

# Reflections

## Voices of English Learners

Eighth Edition, 2025

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

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

## LITERACY LIFTS LIVES

It is my pleasure to share with you the eighth edition of Reflections: Voices of English Learners. The Literacy Council presents the latest curated collection of writings by the adult learners participating in the council's Writing Program. The essays highlight not only the efforts of the students working to improve their English skills, but also their courage and determination to embrace new challenges.

Our students, whose lives manifest a diversity of experiences, are united by a shared commitment to learning and personal growth. Some of them are striving to master English as a second language; others are native speakers who are just beginning their literacy journey. It is the Literacy Council's ongoing mission to guide these Frederick County adults along the pathways to essential literacy skills, opening doors to opportunities that once seemed out of reach.

Fulfilling this goal would not be possible without the dedication of our volunteer tutors. They bring patience, encouragement, and expertise to each session, helping our learners to build confidence and skills that ripple outward into families, workplaces, and the broader community. Their generosity reminds us that education is most powerful when it is shared.

The pieces you are about to read are a celebration of achievement, resilience, and hope. Every story captures a significant moment in our learners' lives, now made possible to share thanks to the gift of literacy. Our vision—literacy lifts lives—is evident on every page, as students demonstrate the power of learning to transform futures. I encourage you to read these stories with an open heart and mind, and I am confident that, like me, you will be inspired by the difference literacy makes in the lives of our students and, ultimately, in the life of Frederick County.

Ginger Trautman  
President, Literacy Council Board of Directors

# DEDICATION

We dedicate Reflections: Voices of English Learners to our adult learners, their families, and their volunteer tutors.

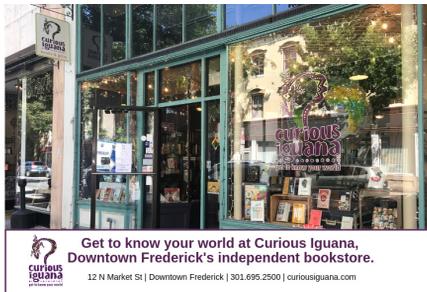
# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We appreciate the continued dedication of our sponsors Curious Iguana, John and Jane Ketchem, graphic artist Karen Peacock, editor Catherine Coundjeris, co-founding editor Julie Heifetz, co- editor Cecelia Reed, and first reader Alix Cooney. In addition, many thanks go out to our dedicated tutors and our contributing students.

*Reflections: Voices of English Learners* is produced by Hood College. Photography and artwork is provided by our students. Aruna K. presented her *Parrot Among the Lotus* painting (page 9). While Young Ae H. presented her paintings: *Time is Coming* (page 62) and *Sunflower* (page 64).

Additional artwork is the HeLa Cell by Darryl Leja NHGRI (26) and *Road* by Karen Peacock (52). Cover art by Karen Peacock.



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

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

*We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon. ~Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Reflections: Voices of English Learners is now publishing its eighth edition! Our students are courageous seekers, believing in their goal of attaining new horizons for themselves and their families. This has been a challenging year of changes for the country and changes for the Literacy Council. Throughout all the transitions of 2025 our commitment to our students has remained a constant and their dreams and hopes for a better life continue to inspire and motivate our board, staff, and volunteers. Their cooperative achievements make Frederick a better community.

Despite tremendous odds, our students find ways to contribute to the work force and engage in volunteer opportunities, immersing themselves in learning the English Language, and becoming contributing members of our society. This year's magazine is a testament to their continued pioneer spirit as they are building new homes for themselves and their families, seeking belonging and community in a mercurial world.

Submission is open to all the adult learners of the Literacy Council—no matter the level of language acquisition—who never fail to impress with the excellence of writing we are fortunate to publish in this magazine. The stories in Reflections are gathered from the histories of our student body and are influenced by their individual voices and experiences.

Most of the pieces come from the Writing Classes that we had online this past year. Although we are getting an increase in submissions from students engaged in tutorials. In personal stories, our students share insights and revelations that their lives have illuminated for them. We watch how they build bridges to the new American culture that they have adopted, humbled by their courage and strength.

Students share their favorite recipes and movies, engage us with their sense of humor, document their travel experiences. They reveal themselves in expository pieces, fictional pieces, and poetry. This year we are privileged to include some art work from our students as well. They allow us to glimpse into their personal worlds. The students' work addresses a wide variety of themes, including, breaking barriers, celebrating cultures, problem solving, and adjusting to stress.

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 a selection of stories to you in the eighth edition of Reflections, the Literacy Magazine of the Literacy Council of Frederick County. We lightly edit, maintaining the integrity of the individual authors' voices.

We send out a call to those of you who are new readers of the magazine as well as students of the Literacy Council to submit your stories for Reflections 2026. We are committed to being a source of community to our authors. And we are proud to continue providing an outlet for our students' unique perspectives, creativity, and voices. ■

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## MY VACATION

By Amoze Nougaisse F.

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*I am Amoze Nougaisse F., married and mother of three children. I like reading, watching certain things on social media and going for walks with my family. I chose this course to better understand and write in English. I learned a lot about how to make a sentence, a paragraph, and define verb, noun, clause, adjective. I would like to thank the Frederick County Literacy Council for this learning opportunity and especially Ms. Catherine, my writing teacher. It is a very beautiful experience that allowed me to better understand English grammar.*

Last July in 2024, we went to Albany, New York to an Independence Day party at my cousin's house. We took the opportunity to visit other



members of the family. On this occasion we did a lot of extraordinary things. The children played football, and we went on some walks too. We took the opportunity to eat meals from home. It was really fun. We swam in the pool as a family, and I am ready to repeat this experience if I find the opportunity. ■

## MY FREE TIME

By Amoze Nougaisse F.

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In my free time, I enjoy indulging in a variety of activities that help me relax and unwind. One of my favorite things to do is to read a good book. I also love going for long walks in nature. Additionally, I enjoy practicing physical exercises and praying to God. These activities bring me joy and peace, making my free time truly pleasant. My free time during the week is different from my free time on weekends. My children are available to accompany me on weekends, and we do family activities. Sometimes I spend time on the phone with my family and friends. ■

## MY FAVORITE MOVIE

By Amoze Nougaisse F.

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Today I am going to tell you about my favorite movie, "Romeo and Juliet."

It is the story of two lovesick teenagers. They are supposed to be sworn enemies because of their families' ongoing conflict, but they fall in love. This movie is based on a tragedy written by William Shakespeare and featuring the actors Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes as the heroes. I like this movie because it shows us how love can influence people's decisions, love cannot be rushed, and love is the most powerful thing in the world. This is one of the greatest love stories of all time. ■

# MY FAMILY RESTAURANT

By Ana Piña C.

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*Hello! I'm Ana, and I want to share with you some of my experience with the Literacy Council here in Frederick Maryland. I emigrated to this country 10 months ago and, looking on the internet for centers to learn the English language, I found the Literacy Council. I started my classes in January of this year. It has been a pleasant experience since I have learned a lot of English as my second language. This has opened doors for me for better communication in my day-to-day life. I like to attend classes in person since they are very interactive and the ones I have taken via Zoom have taught me that I must try harder to learn grammar and spelling through reading. My goal is to continue learning the English language until I have completely mastered it. Since I do it not only because of the need to be able to communicate, but as a personal goal to be able to perform in some work area that is related to the law career that I studied in my home of Mexico. I am very grateful to all the staff who work in the center and to my tutors. Thanks to their support, every day it becomes more possible to achieve my goal.*

My favorite place in my country, Mexico, is a family restaurant. Its name is The Sauces.

I like it a lot because I usually go there every weekend to eat with my whole family. There is a lake where we can use boats. The food is delicious, as is the weather. ■



# IN MY FREE TIME

By Ana Piña C.

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In my free time, I like to go for walks at the mall. I usually go on weekends. Sometimes my husband accompanies me. I also like to watch a movie with my husband in the afternoons. I like the weekend to go shopping. In my free time during the week, I like to go walking every day in the morning, I cook at home and do the cleaning. Saturdays and Sundays I don't cook. ■

## REFLECTIONS

By Anna H.

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*My name is Anna H. and I have been working with an English as a Second Language tutor for 2 1/2 years. I've also taken writing classes. I really enjoy working with the Literacy Council teachers. I have improved my reading and understanding of parts of speech. I like to go to concerts in Baker Park in Frederick, and I exercise every day. I visit my grandkids and play cards and puzzles with them. I also like to take them to the pool. My husband and I enjoy spending time together.*



Although reflection is a subjective exercise, it is often used to inject more objectivity into writing. When the writer engages in reflective writing, they can take a step back and deliver more context in the piece. This offers them a

path not only to greater understanding of their own instincts and ideas, but also helps the reader to better understand the work. ■

## NIAGARA FALLS

By Anna H.

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Niagara Falls is a city on the Niagara River, in New York State. It's known for the vast Niagara Falls, which straddles the Canadian border. You will need a passport to cross the border.

Discover Sea Creatures at the Aquarium of Niagara, an aquarium with various exhibits, including sea lions, and penguins. Then visit Niagara Falls, which is a beautiful waterfall, The Observation Tower at Prospect Point looks out over Niagara Gorge and

offers a view of all three waterfalls at the Niagara Gorge.

Bella Rose Vineyard is a winery we visited. Niagara Wine Trail also has other regional wineries offering tastings directly at the festivals and tours of local vineyards.

We love seafood! My husband and I talk about what we want to do after our visit to Niagara Falls: Do we want to go to the movies, or go out to have dinner at Red Lobster Restaurant? ■

# TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF

By Anna H.

You're going to come across people in your life who say all the right words at all the right times, but in the end it's their actions you should judge them by, so pay attention to what people do consistently. Their daily actions will tell you almost everything you need to know. And remember that today

is too important to waste. Take good care of your personal boundaries and what you allow yourself to absorb from others. Count your blessings, value the people who truly matter—the ones whose actions match their words—and move on from the drama with your head held high. ■

## HOW I LEARNED TO PAINT

By Aruna K.

My name is Aruna K. I come from Narasaraopet, India. I have been living here in Frederick since 2019. I have had a wonderful experience with the Literacy Council. It is helping me learn English better. The Council provided very good teachers for me. One teacher is Erin R., who helped me apply for a special tutor. Her name is Sarah L. She is helping me speak and write English. They are very caring to me and help me improve. My hobbies are painting, reading, cooking, and traveling. My goal is to speak better and to get a job. I earned an MBA in India, and I would like to enroll in Frederick Community College.

When I was a child, my grandfather, Veera, was an architect. My grandfather knew a lot about painting. He made sculptures by carving wood and rock. He made very beautiful sculptures. He drew plans for the temple in the village. I got interested in art because of my grandfather. He taught me how to do artwork. When he carved the wood,



*Credit: Aruna K.*

then I would paint it. Day by day, I developed an interest in painting.

My dad observed that I had an interest in painting. He connected me to a painting teacher. She taught me how to paint on fabric. I was 18 years old when I learned. She gave me suggestions during the painting class.

After that, I began a business in fabric paint. I was painting on fabric to sell them. I earned a lot of money in my country.

My family, my father, Purnachandrachari, and my mother, Dhanalakshmi felt very proud to sell the paint art. I gave my father the money I earned. He said, "My daughter is earning money at 18 years old." I learned multiple ways of painting such as hand painting, acrylic painting, water painting, glass painting, embossed painting, and sand painting. I learned hand painting with a brush and fabric.

My teacher was very kind during the class. Her name was Lakshmi Shalini. She taught me in a very friendly way. She never scolded me. She taught me on fabric. I am learning to paint animals,

trees, and birds. I am using fabric paint on the fabric.

I started a small business. It was running for two years. After that, I got married. We moved to the city. My husband, Bahuguna, got an opportunity in the United States for a job. He came to the U.S. My husband told me if I had an interest in the business I could continue. I didn't start the business because I had a baby. I thought I couldn't balance both family and business.

My husband was very busy with his job. After six months, my daughters and I came to the U.S. I didn't start a business in the U.S. yet. Right now, I am teaching my kids to make art. I am also utilizing my time to learn new things. I never feel sad because I am always learning new work. ■

## MY HEAVEN

By Bunkong W.

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*My name is Bunkong, and I am originally from Thailand. When I first arrived in the United States, I could hardly speak English and felt very nervous about talking to people around me. One day, a friend took me to the Literacy Council in downtown Frederick, where I began attending English classes.*

*Learning a new language was not easy, especially for me. I took many classes and worked hard to improve. Over time, I began to understand and slowly I gained confidence. Today, I can speak, read, and write in English. It is not perfect yet, but I am very happy with how far I have come.*

*Now I can talk with my neighbors, make appointments with doctors, and do many*

*things I could not do before. I am proud of my progress, and I want to continue learning and improving my English skills.*

*Lastly, I want to thank all my teachers at the Literacy Council. I am deeply grateful for their support, patience, and encouragement. They helped me find my voice, and I will always appreciate everything they have done for me.*

I have been living in this house since I moved to the United States. It's small, but just the right size for the two of us. My husband served in the Navy for 28 years, and I have always been proud of him. As for me, I'm a homemaker, and we never had children. ■

The house has both a front and backyard. I plant flowers in the front and grow herbs and vegetables in the back. I have many kinds of herbs—lemongrass, basil, chili, and more—which I use in cooking. Fresh ingredients straight from my garden always make a difference.

Welcome inside! When you open the door, you can see the kitchen island. It's my favorite spot, where I spend a lot of time. I use it for preparing meals, eating, and even doing my homework.

To the right of the kitchen island, near the windows, is a small corner where I store herbs that wouldn't survive the winter.

If I had lots of money, my husband once said, he would buy me a big house. I told him, "Thank you, honey, but I don't need it. I love this house—it's my heaven on earth." ■



## EDUCATION'S POWER

By Bunkong W.

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I grew up in a small village in Thailand called Nam Yuen, where farming was the way of life.

My family and the community planted corn, beans, and other crops twice a year, depending on the rain to keep them growing. Some years there just wasn't enough rain, and when that happened, the crops struggled, and people had a tough time making a living.

Education was limited. Back then, Nam Yuen had only one primary school, so higher education wasn't really an

option for most people, including my family and me.

Meanwhile, my auntie's family lived in a big city, where schools and universities were everywhere. Her children had the chance to get a good education—one became a teacher, the other a businessman—and both ended up doing well in life.

In the end, education makes a huge difference. It helps people build a stable future, opens doors to better opportunities, and brings more security and success. ■

# A NEW PATH

By Carlos M.

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*Hello everyone. My name is Carlos M., I'm 36 years old, and I'm from Venezuela. I'm a civil engineer, and a mountain bike rider. I like to spend time outdoors getting to know new trails in the mountains, and spending time with family and friends at the beach. I moved to America a couple of years ago hoping to get the opportunity to have a better future, and keep developing as a civil engineer, but also as a person.*

*My experience at the Literacy Council was very fun and productive. Working with classmates from different countries and with different cultures was very interesting. Every session I learned something new from them and about them. I really enjoyed spending time with people from all around the world. Working with Ms. Catherine was great. She makes you improve and pushes you to the next level in every class. She also made every session very interesting and fun with the way that we interact and discuss each topic. It was a completely new and different experience for me. I'm grateful to Ms. Catherine for her patience and advice, but also for the type of person that she is. She cares about everyone and listens to everyone's opinions and respects them.*

*In general, I could say that this trip into writing in a second language was good. It gave me the opportunity to expand my knowledge, meet new people, share stories and cultures with them, and be aware of how far I could get from a brainstorm, a title, or just a simple idea.*

*Thank you so much Ms. Catherine and all the staff of the Literacy Council.*

One year ago, I started this job at

Maxwell's Kitchen as a line cook—without any previous experience and knowing nothing about how to work in a kitchen environment. The first thing that I learned was how to talk to everybody inside the line. There are specific ways to say something, or to ask something. For example, when you are standing, or moving behind someone you are supposed to call it by saying “behind.” That was a whole new concept for me.

Then, I had to learn how to do all the recipes from the recipes book (sauces, pickles, beef, blanché fries, brine chicken breast, beet bacon, roasted, tomatoes, mushrooms, crispy onions, etc). After that, the chef asked me one day, “Do you want to try something different and jump in the kitchen line with me?” A few minutes later, I was standing over there, trying to do my best. I started learning how to work at the fry station, and then, the middle station. This is where I was supposed to build the buns and follow all the tickets on the board, put all the toppings on the buns, make salads, etc.

I had to learn how all the stations work. That means, learn everything that is on the menu. The last station that I learned was the most important one: the grill station. In that station, you had to learn how to cook all the meat to the proper temperature, and know how to deal with managing the pressure behind the busy hours.

In conclusion, I could say that all the previous stations, and my experience with them, took me to the final and most important spot until this day. ■

# THE SOCIALISM OF THE 21ST CENTURY

By Carlos M.

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Since 1998 there has been a new political system installed in Venezuela, called “Socialism of the 21st century”. This new chapter in our history brought with it a lot of issues that we, as a society, are still suffering from.

If we go back in time and take a look, in 1998 we were the second-largest exporter of oil in the world after Saudi Arabia. Just after a year, the new system was installed, and the economy started to collapse. From there, we have had the biggest inflation rate per year. This goes hand in hand with corruption too. The new fake “socialism”—which includes some features uncomfortably similar to communism—likes to take away all the money from investments, taxes, businesses, natural minerals exportations, and make it disappear into the pockets of corrupt agents.

That is the main reason why our health system is unsteady, useless, and destroyed. That is also why the power system shuts down and many cities must face blackouts every single day for between eight and 14 hours. On the other hand, the oil-and-gas system is also breaking down because the infrastructure did not get the proper maintenance during the past 25 years of communism, while daily production of gas has been dropping down. All these problems are the reasons why people must spend 24 hours in line to try to put gas into their cars.

The political situation down there is very critical. You are not allowed to speak or protest peacefully against the regime, even though



it is a constitutional right for every Venezuelan citizen. All these scenarios are the foundation of the immigration crisis that the continent is facing since a couple of years ago.

I will say that the solution to all these issues that we have been facing for the past 25 years now, is to get rid of the current system and try to create a new political system free of corruption and able to work in a proper way, for the people, by the people, and for the entire country—no matter what.

Also, it would be good to let the new generations know about this part of our history, and make them understand that this system did not work. It is true that, “whoever doesn’t know their history is doomed to repeat it.” ■

# A FAMOUS PERSON I ADMIRE

By Djanie A.

*Hello, my name is Djanie A. I am Haitian and I arrived in the United States in July 2024. I am a persistent and courageous person. My medium-term goal is to continue my studies in the fields of science and management. Learning English has always been important to me, but it wasn't easy without an environment that forced me to practice. Then I discovered the Literacy Council online, and I enrolled. The classes help me improve my speaking, reading, writing, learning expressions, and even discussing current events. It's really amazing how many aspects the classes cover! I still have a long way to go, but my progress is noticeable, even my loved ones have seen it. This program motivates me to keep trying, stay focused, and build my confidence in learning the language.*

*I know that one day, it will pay off and I will reach my goals. I am very grateful for this opportunity and happy to see two of my stories published.*

One of the famous people I admire is Madam C.J. Walker (1867-1919). She was an entrepreneur and a pioneer in the cosmetic industry, known for creating hair products for Black women. Because of her hard work, she became one of the first self-made millionaires in the United States.

Madam C.J. Walker represents determination and strength. At a time



when opportunities for Black women were limited, she overcame barriers and built an empire. She not only created a flourishing company but also formed a network, offering job opportunities to women and contributing to their financial independence.

In addition to her business success, she also supported education and civil rights, helping many people improve their lives.

Her story is a true source of inspiration and proves that perseverance can lead to success. She paved the way for other women and continues to have a positive influence today. ■

# ALLOW YOURSELF SOME FREE TIME

By Djanie A.

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Lost in our daily activities, we sometimes forget to take time for ourselves, to do what we are passionate about, or simply for things that are neither imposed nor essential. However, it is important to allow ourselves moments of free time to grow according to our own aspirations. These moments are precious, because it is in my free time that I find myself and take pleasure in activities that relax me and make me feel good.

During my free time, I indulge in various activities that contribute positively to my balance. Some require discipline, while others are more spontaneous. During the week, I try to find a time to exercise for about 30 minutes at home, following YouTube videos, usually in the morning before starting the day. I also try to improve my English by learning something new every day, but it's not always easy, especially after a long day.

Although I exercise at home, I have also been looking to vary my physical activities, which led me to try swimming. I started learning, but I took a break because, alone, I lacked confidence. I prefer to reach a certain level before continuing alone. I also spend time on social media, time that

I would like to cut down on, because it is not always constructive and can sometimes have a negative impact on my well-being.

Depending on the season or when the opportunity arises. I like to travel, especially with my sister, discovering new countries and cities, taking photos, and creating videos on my phone. On weekends, I like to spend time with my family and, when time permits, go running on Saturday mornings when it's not too cold. On Sundays, I like going out, whether it's for brunch or visiting new places.

My free time activities vary between the week and on the weekend. During the week, I mainly focus on sports and learning activities which require more discipline, while the weekend is more dedicated to relaxation and spending quality time with my loved ones.

So, I believe it is essential that everyone takes time for themselves, in their own way. That's why I try to find a balance between my responsibilities and activities that allow me to relax. And if you find yourself lacking free time, maybe it's time to rethink how you manage it so you can have more time for yourself and to thrive. ■

# EDUCATION

By Erica Z.

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*My name is Erica Z. I'm from Perú. I'm a business administrator with a master's degree in marketing and commercial management, and I need to improve my English to validate my credentials, and be able to work in the administrative field. That's the reason why I'm studying English at the Literacy Council and Frederick Community College. I know I'm still in the learning process, but I'm sure the conversation and writing classes at the Literacy Council will help me speak fluently and find the right words to form good sentences. By volunteering, I can promote reading in children and adults in the community by giving away books and spreading information about the Literacy Council's in-person and virtual English classes. I can also tell them about my experience as a student, and in some small way, I can give back for all the help I've received from the Literacy Council. The most important thing is to emphasize that it's never too late to learn, and that you can achieve anything you set your mind to with effort and sacrifice. I really appreciate all the study opportunities available in Frederick. Thank you, Literacy Council!*

In my country, inadequate education is one of the main problems that does not allow Perú to progress, even though we have a biodiversity of

natural resources and one of the most stable currencies in South America.

It is very sad to know that in these times there are still people who do not have the possibility of achieving their goals due to lack of financial resources. Unfortunately, the current government is led by incapable people who do not invest in health or education. They want the people they govern to continue having these shortcomings and not realize how inefficient they are as leaders.

However, today, thanks to globalization and the internet many possibilities and opportunities have opened for those who do not have the resources but do have the desire to get ahead. For example, there are comprehensive scholarships offered by different universities in various countries to attain university degrees, technical careers, even master's degrees and doctorates, and many times it is no longer necessary to travel. Now you can study online from anywhere in the world and access studies and remote jobs.

Finally, I believe that it is the responsibility of every individual to find the best way to get ahead and not expect others to do things for you. Sometimes the opportunities are there, but if you do not look for them you will not find them. ■



## MY PARENTS' HOUSE

By Erica Z.

I fondly remember my parents' house, where I lived from birth until I was 18. It was a large house with a front yard and a very large back yard, and many birds came there.

We had a yellow chili tree, a banana tree, and a huge pine tree. After five years, they had to uproot it because the roots of the pine tree were lifting the floor of the library and my dad's office.

We were very happy there, and when terrorism broke out in Peru, when you left home, you didn't know if you'd return alive. Every day my sisters and I had to go to university. My father decided that, for safety, my two older

sisters and I should study abroad, so we moved to Argentina. We lived there from 1989 to 1992.

There were changes in government and the country became safer, and we decided to return to Peru. By then, my father had sold the big house, and now we lived in a large apartment in San Borja that only had a balcony with a few red roses at one end and white roses at the other that almost never bloomed.

Finally, as my father used to say, you don't miss what you don't know, so I hope one day to be able to live in a house with a very large garden again. ■

# LIFE AT THE REHAB CENTER

By Esperanza G.

*Esperanza G.C., MD, MHA, INHC, holds a doctor in medicine and master of health administration degrees from the Valle University in Colombia. She is a certified international health coach. When she came to the United States, she led health promotion and prevention programs at clinics and wellness centers in Rhode Island and the Washington metropolitan area.*

*She worked as a physician for 15 years in Colombia. For more than 16 years, in United States she has worked as an Integrative Nutrition Health Coach. She has helped many patients reverse chronic diseases through a diet of whole foods and changes in lifestyle to improve the quality of life.*

*During the last three years she started to take a student-led conversation class and writing classes at the Literacy Council in Frederick with the purpose of improving her English skills. The Literacy Council has an excellent group of volunteer teachers with the passion of helping others to learn English. Her goal is to finish the training as a functional medicine provider to help more people reverse dysfunction or disease and achieve their health goals.*

Three months ago, my daughter was referred to a rehabilitation center in Virginia because she broke her left tibia. The cast she wore, from her thigh to her foot in a sitting position, made it not possible for her to manage at home. The three weeks at the rehabilitation center was the most traumatic and awful experience for us.

Thinking about the worst moments



people have when they are aging or disabled shrank my heart. Many things happened there. The first problem was the quality of food. They don't have a balanced menu with proteins, vegetables, or fruits. Many times, the dinner was hot dogs, hamburgers, pizzas, and other fast foods. The inadequate staffing and lack of attention needed to care for everyone made the waiting time for each person very long.

Thank God I had the possibility to stay 24 hours a day with my daughter.

During my time at the center, I had the opportunity to see how American people are aging. I am astonished to see how more than 90 percent of patients there were sick, and I understood first-hand the effects of the sad American diet and lifestyle.

I could see the difference between aging in the U.S. and in my country, where old people are still strong and live with their relatives. I think most people in this country are programmed to finish in these places in very poor conditions. Some of them haven't even any visitors or relatives. ■

## AUTUMN WALKS

By Esther M.

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*My name is Esther M. I am from Perú and I am a teacher. I love to teach, but I love to learn too. My family lives in Perú and in other countries. I got married with an excellent man from the United States, and we live in Maryland now (for one year and four months). I need to improve my English to live and communicate better, and I found that the Literacy Council is an excellent place to do that. The Writing 1 Workshop was a great place where I could learn, read, discuss, and lose my*

*insecurity with the language. The teacher encouraged me to believe in myself. Through this class I discovered new vocabulary because we read interesting books and wrote about our personal experiences, feelings, goals, tastes, interests, discoveries, etc. I want to learn more and more! Thank you so much!*

The leaves in autumn

Smile at me as I walk by,

Warming heart and soul. ■

## THE BEST FORM OF COMMUNICATION

By Esther M.

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Throughout my years of life, I have seen many forms of communication. I clearly remember the telegram, the public telephones, and personal letters, etc. With the arrival of the internet, new technologies have given us many new forms of communication.

After many experiences, I prefer to use the application WhatsApp for my current and personal daily communication. It started in 2009 as an instant messaging service for smartphones, and is owned by the American company, Meta.

I used both versions: as a normal app on my cellphone, and as the web version for my laptop (even at my work in Perú). Using WhatsApp, with your smartphone you can send and receive content such as texts, audio, video, GIF,



documents, contacts, locations, calls, and video calls.

I prefer WhatsApp because it has many benefits and is very friendly, far superior to using basic text. ■

# THE WORST PROBLEM

By Esther M.

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Corruption is the most important problem in my country. For example, we have four ex-presidents in prison (one of them passed away several months ago) because they committed corrupt acts.

We have millions of losses from our economy. That means fewer schools, fewer hospitals, fewer roads, and sadly more people in poverty.

The causes of this corruption are varied. One author explained that corruption came to Perú in the 16th century when the Spanish conquerors—ambitious and ignorant—killed thousands of the Inca Empire's

people and stole their gold, silver, and other treasures.

Another cause is the prevalence of corporate bribery, which means giving or receiving valuables, such as money, expensive gifts, or favors, to obtain an illegal business benefit.

The absence of values in society means there is no clarity in determining what is right and what is wrong in public service. Judges, police officers, congressmen, and even presidents fall prey to this terrible evil.

We must all work together against this terrible evil. ■

# MY PHOTO ALBUM

By Janet C.

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*I love my writing classes. But I struggled to write new articles. I took a long time to think about my assignment's title. So, I started to observe my daily life, ask questions of myself, and think deep down. When I have a direction or an idea, it was easy to write down my paragraphs. I cured my wounds when I wrote the sad stories. I encouraged myself when I wrote high-spirited stories. I was excited when I wrote about my travel journey. I was laughing when I wrote funny stories. I had different emotions when I was writing. It makes my life colorful, beautiful, and interesting.*

I went to my room and sat down in front of the makeup vanity table. I opened the drawer and took my photo album out. I wiped and blew the dust off. I turned the book to page one.

I saw a picture of my mom hugging the newborn and my older brother sitting on my dad's leg. The newborn was me. "My little girl, welcome to the world and our sweet family" my family greeted.

I turned the book to page two. I saw a picture of me wearing the school uniform in the playground with my family. "Why didn't I wear the beautiful dress at that time?" I asked my parents curiously. "We didn't have a lot of money to buy it because our financial situation was not good at that time. But we wanted to take you to discover this beautiful world," my parents explained.

I turned the book to page three. I saw a picture of my family and me with big smiles because we were traveling to Japan. "I was happy I could take my

lovely family to Japan,” my parents said, excited.

I turned the book to page four. I saw a picture of me wearing a cap and gown and standing at the university stadium. “Mei, we were proud of you and congratulations” my parents said, with joy. I turned the book to the last page. I saw the picture of my fiancé holding me and saying goodbye to my parents. “My little girl, you are ready to have a new family, but we are always going to love you and be with you” my parents said, with tears.

Albums are like spices. When you look at one picture, it makes you

delighted and excited—as if you taste sweet and sour candy. When you look at another picture, it makes you cry and angry—as if you taste bitter and spicy chili kale. Sometimes we like a chef to make our life have different tastes. And it will create a life that is unique and just belongs to you. Albums will capture and collect your every important moment.

My photo album warms my heart when I read it every time. Although those pictures were old, it happened a long time ago. But this album is my treasure and it could never be replaced. Note: Mei is my nickname; the meaning is “little sister.” ■

## MY FAMILY’S SNOWBOARDING ADVENTURE

By Janet C.

At the beginning of this year, my family planned to go snowboarding. This was our second year going snowboarding. We were excited and expecting that day would come quickly.

The day was coming and we woke up early. All of us couldn’t wait to get there, so we headed down to the resort after we checked out, and we brought all the stuff including snow gear, snacks, and drinks. We were not familiar when we took the lift and slid down, because we didn’t practice for around one year. But our body memory came back fast, and we enjoyed the speed of sliding down. My husband learned how to go snowboarding from YouTube. It was amazing. He taught my three kids and me after he figured out how to go snowboarding. He was talented, but he was not a good coach. “Why do you guys not understand what I said?” He



was mad. That is why family or parents can't always be your coach. They will use their strict criteria to ask you to pick up immediately what they taught you. We decided to book a private class for three kids and me. We had a good experience at the class. We had more confidence in controlling the direction with snowboarding and did better than before.

My oldest son had good capability to pick up new things. But he liked to complain and feel frustrated at the beginning. "It's difficult to do this and it hurts when I fall down." He was sad and unhappy. My husband and I encouraged him to practice more and stop complaining that it was not a meaningful thing. After he had class, he caught up with what the coach taught. He could take the lift and slide down by himself. He is a smart boy.

My daughter is "stamina girl." Her capability is not better than her brother's. But she was willing to practice and challenge herself even if she fell down a lot. "Daddy, could you take me to the steep hill? I want to be challenged by the difficult lane," she asked. I

admired her courage. It was not easy, but she made it.

My youngest son is a strong and brave boy. Last year he sat down at snowboarding instead of going snowboarding. This year he already stood up at snowboarding and slid down. It wasn't half bad. "I'm afraid of falling down, but I want to do well like my siblings," he insisted. Sometimes he cried while he was falling, but he still went snowboarding in the end. He is an amazing little boy.

How about me? I had a bad snowboarding experience last year when my coccyx got hurt. I was afraid I would get hurt again, but I kept practicing to learn how to control the direction. Both of my knees and one elbow had big and dark bruises. "I'm so happy I know how to go snowboarding, even if I get hurt. Because my dream is coming true," I laughed loudly.

We expected to go snowboarding every time and chat about fun things that happened while we went snowboarding. We had good memories this winter and we already plan to go snowboarding next winter. ■

## OUR EUROPEAN ADVENTURE

By Janet C.

Travel is a good way to take a break. You can take your time to walk through the beautiful streets that you have never seen before. You can taste different food that you have never eaten before. You can say hi to people in a local language that you have never spoken before. You look like a student trying to learn everything from other countries. And you will have more experiences than

you have never had before.

My dream was to travel around the world when I was a little girl. Even if I am already grown up now, my dream still is the same. I want to explore various cultures, languages, foods, and people in different countries.

I went to Europe with my family last year. I considered many things to plan the schedule. Because my older son

had class at that time, I was worried he would miss classes for a few days. "He will remember he had traveled to Europe his whole life, but he will not remember what he learned that week if he didn't skip classes for a few days," my husband said. Finally, we decided to take all our kids to Denmark and Germany for one week.

It was our first time in Europe. We were nervous and excited on this trip. Finally, we took the flight and started our European adventure. On the first stop, we arrived at the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen. We took the light rail to our hotel. "This hotel just provides for residents at least 18 years old, but I can help you to find family-friendly hotels nearby," the staff of the hotel said. We took some time to find the other accommodation. We loved our new hotel, because it had two rooms and one living room. The space was enough and comfortable to let each person have their own place to take a rest.

I toured Copenhagen with three kids by myself when my husband attended the conference. It was a big challenge for me. Because I didn't know the Danish language and I had a poor sense of direction, I was afraid that I couldn't find the way back to our hotel. Despite this, I took my three kiddos to the playground and had yummy lunch around our hotel.

On our second stop, we moved over to Germany a few days later. My husband rented an electric car in Germany. "I recommend that you drive the gas car from Copenhagen to Hamburg," the staff said. My husband insisted on renting the electric car. One time, the battery of the car registered low, so we stayed in the car and had McDonald's lunch while we charged

the car battery. This situation was so ridiculous, but it made us burst out laughing every time we talked about it. Maybe we need to listen to the staff's suggestion next time.

We took the ferry from Denmark to Germany. We drove the car to the ferry. We went to the upper level to see the beautiful view after we parked the car. We heard the waves hit the ferry and said goodbye to Denmark.

Hi, Germany. We rode the bike to visit famous places in Hamburg. My husband rode the family cargo bike to carry the two young kids. "You look like a kangaroo who carries two babies in your pouch," I smiled. I will never forget this beautiful picture.

"What was your favorite part of your trip in Europe?" I asked my family. "I liked Germany, because I enjoyed riding the bike the whole day in Germany," Jimmy answered me. "I liked Denmark, because I could eat chocolate ice cream," my cutie pie Avery said. "I liked everywhere, because I could come with you," my little boy Bryce shared. "I couldn't forget the German beer and I was pleased I could take the whole family to have a European adventure," said my husband, proud of himself.

My dream came true. I went traveling with my lovely family. Each one had unique memories of their trip. How about me? I enjoyed taking a trip with my family. And I liked to observe everything. I thought Europeans had big noses before I visited, because I learned it from a movie. After all, I got the answer when I had a trip in Europe. It was not true! Sometimes you need to travel to see evidence to detect if a thing is true or not. You will get the answer, special stories, and experiences. ■

## AWKWARD TIPPING

By Jun P.

*Hi! My name is Jun. I am from South Korea. It has been over two years since I moved to the United States. The first thing that surprised me when I arrived was the greetings. They greeted me everywhere. That always made me feel good. There was even a person who kept greeting me while driving, so I waved along with them. At that time, I didn't realize until that person made a serious face that it wasn't a greeting, but a signal to hurry up and pass. Anyway, people's bright smiles are warming up my life here.*

*To be honest, greetings are very important in Korean culture, but we rarely greet strangers. This is ironic. Smiles are even rarer. If someone greets you, most of them have a purpose. I'll unpack it next time I have a chance to talk about it.*

*And I love this town. It's a very comfortable place to live, with everything in harmony. I like traveling, but sometimes when I go to other places, I experience hell. Crazy driving, scary towns, dark atmosphere, etc. I have no reason not to choose Frederick as my hometown in the States.*

*And I like being active. So, I enjoy various sports. However, doing sports for a long period sometimes seems to break the balance of the body. So, I have been focusing on running and walking these days. I'm constantly looking for great secret places for running. If you know of any, please let me know.*

*I think language is the first step and the most important means to understand a culture and people. So, I am lucky that the Literacy Council provides the infrastructure to make all these*



*moments much easier. I want to take the opportunity to sincerely thank all the tutors and council members.*

Tipping in the United States always makes me feel uneasy. Even after a nice meal, there is always a final “task,” deciding the right amount to tip. And what if the service wasn't good or even rude? Even in the worst situation like this, I still feel guilty if I don't pay a general tip of about 18 to 20 percent. It also feels like I always must judge the server and the restaurant. I'm not a judge.

At first, I thought that tipping was

an interesting culture of the U.S. I didn't mind it. I just understood that this is a culture that has been passed through generations and a classic culture that everyone has created together. For business owners in the service industry, it would be good to reduce their staff costs, and for workers working as servers, it would be good to work freely like freelancers, and take home a high wage. As a result, a tip has played a significant role in business stability in the U.S.

But now, I question it. Why should customers, not owners, be responsible for business stability? To be honest, it feels like business owners are making customers pay for their employees. I think Americans might not question this point, because it's a culture that has been around for a very long time, and many of them have even worked for tips.

I think it needs to change. I believe it would be better if the tips are already included in the price. In most countries, servers' wages are included in the cost of food.

In this way, customers wouldn't have to get stressed about tipping. And there's no need to experience the strange structure like customers paying employees' wages. Of course, it can't be easy to include wages in the cost of food. It would be different for each state and business type. Also,

new problems might also happen. Maybe service would get worse, or food prices would go up dramatically. But this will be resolved by market logic. Business owners would find reasonable ways to adjust their pricing to be competitive, and if a restaurant provides bad service, people will stop going there.

And when I consider the recent policies for efficiency in the U.S., tipping would seem like a big example of inefficiency. The word 'tip' itself sounds inefficient, doesn't it? According to the current trend, reform is needed in any way.

After all, what I want to say is that I don't go to a restaurant to judge someone. I just go to enjoy a meal and pay for the food and service. I don't want to be forced to judge. In this way, tipping sometimes seems even contrary to the idea of freedom.

Maybe I feel this way strongly because I didn't grow up with tipping culture. I am not denying that culture at all. It is just a small inner thought that started as a simple question. Tipping is certainly a beautiful American thing, reflecting the generosity of Americans. And it is also a unique practice that values human interaction; however, Americans have kept this tradition for a long time, and now it is certainly time to re-think it. ■

# HAVE YOU EVER HEARD ABOUT HELA CELLS?

By Jun P.

I was a very quiet student a long time ago. I always had taken other thoughts without any hard questions. However, I felt too weird at that time when I took a biology class.

Maybe it was my first time to feel disgusted in a class. That was exactly what learning about the HeLa cell did.

This cell was the very first one that had been replicated and maintained its integrity. It was from a woman named Henrietta Lacks in Virginia around 1950. The HeLa cell was taken from her body without her permission. The cell was a very powerful cancer cell, so it could appeal to many companies and medical researchers. And after the host died, the HeLa has continued to be replicated and used

without her agreement or consent.

In fact, the HeLa is still viable and used today in the world.

Even without the host, Ms. Henrietta Lacks, HeLa became the most famous cell from a human being—one that could live forever. There is no doubt that it has helped cancer research very much, and it must be a big scientific discovery. But it was once part of someone's body, and no one knows what she would have wanted.

I continue to evaluate my feelings of disgust on this great discovery, but I still need to tell this story. Have you ever heard about the HeLa cell?

No?

Please remember Ms. Henrietta Lacks. ■

## Henrietta Lacks



The world owes much to Henrietta Lacks. Henrietta Lacks was an African American woman whose cells were removed during a biopsy in 1951—and used for research without her knowledge or approval. A few months after Henrietta's diagnosis of cervical cancer, she died at the age of 31 years old. She never would know that more than six decades later, her cells would continue to grow and provide a foundation for advancements in science and medicine.

Henrietta's cells revolutionized the field of medicine. Her amazing and immortal cells (commonly known as HeLa cells) have been used for decades in biomedical research—to study cancer, the effects of radiation, and AIDS—among many other areas. Her cells led to the development of successful drugs in fighting human diseases, such as sickle cell, hemophilia, herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), Parkinson's disease, and influenza, among others.

<b>1920</b>	<b>1941</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1952</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>2013</b>
Henrietta Lacks was born in Roanoke, Virginia on August 1, 1920 in Roanoke, Virginia to Clara and George Lacks.	On April 10, 1941, Henrietta Lacks married David "Doc" Lacks.	A biopsy of Henrietta Lacks' tumor was taken and sent to the lab of Dr. George Gay resulting in the creation of HeLa cells.	Scientists used HeLa cells to help develop the polio vaccine.	Scientists used HeLa cells to study the behavior of salmonella inside human cells.	HeLa cells were used by Coltrane virologist to help prove that the human papillomavirus (HPV) causes cancer.	HeLa cells' impact on the development of HIV was studied by scientists who selected HeLa cells with HIV.	HeLa cells were used to study tuberculosis.	On August 6, 2013, the NIH announced an agreement with the family of Henrietta Lacks to allow biomedical researchers controlled access to the whole genome data of HeLa cells.
								

Credit: Darryl Leja, NHGRI

# GRANDMA AND ME

By Lucas B.

*I am Lucas, as I used to say here, "I am a psychologist from Brazil," and it's part of who I am. I like to read, write, live my life, and get new experiences like the one that I had with the Literacy Council of Frederick County. I had a goal of learning English, but, with the LCFC I could learn more than this. I had the opportunity to know more about other cultures, languages, meet new people, and make good friends. Now, I guess that I am more than a psychologist from Brazil; I am "Lucas from the world."*

I have a special admiration for my grandmother from my mother's side. She is one of the people that helped with my upbringing, with love, but also with good educational methods. She helped me by increasing my faith. I lived with her for eight years of my life, from 10 to 18 years of age. She was a math teacher and helped to teach poor people in the community. Also, she likes to give food and donations to homeless people.

Despite her charity work, she is a strong woman of temperance as she saved her money to buy her dream apartment. Grandma planned it out for maybe three years and bought it while the apartment was not even under construction, I remember. She called it "my palace" and the apartment was a good size to accommodate her family. It is in a condominium with a pool, playground, games room, and a gym.



My grandmother let her fragile side be known sometimes, especially to me. What makes her a real human being is never denying her personality, and being honest with her feelings is a quality too. I feel that we have complicity. Thinking about the title to this essay, I could remember a picture frame of me and her, with letters above the photograph where it was written "Grandma and Me." While I am here in the United States, she said that she misses me so much and wants me to return. This request moved me and makes me think that we are really like two great friends. I am so grateful to have her in my life. ■

# MY JOURNEY WITH THE FREDERICK COUNTY LITERACY COUNCIL

By Lucas B.

I came to the United States on January 28 to spend about six months here, getting new experiences. One thing I expected to gain was to learn and improve my English. So, I started to look for English classes in Frederick. Finding the Literacy Council, I was able to start the classes at an appropriate level based on my personal English skills, because of the previous evaluation.

I always wanted to learn English. I think that it is a universal language and can help me in various aspects of my life. One of them is about work. As a psychologist, learning this language

can help me expand my clients beyond Portuguese speakers, as well as reading about psychology in books and articles that I do not have translations to yet.

Now, I attend several classes per week—one in writing, one in conversation—and I also went to an extra conversation class on Fridays. I personally think that one of my goals with “new experiences” in the U.S. has been accomplished, as I have this opportunity to improve my English.

I am grateful for this experience and for the possibility of making good friends here. It is something that I will never forget. ■

## MY FIRST TIME DOING PARKOUR

By Lupita M.

*My name is Guadalupe Murrieta, and I am from Mexico. In 2022 I moved with my husband and two children to the United States. We found a nice house in Frederick, where our children are enrolled at Ballenger Creek Elementary. I enjoy spending time with my family and learning new things. One of the activities that recently caught my attention is parkour. I had never practiced this sport before, but when I learned more about it, I became very interested. In this essay, I will share my personal experience with parkour and explain how it has been both fun and challenging for me and my family.*

Parkour is a sport that was initially

developed in France in the 1990s and has become popular across the world. The first time doing parkour my children were excited. They had only seen this kind of sport on TV, when they commented that at some point they would like to try it. My children—Andres, nine years old, and Isabella is seven years old—are very young risk takers who are not afraid of extreme sports. We are from Mexico, where this type of sport is not very common. I started researching about this sport in our hometown and learned it is not practiced much, only in big cities such as Mexico City.



This year we traveled to Canada to visit my best friend. She told us that there was a place near her house where we could try parkour. We looked for the tickets and the place, and then we ventured to try this new experience. The day was rainy but that didn't stop us. The place had many obstacles which made the experience more fun. They had zip lines of all kinds and sizes, but the most fun and the biggest was the last one that awaited us at the end of the route. We spent two hours practicing this sport in the middle of the rain, and while the adrenaline made us feel better, it took us a little more work to pass the obstacles.

Parkour is usually done in buildings or places suitable for practicing the sport. The place we went to features obstacles that make the sport easier, and it can be practiced with adequate safety equipment such as harnesses and helmets to prevent injuries. Parkour can be done with or without

protection by people who have experience in this sport.

In the beginning we had many doubts about how we would do this sport, but before starting, the guides explained the basic rules to practice parkour. Afterwards, we felt very comfortable with this new experience, and it is something we will never forget.

I realized that if my children can do it, it gave me the security that they can do more risky things. Having already spent four years in this country, I believe that whatever we want to do, we can achieve it without fear. When I first moved to the United States, I was very afraid to communicate with other people, because I did not understand the language. Today I have learned a little more English, and I am working to move forward in my goal of speaking it. I know I can do it!

Wikipedia is a good source for more information about the history, evolution, and practice of the popular sport of Parkour. ■

# MY GRANDMOTHER, A MIDWIFE

By Maria S.

*My name is Maria. I am 42 years old. I am from Honduras. I like to cook traditional meals and I like music. I also like to spend quality time with my family. I am currently learning English with my tutor, Mrs. Carol. She is fantastic, and she has been tutoring me since November of last year. My goal is to learn English so I can help my children with their homework and better understand it in my community. Learning English as my second language will overall be beneficial to me and my family.*

My grandmother was a midwife in Honduras, despite never having formal schooling. She learned everything through experience and knowledge passed down from others. Women in the village trusted her to assist in childbirth because she had a natural ability to help mothers deliver safely.

She also knew how to make medicine using natural herbs. Without any medical training, she understood which plants could help with pain, stop bleeding, or speed up recovery after birth. She gathered herbs from the land, prepared them into teas or oils,



and used them to treat the mothers.

Her skills weren't taught in a classroom but came from observation, practice, and tradition. Even though she couldn't read or write, she had knowledge that even some doctors respected. People relied on her for delivering babies and healing with natural remedies. ■

## ANOTHER HERO

By Matsumi S.

*I came to America from Japan where my daughter's family lived eight years ago, and meeting the Literacy Council in Frederick and learning English for the first time in a long time was a valuable experience that helped me grow regardless of my age. By exchanging opinions with my classmates, I was able to converse more proactively, and I discovered that writing is fun. I am so grateful to ESL Coordinator, Ms. Catherine, and all the other staff for all their help. Thank you so much. I will be leaving this place soon, but I wish you all good health and happiness.*



The year is 300 B.C., and this is Macedonia. One boy was born there. His name was Alexander III. Alexander the Great, who would later be remembered as the most successful king of all time. However, he passed away at the young age of only 32.

Oh, wait a minute. In the 32 years of his lifetime (including childhood, which is shorter?) how was it possible to conquer vast lands from the Mediterranean to India? Let alone in an era when there were no weapons like today.

In fact, there was a hidden secret. I'm going to tell you that here today, only for you who are listening to this story.

After the death of his father, he ascended the throne at the age of 20 and expanded his territory one after another, but it seems that another person supported the progress behind the scenes: Alexander's twin brother, Alexander III + α, the so-called

Kagemusha.

Now, I must add some explanation about Kagemusha here. A Kagemusha is a substitute for celebrities and enemies, and in English, it is called "a body double" or "decoy." Originally, the role was played completely by a stranger, but in their case, they are special, after all, they are twins, so they look exactly alike, from their facial features, physique, and way of thinking, that of course no one will notice if one is replaced by the other.

In the era in which he lived, medical technology was underdeveloped, so the probability of having twins was very low, and even if they were born, there is a possibility that their existence was hidden.

It is said that his mother, Olympias, was a very powerful woman, so the possibility that she gave birth to twins cannot be ruled out in the literature.

No, she gave birth. Now I understand why he was said to be an undefeated king in his lifetime. If the two of them were working together, it would make sense to conquer the territory in a short period of time. Even if they were at the head of an army and in command, if two people take turns fighting, they'll use half as much energy.

Later history books do not mention that he was a twin. It seems that no one else knew about this.

However, I think that one question has come to mind for you. The idea is that if one of the two dies, the other should take over and expand the country. Yes, that's true. But they couldn't do that. They have always been like two wheels of a car, so when one of

them was gone, the other one lost his balance and couldn't stand. And then the last remaining one disappeared unnoticed.

Recently, the tomb of a king was found in Egypt, which is said to be a once-in-a-century discovery since Tutankhamun, and somewhere in the royal tomb there may be a tomb where the brothers Alexander III and his "twin brother" are buried. For they conquered Egypt and became the king of Egypt, and his body was first buried in Egypt, but then it was buried in Alexandria, which bears his name, and it is unknown where he went at the end. I am sure that these two heroes of legend and story will rise from the sand. ■

## MY TREASURES

Matsumi S.

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In the United States, where people from all over the world gather, you, the people I have met through my English lessons are my treasure.

I was able to learn about the culture of each country, and I was able to teach you about my home country of Japan. However, I am not sure how much I have been able to convey in my poor English, so let me introduce you to a fascinating Japan that you will be eager to visit.

1. The toilet is called a washlet or bidet. I'm sorry for this part of the story right off the bat. But this is very important, isn't it? Not only in homes, but also in public and restaurants, almost all of them are installed. It's packed with all the features you need.

2. When you enter the house, take

off your shoes. Many Japanese families use tatami mats, so you almost always take off your shoes at the entrance. In addition, if you arrange the shoes neatly, you will be very praised.

3. Public trains and buses run on time. Everyone on the train during commuting hours is silent, and when they arrive at their destination, they head for the exit at once. There are no recycling bins at the station. But it's beautiful.

When I take the train and go on a trip, I buy a bento takeaway meal box called an ekiben at the station and eat on the train. That's part of the fun.

4. There is a large variety of food. It is no exaggeration to say that you can eat food from all over the world, but

there are many types of everything, from vegetables, fish, meat, sweets, and bread, to drinks, alcohol, ice cream, and fruits

The scale of the store is not as big as in the United States, but the variety is so overwhelming that it is difficult to know what to choose.

5. You don't have to tip when you eat at a restaurant. You only pay the cost of meals and taxes. No matter where you shop, you don't need to tip.

6. There are convenience stores like 7-Eleven all over town, where you can buy anything. There is a wide variety of snacks, from staples to desserts and drinks. The chicken is also different from the American one, but it is very tasty.

7. Vending machines are also everywhere. You can hydrate as soon as you are thirsty and cold or hot foods are available. Again, there are many types.

8. The road is on the left. This is important. You can't turn at a red light. The car's steering wheel is on the right side.

9. There are many historical buildings. In particular, the cities of Nara and Kyoto are concentrated, and it is crowded with many foreign tourists. Japan is about 2685 years old this year.

10. There is a hot spring. Some tourist

destinations are famous for their hot springs, but there are public baths and hot spring facilities in the city. Our granddaughters were swimming as much as they could in the hot spring for the first time. (Actually, you can't go swimming, but it was special because there were no other people on the day we visited.)

These are the top 10 traditions that I would like you to experience.

There's a lot more to come, so please see for yourself.

Our family's favorite baseball team, the Dodgers, recently held a game in Japan, and they enjoyed sightseeing in between, and they always praised how wonderful Japan is. As a Japanese person, I was very happy.

How is it? Do you want to go to Japan?

From Maryland, it takes a little time to cross the American continent, but I think it's well worth the time. And someday, I will meet someone in Japan from my journeys, who I have met before from the many people I have become acquainted with, I am sure that they will be connected by a red thread.

Thank you very much for sharing a really good time. Until the day we meet again. ■

# DREAMS

By Matsumi S.

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What kind of dreams do you have?

People may say that I don't dream because I'm tired and sleep soundly, but you still don't remember, and you do dream. In fact, it seems that some people do not dream due to a combination of conditions such as short sleep time.

When I was a student, I was often in a bind, and I remember being scared and wanting to get up, but I couldn't. Sleep paralysis is a condition in which the body feels like it is tightening even though the consciousness is clear when sleeping. This is also a kind of dream, but I'm sure I was stressed out from studying. I haven't had one since I was a student.

In Japan, it is an old tradition that what you see in a dream becomes a reality, which is called a positive dream, and if the dream is good, you don't tell anyone because it will not come true if you tell people. On the other hand, if it is a bad dream, you will tell people so that bad things do not happen. Precognitive dreams are often referred to as positive dreams.

Have you ever experienced a scene that happened in the real world that you have seen in your dreams? This phenomenon is commonly referred to as *déjà vu*. This is a kind of dream.

Let me tell you one story about a strange dream. Initially, my daughter was not blessed with children. One day, in a dream, my husband, who had passed away, walked towards my daughter, holding an unknown boy by the hand. She thought it was a strange dream, but after a while, she had a baby. Before she knew the gender, she started stocking up

on boys' clothes. And a boy was born. It's a really strange dream.

There is a Japanese legend that if you dream of Mt. Fuji, a hawk, and an eggplant on the night of January 1 of the New Year, good things will happen for the year. Mt. Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan, the hawk is a bird that flies high in the sky, and the eggplant is said to be auspicious in the sense that it is a symbol for achieving success. I've lived for many years, and I've never seen one.

Furthermore, is color in your dream? Or are they monochrome? Do the characters in the dream talk? Or remain silent? It seems that it all depends on the mental state at that time, but it seems that the younger the person, the more beautiful and colorful dreams he has. My dreams are always in black and white, and I feel like I'm talking, but no other characters are talking. And sometimes you see the continuation of the dream even after waking up once. It's a very strange feeling, and even after waking up, I sometimes think for a while whether it's reality or a dream. It's very strange, isn't it?

There are many things that have not yet been elucidated about dreams, so I cannot give you a definitive conclusion about the truth of dreams, but I would like to tell you one way to have good dreams. It's about going to sleep thinking about what you're going to enjoy as much as possible. With this, you will be able to dream of Mt. Fuji, a hawk, or an eggplant.

Is it in a dream that I'm telling you about my dreams right now? Or reality?

Well, which one? ■

## THE CAVE OF STORIES

By Mônica Elizabete S.

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*I am Mônica Elizabete and I come from Brazil. I moved to the United States 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 my own. 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 communicate and to know these different cultures. I'm very grateful for this opportunity to be part of this family.*

I like to think at my home where I have a separate spot for each activity. I work at my desk in my bedroom, study



at the table in the kitchen because it's bigger, and I can spread my papers around. I read on my sofa, which I think is my favorite place because it's cozy and surrounded by my plants. It feels like a little cave. I can sit in my spot and feel the sun coming in through the sliding door. When I sit down to read a book, it's a break in my day, and I try to make this moment feel special. ■

## MY FREE TIME

By Mônica Elizabete S.

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Usually, I hear that the free time is about the time you are off the job. But what kind of job? Are we talking about when we receive money for work or all the work in life? So, I will talk about my free time between the job for money and the jobs we need to do at home.

On weekdays when I'm at home, I don't like to wait for a big period of free time to do something. So, when I work doing my laundry or making lunch, I use the free time to read, watch a series, water my plants, or play with my dog,

but the last one is my obligation, too. In the afternoons I like to drink coffee and think about the week and the things I would like to do. In the evenings I have dinner with my husband, and we have a conversation.

On my weekends sometimes we go out with friends to dinner or to do something fun. This winter we went tubing and it was so cool. It reminds me of when I was a kid and I slid around on the grass using a piece of cardboard on the hot days. ■



## WHAT IF THERE WERE ANOTHER WORLD OUT THERE?

By Nataliia K.

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*My name is Nataliia and I'm from Ukraine. My hobbies are collecting 3D cake pans. Currently I'm learning English at the Literacy Council of Frederick County and I am thankful to my amazing American friends and teachers for their support and helping me to learn English.*

I would like to tell you about my father and his family. My father Andrii was the fifth child in a family of eight kids and he lost his father at a young age to World War II. The death of his father affected him very much and eventually determined his relationship with older siblings. His older brother Vasil also went to war, but he was lucky to come back alive and even made a career in the military. As a result, when

I was born my family was already mistakenly viewed as belonging to the elite. We lived like everybody around us and had the same issues with food shortages and other things, but Vasil was a high-ranking general and lived in Moscow. Many times, he was giving away unwanted stuff to his younger siblings. One time, when I was six, he gave us his unwanted old TV and back then it was the only TV in the neighborhood. Our house looked like a cinema with neighbors around every evening. Another time, when my uncle decided to visit his place of birth, a small village in Kyiv region, Ukraine, they built an asphalt road to the village up to the house he grew up in, so he could comfortably drive his car there. The

village also created a museum dedicated to Vasil.

Even though everyone was happy for the villagers and a new road, my father couldn't forget the pain and suffering of his mom and his younger brothers and sister that made him oppose communism and the Soviet regime. He thought that people from some of the villages, including his father's, were sent to the front unnecessarily without any training or equipment. Doing so brought more suffering to the families and economy than advantage to the military. He thought that roads needed to be built because people needed roads, but not because of his brother's visit.

Throughout all my life, I visited Vasil in Moscow only twice. Usually, he was coming to see us. The second time I visited him I was 14 and it was the wedding of my cousin. I still remember Vasil's apartment on the Red Square and his summer house. The summer house was something I had never seen before. The house kitchen had an entire wall of giant refrigerators and when you opened them, they were filled with boxes of vegetables and fruits of many kinds as well as barrels of black and red caviar and other foods. These people I was related to had everything and

anything they wanted when the rest of the country suffered. That was the day when my father got disappointed with his older brother on a larger scale than just political and it changed his views on the USSR even more. My father didn't want to be associated with his older brother any longer even though they were continuing to talk to each other until the death of Andrii in 1996.

Andrii was very resistant to Soviet propaganda all his life, specifically about the West and the United States—except for two times. He believed the U.S. had very polluted air, and that all their grass was synthetic. Somehow, he saw proof of it in the movies we all were able to see after the collapse of the USSR. He thought the grass in the U.S. movies is too green to be natural and the air was not clear.

When I first arrived to the U.S. in 2010, the grass and air quality took my first attention. I landed in New York, and, after all, it is the best city to give quick answers. I found out that grass in the U.S. is greener because people cut it more often and the air feels less dusty than in many cities of Ukraine.

When I went back to Ukraine, I visited the grave of my father and told him that he was wrong and the grass in the U.S. is real grass and the air is fine too. ■

## DIVE INTO THE PAST

By Natta S.

*My name is Natta. I came to the United States from Russia in 2023. I didn't feel very confident about my English and tried to find some courses at school to improve my knowledge. I was lucky to find the Literacy Council, where I found understanding and support. For over three years I have been attending classes and my English is now much better. Moreover, my essays were published in "Reflections." Now I'm happy once again for the opportunity to publish my new essays. I'm very grateful to my teacher Catherine C. and to all the Literacy Council staff for their help in my English learning.*



It was an enormous event in my kid's life. My parents took me to the cinema, and not to a children's cartoon, but to a real American Western—a thrilling and romantic movie.

In almost 50 years I remember the name of the movie, "Mackenna's Gold," as well as the starring actor, the charming Gregory Peck—my secret teenage love.

The story of the movie took place in the Grand Canyon, next to Las Vegas. I didn't notice the pretty simple and naïve plot of the movie. Of course not!

What I did remember was beautiful music, breathtaking views illuminated by sun, rocks, and cliffs, huge soaring condors in incredible blue sky, and of course romantic love story. In my 12-years-old mind it was enough to fall in love with the movie and the Grand Canyon immediately and forever.

Sure, I have been dreaming about getting to this place for many years, I wanted to see it with my own eyes! To see the Grand Canyon!

Long story short, last summer I persuaded my youngest grandson to fly to Las Vegas with me.

Of course, I drew for him a completely different picture; I promised to go to the famous shows, spend time next to the swimming pool relaxing and being lazy. Among the other exciting plans, I offered an excursion to the Grand Canyon.

Sure, I have been thinking only of the Grand Canyon, none of the other plans were of my interest.

The happiest day came; we were on a bus on the way to my dreams.

I can't describe my disappointment, which started on the dullest way to the place. Five endless hours we had been dragging through the dusty stone-sand desert, scary Joshua's Forest, and homeless slums.

Finally, we arrived.

Where are the bright orange-

red rocks of the Canyon? Where is bottomless blue sky? Where, at the end of all this, are the condors?

Instead, we faced a fenced-in area, which was under the management of the local Native tribe.

The Grand Canyon wasn't free. To look at the Grand Canyon, one needed to pay for a ticket. To visit a transparent skywalk, one needed to pay again. Not

to mention that the primitive souvenirs and tasteless food were as expensive as in a fancy place.

The next five hours back to Las Vegas I thought of my childish desire to dive into the past, to be again in my teenage dreams. However there is no way back, there is no time-machine...

The wise ones say, don't look back. Live in the present. ■

## CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK

By Natta S.

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I would flatter myself if I associate my family with a rock. It wouldn't be the truth. Yes, we are a family and when life gets rough, we support each other and help each other, but it concerns only unsteady periods of our lives, but as soon as life returns to normal, we move in our own different directions.

Lighthouse doesn't fit as well, family is not guiding light for us, showing us the way home. We all have our own guidelines, our own targets.

I may endlessly count in my mind all the metaphors for our family, some of

them fit more, some less. Looking for the best metaphor for my family I think of a book, a storybook or anthology book.

We are writing our own stories in this book. Sometimes it is a novel, sometimes it is fiction, and sometimes it is a puzzle. It might be a detective story as well. Each member of our family adds some depth and texture to our family book, paints it in different colors. Do I want this book to be thrilling? Do I want to read this book?

No, in this case not at all! I want it to be long, peaceful, and dull. ■

# SCARLET SAILS

By Natta S.

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Do you like fairy tales? I don't, not anymore.

But to be honest, in my childhood I was in love with romantic stories, fairy tales, drama novels and other tearjerker literature.

Are you ready for one of this kind? Here you go...

Once upon a time a girl named Assol lived by the seashore. She was poor and lonely, sad, and fragile, not very pretty but not ugly. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father was very busy with everyday life and had no time to pay attention to his daughter. She had no friends to play with and nobody really liked her—and some teased her.

But nothing happened without a reason; there was a reason for their cruel behavior.

She expected a miracle.

When she was five years old a gypsy woman told her, that once, out of the blue, she would become a chosen one. She would meet a real love. Her love would be a prince, a captain of a beautiful ship with the scarlet silk sails. The prince will fall in love with her and take her to the magical country named "forever happiness."

Do you know what happened next? Yes, the miracle came true! The beautiful and rich prince with his silky scarlet sails came and fell in love with her, despite her dirty and torn clothes and questionable appearance.

Of course, he did. It is a fairy tale, isn't it?

I shortly and a bit ironically retell you a very famous story, written 100 years ago by a talented Russian author Alexander Grin. He was the last romantic, a great dreamer.

Once a friend of mine told me: "If I would have a power, I would prohibit Alexander Grin for being read by teenagers!"

Why? He was a great writer, all girls of my generation spent so many hours reading his marvelous stories.

That is exactly the reason! Life differs so much from all these magical stories! Do you really think we should wait for a prince? Or is it better to realize from the very beginning that life is not silky scarlet sails?

What do you think, my friends?

I still don't know which is better—dream big, aim for the stars, or keep your feet on the ground. ■

# CLIMATE CHANGE

By Nicola B.

My name is Nicola B., and I was born in Italy a long time ago. I moved to Frederick during the COVID pandemic, in October 2020. My first years here were difficult for many reasons—one of the biggest challenges was communication. I started taking classes at the Literacy Council to improve my spoken and written English. The people I've met over the years have been very kind, and they have helped me a lot in reaching my goals. My journey is still ongoing, but I want to say thank you to everyone who works at the Literacy Council

The climate change is the biggest problem of our day. In the last 100 years the use of fossil oil and carbon has given a strong push for the development of our civilization. But all these improvements of a better life now come with a bill with a change in the weather.

We have the climate problem because we produce a lot of CO<sub>2</sub>, with constant use of cars and from big farms. The CO<sub>2</sub> goes in the atmosphere where it increases the ozone hole where the ultraviolet radiation can reach our world with the increase of temperature. The increase of temperature changes the weather that we experience, with the decrease of differences between the seasons, extreme climate events, heavier rain, stronger hurricanes, and more drought.

It is possible to reverse this problem, and during the pandemic we understand that when we stopped using cars and big farm production decreased, it reduced the ozone hole. But after the end of the pandemic and



the increase of emission of CO<sub>2</sub>, the problem is again here.

We need to stop this change before it will be too late. We don't have the need to save our future (we are too much egoist), but we can think about saving the future of our sons and daughters.

The world changes and the climate changes, and this doesn't mean it will be the end of the world, but it could be the end of humanity as we know it, with more angry people, more social difficulties, and excessive climate trouble.

There are different solutions to reduce the ozone hole with the increase in the use of electricity. We can make electricity from the sun, wind, sea, everything around us that produces energy. In the last decade the development of nuclear energy could be a big opportunity to reduce the production of CO<sub>2</sub> and help nature. But all these productions of energy have a cost, and how can we fix them will be the differences in life choices between the old generation and new generation. But I don't think we have learned enough from the recent problems. ■

# HOW TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE?

By Nicola B.

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The process of learning a new language takes time and is different for each of us. Some people speak many different languages, and they take the name polyglot. If you ask how they learn a new language, it is probably each person will give a different answer, this is because each of us has a different method to learn.

Some people learn only by listening and with vocal reproduction of the sound, other people listen to some sentences repeated during the day or for weeks, still others start speaking with people of different countries by going to visit that country. It is very hard to suggest how to learn a new language. Our capacity to learn is different depending on how we develop our methods. Over the years you can find a method but, in some cases, you need to improve your method with new ideas. If you like reading, read a book or watch your favorite TV series in the language

you want to learn. I know it is not so easy.

I have my experience to describe how to learn a new language: now for five years I try learning English, but I am not a bilingual yet. I started to see my improvements last year listening to some episodes of series for one week, and I started taking lessons at the Literacy Council of Frederick. My next step will be interaction with different people with different accents to improve my listening.

Also, scientific results suggest that learning a new language exercises our brain, helps to grow new neural connections, opens areas that we don't use in a normal day, and have a young brain.

What I can suggest is that you don't lose hope. During the first few efforts it will be hard, but afterwards, with passion and a lot of work, one day you have a big breakthrough and afterwards it will be easier. ■

## FALL

By Nicola B.

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We have four seasons, and they are different in temperature, light, and weather. Spring starts on the 20th of March. Nature wakes up, trees start to have leaves, animals come out of the underground burrows, the days will be longer and a little bit warmer. The 20th of June starts summer; the days are very long and hot, with nice weather and less rain. The fall starts on the 22nd of September. During this season the temperature and light decrease, but

nature starts to change and the leaves have more than a thousand brilliant colors; it is like watching a painting. Winter starts the 21st of December when the days are shorter and coldest. We have snow and the only animals you can find are birds.

Each of these seasons are very special, but my favorite season is the fall. In this season in my town, we have the harvest of grapes, it is hard work, and the days are very long working

days. During the night the grapes are worked to make the wine. In this time the people stay together to help each other, and there is so much work, but sometimes you don't get tired because you are happy! (Sometimes it is also the alcohol.)

I like the fall because I remember the days when I was a young and strong man, when I went to help my neighbors

or my uncle with the harvest. They were so happy, and they looked at me with a big smile, and I was happy too. Maybe one day I will go back again, but the nostalgia is the feelings I have now, and I know that those days won't come back. The people I left 15 years ago are now different from how I remember them. The people that I knew are alive only in my mind now. ■

## I LOVE MY FREDERICK

By Olga B.

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

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

When somebody finds out that I live in Frederick, they say: "Oh, how far!" It's true. I spend one hour driving to Washington D.C., Falls Church, or other places where I need to be. It takes energy and time to drive so far; however, Frederick has a lot of benefits compared to other places. The first is

safety. We have good public schools. This is the main reason many people moved from Montgomery County to Frederick.

I really love the beautiful Catoctin Mountain Park. The park includes 25 miles of hiking trails, popular trout fishing streams, camping, and horseback riding. In hot June when the weather exhausts you, it is a good idea to spend a couple hours hiking on trails by the mountains. You can observe old rocks and unusual tree shapes, and you can even find blueberries and make friends with a little chipmunk.

I love to walk in downtown Frederick. You can look at the dusty National Museum of Civil War Medicine; you can attend a concert at Weinberg Center for the Arts. You can wander around the little souvenir shops and buy cute useless things. You must walk around and find some unusual frescoes on the wall of the Carroll Creek Canal. The best time for this is evening twilight. You can find a lot of nice, interesting things in Frederick.

By the way, located in Frederick is



a unique place where local beer has been brewed for over 100 years. This place is Brewer’s Alley. According to the popular Brewer’s Alley restaurant’s website, it “was located on what is currently South Court Street. Beer Production ceased in 1901 when a large fire consumed the brewery of John Kuhn, who was the last in a long line of brewers to occupy space along the banks of Carroll Creek. For over 153 years, from the very beginning of Frederick County, Brewer’s Alley was a fixture in the social and economic landscape of Frederick. ...” I never liked beer before, but after trying it once in Brewer’s Alley I realized that craft beer is not only tasty but is also a healthy drink with minerals and vitamins.

My favorite place in Frederick is the downtown at the Carroll Creek Linear Park.

In summertime you can enjoy

blooming lilies in different colors and forms, which look like young girls in delicate dresses. Fairy lotuses greet you with a mysterious smile. At wintertime, local artists exhibit their installations. Every holiday season there is a collection of very beautiful ships that stand on the water along the entire length of the canal. These ships of different shapes and colors are fantastic ideas of artists who create an atmosphere of fabulous unreality.

I could write a lot about the beautiful courtyards, old streets of Frederick, and the little souvenir shops. On the street you can see musicians and a touching detail: water bowls for dogs. But it’s better to see for yourself once than to hear about it 100 times! I highly recommend that everyone spends time in Frederick, and to be sure to walk along the canal and enjoy the charm of this place filled with the energy of the past. ■

# ABOUT MY RECREATION TIME

By Olga B.

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I love and respect people with inquisitive minds. I really want to be like them. For those kinds of people, it is no problem of how to spend the weekends. I am happy, and proud that I am surrounded by smart, educated, and curious friends, who occasionally invite me to visit a new exhibition in the gallery, to join them hiking, or visiting interesting places, etc. Unfortunately, I am not a person who is good at searching for interesting places.

I need to learn those skills from my friends. In my previous life I was working in big opera theaters. And my day off was Monday. Saturday and Sunday we had performances or rehearsals.

Now I perform, but not as often as I would like, but the habit to work on weekends I carry all my life! I need to learn how to find interesting places, how to plan for visiting them, and involve my husband, who also doesn't know how to spend free time. On weekends I rarely relax, and this is my big problem. Mostly I do the same things which I do during the week. Play the piano, cook, train my voice, go to

gym, and swim. I don't know why, but I have no time to watch an interesting movie... I don't know how to plan my time. A big problem that we have is that I share no common hobby with my soulmate.

By the way, my smartest friend, Julia, visited the Clara Barton House the previous Saturday.

It was a walk with a forester guide. They started at 9 a.m. and Julia invited me to join. But I did not expect to find something so interesting as this house, and refused to attend this event.

My plan for Saturday and Sunday was to spend time with my husband, but I have no idea what is interesting and beneficial that I can propose to him. (What do you think is better? Any suggestions?) Knowing that my husband doesn't like to just wander around the forest, I declined her invitation from this walk. When I saw her photos, I realized that my husband would have gotten great pleasure from seeing this estate.

Once again, I arrive at the conclusion that weekends need to be planned well in advance, and I need to trust my friends more. ■

# THE CORNER GARDEN ON A NOISY AND BUSY STREET

By Rosilene F.

*My name is Rosilene, and I am from Brazil. I moved to the United States with my husband and two young kids almost seven 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 County helped me along my path. I went from learning ABCs to reading books. I used to study English in my daily life for cooking, reading news, watching movies, and YouTube, but the biggest 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 to continue to learn to read and write better in English.*

It is springtime, and the day is bright and windy outside. I am in my living room sitting on the couch, holding my laptop, and searching for ideas for my homework. I've looked at my old works, the ideas in my head, online, newspaper but nothing seems to catch my attention today. Instead, I am looking out my window. It is a big—at least for me—bay window. There, I put my plants for the coming season: tomatoes, basil, and flowers. Through the window, I can see my neighbor's trees and the busy streets that surround my house. I live in a corner lot between two busy streets.

First, I should say that living so close to the busy streets is a challenge, with the unstoppable noise and cars coming



and going. It is easy to be stressed out, but today I chose to look beyond it. I am looking for life in the middle of the concrete. The busy street gives me a feeling of life, any type of life; people's lives inside their cars, trucks, buses or just walking on the sidewalk. How many stories do I have crossing in my front yard? Others' lives fly or climb the trees. I still admire how birds can sing and be heard in such a noisy environment. It is a true delight listening to the birds coming back from winter.

From my small kitchen window I can see my neighbor's backyard, a beautiful yard full of life; yellow daffodils are in full bloom. I can see the season changing, the birds gathering sticks, or anything, from our backyards and flying to a nest that is under construction. Still, in my kitchen, I can see the mountains

through the double door. How the sunlight and the season can change the mountain's color. From dawn to sunset, from green to red, the mountain is there behind the door, behind the roofs.

From the bedrooms I can see the street, the noisy and busy street, the park with its green carpet and new trees, the traffic light, and the road works. I can see life.

The only thing I cannot see from my windows is my garden. But it doesn't bother me because I know that people, and animals, can see it. Spring is bringing back the colors, waking up life that was sleeping, bringing

beauty. Because of it, I realized that I have a dream. My dream is to have a beautiful garden for the birds, the bees, the animals (not for you, squirrel), and especially for the people. Right now, it is a shy garden waking up from a cold winter, but one day it will be known as a beautiful corner garden on a noisy and busy street.

I am now in my kitchen looking through the door. The wind is bending the trees. Petals of cherry blossoms are flying free in the air. The mountain is dark green with a blue sky, and I have found something to write about. I have found something to dream about. ■

## GROWING UP BETWEEN TWO CITIES

By Rosilene F.

My hometown is a medium-sized city with many factories, stores, and offices. A city with noise, cars, buses, and people. When I was a kid, I lived in the suburbs and could play in the streets with caution. At that time playing in the streets was possible, but we had to pay attention to the cars. Besides our house in the city, my family has another house in a town in our region. Back in the '90s, it was common for working class families, not only the rich, to have two houses, one in the city where they lived and another at the beach or the countryside area. We used to call the second house a vacation house. The town where my family has a house is in a rural area, in a village eight miles from its downtown. I grew up going there during weekends, holidays, and vacations.

The small village is cut by a dirt road and is surrounded by dairy, cattle, and

eucalyptus farms. Some people live there, and others only have vacation houses. Back in the day, the only public transportation available to the villagers was the "milk truck." It was a medium-size farm truck filled with big metal milk containers. It came every morning to pick up the milk from the farms, and then people going downtown in the city could ride it, sharing space with containers full of raw, fresh milk. Coming back from the city in the afternoon was only possible by taxi or by foot.

We call that place *roça*. *Roça* is a term that we use to refer to rural areas, the countryside. My parents still live in our hometown with its amenities and the countryside with the peace and a backyard full of banana, lychee, jabuticaba (typical Brazilian fruit), and orange trees.

I can still feel the sensation of running barefoot in the mud after a rain

in the summer. Or smell the scent of the dew in the trees on a cold morning in the winter.

In front of our first house, there was a hill that belonged to a farm, but because it was so close to the road, kids used it as a natural slide. We had to grab cardboard, climb up the hill, and then slide down on red dirt. We had to have clothing that we only used there because, after playing, it was almost impossible to clean the red spots on the clothing.

As a kid and young teenager, I went to the fields with my neighbors to catch ants. Some people like eating that type of ants; others liked to harvest a natural plant that they could use to make natural brooms, and still others liked picking up jackfruit from the tree.

Some mornings, my parents bought fresh milk from the nearby farm. We usually brought to the corral a tin cup with chocolate powder. After milking the cow, the man filled our cups with milk; we drank raw, fresh, warm milk straight from the cow's teats.

During hot days we could refresh ourselves in a creek that runs behind some houses. We call it a waterfall, but it was not that big. Or my parents sat chatting with neighbors on the sidewalk in front of the house while the kids played in the street, making mud cakes. We had plenty of clean and free water that came from the mountains and red mud in every inch of the street.

If for us, playing free in the street

was our freedom, for my mom, it was cooking on her wood stove. It is almost impossible to have one in the city; after using it everything smells of smoke. This wood stove is made with clay and red bricks, a typical wood stove in the houses there. For her, it was the time to put aside, for a moment, the modern gas stove and use something that she grew up knowing. She used to live much farther from that village, a place without electricity, accessible only by horse. She always says that they only eat what they could harvest or trade with neighbors.

However, in my tweens, I stopped going there frequently. City life was more appealing with its shopping centers and movie theaters. Or maybe it was a moment to find myself apart from my parents' life. It was the beginning of the internet and cable TV. The roça was too boring. They didn't even have a phone in their houses. The only phone available was a public phone (payphone) on a sidewalk. It was a place for elderly people that like gardening, cooking on a wood stove, and sitting in the sidewalk, chatting with other old people talking about old times.

Today, I miss the tranquility, the silence, the isolation, the old stories, and even the wood stove. As a kid, it was a place of free playing; as a young adult, it was a boring place for old people; and now, as an adult who is aging, I understand why my parents always loved to be there. ■

# THE NOISY CONSTRUCTION

By Rosmery V.

*Hello, my name is Rosmery V. For me, the Literacy Council is more than just a place to study, it is a community full of kindness and support. Through the help of the teachers, I have been working hard to reach my goals, especially learning English.*

*Being part of this program has given me confidence and motivation. Every class is an opportunity to grow, not only in language but also as a person. I feel proud to belong to this community, and I am thankful for the patience, dedication, and encouragement of my teachers.*

*My goal is to improve my English so I can better support my family and have more opportunities in life. I'm excited to continue learning and growing with the Literacy Council.*

My beautiful house has a lovely yard. My husband mows the lawn once a week and also takes care of the flowers. I like to cook with organic spices, so this spring and summer I have started planting my own herbs like cilantro, basil, parsley, and mint.

During the summer, our daughters play outside and enjoy different games like soccer and jump rope. At the same time, we enjoy having breakfast and dinner outdoors. It is a perfect moment to spend time together as a family and talk about our plans.

My house has a great location close to the city of Frederick, Baker Park,



Carrol Creek, a church, the Literacy Council, post office, and several restaurants. You can walk and enjoy downtown Frederick. On the Fourth of July, we can see the fireworks from the comfort of our home.

Recently, things have changed. There is a big construction project next to our yard, and it blocks the sidewalks. I am happy that the city of Frederick is growing and that there are many buildings and businesses, but the construction is so close to my house, and it is frustrating.

I feel like I have lost the peace and privacy of my neighborhood, especially our beautiful view for the Fourth of July. ■

# CAMILA'S ROOM: A SPACE OF LOVE, LOSS, AND LIGHT

By Rosmery V.

There are many places in my home that I love.

The backyard is perfect in the summertime—my daughters enjoy playing, running, jumping rope, and I enjoy watching my flowers grow, as well as the herbs I use for cooking.

The kitchen is where every morning I share beautiful moments with my daughters and my husband. We prepare breakfast together while music plays in the background—sometimes dancing to the songs my girls love.

But over the past few months, one room in our home has become the most painful space—filled with hundreds of memories. It's the room of our beloved daughter, Camila.

Our seven-year-old daughter is no longer physically with us. She went to be in the arms of our Father God, leaving a great emptiness and thousands of memories in our lives and in the lives of everyone who knew her during her beautiful, though short, time on earth.

Camila was a joyful little girl. She loved playing, making friends, but most of all—dancing, singing, and acting like a YouTuber. She loved playing with her Barbie dolls in her room and collecting her Squishmallow stuffed animals. Whenever the house was a little too quiet, I knew Camila was in her room, happily playing with her toys. Otherwise, the living room became her stage—where she would sing and dance with so much joy.

In the early days of this painful

grieving process, it was incredibly hard for our family to see her room—empty and silent. It no longer echoed with the energy and joy of our beloved daughter, who every morning would wake up to her favorite music playing from Alexa as she got ready for school. Camila loved getting ready to go to her beloved Parkway Elementary.

But one day, during the pain and sadness, I decided to transform her room—a space filled with unforgettable memories where she had shared so many special moments with her sisters, Casey and Daisy, as well as with her cousins and friends she loved so much.

So, I moved my desk into her room. I hung up photos around it—pictures that remind me of the most beautiful moments we lived together as a family, just my husband, our three daughters, and me. I placed my orchids on the windowsill and added some of Daisy's toys too.

I've transformed this space into my home office—a place where I study, do my English homework, and spend time with my daughters while they play beside me. It's also where I read the Bible, plan my days, and sometimes even exercise. But more than anything, it's a space where I cry often, and where I remember every moment with Camila.

Though Camila is no longer with us physically, her presence fills this room in every corner—in every photo, every toy, every memory. This space, once filled with her laughter, now holds her legacy.

It has become a sacred place of healing, where pain and love coexist.

Transforming her room has helped me find moments of peace in the middle of heartbreak. Here, I feel closer to God and to her. I believe Camila would love to see how her room continues to be full of life, music, and love.

To any parent walking through unimaginable grief: hold on to your memories, speak your child's name, and don't be afraid to let their presence continue in your daily life. Love never ends. And in that love, we find the strength to keep going.

With love to Camila González. ■

## THE ROADS OF MY JOURNEY

By Ruby T.

*As a former academic manager at Peak Point Academy, I have a solid background in media and education. I trained over 2,600 students and created job opportunities for young people in Myanmar. I am also a prolific writer and a co-founder of Ka Laung Pyan Publication.*

*I was a participant in the 2017 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Fellowship, a scholarship program from the U.S. Department of State for Asian youth leaders to study at top universities in the United States.*

*After actively participating in the 2021 Myanmar Spring Revolution, I happened to relocate to the United States. I have since served as a global affairs technician at the University of Connecticut and earned a Non-Profit Management Certificate from Drexel University. I am currently pursuing a career as a data analyst.*

*As part of this career transition and my new life in the United States, I am actively engaging with the Literacy Council of Frederick County. My experience there has been invaluable. I joined the Literacy Council of Frederick County's speaking and writing classes in 2024.*



*This experience not only supports my professional growth but also connects me with my new community.*

The roads we travel become the stories we tell, connecting us not just to places, but to each other. So let me share the roads I belong to, and I call home.

The backroads of West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland twist and turn like long, black ribbons, stitching together the small towns that dot the countryside. More than just roads, they feel like the veins of the region, carrying life and connection

Driving along them, you're enveloped in a world of green—rolling fields, thick forests—with each curve revealing a new postcard-perfect view: a hidden valley, a sun-dappled pasture.

There's an old-fashioned feel to these roads, a sense of a slower time, and the air is often fragrant with the scent of wildflowers. They speak of the region's history, hinting at the stories of coal mines and family farms.

A drive here is like reading a storybook, with the hills and rivers as the illustrations. These roads are crucial, not only connecting communities physically, but also weaving them together with a shared sense of place. ■



*Credit: Karen Peacock*

## ROADS I CALL HOME

By Ruby T.

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Black ribbons on green, a winding way,  
Through hills and valleys, where secrets lay.  
Each curve a glimpse, a story told,  
Of fields of gold, and forests old.  
The scent of bloom, the whisper of time,  
A rural heart, in every climb.  
So, drive along, and let your soul,  
Find peace and place, and make you whole. ■

# THE UNEXPECTED JOY OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

By Ruby T.

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The hidden rewards of helping others often lie in the human connection it fosters. I once found solace in a friend's quiet presence during a personal crisis, realizing that true help can be as simple as offering a listening ear. Conversely, a colleague's unexpected assistance on a challenging project not only solved the problem but also restored my faith

in human kindness. These experiences taught me the importance of both giving and receiving help with openness and gratitude. I strive to actively seek opportunities to assist others, while also embracing support when needed. By cultivating these habits, I aim to enrich my life with meaningful connections and unexpected moments of joy. ■

## MY STORY

By Saberah M.

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*My name is Saberah M. and I am from Afghanistan. I am married and have two little boys. My hobbies are painting and baking. I want to improve my English, so I can get a degree in the future.*

My husband and I moved to the United States almost three years ago. I left my family and now I miss them. I am going to talk about my mom. She is a wonderful, strong, and brave woman, and is kind and helpful to others. She always taught me positive roles. To me, she is the most important woman in my life because of the important things she has done for me, like helping me grow my inner strength, helping me grow as a person, and helping me be braver. Before I came to the U.S., my mom gave me a handmade scarf and I brought it here. Sometimes when I feel sad, go through hard times and cry, I can hold this scarf and it reminds me of my mother. The white handmade scarf, and I brought it here. Sometimes when I



feel sad, go through hard times, and cry, I can hold this scarf and it reminds me of my mother. The white handmade scarf is a beautiful gift for me because I can feel my mom. I am always thankful for my mom.

I learned English at school in Afghanistan. I could read and write, but I couldn't speak it. I was frustrated and embarrassed because I needed someone to speak for me. I watched movies on the TV a lot to help, but it

did not improve my English very much. Then I found the Literacy Council. Now, after taking different classes and having a tutor, my spoken English has improved. My tutor is very kind and I'm so grateful for her. I want to thank her for her dedication. I am so grateful for the Literacy Council (board members, employees, volunteers, and donors). They helped me improve my English so I could immerse myself in my new community. God bless! ■

## BUDDHISM FOR A GOOD LIFE

By Sajitha J.

*My name is Sajitha J., and I am from Sri Lanka. I arrived in the United States about 11 years ago. I used to be a teacher for middle and high school students back in Sri Lanka. Currently, I am self-employed. I love baking, doing outdoor activities, reading books, and doing volunteer work. I heard about the Literacy Council from the Walkersville Library. I attended a high beginner English language class. Then I attended intermediate classes, including writing and conversation classes via Zoom and was able to improve my English knowledge.*



Once Lord Buddha said, "Peace comes from within" and "The mind is everything."

As a Buddhist, I always try to do good things. If my mind is not good, everything is not going to be good. So, I think most of my personality builds from my religion. When I was a little one, I started going to temple and to see the monks to get advice from them. Everything they said helped me to shape my life in a good way.

If you know a Buddhist person, you

know they must follow precepts every day in their lives. There are five for lay people. In Buddhism, lay people are Buddhists who live a secular life while practicing their faith. They are also known as householder-practitioners.

Here are our five precepts:

### **Not Killing**

This precept emphasizes respecting all life and abstaining from causing harm or violence.

### **Not Stealing**

This precept involves respecting property rights and avoiding taking anything that is not rightfully yours.

### **Not Committing Sexual Misconduct**

This precept promotes responsible and respectful relationships, avoiding infidelity, exploitation, and other forms of sexual misconduct.

### **Not Lying or Engaging in False Speech**

This precept emphasizes honesty and integrity in communication avoiding deceit, gossip, and harmful words.

### **Not Indulging in Intoxicants**

This precept encourages abstaining from alcohol and other intoxicants that can cloud the mind and lead to harmful actions.

If anybody practices the five precepts, they will be living a morally good life. And their after life is going to be good as well. We can avoid bad habits by practicing precepts. There are also benefits for the society. People who are practicing the precepts will respect other people with dignity. They will reduce violence. They will have good understanding between people. The precept can be viewed as a pathway to protect the rights of others (not stealing, not killing). People who are practicing the precepts can set a good example for others, inspiring them to strive for ethical living as well.

So, I think if we practice these five precepts from Buddhism, in our life, we will have a good life. ■

## THE HAPPIEST MOMENT OF MY LIFE

By Sajitha J.

One of my happiest moments of life is becoming a teacher. I was a teacher back in my country. After finishing my high school, I had an opportunity to join one of the teaching colleges in Sri Lanka. It was a government institute. I applied to the college, then they sent a letter to me asking to do the interview to check my educational qualifications. I faced the interview very successfully. I remembered that day like a dream. Because that day I had to wear the traditional saree to the interview. It was a must. In Sri Lanka every teacher must wear a saree to the school. I think the interview board was practicing for us to wear the saree and give us an idea how the job is going to be in the future. Luckily, I passed the interview with flying colors. Because my high

school grades were better than the others', I got selected to study for the music diploma in teaching. There are only a few people who are selected for this course.

A few days after being selected for the course, they sent me a letter with all the details. It indicated the items that we must bring to the hostel. We had to stay at the girls' hostel and attend the lectures. There is no exception for not staying at the hostel. Everybody had to follow the rules.

I went to a hostel with a lot of essential items. My parents carried two big suitcases into my room in the hostel. After orientation I started attending the classes. At first it was kind of hard to adjust to the class. Then I got friendly with other students, and I realized

adjusting to something is not hard at all.

In college I learned so many subjects, including measurement and evaluation, child psychology, sociology, physical education, music, (my major subject), arts, dancing, and other languages etc. I worked so hard to get the full knowledge of these subjects. After six months of studying these subjects, we had to go to school as a teacher trainee. Before we got there, we had to make lesson plans as well as visual aids for the children in the school. In the first day of the training period, I got so nervous in front of the students. I was shaking, misspelling, and had no smile on my face. But after a few sessions of teaching, I got over all the difficulties that I faced.

I had to learn all the subjects for two years. Within those two years I had to go to a different school every two months to get the training we needed. After every session, my mentor graded my lesson plan and teaching skills. That time was very fun and hard. We went to schools with a group of eight to 10 trainees. That's the fun part. But making lesson plans and visual aids is a little bit hard. We had to be creative to teach

the students. Otherwise, we didn't get good grades from our mentor. I taught all ages of children. That was a great experience.

After two years I had to face the final exam for the Teaching Diploma. So, I worked hard for the exam and did well. A month after the exam the results were out. When I heard the news, I checked the results online. I got the best results, as I expected. I got overall an "A" for my passing grade. I was one of the students on top of the class.

Then, after two months, our graduation ceremony was held. After lots of hard work and strong dedication, I received the certificate of National Diploma in Teaching. It was my dream come true. Several months after graduation I received a letter from the Department of Education saying I was appointed as a music teacher in the national school. When I was reading the letter, I saw my parents were crying. They weren't sad tears; they were happy tears. They knew all their hard work had paid off.

So, when I think back to that moment, I can say becoming a teacher was the happiest moment in my life. ■

# MY SNOW VACATION, PART I

By Stephane M.

*My name is Stephane M. I was born in Gabon, a central African country.*

*I'm married and a father of a daughter and stepson. I've always wanted to discover the United States, and living here is a dream of mine. For me, like many people who live outside of this country, coming to the U.S. is a dream, an ideal.*

*I've been living unforgettable moments with the Frederick County Literacy Council program since 2021, when I started my classes. Currently I am in the progress of learning English and interacting with different teachers and students from all over the world. I'm right in the middle of my American dream.*

During primary school, I must have been between 10 or 11 years old, my school offered a snow vacation for one week. This opportunity was possible because I was in a French private school. The activities offered were mountain hikes and sport activities such as skiing and ice skating.

The program was attractive, but an obstacle stood before me—convincing my parents to offer me this excursion, which was not financially affordable for everyone. The task was not so easy, to get my parents to agree to offer me this trip, but it was on the condition of obtaining good results at school. So, I was even more motivated than usual, and I respected the reward by obtaining good results.

The plane ride from Gabon to France lasted about seven hours. We landed in the city of Marseille. To do a little geography, Marseille is in the south of France, and this city is the second-



most populated after Paris. Arriving at Marseille airport, we had a final five-to-six-hour bus ride to reach the Aiguilles-en-Queyras ski resort, our destination.

It was a spectacular and breathtaking journey. As we got closer to our goal, the landscape transformed. We went from flat fields to mountainous ground, with the first appearance of snow at the summit. One of the most impressive things was the narrow and climbing road which we could not see below because we were at a high altitude. So, the adrenaline rush dominated my fear from minute to minute, on this “zigzag” route

It was unimaginable for me to discover this type of landscape, I came from an African country, Gabon, teeming with dense equatorial forest, punctuated by two seasons, rainy

and dry, where temperatures are hot and humid. Kilometer after kilometer traveled, the mountains had “put on their most beautiful clothes.” This magical décor brought me back to memories and admiration of films and documentaries on the mountains and the big peaks.

Arriving at the Aiguilles-en-Queyras station at the end of the January

afternoon, we were exhausted by this long journey, but it was worth it. We were settled in our rooms to rest and to be ready for dinner tonight.

With my eyes and thoughts in the stars, I surrendered to the idea of taking full advantage of this week, which would allow me to discover and enjoy this life-size playground, which is the opposite of where I come from. ■

## MY SNOW VACATION, PART 2

By Stephane M.

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After a few hours of well-deserved rest, we prepared for the evening meal. We were staying in school. We were close to 150 school children gathered in the dining room, many coming from different schools and regions of France.

The dining room was noisy and joyful. Imagine more than 100 school children all talking at the same time: It felt like a party or a shopping center.

The evening meal consisted of several starter dishes, a soup or green salad, and the main course, tomato stuffed with pasta or panéed chicken with vegetables. The meal finished with desserts, fruit salad or choice of cheese (cow or goat cheese). Throughout the meal, we got to know each other, even if we were all not in the same classes, and the less shy

ones made friends with our hosts.

It was in a way a “cultural shock” for me, sharing a culinary culture which was not mine, but also thinking that I was going to live this experience far from my family. But in my opinion “the unknown” is a learning experience and an opening of the mind.

After the meal, our hosts during this trip presented us with the program for the next day, and it seemed tempting. We were enthusiastic as the day came.

This snowy night was punctuated by the repeated comings and goings of the snow plows’ rotating lights. So, with my head in the stars, I replayed the movie of this first day in Aiguilles-en-Queyras, being overwhelmed by emotions about the wonders to come. ■

## MY SNOW VACATION, PART 3

By Stephane M.

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The first day started with a stop at a ski equipment rental store, it was a special and funny moment for those who had never skied. Trying on a combination of protective helmet, glasses, and shoes, I had the impression with all this on me that I was dressed for a space project.

After the rental store, the day took a historic turn, visiting a village located in a valley. This village seemed frozen in time, seeing most of the houses which were built of stones

But the distinction of this village was having been home to Gustave Eiffel for a time. He was famously the architect who created the Eiffel Tower in Paris, which is one of the most visited monuments in the world.

For the record, Eiffel worked in close collaboration with Frederic Auguste Bartholdi who was the designer of the Statue of Liberty. Gustave Eiffel

contributed a great deal to creating the entire iron structure of the Statue of Liberty. He left a gift in the village during his stay; a house built entirely of iron. Recognized worldwide for its creation exclusively in iron which is its trademark, this house is a part of the French cultural legacy in the same way as the monuments that bring pride and influence to countries.

I later understood the importance of cultural legacy, which is an entire part of civilization, and which constitutes its wealth.

After this incredible and informative visit, our teachers provided snacks for a picnic. To make the atmosphere even a little more festive, we sang and shared our personal stories throughout the picnic, because we were aware that these moments would not last forever. That is why we enjoyed these times of exchange and joy together. ■

## SUNFLOWERS

By Tânia H.

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*My name is Tânia H. I came to the United States from Brazil 2 ½ years ago. I did not speak English when I arrived. I wanted to learn English to talk with my husband. He is American and does not speak my language. In 2024, I got my driver's license. I also had some small jobs. I go to an American church every week. I made good friends with people from other countries. We speak in English together.*

*My goal for 2025 is to become a U.S. citizen. I know it is hard, but I am learning and growing. I am also very thankful to the Literacy Council and its volunteers for helping me learn English and for them making my life easier.*

Sunflowers pivot

Where do they turn each day?

They wish to meet sunshine. ■



## PEANUT PAÇOCA, WITH LOVE

By Tânia H.

I will tell you and teach you about the history of the food that makes me happy when I make it. In all my childhood, my father made Peanut Paçoca. It is our favorite dessert.

My father farmed peanuts every year, so my siblings and I have learned how to make this dessert. We gathered the peanuts, to hull them, and then roast them. After that process, we put them in the big mortar and mixed cassava flour, sugar, and salt. We pounded all ingredients with the pestle and mortar, using a piece of wood that is called a pestle hand. We have a lot of fun because we used two handed pestles and pounded together at the same time.

Nowadays and after we sold our farm, we could make that paçoca in the blender. That food, besides being

nutritious, warms my heart.

Paçoca is typical of the Brazilian country food cuisine. Paçoca was invented during the period of colonial Brazil by native Brazilian peoples, but cassava flour can be mixed with other ingredients to make other paçoca such as corn paçoca, sesame paçoca, and dry meat paçoca. The word paçoca comes from the Tupi language, meaning “to crumble” or “to grind.”

Try to make it yourself, for I am sure that you will love it. Here is the recipe:  
1 measure of roasted peanuts (unsalted and skinless)  
The same measure of cassava flour  
The same measure of sugar  
And a teaspoon of salt  
Grind everything in a blender, pass through a coarse sieve. Enjoy! ■

# THE IDEAL DRIVING AGE

By Tânia H.

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Let's reflect upon the adolescence period as a precious moment to get knowledge. Adolescents are questioners, resourceful and have dynamic thoughts. But adolescence typically, can be accompanied by immaturity, and emotional oscillations, lacking in self-control, and having much anxiety, which can interfere in concentration and restrict the learning of complex decision-making skills for driving. This can be confirmed by vehicle insurance that is more expensive when the drivers are young.

Research and statistics show that adolescents have greater tendencies towards risky behaviors while driving such as speeding, using cellphones, listening to loud radios, and talking with other passengers. These behaviors can be explained because adolescents look for self-assertion rather than following rules and laws.

Often the adolescents are motivated to learn to drive because they desire freedom. It is an age of power, recreation, as well as frustration because they don't know how to face pressure from friends. They often make mistakes in their choices.

Taking account what psychology reveals about human brain development, I think the ideal age to drive would be 20 years old. But I recognize that young people need autonomy to gain independence. Therefore, I support the age minimum to acquire a driving license as 18 years old, at the age that they attend college. This can be an additional incentive for this achievement.

In short, the arguments, pro and con, to drive at age 16 are valuable, but for me, it is important to balance the benefits in relation to risk. Traffic safety and protection need to be the priority. ■

# PHENOMENAL ME

By Young Ae H.

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*My name is Young Ae. I came to the United States from South Korea as an international student. After one year, I got married and stopped going to school. Now, I have three wonderful children and a happy family. One of my children is in high school and the other two are twins in elementary school.*

*One of the most important things that helped me was finding the Frederick County Literacy Council. When I joined the classes there, I met kind teachers and other students who were also learning English.*

*The staff at the Literacy Council were very helpful when I started the classes. They made it easy for me to register and choose the classes that were right for me. I didn't feel alone anymore.*

*The Literacy Council helped me improve my English skills. I can speak, read, and write better now. I feel more confident when I go out, talk to people, or help my children with schoolwork. I am very thankful for this chance to learn again.*

*In the past, I had a very hard time with writing. I used to worry a lot about*

grammar and spelling, so writing was stressful for me. But after taking the last writing class, many things changed. Now, I feel more comfortable writing in English. Sometimes, when I want to remember something that happened at home, I even write a short diary in English. That's a big change for me! I don't feel afraid of writing anymore. I want to enjoy writing and keep practicing.

Now, I enjoy my daily life more. I like learning and meeting new people. Moving to the United States was hard at first, but it has also been a wonderful experience. I have come back to study at the Literacy Council, and I feel happy, enjoying my daily life.

I walk with my love,  
A quiet storm, a rising tide.

I cherish every moment.  
Waking in the morning,  
greeting my children,  
seeing my husband,  
I am grateful.

For the chance to begin another day,  
I am happy.



Credit: Young Ae H

When hardships arise,  
I share them with my love,  
and together, we pray.

Not just in beauty, but in might,  
I shine with my own kind of light.

*This poem was inspired by Maya Angelou's poem, "Phenomenal Woman."* ■

## THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE

By Young Ae H.

One of the happiest and most exciting days of my life was the day my family bought our first home. That morning, my husband, my children, and I went to a lawyer's office to sign the final papers. After we signed everything, we finally received the key to our new house. We used to live in Ellicott City, in Howard County, but now we were moving to New Market, in Frederick County.

When we arrived at our new house with the key, our whole family was full of joy. It was hard to believe that this was really our own home. I liked Frederick right away. The neighborhood was quiet and clean, and it felt peaceful. It was a newly built area, and everything looked fresh and well-organized.

After we opened the door to the house, the smell inside wasn't very nice.

It didn't feel fresh, and that bothered us a little. But we knew it was just the smell of paint and glue from the construction. My husband opened all the windows, from the first floor to the third floor, to let in fresh air.

Even though we didn't move in right away, we visited the house every evening for a month. We brought food with us and had dinner together inside the empty house. At that time, my oldest son was in second grade, and our twins were two years old. They were so excited! They ran around, jumped, played with a ball, and went up and down the stairs again and again. My husband and I sat with cups of coffee in our hands, watching them with big smiles. We talked about how thankful we were to God.

Our house looked like a tall building because it had three floors. The outside was white with some brick. Later,

my husband, the twins, and I went shopping for new furniture. We needed furniture for the dining room, living room, bedrooms, and bathrooms. I still remember going to Ashley Furniture. We walked around the store and chose items that matched what I had always wanted. I was so happy to find furniture that was just right.

Now, we have been living in this house for more than seven years, we still enjoy it every day. There is enough space for everything we need, and we feel comfortable spending time at home. I can do what I want, and my family is happy here. When I first came to this country, I never imagined that I could own my house. But now I do, and I feel so thankful. I thank God for giving us this home and for giving us many opportunities. I will never forget this blessing. ■

## MY EXPERIENCE MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES

By Young Ae H.

The first time I came to the United States, I was very worried because everything was new to me. I didn't know the language, and the environment felt unfamiliar. I missed my home country, my family, and my friends. I also felt nervous when I had to go shopping or talk to someone because I couldn't speak English well. It was a big change in my life, and I often felt lonely and unsure.

After I got married, my life became more stable. I had more support and felt safer and more comfortable. I began to enjoy my new life little by little. One of the most important things that helped

me was finding the Literacy Council. When I joined the classes there, I met kind teachers and other students who were also learning English. I didn't feel alone anymore.

The Literacy Council helped me improve my English skills. I can speak, read, and write better now. I feel more confident when I go out, talk to people, or help my children with schoolwork. I am very thankful for this chance to learn again.

In the past, I had a very hard time with writing. I used to worry a lot about grammar and spelling, so writing was stressful for me. But after taking the

last writing class, many things changed. Now, I feel more comfortable writing in English. Sometimes, when I want to remember something that happened at home, I even write a short diary in English. That's a big change for me! I don't feel afraid of writing anymore. I want to enjoy writing and keep practicing.

Another important part of my journey in the United States was meeting a very kind American friend named Pulsherry. She was the mother of one of my twin sons' friends. Our children were in the same kindergarten class, and that's how we met. Pulsherry was a wonderful and kind person. Sadly, she passed away from cancer last April, but I still remember her with love and gratitude.

She helped me learn English in everyday life. When we had playdates for our kids, she would talk with me a lot. I learned many new words and phrases just by listening to her. She was a counselor, so she spoke beautifully and always with kindness. She also had a deep understanding of other cultures and showed a lot of respect and care for people from different backgrounds.

Sometimes on Friday evenings, Pulsherry opened her home so the children could watch a movie together. While the kids watched the movie, the adults shared dinner and had conversations. She also invited friends to birthday parties, so I could experience



*Credit: Young Ae H*

many parts of American culture. Because of her, I felt more connected to this country. Even though she is no longer with us, the time I spent with her is full of happy memories, and I feel thankful that she was part of my life.

Now, I enjoy my daily life more. I like learning, meeting new people. Moving to the United States was hard at first, but it has also been a wonderful experience. I can now come back to study at the Literacy Council, I feel happy also and can enjoy daily life. ■

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