

Women's Perspectives

A Journal of Writing and Art by Adult Learners

THE HERO'S JOURNEY: FIRST STEPS



Issue 14 2019

Women's Perspectives #14

WE LEARN Mission, Vision and Values

Mission Statement

WE LEARN is a community promoting women's literacy as a tool that fosters empowerment and equity for women.

Vision

WE LEARN seeks to build a just society and healthy communities. Therefore, we focus on education, specifically the basic literacies women need to gain access to systems of power and to achieve personal and community empowerment. Women's pursuit of multiple literacies gives visibility to our experiences as women, sustains our on-going desire to learn, encourages critical thinking, and provides the support and information necessary for reflection, understanding, and action to change our current situations.

WE LEARN engages a diverse membership community of adult basic education and literacy learners and alumni, educators, researchers and professional women, community activists and anyone dedicated to moving our mission forward.

WE LEARN members hold these values inwardly reflective of our networking organization and outwardly active to the communities we reach.

Values

- I. WE LEARN is Women-Centered / Women-Positive**
 - II. WE LEARN Supports Social Change**
 - III. WE LEARN Works towards Justice & Equity**
 - IV. WE LEARN Acts through Participatory Practices**
-

Book Design

Layout and design by Stacie Evans, WE LEARN Board.

Photos, except where individual credit is given, are from stock photo web resources such as <https://pexels.com>, <https://burst.shopify.com>, <http://www.freestockphotos.biz/>, <https://unsplash.com/>, <https://broadlygenderphotos.vice.com/>, or <http://openphoto.net/>.

Women's Perspectives #14

A Journal of Writing and Art by Adult Learners

2019

The Hero's Journey

First Steps: The Journey Begins

First Steps: The Journey Begins showcases original writing and artwork by adult education students across all levels. Student writers and artists were encouraged to reflect and to share ideas on the theme: “**First Steps**.” This means something different to everyone, so the selections in this journal cover a range of subjects.

For the first time, the journal includes writing from learners who are further along on their educational path. Some started in adult literacy programs but have gone on to college. Some completed college and graduate school in their home countries before coming to the United States, where they needed to enroll in English classes in order to be able to navigate their new country and use the skills they learned at home. We chose to include these writings to illustrate that the “journey” can begin at many different places and can continue further than we might imagine.

This year *Women's Perspectives* is offering a new opportunity. We asked writers to write for this issue, but also asked them to keep writing. There are going to be a series of writing topics that are all connected to the Hero's Journey, and we hope writers will continue to write on those topics. Our hope is that, if writers create work for each topic, in the end they will have written a full hero's journey!

For this issue, we started with some questions:

- What is your life like?
- Why is education important?
- What frightens you and what can you do about it?
- How will education help your life?
- Do you feel strong?
- What would you like to change?
- What are your days like?
- Why did you choose to come to school?
- Do you feel brave?
- Do you believe you can succeed?

Through personal stories, poems, and other forms of writing and art, students addressed such issues as overcoming obstacles, personal strength, finding work, returning to school, educational

achievements, and goals. The writings show strength, courage, love, kindness, respect and many other attributes.

We hope this collection of writing will encourage and inspire all students. We hope they will use these writings to consider a broad range of possibilities for the qualities they admire in others and in themselves, for ways to recognize and develop their strengths. These writings illustrate the power of supporting women's literacy.

WE LEARN
Women Expanding Literacy Education Action Resource Network
<http://www.welearnwomen.org>
©2019 WE LEARN



WE LEARN received writings from students across the United States and from the Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago. They represented a range of topics and learning levels. This issue features 68 writings and one artwork. The selection committee chose work they felt best represented the theme. They also considered voice, clarity, heart, and writing technique. In reproducing the work for publication, we have corrected typing and spelling errors, but have maintained the writers' original wording even in cases of non-standard sentence construction.

2019 Selection Committee

Geraldine Cannon Becker, Maine

Marie Doerner, California

Stacie Evans, New York

Anna Fernandez-Buehrens, Massachusetts

Jaye Jones, New York

Jessica Ramos-Bahena, California

Rachel Monk, California

Shellie Walters, Washington

You can purchase print copies of this journal by contacting

WE LEARN: welearnperspectives@gmail.com.

Table of Contents

Thank You to Participating Programs	10
Introduction	11
Index of Student Writers	12
Writings	
Why Education Is Important	
First Steps: I Want a Brighter Future	16
Changing My Life	17
My Journey	18
The Journey Begins	19
My Life	23
Confidence Leads to Success	24
Why Is Education Important?	25
The Journey Begins	26
Back to School	30
My Journey	31
The Steps of Life	32
First Steps -- The Journey Begins	33
First Steps: Education	34
Why Is Education Important?	35
Education, Education, Education ...	37
Jobs and Other Journeys	
First Steps	39
I Feel Proud, I Feel Thankful	40

Oprah Winfrey	41
Home	42
My Journey Begins	43
#Me2	44
A Seasonal Journey	45
My Truck	46
My First Job	47
My Happy Experience	48
I Want to Tell My Story!	49
One of the Greatest Things	50
What Is Love?	51
No Fear of Colors	52
About the Something You Would Like to Share With ...	53
My First Job in New York City	54
My Name	55
Overcoming Obstacles	
Life	57
Hero's Journey (Introducing Complicated)	58
I Will Change the World	59
My Journey to Adult Education	60
Improving My Life	62
My Life	63
My Mom	64
My New Journey	65
What Would You Like to Change	69

A Well Balanced Life	70
My Steps to the Future	72
The Loser Who Won	73
Life and Learning	
My Advice I'd Give	76
Women's Perspective	77
My Interview with Melissa Hough	78
Learning to Look People in the Eye	79
Story of My Life	80
I Feel Proud	81
My Childhood	82
Educational Journeys	
The Hero's Journey	84
A Hunger for Education	87
First Steps - My Journey Begins	88
My Secret Life	89
I Always Wanted to Finish School but Life Got in the Way	91
Untitled	92
Overcoming My Fears	93
My Life as an Adult Student	94
My Hidden Weakness	95
My Life in USA	97
From Death to Life	99
The Story of My Life	101
The Hardest Thing to Do Is Start	102

New Beginnings	103
My Big Dark Secret	104
Self-Advocacy	107
The Potential that Everyone Saw but Me	108
Continuing the Hero's Journey	110
General Writing Tips	111
Finishing Your Work for Publication	113
Support <i>Women's Perspectives</i> by supporting WE LEARN	116

WE LEARN publishes original student writings in *Women's Perspectives*.

Please respect the integrity of students' work.

Women's Perspectives Issue 14 – Copyright © 2019.

Permission to reproduce this material is granted for literacy program and classroom use ONLY.

For all other uses, please request permission from WE LEARN.

welearnperspectives@gmail.com | www.welearnwomen.org

Thank You

to the participating programs that encouraged their students to send us their work

Pleasanton Library – The Pleasanton Reads Project	Pleasanton, California
Fulton Academy	Johnstown, New York
Baylor Women’s Correctional Institution	New Castle, Delaware
Seeds of Literacy	Cleveland, Ohio
CUNY Start, Borough of Manhattan Community College	New York, New York
South Brunswick Public Library	Monmouth Junction, New Jersey
Greenwood County Library Adult Literacy and ESL Program	Greenwood, South Carolina
Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA)	Belmont, Trinidad
San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education-DSPS at ECC	San Diego, California
Lehman College Adult Learning Center	Bronx, New York

A Note about Some Terms

Here are explanation for some acronyms that are commonly used in literacy programs.

ABE – Adult Basic Education	GED – General Education Development
HSE – High School Equivalency	ESL – English as a Second Language
ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages	

INTRODUCTION

Thoughts from Board Member Shellie Walters

Shellie Walters has been on the WE LEARN Board of Directors since 2010. She is a student leader and was chair of the 2013 Women's Perspectives Committee. When the 2012 committee was developing issue #7, Shellie outlined some very important points for student writers to consider. These ideas made a great introduction to issue #7. We think they make a great introduction to any issue of Women's Perspectives, so we have continued to share them in each issue since 2012.

As students, we often put ourselves down. We don't think we can do anything. We put ourselves down just because we can't read or write well or can't do math, and maybe we don't have a very good education or had bad experiences in school. We didn't think we could be good or useful until we had a good education.

But what were we doing with what we DID have before we came into a literacy program?

For example, my verbal skills were very good, but I didn't have written skills. I could hide my poor writing skills because I have great verbal skills. I could cover other things because of that, too.

Women who have poor reading and writing skills have lots of other skills, though they might not recognize them as important.

Many women were successful in work or their family or their community, but they were not recognized as successful because of a lack they had in another area.

So, when we come back to school, we're seen as lacking. We celebrate our school successes AFTER we come back, but we forget that we were also productive before!

We have always found ways to make things work in our lives. We have skills in everyday survival beyond what reading can teach us, but we forget we have these coping/surviving skills.

For example, many women have a good work ethic. They are good workers and are able to keep a job. When women come back to school, the teachers or tutors get focused on how much education they don't have rather than how they are or what they can already do.

There are different standards. We don't need the degrees to be successful in many areas, but education helps us to be more successful. Every step up the rung should be celebrated.

In this issue, we celebrate students' voices of strength and contribution. As students, we need to have a look at what we DO have rather than what we don't have. We DO have an important point of view. We ARE already making contributions to society, and they will become stronger with more education.

INDEX OF STUDENT WRITINGS

Title	Author	Page
About the Something You Would Like to Share With ...	Henry Albarillo, Jr.	53
What Is Love?	Seferino Alejo	51
Improving My Life	Seferino Alejo	62
My Journey Begins	Rondalynne Allen	43
What Would You Like to Change	Rondalynne Allen	69
My Life	Shaiea Alselmi	23
My Interview with Melissa Hough	Tammy Anderson	78
The Journey Begins	Anonymous 1	19
The Journey Begins	Anonymous 2	26
#Me2	Anonymous 3	44
Education, Education, Education ...	Nilofar Azimzadegan	37
First Steps: I Want a Brighter Future	Basic Ed Class 3	16
My Life as an Adult Student	Kimberly Brabson	94
Overcoming My Fears	Muriam Brown	93
New Beginnings	Bryant Civitt	103
The Loser Who Won	C.J.M.	73
I Always Wanted to Finish School but Life Got in the Way	Theresa Daye	91
The Hardest Thing to Do Is Start	Dedier	102
Changing My Life	Paulina Diaz	17
I Feel Proud	Paulina Diaz	81
The Potential that Everyone Saw but Me	Serah K. Dookie	108
From Death to Life	Ellen	99
My Secret Life	Glendalyn Flanders	89
Women's Perspective	Robin Flowers	77
Self-Advocacy	Robin Flowers	107
Back to School	James Foster	30
A Seasonal Journey	Jorge Garcia	45
Life	Jorge Garcia	57
Oprah Winfrey	Nate Gobert	41
Home	Lurinarda Gonzalez	42
My Happy Experience	Lurinarda Gonzalez	48
Story of My Life	Belinda Gonzalez	80
My Steps to the Future	Linda Hearst	72
Confidence Leads to Success	Jemma Hernandez Questel	24
My Journey to Adult Education	Melissa Hill-Nance	60
First Steps: Education	Abdul Jalloh	34
I Will Change the World	Jennifer	59
Learning to Look People in the Eye	Jennifer	79
Hero's Journey (Introducing Complicated)	Amaya L. Jones	58

Why Is Education Important?	Elizette Lakoutene	25
My First Job	William Liriano	47
First Steps -- The Journey Begins	Alicia Macoto	33
My First Job in New York City	Alicia Macoto	54
I Want to Tell My Story!	Daisy Mayers	49
Untitled	Alicia Nunez	92
A Hunger for Education	PJ	87
My Journey	Kimberly Plunket	18
My Life	Pushpavati Promod Pawar	63
A Well Balanced Life	Jessica Ramos Bahena	70
The Story of My Life	Ms. Regis	101
My Life in USA	Geetha Samayamanthula	97
The Steps of Life	Arnold Serieux	32
One of the Greatest Things	Arnold Serieux	50
My Name	Arnold Serieux	55
My Journey	Jacqueline Singleton	31
My Childhood	Jacqueline Singleton	82
My Big Dark Secret	S.N.	104
My Mom	Matthew Szabo	64
First Steps	Ronald Thomas	39
First Steps - My Journey Begins	Bilial Traore	88
I Feel Proud, I Feel Thankful	Mahamudu Tunkara	40
My Advice I'd Give	Mahamudu Tunkara	76
My Hidden Weakness	Vidya	95
My New Journey	Caroline Wang	65
Why Is Education Important?	Paula Wescott	35
The Hero's Journey	Michelle Winney	84
My Truck	Israel Zamora	46
No Fear of Colors	Israel Zamora	52

The Hero's Journey: First Steps

Women's Perspectives, Issue #14



WHY IS EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

Journeys can start in many ways. For many people, going back to school can be the start of a life journey. The writings in this section look at starting back to school and get us started in this exploration of the Hero's Journey.

First Steps – I Want a Brighter Future

Basic Education Class 3 – San Diego Continuing Education,
DSPS at ECC

Future, I am

Inspired, but I must be

Responsible

Smart and

Tough

School is important

Teachers help us succeed in

Education

Positive thinking leads to power and

Success

Changing My Life

Paulina Diaz – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

I would like to go back in time, to when I was younger. I would like to be a different person, maybe a very good student, or a good doctor, or an excellent teacher.

Education is very important in some one's life. When I say, go back in time, to me, in my mind, I already finished my career, but now I don't have a choice. I am trying to do the best I can.

I feel happy coming to school, now. Before, I wasn't interested to learn English. I felt that was too hard for me.

If I learn English, my life can change. I want to make more money, get a very good job and be better at my job.

When I was younger, I didn't have time to go to school, but now, I have a little time for myself. This class is so good for all of us. I see we can learn and prepare to take the TASC Test, soon.

My Journey

Kimberly Plunkett – Seeds of Literacy

My life is very busy with school, doctors, appointments, and taking care of my family. I try my best to be consistent with all my tasks. A big goal of mine is to get my G.E.D. My son plays an important role in why I am working toward this goal. He encourages me when I'm tired and don't feel like doing homework. My son watching me pushes me to succeed. Setting a good example for him is priceless. If I had to change anything about my life it would be to get my G.E.D. I didn't understand how important school was for me when I was a teenager, and dropping out was a bad choice. The good news is I am here now working toward my G.E.D at Seeds of Literacy on the Westside Cleveland.

I know now how valuable education is, and having a diploma will open so many doors that are closed. This includes opportunities I missed out on and jobs I wanted but could not get. While school is my top priority, my life can be so busy with all the different tasks I do. Finding time to relax is difficult, but I realize I have to make sacrifices and work hard to achieve this goal. Choosing to go back to school was the best decision I ever made for myself. My diploma will make me proud and will give me new opportunities. Every day I remind myself to be confident, brave, and have faith that I will receive my diploma.



The Journey Begins

Anonymous 1 – Delaware Adult Education / Baylor Women's Correctional Institution

What is my life like?

The weight of life was very problematic. I woke up at one point every day with a physical purpose. Cleaning, and doing laundry and advocating for one cell block. Perhaps now, being unemployed, because being on Max Hall a security unit, and placement until I am sentenced. Acknowledging that the State of Delaware only has one women's prison and struggling with the cancelation of my court date due to a busy schedule of my judge's calendar. I have been incarcerated for two years, and I awake every day with the uncertainty of being released. It comes with some anxiety, and mixed feelings of everyday life. I start my day getting ready, an officer tells me when to wake up and when to go to bed, when to eat, and when to use the phone. I don't eat breakfast even though that's the most important meal of the day. So lunch is at 11:30 depending on which tier recs first, and I may have to wait until 5:45pm to call home or make any food or wait in a shower line to shower in a stall with 3 other people. While out during rec, I must ask the officers for toilet paper, and sanitary pads that the state provides. After my day is done, I relax by looking at the birds of the air and appreciate their freedom. Admiring how God provides for them hoping one day I'll fly away too.

What would I change?

I would change several things, but the decisions I made and the person I befriended who lied on me would be first. I would change the way I didn't act with a sense of urgency to address my legal situation. Fear and confusion gripped me early in this process, so now I am working on changing my heart, being a more forgiving person. Since, I'm a work in progress. Just because I'm locked up doesn't mean I'm not free. The knowledge I get turns into wisdom. So, now in my current state I would change the person I use to be. Therefore internalizing, I look back and think I wouldn't be amazing person I am today, if I didn't go through all that I have experienced. So I would change all the "No's" I told myself and turn them into "I can's."

Why is education important in my life?

Education is import because education it's evolving into something so great, that I need my education to be a lawyer. Especially in today's society, I want to be able to get ahead. Even though you don't need a GED to get some basic jobs, it helps in every area. Having a diploma gives me something to fall back on when everything else fails. I want to be able to build things and not have tension when doing so. I want to deepen my understanding in the changes that happen in education.

What are my days like?

My days are sometimes long, especially when DOC is short of staff. I'm locked in more, for the safety of the officers. My days come with up's and down's, especially missing my children. Loved ones and keeping my faith, that's what has helped me get through these days. Every day I want to get out of jail and smell the flowers and walk in the grass and feel the snow. Every day I pray for something new, and exciting. It's always the same thing looking out the window praying when the mailman comes he has a court date. I need education for that law degree to be able to buy that beautiful big house. The vacations I plan to take, and I need to be able to understand those pamphlets! Education will help me to achieve my goals.

What frightens me?

What frightens me is not getting a court date within this year. It's constantly being postponed, and me proving my innocence everyday gets thinner and thinner. I hope and pray someone would change the wrong they have done to me. Perhaps decide to make it right! I have been in jail for 4 years without having a court date. It frightens me not being able to hold my newborn, I had while incarcerated. Missing my other children also, I am missing birthdays and holidays and these are the times they will remember. I feel alone and do not have any support, plus I am wondering how long the people around me will continue to support me?

Finally being convicted of a crime I never committed weighs heavy on my heart. Identifying the fear I have and realizing I can't allow it to paralyze me. I can push my lawyer to do right by me, and prepare myself with the legal knowledge to be able to represent myself. I need to develop a strategy, and turn the tables of my situation. I also keep in contact with my children, letting them know I love them, I let my daughter hear my voice, so she can remember me . I'm

determined and dedicated to have discipline and success during this time of incarceration.

Why did I choose to come to school?

For a change and to better my future, when I was home I had to provide for my children. Two of whom had medical issues that required me to be home. It was hard to get my education, and also hard for me to work. Social security helped me during that time. There was several times, I went to adult education and brought my children with me. The night teacher would allow my children to sit in the hallway with their games and be quiet. It worked just for a short time until my son got sick, and the teacher assumed I wouldn't be back. I had to start from the beginning again when I returned to school. Furthermore to the present day, I decided to continue my education while incarcerated. Since on a personal level I only have myself to focus on, I discussed an educational plan with my teacher here. Which led me to where I am now, I have much more confidence. So now my dreams seem much closer to obtain, I want my high school diploma and I will get it. I have been a student for 18 months and I have many certificates in writing, reading and math. So I came back to school to accomplish everything I wasn't able to obtain before. Now is my time to thrive!

How will education help your life?

Education has open up a new perspective and has become my passion, helping me become financially literate. I want that beautiful home, and great career, possibly my own business. In the meantime it will help me with looking for current employment, and put me in a position for an opportunity to attend a great college. It will help me reach my goals, to financial stability. It will also help me with a sense of accomplishment vs. a sense of failure. I would be keeping my future in mind, and I would be adding, and not taking away. This would be me rewarding myself.

Do I feel brave?

Yes, and I feel courageous and strong. I feel like the best is yet to come. I'm not defined by what I didn't do back then, but now I have created a new habit. I am now able to focus on my passions, and think positive. I'm also grateful for adult education, and I have faith in myself while avoiding the wrong people during this time of self-empowerment. Even while feeling strong, I believe in myself to continue on. I also prepare myself for the best, the worst and everything in

between. This has been my technique for building my winning attitude. Not only have I pledged to myself positivity and attracting wonderful things in my life, but mentally, and emotionally I am stronger. I have worked just as hard as anyone has, and I know one day I will walk across that stage with my diploma. I vowed nothing will stop me and nothing will stand in my way. I'm a determined strong willed young woman. Therefore I will accomplish what I set out to do.

Do you believe you can succeed?

Yes, in not overthinking things and I have belief! I also have humility, and patience. Holding on to my integrity and continuing to smile. I am able to change any ideas and behaviors, and I believe I can succeed. I'm also able to see another person's point of view, and I rarely complain. I accept responsibility for mistakes, and I'm not into criticizing others. I'm considerate and look people in the eyes. I also have a variety of interests and never make excuses. This all equals a recipe of being successful. I also keep in mind anything that comes too easily or too quickly won't be as rewarding or have the staying power. There simply isn't enough pull to keep a person interested. My purpose will likely require years of effort and include many twist and turns. It will also require more than a few "self-discussions" where I question, "Do I really love what I'm doing?" I will talk myself back into it, and reach new heights that keep driving me to the next level. That will encourage me to succeed!

My Life

Shaiea Alselmi – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

What is my life like?

I think my life is great, in every way. I thank God for it.

What would I like to change?

I don't want to change anything.

I just want to learn more and make myself better and better.

Why is education important?

Because it makes you a better person.

You can live correctly and become more effective in your community.

What are my days like?

Friday is the best day for me.

What frightens me? What can I do about it?

Hell frightens me.

I just ask God to help me and save me and give me the best way in this life.

Why did I choose to come to class?

I came because God told me to learn.

How will education change my life?

I will learn how I can move forward and progress in my life.

Do I feel brave?

Yes, I do.

Do I feel strong?

Yes.

Do I believe I can succeed?

Why not? If I lose I'm going to try again, to win.

Confidence Leads to Success

Jemma Hernandez Questel – Adult Literacy Tutors
Association

My life was not nice because some of my brothers and sisters used to call me stupid and other names. I used to get fooled by other people, especially when they borrowed my money and did not want to pay me back.

I didn't get the opportunity to go to school. I worked at gardening.

I started to learn to do dress-making and drapery and needed to learn to read and write. The drapery teacher sent me to ALTA.

I can now read my Bible, fill in forms, read books and read to my grandchildren.

Recently, when my son passed away I gave the eulogy. I felt brave and strong. Because of ALTA, I believe I could achieve anything in my life.

Why Is Education Important

Paula Wescott – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Education is a very important part of my life. The truth is I always went to school on time. I did classroom work, whatever was on the blackboard. I turned in my homework to the teacher, I went to all my classes: in Elementary School, Junior High School, High School. I stayed out of trouble.

The only way I can succeed is to come to school at night. Another part of my education is my mother taught me is she showed me how to travel on a city bus. Also, I had the best subject classes in school. Most of all, I especially like Social Studies, and Current Events. I am in an excellent program: I'm at the Adult Learning Center at Lehman College.

My Journey Begins

Anonymous 2 – Delaware Adult Education / Baylor Women's Correctional Institution

“What my life is like?” is a question that depends on who you might ask, what day it is, what time it could be, the mood shift I'm going through, and even what the weather is like outside? It is also affected by how the guards decide they want to treat me that day. Keeping all this in mind, I think about my life and what it's like on a regular basis? I wake each morning, rolling over on an unforgiving mattress only 4 inches thick, to start my routine. I wait for “code green” and head for the shower. Making coffee strong enough to “wake the dead” then get myself ready for my job in education. Yeah, I don't just go to school, I work there too. I guess I shouldn't leave out the part where I tell you I'm incarcerated. My life consists of being told when, where, what, how. All I want is to be free. This takes me into....

“What would I change” right now I would change everything, I could start from the very beginning, but that's impractical and that's not who I am. So, I would start with how I got to this position in my life my “Addiction” my “self-obsession” I would go back before I married a monster who would ruin my self-esteem and my son's vision of what a “loving family” looks like. I would give up all the things that got in our way of triumph, my education, and my son's opportunities to thrive and be nurtured in a proper way. I would have run as fast as I could in the other direction, if I only knew how all this would come about.

If I only had known, I'd be addicted to crack cocaine and heroin and spiraling out of control in relationships with nasty people who just dragged me through “Hell.” Eventually leading up to my crime which landed me in what I refer to as my own “Hotel Hell.” I can't change my circumstances, but I will uphold to change my future – nothing can stop me. So now let me tell you why education is important in my life...It hasn't always been important to me, this education stuff... And then one day I had an intervention, yeah! Two wonderful teachers who shall remain nameless of course pulled me to a back-class room.

Now mind you I'm in prison! Do you really think they care? Well they surely cared about me... Anyway, so they came down on me pretty hard. See I really LOVE “Culinary Arts” and I was taking High School Diploma classes, but I suck at math (well I used to) and I was failing my Algebra. So High School Diploma teacher had this BIG idea that she was taking me out of Culinary until

I could show some improvement or finish my credit in Algebra. I actually shed real damn tears over this crap. This tough prisoner shed real tears... actually I'm really not that tough, I'm like a marshmallow on the inside. So that day I made a decision that I need to stop playing around. It was on that day something happened to me and I didn't realize it at the time. My education became the most important thing in my life, and it has been to date.

You want to know what my days are like? Well I guess I don't mind telling you a little bit...My days are filled with routine, I do the same thing over and over again. Once in a while something will be scheduled, or I'll have an event to do for the culinary arts program. Routine for me starts at 7:00 am in education and ends at 11:30 am for lunch, I teach two class periods in between that time. My first class is full of inmates from a program here called the village. They are often full of drama but work really hard while there with us. My second group is my detention class full of women who have not been sentenced and are stuck sitting on "Max Hall." Education is the only program they get to participate in, they work hard, and I have a soft place in my heart for these ladies. It's a struggle for them sometimes having to be locked away 22 hours of the day in a small cell with two other inmates. After lunch it is back to work at 12:30 until 2:45, my last classes are all sentenced women working towards different goals.

The teacher and I both help all of them reach those goals and help them move forward toward other prospects. At the end of my day I go back to my cell, lock in for "code red", watch some TV, specifically Ellen DeGeneres, and the news. I eat dinner at 5:00 pm and if I have no evening college classes, I might just spend the rest of the evening relaxing, watching the latest shows, or making phone calls to my cousin (he's the only person on my phone sheet). He is the only support I have in my life... the rest of my family have disowned me since they were displeased with my behaviors and lifestyle while in my addiction.

This leads me to thoughts, "What frightens me?" and "What I can do about it?"...well what scares me in these times most is failure... going out into the world and not being able to succeed. There are so many things I want to do with my life, so many things that I need to align just right. My son and I have been apart for about eight years, and I plan on trying to reconnect with him; this is one of my biggest fears. I try so hard to tell myself that even if he rejects me that life goes on, but does it? I love my son, and all I've wanted is to get him back under my wing. My next fear is being homeless when I leave this place; I may have nowhere to live. I will be going into transitional housing, even though I have gone down this route before, I fear that there won't be an opening somewhere decent. I fear I will be stuck without a job. Now what I can do about these things, I fear? Have some faith to start with, all things work through GOD.

Brendon, my son, is grown and will make his own decisions, and I will have to own up to my mistakes with him. I'll have to live my life fully showing him that I have changed, and I can be trusted. Then, maybe, we can have a relationship. As far as my fear of being homeless, I have accomplished way too many things while being incarcerated to let the world hold me back from what I want and need. I intend on finding a good job, making a career out of it, saving my money and getting into a place of my own. A little place to hang my coat and scarf in the winter, my own bed to lay my head, a bed that's soft on my hips, a pillow that isn't crunchy under my head or one that hurts my neck. The fear of not being able to reach this level of freedom sits upon my mind, but what can I do about it from my incarcerated circumstance?

They want to know why I chose to come to school... choosing to come to education was one of the first decisions I made, when I was allowed to start making decisions here in this place. When I came in, I was thrown into Maximum Security where I was locked down for 23 hours a day. I stayed on this unit for nine long months, until the warden decided I was not a threat any longer. I wasn't sentenced, so the only thing I could do was go to school. I had already earned my GED here before, so I was put back into the High School Diploma class. I wanted to get off the unit as much as possible, but as I started to earn credits and learn more, the more excited I got about my education. I struggled through the Algebra, but I finally achieved my Diploma.

"How will this education help me in my journey through life?" Well the time I have spent here at Baylor has not been in vain, I have poured myself into enthusiastically signing up for every educational opportunity and accomplished them all. There hasn't been any specific order or anything, but as I get closer to the end of my time here, I am running out of challenges... It's truly time for me to hit the "Big World" and take on new endeavors. I have obtained all or most of the Microsoft Processing computer classes' curriculum (Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and Publisher). Having computer knowledge can put me into just about any position these days; I have an advantage over those who don't have computer skills. I also have taken Web Design Coding classes and now can design my own web page when I open my own business. In addition, I am fascinated by Culinary Arts and have obtained an abundance of certifications in many areas that will be extremely beneficial to me when I reach the outside world. Those include certifications in: Nutrition, Hospitality, Baking and Food Service 1& 2. I've also completed: Serv Safe, Allertrain and The Manage First Professional Curriculum where I earned my M. F. P. credentials.

These will all help me when I go into the food service and restaurant management business. The other things I have done in education like Creative Writing and my college courses give me an opportunity at options. What I mean

by that is, I'm able to choose a different career if in fact that's what I want to do. My education will help me to carry on into others' lives too. I've been tutoring for three years now in the education department here at Baylor, and I've been able to help other women. I would love to be able to do the same when I get home. I'm not about just saving my life; I want to be able to save someone else's too.

"Do I Feel Brave?" An interesting question to be asking a person. I imagine that people that know me might say I'm brave, people who know the "Hell" that I've gone through, those people would award me a medal of valor. I saw the things through my little girl eyes, that were traumatic. I've seen things that should have sent me into hiding, cowering into a dark corner. I've felt pain that could have crippled me, disabled my body and mind, and resulted with me up in some institution. I am asked if I feel brave, and I am telling you that through the trauma, the pain the tears, the years of no calls, no shows, the empty promises, the choice to give up or keep my head pointed toward the moon. It was the moon I followed. It's patience in people; it's tolerance of ignorance that helps me be brave. Edmund Burke said; "Our patience will achieve more than our force."

"Do I feel strong" what exactly are you asking me to explain, the strength in my body, or the mind. Do you want to see my muscles, or read my first book after I write it? I think after all the things I've said and done and the right and wrong turns I've taken along the way, that, yes, I feel strong; strong in mind body and soul. My opinions, and facts matter; my peers listen to what I have to say, and even those above my status. I have character, something I didn't always have the option to show off. My mind is clear from a thick haze of drug addiction and abuse, I feel as though I could carry the world's issues on my shoulders, and I want to help others, not shut them out, and shut them down. My future holds opportunity for strong connections with other women to open up possibilities for those who need help, who aren't as strong as I am now; it's my turn to give back. My soul, as a final point, feels strong about my success, and my sobriety. There are many things that I will need to prioritize when I am released. I have no unrealistic expectations. One day at a time, I will get things taken care of. I have a wonderful support system leading and guiding me the whole way. "Do I believe I can succeed?" There's absolutely NO question in my mind...

Back to School

James Foster – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

James Foster is my name. It's the name my Mother and Father gave me when I was born. Yes, it's true, the streets had me. But now, since I had time on my hands, I thought I should go back to school and try to get my High School Equivalency Diploma. I'm 60 years old, now, and I'm not getting any younger, any time soon!

My Journey

Jacqueline Singleton – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My journey began when I went back to school, at age 21, when I could not read. It was very hard for me. I went home and told my Mother that I wanted to go back to school. She said to me that if that is what you want to do, then go back, if that is what you want to do. I want to get my HSE diploma. I was picked on and called names, when I was younger and in school. It was very hard for me. I did not know if I was going to make it in school, or make it through this life. I did it! I did make it! I am very strong because of God. I am happy that I have God in my life. I'm going to make it. And I'm going to be all right!



The Steps of Life

Arnold Seriox – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My journey began, from the day I took my first steps. Then I fell and rose up again, because it was never my intention to stay down. I knew life was a challenge, so I endeavored to persevere. But life is a battle that is tough. That's why this journey is something I'm still struggling with, hoping to endure.

Now I am going to school, hoping to achieve my goal, which is very important to me. I'm hoping that one day, it will end with the best of life.

First Steps – The Journey Begins

Alicia Macoto – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

When I was younger, I had good grades in school. I think education is important to us. I didn't have the opportunity to study more in my country, because when I was 14 years old, my father died. Then my mother had to work hard and with my older three brothers, I had to help her, too. It was difficult for me to leave school, because I liked it so much.

Sometimes I would talk with my sons about how education is important to their future. And I would tell them what happened when I was young.

First Steps: Education

Abdul Jalloh – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Hello, my name is Abdul Jalloh. I live in the Bronx, NY.

Why is education important?

Education is important to me, because when you have an education, you have the ability to succeed in life. If you have an education, you have the power and the ability to communicate. My life journey is to achieve what I love to do, which is to continue my education.

Education is something that always makes me happy. I can just imagine living without an education. I wouldn't be able to go to college. If I drive, I wouldn't be able to read the signs. And also, I wouldn't be able to have a better job. I will always take this opportunity to become an educated somebody.

Why Is Education Important

Elizette Lakouetene – Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY Start

CUNY Start is a program of the City University of New York (CUNY), the public college system of New York City. CUNY Start is a program for people who have been accepted into a CUNY school and need reading, writing, and math supports and college success advisement. The program helps learners prepare for college-level coursework.

My life is neither the worst nor the best one, but having a positive attitude makes everything seem better. Each day presents new turning points and opportunities. Sometimes I wonder why there are so many challenges. But when I look back on what I've already been through, I'm grateful to be where I am today. Each day has its challenges, but that's normal for most people.

I'm often afraid of too much challenge. I'm afraid of failing, afraid of disappointing my friends and family, who expect so much of me. Initially, when I came to the U.S., the greatest challenge was language. English is my third language, after Sango and French. When I originally arrived in this country, I didn't know about Google translate. I was completely lost trying to communicate. The English I learned in the Central African Republic was not enough. When I heard people talking so fast and their words so well-articulated, I wanted to be like them right away. I remember even using sign language to express myself. Then I went to the Sauti Yeti Center for African Women, and I was sent to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to learn English. It was the summer of 2016.

I met a wonderful teacher who was really nice. I understand what she was teaching me and my classmates. She gave us dictionaries and a DVD to practice pronunciation. She told me the way to improve my English was to watch TV, read books, and practice speaking English. On that day, I believed that I could be better if I did what she said. I started reading a book, I watched TV, and I tried speaking to people. But the next time I was going to class, I got lost.

The first time I went to the IRC I brought the address and the directions written on paper with me. Unfortunately, on that day, I didn't bring it with me. I got off the train and began walking among many tall buildings, looking for the

number 263. I didn't see that number. I cried while walking, saying to myself, "I am lost in this big country."

Fortunately, I met some guys selling tickets for a tour of New York. They saw me crying and they asked if they could help me. I was lucky. They spoke French! They showed me the way to get to the IRC which was not far.

I am glad today to speak and write fluently. I took my education in learning English seriously. I know I'll further my education in the sciences to be in a medical field. Also, I believe it's important to contribute positively to society. I strongly believe that if everyone were willing to get an education, they could be where they want to be and who they are meant to be.

As I said before, my life is different because each day has its challenges. I have particular things that frighten me, and I think the solution is to meet challenges and believe that I am strong enough to cope with everything that comes my way. Coming to school is like a job. I choose to come to school to be educated and to have a brighter future. I also want to be a good example for my younger siblings. Eventually, I want to be a leader in society.

Education will change my life positively and put me where I want to be. Through education, everyone can open doors and make brighter futures. For me, it's really important. I feel brave when I think I can do things. There's bravery in me when things become harder and I push through, because it's part of the life experience. I think it's better to have a positive, hopeful attitude and not expect someone else to encourage me. I keep telling myself I can do anything, no matter what challenges come my way. One thing I know for certain, I'll never give up.

Education, Education, Education

Nilofar Azimzadegan – Pleasanton Library: The Pleasanton Reads Project

Nilofar has an advanced degree, and she is also an English language learner. She is a great example of how diverse adult learners can be. Many people might assume that someone who doesn't speak English fluently has little or no education. Nilofar shows that assumption is false. Adult education classes serve many people with many different needs.

Education is very important in my life as it enabled me to read, write, calculate or communicate in different ways. With the help of education I got confidence which developed my personality to build my opinion, strengthen my position in the society, and most importantly it gave me importance in my social life.

Education begins at home as we grow and learn. My parents were educated and provided opportunities for me to learn, so I got my Master's degree which empowered me to get a good job and make good money for my living which shaped my other achievements in life.

Because of education I was able to teach my children, and help them in their studies by giving them valuable information about history, culture, and science. Through education I taught them to get healthy food and proper nourishment. I brought positive changes in their lives which enabled them to lead a successful life. So it shows how one's education can not only touch one's life but also that of generations.

Education made me wiser and self-dependent which resulted in making better decisions and helped me solve my problems easier. It encouraged me to share my experiences and ideas among people. Education for me was a key to success and played a major role in turning my dream into reality. It increased my awareness of disease such as AIDS and diabetes, global warming and recycling. It helped me stay healthier.

Education teaches me to stay thankful to God and stay happy in every condition of life (or at least trying to), so this makes me happy and satisfied, therefore I can swim in deepest oceans and can climb the highest peaks.

Life is ever changing if you don't want to stay back, being educated is a must. So education should be in every day of life for everyone.

Everyone's journey is different. Some start in similar places – like making the decision to go back to school – but others are different. Maybe a journey starts when you have a job that you don't like and decide to make a change. Maybe a journey starts as you look at the life of a person you admire. Everyone starts in a different place.

First Steps

Ronald Thomas – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My first step is to get back in school and take it seriously and study, so I can get my GED.

And then, fill out an application for a city job, like NYC Transit, Sanitation, Metro North Railroad, or NYC DOT¹.

Then, I could go back to work and build up my credit. I could clear up my old and bad credit.

I'd get me a pension and benefits, with a retirement plan, after so many years on the job. I'd put money in the bank.

Then, I'd buy me a new car, and take out a loan for a new house, if my credit gets cleaned up.

Then, I could start to go to certain cities and countries where I've never been, like Las Vegas, and stay in nice hotels and go to different beaches.

Maybe I'll find time to climb a mountain with a guide or go scuba diving. Something crazy before I drop dead.

Maybe a couple of night clubs for parties and some strip clubs. Ha!

And maybe I would get married if I found the right girl.

After I did everything I wanted to do in life, at the end it would be retirement. Me or me and my wife, living in my retirement beach house, just watching the sun set, every night! Yaaaah!

¹ New York City Department of Transportation

I Feel Proud, I Feel Thankful

Mahamudu Tunkara – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

The things I feel proud about is a surprise happy birthday for me.

The thing I feel proud about is when the weather outside is not hot or cold.

The think I feel proud about is being in school every day and learning new things.

The thing I feel proud about is learning and working so that I can plan my future.

The thing I feel proud about is being a nice gentleman and respecting people.

The thing that I am thankful for is smiling at someone.

The thing that I am thankful for is being serious and being at work and at school on time.

The thing I am thankful for is respecting teachers and one another.

The thing that I am thankful for is advising others and caring about others.

The thing that I am thankful for is respecting my parents and friends

And loving them forever.

Oprah Winfrey

Nate Gobert – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic
Education, DSPS at ECC

Outgoing

Parent to us all

Respects

Action in the

House

Worthy

Intelligent

Nice

Friendly

Roundhouse

Extraordinary

Youthful

Home

Lurinarda Gonzalez – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Home to me is that special house where I grew up with my Grandparents, Aunts Uncle and Brothers, learning all we needed to know, to become a responsible person.

Where I lived, I had many precious moments, like when I had to go to the River to bathe, or to go down to the spring to get water, that I carried home, on my head, in a big can. And when I would get up at six o'clock in the morning, to accompany my Grandma, to go to town and get the milk, from a cow.

No matter how difficult this all looks to other people, to me, these are my beautiful memories of home.

My Journey Begins

Rondalynne Allen – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Just thinking about getting a job. People get jobs all the time. My journey is always I get a job for a week, then I don't have a job for a month, or longer.

#Me2

Anonymous 3 – Delaware Adult Education / Baylor Women's Correctional Institution



A Seasonal Journey

Jorge Garcia – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Sometimes I like the weather. Sometimes it is boring. Sometimes I like the summer, to do exercises. I like to do sports: to play soccer or go running. I like doing sports when it's 100 degrees and high humidity, so I can sweat quickly and burn calories fast, too. In the summer, you can just eat salads, with water or vegetable juices.

Sometimes I don't like summer, because you can't sleep well, in your house. It's so hot you need air conditioning. Sometimes I prefer the winter, because you can sleep more easily. You don't need air conditioning.

But in the winter, I eat more. I like a hot chocolate drink, called La Abuelita, "the Grandma", with bread, or coffee, while I watch TV, at home. In the winter, sometimes I can't do exercises, or do sports, like playing soccer or running. I stay home.

Sometimes that's why I get bored with the weather. But I still like both seasons.

My Truck

Israel Zamora – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

Today I am feeling nervous about my truck. It is still stranded in a neighborhood. I am scared and nervous about what I am going through. I need to get my truck out of there soon! As soon as I can. If I don't get it out of there something is going to happen. I might lose my truck forever because I was not quick enough. I hope things go right today. I hope my truck says something to me.

Now I am calm and easy going with better news than yesterday. I was thinking too much and had lots of worries. Today, I made my truck start and I drove to see my daughter. It was a good feeling.

My truck was not all fixed. It was still stumbling, but now I have time to fix it and get new parts. That is how life is sometimes.

My First Job

William Liriano – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My first job was at a bodega. I was 14-15 years old and the job was only for the summer time. I remember that year I was working in the store, I graduated from Middle School and was going on to High School.

The job was a little difficult because I had to lift up a lot of boxes, but the pay was good: \$200 weekly. That was a good amount of money for me. I bought a lot of stuff. I bought clothes, sneakers, and I bought a whole gaming set up. It took me one month and a half, to get that \$2000, to buy my gaming set up.

Working in that bodega, I learned a lot. I applied what I learned, to my life, and to my new job. So that first job, was one of my best experiences.

My Happy Experience

Lurinarda Gonzalez – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

When I was 9 years old, with the help of my Aunt Martha, I wrote a letter to my Father, who lived in the United States of America. I asked him to help me with money, because I wanted to travel, to meet my Grandparents, on my Mother's side.

That day, when I went with my Aunt, to see my Grandparents, was a bad and also a happy day. Bad because I was sick during the trip. The curve of the road made me car sick. And happy because before going to my Grandpa's house, we needed to cross a canal. My Grandpa came out, to help me to cross the canal, and he carried me to the house.

My Grandpa was an old and sweet person. I never will forget that day.

I Want to Tell My Story!

Daisy Mayers – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

If you are living life without purpose, my story might inspire you. I hope my life's experiences will help guide you through the obstacles you might be facing.

We all have similar stories and we can succeed despite our circumstances. My goal is to give you hope, purpose and confidence. I want to enhance your self-esteem.

You might be facing obstacles but you do not have to face them alone. My experiences have shown me that we go through many things in life, but we can overcome them.

One of the Greatest Things

Arnold Serieux – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

One of the greatest things that I am grateful for is the opportunity given to me, by the All Mighty God, which I grab, and put into practice. That's the reason I am in class tonight, and will continue to push myself, as far as I can go. Because it is something that is highly important for me, and I hope that it will be, for many more people.



What Is Love?

Seferino Alejo – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

Love is peace, happiness and freedom.

What is possession?

A possession is an item; an item is just a thing you can buy or sell. That's why it is a possession! Once you buy it, it is your possession. But you cannot possess a person even when you are married to them.

Love thy neighbor.

Almost all people believe in love or God, and they even try to tell you that they love God. But if you ask them about their neighbors, mostly they say do not talk to them. They are no good. So, where is the love of God and the love they talked about?

To be able to love others and all the rest of creation you need to understand that you are part of it all and that it all works as one, for us all. Once you understand this, you will be at peace with your neighbors and the rest of the world. Be one with the universe and creation. This is the nature of love and power and of freedom. Do you let anyone possess you and do not judge others. Then you will be free.

No Fear of Colors

Israel Zamora – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education DSPS at ECC

I believe we are all different in all aspects. It's a world full of differences. Nothing is the same, but I like being different.

I think it's special for me. This earth has left a big mark on me to stay who I am. My thoughts don't relate to any one country's flag or gang's colors. Some people or organizations spread fear about people who are different. They try to destroy anyone who is not like them.

I wear different colors: pink, sky blue, red and green. I don't think colors change life, but I believe we should be free to wear all the colors. Freedom means no fear of colors.

About the Something You Would Like to Share With ...

Henry Albarillo, Jr. – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

About the “something that you would like to share with ...”

there must have to be lots of things to share

and these are the positive things,

not the negative things, not specifically.

And “If,” I need to be specific,

there are lots of positive things to detail,

so there might not be

enough space detailing all of them.

About yesterday, things that happened

are probably the usual things that happen regularly,

every day, that most, or some people

want, or some people can hate, to have happen.

And lastly, about something important for today,

from the “Do Now” question,

these are the things to do

to get the day over.

My First Job in New York City

Alicia Macoto – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

When I arrived in New York City, my first job was at a Florist Shop. I worked there for only 3 weeks. Here is why.

I was working there from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, seven days a week. My job was to take care of the plants and make bunches of flowers to sell and take the thorns off the roses.

My boss didn't pay me for the first and second week, so when another week went by, she finally paid me. But she only gave me \$80 for three weeks work!

I thought that was all wrong because the other person who was working there was getting \$150 per week, and she worked the same hours, the same amount of time that I did. So I decided not to come back to work there, any more.

My Name

Arnold Serieux – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Names are usually given to us for a reason. My name was given to me by my Godfather, which has motivated me, to be what I am today.

I can vividly remember having a conversation with him. He was telling me how my name had been chosen, for a special reason. And the reason was that a man with the name of Arnold can do anything that he chooses to do, in life. From that day on, confidence in myself has never left me. And it never will.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

*Sometimes a journey
has a rough start. We
all have challenges
that we have to
overcome in order to
move forward and
work toward our
goals and dreams.*

Life

Jorge Garcia – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

I want to have a successful life and to be strong. When I wake up to go to work in the morning, I feel tired but I have to get up. I go to the restroom, wash my face and brush my teeth and I get ready to go to my job. Sometimes the hours go fast, when you are a little busy.

Sometimes I'm sad. I do too much thinking, and I have too much stress. But my Father told us not to be sad in this world, but be happy. My father told us, that sometimes you will have, sometimes you won't have. The world goes around.

Yeah, I listen to my father about what he says about being happy always, and to be positive. Now I go to be successful, because the world goes around. The hours, the seconds, the years go fast. And the important thing is, I don't want to get old!

Hero's Journey (Introducing Complicated)

Amaya L. Jones – Fulton Academy

To me my life has always seemed so complicated. I've always seemed so complicated and I've always made everything I do or want to be complicated. It's funny though, since being incarcerated and sitting still these last few months, I've come to realize that *complicated* was visiting me, like from outside of myself. After all, I'd always dreamed of my life being simple, but when I think about it, simple isn't what I really wanted. Chaos was what I was best at!

I remember when I was about eight years old I had a crush on this boy at school. I walked him home after school and stayed at his house even though I knew I shouldn't have. When I got home several hours later I found that my parents were so upset with my absence that they'd called the police. Dad was crying when I walked into the yard. Before that night, I'd never seen him cry. I'd have to say that it was that night when *complicated* and I first met. We became best friends and by the time I was fifteen, pregnant for my son Jacquin, we were blood sisters. Today that child is nineteen years old.

Jacquin's father was dealing drugs to my father at the time of my pregnancy and was sent to prison for five years soon after I gave birth, so I was raising a two year old alone with the help of some of my family members. *Complicated* liked that. She came to visit again when my cousin was murdered at the age of fourteen in her family home by her mother's boyfriend. At the time I thought it was the worst thing that ever happened in my life and that I would never recover from it. But another friend of *Complicated* showed up soon afterward; her name was *Crack* and those two rarely left my side. Before the return of Jacquin's dad from prison I had two abortions.

I told you that *Complicated* is my blood sister and that chaos is what we are best at. So now that you've gotten a little peek into my relationship with that chick, hopefully you'll see that she found me and not the other way around.

I Will Change the World

Jennifer – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

At 21 years of age, I am continuing my education at ECC to get my high school equivalency. I returned to the United States four years ago, after discovering a terrible secret.

In our house, there were a lot of people: my mom and step-dad, my uncle and my grandma, and all my siblings. When I was 16 years old, my step-father kicked my older brother out of the house so he went to live in California by himself. One week later, my mother came to me crying. I thought something had happened to my brother, but no. She asked me to sit. My brother had found my dad's family. They had told him the truth about how my father died. My mom had been hiding it from us. My uncle, who was my hero, was the one who killed my dad. He shot him in the head.

At that moment my life stopped. I felt heartbroken. I fell into a thousand pieces. All my life I had been living with the person who took my dad away from me. All my life had been a lie.

So I decided to come to San Diego to meet my family. At first it was really hard because they thought I turned my back on them to protect my uncle. I told them it wasn't my fault.

Now I am doing so much better. I met my husband three years ago and I am so grateful to have him in my life. He has been great to me. He is always supporting me. He helps me to love myself. Now I really want to give back. I want to go to college and become a psychologist for kids who went through bad times like I did. I want to help them and to show them that there is a way out. I hope one day I can help a lot of kids. Starting with the high school equivalency, I will go to college and change the world.

My Journey to Adult Education

Melissa Hill-Nance – Seeds of Literacy

My journey to adult education has been a long and hard journey. I have had to push through some struggles and even lost hope of ever getting it. I helped raised my siblings and gave special care to my oldest brother who had seizure disorder from a gunshot wound at the age of seven. My mom was and is a strong and loving mother who taught me at an early age to step up and make sacrifices when it comes to holding the family up and together. So when I got pregnant in high school I decided that I would have my baby and finish school and get a job because college was never something that I wanted to do. I was a caregiver and that's what I wanted to do, even though writing was my passion. I never thought I was good enough or smart enough to become a writer, even after I wrote my first book at sixteen, but hey like a teacher stated to me, you could never become a writer with a tenth grade education and coming out the projects, those are just a fairy tale dream, stay to something that would pay your bills and put food on your table for you and all your children, not knowing that I came from a good family and my dad had two good jobs and the reason we were in the projects was because it was right across the street from the hospital that my brother went to. So I did exactly what she said: I worked, raised my two children and six other children, which were children of family, and made sure that my youngest sister had everything she needed while she was in college so she would finish. Because my other siblings had their high school diploma and started college she would be the first of my mother children to have a college degree and also she could bring her books home so I could read them because finishing school and writing never left my spirit. So at times when the children would come home with homework I would get so excited just to help them and when they walked across those stages my heart was flooding with pride that I had a part in them finishing and realizing how important school was. And again finishing school and writing was in my spirit but after years of trying to go and getting let down from the school being a fraud to getting almost gravely sick with heart and lung issues and being told that I might have five years to live and not knowing how to read and having some short and long memory loss after my system shut down and I lost all hope of ever finishing and writing. Until my young niece asked me Auntie why don't you go to school now that your children is grown and I couldn't help but to tell her the truth about me not being able to read with tears rolling down my cheeks. She wiped my face and said Auntie that's ok I will teach you like you

taught me. And every day as I picked her up from school we would play the game that I played so many times before with her: see it say it try to spell it and my spirit came to life again. I started going over my grandchildren picture books and homework with my niece and grandchildren. Before I knew it that passion was in full hunger and I wanted more and a friend to me about Seeds of Literacy. I had never been so afraid in my life. The entry test was like a foreign language but the teacher was awesome but the class was too fast for me at the time and the location was not a good fit for me. And then I got married and gave up that ideal all together until my family encouraged me to try again. I went to Seeds West and it was like all my prayers and dreams had come true. The helpers are incredible I go at my own pace and when I can come the location is great and I have even been thinking of going to college now that Seeds offer an art of writing class and my spirit wants more. So when someone ask me what is my career plans and goals I say I am in my golden young years I have worked, raised children, got married to a wonderful man, traveled, and the only regret that I ever had in life is not taking my education as important as I should have, but I have been blessed to have another chance with Seeds, and I can't wait until the day I walk that stage.

Improving My Life

Seferino Alejo – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

I started to work at the age of 13. The first year was in Sinaloa, Mexico. By the age of 15, I was already working in the United States of America.

I started to do agriculture, landscaping and construction work. I also worked on a horse ranch for a very nice lady who owned it. I did all these kinds of work until I got shot on November 26, 2000.

For all these reasons, I did not go to school. School was not in my mind as long as I had a job. After I got shot, I ended up in a wheel chair. I am still struggling to get out of it. But I am doing a lot better now.

At first, I spent three months in the hospital until I learned how to feed myself. This was like being born again. Just harder to get back on your feet. Especially if you listen to the negativity of people.

So, I always told people that my God can do all things. Therefore, he can get me out of all of my problems. Even the things that people think to be impossible. All that I am learning now in school will help me to improve. It will change my life.

My Life

Pushpavati Promod Pawar

"Life is like a camera. Focus on what's important. Capture the good times. And if things don't work out, just take another shot."- Ziad K. Abdelnour

"Life is precious" because God has created it and God does not make junk. Every life has a purpose to serve yourself as well as to others. My life also has a meaning and its own perspective. It is like a bird which likes to fly higher and higher and also like a fish in the ocean which keeps moving on. I like to adapt to changes in my life to survive better. 'Change' is an important factor in life. There is a saying, "If you can not change the world better change yourself." The change in my attitude towards myself will help me to be a better and strong person. For that 'Education' plays a very important role in our life especially if you want to bring changes in yourself to thrive in this society. It gives you knowledge, builds confidence and courage, makes you understand the importance of your life, teaches you to use your skills, abilities and also gives you a strength to be an independent person .

A 'Homemaker' is a full time job. My days are busy in finishing household chores like buying groceries, cooking and cleaning, washing clothes, folding and ironing them etc. Along with that also taking care of my daughter, helping her in studies and making sure of fulfilling her needs .Though I try to use most of the time of my day still no enough time to focus on my capabilities to achieve what I want for myself. That's why the thought which frightened me was whether I would be able to speak English fluently and communicate in it without hesitating. I realized that I needed to focus on my views and taking out time to utilize it effectively, to pursue my goal .With that thought I joined ESL classes taken by Lorrain and Susan in South Brunswick Public Library, NJ. With these regular classes and teachers' teachings I have started improving my vocabulary as well as communication skills. This education is helping me in understanding American English accent, culture and manners of American people, giving me confidence to communicate in English with them.

Due to having an education, I do feel brave and strong so that I can weather any hard time in my life. I have a potential to succeed in my life if I keep working hard on improving my skills and abilities. Ultimately we are in the driver's seat to take a control of our life to reach to our goal.

My Mom

Matthew Szabo – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

My hero is my mom; she is the only one. She always loves me so much. I have her back and she has mine. When I am depressed, my mom helps me. She talks to me to make me feel healthy.

My dad is dying, but my mom helps him too. The thing about my dad is that he gets mad very easily. My mom has to talk to him too. She tries to be patient even when he shuts her down. I am very proud of my mom.

My mom is a teacher for people with brain injuries, ABI. She works way too hard because she loves to work with people.

If something happens to my dad. If he dies. I should be looking after my mom. So I try to help around the house. My dad put me in charge. He knows I can do it. But I don't mind, because my mom is my hero.



My New Journey

Caroline Wang – Pleasanton Library: The Pleasanton Reads Project

I began a new journey when I was 40. In 2014, my daughter and I moved from Beijing, China to Pleasanton, California. One year later, my son joined us.

Many people have asked me about what made me move to the States. My children's education was one of the reasons but not the only one. Everybody occasionally feels the need to change, but the feeling is usually followed by “someday.” At 40, I found the courage to ask, “Why not right now?” I was afraid the courage that I had then might fade away. So I decided to take action immediately.

I held a senior position in the human resources department of a multinational company and was in charge of talent development. One of my jobs was to select successors for key positions through a series of well-developed assessment tools. One of my key findings was that we could not instill certain key leadership competencies, such as risk-taking, creativity, entrepreneurship, and even teamwork. Some middle-level managers were very good at one position, but when we asked them to lead an organization or a cross-functional team, they could not do it well. Although the company invested a lot to develop those skills in some individuals, they would fail in managerial positions. Because of this, new general managers were often hired from overseas. I thought maybe some leadership competencies needed to be developed during their education period since leadership training did not help that much. This observation made me recognize a significant difference between the American and Chinese education systems.

Moving to another country was not easy. My son was a 13-year-old teenager, and my daughter was only 7.

When my daughter first started going to school, she couldn't understand anything and couldn't express herself. The English she learned in Beijing was too simple to communicate with others. So I took her to the library to borrow books every week. We read five books every night, three in English and two in Chinese. In this way, while learning a new language, she would not forget Chinese and find greater intimacy and confidence in her mother tongue. I also took her to a variety of activities, from her school's book fair to the Pleasanton Antique Festival, allowing her to practice her language and understand

American culture. At the book fair, her school principal wore a queen's costume and had the children sit around her and listen to her storytelling. My daughter was so surprised. She said that she rarely saw the principal of her school in Beijing. If she saw him at all, it must have been at the New Year's Conference and listening to his speech. The principal was a high-profile person in her mind and could not be approached. Because of this storytelling principal, my daughter fell in love with her American elementary school.

My son was exhausted and frustrated when he entered high school. He wanted to go back to China every day, and he was in a very low mood. Once in a World History class, the teacher asked him to imagine himself as an anti-imperialist historical person and to make an Instagram-like poster of that person. He was instructed to think about what information he would post, what readers he would have, and how they were going to respond. Painting and drawing are my son's strength, and he is also very interested in this kind of work that stimulates curiosity and imagination. He took the homework very seriously and spent a lot of time doing research and reading a lot of articles. Finally, he created the Chinese Qing Dynasty official Lin Zexu's Instagram page. This project got the highest marks and was praised by teachers and classmates. After this, students would often open new conversation topics with him because of his painting and drawing, and he made more and more friends. Through art, he finally found an entrance into American life. With a better understanding of the new culture, he has become exposed to a greater diversity of people and has slowly begun to like more realistic and broader themes. His paintings have always been about "people," and he loves to express people's thoughts, emotions, and stories through painting. In the United States, there are the Scholastic, YoungArts, Congressional Art, and other youth art competitions. The competitions are open to the public, and everyone has the opportunity to participate. His work has won awards in different competitions, and he has finally found his way of development. In China, art education focuses on solid techniques and specific themes, while in the United States, it pays more attention to artistic creativity and whether the works are strongly individualized and visual. Apparently, he prefers the American's approach.

Every year, I ask myself to try something I have never done before. In 2017, I learned about the Destination Imagination (DI). DI is a global educational nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring the next generation of innovators, leaders, and creative problem solvers. DI participants are organized into teams with children, and the team manager who trains and leads the team is the parent of one of the children. We quickly formed a team of six fifth-grade girls, and another mother and I volunteered to be the team managers. We took one

day of training and began to lead the children to complete the challenge. DI offers a lot of learning resources.

Every Thursday, we spent the whole morning preparing for the Saturday practices. It was not easy to be the team manager. Besides my daughter and her friend, I did not know the other girls and their parents at all. Another barrier is language. The children speak very fast, and their thinking is often unfocused. Sometimes I can't fully understand what they say and have difficulty responding to them. If you can't communicate thoroughly, you won't win the respect of the children. I have to spend more time to prepare the content for our Challenge and to learn the characteristics of each child and the problems she cared about. Step by step, we led them to first place in the regional competition and to second place in the California competition. In May 2018, we represented California in the global finals and won fifth place in the primary school level. As a first-time DI team, this is a fantastic result. I am very proud of what I did. Now, our team is preparing for the new Challenge for 2019.

As I raise my children, I have come to understand the necessity of improving myself. So I applied for the adult English learning program at the Pleasanton library. I have been learning and practicing English with my tutor, Mark Ostler, for two years. We read magazines and different types of articles. Sometimes Mark asks me to write essays and recommends his favorite poets and writers for me to read. I can communicate more effectively in English, and my confidence is gradually improving.

Cultural understanding is the key to improving my language. And the cultural insights I need are not available in a dictionary for me. Whenever I have such issues, I can ask Mark, ranging from the questions on jury summons to a house damaged by a woodpecker. In addition to giving me a lot of advice and information on daily life, he discusses parenting with me. As a great father and grandfather, he not only gives me his ideas but we also share our different perspectives. His listening and approval make me feel being respected and confident. I think this benefits me the most. At the same time, he also actively learns about China's education system and Chinese culture generally. For example, I wrote about China's teaching system in one of my essays. He was very interested in it, asked me many questions, and was very much in agreement with several aspects of this system. He is an excellent example of lifelong learning.

It takes a lot of pride, self-discipline, and respect to reach your full potential as a learner, a parent and as a person. Life is a process of learning. Everything in my life has helped me become me. I have enjoyed this new journey, filled with

joys, hardships, lessons, celebrations and special moments, and I'm excited for what lies ahead.



What Would You Like to Change

Rondalynne Allen – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Sometimes I would like to change the way I think. It is very hard for me to think of words because writing was something I used to do a lot of. Now I only write shopping lists, phone numbers of friends and sometimes, job lists.

A Well Balanced Life

Jessica Ramos Bahena

Jessica's journey started in a GED program. She has been published in [Women's Perspectives](#) in the past. Now she has moved on in her journey. She was part of the Selection Committee for this year's issue of [Women's Perspectives](#). We look forward to seeing where her journey leads.

One change I would like to make in my life is start living a well-balanced life. Steps to living a well-balanced life are exercising, eating healthy, and having a support group to help you reach success. There are obstacles that I have to overcome and adapt to before I can reach the change in my life I would like. "Never give up and be positive" is my motto.

I sustained a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in 2009 and since then I have made exercising part of my weekly routine. Last summer, I was hired as an intern in the Navy Coronado base as Administrative Support while being a student. The commute was longer than what I was used to and my exhaustion level was at a max. I wasn't sleeping like I used to. I had to wake up earlier to be at Old Town to catch the first trolley, which was at 4:52am. After that, I had class from 6pm to 11:00pm. Then I had to sleep and get ready for work the next day. On weekends, I was sleeping in a lot! I had to do something to balance my life. I was not going to the gym like I used to so I had to find a way to get back in a routine. As my motivator to go to the gym and to save time, I met up with a mentor of mine at the gym.

When I went to Mesa College, I took morning classes and tried to work on a routine. I would go to my house to have lunch then return to Mesa College to study, review, or for tutoring. I didn't mind walking to the bus stop, wait for the bus, to get to my home because it was more like a mental break. I would return to school after a full meal and with my mind felt refreshed. In 2017, I received an Associate's in Arts so I could transfer to SDSU (San Diego State University) to study psychology. The commute is now longer, but that just means I get a better work-out when I have to find healthy food.

Maintaining a support system has been key in my success. Since my TBI, I have a support group that I keep in touch with. They are my high school teachers who are all retired. On my birthday, we get together and they ask me what is new in my life. I always share my new goals, current things that are happening in my life, and what I have achieved so far. They always provide me with encouragement, advice, and comfort. Having a support system is very important because I want to reach the top. Keeping this support system alive is important and it will help me get a Bachelor's Degree in two years.

It is hard living a well-balanced life for a woman who is a student, worker, exerciser, and healthy eater. I have been able to do most of these, but one change that I would like to make in my life is find a way to live a well-balanced life with this new schedule. I will do this by realizing what I want to change in my life and by actually doing the steps like I have listed above. It is all available to me to make it happen.

My Steps to the Future

Linda Hearst – Greenwood County Library Adult Literacy and ESL Program

My life over the years has been a struggle. What I mean by that is not being able to read well. But God has been with me over my life. He has given me the knowledge to maintain my life. I was not able to read to my two children. When my grandson asked me to read a book to him, it made me want to learn how to read better. So I came to the library looking for help. There I ran across a lady who I used to work with. She took me into her office. We talked and I cried. I spilt my heart out to her about my disability with reading. She said she could get me some help, and she did. She found me tutors. I have a set time for the lessons. I am doing work at home and I am learning. Now I will go to a restaurant and read the menu and order. When I go to the grocery store, I take my time and try to read what the label says.

I've been alone all my life trying to figure it out. I feel good about myself. It is a wonderful feeling. Before I wouldn't go anywhere by myself. I thought one of my family members had to be with me. I have good days and bad days with reading. When it is a bad day, I step back and relax my mind. I lay my book down and go back to it after a couple of minutes. Before I would just give up. I hope that in the future that I will stand in church and read scripture out of the Bible. I do believe I can succeed because when I first started I really couldn't do anything. But now I can do a lot of things with my reading. I know now it is better not to give up.

The Loser Who Won

C.J.M. – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

You would think that the life of a twelve-year-old was easy. It usually is, and so it started. In my world at age twelve, life was so good. I lived by my aunt in the countryside. It was just us girls and her husband. I knew I had brothers and sisters but I did not know them. My mom sent me to live with her and it was here I spent most of my childhood. Life was free and easy, between the shop, my school and the hundreds of fruit trees I had the carefree life any child wanted. On Sundays, we went to church. I got to wear beautiful dresses and we always had Sunday lunch as a family.

Then I met my first loss. I had to move back to Port of Spain, leaving the serenity of my countryside life. Back in the city, I was now getting to know my real family: my mother, father and eight siblings. Now a part of a family of eleven, I was very scared. This was just the start of my losses of what I would come to know as the stepping stones in a harsh world.

Fast forward almost a decade, at twenty-four I was married with three children. Raising three boys was not easy. With a husband who was always working, I had to be both mother and father to my boys. From homework to sport, to girls, it was a challenge but I taught them all I knew. All women are strong. You see them all the time, all over the world, like Mrs. Obama, Oprah and Ms. Paula-Mae Weekes².

What makes me strong is going through marital troubles and getting the confidence to be strong and care for my children, including a son with autism. I faced the ups and downs, the good and the bad but they gave me the strength.

I dedicated my life to my children and this experience taught me things about myself that I needed to survive the other losses I would encounter. My autistic son experienced severe bouts of illness where I had to spend weeks in the hospital with him. Unable to read, all I could do was sign the forms the nurses gave to me. Unable to spell, I could have barely helped my sons through school when they needed me most. As a mother I would have given anything to go back in time and erase the mistakes my parents made by not letting me finish school.

² Paula Mae-Weekes is the first female president of Trinidad and Tobago.

But here I am trying to persevere and push on with all my strength. Moments of fear still flooded my heart when I lay in bed at night. The helplessness of not being able to provide for my children, especially my autistic son, because of my own inadequacies made me tired. I was tired of feeling this way. I vowed not to let my past taint me and my children's future.

Betterment is what I sought and like a gift from the universe ALTA was at my door.

Support however, was scarce, they said, "You don't need that" and "That's for dumb people". Constantly I kept hitting walls, for thirty years I kept hitting walls, watching opportunities slip through my fingers. But this reinforced the importance of education. Now more than ever at fifty something years young, I knew I needed to fulfil the vow I made to myself and my children, not only for them but for my own independence and satisfaction.

Better late than never, I am now an example to my now grown children and grandchildren, living proof of the heights to which education can take you.

While to some it might seem like a small feat, going back to school at my age is my bravest and most proud accomplishment. From the young girl living in the countryside to the woman I am today, my journey has revealed inner strength, parallel to nothing.

They laughed at this loser, but for years I wanted one thing and that was to succeed. The strength I gained over the years has driven me to do just that. I am proud to say that as a woman, a daughter, a mother and now a student, this loser has won!

*Learning about life is
an important journey,
one that all of us take.*

*There's so much to
learn, and these
writers share their
ideas here.*

My Advice I'd Give

Mahamudu Tunkara – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is to respect their elders.

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is to be in school on time.

When you wake in the morning, brush your teeth.

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is to respect the teacher

And not fight with any other students.

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is whatever their parents told them to do

They have to do it.

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is to be clean and eat healthy food.

My advice I'd give to the younger generation is to respect one another

And be friends and love one another, forever.

Women's Perspective

Robin Flowers – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

I believe it is important for a woman to be educated and to feel empowered, meaning that a woman has the same rights as a man or anyone else. A woman has the right to go to school, get a job, or stay at home if she chooses.

A woman should feel independent and not depend on others, but I believe it is okay to ask for help if she needs it. A woman should not be made to feel bad because she needs help sometimes. We all need help sometimes with some things.

All women should be encouraged to follow their dreams to believe in themselves. Others should not make a woman feel bad about themselves. We are all strong and not weak. Just because we make mistakes, doesn't mean we failed.

As women, we should support each other and encourage each other to achieve our goals. We should share our dreams and struggles we have had to overcome to encourage each other. All women have overcome some obstacles in her life. Some have survived cancer, some have had to overcome other struggles, but most women have had to overcome the obstacle to achieve her hopes and dreams.

My Interview with Melissa Hough

Tammy Anderson – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

When you want to change something, do it. I wanted to do an interview so I did it. This interview was a new experience for me. At first, I asked Melissa to tell me about herself, but she said that I need to ask her questions. My three questions that I chose to ask her were:

1. In addition to being paid money, how else has your career created value in your life?
2. Who was the biggest influence in your career?
3. What was your best job?

Here is what Melissa said.

“My career has brought meaning and purpose into my life. Working with and for people with disabilities over the past 24 years has been extremely rewarding. I have gained and learned more than I could ever give.”

The biggest influence in my life was my mentor, Lana Gregori. She believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself and pushed me beyond what I thought was possible.

The best place to work is at ECC. All the students are so wonderful and eager to learn. Faculty and staff are extremely supportive and encouraging. ECC is such a warm welcoming place to work.”

From this interview, I learned to respect teachers and treat them how other people want to be respected. I learned that Melissa had a mentor. It is a good thing to have a mentor in life. I don’t have a mentor so I think I need to find one.

Learning to Look People in the Eye

Jennifer – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

For all my years of school, I was bullied. I was always really skinny and they used to call me “Skeleton” and other mean names. They also used to pull my hair and hide my backpack. I had no friends.

I wasn’t able to look at people in their eyes. Something needed to change. I was so shy.

When I was 15 years old, I had to walk a long way to catch the bus. I invented a strategy to work on my shyness. On the way, I imagined people coming at me. At first I was scared that they would laugh at me, but I practiced looking at these imaginary people. After trying so hard, I finally was able to look people in their eyes.

Changing your world is hard, but you can change how you face the world. Now I can face anything because I know that I can change the way I behave.



Story of My Life

Belinda Gonzalez – Seeds of Literacy

My life was growing up was short. I was eleven years old my home was with a family of seven kids four girls and three boys. My mother, Juanita Gonzalez, liked to go dancing every weekend, leaving us children with my second older brother, Oscar.

He use to hit us girls for not listening to what he had to say. It was very scary because he was a bad person too us girls Oscar raped us girls and threatened us not to tell our mom. We were scared and frightened, so we didn't tell our mom. I was just eleven years old when it first happen. I couldn't stay at that house anymore. I'd stayed at a friend's house until I turned 12 years old then I ran away from home. I didn't know that the streets were very scary. So, I stood with my aunt Clara in her house for a year, until I started meeting people, and I had a boyfriend. At the age of thirteen. His name was Michael.

He was very nice to me at first, it was warm that day the sun was out he took me to go see a movie and after that he took me to eat pizza, we laughing so much just getting to know each other. I met him in 1982 when we started to be boyfriend and girlfriend. In a year he started to play me dirty and hidden

Me, every day. I thought he would change but he didn't. He got more violent, at that time, love was so blind. I had my first child her name was Erica. He was happy at first until he went to jail 1983. He was there in jail for two months. Had my second oldest child Edith was just a couple month old I couldn't take it anymore, I'd tried to leave him, but he found me and hit me again. Because he said, I tried to take his daughters away from him.

I Feel Proud

Paulina Diaz -- Lehman College Adult Learning Center

I would like to advise the younger generation. Don't let them lose their time to become a professional. Life is not easy, especially today. Get a career so you can take care of yourself. Today, everything is expensive.

I feel proud to be giving this advice. When I see a young person graduate, I feel proud, too. For the future, they can see how important this will be for them, and for the younger generation, because they can be the example for younger people. They can help their family and have a strong family, of their own. This is the same for everybody in the world.

My Childhood

Jacqueline Singleton – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

My childhood was not a happy one. My Mother and my Father loved me and wanted me here. My sisters and my brother wanted me here. But the outside world did not want me here. It was alright with me, until the name calling got to be too much for me.

Then, I did not know if I was going to continue to be in this world. I was in a very dark place and the outside world did not want Jacqueline Singleton in it. And this little Jacqueline Singleton just kicked it all back, saying that it was all right. But it took its toll on me.

My Mother knew what I was going through. She called me her Jacqueline Singleton.

“You are my Jacqueline Singleton!” My Mother loved me and my Father loved me.

My Mother had fallen down, when she was six months pregnant with me. My Father caught her and broke her fall. That’s when she gave birth to me.

I was very underweight. I was in danger. But they wouldn’t let me go. I was their Jacqueline Singleton!

EDUCATION JOURNEYS

*We started with the
journey of education,
and that's where we'll
end, too. This is a long
path that is important
to all of us.*

The Hero's Journey

Michelle Winney – Fulton Academy

Everyone's life is a journey, but is everyone his/her own hero?

The most recent part of my life's journey started eight months ago when I walked into the local county court room and heard for the first time that I was going to spend the next eight months in jail. I swear now that my whole life flashed before my eyes. The word *scared* doesn't even begin to describe how I was feeling.

I immediately started pointing fingers at everyone... but myself, of course, and I wallowed in the blame game until after about a week when it suddenly came to me that this way of thinking was going to make my very long incarceration even longer. So instead of trying to find the easiest way to get by, I decided to challenge myself...to prove to my husband and to our four children that I had what it took to overcome this obstacle. This idea, I flirted with it. I don't know if my husband believed me or not when I first mentioned it to him on our phone conversation, but I figured that it might start with a simple choice and an action like going to school. I'd always wanted to complete my high school education but with a husband and four children many of my needs got put on the back burner. Oh and then there was the fear.....the fear of failing.

Here I was in jail. And for the first time in a long time I had the choice to take care of myself....to be selfish. Before this I thought I was a better person because I put everyone's needs ahead of my own. And it may sound silly but one of the first things you learn in jail is how to be selfish. And there were people in the jail programs who taught classes in religion and subjects like "life skills" who confirmed that being locked up was a time to heal and to nurture yourself in mind and body. In a way these instructors were giving me the permission to be selfish. This in itself was for me a new way of thinking.

So I started High School Equivalency classes and unlike most inmates in my classes, I was so hungry to succeed that I took books and homework back to the dorm. I kept working on math problems so that could feel more able to pass the High School Equivalency exam. I studied four months before the exam was offered and I felt ready in all of the five subjects. I'll admit that math was still difficult for me, but I'd prepared.

The night before the exam, seemingly right in line with the way my life seems to go, I found one of the female inmates nearly dead from an overdose. I didn't get

much sleep that night because all I could see were her blue lips and body sitting on the toilet where I found her. I went into the exam the next morning exhausted. About six weeks later I got the results and it wasn't what I'd hoped for, but instead of looking at myself as a failure thinking, 'Why did I even bother,' I thought of my children and asked myself, "Would I be okay with my kids just giving up?" The answer was, "Absolutely not!!!"

I started thinking about what really happened with the exam. I'd passed three of the five sections. And the teacher told me I could take the sections I'd failed as many times as I needed to. This was for me a new way of thinking about a problem. I could chunk a problem down into parts that were easier to deal with. I didn't have to give up on the whole goal of passing the High School Equivalency exam. I have since taken the math and science sections again and I'm hoping that I prepared well enough.

This idea of not quitting has blossomed out like a flower covering the larger context of my life. And this is important because up to now, fear had stopped me from doing many things. And so now I dare to dream about my future. I can't help but wonder if any of this would have been possible if not for coming to jail and really using the time to figure out what makes me happy and to answer the question, "What do I want from life?"

I get released soon and I want to share with you my biggest dream. I want to go to the local community college. I can see myself walking across the stage to get my diploma. And then I see myself owning my very own family restaurant. If there's one thing I know, it's that I can cook. People come to my house to get fed and I have a hard time getting rid of them afterwards!

So the answer to the question I started this writing with is, "Yes, I am my own hero!" and I can't wait to see what comes next.

A Hunger for Education

PJ – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

As I was reading the Guardian newspapers one day, I came across an article about ALTA and what they were offering. The information got my attention, as I was never fortunate enough to write CXC³ and I always dreamt of writing it.

I found out that morning and evening classes were offered and at many different locations, so one can choose a time and place most convenient for them. Most of their tutors were mature adults, which boosted my confidence. In addition to this very generous offer, ALTA was not asking for a fee or any monies except for a pittance for our workbooks, which was more than reasonable and affordable when compared to all they were offering. At the next enrolment, I was signed up.

I think people who have acquired a proper education and/or a degree or more are more respected in society. It is not easy getting by in life without a good education, depending on one's goals and aspirations. One can have some of the worst or best experiences depending on their educational background. I see ALTA as a doorway to a better education.

I knew how to read and spell fairly well, which was derived from teaching myself. I learnt a bit from checking my children's books when they came from school and from doing their homework with them. I also took the advice of a teacher many years ago who told me to never pass a word that I can't pronounce, keep trying until I figure it out, then move on. I read everything I put my hands on and checked the dictionary, which I didn't ever know how to use for a good chunk of my life.

I became more fluent in reading over the years and recognised words easily. As a result of that my spelling was reasonably good. Despite thinking that I knew how to read, I knew there was much more to learn, like pronunciation and the principles and rules of reading and spelling, which would make me even better at spelling and reading.

Sometimes my life feels incomplete, one reason is that I have not yet acquired a decent education. I would love to earn at least one degree. I wonder if I will be

³ CXC – Caribbean Examinations Council is an “ordinary level” examination marking the end of 5 years of secondary education.

able to accomplish and get all the things I desire in life like getting remarried, having a closer relationship with God Almighty, travelling and of course a better education. After all, I'm already 44 years old. Because of my humility, determination and faith in God though, I think I'll do just fine.

I'm glad I chose ALTA because just as I thought, I have learnt so much from September 2018 to present, January 2019 and I know there is much more to learn. I chose ALTA because they seem to understand the plight of the uneducated and the seriousness of illiteracy.

First Steps – My Journey Begins

Bilial Traore – Lehman College Adult Learning Center

Today, I got up early this morning. My journey was so long, I had a lot to do. My first steps were to think about how to make money today. I went to some job to make up my day, and with God's help, I got some money, thank God.

From seven to five in the evening, the time was so long, for me to work all day. Then I had to come to class, because I want to get my GED this year.

If I get my GED this year, I will get a great job and more money. I don't have a set job right now. I have to fight for my life, to get a great job.



My Secret Life

Glendalyn Flanders – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

My life is like a rollercoaster, sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down and sometimes I'm almost to the ground. Every day I wake up thanking Father God for life. I'm a very happy person, but the people around me make me sad within. Some people have no growth with them. Sometimes the people I want to talk and tell how I'm really feeling have no vision for life.

Most people around me do not even know that I am going to ALTA classes. I have not told anyone because they don't have the full understanding about ALTA. Some will think it's for slow or dunce people. But to me it's the best classes anyone could ever do. It teaches so much about reading, writing and spelling, but when people ask me what kind of classes I'm doing, I just say English and I'm not lying, I'm really doing English because it teaches about different types of spelling and how people write and talk. I won't change my story until I'm finished, to show them that not everything they hear and don't understand means they should come up with their own idea and run with it. I don't think like most people. If I don't understand something or someone, I try my best to understand why I don't understand before I make any judgements.

The thing in my life that frightens me the most is disappointing the people who believe in me the most, the ones who know I can do better. I really don't want to be a failure - that's why I'm working hard and trying to learn how to read, write and spell better. Once I accomplish these things I will be able to write proper letters and fill out forms without any fear or shame.

My education means a lot to me because as a young business woman in the hair world I want to be able to do more, not only do hair but teach and lecture about hair and hair products. I even want to make my own hair products one day. Therefore if someone wants to invest in me, I want to be able to speak to them without sounding uneducated. As I grow older, it has come to my understanding that many people who can't read, write or spell are very illiterate and that's because of shame and pride. I don't ever want to be one of those persons.

One day I was listening to the radio and I heard about the ALTA classes and I told my mother. She told me to check it out because she thinks it would be good for me. I decided to check it out and to my surprise it was nothing I thought it would be. I made a good choice by coming to ALTA because so far I

have learned so much. I must say I learned more things in two years than in my many years of going to school. I learn the basics about English. Coming to ALTA made me realise that I was not ready for CXC⁴ because my reading and understanding skills needed improvement. Reading is one of the most important things in life because if we cannot read we won't be able to understand anything in life. I must say since I started coming to ALTA I have improved in my reading and spelling skills. I need to work on my writing skills to top it off. I still need to do a little more spelling, but by just learning how to break up my words into syllables I have come a long way. I feel I could spell any word, even though some words have the same sound but different spellings, I still think I would be able to spell.

Coming to ALTA has made a big difference in my life, especially my teachers because without them I really don't know what I would have been doing to improve my reading, writing and spelling skills and my classmates as well. They too have a part to play in my will to learn because they don't make me feel like I'm stupid. They help when I don't understand. They also inspire me to do better. My ALTA teachers are so understanding, they explain everything and if I still don't understand they don't make me ashamed to say it. I feel so confident in everything I do because of the feedback I get from my teachers and classmates.

I believe I will be very successful because I am slowly overcoming my fears day by day. I know once I am finished with these ALTA classes, I will be able to do all things that were impossible to me.

⁴ CXC – Caribbean Examinations Council is an “ordinary level” examination marking the end of 5 years of secondary education.

I Always Wanted to Finish School but Life Got in the Way

Theresa Daye – Seeds of Literacy

There was things and people that was in my ears talking negative they are out of the way. I tried to go back. I went to School in Cincinnati, Ohio. In my last year of school my mother sent me to Cleveland, Ohio to stay with my Father. So he put me in School so I tried to finish but the School Grading system was so different .Years and years from then I decided to go back. I have got a baby when I was 20 years old. So I decided that I wanted to better myself and go back. It wasn't hard it to do. Then life got in the way again. So I got Married had more children. After they got grown, I tried again. One day I was walking down West 65 Street in Cleveland, Ohio I saw a Catholic Church called St Coleman. It said free G.E.D. classes so I when in and signed up. So I went there for a year. They moved so I followed them. Almost done, People in my ear again so I stop again. Now this time there is no stopping because this is what I really want to do. I need to do to show my Grandkids that they can finish and be someone.

Untitled

Alicia Nunez – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

At 49 years of age, I am continuing my education at ECC to get my high school equivalency. My family needs to have benefits and a reliable income. I cannot do that without an education. I am not sure what my future holds, but I will get a better job. My family needs me to.

These past eight months have been very difficult for my kids and me. I lost my job after working for the same company for over thirty years. When I applied for unemployment, my request was denied because my old boss said that I quit. That was a lie. I was very disappointed and didn't know what to do. I have two children, a 21 year old girl and an 18 year old boy. Both are attending San Diego State University while living at home. I am very proud of them.

Two months ago the worst thing happened to us. My ex-husband, the father of my kids, took his life. I would have never imagined someone as kind and loveable as him could have been so brave to commit such a tragedy. He jumped off a freeway bridge.

These events awakened me to what really matters in life. It is never too late to accomplish goals that were left behind. Now I am determined to live life with passion, kindness, and to never let go of my dreams. My first step is to complete my education.

Overcoming My Fears

Muriam Brown – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

I grew up in a single parent home with seven siblings. I am the second to last. My mummy was a seamstress. She was always busy sewing because she had eight mouths to feed, so the bigger ones had to take care of the smaller ones.

When we came home we had to do our chores. I can't remember picking up a book after school. I never sat Common Entrance⁵ and stayed in primary school up to Standard 6. I sat School Leaving but didn't pass.

I knew my mummy could read and spell well because people came and let her make their receipts for them.

I never understood the value of an education so I used to say when I get big I will learn to read and spell, not knowing the shame and embarrassment I would face in the future. Going to government offices and taking notes in Bible study are very difficult and fearful for me. My heart will start to beat fast and I will lose focus.

One day my daughter and I were vexed with each other and she said to me, "It's a good thing I can spell." In church I had to admit that I couldn't spell. It hurts so much sometimes, I just cry. Reading and spelling bring a fear over me that I can't explain.

I went to ALTA before, but because of commitments I didn't follow through. But I decided to go back. I know that where I was [then] is not where I am now, so I have no intention of giving up.

Education is like a vehicle to me, it will take you places you never dreamt of. It will take you out of poverty and help others to go places too. Coming to ALTA I have learned so much. I am gaining the confidence to overcome my fears and challenges. One day I know I will succeed.

⁵ Common Entrance examination is an entrance examination into secondary school. Most children change from primary to secondary school at ages 11 to 13.

My Life as as Adult Student

Kimberly Brabson – Seeds of Literacy

I came to Seeds of Literacy on April 9th, 2018 and I was very nervous and anxious, I have a high school diploma, but my math skills were a little rusted, I had a wonderful tutors that helped me out with Math, but the one that stood out for me was Mary Garapic, at first I was a little intimidated, but she has helped me so tremendously and I'm so grateful to have her as my tutor.

There were times when I didn't feel like coming to school because I thought that it would be very boring and weather wise, it gets bad especially in the wintertime. So I made an important decision of my life was to go back to school because to me Knowledge is Power still exists. I know for a fact that education is a weapon to use your wits and your brain to use. I was in Special Education classes, due to the fact that I have a disability, but I have the ability to change the world and my community.

It will take time for me to get my career in gear, so I can and will have the power to learn more about myself. My life from Seeds has changed my life completely and I can't wait to make a difference and more. How could I teach people to be the best that they can be? I don't know, but I know this, if they have a goal to set, they need to ask people for help. Don't talk the talk, walk the walk. I hate negativity and despair, it's a shame that people don't want to learn about themselves that don't want to school and learn about themselves because they're so many so opportunities for them to try. I was and still determined to go to school and graduate.

I think about the possibilities of my education and goals, so I can be the best of my best self. Thanks to my son Christopher that had graduated from college in 2016, he said to me that you're never too old to go school, and he even wants me to become more successful. I have the reason because he's the one and my mother as well wants me to be the best.

My Hidden Weakness

Vidya – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

As the clock struck ten in the morning, I nervously walked down to the meeting room where the Monthly Safety Meeting was being held. The thoughts of fright raced through my mind. Is today going to be the day that everyone will know my weakness? What innovated strategy can I develop to prevent this from happening? Let me see. These were the thoughts that would cause me to go into panic mode.

I can remember being in primary school and having difficulties reading the words that end with “at” from the Republic Reader Book 1. Everyone in class was ahead of me. Somehow I managed to memorize the three letter words and went onto the next page. How I wished this was picked up before I reached this state in life. Looking back on those days, I try to pinpoint the reason why, but I came up empty handed.

Secondary school was even tougher. I had to learn two additional languages. “How am I going to do this, when I cannot even read English words?” I thought. I came up with unconventional ways of learning to pronounce words. I vividly remember asking my parents a word in Spanish or French and writing phrases on top of the word to help me remember what it is. This was one of the main reasons why I was left behind with the Spanish exams at CXC level⁶.

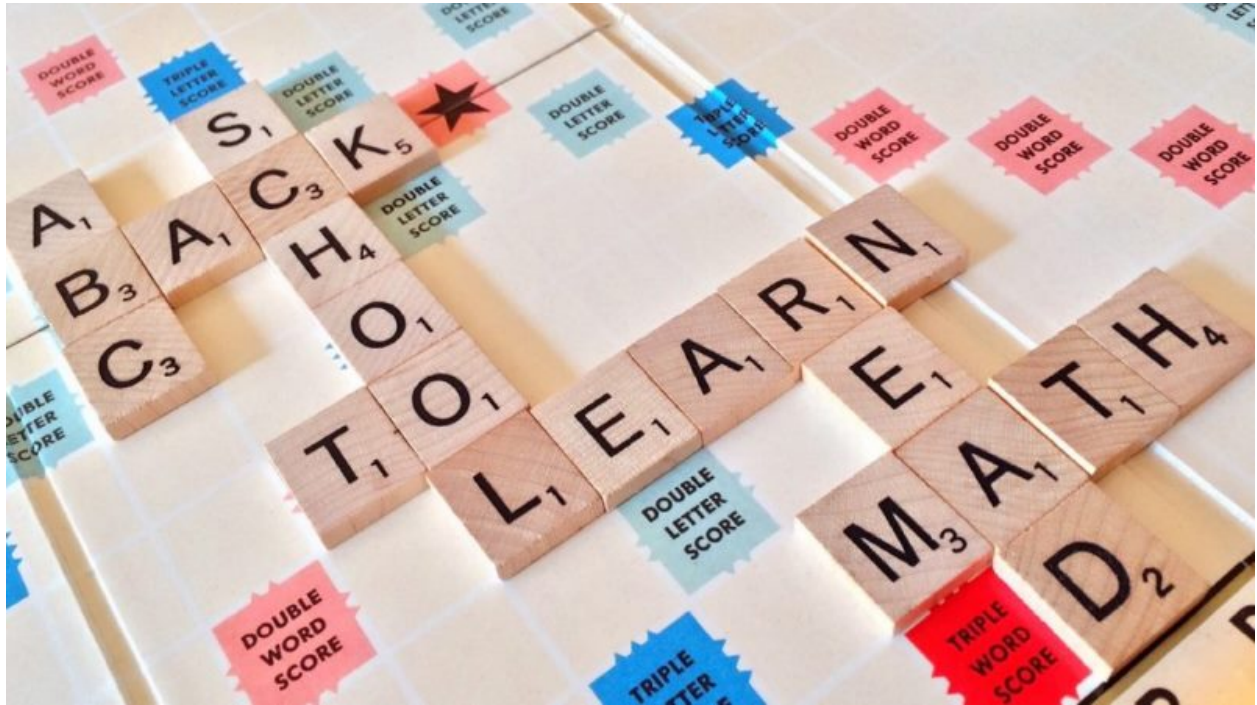
University days were not too difficult. After all, the degree which I was pursuing was a Mathematics Basis degree and I am great with numbers.

But that did not stay so for long. At the start of the working part of my life, those nervous, cold sweating feelings tormented me day and night. Every opportunity requiring me to read, write or spell which crosses my path I would slip into panic mode. I would use Google to lookup the meanings of words before I clicked *send* on the computer screen. I downloaded “apps” on my phone to assist with spelling. These were the things I had to do to keep my weakness hidden.

One day while watching television I saw an ad. It was about a cartoon character trying to read the word *patient*. As I looked on, the ad was

⁶ CXC – Caribbean Examinations Council “ordinary level” examination marking the end of 5 years of secondary education.

introducing ALTA. That was the moment, I knew that my hidden weakness would soon be a thing of the past.



My Life in USA

Geetha Samayamanthula – South Brunswick Public Library

When I came to the USA 4 years ago, I lived like a person among strangers. At the time I spoke very little English. I didn't know that I had an accent. The neighbors of my community made fun of the way I talked. My English was not good enough to keep up a good conversation. At the time I felt shy and afraid to speak. We came from southern part of India. We speak Telegu at home. How could I learn English? Many things were not clear to me in this country like Laws, tradition, culture, weighing system in shopping and doctor's appointment etc.

When I was in the bloom of age, I had lots of loony ideas about education. But my dreams were not fulfilled due to financial problems. After marriage as a mother I need to provide support in my kid's studies. Sometimes I was pulling my weight to finish this task. Then I realized the importance of education in my life.

Language problem had been a thorn on my side until I started learning English. It was really a hard time for me. During the tough time, I wasn't feeling gloomy and I was trying to keep my chin up. I was also grooming myself for the success.

My experiences empowered me to do something beyond this. When someone tells me, I can't do something it just empowers me even more. People's doubts in my ability only strengthen my resolve.

I wanted to change my life by learning English. At first, I listened to people when they were talking. For a longtime I read stories in English to my children, but my pronunciation was not good. Later I went to ESL classes for people learning English. My idea was more widely accepted, even though it too hit some rough waters, but it's been smooth sailing since the second month or so. I learned one thing from these classes that I must slow down while talking so that everyone can understand. I had been working hard to hone my language skills. It took a long time and bunch of supporting roles, finally I had made a name for myself. Education makes me more independent and confident enough to do anything. We have our own money to spend and it also create a status in the community.

Now my life looks like a race. I go to ESL classes and take care of my children. My husband works in a software company. We both learning English because we want to be successful in this country. We are pinching pennies to build a nest egg for our secured future. I hope my ideas for the future will be right on target.

“When Women’s are strong, families are strong. when families are strong, countries are strong”.

From Death to Life

Ellen – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

I am Ellen. I had always felt [that] something inside of me was missing. A part that was dead had now come to life. That part always wanted to learn more about this life that I was born to live upon this earth. I wanted to be able to express myself the way I needed to.

I felt ashamed most of my life because of not being educated. I would not communicate with certain people. I always kept in the background to avoid being asked to do anything concerning education.

Learning and having an education opened doors for me to run through. It brought me into a place of knowing and understanding who and what I was made of. Knowledge gave me information for life's journey. It took me into a whole new world to touch the sky and reach for the stars that were before me.

Somehow I was a lost person, unable to touch that dead part inside of me. It did not matter how hard I tried until I joined the ALTA programmes⁷. I had tried other forms of learning, but nothing helped. I used to say something was wrong with me. I would never learn to read and spell properly.

Now I could truly say I had proven myself wrong. I am now believing and knowing, brave and strong, full of confidence in myself. I have been succeeding with the help of my teacher, Miss Arlene.

This success gave me the inner peace I had been struggling to receive all of these years. Now with this experience, I can help others who are going through the same situation I had gone through. I am already encouraging people to join ALTA classes. This makes me strong in my spirit.

This was the advice I gave to the people: I was once afraid, frightened and ashamed of what people would say, but I had to take the big step because I wanted to learn. I let them know that ALTA was not just about reading, writing and spelling.

⁷ "Programme" is a British and Australian spelling, as opposed to "program," which is an American spelling.

ALTA is about life, your life and my life. I am so blessed and continue to be blessed and happy for the decision I had made to join ALTA.



The Story of My Life

Ms. Regis – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

I started the ALTA program in 2018. I heard about the program on the radio station when they were interviewing a university student. She gave her testimony about completing high school and still having problems with pronouncing words.

She talked about the ALTA classes that had helped her. I took the number and called as I realised that I had the same problem. She said the program really helped her. I enrolled in the program as I have problems reading and spelling some words.

Today, the twenty-seventh of January 2019, I am doing much better than when I started. I have no regrets. The only thing I regret is that I didn't join the classes sooner. Doing the classes will not only help me, but I will be able to help others.

My dream someday is to give back to society and to become an ALTA teacher. I am very self-motivated and whatever I put my mind to I will accomplish with the help of God. I have come to realise that nothing you want in life comes easy, but needs hard work and dedication. I had spent many days crying and asking God "Why me?" especially when I am embarrassed, when I can't spell a word.

I know someday all my crying will be over. I will advise anyone who wants to accomplish anything in life that they can.

The Hardest Thing to Do Is Start

Dedier – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

My life is challenging, being a single mother of two children, because of their father's death. Sometimes things can be difficult. Working hard to put food on the table and paying bills demands a lot. Giving my kids the support they need and inspiring them is a job all by itself. If I were to go back in time and start all over, I would take my education very seriously and really try my very best to stick to my books.

Fear is what frightens me the most in life. Alarmed about not being able to spell, pronounce or even read words properly, I'm facing my fears by taking one of the most important steps in my life by seeking help from ALTA.

Education is one of the most important tools anyone could ever obtain because being educated helps you to accomplish your desirable and successful career. It opens doors of opportunities for progression in life. A friend recommended me to ALTA, after hearing of my luck and shortfall where education is concerned. The choice from here on is not a regrettable one, choosing to come and stay in ALTA classes. Education will help my life because of the occupation and the destination path I would like to grasp. I would love to become a nurse and I would also have to elevate myself for that profession.

Learning to interact with my fellow classmates, reading aloud in class and discussing topics, have encouraged my confidence and bravery. I feel strong within myself when I could sound out and spell words more efficiently. I often hear "the hardest thing to do is to start", I have started with ALTA and that's a step in the right direction to achieving my goals. I am convinced I will be successful and victorious. It is worth the while.

New Beginnings

Bryant Civitt – Seeds of Literacy

My name is Bryant Civitt. I was born and raised on East 105 Lee Ave in Cleveland Ohio I grew up around all sorts of negativity, so I thought there weren't any positive role models in the world, at least not in my neighborhood anyway. Before I knew it, I spent the next 15 years living an unsuccessful life in aspects. I dropped out of school in the 9th grade thinking that everything I needed to know; I had already. And boy was I wrong; I didn't even have a basic education to live a prosocial life in society.

That's when I began to pursue my education simply because I wanted to learn more about life I wanted to upgrade my chances for success. And I knew it would start with my GED; moreover setting higher goals for myself. It definitely would not be easy. I struggled for the last 5 years of my life trying to stay consistent in classes, with no success at all.

Then I found Seeds of Literacy on West 25th and Clark. The tutors are great and very helpful I am now highly confident that I will make it this time around I've been working with teachers, I've been working with my sponsor to set higher goals and further my education , beyond my imagination.

We must be grateful that we have these opportunities. In order to grow, we must develop a system filled with goal patience and rigorous plans. A good life begins with a good education. It is never too late to educate yourself. Sometimes in life, we miss things, blinded by obstacles or over whelmed with life's difficulties.

For a woman it might be twice as difficult to make the same pay as a man. She must have knowledge of self and education to enhance her quality of living; better jobs better pay comes with this process. It would be nice to gain a \$200,000 education and pass it down to your children or grandchildren for free, enhancing the life generations to come. The first step to success is education.

S= see your goals
u= understand the obstacles
c=create a positive mental picture
c=clear your mind of self-doubt
e=embrace the challenge
s= stay on track
s= show the world you can do it!

My Big Dark Secret

S.N. – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

I lived in fear for a number of years now of my big dark secret getting out. I have been working in one of the largest distribution companies in my country for the last twenty ears. Only a few people know that I can't read. I have been living my life in fear and lies for years now.

No one knows what it's like to live in a world where you don't feel like you exist. I attended Biche RC Primary School where I think I stayed the longest. The time spent there in school was challenging. I can remember to this day the sound of the teacher's high-heel shoes when she walked through the classroom. She would walk to the front of the class and then do the roll call. She would then do the Maths and counting with us. I loved this time of the day, but when it came to writing and reading, I did not like it so much.

I struggle still to this day with some of the letters of the alphabet. One thing I can remember and which left a lasting impression with me was the School Broadcasting Programme. In this programme they told us stories from different authors, but my favourite was Paul Keens Douglas. I know it has helped me a lot in my life. My love for plays, arts and culture grew from listening to this programme.

There is nothing like seeing a play come to life. I had the opportunity late last year at the Big Black Box Theatre to see a play come to life and it was amazing. Prior to this I sat in on a few readings of new and upcoming artistes at the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. At the readings you can volunteer to read a part of the play, but I mostly sat there and listened to the readings. I might give my opinion on the piece, but never read.

I have been attending ALTA for a number of years now and I still have the fear of reading to people. My first experience with ALTA was at a charity show at [the] Trinidad Hilton. I was scheduled to walk for a fashion show there. [This is] something I have been doing for a while and it came naturally but it was so different after I learned what ALTA meant.

I felt I was going to die and everyone was going to know that I could not read. To this day, I cannot bring myself to go back on stage.

I worked in the past with the House of Jacqui [modelling agency]. No matter how much Donna tried to get me to go back on stage, I would not go. No one

knew what happened that day at Hilton. I did not only have the fear of people finding out I can't read, but they can now put a picture to the face. My fear of cameras was born that day. To make matters worse, the next day the charity event was published in the newspaper and my face along with others was plastered all over the article. I felt I was going to die. Something that I should have been proud of, I was instead ashamed of.

You may be wondering what brought me to ALTA. After a few years struggling, trying to make it on my own, I had an incident that happened at the bank. I went to withdraw money from the ATM and my card got stuck. I had to go into the bank to withdraw money over the counter. I was given a slip to fill out. I then told the lady that I don't have my glasses and asked if she could assist me please, which she readily did.

I walked out of the bank feeling proud, but that feeling did not last for very long. I took a taxi to get home and the radio announcer was talking about ALTA. I then stopped the taxi and got out, started to walk home, said to myself, "Enough is enough. I have to do something about this as both my parents cannot read. I have to break this cycle."

I called ALTA and I was placed [in a class] close to home, at a church in Diego Martin. My first teacher was Miss Irma Dupigny. I can remember overhearing her talk to another teacher saying, "She not only can't read, she has problems with writing too. I think this is the worst I have ever seen since I have been in the program," she said. I remember I was given the alphabet and the numbers one to fifty to write and I could not accomplish it.

Miss opened her home to me for an additional two days a week so I was now doing classes four days a week. It helped. When Miss got ill and could not teach any more I felt sad. She eventually died. I felt like part of me died too. I have been in and out of the ALTA system for a number of years now, taking long breaks in between. I am not saying that the program did not work. I am just good at running when things get tough. I am now in Level 3 as a repeater. It took a lot out of me to come back to class after losing a teacher again, this time from cancer.

This one really hit home. I lost my mom to cancer. I felt like the entire world was against me. I had to seek professional help to deal with this situation. As I write this, tears cannot stop from falling. I have not mentioned this to anyone until now. So I am here today writing this piece to share my story. Someone who could not even read and write can now do so.

I am not where I want to be. However, I know I will get there. I was asked, "How did ALTA help me?" It has helped me to do my job with ease and I was able to

get my driver's licence and travel, not only in the pages of books. I hope one day to be the voice for ALTA and speak and share my story, not only for ALTA but for people with dyslexia. Something I did not know I had until a few years ago. I would like to say thanks to the founders and the people behind ALTA. Without you I wouldn't be here today. A special thanks to all my teachers, you all have touched my heart and soul.



Self-Advocacy

Robin Flowers – San Diego Continuing Education – Basic Education, DSPS at ECC

Self-advocacy means to speak for yourself, help others, and teach them to speak up for those who are not able to. I want to change society's view of people with disabilities. It also means changing laws and legislation to ensure all people's rights are observed and treated with respect. Self-advocacy means allowing people to speak their mind, not interrupting, not judging, and allowing people to achieve their goals and dreams.

When I attended the People's First Conference, I was able to share my story and history. People came up after I shared and had more questions, were asking my advice, and wanted more information. I encouraged the other people to believe in themselves.

The People's First Conference was a positive experience and I would like to attend this conference again in the future. It makes me very happy to participate in it. I would like the opportunity to share with others how much I have learned. I have learned and grown so much in the past couple of years. I want to thank *Women's Perspectives* for reading my writing and the people that have helped me like Marie, Kathy, Melissa, Kim, and Becky because they encouraged me to keep writing. Now I love it. They helped me learn more self-advocacy.

The Potential that Everyone Saw but Me

Serah K. Dookie – Adult Literacy Tutors Association

From as far back as I could recall my school days, I was good at blending in – so well, that my teachers didn't think I needed help. A simple thing as long division I never understood how to do because I couldn't understand what I had read. Then, term after term, my grades fell – all because I was afraid to ask for help. My mother got discouraged with me and wasn't able to continue sending me [to school]. I wasn't showing any improvement and all I wanted to do was play.

As a young child growing up, all the children from the area were in school. I was the only one at home passing my time in the ravine and drains, catching fishes until my cousins reached home from school. Then, I would be elated to see my cousins. Most times I would be turned away because they had their homework to do and I was told to go home and pick up a book. They would also say, "Try to learn something rather than playing all the time."

This went on for years until everyone had their summer jobs and I had to resort to making a day's work for a farmer, all because I wasn't in school. The work in the garden some days would be very strenuous compared to the summer jobs my cousins had. They would be able to hang out after work, but I would have to get enough rest to go another day. It was not that I needed the money, it was just so that I had a job too.

As time went by my sister started working in the airport. While making a purchase, my sister was approached by the shopkeeper that they were looking for extra help. They wanted to know if she knew anyone. She told me about it and I went for the interview and started working two days per week. While working there, I made many friends who were surprised to learn that I didn't make it past primary school. They were all encouraging me into going back to school because they saw I had a lot of potential.

After many years, I was always told that I had the aptitude for learning. Education had never been a thought of mine until I heard about ALTA in 2014. I was prevented from registering. I made the decision there and then that I had to want change for myself. I told my family and they motivated me to get started.

I joined ALTA and started their classes. There, the tutors were very encouraging and loving towards teaching. I was convinced that I had made the right choice. One of my heart's desires was to work with young children. I have been taking one course at a time and with the grace of God I have been persevering and accomplishing my journey in education.

CONTINUING THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Women's Perspectives turns **15** in 2020! Fifteen years of giving learners in adult education programs the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas, their feelings and dreams with a broad audience.

To celebrate *Women's Perspectives* and the wonderful work learners have done over the years, WE LEARN has developed a full set of writing prompts for the Hero's Journey. The journal you've just read and/or written for is the start of the journey: *First Steps – The Journey Begins*. Now you can continue the journey by following new writing topics throughout the year.

WE LEARN will share writing activities in the form of prompts, sentence starters and hints for writing. All of these writing activities will connect to the different steps along the Hero's Journey.

We hope that you will continue writing your Hero's Journey. If you write for each of the prompts, in the end you will have completed a full Hero's Journey project. We look forward to publishing some of your work in the 15th anniversary edition of *Women's Perspectives*!

General Tips for Student Writers

By Donna Jones

Donna Jones is a student leader who also loves to write. She has developed a workshop by students for students called “Writer to Writer.” Donna was an Honors Award winner for *Women’s Perspectives* #1 for her essay “Better Self Esteem Can Create Better Health.” She has participated on the Selection Committee since 2006. These are her suggestions for student writers who want to participate in *Women’s Perspectives*.



There are 3 parts to writing.

Prewriting: a stage for collecting everything together

1. A good thing to think about before even getting started is to make a list of reasons for sending your writing to *Women’s Perspectives*.
 - a. List the type of things that will stop you from sending in your entry. Sometimes when things get hard or people get upset with a project, they quit. I don’t want to see this happen to you.
 - b. Now list what you will do if one of these problems does happen.
 - c. You can keep adding to these lists. Please don’t let anything get in your way.
2. Pick the right time of day and place to do your writing.
3. Your brain is a muscle and it needs to get warmed up. This exercise will loosen it up: Just write whatever pops into your head. You can use a computer or paper. Remember your writing doesn’t have to make sense or be correct. You can write, “I can’t think of anything to write or I hate this exercise.” Just keep the words flowing for 3 - 5 minutes.
4. Keep a notebook & pen handy during the day to write down ideas and thoughts. Also keep it by your bed at night.
5. Get all the things together that you will need for this project before you start to write (paper, pens, erasers, dictionary, thesaurus). So you won't have an excuse to stop.

Writing: a stage of organizing things and putting them down on paper

1. Review your notes. Remember you don't have to use all of them.
2. Always have a good opening sentence or paragraph. Something that will get your readers to want to read more of your writing.
3. Write from your heart. BE HONEST! Write how you feel. If you feel like crying then make your readers want to cry. Get your readers to react to your story.
4. Your last paragraph is as important as your first paragraph. You want your readers walking away remembering what you wrote. Don't leave them guessing. Remember how a good ending makes the movie good and a bad ending can ruin it.

Editing: a stage for making sentences stronger through tidying grammar and providing additional details to engage readers' attention

1. Put your story away for at least 24 hours. Then take it out, stand in front of a mirror and read it aloud. While reading it, ask yourself: does sound clear, does it make sense, did I put a comma where I took a breath? These spots are not always where commas go.
2. Give it to your teacher or tutor to correct it.
3. Give it to a different person to read. Someone, who you haven't talked to about this writing. Also, give her the call to write from WE LEARN. Ask her, "Does my writing make sense, does it fit the topic?" Ask: "How did you react when you were reading it?"
4. It may take several rewriting sessions before you get it the right way.
5. Most Importantly: Don't give up!!!!!!
6. Be sure to make a copy of what you wrote and file it away. It is something you should be proud of.

FINISHING YOUR WORK FOR PUBLICATION

Each year, WE LEARN receives many writings to consider for publication in *Women's Perspectives*. It is not possible for us to print them all, so the selection committee reads each writing very carefully. We make our selections based on the finished quality of the work (grammar, spelling, etc). More importantly, though, we consider the “voice” of the student writers.

- Has the student writer told us something from her/his unique perspective or experience?
- Has the writer clearly expressed an opinion or told an interesting story or helped the reader to come to some new ideas or understanding?
- Has the writer thoughtfully addressed the theme?

We suggest that students share their writing with student colleagues. Perhaps students can create a peer-writing and editing group. Here are some steps to take in such a group.

1. Read your writing to your peer group.
2. “Interview” the listeners (students in the peer group). The writer should ask the listeners the questions, but not respond. The listeners should answer as full as they can in the moment. Here are some sample questions:
 - a. What words or phrases stood out to you? (Just the words, not the meanings)
 - b. What message did you hear?
 - c. What were you thinking or feeling when you heard this writing?
3. The writer can then listen to these ideas and make changes or re-write the piece according to the comments in order to make it closer to what the writer wants to say.

You can find other suggestions for peer editing work in Peter Elbow’s book *Writing with Power* or Louise Dunlap’s book *Undoing the Silence*.

We have created checklists to assist writers in creating quality writing worthy of publishing. In addition to the categories on grammar, there is a section for interest. While writing may be technically correct, it is important to note that the *Women's Perspectives* Committee must evaluate the "publish-ability" of a work. Consider these questions:

- Is it interesting or original?
- Would someone want to read this?

The hope of the committee is that students will use these checklists (one for essays, stories, and memoir, the other for poetry) to edit and prepare their writing for publication. Students may also want to ask a teacher or tutor about other kinds of writing rubrics they could use. A rubric is a set of guidelines used to rate goals or accomplishments.

***Women's Perspectives* Writer's Checklist: Essay/Memoir**

INTEREST

1. Does the writing address the theme for *Women's Perspectives*? YES/ NO
2. Is the topic interesting? YES/ NO
3. Is the topic original? YES/ NO
4. Has the writer expressed something unique about the topic? YES/ NO
5. Are there enough details to paint a picture for the reader? YES/ NO
6. Are descriptive or rich words and vocabulary used to express thoughts? YES/ NO
7. Is the reader encouraged towards reflection? YES/ NO
8. *If applicable to the writing*, can the reader identify or feel the writer's emotions? YES/ NO
9. *If this is expository writing*, can the reader understand or be challenged by the writer's opinion or point of view? YES/NO

STRUCTURE/GRAMMAR

1. Are sentences complete? YES/ NO
2. Are words spelled correctly? YES/ NO
3. *If applicable*, are paragraphs clearly defined? YES/ NO

-
- | | |
|--|---------|
| 4. Are the thoughts organized clearly and in a logical manner? | YES/ NO |
| 5. Is there sentence variety? | YES/ NO |
| 6. Is the correct punctuation used? | YES/ NO |

***Women's Perspectives* Writer's Checklist: Poetry**

INTEREST

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Does the writing address the theme <i>Women's Perspectives</i> ? | YES/ NO |
| 2. Is the topic interesting? | YES/ NO |
| 3. Is the topic original? | YES/ NO |
| 4. Has the writer expressed something unique about the topic? | YES/ NO |
| 5. Are there enough details to paint a picture for the reader? | YES/ NO |
| 6. Are descriptive or rich words and vocabulary used to express thoughts? | YES/ NO |
| 7. Can the reader identify or feel the writer's emotions? | YES/ NO |
| 8. Is the reader encouraged towards reflection? | YES/NO |

FORM/FORMAT

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Can the writing be identified as a poem? | YES/ NO |
| 2. <i>If applicable</i> , does the poem properly use the stated form (e.g., Haiku) | YES/ NO |
| 3. Are words spelled correctly? | YES/ NO |
| 4. Are the thoughts organized clearly and in a meaningful manner? | YES/ NO |
| 5. Does the poem flow? | YES/ NO |

The impact of seeing your words in print is powerful. Adult learners need as many of those opportunities as possible. Student publishing is central to the mission of WE LEARN. We are proud of *Women's Perspectives*, proud to be able to give learners the space to share their ideas, learn from one another, strengthen their confidence in their voices.

You're reading this journal, so we know that lifting up student voices is important to you, too. We ask that you help keep *Women's Perspectives* going by becoming a member or donating to WE LEARN.

[JOIN OR DONATE TO WE LEARN.](#)

Board member Shellie Walters is an adult learner. Her inspiring words stand as the introduction to this journal. We'll close with her words, too:

As a student I became a member of WE LEARN and then wrote for Women's Perspectives. The confidence I got from being a member led me to getting my AA degree. I would encourage everyone to donate or become a member of this organization to help others like me accomplish their dreams.