

A bright, glowing spotlight beam shines down from the top center of the page, illuminating the text below. The background is a dark blue with a fine halftone dot pattern.

**2024**

# ***SPOTLIGHT***

*an anthology of work by Virginia adult education learners*

# SPOTLIGHT

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**A note on language:** The pieces appearing in **SPOTLIGHT** have been lightly edited by the editorial team with a focus on eliminating typos while preserving the evidence of adult learners’ developing writing skills and their authentic voices. The editorial team has also made some decisions about spacing and other formatting.

# My Why...

*by Elisavet Betancourt-Tapia*

I would like to talk about WHY I want my GED. There's a lot of reasons I want my GED. One, to show my kid I can do it. Two, it's important to have it. Three for me to prove to myself I can do it and it means a lot to me.

I have tried for a long time to get my GED. To me, it's like starting school all over and to be honest it makes me feel overwhelmed. My spelling is not the greatest and let's not talk about my grammar and punctuation. But I am hoping that I get better while I am in class for my GED. My kids are excited that I am going to class. I want to show them it's never too late to get where you need to be. I keep telling them that they don't want to be like me, that I didn't finish school. I tell them that it's hard to get a job without a high school diploma or GED certificate. And if they do get a job it will be one that they may hate. That's WHY to me it's important. You end up with a job that you hate to put up with.

Getting my GED means a lot to me. I want to feel very proud of myself and I want my kids and family to be proud too. I have a great feeling about this. I am going to push forward. This is going to be a great journey. I am not giving up. I will get my GED. I know my WHY.

# From Struggle to Strength: A Refugee's Journey to Belonging

*by Tajaldeen Ashour*

On the quiet streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, I arrived as a refugee, bearing the weight of displacement from my home in Turkey. The unfamiliar environment reflected my initial feelings of disconnection and the daunting challenge of adapting to a new environment. In the midst of uncertainty, a decision came to me— to travel to learn English. Through books, classes, and relentless effort, I encountered both struggles and triumphs in my pursuit of this new language. Every word that was conquered was like a victory, a step towards building a life in this foreign land.

As I came across unfamiliar words, I realized how real the struggles of understanding a language is. Each language barrier felt like a mountain to climb, but I was determined to explore them. Each barrier became a stepping stone to discover new words. I discovered unexpected strength which was one of personal growth. The seeds of personal growth once planted, now flourished. The paths in my journey began to expand.

During this trip, I found comfort in the company of other refugees. Together, we participated in an educational system and shared stories of resilience and hope. Language became more than a means of communication. It became a bridge that connected hearts and strengthened understanding. Dealing with local people brought moments. The challenges, triumphs, and connections shaped cultural exchange. Sharing experiences became a way to break down walls and develop a sense of self-belief. Through these connections, personal growth was revealed and resilience emerged as a beacon in the face of adversity.

As the days turned into months, a sense of belonging began to take root. The community embraced us and we, in turn, found a place to call home. Reflecting on this transformative journey, I realized the power of hope for a brighter future. The challenges, triumphs, and connections shaped not only my language , abilities but also my in this new community. The story of a refugee became a story of resistance, unity and the unshakable belief that a brighter tomorrow awaits in a foreign land.

# The Jazz Concert

*by Charles*

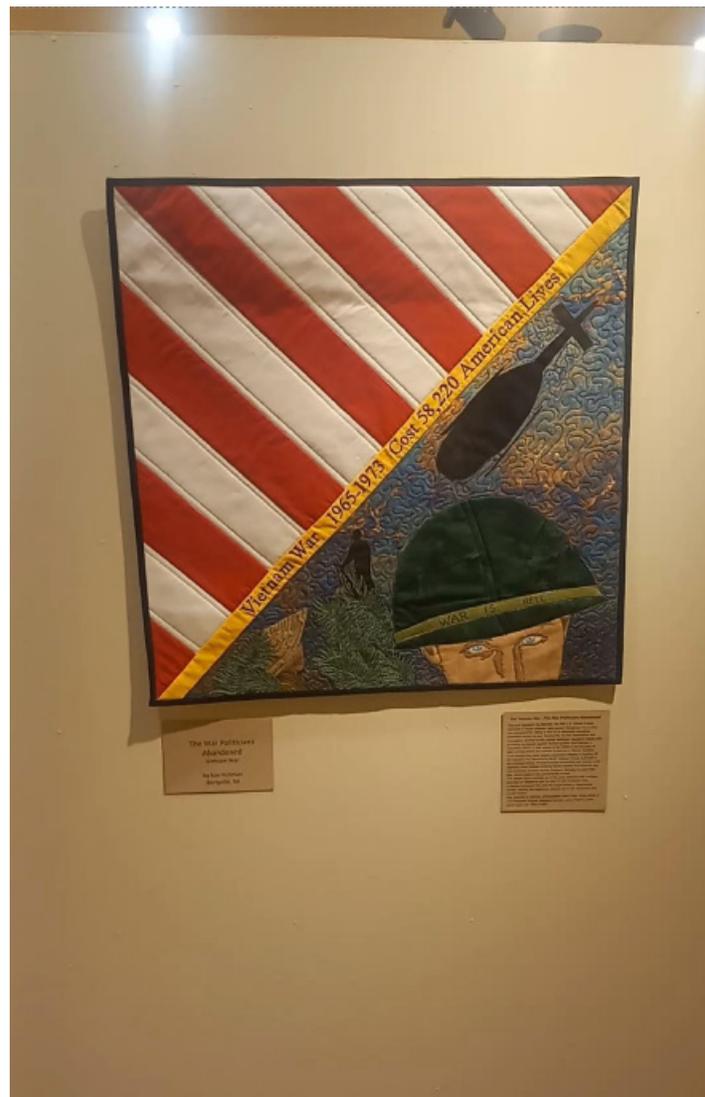
I went to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on November 15, 2023. I went to see my friend James Gates play jazz. It was very crowded, so I got there early. I saved a table for the class.

I had a great time.

# The Vietnam Conflict

*by Charles*

I went to the Perkinson Center with the class to see the wall pictures. I looked at quilts about U.S. wars. Some of my friends fought in the Vietnam War. I liked the quilts from that time.



# Letter to Mayor Sherman P. Lea by BRL Learners

*by learners enrolled in Blue Ridge Literacy's daily Workforce Preparation classes*

We use the bus to go to English class. We use the bus to go to Commonwealth Catholic Charities. We use the bus to go to the Social Services office and the Social Security office. We use the bus to go to the library. We use the bus to go to the bank. We use the bus to go grocery shopping. We use the bus to go to work. Our family members use the bus to go to college. We use the bus to go to the park. We use the bus to go to the clinic. We use the bus to visit family and friends. We use the bus to go to the mosque or church.

The bus doesn't come often enough. The bus has limited service on Saturdays. The bus doesn't run on Sundays. The bus stops far from our destinations and homes. The bus doesn't stop long enough for passengers to get on. The bus stops aren't covered. The bus stops don't have seats.

We need more buses because every year the population gets bigger. We need bus service on Sunday because my family members go to work or go to another place. We need bus stops closer to our homes. We need seats at bus stops because people have to wait for the bus. We need covered bus stops because of the weather. We need bus drivers to respect passengers.



*Blue Ridge Literacy Learners visited Roanoke's Municipal Building in September 2023 and handed their letter to the City's Assistant City Managers. This visit was planned as part of the City Of Roanoke's 2023 Welcoming Week programs.*

# The Small Hotel Room

by Ya Li Fan

I have been working at the Fairfield Hotel for almost 5 years. In the past five years I have gone from a person who knew nothing about house cleaning to a very skilled veteran and I feel somewhat proud of it.

The Fairfield Hotel is a warm family, where employees from different countries gather every morning. They greet each other in English, Spanish and Chinese. Our young and beautiful boss Erica often greets me in Chinese with a strong American accent. It warms my heart. Sometimes I forget to reply "Thank you" in Chinese. Instead, I say thank you in English smoothly. It makes Erica and I laugh continuously whenever Erica and I meet. This lively and heart-warming scene always makes me laugh from the bottom of my heart.

Erica's approachable and amiable manner towards the employees made me immediately feel a bit in awe of Erica the boss.

Adrianna is a young, friendly and fair foreman. She helps every one of our staff clean the rooms. My English is limited, and Adrianna taught me how to use various disinfectants and write my name on the bottles of disinfectants with a pen.

Employees Lettie and Diana are mother and daughter. They are veteran employees who have been working in the hotel for more than ten years. When I first started working, I often asked Lettie for help when I encountered problems that I didn't understand. Lettie always smiled and told me what to do.

I remember one time when I was cleaning my room and I knocked on the door. I forgot what housekeeping said. I said "Housepek'ing" smoothly. I know I made a mistake, but I couldn't remember what the housekeeping department said. When I saw Lettie in the corridor, I gestured with my hand to knock on the door. Lettie smiled and said "Houseman". I knew she was joking. This heartwarming scene.

After a long period of working, we employees get along very harmoniously. I feel like something is missing after not seeing each other for a few days. Whenever I finish work, I drive my car and face the sunset on my way home. I always singing loudly, hoping that tomorrow will be better...

Oh! The small hotel room is the big stage of my life!

# Moffee's Magic Backpack

by Stephen Solomon

Here is Moffee Moth. Gay, carefree, and out for a stroll with his magic backpack. Say, look at all those signs. Why Moffee doesn't even see them. Let's see what they say, "Danger!" "Do Not Enter" "Keep Out" "This Means You". The last sign says "Beware of the Circle K". Moffee Moth might have seen an apple tree. How did Moffee get way up here? Moffee Moth used his magic backpack. He opened his magic backpack and inside was a grabber toy. He flew up. He used his grabber toy to pick an apple, and he got an apple. He flew down and took a bite. "Delicious," he said. But suddenly, the trio locusts were hiding in the bush to see Moffee Moth with his magic backpack. Muzzy Moth used his binoculars to see what Moffee was doing. How does Moffee Moth get across the lake? He opened his magic backpack and inside was a canoe. "Amazing" whispered Muzzy. He said to the trio locusts, "I must have that magic backpack." The trio locusts had an idea, and then said. "Fear not, we have a plan." Meanwhile, the trio locusts brought a bug vacuum. First, he pushed the red button to suck. Let's see how it works. Moffee Moth heard a vacuum noise. Moffee was sucked down into the bug vacuum and was captured by the trio locusts. "I got Moffee's backpack!" said the locust #2. And he opened his magic backpack, and what did they see? "Nothing." But the trio locusts forgot something. "The magic gloves" they said. "All right, how does it work?" asked locust #1. They took off the lid, and set Moffee free. Moffee Moth opened his magic backpack, and what did the trio locusts see? A vicious dog! A vicious dog chased the trio locusts. Moffee used the bug vacuum to suck the trio locusts. But all of the sudden, he caught Muzzy Moth. Moffee was surprised. He saw Molly Moth. "I told you not to go far away," said Molly Moth. And you know why? Because Moffee Moth had an accident.



Stephen Solomon★

# National Holiday – Vyshyvanka Day

*by Irina Kantimerova*

My name is Irina. I am from Ukraine. Every year on the third Thursday of May in Ukraine, the Day of Vyshyvanka, is celebrated.

Vyshyvanka is a national cloth. It symbolizes beauty, power, independence, happiness, and family memory.

The idea of Vyshyvanka Day was suggested in 2006 by Lesia Voroniuk, then a student of Chernivtsi University. She suggested that her classmates and students choose one day and wear vyshyvanka shirts all together. Later it attracted the Ukrainian diaspora around the world as well as supporters of Ukraine.

In 2011 was marked by setting the Guinness World Record for the largest number of people dressed in embroidered shirts and gathered in one place. More than 4,000 people in vyshyvanka shirts gathered on Chernivtsi's Central Square.

For many years, the vyshyvanka serve as a talisman for Ukrainians. Vyshyvanka is a powerful amulet against misfortunes: each stitch kept love and warmth of the soul.

Each region of Ukraine has its own traditions of embroidery and symbolism of ornaments.

Now Vyshyvanka Day has a special meaning – Ukrainians are forced to defend their national authenticity and fight for it, giving their lives.



*My name is Irina. I am from Ukraine. I studied at Blue Ridge Literacy*

# A Special Day to Show Love

*by Milena Alfonso*

The way in which we show our love, affection or appreciation to others may be different according to customs or personal preferences. Caring words, good deeds, gifts, physical contact with warm hugs, and quality time are some examples of the ways we usually express our love for others. In my country Colombia as in most countries, these expressions of affection are part of everyday life, particularly in our family and social environment. However, being able to surprise our loved ones with a beautiful card or a small present on a set day to show our affection and remember how important they are to us make this day a very special date.

Valentine's Day in the United States or Love and Friendship's Day as it is known in Colombia has some similarities in the way it is celebrated in both countries. In the same way that on Valentine's Day gifts are exchanged, chocolates are shared and cards are given with endearment messages, on the Love and Friendship's Day these represent the most traditional ways of showing our love and affection for others. Dinners in restaurants and romantic nights in hotels are other ways but these are exclusive for couples in love, engaged or married.

The date of this celebration is different in Colombia. While the Love and Friendship's Day is celebrated annually on the third Saturday in September, in the United States Valentine's Day is celebrated annually on 14 February.

Another difference is the way the gifts are exchanged. In Colombia the tradition of the "secret friend" is common. It is an activity that takes place during the first or second week of September, in which children and adults participate in different environments such as family, academics or work. It consists of introducing small pieces of paper with the participants' names in a container. Then, each participant takes out a piece of paper with the friend's name to whom they will give a gift. During the days before the gift is delivered, the participants sweeten their secret friend anonymously. It consists of giving away all kinds of candy, chocolates, cookies, desserts or fruits with endearment messages until the day the final gift is due, and thus breaking the anonymity.

I have always thought that the secret friend tradition is an exciting way to show affection and anonymously surprise someone for a few days with small details. Despite the fact that people eagerly await the day of the delivery of the gift with the illusion of receiving something they like, I think they like more to discover who is the person who was hidden for days, surprising them with every detail. The most important thing will always be to show our loved ones how much we care and how much we love them. It does not matter which way we choose to do it. So let's take advantage of this date to do it. Even if it is only once a year.

# In My Neighborhood

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*by William Mitchell*

I live in a great neighborhood. They are improving it every day. There are new sidewalks and speed bumps in our neighborhood. These will save lives. The speed bumps will slow down the traffic and now people are walking and riding bicycles. My neighborhood is a nice clean environment. There is no trash around and the streets are clean.

# My Ideal Neighborhood

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*by HTL*

My neighborhood could be a better place with just a few changes. The junk cars take up spaces for other cars. I think the apartment management should move the junk cars in the parking lot. Neighbors could be friendlier by speaking to each other and caring about the neighborhood. If my neighborhood were friendlier the neighbors would watch out for each other and make the neighborhood safe

# Untitled

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*by Viola White*

My neighbor could be improved with just a few adjustments. What makes a good neighborhood is that people love one another, care for one another and look out for one another. To improve the neighborhood, people can help sick people in their homes. Anything people can do to help clean houses would improve the neighborhood.

# Creighton Court

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*by Willie Spellman*

I like my neighborhood but it would be better with some improvements. Some of the buildings are old and run down. New apartments are being built. This makes the whole neighborhood look better. A garden could be added to the neighborhood. It would be a good place for kids to learn how to grow food for themselves. The exercise area could be bigger. Now more children could use it.

# How I Found The READ Center

by Marlin Griffin

Hi. My name is Marlin Griffin. I would like to take a moment to tell you how I came to find out about The READ Center program.

I take a Bible study class two times a week to become a Sunday school teacher. My friend Jim is the one who teaches me about the Bible. He was looking online one day and found The READ Center program that helps people with reading problems and asked me if I would be interested in it. I said yes, so Jim gave me a phone number to call.

I went home and called The READ Center and talked to a nice lady named Chris Miller. We talked for a while, and she gave me a time to come take the reading skills test. When I was done with the test, she said she would call me back, and she did after a week or two. She asked me if I would like to come down to The READ Center and meet with the person who was going to be my tutor, and I said yes.

When I got to The READ Center, I met with a really nice person named Josie, and she introduced me to my tutor. That is how I met Autumn Bedwell. She and I are working out just fine together. I tell everybody about Autumn because she is a great person to be around. She is a really good person for my reading lessons. She helps me to understand different meanings of words so I can teach others and become a better person.

The READ Center program builds up your confidence to be a better person than you think you are, and you do not have to be ashamed to read around others. All my life, before The READ Center came into it, people told me I was dumb and couldn't read well - but thanks to the program, I can read better now. I thank The READ Center for letting me be a part of this.

**Author's Note:** *My name is Marlin, and I was born in Pennsylvania in 1955, one of 17 children. My father was a farmer, and we lived off of the farm. My mother was a housewife. I was pushed through school. No one took the time to teach me to read or write, but when someone showed me how to do something, I could pick it up right away; I'm a "hands-on" learner. I lived in Pennsylvania from 1955 to 1992, working in a bakery from 1980 to 1992. I lost my job and couldn't find another one because of my lack of skills, and I was told I was a person who would not go too far in life. The READ Center is helping me a lot, and I'm reading the Bible better. I found Autumn, who has really improved my self-esteem. She takes her time with me, and now I'm a teacher, too, teaching a Sunday school class. I want to thank all the staff at The READ Center because I am reading better now than I did a year ago, and I also feel better about myself as a person.*

## My Future Goals

by Barbara Yunnuen Cervantes



My goal is to be a nail artist and learn English. I'm taking some English classes and different nail techniques classes.

Next, I want to get a nail technician certificate and improve my English. Then I will open a work portfolio for the customers. I love this job because I can be creative, different, and show my artistic side. After that I want to open a nail studio with a work team. I like this because I like working in a team and it is outside my comfort zone.

Around 7 years I've been away from my home country. I love and miss my country.

## My Name Is Kemya

by Kemya Gul Sadiq

Transitioning from Kabul to the peaceful streets of Blue Ridge, USA has brought immense change for me and my family. The sad events in Kabul pushed us to find safety in this new land – introducing us to many new experiences. After three months here, I am fully engaged in the Blue Ridge Literacy class, working hard to overcome the language barriers that have come with our journey. My husband's unwavering support is clear as he takes me to and from the literacy class, driving through the calm roads of BRL.

The differences between the busy life of Kabul and the quiet of our new surroundings are clear, reminding us of the big change we're experiencing. After my class my focus turn to my children while the memories of Kabul's troubles are still with them. They now find happiness and safety in their new home. Making lunch and dinner for them helps connect our old traditions with the new experiences we're having, mixing the flavors of Afghanistan with those of our new home. This journey from Kabul to Blue Ridge is filled with challenges and hope, our strong determination, the friendly community and the many opportunities here are the foundation on which we are building our new lives far from the difficulties that once shaped our existence.

**Author's Note:** *My name is Kemya. I am from Kabul, Afghanistan. I am a student at Blue Ridge Literacy.*

# Going to Church

*by Nat*

We went to see artwork by Eugene Vango. My favorite picture showed my people going into church. I like the people in the picture. The picture makes me feel better and good. I want to be in the picture. The church looks nice, and I like to go to church. I am Catholic. I go to church to see the Lord.



# Eugene Vango

*by Stephen Solomon*

We are visiting The Perkinson Center. At the art area we saw Vango's paintings. My favorite painting was the jazz painting. I saw a piano, a trumpet, bongos, a bass, and the word "jazz." I liked the colors on the painting because they were so beautiful.

# Going to Church

---

*by Sis D*

I remember going to church and faking the funk. I remember people used to tell me to go fake it until you make it. This is what I would call keeping the pew warm. I used to scribble scabble in my notebook and my best friend would ask me what the pastor said. I would say I didn't know, I did not hear and she would say ok. I would feel so bad and hang my head down. Still I was faking the funk. I did it for years until my daughter came home with a flier and gave it to me. It was on and popping! The flier said anybody who knows anyone who wants to learn to read should call this number. It was the Read Center. So I called the number and this nice person on the line asked me what day I want to come in and take my assessment. I came in and took my assessment and they sent me to the library on 25th street. I met another sweet lady. She is my teacher and now I go to church and I get my notebook out and write the sermon down for today like John 5 1-9, Destined for a Miracle.

# Untitled

---

*by Kimberly Garcia*

This is my short history, when I was 4 years old, my parents got divorced. I grew up next to my parents, I always wondered what it would be like to have my parents, I always saw children with their parents, and I thought how happy I would have been to have a warm hug from my parents. In my childhood and adolescence I suffered abuse, I was never happy, I always thought my life had no meaning, I grew up a shy person, I find it difficult to socialize with people. Today in my adult life, I try to be a happy person, to fight for my son, and ask God every day to help me forget and forgive.

I grew up believing I was not useful, because that's what they always made me believe, that I would never be capable of something, but today, at 26 years old, I dream of fulfilling my dreams and going far for my son. I want him to feel proud of me.

Because I believe in new beginnings, in peace, in good people, and good things in the future, and believe in God that he is the one who gives strength to our lives to continue fighting.

# DON'T GIVE UP

by Helky Castro

My name is Helky Castro, I am from El Salvador. Eight years ago my life changed. I was in a coma for two months, I was pregnant, and the medical team decided I was to stay in the hospital to prevent miscarriage. After one month my baby died. This news made me too sad, I started with complications, I felt sick with fever, I felt cold, I felt chills and shivering. I had infection in my body. The doctors induced vaginal delivery; they administered epidural and in the instant I lost consciousness, I had many complications. My kidneys stopped functioning, I had fever, high blood pressure and blood transfusion but nothing worked. After a week, I had three hearts attacks on the same day. In the coma, days passed, and my body was inflamed for kidney damage. My extremities started turning purple and then later black. I had septic shock. I depended entirely on machines to keep my organs functioning. The only option the doctors gave my family was:

- 1) Keeping me alive but without my limbs
- 2) Allow my passing (death) by keeping my limbs intact

My family decided perform the amputations to save my life and asked God for his mercy, will, grace and goodnesses to reach me. My chances of survival were only 30 per cent.



My family, friends and church community prayed to God and he answer the prayers. All witnessed the miracle.

I was in the hospital for 6 months for my recovery. I woke up after two months without my extremities. It was very hard to me to find my self in that situation because I needed every help to come back to my normal life. Medical team said I was going to walk in a year, but three months later I returned home and started driving and walking.

I am grateful to God for another opportunity to be alive. I have 23 surgeries, 4 amputations. I can walk , I can cook, I can drive, I can shower, I can go to the store alone. I wrote my book to inspire many people to believe God is real and mercy is great.

I am learning English to improve my skills, speak and read English help to communicate and socialize. Speaking English can open many doors to keep growing and help me share my story with people who need motivation and inspiration to keep going and don't give up.

**Author's Note:** My book barcode is <https://a.co/d/dngNomr> .

# I HAVE MORE CHOICES

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*by Joshua Messier*

When I was young in class, the teacher had too many students. I felt like the teacher did not give me enough attention. When I went to the other class, I felt like I was trapped. I realized that I would not be able to do the things I wanted to do. Now I'm getting help from The READ Center.

Now I feel like I can do what I want to do. I get more attention and more independence. I do more on my own.

Now I have more choices.

# I Am A Miracle

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*by Marie T.*

I am a miracle because when my parents conceived me and my mother was carrying me in her, she was having problems. She kept going to the doctor because she was having problems in her pregnancy. The doctor told her to slow down what she had been doing and to try to take it easy and rest. But she could not because she had other children to take care of. So, in the moment, she did rest when it was possible. When she went into labor with me, it was hard for her and me. The problem got so bad, we both almost died on the delivery table, but both of us survived. Therefore, I became a miracle of life.

# How to Make the World a Better Place

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*by Michelle M.*

Helping others can contribute to the greater good and make the world a better place. Then, you can also feel your sense of purpose.

Being kind, showing kindness and compassion to others can help make the world a brighter place.

Having a positive attitude can turn a bad day into a good day. So can a smile.

You can change the way you feel about yourself. When you are positive, you are more likely to see the good in other people and in certain situations.

When you can see the good in people, you can make the world a better place for everyone.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by William A.*

I would buy my dad a Dodge Ram.

Then, I would bring him to Hawaii. We would go to a luau.

Then, we would go to Africa and see Nigeria.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Von W.*

If I had one million dollars, I would open an animal shelter.

We would take care of the homeless animals until they were adopted.

The shelter would also take in rabbits, monkeys, foxes, and other wildlife.

We would feed them until they were healthy enough to return to the wild. If they can not, I would make a zoo to care for them.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Liliana B.*

I would get a house and clothes.

I would pay for my medicine because I need it.

I would pay for my mortgage and taxes.

I would save it and put it in the bank.

I would get some house supplies.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Billy H.*

I would take one half and give it to the Children's Hospital. Then I would take some more to help the homeless people so that they don't live on the streets. Then I would take the rest and put it in the bank to save. Plus, I would give some money to the bus company for the bus drivers who do not make much money.

# Advocacy

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*by Janine B.*

The READ Center is an adult education program for adults that can't read and people that want to read better. There are people that donate their time to teach adults that can't read. This program has one on one tutors and classes. They are very patient and understanding. They have helped me out so much. I was a woman that was embarrassed and ashamed until I met the READ Center a few years back.

The students help each other out. We make each other feel like we do matter and not to give up.

I know there are some people out there that are tired of people doing things for them because they can't read. When you can't read you end up with people in your business. Who wants that? This program can help you get your life back.

# LITERACY

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*by Ephraim A.*

Learn new skills.

Intake useful information.

Teach through words.

Educate.

Read different ways.

Allegory.

Communicate.

Your vocabulary.

# One of My Most Embarrassing Moments

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*by Harry T.*

One of my most embarrassing moments was when I was in the fifth grade. My teacher asked me to go to the board and do the math problem. I went to the board and did my best, but it wasn't good enough for her. She kept putting pressure on me, so I told her I was trying. Finally, I told her I was not going to do it any more. That's when she got mad at me, and wrote a note to my parents. That got me in big trouble. She said she really didn't want to take me to the office. She just wanted me to stop talking back to her in front of the class.

# The Witch and the Treasure

*by C. Sourbeer*

The year was 1763, I was a young man in the Royal Navy and on my way to being a Captain. One day, while on the docks, I overheard my men talking about an island that was supposed to have lots of hidden treasure and was guarded by a powerful witch. Legend says that she is so evil that just by looking upon her was death! For the next few weeks, I keep hearing things about this island. One day I was sitting at my desk reading reports. There came a knock on my door.

I went to open the door and to my surprise, standing there in the front of me was King Richard himself. I let him in, made him some tea, and we talked. Turn's out that he had heard of my bravery on the high seas. He wanted me to lead an expedition to the island, of all places. I said, "Yes." And made my arrangements to leave.

By the summer of 1763, my crew and I had set sail and were close to the island when a storm came upon us. For three days the storm battered the ship. The crew and I came close to death. Finally, we made it to the island and it was beautiful. When we hit the beach, the sand looked like glass. "Wow." Was the only word that I could say. For the next six months we searched the island for the treasure.

One day, I was out walking the beaches, looking out at my ship, when I heard sound. I turned around and there standing just feet away from me was the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen. She had long, dark hair and eyes as bright as the heavens. I thought I had seen an angel, but she was the witch! I started to walk to her and then she took off.

So, for the next month, I came back to the same spot and each day got closer and closer to her. I finally got close enough to start talking to her. For months I got to know her. One day, I asked her about the treasure and she took me to a massive cave and inside was all the riches you could ever have. I had the crew pack up all the treasure.

One day I asked the woman to come with me, by then I had already fallen in love with her. She refused. She said that she was bound to the island and could never leave. So, I stayed with her and sent the treasure back to the King. I gave it all up for love and I may say, it was all worth it.

# All About Me

by Cynthia Palomino

## My and my small family

Me and my small family

My name is Cynthia Palomino

I am happily married with Jorge, he is a Pastor, a chef and a lovely husband.

We have two children, Qorianka (14) and Sacha (9).

We are from Peru, South America, but we are living on the US now because of my husband's job.

Here we adopted a pet, his name is Yaku, he is a chihuahua, very small dog but with a great personality.

## My big small family

I have a big family in my country: my parents, siblings, nephews, uncles, aunts, cousins and my beloved grandparents.

In addition to being peruvian I am an indigeous woman of Chankas people. My family keep speaking our native language, Quechua, so I speak it, spanish and now I am happy to learn english too.

Since young, my mother has been an activist for our cultural rigths, she worked hard to graduate and then worked on the first proyects to have bilingual education on our lands.

Currently she teaches quechua at the university. She inspires me a lot.

## My hobbies

I love read. My favourite peruvian writer is Jose María Arguedas, he wrote great novels, essays and histories in spanish and quechua.

I also love poetry. My favourite poet is Luis Hernandez Camarero, he wrote a lot of good poetry, but he didn't publish it, he wrote on notebooks and then he gave it to his friends and family. His poetic work was compiled for a friend and it was published after he died.

I like to draw and paint too, it really relax me.

Finally I enjoy to listen music of various genres.

## Activities I enjoy

I enjoy to walk in the nature.

I also enjoy traveling and seeing new places, specially places with history.

I like to cook with my husband, it is an activity that we enjoy doing togheter.

We love bringing the family together at home for a gathering.

I really enjoy gardening, like my mother and my grandparents.

## My career

Since child I liked maths and social studies so when I grow I studied economics on my country.

After graduated I got a speciality on social projects design and then I worked for the government.

Speak two languages helped me to understand better the problems of our communities and to communicate it to the decisión makers.

It also give me the oportunity to recieve training as an native language interpreter, and then to work in the process of developing language policy.  
I met friends of more than 30 indigeous peoples of Peru who became first interpreters in thier native languages. We keep communicating until now.

## **What I do now**

When my husband was hired to work in the US, I leave my job to come here and keep my family together.

It was a hard decisión for me, but my husband have been taking care of the childrens when I worked several years, so I realized that it was my turn to do that.

I think it is a new adventure and a great opportunity for our family, now I enjoy taking care my children and helping my husband.

I am volunteer on the food pantry, and I also teach catechesis to the childrens on the church. I love to do that.

I took time to complete my master studies too, and now I am finishing my thesis work.

## **My goals**

I have several goals, I want to reach them.

A short term goal is to finish my tesis and get my master degree.

A medium term goal is improve my english skills and then got the skills to became an interpreter too. It would be wonderful.

As a long term goal I would like to study for a doctoral degree and to become a social researcher.

I think that with my family support and with hard work I can reach my goals.

## **My dreams**

I dream of giving a good future to my children and that they grow wisely.

I dream to contributing with my people and with other peoples.

I dream to be a better person every day.

I dream of getting old with my husband and having many grandchildren.

Thank you for letting me share with you my story

# I Am From Verona

by Lara Soriolo



My name is Lara, I'm from Verona, Italy. Verona is a small city but it is nice, it's famous for the Shakespeare story Romeo e Giulietta. It's possible to go to Giulietta's house, in particular the famous balcony where she met Romeo, and it is possible to visit their tomb, too.

Verona is a romantic city, you can walk in a long boulevard with typical restaurants, pizzerias, bars, parks, lots of churches and shopping, too. In the morning, people take a cappuccino or caffe espresso, sitting outside in the bar or bakery.

Verona is famous for red wine too, like Amarone Valpolicella. Valpolicella is a city between the Garda Lake and Verona.

Verona has historical arenas from Roman times, usually in the summer there are shows like opera, concerts and music.

I miss my country because of my friends and parents, food like risotto with porcini e tartufo, tortellini and pizza, too.

I recommend you go if you want to take a vacation, every time of the year Verona is good.

**Author's Note:** My name is Lara, I'm from Verona, Italy. I am a student at Blue Ridge Literacy.

## My Name

by Robin Forbes

- R** Restart learning as an adult.
- O** Out of the dark about learning and what I can do.
- B** Believe and know I can do it.
- I** Invest in my learning.
- N** New chapter in my life's journey.

# My Neighborhood

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*by Timothy Walker*

I like my neighborhood, but it could use some improvements. Sidewalks would make it better. We could get around easier. The roads have potholes. They damage cars and can cause problems for people. Our neighborhood needs to be on a bus line. A bus line would make life easier for people that don't have cars. My neighborhood would be nicer with a dog park. My neighborhood has many dogs that would love a park.

## Untitled

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*by Lillie Booker*

My neighborhood is great but there is always room for improvement. My neighborhood needs the trash to be picked up twice a week. It will make the neighborhood cleaner. It will be a better place. The sidewalk needs to be fixed. It would keep me from falling down. My neighborhood needs more street lights. Lights would help me cross the street safely.

## Untitled

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*by Laquinda Wells*

My neighborhood is a lovely place to come to but could be improved. My biggest fear is that they drive fast. It is better if they make speed bumps. the drivers won't drive fast at all. It would be better if they cut down the dead trees so they won't fall on the houses. It will be better if they put street lights on my streets so I can see when I go check the mail. Then I won't have to use my phone light on my phone because it is so dark on my street.

## Untitled

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*by Ruth White*

My neighborhood is nice, but it could be improved with just two changes. First, I want my next door neighbor to stop parking in front of my house everyday. Then I could park right in front of my house. Second, I want my neighbor to be nicer. Then, we can be friends.

# Young Stuntmen

by Alex

In 2013 May 29 to June 4, I Flew with my our Family to Newport News, Virginia, USA From Moscow city, Russia, Scene I was 14 before I turn 15, One man who working company for helping immigrants to give house to live temporary, One person gave us ride to cheap house, In night I set outside with chairs, breathed in fresh air, listened music, and meditated, 20 days later I saw the neighbors wasn't friendly because My neighborhood was Ghetto, people treated as badly, not nicely, We was immigrants, They said, "you don't know English, go back your country" It was so disrespectful, That was racist, Newport news was dangerous city, many drug addicts, homeless, gang members, and rude people. in April 5, I walked another Neighborhood, it was ghetto also, worst than my neighborhood where I lived, Some rude person he was acting crazy, and started discriminate, and I saw his body language, that he threatening on me, I had no idea what does he try to do on me, maybe to harm me and then I run away and from another street to across street Which there is Pharmacy, and small houses, I did running, stopping, and breathing hardly, i was defendly survived, and then I was beside small house There is Police car was parked because There is police officer was lived, people saw me and thought that I'm suspect but not, his neighbor knocked the PD officer's door, he saw me, and Then I took stunts to run away from the police, they didn't catch me, after that get home I told my parents, that I ran away from Police, and my parents got mad on me. In January I went Warwick high school, I was study there, I had some my homies that helping me to translate Russian to English, because My English wasn't good, I took ESL class, and Math class, and gym, I was special student, not regular student yet, I studied 5 months before moving. In April before June, I took the stunts in neighborhood that run away from police, neighbor is angry, and rude, He called me vulgar word MF, and I went wild, 5 time I vandalized with paper wrote vulgar word, 8 time sneak out from neighbor to find, 1 time get sneak out from neighbor's dog, and taser, I was young stuntman, and savage, The neighbor was mad, he called the police, and police did catch me, And I pulled the packet the things, Police warned me to not pull the packet Police didn't shoot me, I was lucky never got killed, 5 days later, I got catch by police again for bullying, trying throw break to window, and calling racial slur, it was first mistake for calling racial slur, because I was immigrant, and Police sent me home, and told my parents for my stunts, my parents got mad on me. in June 15 we moved to Charlottesville VA since 2014, neighborhood was beautiful like Italian or Balkan.

**Author's Note:** I was 15 years old stuntman at Newport news VA



# What Takes Too Long?

by Carol B.

What takes too long is trying to explain myself. Sometimes, it's a long conversation and too many details to tell something that most people can sum up in a few words. I would like to get to the point and be finished in a few words. I'm trying to work on how to do that.

If you have heard of Friendship Bread and how to make it, it's a long process. It takes ten days to process it. You have to squeeze the dough mixture every day until it gets a yeast-like smell. Then, you begin to mix up all the ingredients in a bowl. Next, you pour the mix into a baking pan and bake at 350 degrees for an hour until done. It is so good, but it takes too long to make!

Another thing that takes too long is when I'm trying to find something that I put down. One day, I couldn't find my cell phone. I'm walking around looking everywhere, trying to find it, but still I'm talking on my phone with my daughter. I'm telling her I can't find it. I get very upset and fuss at myself because I can't find the phone. My daughter said, "Mom, why are you upset when you are talking to me on your cell phone?" I was looking seriously with all my everything, looking for my phone that took too long to find. I had it all the time! That is what took me too long.

# Why Did I Choose Cooking as a Career?

by Maria Luz Flores



My name is Maria Luz. I'm from Argentina. I'm 47 years old.

I have been a professional cook since 2017. When I think about why I love to cook in my mind are memories when I was a child. In that time my family and I were in the kitchen all the time because it was the meeting place in the house. We usually got together while our mother was cooking to tell what had happened to us during the day.

I think very good things happen in the kitchen and the food it's the most important for me.

I love cooking for my family, friends or anyone who enjoys the art of cooking.

**Author's Note:** My name is Maria Luz. I'm from Argentina. I live in Roanoke, Virginia, and I am a student at Blue Ridge Literacy.

# The Weather Forecast

*by Lloyd*

I like to watch the news. Channel 6 is my favorite. They show the weather forecast. Tom Patton is the best weather person. I would like a Channel 6 hat.

This year, I would like to be on television.



# Road Trip to the Ballet

*by Stephen Solomon*

Mom, Dad, and I went to the Nutcracker Ballet. On the stage we saw a little girl dreaming about thinking small. Then her nutcracker and the toys came alive. We saw the toys dancing. Just then the nutcracker fights against the mouse king. On the stage we saw two ballerinas riding a swan.

In act 2, we saw two Mexican men and an Egyptian guy dancing with a snake lady and a Chinese lady with a Chinese dragon and two Russian men with a dancing bear, and the sugar plum fairy. And the show was over. We had a great time.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Tywhan B.*

I would open a homeless shelter so that the people would have clothes, food and a place to sleep.

I would open for the people to take showers.

I would also have them bring their pets with them.

# If I Had a Million Dollars

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*by Lauren P.*

I would buy an Ipod and a laptop.

I would buy a mouse for the laptop.

I would save the rest for a rainy day.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Mark T.*

I want to give Virginia Union one million dollars.

I want to make this for a scholarship.

I want to buy a car, too.

# If I Had One Million Dollars

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*by Jakarie*

I would help poor people.

I would get them out of the streets.

I would feed them and give them and their children a house.

I would get their mom a good job.

# One Very Mean Teacher

*by Nasra Fatina*

In the countryside in the refugee camps of Tanzania, Africa, we had to walk everywhere because we couldn't ride the bus like in the USA to school.

We didn't eat lunch or breakfast at school, but we could bring our own food and eat it after or before class started.

When it was time for school, we had to wear a uniform and if we didn't have it on, we had to go back home to change.

If we were lucky, then we might get a good teacher who would help us or make us understand better, but if we didn't have a good teacher we wouldn't understand what we are studying and it would be hard to catch up with the other students.

Lastly, when we were late to class and everyone was there, even the teacher, then we got punished because we needed to get there before the teacher was in class.

Teachers can hit you with a long ruler or they would tell you to hold out the palms of your hands and hold them against the wall with your head down in an uncomfortable way for up to 20 minutes. Sometimes students had to squat down and pull their own ears.

All of these punishments were to make students listen to teachers and follow the rules.

One day when I was almost 12 years old, I was in the classroom and I was not prepared to answer any questions about what we learned before.

There was one very mean teacher who taught this history class and I did not study for his class.

I knew that I would get in trouble if the teacher asked me questions, so instead of waiting for that to happen, I jumped out of the window that was a little far from the ground. My feet were hurting from this long jump, but I was more scared of getting into trouble.

I ran to the bathroom and hid for one hour for the next class with a different teacher to begin.

I didn't get caught, but I would have been in big trouble and my parents would have had to come to school. I only did that one time!

# Jordon Fite

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*by Aiyon*

Jordon Fite is an actor on the show, Power Rangers. I love how he got started on the show as an action figure. He began as a normal person but the producers rewrote his lines. As a result, he became an alien from another planet. He plays a character named Aiyon. He was very excited to try new things since he woke up from a long sleep. He tried foods from Earth and he opened up his own cafe on Earth by making cakes from his own planet. The people love his cakes.

In his personal life, he makes surprise appearances at schools and stores for his fans to see him. They go wild and crazy when they see him. They love to take pictures with him and be around him. I wish I could meet him. Jordon Fite is my favorite star actor. I love him so much, he has a great sense of style. When he goes on a photo shoot, he dresses in his personal clothes and this makes me want to be just like him. As a result, I admire him as a person.

# Budgeting Money

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*by Angel*

I want to buy my son a PlayStation 5 for his birthday to give him his wish. I want to save money out of my check every month. The PlayStation 5 costs \$449.99 plus \$27.00 in sales tax. It costs a total of \$476.99. Each month I need to save \$60 from every check and put it in the savings envelope from February to September 19, my son's birthday.

February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September = 8 months.  $60 \times 8 = 480$

# People Can Believe

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*by Bobbie Moore*

Many things need to be done to help the homeless. The Homeless system needs more improvement for the people because the new homeless people need some more help. The city needs to train its employees to help new people and old people and have a real interest in learning how to respond to leasing their apartment to get back up on their own. The old people already have help knowing what to do.

# Memorial Day

by Joshua

I walked in. I felt welcomed. The host talked about the theme of the show. The theme was Memorial Day. Each quilt showed a different point of time.

My favorite was the peace sign. I liked the way the colors popped. I liked the meaning behind it.

The show got me thinking. I realized the Vietnam War is different than WWII.



# Matt's Story

by Matt Sanders

I like the painting of Maud McLaurine Hurt because she is watching me. She is sitting in a chair and holding a book. Her picture is in the Chester Library. I think she was smart because she read. I think she liked to eat food and shop at K-Mart. I love her picture.



# Tatars in Russia: History and Challenges

by Dajan Kantimerov



Tatars are by far the largest minority in the Russian Federation. There are 5,310,649 Tatars in Russia. The greatest concentration of Tatars is found in the Republic of Tatarstan. The Tatar language belongs to the Turkic language. Tatarstan is a republic in the east-central part of European Russia.

The Tatars in Russia trace their ancestry back to the Golden Horde, a Turkic tribe led by the Tatars that ruled over Russia starting from 1237. The end of Tatar rule in 1480 marked a shift in power to the Russians and the Tatar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan fell to Ivan the IVth. Following this, Tatars in different regions of Russian Empire, such as

Crimea, Siberia, Lithuania, developed separately, with limited connections between their communities.

In the Russian Empire, the Volga Tatar elite played a significant role in Russian Islam and assisted in the incorporation of other Muslim regions into the Empire. This led to the emergence of a prosperous Tatar merchant class, high urbanization rates, literacy, assimilation, and a mobilized diaspora throughout the empire. However, the mass of Tatar population faced harsh measures, including forced conversion from Islam to Christianity, and they were involved in several revolts against Russian domination.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Tatars were promised their own republic, which led to the establishment of the Tatar ASSR in 1920. Perestroika in the late 1980's contributes to the revival of Tatars' nationalism, and Tatarstan declared sovereignty in 1990. A referendum held in 1992 showed widespread support for transforming Tatarstan into an independent republic. Although Tatarstan didn't sign the federation treaty, a historic power-sharing agreement was reached with Moscow in 1994. However, the agreement didn't recognize Tatarstan as an independent entity in international law.

In recent years, tensions between Tatarstan and Moscow have arisen due to discussions on potential mergers of ethnic republics and debates over Russian national identity. Moscow has sought to exert greater control over Tatarstan, abolishing republican legislation, contradicting federal law and altering the ethnic composition of the republic legislature. Russian authorities have cracked down on freedom of expression and assembly, including demonstrations in Tatarstan advocating for sovereignty, education in the Tatar language and the release of Tatar activists imprisoned for criticizing Russian policies.

# Jane's Story

by Jane Michael



My name is Jane Michael. I'm from South Sudan, I have five kids. I moved to America on December 4, 2022. On my way here I was informed that my mother died, I was sad, and I had to keep it a secret from my kids because I was worried that it was going to affect them. I was welcomed by CCC (Commonwealth Catholic Charities) and they took me to an English class at Blue Ridge Literacy and now I know how to write and speak in English. I work at John P. Fishwick as a cleaner. I wake up at 6:00 am and take a shower, prepare breakfast for my kids and listen to gospel songs. Meanwhile I prepare lunch for the family and get to go to work at 2:40 pm. My shift starts at 3:00 pm and ends at 11:25 pm. I spend time with my family on Saturdays and Sundays.

**Author's Note:** *My name is Jane Michael. I'm from South Sudan, I moved to America in 2022. I am a student at Blue Ridge literacy*

# I BARBARA

by Barbara White.

I want to be a **B**etter person.

I have a positive **A**ttitude and attend my classes.

I have joined the **R**ace to the GED.

I have learned to **B**lock out negativity.

I will always **A**ccentuate the positive.

I am **R**esponsible.

I will celebrate **A**fter I get my GED

# Advocacy

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*by Harry T.*

My reason for joining the READ Center is that I want to be more independent with my life. When someone is illiterate, they are missing out on a lot in their lives. When a person can pick up a book and read it from cover to cover and pronounce every word correctly, they can learn a great deal. That is my goal one day. Before I joined the READ Center, my reading skills were very poor. Now I can do my reading on my own. Thanks to the READ Center and the teacher and tutors also. I think I can speak for my classmates as well. We really do appreciate all the help you guys are giving us. Thank you all so very much.

# Untitled

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*by Calvin Phillips, Sr.*

My neighborhood could be a better place with just a few changes. A big change would be if they come through and put gas pipes down. This would improve things because homes would have electricity and gas. Another way to improve my neighborhood is to get the city to come and pick the leaves up. This would help keep the drains clear and keep the leaves from blowing around.

# Untitled

---

*by C.W.*

I like my neighborhood but it needs some big changes. All streets need to be one direction in and one direction out. We need more security for children's safety. We need to take the guns out of the neighborhood. I think that we need more police. I think that it would be safer for children.

# The Class Clown ... No More

---

*by Elijah Ellis*

My name is Elijah Ellis. I am twenty-one years old. And was born in Hopewell, Virginia. I am in school right now for my GED.

Growing up I hated school and didn't really pay attention. Mostly because I was the CLASS CLOWN, which is the reason I didn't finish high school. With the help of my Mom taking me out because she didn't want to get in trouble. The last grade I finished was eighth and not I'm taking my GED class, but not by choice.

I've gotten in some trouble and the court made me come to classes. I never really thought about getting my GED until now but I'm glad that I'm working on getting my GED. Life is not a joke.

I wish it was under better circumstances and by my own choice but I'm here now. One day I'll be able to do so. I told my sister I was getting my GED and she said next is college.

I always want to be the next Pablo Picasso. I love drawing and I do a lot of it in my free time. Hopefully when I complete the program, I will be able to go to college for Art or even a mechanic being that I just picked up a really good skill for fixing cars and doing body work. Being in class is not a laughing matter and I know time will tell.

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## LITERACY

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*by Isha B.*

Learning is fun.

Intelligence is to act smart and think smart.

Tutoring is cool and nice.

Education may be getting a degree.

Reading is fun to do and helps you learn new things.

As you study, you may get God.

Comprehension is good.

You can learn, if you study hard.

# My Adaptation Process in My New City

by *Sindy Roman*



My name is Sindy Roman. I'm from Mexico and I came to Roanoke 6 months ago. I never thought I would live in another country, but my husband had a job opportunity and after 4 months of accepting it, we moved to Roanoke.

It was a big change for both of us and especially for me because I had to quit my job and everything I knew up to that moment. My biggest fear at that moment was that I didn't speak English, but Blue Ridge has helped me to have more confidence in myself and I have really enjoyed meeting people from other countries and their stories. In addition, the classes are very good and the teachers are very friendly. Now I feel very comfortable and safer in this place, they have really helped me a lot with my adaptation process.

The city is beautiful and a very quiet place to live. It is very different from the city where I was born, but I like it a lot and I think that soon I will feel at home.

For now my main objective is to master the language more and next year I would like to volunteer, mainly to help people who need it and give them back a bit of the help they have given me.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this program for people who need to learn the English language, because it really is an incredible way to do it, and I hope that many more people can benefit from it as I do.

**Author's Note:** *My name is Sindy. I'm from Mexico and I live in Roanoke, Virginia*

# ***SPOTLIGHT***

**2024**