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Virginia Adult Learning
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Voices from the Field: Adult Learner Perspectives on Writing and Submitting to SPOTLIGHT

Date recorded: April 19, 2022

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Welcome to *Voices from the Field*, our podcast, highlighting the stories of adult education, educators and learners around the state of Virginia. We're very excited by this special issue of *Voices* today, which is a spotlight on our new publication of learner writing: the *SPOTLIGHT* publication. I'm joined by two of the student writers who contributed work to our first issue, and we're going to talk to them a little bit about how they feel about writing and writing instruction in their adult classes. Thanks so much for joining us today. Can you introduce yourself please?

Inocencia: My name is Inocencia Toribio [Garcia]. I gone this school, high school adult. It's in Springfield. Writing ... my country is that dancing, it is dancing popular, the name is Marinera. So the question you're pulling on the screen was: how is I liked it the writing? I like the writing but not too much. But I try especially for my teacher because she is pushing every time, every day, and every day she says: remember, I doing, you can do it.

Host: I just really appreciate how you kept with it day after day. And I remember reading your story about the Marinera dance. It was something I, it was new to me. So it was great to read and really made me smile.

Inocencia: Yeah, yes. But my feel is going: our writing is so happy because I reading something but the my, part of my family, you know, my nephew, he is dancing. I looking every single days he is practice, and he's improving more and more and more more the days, passed the days you know. Now he have a 18 years old, and he's teaching; now he's teaching my daughter, and say, man, it's very fast passed the years. Yeah. I very happy when I writing; it is especially for his dancing, you know? Because I love it, I like it. It is part of my country; it is part of me.

Host: I really love to hear how you're, you're highlighting your family; you're highlighting your country. And also the idea of learning and getting better and better, and I really see that connection to learning English, too; he's learning dancing and teaching dancing, and we're learning writing skills.

Rosa: Hello, my name is Rosa Hernandez. I am happy to be part of the *SPOTLIGHT* program, and you have a question in there saying that if I enjoyed writing if it was easy. I am gonna start saying that it was enjoyable for me. Because, first thing, I never had the experience to be in a school education and part of that that I was enjoying, so I can start organizing main idea and supporting idea and about setting, chapter, objects, adverb, noun, pronoun. All those things is part of adult education that I was, I am happy to be in the school to learning all these things that I was not know, before I start school. And I think that I can answer that question about the writing. So it was a challenging to do that, and I was, like I said, I was enjoy—exciting, I was: it was easy because I, and the more the teacher's teaching is, the more I want to know. I was exciting that I want to learn. And that was first thing, and be part of the *SPOTLIGHT* that inspired me, because I think that it's when I, when I start I was thinking that I'm not going to be able to do it because I never write. How would I put these things together? This is when I started, I can put thing like I already say, organizing, chapter things like that. And that was, it comes more easily more enjoying to write to *SPOTLIGHT*. Yes, and now I can probably, we're not the best speakers, but we are trying our best, you know, to let the world know that if we're doing, if we're doing this, other people can do it. And I said, though it's for us, we have a family; we have very done, it's not easy, but it's possible. And for me, like, I never, I mean, I don't have a high education, but I, I am doing this because I want to be part of this world that have education so I can educate myself, you know, and it's nice to be part of a *SPOTLIGHT*. It's really good.

Host: It's awesome to have you both in the *SPOTLIGHT*. And it is so inspiring to read your writing and hear your stories. And Rosa, I really admired how you talked about practice and how you really made that statement that if you can do it, anyone can. And also, I'm a writer, so I really enjoyed hearing how you focused on the structure. And even though it was new for you, you learned both those things about how to put the parts of a story together, and also how to put the sentence together. Really combine all those skills.

Rosa already touched on this, but both of you can answer. You can either answer: How does it feel to be a part of our new state publication *SPOTLIGHT*? Or, how did it feel to share your work in your own program? Because I know you had a class celebration, where you read your work and shared it with people in your community.

Rosa: Oh yes. I was like, I am keen. I'm keep talking. Yes. Okay. Yes, like I say it was very nice. I was so happy and I am motivate myself and I, we, want to tell others that, you know, I think it's important for us to get educate ourselves. Because that way we are a part of this world that we can cooperate to have a better world if we are educate ourselves. And, like I say, it was not easy because you know, we have a lot of things, but it's important that we focus on what we're doing. I haven't had a chance to do this in a long time. I wish but, you know, to be in school before, but nothing is gonna stop me because I have my vision to learn. I don't, probably I don't know nothing, but I am: My focus is to learning. Every day, one word is gonna make the difference in this world. And to show that we can do it, nothing—whatever is easy, everybody can have it; but nothing that is not easy, no, nobody wants to have it. But, I don't know if I am confused now. But I think: it's not easy, but we can do it.

Host: Yes. Put in that hard work. I love that you said that education can help make a better world. Inocencia, did you have anything to add about being part of *SPOTLIGHT* or participating in sharing your work and how that felt?

Inocencia: So when that the first day they talk, my teacher. And that's I thinking and say: I don't know. I don't know, what is the *SPOTLIGHT*? I think is not very interesting. Was passed, passed the day, passed the day, and she say, all the time, okay, on Friday, on other days, she's just, she's asked somebody's help writing or something, how to help. And, say, I don't know, I try. I try, but I scared. I'm nervous. But, say, Rosa is never going to school, you know, is for complication here and because working, the kids, and they have, you know, every day is different. And then the teacher said, she's never say, no, you're not doing; and she say, you can doing. And how to talk to her: I remember how to talk to her, say, I don't know teacher; I don't know how, I think, this writing good. First, I don't know how, I speaking and other people are writing and other people but she say, you try; you keep going, you keep going. And say, okay, and one day, say okay, I can, I can, I have to, she's helping me. But today, Rosa is, the education is in focus, the same with Rosa and me, is focus my education, because I need a know how to help my daughter, is I know how to or when she's have homework. And she say, before, she say, mom, can you help? Ah, I don't know. You know, it is very difficult. But now, and she say, mom, can you do it? Can you can you come with me how to writing? But I don't know how. And now and say, okay, yes, I can do it. I help you. And she's so happy. And that is my every day is I go in the school because especially for her because just she is needing, you know.

Host: That's awesome. I love how you persisted and were successful. And now you're helping your daughter be successful. That's a great story.

Kim West: I wanted to share a little something there. Hi, this is Kim West. Hey, guys! I am their teacher, just here for support today. But one of the things I wanted to pull out of both Inocencia and Rosa, is this issue: How does it feel to be published? Second, but first: what inspired you to write your piece? And did you have a specific audience in mind? And what I remember as their teacher was, they were reluctant, that it was something that was new—this whole idea about writing in terms of the process and their capability and wondering about that. The second issue was, I don't have a special story. That's what they both felt. And when they say that I wouldn't give up, every day, I would talk to them, what I was talking with them about was their lives. And, and sharing: there are things that you're doing that are not just ordinary; even if they were ordinary, it would be fine to write about, but they were doing things that were extraordinary, extraordinary. So it may seem ordinary to you, but [not] to the readers that you will influence just by sharing your story—that's the value of being published. And I would talk up the whole idea of being published and what that meant. It gave a voice to your story. And then, Inocencia one day said: I know! And she talked to her family, she had talked to her family about it, and she came back the next day, with a draft of this thing she loved, the *Marinera*. And it took off from there. With Rosa, she was saying: Oh, I don't know, I just work, and I come to the United States. Do you remember saying that, Rosa? I just came here. And it's no big deal. As I was talking to her, her story is incredible. Rosa came to this country as a 13 year old girl alone, alone, 100% alone, and is now here today, thriving—working, family, married woman, student—all of these things are extraordinary. And so Rosa's piece, "Focus and Determination," definitely speaks to her life. So, to me, they inspired *me* as their teacher, and I kept getting more and more excited every time it was time to talk to them, because I

wanted to know what was going to happen next in their story. So, hopefully, that speaks to how you guys felt, Rosa and Inocencia. I'm not sure. But that's how I felt.

Inocencia: Yes, thank you teacher.

Rosa: Yeah, thank you. Yes. Like, the teacher was saying that, in the beginning, I don't have no idea about how I'm going to start. Day by day, I was learning to make the structure of my own story. I know I have a story, but I never know that I can writing my own story and put things together, because now I understand how this happened. How can I put it, one by one, you know, the main idea. I mean, you know, they organize, you know, by organize the, my own story. It's very, it's very important. For me, it was important. It's something that I learn. And, like she say, I came from ... I was 13 years old, it was not easy. But I grew up in a small village of El Salvador. When in my country, I wish to go to school but my parents, they cannot supporting me to go to school, and coming here at this country, they have a lot of opportunity. I mean, I feel a blessing to be part of this very blessing culture in this country, that it's no matter what color you are. And it's important, and I am here. I came and I have a 20 years old boy that I cannot supporting him enough because my speech, my understanding was bad. And now I can say, I feel like I understand a lot now, so I can help my two daughters. I have one that, she's three years old and she's on pre-K. Now the another one is in kindergarten, but before I can go and read to her, but I don't even know myself. I was reading, and I don't have the comprehension to make, to ask question for her. It's very difficult, but I think is difficult, but in the meantime for me is happy, to speak this—that I can be able to help my daughter with confidence. You know, I can ask about what happened in the story. What the story gets city? What is this? All this question I mean; I feel confident, and I feel good about to, I can be when my daughter and read and understand myself. I can make and understand. It's very, it's very, it feels good about ... it feels good.

Host: I hear that confidence is exciting. I really thank you both for sharing your stories. This was not a question I, we came up in advance, but you are both so inspirational. Is there advice you have for other adult learners around the state? Or for teachers? Would you share any advice you have?

Rosa: For me, I think my advice that I would have for every person that have a chance to hear our record is that no matter what situation you are in or what are those tacklers on your life, if you are determined and focused, you going to make things get happening. You can make things happening by focusing, by determinate yourself, and it's important. It's like, determinate and focus, I think, is the most important thing because if you're focus, if you determinate, nothing is gonna stop you. And I think that's the most important thing is, like, no matter what, sometimes I don't want to go to school, let's say that, but I say: I know what I want. I know what I need, and I need to go to school, as part of my focus is to go to school and be there, no matter I want or no; I have to go to school because there's always gonna be something to do—believe me. It's, I don't go to school because I don't have nothing to do. I mean, I'm a person who lives day, whatever I make day by day, but I have to go to school, and this is gonna give me a better opportunity, and I don't have to put my job first. I have to put my my education first because that way my, my educator is gonna make my family to get educators too, and they can make another educated, that's how educations go. And the job, you know, I can go to work. I know it's part of our life. But I think it's important to be determinate and focus and educate ourselves. I think that's it, that's very important. And like I say, always gonna be something, but no matter what, we has to be

determinate of what we need. No excuses, because I think I believe an excuses life. But I am stopped doing that. And I don't want others, other young kids that can hear this. It is like they has to know that the main thing has to be is that they has to educate theirself. Otherwise they are going to be like us, and we don't want this for our young, how can I say, the young kids, we don't want them: we want them to be successful in life. As parents and we has to force them, but first thing, we has to be examples, too. It's not like, it's simple to say, do this. But we have what we were doing. So as a parent, we have to compromise ourselves first to be educates, because that way we can educates our kids, our families coming you know, and I don't know, I get excited. But I want to say that I'm so happy. And I want everyone understand, like, how important the educated is. You don't realize until you are in my position, now. People, they have a chance to educate theirself. They don't do it; I don't have the opportunity when I grew up, I has to work for my family. But that is not an excuse. It makes my feeling. It makes myself feeling, you know, kinda emotionally. But in the meantime, I has to understand that things happen for a reason. And it's my responsibility to get better myself every day, is no one's responsibility [but mine]. And I have to take responsibility for them. And that's what I'm doing and this is what I've been doing. I've worked since I came this country. I was working, I grew up with, I was raising my kids. I don't need by the government. I was working hard myself for grow up my kids. I was not educated enough but I wanted him to be, but I was wrong. Because I should be educating myself first—that way I can see my son successful, but I don't, I can't expect my growth be successful. When I'm working, I'm hanging around. Losing my time. No, I have to be educated myself that way, I'm gonna expect my girls to be successful because that's how things go.

Host: Yeah, I love the passion. The example there, really leading by example with your education.

Rosa: Yeah. And I apologize if I say something wrong, you know, I'm trying to learn English and I am speaking with my heart and with respect to anyone who listens this is that we have to be a model for our kids. In any ways, we have to just try.

Host: I really appreciate you speaking out and speaking from the heart. Inocencia, do you have any advice you would share with adult learners or with teachers? And anyone listening?

Inocencia: No, is that, that's that the same one does talking, is Rosa is talking, everything, what say. It depend, what she say, it depend what you want, you know. Is, is the dependent different? Is not the same one, I think, is there—like the Rosa and me is different, is that the people different, you know, is simply is that Rosa is very hard before, and here, I know, is the same one to say: before I have to working and working and never say, I never say: okay, I have to go in the school because I need it. Before I have to working a lot every days, we are non stop because I need to have my families and need to have to support and have to help my family. And when, when I have a my, my kids and is, my, my life is different, you know? Is changing everything and say: oh my gosh, I say, why, why not go in before in the school? But never is late, you know, that I can do it, and now my, my husband say: you can going. Some, some days I work and some days I go in the school. But again, I going, you know.

Host: You can and you have and you are. I think so many people will be able to relate to that story of working hard and really struggling to find time for education and how your, your family and your children kind of changed that and you were able to find time to learn and improve your English. And also, what

you said, that it's never too late. It really is never too late. And I know people listening to this will be very inspired by the messages you have shared. Would either of you like to read from the work you did for this podcast?

Rosa: Yes. I am from El Salvador, and this is my story about being in the United States of America. I was born in a small village, La Hadura, near the border of Guatemala. I have a wonderful family with my father, mother, brother and sister. My life in my village was very happy because of them.

But things started to happen when I was 13 years old. I noticed that other families had better food and more comfortable homes than I had. Also, I began to hear people talk about going to the United States for a better opportunity. I also heard that it cost about \$10,000.00 to do that. I had no such money.

I only went to third grade in school. When I was nine, I got up at 4:00 in the morning to help my family by selling tamales. I was able to provide breakfast for my family, especially for my brothers, who were younger than me. My father grew corn and watermelon, and at one point a flood washed away all of his crops ... and profits. I regularly saved money from my sales when no one else in my family did. I was able to help my father and my family through that time.

Then I decided to escape. I wanted a better life – for myself. I wanted to go to school. I started my journey by walking and first crossed the river to the border of Guatemala. I had to look out for the immigration people. I made it to the United States because someone helped me at the border and I went to their home in Texas.

Once in the United States, I spent a large amount of time working and then became an adult and mother. I thought of something else: There is more to life than just work. Part of my Spanish culture is to work every day as the only purpose of life. This should not be. We are ruining our kids. I was 17 when I had my son. I had to leave him with a babysitter very often so that I could go to school. I also had to work to have money. I knew that I needed to help my son be successful. I couldn't help him if I couldn't help myself by getting my education and earning money. I had to be available for school meetings sometimes. This meant that I must miss work ... and miss earning money.

I found a way to make it work to help my son. I was determined. I joined the PTA and took part in activities that were held during after-school hours that I could attend and not miss work. My son was able to see me involved, which made him proud. I also learned new parenting skills that were different from my culture but that were very helpful for my son as well. I enjoyed that time.

Inocencia: Good job, Rosa, good job.

Rosa: Thank you.

Host: Yes, thank you for sharing.

Rosa: You're welcome.

Host: Inocencia, would you like to read? It's optional.

Inocencia: Okay, I try it. I think my speaking is not the same as the Rosa, but I trying.

The Marinera is a wonderful dance, and it is a symbol of being Peruvian. It is an elegant couples' dance and shows loving conversation between the partners.

The Marinera Festival is held every January in the city of Trujillo. This event is very important and includes parades, horseback riding and dance presentations. I love the Marinera because I am from Peru and my nephew is a Marinera dancer.

There are schools for Marinera, and my nephew, Brian Flores, attended one. He now performs at parties, dinners, and birthday celebrations. He may perform alone, with a female partner, or with a group – depending on what the guests wants.

Peruvian Independence Day is July 28, and he performs everywhere that day, as a celebration. Also, La Marinera was given the honor as the Cultural Heritage of the Nation. I am so happy that my nephew is a part of this Peruvian tradition. Our family is extremely proud of him, and I love my nephew!

Host: Thank you for sharing!

Rosa: Thank you. Thank you for listening. We thank you for having this meeting now.

Host: It's really a thrill. It's a total pleasure to talk to you both.

Inocencia: So lucky, Rosa, because you and me ...!

Kim West: This is Kim West again, as you're, you guys, you guys are laughing. I know why they're laughing. They support each other very much in class, you know, and people in the classroom, all of them help across the rows to one another. There are 12 students, some of them have had more exposure to speaking, reading, and education than others. And they have little mini groups within the groups but everyone helps each other. Rosa and Inocencia are the strongest, most enthusiastic people. I, clearly I can say, in my class, love it! And, I will, about the *SPOTLIGHT* project, I can't wait until it's published because I feel like the rest of the state, the counties, the schools, the educators, the students get to feel my joy in sharing these stories that I've been bubbling about since November, that I've been excited about for months. So some of the excitement you see in those two definitely reflects what's been in our classroom the whole time. So I just love having you guys as students. Totally.

Rosa and Inocencia: Thank you so much.

Host: It's been great to hear and read, and if you're listening, if you haven't read *SPOTLIGHT* yet, I know you want to now, and you'll be able to find it online. We are so happy to play a small part in highlighting these voices who are really inspirational and just are the heart of what adult learning is about. And also happy to be able to showcase writing skills.