

A large, soft-edged spotlight beam of light shines down from the top center of the page, illuminating the text below. The background is a dark brown with a fine, repeating pattern of small circles.

2025

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 in many places made decisions about paragraph breaks, line spacing, and visual display as some formatting was not transmitted by the publication’s submission form.

A Journey to a New World

by Rufina Wea

I was born during a chaotic civil war and grew up suffering the consequences of brutal men in the pursuit of power. I wish I would have had a normal childhood, but instead, I experienced humanity at its worst. My journey started in Liberia, West Africa, where I spent most of my childhood, surviving instead of living. My family and I traveled to surrounding countries, seeking refuge in our pursuit of safety. After staying in a refugee camp for some time, we eventually settled and waited until the war ended.

Shortly after, my family and I moved back home. Nonetheless, home did not feel like home anymore. Our land was decimated by the effects of the war, subsequently causing hunger, poverty, and an increase in crime. After years of failing to recover and rebuild, my mother traveled to the United States. While my mother was in the US, a threat in the form of a second Civil War occurred.

Fearing for our safety, my mother decided we should relocate with her. As a result, my siblings and I left everything we knew and traveled for a fresh start. This new beginning was an opportunity not to be defined by our past. I was ten years old when we reconnected with our mother. As I looked at the joy on my mother's face, I realized that my days of fearing for my life were over. The United States was a complete cultural shock. I had to adapt to a new way of living. Where I came from, most people looked and spoke like me. I wasn't accustomed to meeting people from different nationalities, religions, and beliefs. Later, I realized that many people in this country had similar stories. They left their home countries and journeyed to this country, searching for new opportunities.

Even though my childhood wasn't ideal, I've accumulated many incredible life lessons. My experiences have taught me to navigate many different situations, and I have gained the wisdom and strength to withstand adversity. Therefore, I will always persevere no matter what life throws at me. I took advantage of the United States' opportunities and reinvented myself. I am now a proud American citizen, a business owner, and a student.

Morning and Night

by Joann Smith

As day break approaches,
the sun is rising
above the mountain horizon.

Roosters are crowing,
letting you know
it's a new day.

I'm in the kitchen
preparing breakfast
for my family;
looking out the window
on a beautiful sunny day
while sipping on coffee.

Now time to put on my shoes,
and go
enjoy a delightful day.
As night falls,
the sun sets
over the Rappahannock River.

As the sun slipped away
over the clouds,
[There's] a twilight of stars,
high in the sky
like diamonds.

Moonlight shines
on the field of snow,
like the darkness of a polar night.

As my eyes retired
for the night,
I said a prayer
to see
another day.

Note: *The author would like to thank Ms. Allener Baker-Rogers.*

The Police Officers Helped Me Change the License Plate

by Ya Li Fan

I have been in the United States for 10 years and have experienced many things, most of which I have forgotten. But here is something I will never forget:

On September 1, 2024 I bought a used car. After transferring the title, the previous owner helped me replace the license plate on the front with my new one. Since the car was old and rusty, the metal at the back of the car would not hold the rear plate, so he rolled the sides together to hold it until I could have it fixed. He told me, "You have your new plate on the front of the car, you can drive it on the road."

I had no choice but to drive toward my destination and hope to find a repair shop along the way. Being anxious, I unconsciously increased my speed. Suddenly, in my rear-view mirror I saw red flashing lights! Now I was in trouble again, not the first time. I slowed down and pulled into the BBC church parking lot. The police car pulled in behind me. I immediately got out of my car, and showed the officer the title to the newly acquired vehicle. I tried to explain the license plate problem, but he told me the problem was that I had been speeding. I kept apologizing and gave him my driver's license.

When the officer saw the rolled up license plate at the rear of the car, he squatted down and examined the rusty screws carefully. Then he made a phone call. About twenty minutes later another patrol car pulled in, with an officer carrying a toolbox.

The two officers helped me to remove the old, rusty screws. Because the vehicle was old, the sheet metal around the license mount wouldn't hold the new screws. The officers replaced it with a new piece of metal, and replaced the mount on it. Finally, he securely installed the new license plate.

I was moved by the dedication of the two officers. They took their work seriously, working with care and kindness.

I was stopped for speeding, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise! Instead of giving me a ticket, they fixed my car and installed my license plate for me. With the end being so different than what I had anticipated, I had cause to stop and reflect.

From now on, I want to be more aware of the speed limit, and not exceed it. It's been quite some time since this happened, but the mental picture I have of those two kind policemen working diligently on my car has stayed with me for a long time. And it causes a tear to come as I think about it. If each of us would take the time to do one kind thing for another person, then we would have a better and more harmonious society.

In my heart, I exclaim, "Thank you officers! I salute you for this lesson you have taught me."

Good Road Car

by C.W.

I love cars because I am a whiz at working on cars. They are my favorite thing. The 1974 Cadillac has a unique body style. This model was the last of the big ones. In 1975, they cut a quarter panel out to make it more compact. Another luxury car was the Buick. It was a nice heavy road car. It had a long sleek body. Finally, I like the Chevy. One of Chevy's muscle cars was the 1955 Corvette 327. This engine was a high performance one meant for racing. Of all the cars I like, I like the last of the big the most.

The F150 Truck

by HTL

I have had many automobiles in my lifetime. My favorite automobile is an F150 truck. I like it because I can take my grandkids to the park to play. We sing songs together as I drive. It's big enough to move things. I take my truck to my son to move his furniture. In addition to being able to move things, the F150 is good on gas.

Freedom to Love

by Elena

Everyone has the right to freedom: freedom of speech, choice, religion, orientation.

My name is Elena. I am 50 years old. I would like to tell you about my freedom to love and be loved.

I was born and grew up in Russia in the city of Moscow. I love my country very much. It's big, beautiful and I've lived in it almost my whole life. In 2016 I met a wonderful woman there. We turned out to have many of the same interests and views on life. And we complemented each other in different things. Brave, smart, purposeful – she became like a ray of sunshine to me. She was not my first love, but I know that she is my last and forever.

We wanted to be together, we wanted to be a family, but in our country, it is impossible to legalize a relationship between two women. We had to hide our relationship to avoid negative consequences.

Twice we experienced the aggression of other people. The first time we held each other's hand in a public place. Seeing this, several people began to shout at us. The second time was in the park when a man noticed just a rainbow pin on my girlfriend's backpack. He started shouting insults at us. It was very scary and upsetting.

In 2018 my girlfriend won a green card and we have a ray of hope. We began the path to freedom to love and the opportunity to be a real family. My beloved moved to America. We missed each other so much and we decided to get married. But unfortunately, in Russia, it was impossible to enter into such a marriage and we were forced to get married in Denmark.

The ceremony was beautiful and romantic but a little sad because her relatives and my mother and son couldn't attend our wedding.

Returning to Russia, I was forced to hide my marriage. I couldn't even show our wedding photos. My wife filed a petition and we waited a long time for a decision to reunite our family.

During our 4 years of waiting, I was afraid for my son, because if his classmates had found out about our family, he could have been beaten. I was afraid that my coworker would find out about our family. I was afraid that my boss would find out and fire me. I was afraid that the neighbors would find out.

Finally, in December 2022, a positive decision was made on our petition and we were able to be together. It was a very exciting event. My son and I came to Roanoke to join my wife to become a real family! We received the freedom to hold hands, show each other signs of affection and not fear for our health and life. We have gained the freedom to love and be loved!

I really miss Russia. I still have a mother there who is forced to lie to everyone about my family. If she tells the truth, she could be fined multiple times.

I really hope that someday every person in every country will have the right to freedom. In Roanoke I received this right and I am happy because I am surrounded by loving and friendly people!

Author's Note: *Elena is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's Advanced Level ESOL Classes.*

My Impression

by Iryna Bilyk-Stanley

I want to describe what impressed me in the USA.

When I come here, the first thing that struck me was the provision of free school buses to children, especially disabled children, who have special buses. Later, I was even more impressed when I saw how much support all people with disabilities have around them. And every day find out and see how the government helps these people, how many programs they provide them. Any place here has everything necessary, including equipment, and conditions to make life easier for these people. Everyone respects them. For example, I think that people with disabilities here do not feel inconvenienced and have the same rights as all other people. They do not feel like a burden to their country and they participate in all spheres of life.

Unfortunately, in my country, people with disabilities are in a difficult situation, although according to the Constitution of Ukraine they have the same rights as all people, but the government does not support them as here.

Author's Note: *Iryna Bilyk-Stanley is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's post-advanced level ESOL classes.*

My Reflections on the Behavioral Health Interpreter Course

by Yoshimi Hiramatsu

Regarding the Behavioral Health Interpreter course, it was challenging for me. I studied harder, reviewed and prepared for the classes, learned new vocabulary, and even sang English songs to improve my pronunciation.

By the end of the course. I felt different. I felt wiser than before and more eager to move forward to the next challenge, rather than just feeling accomplished. Surprisingly, in Japanese, we don't have a direct equivalent for "Behavioral Health". I now understand that there are not only language barriers between English and Japanese but also cultural differences. This course taught me what language means to us, why learning about culture is so important, and what rights we have in the US.

Of course, we also learned what a "Behavioral Health Interpreter" does, as well as about mental health issues, abuses, medications, and counseling. Behavioral Health Interpreter serves as a bridge language and culture, and helps an individual healthier, easier, and more comfortable live in the U.S.. ---That is what I learned from this course.

How has this helped me move forward in the community? That's a great question! I've been reflecting on that since I finished the course. I want to help others who are struggling by sharing the information that I've learned such as the rights to request an interpreter free of charge, and the availability of organizations, facilities, groups, and systems for a non-English speaker in the U.S.. I also hope to help foreigners in my own country, and if possible, I serve as an interpreter. I will continue improving my knowledge of both English and Japanese while also working to broaden my horizons.



Straight from a Student's Heart

by Dong Hu

This is a message from an ELA student to his class, after his presentation on Self-Discovery:

Dear Ms. Roula & Friends,

Thank you all so much for giving me the opportunity to create a special attempt with all of friends in today's class. It is Ms. Roula's trust and the understanding of my classmates that make me try it more bravely. So it's so good to have you all around me that I am not a lonely one but a lucky one. 🥰

I wish my life is a special journey with dreams and love, the same to you, my dear guys. Although there was/is/will be something unhappy during my life, what's better than being happy?! We can find happy persons or things, and also create ones. If you get energy and enthusiasm from happiness, you could face the challenges and difficulties in your lives. 😎

At the same time, I am very glad to explore and experience new ways of learning and thinking. I hope they do work for you and me. So I would rather see Ms. Roula as one of my mentors than only a teacher, because with her help I could try to trigger the process to discover myself as an adult. It's amazing! 😊

When it comes to learn English, I guess there is no way for me besides practice, practice and practice. It's more effective because I am both shy and a man in reality. I believe that sunshine always comes after the wind and rain, to me, and to you. 😊

BTW, that's OK for me that if someone need the slideshow for personal use, please ask Ms. Roula to send you. The self-discovery today is actually based on Dr. John Holland's theory of occupational choice, which is well-suited for someone who want to get the plan about your possible works or even your future life. 😊

OMG, my face now is so tired because practicing English is just practicing my facial muscles. English is pretty different from Chinese, so I have to read it aloud to improve my pronunciation. This is just my answer I didn't tell you in today's class. 😂

Have a good night, guys. Love you all. Dom 🙌

Gone

by Skyler Stepp

Words can't explain how much I miss you.
As many tears that I cry I can't explain how hurt I am that you are gone.
As many times that I have smiled you would think some of this hurt has gone.
As many times that I have laughed you would think this pain is healing some.
This broken heart isn't healing now that you are gone.
You're in my heart from dust till dawn.
Though I didn't get to see you before you passed on, I still have our memories to help me remain strong.
I will miss you the same as the years pass on.
I wish the addiction hadn't taken you so young.

Author's Note: *My name is Skyler. I was born in Michigan and raised a lot of places because we moved around a lot. I am a student at NRV Literacy.*

Untitled

by Shaeed Spellman

The two favorite books I enjoy reading the most of all books in the world would be the Bible and the Quran. The Bible is a very interesting document to me. It contains a lot of spiritual teaching. In addition, it provides knowledge of life. The Bible also teaches about laws and the prophets. It shows Jesus as a comforter. Alongside the Bible, the Quran is the world's greatest book. Mohammad is the last comforter in Islam. God sent Mohammad as a messenger to all mankind as the spirit of truth. Mohammad was a great lover of prayers. He stressed that all mankind should learn the word of God.

Family Photos and Films

by Juana Ponce de Leon

Memories are important for immigrants, and for this reason, if I could save one possession, I would choose my family's photos and films. It has been fifteen years since I came back to visit my country, Bolivia. During this time, my family sent me many photos and films to share with me each moment of their lives. Many moments at birthday parties, Christmases, New Year's parties, visiting family or friends, and national holidays. Also, I received photos of Paquita, the chihuahua we had that has already died, as well as photos of my mom's garden. She loves plants and took pictures of the moments when they were full of flowers, her cactus with flowers, those flowers that only come out for one night, and her changing style. These were all beautiful moments in which they gathered and wanted to share with me. I had moments of nostalgia during that time, and I still do. Looking at these photos and films comforts me.

My Indian Sandwich

by Roshni Patel

I am an expert at cooking Indian recipes and my favorite thing to make is an Indian sandwich. People love the taste and it is easy to eat. Another reason I like making sandwiches is because they are easy to make. My favorite recipe includes potatoes, peanuts, onions, cilantro and homemade chutney, all put on bread. Finally, people like to order them for parties. I sell them in bags of 12 at \$5 per sandwich (or \$60).

Rain

by Zadeth



Friend

by Zadeth



48 Hours

by Ana Mina

In 48 hours, the world would end. Since time was limited, I would make a list of activities to do in two days.

First day:

In the morning I would do a video conference with my parents and siblings, to talk and remember the good times. So we can say goodbye with the best memories.

At noon, I would go with my husband and children to a Chinese restaurant to eat sushi then we would go to eat pizza. In the afternoon, we would bike to a park to play soccer and basketball and tell jokes.

At night we would go camping in front of a lake (Carvins Cove) and we would make a bonfire even if it is prohibited. We would sleep together under a starry sky if possible.

Second day:

In the morning after a good breakfast we would go swimming in the lake, we would rent a kayak to go around the lake and fish. At noon we would order Peking chicken and passion fruit juice to be delivered. At night, we would go to church to thank God for everything we had experienced and received.

Author's Note: Ana is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's Intermediate level ESOL class. She is also the recipient of Blue Ridge Literacy's 2024 Learner of the Year award.

Crayfish in the Waves

by Timothy Walker

My best memory is when my cousin Richard and I went to the creek in Petersburg in springtime. I have three reasons why this is my favorite memory. The first reason is I like hanging out with my cousin because he was nice and fun. The second reason is I like the waves on the creek, the motion is relaxing. My third reason is catching crayfish. I like to release them and watch them wriggle.

My Little Secret

by Karen Ramos

Another day begins! I am dressed in bright red and my wings start to flutter. Here I am, tiny and round, adorned with black dots adding a beautiful touch to my wings. As a messenger of good news, success, positivity, health, and romance, today I am eager to spread all those good vibes to people who need them most.

I am mighty to do many unimaginable things despite my small size, like contributing to protecting various species of plants and crops by eating the pests that damage them. Keeping gardens gorgeous and healthy is my mission, a task that delights me every single day. As you can see, being small is not a problem for me and doesn't limit myself either; on the contrary I consider that I'm charming enough to catch people's attention. In addition, my size is perfect for moving quickly and agilely or hiding anywhere when it is necessary.

I love being a ladybug. I always feel pretty! It's not a coincidence that my name includes the word "lady" because clearly, I am. Don't you think that I am one of the most stunning insects that exist in the world? Children adore me; they have a blast playing with me, as they gently let me crawl across their fingers, or when they try to catch me as I fly. Don't be surprised that adults often love to do it too; isn't that funny? I am so wonderful and unique to the point that my image even ends up on fabrics for dresses, jewelry, and decorations, spreading my magic from pillows to towels which brighten homes. It is like being present everywhere at the same time. That is formidable!

In many countries, people tell numerous stories about me, such as how I am a bringer of good luck, and that if you carry me on your hand, luck will be within your reach. Others believe that if a ladybug lands on a girl's hand, she will get married within a year, becoming the favorite insect of many pretty single women. The question is, are they just stories? Well, that's my little secret. But let me tell you something. The next time you see a ladybug like me, don't hesitate; take a chance, hold it gently, and let its magic touch bring happiness to your life!

Moffee Moth and the Ghost

by Stephen Solomon

Sandlot and Feathers are telling Moffee Moth about the ghost. "What's the problem?" asked Moffee Moth. "There's a ghost at the old park," said Sandlot Stinkbug. Moffee Moth will take them to the Circle K Park to find out. "Let's go," said Moffee Moth. Here they are at the park. Moffee, Sandlot and Feathers are in a dark forest. All of the sudden, they heard a spooky sound. "What's that noise?" said Feathers the Parakeet. Something right behind Moffee Moth, and it's a ghost. "Let's get out of here!" shouted Moffee Moth. The ghost was chasing them. But suddenly, the black branch grabbed the white sheet, and they stopped. It was Max Mosquito. "Surprise!" said Max Mosquito. "So you're the ghost." said Moffee Moth. Max Mosquito had drawn a scary face on the white sheet. It was a joke.



Day

by Ruth



Smile

by Mawada



Storm

by Mawada



My Favorite Insect—Silkworm

by Heidi Gao

Ancient China is famous for its silk production, originating from tiny silkworms that contribute to the creation of soft, shiny silk threads, used to weave precious silk fabrics. Therefore, in China, almost everyone has experience in raising silkworms. One of my childhood joys was raising silkworms, too.

The only food for silkworms is mulberry leaves. In my village, mulberry trees are planted everywhere. I still remember I had one tall mulberry tree in my backyard, too. When the first spring rain begins, mulberry trees start to sprout, and silkworm babies begin to crawl out of eggs. They are very tiny, just like black sesame seeds.

I kept them in an empty shoe box because they didn't like the sun. Every morning, I picked fresh mulberry leaves for them. The living habits of silkworm babies are to sleep when they are full and eat when they wake up.

Silkworms will shed their skin; after one molt, they will be the first -instar larvae. The larvae will be "one year older" after shedding their skin once. They will molt four times in total in their lifetime. Each time, they eat more and more, they look just like white caterpillars. Sometimes I put them in my pencil case and took them to school. We competed to see who took care of them better.

Soon, I noticed silk strands emerging in all four corners along the edge of the box. The silkworms spun increasingly enveloping themselves in layers of shimmering cocoons. Through this meticulous process of sericulture, I came to realize the profoundly selfless nature of the silkworm's existence. From larva to cocoon, pupa to moth, and ultimately from egg to death, it labors tirelessly in silent devotion. I marvel not only at their ceaseless industry but also at their quiet sacrifice during a fleeting life wholly dedicated to sustaining the cycle of creation.

About Kim

by Dennis Jacobs

Kim was a very special person. She was very kind. She was a great person. I fell in love with a great person.

People just gravitated toward her. All my coworkers loved her to death. Every single one of them. They said, "How did you get a woman like that?"

When one of them first met her, he said, "I think I just met a saint."

She never met a stranger. She could talk to anybody. One day my neighbor had a cookout. She went over and was talking to people like she knew them for years and she had just met them 10 minutes ago. They were all mesmerized with her.

Kim was a great cook. She cooked old-fashioned because that's the way her mother taught her. Everything was cooked from scratch. My favorite dishes she made were liver and gravy, smothered pork chops, and succotash. They were really good. My neighbor loved her cooking. I'd come home sometimes, and she'd be cooking and say, "I'm cooking for Mike too."

She liked to watch Lifetime. I would come home from work, and she would be hot over something that was on TV. At first I used to take it to heart, but then I thought she's just watching TV — there aren't any good men on Lifetime anyway. I would be ready for her to have an attitude when I got home if she watched TV.

Kim had a lot of time on her hands because she wasn't able to work. She was bedridden most of the time. She would sew stuff and craft things. One time we needed something to put trash bags in and she took an old pair of my jeans and made them into a little bag. I still have that thing today.

We went through a lot, and I would not change one day of it because she was my best friend.

Kynneddy and Her Grandmother

by Dennis Jacobs

I want Kynneddy to know how she's so much like her grandmother. Kynneddy has the same personality as her grandmother.

Everywhere Kim went, people fell in love with her. Everywhere Kynneddy goes, they fall in love with her. It just amazes me that she's so much like Kim.

Kynneddy never met a stranger and Kim never met a stranger. Everywhere we'd go, Kim would talk to someone like she'd known them for years. Kynneddy is the same way. Everybody in her class knows her. Everybody has to say goodbye to her when she leaves.

Kynneddy is very good with her hands like her grandmother was.

Kynneddy likes watching TV like her grandmother. Kim liked Lifetime. We had to stop her from watching soap operas. She would get into it. Kynneddy watches TV like that too. Kynneddy will sit by the TV fixated. Once she gets fixated on the TV, you've got to wave and holler to get her attention.

Kynneddy is learning different types of music. She likes Michael Jackson and Duran Duran. She's starting to get into Dave Matthews. She's starting to like a lot of different stuff now, and I like that. I don't want her to just be stuck on hip hop because today's hip hop isn't like when I was coming up.

Just like her grandmother, she hears different words and she sings them. Her grandmother was like that. The other day I was playing Duran Duran's "Girls on Film" and she said, "I like that." Later in the car she started singing "Cars Are Blue." Her grandmother was exactly the same way. I remember I was playing Michael Jackson's "Human Nature," and Kim sang "Light Bright."

And if Kynneddy has a song she likes, she wants to listen to it again and again and again. Her grandmother was the same way. She would play a song 20 times, over and over and over. If I play a song and Kynneddy likes it, she says, "Again."

I want Kynneddy to know how much her grandmother loved her. Dialysis takes a lot out of you, but whenever Kim got home from dialysis, she'd say, "Where is that baby?!"

The Magic of December 31st

by Rocio Aguilar-Najera

My favorite time was the last day of every year, December 31st. For me, it was a time when the entire family would gather at my grandmother's house. The day began with the warm embraces of family members arriving, as the air filled with laughter and the scent of delicious dishes being prepared. It was a wonderful feeling.

After attending midnight mass together, we would all gather outside. The church courtyard would fill with the sound of a million greetings and laughter that never ended. The simplicity and beauty of these gatherings have always stayed with me, creating memories that I hold dearly.

I would love to go back to those times and live through them again, looking at my loved ones who have already passed away. I would love to have one more hug and a brief conversation. Now all those beautiful moments remain in the treasure chest of my heart, serving as a reminder of love and togetherness. The magic of that day lies in the special moments spent with my family, the tradition that binds us, and the memories that we cherish.

While these new traditions still bring joy, I am dreaming of having my whole family together again, experiencing the same magic of December 31st as we once did. I am working diligently to make that dream come true, believing in the power of family and the enduring nature of love, which will continue to inspire and unite us for generations to come. These moments of shared joy are what make family gatherings truly magical.

The essence of the last day of the year is the importance of family bonds and the special moments that define our lives. As I try to recreate those precious times, I carry with me the hope that future generations will understand and appreciate the value of togetherness, just as I do.

Untitled

by L. Johnson

Of all the arts, music is my favorite. I enjoy all music genres. One type is gospel, because it is the music of God and makes me feel good. Another favorite is country music. I like that because it is about cowboys and having fun. Lastly, R&B is soul music and I love all the artists, like the Commodores, Earth Wind & Fire, O'Jays and Smokey Robinson & the Miracles. I've had the opportunity to see all of their performances in person.

Wild Animals

by Robert Ferguson

Tonight I went to an art exhibit with my class at the Perkinson Center. I really liked all the animal pictures.

I liked the elephant picture. The elephant has a big trunk. He uses the trunk to eat and drink water.

I also liked the picture of the dogs. There were 3 dogs sitting on the porch. They looked cute and friendly.

Another painting I liked was a bird. I call it a yellow bird because of its beak, but it is a great blue heron. He is sitting on a rock looking at the water. I think he is looking for fish to eat.

The white swan with the orange beak is also cute. He was swimming in a lake.

I would like to go back to the Perkinson Center and see more paintings. The next exhibit is in 2025.



Untitled

by Laquinda Wells

Of all the songs that I like, Comfort Inn Ending by Jhené Aiko is my favorite song. This song has a soft, smooth beat. The beat makes me cry when I hear it. The lyrics have some bad words in them, but they add to the song's message. The lyrics remind me of when a guy does you wrong. This makes me feel sad when I'm listening to the song on my phone. I really love how Jhené Aiko's voice sounds when she sings this song. Her voice sounds very nice.

Bozo The Clown Sneakers

by Belinda Bland

I was a young girl aged 13 in the ninth grade being raised in the south. I had a younger sister age 12 in the eighth grade and we attended public school.

My mother was in her thirties and separated from my dad. She was raising six children by cleaning houses. Whatever she bought for one of her girls, she bought for her sister.

"Mom," I said, "I need a pair of sneakers for gym class."

"I don't think I can buy you sneakers right now," she said.

"I need them if I want to pass my gym class," I said.

"Okay," she said.

One day my mother came home carrying not one but two big shoe boxes.

"Here these are for you all," she said, as she handed me the boxes. I took the boxes and gave one to my sister. I opened the box and to my surprise, inside was a pair of white sneakers. They were high top, skinny, very long in length and seemed to curl up at the toes. All I could do was stare at those funny looking sneakers in that box.

"I can't wear these sneakers to my gym class," I said.

"That was all I could afford to get," said mom.

My little sister didn't seem to have a problem with them. She stuffed the toes of her sneakers with toilet paper. After she did that, her sneakers looked nice on her feet.

"Your sneakers look nice on your feet," I said.

"I put toilet paper in them," she said, "Why don't you try it."

"Okay, I will," I said.

So, I tried doing the same thing with mine but they did not look as good on my feet as they did on hers. I called them my "bozo the clown" sneakers. I took my sneakers to school; I did not wear them. When it was time for gym, I changed into my gym clothes and put on my "bozo the clown" sneakers. Then I went and sat on the bleachers in the gym with my classmates.

Then the teacher called me to do an exercise. I came down and stood in front of my classmates. Before I could exercise, they began to laugh. Not at me but at my funny looking "bozo the clown" sneakers. I was embarrassed but I continued doing the exercise.

When I got home, I told my mother what had happened that day at school during gym.

"Mom I can't wear these sneakers to gym class anymore," I said.

"Why not?" she asked.

"When I got up to do the exercise, all the other children laughed. I was embarrassed," I said.

That Saturday, my mother took my sister and myself downtown to buy us different sneakers. The sales lady showed us a pair of sneakers in a box. They were beautiful sneakers. They were red, white and blue. The color of the American Flag.

"Do you all like these sneakers?" asked my mom. "Yes! They are pretty," I said.

"Yes, I like them too," said my sister.

My mother bought the sneakers for my sister and I.

"I won't be a shamed to wear these sneakers to school. They look good and they make my legs look good, too," I said.

My mother smiled. "I'm glad you like them," she said.

I wore my new sneakers to school. Everyone liked them. They were not twice my foot length. They were not narrow and skinny either. They did not come up to my ankle. I walked around the school with confidence. I felt good about them.

When I got home, I had a big smile on my face. All I could say was good-bye to my "bozo the clown" sneakers. I put them back in their box and put them away forever.

I Would Like to Be a Mummy

by Nat Lloyd

I would like to dress up like a mummy for Halloween. I would wrap myself in rags all over, from my head to my feet. I would go around scaring people. I would wear it to a Halloween party and scare people there too! I would want someone to take a picture of me dressed like a mummy. I would have to take the rags off my face so I could eat some candy though.

Where I'm From? Who I am?

by Yascara Arita Merlos

I am from the mallow broom,
From coffee and its smoky smell.

I am from the clear river San Juan water.
And the child's play on the dirt.
I am from the orange tree that smells sweet back home.

I am from the school and the church,
from Arita and Merlos.

I am from the braves and the believers,
from God and Jesus.

I am from the Christmas tree and the hug on Christmas Eve.

I am from dance and folklore,
from the drum and the caracol (snail)
and with the Tikita-Tikita I move my body ta-ta-ta.

I am from heroes and Xatruch (catracho)
from Lencas and Mayas,
from tortillas and baleadas.

I am from grandmother's tales,
and my grandfather's courage.

I am from moments that make me shine, scream, fight and smile.

And most importantly;
I am from my father's elected name.... Unique name!

Yascara Arita Merlos.
My identity.

My Name is Josianne

by Josianne Lukaba

My name is Josianne Lukaba. I'm from Democratique Republic of Congo, Kinshasa (D.R.C.)

I will never forget the day I left my homeland, the D.R.C. in search of safety. The year was 2002 and the political unrest and violence had become too much to bear.

I fled to Zimbabwe, seeking refuge and a chance to start a new life. Little did I know that a decade later, I would receive an opportunity to start again in a new country, the U.S.A. As I boarded the plane that would take me from Harare to Washington D.C., a mix of emotions flooded my heart. Excitement for the unknown, but also goodness for leaving behind the life that I had built in Zimbabwe.

Finally, I am now in the U.S.A., a place which is also referred to as the land of opportunities. I have met beautiful and good people who are still assisting me. I don't like the U.S.A., I love it!

Author's Note: *I am Josianne. I am a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's Intermediate Level ESOL class.*

My Name is Jane

by Jane Michael

I am from South Sudan. I want to write a story about my country, South Sudan. My mother had four kids, three boys and one girl. A war started when I was young and I got separated from my family. I never saw them again and I was sad. I ran away to Uganda and from there to Kenya. I stayed in Kenya for twenty years, got married and had five children. I came to America on December 4, 2022. The CCC (Commonwealth Catholic Charities) welcomed me. I told them I wanted to learn English. Now I am studying at Blue Ridge Literacy. BRL teaches me to speak and write.

I want to say thank you to Sara and Ahoo. They are so kind to me and also to Teacher Maria and Teacher Silvia. They are very wonderful teachers.

I like Roanoke because I have met so many different people and different cultures.

Thank you. I am Jane.

Author's Note: *Jane is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's Intermediate level ESOL classes.*

The READ Center will Help Fulfill Dreams

by Sis Woodson

I have been so happy ever since my daughter came home from college with a flyer from the READ Center saying that if anyone wants to learn how to read call this number. At the READ Center it has been a pleasure working with everyone especially those who come to help us learn to read. They come out on their own precious time. That's why I do not waste their time, so I try to be there every day on time. It's also a pleasure working with all the teachers, tutors, and students. I love that the teachers and tutors take out their time to spend with us how to read even though they travel near and far. That is a real blessing. I appreciate each and everyone of them. My goal is to be a realtor one day.

Two Pictures I Like

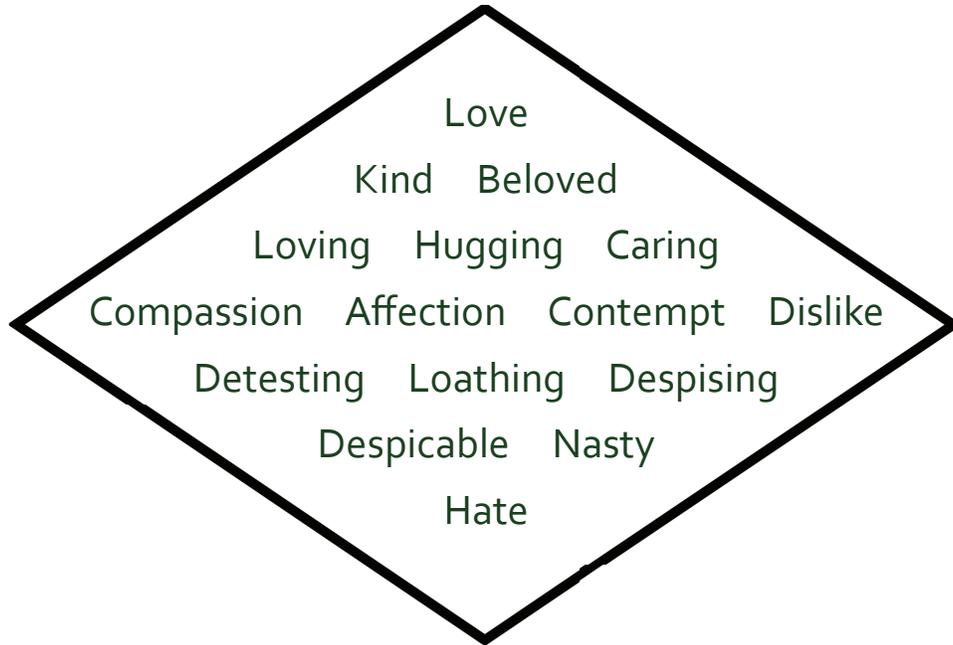
by Nat Lloyd

Tonight we went to look at pictures at the Perkinson Center. I saw two pictures I liked. I liked the picture with the praying hands. I know how to pray. I like to pray. I liked the picture with the two houses. I like the windows because they are green. I like the two people. I like the girl and her mother. They are looking at the houses. They are walking.



Love

by Teresila



Your Perception

by Michelle Abrams

Your perception of me once mattered,
When your arms were around me, I never felt abandoned or tired,
Your love for me once upon a time, took me to heights beyond the moon, stars & sky!
While my love for you was unraveling into wildfires of emotions, my lack of touch and
words not traveling to feed the very soul I claimed to love, instead of loving you I created an
empty heart made of distant cold!

Note: *The author would like to thank Linda from Literacy NRV.*

Our Experiences

by Blue Ridge Literacy Learners

We are from Pakistan and Afghanistan. We live in Roanoke, VA and we have been living here for over three months. In Afghanistan people are kind. The weather is good. The summer isn't hot and we have a lot of fruits during this time. The grass is green and there are a lot of flowers. We have a lot of beautiful rivers. The food is delicious and we have good clothing stores for Afghani dresses called lebas. But it also has bad things. Electricity is bad, two nights on and two nights off. We always lose electricity. Education is very bad because girls can only study for six years but men can keep studying. Women can't work and become professionals. The Taliban says women have to stay home and clean, cook, wash clothes, and take care of the kids. Women also have to wear hijab and can't go out without her husband, brother or cousin. Also, the internet is very slow and expensive.

In the United States everything is good. My English teacher is good and all my classmates are nice. The city is very clean and beautiful. Education is very good and free. The internet, electricity, water, and gas are good. The police and ambulance come fast when you call them and the hospitals and doctors are good. I feel safe. This city is very good.

Note: *This piece was written as a group project by learners who participate in Blue Ridge Literacy's daily workforce readiness ESOL classes.*

Reading in English

by Marie E. Mesadieu

My name is Marie E. Mesadieu. I'm from Haiti. I live in Roanoke, Virginia. I am a student. I've studied English at BRL. Among my experiences, I want to share one (of them) with you. I want to tell you about "Reading in English". I like to read. In my country, I used to read books in French.

Now in the U.S.A. it's very important to read in English and understand. How can I do it? I will explain it to you.

First, I went to school to learn English. I learned the alphabet, vocabulary words with pictures, sentences. And how to form sentences. My great teachers used different methods and ways to teach to help students. They helped students to understand and learn to make phrases.

Next, I have bought children's books. They have given a lot of vocabulary words to me by little stories.

Then encouraged by one of my teachers I have read books and talk about characters. Reading these books has taught me to challenge myself to reach above like Bessie Coleman and Malala Yousafzai. I mention two only.

After that I stay motivated in hopes to read perfectly and understand at an advanced level. By the grace of God, I will do it.

Finally, I thank my teachers, especially the ones who pushed and encouraged me to read books in English. God bless BRL. From my heart.

Author's Note: *Marie E. Mesadieu is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's advanced level ESOL classes.*

My Trip to America

by Zarghuna Hamidi

My name is Zarghuna. I am from Afghanistan. I came here in 2021. I came here by airplane. The trip took 7 days. We started our trip from Kabul to Qatar. Then we flew to Washington. After that we stayed in Wisconsin for 3 months. After that we came to Roanoke. I came to America because my husband worked in the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan. The Taliban came and the embassy closed. We had to leave for our safety. My son was only 10 years old. Now he is 12 and in the 6th grade. He speaks excellent English.

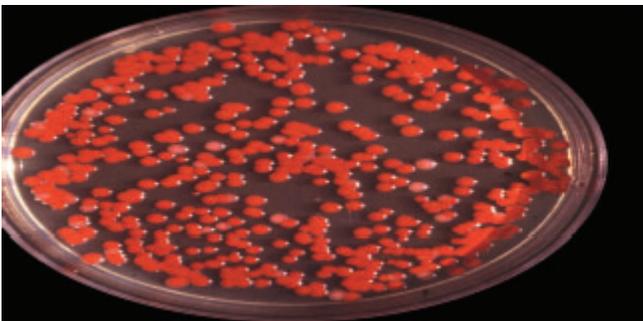
Author's Note: *Zarghuna is a student in Blue Ridge Literacy's Intermediate Level ESOL class.*

A story of how my life changed due to a doctor's inexperience after surgery and I became disabled.

by Maria L Ayala

My name is María Ayala. I am 56 years old and have three children and six grandchildren. I want to tell you my story and how important it is to keep a wound clean. On April 25, 2023, I fell and ruptured the tendon and had to have surgery on May 26, 2023, to repair the tendon in my left foot. But the wound did not heal as it continued to drain. Six weeks later, I was taken to the emergency room and found I had bacteria. On July 21, I had a second operation to clean the wound. Then they sent me to a wound center. They cleaned the wound and took a culture once a week. September, the nurses there told me I no longer had bacteria. On September 22, 2023, they performed another operation to repair the tendon, removing the tendon from my big toe. That didn't work either. The wound wouldn't heal, continued to drain, and was very painful with burning. The doctor told me not to worry that it would take a long time to heal; if not, he would amputate my foot. In November 2023 the wound was still the same problem wasn't healing again wound center did another culture they sent it to a different lab they said again I didn't have bacteria the insurance questioned why taking too long to healing the doctor said was exhausted and sent me to another doctor but all the problem was because the previous doctor and the wound care center doesn't giving me intravenous drugs. He said the best way was to have a plastic surgeon put in an implant and have an infection specialist. The plastic surgeon admitted me to the hospital on December 7th to do the first cleaning operation. He cleaned me again on December 10 and December 12, 2023. The doctor put the implant in my ankle and attached an external fixator. He removed tissue from my right leg to put on the ankle and skin from my left leg to cover the flat. I got two more surgeries on January 03 and 11, 2024. The wound was cleaned again the bacteria were counting in the bone. On March, I had 3 more surgeries on March 14, 26, and 28, 2024. The wound was cleaned again; the infection continued in the bone, and all doctors were worried about the osteomyelitis at this time. The foot had a bad smell. I got a new antibiotic for 18 months. I couldn't put weight on or dengo my foot down because the flat could come loose. I had to learn how to use a wheelchair. Nowadays, I can move around a little more with the help of a walker.

Author's Note: *My name is Maria Ayala. I was born in El Salvador and came to the United States in 1989, leaving my family behind. I am a mother of three children and six grandchildren. My life has not been easy. I would like to thank my ESL teacher, Leslie Heird.*



SEPSIS

Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening condition caused by the body's response to an infection



Serratia marcescens is a bacterium that can cause infections and, in rare cases, meningitis and osteomyelitis. To treat these infections, people must use intravenous drugs.

Life in Haiti

by Anonymous

I am from Haiti. I am married and we have two children.

In my country, I worked in a bank and my husband was a lawyer. After my husband won a case, we faced a lot of problems, they threatened to kill my husband and family. We had no choice but to leave our country to come to the United States. My husband and I used to come to the USA for vacations, my second child was born in the United States. Unfortunately, my first daughter did not have a visa yet. When we started the visa application process for her, my country had just blocked, nothing worked. And at that time bandits almost killed my husband. We had to leave our hometown to protect ourselves. And then, we had no choice but to leave the country without our daughter. But before leaving I asked her what she thought, and at that time, she was only (9) nine years old. Then she looked at me in the eyes and said, "Mom, it's for a good cause, don't worry about me because my aunt will take care of me"

Since that day, I felt strong and now I am waiting for her. I don't know the day yet, but I have a feeling that this day is near.

Loneliness with Chairs

by Andie Compton

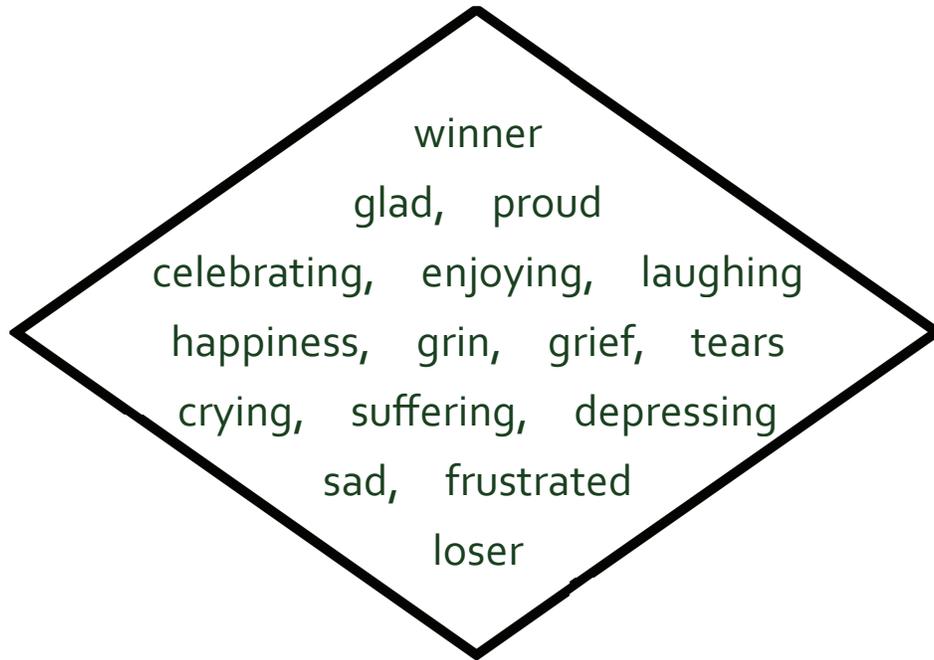
In my younger years, I found myself in a room filled with chairs. These chairs were all sizes, shapes, colours, and even smells but they all had one similarity. They were empty. My whole childhood consisted of finding things to fill these empty seats. Dolls and stuffed animals were sustainable for a time but there's only so much a piece of fabric or porcelain could do to console one.

Teenage years came along, and I turned bitter, angry. The chairs brought a sense of what I did not have: Family and community. Unable to find what I thought I needed during a time; I took my unhappiness out on others. Like a rabid dog, I let my teeth tear at flesh that had no sins related to my pain... Many suffered and so did I.

Finally, in my older years my chairs still stood, not all of them are empty. I found peace and happiness; I found family and community. I've taken up the rest of the empty chairs except for two. Every now and then you'll watch my eyes drift to those seats, looking for the two that never got to experience what I have.

Winner

by Rima



Pessimism

by Wilma



Expectations

by Luke Yves Abad

I feel hands press on my back as I'm almost violently thrust into a sea of my family members, while someone squeezes past them. My sister takes a glance back around, gives me a smirk, then continues along. I sigh a breath of disappointment and continue to walk forward all the while letting the rest of my family walk ahead. *"I'll just give them and her some space..."* I think to myself, *"...it's better that way. I wonder if my sister treated anyone else that way, or if my family would even care."*

All of us are gathering in the Great Hall, an elaborately decorated chamber. Every detail from the ceiling to the floor is meticulously thought upon, as if alluding to the very purpose of this gathering. We start to group ourselves, keeping our distance from the carpet lying in the center of the room, stretching from one end of the chamber to the other. Familiar footsteps are approaching, and I remain silent as I watch others whisper and murmur.

My grandmother gracefully enters the Great Hall and begins to walk down the carpet. She displays a fixed expression and calm demeanor. She approaches the podium at the end of the carpet and positions herself behind it, facing all of us. The ceremony begins.

The ceremony begins with the usual introductions and the exchange of pleasantries. Then, it leads into the true purpose of the ceremony; to nominate and choose the next Head of my family. The leader that *"embodies the qualities and values of what we represent"* my grandmother definitively states. Several people react with excitement, while others simply grin and stand confidently, waiting for their name to be called. I was none of these. I simply stand up straight, with a neutral look on my face, hands pressed together at my sides, anticipating.

"Which is why I am proud to announce..." my grandmother continued, *"that I nominate Leo Hanolo as the next Head of House Hanolo."* Everyone, gasps in shock. They converse with each other and turn their heads to observe me. A sense of fear slowly tightens its grip on my chest, squeezing the very air out of it. The pulling weight becomes so heavy, it anchors me down to the floor, in complete immobility. My eyes could only watch as a witness to the emotions on the faces of my family.

My family takes holds of my hands, and they pull me closer to my impending doom. The spoken words of my grandmother still hold me down, causing my steps to falter along the way. "Leo..." I heard a voice call. A blurry face approaches me, and their two hands softly press against my cheeks. Only then was I able to recognize the face of my grandmother "...out of all the people in this room, you were the only one to let others walk ahead, to remain silent and be observant, and to stand straight, expecting nothing. My dear grandson, you embody our expectations."

Note: *The author would like to thank Patricia Dover-Bedwell.*

Teaching from the Heart

by Yela Martinez

I was in High School in the mid-nineties, I was an average student, nothing to highlight, some difficult family situations may have made that so. What really stands out was my little love for math, either because I did not understand it or because the teachers' didactics were not the best, a school of 40 students per classroom of several courses in each grade, very difficult to focus on teaching from love and all this is added to the time, strategies and innovative methodologies definitely did not go hand in hand with the pile of notebooks that should be reviewed and reports to deliver etc, and the question of... After all, what is the use of math? When will I use everything that I left written in several notebooks? a lot of practical exercises that I only copied from those who had become my friends just to approve the topic.

Almost 20 years later, I had become a preschool teacher, and there I was again faced with math, things of fate led me to teach this area in the grades of primary school, not by choice but by assignment, very little motivated by the idea, but, unlike 15 years ago, now with the firm certainty that math is an essential part of our life, from making simple conversions, time, temperature, measurements, to the interest I pay for using my cards, measuring, algorithms, are not just concepts. They are a pillar of our life, everything is based on it, and in our adult life the knowledge of them will allow us to make good calculations and be intelligent when doing business etc.

What was I going to do? the usual? teach to add, subtract, memorize the multiplication tables? I knew that my apathy was partly due to lack of understanding, for what? why? how? where? answers that the topic answers by itself, but will they enjoy finding those answers?

How I was going to bring my students closer to those books? the books were not the names of my students of course, in fact there was vocabulary that was not even familiar to them, what was my goal? filling notebooks with algebraic operations, problem analysis, putting them at the front of the class to repeat the multiplication tables over and over again? No, we didn't need notebooks, I wanted to hear them create their own analysis, see them find the answer among their friends, in their daily lives, everything we needed was in our environment.

We counted the steps from the classroom to the park and converted them to another unit of measurement, we split the fruit from our snacks and talked about fractions, we looked for the pencil colors that our partner had lost and understood the subtraction, counted the food trays, we added up numbers several times, multiplied, built figures, with their sides, angles, etc. we were only building knowledge by ourselves, from the fun. It became the hour of play, a game of thinking. Was it innovative? Perhaps, the best strategy? Suddenly, I don't know what the great math professors would think, but what I do know is that my students will never forget these classes. Has it served their adult life? I'm sure it did. and with all certainty I say, they loved math, they loved that class.

All this story is intended to share from my own experience, a reflection that could be applicable in any area of learning, now my students are over 20 years old, I proudly say that when I saw them at school in their classes or on the street they always came to me remembering some anecdote of the class, what better gift and than satisfaction.

Teaching must be from the heart and for the heart, in these times when technology has made us teachers and parents aside to fill our children with little relevant information, where they do not learn to think, it is when we should come to them with questions , from their surroundings, from their tastes, a great task for parents and a giant challenge for teachers in all areas, however it is by own knowledge that the diversion and learning is not only for them, if as teachers we remove the whole wall of notebooks, planning, books, standards, etc and see the child who wants to play and who wants to learn, we will be full of ideas to bring it to knowledge and just like them we will have a lot of fun in this beautiful task. It may be out of our comfort zone but it will always be worth it.

Baby

by Fabiola



A Purchase With My First Pension

by Viktor Moskovchenko

Ding!

Unexpectedly, my first pension flew out of a roadside olive tree and nested in my smart-phone. The pension is seven figures, but small.

Maybe a typo? Restarted. The result has not changed!

My life sentence!

Online exchanging into euros left only three digits. And the first digit in both currencies has been the same. This is, of course, number one! Such entertaining mathematics! It seems Pythagoras is resting in our hotel.

Inspired by the gentle sound we continued our walking down to the beach.

There are three ways to become a sailor. Cruises are not considered in this case. To join the navy. To sign a contract to sail the seas, hauling cargo and earning money. Or to rent a ship to spend the money that fell from the sky. Today, our ship would be a motorboat! I was listed as a captain. My wife, the most beautiful of the vacationers, was assigned as a sailor to the ship's commander. We temporarily became part of the pleasure fleet.

Part 1

In short, we sailed. For the second time in my life, I was driving a vessel, experiencing terrible fear from the free play in the steering and the lack of a brake. The first time was in Southern Mexico. But that boat was very little and did not even have an anchor. And a reverser. This boat had such devices, which was important.

The same neophytes as us were scurrying across our course. Theatrical scenery of the inaccessible rocks changed consistently. Blue waves beat against the sides of the small vessel. The stern rose from the speed. Rod Stewart turned on in my heart and started singing:

"I'm sailing, I'm sailing..."

The smiles of the crewmates were open to the Paleokastritsa bays, which was a couple of miles away by leisurely boat ride and where we had already visited in a rental car. A car is good in every way, and it has a parking brake instead of an anchor. I must say I have underestimated the beauty and humanity of this brake all my life before. I treated it as a rudiment without due reverence.

We stopped in a cozy bay near a grotto. We admired it. We swam. We lifted the anchor and went forward, towards the warm wind.

The next stop was made under a monastery on a cliff, at the edge of which, for some reason, an old cannon was installed. We dropped the anchor. We admired the bay. We swam. Then I proudly stood behind the wheel, started the engine, turned on the gas level and, to my surprise, under the roar of the engine, our boat jerked, spun and stayed in the same place.

Part 2

I forgot!!! The anchor remained on the seabed!

I tried to pull it out with my hands, with the boat moving forward and backward. I put on my mask and fins to dive down to the anchor and free it. In vain!

I called the rental office. The connection was bad and I repeated the words from Rod's song:

«Can you hear me, can you hear me?»

They said that they would sail out to help us. The other boats were far away from us. We were alone in the bay. No any sail of hope. An ancient cannon looked with its empty eye socket down at us from above. Half an hour passed before I realized that the help boat hadn't found us.

The anchor tightly stuck to the ledge of a flat rock on the sand at a decent depth. Rod Stewart replaced by Ernest Hemingway. The confrontation lasted two hours in the style of "The Old Man and the Sea", version 2.0. And when it became clear that the anchor was unchangeable, the crew decided to leave it for fish joy. However, to facilitate further searches, we untied the anchor cable from the boat, tied a lifebuoy to the cable and photographed the burial site against the backdrop of the rocks.

Part 3

I hunched over the steering wheel, started the engine, turned the gas lever with my calloused hand, and with the engine tedious roar we left the place of captivity. The sun began to set. I remembered "Wellerman" sad song:

"There once was a ship that put to sea

The name of the ship was the..."

No name ship set off on its return way.

An hour later the judgement time has come. I convincingly explained that the anchor could be retrieved, that I had marked the place, that it had been photographed. They respectfully answered that anchors are often lost, that no one looks for them after they are lost, except for divers-gatherers, for whom it is a good business. We bought this anchor, attaching my card to the terminal, and from it, cheerfully chattering, came out a long white tongue in the form of a receipt with my first retirement money.

We hid this significant purchase at a depth of 20 feet in the Ionian Sea. In memory of Corfu Island...

Jesus, My Savior

by Belinda Bland

Do you believe in God? Have Jesus ever did a miracle in your life? Let me share a story about what I experienced on Wednesday, January 29, 2025. It was a nice, clear, sunny winter day. I was driving home from the music school where I take piano and voice lessons. It was about 4:30 p.m. There was a car in the front of me with a blinking light on the top and there was a tractor trailer behind me in the distance.

As I was driving, I noticed this big sun to the left of me in the sky. It was strange because it was kind of close to me. I kept driving at 60 miles an hour hoping that I could pass this sun and leave it behind me. However, this did not happen. From out of nowhere the sun covered or envelope me. I was blindsided by the sunlight. All I could see was the big yellow sun. I looked down at the road to see the guidelines but I couldn't see anything. I put the car visor down but that didn't help.

I didn't want to stop my car because I didn't want to run into the car in front of me. I also didn't want the tractor trailer to run into me. It was a fearful moment. So I cut my speed to 45 miles an hour. I turned the steering wheel trying to keep my car in its lane. My car ran off the road to the right. I thought I had a tree or something because I heard a rumbling noise under my car. I was driving a scarlet red four door 2022 Nissan Altima. I quickly turned the steering wheel to the left to get back on the road. but I didn't want to go into the oncoming traffic lane. I kept driving and I started to pray.

I began calling on Jesus to help me. I kept calling Jesus's name. "Please help me Jesus," I said. "I need you. Holy Spirit please help me. I kept calling on the name of Jesus. Then the sun began to subside. I could clearly see the road again. I thank God for helping me. He saved my life. I thought about pulling to the side of the road and letting the tractor trailer pass but I changed my mind because I was driving on a back pavement road and there was much space to pull on the side. I continued to drive. I noticed the car in front of me with the blinking light on the top made a left turn. The tractor trailer behind me was gone. I didn't see it anymore. I felt a relieve came over me.

As a believer of God, I knew that if I called on the name God and say His name Jesus, and called on His Holy Spirit, I knew He would help me and He did. Jesus pulled me out of a scary and threatening situation.

This reminded me of Saul in the Bible Acts 9:3-6 "(3) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (5) "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. (6) "Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." At that moment he became a believer of God. He started helping the believers. His name was changed to Paul. He wrote many books of the Bible. However, unlike Saul, I was already a believer.

I believe in the Godhead. Colossians 2:9 "For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." I believe in 1 John 5:7 "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Matthew 28:19 "Go ye therefore and

teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Ephesians 4:6 "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all." When I talk about one, I talk about the other two as well. When I pray to one, I pray to all of them because they are the same according to the Bible. When I do this, I see my blessings.

I believed the Lord, God let me live so that I could tell others about Him.

Woman

by Ruth



Untitled

by Lillie Booker

My favorite show is Judge Judy because she is good at what she does and she is fair. She controls the court by making people behave and whatever she says goes. I like the variety of cases such as a customer is suing her hairdresser and the landlord is suing the tenant. Some cases are funny and some are not funny. She decides who will win the cases by listening to the cases and looking at the evidence.

Lighthouse of the Pacific

by Karen Ramos

By coincidence, I received this photo, and it instantly reminded me of the breathtaking natural wonders that El Salvador has to offer. Astonished by its beauty, I felt inspired to write about one of its most iconic landmarks. The Izalco Volcano is the youngest volcano in both El Salvador and the world that remains active. Its name, derived from Nahuatl, means "place of the black sands," a fitting description that still holds true today. It is also known as the "Lighthouse of the Pacific" because, during long nights sailing on the high seas, ships were guided by constant eruptions and lava flows, like a compass in the darkness of the night.



I clearly remember my mother's stories about the fear the local inhabitants felt during those times. However, over time, people gradually grew accustomed to seeing the volcano alight, a flickering flame that illuminated the nights of the town. What once brought panic to the people eventually became a part of daily life, and the volcano slowly transformed into a popular tourist attraction around the entire region.

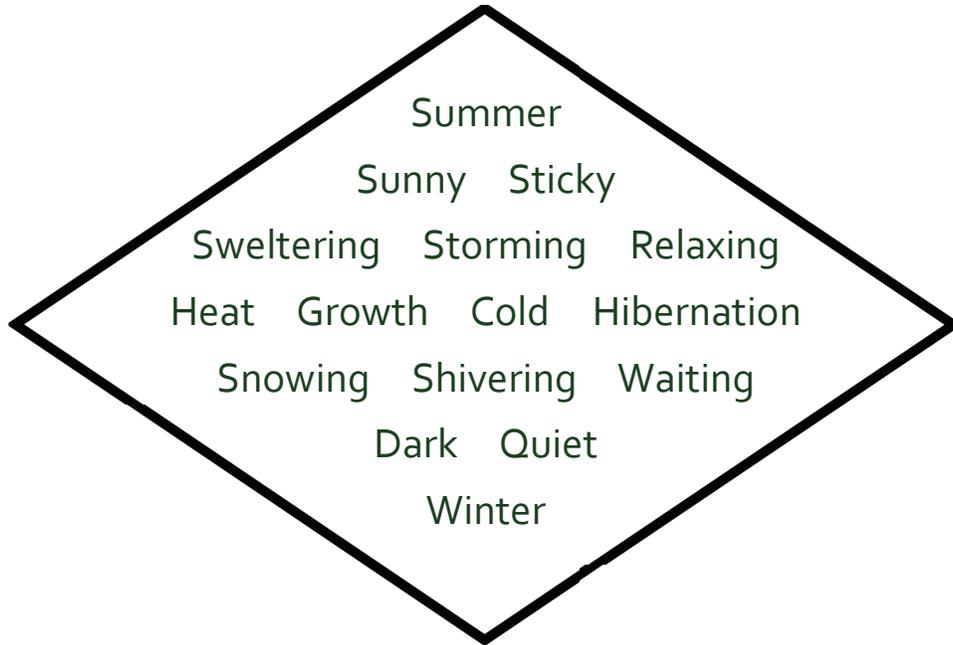
In fact, a hotel was built on a mountain facing the majestic volcano to offer guests a singular view of the spectacular lava flows. However, the builders were not as fortunate. By the time the hotel was completed, and just two weeks before its much-anticipated inauguration, the flames of what I call "the fire machine" were extinguished, leaving more than one hoping to witness that unique and natural spectacle. The locals also placed a big statue of the Virgin Mary at the base of the volcano, praying that the lava would not destroy their small village. Whether it was a miracle or not, the lava flow took another path, leaving the town untouched and free from devastation.

Until today this perfect cone of sand and rocks remains asleep and calm, encouraging the bravest tourists to venture out and climb to the top. One of the valiant was me. A long time ago on a perfect sunny day with a group of friends, I embarked on the expedition of my life, to discover the wonders of the volcano. Standing there at the top to 6,398 ft above sea level, it is impossible not to feel like the king of the world. But at the same time, the smell of sulfur and sight of fumaroles fills you with fear.

What makes this photo particularly fascinating is the visible second crater on the right side, formed by one of the lava eruptions in 1960. Remarkably, even 64 years later, this secondary crater remains intact, as seen in the photo above. It is almost as if the volcano itself is reminding us of the time when it was cloaked in fire, forever standing as the Lighthouse of the Pacific!

Summer

by Mawada



Sun

by Rima



My Favorite Picture

by Stephen Solomon

I like the picture of three dogs, made by Anne Wilson.

It's my favorite picture because I like dogs.

They remind me of my dogs.



A Werewolf Hunt

by Robert Ferguson

I heard a spooky werewolf. It was a dark and creepy night, but I was feeling brave. I went out to look for the werewolf. I looked in a tunnel. I looked in a haunted house. I looked in a bathroom. I couldn't find him. Then, I heard the werewolf howl again: "HOOOOOOWWWW-WWLLLLLLLLL"! He sounded farther away. I looked in a car trunk. I looked in a school. I looked in a hospital. But I still couldn't find him. Finally, I went to the library, and SURPRISE! There was a Halloween dog party at the library!

A Miracle Story

by Heidi Gao

Last summer has been a challenging and emotional time for me as my beloved dog, Lucky, fell seriously ill. Lucky is ten and half years old; typically, boxer dogs only live 8 to 12 years. His black hair around his face gradually turned white, and his eyes became a little dull now. Yet, I've always believed Lucky is a guardian angel sent to me by God. No matter how tough my day was, his joyful dance when I returned home always lifted my spirits. Our bond is deep and unbreakable.

Lucky is incredibly intelligent and seems to understand much of what we say. Earlier this summer, my husband promised to take our daughter and Lucky to New York for a week. He was thrilled, but at the last minute, my husband decided to leave him behind because my mother-in-law dislikes dogs. From that day on, Lucky became listless, refusing to eat and lying motionless on the sofa. I knew he was heartbroken, as he usually accompanies us to New York every year.

A few days later, I realized something was seriously wrong. Lucky had fluid in his lungs and his belly swelled, and he barely ate, losing weight rapidly. I rushed him to the vet, who delivered devastating news: Lucky had a mass in his lungs and might not survive the summer. I was crushed, collapsing into tears. The vet prescribed medication and suggested further tests to check for cancer. A week later, the diagnosis confirmed a malignant tumor. Given Lucky's age, the vet advised against surgery and recommended euthanasia to spare him further suffering.

I couldn't bear the thought of losing him so soon. Against the vet's advice, I brought Lucky home. Every day, I carefully fed him, administered his medication, made him chicken soup, and took him on slow walks. I prayed to God every night. Miraculously, God seemed to hear my prayers. Lucky began to regain his appetite, and his belly returned to normal. Incredibly, after two months, he is healthy again and eating like a machine. He survived last summer against all odds.

Last summer was filled with tears, but it also taught me to cherish every moment with those I love. No matter how long I have with Lucky, it will never feel like enough. As the saying goes, "A house without dogs is like a garden without flowers." Lucky is my miracle, and I am forever grateful for his presence in my life.

A Bank Clerk Who Deserves Respect

by Ya Li Fan

In mid-June of 2024 my friend took me to Truist bank to help me open an account. We were greeted by a young man whose name was ----- ----- . He told us that he had been to China when he was six years old. Naturally, this made a good impression on me, since I am Chinese. The young bank teller processed a temporary card for me, good for a month. He told me it would take a month for my permanent card to be issued.

Time flies, and the month passed quickly. Because my English is not good, I often ignore the calls I receive on my cell phone, since I have a hard time understanding people when they call me. One day in August as I was hurriedly walking past a bank, when I heard someone calling my name! I turned, and saw this same bank teller running after me. He had seen me through the bank window as I was going by, and hurried out to stop me. He informed me, half out of breath, that my permanent bank card was ready. He quickly returned to the bank and replaced my temporary card with the new one.

Although perhaps a small matter, it reflects the first class attitude of this young bank teller, and I admire him very much for his kindness.

From these two small things, we can see that if every employee, working in every position does everything responsibly, then our social environment will be much improved.

Untitled

by Viola White

My favorite outfits are suits. I can wear them in different ways. I can match the top with different bottoms. I can match the bottom with different tops. I also like that suits come in many colors and patterns. My favorite colors are red, gold, blue, and purple. Another thing I like is that suits come in different lengths. I can wear them above my knees, just above my ankle, or just below my knees. My favorite length is just above my ankle because it is more lady-like. Additionally, I like to match my suits with different colored shoes.

My Beloved Red Car

by Rocio Aguilar-Najera

There was one important thing in my life that I treasured in my heart with much love and nostalgia. It was my red car! My dad bought this beautiful red 1968 Volkswagen Beetle. My earliest memories are filled with the sight and sound of “mi bochito rojo.” Every family trip was an adventure, an opportunity to explore the unknown; we travelled miles and miles in that car. Each journey was a story itself, filled with laughter, challenges, and discoveries.

“Mi bochito rojo” never failed us; it felt as if the car shared our spirit of adventure, embracing each challenge with solid strength. One of the most thrilling experiences was crossing a flooded river. The rush of water, the uncertainty of distances, and the determination to make it across safely were moments that tested its courage and revealed its resilience.

Learning to drive marked me forever. It was a wonderful experience, regardless of the screams, scares, and pinches my dad gave me to ensure I learned how to drive properly. The process was not without two accidents, and each time it hurt me deeply. But with every mistake, I learned how to take care of the car. My dad taught me how to clean the carburetor, change the oil, and replace the tires. Taking care of “mi bochito rojo” was a bonding experience that deepened my connection.

About ten years ago, my parents told me that they had to sell it, because the sheet metal on the bottom was completely rusty and beyond repair. With all the pain in my heart, I had to say goodbye to “mi bochito rojo,” but not without first saying thank you for all the adventures we had together.

My car may not be with me any longer, but its spirit continues to inspire me, reminding me of the adventures we had and the lessons we learned. In the end, “mi bochito rojo” taught me that even though things may not last forever, the memories and lessons they teach are eternal.



SPOTLIGHT

2025