

Reflections

Voices of English Learners

Sixth Edition, 2023



OUR MISSION

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

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.

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.



frederickliteracy.org

Literacy *lifts* Lives

FOREWORD

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. The Literacy Council's mission is to provide Frederick County adults with pathways to essential literacy skills.

When someone masters English speaking and writing, they avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings and embarrassing moments. More importantly, they gain new confidence in English speaking and writing. They meet new friends with shared values and interests. Opportunities become endless.

Our students' learning begins with a united effort between our adult learners, volunteer tutors, and staff. They are taught to speak and write English correctly with love and respect. With good intentions in speaking and writing, they begin to attract abundant opportunities to learn and grow. They discover how to advance in their career. They find ways to grow a business in profitable ways. They realize the true power of human interaction. They learn to understand the actual value of effective communication. They know that when you speak with purpose and write with power, you make a positive influence. More importantly, they are creating new prosperity for themselves and others.

The authors of the stories on the following pages will have you seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary, describing places, people, and interactions in almost lyrical prose. Each story offers unique opportunities for us, the reader, to practice the "L Words, words which hold equal measure of challenge and opportunity... language, listening, loving, living, and learning."

I am proud of our students. I am proud of our tutors and our staff.



Sharon Jacko, 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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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 sixth edition! Its continued success comes from the commitment of our students to study of the English language and development of a sense of belonging in a new community. Our students have started their lives over again in Frederick County, Maryland, and have overcome amazing 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 such as volunteer work. The stories in *Reflections* originate from the minds and hearts of our student body and their perspectives on life in general. Submission is open to all the adult learners of the Literacy Council and we are always amazed at the excellence of writing we are fortunate to publish in this magazine at many levels of language acquisition.

Most of the pieces came from the Writing Classes that we had online this past three semesters. Their personal revelations reveal our students in the process of building bridges from their unique cultural perspectives on the new American culture that they have adopted. In these writings, students share their favorite foods, their sense of humor, their travel experiences, fictional pieces, and their personal memories. The students' work covers a wide variety of themes which include breaking barriers, solving problems, and adjusting to fear.

This has been an exciting year as we celebrate the Literacy Council's 60th Anniversary of serving Frederick County residents and improving the lives of our students through enhancing their educational experiences. We have increased the number of classes we offer and reached a wide range of student needs through our Workplace Literacy Program and in the community schools through our Parent Literacy Program, in addition to our group tutoring sessions and one-to-one tutoring – our original model.

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

We would like to invite those of you who are new readers of the magazine and students of the Literacy Council to submit your stories for *Reflections* 2024. 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 support of the Literacy Council of Frederick County's Board of Directors, President Sharon Jacko and Immediate Past President Geordie Wilson, Executive Director Laurie Fisher, Program Manager Nancy Gibbons, and our sponsors, Curious Iguana, John and Jane Ketchem, the Lapera-Holler Team, Patriot Federal Credit Union – and also our graphic designer Betsy Maymon, editor Catherine Coundjeris, co-founding editor Julie Heifetz, first reader Catherine Cox, our dedicated tutors, and our contributing students. *Reflections: Voices of English Learners* is produced by Strategic Factory with photography provided by our students.

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MY THREE COUSINS' STORY

by Aesha M.



I have been with the Literacy Council for at least two years. I am with the Literacy Council because I want to pass my GED. I like to make jewelry (especially flowers out of beads), cook any type of food, and listen to Hindi music. My biggest goal is to become a nurse, ideally a registered nurse (RN).

I had two cousins who were girls. We lived in the same house, and our world was so different that we had different thoughts from other people. For example, we wanted to go to school, but we didn't think that going to school was terrible for girls. We thought that anyone who could go to school were fortunate, but our responsibility was different than that, and we learned

how to cook and became good wives. Every morning in summer, we went to the mountains to collect flowers, then played with the flowers and gave them to each other.

We have always had the dream of freedom. One of my cousins pretended to be a doctor. No one could hear our voices every night; we went to bed and wished for a free life. But unfortunately, we didn't get any right to go to school. We were wishing to dance outside with other children and girls and go to school. We always wished other girls were also free. My older cousin always told me so, and she said, "I want to be free from this, but I don't know how I will be free from this nonsense."

We put on makeup, wore high heels, and walked in front of the mirror. We laughed about who was most beautiful and who was not attractive. It was a good feeling for us. At that moment, we forgot about every evil, awful thing that was happening around us. Our childhood was terrible for us, but one thing was perfect; we loved each other. We were best friends. We shared everything with each other. We were in a difficult situation, but we always made ourselves happy. Then, one day came, and we were separated from each other I don't know where they went. I am always dreaming about them. I will meet them again some day.

MISSION OF PEACE IN HAITI

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.

Dedicated to my brothers and sisters of the United Nations, members of the Blue Helmets who participate in peace missions around the world.

In the year 2006, I was working in the Army of Perú's Operations and Protection Battalion, where I began training to apply for the Peruvian contingent #4, which would participate in the United Nations Blue Helmet Mission in Haiti. I was selected in February of 2006 to undergo training for four months and be ready to travel in June of the same year. In June,

204 soldiers from the Armed Forces of Perú gathered, and we already knew the day and time when we would begin our mission in Haiti.

The day to depart arrived, a Saturday on June 15th, and we all gathered at Group #8, one of the airbases of the Armed Forces of Perú. At 8:00 p.m., we began to board the Air Force plane, the mighty KC-130H Hercules. The aircraft's engines roared to life, and all the soldiers were silent, thinking about the journey's destination and our families.

Finally, at 10:00 p.m., the plane took off, and we disappeared from each other's sight. From the heights, we spotted the yellow lights of the city of Lima. I slept for almost 2 hours until the crew informed us that we were in the midst of a storm. In a few minutes, lightning struck the plane, shaking the giant Hercules and plunging it into complete darkness. The turboprop engines shut down and crew members began to cry out "Oh my God" and other exclamations. After a few minutes of uncertainty, we all panicked.

That's when the Air Force captain, who was acting as a flight attendant in the darkness, reassured us. At that moment, a miracle occurred in the air: the engines restarted, the lights came back on, and we were told that we would land in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to repair the damage caused by the lightning. We spent at least three hours in Guayaquil, and then we continued our journey to Barranquilla, Colombia, where they completed the plane's repair. Finally, we resumed our journey

at 6:00 a.m. with the final destination of Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Upon arriving at 10:00 a.m., we were all astonished by the city's panorama. We were struck by the zinc-sheet houses, old cars, the unpleasant smell of sewage, and the lack of road signs. Cars circulated without respecting any traffic rules, creating long queues of two to three kilometers. When we left the airport, we noticed that the majority of the population was of African descent.

When we arrived at the military base in Port-au-Prince, we were welcomed by General William Zapata, who was giving instructions on the military operations of the Peruvian Military Base. That's when I saw the Air Force captain, who had been the pilot of the Hercules plane that transported us to Haiti. He began to describe what happened on the plane during the

storm. He explained that when the lights went out, three of the plane's engines also went out, and the pilot had to glide the aircraft due to the lack of engine response. He looked at all of us, made a hugging gesture, and told us that we were in that place thanks to a miracle and that miracles exist.

"It was a journey filled with challenges and moments of uncertainty, but we reached our destination. Looking back on that day, I feel deep gratitude for life and for believing in miracles. This episode reminded us of the fragility of existence and the importance of cherishing each day. Today, I share this story not just as a memory but as a reminder of the valuable lesson we learned in the turbulent skies of that day: "That life is a precious gift, and sometimes, miracles are closer than we imagine."

PLANTS FROM MARS

Bandee W.



I am Bandee W. from S. Korea. I live in Frederick with my family. I am glad that I found the Literacy Council in Frederick and met wonderful teachers and friends. The teachers in Literacy Council are dedicated volunteers who serve adult students with their literacy skills. They have many options to choose from such as one-to-one tutorials or classes with many students. After a short placement test, they place you according to your needs. You can not only learn English but also make friends from all over the world at the Literacy Council. I will continue to take classes and want to give back someday. Finally, I want to thank all the teachers, volunteers, donors, and staffs for impacting other people's lives through the gift of literacy.

Knowing how to grow your plants is a talent I believe. My mother knows how to take care of plants. Any plants in her hands thrive. She brought the dead plant that someone threw away at the dumpster to her home and

made it alive again. I gave her the plants that I killed and she brought them back to life again. But plants are complete aliens from another planet to me. I totally don't understand what they are saying.

I always envy those people who can keep their plants thriving. I asked them what was their secret, and I did what they did. I watered them according to the directions. I put them near the sunlight, so they can have a plenty of light. I wiped dust off the leaves, so they could breathe better. I took them outside for fresh air. I talked to them and told them that they were beautiful. But no luck! No matter what I do they die. My friends said that watch them closely because they will tell you and show you what they need. But they are speaking Martian to me, so I gave up.

Last winter my friend gave me a plant as a gift. I hesitated to accept it because I knew that I was going to kill it. I wished that they knew by now that I was not good at plants. It was a small succulent plant. I was thinking about what to do with it. Maybe I could give it to someone. Or should I try again even though I know what the result will be? While I was still thinking, my son took it to his room. After that, I forgot about it.

Every morning I go to my son's room to open the blinds and do a little cleaning. I checked the plant from time to time. It didn't die yet after a couple of weeks maybe because it was a succulent plant whose leaves contain some water.

Then one morning I went to my

son's room. I saw it bloomed. One small yellow flower was wide open. It was such a joy to see the flower. I felt like finally I am communicating with this Martian for the first time. How

amazing! I said to the flower that she made my day. Now I know why people grow plants. After all, I can grow the plants from Mars with my green thumb!

WOOF, WOOF!

By Bandee W.

Have you ever wondered what dogs are saying to you when they are barking at you? If they could speak a human language, what would they say? Even though I don't own a dog, I know that dogs can communicate well with us by watching my neighbors' dogs, viewing documentaries about dogs, and reading books about dogs.

Dogs can communicate with us by barking. First, there are alert barks. They are repeated and high pitched. They are saying "Get away from me or I will bite you." Those barks are aggressive and many times paired with showing the teeth.

Second, there are happy barks. They are short and cheerful. My neighbor's dog, Fin, always gives me one "woof." He is saying "hi or hello." If I pretend not to hear him, he goes another "woof." These also can be let's play barks. They are saying catch me if you can. One time I played hide and seek with him. When I hid, he barked at me saying, "where are you?" When I showed up, he barked at me again, "there you are!"

Third, there are serious barks when they are in pain. Those are whimpers, whines, screaming, and all very serious

sounds. These should alarm the owners and be addressed urgently and immediately.

Dogs can communicate with us through their body language. When dogs are yawning, looking away, or lifting their paws, these are calming signals. Another neighbor's dog, Max, looks at me wagging his tail gently without barking when I say "hi" to him. If I come closer to him and bend down my body, he gives his paw to my hand. He is always calm and content.

When dogs are happy, they are relaxed and they might show their belly for the belly rub. Their tails are sweeping mid-level; they are not high stiff wagging which is the sign of aggression. On the other hand, when dogs are fearful or anxious, they are panting, looking in many directions, and might refuse to eat.

People say that dogs are man's best friend. They have been with us ever since our humans landed on earth. I hope that we can communicate better with them by paying more attention and giving more love to them because we need them as much as they need us.

LOVES ME, LOVES ME NOT

By Bandee W.

Have you ever bought flowers for your loved ones? I am sure you have. Then when was the last time you bought yourself flowers if you ever did? Today I want to introduce a song by Miley Cyrus. The title is "Flowers."

This song talks about how I can be the best friend to myself. It looks like the writer wrote this song after she broke up with her boyfriend. But it has a point. The song says that I can buy myself flowers, talk to myself for hours, and I can love myself better than you can.

I think it is so true that I can love, understand, and know myself more than anyone can. But in reality, it may not be true. We constantly think about what other people think about ourselves. But we don't think much about how I see myself or how I like myself. Many times, I could not think about what I wanted in my life because

I had to put my kids and my family first before myself all the time. I am not used to thinking about myself first even though my kids are all grown up now. I thought it was the right thing to sacrifice myself because I am a mom. I was happy to give everything to my family, but I could not deny that something was missing.

Last year my daughter went to college. My nest was not full anymore. It was half empty. I realized my baby has big wings to fly. I was happy and sad at the same time. Then, I thought about myself and my life. I bought flowers for myself. I talked to myself; "I did a wonderful job, I worked hard, and I am the champion in my life." So, I gave myself flowers. I thanked myself and said I love myself.

Today why don't you buy flowers for yourself? Give yourself a big hug and say, "I love myself."

THE LAST THREE YEARS

By Ching L.



I was fortunate to be a part of the Literacy Council for a couple of months last year, and it has been a very rewarding experience. Not only have I had the chance to enhance my language skills, but I have also had great connections with the teacher and my classmates. The supportive environment allowed me to communicate freely in English, which has been improving my grammar and fluency. My confidence has grown, and I have set achievable goals for myself. I am eager to learn more about English no matter inside of the class or outside of class. Thank you to the Literacy Council, where I can further develop my abilities and foster a deeper understanding of different cultures through language.

In the past two to three years Covid has been affecting everybody's daily life. People keep their distance from other people due to the virus, this is a very sad thing in these few years. But during this time, I am very lucky to find my roots for myself. I have found

more reasons why I want to stay in the United States.

It is human nature that people want to talk to those who speak the same language or have similar background because it is easier. During the time of Covid, I have my two boys with me and their ages are two and four. I am lucky at the time that they are not of school age yet, but the difficult part is I try to entertain and educate them during the time I have, so my kids can be continually growing in a normal environment. On the internet, I have found 3 other moms who were in the same situation. We all spoke the same language; our ages are close and most importantly our kids are all close in age. So, a group of 3 moms and 7 kids were formed during this covid time.

We shared our parenting experiences, cooked hometown food together, and covered each other when it was needed. Even though we were in a time of social distance, we enhanced each other's life when we were together. It is like a net catching you when you are falling down,

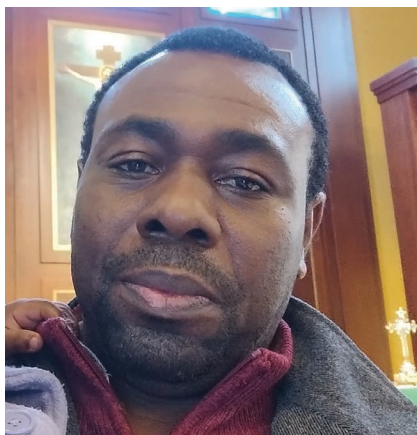
knowing there are other people who have the same experience as you; I am not alone. Also, you put your hand out to help others and make yourself feel good too.

Now, most of the kids in the group were of school age. Our moms started to rebuild their new regular life, and we did not hang out together as much as we did during the Covid times.

But we know and I know that there is somebody just like me, having a similar experience and working hard to be parents, trying to fit in this new country and different society. I think this is part of the beauty of the United States. Everybody from different backgrounds finds their own group. Eventually, every group stirs into one big pot: the United States.

MY COMPUTER GIFT

By Emmanuel B.



I am a Cameroonian who arrived in the United States approximately 7 months ago. My academic background is a bit atypical because I started with biochemistry then one day, I decided to go into computer science. Thanks to this last training, I was able to teach for almost ten years as a computer teacher in several private high schools in Douala in Cameroon. It was with devotion and commitment. Teaching is a noble job and I am proud to have contributed to the education of Cameroonian youth. I

am convinced that my integration in this country will go through the language. The Literacy Council helps me in this direction. This is an opportunity to thank all the staff for their professionalism. My goals are to be able to communicate in English, to read well and to write what I think. I am more tempted for a short academic training in computer science or to do certifications. I remain ambitious and determined because my future will depend on the efforts made today.

My first computer makes me think of my brother Etienne who lives in Texas. It was a new TOSHIBA computer, gray color, with the following characteristics: processor 2.5GHz, Ram DDR 16GB, hard drive disk 500 GB, Wi-Fi connection and the operating system was Windows 8. It was very speedy. I was a new student in IT and my brother was new to the USA. Although his situation was challenging, he bought me a computer. I appreciated his action, and I still remember him every time when I am working with that computer.

NKUI MY FAVORITE FOOD

By Emmanuel B.



Nkui is a traditional dish in western Cameroon. It is a sticky sauce made from the bark of a plant called *Triumfetta pentandra*, seasoned with several local condiments (ngachu'u, Tumteu, ngeudjo'o, lemm, a little

limestone, salt and much more) and served with corn couscous. To cook the Nkui, we extract the bark of the Nkui plant, wash and put it into hot water for about an hour. After that crushing them with our hands in that water to have a sticky sauce. Then, we season the sticky sauce with the Nkui spices mix (the combination of different local condiments), limestone, chili and salt. Finally, we beat them together thoroughly with our hands until we get a homogeneous mixture. It is eaten by hand because the sauce is so sticky that no utensil can catch it. I don't have a favorite occasion to eat it, but it is mostly cooked to feed mothers after birth. I like Nkui so much because it has the benefit of stimulating appetite and facilitating digestion.

DOUALA

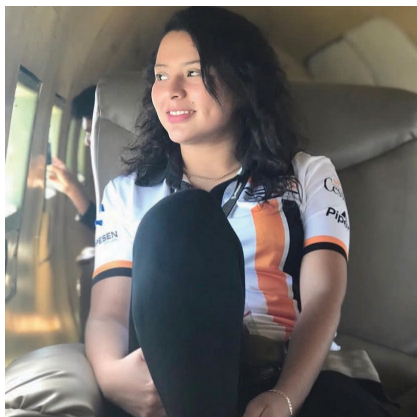
By Emmanuel B.

I remember growing up in Douala, one city of Cameroon which is situated in central Africa. Douala is a coastal city in southwest Cameroon. It is the largest city in Cameroon and its economic capital. It is also the capital of Cameroon's Littoral Region. The climate of Douala is tropical with a dry season from December to February and a long

rainy season from March to November, with very heavy rains from June to October. Douala is a cosmopolitan city. One of the peculiarities of Douala is the traffic jams at the major intersections. There, I taught computer science in high school. In Douala, I feel good because it contains all the landmark of my life.

THE KEY CHARM: A LITTLE PART OF THEM

By Fatima V.



Hello dear reader.

I am Fátima, I am a Salvadoran pilot, lover of the skies and in love with the small miracles that life hides. I love animals and nature, I am passionate about exploring the world and different cultures. I came to the USA with a basic level of English, that changed my personality a lot and I went from being an extrovert to an introvert, but luckily, I found the Literacy Council of Frederick and they helped me a lot. I found a place where I feel confident enough to commit mistakes and learn about my mistakes. My teachers are kind and they always make me feel smarter in every class, with their help I can have conversations and write about myself feeling confident. I improved my English very well, and finally, I was able to be extrovert again but in a new language. Thanks to them I was also able to resume my career and fly. The Literacy Council of Frederick was one of the best choices I ever made, and

I will always be grateful to them and all they did for me. I say goodbye thanking you dear Reader for supporting this project that gives foreigners the wings we need to take flight to our dreams.

It was January or February on 2021, when my best friends traveled to take a training, and one of them brought me a key ring. I usually collect key charms unconsciously, so I bought it with me, but I never used it. However, this key charm was special and I used it with my documents every day.

It reminded me of my classmates for a while, and they knew that I missed them so much, so they said to me: “we can’t be with you forever, but now you have a little part of us with this key charm.”



The key charm is from the Air and Space Museum, and is made from a beautiful silver stainless steel with a lot of details. It is a ring with a gyroscope dice, and has different designs on its surface such as an astronaut, a rocket,

a satellite, a moon, an airplane, and letters that spell NASA together.

When they gave me the key charm, it was special, but now it is even more special than when they first gave it to me. They passed away over 1 year ago in an aircraft accident, and I miss them a lot every day. They were my cheerleaders in all my life. When I wasn't sure to make something or

I was afraid, they always encouraged me and supported me. I am deeply grateful for everything I learned from them. Actually, I can't talk to them but when I need them, I feel that they are with me. I look at my key charm and it makes me feel strong that I can conquer the world. I have no doubt that a part of them is always with me with that key charm.

BULLYING EFFECTS: A LATENT DANGER

By Fatima V.

Bullying is a verbal, physical or emotional attack on the victim. The person who's receiving bullying is in a bad position where the violence is an important part of their day, and it's so hard that the person can't think of anything else. This produces that violence is something normalized for the victim. When the violence is normal, usually the victim starts to be violent with other persons weaker than them, and this is only the beginning of a long interminable chain of violence. A chain that usually ends in aberrational acts of violence,

in the worst cases even with deaths or hospital visits. I think that the only solution to end the bullying is 0% tolerance with it, and to teach kids that is better to give love to the each other than to bully others. Bullying is a latent danger and can become a nightmare for everyone, if we don't put an end to it. Learning to love the differences of each of us and teaching the children around us to accept and love themselves and others will be the forceful solution to this endless problem.

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY

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 taught 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.

When I was an adult, I had flashbacks to my childhood memory. My parents had a hard life because both worked very hard in a village. My mother made food every day for my father. He worked hard every day all day; he grew corns, beans, onions, rice and peppers. I remember one year my father said, "This year working only onions is very expensive." However, he did it, and he left the village where onions were very expensive. He sold the onions to make money. Then came the day he bought clothes for us and he said, "I had money from selling the onions and now I can buy clothes and shoes for you. I feel very happy, because that time I had new clothes and shoes when he came back from the village. He brought me one blouse and pants and shoes. My brother was very happy too. He did as he promised my brother at 6 or 7 to do, and my brother was happy to finally have something new. I admired my father because he thought of his family first. He brought clothes for my mother and my little brothers, too. This past memory stays in my mind and heart as if it were yesterday.

MY DAUGHTER'S GRADUATION FROM HEAD START

By Flor S.



It is a big day for my daughter. Her teacher told me she has a graduation from the Head Start Program. It is too amazing. When she began at school she cried a lot, but when one week passed, she liked to go to school. She started learning to write her name very quickly. When she saw the first letter of her name everywhere she always said it is my name! F is for Fatima! So, now she is learning colors, shapes and others things. The teacher speaks Spanish, so my daughter feels more comfortable with her. The teacher is very nice. When time passed, she grew to love her a lot. I miss her when she stays at school because she is growing up. I said to myself, "It is a special day, and I am so proud of her when I look at her in the dress like a princess and wearing fancy, sparkly shoes, and a hat with the name Fatima on it. I feel happy to see the others kids take pictures with their parents, and of course, I take pictures with her to remember this beautiful moment forever and ever.

INDESCRIBABLE FLAVORS

By Geraldine C.



My name is Geraldine C., I am Colombian and I emigrated to the United States with the aspiration to continue studying and to fulfill my goals of being a great professional and to continue learning every day. Something that I emphasize about me is that I love to learn and to teach what I know, thanks to the Literacy Council program that has accompanied me in this process of improving my English and to Miss Catherine C. who complements us with her knowledge, I am very grateful to them because they have been a great support for me and have helped me to fill myself with knowledge every day "The wonderful thing about learning something, is that no one can take it away from us." (B.B. King).

Today I come to talk about my favorite food: the Natilla. It's a typical dessert in Colombia, we eat it more in December. Usually, a box comes with all the ingredients: just mix with milk and cook, but other people add all the

ingredients and prepare it. Some of the main ingredients are flour, eggs, milk, raisins, coconut flakes, sugar, vanilla and many more. People often add different ingredients. It has a variety of preparations and flavors, and it's something quick and easy to make.

I remember that at Christmas my family can't miss this dessert, and we usually eat it with *bunuelos* which are cheese balls, an incomparable mixture that I love. Also, when I was in Colombia, my mother used to prepare this recipe for us at other times of the year. She simply said that we didn't have to wait for the date and we were happy that she prepared it for us

Every time I think of this dessert, I am transported back in time to the moments that I have shared with my family, mainly with my grandmother. Its soft and warm texture resembles it with my grandmother's arms, and I remember when she prepared it for me, this dessert symbolizes a lot because I usually share it with the people, I love the most.



ONE DAY IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD

By Geraldine C.

It is a Sunday, around 3:00 in the afternoon in Medellin Colombia, and I hear the bird cheeping and a small dog barking, I can see my neighbor mowing the grass, and I can smell the freshly cut grass and I like it. Also, I can see the children playing with the black and white ball. How they yell and run! They are happy because they just scored a goal, and I see my neighbor washing his old car.

I see the houses around me and

how beautiful they look with different colors and decorations, some with balconies, others large, some small, others tall. My niece is riding her new bicycle and I can see how happy she looks. A big tree is close to me and two yellow birds fly over it. The sky is all blue, and I can't see any clouds in the sky because the sun is strong and bright. I can see my house and I think about all the moments that I have lived and spent there with my family.

MARDI GRAS

By Ghislaine C.



My name is Ghislaine C. I am an English student at the Literacy Council and Frederick Community College. I am interested in international business, to master English as a second language.

The main annual Mardi Gras is held, in Champs de Mars Port-au-Prince

Haiti. It is a colorful event. Everybody is enjoying themselves in the street with different colored costumes. I am surrounded by the smells of diverse food mixed with the beverages; and also, the sounds of many bands known as Ra-Ra, which is a unique festival music for processions in Haiti. As for some, the Haitian Carnival is interpreted as a spiritual activity. In which Ra-Ra is also part of Ra-Ra Societies form musical parading bands that walk for miles through local territory attracting fans with old and new songs. Bands stop at solemn spots where they salute the ancestors. Musicians play drums, sing and sound bamboo horns and tin trumpets. I stand on the pavement where I have a better view. Some people follow the parade. Others are just dancing.

THE PLACE THAT I LIKE BEST

By Ghislaine C.

The place that I like to be is back in my home country. In Jacmel Port au Prince, there is a beach called Raymond des Bins; it is also known for its historical sites. This beach is magical and peaceful. I usually go there just

to relax and enjoy all their varieties of seafood. People all over the world come for vacation. It can sometimes be crowded but you are still going to have a good time with some music and other playful activities.

MY EXPERIENCE IN PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN AMERICA

By Hilda M.



My name is Hilda. I am Salvadoran with a degree in chemistry and pharmacy. In El Salvador I worked in quality control. I arrived in the United States in December 2018. I am currently receiving English classes with my tutor, Gary Bennet, whom I thank very much for his teaching and support.

In my country I worked in a pharmaceutical company called Bayer for 22 years. I was the head of Materials Department in the area of quality control. In that company I was fortunate to receive different technical training and leadership and personnel management training. My

collaborators were pharmaceutical and technical chemical professionals. As in everyday life, in the work environment we find many people with different ways of being and doing things and although it is normal to be surrounded by different personalities, what must be done is channeling those skills and knowledge to achieve objectives. In El Salvador I had great experience in personnel management. I always had the support of my bosses and the human resources department.

Leadership is a fundamental skill to guide and motivate people to achieve their objectives.

Four years ago, I began working in the United States in a supermarket with the position of Head Clerk with two people under my supervision. Although the work is different from what I did in my country, I have applied my knowledge and the ability to lead, achieving the expected results. At the supermarket I have worked with two collaborators who I define as problematic employees. One of them did not comply with some procedures and company policies, and sometimes

had a bad attitude. The other collaborator follows procedures and does her job well, but is disrespectful, has a bad attitude, is distracted, and behaves strangely.

I have never had this kind of troublesome staff before. For the good performance and improvement of the work environment, I apply feedback, constantly direct them, teach them the procedures, and set an example. I speak to them with great respect and am patient while training them. I provide assistance, discipline, order and cleanliness instructions, etc., however over time these collaborators sometimes show a bad attitude, are disrespectful, and exhibit strange behaviors that affect the work environment and therefore efficiency.

As a result of these behaviors outside of normal principles or values, I had to go to the senior managers for

their support, but unfortunately, they did not give them a proper follow-up for this type of problematic behavior. This is possibly due to the work we do which does not give importance to these cases. This is my first job in America, and I cannot generalize that companies in this country do not give support to their leaders in relation to personnel management, specifically problematic personnel. But it does make me wonder.

In general, I like to maintain and work with a work team that has the principles of being honest, efficient, flexible, respectful, and that makes for a pleasant work environment. Since work is a responsibility and a blessing to have, we should perform our duties in an honest and respectful way because we are just passing through and sharing most of our time in that place.

THE MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT OF MY LIFE OCCURRED WHEN...

By Iryna D.



My name is Iryna, I am from Kyiv, Ukraine. I have always been interested in other cultures and thanks to the Literacy Council, I was able to learn more about different countries and traditions while learning English. Due to the fact that the classes were held in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, we had the opportunity to communicate and learn more about the traditions of our countries and American culture. While learning how to write paragraphs,

students could exchange ideas for the future and how to express an opinion in English. It was a very positive experience for me!

We have a lot of memorable moments from our childhood.

I have a lot of vivid memorable moments from this period of my life, too. My grandmother had to live in the Crimea Peninsula. It was a really peaceful place near the Black Sea. I remember one day when my cousin and I were on the beach. The beach is located in a small bay with many rocks, and that day the water was very warm. We swam and snorkeled a lot and found a place with a lot of

mussels. We dived all day and had a lot of fun. We took the mussels home and showed our grandmother. She wasn't so surprised but she acted like it was a really big deal.

She cooked the mussels with rice, soup and greens and told her friend that her granddaughters are real fishermen.

We were so proud and had a plan to buy our own boat for fishing next year.

When "next year" happened we were more interested in the boys diving in the bay than in the mussels. This is how my never-beginning career as a fisherman ended, but these are good memories.

MY EXPERIENCE LEARNING ENGLISH

By Iryna D.

The English language is the most common language for traveling. "I really like traveling!" were my thoughts 5 years ago. I have been learning English for almost 5 years and I never thought that I'd be living in a country where I have to speak this language.

I liked my life in Ukraine and had a great job in marketing. When I was somewhere in Europe, I used my basic

level and it was enough. Or my friends spoke well so I always had a translator with me.

But I don't travel now and have to know something more than: "Sorry could you please help me find this address?" That's why I need help with my English level. I hope that I'll be able to have a good job and I'll have the opportunity to travel again.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

By Jacqueline B.



My name is Jacqueline. I'm from Aleppo, Syria. I'm a retired physician. My husband and I moved to the U.S. because of the war almost 10 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. I was frustrated and embarrassed because I needed someone to speak on my behalf. After attending different classes with the Literacy Council, my spoken English has improved. I attained my driver's license, and got my citizenship. 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 Salvation Army and I'm a board member of FFNP, an independent non-profit agency. I'm so grateful for the Literacy Council organization (board members, employees, volunteers, and donors) who have impacted my life and helped me achieve those goals and immerse myself

in my new community. God Bless!

It was my first day on call in the hospital when a screaming came across the sky mingled with the wailing of an ambulance that was helping a patient to the emergency room. The sound punched my heart and pierced my ears, and pushed me into the emergency room as fast I as could to find myself in front of a tragic scene.

A middle-aged woman lying on a stretcher suffering from a drooping on one side of the face, slurred and unclear speech, disturbance of consciousness, and hemiplegia. Beside her stood a man hugging a young girl with one hand and holding the woman's hand with the other. Both the man and the girl were crying silently and refusing to leave the room. For a professional it was clear that the patient had a stroke. So, after drawing some samples for the necessary blood work, she was referred to the radiological section for a CAT scan for her head to confirm the diagnosis and find the etiology of the stroke.

Meanwhile I spoke to the patient's companions who I found out were her husband and her daughter and I did my best to comfort them and convince them to wait outside because any emotional feeling would make her condition worse. And they did wait outside.

The CAT scan report came back confirming the diagnosis of a stroke, but woefully the cause was a massive bleeding in the brain. Immediately a neurological and neurosurgery consultation were requested, and the

necessary procedures were done. And she was admitted in the intensive care unit, and I was one of the team members.

Unfortunately, when I was alone watching her, out of the blue, her condition started to deteriorate so fast that a sense of panic invaded my whole body. My heart started throbbing, and was about to come out of my chest. My mind froze and I could no more think or reason. My movement slowed down as if my feet were chained.

Just at that time, the monitor buzzed and showed a flat line which means her heart had stopped, and a prompt resuscitation was needed. I tried to help her, I tried to ask for help, but I couldn't respond nor could I do anything; though I knew at such a moment every second that passes counts in saving a life. I was so

frustrated and overwhelmed that a screaming came out of my heart, and I felt like somebody was hugging me and pulling me back to safety. I opened my eyes to see my husband assuring me, "It is a nightmare darling, calm down, calm down."

"No, I killed her, I would have saved her only I couldn't walk!" And I burst into tears. A few minutes later I regained my composure and self-confidence, and I thanked God that it was just a nightmare.

Today reflecting on my long journey in practicing medicine I feel blessed that I had never gone through a similar situation, nor had I committed a medical error that would have left a deep wound in my heart and a disgraceful memory in my mind. It had all been just a bad dream.

AN INCREDIBLE HALLOWEEN

By Jacqueline B.

Various stories were woven around the celebration of Halloween, its beginning and its relation to religions most of which attributed it to more than one thousand years ago and believed that on that day the souls of the dead return to their homes. So, people used to dress in costumes, and light bonfires to ward off the evil spirits. Today Halloween is a secular holiday full of fun and entertainment not only for children who wear disguises, hold their baskets, and go roaming in the neighborhood for trick and treat, but for adults as well.

Years ago, a few days before Halloween, one of our friends

suggested a weird idea for celebrating the event and having more fun. His suggestion was to party and spend the night in a haunted house he knew. We excitedly agreed, believing deep in our hearts that haunted houses and spirits are not more than superstitious beliefs.

On Halloween day, we disguised ourselves in different scary costumes, packed some candles, flashlights, and personal needs. We also got some foods snacks, candies, waters, and beverages. On our way to the adventure, our friend told us that the owner of the house was a rich, happy and kind man who lost his only son in a mysterious circumstance, and he

could never find out what happened to him nor where he disappeared. This tragic loss led him into severe depression and eventually he ended his misery by committing suicide. Years later the neighbor claimed to hear strange sounds and see scary shadows wandering inside the house. And since then, it was labeled “The Haunted House,” and no one ever dared to dwell there or go inside it.

Hearing the story, I felt sad and scared. I asked my friends if we should consider changing our plans. But unfortunately, they were so excited and were able to calm me down and convince me that it was just a fable, so we went on with our venture.

When we reached our destination, the darkness was creeping to wrap the old abandoned house with an extra gloomy look. The weather was cold and windy, and we could hear the rattling sounds of the loose broken windows. These scenes renewed my fear, but there was no way to draw back now. We pushed the old worn door and found ourselves in a big room. We turned the flashlights on, and we could tell it was the living room. The furniture was covered by sheets that had been clean and white, but now they were dirty and gray. The air smelled musty. The dust was everywhere, on the floors, on the walls, and it clung to the pictures. Cobwebs were spread in every corner, but an exceptional one amazed me. It was a big cobweb hung from a chandelier and dangling free to the floor like a fancy wedding dress made of silk and lace.

Actually, some of us were disappointed by the place, and

the others found it just perfect for celebrating Halloween. So, the only option we had not to spoil the event was to ignore the mess and enjoy ourselves. We quickly uncovered the furniture, dusted the tables and lighted the candles. Then we started our party by playing music from our cellphones. We chatted, laughed, ate, and danced. We were happy enjoying our fellowship when unexpectedly we heard a moaning and a loud crash coming from upstairs. And in a blink of an eye, we saw a figure covered with a white, wide sheet, dragging himself towards us. His eyes were filled with glittering tears, and he looked sad and anxious. We were so frightened that we tightly held each other, shivering and crying. The figure moved closer staring at our faces and smelling our scent. And as if he didn't meet his desire, nor was he satisfied, he screamed desperately and painfully then vanished. At that moment we screamed, too and collapsed to the floor with our hands clamping over our ears and all we could hear was the pounding of our hearts. When we recovered our perception and calmness, and retrieved our strength we rose up, quickly gathered our belongings and drove back home.

For more than a week, we couldn't talk about our experience. We were almost traumatized. But now when we recall the event, we laugh and try to understand what happened then. Was the figure the spirit of the father returning home looking for his son? Was the house really haunted? Was what we experienced merely a fantasy? All we can say is if you want to know, go find out yourself!

DIVERSITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE OTHER

By Jamila T.



My name is Jamila. I am from Aleppo, Syria. I have four children and eight 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.

Diversity and acceptance of the other, means that people are different in terms of shape, color, gender, religion, belief, and thoughts, so we should not be superior to those who are different from us, but rather accept them in peace, despite the differences in culture that may exist among them.

In Syria, where I was born, and lived there is no clear diversity. Most of the population is from the peoples of the

Mediterranean, who have the same color, and almost the same culture, but there is diversity in religion between Christianity and Islam. There is no other religion; although, we have different perspectives about the other religion. Yet we respect them as friends or co-workers, but I know about diversity in other countries through movies for example such as *Roots* by Alex Haley or from the news such as religious persecutions in some countries.

Here in the States, there is diversity of all forms. There are different races: African Americans, Africans, Asians, Indians, Europeans, and Hispanic to mention a few. There are also differences in religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and Atheists.

The diversity between people living in the same society is normal and acceptable, but it is not acceptable for this diversity to turn into dispute. After all, everyone has the right to have his own opinion and belief, and we have to respect that belief.

Now in these days, social media is helping to spread bullying, arrogance, and belittling some nationalities and races, which becomes a reason to start wars on those who disagree with them.

Therefore, as parents, and as a society we have to teach our children how to live with others in peace. The schools as well should contribute educational curriculum that helps to foster respect for others and their opinions, and teach them how to listen and talk to people who are different from them. The media can also get

involved through programs that help to reject exclusion, prejudice, bullying and violence which is evident in these days; furthermore, encourage them to respect, love, and cooperate with the others, have good morals, learn how to apologize, and be humble.

After moving to the States, I got to know people of different nationalities, through church, the Literacy Council, neighbors, and I became friends with them. We meet sometimes for conversation, visit each other, share food, and attend together some

events. I am proud of them and proud of their friendship. After all I believe, and I am sure that we have a lot in common, despite our different histories and background.

Diversity is good, because it makes the world a more wonderful place to live. We can make new friends, learn more about them and their world, and have more opportunities to learn new things, make better decisions, and have a better vision of the world which helps us grow intellectually and spiritually.

EASTER COOKIES (KIEGEH)

By Jamila T.

Easter is the biggest and most important Christian celebration. It is a day of joy and happiness. It has its own sanctity, religious and social rituals. Eastern Churches name this day the great celebration day, where the great Lent is celebrated, which lasted forty days ends.

Easter customs differ in different parts of the Christian world, but they share the custom of coloring eggs, decorating homes, preparing homemade liquor especially cherry liquor, and baking Easter cookies. It is a custom that has been passed down through the generations.

Preparation for making this cookie, which is called Kliegeh, begins on the day of the Annunciation, March 25th. On this same day some men in our church volunteer to knead a large amount of flour to make dough without yeast. The church believes it will ferment by the power of God, like the Virgin Mary who conceived Jesus

by the power of God. We, the members of the church, take a small piece of this special dough, and save it to use it for our own Easter cookie in the last week before Easter, Holy Week.

Making the Easter cookies means a sweet, joyful, and happy time with the family where everyone helps. In the big bowl I mix the flour, the semolina, then add the appropriate amount of butter, sugar, and add the required spices, mahaleb, cardamon, cinnamon, nutmeg, nigella seed, and the church dough.

My sons are the ones who knead the dough. When one of them gets tired and sweat drops start running down his forehead into the bowl, he asks me: Is this what the bible means when God says to Adam from the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread?

At the end when the kneading is over, I always draw the sign of the cross on the dough, cover it with towels, and leave it to ferment. Meanwhile my

daughters prepare small balls of dates, walnuts, and pistachios to fill the cookies.

Neighbors and close relatives join us to form the dough, some of them make it in the form of rings, other stuff it with dates or walnuts using special templates. Even the kids join us and make little dolls or birds out of the dough. My daughters bake the cookies

after coating its surface with egg white, so that it is a beautiful, shiny golden color after baking. Time flies by quickly while we are having fun, working, chatting, and drinking coffee.

On the day of Easter, tables are decorated with the most important object for hospitality. It is the Easter cookie.

HOW TO COOK A CHINESE DISH CALLED KUNG PAO CHICKEN

By Jenny C.



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

As a mother of two kids, cooking should be the most basic skill, but

since my mother is always by my side, I never knew how to cook. In September last year, my mother had to go back to China to handle the retirement affairs with my father. So, I learned how to cook from scratch. In just half a year, I already have very good cooking skills.

Today I will teach you how to cook a simple and easy-to-learn Chinese dish - Kung Pao Chicken. I learned in such a short time; I believe you can too.

The ingredients that need to be prepared are chicken, carrot, peanuts, cucumbers and green onion. The seasonings need to prepare are soy sauce, oyster sauce, cooking wine, vinegar, and a little starch and sugar.

First, we need to cut the chicken into small pieces and put them in a large bowl. Then add starch, a little salt, two tablespoons of cooking wine and one tablespoon of oyster sauce. Mix well and marinate for 5-10 minutes. Then cut carrots, cucumbers and green onion into small pieces. Meanwhile prepare the sauce: 1 tablespoon of starch, 2

tablespoons of sugar, 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, 2 tablespoons of cooking wine, 1 tablespoon of oyster sauce, 1 tablespoon of vinegar, and a little sugar with water. (Set the sauce aside.)

Quickly fry the freshly marinated chicken until it is golden brown with high heat in advance, so that the chicken will be particularly tender. Then put the fried golden chicken on the

plate, allowing the meat to rest.

Next, stir-fry cucumbers, carrots and peanuts on high heat, add the golden chicken that was just reserved and pour in the sauce just adjusted, and stir fry quickly. Finally, stir fry evenly. I think you should smell the food now.

Kung Pao Chicken is a Chinese home-cooked dish. My two children like it very much. I hope you like it too.

MY TERRIFYING EVENT

By Jenny C.

Whenever the most terrifying events are mentioned, it is usually related to a life-threatening situation; such as the destruction of a natural disaster, or the horror of an operation. Let me share my personal terrifying event that may seem trivial to you, but it's a dark shadow of my childhood. That is the exam!

In China, it is necessary to pass very important examinations when going from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, and from high school to university. Every big exam in China determines your future. I am the only child of my parents and they put all their hopes on me. So, you can imagine how heavy a burden I have on my shoulders.

The big test that impressed me the most was the transition from elementary school to middle school. It was the first big test I would face in my life. My parents signed me up for a lot of cram classes, and I needed to do a lot of extra homework. The daily homework took my breath away. My heart was under great

pressure. I basically had no time for entertainment.

I remember that I was very nervous during the test that day, my palms were sweaty, and I did not answer many questions with my normal ability because I was too afraid of failing the test. For a few hours during my exam, my mother stood at the gate of the school waiting for my exam to end.

The test results were not good, which also taught me that the more you worry about the things you are more afraid of, the more likely you are to fail. Although I have grown up, matured, and dared to face failure, my childhood exam experience was really the moment I was most afraid of, and even now I still have nightmares about the kind of fear during the exam.

Therefore, because I have had such a bad experience, I treat my two young children with special tolerance. And the grades in the United States do not mean everything.

I want my two children to have a happy childhood and choose their own future.

MY TWO LOVELY GIRLS

By Jinjin C.



From being shy and unsure of how to express myself to becoming fluent and confident, I take pride in the effort I've put in. From being a new mother struggling to handle my crying child, to now being a calm mother who helps them solve problems, my children and I have grown together. I still remember having no local friends after coming to the United States, but now I can gather and chat with friends, sharing moments of joy. Looking back at my six years in the U.S., I've gained personal growth and happiness. This experience will continue to shine brightly in my heart.

Nine years ago, I welcomed my first daughter into the world. Three years later, I received the arrival of my second daughter. From their first taste of solid food to their first steps, from uttering their initial word “Mom” to singing songs independently, and from being able to ride their bikes to the day they went to elementary school — each milestone has been a testament to their growth. I am fortunate to witness their journey unfold. While raising them, I grew with them.

Before giving birth to the first baby,

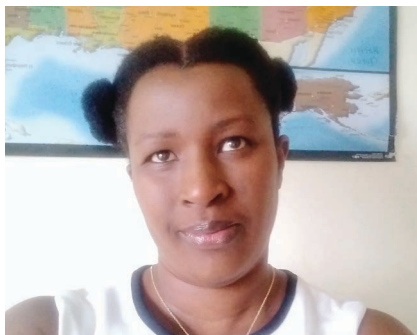
I read books about child-rearing, preparing myself to be a good mother. I followed one piece of advice on avoiding feeding children egg white before they are one year old. However, my mother had a different opinion based on her life experience. She believed it was OK to include egg white in her diet. I insisted on the scientific method instead of the traditional one. I thought more about the conventional way of raising children after I had a second daughter. I combined what I read and what I heard from my mother. I understood that a cautious introduction of eggs could be safe without allergic reactions. I knew the book suggestions, why, and how to use them daily.

In their journey of growth, they are willing to explore the unknown. Three years ago, they rode bikes with training wheels while I took a walk. Now, they independently and confidently ride their bikes while I am running. Once, they watched other kids using monkey bars. Then they persistently practiced on the monkey bars and fell to the ground many times, their palms with bloody blisters. They end up successfully passing the monkey bars. I am so proud of them, who went with them to all the swimming meets this summer. When I see them, I feel a growth power pass to me and inspire me to go further.

As they continue to blossom and explore, I find that life is a series of beautiful moments, and I am grateful to be a part of their remarkable journey.

VACATION

By Joselyne N.



My name is Joselyne Mary N.. I am from Burundi; 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.

The beach and the city are both great places to vacation. The things you can bring with you can be different depending on where you go. At the beach, you need to bring bathing suits and surf boards or shoes. At the beach you want to bring shorts and tank tops, but when you travel it's good to bring comfortable shoes and

jackets. At the beach, the restaurants are mostly seafood, but in the city, restaurants consist of everything you can imagine. The city restaurants are more expensive than at the beach. For example, you could spend thirty dollars or less per person, but at a city restaurant it may cost you a hundred dollars or more. At the beach the pace is slow. It is the great place to go to relax and take things one day at a time. People are friendly at the beach, but in the city, it seems the pace is much faster. Also, travel in the city requires some extra preparation more so than going to the beach. For example, you need to get a passport or you need to learn basic phrases in another language. In both places you can do some activities like read magazines, play games or cards or enjoy talking with friends. Travel in the city is better for me because I enjoy unfamiliar experiences, stepping outside my comfort zones, and learning something new. In conclusion, the beach and the city are both open any time of the year to help people who want to relieve stress and get away from work for a short time.

A HAPPY MOMENT IN MY LIFE

By Joselyne N.

The moment that I was very happy in my life was during the official engagement ceremony between my fiancé and me, who is now my husband. During that ceremony, a dowry was offered by my fiancé's family to my parents in front of a huge gathering of family members and friends. According to our culture, a dowry is a gift to the lady's parents from the man who will be her husband. It can be a sum of money or a certain number of cows. First, one month before that day, I invited my friends and family. Also, I tried to find a strong committee to help me to organize the party. The committee was a group of thirty persons. They were good and nice because they did a great job. They shared all the roles from the

beginning to the end. Next, that day, my fiancé and I were very happy. We prepared everything and were well dressed. Before everything, my family said welcome to everyone and why they were there of course with a glass of wine for everyone. Then, there was a time for my parents to be given a dowry from my fiancé's family. After that, it was our turn, my fiancé and I to offer the presents to each other and to both sets of parents, too. We all continued enjoying sharing drinks and a delicious meal. Last, there was beautiful music. We had a good time. My families and friends were very happy and proud of us. Our lives were full of excitement in that wonderful moment.

A GIFT FOR LIFE

By Kaliopys C.



My name is Kaliopys C., I'm from San Pedro Sula, Honduras. I'm a business and industrial administrator. In 2021, I arrived in the U.S. and I settled in the state of Georgia. After of 1 year and 4 months, I moved to Frederick. In Frederick, I found the big opportunity to improve my level of English; given that the biggest barrier that I have had to work in my field in the U.S. was in the language. That is possible, through of Literacy Council, which assigned me a tutor, my dear Ms. Surekha R., and also, I was able to take writing classes with my dear Ms. Catherine C., to both I want to thank

you for all the dedication for teaching me. In the same way, I want to thank all the people (employees, volunteers, donors and board members) who make the Literacy Council function possible. My dream is to get back to work on my career and in the future, I will be able to help other people who find a language barrier to continue their dreams, and tell them that it is possible and that together we can do it.

My Mother is a wonder woman, strong and brave, a woman given to God. She always teaches me to have a positive attitude.

When I was child, my mother gave

me a gift for life—a gold chain. She gave it to me on a special day: my first day of school. It wasn't just a gold chain, but the words that she gave me at that moment "the sky is the limit, never give up."

Sometimes I feel sad, I have hard times and I can even cry, but I can hold this gold chain and it reminds me of my mother and her words that day: "the sky is the limit, never give up," and these words carry me into life with powerful forces.

A gold chain is a beautiful and precious gift, but loaded with the wise words of mom: For me it is "A Gift for Life."

MY FAVORITE FOOD

By Kaliopys C.



My favorite food is gyros, a food of Greek origin. Gyros are made with grilled or sautéed meat, which is placed on pita bread, salad, and tzatziki. In my family it is a very representative dish that we share on many of our birthdays. When I eat a delicious gyro, I feel close to my family that I miss so much.

HOMESICK

by Karine S.



My name is Karine S., I'm 24 years old and I was born in Brazil. I left a promising career in my country to live a new experience in the U.S. My first step here in U.S. was looking for something to improve my English skills and I found the Literacy Council with you amazing volunteers who taught me with so much love.

When you live abroad there are important challenges you face. Some are small challenges; some are bigger and more difficult to handle by yourself. You will need support in these moments to face whatever comes your way. Who do you have to support you in these moments?

When you decide to become part of a new life in a new country, this decision is very difficult. If you need a fresh start sometimes it is better not to be afraid about what can happen, because everything can be a true adventure in the beginning, but you need to be prepared for the challenges

when the problems start, and you don't have anybody closer.

When I decided to live this new experience, I tried to prepare myself for this. My plan to start this new step was to begin going to therapy with a psychologist, but I failed. I did once in my home country, but I couldn't find a good time in my schedule to go to another appointment. I was in a workaholic moment, working every day ten hours per day and I had to keep studying after work. At that moment it was not a priority in my life. I was really confident everything would be fine if I had some comfort food from my country and spent time in superfluous stuff such as going to some stores to see the deals.

In the first month this was enough to keep me happy in a new life, but after the second month every place I went wasn't enough and I was feeling an existential emptiness. Sometimes I went to several stores on the same day, I didn't buy anything, I was there because I didn't want to think about some difficulties I had, such as speaking English and I was missing my culture. Sometimes I didn't want to cook my comfort food and I didn't have any Brazilian restaurants close by to go to. Everything is interesting when it is new. I had some important friends in my country who supported me a lot in my decision, but they didn't have enough time to spend with me talking about my problems. So, I decided to start my therapy.

Psychology isn't only about mental disorders. According to Lisiane Duarte

da Silva , we can see some benefits from therapy : discover and develop problem-solving skills, through management learning, promoting self-knowledge, improvement in relationships and help to deal with difficult situations. It was a great way to see how I'm lucky to be living, and what I planned in the last years was

awesome, and how I'm strong enough to be living this experience by myself.

If you don't have someone to talk about your problems with, or laugh about the funny situations that happen in our life, I encourage you to have a professional person to advise you and have a fresh start with yourself.

MY DREAM JOB

By 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 a safe future. My second is to search for new work opportunities. Learning English and living in the USA was out of my dictionary. I lived a conflict

between a heart who wanted to stay in Lebanon and a mind who had to go to USA. It took me 5 years to decide, and the answer was a reunion of my family who is my whole life. Here we go, I am here now. Because of the Literacy Council and the variety of their classes that works on our reading, writing, listening and speaking skills I get involved in the community by going out, meeting new people and having conversations. I hope that when my kids grow up, they will remember our sacrifices that we did it for them. A huge thanks to my teachers at the Literacy Council, to my husband and to my kids who trusted me and encouraged me to be the best.

I will begin my story by introducing you to "my idol." One day, my grandfather told me: "a hit that breaks you, teaches you." My grandfather was born on 1929. He served in the army for 30 years. He was the oldest son in his family. He was a responsible, a trusted, and an educated wise man. He was a counselor for all the people in our village. He was intelligent in his decisions, and he had information

about estates for all people. He was a manuscript writer. He had a personal library that contained all his poems and memories that he wrote. He treated my grandmother as a queen. I was his preferred granddaughter. All this I remember every time I visit his grave.

How is he dead? I will never forget his death story. In February 2015, he went to the hospital for his annual checkup. The findings were very bad: pneumonia and bronchitis. Suddenly, they transferred him to a hospital in the city for his critical case. I wasn't ok with this. I was scared because the doctors couldn't give us a final diagnosis. Before 2 days from his death, he called me to help him.

I finished my work at 2p.m. and my dad picked me up: "Quickly! Quickly to the hospital, your grandfather needs you." My grandfather's face was like a tomato, his hands were swollen with hematoma, and he was nervous with dyspnea. I couldn't explain my feelings. My tears fell like a waterfall down my face. I couldn't believe that on this day I would see him in this appearance. His voice was like a skeleton who takes

his last breath. He said about me, "she is my granddaughter; she works in general security and she is a nurse."

I told myself, "Karma, focus, you should make it because you can make it."

With trembling and crying, I worked with the tools of a blood test. I tried to be calm and managed with him as a normal patient. I took my time to find a vein, and then I was done.

I think in that time God gave me this patience. Seriously I was surprised by myself because none of the other nurses could draw his blood. All my family till this day remind me of this time, especially my grandmother.

It's a long story, I know. Because of this class and because of you, being far away from my parents, I think about it. Now I dream to be a geriatric nurse who will work in a retirement community and take care of the geriatrics. I think of my grandfather and say to him, "you are alone in the cemetery, but I am proud that I am your best granddaughter, and happier, because it's the first time that I wrote your story."

THE HEALTH BOOK

By Karma C.

My 8 years of experience in the children's vaccination branch of the military allow me to define my title and responsibilities. The Health Book is a record for our children and it is about health and safety. Health and safety mean vaccination. Vaccination means immunization. Immunization means protection against a disease. I swear that I repeat this explanation every shift of my work day for the parents, but I am still surprised why they persist to ignore this book and name it a "note book."

You know why they call it that??
Listen to the reasons:

I forgot it at home. My kids draw on it and cut it. There are other easy reasons in front of another mother who told me that I washed it with the washcloths by mistake, or others who said "we moved, so I don't know where the book is."

In my opinion, it is not a big deal that you lose this book, but the big problem is that you continue to fail to try to get a substitute for this book.

"Listen Madame you need to ask your child pediatric doctor or the ministry of health for a new one." If you, dear readers, are in my place how would you react or respond to the mothers. I know it's a lot but still more

and more sickness spreads.

You believe that 1% of mothers said I am sorry, but we are divorced and the status at home is not ok... did this convince you? What is the fault of this poor child? Some parents don't trust in vaccination under the pretext that their ancient grandparents never took vaccines.

Sometimes the parents treat you in the opposite way like they are the doctors and you are the patient. My friends listen to me: A long time ago, a lot of children died and nobody knew the reason and how to solve the problem. Medicine began searching to find a way to stop this sudden death. Until they explored vaccines for the children disease, such as measles, varicella and meningitis.

Help me to send a message to parents in general and to mothers in specific that if your child is totally unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, because some kids take 1 shot of each vaccine and this is wrong. They need the complete series, and there are life and death consequences to their omissions.

The life of your child is your responsibility. It is your responsibility to protect him. Protect him by vaccination.

AN UNUSUAL CAMPING EXPERIENCE

By Lily D.



I'm Lily from China. I have broad interests. I like learning something new. I like traveling and sharing my traveling stories with friends. In my spare time, I am interested in reading and watching television, especially stories related to love events and playing Poker and Mahjong. I will continue learning and practicing English to make my English better.

I have been camping many times, but there is a camping trip that I will never forget. It was the summer of 2003. My friend, Lin, called me and invited my husband and I to go camping with them. We gladly accepted because we have never been camping in the U.S.

The weather was very beautiful on the day of our departure. We were on our way with our bags and camping equipment. We enjoyed the scenery on both sides of the Winchester and Moorefield roads along the way. After four hours of driving, we arrived at our destination-Snowshoe Mountain in West Virginia in the late afternoon. It

is a ski resort in winter, but you can go biking or hiking in summer.

I was surprised that there were about twenty people who joined us camping. The camps were typically well equipped with electric piles, and barbecue grill. After checking in, we set up our tent immediately. However, I saw that someone had already opened the electric fire and started to grill barbecue chicken, beef, and corn for dinner. We were all hungry and we ate fast. After a wonderful meal, the big kids played soccer in the field, the little kids played hide and seek in the tents. The adults drank beers, played cards, and gossiped. As it was getting dark, we lit a campfire, and sat around the campfire, singing songs, chatting, and laughing. We had a great time. At about 10 p.m., we felt very tired, so we put out the campfire and crept into our tents. We all slept soundly.

In the middle of that night, we were awakened by a crack of thunder and lightning. Just then we heard a shouting, and our tent was overflowing with water! It was raining heavily with strong winds too. Fortunately, we rented a cottage for families with small kids. We all ran quickly into the cottage for shelter. We were quite wet when we arrived in it, and a dozen people of us crammed into a small living room through that rough night. Outside, the storm continued furiously all night.

The next morning, we discovered there was water everywhere, our tents were blown down by the winds, and everything on the tent floor was wet because we could not get it picked up

last night. What made us even more frustrated was our original plan to climb Snowshoe Mountain was not possible because of the hard rain and the snow melting on the mountain which caused it to be too slippery to climb.

This was a unique camping trip that I will never forget because it was my first experience camping in a heavy rainstorm with strong winds. I learned a lot for my next camping trip.

KEEPING UP WITH CHANGES

Lily D.

Since 1978, the world has changed so fast for me in China. When my family bought the first black and white, tube type, nine-inch, television set, which was a novelty in China. Every evening our neighbors would gather at our house to watch the news and shows on our television.

In 1987, when my husband was in Australia, he could buy a duty-free television in the Service Department for Overseas Personnel. We bought a twenty-inch color SONY television, and we considered it a treasure.

In 2005, we bought a larger color television with projection screen and spent \$3,600 when we moved to our new house in United States, and later, we purchased a sixty-inch ultra-thin, LCD and then a seventy-five-inch, 4K, high-definition TV. Over the years, televisions have gotten larger and less expensive since there were an estimated 5.69 billion television viewers around the world then.

In 1990, my daughter and I stayed in China as my husband went to the United States. At that time, there were no private phones at home and communication had to be done by writing letters to each other, and a letter took twelve days from China to the United States. International

calls were too expensive; they cost about one dollar per minute. When my husband wanted to call us, first he needed to write a letter letting us know twelve days earlier. Since we didn't have a phone at home, we had to go to my office to receive his call. When the day came, we needed to get there a little bit early; otherwise, we would miss his call. I remembered that we were so happy to hear each other's voices, even if just for 10 minutes. It was too expensive to talk long, and we had to wait another month before we could talk to each other again.

Since 2015, communication equipment has become much easier to operate and less expensive. There are many tools you can use, such as cell phone, email, or WeChat... you can choose what you like. It was time saving, cheaper and faster.

It is amazing and how much the world has changed, however, sometimes I also feel that I have missed something precious, but I like these changes, because the changes are both a challenge and an opportunity for me. Changes promote economic development and social progress. I must keep learning and working hard to keep up with the pace of the times, and not be left behind by society.

PUMPKIN PATCH

By Maria V.



My name is Maria V. I am from Colombia, South America. I came to the U.S. with my husband and my three sons. I have long attended the Literacy Council office. I have received a lot of help from tutors, who work by donating their time and expertise. I just want to express my appreciation to all the tutors and volunteers for their hard work. I am grateful for their positive influence in my life. All tutors are kind-hearted persons who gladly give us their time. I am also very grateful for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout the year. Each class is a new adventure. My goal is to one day (hopefully soon) speak English fluently and also be able to speak it without an accent. I am still working on it with the help of the tutors. I will always be grateful to them and they will be in my heart for the beautiful work they do.

Have you ever been on a pumpkin

patch collecting pumpkins with your family? We went for the first time for my family and me to a farm that harvested pumpkins. All information about the pumpkin patch was given to us by the schools where my children were studying. The pamphlets said: "You can go pumpkin picking here." The instructions provided us with direction and guide to follow when we went to the pumpkin patch. Every October, a nearby farm family opens their land. We had to go to know and learn as parents the American customs, and my sons would learn as well. Although in my country we have a variety of pumpkins, we don't have the pumpkin patch.

First, we arrived at the pumpkin patch. We hadn't seen so many pumpkins planted in every inch of land on that farm and had not seen so much variety when compared with my country. There were so many kids, parents, grandparents watching their children pick up pumpkins in the beautiful, giant, and well-organized field. Also, we could find every size of pumpkins, and different color that we could imagine. This farm was in Frederick on the route 40. The pumpkin patch was surrounded by a barn and different kinds of animals such as pigs, cows, chickens, and two llamas. My husband, my three sons and me, were walking in the pumpkin patch for about 10 or 15 minutes. Once we picked up a pumpkin that we chose, we had to wait for someone who had brought us to the pumpkin patch on a red tractor sitting in a

wagon. According to the schedule, it was already time to come and pick the group up to take us back to the main house of the farm where the beautiful pumpkin patch journey began.

The second thing we did was enter the farmhouse. As soon as we entered the farmhouse, we could see a large cash register with scales to weigh the pumpkins and be able to pay for them according to their weight. Meanwhile we paid for the pumpkins, the smell of hot cider awakened our sense of smell, inviting us to have a delicious, aromatic, and hot cup of cider with spices, which comforted, cheered, and warmed us on that cold day with autumn winds.

Every time my family and I looked at other tractors hauling people back and forth from the farmhouse to the fields and passed each other on the road, we greeted each other as if they were our best friends. It was our first experience of sitting on top of hay. The hay had been arranged in the form

of rectangles, so that people could sit there and admire the beautiful landscape. The ride circled the farm, stopping at the pumpkin harvest ready to be picked. The wagon was a long wooden cart pulled by the tractor. My three children and other children had fun and were ecstatic in the wagon. While every family was having fun, my husband and I felt our bodies shake, tremble, vibrate, and shudder with the movement produced by the tractor on the unpaved road. As soon as we arrived, we were both dizzy.

To sum up, despite the seasickness, my family and I returned until our sons were grown. We waited for autumn every year. We enjoyed the tractor ride for families around the farm grounds. My husband and I feel nostalgic, remembering the old pumpkin patch we used to go to when my sons were children. It was a beautiful, pleasant, and delightful American custom of visiting the pumpkin patch.

OLD MICHELIN BLOTTER

By Maria V.

Michelin is a registered trademark of rubber tires. Am I writing an advertisement for the company? No, I was just remembering, when I read a poem, and its metaphor about ink stains, the image of the Michelin Tire Man on the blotter with ink came to me. I want to discuss this poem: "Catalog with Illustrations" by Marvin Bell, *"The beauty of and old desk blotter where ink stains grew into the shapes of ships in a turbulent ocean, and the*

ticking of the clock in the sunlight thickened by dust." In addition to quoting the poem, I want to write what made me think back to my childhood memories that were stored in the deepest recesses of my soul. They are vivid images with my beloved grandfather.

When the poem alludes to the beauty of old desk blotter, the image of my only grandfather, my father's father, cleaning his fountain pen on the

blotters with the Michelin figure came to my mind. I can still recall how he signed some letters with his fountain pen, and his small glass bottle filled with black Chinese ink. Also, there was blotter paper everywhere with the white Michelin image. The blotter paper was white, and in the front had a Michelin Tire Man. The blotter had a yellow frame exalting the humanoid figure stacked with tires. The blotter was a medium size, equal in size to a Christmas card. The blotter paper was thick, made to absorb excess of ink. My brothers and sisters and I played with them as though we were repeating what the poem says: "where ink stains grew into the shapes of ships," in our case we painted amorphous figures without any meaning but happy to be able to use the fountain pen and fill the blotter with stains. The fountain pen consisted of a metal nib mounted in a wooden handle. The metal nib he used to smear with black ink, clean it with the blotter and write his letters with the beautiful handwriting.

The poem keeps resurfacing in my memories. "The clacking of the typewriting keys." The sound click clack, click clack when my grandfather used to use his black Remington typewriter on the beauty of the old desk. By the way, we couldn't play with his typewriter. This typewriter was modern in my grandfather's time. It contained two reels, one on the right side and

one on the left side. The reels were wound with a cloth ribbon, divided in the middle by two colors, red at the top of the ribbon and black at the bottom. As soon as he pressed a round button with the chosen letter, the letters magically appeared on the paper.

The Michelin tire man has a special place in my memory and means a beautiful remembrance of my childhood, because my grandfather used to sell tires of that brand in my country. To finish I would like to write what I found googling about the history of that figure. According to Google: 'Bibendum (French Pronunciation), commonly referred to in English as the Michelin Man or Michelin Tire Man, is the official mascot of the Michelin tire company. A humanoid figure consisting of stacked with tires, it was introduced at Lyon Exhibition of 1894 where the Michelin brothers had a stand. He is the one of the world's oldest trademarks still in active use.'

To sum up, poems are intimate moments in time, evoking events, and moments in our lives. This poem made me go back in time; his verses stirred up memories of my childhood. I admire the poets and their poetry full of inspirations and arousing interest and admiration in a powerful way in those of us who are not poets.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelin_Man 2008. Accessed January 29, 2023.

MY LITTLE CANDY

By Mônica Elizabete S.



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.

My favorite food is "Brigadeiro" and it is a dessert from Brazil. We used to get it at a children's birthday, but sometimes on adults' birthdays too.

If you wish to do that, you need to use 1 can of condensed milk, 3 spoons of chocolate powder, and 1 spoon of butter. So, put all the ingredients in a pan and stir all the time while cooking. When you stir and can see the "bottom of the pan" it's ready. After that, you will transfer the confection to a greased plate and wait to cool. Finally, make little balls and press in grainy chocolate.

I like it when I can find "Brigadeiros" at a party, but my favorite occasion for eating it is when I'm feeling bad during my period. It's a comfort food. But in these moments, I eat a little hot and directly from the pan. This is the kind of food you learned to prepare when you are a teenager and you can eat alone or share with girlfriends.

PHENOMENAL

By Natta S.



I wouldn't believe half year ago if somebody would tell me that I would start writing in English and, moreover, I would enjoy it. I was born in Moscow, 64 years ago, and recently moved to Frederick to live with my daughter's family. My English was poor and a bit bookish. I wasn't able to speak and understand my three beloved teenage grandchildren. When I contacted The Literacy Council, my only goal was to improve my English. But life is unpredictable and full of surprises, I was given a chance, not to only develop my conversational skills, but open a new world of writing enjoyment for myself. I'm very grateful to my teacher Catherine C. and all The Literacy Council staff for this magic opportunity!

She was a sparrow, nothing phenomenal or even noticeable. A small and skinny body, short-haired head with sharp, tiny nose, small but

bright eyes. Light and quick, a real sparrow, one move and she'll fly away.

She was a friend of mine, but not my closest friend. We studied at the same university and barely knew each other, no long girlish talks, no common stories, just hi and buy, that was it.

Once on summer holidays, when the exams and parttime work were finished, we finally got some time to rest. I was invited to spend two weeks with my university's friends in Caucasus. We would be hiking.

We were a group of students, twenty years old; at that time hiking seemed to us thrilling and restful. We were young, brainless and eager for adventures. We had no idea what is hiking in Caucasus. Now we are all well aware.

Imagine a heat about 90 degrees Fahrenheit but over this, we were supposed to hike on the mountain two and half kilometers high with all our belongings and food for seven days. At the same day we should've went down, to organize a place to eat and sleep, and next day move ahead high on and on... five silly girls and five silly boys. Actually, it turned out to be a nightmare.

The beginning was beautiful, the boys trying to seem gentlemen, and took all the food and our belongings, so we started without burdens, young, fresh and happy. In an hour when we stopped to drink, and have some rest, the boys realized that hiking is really hard, and the backpacks are too heavy, so, better to be alive rather than be

gentlemen and returned to us our goods. In the next hour they required us to split the food (canned food and groceries) for carrying.

At 2000 meters high, we were not fresh and not happy at all, as we carried very heavy backpacks and hardly could move, the burdens were unbearable.

"Mom, you were right, you were right again!" I thought of my mom, who was strictly against this adventure. I felt it was like simply the end of my life, my pulse was 200 beats per minute, the air was rarefied, I couldn't move or even breathe.

No surprise, I wasn't alone like this, three of the five girls felt the same, we laid on the rocky ground breathing heavily, unable to move.

"Get up, you can do it, get up!" A small but strong hand helped me to get up, this hand pulled me up and up, to the top of the mountain! The

sparrow! She pulled and kicked me until I started to move, then picked up my backpack and carried it pulling me up! I started stepping very slowly, but with each step I was more and more confident. I felt a kind of second wind. She helped all of us; she almost carried one of the girls. Small and unnoticeable sparrow, how strong she was! These were not muscles, but spirit. She was a real fighter; the girl who never gave up—in spite of whatever we faced.

It was more than forty years ago, but the events of this hiking are still sparkling in my head! If I'd written a novel, probably I would have finished like this: now my motto is- sparrow! But life is not a novel, we are who we are, but I'm trying. In years, when I feel weak and depressive, I remind myself, hey, remember—sparrow! Don't give up no matter what.

UNSPEAKABLE

By Natta S.

How can we express the
unspeakable? By a gesture? Glance?
Breath? Heart beating?

What a puzzle?

Are feelings unspeakable?

People invented so many words to
express bad feelings, in each language
there are clusters of dirty words to
insult, humiliate, hurt, but when we
want to say words of love, we
are speechless.

But I will try.

I perfectly remember a day when
I gave birth to my daughter. It was

in March, forty years ago. In Moscow
March is almost another winter,
snow, wind, cold, but in spite of the
snowstorms a smell of spring is around
you, even snow itself smells of spring's
flowers and sun - bright, strong and
hot penetrates dull, low sky and
sunshine calls for coming spring.

So, it was the end of March, evening,
I was home with my father-in-law, my
husband, a student of medical school
was at his duties in a hospital, where
he worked as a nurse in intensive care.

I called a taxi and told my

father-in-law, who was a doctor as well, that I need to rush to the hospital and while we were waiting for a taxi, he was reading me a book trying to calm me down. But I was not there, not in an apartment or in a book's plot, I was far away completely in my thoughts and feelings!

I was deep in bittersweet feeling of my pregnancy ending, wild fear for a child, its health, its future. Scared of pain and of unpredictable chain of future events. Sure, it was the most important moment in my life! How could I listen to the book?

The rest of this day was a bit misty. Hospital, doctors and nurses, pain and finally my baby's first cry. My baby came to this world healthy and happy, and I after all these tortures was alive and incredibly happy, and sun continued to hit and shine through window, declaring life and spring.

Sometimes I think my daughter is like the March sun, unpredictable, but shiny in spite of everything.

Unspeakable feelings, could I express them? No, better to glance, breath and keep silent.

LOVE...

By Natta S.

Love is always different, it may be a kid's love to his/her mother, man to a woman, love to a child and even love to the place you belong, to the country you were born.

In the youth love is selfish, you need to be loved and you are eager to love, you fall in love for your mind and your body requires it, but it is more passion than true love. You need to breath the same air with the person you are in love, to share every moment of your life. You forget of everyday duties, of everything around you.

But shortly this love fades, especially if you give birth to a child. The whole world now is in this tiny baby, you can't

think of anything else but its needs, health, future etc. This is mother love. Nothing is stronger, nothing is as long lasting.

But surprisingly today I think of another love, love to the place I belong. To the country I was born; this strange feeling chases you when you are far away from your home. You miss your home: the bakery on the corner and the smell of freshly made bread, the paths in your garden, fireplace in your country house, your friends and yes, even traffic jams on your way home after long working day.

Love is always different and always so important.

A BEAUTIFUL MIRROR

By Olga P.



Good day. My name is Olga P., I am from Ukraine. Unfortunately, now my country is suffering from war - daily shelling, howling of sirens, lost lives of adults and children. This is all I hear from the family who remained in Ukraine. But I have hope that the war will end soon and my husband and I will return home. For more than 500 days of the war, I met many

good people in Ukraine, Poland and America who helped my family and I am grateful to them for that. I was a music teacher in Ukraine. I sing Ukrainian songs, play the piano and bandura. I also weave Ukrainian national jewelry from beads. Now my daughter and I are learning English. I attended courses and after achieving certain results, I was able to find a job as a kindergarten teacher. P. S. Dreams do come true; we believe in them!

I want to tell you about a beautiful mirror that I bought in Krakow, Poland. I was on an excursion to the Wawel Castle and saw a small but very beautiful mirror in the souvenir shop. It depicted Princess Maria, a beautiful and young girl. This thing is very small and convenient, it can be put in the smallest pocket. I gave this mirror to my sister, whom I love and miss very much.

DELICIOUS BORSCH

By Olga P.

Hello everyone. I want to tell you about my favorite food – borscht. This is a Ukrainian dish. Borscht is prepared by using the following products: meat, beets, onions, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes. This dish is served

with sour cream and resembles a soup. You can also serve donuts with garlic or plain bread with borscht. I love to cook this dish even in America because it reminds me of my home and my country.

POLAND

By Olga P.

I want to tell you about the Tatra Mountains, which are located on the territory of Poland. This is a very nice place. Even in summer you can find snow on the peaks. It takes about 2-3 hours to reach the top. I really like to climb the mountains in the summer,

because there you can see beautiful landscapes. There is also a small village near the ascent point, where you can buy souvenirs and eat delicious food. I love Poland because there are very kind and friendly people who help Ukrainians. Poland is my second home.

THE HAPPY BIRTHDAY

By Perresse T.



My name is Perresse, I came from Cameroon Central Africa. I have been in the United States for two-in-a-half years now 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.

Normally, a happy birthday is the day that you came into the world for your first time. Your parent and your family enjoy it. The hours pass, days pass, seasons pass, years pass, and everyone waits for that special day to enjoy with family, make wishes, or do

something special. In this topic, I would first like to show you the importance of the day of birth, and secondly to examine the importance of celebrating every day.

Obviously, the day of joy for everyone is the day of their birth. To give to that day a special taste, we celebrate with a candle on top a big cake, wine, juice, also champagne and your favorite music. Everything is right with the world, if you spend all night with your friends or your family around the table, discussing the next step in your life. Of course, you look forward to the year ahead, yet another year to top off the last one. Curiously, you create bigger and bigger resolutions for a better life.

In the morning, you wake up and you realize that it was just wishes that piled up to make you happy, and now it is the time to accomplish your hopes. You face the mirror and see, know, and believe that your hopes are possible, but not with a magic wand. You need to change many things in you and around you to achieve your goals. Your

joy starts to fade, the reality is here, and you start to stress about the bill, how to get a new promotion, or you need to fix your car or buy another one. Why think that you have just one day to be happy? Take a breath and tell me why that the only day you can enjoy yourself is your day of birth? We will try to give you some answers to think about.

Actually, it is important to celebrate every day. When you get up every morning you look out your windows to see the sun shine. Also, you can hear the bird sing if they live nearby, or you can hear a song on the radio from those who work all the night and are still working. You take a shower; you feel the water immerse your body. You can be hungry or thirsty, it depends on your diet. And you realize that you are alive and awake. You are full of joy and peace. You don't have a promotion or a lot of money in your account, but it doesn't matter; you are happy. Every second or hour is special or particular: you run to your job; you meet your friend; you make a new appointment. A new thing come up; and at the end of the day you realize, talking with a

loved one that you had an amazing day. You are healthy and happy, in another word, you achieve the goal of today. Can't we say that this day that brings you as much peace and joy as your day of birth? Of course, yes, every day that you put value on is really your birthday.

To conclude we can say that every day we have is a gift. You don't know if it is your last day, but you know that when you receive a gift you are so excited to open it and be happy to see what is inside and you definitely love it. To those who believe that your happy day is your birthday, you are right and those who believe that every day is a birthday are right, too. Just combine both days, take a look and see what magical life you can live every day, and stop waiting for one day to be happy. Every morning, make wishes along the day, then accomplish them. If in the end of your journey one day something is missing, it doesn't matter, you always have another gift with tomorrow. Enjoy the end of the day and keep in mind that you would have other wishes tomorrow, and the day that came after tomorrow.

PLANNING NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

By Rosilene F.



My name is Rosilene and I am from Brazil. I moved to the U.S.A. with my husband and two young kids almost 6 years ago. Since we arrived here, I started to find ways to learn English. With my natural curiosity and places like the Literacy Council of Frederick I went from learning ABC to reading books. I used to study English in my daily life for

cooking, reading news, watching movies, and YouTube, but the big improvement happened to me when I moved to Frederick and started Writing Classes at LCFC. After starting these classes I read five or six books in four months. I got a Library card, and I feel in paradise every time I go there. LCFC is igniting in myself the desire for reading and writing better in English.

New year, new resolutions. The feeling that we need to do something new or, reach a goal is almost present every New Year's Eve. Learning something new is really motivating. However, in the midst of January, usually, our motivation is not enough to keep us learning. Simple steps can be followed to minimize one more unfinished project. Knowing ourselves, choosing the correct project, and setting small goals help us to keep up with our projects for more time.

Sometimes we are excited by new ideas that are coming up around us. For example, it seems that everyone now started to talk about plants. How they are beautiful, relaxing, healthy, and many wonderful things. You are excited about becoming a parent of plants. However, you don't have enough space in your house, or time to daily take care of the plants, or you can't afford to buy the thing that involves having a plant. Or maybe, you want to do that because everyone is talking about it.

Choosing a project that we really want to learn is part of knowing ourselves. It helps us to put the real dimension that involves learning

something new. Even though, after a long day of work we still go to take class, read a book, or have hands-on activities, because we see real value in acquiring this new knowledge. First, it is important to know the real motivation to do that project. We need to see if it fits in our time and budget because is really frustrating to start a project that we can't afford to finalize it.

If you know your real motivation, availability, and budget it is time to think about the process that you will use to learn. It can be through workshops, books, friends, online classes, or free projects from the internet. At that point, it is important to know how much time you really have to dedicate to a new passion. Not doing that sometimes can compromise the results. Imagine starting a garden that you only can take care of it once a month. Or, piles of unfinished cut fabric lay on the couch without time to finalize them.

Now you have the project selected, and the time and budget estimated. The next step is setting goals. But, small goals. Grabbing the big project and chopping it in chunks helps to be more focused and motivated. And, always remember that the practice leads us to perfection, or more closely, our best work.

Maybe this process looks complicated or unreal. But, the combination of excitement and planning is important in guiding this new learning project in the best direction with fewer unfinished projects and less frustration.

A NEW WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

By Rosilene F.

Learning to write in English has been my excitement now. To be able to put words together with meaning, showing and communicating ideas is empowering. When we read and write the world opens for us; even more when we do it in English. Many wonderful things are written in English such as research, movies, books, and music. Writing and reading open doors for a better understanding of the USA's history and culture. It is a new world of possibilities. Now, learning English is more than surviving, it is for thriving.

Learning English is one of my lifelong struggles. When I was a student, English was a second language in the public school system in Brazil, but despite it being mandatory we didn't need grades in order to be approved. Year after year we started learning the simple present of the verb To Be. Private English classes were good options but, sometimes they were not affordable.

I studied English from 5th grade until High School. After that, I ended up knowing a few words. In the college where I studied, English was not required, however, I tried many private English classes, but, a simple thing was an excuse to quit the classes. At that point, I did not see English as an important thing to learn. I was 34 years old, married, and with two little kids when I arrived here in the USA, more specifically in Rockville Md.

I started taking classes in Basic One only on Saturdays in Gaithersburg. Unfortunately, I was not able to

continue because the school did not have enough students for the next level, Basic Two. I found another place in Silver Spring, but I did not feel the method there was good for me, it seemed more for young learners. After these experiences, I chose to learn English in my daily life. While here, I am a stay-at-home mom I needed to know about my role. Then I googled every possibility to apply English in my daily life. I found blogs, recipes, and YouTube channels. I did not understand, but I continued. I subscribed to Good Housekeeping, Better Homes, and Martha Stewart magazines. I bought a lot of cookbooks, educational and kids' books (I was a teacher in my country). I watched Simple Songs videos every day. I listened to the radio and podcasts.

And, what I assume was more important for me, I was curious. I read about the education system. I watched FOX 5. I attended Sunday mass in the Catholic Church. However, the big challenge came with the pandemic. My kids one in 2nd grade and the other in kindergarten. My son is special needs and he needs my help in order to attend the virtual classes. I stayed with my son the whole day in front of the computer. I was in kindergarten with him. Finally, I found free English classes online at Montgomery College and, later at the Literacy Council of Montgomery County.

When I moved to Frederick, I started to take classes in writing at LCFC (Literacy Council of Frederick County).

I am not confident with my English, especially in speaking and writing. I know that I learned a lot since I arrived

here, but I know that I have to learn more, first: confidence.

A TERRIFYING EVENT

By Sidike B.



My name is Sidike. I came from East Turkistan with my family in 2015. I had two daughters then and now I have 6 daughters. I am proud to be the mother of 6 princesses. They are my daughters, who need my care. They are my sisters, who help me and take care of me. They are my friends, who converse with me or have fun. I have a happy family! During my first five years in the United States, I did not have the opportunity to go to school or take online classes due to a variety of reasons, including having children, financial difficulties, and communication difficulties.

I was proud of my English skills which I had learned in my country when I was at university in 1999. I thought I could communicate easily if I would go to an English-speaking country. My dream

that I always wanted to go abroad to open my eyes, to develop myself came true. But it was not that easy to survive in another country with my limited English at that time. In the first few years, my mind was empty, scared of talking to people. Whenever I meet someone or go somewhere I was like a mind-locked person who does not know what to say. But there was always something that pushed me. I learned from my kids. I read books with my kids at the library which was the only place we enjoyed. I joined some conversation clubs at the library. I was always looking for classes at the library. Once a librarian who was at the C Burr Artz Library recommended the Literary Council, which provided classes or where I could find tutors. I was super excited and went to their office and told them my circumstances. They found me a tutor a few months later. I took an online class once a week for one year and I learned a lot from my tutor. Unfortunately, I had to stop taking this class because my fifth baby was born.

In 2022, I noticed the Literacy Council's office arranged a bunch of classes like writing and reading. So, I registered for a writing class to improve my writing skills. I had not realized I could write an essay until I got my teacher Ms. Catherine's good comments. I joined two back-to-

back writing classes which were set up by Ms. Catherine. There were a lot of improvements in my writing and reading through Ms. Catherine's instruction and her encouragement. I enjoyed our writing and reading class. I love Ms. Catherine's teaching methods. She always gives great feedback to her students even if they write very badly to encourage them to keep writing. Ms. Catherine opened my door to writing. She made me realize I could write an essay. I appreciate Ms. Catherine!

Now I am a licensed daycare provider, part-time teacher, and part-time college student. My goal is to improve my English skills to express myself, share my experiences of teaching kids when they are little, write about my new instructional ideas for educating kids, and learn new skills, and new knowledge to develop myself in my career.

I like reading, sports, gardening, and spending time with little kids. I enjoy working with kids, also interested in cultivating children's language skills, learning skills, and independent skills.

I am 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, write in English, and publish an essay.

It was a sunny day at the beginning of Autumn in 2020 when my 5th daughter (Arifa) turned one year and one month old. I was watching my kids while they were playing in front of the door. Our neighbor, Rebecca came with her two daughters who were two and four years old. They

are exactly the same ages as my 3rd one and 4th daughters. They always played together. I was talking to Rebecca while the kids were playing. My one-year-old baby was playing too. She started walking when she was 11 months old, so it was perfectly fine for her to walk everywhere as she was 13 months old. By and by, talking to my neighbor, I totally forgot where my baby had gotten to. Suddenly I was shocked that something was missing. I opened my eyes big and looked around. I saw everyone was playing except for my baby. What? my baby! Where was my baby? Where? I looked right, looked left of the house, looked in front and in back of the house and I looked everywhere she might go, but I could not find her.

There was no sight of the baby. I called her name. There was no response, absolutely she could not respond because she was late in developing speech. I called my oldest daughter (Khadija) who was inside the house to see if the baby was inside. She ran outside and said there was no baby inside. We all started looking for the baby. I started imagining the possibility of something bad happening "What if something bad happened to her, I could never get back my baby. What if someone kidnapped her? I could never find her. What if there was a car coming and didn't see her and crashed ... if she walked through to the road?" No! No! I didn't want to think anything bad. My heart was broken. I was crying while I was looking for my baby. I complained to myself that I was not a responsible mom. I investigated the garage, investigated the workshop, I looked in every bedroom to think if she was sleeping or playing somewhere

even though my oldest daughter had already looked. I could not find her.

Suddenly, I heard my oldest one calling “I found the baby, I found the baby... She was sitting next to the bush which was in front of the sunroom door.” What? We just looked around the house, there was nobody! Anyway, she was there. “Oh, thanks be to my God!” I whispered to myself and expressed my happiness by crying. I flew to my baby and hugged her tightly.

Now I realized why she was at that door. A few days ago, I started opening my homeschool for my 3 kids who

were 4 years old, 2 years old, and one year old. We pretended to be playing a ride on the school bus game. We carried our backpack which was filled with real lunch, and used our bicycles as a school bus. We rode our bicycles around the house and stopped in front of the sunroom door since it is our classroom. I made my little kids wait there and ran inside the house from the front door to open the sunroom door for them, and welcomed my new students. That is why she might have come to this door. Anyway, it was so scary, especially for a missing child! Luckily, I found my baby safely!

FROM LITERACY COUNCIL OF FREDERICK COUNTY TO GEORGETOWN LAW SCHOOL: MY LINGUISTIC AND LEGAL ODYSSEY*

By Silvia M.



Silvia M. is a long-time friend, and fervent supporter of the Literacy Council. Silvia's story with the Literacy Council began when, as an immigrant in 2011,

she could barely speak English. Her relationship with the Council extends beyond mere participation; she's been an author of Reflections: Voices of English Learners, a volunteer, tutor, student, and Spanish language translator. Through the Council's solid support, her journey from beginner lessons to a strong advocate for Literacy in Frederick County are unstoppable. Currently, as a student at Georgetown Law School, she works at the office of Human Rights and The Office of Public Interest and Community Services. Silvia continues to exemplify the transformative power of literacy.

Silvia M. is a trained lawyer in Perú and was a Law Professor there. In the U.S., she finished a Paralegal Program at Frederick Community College under the lead of Dr. Tracy Parker and has been a law intern for the Frederick County State's Attorney's Office, in addition to volunteering with various community organizations in Frederick. She is now an LL.M. Candidate at Georgetown Law Center. Her work with community organizations reflects her determination and provides an example to others of what is possible with belief in oneself. Silvia's path hasn't been without its challenges, but her motto, "because she did not know that it was impossible, she went and did it," has guided her every step of her way.

This speech was delivered in the unprecedented year of 2021 at The Rotary Club of Mount Airy by invitation of my teacher who became my friend Denise D. The year that was marked by the global pandemic. I share my extraordinary journey of language acquisition, cultural integration, and professional pursuit in the United States with emphasizes on the crucial role that Literacy Council played in my linguistic and personal development.

I'm thrilled to be standing here before you today at the Rotary Club in Mount Airy. My name is Silvia M., and I can be speaking in front of you today because of the Literacy Council of Frederick County. The Literacy Council of Frederick County gave me not only the tools to learn English, but the support needed to succeed. For me it has been both an incredible journey and a profound learning experience.

In this spirit, I would like to talk about the importance of community services, and one organization that has been crucial to my journey: The Literacy Council of Frederick County.

Before I start, I want to say that I am from Lima-Perú and when I came to live in 2011 in the United States, I could barely speak English. In Perú, I am an attorney with a master's degree in Commercial and Civil Law. As well, I am a certificate Conciliator with specialization in Family Law. I practiced law; mediation and I taught at the university as a Family Law and Commercial Law professor for seven years. I am fascinated by my career, and currently I am a student at Georgetown University Law school in Washington D.C. I started the fall 2021 the Two-year LL.M. with certificate in Legal English for foreign-trained Lawyers. Learning English at the Literacy Council at the "One to one program" transformed my life forever. Participating in "English conversation class" gave me the confidence to talk in public and "Civics classes integrated myself to my new country and made me meld with the U.S. The Literacy Council of Frederick County was instrumental in my transition to live in my new home.

Learning English at the Literacy Council in the "one-to-one program" transformed my life forever. Because I broke the invisible barrier of language and started speaking English and pursuing my dreams. However, the path wasn't easy. Back in 2011, I was fortunate to find in the library a brochure where I read for the first time about the Literacy Council. I understood words like: "English class", "one-to-one program" and

"free – no cost." I started with Freida P., my first tutor. We — Miss Freida and I — started at the one-to-one program with the series of Laubach Ways of Reading: Correlated Reader, Other Vowel Sounds and Consonant Spellings. The classes were at the office and the flexibility of the program allowed to meet with her as much as both could. Among all the grammar classes and books, I loved the idiomatic expressions that I learned from a book called "Essential Idioms in English." The idiomatic expression helps me to understand the language more. For example: bring your umbrella. It's raining cats and dogs out there! – means very hard rain. No expectation that a dog or cat would fall from the sky. For me as learning new language idioms were a phrase not easy to understand at the beginning but now, I can say that idioms help me to "kill two birds with one stone" because they help me to better understand on a daily basis communication in the community and second in my class of U.S Legal American System at Georgetown Law Center where professor Hoffman explains that judges use idioms at their opinions.

For me, one-on- one tutoring teaches students to speak with confidence. Also, the student receives immediate feedback, allows adjustment of pronunciation on speech and pronunciation that sometimes can be "a pain in the neck." The personalized program fits my necessities quite well and allows me to gain confidence to speak in public. A great thing to know about the Literacy Council is that we have several other classes to learn English.

My second class at Literacy Council

was with Denise D, my teacher at English conversation class. She always warms up the class with a casual conversation and because of her personality she creates a safe and supportive environment for us. I always feel welcomed at her class and so happy to have the magazine "News for You." The topics of conversation were wide, and our conversation classroom was like the United Nations. Participants of the class are from Asia, Europe, Africa, and Sudamericana. Students received a free copy of the magazine. It was a great way to improve our skills or to listen on our own devices (cell phone, iPad, or computer) and with the option to read on paper. Thanks to the class I was aware of such important events though different season, holidays that as an immigrant I was not celebrating before. Likewise, stories that were covered for the magazine "News for You" were the main piece of our conversation class. For example: I still remember "Punxsutawney Phil and the Groundhog Day". I learned about this winter tradition where a groundhog called Phil will emerge from its burrow and made a prediction about the weather in February at Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Through the conversation class I broke the English barrier, and I started talking aloud. Denise gave us encouragement and generated that the comprehension flow at the class. Students asked questions and shared opinions and without thinking so much about the language we started talking, we started keeping a conversation in English. The magazine is an extraordinary resource for me and in combination with the conversation

class my tongue and mouth muscles were training too! Denise took the time to keep all of us engaged at the class, showed us sounds accurately, and we practiced with her at class, as well!

Literacy Council supported me even at the pandemic time. I took a conversation class, and we met on Zoom. Practicing English gave me fluency in speaking and provided me with an active background of civic knowledge that helped me to make connections with common phrases, idioms, and pronunciation. I am now at the point where I feel bilingual and used that skill to finish a Paralegal Program at Frederick Community college, to work with Frederick County Public School as an interpreter and to be a student at Georgetown Law Center.

The third class that I was enrolled in was a Civic class with Miss Marianne D. which fit perfectly with my background. I learned much about the rights and obligations of good citizens in our society. At this class we learned about government in general as well, we learned about events that happen here in Frederick, Maryland. I remember learning about the history of Frederick County, Barbara Fritchie, Francis Scot Key, and the Civil War. Also, I learned about Civil Rights, Martin Luther King and more topics. I need to admit that I took Civics class at least three times. The format of this class was a two-hour session one time per week. Students met at museums, downtown libraries, local businesses, or Frederick Community College. Miss Marianne with passion taught me to be informed and engaged as a citizen and yes, indeed I achieved my citizenship in

2014 with the support of the Literacy Council. An experience that impacts my life and opens the doors to the sky. I feel so proud to be an American and I achieve that goal with the support of the Literacy Council of Frederick County.

The next year in 2015, I was a keynote speaker at the Winchester Hall at the Naturalizations Ceremony organized by the Human Relation Commission. I believe that because I am learning English, I can stamp up in front of them like I am doing tonight. It was a wonderful experience!! I spoke aloud without fear in front of people in a new language. I feel confident and I speak as often as possible to many other Spanish immigrants to encourage them to learn English, to write in English and to sing songs in English. I enjoy linking people with people. I hope I can impact other people's lives like the Literacy Council's tutors did for me. Receiving the "Recognition of Service" award by the Rotary Club of Mount Airy in Frederick Maryland is indeed an honor. But more importantly, it serves as a reminder of the power of learning an idiom, to educate yourself and how it can impact your journey as an American Citizen.

To conclude my speech, I want to leave you with this reflection: "How can a one-to-one English program give me tools to transform my life?" or "How can a conversation class make an impact on my life?" Well, as I said at the beginning in 2011, I could barely speak English and I can say that my comprehension and pronunciation have improved since I started classes at the Literacy Council. Then, my confidence to connect with new

people that speak English was not a problem since I felt that I can deliver a message. Maybe I cannot speak perfectly yet, but I have the grammar and vocabulary to express my ideas and am able to communicate effectively.

Although my goal at the Literacy Council was to learn English at the same time, I use my first language “Spanish” to close the gap of the English barrier at Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) as an interpreter since 2013 to the present. As well, I use my bilingual skills to help at Frederick Community College at the Pro-Bono Law clinic as an interpreter to the low-income families that require free legal advice from 2017 to 2020. I became the Literacy Council’s tutor in 2013. That’s my way to express my thankfulness and my pride to be one part of this amazing organization.

In my assimilation process the Literacy Council has a key role because it helps me to achieve the skills to speak a language. The fluency to speak made me understand the history, culture and the idiomatic expression

are now a “piece of cake.” This dynamic individual process involves two parts. First, a student like me that starts almost from “zero” English to nine years later persists in the dream to become an attorney in the U.S. Second a tutor who patiently and empathetically teaches us not only English but fosters dreams.

I read a Mark Twain quotation that states: “They did not know it was impossible, so they did it.” However, I prefer this version to apply to myself “because she did not know that it was impossible, she went and did it” these quotations summarize my experience as an immigrant arriving with dreams to U.S. and working to increase my opportunities knowing and talking English. I stand here today, not just as a testament of my perseverance but as an example of the incredible things that can be achieved with the right support.

**Speech as a guest speaker by Silvia Muñoz at the Rotary Club of Mount Airy. Award of Recognizing Service, September 7, 2021.*

A NEW BEGINNING: A NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

By Stephane M.



My name is Stephane M., I am 47 years old, I am from Gabon, a country in Central Africa, married and father of one daughter. I studied in France, from high school to college (2 years of college in Administration and Human resources). My professional experience was in Gabon within oil companies in the logistics and security of oil sites (HSS). I have been in the United States for 2 years and 4 months, I have been taking English lessons thanks to the Literacy Council of Frederick program. This wonderful and enriching experience in terms of relationship, professional and organizational terms, has allowed me significantly to improve my English (written and spoken), thanks to the sharing and exchange with the various teachers and students that I had the honor of working with. Today my goals are as follows, to integrate and work here in the United States and become

a citizen of this country, but also to give my person in community actions, volunteering and to share my experience through writing. Finally, I would like to engage in political action for the well-being, to help improve the lives of some of most vulnerable citizens. I have been very touched since I came to United States by the hospitality and the kindness that has been offered to me, as such I want to give back through my actions what this country has given me.

From my childhood, I was rocked by the American films and series of the 80s, such as "Dallas," "Miami Vice," "Alf"... Even if the series and film were fiction, it already aroused in me the desire to discover this great country.

The United States has always excited my curiosity, from my little experience of having lived far from my native country Gabon, during my studies at the college and the university in France. America remains a pleasant discovery, by its way of life, and the kindness and availability of the people who have crossed my path.

The example to support this kindness is my experience as a student in the English class of the Literacy Council of Frederick County program. This program allowed me to easily integrate myself, thanks to the positive energy instilled by the teachers I had, by their humor, their professionalism, but also by the festive and joyful atmosphere during the lessons.

All these factors are for me and

other students an advantage to better understand things and progress.

The beauty of this country is also wonderful, with its wide-open spaces, breathtaking landscapes (for example the Grand Canyon...), and different climates. For a moment try to put yourself in the place of someone coming from a country of barely 2 million people inhabitants, by comparison the city of Chicago in 2021 had 2,697,000 million inhabitants.

The United States for me in order of magnitude is on a continent.

One of the important wealth in this country, in my eyes, is its cultural and culinary wealth, thanks to its rainbow population (American Indian,

European, African, Hispanic, Asian...).

The diversity of this nation and the strict respect of its constitution, are the pillars of its economic success.

Even if there remains a problem linked to the proliferation of firearms, the United States remains a model and example of economic and social success and especially in terms of human rights.

Living today for over 2 years (April 24th was 2 years to the day I have lived in this country), I remain fascinated by all that I have left to discover and I wish to register for the duration in the United States, and one day become an American citizen.

FIRST THREE DAYS

By Tetiana F.



My name is Tetiana F. I was born in the western part of Ukraine, but for the last 18 years, I have lived in Kyiv. I am a single mother of a daughter named Sofia. When we arrived in the U.S.A. because of the War, the Literacy Council helped me improve my English, especially my

writing skills, which I later used in further learning. Now I am studying in college to get a certificate in computerized accounting. I hope that the War in Ukraine will finish soon, and we will not have to worry anymore about our family, relatives, friends, and all Ukrainians.

Rumors of the War had been circulating actively since late 2021. Most of the population did not believe in that or could not imagine that the war would be against the civilian people. That's why everyone was shocked in the first days. No one could imagine such a terrible War. The 24th of February divided the lives of Ukrainians into "before" and "after."

When the president of the United States announced that the War would begin on February 17th, I decided to

leave Kyiv on that day. My parents live in Western Ukraine. So, my eleven-year-old daughter Sofia and I went there. But the War had not started then. I had to work in Kyiv. Therefore, I came back home on February 19th, but I left Sofia with my parents for the next two weeks.

On the eve of February 24th, I went to bed late. I read forums where people shared their thoughts about the possibility of the War. There were a lot of anonymous reports that the War would start the next day. Some people packed an "alarming backpack." It is a backpack with documents, money, water and dry food, warm clothes and other necessary things.

My roommate woke me up at nearly 6 o'clock in the morning and said, "The War has started. Russians attacked Kyiv." I was very scared. The sounds of explosions could be heard in my apartment. I opened the news on the Internet, read and saw terrible videos.

I looked for bus or train tickets, but all were booked. I didn't have a car. So, I called my friend Kristina, who had a car. She was in a hurry and prepared to leave Kyiv in a western direction. I decided to go to the bus-stop, where Kristina had to pick me up. I dressed in the warmest clothes and I packed my "alarming backpack." It was very difficult to find a taxi, so I waited for nearly one hour for the car.

I arrived at the bus-stop at 8 a.m. There were a lot of people and cars. At 8:30 a.m. cars practically stood in a traffic jam. All gas stations in Kyiv were empty by that time. Kristina called me and said that she had very little gas and she wanted to drive to her sister's house near Bucha. I decided not to go

there. I came back to my apartment.

The road inside the city was clear. I saw huge lines at ATMs and grocery stores. My street was quiet, and people tried to store food and cash. No one knew what to do. Any route could be dangerous. Gas quickly disappeared. Staying in Kyiv was dangerous too, and many people simply fell into a stupor. Unfortunately, some people made wrong decisions that day. Kristina spent weeks near Irpin but she was lucky to escape later. Unfortunately, many people stayed there forever.

The situation was so stressful that I didn't have an appetite at all. I forced myself to eat a little. I thanked God that Sofia was in Western Ukraine with my parents. She didn't see all this horror in my eyes. I know that she read the news and watched videos. But being in the midst of the War was much worse. I tried to encourage my daughter during video calls and not to show my fear. At the same time, it was terrible to be apart from each other in such a dangerous situation.

The rest of the first day of the War I spent reading and watching the news, talking with friends and relatives, looking for train tickets, and preparing my corridor for the night. I used a special service for travel, which allowed me to buy tickets online immediately. And I was lucky. I got my ticket for the evening train to Western Ukraine for February 25th.

I had no sleep all night. I sat on the floor in my corridor, where I laid out all my blankets and pillows. People said that it is the safest place in an apartment: between two walls from both directions, without windows and mirrors. I read the news and chatted on a women's forum. I connected with

the groups in Telegram that notified the alarm signal, because in my district the loudspeaker was not audible. That night was very long and full of fear and confusion.

My second day of the War began with cleaning. Doing something was helpful. I took all the perishable food outside. Not to leave food in the fridge was important too, because I didn't know when I could return. I understood that I might not return to my home at all. Some houses were destroyed at that moment. And no one knew what would happen next.

My neighbor took me to the train station, which was very crowded with people, children, cats, dogs and suitcases standing everywhere. I decided to wait in the underground passage that seemed safer. Most people didn't have tickets; they waited for evacuation trains. When boarding was announced, they ran to the wagons in order to have a chance to find a seat. Everyone who was unlucky had to wait for the next evacuation train. Boarding the train was easier for me because I had a ticket for the

regular route.

The trip could be dangerous, because missile strikes were carried out all over Ukraine, and no one knew which place would be fired upon next. That's why, I didn't tell my parents and my daughter that I was on the train. Only my sister knew about my trip. Sometimes the train stopped and the electricity was turned off. Such moments were scary. The wagon had windows and mirrors. I knew that shrapnel and glass shards are very dangerous and they could hurt or kill. I didn't sleep for the second night either.

Finally, I arrived at the last station at 1 p.m. I got on the bus and only then I called my parents and said that I would come soon. Hugging my daughter and my parents was true happiness. Only in my childhood home was I finally able to sleep.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the end of the horror, but only the beginning. The War hurts the souls of every Ukrainian. It doesn't matter where they are: in Ukraine or abroad. We all lost our "peace."

PROGRESS REQUIRES SACRIFICE

By Tetiana F.

Furry friends give their lives to improve human things in areas such as: food, medications, cosmetics etc. (It is awful from some points of view.) But we should use animal testing, because we haven't any other choice.

Animals' DNA is actually very similar to humans. For example, mice share 99 percent of their DNA which is similar with ours and their population grows very quickly. That's why mice are the

most common participants in the experiments. Scientists also use rats, rabbits, cats, dogs, pigs and sheep. In fact, any kind of animal can be used for testing and researching. The choice of participants of the experiments depends on the goals of scientists.

The cost of animal testing isn't cheap, but it is definitely cheaper than other ways of researching, and it is safer for humans. For example, "more

than 10,000 babies were born with deformities or heart disease after their mothers took thalidomide to suppress morning sickness in the 1950s." As you see, it is extremely important to use animal testing before using medicines on people.

Hopefully nowadays animal testing is being used less often than in the past. "Following the EU's lead, more than 40 countries have banned — or are phasing out — animal testing for cosmetics." The cosmetics industry is huge and it is a good start. Despite this, it is extremely important to use animals in developing medicines and

health research, because human lives are the most valuable thing. And for now, we haven't any other methods for testing. Maybe, in the future, we will use robots and simulations.

Despite this, animal testing is an indispensable kind of research for now. The only thing we can do is reduce the usage of furry friends. And in the meantime we should look for another way to achieve the same goal.

*Brittany Hopkins Contributor.
6/7/2021. "Animal Testing Pros and Cons: Where Both Parties Stand." <https://theflag.org>. Accessed on March 31, 2023.

OUR CLOTHES

By Tetiana F.

When I gave birth to a child, I began to think about the future of the world. Information about pollution of the textile industry is a shocking study with troubling statistics. At the same time, everyone can influence it. So, I decided to start with myself and to minimize clothing waste.

There are different ways to reduce pollution of the textile industry in personal cases. Someone buys secondhand clothes more often. Someone gives their unnecessary clothes to other people. But my way is to just buy less clothes. Sometimes it is difficult not to buy extra things. At that moment I used additional arguments, "You could use this money in a better way! Do not bury your finances in your wardrobe."

After repairs in my apartment, I bought only one small wardrobe. And after that when I buy one piece of

clothes - I give one away. The same is true with my shoes. That's why I didn't buy a lot of clothes. With this approach, it is better to buy quality things that will keep a decent look longer.

Usually, I buy clothes at the end of the season. I look for sweaters, sweatshirts and winter jackets in January-February. And t-shirts, shorts, and dresses I buy in August-September. Before my shopping I reviewed my wardrobe and decided what pieces need to be replaced. I use old clothes for home clothes (T-shirts and sweatshirts, sweatpants, leggings, shorts) or give these to pet shelters. In Ukraine we have different clothes for home and outside.

As you see, it is not as hard to do conscious purchases. I think that everybody needs to take small personal steps in reducing clothing waste.

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