

# Reflections

## Voices of English Learners

Fifth Edition, 2022



5th Anniversary

EDITION



**LITERACY COUNCIL**  
FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

EMPOWERING ADULTS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

## OUR MISSION

To provide Frederick County adults with pathways to essential literacy skills.

## OUR VALUES

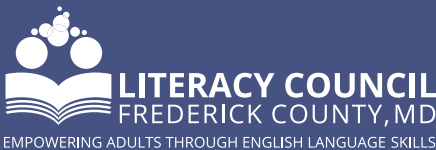
- Sustaining our organization through responsible financial stewardship, sound management, and community engagement.
- Teaching a parent in order to educate a family. Educating our students in a learner-centered format with compassion, confidentiality, and respect.
- Producing a safer, healthier, economically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

## OUR VISION

Literacy lifts lives.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Success for the individuals and families we seek to serve rests on a collective community approach that shapes a full path to a thriving life.



[frederickliteracy.org](http://frederickliteracy.org)

# Literacy *lifts* Lives

## FOREWORD



The Literacy Council of Frederick County provides a learning center for more than 300 adults each year. These adults originally come from over 40 countries and throughout the United States, who speak over 20 different languages, and who are living, working, and raising families in Frederick County. Since its founding in 1963, the Literacy Council has made a difference in the lives of over 9,250 adults and their families.

The Literacy Council commemorates its 60th anniversary in 2023. On the eve of this significant milestone, we celebrate the publication of our Fifth Edition of *Reflections: Voices of English Learners*, as a lasting tribute to our students ... whose inspiring stories reflect their hopes and dreams, talents, and passion for the future that these individuals and their families give our community.

Without strong English language literacy, thousands of people in Frederick County are being held back from achieving their full potential. They have fewer job opportunities, they tend to earn less, and it's much harder for them to navigate even basic health and social services. That's a tragedy for every person and family affected, and it's a terrible loss for the community.

The Literacy Council of Frederick County lifts lives, and builds community in the process, by teaching literacy skills to adult learners. Guided by a dynamic new mission: *To provide Frederick County adults with pathways to essential literacy skills*, the choice of this year's cover image for *Reflections* of a bridge along Carroll Creek, in downtown Frederick, symbolizes how literacy is a bridge that provides pathways to a brighter future. *Literacy Lifts Lives*.

It's an honor to support the work of the Literacy Council, our exceptional students, and committed volunteers.

Geordie Wilson, President  
Literacy Council Board of Directors

## Literacy lifts Lives

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

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*Reflections: Voices of English Learners* was produced by Strategic Factory with photography provided by our students.

The Literacy Council of Frederick County is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization.



## DEDICATION

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

## EDITOR'S NOTE

*Reflections: Voices of English Learners* is now publishing its fifth edition! Its continued success comes from the dedication of our students as they learn English and acquire a sense of belonging in a new community. Our students have started their lives over again in Frederick, Maryland and have faced serious challenges to do so. They have formed new pathways for themselves and have contributed to our workforce and many other aspects of our community living. The stories in *Reflections* originate from the minds and hearts of our student body and their perspectives on life in general. Submissions are open to all our adult learners, whatever their levels of language acquisition, and we are always amazed at the excellence of their writing.

This has been a year of getting back to business as our country returns to normal activities of school and work. Some of the pieces you'll read here come from the students in the writing classes that we held online for three semesters. Their personal revelations reveal our students in the process of building bridges from their unique cultural perspectives to the new American culture that they have adopted. In these compositions students share their favorite foods, their sense of humor, their travel experiences, and their personal memories. You'll read about breaking barriers, solving problems, and adjusting to fear. Some students were inspired to write poetry to express their struggles to learn the English language.

Our students are making progress in their lives with their newly acquired English language skills and making a difference for themselves, for their families, and for our community. We are privileged to present to you the Fifth Edition of the Literacy Council of Frederick County's literary magazine. We edit only lightly, 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* 2023. Let's continue to be an avenue for many student voices seeking a home for their individual ideas and perspectives.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This magazine would not have been possible without the generous contributions from our student authors, our dedicated tutors, editors Catherine Coundjeris and Julie Heifetz, our graphic designer Betsy Maymon, and first reader Catherine Cox.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

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Thank you for the support of the Literacy Council of Frederick County's Board of Directors, and President Georgie Wilson, Executive Director Laurie Fisher, and Program Manager Sarah Fowkes.



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# THE TERROR THAT CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN

by Amilcar F.



*I am Amilcar F. from Apurimac-Chalhuanka, 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, 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.*

This story is dedicated to all the young people of Perú called "cojudignos" who do not know the real history of terrorism, of the barbarism that many humble peasants suffered at the hands of the "Shining Path" of terror. I invite you to think that communism leads the people to misery, to the loss of values and the rule of law. And I ask you to honor the memory of your patrolmen, police and military who offered their lives for the peace and integrity of Perú.

I was barely six years old when I learned to read and write. At the same time, I listened to how my parents and the villagers spoke with great concern about terrorism. They, who murdered with stones and machetes all the people who did not want to follow their political ideas of Maoism, Leninism thought, Gonzalo, Abimael Guzman, and Reynoso.

In the year of 1984 in the District of Soras, Department of Ayacucho, organized by its mayor, they refused to follow the ideas of communism, the "luminous path," and confronted the terrorists, displacing them from Soras and other nearby towns in retaliation for that action by the residents. The cowardly terrorists staged an incursion of terror by hijacking an Interprovincial bus named "Expreso Cabanino."

On July 16, 1984, taking the 16 passengers who were traveling to Soras as hostages, the terrorists murdered them all with stones and axes. After that massacre, the bus continued its route towards Soras because the terrorists forced the driver named Constantino to continue driving towards Soras, arriving at each town on the route. Soras were murdering humble defenseless peasants who were victimized only with a stone and a machete. They were all the people who were on the list for not obeying or following the terrorists led by Abimael Guzman as the leader of the criminal organization.

In this story I will name Jose Quispe Palomino who is the author of the



death express that in only one day killed 109 humble peasants. José Quispe Palomino today is alive leading the militarized communist party of Perú in the jungle of the Departments of Junin Ayacucho and Apurimac, who, according to intelligence sources and protected witnesses, helped finance the political campaign of today's president of Perú, Pedro Castillo Terrones, with two million dollars from drug trafficking, because they are allies of Jose Quispe Palomino.

I write these lines of the horror story so that everyone knows that in Perú there is a group of terrorists called the "Shining Path" that continue to spread terror and barbarism. For a long time,

many communist politicians in Perú try to change their name, saying that they are people with different ideas or that they are a group of guerrillas. The truth cannot be hidden, they are the Shining Path terrorists and they are allies of the drug traffickers who are trying to subjugate Perú to terror and communism. This mini-story is one of thousands that exists that I have not been able to name but the written history is real. I only need to specify the names of the inhabitants and the cities near Soras District because they are names in Quechua.

Ha-Ila-Ila Perú! (Which means in Quechua: Long life, Perú!)

Thank you, Amilcar F.

# THE MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN MY LIFE

By Ashley G.E.



*My name is Ashley E. I am from Dominican Republic. I have been living in the United States for 9 months. I live in Frederick, MD. I am interested in medicine and I would like to become a nurse, but I do not know much English. Then I found a wonderful place in Frederick which is called the Literacy Council. They have an excellent program and amazing teachers, with whom I have learned a lot. And I thank you for the opportunity to be in your program.*

The most embarrassing moment of my life happened to me one afternoon when my friend and I were leaving the university. On a hot and sunny day in my country, my friend and I were finished school for the day, and we were hungry, so we decided to go to a supermarket to buy some food. Before we arrived, she asked me if we could make a stop at a nearby travel agency

because she wanted to change a flight that she had to Cuba. I agreed, so we went to the agency first and then, we went to the supermarket. We decided to walk to the place where we were going to eat. On the way, when she and I were near a wedding dress store, we saw how a flock of pigeons were flying through the sky above, and at that moment I felt a jet of something that I thought was water falling on my hair and clothes. My friend looked at me and said, "Mana! You have pigeon droppings on you!" At that moment, I did not believe it, because she and I have confidence with each other, and we usually joke a lot, so I decided to approach the window of the wedding dress store and I could see that it is true. So, she and I exploded with laughter. Then when I turn around, I met a guy getting out of his car and he looked at me, he got back into his car, and pulled out a piece of paper and offered it to me. I accepted it and thanked him. My friend also helped me wipe myself with a piece of paper from one of the notebooks I had in my backpack. I felt very embarrassed, so I decided to go home and take a bath. That moment, even though it was the most embarrassing moment that has ever happened to me, it is an unforgettable moment, my friend and I always remember it and we laugh.

# MY EXPERIENCES

Ashley G.E.

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My experience moving to the United States has been very positive and fun. I have spent 6 months living here and every day has been enjoyable. I have visited beautiful places such as the White House, the Capitol, as well as the Washington Monument. I have also visited the zoo, aquarium, and different museums. I have tasted different dishes that are part of the American culture such as baked turkey with gravy, pumpkin pie, and apple pie. The language has been an obstacle for me. Sometimes I do not understand

what people say to me and because of my accent people do not understand me either, so learning English is very important for me. My goal is to communicate in a clear way and to be understood. Then, finding the Literacy Council has been very significant for me because I can meet, practice, and interact with people who have the same goal as me to learn and that is a motivation to achieve my goal. Living in the United States has been one of the best experiences I have had.

# MY KITCHEN

By Ekata P.

*My name is Ekata. I am from India. My mother tongue is Gujarati. I came to the United States in 2007. I live in Frederick, Maryland. I am working as an operator in Saputo Dairy Food. My hobby is reading, embroidery, and hiking, but cooking and baking is my passion. My goal is learning reading and writing in English. I have had a great experience with the Literacy Council. They have good teachers. Catherine C. is my teacher. I took two classes with her: Writing 1 and Writing 2. She has lots of patience and encourages me. I am very thankful to the Literacy Council for giving me the opportunity to improve my English. I learned proper sentence formation and grammar skills. Now after going to classes, I can do text messages and email easily and I can have conversations with people. Thank you, Literacy Council, for helping me. You do a great job with helping different communities.*

My favorite place in the house is my kitchen. I like to cook for my family and friends. I always try to cook different kind of food. I grew up in a big family and I always helped my mom. My grandpa encouraged me to cook and would eat whatever I made. Then I started developing interest in cooking, and making good food. Every time I cooked for people, they liked my food and appreciated me. I started catering a couple years ago but I have full time job and it's very hard to manage both. Then I stopped the catering, but I always help my friend and family events and wedding menus and make food for them. My family and I do not eat outside food. I'm a vegetarian. I cook every day for my family. When I have a day off of work, I spend most time in my kitchen, making food. I like to listen to music in my kitchen. Before I eat food, I offer it to God. I am never tired of cooking. It is not a relaxing place but I enjoy it. I like to spend my time there.

# MY MOST HAPPY MOMENT

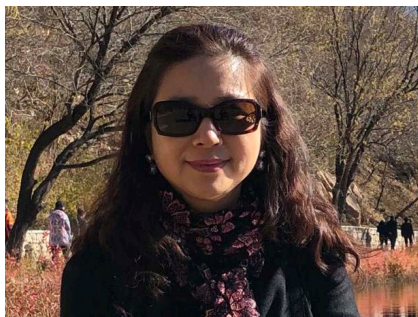
By Ekata P.

My most happy moment was when my daughter was born. She started crying and my doctor congratulated me and said you have a baby girl. When I saw her for the first time and held her hand, it was a very amazing feeling in my heart. I cannot explain it. Thanks to God for blessings me. It was a life changing experience. She was so

quiet, I never forgot that moment. Her hands were so small with little fingers. She opened little eyes and her pink thin lips on her chubby face made me feel joy. After 25 years I think about that moment and thanks be to God. He gave me a blessed daughter. That day I feel very special as a mom.

# MY FAVORITE BOOK

By Emily H.



*I am Emily H. I come from Beijing, China. I have a lot of hobbies. I love reading, cooking, baking and playing table tennis. My university major is silk engineering. I arrived in the U.S. last September. I started learning English with the Literacy Council in January this year. Teachers are very nice and dedicated. They not only teach us English, but also provide us with*

*many social resources. After one session of the course, my English has improved a lot. In the future, I will insist on listening, speaking and reading, and continue to move forward on my English learning path.*

My favorite book is *The Circuit*. This book tells the story of an immigrant child and his family struggling in America. In the book the main character Francisco Jimenez has a very hard time in America. This is truly a telling of the America Dream. It is a story about a family who works hard under the worst of circumstance to help each other. I love this story because I can find resonance in this story. I read this book over again sometimes. After reading it, I recommended it to my son.

# URBANA

By Emily H.

My favorite place is where I live now—Urbana. Urbana is a beautiful town. There are four distinct seasons. In spring time, we have warm weather and sunny days. There are many beautiful flowers in the gardens and in the fields. The birds begin to sing their songs. Everything comes to life again. In summer the weather is very hot and it rains a lot. All the trees are beautiful with their green leaves. The sky is very clear and blue, and the sunshine is much stronger

than that in other seasons. In autumn the weather becomes cooler day by day. It is the best season we have. Winter comes with frost and snow. The weather grows colder and colder, and much snow falls. But winter is not very long with us, for spring comes again soon. In Urbana, there are also a lot of international cuisines, such as Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, Indian, Italian, and American food. We are happy to live here.

## MY FAVORITE FOOD

By Emily H.

My favorite food is dumplings. The ingredients of dumplings are meat, vegetables and dough. It is difficult to prepare, and the ingredients aren't expensive. It is from China. My mother made it for me on weekends when I was a child. We also eat them on New Year's Eve. Dumplings have a very long history. At first dumplings was

a food that Ancient Chinese doctors developed to help the poor people, also the dumplings are called "jiao er." I like this food because it has a wonderful meaning when you eat dumplings. It is a symbol of fortune and treasure, and it can let the rest of the year be well and you won't have any trouble.

## THE DECK OF MY HOUSE

By Fatemah N.



*I'm Fatemah from Afghanistan. I am interested in reading novels and stories, walking on the beach, listening to music, smelling flowers, and climbing in the mountains. I want be happy and joyful and do my responsibilities to make a better world. I want to write stories and give hope to people. I read stories in the Farsi language and write in Farsi, but I learned to read and write in English language at the Literacy Council. I had a great experience reading and discussing*

*a book this past semester. I also am learning how I can write in English and everybody in the world can read that. Thank you, Literacy Council!*

My favorite space in my house is the deck on a day in April. It is so calm and peaceful with a beautiful view of woods and Ballenger Creek. Every morning when I open the door, I see my tulips and daffodils wake up and wait for watering. Trees in the wood are like kids that they are happy with a new dress with blossoms on it. The grass takes their hands and come up from the ground. Little birds fly between branch and blossoms. They fight together for a little caterpillar. Ducks swim on fresh water and find some seaweed. Squirrels play hide and seek together. A lot of huge trees live near the creek, and they are so old and white. I swear one of them has eyes that blink at me. I wish a wisdom lived on the trees and fairies flew around



them, but I can't see any magic. The only magic is a beautiful blue bird flying among the branches with songs so nice. I drink my coffee when sunlight

caresses my face and the breeze walks in my hair, and brings to me, the great smell of cherry blossoms. Oh no, it's too late. I have to go work.

## WAR AND PEACE

By Fatemah N.

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Peace is the best choice every time you want to fight. It brings civilization and development. Children grow up. They go to school and learn new things. People go to vacation on a sandy beach and the only thing they can worry about is sunburn skin, or just to choose pizza or spaghetti for dinner. A lot of joy and happiness is in the mother's face and they only worry about their kids not messing up their clothes. Parents have great dreams for children and children worry about new toys and what they want. In peace time, the politicians talk about environment and make decisions on

how to clean the ocean.

But then war comes. War is ugly and poisonous and kills hope. Parents just want their children to live. People travel but are scared and panic to find shelter and food to stay alive. Soldiers kill each other. Mothers cry and a lot over stone graves that proliferate. Politicians warn and argue together with more killings every day. That is so heartbreaking. But one thing that comes out of war is beautiful. When you fight for freedom and human value and you don't accept slavery because you are free.

# MAKE A REALITY OUT OF OUR DREAMS

By Flor S.



*My name is Flor, and, I am from Guatemala I was born in 1984 in the department of Jutiapa. I am the second of the family. I have 3 brothers and one sister; we are 5 children. My parents always teach me that you have to work hard to achieve what you want. My mother is very Catholic, and my father works the earth. I love studying at school and I always liked asking a lot of questions. I worked hard in my classes. I liked mathematics and that's why I studied the first 6 years of school, and the 3 years of basic, studying on weekends. Since my parents could not afford school for me, I worked my way through. My brother helped me, so I only worked on the weekends. I graduated from Perito Accounting School in Guatemala.*

I decided to travel to the United States and be able to have a better job and help my family. At first, I had many difficulties since the language was very difficult and everything is difficult for me. I had to learn English. I have worked at fast food restaurants that

helped me a lot to learn the English language a bit then I went to study at school and take English classes for adults. I met my husband, and we got married. I had to stop working and studying in the English classes since I was pregnant with my first son. At that time, I had a tutoring teacher helped me a lot.

I have three beautiful children: two sons and one girl. My daughter entered the Judy Center Program and I met Ms. Holly one teacher who I know from the library, and she told us that we could apply for an English tutoring. I was very lucky since they sent me applications to be able to have a teacher and to study more English, and to take writing classes as well. I also met Ms. Ruth who taught me, and Ms. Catherine who taught me how to be able to write and read in the most fluid English. I have read a beautiful book, "The Circuit" in our Writing 1 Class, and I am practicing a lot of English, and one of my goals is to take my GED and be able to help my children more at school and be able to motivate more mothers who are dedicated to work and raising their family.

However, we can also work on ourselves make a reality out of our dreams. Thank you very much for the opportunity you give me power to express myself and tell a little of my life thank you very much my Catherine for your support.

# MY FAVORITE MUSICIAN

By Flor S.

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I admire Ricardo Arjona a lot. He is my favorite artist. He is the first artist who composes songs and music and leaves us an excellent lesson in his lyrics. He was born in Jocotenango in Guatemala in 1964. Since he was a child, he has liked music. He participated in a youth contest where he gained popularity, but he dedicated himself to continue studying giving tutoring classes to low-income children which he helps with school supplies.

He really liked the sport of basketball where he was the first one to score the most points in a single game in Guatemala. My favorite songs are "Lady of the Four Decades" and "It Was You." It leaves us a moral where we value our lives. That is why he is my favorite artist, and he is from Guatemala, too with great pride. He is an artist who leaves a beautiful message in each song.

# QUESADILLAS

By Gladis A.



*My name is Gladis and I am from México from the wonderful state of Chiapas. Since I was twelve years old, I have tried to learn English but my brain never received that information, but now I think I hadn't a motivation for really needing to learn it. Last year my sister gave me and my family a beautiful news: she was pregnant! That was the first time I was thinking about learning English, so I could talk with my nephew, but that still wasn't enough because I thought of course he will also speak Spanish. In January, I came to the U.S.A. to help my sister with her baby. Days before she told me about an interview with immigration, but she assured me that someone would do the interview with me in Spanish. However, when I was in the airport somebody from immigration spoke with me and they*

*did not speak Spanish, so a kind girl traveler helped me. She answered the questions from immigration, and finally I could enter into the U.S.A., and I was so thankful to her. I couldn't believe what had happened because I always remember a famous saying in México "by asking you get to Rome," but at that moment I couldn't communicate. I decided then that one day I would want to help another person as that girl had done for me, because she taught me that communicating in other language was so important. It could be as important as losing the chance to meet your beautiful nephew. A sister's friend told us about the Literacy Council where I could learn English. The classes are unusual, because in addition to learning English you also learn about other cultures and other countries from your classmates. My teachers are nice and kind, but I think that the best they have taught me is that now I believe that I will be able to speak English someday with motivation and discipline.*

One of my favorite dishes is the "Quesadillas." In México is an easy dish to make, you only need tortillas, cheese and you can add everything that you like to it, for example I usually add ham. You need to warm the tortillas, put cheese and what you most like. Then fold tortillas and wait for the cheese to melt. It is a dish usually for breakfast or dinner, but also to eat for

lunch. When my mom has time, or it is a special occasion, she makes delicious big tortillas by hand, and prepares a lot of dishes to add to quesadillas. Also,

she puts cream, lettuce and avocado on top. Mom's Quesadillas are the best. The "Quesadillas" are a delicious, versatile and easy dish to make.

## MY FAVORITE LAKE

By Gladis A.

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My favorite place in México is a lake. Its name is "Colon." My family visits this place every vacation between March and April because the weather is hot. We camp there for two or three days. The lake has a beautiful color, and is a combination between green and blue. It has a lot of beautiful trees around it. Also, the sky is always clear and blue. The water is cold but when you start to swim you enjoy it. However, in the deep you have to take care because

there are snakes. In the night near the shore of the lake you can see little fish and crabs illuminated with the moon light. I enjoy seeing the reflection of the moon in the water. Also, this lake is a tourist place, so its inhabitants sell things. In the morning you can buy ice cream or cold beer and, in the night, you can buy Mexican food like taquitos. It is a beautiful and natural place.

# MY FIRST JOB IN AMERICA

By Hilda M.



*My name is Hilda M. I am Salvadoran with a degree in chemistry and pharmacy. I started studying English at the Literacy Council in 2019. I was fortunate to be assigned a tutor to whom I am very grateful for his unconditional help. I love walking and watching funny, romantic and action movies. I also love meeting people and learning about their cultures and customs. I also love visiting beautiful places with the family. My goals are to work in my field, obtain my U.S. citizenship and buy my own home.*

In El Salvador I worked in quality control at Bayer. I knew basic English, but I wanted to improve. I arrived in the United States in December 2018 and started looking for a job in my field, but it was not possible to find one because of my difficulty with the English language. However, I continued looking for a job and managed to get one outside of my career field in a supermarket called Giant in the salad bar area. The job consists of preparing fruits and vegetables and packing them and labeling them

under the guidelines of good food practices. Due to the knowledge of my career and experience in the area of quality control, I began writing specific procedures for the area, formatting them as a list that facilitated and sped up activities and wrote the specific rules of good food practices under proper food code references. I also wrote the procedures for staff training. I actually supervise a person in this area. I help monitor continuous improvement in food safety and passed an inspection by the authorities. I thank my tutor, Gary B., for teaching me and helping me in reviewing the documents I wrote.

As a matter of course, I apply a work plan every day, establishing the priorities whose sales results have been satisfactory. The bosses are very happy with my performance in my job despite my difficulty with the language. I seem to write English a little better than I speak it at this time. But my tutor says I am now learning at an intermediate English level.

For all of the above, I have learned a lot in the area of food and food safety, as well as meeting people from different cultures. I have lost the fear of speaking English through communication with co-workers and customers. My goal is to one day get a job in my original field of chemistry and pharmacy. All that fills me with great satisfaction from the achievements that I have made so far.



## OUR TOKEN

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, eight 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!*

Memories are the spirits of unforgettable events we have lived and experienced with all their sweetness and bitterness. They lie sleeping deep in our hearts and minds. Sometimes a scent, a scene, or a word can awaken a memory and retrieve it as a vivid image just happening now. When Ms. Catherine told us about the broken ceramic art from her childhood, she took me forty-three years back when I was newly engaged to Samir, my husband now. He was an architect, highly educated especially in Syrian history. He liked and valued many types of art beside architecture.

Once he had a task in Damascus, and when he returned and came to see me, he seemed enthusiastic and eager. He was holding a wrapped long object carefully close to his chest, like a father embracing his newly born baby with love and fear that he might be hurt. He cautiously unfolded the object to reveal a spectacular sculpture, carved ceramic, about 15 inches high, pale ivory color like human skin tone. He told me "This work of art is from Saeed Makhoul, the famous contemporary Syrian sculptor whom I cherish a lot. I could not resist buying it. It represents life. I hope you like it, so it would be our token." Then he handed it to me to study it closely and think about it. At a general look, it seemed to me as a miniature tree trunk carved all around with a lot of protrusions. But when I looked for its details, I could see the seasons of mankind's life depicted in

scenes of nature. I saw winter in the face of an old weary man with a long beard representing wisdom, spring with small buds and the features of a child full of promises, summer with its juicy fruits and the mien of an ambitious adult working hard to build his future and his nation, and I saw fall in the visage of a middle-aged man full of life and achievements. Amidst these people, empty places and holes were scattered, telling me their stories about the ups and downs they have experienced through their life's journey.

I was so excited I looked into Samir's eyes and shared with him the joy, love, and gratitude that overwhelmed us, and hence forward our token was born and it became "she." Why she? Because life and nature are feminine in our Syrian Arabic language. I put her on the floor beside Samir and hurried up to find and prepare a safe decent place for her. Unexpectedly I heard a scream, I rushed back and saw Samir looking sadly at our fractured Token with teary eyes. I was shocked, especially that a broken gift is a bad omen in our culture. But seeing his woeful appearance broke my heart

and pushed me to take hold of myself and do my best to comfort him. While doing so a feeling of guilt struck me, why did I put her on the floor and not hand her directly to him, especially that she was an irreplaceable piece of art. Besides she was very expensive, she cost him an arm and a leg. I was overwhelmed by this painful feeling when Samir regained his composure and confidently said, "I will fix her, she didn't crack, she is broken just in two pieces, I can fix her." At that moment we both took a deep breath, but we were not relaxed not until he actually fixed her. Our Token's presence in our life gave us the courage to face many difficulties throughout the journey of our marriage. She taught us not to give up on something precious to us. She taught us that there are always ways to fix an issue, to correct a mistake, to restore a relationship and to achieve a dream. Sometimes we fail, but failure should not stop us. We should try different ways, believe in ourselves, and pursue our goals. Hence, we thrive and inspire others to do the same.

# THE BIG DECISION TO LEAVE SYRIA

By Jacqueline B.

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Decision making is an important part of human life. Every day we make many decisions, most of them are small, fleeting, and quickly forgotten. But every now and then we are all faced with a big or crucial decision that requires a time of quiet reflection, deep thought, and wise discussions.

A big decision is one that we intentionally make or choose between two or more options which will have a significant and long-term impact on our lives. And the younger we are the more difficult decisions we face. Some of the big decisions I made through my life were life changing. Choosing to go to the university to study medicine, which at that time, my parents thought it was a toilsome and demanding profession for a female to handle, especially when she will have her own family to take care of. Another decision was accepting Samir's proposal for marriage (my husband now) who was a new graduate as an architect and we both needed quite a long time to build our careers. Yet a third big decision we had made was supporting our only son to do his master's degree in economy in Germany, despite the fact that his absence would negatively affect our lives and raise a lot of fear and worries about him and yearning and longing for him, too.

Fortunately, the outcome of these big decisions we had made was amazingly rewarding. It nourished and strengthened our relationship as a family and reflected on our personal and social and professional lives.

Our life in Syria was peaceful and

delightful and gratifying. We had achieved most of our dreams, we were surrounded by love and warm relationships, and we had a promising secure future, especially that Syria was a safe and self-sufficient country. All was peaceful until 2011 when the uprising began bringing with it a long scary nightmare that turned our lives into horror, grief, and despair. We witnessed death of civilians and soldiers, adults and children, guilty and innocent, as well as destructions, kidnappings, bombing, looting of historical sites and many more devastating acts. In response to the real dangers and threats of life, many people immigrated seeking asylum in Europe, Australia, and other safe nations. Leaving Syria was never in our plans. But out of the blue we got a phone call from my brother-in-law telling us that the application he had submitted for U.S. citizenship, 13 years ago, for us had been accepted and our Green Card had been issued so we should come to the United States to get it. What a surprise!! We were bewildered. We had almost forgotten about it.

Our first response was "we are not going to leave our country!" How could we leave our careers to which we had devoted our lives and built good reputations and many friendly relationships? How could we forsake our own home where every piece standing there had a precious memory and a story to tell? What about our families, especially my elderly mother whom I used to visit daily and look

after her health?

Later and after the effect of the surprise had faded away, and after we regained our composure, we realized that we were facing a new big decision that required to put our feelings aside and think deeply of the advantages and disadvantages of the decision that we were going to take, as well as to discuss the matter with our son who was in Germany at that time. Our son was happy about our opportunity, and he was absolutely in favor of the decision for us to leave the country as soon as possible. Reasoning the advantages, we found out that we had forgotten that life is an adventure and going to the United States had been one of our dreams when we were studying in Aleppo College when it was run by the American Presbyterian Church. So why don't we take on this adventure and achieve our old dream?

Another advantage was getting the American passport, which would give us the opportunity to go around most of the world's nations without applying for a Visa. Besides we would be able to visit our son whenever we wanted. And the most important of all these

advantages was ensuring our safety and well-being.

The disadvantages were leaving our beloved families and friends. But we were sure that the day would come when we would go back home and enjoy their fellowship and share our new stories. And until that day comes, technology would give us the opportunity to communicate online with them. The language barrier and the diverse cultures in the states were among the disadvantages, too. Finally, we found out that the pros outweighed the cons, so we decided to go on the adventure.

Through the 8 years of being in the U.S. my spoken and written English has improved. My spiritual life has grown as well. Being exposed to new diverse cultures have broadened my horizon and enriched my life experiences. We have also made good friends from different nations. The American passport we have got allowed us to visit our son in Barcelona, his new residence. Actually, making the right decisions in life are crucial to our future place in society, and to our well-being.

# OUR LAST DAYS IN SYRIA

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 reading and writing in English and I thank the Literacy Council and the teachers for helping me to do better in English language.*

The most beautiful words I have read about the beauty of spring in Syria was by Gibran Khalil Gibran. He wrote: "Spring is beautiful everywhere, but it is more than beautiful in Syria. Spring is the spirit of an unknown god roaming around the earth rapidly. When Syria reaches, it walks slowly backwards, enchanted by its beauty," and he was right. With the beginning of spring, the temperature warms up, the sun shines again after the cold winter, and we

begin to open the windows to receive the fresh air which fills our hearts with joy and happiness.

In spring we celebrate Easter, which is also a happy occasion. It is the most special spiritual occasion in our church, so we have to prepare in advance for this event. We bake special cookies and make cherry liquor and color eggs to serve them to the family and relatives when they visit to greet us on Easter day. This tradition has been repeated every year for centuries.

But the year of 2012 was different in Syria, the war had begun. We were all scared, we could hear the sounds of gunfire and explosions from afar, electricity and water were cut off most of the time, so there was no heating.

At that time my youngest daughter and I stayed at home while the other family members were in U.S.A., because she had to finish her graduation exams. We booked tickets with the Turkish airline to join the family in the U.S. after she finished her exams and after we celebrated Easter.

It was a difficult time due to the lack of electricity, water and heating so we left all the rooms of the house and lived in a small room where it was more convenient to dwell in. We used blankets for heating, candles or flash lights when the power went out; however, I was satisfied and grateful and never complained, because we were living in a cozy room. We spent the nights as she was busy with her studies, whereas I spend my free time

reading, knitting, and listening to the radio, which was our companion and comforted us in the silence and stillness of the long nights with sweet music, various programs, local and international news.

Unexpectedly, we got a phone call from our airline agent informing us that they would stop their flights permanently in few days from Aleppo airport because of the war. We had to hurry to travel before it shut down, and that's what we did. We rescheduled for the last plane taking off from Aleppo airport. Unfortunately, I was so disappointed because I won't be in Aleppo during Easter my favorite season.

I clearly remember our last night at our lovely home, when the family and relatives gathered to say good bye, thinking it would be just few months before we come back.

I locked the outdoor hoping we would come back after a short period of time.

The way to the airport was scary as we were constantly hearing the terrible sounds of gunfire and explosions close by, but we made it to the airport safely. Finally, after a long travel we reached our home in Frederick and I was so happy to see my family.

Sadly, we have not returned home since then due to the bad condition in our city, and my daughter had to go to another safer Syrian city to graduate.

Ten years passed and the outdoor is still locked waiting for someone to unlock it. I wish I could open it myself; I hope to go in, open the doors and windows, let the fresh air freshen us both, me and the house.

I miss every corner in my house: I miss the books in my bookcase; the kitchen and the utensils I used to use; I miss my closet and clothes that I left in it; and I miss sitting in the balcony and looking at the city to enjoy its beauty. I wish my wishes come true and I can visit my house someday.



# A MEMORY FROM CHILDHOOD

By Jamila T.

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We all have a family, parents and relatives. We all love them, and are concerned about them. We also worry about being separated from them. Grandmothers are the most important ones that we care about and love. With grandmothers, we feel warmth, tenderness, safety, and comfort. If sometimes our parents get angry at us for a misbehavior we did, we rush to her for she is our best protector. She hugs and kisses us. Then we look at our parents with the look of victory, for we are in a safe haven. I was lucky to have my grandmother. I have wonderful unforgettable memories about her.

I still remember how she used to listen to my simple words with interest, which made me feel I am the most important person in her life. I shared great lovely moments with her. For instance, every time I turned my back on her, she would comb my hair, and each time she passed the comb on my hair I felt joy, even sometimes when the comb hurt me. She used to say: "Sorry my little girl." She would tie the ribbons on the ends of the braids she made. Then when I turned my face to her, I would see the look of love in her eyes, and I would feel that I have become more beautiful.

I remember her holding my little hand in hers as we walked slowly to the church, or to visit her relatives. I still feel the warmth of her hands while holding mine which made me feel safe

and comfortable.

My happiest times was when I slept with her on summer nights on the roof of her house. She used to hold me in her arms under a thick blanket, so we could enjoy the cool, and gentle night breezes. As for me I would keep staring at the sky, watching the shining and twinkling stars. I also enjoyed watching the moon light up the darkness of the night, and watched it growing as the nights passed by from a crescent to a full moon.

I never got bored sitting next to her listening to her very attentively as she told me children's stories. She was my first library. She told me stories from her life. She was my advisor; she taught me how to behave and be happy with the smallest things. She was my teacher; she taught me knitting, crocheting, and cooking.

This was not a mere memory from childhood, but it was a period of time in my childhood, a period full of joy and happiness. Many years have passed, and I am now a grandmother, as she was to me. I also love my grandchildren, try to be with them as much as I can, read to them, talk to them, and play with them, but I always ask myself: "Do I treat my grandchildren as well as my grandmother used to treat me?" I am always in a competition with her trying to be like her, but I am sure she is always the winner.

# OUR THRIVING URBANA COMMUNITY

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 the Literacy Council.*

I like our Urbana community very much. Not only is the air good, the house new, the neighbors friendly, but the school district where the kids go to school is also great. The only problem that needs improvement is that many public facilities cannot keep up with the rapid population growth. For example, traffic is beginning to congest, and many intersections have no stop signs and no traffic lights. Pedestrians crossing the road have potential safety hazards. There are also limited banks and fast-food restaurants nearby, especially the fact that there is no zip code 21704 post office. I think this is very incomprehensible. Hopefully, the community can improve as soon as possible. Otherwise, I am very satisfied with my community.

## THE PERSON WHOM I ADMIRE THE MOST

By Jenny C.

My Dad is a successful man because he has a good wife behind him. That person is my favorite and most admired person. She is my mother.

My mother gave birth to me when she was very young. Due to China's national conditions, she could only have one child, so she gave me all her love.

Due to the nature of my father's work, he has not been at home for many years. Only my mother

accompanies me. She works non-stop also and takes care of me day and night. She rarely asks for help from others. If something is broken in the house, she always fixes it herself. She is very independent and very strong.

She has always taught me that women must rely on themselves as much as possible in everything, because only when we have the ability, can we get the respect of others. So, under her education, I never relied on

others, as long as I have the ability and time, I always work hard and earn money.

Later, I gave birth to my son and daughter. It was also my mother who took a 17-hour flight from China to the United States to help me take care of two young children. Because of my mother's help, I can have time to go out to work.

My grandfather was the principal of an elementary school, and my grandmother is a teacher in China. So, my mother is very knowledgeable, and she educated my two children very well.

I am very grateful to my mother; she gave everything to me. She is the sunshine in my life and the pillar of my spirit.

## AN UNFORGETTABLE MOMENT

By Joselyne N.



*My name is Joselyne Mary N. I am from Burundi, and I've been living in the U.S.A. since 2015. I want to know English like a native American and be able to communicate with my friends, coworkers and my children's teachers. I'm very lucky to find the Literacy Council for help. It's a great place for learning English with friendly and nice teachers who help me to level up my English. I appreciate the help.*

Everyone in the world has experiences which they think about. My unforgettable moment in my life was the day when my beloved uncle died. He was a friendly person and someone that you could trust. He loved everyone and they loved him too. He loved to pray in his life. He passed away one year before being married. I was in high school and we lived together far away from my parents because of my school. From that day, I was feeling like a completely different person than before. I was so close to him. He taught me a lot of things like responsibility, organization, and the importance of friends in my life. I used to go with him to visit friends and members of the family on the weekend. He also helped me to finish homework and reviewed notes in the evening. I didn't have time to tell him how much I loved him, but I planned a big surprise for him after my school. This shocked me because recently, I thought that I would remain forever with everyone,

especially for those that I loved very much. Sometimes, I can imagine what I could do with him now if he was still alive. But later, I reflected upon my experience and realized that it taught me a lesson that this sorrow will happen to everyone. I also realized that it's important to do everything good you can do, for your family and friends while they are alive because you never

know what will happen tomorrow to you or to them. I thank God for that lesson for me and for everything good that happens to me every day. I believe that my uncle has reached a better place with God. In conclusion, life is full of good and bad moments but the most important thought is to thank God for everything and try to find or learn a lesson in everything in life.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE

By Joselyne N.

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The persons whom I admire very much are my parents because they took care of me when I was a baby as well as when I was at school and even now. First, when I was a baby, they did everything for me day and night until I became independent. They helped me too in little things like cleaning up toys, making my room neat, or taking a shower by myself. For example, they told me that I started to make my bed and to take shower by myself, when I was 3 years old because they taught them to me early. Next, when it was time to go to school, they took me to school and helped me in everything at school especially how to respect others and Jesus. I remember that I won the golden eagle award when I

was in high school. I also remember when I was at the University, I helped a classmate who had a problem and from that day on we were good friends. Then I got married with my husband who belonged in that family. Finally, even though I am now a grown-up person, they keep their eyes on me. They call me or check on me to see how I am doing. My parents still give me some advice like how to educate my children or how to be a good mother. For example, my mother told me how to be a good mother, and she asked me some questions every day in my life to guide me as a mother. I really appreciate their help because I am what am I because of them.

# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WAS MY DREAM

Karma C.



*My name is Karma. I am from Lebanon. I am married and I have two kids.*

*I am interested in writing, cooking and playing tennis. My goals are several and increased when I moved to the United States. My first and important goal is to protect my family and ensure for them a happy and safe future. My second is to search for new work opportunities.*

*My last visit to the U.S.A. in 2021 was the best because it was for a long time, which gave me the chance to explore and try the new life style in the U.S.A. I had the best experience. At the beginning I was scared but day after day I felt better. I woke up from my dream and said to myself nobody can help you more than yourself. I cried a lot, I worked hard, but finally I won the struggle. The Literacy Council was the step that changed my life and changed me from a shy woman into a confident and strong woman who can fight for all. A huge thanks to my*

*teachers at the Literacy Council, to my husband and my kids who trusted me and encouraged me to reach my goals.*

Coming to the United States of America was my dream. In 2018 my husband had an opportunity to come and work here. I visited him twice at 2018 and 2019. My first year was so hard, I felt alone and couldn't communicate with people without help of my husband. I had culture shock.

My second visit was a vacation with my mother in the summer of 2019, and it was better.

In August 2021, I moved to the United States. I was scared but my husband encouraged me by telling me that life in the USA was not easy, but you can do it. I needed my driving license. My husband enrolled me in the English classes at the Literacy Council. My first day was miserable because I didn't understand anything. Day after day I became more confident in myself, I made a PowerPoint Presentation for the first time in my life in the English Language. I liked that experience; the stress went away.

Every morning I talked to my self and said: "You should be strong and move forward because your family needs you." I wish a shining future for my kids and family.

Finally, I send out a big thanks to our teachers at the Literacy Council for your help.

# GRAPE LEAVES

By Karma C.

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The leaves of the grapevine plant, are used in the cuisines of a number of cultures.

They may be obtained fresh or preserved in jars or cans. The stuffed grape leaves or as we call it in Lebanon Warak Enab is a classical and delicious Mediterranean dish commonly served as an appetizer. Warak Enab is my all-time favorite dish that I love eating and actually grew-up helping my mother to make. I learned to stuff and roll grape leaves when I was probably 12 years old.

Traditionally, the leaves are commonly stuffed with mixtures of rice and meat or rice and veggies. This recipe is near and dear to my heart. This "Mezza" is not easy to make but the ingredients are simple and cheap.

This is the way that I make the stuffed vegetarian grape leaves:

First, we do the "stuffing." We cut fresh parsley, mint, onion, and tomato. Then we add the uncooked short grain white rice with: 7 spices, black pepper, salt and vegetable oil. Then we mix all that together and the stuffing is ready. Next, we ensure that the boiling leaves are well dried.

Now it is time to get rolling:

Start by open up the leave flat on a cutting board and add a teaspoon of stuffing in the middle of each leaf. Next, carefully fold it in the sides and roll it like you would when making a wrap. It will take about 45 min to roll one jar of grape leaves and this is truly a labor of love.

Afterwards, I use a deep pot for cooking. I start by layering the pot with oil and sliced potatoes and/or carrots. Then I add the stuffed and rolled grape leaves over them and repeat the layers in the pot until you run out of grape leaves.

When you are done, add lemon juice with salt. Then, place a small plate on top of the grape leaves to hold everything in place. And then add boiling water on top. It will all be absorbed by the rice in the cooking process. It is cooked until the grape leaves are tender, juicy and utterly tantalizing!

I call it YUMMY!!!!

This dish is very popular and it's loved by so many. Try it, and you will absolutely love them.



# MY FREE TIME

By Katya Y.



*Hello. My name is Katya. I am from Russia. In my home country I was a teacher of physics. My husband and I came to U.S.A. several years ago. It was very interesting to see a new country. It was my first trip abroad. There are so many different people, different climate and a lot of sun! At first, I did not have friends, but I had a lot of hobbies. I sewed dolls out of fabric, made macrame, sculpted from clay, repainted old furniture from secondhand stores, gardened and much more. When I came to America, I thought I knew English well, but I was wrong. I did not understand simple phrases from people like "How are you doing?" I was in shock. At first, I did not think about my English, because I had a new baby. I expected that my English would improve by itself. Unfortunately, this did not happen. In 2022 I became a student of the Literacy Council. My goal was to begin to understand English speech well. Of course, I have had attempts to learn English. But I gave up every time when*

*someone asked me something in English and I did not understand anything again. I was very upset. So, I decided to turn to professionals. I had three teachers: Catherine C., Anna O., and Kim D. And they are awesome! I saw a sincere desire to help us all in their eyes. If someone did not understand something, the teachers tried to explain the same thing with different phrases. I am a very shy person, and it is difficult for me to communicate with people even in Russian. I've never had many friends because of this. Communicating with strangers in bad English is much more difficult. But these lessons gave me confidence. The great advice was: "Look for an opportunity to communicate in English everywhere." At first it was difficult, but later it became easier and easier for me to start talking to someone. Recently I heard the phrase: "Do what you're afraid of." Our fears prevent us from moving forward. But they must be understood, accepted and made so that they do not interfere with life. I'm a little envious of those who came to English lessons right after coming to America. It was my mistake that I didn't do it. Of course, English is not the goal. English is a tool to communicate with people, to study and to work. I am very grateful to my teachers for their help in learning foreign language. They gave me a motivation and self-confidence, and then I will continue to improve my English myself.*

When I have a free time, I have a lot of things to do if it is summer time, I like gardening. Every year I buy plants that bloom from spring to frost. For example, tons of new spring bulbs were planted 4 months ago. And I cannot wait for their blooming this spring.

If it is winter time, I stay at home, but I have a lot of hobbies anyway. First of all, I like to paint furniture and walls. Usually I buy furniture in Goodwill, clean it, sand it, and repaint it. All our

furniture in the house is repainted by me, even the kitchen cabinets. When my kids were young, I had more free time, so I sewed dolls out of fabric, made macrame, sculpted from clay and much more. I also teach my children math, physics, and chemistry. I am interested in dancing, Spanish language, but I do not have enough time for all of this. I cannot list all my favorite things I did, or I do but I am sure I will have more new hobbies.

## MY FAVORITE FOOD

By Katya Y.

My favorite food is a chia pudding. I have 3 kids so sometimes I prepare meals from simple ingredients. For this recipe all you need are 1 cup of almond unsweetened milk, about 3 Tbsp of chia seeds, about 3 Tbsp of coconut canned milk, 1 scoop of protein powder (I choose chocolate protein) and 1 banana. At first, mix milk and the

chia seeds. Wait for about 20 minutes until the chia seeds are incorporated into the milk. You need to stir them several times. When the milk thickens, add the rest of the ingredients. And finally add sliced banana. I like chia pudding because it is easy to make, and it is very delicious.

# DANGEROUS AND FUN

By Lily D.



*I am Lily, I was born and raised in China and I graduated from the University of Science and Technology in China. After graduating, I worked in a research academy for 15 years. In 1992, I came to the United States because my husband got a job in Maryland. I studied hard and acquired my U.S. Citizenship in 2001 and my MD driver's license as well. I used to work at several companies doing data entry, accounting, clinical data management and got an employee appreciation award.*

*I have been learning English since college, but English speaking and listening is still a problem for me, and I need to improve my language skills. I am very grateful to the Literacy Council of Frederick County staff and tutors who dedicate their lives assisting immigrants in learning the English language. Their efforts have allowed me to speak and understand English better and has given me the opportunity to develop my writing skills for Reflections: Voices of English Learners. Many thanks to*

*Catherine and my tutors.*

In 2013, I went on a cruise with my friends. It was a 12-floor super luxury cruise ship, and there were more than 2,000 staff members on it. The food was great, and the service was wonderful.

One day, our ship parked in a small town of Bahama Island. As soon as we got off, we were surrounded by local taxi drivers calling "choose me." We chose the one who asked for the cheapest price. This taxi driver seemed nice. He had dark skin, bright eyes and a beautiful smile. He took us to all the famous places we wanted to visit, and took good care of us.

When we were visiting the last scenic spot, our group leader paid him, together with our generous tips. When we realized that we needed to catch our cruise, we found that our taxi driver disappeared. There were very few cars in the street, and we couldn't rent any. It was getting dark and we were hungry. The place looked dangerous then. Finally, somebody called the local police. To everybody's surprise, the police got us a brand-new black limousine!

When the limo brought us to our ship, it was only 10 minutes to depart!

We spent extra money on the limo, but everyone was happy, because none of us had ever been in such a luxurious car! We were astonished to see the leather seats, beautiful wine cabinet and wooden control panel. It was fun for everybody!

# A STRANGE VISITOR

By Lily D.

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My husband and I usually celebrate Chinese New Year with my daughter's family each year, but for the Chinese New Year of 2022, it had snowed so much that the roads, houses, and cars were covered with a thick layer of snow. In the morning, when I opened the front door to look out at the beautiful snow, a bitter cold wind blew in and encircled me. I saw no vehicles or pedestrians on the road, there was only the snow plow as it kept busy moving snow back and forth to move snow off the road.

Even so, I returned to the kitchen to finish preparing eight of my favorite delicious Chinese dishes for our dinner to celebrate. After dinner, my husband built a warm cozy fire in our fire place. I sat down in the couch to relax and watch television and my husband went downstairs to finish his work.

Suddenly, about nine o'clock, I heard a strange rattle sound at the front door it was as if a key was being put into the door lock to unlock the door; it lasted for about thirty seconds then it stopped. I thought, is it a burglar trying to get into my house? I immediately got up from the couch and went to the window beside the door to look on the porch to see if someone was on the porch; I looked but I didn't see anyone so, I went back to relax in the couch and continued to watch the movie.

Suddenly, I heard the noise again, but this time louder! I was really scared, so, I rushed downstairs to explain to my husband about the strange rattle sound at the front door. My husband

was concerned too and immediately rushed up stairs to investigate the strange rattling sound at the front door. He went to the door window, and looked out to see what he could see. My husband immediately shouted "A dog, a big black dog!" I rushed over to see and saw a big black dog walking back and forth on our porch. "Oh my god!" I was so relieved. We realized that the dog was lost and must be bitterly cold and wanted us to help. My husband opened the door and immediately, the big black dog scurried into our house rushing under the dining room table. The dog was very quiet, shaking and looking up at us with wide eyes as if scared and bitterly cold.

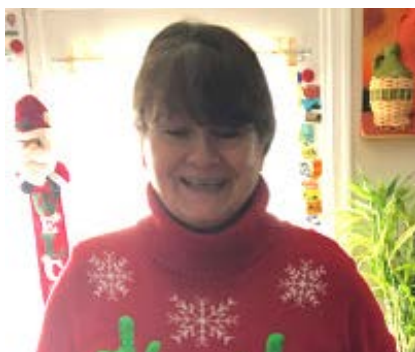
We wanted to help the dog by calling its owner, but we couldn't find a collar around its neck with information. We thought, "How can we contact the owner?" My husband thought a moment then said, "I will go outside to see if someone is looking for a lost dog." He bundled up and went out into the bitter cold weather to search for the dog's owner. Soon, he saw five people walking in a hurry along the opposite side of the street looking around and calling a dog's name as though they were looking for a dog. There was a van following them. My husband shouted to them, "Are you looking for a dog?" They responded anxiously, "Yes!" "Yes!" "It's here!" My husband responded. They quickly came running toward him and followed him to our house. They

rushed into our house, the woman as soon as she saw the dog rushed over under the table and picked up her dog and kissed it's face as if she had found a long-lost child. They said many "thanks" to us even as they walked away relieved that they had found their dog.

Although it has been a while since this incident occurred, I still often think of the fright that this strange visitor gave us. For me, a person who does not keep pets, what makes it unforgettable and shocking is the great love of the Americans for their animals.

## AS A TOUR GUIDE

By Maria V.



*My name is Maria. I came to the United States with my family: my husband and my three sons. I am very grateful to the Literacy Council of Frederick County. My teachers help me to improve my writing, reading and listening skills and to allow me to better communicate with others. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the teachers and all the Literacy Council staff for their great work and patience.*

Washington D.C. is the capital of the United States colloquially called D.C. and a cultural melting pot too. Its famous buildings have influences

from ancient Egypt, classical Greece and Rome, medieval Europe, and 19th century France. The genius of French architect and engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant designed a great city for George Washington who was the first president of the United States. The architect Pierre L'Enfant was born in Paris in 1754. He came to the U.S. and enlisted in the American Revolutionary War of Independence. He is credited for the process of designing and building Washington, D.C., with its wide avenues connecting significant points, its spaces, public squares, and its grid pattern of all streets. Why did I start talking about Washington D.C.? It is because I live near the D.C., in the state of Maryland, and with my husband we have become tour guides. Not as paid work but as a guide for our relatives and friends who want to know more about the history of this beautiful country, where my family and I are residing. We frequently familiarize people who come from Colombia or another country with the history and customs of a particular

region in this case Washington, D.C., and Maryland. My husband and I are planning travel itineraries. We choose the most important places, sometimes by vehicle sometimes on foot. As a result of the constant visits, we have been increasing our knowledge of the history, culture, food, geography, politics, and history of the tourist places.

Why should we need to focus on the history of Washington, DC? Because first, it is the capital of the U.S. Second, the two important airports are in Virginia, close to D.C. The Dulles International Airport has been in Sterling, Virginia, since 1962. We researched on Google who designed the airport. It was designed by architect Eero Saarinen. The Reagan International Airport or once called National Airport was opened for business on June 16, 1941. In 1998, President Bill Clinton changed the airport's name from Washington National Airport to Ronald Reagan, to honor the former president on his 87th birthday. It is also located in Virginia. This airport was designed by Air Alliance Joint-Venture architectural/Engineering team. Although the two international airports are in Virginia, it is an obligatory step to pass through Washington, D.C., and to take the beltway and then take the route 270 to Frederick. That is our routine when we pick family and friends up at those airports.

Afterward, before taking the beltway, we will look at the beautiful architecture and buildings in downtown DC. To begin, we look at the distance to the White House. George Washington, the first president,

selected the site for the White House in 1791. After eight years of construction, the president at that time, John Adams with his wife Abigail, moved into the unfinished residence. According to Thoughtco.com: "Irish-born architect James Hoban may have modeled the initial structure after the Leinster House, a Georgian style estate in Dublin, Ireland. It was first built from 1792 to 1800. After the British famously burned it in 1814, Hoban rebuilt the White House, and architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe transformed the White House from a modest Georgian house into a neoclassical mansion."

All the time my family and I have been living in Maryland near to the capital of the U.S., and that is why we are familiar with this tour in Washington, D.C. because we are always taking our relatives or friends to know the interesting places. As tour guide, we investigate and stay up to date with new attractions. The Smithsonian Institution is the one that runs the largest museums in D.C. Smithsonian museums flank both sides of the mall. There are 19 museums, war memorials, the famous monuments to Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and the National Zoo too. We provided them information and cultural information that we find online. Courtesy tours are sometimes available by appointment at the museums at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, free as well as the Sackler Galleries of Art. This was true before the Covid pandemic. We were looking for museum hours, and schedules for all these attractions. Now, we have to wait until June of 2021 for their doors to reopen due to the Covid pandemic closures, and

then we can continue as a tour guide. My husband and I made the itineraries and we let them move through the museums. In the afternoon we picked them up in the same place that we had left them. Hoping that they would have had as much fun as we did for the first time in those spectacular places full of history.

We make sure they are aware of everything they need to know and think about how we will improve it next time. Sometimes we don't know some questions. Sometimes, we need to ask question on Google. But the best help as a tour guide is to learn more about the history by exploring and learning new things, and that's a lot of fun.

To sum up, the work as a tour guide is rewarding. Although we are not as prepared as the professional tour guides, we try to do our best work. To finish with all the learning about history, we take our relatives to the Outlets, where they gladly buy brand clothes at reasonable prices. So, when they go back to their countries of origin, their suitcases will be loaded with beautiful memories, experiences, and brand-new clothes. Meanwhile, next year we will be waiting for another family member and start again our volunteer work as tour guides. We can help them make their trip a memorable one.

## THANKS TO LITERACY COUNCIL

By Maria V.

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There are many students like me that faced the challenge of learning English as a Second Language. When my family and I decided to come to the U.S., we landed in Maryland. Like most immigrants we faced the challenge of learning fluent English. Learning English is a barrier that must be overcome if we are expected to progress in all important areas of our lives, such as in schools and in the job market. My three sons learned their new language here. For adults like my husband and I who are looking for a place to learn English as adults, we found the Literacy Council office in

Frederick, which was our lifesaver to improve my low level of English.

However, I think that in many countries they have been studying English since a relatively young age. If you don't practice it regularly, you end up forgetting it. Although, I remember studying English in my high school in my country, it was a different experience coming to the United States. When you face real life experiences and try to speak English in the U.S., you feel like you go into shock. First, the Americans I knew spoke so fast, that I couldn't understand. Second, their pronunciation was



different from what I had learned. I realized that English was more difficult than I had thought. Later, I found the Literacy Council Office in Frederick to help me learn and understand the English Language.

Frederick City was a new place, and we tried to adapt. We feel more comfortable in the new neighborhood because there were people who speak our language there. My kids had trouble communicating in their school with the new language, English. They went to take ESOL English. At first, they were very frustrated and angry. I also felt frustrated because I couldn't help them. I wanted to be able to communicate in English. I, like my sons, had to learn the English language. Not only by learning English in a book, but learning to communicate, and learning to socialize in the new country and the new city. So, it was a process.

Some reassurances I found was when one day a friend told me about

Literacy Council and explained to me that it is an office where volunteers taught English to adults, and I could get a tutor. It was a surprise to know about the Literacy Council Office. I went to register and got a tutor for myself. That was truly wonderful. My tutor was very nice and helpful like all tutors and volunteers I have met at Literacy Council. I enjoyed meeting people from all over the world through the various classes I attended. Not only did I learn English, but I learned about different cultures as I made friends.

In conclusion, thanks to the help of the Literacy Council, I was able to become a citizen of the United States of America. I have learned new ways of communicating even though I am still learning English because it is an ongoing process. When I come across a friend who wishes to practice and get better at English, I will tell them about the Literacy Council.

## MY FREE TIME

By Mechy E.

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*My name is Luisa, but I used the nickname (MECHY). I am from the Dominican Republic, and I have two adult children, Yomerly and Joel. I met my husband in 2018, and his name is Jeffrey. I moved to the United States in 2021. I live in Frederick with my family. I think Frederick is a nice place for you to live. I worked as a Spanish and math*

*teacher in high school for 22 years in my country. I was afraid to come to America because I would be facing a different culture and language. At first, I was very worried because I didn't know any English, but now thanks to the classes and my tutor, I am feeling much happier.*

I cook lunch and dinner every day for my children and for my husband. In my free time, I watch different programs on TV. I play table tennis at night with my family. I like to pray and read my bible in the morning before breakfast. Every day I play with my cat Paco. I listen to Christian music in the morning, before calling my parents in the Dominican Republic. In the night before getting dinner, I play Skip-Bo with my children. Some weekends we play bowling, and mini golf; it is very fun.

## IN CLASSES

By Mechy E.

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Since January 15, 2022, when I started to study English at the program at the Literacy Council, I feel much more comfortable because I have been able to make huge strides in learning the language. Now I can understand the language and communicate with the people in English, thanks to all

those teachers who have helped me during the classes received every day, either online or in-person at FCC; especially my tutor Y R., who always told me, "You can do it!" Jennifer, Catherine, Elaine, Jayne, I also thank my FCC teachers Mary and Brandon, they are excellent teachers.

# CREATIVE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

By Mônica S.

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*I'm Mônica Elizabete and I'm from Brazil. I moved to the USA in 2020 and I have lived in Frederick until now. When I moved, I didn't speak any English and the Literacy Council was and is very important to me. I felt welcomed in a different country from mine. I enjoy traveling and visiting tourist places, riding a bike, hiking, and meeting new people. In this country I met American people and a lot of people from other countries too, so learning English is so good because it's possible to talk and to know these different cultures. I'm now looking for a job in Frederick and the Literacy Council is also very helpful for that. I'm very grateful for this*

*opportunity to be part of this family.*

I think a great job today is on the internet and social media, which is about teaching about some aspect of your life. There are many people making money from internet videos about their lives, and what they like to do. People need communication and sales skills. They also need good cameras and internet.

During the pandemic I watched on YouTube people who built motorhomes to travel, and they left their jobs. These people started making money by teaching other people how to do this, too. They give workshops on motorhomes construction, advice on life on the road, and also possible ways to make money while traveling, such as working in a hostel, selling crafts, creating some travel product, etc.

People who have gone to live in other countries talk about their experiences and then offer groups of tourists from their countries to get to know the city where they live in nowadays. All of these services are shared in internet videos and people pay to participate. With these jobs people can continue to travel around the world while working. I think this is a unique job opportunity for people who like an adventure.

# POVERTY

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.*

Cameroon is located in central Africa far above the equator. We have four auspicious seasons: one longer dry season, one short dry season, one long rainy season during the holiday, and one short rainy season. Like many countries in black Africa, Cameroon suffers from poverty. In our topic we will show the origin of poverty, the different kinds of poverty, and the effective strategy to fight it.

The situation or experience of being poor or, a lack of a particular quality is a definition we can give to poverty. The factors like war, genocide, famine can be considered to be the origin of poverty in Cameroon.

After the Colom war, we assisted now in the war of different regions in

my country. Our research shows us that the main cause of this war was a politician who allowed the trouble to grow between the civilians and the government. We can identify several types of poverty at the end of this.

Poverty is a lifeless existence.

We can cite voluntary poverty where some people refuse to work and provide for their needs. They should learn the work ethic from the ants. Apostle Paul in the bible said that if someone won't work, don't give him food.

Situational or conditional poverty is the poverty that nobody can prevent. When the war came in the city people left their homes with every important thing and moved to save their live. They left their business, animals, and goods of all kind. We can see that the rich man can become a poor man. In this overthrow of normal life, we have the thieves who can ruin you overnight. With the same idea, we have drought, flood, and chronic diseases.

Hereditary or generational poverty is the kind of poverty which goes from one generation to another from grandparents to parents and the children. The main cause here is the fact that the family accepts this as inevitability, bad luck, and do not react to remedy the situation. The family does not have the courage or wherewithal to change the situation.

And at the end we have the worst which is structural poverty.

We call it structural poverty because there are structural organization,

global order structures that keep other countries bent over in poverty. For example, we have the United States. The United States has the partnership with the poor countries for fifty years now and, the poor countries are getting poorer and the rich countries are getting richer. The current solutions are not working.

We have an attempted solution for these four types of poverty. One of the solutions is to have critical

awareness and make a decision to change. Another is the United States can revolutionize the world without violating the poor furthermore, review the quality of the relationship and stop abuse altogether.

W.H.O. defined poverty as a condition characterized by deprivation of basic necessities (water, electricity, health, and education). Unfortunately, this is where we are in black Africa particularly in Cameroon.

## THE KITCHEN IS MY FAVORITE SPACE

By Perresse T.

In my childhood I always see my mom in the kitchen and, in my culture, the girls stay in the kitchen with their mother. Maybe it is the reason that I am happy to be there. The position of the kitchen here is different than with my home country. There we have the living room and the other door at the end of corridor which leads to the kitchen outside the house. Here in the appartement, the kitchen is in the same area with the living room. However, I still love the kitchen whatever the place is whether outside or inside it reminds me of my favorite space. For now, I have a lot of cabinets where I can put what I want. And, it is easy for me to find what I search for. My stove is electric and I don't have problems with the light going out.

I have a big brown dinner table on top of the carpet of living room. A big black refrigerator to the right side of stove and microwave on the left side. The dish washer occupies one of the multiple cupboards. This machine helps me to save time and I take advantage to sweep the table and mop the floor or do other things. I can take a good nap during the time the dish washer is doing its job. I am so happy to cook and serve food to the people. I really appreciate it when my family asks me what is the menu for today. Preparing food is my area of expertise. I am so glad when my guest tells me that my food tastes good. I think that one day I can open a fast-food restaurant.

# MY DRIVER'S LICENSE

By Shazia H.



*My name is Shazia H., and I am originally from India. I am an enthusiastic foodie. So, when I came to United States, I had to face many difficulties especially in the communications field. Whenever I wanted to explore the Frederick city, communication was becoming the obstacle in my way. During the first six to eight months were very tough for me I was losing my confidence and then I came to know about Frederick Literacy Council through internet search. I attended many conversations classes, one civic class and also one writing class. Thanks to all the very helpful and nice teachers of the Literacy Council to boost by my confidence level. The journey of learning was very beautiful and very helpful. Now I feel more energetic and confident and have no difficulties in communicating with the natives. Once again thank you so much to all the lovely and very caring teachers of Frederick Literacy Council.*

This is the story about my experiences and process of getting my driver license. When I came to the U.S., the first thing I was eager to do was to learn how to drive a car. So, after five months, I went to the MVA (Motor Vehicle Administration) with all the documents of my Maryland proof of residency. The lady at the counter explained to me all the process and steps of getting driver's license and gave me a thin book for the knowledge test preparation.

Step 1. After one week, I went to the M.V.A. to take the written test and passed at the very first attempt, in which I had to answer 22 correct answers out of 25 questions within 15 minutes. The M.V..A employee gave me a learner's permit.

Step 2. I enrolled in 40 hours of classes, which included 6 hours of driving lessons with the Gregg Driving School and paid \$500 fee. After completing 34 hours of driving classroom lesson, I made an appointment for driving lesson. Miss Elina was my instructor. She drove me to the Harry Groves Stadium parking lot and parked the car. Then she came out from the car and told me to sit on the driver's seat and for me to start to drive. It was my first time in my whole life that I sat on the driver seat. I sat in the seat and was looking downwards, Elina asked, "Why are you looking downwards?" I answered her with shyness, "I am trying to sort out which one is the gas pedal and which one

is the brake pedal." She looked at me with a very surprised face, I never felt so much embarrassment in my life. But Miss Elina was a very polite instructor. She taught me well. She gave me a very useful tip that, "Whenever you make an appointment for a road test, before that you should go to the test area site and watch the students who were taking the test. It will help you to build the confidence and to understand the process."

Step 3. After 40 hours of classes, I had to have 60 hours of driving experiences. In the mean time I could not drive the car alone, so I had to drive accompanied with a driver with at least 3 years' experience. So, in that case my husband helped me. He had five years' experience. Meanwhile I went 6-7 times to the test area and watched the process. I noticed that out of 5 instructors there was a big, tall instructor who was very strict. He very rarely passed the students.

Step 4. I made the road test appointment. When I went to M.V.A. for the road test, the lady on the

counter gave me a token and asked me to pull my car to testing site area and wait for my instructor. I pulled my car to the site and had been waiting for the instructor, after 5 minutes, I saw the same strict guy was coming to my car. I became very nervous and thought, "Today is not my lucky day!" He opened the passenger side door and sat on the passenger seat and said, "Hi! My name is Kevin and for today I am your instructor." Then he asked me to proceed. That day I failed, because of my fear of Kevin or my lack of practicing. I am not sure. Anyway, almost after six months I retok my road test exam. This time I practiced well and gained good driving experience. So, I went to the M.V.A. on the test day and as usual I pulled the car up to the test area and waited for my instructor. It was my destiny that Kevin was again my instructor that day. But I did well and passed the exam, hooray! I got my driver license that day. So, this was my journey to getting a driver license. I am very thrilled and excited to be a driver in the U.S.



# A SENSE OF HUMOR

By Silvia M.

## The many faces of



Silvia

The cat “cataplums” (splashes) in the water and no more meow, meow. That is the answer in Spanish to the question: Do you know how to say in English “The cat fell in the water and drowned” (El gato se cayó al agua y se ahogó) and the sound of laughter in Spanish would be “jajaja” similar to the English “Hahaha” As you can see the sense of humor varies depending on languages used.

Now that I can speak English, I question to myself about a topic that affects immigrants a great deal, and that is the language of humor. I wonder if there is a big difference between how we share a sense of humor and laugh in different languages. I am a native Spanish speaker, and asked if there really is much difference between the sense

of humor in English versus Spanish? As I start the process of learning the English language, I can say that I am convinced that humor is a universal language. There will always be ways to laugh with other friends, coworkers, or family members whether or not we share the same language, because we will always have a path to shared experiences. A good sense of humor is an expression of happiness, and this is the best sense of humor “when it says less and suggests a lot.” This is what works for me in understanding English humor.

Now, I feel bilingual in English and Spanish and there is no secret that the structure of the language also sets the parameters for how we structure our thinking. But I am not sure if it affects what makes me laugh at any given moment. Is there a dominant side at the moment that I make a joke in English? Sometimes the way to say a joke in English for me is a straight argument rather than when I said a joke in Spanish. In Spanish I prefer to captivate attention, continuing dialogue in circular thoughts until I capture the listener until then, I conclude the idea after a few minutes. In addition, the difference in structure of the languages made me think that English sentences are shorter, and pack more meaning into fewer words, which can make the final line of a joke more explosive. The grammatical structure of Spanish is different because it requires longer circular sentences, meaning the listener would have more patience

waiting for that final line of the joke without problem listeners can wait for minutes at the end of a joke.

The importance of humor in the acquisition of a second language for learners includes, among other elements, transmitting a culture, it gives us details about pronunciation and it also helps to transmit joy. However, we must keep in mind that jokes are sometimes translatable from one language to another, however it is not always possible to do so. Laughter unites us, helps us release stress, connects us with joy and confidence. I deal with light joke about weather, animals or about daily life or beliefs. I remember to laugh when I learned a few jokes that are not my creation, but I share in this essay hoping that you can share with your friends:

- How the dogs bark in English? "roof-roof" and in Spanish? "gua-gua".
- Why won't the elephant use the computer? He's afraid of the mouse
- How do hens stay fit? They do "egg-ercise"
- Which are the stronger days of the week? Saturday and Sunday. The rest are weekdays
- Why is six afraid of seven? ... Because 7 ATE 9!
- What does one wall say to the other wall? Meet you at the corner!
- What did the football coach say to the broken vending machine? Give me my quarterback!

To conclude, the grammatical structure of Spanish is different because it requires longer circular sentences, meaning the listener would have more patience waiting for that final line of the joke without problem, in fact Spanish listeners can wait for many minutes for the end of a joke. I have the tendency to laugh and make jokes and have a good sense of humor more in Spanish than in English. However, no matter in which idiom you laugh or do jokes it activates the limbic system that is the part of the brain that governs emotions. Consequently, a good sense of humor unites me with other people, laughing helps to form bonds that build trust and gives me a friendly and positive outlook. A sense of humor is more than based on the difference of the languages, it is based on how we are. So, keep in mind an old phrase "Laugh and the world laughs with you" share and laugh and make it a habit to spend time with friends and spread joy and relaxation.

# A DREADFUL DAY

By Sidike B.



*My name is Sidike. I am a mother of 6. I came from East Turkestan in June 2015. I had no chance to go to school or online to learn English because of several circumstantial reasons. Although I learned some English back in East Turkestan, I am continuing to study English here. When I first found out about the Literacy Council, they found a tutor, Roni S.. We had an online zoom meeting once a week and I learned a lot from her. Unfortunately, I had to stop taking class because of my busy schedule. The end of last year I noticed the Literacy Council's office arranged a bunch of classes. So, I registered for a writing class to improve my writing skills. I did not realize I could write an essay until getting my teacher Ms. Catherine's good comments. There were improvements in my writing and reading skills last semester by Ms. Catherine correcting my mistakes and her encouragement. I joined the writing class again which started at the end*

*of April in 2022. I have been enjoying our writing and reading class. My goal is to improve my reading, writing, and speaking skills to express myself, to share my experiences of teaching multi languages to kids when they are little, to write about my new instructional ideas, and develop new skills in this challenging life. I like reading, sports, gardening, learning new skills, new knowledge, and spending time with little children. I am also interested in cultivating children's language skills, learning skills, and independent skills. I am super excited that my essay was selected to be published in Reflections: Voices of English Learners, and I appreciate that the Literacy Council offices gave me an opportunity to learn, to write in English, and to publish an essay.*

Life is a mixture of good days, bad days, and horrible days. Everyone experiences the joy of a good life and frustration of a bad life. I try my best to have a good day, but sometimes I have bad days and horrible days.

It was late in the autumn of 2017. My husband went to work, and my two older daughters went to school. I was at home with my two little girls. One of them was a two-month-old baby, the other one was two years old. I was cleaning the house, and needed to go downstairs to the garage to put out clothes which I organized for next summer. I was going to the garage, and my two-year-old daughter was also coming with me. I opened the

door carefully and pushed a box to prevent the door closing suddenly. I was in a rush to put the stuff away while my daughter was playing. I did not notice my daughter was playing at the door until the door slammed shut. We were locked in the garage! I could go outside, but could not go inside the house. My two-month-old baby, who was upstairs, was starting to cry. I was extremely nervous and scared and did not know what to do at that moment. I was thinking everything like "What can I do? Can I call my husband? No, it takes more than one hour for him to get home. What if something happened to my baby who is crying upstairs? Can I call my neighbors? No, they are at work too. How about the window? No, I locked all the windows a few days ago." My heart was broken while my baby was crying and crying, I was crying too. At that point the only thing I could do is call 911. I called 911 immediately, and I told them what was happening while I was crying. The lady who answered my call told me to calm down and asked me to provide

my information. The time was running on, I could hear my baby was still crying upstairs. I asked them to come immediately to save my baby.

I could not bear to hear my baby's crying. In ten minutes, a police officer came, and asked me to describe the case. He said, "I cannot do anything, except kick the door hard to open, and it may break the door." I said, "it is ok if the door breaks, I need my baby." The police officer ran and kicked the door extremely hard and the door opened. I flew upstairs and took my baby in my arms, and hugged her, fed her to make her calm while I was crying. When I got downstairs there were fire marshals who came with their big firefighter trucks. I said, "Thank you for the help." Then they all left. I was happy to have my baby safe and sound. Luckily my husband is a handy man and he fixed the door later after that. A few weeks passed, and there was a bill that came from the fire Marshall office to pay.

I really had an extremely dreadful day I have never forgotten.

# BENEFITS OF TEACHING THE MOTHER LANGUAGE TO CHILDREN AT AN EARLY AGE

By Sidike B.

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Children can get lots of benefits from learning their mother language at an early age. They can easily learn their mother language, communicate with their community people, and understand their cultural heritage if they know their mother language. Also, it is not too difficult for their parents to teach.

When we live abroad, we may feel that we must teach our kids a community language first, that may be English. English is widely spread around the world, so everyone wants their child to be fluent in this international language.

I agree this is true, but we shouldn't dismiss our mother tongue to teach our children. It should be on our top list of languages to learn.

Kids can get lots of benefits from learning their mother language first. Here are some of those benefits:

1. Children can learn easily when they are little.  
Kids are naturally exposed to their mother tongue, if we teach our native language when they are very little, even when the majority language in our community is different. Kids can learn languages from age 3 or 4 if they are ready for communication skills, motor skills, vocabulary skills, and other skills which are related to learning languages. They can learn two or three languages at once after being fluent in their mother language.
2. Children can communicate with their family members.  
They can communicate with their grandfather, grandmother, and cousins who are back home who might not speak English. So, it is very important to teach our mother language to our kids who must keep close connections with their immediate families and extended families.
3. Children can continue to understand their cultural heritage.  
Kids can understand their identity, their ethnicity, their culture, and their language if they fluent in their mother language. It is very difficult to make our kids speak fluently in their native language, but we can teach them to read fluently in it. By reading books in the native language, they are proud of their language, their cultural heritage, and build a high level of self-confidence. If they can successfully learn this first language, they can open the door to learning many languages.
4. Children gain a high enthusiasm for reading.  
Early literacy for children in their native language creates a higher reading enthusiasm. They spend most of their time on reading at an early age and learn lots of basic knowledge, and have a full imagination if they can read at an early age in their native language. Although learning the local

community language like English is important, preserving our native language is essentially as important. It helps kids to preserve the ethnic identity and cultural identity and helps them develop a sense of belonging.

It also helps kids to build a close connection with their community people, especially with their family members, and helps kids to be better thinkers and to be better learners at school.

## MY FAVORITE SPACE

By Sidike B.

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My favorite place at my house is my sunroom because it serves many purposes. It is my office, my classroom, and it is my resting area. My sunroom is well settled with everything that I need. It is very bright, warm, and beautiful with three walls full of windows. My sunroom is simply decorated with a bulletin board where I post emergency numbers, important events for every week, wall charts for kids to learn basic knowledge, variety supplies for crafts, books for reading, and toys for playing. These are the most attractive things to make my kids always go in to my sunroom to make a mess. In addition, there is a table with a storage bench, which I use for keeping blankets and pillows for nap time, and some chairs where my kids and I sit to work, study, and make crafts. Even

though it has been a shared room with my kids, I could quietly work or study, peacefully and think of my life in the morning or midnight when my kids are sleeping. It gives me a lot of energy to work at least one or two hours every day at my sunroom and then to work together with my kids the whole day cooperatively and successfully. I also like to take a nap in my sunroom because it is always warm and comfortable with soft carpet, pillow, and blanket. I can listen to the birds singing in the morning just like putting beautiful music in the CD. I can see the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. In addition, my sunroom is my favorite place because it always helps me to think of new ideas, new skills to make my life meaningful and successful.

# WHAT A FABULOUS INTIMACY

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 hinderance 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 mickle." 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.*

Writing is like a fluent needle,  
which beautifully embroiders  
with diverse-colored threads.

Reading is like a spring  
which doesn't dry out forever.  
So that writing pulls up an endless story.

Besides, it is like discovering hidden treasure  
I can journey into the unknown land  
wearing an ordinary jacket,  
with unfinished embroidery.

At arrival, I can harvest expressions,  
They will be decorated on my elemental jacket  
with my rich experiences.

Finally, I will stitch on my plain coat magnificently,  
sometimes with self-reflection,  
sometimes with repentance.  
It will also be my practice on life.

What a fabulous intimacy they are  
like between needle and thread which will  
embroider a distinct design on my jacket.



# ADJUSTING TO FEAR

By Sungheui B.



Most people experience fear at certain times like during the coronavirus pandemic, because they don't want to get a severe virus, which could kill them. But if they can adjust to new circumstances and control with knowledge, they can hang on during any situation. Also, fear would be getting lesser, and then it will be gone gradually. Now people have learned to live with the threat of the coronavirus. They have made adaptations in their normal lives.

I had some anxiety at first as others. At that time, I had radiation every day when the virus was spreading. My immune system was lower, so I wore a face mask earlier than before the executive order, because my family and friends who live in South Korea worried much for me due to the virus increasing in the country. I also followed preventative measures for myself as much as possible, especially when I came back home from the hospital, which was located

in Baltimore City, having one of the highest infection rates in Maryland.

However, nowadays I am not concerned about much because I am controlling my fear. I visited my general surgeon yesterday to follow up regularly. I could remember my first visiting day. There was a wall-mounted picture which explained about the breast cancer. Although, the main color was pink, but it was very complicated, and an ill-favored picture in my sight. Fear was getting closer to me like a big wave at the moment. What if I was diagnosed with cancer? Because at that time, I never thought cancer would happen to me. Later on, I had several tests such as biopsy, imaging, computer tomography and so on. Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. However, I did not want to continue to be in fear, although I felt like experiencing a strong earthquake. Thus, before my operation, I looked up on the computer searching for information about it. Furthermore, I read a bunch of brochures which described procedures from the hospital. During that period of time, my fear was almost gone, so I was not very afraid about it anymore.

I had been thinking about the subject for my essay before visiting the doctor's office. Fortunately, when I saw the picture, my brain clicked and I realized how I had adjusted, and how I had overcome those hurdles. It was a strong enough feeling to evoke a special memory for me.

I pray that the coronavirus pandemic

will be gone soon, although many of the experts predict that it might be with us a long time. However, I hope everybody will adapt their lives to the

new normal. Therefore, they can look on the bright side in order to escape from the fear.

## FLOURISHING FROM FAILURE

By Sungheui B.

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Though I don't have many achievements, wealth, or health,  
I have something that others don't have.  
I have a unique love that others couldn't have,

I can grasp such a treasure from you.  
To look for another me.  
Because you turn my pain into gold.

Who wants to better understand others?  
Who wants to better concede to others?  
Who wants to better comfort others,  
with truth, faith, and all my heart?

Another me is trembling still inside,  
but who has gained a lot from you,  
which cannot be exchanged for any value.  
I am growing little by little.

I am flourishing all the time  
On the way back from any failure.

# MY FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO GHANA

By Theosebia Q.



*I am Theo, and I am a reserved and interesting person. I am one of a kind. My goal is to get my GED so I can have new possibilities and soar to new heights in life. My experience with the Literacy Council so far has been quite new and different. Their approach to teaching is very unique and a new style.*

I went to Ghana for the very first time when I was eleven years old. It was a new and different experience. I was very nervous about what Ghana would be like. Not too long after, I was told that my ticket was bought and booked. To my amazement, my Mum

also was going with me to Ghana.

Later on, we started packing our luggage. After that, we boarded the plane and said goodbye to our family, and off we went.

When we finally arrived in Ghana, we were welcomed by my Uncle Steven. Later on, we took a cab and went down to my Auntie's house. We greeted each other and people came around to help put our belongings in our rooms.

Shortly after, we were asked to come over for dinner. During the dinner, we had long discussions. Afterwards, we went to the bathroom to brush our teeth and take our showers.

The next day, we woke up in the morning to have morning devotion. My mum sent my cousin to run errands and look for a school for me to start to attend. He took me to Lorraine School in Dansoman. They made me take entrance exams before I was allowed to enroll in the school. Next, they bought all the necessary items and supplies to bring to the school.

I started classes and made new friends. Eventually, I got settled down and became very comfortable. My time in Ghana had its highs and lows, but overall, it was pretty okay.

# POOR MAN'S SOUP

By Y R.



*My thanks to Ms. Catherine and to the Literacy Council for their dedication in helping the people who need to learn English, so that we blend in and perform better in society. It is my sincere hope that I could do the same, and follow in their footsteps by helping others.*

A bowl of soup comes to my mind when I think about my travel in Ireland. Unlike people in many big cities, I found people in Ireland were kind and peaceful, despite sometimes violent political conflict in the Northern part of Ireland at the time.

I once lived in London for a semester of cultural study many years ago. Our class went to see plays almost every night, took a couple of field trips per week, and learned about poets and writers of the past, many from Ireland. I read "A Modest Proposal" by Johnathan Swift and "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" by Yeats, which stayed in my mind from earlier days. When I decided to visit Ireland for a week of backpacking

during a break, a friend wanted to join me. We took a ferry from London to Dublin. After a couple of days visiting museums and around the city of Dublin, I wanted to explore the countryside of Ireland starting from the south. But my friend said that she needed to leave Ireland because she spent all her money buying many glass items for gifts to send home. After her departure, I headed down south on a bus. I stopped by Waterford in Kilkenny where I was showered by seawater as waves hit the walls of the lighthouse ruins. There were many ruins of castles and churches carrying heavy crosses on their heads and decorated only with cobwebs in County Kerry. It also rained often, which kept the hills green. I was usually under an umbrella walking into guesthouses toward the evenings.

Then, I found out that I could go to Northern Ireland on a train. When I got on the train, I remembered the movie "The Great Train Robbery," which was made in Ireland by Michael Crichton. I knew this because I read his autobiography with my son when he was younger. We talked about the monster Michael created growing up. He explained extensively in detail about his personal search and struggles by traveling and visiting psychics, mediums, tarot readers, and fortune tellers every evening, even during the time he was making this movie. In the book, Michael was living only with his mother, while his father served in the military. Whenever his father came home on leave, he took

Michael's mother away from him. Michael got upset so he created a monster to fight for him. Ironically, this monster turned against him too, when he became an adult. The tragedy was that Michael didn't know he was fighting against his own creation, until very late in his life. When he finally came to this realization, it was easier for him to get rid of the monster. He wrote about it in the second part of the same book before he died. I wondered for a moment, if I was riding the same train.

The train I was riding in stopped in Belfast at one point where everyone got off. I followed the crowd, thinking that was the last stop. When I approached the main street behind the crowds, I heard "bang, bang, bang," like firecrackers. Suddenly, people started to run and disappeared into the alleys dropping their possessions, pushing and turning over the tables of street merchants, and kicking the items that were spread on sheets for display. I was standing there dumbfounded not knowing what was going on. Then, there was no one, an empty street, only shoes thrown here and there, like in a war zone on TV. After a while, people started to come out and resumed their activities as if nothing had happened. Apparently, this type of incident was common in Northern Ireland at the time.

It was on a cold rainy day in the fall, when I arrived at the unfamiliar destination, and I wanted some comfort food. I walked into an alley to find a restaurant. An elderly gentleman I was walking by uttered to himself as he was opening the door to enter, "This is the best place for a good bowl

of soup on days like today!" I followed him in, and saw the steam flowing out from a large pot with a huge spoon dipped in it. I asked for a bowl of soup and gazed down to survey the place. It was very small, like a cozy kitchen in a family house, with a crowd of less than ten people talking to each other, some seated some standing. I too was standing with a bowl of soup in one hand, and a slice of bread in the other. Then, someone yielded a seat to me, which I accepted humbly. I felt safe with the people in the restaurant that reminded me of home. Momentarily, I was a member of a large family, passively listening to their noisy conversations about their lives of the day. Strangely, I can still feel what I felt then, remembering that place and the people like a photograph, but not the words I exchanged with them. The soup was heavenly; wholesome, a perfect healing remedy for my body and soul.

It was dark and still rainy when I came out from the restaurant, and I needed to find a place to sleep for the night. Luckily, I didn't have to walk very far to see a guest house with a sign, "not occupied." I was invited in and soon after another guest, their regular, arrived. We sat together, the lady owner and her three young children in their living room, listening to the rain dripping through the roof into well-placed buckets, pots, and bowls. The children were having fun: asking me questions, chattering between themselves, and laughing away with everyone. In the morning, we all ate breakfast together, which the lady had made of eggs, potatoes, and sausages. When the time came for me

to leave for Innisfree in Sligo County, they told me that there was no public transportation to Innisfree because the tourist season was over. I was willing to hitchhike, but no one would go to that direction during the off season, they said. Then other guest offered to give me a ride back down to the south. I was disappointed that my travel in the Northern Ireland was over at that point. I thanked the driver for the ride, and he thanked me back for the company.

Upon returning home to the U.S.A., I talked with an Irish shop keeper

about that special bowl of soup I ate in Ireland. He laughed out loud, and said, "You had poor man's soup!" Yes, that "poor man's soup" was the very best soup I've ever had. It was on a cold day in the fall, when a bowl of soup was what I needed most at the time. I still can taste that bowl of soup when I think about the day, I was in Northern Ireland so many years ago.

\*I found a line from Encyclopedia.com that said, Yeats's poem was influenced by his reading of Thoreau's "Walden Pond" of 1854.

### **The Lake Isle of Innisfree,**

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

—William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

# THE LANGUAGE CALLED ENGLISH

By Y R.

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We were wanderers  
from around the world  
met with strangers' conscious of each other  
in the class of the language called English.

We are here to learn English,  
for there is not much, not much  
we can do without learning  
the language called English.

The English language  
cannot be mastered, I tell  
myself when I am discouraged.  
But there is not much, not much  
I can do without learning to speak  
the language called English.

I sometimes remind myself  
that I am a foreigner after all, and try  
to live with what I can, without feeling  
too guilty in the language called English.

Grammatical errors  
my awkwardness in speech  
and writing is clearly obvious and  
foreign in the language called English.

Just another day,  
I wrote to a friend "Mostly bug eaten,"  
but "Mostly bugs were eaten" was sent.  
Erroneously auto corrected by the  
computer in the language called English.

Yet,  
many have survived  
many have become successful  
many more ought to be known.  
Knowing that, I am glad to keep up  
with learning the language called English

Today,  
we have come to be, not just a class  
but a community of friendship in a learner's club,  
unlike any other, in a class for the language called English.



# PINEAPPLE CHICHA

By Zuleima A.



*I am Zuleima, mother of three daughters ages 5, 9 and 15. I am a doctor in my country Colombia. Furthermore, I always love looking for the simplest ways to lead a healthy life, especially with natural food, which provides what our body needs to prevent diseases. I like to cook and prepare healthy recipes, as well as encourage physical exercise, healthy routines and managing emotions, as pillars of good health.*

It is a very healthy drink, dating back to our indigenous ancestors, who

used typical foods of the region. It is prepared with 1 cup of rice, 4 cups of water, 1 cup of pineapple, 2 cups of previously washed pineapple peel, half a cup of sugar, cinnamon and cloves.

You put everything in a pot over low heat and let it boil. When it is cold, place it in a glass container, cover it and leave it fermenting outside the refrigerator for 3 or 4 days. The bacteria consume the sugar and convert it into alcohol. The more days it is left to ferment, the stronger its flavor will be and the healthier it will be. Since it provides beneficial bacteria for our intestinal flora, they are homemade probiotics, and it is part of the many ferments that we have taken from our ancestors as a natural option to counteract the consumption of industrialized products that damage the normal bacterial flora of our body, making us more susceptible to disease.

I do it every week and my daughters love it, but for them, I give them a smaller dose every day.

# MUSIC OF MY LAND

By Zuleima A.

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My favorite singer is called Carlos Vives. He is from the Colombian coast, and his songs combine the folklore of the people of the Colombian coast. When you listen to this music, it makes you want to dance and his lyrics speak of love and the good customs of my land. His musical group uses instruments such as flutes, accordion, drums and trumpets, making a combination of interesting rhythms.

Recently, he was part of the singers of the movie “Encanto” that shows many aspects of the different cultures of Colombia. Definitely when you listen to Carlos Vives, you get an idea of what Colombia is like.

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# Literacy *lifts* Lives