the problem without saying a word!

There are some tricks in daily life, however, I learn English every day. I enjoy my journey to learn English.

The more English I learn, the more confident I become using English with native speakers. The more English I learn, the more I understand American culture. The more English I learn, the closer I get to my career goal.



50TH YEAR REUNION

by José T.

My name is José Trujillo and I have been here in Maryland six years and I already became a citizen of the U.S. I am very glad that I have found the Literacy Council as a support to improve my English. And I am very pleased and grateful for all the help and dedication that all the teachers have had for me. Thank you.

I could say that this is one of the most recently happy occasions I have ever had. It was the Celebration of 50 years of High School.

We completed high school in the year 1967 and when I say we, I mean my partners of about 100 students, used to celebrate our graduation every 5 years in Venezuela. But this time, 2017, was different because there were two celebrations. One in Caracas, Venezuela, and another here in the United States in Fort Lauderdale, Florida at the same time.

Therefore, we decided to organize a party. We tried to locate everybody. We contacted them by phone and started to make invitations. It happened this way because there were many colleagues here in the US, in the area of Florida. One of our friends brought a computer to the party and we could watch everything that was going on in both parties.

Even if my trip took me 25 hours from Fredrick, MD to Fort Lauderdale, FL, it was worth it. I took 2 buses from Frederick to Shady Grove, boarding 1 metro to Union Station to take the Grey Hound bus to Fort Lauderdale, switching the bus 3 times on the road to get to the celebration! It was all worth it.

I got ready myself for the party. I only carried with me a small bag with the necessary clothing for one night and I took with me a beautiful hat that my wife gave me. She died about 9 years ago and this hat is very important to me of the deep feelings it represents. I wanted to step in the party, wearing the hat to show off in front of my friends. But I lost it when I went to the bathroom in the second bus station of the Greyhound bus stop right before I got to Fort Lauderdale.

The party was good. The BBQ was fine and exquisite. We ate and shared a lot of memories that made us laugh like those days in school. I had the opportunity to see other friends that I had not seen for a very long time.

Some of our colleagues brought their wives along with them and they had a good time, too.

Because some of our friends started to

leave, we had to move from the area of the pool to the bar inside the building. Then when we were just a few my friend who organized the party and lived in the building said to us, "Let's go upstairs to my apartment." So we finished the party in his house. The following day my friend picked me up at the hotel to take me to the bus station to go home.

But the best part of the trip was to recover the hat that my wife gave me,

which meant a lot to me, at the second bus station on my way back home. When I got to this station, I asked the lady for the hat. She said just a moment please and when she came back carrying the hat in her hand, it made me so happy that I gave thanks to God!

When she gave me the hat, I said thank you to her and I told her that I was very grateful to recover such an important memento of my wife.

SIMÓN BOLÍVAR

by José T.

My favorite person and the most I admire is Simón Bolívar. He was born in Caracas-Venezuela.

I admire him because I believe there has never been a person like Simon Bolivar in the Venezuelan history. He was the fourth son of Don Juan Vicente Bolívar and

Doña Maria de la Concepcion de Palacio y Blanco. His family was one of the most noble and wealthy, creole and aristocratic, families in Caracas.

He became orphaned at very early age, and the tutoring of the children was done by his mother Doña María. Doña Maria contracted tuberculosis and died. His uncle took care of him and taught Simón the fundamental ideas of reading, writing, geography, and history.

Then, Simón Rodriguez was the one who gave Bolívar the most important influence. Therefore, Simón Rodriguez is considered the real preceptor of Bolívar.

Esteban Palacios, his uncle, who used to live in Madrid, invited Bolívar to come to Spain. Therefore, on January 19, 1799, Simón embarked to Spain. It was the first time Simón Bolívar, a young boy of 16 years old, did not depend on anybody.

It was the Marquis of Uztáriz in Spain who inculcated in him the pleasure for reading. Simón read the great ancient poets, philosophers, histories and orators,

and the modern classics of Spain, France, Italy, and England.

In the house of Uztáriz, the young man met María Teresa, the daughter of a nobleman, Bernardo Rodriguez de Toro, and Simón fell in love with this girl. Simón became her boyfriend. Afterwards they got married and they traveled to Caracas.

Although Bolívar considered himself the happiest person in the world, his happiness would not last too long. His wife succumbed to a very high fever and she died. The death of his wife put him on the political path. He got all his things ready and started to prepare his second trip to the Old World.

He went to Rome in Italy and one day he went to visit Mons Sacre (Sacred Mountain) in company of his old professor Simón Rodriguez. They talked about the peasants when they had to go away from the Sacred Mountains because the oppression exerted by the Romans Patricians was unbearable.

Then, Bolívar's mind and heart started to think about Venezuela. A deep reverence invaded him and he felt an unstoppable impulse to express his thoughts. He got to his knees and swearing before Rodriquez, with hands together, he said: "For the sacred dirt that

is under our feet, I swear to my God that I will free my country Venezuela.” The history proved that it was a downright promise that Bolívar kept along his entire life. After four years out of his country, he decided to go home. He was 24 years old.

When Bolívar was in Venezuela, he started to think about all the things he had to do to get all the Spanish out of South America. Bolívar was the first to introduce the idea of liberty in the reduced circle of his proper state. Totally breaking with tradition, by freeing his slaves, and so did the following families: the Toro family, Montilla family, Uztáriz family, and the Ayala family.

Venezuela was the first Spanish possession to declare its independence on April 19, 1810. On May 25th of the same year, an assembly (Pro Tempore) was constituted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and from that moment on there were a lot of changes in South America. For instance, in Nueva Granada a viceroy was dismissed. Chile, México, and Ecuador did the same.

In less than 6 months—from April to September—the majority of the countries in South America had separated from Spain and declared their independence. Simón Bolívar fought a lot of battles, almost in every country in South America. He participated in different campaigns where he won many battles, crossing the Andes Mountains, the plains and by the swamps and the Caribbean Sea.

Bolívar contributed to and inspired and reached in a decisive way the struggles for independence of these countries: Columbia (August 7, 1819), Venezuela (June 24, 1821), Ecuador (May 24, 1822), Bolivia (August 6, 1823), Perú (December 8, 1824) and Panamá (November 6, 1903) Simón Bolívar for his actions and ideas was considered “The Liberator of America.”

After 20 years of war, 11 as president, Bolívar retired to private life without fortune. He sold his silver, personal things, and his horse in 1700. The Parliament

assigned him an annual pension of 30,000 pesos for a lifetime. On May 25th his health was very bad. And when he got the news of the death by treason of Sucre the Mariscal (the Marshall), the Marshal of Ayacucho, in Burruescuo, Columbia, it made Bolívar very mad. He exclaimed, “Oh my God, they have spilled the blood of Abel!”

On December 7th Bolívar went to La Quinta (the House) of San Pedro Alejandrino in Santa Marta, Colombia. It was a farmstead. But it was evident that the end of the “Liberator” was very close. He wrote his last will and testament. He was very kind to his butler who served him for years. Bolívar decided that the sword of Sucre, the Marshal of Ayacucho gave to him, should be taken back to his heirs; also, the gold medallion that Bolívar received from the Republic of Bolivia must be given back to it.

The most part of his will was given to his sisters. He ordered to be buried in Caracas his home town. He confessed and received last sacraments in the Catholic way. He, the Liberator of America, died on December 17, 1830 at 1:00 p.m.

The following day, December 18, Bolívar’s body was taken to the cathedral of the small town of Santa Marta to be embalmed.

Bolívar’s shirt was torn up and threadbare. One of Bolívar’s generals, General Silva, looked for one of his own shirts to put it on Bolívar’s body and he said: “How come the Liberator of South America is going to be buried in rags.”

It has been a great honor for me to write about Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of South America.

Citation:

Look for this movie in “Netflix T. V.” in search under “Simón Bolívar.”

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MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES

By Joseph K.

I'm Joseph from Cameroon in Central Africa. My first language is French. I arrived in the United States for one and half years and I live in Frederick. I'm married and I have three kids. My goal is to be a network and computer systems administrator. To achieve my goals, I plan to go back to college. To graduate from college, I have to speak, to listen and to read English. So, I registered with the Literacy Council to learn English. In my first year at The Literacy Council, I attended several classes. The different classes were: Beginner Reading and Phonics, Writing 1 & 2, Intermediate Conversation, Civics, Essential Skills for Job Seekers and others. From my experience about our classes, my instructors were prepared for class. They answered our questions and helped us understand. I sometimes completed homework assignments. I communicated with my instructor if I was absent. Some classes were sometimes difficult for me. For now, I don't use English in my home because my wife and I want our kids to learn our native language. More and more, I feel more confident using English. These classes helped me to speak with my coworkers.

I was happy to have virtual classes because I do not have childcare.

My family and I have moved to the United States to get more life opportunities. In 2020, we arrived in Frederick from our country Cameroon. We started a new life and everything was new for us. First, we found where to live. Our friend helped us to find an apartment. He showed us some important places in the city. With him, we discovered important supermarkets, parks, some streets, and we visited Frederick downtown. In the next step, I looked for a job to support my family. At this time, we were faced with a big problem: I needed to communicate with people in the company. I would have to speak English, but my first language is French. So, I had to learn English. My same friend drove me to the public library. There, the receptionist showed us the Literacy Council. My wife and I started English as a Second Language in winter classes 2021. In conclusion, it was not a wrong idea for us to move to the United States because in only one year, we could see the difference between our new and old life.



HARD WORK NEVER FAILS

By Lily D.

Lily is from China. She has been studying at the Literacy Council for a few years. She knows that it is not easy to learn a language, but she never gives up. She learns English from TV, from colleagues, friends and tutors. Her goal is to speak English more fluently.

More than 20 years ago, when I was taking some trash to the apartment garbage collection station, I saw a typewriter there. It was black, half old and half new, and all the keys were still there. Why don't I learn typing on this machine? I thought, so I brought it home, borrowed some typing books from the library, and started to learn typing.

However, I thought about giving it up only after three days. I could not believe how hard it was! I had to remember 26 letters plus symbols positions on the

keyboard, and which finger I should use. Oh my God! It's really killing me. I put it aside and didn't want to touch it anymore.

A few days later, when I was reading a local newspaper, I found that many jobs were requiring typing skill. I needed to find a job, so I started over.

First, I reminded myself to be patient. Second, I followed the book's instructions, and put my fingers on right places, and practiced slowly. Third, I tried to remember 5 letters positions without looking at the keys every time. I had a very hard time the first week. But I still practiced 6 hours every day. After one month, I felt that I was typing much more smoothly.

After two months, my husband asked: "Do you want a test?" Yes, I do. Then he gave me an article to type. When I

finished, he told me that my typing speed was 50 wpm!

I started applying for jobs. But I failed my first interview, because they prepared a computer for the test. Typing on the computer was totally different from typing on a typewriter: When I typed one letter on the computer, two identical letters came out, the computer keyboard was much

more sensitive, so I should type much lighter.

When I got home, I tried to type more gently. Finally, I passed an exam and got my first office job of data entry. Through this skill, later I got an accounting job, and a clinical data management job, and so on.

Hard work never fails!

AN ANECDOTE DURING THE PANDEMIC

By Lily D.

COVID-19 was prevalent in the world, and I hadn't been out for quite a while. Last April, after some hesitation, I went to Lowe's, bought two pots of pink carnation, then hung them on my porch.

One morning, when I opened the front door, suddenly a bird flew out from my carnation. Then I found a nice nest right in the pot. I called out, "Look! There are five eggs in our flower!" My husband went out, he was also very excited. Apparently, the mother bird was hatching these eggs just now.

Since then, watching the eggs became the first thing we did in the morning. After two weeks, we were so glad to see four eggs hatched. The little birds were so cute! Their eyes were closed, their skin was pink, and their beaks were yellow. We didn't know how to take care of them, but still took some earthworms to the porch. We hoped the last egg could hatch, but it didn't. The little birds grew up quickly. Their eyes opened, needle-like brown feathers grew out. They looked like wrens, but we couldn't be sure.

One day, when we checked them as usual, we found that all the little birds were gone. We were a little sad, also a little happy. They had grown up, and it was time to live independently.

We witnessed the whole process from egg hatching to growing up, took lots of pictures of these adorable little birds, and shared them with our family and friends. These little birds really brought us lots of fun during the pandemic.





THE BEST-SELLING BOOK IN THE 17TH CENTURY

By Maria V.

This note is a simple and sincere expression of gratitude. To all people who are part of Literacy Council of Frederick County, for your hard work and dedication. Thanks so much. There are many things that I could not have accomplished without the help of my tutors. My heart will always be filled with gratitude and solemn joy.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra author of the best-seller book of the year 1600 from Spain and Europe: *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*. It is a novel written in two parts. This is the most outstanding work of Spanish literature. And considered a fundamental work of Western Literature. The popular literature at this time was romance, idealism and reality. According to Wikipedia, Don Quixote also holds the distinction of being the second most translated book in the world, after the Bible.

Was there a bestseller in the 17th century? I think so. *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of la Mancha* was destined to become a bestseller. This book was written with narratives that were fantastic filled with magic. The idealism and realism are the two major conflicting themes. The author wrote Don Quixote with details of his life, wrote about his

experiences as both a soldier, and as a slave in captivity. He became a soldier in 1570 and was badly wounded in the Battle of Lepanto. He was also captured by the Turks in 1575. Those events served as a subject matter. Ever since, in 1600 his book was considered the most influential in the development of world literature. According to Wordatlas.com, "Francisco de Robles printed it in two volumes; first in 1605 and second one in 1615. The release of the first and second English versions came in 1612 and 1620 respectively." In addition, the two versions in both languages Spanish and English were a success as well.

Otherwise, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was open minded, well-travelled and very educated. Like Don Quixote, his protagonist in his book, he was an avid reader. Years later, back in Spain, he completed the book in prison. He had problems due to irregularities when he worked for the government. His novel, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, was written with fantastic and wonder-filled narratives. It is a novel of contrast between idealism, romance and reality. This book has a little bit of everything. It has been interpreted as a

comedy, as a tragedy and as a satire. Don Quixote is the story of Alonso Quijano, from the region of la Mancha in Spain, who is passionate about reading and that's why he loses his mind.

Then he leaves home in search of his own chivalrous adventures. He himself becomes a knight errant. However, when he decides to become a valiant knight, he gets a rusty suit of armor and old horse named Rosinante. In addition, he enlists a peasant named Sancho Panza to be his squire. Sancho Panza was his faithful squire until death.

When I read the book Don Quixote for the first time in my class of literature in high school, it seemed very extensive and sometimes difficult to interpret, as it is written in ancient Spanish. Even though I needed a dictionary to find the meaning of some words, I enjoyed it a lot, imagining every madness of Don Quixote with his faithful squire Sancho Panza. Since then, I have in my mind memorized the beginning of the book: "In a place in

La Mancha, whose name I do not want to remember, a nobleman lived there long ago, one of who has a lance and ancient shield, *ardaga*, on a shelf and keeps a skinny nag and a greyhound for racing."

To sum up, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, a Spanish novelist, playwright and poet, was well known in his time, but his masterpiece for which he was known was, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*. This book gives a moral by teaching us that life is to be challenged. Don Quixote and his squire proved that chivalry is not dead, aspiring to be heroes is a worthy effort. It shows that the passion and the discipline of a determined soul is a foundational element in becoming a leader. Although in the final act, he ends up as a pitiable old man whose strength and wisdom have failed him.

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THE GODFATHER TREE

By Maria V.

Is this Colombian folk tale a myth or reality? Well, I could not assert that it is reality. Although, I do not question this popular story that my mother-in-law told me, it is not to be believed. This folk tale is very popular in the northern Colombia, where my husband and his family were born. My family and I are southerners, that is, from the Andean or southern Colombia, and I had never heard this folktale.

On my recent trip to Colombia in October 2020, my husband and I, went to visit my mother-in-law in Santander. She enjoys telling folktales about her region. She mentioned a tree called "Pedro Hernandez". Many stories have been woven about this tree due to this

characteristic that makes it, such as producing gaseous emanations of a volatile acid of glucoside nature, especially when blooming.

However, I am a skeptical or incredulous person. But seeing that my mother-in-law was telling her story reliably, I began to believe. She told us that one day while she was walking with her brother, and suddenly he started to greet somebody or something, "good morning comrade Pedro Hernandez, excuse me, I am going to pass beside you"; after that my mother-in-law stood back looking at who was the friend and who was this *Godfather Pedro Hernandez* he was greeting? She said, my brother took my arm and started explaining, this tree is

known as godfather Pedro Hernandez and the villagers say that if you do not greet him and ask permission to pass beside him, the tree become angry and makes the people get sick. In fact, without thinking about it, my mother-in-law, just followed the instructions and greeted the tree: good morning godfather Pedro Hernandez.

Although, some minutes later, she asked her brother, what happens if you do not greet it? Her brother answered: you start having fever, and after your body start to break out and if you do not do something you could die. The person needs to go to the local hospital and pay for the vaccine or easier, you must come back to the tree and piss on him. I kept thinking, was it a fact or a Colombian legend?

Even though my mother-in-law told the folk tale with sincerity, I was left with the doubt and decided to learn more about that strange tree. I googled about the strange tree, to learn more and wanted to know if it existed and understand the allergies it produces in people. In addition to the folktale, I found this article, according to Google and *El Tiempo*, the main Colombian newspaper: "I remember that as a child, my father, when passing near a certain tree, would take off his hat, bow and say hello: Goodmorning godfather Pedro Hernandez, with your permission. Then he would warn me: Don't ever be rude and stop greeting him. Because he has a very unpleasant way of expressing his anger, causing you itching, fever and breakouts all over your body". The

Scientific name is *Toxicodendron Striata*, also known as Manzanillo, Hinchador and Caspicaracho. According to "The Adventures of Professor Yarumo," which is a didactic, recreational, and informative television program in Colombia, the professor said; "in the countryside they fear it, so they have tried to extinguish it. But it survives because most sawyers refuse to cut it. What has been lacking is those who study it and discover its usefulness? If such an important medicinal element is extracted from curare (another plant), why cannot something similar come out of Pedro Hernandez tree? This tree is from Anacardiaceous family, which is why it so similar to the mango or the hobo. He said: when I met him, I unfortunately discovered that I belonged to the group of allergy sufferers. For this, in the field they make a very important recommendation: the villagers say that when the itch begins, it is time to urinate it. Logically, I also had to proceed and do the same."

In conclusion, I think the legends are based on something real, in this case, the Colombian folktale, the tree exists, and the allergy produced by Godfather Pedro Hernandez exists. I liked the end of The Professor Yarumo words, and I transcribe them: "To cure swelling it is recommended to use ointments based on cortisone. Furthermore, my godfather Pedro Hernandez hopes that the man will discover the secret of his goodness; after all, there are no bad plants. Bad is the man who misuses nature."



A DIFFICULT TIME IN MY LIFE

By Marina P.

My name is Marina. I came to the United States six years ago from Uzbekistan. Here I live with my family, my husband and two beautiful daughters.

In my country I graduated from the University of Foreign Languages. By profession I am a teacher of French and foreign literature.

Currently, my main goal in life is to get a profession that will be associated with children. I really love children! I enjoy helping them. I like to share knowledge, and doing good deeds.

To make my dream come true, I need to learn English very well.

Therefore, I've started to attend ESL lessons at the Literacy Council of Frederick County.

Here I found very experienced teachers who are truly dedicated to teaching. In the class students learn to express our opinion on the subject, as well as speak and write competently. Our teachers are happy to

share their knowledge. Their lessons are very informative and interesting.

I am very glad that I found this educational center. I'd like to share my new good experiences with my friends about this program.

With much respect I'd like to express my gratitude to our teachers for their work and patience!

Each of us sometimes have events that leave positive or negative imprints in our lives. Some people remember this day as a happy and joyful event but some people remember it as a sad or sorrowful event. "All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." (L.Tolstoy, Anna Karenina)

This difficult time in my life happened when I was pregnant with my second child. Then I was in the fifth month of pregnancy. After a routine test, the doctor called us and said that the tests

indicated that the child had pathologies and abnormalities. It was a shock for me and my family. We had been waiting for this child. It was a devastating time for our family. Life is merciless, ruthless and cruel. We began to visit geneticists who tried to conduct research on whether our relatives had any diseases or abnormalities. Then we offered to do a medical test called amniocentesis. Only this procedure could 100% determine whether the child was healthy or not. We had to go for it. Doctors conducted this study with a special needle which pierced the anterior abdominal wall and then collected amniotic fluid, which contained fetal cells for subsequent laboratory examination. The procedure was painful, unpleasant, and risky.

Then came three long and agonizing weeks of waiting. Near me was my husband, my daughter, my relatives, who helped me in this difficult time. They tried

to encourage me, set me up for good test results, and sent me various articles that inspired me. We walked along the ocean with my family. We watched cartoons with my youngest daughter, and we visited our friends. We did everything that could distract me from gloomy thoughts.

But the worst part was the nights. There I was alone, alone with my grief. And when three weeks passed, came the day which depended on the future life of our family. Waiting for the test results my husband and I sat in the doctor's office and quietly asked God that our baby be healthy. Each in its own way. The test results showed that the baby was healthy and well developed. It was a great happiness!

Four months later, our long-awaited, healthy and beloved baby was born. It was a fine day which was branded in my memory and in my soul.

UNIFORMS

By Nesiha N.

Hello my name is Nesiha. My first language is Amharic, and I am Certified Nursing Assistant. I was a student during the springtime. It was a great time, and I learned a lot!! Thank you!

I think students should wear uniforms because it increases their confidence, helps families with finances, and equalizes everyone. No one stands out; everyone is the same. Wearing uniforms enhances school pride, unity, and community spirit. School Uniforms may improve attendance and discipline. Uniform policies save valuable class time because it is easier to enforce than the standard dress code. Students' legal rights to free expression remains intact with mandatory school uniforms.





MY BABY SISTER

By Olga B.

My name is Olga. I am from Russia. I am an opera singer and voice teacher. My career has taken me throughout many of the main opera houses and concert stages across Europe and the United States. I performed with great success in major roles such as Tosca, Mimi (La Boheme), Violetta (La Traviata), Micaela (Carmen) etc. with Teatro Lirico D'Europa.

I am really happy to be a part of the Literacy Council. I recommend this excellent school for everybody who wants to start to learn a foreign language and to improve their English. I really love teachers in this school and the process of studying here is very interesting and I learned many new important things. Thank you for this beautiful possibility for me and my new friends, which I found at the Literacy Council.

This is my story about the happiest moment in my life. Life is a long way and we have many different moments on this long road. This amazing journey is full of surprises. Events of our life are very different and we meet them not with the same feelings and understanding. Sometime we are not ready for the gifts, which we get from Fortuna.

When I was a child, I dreamt of having a close friend—a soul mate. I felt lonely and wanted to take care of someone. I did not have any pet in my home, because my

dad was a military man and we moved from place to place. Our moves were not only the reasons for my parents' refusal to have a dog or a cat, but they just did not believe that I could take care of the pet.

Time to time I talked with them about my dream to have a sister, or a brother. And once my dream has come true. I was 9 years old, but I felt very mature and serious. My mom was pregnant with my little sister. All 9 months I protected her in every possible way. I didn't let her lift weights and be nervous.

On April 14th early in the morning, my parents went to the hospital. I was very anxious and I understood that something important and significant was about to happen. I remember that when my little sister was brought home, I was in the seventh heaven. I remember that I was running down the street and shouting to my classmates, "I have a girl!" It was very funny. I felt that this girl was mine. As if she were my daughter. I had a friend in my school and her name was Kat. I loved my girlfriend very much. And I decided to name my sister after my friend. The parents did not mind. So, in one day my life changed 360 degrees.

I have a sister, and I am so happy.



AN IMPORTANT LESSON

By Perresse T.

My name is Perresse, I came from Cameroon Central Africa. I have been in the United States for one year now and a half with my family. We came here to have a better life because we have war in our country. My principal goal is to return to school and be a nurse after graduation.

I live in Frederick, and I have a beautiful experience learning with Literacy Council. I really appreciate the manner that my English has improved and, the close relationships teachers have with the students. I have a terrific relation with Literacy Council because it is where I start to learn English and I have a very good teachers who help me improve myself. Also, the best part is I have a tutor who helps me with many books provided by the Literacy Council and we work with them

to prepare my placement test to enter the college.

I kept in my heart the gift of the Literacy Council gave to my children in the new year. People in Literacy Council are so nice to me. I wish long life to this foundation, and hope that any person who needs to improve her English may come here. I am so proud of this institution and his teachers.

I wrote this following paragraph to show how I was jealous of somebody's success. She was my class mate and, I now no longer feel that way about her. After my initial misbehavior, I made a resolution.

I never forgot the day that I was in the hospital because I fell down in the school. The arrogant girl at school whom I didn't

like visited me all the weekend days. The girl was my heart's enemy because for her arrogance to be the first in mathematics, physics, information and science. I didn't used to greet her and didn't appreciate her presence near me. But she was the person who brought me gifts and comforted me when I was hospitalized. When I spoke with her, I saw that she was a marvelous and simple person. On Monday when I

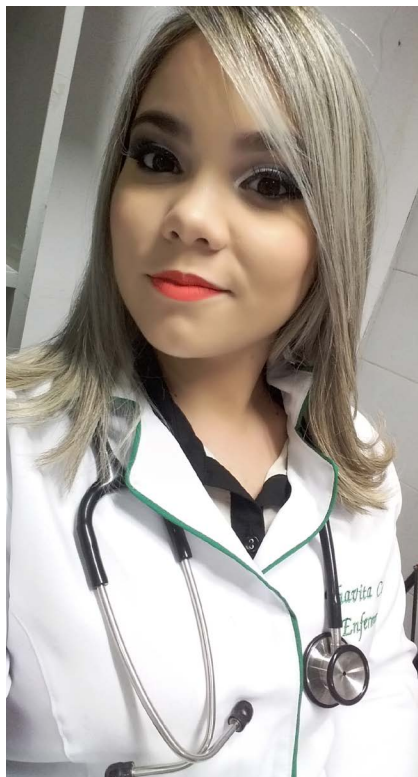
came back to school, all my friends came to kiss me and asked me how was my weekend and, if I felt better now. The arrogant girl didn't come near me, but greeted me with the sign of the hand at a distance. I returned a smile to her. Since that day I keep my friends and made a new friend and I don't have an enemy in my heart. I learned not to have judged another person. Everybody has her own manner.

THE PERSON WHOM I ADMIRE

By Perresse T.

The famous person who I admire is my mother, Marie. She is from Cameroon in central Africa. She lives in the west region and her principal activity is farming. She is forty years old, and she is the person who gave me unconditional love here on the earth. The only one who prays to God to leave this world before me. I lived in her house; I lived under her roof, and I stay in her heart having left her house. I admire the ears of her heart, which understands my suffering without me having to open my mouth. She is a courageous woman, who after working for society, you came to your home and worked again for us, and your salary is to see your children

happy. The one who uses my weaknesses to set me up to be strong. And if I ever fall, she is able to unleash the sea for me. You knew how to support my multiple blunders as a teenager, and did not hesitate to reorient me in order that I measure up so that I find my way which makes me good company. You remain the only person who is my friend, no matter what happens, I know all will be right. When you are around, I know that I'm not afraid, and all will be fine. I already know that you love me the day that you decide to give me birth and be ready to give your life so that I can live.



MARRIAGE ISN'T A TRADITION ANYMORE

By Rebeka C.

Rebeka is a 26-year-old Brazilian girl who lives in the USA. Since she was a kid her dreams were to travel and meet the world. As a child her dream for a time was being a flight attendant, then at another point she wanted become a doctor. She even thought about being a doctor for the Brazilian air force. She ended up being a nurse because of her desire to help people. After the nursing degree, she had the chance to travel to the USA and she followed her heart to join the new experiences the life was giving her. Already in the USA, she discovered about the Literacy Council and found it as an opportunity to learn new

things and improve her English skills. The Writing classes came as a possibility to express herself, doing something she loves to do that is putting her feelings and experiences on paper. As a person who loves to care about people, she believes that everybody should have the same opportunities to access a quality health system and this is one of the causes she cares about.

There are diverse factors that have influenced people getting married at an older age. Some of the factors are female autonomy, women are more independent and career-driven than ever before. In the past the marriages were seen like an obligation, especially for women. If you were a woman and single it was not seen in a good way. Other than that, since the women didn't have the same rights as men and they couldn't work or study the marriage was the only way to have a "free" life, to get out of the parents' house and start a new life.

When the women started getting more rights, studying what they wanted to study, having the right to work with what they wanted, getting higher salaries, having more stature in the work places, everything started to change.

Nowadays, getting married and having kids isn't a necessity anymore. Before, the woman suffered a lot of pressure of the society to get married early, and to have kids as soon as they got married, and the woman couldn't work because they're mostly at home taking care of the kids and the house duties while the husband was working to support the family. With the feminism movement they started breaking these roles. Now, more and more women are following their passions and exploring their potential, and sometimes even becoming the breadwinners of the household.

Another factor is that people are more aware of themselves as individuals. First, they're focusing on their work, and they're putting more attention in their professional career, in building themselves

in their profession, even more so they end up postponing marriage or raising a family for later in life. Also, people are not caring too much about the traditional structure of marriage. Most of them feel comfortable living together and sharing a life with the partner without the need to get a title, and sometimes they even live together for a while with the partner before getting married.

In a nutshell, with the society evolving there are a lot of challenges and questions that people face before deciding to get married and it has been changing the traditional away that marriage was seen in the past, and the tendency is that it will keep happening this way as life is getting busier and people are having different and varying choices.

THE DOMINANT WORLD LANGUAGE

By Rebeka C.

It's clear that English is the most popular language of the world, and it is the most commonly spoken as a second language, and the 3rd language with more native speakers. But what people don't know is how this began, and for sure I can say it wasn't because it is an easy language to learn. It's known that the British Empire was very influential and powerful, and it colonized different people. What transpired is that those people were forced to learn the language. In this way, English ended up being the native language of a large number of countries and being used as a second language for other ones. Then it has expanded all around the globe.

Since English is a global language, it is used in diverse areas such as business, universities, science, computer, games, diplomacy and especially tourism. That being said it is really important nowadays, to follow the expectations of the market,

and speaking English is turning into a "must" in view of the fact that most jobs require it. In the University/college even if it is not in a foreign country and if you don't need to use English day by day, it is important knowing the language because many scientific papers are written in English and if you speak it, you'll get an advantage.

English is everywhere, TV shows, series, movies, books, articles, songs, internet, etc. In addition, speaking English also makes it easier to travel and to expand your circle of friendship, giving you the opportunity to find friends all over the world and experiencing other cultures.

This way, speaking English is very important today, seeing that it improves the chances of finding good opportunities whether it is your professional or personal life.

LEARNING ENGLISH

By Seethalakshmy V.

My name is Seethalakshmy. I'm from India where I worked as a teacher for about 32 years. My husband and I moved in USA because of living with my mother and family.

I learned the English language in school and college. I could read and write, but I could not speak fluently. After attending different classes at the Literacy Council, I have improved my language and speaking ability. Now I am so excited.

In India I taught science subject to the students. After I settled in USA, I approached Literacy Council for improving my English language. Teachers in the Literacy Council contributed fabulous work for all students. I appreciate a lot their reliability and industrious work. I attained so much more, so that I can engross myself in my new community.

My goals are to become a teacher in USA. Teaching is my passion. I would like to work and serve in society and help the people. I would like to work with kids.

In my opinion we have to behave in the society full of empathy, kindness, love, and dignity.

English is the Global language. First of all, learning English helps us to have more opportunities in our life. Knowledge of English will help us to achieve all of our goals of our career. One of the main reasons for learning a new language is to communicate with new people. Learning English will increase and flourish our talents in different platforms.

Next, learning English will promote our chances to get a job, participate in discussions, and improve our



networking skills and increase educational opportunities. Moreover, English is an important language for all of professional and personal goals.

Whether we are just starting out in English, or we need some motivation to keep going, understanding the importance of the language will help to reach fluency and change our life. Being able to write emails or other correspondences in English is another important asset for employers. With English, we can study all over the world. If you speak good academic English, there are lots of opportunities for us to find an appropriate school and course to suit our needs.

Finally, research shows that learning a new language makes the brain stronger and more versatile. Now I am going to conclude the necessity of learning English is very useful and amazing. It is a challenging task, but also beneficial in life. In my personal life, I am working hard to become fluent in English.

Let me conclude with a Persian proverb, "A new language is a new life."

THE DARK SHADOW

By Seethalakshmy V.

Oh! I will never forget that day, which scares me even now.

I remember that night almost at 7p.m. That day bringing fear every time, when I remember.

First, let me get to that point. At that time, I was studying in 8th grade.

My sister and I were reading our books, and doing homework. My mother was taking a bath. Our father was not at home and no one else was at home. It was a very dark time. Suddenly, our dog, Rocky was barking.

At that time, we looked around through the window. Suddenly, we could hear a voice. Our hearts began to beat faster. When I looked at my little sister, she was doing something without knowing anything. The color of the night seemed blacker. The silence doubled the intensity of our fear.

Meanwhile, I saw a black shadow moving on the window glass.

Then I screamed in shock, calling “Amma, Amma” and ran inside the room followed by my younger sister. Suddenly, our mother was frightened and ran toward us. When he heard our cries, the thief in the form of the dark shadow outside ran away and hid.

Our neighbors came running and looked for things. Then mother explained the matter. Neighbors arrested the thief, and brought him before us and apologized. Our neighbors performed the duty of the police.

We had no facility to call the police then.

The 911 facility that I see in the USA gives a lot of protection in my mind.

I will never forget that incident. I still remember it with a shock!



2020 A RUTHLESS YEAR TO DREAM

by Silvia M.

Silvia M. earned her degree in Law in Peru and worked more than eleven years at her boutique Law Firm (2001–2011), worked as a Law Professor in Perú, and received an International Prize for Academic Excellence (Ecuador) from Iberoamerican Council in Honor of Quality Education (CIHCE–2008).

In 2011, as an immigrant, Silvia could barely speak, write, or understand English, but she remembered going to the library and getting a green flyer about English classes. It's when she found the Literacy Council of Frederick County, and she went to visit the office the next day. With her first tutor, Freida Pryor, she started as a beginner student with the Laubach Way to Reading and skill book #1, #2, #3, and her favorite book was a book called 101 American English Idioms: Learn to Speak Like an American Straight from the Horse's Mouth. Silvia was part of several classes such as Conversation Class

with Denise D. and Irene R., Civics Class with Marianne D., Writing Classes with Catherine C., and she enjoyed being part of the book club reading group. Since 2013, Silvia has been an active supporter of the Literacy Council as a tutor and volunteer. She continues to support the organization as much as she can.

Since Silvia came to the U.S. in 2011, her long-term goal was to become an attorney in America. She feels thankful to the Literacy Council of Frederick County for teaching her not only English, but also the way to become a citizen with a voice. This important skill provided by the Literacy Council has allowed her to make a contribution to her new country. Silvia worked with dedication from 2013 to 2020 to provide faithful service to military families at Fort Detrick, Frederick Commission for Women, Asian American Center, the Centro Hispano, UNESCO Center for Peace, Frederick Public Schools, Pro bono clinics at Frederick Community College under the leadership of Dr. Tracy Parker, and of course, to Frederick County Literacy Council.

Now, ready for a new goal, Silvia is admitted and will start an LL.M. at Georgetown Law School this fall 2021. How exciting!

The World Health Organization reported that the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly revealed coronavirus in 2020. The impact of the virus has been extensive: "In the history of humanity, a pandemic has never affected such a high number of people in terms of deaths and infections in such a short period of time. A separate factor is the speed of geographical spread in the entire world. Consequently, state, and federal impositions in the name of public health were imposed around the world, voluntary and/or forced confinement, quarantines, mandatory use of masks, shortages of medical personnel, overflowing and collapsed hospitals and morgues, solitary deaths, funerals by zoom, common graves, altered schooling, and

high unemployment rates.

In addition, the educational system suffered a transformation during the COVID-19. All school systems switched to virtual; libraries were closed, and no in-person meetings were allowed. I learned with the pandemic that education is much more than what happens in a classroom. Education needs an interaction with the teacher in order to learn to communicate effectively in English. Education supports adults that are navigating life challenges, so that adults like me can relearn routines

to change the trajectory of our lives. Even the 2020-school year was undoubtedly a year full of stress I needed to highlight adjustments to receive zoom education. It revealed how to respond to unique challenges and how to be creative in engaging students to learn.

I said that the impact of the virus has been extensive, and I was not an exception. I lost family members without saying goodbye. The fear, unhappiness, and blue days throughout 2020 are described below:

I have felt unhappiness that I never felt.
I have had my heart melt.
I have felt depressed at the same time.
I have seen my uncle's life go in a moment.
Without saying goodbye even, to the loved ones that are there.
I have even missed the people I did not know.
I have touched pain for artists that passed away.
I have cried like I never ever cried.
2020 the year that time stopped.

I have prayed for what I never prayed for.
For health, for unity and to see my loved ones again.
I have struggled with heartbreak and thoughts.
And the hugs became sighs.
2020 the year where I suspended my dreams.

I have felt all the fear that I never ever felt before.
I have suffered the bitterness of what I lost.
My godfather, my uncle, and my aunt.
My childhood friends and my former neighbors in Perú.

2020 the year that the world stopped and took a breath.
I have carried the impotence of what I did not understand.
I have felt that the pandemic has to serve us
to teach a lesson to everyone.
To care about others, like in the past.
And although everything will pass, and we need to continue.
And although everything will pass, this has to unite us.
We have to adapt to this new world.
In the name of those who are not here and to whom,
we could not say goodbye.
It's up to us to create our new normal.
2020 the year that an invisible virus stopped the world.

TO ME ENGLISH IS ...

By Sungheui B.



My name is Sungheui. I am from South Korea, and a musician, a Soprano. I moved to Frederick at the end of 2010 and love it here so much. Soon I joined the Literacy Council. At first, I was not getting involved in the classes, because of lack of self-confidence. However, I returned there in 2017, and enjoyed a writing class very much. After one year later, I had a bad experience, which seemed so unfair at the public school. I looked up their website to be appealed, and so struggled. But I couldn't give it up and resolved that issue eventually. It made me determined to study hard and learn English well. Unfortunately, during this process, I met a huge hindrance with my health, but I didn't give up. I am still struggling, especially with speaking. However, I believe that my English is improving step by step. As they say, "Many a little makes a nickel." Learning English is about finding myself, who is always bubbly, and confident. Thus, I love learning English so much at the Literacy Council, even though English is crazy difficult.

I feel that you are excessive to me.
I sense that you are extravagant to me.
I observe that you are the vastness to me.
I notice that you are so sophisticated to me.

So, I cannot approach you.
I cannot reach out to you.
I cannot acquire you.
I cannot even nudge you.

But you are always attractive to me.
You are every time charming to me.
You are at all times engaging with me.
You are still beautiful to me in my mind

Despite that, you make me, who has known just one side,
shrink due to lacking general knowledge.
For the most part, when I express my words.
My mouth does not shape my thoughts,
which is what I hate. It seems so rebellious,
especially my tongue is not able to swivel occasionally.
They do not look like my good colleagues,
even if the language is vertical or horizontal.

Throughout those obstacles, I assume that
I am getting closer to you more, little by little.
Although, I feel like I am on a Roller coaster.
There are few crescendos and tremendous decrescendos,
but you are still enjoyable at this moment.

Because you give me much of the learning joy,
you permit me to find my true self,
who perceives the delight of edification, and confidence,
you show me that my life will be more enhanced.
Over all, you grant me this precious legacy.

A STRANGER

Sungheui B.

There is a stranger who does not have much health,
wealth, acknowledges, expertise, achievements,
Happiness, and worldly-wise so on.

There is an alien who has the whole thing.
Because the Lord is all in all of her.
He plants a tiny mustard seed in her heart
without anyone's knowing.

There is a foreigner who knows that
what the seed is precious like a naked pearl,
which is slightly distorted, so gashed by
a steep wave and uneven stones.

However, the seed still growing up
without anyone's censoring, even herself,
like yeast-filled bread swells overnight.

Besides, it is getting larger throughout
the life of the unfulfilled traveler.
One day, it becomes a gorgeous tree,
like a significant place, where other newcomers
can put their burden down.

There is a settler, who speaks different languages,
glimpses a dissimilar scene ponders the distinct way,
has a contrasting joy, has unlike compassion from the heart,
has a divergent peace all the time by walking the life of
the peripatetic.

The outsider sings spiritually.
On land or sea, what matters where?
Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.



My name is Vanessa and I come from Cameroon. I want to learn more English to go to school and study to become an MRI technician. I like to shop, to watch movies with my family, and to go to the restaurants with my family. The Literacy Council is a good place for someone coming to the United States who need to learn English. My teacher is so nice and helps me improve my pronunciation so that now I can be understood. Thank you for all your help.

MY FAVORITE SINGER

By Vanessa M.

My favorite singer is Charlotte Dipamba. She was born on May 23, 1984, in Cameroon, and she has a higher education degree. In addition, she lives in France, and she has a child who is 14 years old. I like Charlotte because she is nice, beautiful and intelligent. I love all her

songs! They are cool and slow. She grew up with her grandmother, because her mother went to the U.S. when she was a child. Her kind of music is ross, hop, classic and sweet. Finally, I like Charlotte because all her songs speak of her childhood, her encounters and her family life.

MY FAVORITE AUTHOR

By Vanessa M.

My favorite author is Jean Michael, and he wrote very funny theaters in Cameroonian comedy. His job is in the movie making business. When he is the spectacle, everyone only wants to buy his ticket. In the theaters everyone laughs and shouts. I like Jean Michael because every time I saw his show, I realize that my

problems are over. He is very funny and is a big actor in cinema in Cameroon. Every time when I have something bothering me, I open YouTube and watch these last shows live. It has a way of relieving stress and creating good emotions in the lives of many people who suffer normally.



REPORT ON ENRIQUE'S JOURNEY: THE STORY OF A BOY'S DANGEROUS ODYSSEY TO REUNITE WITH HIS MOTHER BY SONIA NAZARIO

By Wenfei Z.

I'm Wenfei from Beijing, China. I was a research scientist before I came to the United States. I have been here for more than two years. How time flies! In the Literacy Council of Frederick County, I studied English, I learned the culture and history behind the language, and I made friends from different countries all over the world. It's like a big family and gives me a sense of belonging. Learning is a lifetime journey that I'll keep traveling and evolving through. I appreciate all the tutors and volunteers working here to help me keep learning and bringing out the best version of myself.

On March 2, 2000, Enrique, a 17-year-old boy, who lived in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, was setting off on his long and adventurous journey from Honduras, through México, to the United States to search for his mother (Nazario, 2017). After divorcing, his mother, Lourdes, had had to leave him at the age of 5 for the United States to make a living and to give her son a better life. However, she never

went back during the twelve years as she had promised to because of the harsh reality that she had never earned enough money although she worked several jobs at the same time. Enrique became confused and grew rebellious due to the absence of his mother and he developed a desperate longing for his mother's love. As he missed his mother very much, he became determined to find her on his own despite his illegal status, having little money, and other unexpected dangerous circumstances. During his journey, Enrique had learned to never give up in the face of obstacles and to accomplish his goals with grit and determination.

It was his eighth attempt to reach the United States. All his previous seven attempts had failed disappointingly and ended up with deportation. Even though he had been severely beaten, robbed, and humiliated, he still decided to take the bull by the horns and started over again

instead of giving up. Once again, he came to the border of Guatemala and México and prepared to enter the well-known “beast,” Chiapas (Amy, 2020). He spent the night in the graveyard near the train station to prevent from being caught by the police who were searching for them like hunting wild animals (Nazario, 2013). When the freight train was approaching, he ran over to the train and jumped onto it. To stay away from the bandits, gangsters, and corrupt police, he had to stay on top of the train. It was extremely dangerous as he could slip off the train and get killed or injured at any time. When the train stopped, he quickly jumped off it and crouched by the tracks to drink water from puddles that were contaminated by fuel. When he jumped back, however, he happened to meet a couple of gangsters who beat him up severely as he had no money to give them for “protection.” Worst of all, he lost the only piece of paper that he had with his mother’s phone number on it.

Despite all the adversities, Enrique arrived at the encampment on the bank of Rio Grande in Nuevo Laredo near the border, where he could see the United States. The camp, hidden by the reeds from American immigration officers, was full of immigrants, criminals, and smugglers. It was filthy and boisterous; however, it was the safest place that he could live compared to the others. As he had lost his mother’s phone number, Enrique had to find a way to reconnect with her to make sure that she was still in North Carolina. Nevertheless, the only number he could remember was from Honduras, so he had to make two phone calls that would cost him 100 pesos (Nazario, 2014). To earn some money, he found a job at a taco stand near the camp where he went to help the customers wash cars every night. However, it was far from enough so that he had to find another way. Fortunately, El Tirindaro, a smuggler, as well as the camp leader, helped him make extra money by selling

other immigrants’ clothes left behind on the river bank. Of course, it was not just a favor, it was regarded as an investment to improve his chances of getting paid and hired when Enrique connected with his mother. Without any doubt, Enrique needed the smuggler’s assistance this time. Being close to the United States, the border patrol became increasingly intense and rigorous. Therefore, it was impossible to get there by train, bus, or walking. The only way was through the breast-deep river even though Enrique wasn’t able to swim. Finally, Enrique had earned enough money by Mother’s Day. He couldn’t wait to dial the regained and precious phone number of his mother. With an anxious and almost choking voice, Enrique said, “Mami?” Lourdes said with trembling, “Hola, mi hijo. where are you? I was so worried.” (Nazario, 2014, p.178) During that call, Enrique explained his situation and worked out all the details with his mother. They decided to hire Tirindaro to smuggle him to the United States in spite of the hefty cost of \$1200 (Nazario, 2014). Definitely, hearing from her son was the best present she got on that day.

On May 21, 2000, Enrique waited at the riverside to go across the Rio Grande at night (Nazario, 2014). He and two other immigrants were all stripped to their underwear. They put their clothes into plastic bags to prevent them from getting soaked. The water was cold and the current was rapid. However, the most dangerous thing was the whirlpools that couldn’t be seen. Sometimes, there were even some dead bodies floating on the river. In addition, they had to cautiously hide from the U.S. Border Patrol on the other side of the river bank. If they got caught, all the efforts would be wasted despite being so close to the destination now. Enrique felt deeply afraid as he couldn’t swim, but he had to pluck up his courage to keep moving without hesitation. Enrique was tightly grabbing onto an inner tube that was led by the smuggler. He could even see

the blue and red flashlights of the patrol car on the other side. He was so nervous that he almost couldn't breathe. Luckily, he arrived safely at an island in the middle of the river. They huddled together in the cold and dark night and waited for the patrol to leave. Then, the smuggler took them across the rest of the river and came to a covered and steep place where they changed quickly into their dried clothes. After that, they kept running and hiding until they arrived at a residential street.

There was already a prepared vehicle waiting for them on that street, which they jumped in and Enrique was so exhausted that he fell asleep immediately. Tirindaro had already left when he woke up. The driver took him to a house where he could call his mother. Lourdes was too worried to sleep and eat. She had been waiting for a call from the smuggler for the whole night, however, the smuggler asked for an extra \$500 (Nazario, 2002). After talking with Enrique, she transferred the money that they demanded, which she had to borrow from others. Then, the driver took Enrique to Orlando where Lourdes' boyfriend picked him up to drive him to North Carolina. On the morning of May 28th, Enrique had traversed over 12,000 miles, 122 days from Honduras to the United States, and eventually reunited with his beloved mother (Nazario, 2014). Enrique rushed to his mother and gave her a big hug and kiss. Lourdes said with tears in her eyes, "You're here, mi hijo." "I'm here," he said (Nazario, 2002, para 5). In that moment, they felt as though they were the only persons in the world after a century. Afterwards, Enrique obtained a visa to stay legally in the United States (Nazario, 2013) and to work hard to buy his mother a house and open a restaurant in the future (Nazario, 2014). In an interview, Enrique recalled that the most difficult and dreadful thing in the journey was that he never knew when and where he would stay and get some food or water (Nazario, 2013). Nevertheless,

with his grit, determination, perseverance, and desperate hope of finding his mother, Enrique succeeded and achieved his dream. However, there were so many children like Enrique who were abandoned and left their home behind them to search for their mothers (Amy, 2020). Enrique was the luckiest among these unfortunate children because many of them had been killed or injured during the dangerous journey. The events that led to this phenomenon and how to address this issue should be worthy of deep reflection. No mothers would want to leave their children to go to a totally unfamiliar country, just as no children want to experience such a dangerous journey. Therefore, we should help those countries like Honduras to solve their poverty and violence instead of building walls at the border.

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STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

by Wenfei Z.

Living abroad can be an exhilarating experience that encourages new world views. However, it may also create a sense of feeling lost and confused. That's all because of culture shock. I had never been outside of China. In 2018, I traveled to a new country, flying nearly 7000 miles from Beijing to Washington, D.C. There were plenty of differences that I encountered.

Culture shock is the disorientation a person may feel when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life, behaviors, and values. Although people experience culture shock differently, it generally moves through four stages: honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance.

First, the honeymoon stage. When I first arrived in the U.S., I was in love, everything was exciting and fascinating. I was filled with a sense of wonder and adventure. All the differences seemed incredibly romantic, and I even idealized the new culture. There were beautiful trees and animals that I hadn't seen before, even the sky was bluer. I was surprised when walking along the street, strangers greeted me with a smile, which in China strangers seldom do.

Second, the frustration stage. The same cultural differences that initially seemed interesting and cute might become a source of irritation. I started getting frustrated when I couldn't find the yogurt or snacks that I used to eat in my hometown. I felt that lots of snacks in the U.S. are too sweet or salty compared with the ones in China. I got irritated with public transportation. We didn't have a car, I had to take the bus everywhere. The buses in Frederick are very inconvenient compared to the ones in Beijing. If I missed a bus, I had to wait for an hour for the next bus, which was hard when

carrying groceries. With the frustration stage, came feelings of homesickness and loneliness. I didn't know who to talk to when I hadn't made friends yet. I missed my friends and family in China and the time difference was a huge communication barrier.

Third, the adjustment stage. I began to feel more familiar with surroundings and get used to a lot of things. I knew how to get around the new city on public transport. I built a daily routine and figured out where to buy my favorite brand of shampoo. The turning point was when I got some new friends and became more confident about speaking in English. I went to the Literacy Council and Frederick Community College to study English, where I made many friends from different countries and learned diverse cultures. I found a nice gym with a humorous trainer and some workout buddies. I'm still adjusting to the different culture, habits, and language, but it's getting better.

Fourth, the acceptance stage. I've got a community, a routine, and a fairly good grasp of the language. Life is easier and even more comfortable. I now volunteer in many places with my friends, where I get a better understanding of what the community is and want to contribute. I'm finding similarities between here and my hometown. I know that I don't have to answer the question "how are you?", as it's just a way of greeting. It's like in Beijing when we greet others, we say "Chi le ma?", which means have you eaten in English. We don't really want to know what you've eaten. I began to understand idioms and sarcasm. I know when someone says break a leg, it means good luck.

These are the stages that I've been

walking through. Culture shock is not limited to different countries, it might also be applied to different states, even different communities. When we understand the stages of culture shock and accept the different cultures, the world will become a

better place. As Robert Alan said, “Culture differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.”



SEEING

By Y R.

I feel blessed to have this online class from Literacy Council especially during the COVID19 pandemic. Without it, I could have been cut off from the society which is what I once experienced when I first moved here. “Ubuntu,” the Zulu phrase, means “I am, because you are.” I am learning to write because of you: Ms. Catherine and the Literacy Council.

Early on a beautiful morning
A fiery red glow is seen through naked
trees
from the edges of the sky and earth.

A dove sitting on a mulberry tree
scanning over the rooftop
built of red bricks in the distance.

Seeing the squirrels leaving
she flew out to pick at her breakfast
from the seeds I left for them.

But, the squirrels returned
to have her leave again
even as she landed.

She flew away, where I do not know
she may return the next morning
I will miss her until then.

COSTA RICA

By Y R.

"Roads were made for journeys, not destinations." –Confucius.

Costa Rica is a dream destination for many travelers, for its exotic wildlife and beautiful scenery, with thrilling activities in the rain forest and on the beaches. I made my trip there a few years ago. My reasons were to get away from the cold weather at home, attend a 10-day meditation retreat course, and climb Mt. Chirripo.

Prior to my departure to Costa Rica, I was connected with Janny, through a meditation program. She was an American student, living there and studying Spanish. I took a taxi to her house in a small town from the airport in San Jose. It took many hours because the driver got lost on the way. I gave him Janny's phone number to call her, since she spoke his language, but that didn't help much. When, I finally arrived at her house, it was very dark, and her neighbor's dogs were barking loudly.

I woke up early the next morning and decided to walk out to look around. The place was like a small vacation community in the woods. There were tall pine trees in the front of the house that reminded me of my youth where I grew up under the pine trees, and citrus bushes of lemon and lime in our back yards. After breakfast, Janny took me to her school and surrounding areas for a walk. When we reached a fruit stand near her house, she told me that was the place where she went to every day, for her fresh fruit. She said that she basically was living on fruit because she wouldn't be able to find those types of fruit in the U.S.A., as her study there was coming to end. I stayed with her the second night.

On the third day, we took a long bus ride to San Isidro. We got there a little early to meet with another person, who would give us a ride for the rest of the way to the meditation center, so we spent

our time in a market to purchase last minute personal supplies. Not having their own center, the meditation group in Costa Rica rented the Christian Prayer Cabin, which was located in a remote area on a hill. The prayer cabin was like a meditation center in another place. The prayer hall was located on the highest spot on that hill, where our silent meditation practice would be conducted. The kitchen building was next to it, where most other business was taking place, and there were two separate buildings down in the lower area for men's and women's living quarters. There might have been some 50-60 people in the group. Many were from Northern America, Canada, and other parts of Europe, and were trying to get away from the cold weather, like I was doing. When the registration finished at 4 p.m., we had a light vegetarian dinner, a bowl of soup and pieces of bread, before we began our meditation course. The next ten days we would remain silent, cast our eyes down when walking, wear no makeup, perfume or elaborate outfits, and request to communicate by writing a note, but only for emergency situations.

After the ten day course ended, I took a room at the Hotel Chirripo in San Isidro, for the night. The next day, I took the bus to the foothills of Mt Chirripo, and I found a guest house owned by a couple from New Mexico. I stayed there for a week or so. I didn't have the pass to enter Chirripo Park. I should have acquired a pass before my travel, since they limit the number of entrants each day, and because it is one of the famous mountains to climb in Central America. So, I went to the park gate before dawn, to line up to purchase a ticket that is made available, when someone doesn't show up. There was a long line each morning I went, but I got a ticket

on the third day. It included an overnight stay in the basecamp. I encountered some difficulty climbing up the mountain because I lacked energy, stamina, and was very weak overall, since I had lived on a minimal vegetarian diet during the meditation course. I regretted that I had not taken some time to recover and regain my strength before starting the challenging mountain climb. When I arrived at the Creston's Base Camp, it was late afternoon. They didn't serve any food, only bottled water. Unfortunately, it wasn't the best day to be on the mountain, and to look out to see the ocean because it was very cloudy. It was too foggy the next morning also. I had more difficulty coming down from the mountain that morning than going up the previous day. My legs were wobbly, and painful sliding down the sharp slopes. It was very dark when I finally arrived at my guesthouse room. It took a couple of days of rest before I could walk again.

I then decided to take a walk down to the river to go where I previously saw a road that followed upward to another side of the foothill. I had seen it each time I was riding in the guesthouse owner's car, to go grocery shopping in the village. I was awestruck by the sun-bleached huge rocks, the mountain river sparkling in the sun, and the powerful sound of water rushing down from the mountain slope, between the white rocks. Its mystical atmosphere whispering, calling me to come. I walked up slowly and kept looking into the gorge to my right side, in anticipation of finding something new. When I finally reached the top, I found young children playing next to their schoolhouse, at the entrance of the village. I didn't know why, but I stopped there without going further. Then, I turned to walk back down slowly, without a word or gesture of any kind to communicate, with the children. Now that I think about it, the door is still open for me.

I went back to Chirripo Hotel in San Isidro, to get more rest, and recuperate. I

went to the open-air market for my food in the mornings, spent afternoon hours sitting at the café on the ground floor of the hotel, and walked around the town after the burning sun went down. I got local information from a young hotel clerk and from many American retirees who live around San Isidro. They came to chat with other Americans, as it was their meeting place. The town park square was right in front of the hotel café. From there you can watch young children play, stray dogs running around, and beautiful young people flirting with each other gaily, into the late night. The clerk told me many interesting stories about life around in San Isidro, including his own. The open market was another fantastic place to watch people, like watching silent movies, since I did not understand their language.

After a few days of rest, I took a bus to San José, the capital city in Costa Rica, from where I eventually would fly out to Panama. I prefer to stay in guesthouses when I travel because I can attain information from other travelers, who share and get connected with one and another. While I was in San Jose, I had lunch with another meditator, who I had previously met at the meditation retreat. She was a botanist, teaching at a college. She took me to a museum after our lunch, then to her house to show me many of her exotic projects, studying plants, and photos from the books she had published. Out of curiosity, I asked her why the houses in San José were fenced with black iron bars, and also on their gates and windows. It was for security, I was told. There are burglars in the city. I learned that Costa Rica has a small police force, and no military.

Another day, I joined a group that was going to another place to celebrate International Women's Day. The house was in a remote area without any neighbors, but it had a large garden. The lady who lived there grew herbs, mostly hibiscus, to export to the U.S.A. Because of the

warm climate in Costa Rica, hibiscus was flourishing everywhere I went. I spent most of my time in her garden, while the others were having fun, drinking, laughing, enjoying in celebration of the International Women's Day.

I also learned that many non-profit organizations in the U.S.A., send student volunteers to do projects in Costa Rica. I joined a butterfly project for a week, outside the city. I was introduced to a family of two for a homestay program, including an elderly mother and her grown daughter. Her son was living in the next house with his own family. The volunteer pays the family for room and board, but no lunch is provided. I walked to the project each morning, but there wasn't much to do. I hung out for a few hours each day. I remember asking the manager why there weren't any butterflies inside the butterfly net, but I don't remember what her explanation was. I sometimes ended up spending my time following the daughter around at their house. She had a small garden growing sugar cane, from which she

was trying to make raw sugar cubes, using drinking glasses. People in Costa Rica were laid back, though they seemed to be poor, but happy. I then flew out to Panamá the next day.

Costa Rica was undisturbed, naturally wondrous with a variety of wildlife, multicultural aspects, and the people there loved to celebrate, and share with anyone who wants to join. I've lived and traveled in Costa Rica just over a month, but I treasure it like a lifetime's experience. I met people from all over the world, visited a volcano by traveling on a local bus, and had lunch in a coconut plantation. People were friendly, content, and happy. My travel in Costa Rica was one of a kind. Traveling for me is to experience unique types of life in different environments, where I can feel energy levels other than what I am familiar with at home. I wish to make a home on the road in many more and different countries, not only in my mind, but also through hands on experiences.

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