



Celebrating
Our Journey

Volume 12

Celebrating **Our Journey**

Volume 12

A Collection of Life Stories
written by Oklahoma Adult Learners



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Foreword

The Oklahoma Department of Libraries' Literacy Resource Office has been reporting some great successes in recent years. Whether it's the national recognition of our Health Literacy grant project, or the inspiring stories of our immigrant neighbors who have gained U.S. citizenship with the help of ESL and naturalization assistance supported by ODL, there has been a lot to applaud.

We have to admit, though, that there is something really special about *Celebrating our Journey*, ODL's periodic collection of writings by adult learners. In these pages, students put their new writing skills to work, communicating their feelings on a variety of topics: the dreams they have and how those dreams now seem within reach; the family, friends, and mentors who have made a difference; the meaning of home, and the wonders of travel.

In this volume, for the first time, we also hear from instructors and literacy tutors, who share how profoundly fulfilling they find their work with adult learners.

The past year has been an especially challenging time, and a few of the writers do reference the COVID-19 pandemic. More than anything, though, these stories are filled with pride and optimism. New skills are being mastered, and new doors of opportunity are opening. The future is looking brighter.

Please join us in celebrating these stories of courage, growth, and triumph.

Melody Kellogg

Director

Oklahoma Department of Libraries

Dreams



Dream



All my life, I've wanted to be a professional graduate from a university and live a working life according to my academic profession.

On November 12, 2013, my dream came true. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Sports Management Degree at the National University of El Salvador.

Yet four years ago, for many reasons, I decided to move to the United States. One reason being despite the fact that I was a professional, my monthly salary was only around \$700, which is equivalent to about \$4.16 per hour. I also took into consideration the growing violence in my country. However, the main reason for my decision was that my parents and most of my family lived there in Oklahoma. So, I decided to move to Oklahoma.

When moving to a different country there are many requirements that must be taken into account. A few among them that I can mention are housing, legal status, work, health, education, economic status, and language.

Even though I had most of these requirements, I did not speak English. Learning a different language is very difficult, especially when you don't speak the language of the country you are living in. With the help of the Bartlesville Literacy Services and their free English classes, my English has improved significantly.

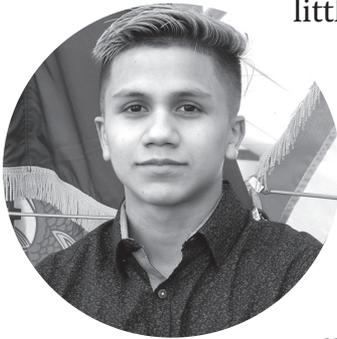
I have now been living in the United States for four years. My dream is to perfect my English, finish my school, and later graduate from a university so that I can have the opportunity to work as a teacher in a school, and do what I always loved doing, which is teaching. I know that I will make it.

Marvin Aguilar

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Dreams

My name is Arnol. I am from Honduras. If I could do one thing, it would be to play soccer professionally. It is one of my biggest dreams. When I was a



little kid, I watched professional soccer, and I dreamed of playing with them. I watch professional soccer games to learn new strategies of this sport. This has helped me understand this game better. For example, it has helped me learn when to run and when to defend and wait for the perfect moment to attack. Also, it has taught me when to pass the ball and know when to score goals. If you fail, try again and try to correct your mistakes. And, you have to have a winner mentality.

I moved to Bartlesville three years ago, which was a big change for me. I left my family and came looking for a better future. In the beginning, it was so

difficult because I didn't know English. I didn't even know a single word, but Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services helped me to learn English. I enjoy taking classes with the teacher, Norma, at ELL conversation classes. I just want to say thanks for teaching me this language. Without their help, I couldn't speak English. They are still teaching me, because learning a new language takes a lot of time. I love their classes. They teach English very well.

Learning English has helped me to play soccer here in America. I would love to achieve my dream of playing professional soccer. I have fun every single minute I play. I meet new people and make new friends. This is what made me start playing this amazing game. I don't have enough words to describe this sport. If I were to be born again, I would choose this sport again.

Arnol Barrera

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

The Story of the Love of My Life

My name is Michell Beleele. I am 48 years of age. I met my wonderful husband through a friend. My husband was my friend four years before we got married. Then, four years later we moved in together. I am a mother of two boys.

The day the love of my life became sick with liver cancer changed my life forever. I took care of him until the day he was called home on April 13, 2019. I live everyday grieving over him. I know that I need to let him rest, and one day I will.

I am currently attending OIC to try and obtain my GED. This is one of my goals. There have been times when I thought I would quit but I am determined to finish. I know my late husband would be proud of me and cheering for me from above.

This is my journey.

Michelle Beleele

OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

All People Are Important

I am terrified of all the bad things in the world that happen to women and children. I believe women and children around the world are the most at-risk groups. I am afraid something could happen to me, my daughter or my granddaughter. Because of this, if I could do one thing, I would create new forms of education for families and schools. I want to teach everyone that all people should be respected, and their lives are important.

Women are not valued. In many places, they are expected to be a certain way and can't truly be themselves. When in reality, they are all unique and can use their talents to improve the world. Children are abused because their parents believe they are prop-

erty and often this is the same with other adults. When in reality, they are not property but children of all humanity. Parents don't know where their children will spend their lives. If children live like they are a part of all humanity, then they will grow up to treat all people with respect—no matter where they live.

I am convinced that we can change the world if we educate children all around the world. The first step is to educate with love. Then you have to teach children about boundaries and how to respect others and themselves. Lastly, you have to give them time to grow and develop; during this time, you have to maintain the love. If this is done, then we have a whole generation that has respect for all people and the world would be a better place.

Margarita Calvillo
Stillwater Literacy Council

The Journey of Learning to Read

My name is Maria. I am 43 years old. I arrived here in the USA when I was two years of age. I came from Chihuahua, Mexico with my parents and siblings. I have three brothers and two sisters.

My dad's boss smuggled us across the border. I don't remember but my parents told the story. My mom is now deceased, and my dad is in prison.

I am a single mother of three boys and one girl. I struggled in school with my reading. I have learned a lot since I started school. The day I came to OIC was a good thing. Also, I met a wonderful person, Latakaer Surney. She helps me a lot even when she doesn't want to or have the time. I also want to thank her and the wonderful teachers at OIC. It feels good to be able to read more and better.

Maria Carpio
OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

Dreams Do Come True

Cheesy, I know! But true. The fact that you are reading this line is a dream come true. Let me explain why.

I was born in Mexico City, so English is my second language, a language that I first heard when I was about six years old, and I fell in love with it!

“Careless Whisper” by George Michael was the song that made me dream about speaking fluent English someday. The music was beautiful, and the melody suggested it was a romantic song; but I could only try to guess its real significance. It was hard to explain to people why I liked those songs and how they could make me feel sad or happy by listening to words I didn’t understand. I remember some people even made fun of me because I liked to hear music in English. People called me a fool or worse for what I liked, but I did not care. It made

me want to learn more, to understand, to read, and to write this language.

It took me years, but I can finally understand English. At least I think I do. My ESL teacher said I do, and I believe her! I've been able to read some of the greatest writers in their original words like Edgar Allan Poe, Maya Angelou, Oscar Wilde, and even Danielle Steel. They help me to learn by showing me new words with profound meaning and by teaching me that words, differently spelled, have the same meaning. With that, they allow me to fulfill a dream—you reading my words in English!

See? Dreams become reality!

Ariadna Carrion
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Dream Trip to Paris

A trip to Paris has been my biggest dream since I was a teenager. I definitely love to travel and I try

to take a couple of trips every year. I think that the best thing that you can do is get to know new places, cultures, and customs.

Why do I want to travel to Paris? Because I think it is the most beautiful city in the world.



Travel to France will be expensive, so I will have to save a lot of money for at least a couple of years. The tickets will be really expensive, but I think I can manage the budget for my stay, food, and tickets for the different attractions. Something that I have to think about is how long my trip will be because if I travel to France and I am paying for an expensive ticket, I will have to make the most of my time and visit other places.

In Paris, I want to visit the Louvre Museum because it is the world's largest art museum. I want to walk through the Arc de Triomphe and have a picnic in

the Palace of Versailles, but I especially want to see the Eiffel Tower, the greatest landmark in the City of Lights. I want to visit the Eiffel Tower during the day and night and have a fancy dinner in a local restaurant overlooking this wonderful tower. Another place that I would like to visit in Paris is the Notre-Dame Cathedral that won't reopen until 2024, so I have time to save money.

We are currently in the middle of a pandemic that nobody expected and that complicates everything. At least I have time to plan this trip in detail and think everything through carefully to enjoy my dream trip to Paris.

Sheyla Cobenas
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Dream

One dream I have would be to encourage those who are reluctant to join the adult literacy program either

as a student or a tutor. When I first came to the program, I was so nervous. However, after I was evaluated and assigned to my first tutor, he encouraged me to stay focused on him and not worry about what others looking on may think. This advice helped ease my mind and I began to

enjoy learning.



I would like to tell those who need to learn to read better a few things. It will help you do your job

better and help you enjoy your work more. It will make you feel better about yourself. It's fun to learn. You can learn to read instructions on how to put things together. You can read to your children. You can learn to read a book or newspaper and even join a book club. Also, it can help you get your GED.

For those who are students in the literacy program, I'd like to encourage them to continue. Get involved

in the book club, workshops, attend the state conference, and attend the literacy holiday parties to develop some friendships. These new friends can help one another.

I would like to tell adults to volunteer their time to become tutors. It really helps a student to have a better life. Once they are trained and assigned a new student, they just need to get to know him or her and help them learn to read.

My dream is to continue to be an encourager to those needing to be in the literacy program, those who are already in the literacy program, and encourage more adults to become tutors. This will bring lots of joy to so many people.

Billy Colson

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My Dreams

My name is Melissa Cruz. I'm from Mexico and I

came to Oklahoma to have a better life. I have a lot of dreams, but two of them are the most important to me. My first is to learn English and my second is to graduate from university. To reach them, I took ESL classes. Then when I felt more confident, I decided to take TOEFL classes, which will eventually help me go to a university. Thanks to my teacher, I feel more confident with my grammar and I do not feel nervous to talk with people in English. I'm doing my best to pass my TOEFL test and start a new experience called "university." Once I pass the test, I'll start going to university. I'll give all my best, and I will strive in my classes until I graduate.

Melissa Cruz

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Children Are My Dream

My name is Raquel Escobar. My dream is about my children. I want them to have a great life in the

future. First of all, I want them to be healthy and to live a long time for their families. I hope they keep their healthy eating habits.

Second, I want them to be good people in society and study a career. I know they have a lot of motivation to study, so I want to help them apply to better schools to achieve their goals.

My 13 year-old daughter wants to be a psychologist and my 10 year-old son wants to be a police officer. I want to help them become who they want to be.

My husband and I want to be our children's heroes when they remember how hard we worked to help them study. Finally, I hope they achieve their goals so that they can travel wherever they want and make a happy family.

Raquel Escobar

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Emigrating

Many people know how difficult it is to leave your country to get here pursuing your dreams, and to be afraid of facing another language and culture. I thought about all those things when I came and felt fear. First of all, my mother is here, and she was already waiting for me with great excitement and joy. We had not seen each other for a year. I know that many people from my city come for the same reason I did. They leave their families and everything they love in Venezuela. I am grateful for everything this country has given me. One of the benefits I see about emigrating is that young people can achieve so many dreams without depending on their parents. For example, buying a car with the money that you earn with so much sacrifice. All in all, leaving one's country is not an easy decision, but there are many benefits in doing so as well. The most important one is the ability for immigrants to pursue their

dreams. I know that what my family has done has helped me to get by despite everything.

Arianna Fuenmayor
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Dream

My name is Vilma Gamonal and I am 45 years old. I am from Peru so my first language is Spanish. I arrived in Oklahoma on December 6, 2011. I am married and have three wonderful children. I have one daughter and two sons; they are years apart. My daughter is 24 years old. She is very happily married with one baby boy. He is my first grandson. When I see him, my heart beats a thousand times. My older son is 12 years old and my younger son is 2 years old.

Since I arrived in Oklahoma, my first problem was to speak English better. I was feeling sad and frustrated with everything around me. During my first

couple of years, I was trying to return to my country because all my education and knowledge was not valued at that time. I put off all my dreams and goals to take care of my children. My two older children and my parents were my support and my life. I worked hard and raised my two older children by myself for several years.

I am a busy Mom now, but I need to balance my responsibilities and my dreams. I have tried to be the best Mom in the world for my children, but I have a hunger to learn English as my second language. I am not shy or scared of situations in my life anymore; my dream is to enter college. My dream is to understand better how to speak, read, and write in college to become a professional in the education field. I am feeling confident that I will be a better person and will be a help to other people.

Vilma Gamonal

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Goals and Dreams

I came to the United States in 2017. I lived in Los Angeles for 3 months with an aunt. Then, I decided to come to Oklahoma City to live with my brothers.

One of my goals is to learn to speak English fluently. It is something that is difficult for me, but nothing is impossible. I will make it and keep studying until I reach my goal. Then I will prepare to be a professional pastry chef and open my own bakery. I will make the best and most delicious desserts in Oklahoma.

So far, I am taking the first step of learning English. I have two jobs to save money. I work in a restaurant in the morning and in the evening in a wood factory called Barnwood. I hope the sacrifice is worth it! I have a family. We are numerous, 12 siblings. I know they will be there for me when I need them.

I would like to travel to different states and enjoy

myself before marrying my future partner and, of course, form a beautiful family. I would like to have 2 children, 1 girl and 1 boy.

Enjoy life day after day; never lose hope. A saying goes, *“Fight for your dreams even though your life will take place in them.”* Let’s never stop chasing them day by day.

Beverly Giron

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

HiSET Dreams

Life has not been easy as a single mother with six children.

I’ve faced many obstacles.

I’ve struggled with things such as food insecurity, fear of homelessness, and no support system.

I’ve had a hard time finding work without my high

school diploma and keeping work with children at home that need care.

Through all of the ups and downs, my children have given me a reason to continue moving forward, despite the hardships, with the will to face each day with a positive outlook.

I've attempted to get my GED several times in the past.

I'm confident that with the TANF Literacy program I can accomplish my goal/dreams and better our lives.

Courtney Herman

TLI of the Literacy Council of Le Flore County, Poteau

Dreams

My name is Sofia Hernandez, and I am an English as a Second Language student with New Dimension,

where I study in Love County at the library. My tutor is Mrs. Michelle Lawson.



This study has been such a blessing because she teaches us more than what is in the workbooks. Mrs. Lawson has taught me how to read at the grocery stores, to organize my money, and budget in English, instead of Spanish. She is an awesome tutor! Very, how you say, personable.

Due to the tutoring for all fall and spring, I graduated from the ESL course and now in the fall will begin working on my GED with Mrs. Lawson as my tutor.

I am so pleased and grateful for New Dimension having a class in the Love County Library. It has changed my life. This year I was the speaker for the Arbuckle Literacy Leadership Coalition graduation,

and that made me very proud and grateful to be able to give my speech in only English.

Thank you, Oklahoma libraries for your support of New Dimension. Gracias.

Sofia Hernandez
New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

My Dreams

Hi, my name is Elizabeth Herrera. I moved to Oklahoma 4 years ago. I have a small family with my husband and my son. At my job, I am a barber. I love to cut hair.

I have many dreams. I think that we should always have dreams. No matter how old we are, we should always try to make our dreams come true.

My first dream was to be the owner of my house in Oklahoma. I have already done it! My second

dream is having my barber shop. My third dream is to speak English this year.

Elizabeth Herrera
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My All-Time Dream and New Goal

Ever since I was a little girl, American cheerleaders in pro sports were my idols. In 2012, my dream came true when I made a dance team in Oklahoma

City. I left everything: my family, my friends, my job in Japan, to embark on a new life in Oklahoma.

Learning something new every day was exciting, but at the same time, it was challenging to handle the language and cultural barriers. It wasn't easy to start a new life from scratch in a different country.



No matter how hard things got, I felt the joy of living my dream at the end of the day.

On March 13, 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from doing what I love. Being a cheerleader is not just a job for me, it's a whole lifestyle. It's the reason I wake up early for a workout, eat healthy meals, and prepare for dance performances.

The experience gave me countless opportunities not only to become a better dancer, but also to be a better person. I learned a lot about diversity and inclusion as the only Asian dancer on the team. There were times when I couldn't see the bright side of being a minority, but after 4 years, I realize my uniqueness makes me an asset, and the team more diverse. I am confident and proud of what I've done and who I am.

When young people ask me for advice, I always say, "Be proud of being different from others." After more than a year-long break as a dancer, I now have

a new goal: to help promote diversity and cultural inclusion in the OKC community. I hope things work out in the near future to be able to inspire and encourage others.

Kei Hirata

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Our Planet, The Earth

We live in a perfect world. Our Planet Earth is magnificent, and we experience many benefits from it. We can find everything we need on Earth. The result is a fascinating and perfect home. Everything is in synchrony.

Earth is the third planet closest to the Sun. It has a solid, active surface with mountains, valleys, canyons, plains, and more. It is marvelous. The planet Earth is made of 70% water and 30% land. Every single part of the world is fascinating. Flora and fauna

live in this ideal natural habitat. The ocean is breathtaking, and it is so important in the history of life.

It is our obligation to take care of and protect our beloved planet. The Earth has natural magic. My dream is that our planet will remain forever in the universe. I hope our kids are able to live safely in this environment. Please, we need to preserve our planet Earth.

Martha Ibarra

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Dreams

Thanpitcha (“Tunny”) was born and raised in Udonthani, Thailand. Her mother passed away when Tunny was 13. She was then raised by her aunt. Watching her mother die made an impact on her and as she grew up she never wanted to be in the situation of not knowing how to help others. This was her drive in pursuing her education in

nursing. Tunny has two daughters and wanted them to be educated in how to help others.



Tunny was an astounding nurse for 25 years in Thailand. She was Head Director of the 1000 bed hospital and also opened her own clinic. She traveled her country with doctors and professional colleagues to conferences and trainings knowing she would take that knowledge and use it to train others.

Tunny met her husband online in 2018, Bryan Jones, who also worked in the medical field as a registered nurse. He was able to visit Tunny and her girls quite frequently until the pandemic. They were married December of 2018 and started the VISA process to move to the United States.

They arrived in the US on April 1, 2021, and one week later started looking for the literacy program

that could help them improve Tunny's and her daughter Watunya's English.

Watunya graduated in Thailand and is wanting to learn English in order to enroll in college to become a doctor. Having minimal English-speaking skills, she is determined to learn as quickly as possible.

Tunny has been a great inspiration and role model for her daughters. Tunny will not be nursing in the US, but continues to run her skin product line and the other businesses she has in Thailand.

“My job now is to encourage my daughters to help them achieve their goals and be able to help others.”

Thanpitcha Jones
Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Dreams

Before, I didn't think I could finish my GED. I was scared to apply and interview for jobs. It was hard

to speak English, and I couldn't say what I wanted to say. I was worried about the American citizenship test. I didn't have confidence in myself. I thought I was too old to learn and that only young people could learn.



Now I can speak English better. I'm not scared of interviews, and I have a good job. I passed the citizenship test. I passed the GED test, and now I'm planning to go to college. Before, my goal was just to pass the GED, but now I know I can go to college. I am more confident. I have met many people who are older than I am who are still learning. I realized it doesn't depend on age. I'm ready to learn everything.

Huai Kim

OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

Dreams

Before I started tutoring, I didn't have many opportunities, and I didn't have confidence in myself.

Now, I have more confidence.
I got my American citizenship.

Never give up.



Paulina Kumeh
OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

Dreams

I came to the United States from the Dominican Republic with a green card when I was twelve years old. I arrived in New York City to meet other family members during the Christmas season and could not speak a single word of English. I was scared to death.

I didn't think about becoming a US citizen for sev-

eral years. When I finished high school, got married, and had children, I became interested in becoming a citizen. I loved the United States, its freedom, and opportunities, and I wanted to be a part of it. My problem was my fear of passing the test and other requirements to become a citizen. I filled out the application and studied the test questions a few times but never applied. A couple of years ago I heard about the program Mrs. Litsch ran and decided to attend it. She encouraged me every time I became discouraged.

We finally submitted the necessary paperwork and early in 2020 I was scheduled to go to Oklahoma City for fingerprints and “biometrics.” Then COVID hit and everything was put on hold for a year. In March 2021, it was scheduled again. After the fingerprinting, I was scheduled to take the test. After all the past year of studying and Mrs. Litsch’s help,

I took and easily passed the test and was scheduled to be sworn in as a citizen.

The swearing-in ceremony was completed on April 30, 2021. On Monday, May 3, I registered to vote. I am proud to be a citizen of the United States. Quite often I cry when I hear the National Anthem and America the Beautiful. It's a great feeling and you can do it too!



Maria Lamar
Duncan Area Literacy Council

My Family: Remembering the Past

I have three children: two daughters and one son. My children had a hard childhood during the war in Iran. I remember the time they were watching the air strikes on TV. The air strikes were happening

right then in our town, and they made the children nervous. But still, they all became successful and earned master's degrees. I am proud of my children.

My dream is to go back to when my children were younger and were going to school. My husband and I helped them do their homework. My husband picked them up from school and came back to our home every day. When my children had tests, we didn't allow them to watch TV. We also didn't go to parties, restaurants, or picnics. After they passed their tests, my mother came to our home. The children played games with their grandmother such as raze jangal, marpele, and mench.

I remember when my children helped to organize for the New Year. My parents gave a New Year's gift to the children. The grandparents would put the money in the Koran (the holy book of Islam) and give it to the children as New Year's presents. We ate different foods such as Iranian rice and vege-

tables, called sabzi polo and mahi, reshe polo, and kukusabzi. The whole family also danced together.

Remembering the past is sometimes fun and sometimes it is not.

Ziba Mohammad Rezie Larki
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Dreams of Learning English at 72

“A human being during his life span must have goals, purposes and dreams of a better future, regardless of age.” All through my 72 years, I have learned to overcome difficulties and triumph over my shortcomings. My father passed away when I was 4. My mother was very young and did not have sufficient education or experience to guide her family and manage her farm.

In my childhood, I learned to read and write without the help of a teacher and managed to obtain

certificates of primary and secondary education. From there I pursued law and graduated at the age of 36. Four years later, I opened my own law firm and made a successful professional career in my country, Colombia. But, I still did not speak English.

My three children from the age of 6 studied English, worked for important companies in Colombia, and were hired by British and American companies in the United States. I was still a successful lawyer in my country. My grandchildren were born in Pennsylvania, Tulsa, and Miami. They spoke English, but their grandparents didn't.

In 2005, I lost my right eye, and decided to divide my time between my children in America and wife in Columbia. In 2017, twice a week, I participated in Conversation Circles offered by the TCCL. Back then, Danielle was the ESL Specialist and she helped me with spoken English, and I borrowed numerous books from the library.

In 2020, I returned to the US and in 2021 contacted Tulsa City-County Library about the virtual Conversation Circles they conducted on Zoom. I got in touch with their current ELL Specialist, Fatima Zehra, and she signed me up for the online classes in February 2021. My journey towards learning English started with writing, practicing grammar, reading law and history books. I learned a little, but I had problem understanding and speaking in English.

My conclusion is ... it is necessary to speak and listen. They are reciprocal and complementary. I now communicate in English with individuals in the US. The benefits that foreigners in the United States receive from the government of Oklahoma is immense. In my case, now I work online and advise companies that can do business with Latin America.

My dream of learning English seems to be coming true!

Ezequiel Malaver

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My Dream



My dream is to be a singer. When I was a little boy, I always wanted to be a singer. I think it would be fun and I would enjoy it. To make my dream come true, I am working with a tutor at the Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services twice a week to improve my literacy skills.

My favorite singers are Elvis, Jennifer Lopez, and Selena. I really want to be a singer like Elvis. He sang to little kids, and they looked up to him. Elvis joked around with his fans and had a good time. I think I would really enjoy that.

I also want to learn how to play the guitar. I dream of owning an electric guitar with an American flag and a bald eagle on it. It would be fun to play the guitar and sing to my fans.

By improving my literacy skills, I will be able learn songs and memorize them. I would like to make CDs and even go on to make movies. This would help me make money so that I can help my mom and my kids. I would like to give my mom my CD so that she can enjoy my songs and see her son doing something.

Mark Martin

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Lawana's Dream

What are some things that I dream about? How will my life be in the future? How will my son turn out when he grows up? How are our lives going to be different from now? What are the things that could be better than now?

There are several things that I dream about in my future. I want to have a four-bedroom house that is all mine. I want to have everything paid off that I

owe. I want to have a godly husband in my life. I want to follow God's will for my life.



What is my son's life going to be when he grows up? I hope he will be a basketball player in the NBA. I hope he has his own house, a good wife that cares a lot about him, and a baby of his own.

I will be happy with my new life. Things will be looking better than they look now. I will be happy on the path that God leads me. I will be happier than I am now. I will have everything paid off that I owe.

I will not have a lot of things to pay off. I will have money to spend. I can go on a trip out of town or go on a boat ride if I want—things I have always wanted to do in my life.

My dreams are a lot better than my life is right now. I'm in a lot of debt. I'm living at my dad's house. I'm

trying to get things paid off. I am asking God to help me with everything and trying not to go crazy with everything going on in the world.

Lawanna McCalister

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My American Dream

I left my country in 1974. I was only 19 years old and not able to speak or write English.

I was born and raised in south Iran. At the time, the country was going through religious conflict between Sunni and Shia.

My father was born and raised in Basrah, Iraq. After a two-year required study of the Quran, he studied literature and language and became fluent in Arabic, Farsi, and English.

On the other hand, my mom had a 6th grade education and only speaks Farsi. She is very religious,

believes in the old way of Shia culture that women should obey the man, cook, clean, and raise the children.

My dream was not to come to America and live the



American dream; it was my father's dream for each of his children to get educated in America for a better life and for us to return to Iran. My dream was to stay alive and fight in my country, even knowing I could be killed.

After three years of college, I met a young woman from Chouteau, Oklahoma. After six months, I asked for marriage. My father did not approve. Nevertheless, we were married on January 8, 1977.

My wife changed my way of thinking and opened my eyes. She inspired me to have love, peace, and hope in life.

I had an American dream with my wife but when cancer took her away from me after almost 40 years of marriage, I lost my dream. I still look forward in life to the dream of what my wife and my father had for me and I hope they will be proud of me one day. Be strong, do not give up, have hope, and have the true God in heart and mind.

Dedicated to my wife, my parents, and my children.

Behzad Nabatian
Pryor Public Library

From Cuba to America

Osbel Ortiz has been studying English as a second language with the Hollis class of Great Plains literacy program for 3 years. After much effort and preparation, he passed the naturalization test and was approved to take the oath to become a US citizen on May 14, 2021.

Osbel left his home country of Cuba in 2014. His grandfather gave him the money for his trip to the United States by selling his house in Cuba. Osbel's dream as a youth was to live in a noncommunist country with the freedom to work and be responsible for making his own choices in his life.

He says, "Life in this country gives me the opportunities I would have never encountered in my own country of Cuba."

He began his first job in the United States wearing clothes and shoes that were given to him by the family who also gave him a place to stay. He worked several manual labor jobs so he could obtain his CDL license and started to learn to speak English with friends helping him until he was able to start taking ESL classes with the Harmon County Great Plains Literacy Council in 2018. He enjoyed the socialization in the naturalization class, listening to the history lessons of the United States in comparison to

other countries of the students also attending. He applied himself fully until he was able to apply for his citizenship. Every step of his journey has helped him reach his goals to receive citizenship in the midst of the COVID–19 pandemic and achieve what his grandfather sacrificed so long ago.

“I greatly appreciate all the help I have received since I came to the United States and know the decision my grandfather and I made years ago was the right one.”

Osbel Ortiz

Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus/Harmon County

My First Child

When I was pregnant, I was excited and nervous. I used to dream about the day that my baby was going to be born. I could not sleep well at night because I was looking for different outfits and baby stuff for my child. Finally, when the day arrived and

I was on my way to the hospital, my stress and fear increased. However, once the baby was here, I felt relieved and very happy. It was an amazing experience when everything was over, and I could finally hold my baby in my arms.

Edith Perez

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Be a Nutritionist in America

Since I became aware of what I ate, my interest rose in nutrition. In my family it was never an important issue; so, for me learning to eat healthier, knowing my body, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle was definitely a goal for the future.

I want to learn to help others not only to eat out of hunger, but for nourishment. It is a subject that I am passionate about and interests me. I would like to be able to help and guide the people around me so that they have a healthier life; and to achieve my

dream of being a nutritionist, it is very important that I speak English well. This will help me use my future profession not only to help Spanish speakers, but also English speakers.

One aspect that I love about this profession is the fact that I can help people have a healthier lifestyle which will change their lives in a positive way. I see many people of all ages live a life of frustration and illness due to having a bad diet most of their lives. Information is power so why not guide people to lead a better lifestyle?

Elizabeth Perez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Team Member

First of all, I am proud to be a part of the New Dimension Literacy Council team. I am a salaried tutor for Adult Basic Education and GED. I've had the privilege to teach subjects for the GED Program,

as well as the fundamentals of reading for the last four years.

Our Executive Director, Mary Finley, began the Computer Literacy course last fall called Microsoft 10 Basic Education, from which I graduated in May. Although I worked in positions my entire career—Probation Officer for Tulsa County, Child Protective Services for Carter County, and retired from the Employment Security Commission—I had never been taught the basics of the computer. All employees who use computers every day need the basics. I now have a manual, produced by Miss Finley, to use when I need to refresh my memory on information about Microsoft Word or Windows 10.

With the help of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, my goal is to continue to serve our community through New Dimension Literacy Council.

Virginia Perry

New Dimension Literacy Council, Ardmore

My Dreams

I was born in a very small town in Guerrero, Mexico. About two hundred residents lived there. I was fourteen years old when my grandmother passed away because the doctor wasn't there that day and she was very sick. So, I said I was going to be a doctor to help my people. That was my dream back then, but my parents were farmers who raised pigs, chickens, and cows, and grew corn and beans. They didn't have the money to support my career.

Today, my dream is to get a better education and improve my English speaking, reading, writing and understanding in order to get a better job. I have been studying English off and on for the last 10 years. I would like to take classes to work as an air-conditioning technician because they make good money. I need to understand English very well to accomplish this dream.

Dreams

Dreams do come true. I come from California, and during my time living there I always dreamed of owning a house. In California, I lived in a small apartment with my daughters. I just wished to give



my daughters the best, but my husband and I found it difficult at times. Days, months, and years passed by, and I said enough is enough, we need to save for a house. Yet the more we tried the farther away the dream went, and little by little my dream of the house was leaving.

Then one day my husband's family, who lived in Oklahoma, came to visit us. They spoke so highly of Oklahoma. It never once occurred to me that maybe we could buy a house in Oklahoma. A few years went by, and they came back to visit and invited us to visit Oklahoma. And we did. It was the first time

I had ever left California. I remember how beautiful and peaceful it was compared to California. When we went back home my life returned to normal with going back to work as usual.

Two months passed when we got a call from my husband's family again, but this time it was over a house which was up for sale. I didn't think twice and told my husband to think it over. My dreams for a home were closer. It was just up to us to decide if we wanted to leave our lives in California behind. In less than three months we packed our bags and moved to our new home. We got the home I had dreamed of for so long, a home that we could finally call ours. I thank God for being able to help us along the way in fulfilling our dreams.

Ana Ramos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Living with a Man Called a Husband

I was married for 10 years with 2 children working full time as a CNA and holding 2 private duty jobs. My husband also worked full time for the Lawton Constitution after early retirement from the Army. Our busy lives included a huge amount of partying as my husband was Puerto Rican from New York. Our lifestyle went into the fast lane during this time of our marriage, which included dealing marijuana that led him to prison for 3 years. After he went to prison, my life was turned upside down, I continued to work 3 jobs, with teenage children. I went to LPN school. It became so overwhelming I dropped out. I was introduced to a controlled dangerous substance; it became my escape after work. It led me to eventually quitting my jobs. I packed up my kids, went to my parents' house to regroup. I eventually went back to Lawton, my husband

came home from prison, I went back to work as a CNA, and my husband was the sole supporter in our marriage with his income. We were going to church and then News Year's Eve came along and we both relapsed thinking it would only last a weekend. Weeks turned into years. Before we knew it, our bad choices of choosing to live on the wrong side of the law included making myself a felon. In 2006, he passed away after a long-term addiction. Nine months after his death I stayed sober and went to work for the VA Hospital. Today I am still living sober and will be celebrating 15 years on July 2.

Esther Rosado
OIC of Oklahoma County

Becoming a Teacher

When I was child, my dream was to become a teacher. Education has always been my priority. My parents always stressed the importance of obtain-

ing an education, having missed that opportunity themselves. My parents taught me as a child that schooling was vital to success in life. Truly, that lesson has been the most important in my path to college. I don't think I would've made it this far had I not taken my education seriously.

My dream is to obtain my master's degree in geography. Two years after getting married I moved to Oklahoma from Morocco with my husband, and I found out everything is different. That's when I realized I have to study more.

My next step is to study for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) so I can enter a university. Knowing English will increase my chances of getting a good job in a multinational company. It's also the language of international communication, the media and the internet, so learning English is important for socializing and entertainment as

well as work! By taking the TOEFL and going to college I will achieve my dream of becoming a teacher.

Wafa Salhi

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Journey

My Name is Latakaer Surney. I am 41 one years of age. I have three beautiful children. I moved to Oklahoma City five years ago from Texas. I first started at OIC in 2016 and went off and on for five years. Over that five years, I met and had some wonderful teachers. When I first started at OIC, I had some rough times and struggles to get on the right path. I came to get more skills and my GED. Just as I was about to give up there was OIC pushing me to not give up. I am going all the way and there's no stopping until the end. My experience at OIC was the best thing that happened to me.

Latakaer Surney

OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

Nothing Is as Real as a Dream

I have always wanted to be a professional accountant. It all started when I was in my junior year in high school. My father had wished I would become a medical doctor someday and I really wanted to make him proud, until my interest in working with numbers got the better of me. I decided to drop my



father's wish in favor of my own dream of becoming an accountant. After I informed my father, I could see the sadness in his eyes. I feared that he would express disappointment, but instead he was understanding, and he showed me support and encouragement with smiles and hugs. He wanted the best for me. What a huge relief!

A few years later, I got married and followed my husband to the United States. My husband taught me a whole lot about American culture and showed

me effective means of improving my English speaking and listening skills. I also began tutoring sessions through the Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition in the city of Weatherford.

While I was learning English, I was also doing research on how to achieve my dream and eventually found out about Certified Public Accountant (CPA), a title for qualified accountants in English-speaking countries, including the United States. I could tell from the information I gathered about obtaining this title that the program would be challenging. Well, very challenging, actually. But the fire behind my drive and determination was still burning! So, I went ahead and completed the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program that included all the prerequisites for eligibility for the CPA exam.

Hopefully, my three children are taking notice of what dedication, hard work, and perseverance look like and will cherish these valuable life lessons when

they grow up. In the words of author Tom Clancy, “Nothing is as real as a dream. The world can change around you, but your dream will not. Because the dream is within you, no one can take it away.”

Ines Tambandue

Westcentral Oklahoma Literacy Coalition, Weatherford

Dreams



Part of my philosophy is that life is always worth living. A person like me used to see very little possibility for change when I was thinking, “If I could do one thing, what can it be?” I have known many people who define dreams by saying: If you don’t make your dreams come true by 30, then you’re too old to start. How sad! I always live my life to minimize possibilities of regrets, but I also knew that I was not doing enough to complete my dreams.

As I hope you know, “Insanity is repeating behavior that takes you over and over in a carousel without seeing any results.” Well, I was tired of feeling insane. The world may not go out of its way to help me. After 20 years of the same routines, I understood there were more possibilities for me than I ever imagined. I started to write my own story, my new beginning ... going back to school.

These dreams were not just for me! I wanted to make my family proud. I needed to be more responsible. Today, I am continuing growing in the direction of positivity and optimism. At 40 years old, I went back to school. My life and emotions are back as if I was 20 years old. Please do not stop dreaming! Life is too short to think “what if?” Everything takes time and sometimes even tears, but I got up and got the job done.

I am proud of myself for becoming who I am today. I am getting the job done. To become a nurse is my

goal. Therefore, don't be rough with yourself. All the walls and rocks that crossed my path during all these years have helped me to make my dreams come true.

Vanezza Terry
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Traveling is Dreaming



My name is Jonnhy, and I live in Oklahoma. When I was a child filled with dreams, I would watch television and imagine myself visiting the places that would come out in the movies. For me this was only a dream because it seemed impossible.

After time passed growing up, the moment came to realize all those dreams. So, I decided to start the adventure. First, I went to Paris, France, a place full of romanticism. Second, London, England, a place of

kingdom. Third, I visited Amsterdam, Netherlands, which is full of color and bicycles all over the place. Last was Rome, Italy, a really old place full of history.

Whenever I would go back home, I would feel satisfaction knowing that those dreams that I believed impossible were possible. Dreams are like this. They come and go. They take us to places unimaginable, and you always come back home.

Jonhny Chavez Vasquez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

A Special Day

“What a beautiful dress you bought, Mom!” I said when I returned home that hot summer night in 1990. “I bought it today, I don’t know when I’m going to use it, I’ll keep it for a special day,” she commented from the kitchen where she was that moment.

It was a beautiful dress with small flowers in differ-

ent shades of green. It was a simple dress but wasn't something she would wear every day.

My mother was a simple woman, mother of three girls, with expressive eyes, a big smile, and naturally tan skin. I thought she'd look so pretty in that dress because it went well with her skin tone.

A few weeks passed and my mother went to visit her parents in another city with my little sister, Norma, who was sixteen at this time. It was 7:30 AM when the phone rang in the room where my sister Nancy and I got ready for our day. It was my sister Norma. They had been at my grandparents for a few days.

"Mom is sick and in the hospital," were her words. She sounded sad. I never thought we were about to live the most painful time of our lives. I called my boss; I wouldn't be at work for a few days. I went to the bus station; it would take 4 hours to get to where my mom was. When I got there the doctor said she'd had a brain stroke. You could see the shortcomings

of that small hospital. The next day an ambulance took her back to our city. In a few weeks, she was talking and looking better.

Saturday, September 1, something happened. She was talking with us, but looking weak, she closed her eyes, laid her head down, and stopped breathing. Our beloved mother had died. The rock of our family wasn't there anymore. The time had come to walk alone and apply to our lives the teaching and values that she left us.



During the process for her burial, I was asked to bring clothes for her. I went home and straight to mom's closet. There I saw the green dress, still brand new, and heard her words, "I don't know when I will use it, keep it for a special day." That was the last dress she ever used.

A Note from Rita—I'm not someone to give advice,

but in my experience, I can only say to enjoy life every day and don't leave anything for later. Just waking up and opening your eyes in the morning is a *special day*.

Rita Vazquez
Duncan Area Literacy Council

Being Able to Speak English

I have lived in this country for about eleven years now and being able to learn English has been a challenge for me. Speaking English is an incredible tool to have, and it is something that I have always been interested in.

First and foremost, speaking English opens many doors for people. In my case, I can get better job opportunities. I can also make my doctor's appointments myself, order my food in a restaurant, and pay my bills without needing someone to help me. I believe that if we have the opportunity to live in this

country, we must take advantage of all the opportunities it offers us.

My entire childhood and the majority of my adult life, I lived in Mexico. I started a family there and made a life for myself. When my husband and I made the decision to emigrate to the United States, we knew it would be very difficult for my children, but it would be especially hard for us as this was a new country and we knew we had to learn the language. Children are adaptable, it is easy to fill a cup that isn't full.

As an adult, I think it's easy to say my cup was very much full. I am very proud of my achievements so far. I would like to keep studying English and challenge myself to continue learning, continue to open doors, and continue to better myself.

My next goal is to become a US citizen. After that I plan on continuing to work hard towards a bet-

ter future, for a better life here in the US even with a full cup.

Martha Velasco
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Feeling Successful

After eighteen years of marriage, I suddenly found myself sleeping in a car with four children, in the dead of winter. I didn't have a penny to my name and had no idea of how I was going to take care of my babies.

After a few months of jumping through hoops and taking tests for the state, I was able to get into the literacy program. This was not my first choice; however, it was my only option.

I entered the program and learned the lessons offered with a determination and desire to get through it as fast as I could. I was on a roll and made great progress.

I was able to take two tests out of the five required to get my high school diploma before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. As a result, the testing facilities shut down and I wasn't able to complete the final three tests for several months. This was discouraging and frustrating, but all I could do was wait.



During the months of waiting my instructor allowed me to work on and complete a novel I had written. I used the time wisely and rapidly finished the novel. I also started up a couple of new ones that I have since finished.

The test facilities opened back up after several months, and I was able to finally finish my remaining tests. I was pleased to see that I had passed all of them and received my diploma as a result. I can honestly say that I don't know what the future may hold for me and my books, but I have a peaceful con-

confidence that with a little patience and a lot of hard work, I'll be able to face whatever comes my way.

The literacy program taught me that success comes to those who don't give up and, of course, to have patience. There are things in life that you cannot control, but you don't need to let them dictate your future outcome in life.

Valdeara Walberg

Delaware County TANF Literacy, Jay

The Gift of Knowledge

Throughout my life I have enjoyed learning about music, literature, and nature, but the one thing that has impacted me the most has always been languages. Being that my first language is Spanish, English did not come so readily or easily as did my native tongue. However, I enjoyed traveling, and with each country I visited, my love for languages grew even more. Traveling expanded the way in

which I view the world and the beautiful cultures each country and people have. Through these experiences, I have developed a love for teaching and helping others learn as well.

I desire to become a teacher and interact with people who are ready to learn, as well as those who are not so enthusiastic due to hardships or overwhelmed with duties of life. I wish for them to be inspired



as I have been inspired and I hope for them to have an opportunity as I have received through tutoring sessions with English teachers at the Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services. I am incredibly inspired by their diligence in helping me learn more. I am hopeful and confident that with persistence and diligence I too will be able to teach English in the future.

So, with my future English teaching degree, I would

like to share knowledge as my tutors have done with me. In order to accomplish this dream, I will return to school and learn all that I must so that I can help those who desire to learn and understand the English language.

Susana Wayd

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Following Dreams

Following my dreams are not all about me.

Following my dreams do not mean that my dreams will be at the expense of my family or everyone else around me.

Dreaming is not the ultimate goal.

I am a vessel ready to follow my dreams and fill myself with true life experiences worth sharing with my children, and obtaining hope, inspiration, courage, and a meaning to live life to the fullest.

It is my privilege to do what I am put on this earth to do. It is my responsibility to read and seek out support, skills, knowledge, and listen to instructors and mentors who will help me get to my stages in following my dreams, so that I can be the best mother and successful person who I am created to be in following my dreams.



Sherry Wilson

TLI Literacy Council of Leflore County, Poteau

Heroes



Heroes Actually Exist



This story is not about Superman or Spiderman, or any superhero that TV shows us. This story is about real heroes. As we say in my country, “Mamá solo hay una.” This could be translated literally as, “We have only one mom.” That may sound obvious, but there is more to it.

My mom is my best friend. I really admire my mom because of her strength, her love for the people around her, and her love for her family. She is always willing to help me. It could be early in the morning or late at night; rain, hail, or shine, she is always there for me.

Last year I had a terrible accident. I was riding a bicycle on a hill, when suddenly I lost the control of my bike. I was so scared that I fainted. I fell to the ground, and I hit my face. That was awful! The left

side of my face was badly damaged. I think that was the worst day of my life, and I have been through so many things since then.

After the accident, my mom was always with me. From that moment, she dedicated her life to me and my needs. For example, at the hospital and during every surgery, she kept vigil at my bedside, took me to the bathroom, and fed me. She did everything for me. Of all the people in the world that love and support me, there is no one like my mom.

My mom is definitely my superhero; she is so smart, noble, patient, and beautiful. She turns my bad days into great days. She makes me happy and I am so proud of her. There is no power on earth that surpasses the love she gives me every day.

Natalia Hernandez Alba
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Hero



The one reason my father is my hero is because he works three jobs. He works very hard and tries to care for his family, going days and nights without sleep.

My father's name is Andy Thompson. He is 51 years old. He has 7 children, 8 grandchildren, and another grandchild on the way.

He has three dangerous jobs. His main job is sergeant at a prison. His second job is a police officer. My dad's third job is volunteer firefighter.

My father is very brave. You never know what could happen while working in a prison. Being a police officer, you see and do things that a normal person most likely could not bear. As a volunteer firefighter, he has to run into fires without stopping to

think what he is doing. My father just does it freely and voluntarily.

These are the reasons for my father being my hero.

Cyerra Bentley

TLI Literacy Council of Leflore County, Poteau

My Hero, Cardi B

My hero is Cardi B. Cardi B's real name is Belcalis Marlenis Almanzar. Her birthday is October 11, 1990 and her father is Carlos Almanaz. She got her start on a television show called "Love and Hip Hop." She was on "Love and Hip Hop" for three years before she left to start her music career. She won a Grammy Award for Best Rapper of the Year in 2018 for her first song called "Bodack Yellow." Cardi B made hit after hit with songs like "Foreva" and "Up."

Cardi B is now a mother and wife to another rapper in a group named Migos. Her husband's stage name is Offset. Cardi B now has her own makeup

line and partners with Reebok. Together they have a collection of outfits and tennis shoes.

Cardi B is my hero because she came from rags to being a well-known rapper. She is a strong woman to be able to have both rapping and business careers. She works hard on her music to come up with new songs and make business deals with companies. Cardi B is a wonderful woman to take care of her family. She has the strength to work on her family and her music at the same time.

Stephanie Blackmon
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Mother Is My Hero

A hero is someone who has given his or her life to protect ours. A hero is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, and noble qualities.

My hero is my mother. Her name is Aisha, and she teaches me that failure is not to be the end of life.

She shares with me the lessons she has learned from failure. She would do anything to help me or risk her life for me.

I remember when I was 5 years old. I was playing in the park with some friends. Suddenly I saw something moving. I thought it was a toy, but when I tried to catch it, my mom came in at the right time and took me away. She was very scared. She told me it was a dangerous snake! My mom's hands were shaking, and she was really scared, and she saved my life.

My mother is the bravest person in this big wide world. She is really overprotective when it comes to protecting our family.

In conclusion, my mother is my superhero. She is my inspiration, and I will never stop loving her. At the end I would like to say this to my mother: to the world you may be one person, but to me you

are the world. I will love Mom for a thousand years and more.

Sana Boutzoua

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Mom, My Hero

My mother is a very important person in my life. Without her, I wouldn't be what I am. She is a strong woman, intelligent, compassionate, honest, a hard worker, respectful, patient, generous, and has good manners. She loves to cook. She enjoys family time.

She is my inspiration. She is always there to help and support in difficult moments. She is a woman of faith who loves God and others very much. She taught me to have faith in difficult times and to be grateful to God for every blessing.

I show my love to my mom by calling her my princess, preparing a special breakfast for her, and some-

times giving her a massage on her feet and also a pedicure.

I am very grateful to God for my mom.

Lorena Chavira
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

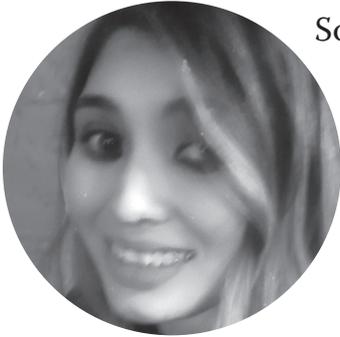
Heroes

I will always remember how brave my dad was. Before I was born, he had a job in Tulsa, Oklahoma at Public Service Company of Oklahoma. He liked football. He bought groceries every week. When I was a baby, he bought me a rocking horse. He fixed supper when I was a teenager. He took good care of me. He loved his five children very much.



Alexia M. Conway
Creek County Literacy Program

My Little Hero



Sometimes heroes are family members. My hero family member is my little daughter. I feel like she saved my life because I was really sad and depressed. Many days it was hard to get out of bed. On those days, she would run to me joyfully saying, “Momma, Momma!” This made me realize she needed me at the time when I felt no one needed me. It gave me the strength to carry on a better life.

Even though she looks up to me, I look up to her. I love how she is kind to everyone and that makes me want to be a better person. When I get angry and I see her happy, it takes my anger away. She doesn't worry about things and she has an innocence about her with a childlike trust.

She has inspired me to start writing. When she was born, I wanted to start writing children's stories.

Because of her active imagination, it inspires me to write. Writing brings me lots of joy.

The love she has for me is unconditional. This inspires me to be a better person. So, if you are having a bad day, remember there is someone out there who loves and cares for you.

Rochelle Fields

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My Family Are My Heroes

I could not choose just one hero in my family, because all of them have kept me safe and helped me become a good person. When I was a kid, my parents took our family and moved to a big city to find better opportunities for work and studies. My siblings and I grew up helping our parents and each other. In my eyes, they are a Super Family!

Who are these Super people? My mother is my Super Mom and her name is Fanny. She can always

see how I feel and what I need, no matter the distance. She is always there for me. My dad is my Super Dad and his name is Mario. He always cared about my interests and he has looked for the way for me to make them come true. My sister is my Super Sister. Her name is Gabriela and she has the power to motivate me. She likes to be my partner in my adventures. My brother is my Super Brother and his name is Emiliano. He makes me dream and then work for my dreams. He wants me to be the best every day.

They are always in my thoughts and motivating me to be better at all times and in all ways. My life would not have been the same without my Super Family.

Nathaly Gordon

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

He's My Hero

I have three young adult children. They're all my

heroes. But today I will talk about my oldest son, Jonathan.

Jonathan is 23 years old. He's lived in Oklahoma since he was two. He was born in Mexico, but he's a Mexican American. Oklahoma is his home, and this is his country.

When Jonathan was little, he was so smart. He got many awards from pre-K through high school. At 15 years old, he started in Del City High School Band. He played the trumpet and French Horn. In 10th grade, he started Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC). He was a Boy Scout too.

The four years in high school weren't easy for him. He had many responsibilities. He participated in our church with gospel classes, and for four years he had classes at 6 am every day. Jonathan started work when he was 15 years old. He had part-time jobs, and he never stopped working.

At 16 years old, Jonathan asked us if he could join the Marines. We said, “It’s not a good idea!” He needed to grow up a little more. When Jonathan started 11th grade, we signed the authorization for a reserve Marine.

Jonathan graduated as a valedictorian from high school in May 2016. He went to Boot Camp at Base Camp Pendleton for three months.



Jonathan graduated Boot Camp on October 7, 2016, in San Diego, California.

When people ask why Jonathan is a Marine, I say Jonathan followed his father’s advice, “You should always serve others.” My son is a Marine. He’s trained for combat and to protect us at any time.

Jonathan continued studying, and next month is Jonathan’s graduation as a paramedic. When I see

Jonathan, I call him: “My sweet Marine.” He’s my son, he’s my hero.

Patricia Hernandez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Hero

My hero is my best friend. His name is Charles and I’ve known him for thirty-two years. I remember meeting him; it was October 17, 1989. We did everything together. We went fishing, hunting, and dancing; we always showed respect to each other. We were young, but we have always had a lot of respect for each other. He asked to see my son and then said he looked like his father’s people and I agreed.

We enjoy fishing together. One weekend, my mother kept my son and we decided to go to White Lake. We had a great time and caught a lot of fish. It was getting dark; I was ready to go but Charles said,

“Let’s camp out.” I said, “No, I don’t sleep outside and I don’t camp.”

He thought that was funny and he took me home. Another time we went hunting. Our hunting trip was fun. Charles and I both shot a deer. We got home right at dusk; it was enough time to skin our deer.

When I think back on all the things we did, I can genuinely say that Charles will always mean so much to me. Our friendship is so special because we are truly friends. To be a friend, you must respect each others’ values and opinions, no matter how hard that may be. He is that kind of friend to me. We are friends who care about the other, we help each other up when we fall, and we are always there for each other.

Linda Jones

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Mother

My hero family member is my mother, Victoria. She was the most amazing person I have ever met in person! She had a happy character, and she was very determined to complete her goals.

She had two husbands. Her first husband was Ricardo and he is my father. He left us because he fell in love with someone else. I think she was very brave despite the disappointment. After that, she became a single mother and raised three young children.

Five years later, she married a man named Jesus and they were happy. She had six more children, though one of them died at birth. This death made her very sad, but she moved on.

Thirteen years later, her husband Jesus died. The man, who was her partner and her great love, was no longer by her side. My mother was devastated inside, but she was strong on the outside. She thought

about the pain of her children and wanted to support them despite the difficult circumstances of becoming a widowed mother of eight children.

Wow! She was very brave and her main goal was to turn her children into good people. My mother was a woman of unshakable faith! She taught us joy and hope in life. She had the power of a hero. You knew there were no impossibilities for her while God was on her side. She was always willing to help other people, even if they were strangers. She always had a word of encouragement for those who felt defeated. She blessed so many people until she died in 2011.

I love that I was named after this woman. My mother left us a legacy of power, faith, and hope to pass on to others. This is why the hero in my family is my mother.

Victoria Li

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Father, My Hero

My father is an admirable man with a strong character. He is brave, intelligent, and hard-working. He has always loved to help humble people like himself, and he has always despised injustice. For too many years, I saw him fight for the rights of people without economic resources to be heard, even though he didn't have them either. But he did have something very important: intelligence, courage, and a lot of knowledge of the laws.

My father didn't study academically. He only attended school until the 3rd grade because he had to start working when he was only 8 years old to help his parents. Through books, he had the opportunity to learn a lot. He was self-taught. He never got a degree, but his knowledge was extensive, and he used it to help people in our little town of Praxedis.

In 1985, the rich people of the town stole the lands of the poor people, including my father's land. He

traveled to the state capital and, using all his knowledge of law, he acquired the necessary documents to have the lands returned. Not only that, he also managed to get houses built for all the poor people of the town. That's why he is my hero.



I have many other stories like this one because it was what he did, he helped people. Besides that, my father was a very creative man with a great sense of humor.

Thanks to my dad, I can say that I had the most beautiful and fun childhood.

Now, my father is 87 years old. He can't speak well because he has suffered various strokes, but he can remember everything. I have always said that he is like a book full of amazing stories. I am so proud to call him my father.

Lidia Marquez

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Inspiring Mother

My mother is kind, generous and optimistic. First, she always makes people feel good. For example, she often has a smile on her face when she meets people. Every morning, she walks outside the park and always says “Hello” and “How are you?” to her friends and somebody that she meets for the first time.

Secondly, she is generous with her money. For example, she is good at cooking, so she often cooks the traditional food and brings it to poor people. Also, she has spent a little of her money for an open-heart surgery program in Vietnam.

Finally, she is very confident with her life. She had been fighting her diseases. For instance, she has high blood pressure, cardiac disease, diabetes, and arthritis. She takes medication every day, but she never feels bad. She has always walked and exercised twice a day. She still cooks delicious food for

her friends and often watches the news, TV shows about cooking, and comedies. She sometimes calls her friends to talk and laugh. Moreover, she calls my sisters and me to advise us every day. I will always remember my mother's kindness, generosity, and positivity.

Dung Nguyen
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Hero

My hero is my father. I call my father my hero for many reasons. He worried about everything when I was a child. He had to work two shifts to get enough money to pay the bills. He took care of my sister, mom, and me very well. Even today, he can help my mother when she is sick and drive her to the hospital.

My father was a soldier before. He taught me math at home before I went to school. He knows how to

cook and can cook the food for my mom at home. My father will fix the house if it has a problem. I love my father very much and I cannot forget what he has done for us.

Trung Nguyen
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Dad is My Hero

My name is Helen. I was originally born and raised in Nigeria. I came to Oklahoma 26 years ago. In 2010, my dad, who is my hero, fell sick and died. I was devastated. My greatest goal in life was to bring my dad to Oklahoma to meet my husband and his two grand kids. Growing up as a teenager, my dad and I had some disagreements. In that process I left my native country for London, England and later moved here to Oklahoma. As a teenager, my dad saw that I was very brilliant and said to me, “when you finish high school, you’ll go to the United States

of America to study law.” That did not happen, and he was disappointed with me and our relationship grew apart. In 2006, we started talking again on the phone and reconciled. In 2010, he had cancer and died.

In May of 2019, I decided to take some GED classes and I found OIC in Oklahoma City to take some classes and in November of 2020 I took my HiSET test and graduated. Thank God for that. I had to pick up my dad’s dream because I believe in my heart that my daddy’s dream for me is still alive. Taking computer classes here will put me through to take some college classes. I love my dad and miss him a lot. His dreams are very much alive in me. I thank God for reminding me of the voice of my father’s dream. I believe that God spoke through my father to me.

As I grow older, I am realizing that God really has a plan for my life. I am so encouraged to continue

to read, write and to learn more. I am also encouraging my kids and others around me as well.

Helen Fyneman-Kalio Ohadugha
OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

My Hero

My mother was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico. I was her first daughter. I was born when she was 30 years old. She was a strong and positive woman even though not everything was always good. Our life was happy. I had two more sisters and a brother.

And all of this started with a mole on the sole of the foot, various medical opinions, and no diagnosis.

Until in 2007, everything changed. My mother was ill with one of the most horrible and unpredictable diseases that exist—skin cancer on a near fatal level.

I was 16 years old, and my mind was not assimilating what was happening very well. I just thought

that with chemotherapy and treatment she would be fine.

Everything was going wrong, things got complicated, and her life was fading. I had heard that people who are in a critical state, going to die, get better and then die. It's real, life gives you the opportunity to say "goodbye."

It has been 14 years and now that I am a mother, and I see my daughter so fragile and so small; just the idea of leaving her alone and not seeing her grow or not being able to protect her is unbearable to me.

Sometimes I imagine myself in that situation and think that I just could not do what my mother did. For me, it was the most admirable thing that a human being could do—to accept death knowing that you leave what you love the most and fight until your last breath.

Viridiana Jeanett Ramirez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Hero Family Member

My mom is my hero. Her name is Maria and I was named after her. Maria is a strong woman. Despite the difficult times that she goes through, she is a positive and happy woman. Even if she does not feel well, she is always there for others. My mother worked very hard to educate us. She did it with a lot of love for my five brothers, two sisters, and me.

I love her because she was always with me. When I was sick, she always took care of me and had patience even when she felt bad. One time when I was young, I had internal bleeding and almost lost my life. It was a difficult week for my mother. She had to be in the hospital with me and be at home taking care of my siblings at the same time. Because my father always had to work in the US to support our family, he was not present to help in difficult times. My mother never left us alone and was always there for us.

My mother is indispensable. She taught her daughters to cook, to work in the fields, and to work with her in her garden. Her garden is what she loves the most and it is exceptional! She is affectionate with her grandchildren and covers their mischiefs. They love her so much. She is my everything. I could write a book filled with all her teachings and adventures. One thing I know is that she is the woman that I most admire. *Thank you, my hero, my mom!*

Maria Rodriguez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Family

My family consists of my husband and four children. I have two boys and two girls. My husband is my pillar and my right arm, and my children are my strength. For example, my husband works hard, so that we do not lack anything. Also, if I am tired or sick, my children give me the strength to

get ahead. When we get together, we really enjoy playing games, as well as talking, and remembering anecdotes from the past. For instance, we play lottery, cards, and we watch vacation videos. My family is the best, and those moments that we spend together are unique and unrepeatable. This is why we make the best use of family time.

Irma Ruiz

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Heroes

When we think of the word “hero,” some of us relate it immediately to a person who we saw in cartoons or in a movie, a person who has done incredible things like Hercules and other legendary figures. But I believe that it is related to a person who is admired or idealized for his or her courage or determination as well as outstanding achievements; a person who can be a model by following his or her passion

with integrity, honesty, patience, caring, humility, and support.

Fortunately, in my path I have been able to find people with the qualities that I have mentioned.



I have learned from them, such as how to accept things as they are, because everything happens for a reason. From such heroes, I have learned not to give up easily even when I have failed 99 times, to accept myself, to give the best I have, and to show altruism and compassion for everyone because you never know when a situation will come up that you could help with. They have taught me to be grateful both in success and in failure, and also that there are no mistakes, only lessons to be learned. Those heroes have taught me that *forgiveness* is a gift you give to yourself to be at peace, to be happy. You don't forgive because you are weak, but because you are

strong enough to realize that only by giving up on resentments will you be happy and smile, even on your darkest day and worst time, even though you are broken. Besides all this and much more, such heroes have given me proof that nothing is impossible if you just dream, believe, and achieve with conviction and perseverance.

Wendy Meza Soto
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa is my hero. I admire her very much because she did a lot of things for people. Mother Teresa was born in Albania, and she was a Catholic nun. From when she was young to the time she died, she always helped poor people.

When she went to India to help the poor people there, she opened a school for teaching the young girls who did not go to school. They could not read

or write. Also, she brought foods and medicine for the poor people who lived there. She often cleaned their wounds, although they were very dirty.

She always smiled at people. She loved people very much. When Mother Teresa passed away, a lot of people around the world, even presidents, sent messages of their love for her.

These things that describe everything about Mother Teresa are just some of her wonderful qualities. I admire and respect her very much. This is my hero who reflects my life: Mother Teresa. I love her.

Thu Tran

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Heroes

I'm a 52-year-old Hispanic female. I've lived in Duncan, Oklahoma since I was about 8 years old when my parents came to America. I'm writing

about a person who I consider to be a true example in my life.

When I came to the states, I didn't speak any English. I started school in 4th grade and my cousin Blanca would translate for me. However, it still was a challenge and as a young girl, I was very nervous and scared. During roll call one day the teacher asked me to say my name, which at that time, I didn't know what she was asking, and my cousin wasn't there to help me, so I started crying hysterically which led to me being transferred to my other cousin's class with Mr. Richie at Lee Elementary.

This was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was ahead in math, so I had an extra hour each day and Mr. Ritchie took it upon himself to provide me with ways to learn English. This may not sound like much to some, but this extra time and effort from Mr. Ritchie helped me learn English

in half a semester and I was able to get ahead in my classes and even became very active as an athlete.

I was involved in the Spelling Bee and other school

activities. Mr. Ritchie's extra effort

taught me to care and do for oth-

ers without being asked, expect-

ing nothing in return. He was a

great teacher and a great person.

He made a big impact on my life and

not only taught regular school lessons but

taught "living by example" lessons, and always went

above what was expected of him, which is what I

try to do myself.



Maria Dolores Varela
Duncan Area Literacy Council

Mom is My Hero

I was born on February 2, 2000. I have two siblings—
an older sister and a younger brother.

I had my first seizure on January 1, 2002, just before I was two years old, and had 20 to 40 seizures daily. I had to relearn to walk because the seizures affected the right side of my brain.

I was in the hospital in Fort Worth, Texas for 139 days at the age of 3. My doctor, Dr. Angel Hernandez, brought his family to see me on special holidays and brought me Barbie dolls!

My mom was in nursing school while I was in the hospital and whenever she had a test, my Nana would come and stay with me. I also remember my mom nursing my baby brother while being with me in the hospital.

I danced at Heartbeat Studio for one year. We had a Groovy Girl surprise party. We got tiaras and boas and made our lipstick and lip gloss.

I had my first service dog, Jake, at age 8. I was blessed

by a special couple who lost their son named Jake, the year before.

I took a Make-A-Wish trip to Disney, Sea World, and Discovery Cove—where I swam with the dolphins.



When I graduated high school, my Nana took me to New York, and we met Robin Roberts. Robin

told me she loved my resilience. We went to watch a musical and walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. We got stuck there and had to call a taxi to take us back to the hotel. Then, we ate at Shake Shack.

If my mom had not taken a video of my seizures to show the doctors I needed help, I would not have had these neat experiences.

Katy Grace White
Duncan Area Literacy Council

Home



Home

My name is Katty Bailey. I lived in Thailand. Thailand is a small country, but it has a lot of beautiful places. Thailand has a beautiful beach, delicious foods, and good culture. I like to travel. That's why a good job for me was tourist guide in Thailand.



I traveled to a lot of countries in Asia. For example, Singapore, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar. All of them are very beautiful countries. Then, I got married to my husband, and I came to the United States to live in Oklahoma City.

It was the first time for me to arrive here. I was so excited and very happy to come here. The USA is a very big country and a lot of kind people are here. But the culture is different than Thailand and there's different food too. But I like to learn about everything here.

I am very proud of my husband and I want to say thank you to him. He opened my world. He is a very good man, and his family is very kind to us. He takes good care of me and my family. He takes me to study English language where I met a good teacher and have new friends in my class. Now I can say about my feeling ... I love Oklahoma City!

Katty Bailey
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Home

I am from Guatemala. My hometown is Chiche, and it is very beautiful. The climate is pleasant and there are many trees. There are rivers, too, where you can go swimming. In Guatemala it is not too cold and it's not too hot. The temperature is always 75–80. All the places look nice because every place is green all the time with trees and grass. There is a very beau-

tiful culture in my town of Chiche. We set off rockets each New Year and we celebrate many holidays.

The problem in my country is that you don't make a lot of money. You work a month, and



they only pay you three hundred dollars. For that reason, I traveled to the United States. When I arrived in the United States, I could not understand English. I

had the opportunity to take classes in Woodward. I can understand some English now and I speak the language a little.

I want to thank my teachers for helping people who don't speak English. I thank God for having this opportunity.

Baudilio Chitic

Northwest OK Literacy Council, Woodward

House or Home: Which One Do You Prefer?

When talking about a home, many may think that it is a house, well decorated and well-off. It even occurs to me that some think it must be moderately large to be considered a good home. But for me, a home consists of small and subtle things, such as a welcome mat, a plant at the entrance, my pet waiting for me with its wagging tail, or watching my partner enjoy my company. It is also making plans for remodeling or making a simple change of the sofa. For me, the smell of coffee in the morning made by my boyfriend and brought to bed is how my home smells. These are some things that make my house a home, a space that pleases me, welcoming something that is my own, in my style. It is not like the one I left a while ago, that of my beloved parents; that house brings so many memories of my childhood. In my childhood home, the spaces each

tell a story: my first steps and my first fall, the first tooth I lost, my toys, my first pet, Minina, the most beautiful kitty that I have had who hid inside the house and slept with me or my brother. In my parents' home there are only memories of the affection received from love, not only from my parents, but also my brother, my grandparents, and all my family. Memories of family reunions, but also the fights between brothers for a piece of mango made my home beloved. Each glass, sofa, chair, table, plant and my bed has a memory special to me. In the future, I hope that my home will give those same memories to my future children.

And what is a home for you?

Geidy Garcia

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

I Love My People

My name is Sara and I'm from Zacatecas, Mexico. My hometown has many traditions and is a beautiful place. I like to listen to the birds sing and breathe the pure air that is under the trees. I enjoy sitting in the square and looking at all the people walking by and children playing. I love to wake up in the morning and listen to all the music in the streets. Zacatecas is my beloved hometown where there are traditions such as religious dances, like the celebration of Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Celebrations are also when Mexican food is enjoyed, such as tamales, atole and fritters, elotes, and delicious chorizo and carnitas cakes. My most beautiful memory of my youth is having fun with my friends as we



walked through those long, lovely streets. I love my people!

Sara González

Northwest OK Literacy Council, Woodward

My City

Big cities represent an opportunity for work, education, services, and fun. I lived in a beautiful city with a great history of more than 420 years called Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco. Nowadays, it is a very polluted city with an overcrowded population, crime problems, and deficiencies in public services. These problems have been caused by the migration of people to the city, whether for health, professional, or economic development. However, despite all these bad things, Guadalajara is a beautiful city that makes tourists want to visit it.

Maria Guzman

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

A Place I Call Home

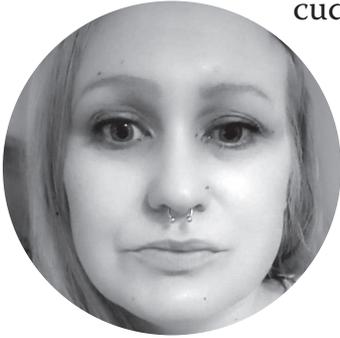
The word “home” has a fond meaning for me. I have lived in many places but called very few home. A home has a sense of security, comfort, and peacefulness in the air.

Many may think my surroundings, or my normalcy are odd, but the semi-chaotic playfulness is quite normal for me. I have four children at home and at times they are not so easily entertained or amused. If you walk into my home, you may see some things that you don’t understand.

One, for instance, may be drawings on the walls. Although I do not encourage it, it happens. One time my girls, Alayna and Alissa drew a dream catcher on their wall to protect their dreams; it helps them sleep at night, so It’s okay with me.

Another time they removed the slats from the middle of their beds so their mattresses would sink to

the floor making their beds into the shape of a taco. They said it was comfy and felt like they were being cuddled.



Small things like these are what is familiar to me. Without these deeds of mischievousness something would be missing.

My children are what makes my house a “home,” and I would not change that for the world.

Kandi Hankins

TLI Literacy Council of Leflore County, Poteau

Two Homes

Hello, my name is Baltazar Hernandez. My wife and I are from Mexico, my first home. We have been married for twenty years and have lived in Oklahoma for seven years. This is our second home. We have four kids, two boys and two girls.

We live happily in this country and have been here so long because it is better for my family. We have good jobs, and our kids have a good school. My first son is studying psychology and my thirteen-year-old daughter is thinking about studying beauty. Our other kids are small.

I miss my country and family, my parents and brothers. I would like to have a visa so I can go see them. Thanks for everything!

Baltazar Hernandez
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

5 de Mayo

When somebody thinks of party time, “5 de Mayo” is a date that shows up on the top of the list. Most of the people, even if they are not Hispanic, have the idea this date is a big celebration in Mexico, like Independence Day is in the US.

However, in Mexico this date is not a holiday. 5 de

Mayo is a commemoration of when the Mexican Army, in the year 1862, under command of General Ignacio Zaragoza, won one big battle against the French army over the territory of Puebla. France in



that time had one of the most powerful armies in the world, even over the United States, so it was big news when this happened, but Mexico eventually lost the war against France.

So, why is 5 de Mayo a big celebration in the United States? Some authors said that victory was important for the US because in that time France wanted to expand their empire, and Mexico was a potential point to start a war with the United States. Another theory talks about the human rights fight in California in the last century when Mexicans, who were Latino proud, wanted to celebrate their culture and history. Most recently, some Mexican

companies like Corona celebrate this date for commercial and publicity reasons.

There are many reasons why we celebrate 5 de Mayo, but a very good reason is that everyone enjoys traditional dance and delicious Mexican food.

Luis Higareda

Northwest OK Literacy Council, Woodward

My Home is Made of

My home is made of ... hearts. Those hearts have moved for eight years from one place to another and everywhere they arrive, they try to find a nice place to grow and make interesting things. That is why those places are always full of pictures, random items and projects that will never be finished.

Three hearts feel always very happy for coming, traveling and visiting fascinating and beautiful places. It gives us the opportunity to meet other people and learn new customs. Three hearts believe every trip

is making their inside richer and expanding their horizons. And it's true. Every summit that is conquered, every river that is passed, and every mile that has been walked has left in these hearts amazing experiences and memories. Three hearts will need these memories if one day they find a place where they will stay for a longer time.

One day three hearts will find a place for a longer time and will build a house. The walls of the house will be hung with pictures of high, dignified mountains covered with snow or lagoons surrounded by beaches and sea depths hiding blue secrets. People and stories will remain in their hearts. All projects will be finished. And hearts will take root. After that I will write a new short story about my home, or ... I will make a new plan for my next trip.

Dorota Horniak-Klosinska
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Refuge

The house where I live has beautiful vegetation around it which makes me feel great.

This landscaped place is made up of pines and trees that become refuge for the birds that perch on them, intoning beautiful melodies and various sounds. Their melodies manage to capture my attention, dragging me to be part of their world.

Within this space, the wind moves the branches of the trees, and I can see how they move from one side to the other as if dancing to the sound of the wind.

Each is different, but they all form a universe of natural beauty which comforts your spirit and soul with peace. Without saying a word, they say so many things and show so much beauty that it is almost impossible not to succumb to this environment that tastes like purity and magic.

This wonderful place, which I created with love,

work, and dedication became my space, where I can unleash my imagination and my feelings, planting in it laughter, tears, flowers, and seeds. At the end of the day, after weeks of months and years, it has allowed me to say today that this place is *my refuge*.

Norma Velandia Luck
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Our Land

I remember clearly when we crossed the Red River on US Highway 70 for the first time. A big sign said, “Welcome to Oklahoma.” It was a new hope and new land for us following the directions from God. We had many expectations, and fears of course, too. We found a new workplace and a big family that felt like a hug to us.

We felt this warm welcome in all situations. Our neighbors gave us homegrown tomatoes. We saw many smiles in restaurants and shops. We, the Latin

people, are considered friendly, but Oklahomans are too!

It didn't matter if our English was incorrect. We received a helping hand everywhere we went. We have received friends and even discovered new flavors!

It has been four years since we crossed the Red River, our English is improving every day, our children have friends and participate in school, and we are learning cultural differences that include patience, faith, and smoked ribs.

I know Chile is different and we do miss some of the things. The lifestyles may be different—the weather too, the people no better or worse than at home. It is said you have to be born in a place to be considered native there, but I feel this is my land too!

Jorge Maza
Durant ESL Program

Home

My first home I formed was with my husband—a small apartment in Santiago de Chile. We decorated it to our liking, and after three years we changed to a different one in Miami, Florida. It was almost bare with only the basic needs. We were very excited because my second child was due.

We moved to another apartment which made our third one. I had my son, and with him our house was too full, so we moved to another apartment for five years. In our journey we realized what to ditch that no longer served God, so we moved to Durant, Oklahoma.

We had two prior houses and are currently in our third. It is decorated, finished, renovated and full of family. I have learned that a home is what you take wherever you go. We have moved seven times and

God taught us how to live through the process and be grateful for opportunities!

Norma Maza
Durant ESL Program

Home to Mexico City

Hi, my name is Yolanda Medina. I'm from Mexico City. I came to America with my family, and we live in Oklahoma. I have not gone to Mexico in 19 years, and I would like to visit my sisters. Our lives haven't been easy for us. My mom died and we went different ways. I would like to see them again, and talk for a long time, see my nephews and the people I haven't seen in a long time. Now that there is the pandemic, my sister got sick with COVID, and was very delicate in health. We talk every day.

My dad lives alone, and I would like one day to eat together and remember all the moments we lived

when we were young—the family grew up so fast. I have six grandkids and they're very cute, all of them.

I have four kids, three married and one single. They are fine. They have their jobs and their family. My single son no longer depends on me, so I would like to visit my sister, leave without any concern and leave with my husband. I hope my trip home is soon.

Yolanda Medina

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Home Is Made of Love

I like to travel in my country. I like to meet everybody. I've been to California, Texas, and Florida. I've also been to Puerto Rico. It is beautiful. You can hear the ocean as the water splashes against the shoreline. It sounds beautiful as it splashes against the rocks. Las Vegas was beautiful too.

I live with Gwen now since my sister died. I've been there a year now. They say I'm part of their family.

They come and visit. Sometimes I color and read my words. I go to my counselor every Monday. I like Gwen because she used to be a therapist. She is a good guardian. She tells me I am a good person. I love her and that's why my home is made of love.



Margo Morales
Duncan Area Literacy Council

My Home When I Was Little

I am from Colombia. We use two last names; my dad's last name is Martinez and my mom's last name is Rintá. I have a beautiful family and I have wonderful memories about my childhood. I grew up with seven siblings, with good principles, with a lot of love, and with many rules.

We lived on a farm and there were many animals. We had horses, cows, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats,

rabbits, pigs, and even bees! When I talk to my children about that, they smile and say to me, “You’re funny, Mama. You lived in the zoo!” I went to elementary school and it was far from my home. It took thirty minutes to walk there and I had to pass over a big creek. When it was raining, we had big trouble crossing it.

After school, I helped with the housework, I played basketball, and I liked to dance. I was very responsible with everything at a young age.

When I went to secondary school, I needed to move to a different town. I could only go to my family three times a year, for two months in the summer, which is Christmas in Colombia; for one month in June and July; and one week for Holy Week in March.

It was a very happy time. I miss that time and I miss my family because they are all in Colombia.

It is a short history.

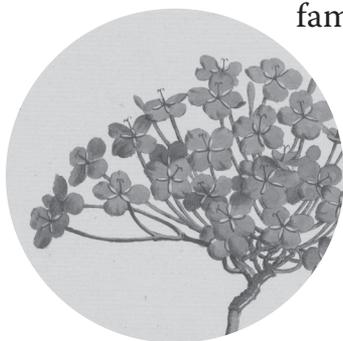
Blanca Lucila Martinez Rintá
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Home

When I think of home, I can't say just one word because it's so much more than those four letters. My family consists of 5 sisters and my parents. I am the middle child. We grew up close to my dad's extended family in Chiriqui province near Costa Rica, but my mom's family lived in Panama City, eight hours away. For that reason, I grew up closest to my dad's family. When there are special days like birthdays, Mother's Day, or Father's Day, it makes me feel nostalgic because I miss being with them.

For me, home also means close friends, including the sisters and brothers that life has given to me. Although we are far away, we are still in contact. I moved to Oklahoma in 2015 to start a new life in

another country, and I'm very lucky to have the best family-in-law that I could have ever wished for. We have adopted two dogs, Bella and Kasey, whom we love and who are a very important part of our family.



I can also say that home means music and food. Latinos carry music in our blood. When I hear Panamanian music, that I always listened to with my parents when I was a little girl, it immediately takes me to my town. The same thing happens when I eat Panamanian food like rice with chicken and vegetables, rice with beans, chicken soup, ceviche, fried red snapper with patacones, hojaldras, and empanadas. Here in Oklahoma, I try to bring my town to my table.

Another word to describe home is my country: Panama. When I hear the Panama Anthem, it's impossible not to cry. No matter where I am or

where I live, I will always say I'm from Panama because I'm very proud of where I come from.

Mavys Robertson
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Home

Because of the pandemic I have been staying at home. I have learned new household chores. I live with my brother Tommy and my sister-in-law, Connie. I do the laundry and fold the clothes. I dust and vacuum. We have two new dogs that stay home with me. I take them outside. Connie has been teaching me how to cook. I was able to help take care of her mom and keep her company. I miss my tutor, Patty Richie, and can't wait until we



can meet again. Until then, I enjoy taking care of my home.

Mary Ann Rusco
Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

Potluck Party

My neighbor and I had a cookout on a Saturday evening in March. It was the first time I have attended a cookout since living in the United States. Originally, I didn't intend to stay very long because my English is not very good. But when we were together, the atmosphere was very harmonious and I felt very comfortable, so I stayed till the end.

That was held in Heather's backyard. Heather and Brad have two children. Their son is six years old, and their daughter is four years old. My other neighbors, Jeff and Valeria, also came over. She came from Russia, and her English is excellent. Andre is their son. Natalie, my next-door neighbor, was also there.

Jeff made burgers and hot dogs on the grill. Heather prepared many different types of drinks and salads. I brought two traditional Chinese dishes. Brad played with the children. We talked while we ate, and everyone was very happy. My husband arrived after he got off work. What surprised me most was they all liked Chinese food very much. Brad and Jeff's families have both traveled to China. Jeff showed me his pictures, and he had even tried making Chinese food at home.

I think the cookout was a bridge for us to get to know each other better, and it will hopefully give me a chance to improve my English. In fact, I have received several invitations to different parties, but I never participated in them. It seems that I have lost many opportunities to know others and practice English.

It was really a wonderful weekend. Ideas and conversations were left unfinished, so we plan to do

it again in the near future. I'm not ready to hold a party at my place yet, but maybe in the future I will.

YanJun Tong

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Home

What does home mean to me? When I talk about home, I'm not alluding to the material building. I'm referring to the home environment. To me, home means family, love, and God.

First, family helps us to create our property. For me it is important that a family has values, support, and protection. Values and support are important in the family because they help us to create bonds of respect between parents and their kids by showing love and generosity. Parents show their kids protection by caring for them and giving them the basic necessities like food, shelter, and education.

Secondly, I believe love is essential to have a healthy

family nucleus. When love exists in your home, the relationship with your spouse and your children are stable, and this creates a family with unity and harmony.

Lastly, applying the wisdom of God in our home helps us to make good decisions because God desires for unity in families. In James 3:17, the Bible says “...wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” In other words, God wants us to use his wisdom to create a lovely family.

In conclusion, family, love, and God make a stronger and more peaceful home. Having all this, we can build a peaceful and lovely home.

Gabriela Walker
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Home

What does home mean to you? Home can mean

different things to different people. Home can be a place where you live. Home can be a place you miss whenever you're away from it. Home is a place with many meanings. To me, home means comfort, security, and happiness.



Firstly, home is comfort. There is nothing better than the comforts of home after a long day at work. For me, work can be stressful, and there are many things at home that can help relieve my stress. After work, I like to wind down and relax by listening to music, doing yoga, or watching television.

Secondly, home is security. It's a place of healing. When I feel stressed, sad, or agitated, I can freely express my feelings in the safety and warmth of my home. A big part of making me feel whole is my family. I love them a lot. We share our joys and trou-

bles and support each other. The warmth and love of my family makes me feel protected.

Finally, home is happiness. Taking walks around the lake, playing badminton, or even just eating dinner with my family makes me feel content. My family and I have made many joyful memories throughout the years, and I will forever cherish all the good times I've had with my family. Home makes me truly happy.

As you can see, home is very important to me. Home is comfortable, especially after a long day at work. I can relax under a quiet night. Home is secure, where I can express my feelings with my family. And all of that makes me happy. Home has different meanings to different people, but we all have a place we call home.

Suzhen Wang

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My New Home

I used to live in the country with my grandparents for 10 years. I did not want to move to the country because I like the city. I met my boyfriend a long time ago. We are now together. I moved to town.



I am learning to cook things like spaghetti, chicken fried steak, lasagna, and meatballs. We also do odd jobs for other people we know, like helping to move and cleaning for people. We like to watch NASCAR and football on TV. We each have a football room in our house and my team is OSU and his is OU. It is a house divided.

We have a pet cat name Frisky. (My dog Sweet Pea still lives in the country.) Frisky will bump into the wall and growl at it like a dog. He liked to sleep with my stuffed rabbits at Easter. He is a funny tabby cat.

We walk to town from our house because we don't drive. Sometimes my Habilitation Training Specialist takes us to Tulsa Hills and to the grocery store and Wal-Mart. I like living in town, and we go to church here and to the library.

Paula Watson

Creek County Literacy Program, Sapulpa

A Place Called Home

The word "home" has an unknown meaning for me.

I have lived in many places, but none of them ever made me feel like I was home.

To me, a home has a sense of discomfort that is smothering.

Many people would find my home murky, unsteady, and unloving.

My home lifestyle is quite questionable, like for

instance, “When and where are my parents?” “Are they coming back?”

Days are slow and scary when they’re gone from this place called “home.”

Jayda White

TLI Literacy Council of Leflore County, Poteau

Instructor



Enhanced Both Lives

Reading has enhanced my life immeasurably. I am already grateful for my ability to read books for pleasure and learning but through the literacy program I have become more aware of things I don't normally think of, like being able to read and understand contracts, applications, recipes, grocery items. Those little things are so much a part of my daily life that they go unrecognized. I realize now, what a gift I have been given.

I have never actually been witness to another person learning how to read. I have been working with my student for over two years now. It started out very bumpy and I almost asked for another learner. I am so glad we figured out what works best for the both of us and stuck with it. I have watched this quiet, withdrawn young man begin his reading journey at about a first-grade level. He is now reading at about a 4th grade level. It has been amazing to watch him

make connections, sound out harder and harder words and understand what he is reading.

He has a wonderful support system at home and that has helped a lot. I have grown to really care about this charming, funny young man. I have been able to help him work on job applications and study for tests for getting a new job. As of this month he now has his first real job working as an airport wheelchair transport person. He tells me he loves his new job, his boss, his uniform (he sent me a photo of him in his uniform).

Our paths may have never crossed had we both not signed up for the literacy program. I am so glad we did. I think I can speak for both of us to say that the program has enhanced both of our lives for the better.

Margee Aycock

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

It's About Understanding and Being Understood

I have counted myself very lucky to have had the ESL students I have had. Are they perfect speakers? No. Are they perfect writers? No. Can they be understood when they speak? Yes. Can they be understood when they write? Yes. Are they wonderful people? Emphatically yes!

I have made friends with a student from Turkey who came here with her husband not knowing very much English at all. I think she was very brave to do that. Could any of us move to another country where we don't know the language, customs, or religion, and there are no friends or family? I don't think I would be able to do that very easily. I have made friends with a student from China and a student from Taiwan.

Through all of these friendships I have learned about other cultures, their food (*yum*) and their lives

before coming here, and their goals for their lives here. I hope that my association with these wonderful students has helped them in some way, however small. I believe their association with me has given me a new cultural competence and understanding. Just an FYI, my current student and friend Sibel Yalcin Cirak will be leaving Tulsa and moving to Dallas. This will be accomplished by August 1. I would like to make friends with another ESL student if you have one available!

Dana Brooks

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Sharing Our Knowledge and Experiences

I started teaching at Community Literacy Centers in January 2020. All the class meetings were in person at different locations such as libraries, community centers and schools. After spring break, all class

meetings were conducted virtually on Zoom due to the pandemic. We have been teaching classes online since then, but that may change in the near future.

I teach English as a Second Language to adult learners. The students are from different parts of the world with different languages and cultural backgrounds. The majority of them are from Mexico, some are from Peru, Brazil and Venezuela; some from Nigeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and some from Vietnam and Myanmar.

All the students are learning English for different reasons. For instance, many are mothers to young children, and the reason they are learning English is to communicate with their children, and the children's teachers or doctors. Meanwhile, some students want to improve their English so they can get better jobs, and some want to feel more comfortable in certain social situations. Alternatively, a handful of them just enjoy learning a new language.

No matter what the reason might be, the students show tremendous dedication. A perfect example of this is when I have students who join the class meetings while they are caring for their young children and/or infants.

As a second language speaker myself, I understand that learning another language as an adult can be quite challenging. Therefore,



I want to help the students achieve their goals in any way possible. It is rewarding to see students speak English with confidence. Not only do I learn from my students how to be better at teaching, but they also inspire me to continue learning. After all, we become better people by sharing our knowledge and experiences with each other.

Thiri Htun Caplinger

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Why I Teach

I have worked in the field of education more than twenty years. I served as a consultant for the United States Navy prior to becoming a teacher. I entered the field of education to make a difference and to improve the lives of my adult students and their families. This year, in the shadow of the pandemic—easily the most challenging school year ever—I was reminded why I teach.

This year I had the honor and privilege of working with adult English language learners. These beginning level students were eager to learn. Everyone worked hard and dedicated themselves to begin the process of learning the English language.

It was invigorating to have a class of adult learners so excited about learning. And once the students began writing, they really began to grow in their understanding of the English language. They began to speak more fluently, and conversations among

the students became natural and more frequent. If a class member had to miss, the others wanted to check to make sure everything was okay.

It was during the final six weeks of the class when amazing things began to happen. We used the Five-Step Writing Process. Student writers began formulating a written project based on their experience with our Health Literacy events. As the students followed the process, their understanding, knowledge, and use of the English language really took off.

I don't need to describe the quality of the students' work because they will be published in a book. I am immensely proud of their work and their dedication to learning. Even though this year was the greatest challenge of my career, it was an amazing experience. I am thrilled to have been a part of this class!

Rob Cowell

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

A Note from Annie

For a middle-aged man, the difficulties of getting on a path to reading and writing are great. The need to change oneself can grow from a seed dropped in the heart at any age by a kindred spirit and can grow until one feels it will burst if that change is not acted upon. The path of a man we will call Jerome, began at the Lawton Adult Literacy Center and was to include obstacles, detours, and finally, a global pandemic that closed the Lawton Public Library and shut down the city's bus service upon which he was dependent.

Jerome was driven by his lifetime goal of being able to read the Bible. As his tutor, it seemed to be a daunting task. After delving into the many versions of the Bible in the library, it seemed better to strive for a more short-term goal of learning to read a well written, well-illustrated, short book.

I remembered a favorite book of my granddaughter's

called *Walk with a Wolf* written by Janni Howker and illustrated by Sarah Fox-Davies. Jerome is Native American, and I thought he might find it interesting. After I read it to him the first time, he was hooked and requested I read it at the close of each of our sessions. He kept it in his backpack and brought it to each lesson from then on, even though, after a while, there were periods of time between readings. Suddenly, he stopped attending his lessons after having begun with me in January 2020. I tried to reach out to him for several months with no response. He had mentioned wanting to join a friend in another state, so I assumed he was gone. Then one day I received a phone call. He apologized for his absences but said he was leaving shortly. We said our good-byes and thank yous, but he still had just one question: could he keep the Wolf book or did he have to give it back? I replied that it was his to keep the

day I showed him how to write his name inside the front cover.

Annie Dryz
Lawton Adult Literacy Center

Teaching Adult Education— English Language Development

Teaching Adult Education has been a great part of my teaching career. The adults have this appreciation for their education, and they have the enthusiasm to match. Each student has their own reasons and goals as to why they want to learn English. I'm just happy to be able to be a part of that and be able to help them achieve their goals

The relationships I have established over the years has been tremendously rewarding. The students come to class because they want to learn English and improve their lives and the lives of their families. But they also feel like the classes provide them

a purpose. It gives them a sense of belonging ... belonging to a group. And it's a group with similarities, but also differences. And no matter how different, or what culture, or what language, they (we) are all in the same group ... a group that wants to learn better English. So, they develop relationships within the class. Really, this helps them to learn in a truly healthy and fun way.

When it's class time, the students tell me how they have looked forward to the class all day. It's a good feeling knowing that they so eagerly want to learn. It puts me in a position of importance. I want to be at my best when it comes to teaching my students. And it's for all these reasons that I'm inspired by their dedication. These students work either at difficult types of jobs or are taking care of their families all day. And to have the energy to show up to class on a consistent basis is something to behold. When you have students like that you can under-

stand why it's a privilege for us to teach and be part of this wonderful group.

Andy Escajeda

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Teaching Is a Way to Learn

Teaching English to adults has been a great experience for me. As an immigrant, I know how it feels to start from the bottom and understand how hard it is. The truth is, I felt like some of my students connect with me because of this; I knew how to put myself in their shoes and by doing this, our classes would focus on the basics of the levels they were in.

Nevertheless, this was a big challenge for me, because I was a beginning teacher, mostly because my students were older than me and I thought that would make me feel nervous. To my surprise it did not happen that way. I felt the connection instantly and

although I was younger, the respect I received was unmatched.

The most exciting part about my teaching journey was the growth the students were showing. It amazed me how fast they were learning and every time they came to class, I was proud. Something that I learned about my students was the way each and



every one of them have a way to learn; some like to participate the most in reading, some like to participate the most when we are doing activities that involve pictures. It is amazing how students develop their own strengths. Students have shown me how important it is to learn ways to teach. Every class was amazing, every topic and how students developed and learned over two semesters was shocking. This indeed was as much of a learn-

ing experience for me as it was for them! My adult students taught me how to teach.

Maria Esparza
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

A Teacher's Hero

There are many qualities that we associate with heroes. Often, we think of how strong and brave they are or how they save the world. However, I have learned that heroes come in a variety of forms. Over the past nine years I have been fortunate to work with 447 international students from around the world. When I think of a hero, it is those students who come to mind because of their hard work and the sacrifices they made for their education.

I teach English as a Second Language (ESL). Learning a language is very challenging because it requires a lot of discipline and risk taking. Becoming proficient requires years of intense study. It can be dis-

couraging as well because even advanced students make mistakes. However, it is through those mistakes that language is learned. My students had to keep pushing themselves when it was difficult while also being vulnerable to make mistakes.

Not only did these students take on such a challenge in learning a new language, but they also made many sacrifices to do so. They left their homes and their families to travel halfway around the world for an education. They had to adapt to a new culture and customs while being separated from their support systems and loved ones.

My students have worked hard and sacrificed so much for an education. Nelson Mandela said, “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Their efforts are bringing us together and making the world a better place. Therefore, my students will always be heroes.

My Journey

I have been tutoring for the last seven or eight months in mathematics, but I was recently asked to tutor the Celebrating Our Journey library event. I was a bit skeptical, but I agreed. I was concerned because writing is a very personal matter and there are so many parts: spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, and essay organization. And we were doing all of this over Zoom. I needn't have worried because the staff at the Community Literacy Centers knew well how to accomplish this daunting task.

Each week over five weeks we met to learn a clearly presented, manageable piece of the process. Meeting the other tutors told me that everyone comes to this process with different skills and experience; I wouldn't be expected to be perfect.

Then I met the participants. In separate breakout rooms the authors first settled on a topic and then

I tried to pose broad questions to help them decide what part of their lives to include in their stories. It was surprising to watch how one author crafted two journeys for her story: her passage through childhood to becoming an adult and that this happened while moving from place to place across the country. Even though another author arrived in Oklahoma from another country, she chose to write about her dream. After raising her family for several years, this author has a dream that is well within the realm of possibility here in Oklahoma.

At the last meeting, all of the authors read their stories aloud. A few were amusing, but several brought tears to my eyes and I found that I was not alone. I hope to have the opportunity to take part in a similar event in the future when the authors can once again tutor me about new experiences.

Beth Landon

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Eulogy for Carolyn

She told me she could not read because no one in her family was able to help. Therefore, she sat quietly in the back of the class and did not understand the lessons because she could not read.

Nevertheless, she persisted. Carolyn had two daughters to raise and wanted them to have the things she never had. She worked as a bartender. How did she distinguish one bottle's contents from another? She learned the bottles by label color instead of print, and she did well. She worked for our local school district as a bus driver then worked in maintenance.

When I had the privilege of selecting her as my literacy student, we discovered that besides having our name, Carolyn, in common, we also had my son in common. Unbeknownst to me, she had been my son's special education bus driver and had safely transported him for several years. I felt that tutor-

ing her could be a way to “give back” to her for what she had done for my son!

She was always starving for knowledge, and she asked questions about everything. She began to discover many things about her world. She was excited to read about Rosa Parks and wanted to know more. The world globe fascinated her, and she had to see where Paris, France was because she wanted to visit there.

When we worked together, we laughed and we read and we laughed some more. We were friends for 10 years, and I learned so much from her that I will never forget. After a long gap in our sessions, I found out she was sick and went to visit. She was unconscious, so I sat with her for a few minutes then kissed her as I left. She passed about three or four hours later. I still grieve for her as my family member. And I hope she has visited Paris.

Carolyn Lee

Ruth G. Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Blessings

Some may wonder why a seventy-year-old grandmother, a retired elementary principal, would consider a part-time job of teaching adults the skills necessary to receive an alternative high school diploma. Initially, my intent was to once again become a change maker in society, to make a difference in another's life which, in and of itself, is an honorable reason. However, as I soon discovered, stepping into the role of an adult educator has resulted in the teacher, rather than the students, receiving the most blessings.

As an adult educator, I have great appreciation for the determination of these devoted adults who are overcoming many hardships they have been dealt. My students have had past difficulties that brought their education to a halt: an unplanned pregnancy, lack of parental support, uncaring teachers, and the list goes on. Most of the students have had their

confidence trampled on but with renewed commitment, they resolved to better themselves. Most, while juggling a job and family, come to me with lofty, yet achievable goals, realizing that obtaining a high school diploma will open doors of opportunity.



Observing the joy in a person who has just passed a HiSET exam is what drives me to continue in this position. One student actually danced down the hall and took a picture of our “congratulations” sign. Another student shared that he never thought he would be able to pass any of the exams and was totally in a state of euphoria when he passed his first test. (We danced a jig together.) One gentleman, upon receiving his diploma, secured the job that he had desired for many years.

Has it become obvious why I love working with these awesome people? As an adult educator, I

do inspire students, but in reality, they inspire me much more.

Janice Manlove
Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Student to Instructor

I started learning English when I arrived in Woodward, Oklahoma in 1997 after immigrating from Venezuela. Although I had taken some basic English courses back home, I knew that it would be critical to improve my listening and speaking skills as I embarked on this new journey.

Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council helped me to learn English. My tutor, Wanda Luthi, taught me at the Woodward Public Library. In the beginning, we met weekly, but we increased the frequency of our tutoring lessons over time. Wanda was an excellent tutor—she was patient and knowledgeable, and she went above and beyond by not only help-

ing me learn English but also by mentoring me on how to start my new life in Oklahoma. Wanda and I became very good friends.

I took four long years of tutoring and self-study before I felt confident enough in my ability to speak and understand English. It was then that I noticed the very big need in our community for more ESL tutors, and Wanda encouraged and inspired me to give back by serving as a volunteer tutor. So, the Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council trained me to become an effective educator, and I began teaching English to students in small groups.

Over the years of working with students, I have been humbled to receive many awards and honors recognizing my contributions to the community. Most notably, in September of 2006, I was honored to receive the Literacy Hall of Fame Tutor Award in recognition of my contribution to Oklahoma Literacy.

My journey has not always been easy, but it has always been worthwhile. Currently I am working as an ESL instructor for the Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council in Woodward where I teach classes for adults, both in-person and online. I have also built a 16-year career in the Woodward Public School as an ESL paraprofessional and interpreter. I never see my journey as finished, so I continue to improve both my own English and my teaching methods so that I can continue to reach and motivate others. Teaching ESL is how I give back to my community; it is not just a career for me but a true passion and calling.

Mauren Mora

Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council, Woodward

My Greatest Reward

My name is Karina, and I am Brazilian, Texan, and Bolivian. I've been teaching for 25 years. I mainly

teach English, Spanish and Portuguese. My youngest student ever was 2 years old, and my oldest was 76 years old. I have taught students from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds, and education levels. Over the years I have found that my teaching is 10% and their hard work makes 90% of their success.

I find teaching fascinating because I experience wonderful fruit through my students. I plant the seeds; they become the fruit! The following are some of my favorite stories.

An 18 year-old man was a janitor at Pfizer; he was bullied and lived in the slums. Today he is an Accounting Manager making a six-figure income, fluent in English and Spanish, traveling all over the world.

Another student, a 38 year-old woman, was a housekeeper whose dream was to sew wedding dresses. Her goal was to learn English to work for David's

Bridal, a well-known wedding dress store. She reached her dream in eight months!

A 22 year-old woman who is now an odontologist, was raised on a farm and had no English. She needed to pass her TOEFL test to receive a full scholarship for her master's and doctoral programs, which usually requires eight years of English. We both committed to do it in a year and a half, and she passed!

A 76 year-old woman is a realtor. She was dependent on other employees due to her lack of English. She learned English, Spanish, and computers, resulting in not needing extra employees to independently grow her business!

These stories are God's blessings. All these stories have become a memoir of amazing, touching, and long-lasting testimonies. When I look back, I am in awe and incredibly grateful God put us together!

Karina Paz

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

The Joys of Teaching Have No Age Limit

After almost 30 years in elementary education—from classroom to labs to administration—I found myself taking early retirement. Several years later, as I was looking at getting back into education, I found Community Literacy Centers and applied for a job teaching adults working toward their high school equivalency. “Hmmm ... interesting,” I thought, “but I have little experience with older students.” Well, I was offered the job and took it with some nerves and hesitation.

It’s now three years later and it has been a challenge, a learning experience, and a joy! There are a few things that I have learned (or realized or remembered) that are important. First, learning is learning, regardless of the students’ ages, backgrounds, disabilities, or other factors. Learning is possible when it is desired. Motivation is key and these stu-

dents are motivated! They have reasons to commit the time and effort, which is monumental. This test is hard, harder than any of us who went straight through high school would realize. This experience has given me so much respect for my students who choose to navigate this process and move forward.

Secondly, humans are human. We all have fears, insecurities, connections, desires, and dreams. These adult students are chasing those dreams. They are facing their fears and insecurities and making that dream come true.

Finally, joy is joy! The pride, accomplishment, and huge relief that these students feel when they pass that last test and get that diploma is equally as thrilling (if not more) than when a high school senior walks across the stage.

Teachers often say they learn more from their students than students learn from them. So true. I have again found a love of teaching in a new venue, with

new students, and am learning so much from them.

Thank you, students!

Ginger Pebworth

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Teaching ESL During a Pandemic

The pandemic's biggest challenge for educators was NOT being able to teach in person. Very quickly we had to find another way to do it. I discovered the most beneficial way to teach my adult ESL class was by using apps called WhatsApp and Zoom that had to be downloaded by the students on their smartphones. First, I sent a Zoom invitation to my students on WhatsApp that included the time and date of our meeting, and then as I was teaching on Zoom, I used a MacBook and an iPad so that I could share my screen with my students. Sometimes I shared a PowerPoint through a Chrome extension called

Screencastify that helped me record my lessons. I then posted the lesson on YouTube and shared a YouTube link with my students on WhatsApp so that they were able to find and view the lesson for the day.



During our virtual Zoom class, there was a lot of interaction among my students. During the year, some of my students moved to other states but were still able to attend virtually and communicate with me through WhatsApp. The ability to attend class from different locations is a really great feature of virtual learning. A challenge for my students has been to have self-discipline because learning English means attending class. Personally, the most challenging part was the internet connection during class. An intermittent connection sometimes stunted my students' ability to get or comprehend information. The Northwest OK Literacy

Council helped me with this challenge by providing a hotspot so that my internet connection would be more stable, and this helped my whole class because there wasn't as much lag time and images showed up clearly.

Teaching during a pandemic wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council of Woodward. My students are very grateful for their opportunities to learn virtually, and I am grateful for their confidence in me and their support. Working together, our goal was always to do what would benefit the students.

Silvia Routh

Northwest Oklahoma Literacy Council, Woodward

Teaching Adult Learners

Have you ever walked into a doctor's office and been handed a clipboard full of papers to be filled out, *only* to notice they are in a language you do not read

or speak? Have you ever gone to a parent/teacher conference to talk about your child's educational needs and successes *only* to be dismayed that the teacher is not speaking in your language and her documents are in a language you neither read nor understand? This is why I teach adults!

I want to empower my students with the ability to communicate in their worlds, wherever that might be. I want to give my students the gift of learning to read, write, and enjoy using English in their daily lives.

My favorite thing about teaching these brave and courageous adults is when that lightbulb goes off in their mind and I *see* that they are understanding exactly what I am saying to them! I also *love* how they encourage and applaud the successes of their fellow classmates. They become each other's' biggest cheerleaders.

Finally, it brings me great *joy* to hear a great big

“thanks!” on a daily basis from my adult students. They are so grateful for every single part of each lesson I share. This is why I am so encouraged and inspired when I teach adult learners!

Nita V. Wood

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

An Honor and a Privilege

My journey in partnering with the Community Literacy Centers of Oklahoma is an honor and a lifelong desire come true. Over ten years ago, I had it placed in my heart to work with adults who hunger to learn and create a better life for themselves. However, I had little knowledge as to how to make this dream come true. I thank the students and the Program Coordinator of the Community Literacy Centers; these fantastic people took a chance by letting me into their lives to help facilitate learning and glean a piece of their hearts.

It is an honor and privilege to walk beside the adults of Oklahoma who continue their education. These people are my heroes. They make a conscious decision to better themselves, and for this, their communities are blessed. Our tutees come from all walks of life, and their stories are meant to be heard and cherished. As a tutor, I would sit and listen in awe of the struggles that many of them face, whether it's health challenges, family challenges, or internal struggles. However, despite these struggles, they show up for class ready to learn.

One woman told me, "When I am having a bad day and don't want to go, I go and then I feel better."

Getting to be part of their life is a gift beyond words. I know many tutees are so grateful for their teachers and tutors, but I know the teachers and tutors are just as thankful to the students. It is truly a partner-

ship cultivated and nurtured by all people involved across this great state.

Natalie York

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Special Place in My Heart

My name is Yvonne and I have worked in the field of education for over 20 years.

Learning English holds a special place in my heart. My mother was born and raised in the border town of Del Rio, Texas across from the Mexican city of Villa Acuna, now called Ciudad Acuna. In the barrio, where my mom was born and raised, all the students and teachers spoke Spanish so when my mom got married, she did not speak any English!

My mother and I worked together for the Migrant Education program in California. We worked with the Spanish-speakers whose parents worked in the agricultural fields. One of the program's require-

ments was that every employee who worked with students had to pass the literacy test in English. I remember tutoring my mother before she took that naturalization examination, and we were so happy when she passed the exam!

I have worked teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) mostly with the Spanish-speaking students in bilingual and migrant programs in California, but my last school was at Sally Gillentine Elementary in Hollis, Oklahoma, where I worked with another tutor in the Great Plains Literacy Program here at the Altus Public Library. I have been tutoring virtually for the program since the return of the pandemic in September of last year. My son found the need to move me to Oklahoma City to live closer to him. I didn't want to stop tutoring my students so with the resources the GPLC has, I haven't had to leave my students.

I have worked other types of jobs, but I have always

found great satisfaction teaching ESL. I always stress to all my students and even to my grandchildren that a college degree is a must if they are to succeed in today's society.

Yvonne

Great Plains Literacy Council, Altus

Poetry



English in My Head!

I don't know how to feel
Because when I speak it sounds weak!



All these words are in my head!
I wish they would speak for
themselves,
And they are also in my mouth
But they don't want to get out!
Because I try, try, and try
But all they do is hide!

If I could speak English well
Oh, my God, it would be great!
But, I know and hope one day,
I will think and speak perfect!

I'm grateful for the people who try to understand
All that I speak and the words that I said!
That action says a lot
About your kind heart.
And I really appreciate
For all the help you always make!

I don't want to finish this
Without giving a big thanks

To God who is always here and for all the care he
makes!

Claudia Cortinas

Northwest OK Literacy Council, Woodward

My Life

Oh, how I always wondered how it would be
It went so quick
We didn't spend much time together, you and me
But we forgive and love on
Friends are like family
In the end we learn from each other
And together we may live successfully

Ashaunti G.

The RISE Program, Tulsa

To Hear a Wee Bird Song

His eyes hear the rippling of the waters
As they splash and frolic in the gentle brook.
His eyes hear the rustling of the Autumn leaves
As the wind carries them softly to the ground.

His eyes hear the rushing of the waves pounding
on the sweating sand.



His eyes hear the gentle furrowing of
the wheat field

As it waves its hand in balmy
winds;

But he would like only just one
thing,

To hear a wee bird sing.

His eyes can hear the crackling of the
logs upon the fire.

His eyes can hear the laughter of a thousand
happy faces

On the lips of young and old of many different
races;

But he would like only just one thing

To hear a wee bird sing.

And every time the wishbone cracks

We wish, and wish, and wish.

Susan Hauptert

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

The Beauty of Life

How beautiful to wake up and go for a walk
 among so much nature,
Open the door and watch, how the wind gently
 blows you
Life to the trees, flowers and grasslands around
 like the sound
Of water running through that stream catches
 you and invites you, seduces you
And you enter it, you want to feel its freshness, in
 your feet, in your hands,
And you end up taking a big dip and lying on the
 shore over the
Pasture, surrounded by flowers and beautiful
 animals that live there.

Enjoy nature, the sound of water, feel like the wind
Caresses you, listen to the song of the birds,
 observe and delight
Your pupils with so much creation as beautiful
 and perfect as it is
The one that exists on earth, nothing is as
 wonderful as what it offers you
Day by day life.

Walk and look at so many fruit trees around you,
 oranges,
 Mangoes, tangerines, grapes, blackberries, apples,
 walnuts, peaches,

You have a delicacy at every step
 you take,

nothing more beautiful than
 what your eyes see

Every sunrise, every second,
 every minute, and best of all is

Knowing that you will enjoy it,
 day after day.



Nothing more wonderful than nature itself, just
 looking

Around you enjoy the goodness of the land, the
 land is very

Generous, very kind. We are the luckiest beings of
 Existing in it, gives us the countless riches of it,
 gives us a

World full of satisfactions, it fills us with
 blessings, it gives us

In full hands, what more could we wish for, if we
 have it all,

Our mother nature teaches us to love the next.

Life is shorter than death, enjoy your life each
I sigh, every minute, every morning, every
moment, because
Life is short.

Lourdes Hernandez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Privacy....

(Because I am a private person, this is my journey.)

Who is she?

Where did she come from?

Is she alive or is she numb?

Is she young, or is she old? Is she hesitant, or is
she bold?

Is she tall, or is she short?

Is she swift, or is she a dork?

Is she poor, or is she rich?

Is she nice, or is she mean?

Is she sane or is she crazy?

No one knows because she is privacy!

Leslie Lowman
OIC of Oklahoma County, OKC

A Conversation with English!!

I don't know when I'll dominate you.

I don't know if I'll dominate you.

But is it necessary?

I use you daily.

What's important, English,

To me you are a vehicle

A means of communication

To avoid isolation.

At the end of each day,

I utilize you as much as I can,

As much as I need,

Using all resources I have,

To practice my speech.

The more I expose, the more I gain!

There are many opportunities...

ESL classes, Conversation Circles at the libraries,

Doing errands, visiting doctors, or volunteering,

Going to the movies or to the theater,

To the opera or ballet, or watching TV,

Talking with neighbors or friends,

Having a coffee or tea with somebody.

How much I learn depends on me

Life is made easy
Thanks to the various translators
I have available to me.

Many people listen patiently
Realizing I'm a foreigner.
Be it a cashier, a farmer,
A receptionist, a librarian,
A teacher, a waiter, or a kind
neighbor.

Thanks to all of them,
I practice more and expand my knowledge
In English galore.

This helps me talk to more people,
And gain more confidence,
And strengthens relationships with one and all.
This is how conversations evolve...
At the beginning there were easy queries and
precise answers.

Many times, I requested to repeat the questions.
Now I can understand more people
And partake in longer conversations.

I am learning the sound of words
By replicating them to improve pronunciation.



I add new phrases to increase my vocabulary
Fix grammar; read and write more frequently.
I'm getting better, I'm learning fast
And it's all because I have been exposed
To foreign language this is in the past.
Learning is a process,
Practice today, now, and tomorrow.
Do not stop, delay, or procrastinate!!

Maria Ainhoa Perez de Nanclares
Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

“I wish I could tell you
my brother...”

We have been with you 70 days...
Since you entered that hospital infected with
COVID.
With you we are, all of us that love you!
70 days of agony filled with prayers and hope!
I wonder, what you are thinking; what are you
going through?
How are you feeling? Scared? Afraid? Terrified!
Watching yourself Needled, Intubated, and Tied
to that bed,

Completely alone at this undesirable place.

I wish I could be in your stead.

If there was a queue I would go first.

But if I were there, how could I be here
night and day interceding for you?

You looked after me and my sons
for so long!

How can I now tend to our
mom?

Without your Advice, Support,
and Partnership!

We are here for you united in faith

Recalling good memories and sad ones too,

Because those ones brought us closer for sure.

Forgive us Lord! For all our Offenses, Disputes,
and Differences.

But here we are! Together as our deceased Father

In his final farewell gathered us and tied us with
ropes of love.

But today, I am here, and you are there,
miles away...

Unreachable, Inaccessible, Untouchable!

Oh, Heavenly Father! What a bitter Christmas gift!

Instead of bringing me Jesus as a child,



You brought me my brother, crucified!
I'm begging You, My Lord! It's Christmas time!
It's not the hour for Penance, Punishment, or
Painfulness!
Have mercy on us! Bring us the good news!
Come on, dear brother! Please, come back home!
Now I am here, and you are there.
But we'll be together forever one day!
"And I'll tell you my brother, just how much
I Love, Adore, and Respect you
When in heaven we meet again."

Lidia Lucia Prado

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

Heroines of Flesh and Blood: An Ode to My Female Teachers

If I'd not the teachers I had,
I would not have become the person I am.
Their lessons
filled my brain with complex light and cultivated
connections.

In my innocent infancy, my elementary teacher
became my idol.

Rosa María Sánchez taught me to read and write.
I wanted to be smart, trustworthy,
and prudent like her. She showed me the light.

In my precocious childhood, I began
to learn English.

Irasema Aguilar taught me how to conjugate in a
foreign language.

I wanted to read, write, and sing
in various languages. She gave my mind
a new spring

In my enlightened adolescence, I embraced the
passion for traveling.

Diana Pardo taught me to appreciate cultures
and traditions.

I yearned to explore
new countries. She increased my acquaintance
and more

In my exuberant youth, I adored teaching.
Teresa Moinette gave me a fascination
and drive for education and pedagogy.

She inspired in me the joy of transmitting
knowledge

In my emerging adulthood rose my love for theater.
Julie Ward taught me the charm of stage.
Through the actors, scenography, and scripts,
I discovered another art. She injected in me a love
for fiction plays and left me relishing each page

In my maturing adulthood, I confirmed that
writing is hard.

Nancy LaGreca taught me how to write carefully.
I learned to polish, edit, and develop ideas in text
She increased my passion for authoring, with new
ideas being expressed

At my current age, I have finally found my female
role model.

Nancy also taught me how to be a better person.
With her example, I found that women can do
great things.

She inspired in me a lust for life and a brand-new
set of wings

Luvia Rodriguez

OCCC Adult Literacy Center, OKC

Calm, Happy, Comfortable

Okinawa is Home.

Close friends and family.

Small island to meet up easily.

Lovely beaches with an ocean breeze.

Watching the sunset.

Calm, happy, comfortable.

Okinawa is Close Friends.

Meeting up for a drink together.

Going to the beach.

Going camping.

Calm, happy, comfortable.

Okinawa is Family.

Mom cooking traditional Okinawan food.

Grandma's house.

Grandma talking to me in the Okinawan
language.

Meeting up at family events.

Sleeping on tatami.

Calm, happy, comfortable.

Okinawa is Araha Beach.

Powdery white sand.

Cafés all around.

Magnificent ocean.
Smell of the ocean breeze.
Calm, happy, comfortable.

Okinawa is Beautiful Sunsets.
Cape Zampa sunsets are the best.
Spectacular orange and red colors.
Sun slowly sinking into the ocean.
Calm, happy, comfortable.

Okinawa will always be there.
When COVID is gone.
I can't wait to visit my friends and family.
I hope we can move to Okinawa in the future!

Wakana Stokes

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Travel



An Unforgettable Paradise

Punta Cana is one of my favorite places where I have traveled. It is located in Cabo Engaño in the eastern part of the Dominican Republic. Upon your arrival, the people are very kind, and you see a lot of vegetation.

Travel from the airport to the hotel was a little more than an hour, so our driver told us some of the history about Punta Cana. He said that until the 1960's, Punta Cana was a jungle zone, and its beaches were pristine because there were no roads or infrastructure to go there. With only a lot of vegetation and lagoons, the people in Punta Cana couldn't see any potential. By the end of the 60's, a group of investors from North America saw unrealized possibilities in this area, and they acquired a large amount of land where they started to build hotels. Eventually, Punta Cana started to be known for its idyllic beaches with fine white sand, warm weather, and its blue and tur-

quoise sea, making it the new Caribbean paradise tourist destination.

I was definitely in love with the attention and kindness of the people, the weather, the fine white sand, the turquoise and blue of the sea, and water so calm that it allowed us to go far from the shore. We didn't leave the hotel because the driver told us that the clubs and places to dance were far from the tourist zone; but that wasn't important because the hotel was big and had a mall inside with many bars where you could have a drink. So, we enjoyed the hotel, the beach, and the sea most of the time with a cocktail in hand.

Samantha Blanco
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

A Great Trip

My name is Karin Campos. I like to travel a lot. After saving a lot of money, I had the opportunity to go in

2018 to the wonderful country of Peru, where I visited wonderful places such as the Huacachina Oasis, the Nazca lines, and Machu Picchu.



Machu Picchu was great. It is an Inca citadel located in Peru and built in the 15th century. It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and is considered by many to be one of the wonders of the world. To get there, take the train, and then walk for two hours.

It was a wonderful and beautiful experience. It is more beautiful than what one has seen in photos or on television. It is a magical place that I would return to, and that I recommend for people to experience.

Karin Campos
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Travel Together!!

What do you eat to live? What do you do to be happy? What can you do without sleep? To me? That is “Travel.” Travel is my food, my happiness, and my passion. But it was not my dream until I became a teenager. Traveling to Europe in 1996 totally changed my life.

I traveled nine countries for a month. It was full of new experiences for me. My hometown is the third biggest city in South Korea, but at that time we just had two hamburger franchises and not even a subway. On the other hand, in Europe, there were McDonald’s and Burger King’s everywhere. Their French fries were very crispy. Their public transportation system for tourists took me anywhere with one ticket. I saw many famous places and architectures which I had only seen before in textbooks.

My favorite memory was in London, UK. My best friend and I checked out of a hotel in the morning.

People looked busy, rushing to get to work. The smell of perfume and the fresh morning air energized me. We enjoyed sightseeing on top of the double-decker bus and walked along the riverside from Tower Bridge to London Eye. The weather was perfect, and the terrace of restaurants were full of people relishing their coffee.

There's an African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Now, I'm here in the US with my husband, who has similar dreams of travelling the world. My next goal is a cross-country tour in America in an RV. And I'll do it together with my dream partner, as I want to go far. Every day is exciting with him while we ponder and prepare for our *next plan!*

Kate Choi

Ruth G Hardman Adult Literacy Service, Tulsa

My Trip

My name is Leticia Cifuentes. I am a student of

OCCC. I have a wonderful teacher, Annette Brown. I love to travel. I like to see the mountains, sea, lakes, rivers, and big cities. I like to visit museums, monuments, parks, restaurants, zoos, aquariums and more.

I've had the opportunity to travel across the country by car. This was very important for me, because I saw many things that God has created to enjoy.

This trip started in Weatherford, in July 2020, with all my family. The first place we visited was Mount Rushmore National Memorial. This is a sculpture carved into granite, designed by sculptor Gutzon Borglum. The 18-meter-high heads are of four former presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. This monument is located near Keystone, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Each year 3,000,000 tourists from all over the world visit this place. It is an amazing view.

We continued our trip and we arrived at Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. We saw glaciers, with portions of incredibly blue water; and some have steam vents or fumaroles. The most famous glaciers are Grand Prismatic Spring and The Mammoth Hot Spring. It was a wonderful trip.

Leticia Cifuentes
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Exotic Trip to Thailand

I love traveling to see and admire the world I do not yet know. I went to Thailand by myself for a week before I was married. Most people have images of glimmering temples when they hear about Thailand. Yes, these are beautiful and gorgeous, but the most admirable part of this trip was visiting the northern side of a small, isolated village where the Long Neck tribe lived.

I became really interested in the Long Neck tribe

when I watched a travel program as a child. It took about an hour and half by small boat from Chiang Mai. The village is surrounded by mountains, and their houses are so flimsy, made only of plywood with straw roofs. While I was there, I learned more about their lifestyle, the reasons for making their necks longer, and how they made their necks longer. The more I learned, I felt afraid and astonished.



There are two reasons they make their necks longer. One is a symbol of beauty, the other one is a tradition of this tribe. Only the females make their necks long, but this is their choice whether they do or not. They wrap brass coils around their necks. First it starts with a five- or six-layer brass coil when they are around five years old. Then, a few years later, they replace it with a new coil that has more

layers. This process repeats itself many times until they become a young adult. Some women's necks are about 10 inches long. They never take off the brass coils unless they need to replace them or for medical reasons.

Thailand is only one of my travel experiences. Traveling is extremely appealing to me. It always gives me an overwhelming feeling of excitement and leaves a strong impression on me.

Miyuki Drakes
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Home Away from Home

Traveling is a wonderful experience every person needs to try. Through traveling, we learn more about life. My dream as a kid was always to travel and discover new places around the world. Traveling to Florence, in central Italy, was a dream come true.

I spent countless summers in Florence when I was

younger, before we moved there. It was a marvelous experience of culture, food, and music. I can get lost in the beauty of Florence and admire the magnificence of museums, like the Uffizi Gallery, the most important and most visited Italian museum. I have visited it several times and I can still feel the magnitude of it when I enter with its multitudes of paintings, statues, and history.

One of the places that I like most in Florence is Piazza del Duomo in the heart of the city. There are plenty of shops and restaurants around. One cappuccino alongside a croissant is all I need to relax and enjoy the view. When I wanted to enjoy the street musicians, I would make my way to the Ponte Vecchio. It's one of the most famous bridges over the river Arno. The bridge is full of jewelry shops and art dealers. The evening was my favorite time to go and enjoy the fabulous view of the sunset. One of the most beautiful churches I have ever seen is

the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, located in Piazza del Duomo. It has gorgeous architecture and the artwork on the building is awe-inspiring.

Florence is a lovely place to visit and experience the most unique landmark buildings creating a magical atmosphere. No words can describe my feelings about Florence. Florence is my second home, where my best memories were created and where I find true happiness and can be myself.

Kally Elmrabti

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Holiday Weekend

We will celebrate my husband's birthday at our beach house this weekend. It will be so much fun, and my two children are super excited. Every time we go to the beach house, we have a lot of fun. We enjoy when we spend time together as a family. We also do many fun things like playing, volleyball, soc-

cer, and other things. For all these things, I know it will be an extraordinary and fun weekend. There will be unforgettable moments.

Yesireth Farias
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Where I Like to Go, Shiraz

My name is Leila. I live in Edmond, Oklahoma. I like to go to Shiraz, a southern city of Iran.

Shiraz has a beautiful spring with a lot of flowers and blossoms. It has nice old places that are part of Iran's history.



For example, Takhte Jamshid (Persepolis) is an amazing ancient place. It is a part of the great history of Iran. As a tourist, please don't miss it.

This place was used by the kings of the Achaemenid

Dynasty, about 500 BC. UNESCO declared the ruins of Persepolis a World Heritage site in 1979.

There are famous poets' tombs in two big gardens in Shiraz. One of them is named Hafez. He lived 700 years ago. The other one was named Sadi, who lived 800 years ago. Visiting Hafez's tomb at night in spring can make a remarkable memory for you.

Leila Fazelzadeh

OSCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Travel to the State of Washington

My wife and I arrived in Seattle four years ago when we first came to the USA. Seattle is Washington state's largest industrial port city with a beautiful waterfront. When we arrived on the Pacific coast, the Pacific Ocean was calm and cold, and it was impossible to swim there, even in the summer, since the ocean doesn't change with the seasons.

Bellevue is a small town located near Seattle on the shores of Lake Washington. It is a lovely city with tall buildings where the head offices of many well-known world-famous companies such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon are located. The picturesque shores of Lake Washington are visible from the upper floors of the high-rise buildings. In summer, there are many vacationers on the lake in boats, yachts and schooners or just swimming and relaxing on the shore. At Christmas time, this city is all decorated with sparkling multi-colored lights that make this city look even more glamorous. On weekends, we could meet up with friends to have fun or go to idyllic mountain lakes or the coast full of natural beauty.

I am amazed by all of the stunningly tall trees in the state of Washington. The climate and nature are similar to my hometown where I grew up. Landforms are hilly with the same type of trees such as spruce,

pine, oak and maple. Only birch trees weren't there. The summer weather in Washington is similar to the weather in my hometown, reaching 25 degrees Celsius, but in the winter the temperature is colder in my hometown getting down to -25 degrees Celsius.

We often remember the place when we first came to the USA, Washington state. We would like to go back there to visit friends and once again travel to those places we so enjoyed.

Alex Gorinov

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My City

I am very proud of my home, Ho Chi Minh City, and I hope you have a chance to go there. I lived in Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon, for twenty-five years. It is the biggest city in Vietnam, and also the most crowded one. Saigon has many iconic

places to visit such as Ben Thanh Market, Nguyen Hue Walking Street, Grand Theater, Notre Dame, and other places.

The cuisine in Ho Chi Minh is very diverse and appealing. You can find dishes from all parts of Vietnam, and the flavors will not disappoint you. The night markets are true heaven for you to discover and try those foods.



Landscapes outside of the busy center are very beautiful. You can find large grass fields and clean rivers in the suburbs, and many people like to go there for a picnic and to enjoy the fresh air.

I love to explore street food, gather with friends at coffee shops, and go shopping when I have free time there. Saigon has almost everything you might want. The roads are always full of vehicles. Tall buildings are everywhere, and people always seem to be very busy. During rush hour the streets look like they

are burning under the heat of exhaust fumes, and it is hard to go even a short distance. Very late in the evening, Saigon finally becomes quiet, but there are always people that hang out after midnight. It can be said that this city never sleeps.

Because Saigon is full of people from all over the country and even the world, I have to admit that it felt quite complicated when I first got here. For people who always seek opportunity, Ho Chi Minh City is an ideal place to go.

Le Hoang

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Favorite Vacation

My favorite vacation was visiting Morocco with my kids. In the summer of 2019, I was pregnant, and I went to Morocco to visit my family. We took three airplanes to get there. It took us 24 hours between airport waiting and flying to arrive in Morocco. We

met our family. It was a happy time. After spending a good time with my family, I took my kids to different places such as beaches, old houses, mountains, farms, and parks. I also took them to where I was born and raised to show them their home country.

My goal of this trip was to teach my kids our traditions and our culture and to meet their family (Grandpa, Grandma, Uncle, and others). I was happy because I reached my goal, and now I wish to achieve my next dream of visiting my country again.

Zienb Isaf

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Travel

My name is Mansoureh. I live with my husband, Majid, and my son, Erfan, in Oklahoma City. We love to travel. I went to Dubai several times. The last time was last year in the summer.

Dubai is one of the most modern cities in the world, located to the south of my country of Iran. I would love to live in Dubai because it is close to my country, Iran, and because it is a humble place, and a lot of capitalists live there. It is an expensive city. It has different conditions to buy a house and work. The official language of Dubai is Arabic.

It has the most beautiful and best tourist attractions in the middle east in its heart. The world's largest flower garden opened in 2013 on Valentine's Day in Dubai. Forty-five million flower branches have been planted with drip irrigation.

We went to a beautiful beach in Dubai. Also, we went to the biggest mall in the world. It was very beautiful. Many rich foreign tourists choose a Dubai tour for a luxurious and special trip.

Taking the Gifts That Life Gives Me

I was born in Puebla City, located in the central highlands of Mexico. It's a modern city that was founded in 1531. It has many museums, a lot of traditions, great restaurants, prestigious universities and spectacular landscapes of the Popocatepetl active volcano.

In the early 2000s, I started traveling to the United States. I visited Minnesota where I had training. While I was there, I saw snow for the first time, which was amazing.

Another country that I visited was Canada. I visited Toronto, Niagara Falls and Quebec.

Seeing all these beautiful sights helped me to realize that I wanted to formalize the relationship with my boyfriend and share beautiful moments like these in the future together.

Before we married, I had the opportunity to work for a company in Santiago de Chile and visited Villa del Mar. After the wedding, we moved to Mexico City where we lived for six years. In 2004, we took our second honeymoon in Florida and went on a cruise to the Bahamas.



After that, we lived in Philadelphia.

During that time, we visited New York, Washington, Delaware and Atlantic City. That was a beautiful time because I had the time to enjoy my two babies.

When we came back to Mexico, we moved to Monterrey and lived there for nine years. It was a special time because my sons grew up there and I worked for a prestigious company where I had the opportunity to travel a lot. One of those places was Bogota, Colombia.

Now, we live in Bartlesville, Oklahoma where my

husband works. This experience has been great because we have met very nice people. I like to see the wildlife and the sunsets, so it's a peaceful place to live. We will be here until the next adventure.

Delia Barrientos Lopez
Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

Trip to Brazil

My name is Elza. I live in Oklahoma City, and I like to travel. I went to Brazil, to visit my family and friends with my husband and son for a very special occasion—to celebrate Father's 91st birthday in Japura City, at my brother's farm.

We also had a family reunion. My father's brothers and sister also came. It is a moment that will be marked in my life forever. The children were able to have fun in the pool, on the seesaws, and at the kiosk eating a delicious lunch of Brazilian Food. Also, with a big smile, my dad cut the cake.

After that meeting, we went to Caporanga City, where my parents were born and married, to visit some relatives. I went to my aunt's farm, a beautiful place, that my aunt cares for with love! Then we went to the church where my grandparents used to congregate. Then we went back to my daughter's house!



The family is the most precious asset we have on earth!

Elza Dos Santos Mack
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Travel

When I was young, we moved around a lot. We moved three times until we settled in Oklahoma and stayed. My dad worked for General Electric; it was a very good job in finance, but he had to go

where he was needed. On the long trips to our new home, we would play games like car bingo. find the first letter of our names in signs, super slug bug, and other games that my dad would make up.

I was born in Syracuse, New York. Mom, Dad, my sister, and my brother were all born in different parts of New York. When I was six years old, my dad was transferred to Oklahoma City, so we packed up our family and drove to Oklahoma. All three children were in the car with Dad, but my Mom had to fly because she was pregnant with my little brother. He was born two days after we arrived in Oklahoma City. My Dad had to go to work right away, so my brother and I had to go to an awful daycare while my sister was lucky enough to go to school. We lived in Oklahoma City for two years.

When I was eight, we moved to Phoenix, Arizona. We had four naval orange trees in our back yard, so we never had canned orange juice while we lived

there. We would eat oranges until our mouths got sore. My younger sister was born in Phoenix. She was six months old when my dad was transferred again.

In 1969, with five kids in the car from the age of six months to fourteen years, we moved back to Oklahoma City.

I am in my 60s now and am glad that I decided not to move around once I became an adult.

Janet Martin

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

My Vacation in Puerto Rico

When I think of home, I only think of one place: Puerto Rico, a small island in the Caribbean.

Upon my arrival, I will start the route to beautiful Old San Juan, founded in 1521. I will visit El Morro and taste a refreshing piragua (shaved ice)

with coconut or raspberry flavor while watching kites fly. Next, I will go to La Fortaleza, home of the Governor of Puerto Rico. I am a nature lover, so I will go to the only tropical rainforest in the United States National Forest system, the Yunque National Forest.

Later, I will drive to the port of Fajardo and take a ferry to Culebra, a small island east of Puerto Rico. Here, I can enjoy a day at Playa Flamenco. It's one of the ten best beaches in the world.

I can't leave the metropolitan area without visiting Casa Bacardi, the largest rum distillery in the world. The cocktails are the best. My favorite is definitely the mojito. Nothing compares to the feel and taste of rum and lemon, mixed with mint.

Another highlight is the southern part of Puerto Rico where the Ponce Art Museum is located. In its collection is a major work by the English

painter Frederic Leighton called “Flaming June.” It is an icon of the Victorian era. To learn about Puerto Rican origins, I will go to the Tibes Indigenous Ceremonial Center, home of the first settlers of the “Taínos” island.

Finally, I cannot leave Puerto Rico without visiting my beautiful town of Cabo Rojo, where the Los Morillos Lighthouse stands out along an impressive view of the beach and cliffs. I will not miss the chance to enjoy a delicious piña colada and our traditional mofongo, a Puerto Rican dish with fried green plantains. It will be a marvelous trip.

Coraliz Matos

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Traveling in My Country

I, Irina Meade, was born in Russia, in the city of St. Petersburg. But, my parents moved to work in

another city where we lived for a long time. We often came back to visit my hometown with my parents. I've always missed this city.

St. Petersburg is the most beautiful city in Russia. This is the heart and cradle of Russia.



If you decide to go on a trip to Russia, then you must definitely visit the city of St. Petersburg! Every street and building in the city show the history of Russia.

There is one unique place in St. Petersburg. This is the cruiser Aurora. There are also many palaces in St. Petersburg, because the royal families lived there for more than three centuries. These are the Winter Palace, Mikhailovsky Castle, Gatchina Palace.

Tourists come to St. Petersburg to visit and see the Hermitage, St. Isaac's Cathedral and many sights.

The city was founded by Peter the Great at the place where the Neva River flows into the Gulf of Finland.

For me, my favorite time in St. Petersburg is the month of May, the month of white nights. Yes, yes, the city has a special time when the nights are really white. And there are many bridges in the city, and they are all drawbridges. There are about 800 bridges in the city.

Now, I am married and live in the USA, but if you ask me about Russia and which city to choose for travel in order to get to know Russia better and get acquainted with historical sights, my answer will always be that the most beautiful city for traveling in Russia is the city of St. Petersburg.

Irina Meade

Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

My Magical Fairy Tale Journey

The first country I ever visited was Denmark. I

was representing the Agriculture Secretary of Mexico, where I worked. I was in Copenhagen for two weeks, during which time I had the opportunity to visit various museums, take a city tour, and walk a lot. I was pleased to see that most people used bicycles instead of cars, and plastic bags because bottles were forbidden.

My favorite museum in Copenhagen was the National Museum of Denmark, located inside the Prince's Palace. It is the biggest museum of Danish cultural history with objects that were more than 14,000 years old. I remember the Christiansburg Palace, where the 3 powers of government are housed; and the Denmark Royal Guard which parades through the city center twice a day. The Statue of the Little Mermaid reminded me of my childhood.

The Queen of Denmark offered a dinner in honor of all participants in one of the palaces of

Copenhagen. We arrived by car at night. There was a big hall and a double door to enter the room where dinner was held. The walls were



yellow and white with large windows, hardwood floors, and some furniture. There was a large table in the center filled with dishes from different European countries, and the servants were elegantly dressed. We ate, talked, and listened to music. At midnight, we returned to the hotel. What a wonderful experience!

This trip to Denmark had a special meaning for me because I grew up reading the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen; so getting to know the country where he was born and wrote his stories reminded me of the dreams and fantasies of my childhood. It was a trip full of magic, and

great professional growth as well. It was perfect in every way!

Maribel Medina
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Story of a Short Trip

My name is Laura and I am from Mexico. I live in Bartlesville now and I attend classes at the Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services program where I am learning English. I have always liked traveling and visiting different places that have history and seeing the nature of the city. Eight years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to the city of Chicago with my family.

It was an unforgettable experience because it was the first time I traveled to Chicago and visited the Navy Pier, where I had the opportunity to get on the Ferris wheel, which is located on the shore of Lake Michigan. It has been a part of Chicago history since the original wheel was built in 1893. Brian Murphy, Chief of Operations for

Navy Pier, said that the original Ferris wheel was built by George Washington Gales Ferris Jr. with a height of 246 feet. The current Ferris wheel opened in 2016 at the Navy Pier, and it is now called the Centennial Wheel.

My experience when I was at the top of the wheel was



exciting, because when you look down

from the wheel, people and autos

look very small, and you can also

see much of Lake Michigan. The

Centennial Wheel is the biggest and

tallest Ferris wheel that I have ever seen

in my life. I also learned that this attraction

brings between eight and nine million people each year

to Chicago. The fun of traveling is that you always learn

something new from the places you visit. This family

trip was incredible, exciting, and fun, because we all

enjoyed the nature and the history of this beautiful city.

Laura Mercado

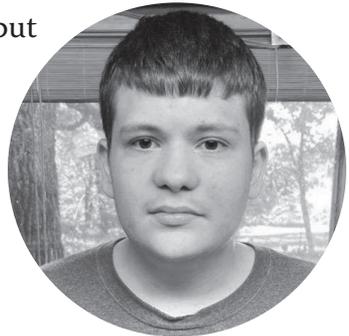
Bartlesville Public Library Literacy Services

My Trip to Vermont

When I was younger, I had this map of Vermont. I liked to collect and look at different maps. The Vermont map was my favorite. I liked it so much I decided to ask my parents if we could go there on vacation. I convinced them to take me when I was 9 years old. We took a trip to Vermont. It was April when we decided, and it was summer when we went to Vermont.

We ended up staying two weeks. We were able to stay for that long because my dad could take off work for that long. Our vacations were normally two weeks.

We went because I wanted to go, but also my parents did a lot of research about the state prior to our going. They knew a lot about the state. They were excited too. It seemed like a beautiful place to take a vacation.



We saw beautiful green rolling hills. The land was mainly

these rolling hills. The hills spanned as far as you could see. We were there in the summer, not in the fall. The hills were green, not a bunch of different fall colors. They were breathtaking, nonetheless. It impressed me how green the hills were, even in the summer.

I would definitely go back for another trip to Vermont. I would like to live there one day because of the beautiful landscape.

Jesse Miller

Duncan Area Literacy Council

First Time Getting on a Plane

Getting on an airplane at Bangkok's Airport was an amazing experience. First, all my kids and grandchildren sent me to the airport. Even though it was a short time, I could feel their love and care.

Later, my husband could not remember the airline he bought the ticket from. We were very anxious. Finally, he calmed down and remembered where

the ticket was. Suddenly, he thought of something. Then he turned his phone on, walked up to the flight attendant, and handed his phone to the operator. In just a moment, we went inside to sign another document. We were in a hurry. I took my youngest daughter's hand to keep up with my husband because he was in a service car.

Once I was on the airplane, I couldn't take my eyes off the window. I was excited with this trip. Finally, we made it to our final destination, which was the United States.

Phetcharat Pettyjohn
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Heart Love: Traveling Back in Time

When I was eighteen, I decided to enter a convent, convinced that it was my calling to serve God. I was there for two years before a problem arose and I returned to

my little town. When I arrived back in Covadonga, I had to get accustomed to my old life again; going for walks, to parties, and making new friends. At the time, my beloved cousin had a boyfriend named Rigoberto. He was unfaithful to her, but when I met him, he seemed like a very kind and respectful boy. They broke up, but Rigoberto stayed in contact.

Rigoberto told me he was anxious to join the seminary and we started talking. He found me everywhere. When I left work, he was waiting to accompany me home. We became best friends until one day he asked me to be his girlfriend. I was happy because I was beginning to love him but wanted to get my cousin's blessing before accepting him. It turns out that in the time since their breakup, my cousin had met and fallen in love with another man and was engaged to him.

A weight was lifted from me, and I accepted Rigo. He was the ideal boyfriend who wrote poems, accompa-

nied me to choir practice, and took care of me. it was very easy to fall in love.

We were together for ten months when his dad called saying he had to move to the United States. He left, and even though he was gone, I felt happy that he was in my life. Almost two years passed, and another boy asked me to be his girlfriend. That boy has been my husband for seventeen years now. Rigo was not my destiny, although sometimes I remember our time together, and all the beautiful and sad memories we made.

Sandra Sanchez Prado

Community Literacy Centers, Inc., OKC

Wonderful Benefits of Traveling

Have you ever thought of escaping from reality? Travel relieves stress and boosts mental health. My dream is to discover the world. Meeting new people and adapting to new cultures make one more

globally and culturally aware. Also, I believe that it's a great experience for children.

I want to go to Delhi, Taj Mahal, and Varanasi in



India to discover their natural beauty, ancient architecture, deep history, exotic food, and rich culture.

I would like to see Thailand, where my husband's family's roots

are; eat Thai food and visit some historic sites. I really want to see the Lantern Festival called "Yee Peng," in Chiang Mai and usually held in November. It is one of Thailand's most famous festivals and thousands of lanterns are released into the night sky all at once. It must be stunning to watch.

My husband and I are interested in history, specifically European history and the Roman Empire.

I want to visit Barcelona and experience Sagrada Familia. I would also like to go to Park Güell with some of Gaudi's architecture. My husband was sta-

tioned in Crete, and he told me that it is a beautiful island with great food. Crete was the birthplace of the ancient Greek god Zeus, and I'm fascinated with Greek mythology.

I would like to go to Nagano, Japan during the winter season. There are many tourists who enjoy natural open-air hot springs. You can watch wild monkeys enjoying themselves in the hot springs in the snow. How adorable they must be!

Having a trip planned makes me happy. I may be able to go to other states for fun, but still, it's difficult to go abroad right now. I hope the coronavirus situation gets resolved soon, so I can make my dreams come true.

Ayumi Rankin
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

The Wonders of Travel

Traveling is one of the most exciting experiences in

our lives. It gives us the opportunity to visit different places and meet and learn from different peoples and cultures. Throughout our lives, we have many hopes and dreams about traveling; one of mine was to visit Iguazu Falls.

Iguazu Falls (in Argentina and Brazil, South America) is an amazing, majestic, magical, and incomparable place. I remember when I was there being so overwhelmed with its beauty that I started to cry. Also, that moment was even more special because my mom was with me. This was our first trip abroad together.

I think I am a lucky person. As a result of this trip, I have had the opportunity to visit other beautiful places that I never thought I would get to see.

Since my husband and I first met, we have taken many trips, which have all been fantastic and unforgettable. Each place tells its own story. Here are three of them:

- *Glacier National Park (Montana)* is fascinating. You can see up close and personal the glaciers on the mountains.
- *Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming-Montana-Idaho)* is spectacular. It has almost everything: wolves, bears, moose, pronghorns, beautiful sunsets, and starry skies.
- *Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado)* has all the contrasts. In summer, lush green trees; in autumn, colorful trees; in winter, it's completely white all around you, with frozen lakes.

These are some of the best places within the United States; however, there are also plenty of other options available to us beyond these shores.

Give yourself the opportunity to visit a new place. Don't think too much about it, just do it! Have your own adventure. Take a chance! It can be a lit-

tle intimidating; but at the same time, it can be very rewarding.

Jineth Rodríguez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

A Captivating Journey

I took an especially amazing trip with my wife, newborn daughter, mother, and my brothers to the city of Prague in the Czech Republic to spend an unforgettable New Year. It was a cold winter that year, but my wife and I were fascinated with this new adventure because our daughter was barely three months old, and we traveled with the help of a very warm baby carriage.

In Prague, we joined an interesting tour with several Spaniards. The visit allowed us to become acquainted with a very beautiful city, full of elegant buildings that were spared the destruction during the Second World War.

One of the most iconic places we visited was the Charles Bridge where we saw many little souvenir shops, several artists making pictures, others playing classical music, and many tourists walking on the bridge. Another place we visited was the Christmas market with many local crafts and food.

At sunset, we went up to the castle to enjoy the picturesque view of the city. What I remember most about the castle was a room with a massive door with stunning windows and huge panes. I was very impressed with that room, because the guide who took us there told us that the monarch who had lived in the castle always entered the room with his horse. Near the castle we saw the writer Franz Kafka's house and museum.

Finally, the most impressive place in Prague was the astronomical clock on the south wall of the City Hall. We were amazed at the beauty and precision of the astronomical clock in the square, with the

twelve apostles parading each time it was activated. An incredible number of people gathered around the square to watch and listen to the clock.

Everything we saw in this city captivated us.

José Rodriguez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

My Day Fishing

I go fishing every chance I get. I like to fish because I have a lot of time to think while waiting for something to bite the hook, and because I enjoy outdoor activities.

Last weekend I went fishing at Lake Perry, which is located about 60 miles north of Oklahoma City. I had to go alone because my friend cancelled because he said that he had to work that day. Lake Perry is surrounded by a lot of trees and some tall grass, but everything was still dormant when I was there.

Once on the lake, I waited some hours, and I almost gave up, but something finally took the bait. It was a large catfish that almost broke my line. After fighting it, I finally caught it. I took some photos and then unhooked the fish and put it back in the water.

It was a very nice day because I had a lot of fun. I thought I had driven to that place in vain until I finally caught a fish, so my trip was successful. If I have the chance to go fishing again soon, I really hope to catch a black Bass.

Josue Rodriguez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Some Famous Places in America

We spent a two-week vacation traveling to some famous places in western America during fall break.

In Page, Arizona, we took a boat tour on charming

Lake Powell in the morning. In the afternoon, we went with a tour guide in his truck to Antelope Canyon in the middle of a desert. In the cave, we



had to be very careful because there were snakes and spiders. In some parts of the cave, it was dark and narrow. There were also small holes where sunlight was peeking in the cave. The guide was an expert in helping us take plenty of photos of gorgeous scenes.

We visited Zion National Park in Utah. It was very hot. but still fun. We saw deer, goats, and gazelles. We got excited when one of the deer came very close to us. There was a shuttle for all the trails, and we preferred the easy trails with beautiful views.

In California, we went to California Adventure Park. There were many enjoyable rides. Guardians of the Galaxy was dark and scary with big sudden drops,

so my daughter screamed a lot. After that frightening ride, we watched Elsa and Anna's live performance, which was my daughter's favorite. On the second day, we drove to San Francisco. It is one of the most beautiful cities in the United States. We began our trip walking on the Golden Gate Bridge, but the weather was very windy, cold, and foggy, so it was difficult to have a good view. Still, we were able to take many nice photos. After that, we went to Alamo Square, Pier 39, and Lombard Street with impressive views.

We returned to our house after a long road trip full of fun. We were all happy and glad to have this trip.

Zeynep Saglam
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Visit One of the Best Beaches in Mexico

I like to travel to get to know new places. I prefer

natural places, like beaches, mountains, and forests because they are relaxing for me. I also like to experience cities for their infrastructure, economy, and culture. But the thing that I enjoy in both is the gastronomy.

Mexico is a beautiful country, with an extensive diversity of gastronomy, beaches, and magical towns. One of the beaches that I visited three years ago was Cancun. It's one of the best beaches in Mexico. Cancun has a vegetation reserve and virgin beaches. There are a couple of places I recommend for their cuisine. One restaurant that we enjoyed was in the park Xcaret where the food was delicious. On the Island of Women, we ate tikin xic fish, a big fish with seasoning.

The Island of Women is in Cancun, and it is a beautiful place. It is 4.97 miles long and .3 miles wide. The northern part has one of the best beaches in the world, and in the south the visitors can view

the sunrise. The people sell handicrafts like bags, plates, and keychains. North Beach is one of the 10 best beaches in the world.

We also went to Tulum in Cancun, where you can find Cenotes, which are sinkholes. They are like a natural pool. The people who swim in them are not permitted to use chemical sun protectors in order to keep the water clean. You can find cenotes as deep as 21 feet.

You should visit Mexico. If you plan to visit a beach, I recommend Cancun. The weather is very nice in almost all months, and you can experience nature, adventure parks, culture, and monuments.

Maria Serrano
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Destinations

I long to travel to many different countries, and I get excited about any kind of travel: sea travel, road

trips, or air travel. I remember a trip to Hawaii several years ago when we visited Kauai Island, also called the Garden Island.

My whole family flew to Kauai. Kauai is a very lovely island and we spent a week there. We hiked to the Hanakapiai Waterfall as well as sat on the beach to enjoy the gorgeous sunsets. The beach was very nice, with white sand and a calm, peaceful ocean. The sunsets on the beach were breathtaking with the ocean shimmering with sparkles of red and orange. It was a sensational trip, and I'm planning to go back to Hawaii someday.

I have also visited different states. Our sea cruise to Alaska was unforgettable. We took a lot of beautiful pictures. My favorite one is a glacier photo. The cruise ship was able to get close to the glaciers, and we spent about 3 hours just viewing and photographing the glaciers. It was magnificent. A couple of the towns we stopped at were Sitka and Juneau.

Our cruise ship arrived in Sitka early in the morning, and we walked around the small shops. The day was nice, and we went to the mountains by cable car and could look down towards the shore and the ocean. It was a fabulous adventure.

On my future vacations, I want to visit Europe. I would like to go to Germany and Spain because I am interested in the history of these countries. I dream about traveling around the world and visiting different countries. I enjoy learning about new cultures and meeting new people from all over the world.

Marina Smith

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Unforgettable Pokhara

About two years ago, I visited beautiful Pokhara, Nepal, with my husband. When we reached Pokhara, we went to the guest house to drop off our luggage, and then we left to go boating on Fewa Lake.

Fewa Lake is located near Pokhara, and it enhances the overall attraction of the city. It is a large lake with green water, a temple in the center, and access to a lovely forest on one side. I heard that in the morning, we can see the image of Fishtail Mountain from the lake; but sadly, we missed it because we arrived at five in the evening. Still, it was a lovely moment because of the stunning lake views and a cool breeze.

The next day, we went to David Falls, a cave, and other charming places. We wanted to experience paragliding, but unfortunately, because of the rainy day, we could not. One of my friends was living in Pokhara, so we went to meet her, and we spent a few hours at her house before going back to the guest house.

The following day, we went to Bandipur, a small city located in the hilly region of Nepal, where we saw spectacular eye-level views of the snow-cov-

ered mountain before returning home. I will always remember this unforgettable moment in my life.

Student from Nepal
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Istanbul

Most people all around the world like to travel and there are lots of places to visit and travel. One of my favorite places to travel is Istanbul. It is a historical place that everyone must see. People in my country travel a lot to Turkey because it is near my country. Istanbul is a wonderful city because it has many historical places, especially mosques that attract tourists.

Istanbul has a variety of mosques. One of the most popular and important mosques in Istanbul is Süleymaniye Mosque. It is a beautiful place to see. It has architectural character and historical context in and out of the building. This mosque is an

important building in Istanbul and people can walk around it. Also, this famous mosque is so big that people can take professional pictures there.

I really recommend Istanbul to see and enjoy, because one thing that people should know in their life, is to know about different places in the world.

Farnoosh Taghizadeh
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Jamaica

My name is April Tripp. I live in Grove, Oklahoma. I moved to Grove several years ago from Olathe, Kansas.

I have never traveled very far, but one of my dreams is to go to Jamaica. I think Jamaica would be a fun place to visit from the pictures I have seen in books, on television, and on the internet. It looks like a place to relax and have fun. Jamaica is located in the Caribbean Sea not too far from the United States.

I would like to eat some of their food. I saw pictures of their food on the internet and it looked so good. There were some pictures of the jungle and some wild animals. I would like to pick some seashells on the beach. The water looks so pretty and blue. I really like the beat of their music, and I would like to meet some of the Jamaican guys. They look so cool. There is so much stuff in Jamaica that I would like to see and do. I hope I get to go there some day. If I do get to go, I would rather fly than take a cruise because I would get there faster by plane than by boat.

April Tripp

Delaware County TANF Literacy, Jay

My Trip to China

Seven years ago, I traveled for the first time to China as part of a conference on HIV/AIDS for physicians. China is the most populous country in the world,

and its people are very kind and welcoming. I was able to visit several cities as well as several tourist sites. I experienced a park, mountain, zoo, museum, and the Great Wall of China.

The Great Wall of China is an extremely big wall, like a mountain. It is very tall, taller than everything around it, with so many people. This great wall is like huge stairs, and everybody goes up these stairs to have a view of the city.

In China, all the streets are crowded with locals, and there are people everywhere. The traffic is always heavy, and the streets are always overcrowded. It's a spectacular place to visit, with people going here, there, and everywhere. For me, seeing so many people from the population circulating in the city made a big impression on me.

John Tshiyoyo

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

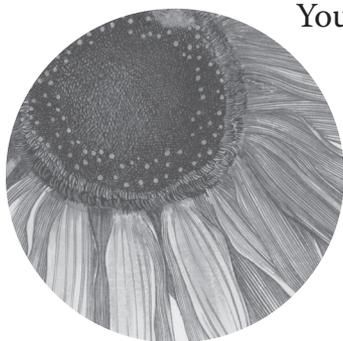
Addicted to Travel

Do you like to travel? I love to travel, whether locally or overseas. I can find something interesting in each place. The most important thing is discovering something new. If you ask me why, I can give you three reasons.

The first reason is history. My favorite place for traveling is Europe. I like walking through and gazing at the ancient parts of cities. You can touch the culture of other nations through their painting, sculpture, and architecture. When you stand near a church that was built 500 years ago and think about the people who lived there at that time, what they did and how they thought, you are filled with awe and wonder.

Another exciting part of travel for me is trying new food. It's incredible to try authentic food. I have eaten sausages with cabbage in Munich, sandwiches with herring in Amsterdam, frog legs and snails in Paris, salt salmon in Helsinki, and fish and chips in

London. This was amazing! I will never forget it.



You should follow only one rule when you choose the place for a meal—go where the locals eat.

Lastly, the emotional aspect.

Traveling gives people so many positive feelings that these can't compare with anything else. You can meet different people, listen to their stories, and immerse yourself in the culture. Also, the greatest joy in traveling is often in the excitement of the journey rather than in reaching the destination. I agree with this because often, before the trip, we fantasize about how our destination will look, feel, sound, and taste.

In conclusion, I recommend that if you have the time and money, explore our wonderful planet. I guarantee it will give you more than you can imagine.

Anna Usoltseva

OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC

Travel to Lake Tenkiller

In July 2019 my family and brothers went on vacation to Lake Tenkiller. We rented a cabin for 4 days and 3 nights. The lake isn't far from the city, just a 2-hour drive to get there. It's a big lake with a boat station and restaurant bar. There is an area with a lot of sand like a beach where you can swim, and they also have grills all around the lake to have a barbecue. It's a nice place to relax and rest and spend your vacation days.

The first day, we arrived in the afternoon, so we just toured the place really quick and returned to the cabin. Our cabin was on the top of the mountain and had a grill to cook, and the weather was perfect. The cabin had a great view of the lake. We made a fire and cooked outside to be comfortable. At night, the neighbors shot off fireworks because it was Independence Day. We went to sleep very late that night.

The next day we went to the lake and rented a boat and went boating all day. We enjoyed the scenery of trees and mountains, the big, beautiful lake, some fishes, and a lot of people on vacation. It's a beautiful place to forget about your stress!

Gilberto Vazquez
OCCC Adult Learning Center, OKC



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