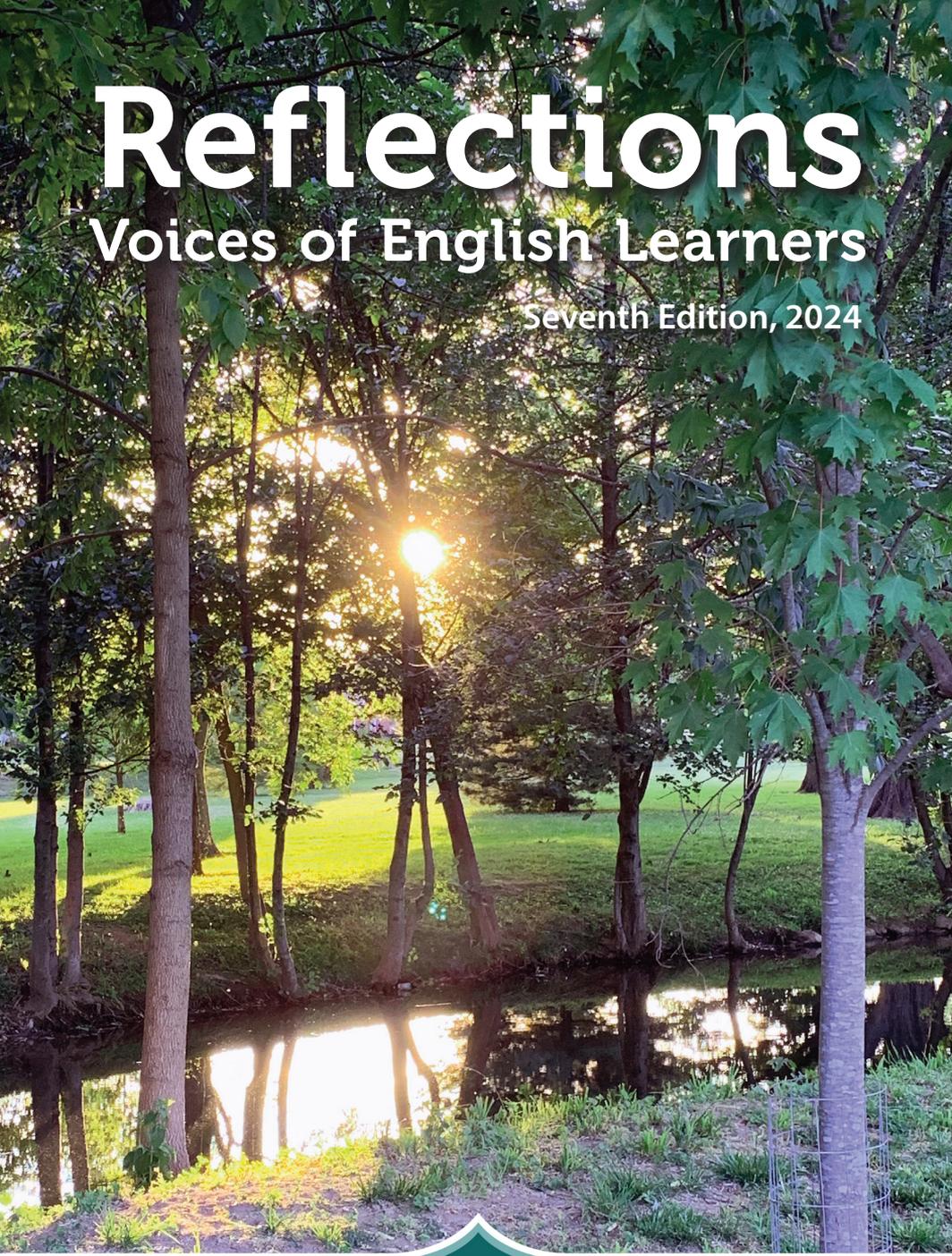


# Reflections

## Voices of English Learners

Seventh Edition, 2024



**LITERACY COUNCIL**  
FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

EMPOWERING ADULTS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

## OUR MISSION

To provide Frederick County adults with pathways to essential literacy skills.

## OUR VISION

Literacy lifts lives.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Success for the individuals and families we seek to serve rests on a collective community approach that shapes a full path to a thriving life.

## OUR VALUES

- Sustaining our organization through responsible financial stewardship, sound management, and community engagement.
- Teaching a parent in order to educate a family.
- Educating our students in a learner-centered format with compassion, confidentiality, and respect.
- Producing a safer, healthier, economically stronger, and more vibrant community through adult literacy.
- Sustaining, empowering, and energizing a passionate, strong dedicated volunteer base.



[frederickliteracy.org](https://frederickliteracy.org)

The Literacy Council of Frederick County is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

## THE MAGIC OF LITERACY

Welcome to a collection of stories written by students from the Literacy Council, a program dedicated to teaching English reading and writing skills to adult learners. Our students come from diverse backgrounds—some are from other countries, learning English as a second language, while others are native English speakers who didn't have the opportunity to learn to read and write during their early years. Despite these different paths, they all share a common goal: unlocking the transformative power of literacy.

As one of our students wrote in a moving essay on p. 17, learning to read and write is like a magical superpower. Literacy opens doors to better job opportunities, deeper community involvement, and personal growth. It empowers them to navigate the world with confidence and achieve dreams that once seemed out of reach. Recognizing the importance of this skill, our students dedicate their valuable time and energy to mastering it.

Our tutors play a vital role in this journey. With patience, dedication, and a shared belief in the power of education, they volunteer their time to help their neighbors develop these essential skills. Together, they create a ripple effect that touches not only their lives but also those of their families and the broader community.

The essays that follow are a testament to the time, effort, and heart invested by both our learners and tutors. Each story reflects the belief that literacy truly lifts lives—transforming individuals, strengthening families, and enriching our community.

As you read these essays, we invite you to see the magic of literacy through the eyes of our students. I am confident you will come to believe, as I do, that literacy is indeed a superpower.

Catherine Mock, President  
Literacy Council Board of Directors.

# Literacy *lifts* Lives

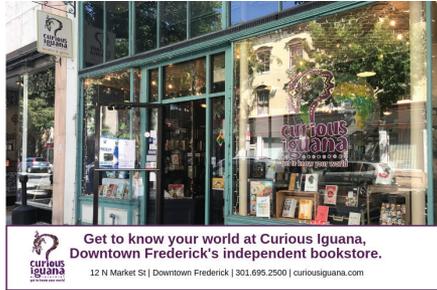
# DEDICATION

We dedicate Reflections: Voices of English Learners to our adult learners, their families, and their volunteer tutors.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This magazine would not have been possible without the generous support of the Literacy Council of Frederick County's Board of Directors, President Catherine Mock and Immediate Past President Sharon Jacko, Director of Operations Nancy Gibbons, our sponsors—Curious Iguana, LSWG, Wonder Book & Video, Chuck Roberts, John and Jane Ketchem, and also graphic artist Karen Peacock, editor Catherine Coundjeris, co-founding editor Julie Heifetz, editor Cecelia Reed, and first readers Maggie Clingman and Alix Cooney. In addition, many thanks go out to our dedicated tutors and our contributing students.

Reflections: Voices of English Learners is produced by Strategic Factory. Photography is provided by our students. Cover photo by Karen Peacock.



The opinions expressed in these essays do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Literacy Council.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Reflections: Voices of English Learners is now publishing its seventh edition! Each year the students' work amazes and enlightens me. I am always profoundly humbled by the depth of their insights that are informed by the travails of starting a new life in the United States. They are creating new homes for themselves and their families, seeking belonging and community in an ever-changing world. Despite tremendous challenges, they find a way to contribute to the workforce and engage in volunteer opportunities, immersing themselves in learning the English Language, and becoming productive members of our society.

The stories in Reflections evolve from the histories of our student body and are shaped by their unique voices and experiences. Submission is open to all the adult learners of the Literacy Council—no matter the level of language acquisition—who never fail to impress with the excellence of writing we are fortunate to publish in this magazine.

Most of the pieces come from the writing classes that we had online this past year. In personal stories, our students reveal themselves. Through the lens of their unique cultural perspectives, we watch how they build bridges to the new American culture that they have adopted. Students share their favorite foods and movies, flash their sense of humor, relive their travel experiences. They reveal themselves in expository pieces, fictional pieces, and poetry. They allow us to glimpse into their personal memories. The students' work addresses a wide variety of themes, including breaking barriers, celebrating cultures, solving problems, and adjusting to stress.

Our students are progressing in their lives with their newly acquired English-language skills and making a difference for themselves, for their families, and for our community. Our adult learners represent many different nationalities, languages, and cultures. We are honored to present a selection of their stories to you in the seventh edition of Reflections, the Literary Magazine of the Literacy Council of Frederick County. We lightly edit, maintaining the integrity of the individual authors.

We send out a call to those of you who are new readers of the magazine as well as students of the Literacy Council to submit your stories for Reflections 2025. We are committed to being a source of community to our authors. And we are proud to continue providing an outlet for our students' unique perspectives and voices. ■

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# EUROPE WAS WAITING FOR ME

By Ángela L.

*I'm Ángela L., I am 28 years old, I'm Colombian, and I arrived at United States almost two years ago. I came here because my dream was to improve my English skills. I think to know different languages help you to know more cultures, have better opportunities. To find Frederick County Public Library has been a big help. I made friends of different countries, I know now about other cultures, and I have improved my English skills. I always tried to study the language in my country and by myself, and it has been a hard way, where sometimes I feel frustrated, but in the same time happy because through every mistake I can improve a little bit more. I find the Literacy Council has been the best thing that happened to me, because I know new people. I have improved my English skills a lot. I made new friends and it helped me to get out of my comfort zone and my routine. My hobbies are that I love animals and I love to help them, I rescued three animals in Colombia, and I tried to help one foundation being like a godmother. I love to travel, for that reason I was in Europe, where I had a lot of adventures with my sister and where I could put in practice my English. In addition, I love to share time with my family and I enjoy making crafts and walking in the nature.*

I was so happy, because after almost nine months I was going to see my sister and one of my cousins, and because I was going to know other different places and cultures, I was excited because I was afraid about my English in the airports, restaurants,

hotels, and public transport in the other countries. I needed to communicate with other people who did not speak Spanish, and English is a universal language.

It was August 25, 2023, I traveled from Washington, D.C., to Lisbon, Portugal with the destination to Barcelona, Spain (it was almost 7 hours in the airplane). It was 11 a.m. and I saw my sister and my cousin in the airport of Barcelona, Spain. We were very happy! In the afternoon we were at the beach in the Mediterranean Ocean and at night we had a dinner, and I could see and play with my cousin's five kittens.

Two days after, my sister and I traveled to Paris, France. It was so funny, because we did not speak French and we were lost at midnight and we did not know about the hotel's keys, so, we needed to find people and speak in English for help, the people in Paris were so helpful. They found one hotel for us, we went to Disneyland, it was so beautiful and amazing, but the public transportation is a big mess.

Three days later we traveled to Rome, Verona, and Venice in Italy and came back to Barcelona, Spain, to share a little more time with my cousin before traveling to Washington and my sister going on to Colombia.

In conclusion, it was a very exciting and emotional trip. I practiced a little bit my English; I could see my sister and cousin; I could know more beautiful places; I met new people and learned about other cultures. They were the best 12 days. ■

# A DIFFERENT WAY TO TALK

by Angela L.

Animal communication is the way that the animals want to say or express something, like when they are hungry, they are sick, they want to play, etc. They use their legs, tails, ears, meowing, barking, pecks etc., all of them are different, and for that reason, they have a different way to communicate with us, maybe they have learned with their owners and other they do naturally.

In this case, I am going to talk about pets, like dog, cats, and some birds. For example, the cats' meow and purring by nature, when they are meowing, they want to say, they are happy. When their ears are forward sometimes, they are alert; when their tails up, it means they are happy too; when it is down, probably they are sick; and when the tail is fluffy, they are angry. I have 3 kittens in Colombia and what did they learn with me? I used to use the keys to open the door, now, one of them touch the keys and start meowing to say I want to go outside. When one of them wants a hug, she goes to my parent's room and lies down on the bed in my dad's arms.

On the other hand, the dogs move their tails when they are excited, and they bark when they are playing with other dogs or when there is something new in their house, like people, other animals, that mean they are alert, but for example, one of my friends has a dog, when he barks it is because he saw a cat



outside. When he sneezes, it is because he wants to go outside or when he is close to the table while we are eating, he wants that we give some of our food.

Finally, I want to talk about birds, but in this case parrots, they have the ability to talk like us, they can learn and repeat a lot of words and even they can sing. We are the example for them, if they can learn bad words, it is because we use them all the time, and they learn about the way we talk with others in our environment. For me, they are so smart and funny.

In conclusion, each animal has a natural way to communicate with us, but they can find and learn too from their owners' other ways to want to say or express something. ■

# RABINDRANATH TAGORE, A GREAT INDIAN POET

By Annie D.

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*My name is Annie D. I am originally from Sichuan, China. I came to the Literary Council of Frederick County after moving here from Rockville with my husband. The Literacy Council has been wonderful to me, and I am very grateful to them. I really enjoy learning from the amazing teachers and meeting other students. Some of my hobbies include cooking delicious food, increasing my vocabulary with crossword puzzles, and visiting America's National Parks. My goals are to become a United States citizen, graduate from Frederick Community College with a Nursing degree, and become a Registered Nurse. I would like to be a Nurse for the Department of Veterans Affairs and care for American military heroes.*

Rabindranath Tagore was an Indian poet, and he is the founder of modern Bengali literature in India. As the first Asian to win the Noble Prize for Literature, he is the author of the poetry of "Gitanjali," "Stray Birds," "Fireflies," "The Crescent Moon," and more.

Tagore's poems mainly describe nature and life, and the poems are about romanticism and realism, which

are full of wisdom in dealing with the world. They include penetrating philosophy, containing the ideals of love's beauty, courage, and freedom, as well as matters of life and death. Human nature has a soul here. I know most of Tagore's collection of poetry, but I especially like these lines from "Stray Birds":

If you shed tears when you miss the sun, you also miss the stars.

Once we dreamt that we were strangers.

We wake up to find that we were dear to each other.

The world had kissed my soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs.

In Tagore's poetry, life itself and its diversity is the cause of joy. At the same time, the love he expresses (love for life, nature, and country) is also one of the themes of his poetry.

Tagore's poems touched my soul deeply. Every time when I read them, they make me feel like I lie down on the clouds in the sky, everything seems far away but within reach. ■



## THE TASTE OF FOOD AND LOVE

By Annie D.

Saozi noodles is a popular food in Southwest China. This noodle dish is made up of many ingredients. In early China, most people lived in poverty with extreme lack of food. To have stronger physical strength to keep working, people thought of cooking together all the ingredients at home to get through such difficult times. Food has evolved over time, with ingredients becoming richer, and more delicious. Saozi noodles is one of them, and it is one of my favorite foods.

In my childhood, my mother often made this, and I always liked to stand by the kitchen door watching her busy figure. She made the whole kitchen exude the smell of love.

If you want to ensure that the saozhi noodles you make is delicious, the following ingredients are

indispensable: pork belly; tofu; potatoes; tomatoes; carrots; fungus; dried mushrooms; ginger and some green onions. At the same time, there are also many types of seasonings required, such as soy sauce; dark soy sauce; oyster sauce; sugar; mature vinegar; cooking wine; and a little chicken essence.

The ingredients for this dish are easy to find, but the cooking process is not simple. There are so many ingredients, so the preparation takes longer before cooking.

Since I was a child, and many years later when I became a mother, saozhi noodles stayed throughout my memory — it is the love from my mother. Whenever I make this dish, endless thoughts of my mother fill my heart. ■

# MY WEDDING DAY

By Busra B.



*My name is Busra. My nickname is Bush. I am from Turkey. I make jewelry and I like shopping. My personal goals are to speak English like an American and to be able to get a job. I have been working with my tutor, Anne, for almost a year. We meet once a week. We study writing and speaking every week.*

The morning of my wedding day was a little bit stressful, but fun.

When I got up in the morning, I drank my coffee and took a shower. Then I went to the hair salon to have my hair done. When I got home my friends, my husband-to-be, and his family came to my parents' house. My friends came to the door and said, "If you want to see Bush you have to pay money!" (This is a Turkish tradition). After that my husband-to-be gave the money and we danced and took pictures. They left our house and we

got ready for the next part of the day.

A makeup and hair artist came to my house after my husband-to-be left. I was wearing a white top with feathers and white pants. The hair artist put my hair up and then the makeup artist refreshed my makeup. After that I put on my wedding gown. It was a cream-colored, long-sleeved, lace, floor-length dress. My future husband came back to the house and told me "You look so beautiful." I felt excited and happy.

Then we went to the hotel for our wedding ceremony and party. Before the ceremony we drank and talked with our friends. One hour later it was time for the ceremony. A wedding officiant asked us some information, and asked if we wanted to marry each other. Of course, we said, "Yes!"

After the ceremony we had our first dance. We danced to "Perfect" by Ed Sheeran. Soon everybody danced and had fun. We had a dinner of kuzu kapama (lamb wrapped in grape leaves), hummus, yogurt, and salad. After the dinner we danced until midnight, and took more photos. Finally, at the end of the evening I felt loved, relaxed, and little bit tired. ■



# THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON IN MY LIFE

By David S.

*Greetings to all readers of Reflections 2024. My name is David S., and I want to welcome you and thank you for the support that all the residents of Frederick have provided to our Literacy Council over the years. During this edition, I have had the privilege of being selected to share with you two writings that were part of my assignments during the courses I took as part of my development and strengthening in the English language.*

*It has been an honor for me to get to know the Literacy Council Team. This group has shown passion for assisting ESL (English as a Second Language) members of the community and developing their English skills. My experience has been incredible, and I want to invite anyone who needs help with the English language to come by the center's offices and receive guidance. No matter what level of English you are at, I guarantee that the Center can provide you with new tools so that you can develop and interact with more confidence in the community.*

*To let you know a bit more about me, I would like to share with you some of my experiences and interests. I moved to Frederick in 2018 after living in Leesburg, Virginia for seven years. I am a professional in information technology and work as a network engineer for a company that provides services to the U.S. government.*

*The first time we visited Frederick, we were enchanted by the town. We discovered so much history in just one afternoon that this visit helped us make the decision to move to the area. After*



*much searching, we found the perfect place to accommodate a family of six. Frederick is a place that has offered our family something for everyone. The culinary experience is unique, with a wide variety of different restaurants in the area making Frederick a gem. Personally, I enjoy playing golf, and Frederick does not disappoint with so many courses nearby.*

*My wife is delighted with the wide variety of shops and options offered in the area. Additionally, the location provides us immediate access to major roads and highways.*

*One of my personal goals is to pursue a doctorate soon. Obviously, I would continue in the same area of*

*technology in which I currently work, and I hope someday to be able to teach and prepare new generations in the field of technology. In the short term, I am considering taking some additional courses at the Literacy Council to continue strengthening my mastery and confidence in the English language.*

*I'll leave it here for now, but I want to invite you to get to know the Literacy Council and use the services they offer to all members of our community. These services are what have helped me communicate much more confidently in my workplace and express myself in a more relaxed and natural manner.*

I would like to write about my dad. He was the most influential person in my life. My dad from the very beginning was a fighter, he never gave up. He came from a very humble family who lived in a rural area in the town of Comerio, Puerto Rico. My dad joined the Army at the age of 17. He spent eight years of his life in the military service. When he returned from service, he started community college and studied accounting. He loved numbers, and he was very good in math. After receiving his diploma, he joined the Puerto Rico power company and he spent 30 years working there. His job was as a power lineman. That particular

job was super dangerous because linemen most of the time work with electricity cables or live cables. Any error can be fatal.

After retirement he went back to the job force, and he was a man of many talents. He started working in a private electrical company as a foreman. He oversaw the development of the electrical phase of the first electric train in Puerto Rico. My dad was not an engineer but every engineer of the project always looked to him and asked for his opinion. He was very intelligent and a respectful person. Everybody loved to work with him. After successfully finishing the development training, the company assigned him to a new project. He was in charge of the building of a new pharmaceutical plant in Puerto Rico. That project was an investment of five hundred million dollars and close to three years of work.

The priority of my dad always was his family. He pushed me and my siblings always to pursue a college career and challenge ourselves, get out of our comfort zone and be an inspiration for other people. More importantly, he taught us to love the Lord and be a good Christian. That is his legacy and lives in the hearts of his kids and every person who meets him. ■

# COME VISIT PUERTO RICO

By David S.

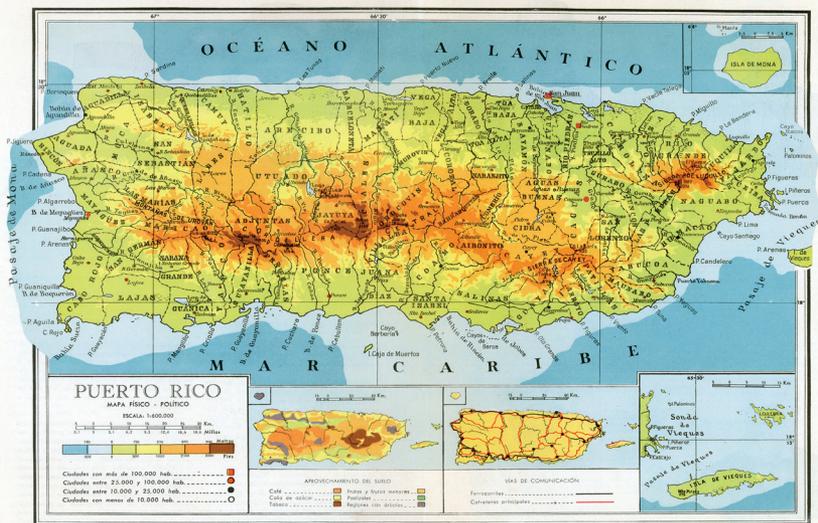
My favorite place in my country of Puerto Rico is a town named Isabella. It is a beautiful and peaceful area located on the northwest coast of the island. Isabella Town is very popular in the surfing community because that area produces big waves all year-round. In the past years, Isabella has been the host of many local and international surfing competitions.

Another great and beautiful area of Isabella is their underwater cave system. The only thing is to enjoy this beautiful and unique underworld you need to be a certified diver. The caves are in a remote area and just accessing the area is a fully enjoyable experience. The cave's entrance is located at a

depth of probably 18 to 22 feet under the surface. It is recommended to get access with an experienced diver or a local guide.

Inside the caves is a totally different world, the marine life is very rich and diverse. Some people describe the experience as like entering a big fishbowl in a secure environment. I personally enjoyed this before, and by far it is still one of my favorite life experiences.

I recommend that anyone visit Puerto Rico. The island has something to offer to everybody. Puerto Rico is rich in history, culture, food, and is a very secure place and part of the United States. Please come and visit any time. ■



# TETSU NAKAMURA

By Emiri T..

*Hi. My name is Emiri. I'm from Japan. I have lived in the U.S. for 11 years now. But I am still learning English. I have three children and have moved to five different states. It was busy, and I didn't have a chance to be comfortable with the community where I lived. My children are growing. Finally, I had time to take care of myself. That's why I signed up with the Literacy Council. I am still afraid to speak in English, especially on the phone, but I can practice speaking English while I take classes. My children know English way more than me now. Sometimes, I am not able to understand what my children are talking about. One day, I want to understand them with no problem. Also, I would like to join community volunteers, like volunteering for my children's school. My goal is to be comfortable speaking English even on the phone, and to be part of the community.*

I like Tetsu Nakamura. I don't think he is a famous person in the U.S., but he is a famous person in Afghanistan and Japan. He was a doctor. He worked in Pakistan for over 20 years, but couldn't stay because the country's political situation was worsening and not safe, so he moved to Afghanistan after that. He wasn't just a doctor. He thought about what was best for the community. He made irrigation canals, schools, and mosques (Islamic prayer halls). Before the construction of the irrigation canal, many people died from lack of water and food. Irrigation canals saved the lives of 65, 000.



Unfortunately, Tetsu Nakamura was killed by a terrorist Dec. 4, 2019.

I like him because he was devoted to the poor and those in need of help, regardless of his own interests. It is not easy to decide to make a difference, but he did it. Even if you want to make a difference, it's hard to put it into action. That's why I like him and respect him.

To learn more about Dr. Nakamura, here are several sources:

[https://specials.nishinipponco.jp/tetsu\\_nakamura/kids/](https://specials.nishinipponco.jp/tetsu_nakamura/kids/)

(*The Nishinippon Shimbun*, 2020)

The New York Times ([nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)):

"He Showed Us Life: Japanese Doctor Who Brought Water to Afghans Is Killed" By Zabihullah Ghazi, Mujib Mashal, and Fahim Abed ■

## NY FAVORITE MOVIE

By Emiri T.

---

I like comedy, animation, documentary, history, and family movies but I like movie musicals more. My favorite movie is "Sister Act" especially, "Sister Act 2" which has been my favorite movie since I was little. The main character is Whoopi Goldberg in the role of Deloris. She finds herself coming to the aid of her nun friends who need help to save the old school. They did a 30th anniversary reunion on a TV show last week. Sister Act 2 cast did a performance of the song from the movie. That made me so happy. I like this movie because Deloris saved the old school, also she found out about the students' possibilities and strengths. She never gave up and

tried her best, and this movie always reminds me of old memories.

My dad and I rented this VHS at a store when I was little. I really love gospel and chorus. My family and I go to hear gospel and chorus at downtown Frederick in December. This event is called "Candlelight Tour of Historic Houses of Worship." These are beautiful events and make me feel calm and peaceful. If you have never attended, please try, and enjoy these events. I love downtown Frederick but it is especially gorgeous and beautiful in winter.

I've digressed off topic, but if you have never watched Sister Act 2, please watch. ■

## MY FIRST VISIT TO WALT DISNEY WORLD

By Esperanza G.C.

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*Esperanza G.C., MD, MHA, INHC holds a Doctor in Medicine and Master of Health Administration degrees from the Valle University in Colombia. She is a Certified International Health Coach. When she came to the United States, she lead health promotion and prevention programs at clinics and wellness centers in Rhode Island and Washington Metropolitan area.*

*Esperanza G. C. worked as a physician for 15 years in Colombia. For more than 15 years in the U.S. she has worked as an Integrative Nutrition Health Coach. She has helped many*

*patients reverse chronic diseases through a diet of whole foods and changes in lifestyle to improve the quality of life.*

*During the last two years she participated in the Literacy Council's student-led conversation classes, leading discussions and joining writing classes with the purpose of improving her English skills. The Literacy Council has an excellent group of volunteer teachers with the passion of helping others to learn English. Her goal is to finish the training as a functional medicine provider to help more people reverse*



*dysfunction or disease and achieve their health goals.*

When my daughter was five years old, I planned to visit Walt Disney World in Florida. We went to Miami to visit a cousin and her family, then we took a tour bus to Disney. My English level was basic .

I received verbal instructions in English when the bus arrived, nothing in writing. We were very happy when we arrived to Disney Park after two to three hours. I remember the couple that spoke Spanish and I tried to not miss them. My daughter was excited with all the attractions at every station we visited. All was beautiful and almost magical. We enjoyed the time together.

But surprise was in store for us. After the parade before midnight, we had to take the shuttle to the parking lot.

I took the wrong one. I was supposed to take one to the parking for busses, not for cars. We were the last ones on the shuttle. We were off the bus and walking for an hour until the entrance and asked the person what I need to do.

I didn't have any information about the hotel, because next day we would be visiting the Epcot Center. This person found my information in the computer and called the taxi to go to the hotel. The happiness to visit Walt Disney World had turned into nightmare for me.

We were nervous, very exhausted, and hungry. When we got to the hotel, I called the receptionist and asked about the time the bus would be leaving for Epcot.

The next day at 6 a.m. we were ready to take the bus. This day I was sure to follow the people who were with us to finally come back to Miami. ■

# BEING BILINGUAL IS A SUPERPOWER!

By Estephany C.

*My name is Estephany C., I am from Mexico, and I emigrated to the United States in June 2013. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in nutrition in my country, I made the decision to enter a program that gave me the opportunity to come to the United States where I would live and share with a family and help take care of the children. I planned to stay for one year. I wanted the experience, to get to know the country, the culture and above all learn the language. The first girl I met was from Colombia, and we became very good friends! The moment when you meet someone who speaks your same language it is so magical, especially when you miss your family and your country. After three months I met two girls from Mexico, with whom the connection was even stronger since our stories were similar. We were from the same country, and we were the same age. And soon after I met my future husband, with whom I had a beautiful friendship. "The Four Mexas," we called ourselves.*

Everything was wonderful, I was getting to know the country, traveling when I could, but I didn't really practice English much. My host mom wanted me to speak Spanish to her son, and I was embarrassed to speak English with her since her Spanish was very good. The end of the year was about to arrive, and she asked me to stay with them for another year. It was a decision that I had to think about since things with "my friend" were getting very serious, and I felt that saying goodbye would be even more difficult.

I stayed another year, and now that



year has become 10 years, after finishing the program; I returned to my country for six months and then returned to the U.S. to start a family. Did I sacrifice my career? Yes, but it has been worth every moment. My English is still not perfect. I have been fortunate to move to Frederick, and be able to take classes at the Literacy Council, which has helped me and continues to help me. Above all, I feel motivated to continue learning. I want my children to feel proud of me and their roots, so just like me, you see that speaking two languages is wonderful.

Browsing the world of the internet, I came across this phrase: Being bilingual is a superpower. Countless times my oldest son and I have had conversations about having a superpower. Would you like to have a superpower? Which one would you like to have?

The responses have been many and of course have been influenced by the big screens with those majestic women and men with impressive muscles (those that you get by spending hours in the gym), in fitted suits and sometimes with a cape.

It is difficult to make an 8-year-old child with a great imagination understand that just as we are, we are perfect and we do not need more, since the more we fear ourselves, the more responsibilities we obtain. But for him, having a superpower seems indispensable, because not having one causes frustration and sometimes even anger.

As a mother, you try to make them love themselves as they are, to see all the good in themselves and, above all, the potential they can reach when they become what they want. However, we must be careful in what we are going to tell them, as I usually tell them: "You can achieve everything you set out to do, you just need to practice." This mantra has become something very serious.

He now believes that, if he practices jumping and jumping higher and higher, eventually he will manage to fly one day. And while he arrives at that day, I must manage things, so that his dream of literally flying like a superpower is not a complete disappointment. That is why the opportunity to explain to them that being bilingual is a superpower is something I found incredible and very helpful... Just what I needed!

And the more I think about it, I really think it is true.

It has always seemed wonderful to me, how a child can have a conversation

in two languages, respond to a friend in one language and turn around and respond to the other in another language without even thinking about it or at least that is what I perceive.

And it's funny how I — who am older, coming from another country, with a different culture and language— felt embarrassed. I was embarrassed to speak, go to a restaurant, ask for help, ask for directions, do simple things like buy food, make an appointment, etc. etc.

And here are my two children without shame, with courage and above all with pride because I have always reminded them that there is nothing wrong with being bilingual, nor is there anything to be ashamed of, wanting them to avoid the things that I felt, because I was not able to see everything that comes with being bilingual.

Being bilingual opens the doors to more and greater opportunities. The benefits are many: It helps you to be more open, to have more concentration and to learn faster, it also makes you determined to find a better job, want to travel more, and meet more people, learn another culture, and slow down aging. Anyway, to mention a few, since the list is long.

Being bilingual is the best legacy I can give to my children, teaching them about our culture, about our language, about the people, with the hope that they want to learn not only just two, but even more languages to enrich that superpower.

I'm a happy mom, with a great family and our superpower is being bilingual!

What about you? What is your superpower? ■

# WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF?

By Estephany C.

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Imagine a house in the mountains, surrounded by nature (flowers, fruit trees), fresh air, the singing of birds. You and your confidant have a good coffee while sitting on the terrace talking and watching the children playing for hours without wanting to go back inside of the house yet. It seems like a dream come true, nothing more to do than enjoy the wonderful view that nature offers you.

You do not have to go out to work since the land and farm animals provide you with food. Fashion does not exist here; you don't have to impress anyone, luxuries... for what? It really is of no use, light and energy

seem essential, but fortunately down the hill you have a river (one of the few treasures we have) and as a community you have created mini-hydraulic energy that provides you with both needs, just as you take advantage of the energy from the sun, with solar panels made with recycled materials.

Imagine, too that you are a small community; children do not miss out on learning and socializing. It's like a big school, where you learn something new all the time. That's how it is! You didn't read the above sentence wrong: you learn, both the adults and the children, day by day. Children learn to add, subtract, read, and write. They are

taught to cultivate, harvest, cook, bake, embroider, sew, build, in short, everything that can be done with human hands. But above all, they are taught respect, love for themselves and for others, and the importance of having values.

I told you! it seems like a dream. Of course there are conflicts, tell me where they don't exist, so I won't go there, since I believe that a world without challenges is a boring world. But what would happen if to "make our lives easier" for this world or community and introduce them to great technologies, the endless number of things you can do with their help

Tired of spending time cleaning and not having time for your family (that's how it is sold to you).

**DON'T WORRY!** We have just what you need.

The automatic vacuum cleaner, you don't even have to touch it anymore, it goes alone to where it is dirty and cleans it, and the best thing is that it stores itself. You don't know how to get to your destination, no problem! With GPS everything is easier. You want to communicate with your loved ones, this device does that and more: it is called a smart phone.

And you can learn, play, talk, exercise, schedule an appointment, make video calls, take photos and video. You can watch series, movies, news, send an email, go shopping, grocery shopping, use a calendar, etc. etc.

However, there is a catch. Nobody read the fine print of the contract about excessive use of this communication device. It can be extremely addictive; it has consequences for all ages. You lose interest in talking to the person next to you, children no longer want to go

out to play or read, the device reads for you, even more it will cause you to need things that you didn't even know you needed. Did you know what you wanted, fashion luxuries, the latest model of car, smartphone, TV, brands, and video games? And what about the problems with the brain and your memory, you will no longer even use it for what you need, such as important dates, names. Everything will be saved for you and your cellphone will know.

The dependency will be so big that when something happens to the cellphone or the internet fails, it will seem that the world has stopped, and everyone, especially kids and teenagers, will feel miserable. What am I going to do? How helpless, I don't even know how to get to such and such place, it's the end of things.

As an adult you will force yourself to go out to work with a schedule and daily routine because you must pay the bills for all the things you will acquire, becoming a slave to time since you will only live to work and spend.

What would happen if...? those small letters become large, red letters, and when we obtained them, we used all these devices responsibly. We won't expect the phone to solve all our problems or do everything for us. We would use it only as a means of being able to communicate with your loved ones, and be able to see them or use it in a true emergency.

For me it would be the perfect world, just as I began this essay. A place where we enjoy, learn, and take advantage of nature as well as respect it, and respect each person, helping each other, but above all **WE LIVE**

That for me would be a dream come true! ■

# CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

By Esther M.

*My name is Esther M. I'm from Perú and I'm a teacher. I love to teach, but I love to learn too. My family lives in Perú and in other countries. I got married with an excellent man from the United States, and we live in Maryland now (for four months). I need to improve my English to live and communicate better, and I found that the Literacy Council is an excellent place to do that. The Writing 1 Workshop was a great place where I could learn, read, discuss, and lose my insecurity with the language. The teacher encouraged me to believe in myself. Through this class I discovered new vocabulary because we read interesting books and wrote about our personal experiences, feelings, goals, tastes, interests, discoveries, etc.*

*I want to learn more and more! Thank you so much!*

In April we visited Washington, D.C., because we wanted to participate in the Great Cherry Blossom Parade! One good friend recommended it to us, and we were so grateful for this beautiful experience.

The parade is annual, and many people attend this wonderful activity. Many parents with curious children come to this interesting event. The tickets were obtained through the web page, and the price was good! It was wonderful to see many lovely families enjoy this event together.

The public took memorable pictures, because many people march along Constitution Avenue to the sound of joyous music. The parade shows many wonderful bands, theme cars,



choreographed dances, beauty queens, artists, professional singers, personnel of different colleges, universities, and other organizations like Disneyland!

We observed that the most important color was pink because it represents the marvelous season: spring and cherry blossoms. Some women dressed in this nice color, adults, youth, and kids too.

We heard the different music, and it was impossible to avoid dancing! The wind was strong this day, but our happiness was stronger than the wind!

At the end the parade, we walked through The Cherry Blossom Festival, and we could smell delicious food, and finally we ate some excellent Thai food.

I like listening to the amazing National Children's Choir. Their sweet voices were extraordinary.

I was so grateful for the good volunteers, who worked hard organizing this interesting event.

We recommend to the class that they attend the next wonderful and unforgettable parade in 2025! ■

## LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

By Esther M.

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La Vida es bella or Life Is Beautiful, is my favorite film among so many. Its title is touching and human, because it has drama and comedy—a perfect combination that maintains the attention of the public.

The principal actor is Roberto Benigni, but he is the director too. And he is the writer of the story! Benigni wrote the story based on Rubino Romeo's life. He was a Jewish survivor who told the story of his father who lived two years in a Nazi prison camp. Nicoletta Braschi is the actress who plays the role of his wife (she is the actor's wife in real life) and Giorgio Cantarini plays the role of his son.

The story started with comic scenes of Guido Orefice (Benigni), who dreams of becoming an owner of one bookshop, and he works as a waiter in one restaurant. Many interesting things happen until Guido met his principessa. He did many things to attract her love.

Finally, during her wedding with another person, Guido carries off the bride and started their love story.

Then they have a baby called Giosue. He loves his parents, and he likes the war tanks. The day of his birthday something terrible happens. The Germans captured him and his father. So, the mother with so much pain also gave herself up.

They don't stay together in the camp. The mother stayed with the women, and the father cares for his son all the time. He did everything to prevent the child from realizing the sad reality. It was his intent to make his child believe that everything soldiers ordered them to do was a contest in a game, and the winner would get a tank as a gift.

The boy believed in his father and was never afraid. In the end, the Germans killed the father, but until the very last moment he played with his child. Finally, the boy found his mother and learned from his father that life is beautiful.

When watching this movie, it is impossible not to be moved by this beautiful story of paternal love. ■

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## SUNSET

By Gabriel A.

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*Hello, I'm Gabriel A., but you can call me Gab. I'm from Togo, a country in West Africa. I come from a close-knit family with three siblings, including one sister. Their support means a lot to me. I'm a software engineer with a bachelor's degree. Currently, I'm learning English intensively and attending a software engineering bootcamp to stay updated with new technologies. I love coding and exploring different cultures. My goals are to improve my English, sharpen my*

*technical skills, and secure a rewarding job in software engineering.*

*My experience with the Literacy Council has been invaluable in helping me improve my English and adapt to life in the U.S. I am excited about the future and the opportunities that lie ahead. Thank you!*

The incredible sunset  
Dazzling the exhausting day,  
What a beautiful spectacle! ■

# TREASURE BEYOND GOLD

By Gabriel A.

Once upon a time, in a small village hidden by dense forest, there lived an old man named Xavier. He was known for his wisdom, but he had one secret he never shared.

Every night, Xavier would walk into the forest carrying nothing but a small lantern.

The villagers whispered about where he went.

Some said he visited a ghost.

Others thought he searched for a hidden treasure.

But every morning, he returned with nothing but a beautiful small smile.

In the same village lived one curious boy, his name is Melvin.

One night, he decided to follow Xavier.

He waited until the moon was high and slipped out of his window, following the flickering light of Xavier's lantern.

The forest was like a giant maze, trees like towering walls.

Xavier moved silently, like a shadow slipping through the night.

Melvin struggled to keep up, stumbling over roots and branches.

But he did not give up.

Finally, they reached a clearing. Xavier stopped and set down his lantern.

In the clearing was a small shimmering pond.

Xavier spoke to the pond, but Melvin was too far to hear the words.

Melvin watched as the first of dawn touched the pond.



It shimmered more brightly, and then, in a whisper of light, an image appeared on the water. It was a woman, gentle and smiling.

As the image faded with the rising sun, Melvin felt a warmth in his heart.

He suddenly understood. The pond was a mirror of memories, showing Xavier a lost lover, forever remembered at dawn.

As night became day, he started to understand the truth.

Xavier's treasure was not gold or jewels, but moments of love, kept alive by the light of his lantern. ■

# MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE UNITED STATES

By Gabriel A.

My journey to the United States began in December of last year, and it has been a transformative experience. Coming from Togo, I had always imagined the U.S. as a land of opportunity and dreams. Indeed, it has lived up to many of my expectations, but it also comes with its own set of challenges.

One of the first things I noticed is how big and diverse the U.S. is. The landscapes and cities are large and full of different people and cultures. This diversity is exciting and makes the U.S. a very interesting place to live.

As a software engineer with a bachelor's degree, I initially thought that my coding skills would be my primary asset. I believed that coding was a universal language that transcended borders. However, I quickly realized that effective communication in English is crucial, especially when working in a team. While coding remains a significant part of my skill set, the ability to articulate ideas, understand requirements, and collaborate with colleagues is equally important.

To fill the language gap, I am currently learning English intensively. This is a challenging but necessary step to ensure I can integrate fully into the professional environment here. In addition, I am also attending a software engineering bootcamp. This helps me stay current with new technologies and methodologies in my field, ensuring that my skills remain sharp and relevant for potential job opportunities.



The bootcamp has been very helpful. It gives me practical experience and helps me understand how people work in the U.S. Balancing English classes and the bootcamp is tough, but it is worth it for my future. Despite the challenges, I am optimistic about my prospects in the United States. The initial adjustment period has taught me resilience and adaptability. I am confident that with continued effort in improving my English and my technical skills, I will be well-prepared to find a rewarding job in the software engineering field.

In summary, my experience in the U.S. has been a mix of wonder and hard work. It is a place where dreams can be realized, but it also requires dedication and perseverance. I am committed to overcoming the challenges and making the most of the opportunities available here. ■

# MY COUNTRY, HAITI

By Ghislaine C.

*My name is Ghislaine C., I am from Haiti. I have two daughters and three granddaughters and a grandson. I have been living in Maryland since 2019. I started learning English at the Literacy Council two years ago. My goals for next year are as follows: I will take my GED classes, I will also take some basic business management courses because I would like to open my own business soon. My experiences are that when I first came, I didn't comprehend nor speak English, but now with the help of the teachers, I can speak, understand, and write English. The Literacy Council gave me new directions toward different sources of information. THANK YOU, Literacy Council!*

I was born in Haiti. Haiti is on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea. Haiti shares the island with the Dominican Republic and occupies one-third of the island.

The island was inhabited by the indigenous Taino people, who originated in South America. They called the island Haiti, meaning, "land of high mountains."

The official name of Haiti is the Republic of Haiti. Haiti has an area of 27,750 square kilometers. It is the third largest country in the Caribbean with a population of 11.4 million. Haiti is just a little smaller than Maryland. The capital of Haiti is Port-au-Prince.

Haiti has a complex history. Columbus came and took the island from the Taino people in 1492.

The island was then occupied by



Spain, then by the French. They all brought to the island slaves from Africa.

During those events, there was a war against the Taino population and the population was killed.

After suffering from slavery from the Espanol and the French, the slaves rebelled and Haiti finally gained its independence. In 1804, Haiti became the first independent nation of Latin America and the Caribbean. Haiti is the only state in history established by a successful slave revolt. Our official language is Haitian, Creole, and French.

The people of Haiti love to laugh, eat, and dance. In Haiti, every year we have carnivals. People dance on the streets and dress for parades. Haiti has beautiful beaches with white sand and the food is delicious. The national sport of Haiti is soccer, everyone knows how to play soccer.

Haiti has a complex history but we are resilient people.

I miss my family and friends.

I miss the sun and the breeze.

I miss the beach too.

Right now, Haiti has social problems and experiences violence.

It makes me sad, but Haiti is my country, and I will be visiting home soon. ■

## ITALIAN FOOD, MY FAVORITE

By Ingrid P.

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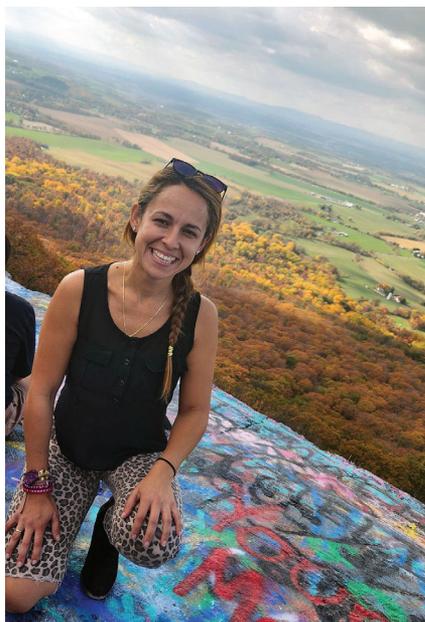
*I am Ingrid P., I live in Frederick with my two children and husband. I like to play with my kids and go camping with my family. I love eating Italian food and Japanese food.*

My favorite food is Italian food, because twice a week my mom made “spaghetti alla ragu sauce” or “carbonara sauce” and I loved that. The recipe is easy and cheap. You only need spaghetti, ground meat, vegetables, salt, and parmesan cheese. For the other sauce, you need bacon, onion, cream, salt, and pepper.

Although pasta originated in China, it was in Italy where it really caught on and became a kitchen staple. Italians began making pasta in the mid-13th century, using wheat flour and water to create a dough that was then rolled and cut into different shapes. The sauce in Italian is called “ragu alla Bolognese,” sometimes simply referred to as ragu. A ragu is a meat-based sauce, and in Italy we have many different types of ragu. The Bolognese

just happens to be the most popular.

I loved this food because it reminds me of my childhood, dinners at grandma’s house, cousins eating together at the table, and my whole family. ■



## MY FAVORITE SINGER

By Ingrid P.

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My favorite singer is Ricky Martin. He is Puerto Rican, and his songs are romantic and pop, which I love. My favorite song is “Vuelve” because it is a different interpretation. The song’s

message is romantic and real.

I have liked this singer since I was 15 years old because I like the message, and the different melodies. ■

# “SANGUIS TUUS DABIT MIHI VITAM”

By Isela Isabel S..

*I've got my names from two powerful women that form part of my history: Maria Isela G. C. and Isabel Lucila C. D. My great-grandmothers were two strong women who fought in a country full of gender injustices to give their families and themselves a better life. It is because of their resilience and bravery that I found the strength to come alone from Ecuador to the United States when I was 18 and start my life here.*

*Leaving all the love and comfort that my family gave me, and starting over, was one of the most challenging things I've done. In the process of facing a new language, culture, food, laws, and administrative processes, I met people and organizations that supported me, and now I consider my family.*

*The Literacy Council gave me the confidence that I needed to believe that I can learn new skills in English, that I can express myself, and my thoughts in this language, and that they are well received. Now I'm looking into taking some classes at the community college, to become an early childhood educator and a medical assistant.*

**1 a.m.** Thomas opened his eyes and realized that he fell asleep in the bus station for about five hours. How would he go back home? His phone died during the nap, there was no more option than to start walking.

**2 a.m.** Four miles farther, he realized that a woman was following him. As close as she was, the colder the weather felt. Thomas started to overthink the



situation: What if a dangerous thing was about to happen? What if the woman was going to assault him? What if she was a suffering soul asking for help?

**3 a.m.** Thomas' thoughts went so deep that, without noticing, the mysterious woman was next to him. Trying to make the situation less scary, he asked if she was cold because she looked very pale, but she continued quietly and looking at the floor. Was that a “no”? Did she know the language? Was she shy? Thomas' imagination grew very active.

During the next two hours Thomas tried so hard to make that woman speak, he told her about how he got into that situation, about his dreams, his job, his family, and his fears.

**5 a.m.** The woman finally spoke. She said “Sanguis tuus dabit mihi vitam,” with all the conviction and energy in her voice.

Thomas was British, but of Latin American origins, so when he heard “sanguis,” he automatically thought about blood. Nothing that includes blood in the sentence could end in a safe situation. Thomas started to assemble the little pieces in his head: white skin, dark place, cold weather, Latin speaker, blood.

**6 a.m.** As night became day, he started to understand the truth: She was a blood sucker. ■



## THE ART OF GIVING

By Isela Isabel S..

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The art of giving is a way of sharing love. It is a kind of language that we use to express our feelings with no words that say how much we appreciate somebody. For many people, giving something would mean a valuable object, but it is more than that. It could be time, hugs, or advice. If I could have the opportunity of sharing my love through a gift with someone I love, I would choose the one that gave me life.

My mom gave me more than she had, for my safety and happiness. She gave me time when she had to study, work, and take care of a home at the same time. She gave me love when she was heartbroken. She gave me hugs when she was the one that really needed them. Being how she is with me,

with the ones she appreciates, and even with the ones [with whom] she'd rather be contactless, is why she deserves the entire universe.

Although I would give my life for her and to take care of her, if I could have the opportunity, I would give her my eyes. With them, she would look at how brave, strong, and persistent she is. And how I see her as a superhuman for becoming an excellent dentist while she took care of two little girls in a home with economic problems. My eyes would help her to make sure that even though I grew far from her, I felt her always by my side, and that every little sweet action made me feel the biggest love and the most loved child in the whole world. ■

## LOOKING OUT A WINDOW

By Isela Isabel S..

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Our imagination is a two-sided weapon: it can help us to dream of a better future and boost us to achieve our goals, or it can create harmful thoughts that sabotage our potential. In the writing workshop class, we had to use our imagination to create a writing about finding something unbelievable outside of our window. But guess what? I don't need to use my imagination. When I look outside, I can't believe I am in the United States.

For lots of immigrants like me, the fact of being in this country is a dream. That's why we hustle hard to arrive

and grow in this country. America has plenty of opportunities for the ones who are not scared of working hard to achieve their goals. This country is full of gentle people and helpful resources that support you even when you are alone.

While I'm writing this, I'm looking through the window, and I can't believe how loved and welcome the American people have made me feel during my crossing. I hope one day I can return to this beautiful nation a little bit of what it gave me. ■

## HONORING

By Jamila T.

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*My name is Jamila. I am from Aleppo, Syria. I have four children and nine grandchildren. I am a civil engineer. In 2016, I joined the Literacy Council to improve my English language. It was a fortunate turning point in my life. I met great teachers and wonderful friends. I joined conversation, civics, reading and writing classes. I love reading. I used to read in my language, but now I am enjoying reading and writing in English. I hope to continue to read and write in English, and I thank the Literacy Council and the teachers for helping me to do better in the English language.*

On the 21st of March every year we celebrate mothers in my country,



which is the first day of spring, so parties are held and gifts are given to her in honor of this occasion. For mother's virtue is great and unforgettable, according to any one of us.

A few days before Mother's Day in 2007 the phone rang in our house in Aleppo, and when I picked it up the speaker told me that she was from the engineering union, and they chose me to be the "Mother of the Year." She continued to explain to me, "This honoring, which takes place every year, is a sign of encouragement and recognition of the efforts of motherhood. And we saw that you deserved this honor."

At first, I was surprised at how they remembered me, for I was always at home spending the day doing house work, taking care of my children, and helping them with their lessons. I even thought my friends and managers had forgotten me, but on the other hand, I felt happy, almost flying with joy, and so were the children.

On the day of the celebration my older son and I went to the party which was in the Engineer's Club Hall. The tables in the hall were decorated with bouquets of colorful flowers and words of honor for the mothers. I was happy to meet my friends, co-

workers, and some of the employees I know.

The ceremony began with speeches about the mother's role in those current days, which was full of risks and challenges for children.

When my name was called, I went to the platform and received from the president of the union (who later became the prime minister of our country) a certificate of appreciation. On it was written: "In the appreciation of your efforts to raise a good and loyal generation to serve and develop this country."

In turn, I thanked him and said, "I am very happy to be honored by this great institution. It is good and necessary for organizations to honor their employees."

Finally, I believe that we humans work with all our strength to achieve our goals, but we pray to our Lord asking him to bless our lives, and succeed in what we do. I believe in the Proverbs 21:31 which says, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord. ■"

## PICKING FIGS

By Jamila T.

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Fig trees are one of the oldest trees on earth. They have existed for more than ten thousand years. They are blessed trees, for they are mentioned in the bible in the Old and New Testaments, even our church offers figs

and grapes on the Assumption Day as a blessing.

Most of the fig trees grow in the Mediterranean area. Fig trees have many kinds, and its fruits have several colors, from blackish red to golden

yellow, but all of them have a sweet taste. Fig trees have green, broad, and rough leaves, and have intertwined branches so that farmers can take shelter in their shade from the heat of the sun.

Aleppo produces the best kinds of figs—the golden yellow that taste very sweet. The soil is very good, and the figs are watered only with rain water. It is normal seeing villagers in the fall selling their fig products in the local markets for cheaper prices than the prices of other fruits, such as apples or bananas. It is called the food of the poor.

I have a funny story from the early 1990s. Whenever I remember it, I laughed at its memory. On the other hand, I miss those happy days of my golden times. My sister-in-law and her husband owned a vineyard of figs on the outskirts of Aleppo, and we often used to go with them to pick figs. They had a small Peugeot car, and we all had to go in this small car, my four children, and I, including my sister-in-law, her husband, and her four children. The car was very crowded as we crammed into it. The little ones sat on the older ones' laps. We didn't have at that time seat belts, nor car seats. The children were about the same age, and were close friends, so they had fun all the way to the vineyard talking, laughing, and singing.

The road we drove on was narrow, and on both sides of it we could see some small villages, and children playing in the streets. Then we had to

drive on an unpaved road full of small and large stones, which made the car bump, and we inside the car bumped as well. Finally, a large land full of green trees appeared to us, in which we saw lots of figs hanging on the trees as if they were pearls shimmering in the sunlight.

We all started working, everyone carrying a bucket to put the figs they picked. Of course, while picking we ate the figs that were beautiful and ripe. There are others who shared with us the pleasure of eating these sweet fruits: the birds, as they build their nests on the top of the trees. These fruits attracted the birds to perch on them, chirp with high voices, rejoicing over the sweet taste of the figs.

At the end of the day, and when the sun began to set in a place where there is no electricity and the buckets are filled with figs, we sit on a small rug put on the ground to rest, drink coffee, and take photos with the family.

After we returned home with the buckets full of figs, we sorted the fruits: some to eat fresh, some to dry, and some to make into jam and save for winter.

The years passed, the children grew up, and left the country. My children moved to this country, whereas their cousins moved to Europe after the outbreak of the war in Syria, and the vineyard became under the control of the Turkish Government.

We have nothing left of this story except the sweet memories. ■



## THE BEST MOMENT

By Janet C.

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*My name is Janet C. I'm from Taiwan. I just moved to Frederick County around a year ago. It's a beautiful place. The other wonderful thing is that I had a class with awesome teachers and classmates at Literacy Council of Frederick County. In addition to improving my English, I have more confidence to speak English with*

*everyone. Therefore, I started to enjoy my life every day in the United States.*

A lot of things happen to everyone and every day. But people have one impressive moment in their life

Whether this thing is good or bad, it will affect your future.

I had lost my way for a while. I didn't want to get up every morning and just wanted to stay in bed the whole day. I didn't have the confidence to do everything and thought I was not doing well even when I tried to do something. Everything was negative and dark.

One day, I went swimming in the gym. I found my way suddenly. I wanted to get up early every day. I wrote the new things on my to-do lists and I tried to finish my plan even though I was tired. But I still was happy, and had the confidence to complete the to-do lists.

Life is like a hiking trail in different

ways. We can enjoy and face the smooth trail. And we can work hard and overcome the tough trail. We don't fear what will happen, rather we just keep moving to accept the challenge. Although we don't know the result that it is successful or not. We are still proud of ourselves, because we already try our best. The outcome will be your best piece and moment in your life.

My best moment is that I figured out what I wanted when I went swimming. I saw the bright light in front of me. I now have confidence to face challenges in the future. Remember, you just need to move on, and not stay stuck in time. ■

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## MY DREAM COME TRUE

By Janet C.

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I had the dream that I wanted to go snowboarding and take the lift to the hill and slide down. I saw the person from the movie that went snowboarding from a hill when I was little. I thought it was a cool thing and I made a wish that I will go snowboarding when I grow up.

My dream came true in this winter. I went to the ski resort to go snowboarding. First, I went to the main center to take my equipment. I was embarrassed because I didn't know how to put the snow boots on my feet. I peeked at the person that was

seated beside me and got my answer of how to put the snow boots on. Next, I went snowboarding, and fell down many times. It was not easy because your two feet are stuck on the board. So, you need to learn how to balance your body when you go snowboarding. Finally, I took the lift to the top and slid down to the end.

I was proud of myself that I overcame the fear and insisted on making my dream to be a real one. Even if it was painful when I fell, I still practiced until I could slide and make my dream come true. ■

# THE BIRTH OF MY BABIES

By Jieun J.

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*Hello, readers of this magazine. I am pleased and a little shy to introduce myself as one of the writers here. My name is Jieun J., and I am from Korea. I've lived here in Frederick for six months. Before that, I stayed in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for four and a half years.*

*I am thoroughly captivated by the atmosphere of this area, which is serene yet pulses with energy, making it a delightful place to live. Furthermore, I was thrilled to discover how many breweries are situated here, offering freshly-brewed craft beers, and their variety is amazing. My modest aspiration is to try every drink on their menus.*

*To tell you more about myself, I am striving to become fluent in English to fully integrate into this community. The Frederick County Literacy Council played an important role in that journey, giving me a vote of confidence. They offer experienced and specialized classes, and all the staff are friendly and welcoming. Thanks to FCLC, I can proudly say I am better than before.*

*Thank you for taking the time to read my introduction. I look forward to sharing more stories and experiences with you in the future.*

I would like to talk to you about when I met my children for the first time. Before meeting them, I thought I knew what is love exactly, but I didn't. They are the sun to me, they are warmth, sunshine, and glory always. Furthermore, I can't live without the sun, and I feel it day and night. Even

though I had a hard time during pregnancy with pre-eclampsia, I literally forgot every challenging situation as soon as I heard their crying. It made me cry as well.

If you're open to it, I'd like to talk about my pregnancy. During the first trimester, I watched one tiny raspberry in the sonogram, which was 10-weeks-old creature full of beans, wiggling continuously. My family got overwhelmed with this first precious gift. A day when the first snowflakes fell, once again, one "raspberry."

In the second-term ultrasound, we suddenly encountered two storming hearts in the middle of two "mangoes." The dazzle of "mangoes" sweetness left us speechless. Until, finding those "mangoes" mommy was curious about her belly. "Why is it so big with only one 'mango'?" After that, we were busy buying one more of all the baby items and even thinking of one more name. In this way, the marvelous second presents threw themselves into my arm while the spring breezes were blowing. Whose heart could resist the honeyed charm of "mangoes"?

On a starlit summer night, two hasty-tempered "pineapples" got ready to explore a fun world. They only took 33 weeks to ripen; however, they proved their strength to themselves. It was as if they were whispering, "Mom, we've grown up enough." As dawn broke and the hospital filled with their cries, the sun rose. I mean, my sons rose. Golden suns. ■

# MASAN, SOUTH KOREA

By Jieun J.

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I was born in 1992 in Masan, which is in the southern part of South Korea. My hometown is surrounded by the ocean, but unfortunately, there are no shores. This port city is famous for increased international trade. I cherish my city and I have a lot of fond memories there.

To be honest, as soon as I was born, my grandparents were disappointed because of my sex. I have an older sister, so they wanted to have a grandson rather than a granddaughter again. Because there is a widespread preference for male children in our culture, some old individuals still stick to this sad tradition.

The preference for male children has its roots in Confucianism and it has had a profound influence on East Asian cultures. I cannot hate our old generation, but understand them. They just had been learning it from their environment in daily life. It means, they naturally have absorbed it. However, nowadays, due to these phenomena, females become much more precious because of the low proportion of women.

In my 20's, I moved to Seoul, the capital city, to attend university. And now I am here in the United States reflecting on the things I've done well in my life. I realize that I've expanded my perspective to encompass a larger world. At first, I was shocked by the



hustle and bustle of the big city, but I have learned many important things such as different cultures, the local language, public systems and even the rapidly changing business industry. What about the United States? People from all over the world gather here with their own goals. We all live together and continuously learn from one another.

I am anticipating the next phase of my life. What kinds of fascinating events will happen? The future is uncertain and this makes our life more exciting. It would be the foundation of growth, even if we were in the face of adversity. ■

# WHAT PROBLEM IS THE MOST CRUCIAL?

By Jieun J.

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According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., on May 29th, devastating flooding occurred in a city in Brazil resulting in hundreds of thousands of people losing their homes. Some specialists insist that climate change caused by human activity leads to tragic disasters like flooding, drought and more.

But what is climate change? To answer this, we must understand that every place on the Earth has its own specific weather conditions. For example, there are always glaciers and ice in the Arctic while the Amazon has sultry and humid weather with rain occurring year-round. However, if the weather differs from its ordinary condition, we call it climate change. What's worse is that this change is accelerating rapidly.

This transition affects many things related to demographic, geographic, health, biological and sociopolitical factors. These impacts include extreme weather events, dangerous heat, sea-level rise, air pollution, ecological effect, water scarcity and reduced food production. As a result, people will be in danger, especially those who live in vulnerable places or far away from infrastructure like healthcare facilities. The World Health Organization predicts that climate change will lead to over 200,000 deaths between 2030 and 2050.

Why does climate change occur? There are various causes, ranging from natural phenomena to human activities. Natural causes include volcanic eruption, solar radiation fluctuations, tectonic shifts, and orbit changes. On the other

hand, man-made causes can be broadly classified into three categories: burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and increase in greenhouse gases. In particular, to generate electricity and heat by burning fossil fuels is a primary cause of climate change.

Unfortunately, it may be too late to completely halt climate change. Yet, we can still mitigate its effects by reducing our carbon footprint to minimize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and slow down weather pattern alterations. First, we can improve vehicle fuel efficiency by carpooling, taking public transportation, choosing electric vehicles, avoiding traffic, getting rid of excess weight from your car, and getting cargo racks instead of a large vehicle. Second, at home, there are a lot of practical ways to reduce energy consumption, such as sealing air leaks, using appliances with a higher energy star rating, turning off lights when not in use, and installing solar panels on rooftops. Lastly, consuming locally-produced and organic food is advisable, as many fertilizers are also fossil fuel-based.

To pass down our beautiful Earth to the next generation, we must all come together. Furthermore, more support from the government, not only in taxation but also in regulations regarding fossil fuels, is essential. These days, we cannot help but say that it's time that we try to protect our planet, not destroy it. Otherwise, we will face difficulties even in obtaining clean drinking water. ■

# INSPIRATION

By Karma C.

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*My name is Karma. I am from Lebanon. I am married and I have two kids. I am interested in writing, cooking, and playing tennis. My goals are several and increased when I moved to the United States. My first and important goal is to protect my family and ensure for them a happy and a safe future. My second is to search for new work opportunities. Learning English and living in the U.S. was out of my wheelhouse. I lived a conflict with a heart that wanted to stay in Lebanon and a mind that had to go to U.S. It took from me five years to decide, and the answer was a reunion with my family who is my whole life. Here we go, I am here now. Because of the Literacy Council and the variety of their classes that work on our reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills I've gotten involved in the community by going out, meeting new people and having conversations. I hope that when my kids grow up, they will remember our sacrifices that we did it for them. I want to give a huge thanks to my teachers at the Literacy Council, to my supportive husband, and to my kids who trusted me and encouraged me to be the best.*

The process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something is "inspiration." That is what happened to me when we shared our classmates' writing, last week.

My first colleague reminded me of my mother. My mother was a teacher. She was ingenious in redactions in both French and Arabic languages.



She taught us how to write letters that had a special form.

To my Dear,  
Good greetings and yet,

from far away, I send you my letter with deep feelings of love and missing you.

I hope that you are in good health and your work is going well.

Plus, here are more details about us.

We wish to meet soon.

Your sweetheart.

This letter is from 1987, when my father was in Switzerland. My other colleagues talked about sacrifices, hard work and looking to the future. All these qualities belonged to him. My father was eight years old when his mother died. He was the oldest among six siblings. His father had married after one year of the death of his wife Karma. He took the responsibility to take care and protect his siblings all the time, and his auntie raised them.

He began working at age 13 years old at the Directorate of Geographic Affairs. He traveled for work at 18 years old. He worked hard and build himself up all by himself. He married my mother in 1987 after an arranged engagement by his grandfather.

He had a special expression, keep your "good money for your bad day."

He was our friend at home. Every night we had a family lecture about life. He helped everybody.

But he refused to have help. He was very organized at home. He prepared breakfast for us every day before going to school: a cup of milk, dates, some nuts, and a sandwich with tea. If someone needed a ride, he was ready. He prepared coffee with her favorite biscuit for my mother every morning. All the groceries and what she needed for her day was present at home before 10 a.m.

He was very energetic, sometimes he went walking for one hour to search for anything we needed. He helped my mother with domestic chores. He is a talented cook. His famous sentence, "eat and enjoy." It is true that before

my siblings and I got married, nobody bought anything before getting his opinion or asking him for help. Every year, he went to the cemetery to visit the grave of his mother (he washed it and put flowers there) with tears in his eyes.

He is now 64 years old and still has two jobs. He is happy with that. He refused to retire and stay at home. When I was young, all the time, I told him that I would like to marry a man like you. He smiled with no comment. I was jealous of my mother and two sisters because before he went to work, it should just be me that was the last one who hugged him and kissed him, I would go out to the deck and say goodbye to him with kisses.

If anyone was sick at home, he stayed awake all night and brought them to his bedroom to sleep. Maybe if I will continue talking about my father, I will write a book. Finally, thanks for my friends who reminded me of all of that. Happy Father's Day to all the fathers in the whole world and to the king of our home. ■

# THE AURORA BOREALIS

By Léopold A.

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*My name is Léopold, I'm 25 and I'm from Togo. Togo is a small but beautiful country in West Africa. I'm a statistician with a passion for math, science and technology. My experience with the Literacy Council has been wonderful so far. I've been taking classes with the Literacy Council for almost a year now. My first class was literally my first interaction with people other than my family members in this country. These classes have allowed me to learn new things, to start expressing myself more easily. I also got to know some wonderful teachers and classmates. I particularly appreciate the kindness and patience of the teachers. My aim is to continue learning, practicing as much as I can and becoming totally fluent. I would like to thank all the teachers and everyone who works at the Literacy Council for all their efforts. May God bless you all!*

The Aurora lights

the sky with bright colors

And this creates a stunning show ■



# THE PERSON WHOM I MOST ADMIRE

By Léopold A.

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I'm a big fan of creators and inventors, especially Steve Jobs. He co-founded Apple. It's probably the biggest company in the new-technologies industry. Steve Jobs was brilliant and came up with lots of cool ideas for new products. He made the iPhone. He was one of the most influential figures in

technology. Steve Jobs also gave great speeches. When he faced challenges, he never gave up and kept working hard. His legacy continues to inspire people to think differently and pursue their dreams, and above all helps us remember that nothing is impossible if we give it our all. ■

## MY FAVORITE PLACE

By Léopold A.

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The Independence Place in Lomé is a symbol of my country's freedom from French colonial rule in 1960. This square is surrounded by government buildings, shops, and cafes. It is a central hub for gatherings and events. Locals and visitors gather there for political rallies and cultural festivities. There is a variety of street food options. We can taste some grilled meats,

sweet pastries or jollof rice there. For me personally, this square is a miniature representation of my country because it brings together everything that makes Togo beautiful: a blend of modernity and tradition. And for all Togolese citizens, this square represents a profound source of national pride and unity, and shows what we can achieve by being united. ■

## AN EXAMPLE THAT HARD WORK IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

By Loany N.

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*My name is Loany N. Five years ago, I started living in this country. I moved to Frederick in July 2022. In my native country, Honduras, I am an elementary education teacher. Last year I decided to become a Nursing Assistant in the United States. The classes I received at the Literacy Council of Frederick County helped me enormously since, to register for the Nursing Assistant course at Frederick Community College, I had to take an Accuplacer test and write an essay to evaluate my writing in English. I achieved this thanks to the help of the writing classes I took with instructor Catherine C. Also, it helped me when I was taking the course to improve my English for the required classes. I am determined to speak English fluently one day, I am working hard to*

*achieve it. I express my gratitude to the Literacy Council of Frederick County for their assistance in teaching English to individuals like me and for providing us with resources.*

My mom, a strong and hardworking woman, has always been an inspiration to me. Her words of wisdom and encouragement have guided me through the toughest of times and motivated me to reach my goals. One saying from my mom stands out in my memory, a saying that exemplifies her dedication and resilience in the face of adversity.

She had already five children when she started to study to support our family, sacrificing her own time and

energy to ensure that my siblings and I had everything we needed. I remember sitting at the kitchen table, trying to focus on my homework while my mom worked diligently on her tasks to become a nurse. As I struggled to concentrate, she looked up from her work and said, "Hard work is the key to success, my dear. Never give up on your dreams, no matter how difficult things may seem." That's why sometimes when I want to give up learning English, I feel ashamed because if my mom could achieve her goals, having a husband, little kids, church commitments, and all types of obstacles, I realized that I can achieve everything that I work hard to get.

Her words struck a chord deep within me, reminding me of the determination and perseverance that had defined her own life. Despite the challenges she faced, my mom never wavered in her commitment to providing for her family and creating a better future for us. Her formidable strength and work ethic served as a constant reminder that anything is possible with dedication and hard work.

As a child or a teenager, you do not tend to value everything that your parents do to ensure you have all that you need. I remember watching her get up at 4 a.m. in the morning to get everything ready for our breakfast before she went to school. Then she got back and stayed up late at night to do her homework. Living in a foreign country and facing the reality that I never experienced in my country (thanks to my parents' protection)



allowed me to realize the true extent of my mom's sacrifices and the depth of her love for our family. I have always known that I had a role model in my mom, a woman who embodied the principles of determination, resilience, and perseverance.

As I write this essay about my hardworking mom, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and admiration for the woman who has shaped me into the person I am today. Her advice continues to motivate me to strive for greatness and never settle for anything less than my best. My mom's accomplishments were a reminder that hard work truly does pay off. ■

# MY INTELLIGENT, LOVING, AND PROVIDING HUSBAND

By Loany N.

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I can still vividly remember the tall, smiling, and handsome young man in a black T-shirt and blue jeans confidently strolling around, effortlessly catching the attention of more than one pretty girl at the gathering where we were reunited with several hundred young people. Of course, I was one of them. But in my mind echoed the words of one of my favorite cousins: “If you show too much interest, men will feel more important.” So, after briefly indulging in watching him, I quickly averted my gaze. Little did I know, he had also noticed me.

After spending several hours in the venue, I felt a gentle pat on my shoulder. To my surprise, it was the charming young man whom I had pretended not to notice, attempting to strike up a conversation with the flimsiest of excuses. I couldn’t help but blush. That’s how I met my husband. However, that moment wasn’t the time we got together.

Two years passed, and he immigrated to the United States from Honduras. Despite the distance, we stayed in touch (thanks to Facebook) and eventually began a relationship. He visited me every year for one month, making me the happiest girl in the county at that time. This continued for five years until he applied for a fiancé visa for me. We got married and had a small, but intimate wedding ceremony with relatives and some friends.

Since coming here, he has been my rock, supporting me whenever I needed him. He encouraged me to learn English

and patiently taught me how to drive, until I finally obtained my driver’s license. Together, we worked hard to buy our house, and another blessing entered our lives: our daughter. True to form, he excelled in his new role as a parent—a dedicated, loving, and providing father and husband. Thanks to him, I can stay home and take care of our daughter.

However, perhaps his most extraordinary quality lies in his role as a provider, not only in material wealth, but in the wealth of his support, his guidance, and his unwavering commitment to the well-being of our family. Whether taking on the responsibilities of breadwinner or serving as a pillar of strength in times of adversity, he stands tall, a beacon of dependability and security.

His intelligence illuminates every aspect of our shared journey. His intellect is not simply limited to academic prowess or professional success but is a light of wisdom that guides us through the complexities of life. With an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a curious mind, he approaches challenges with analytical insight, finding solutions where others only perceive obstacles. His intelligence is not handled with arrogance but with humility, always seeking to learn and grow, both personally and intellectually.

Moreover, his love extends far beyond the confines of our relationship, encompassing our family, friends, and community. His compassionate nature knows no bounds as he extends a helping hand to those in need.

I thank God for the immeasurable blessing that he is: a gift that the universe has given me, an incomparable treasure. To my intelligent, loving, providing husband, I offer not only my deep gratitude, but also my unwavering love and devotion. How blessed I am! ■

# MY TREASURE HUNT

By Mônica Elizabete S.

*I'm Mônica Elizabete S. and I'm from Brazil. I moved to the United States in 2020 and I have lived in Frederick until now. When I moved, I didn't speak any English and the Literacy Council was and is very important to me. I felt welcomed in a different country from my own. I enjoy traveling and visiting tourist places, riding a bike, hiking, and meeting new people. In this country I met American people and a lot of people from other countries too, so learning English is so good because it's possible to communicate and to know these different cultures. I'm now looking for a job in Frederick and the Literacy Council is also very helpful for that. I'm very grateful for this opportunity to be part of this family.*

Hmm... when was the last time I lost something? This is funny! I can't remember the last day I passed by without losing something.

Every day is the same. I need to find my cellphone two or three times per day. And it's always in a silent mode, so I can't ask my husband to call me to help find it. Many times, he was mad at me when he saw me looking for something, and he didn't understand how I can lose my things every time. On the other hand, I know exactly where everything is that he is looking for at home. But, if it is about my things, I need to spend some time to remember where I put this or that. The worst thing I can do is talk to myself: "I will put this here because it is important and I need to find this quickly when I need it." But



I will never remember this place!

So, nowadays, I have a system for my work. For this I'm a super organizer, I need to be. I always had compliments for this, and didn't care what kind of job I had. But, for my personal things I'm a mess. And I need to be sometimes. I can't handle everything and sometimes I need to relax. But, to my good fortune, the most things I already lost were in my own home somewhere.

Often, I play a game with myself, pretending I will get a gift when I can find these things. I don't get mad with myself anymore, only for a few minutes. I begin thinking I don't need these things to survive, and I will be okay without them. If one day I find it again, I can have extra happiness.

When I was young, I wanted to buy everything again—and many times it would go into the drawers. Now I can think about what I really miss and what is important to me.

Many times, I organize my things in the hope I can find everything. It doesn't work every time, but it's helped me clean the house, revisit my stuff, and think about how I spend my money. It's my secret treasure hunt! ■

## MY STORY

By Nataliia K.

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*My name is Nataliia. I am from Ukraine. My hobbies are reading books, gardening, learning about art. After I started living in United States. I have an additional hobby and now I am collecting 3D baking cake molds. In Ukraine we do not have such variety of baking molds except basic ones.*

*I was always very communicative person, and had a job, but in the U.S. I feel myself limited because I do not speak English. The Literacy Council of Frederick County gave me opportunity to learn English, and I started to believe in myself and my future again.*

Hello everyone, my name is Nataliia and I am from Ukraine. I never dreamed I would live in the U.S. even though I have visited this wonderful country many times before. My daughter lives here. I am Christian Orthodox, but I love the American Christmas, and I usually planned my visit to the U.S. during this wonderful holiday. In 2021, I visited U.S. for the Christmas celebration and planned to return after the New Year, but because of the cold Ukrainian winters I decided to stay a little bit longer until the spring of 2022. Unfortunately, on 24 February, 2022, my country was invaded by Russia,



and a war was started on a large scale. I wasn't able to go back home to Ukraine. I consider myself lucky to find shelter in this wonderful country even though I worry about my relatives and my native country every single day. I am thankful to every country and every single person who supports Ukraine because it gives me hope that my Ukrainian relatives are going to survive the war and my motherland will have an independent peaceful future where all Ukrainians can be reunited once again. Thank you all. ■

# PAPA

By Natta S.

*My name is Natta. I came to the United States in 2023. I didn't feel very confident about my English and tried to find some courses at school to improve my knowledge. I was lucky to find Literacy Council, where I found understanding and support. For over a year I have been attending classes and my English is now much better. Moreover, my essays were published in "Reflections." Now I'm happy once again for the opportunity to publish my new essays. I'm very grateful to my teacher Catherine C. and to all the Literacy Council staff for their help in my English learning.*

I love ice cream and lemonade and my doll Julietta and carousels and cartoons! What a silly girl I am! Of course, more than anything in the world I love my mom and dad! And my sister, she is my idol; she is even more beautiful than Julietta. I want to look like her. No, better than that, I will be her.

I'm a five-year-old, and we live in Moscow, nearby Red Square and the Kremlin. Whatever will be the weather today, mom will let me put the socks on. Usually, I wear thick pantyhose during this season. But today I'll wear a sailor's kid's suit—not the old dull dress. Mom will tie a huge silk ribbon on my short hair. I'll definitely will be the prettiest girl, though I won't be able to see myself in a high hanging mirror. I'll have cake and lemonade for dinner instead of the hated soup! And the most thrilling thing will be in the evening. All of us—mom, dad,



my sister, and I—we will all run to the Red Square, to watch fireworks in my honor! Yes, yes, today is my birthday!

Hey, guys, why is nobody paying attention to me? That is not fair! It's my birthday!

I was born on May 8th, 14 years after the ending of the Second World War.

In 1941, my father was a 16 years old teenager. His family lived in Odessa, with his mom, dad, two younger twin brothers, and my father. He was an average teenager with dreams the same as any other boy his age: girls, friends, chess, football. But fate and war decreed differently for his life.

Nazis were dangerously close to Moscow, everyone who could fight was mobilized and sent to the front. Both my grandfather and my dad were among those millions of troops.

I have never seen my grandfather. He was killed very shortly after while defending Odessa. My father went through Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and finally Germany. The war finished for him in Berlin. He was just a soldier, an infantryman. Two times he was in

captivity. His mother got an official letter of his death. She didn't believe it. How could it be possible that her firstborn, her son is dead? No, she froze and waited for him. And he survived, he was lucky. Millions of those guys never come back.

As he used to say he crawled half of the Europe on his belly. He was at the very center of the deadly fight known as Kursk Bulge. He took part in the Battle of Berlin. He had a lot of medals and awards, but had never talked of his feats. He hated to talk of the war, he hated the war.

He wasn't very talkative actually. I'm absolutely sure though he was not wounded physically, except for some small contusion and the further problems with his hearing. But he forever was wounded mentally. He saw too many deaths, too much pain.

I always wondered when seeing him reading documentary books about the

Second World War. It seemed boring to me. Now I realized he needed to understand the death's play in which he took his modest role as soldier.

The Victory Day wasn't just a holiday for him, it was a day of a grief and sorrow, a day of remembrance, when tears and happiness all mixed together. In this day in our family, people gathered to commemorate relatives and friends, who lost their lives defending the world. Dad on this day was always dead drunk, though he wasn't a drinker and mom never argued with him.

It is also the day of the cycle of life—infinity. My father survived, his life continues through us — his children, and further, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

And that one, five-year-old, silly girl and upset those days, will realize in years to come how happy she was to be born on this beautiful Earth! ■

# THE OPINION OF A RARIFIED DINOSAUR

By Natta S.

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If our ancestors would have had mobile phone, computers, or other modern devices, we would never have to know a lot of old fashioned, but dear to our hearts, subjects. Books, for example. Now very rarely is a young person fond of reading.

My generation had no computers, so books were almost the only way to a knowledge, adventures, and dreams. Books opened doors in our minds, allowing us to live an entire lifetime and travel the world without even leaving the comfort of our armchairs. We loved books, we cherished them, we asked our friends to recommend a good book to us.

I still remember the librarian in my school. I remember how her attitude had changed when she realized that I was coming to the library, looking for a new thrilling reading, a new adventure. After a while she started to keep some special books for me. These books were my friends, they taught me, changed

me, made me a different person.

I'm happy that I'm able to taste a good book as a delicious food. Enjoy it, re-read it, open new layers and new ideas. Theaters, concerts, museums and exhibitions, all these attractions are not an empty sound for me. They are real attractions, which make my life more exciting and interesting!

I think, should our ancestors have had mobile phones, we wouldn't know astronomy. Who would watch a night sky when you can watch night TV show. I don't mind TV shows, but for me the sky, with all magnificent stars and mysterious moon is prettier.

But I believe I'm a rarified dinosaur. Sometimes when I'm watching my three beloved grandchildren staring at their iPhones, I would like to shout: "Guys, life is not inside your phones, it is outside, all around you. Just stop watching somebody else's life and deal with your own. It is much more interesting!" ■

# OUR RUSSIAN SUMMER

By Natta S.

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Come on, my friend, follow me, I'll show you a real beauty of the short Russian summer.

I was seven and my sister nine. Our parents, still young and strong, got a tiny piece of land about 30 kilometers from Moscow. They were eager to build a house, a small one, but their own on their own land. They didn't have anything—money, construction materials, knowledge of construction—but only a burning desire to have the house of their own.

Two months together, our family, the four of us, with my mom, in a bright black-rosy puffy-skirted dress, which we all called gipsy, screaming orders. She looked a little bit a real gipsy, always too critical and negative to all around her. Her husband, my sister, myself, our wretched, crooked barn, made by our father, and the whole idea to spend time in this stupid way. My father, in old-fashioned faded blue-striped shirt, which flattered his blue eyes, with a hammer or a saw, hiding from mom's furious commands. My sister, smart, plump, shiny with curly hair, the ideal who I have been overtaking for years and could never catch up.

I hope one day I'll tell you about my family, not now. It definitely deserves a separate story.

That is us and the summer ...  
Never in my life have I had a happier

summer. Never have I had more confidence in my parents' love and unbelievable feeling of security, for our parents—wise and strong. Nothing to worry about, we are surely covered from any outside storms or problems, no matter if it was weather or robbers! It was beautiful and unforgettable.

Have you ever smelled the early morning mist in the woods? Have you gotten up at 5 a.m. to walk into the half-dark forest, still silent and a bit scary? Have you watched a giant, slowly moving sun, rising upon the forest? And then an immediate change in the air, as if everything was awaking and ringing, all together: birds, wind, rustling trees. Or have you ever felt a kid's happiness of a first-found mushroom and one more and more? And the path back to our unbuilt home with baskets full of mushrooms and berries? Have you ever eaten the food cooked on fire? Have you ever spent evenings listening to fairy tales? Mornings and evenings full of special tenderness and care, we were a team with one idea and a goal.

How much do I miss this time! Hey, get back!

There is a joke. Nobody has ever seen a summer in Russia. Only two kinds of winters—one endless, white winter and a short, green one. Crazy Russians call the green one a summer. ■

# MY FAVORITE MOVIES

By Nicola B.

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*I am Nicola B. and I come from Italy. I am here in the United States since October 2021. I was born in a small city of the Southern Italy called Montemarano. My family are hard workers and when I was child, I helped my parents on our farm. It was and is hard work and when I grew up, I decided to study to improve my English, so that I can have a better life as I tackled my Ph.D. During my Ph.D. time in Naples, I learned more, but now to improve my knowledge I decided to come here, and I work for the National Cancer Institute in Frederick. The first years were very hard because the world changed because of Covid19, and for me being in the new country where the people speak different language has not been so easy. This last year through my friend I learned about the Literacy Council where I started to study English with more intensity. My goal is speaking and writing like a native person of this country. I need to say "thank you" for their hard work as my teachers: Catherine, Don, and Lynn, and all the staff who do their best work every day. THANK YOU SO MUCH!*

I don't have one favorite movie, but I have two categories of how to select the movie I watch. My favorites categories are science-fiction (sci-fi) and fantasy movies. I like the sci-fi movies because they describe how our future could be, and the fantasy because it remembers all is possible

Some past months I saw Blade Runner, which is a 1982 sci-fi movie. The story describes how synthetic humans known as replicants, are used



to work on space colonies. Harrison Ford is a cop with the name of Rick Deckard, and he started to search for replicants that are illegally on the Earth to kill them.

I like this category because it tries to explain how our future could be, because the humans have the possibility to change their life on the Earth, but sometime, humanity could be the monster that kills everything. Films like Dune or Prometheus are other different sci-fi films, but they show how the humans have different colonies in the universes where travel from different worlds is possible.

The other category I like is fantasy, Game of Thrones, The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, and Star Wars. I remember when I went in middle school and how my teacher spoke about the first short movie made by the Lumiere brothers. The movie shows the realistic arrival of a train in a station. When the people saw that movie for first time, their reaction was to run outside because they didn't know what was happening.

This example shows the power of this art form, and now I seek in the movie theatres for the same amazement. ■

# BAKEHOUSE IN FREDERICK

By Nicola B.

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The city of Frederick in Maryland is not a big city, but it is an old city in this country. When you visit Frederick, you need to see Market Street where you can find more restaurants, pubs, and stores to do shopping every day. My favorite store is the Bakehouse on the Market Street at No. 69 S. They make one of the best croissants to eat in this country. The store is open only Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. When you enter the store, you are

surrounded by different smells: one comes from the ovens, that worked in the early morning to make the croissants; the second smell comes from chocolate croissants, almond croissants, and cake. The store doesn't have so many tables and chairs where you can eat, but outside along the river near Market Street you can sit on the benches and eat among the bird sounds—and enjoy eating your crisp croissant. ■

# AGING WITH GRATITUDE

By Rosilene F.

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*My name is Rosilene, and I am from Brazil. I moved to the United States with my husband and two young kids almost six years ago. Since we arrived here, I started to find ways to learn English with my natural curiosity. And places like the Literacy Council of Frederick County helped me along my path. I went from learning ABCs to reading books. I used to study English in my daily life for cooking, reading news, watching movies, and YouTube, but the biggest improvement happened to me when I moved to Frederick and started writing classes at LCFC. After starting these classes I read five or six books in four months. I got a Library card, and I feel in paradise every time I go there. LCFC is igniting in myself the desire to continue to learn to read and write better in English.*

If you could change something from your past, what would it be and why? This question was part of a writing assignment, but looked more like part of a therapy session. My first answer was: I would change the moment when fear makes me give up on projects or dreams. But later I realized that my answer could have more gratitude with my present.

When I look back easily, I find many things that I could have done differently. Regret is the name of the ghost that haunted me for years. I think everyone has their ghosts. Mine always whispered in my ears that I am weak because I never finished what I have started, or don't even start this or that because you are not going to finish it—you are a quitter. This ghost brought me fear, a



feeling of failure, low self-esteem, and hours of therapy.

Last week I was watching an old woman listing her regrets and advising her audience about those mistakes that she has made. The list was long. She talked about divorce, job, diet, exercise, money, and so on. I heard that and started to think about it. I am probably half her age and thinking about aging with regrets started to bother me. If I am regretting things that I have or have not made or in the past, it is because I am not being grateful now. Then, I started to look in my present and

realize if I am here today it is because of things that I gave up, feared...things I did or did not do in the past. The feeling of gratitude needs to be bigger than the feeling of regret. Obviously, I don't want to sugarcoat mistakes, bad decisions, or behavioral issues, and I think no one should do that.

I am slowly learning about not dwelling on unfinished projects or moments. I am looking for the motivations behind my behaviors. Learning English was one of those unfinished projects. Instead of regretting not learning it when I was young, with no kids, I am focusing on why I gave up and trying not to repeat it again. It is much more about how I behave, how things became a cycle in my life and what I want because of my actions. Thanks for the hours in therapy.

I have found that aging, accountability, and gratitude need to walk together. Being responsible for my actions or lack of them is an important part of getting older for me. The next step is recycling projects, if they are still important, and refreshing dreams. I want to restart many projects with a new attitude and, of course, try new things. I hope when I am much older, I don't regret the past, but find gratitude in the present. ■

# KNOWLEDGE EMPOWERS US TO NAVIGATE OUR WORLD

By Rosilene F.

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*Last winter we had the great opportunity to attend civics classes and learn a little bit more about the United States. Ms. Dacey, an amazing and keen instructor, took us to many places in downtown Frederick that help to tell America's history and Frederick's roles in that history. The structure of the U.S. Government was discussed as well, focusing at that moment on Frederick City governance. At the end of the classes, we had a meeting with the mayor of Frederick City in the City Hall.*

Frederick is full of history, and we can see that walking through downtown. If we pay close attention to the walls on many buildings, we can find information about why that building is important for Frederick or for the nation's history. Visiting Barbara Fritchie's house or The National Museum of Civil War Medicine, even buildings that belonged to Hood College or the bridges on Carroll Creek tell us important stories of people that helped to shape Frederick, and U.S. history. There are pieces of history everywhere in Downtown Frederick, and the best place to start is at the Visitor Center

Another part of learning about civics is understanding how the

government is structured in the U.S. and how the Constitution is the supreme law that rules everything. Briefly we learned about the federal branches and their responsibilities, how elections work; how candidates are selected; and how the branches of government are organized into state, county, and city levels.

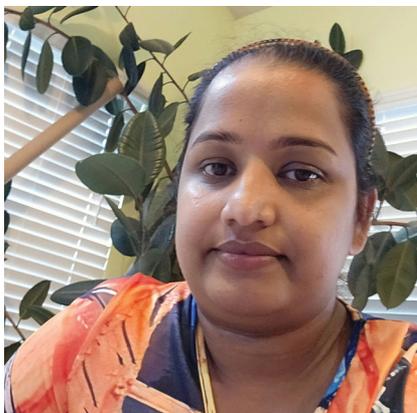
At the local level we could see how important it is to be informed about what is happening in our city and county because what happens at the local level will impact our lives more closely. In other words, the decision that the mayor or the County Executive make could impact our streets, water, or property tax. Touring the City Hall and meeting the mayor in his office was such a pleasure because we were able to hear from him [about] what he was working on at that moment and show him our commitment—as English learners in civics classes—to diversity, and respecting the local and national culture and history.

In conclusion, civics classes seem to be an important topic for English learners to have. These classes put the students in contact with living English, history, and citizenship. Knowledge empowers us to navigate in this foreign world. ■

# A SCARY MOMENT IN MY LIFE

By Sajitha J.

*My name is Sajitha J., and I am from Sri Lanka. I arrived in the United States about ten years ago. I used to be a teacher for middle and high school students back in Sri Lanka. Currently, I am self-employed. I love baking, doing outdoor activities, reading books, and doing volunteer work. I heard about the Literacy Council from the Walkersville Library. I attended a high beginner English language class. Then I attended intermediate classes, including writing and conversation classes via Zoom and was able to improve my English knowledge.*



It was a rainy day. Roads were slippery, and I couldn't see the roads clearly. It was the kind of day we must stay at home to enjoy the weather. But it was my one and only cousin's wedding. So, we didn't have any options.

We decided to go to the wedding held up on a hill in the countryside. We had to drive through the mountain areas. My brother and I were laughing and watching the outside beauty, enjoying the music. We were talking about how we would spend the day in this kind of weather, every day. But suddenly the car hit the brake with a big creaky sound. My uncle hit his head on the front seat at the same time. He wasn't wearing his seat belt.

We had no idea what was going on. When I looked through the window,

I saw a big container truck had fallen off the road. The road was curved with a cliff. When the truck fell from the road, I saw the stuff in the truck spread all over the place. I had goose bumps. Everybody in our car didn't say a word, only staring at each other. Then we prayed for all the people who were involved with the accident.

We left the place, because the emergency vehicle needed the space. We don't know any other details about that accident. I don't even want to know; it was that scary. Hopefully the people in the truck will survive.

If the driver carefully drove that day, the accident would never have happened.

So, this was my experience about a scary event. I still can remember the accident like yesterday. ■

# OM JAYA SHREE MAN NARYAN

By Samajana N.

*My name is Samajana N. I live in Urbana, MD. I joined the Literacy Council in 2017, since then my English has improved a lot. Now I can speak with anyone easily. My interests are to learn more English and my hobbies are reading and sewing. I encourage everyone to join Literacy Council if they want to improve their English.*

Our visit to the holy places of southern India—with 42 members of a group—began on December 18, 2022. We started to go by train from Jogbani-Biralmagar and reached at 3 a.m. a big junction, Howrah Kolkata (Calcutta). We got off about 4 a.m. took a shower in the junction bathroom with a charge. We drank our own tea, coffee, and liquor. We rested sometime after that. Some of us went to visit the Howrah Bridge, and the famous holy river Hooghly, which joins the Ganges River. There, we sprinkled holy water on our body and head. We were hungry so we bought some fruits with hot water and returned to Howrah Junction. Then we ate some lunch also.

Afterward we went by train to Pun at 10 p.m. We honored God Janan Nath Dham Puri. Some of the members were stranded on the rail road side. So, guru Chakrapani went to pick them up, and they arrived at 3 a.m. in Puri. We were already at ashram by Bishnu Guru at 10 p.m.

Our daily religious work began the next morning before all the devoted got to see with honor god Jagannath. That temple was one-half to one



kilometer from our ashram. We reached the area of the temple and washed our hands. Warm water was flowing down the marble stair, refreshing the pool. The temple was tall and filled with artistic beauty. We stayed on the line. Other devotees were already there, and entered the temple to reach the gate of Lord Jagannath.

I saw idols of Brother Balaram, Sister Suvadra and Lord Krishna which were petite and lovely and filled with emerald jewelry. I also saw with honor to the god Brother Balaram, Sister Goddess Suvadra, and Lord Shree Krishna from some idols as far as our [Nepalese] Pashupatinath Temple from the western door. When I saw the gods, happy tears flowed from my eyes. I was peaceful having waited so many years to see the Jagannath [Temple].

The priest gave me prasad [food to

offer to the deity.] I said to the priest, “Could you give me more prasad for my family,” and he gave me more to offer to the deity to give devotion as I can do for the gods. I had heard that the temple was built by the Ganga Dynasty. It looks like the temple was thousands of years old, filled inside and outside with delicate and small artistic designs of very nice comeliness that filled my thoughts.

We exited from the temple and walked around to see with honor other gods’ temples. Everybody talking about the crowds of devotees. But it was not in my mind. I wanted to see with honor Lord Jagannath. We went with Guru to see the kitchens where the prasad of god was cooked and distributed. Cooks made prasad in new earthen pots they stacked over a wood fire. The pot will be pulled gradually, step by step according to their size. I had heard that

the food in the top earthen pot cooked first! The other pots gradually began to cook down. How? Why is that? Surprise or magic or the power of god? When we cook food always the first pot closest to the heat cooks and down after that the last one cooks—this is a system I knew.

I had heard that there are more than 500 kitchens. According to talk, people don’t cook foods in their house on Jagannath Pun. Every day every family eat foods offered to the deity taken from Jagannath Temple like lunch. Prasad will reach every ashram of Puri for dinner. How many devotees (pilgrims) come to take food offered to the deity? Twenty thousand to eighty thousand pilgrims—or maybe more—eat the prasad which will always be the perfect amount. How does this happen? What kind of miracle is this for us? We are left to think and wonder. ■

## THE PERSON WHOM I ADMIRE MOST

By Sandra T.

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*Our family is sincerely grateful to your Literacy Council organization for the great work you do for people! You helped us a lot with learning English. These were very interesting and exciting lessons!*

A little story about us. We are a large family from Ukraine who came to the United States by God’s will. When the war started, we lived in the epicenter of hostilities, in the city of Kyiv. We miraculously managed to get out of there to the city of my childhood. Then we decided to go abroad for the safety of our children.

We lived in Belgium for a year, and when God said to go to America, we had no idea how it should be, because we had neither finances nor friends in the United States. But God gave us a family of sponsors from Maryland, who together with their church in the city of Walkersville. The Walkersville Community Church (WCC) paid our way and took care of our safe flight here. Pastor Tim F. and his wife Beth became like our own parents. The “New Life” church also helped us a lot. Pastor Abe and Sue and her husband Larry took care of us like our own children. God has given us many



time of our stay in the beautiful city of Frederick. Our children really liked the English language, locality, beautiful landscapes.

We are very grateful to God for this path He is leading us on. It is an extremely difficult path, when you must flee your home country at night to the

sound of gunshots, sitting in basements day and night, because it is dangerous to go outside, then taking your children by the hands, grabbing your documents and running to nowhere, explaining to the children that they hear the sounds of fireworks, instead of detonating bombs... And then going to a foreign country, where the language is unfamiliar, there are no friends, no relatives, no money, no things...

God has done many miracles in our lives personally. When I was pregnant for the first time, my gall bladder burst after six months of vomiting. A serious infection of the body occurred and my organs failed. I was in intensive care for a long time. The doctors did not give me or my daughter a chance for life. And when the situation worsened even more, the doctors declared the death of the child in me. They said that she had to be taken away from me, because she had died. But they could not operate on me again, because I had a very serious condition. They waited three days for my condition to improve. My mother, friends and church prayed to God for our lives. And a miracle happened. When the doctors examined me again, they heard a very weak heartbeat of the child! God resurrected our daughter Yelyzaveta!

Also, when I became pregnant for the second time, the doctors told me to have an abortion due to my health condition, because it was very dangerous to carry a child and give birth. But I decided that if God allowed this life to take shape, then he would allow our daughter to be born. I was under the intensive supervision of a doctor for all nine months. And at the appointed time, our second daughter, Anna, was born by caesarean section.

This is also a great miracle of God, because if I had been scared and listened to the doctors, my daughter would not be here now.

It was also a great miracle when God gave us the promised son Eleazar 12 years ago, God said that I would give birth to this beautiful child. And it happened now, here, in America. God gives life for our son Eleazar!

I want to appeal to everyone who will read our story. If you have bad times in your life, there will be difficult hopeless situations, but you can always count on the help of God Himself. Only He can change your circumstances, no matter how difficult they may seem. Just ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart, into your life, into your circumstances and help you. You don't have to wait for a better time to turn to Him. Come to Him as you are! In such situations, in which you are now. And He has all the power to change your life for the better.

He is the Lord. He rules the whole universe. He is your Creator. No one else loves you as much and knows you as perfectly as He does! He is waiting for you to lift your eyes to Him and call out to Him! Even if you don't have the strength to whisper these words, just say this short prayer in your thoughts: "Jesus Christ! I accept You as my Lord and Savior.

And do not doubt, He will hear your sincere prayer and come into your life. And it will become beautiful and healed, complete, without sinful addictions and pain. Even if you have lost everything in life, but there is only a small hope for salvation, remember that the Lord can restore all that you have lost. Frydrykh family from Ukraine, with love.

"And the Lord will be a stronghold for the oppressed, a refuge in times of adversity" (Psalm 9:10). ■

## MY FAVORITE FOOD

By Sandra T.

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Usually, I like to eat everything. I prefer healthy products because I am a nursing mother. I also monitor my health and the health of my family. My favorite dish is Greek salad. I think it is a healthy food because it consists of healthy products such as black olives, fresh cucumbers, tomatoes,

feta cheese, olive oil, green onions, red peppers, and croutons without spices. In Ukraine, I made this salad every week. Here in America, I often treat my American friends to this dish. I believe that people should take care of their health and eat useful and healthy food. ■

## OUR STAY IN BELGIUM

By Sandra T.

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When the war started in Ukraine, we were forced to go to Belgium. We lived there for a while. It was a beautiful time. We really liked Belgium, its architecture, nature, and people.

I especially remember how we used to go to the farmer's market every Monday, which sold foods brought from France and from different provinces of Belgium. It was located not far from our house, on the central street of our city. There was always a smell of fresh baked goods and fruit. It seemed that people came from all over Belgium to this market to have time to buy the freshest fruits and vegetables.

I also miss the time when we could just get on a train and be in the French city of Lille in 30 minutes. We lived very close to France, so we went there almost every weekend. We walked around the city and went to our favorite pastry shop, where we bought a French meringue cake. This is probably the most delicious cake we have ever eaten in our lives.

One day before Christmas, we saw a huge fair in these streets with a street performance of a musical orchestra. People had fun and danced. It was very interesting and enjoyable. ■

# A NEW CHAPTER IN THE UNITED STATES

By Siham A.

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*I'd like to say thank you to the Literacy Council volunteers who help students improve their English. It's a good thing they're there to help people who can take English lessons. We are very lucky. I'm going to continue improving my English and above all I hope to be able to move to another country to try a new language experience.*

As I write this, I've been in United States for three months. It's not my first time in U.S. I already came on holiday. Why am I here?

I was born in Algeria (North Africa), but I grew up in France. I am 26 years old. I have a bachelor's degree. Before I came in U.S., I was a sales manager in a big company in France.

Since I was young, I dreamed of becoming a flight attendant. I am someone very curious, I love learning about new cultures, new religions, and meeting new people. English is very important if I want to be a flight attendant.

I studied English at school, but I was very bad. I start to learn English two years ago by myself. I used to travel so I can practice my English and meet new English speakers. In 2023, I spent four months in Dublin, Ireland. This city is lovely, but their accent is not easy. It is nice to understand and to listen. After this experience in Ireland, I decided



to go to the United Kingdom, but I changed my mind because the British accent is very nice, very “sexy” but I prefer American accent, it is easier to understand American people

That's why I am here. Some days it's not easy to learn a new language. I mean it is very exhausting! Yet I must focus on my purpose. I need to think of my goals. Overall, my English has improved, and I can be proud of me. ■

# LOSING LILY

By Tatiane R.

*I am Tatiane. I am a person passionate about reading, knowledge, and communication. Reading makes me experience new sensations, self-knowledge, and intellectual development. I earned my bachelor's degree in pharmaceutical science in Brazil. Now living in the United States, I started my pathways to becoming a pharmacist. The Literacy Council of Frederick County has been helping me in this search for knowledge to learn the English language.*

It was the summer of 1995! I was fifteen years old. In Brazil when girls turn this age, we have a debutante party. You danced a waltz with your father, grandfather, older brother, and a boy that intended to date you. The party is an amazing moment in girls' lives. My grandfather used to give me a lot of gifts, simple ones, but for him all of them represented something in his life. Objects are not just objects for me, they represent something in my life too.

My grandfather gave me a necklace as a debutante party gift. But it was not any necklace! It was a piece of jewelry that belonged to my great-grandmother.

I did not know her. My grandfather told me a lot of stories about his mother, by the way... interesting stories! She was a remarkable woman: strong, smart, meticulous, adorable, and an amazing cook. She was able to raise all her children alone, while my great-grandfather fought in the Second World War.

At that time, my great-grandfather



sent me a gold necklace that belonged to her. The pendant was a Calla lily which meant perseverance, strength, and power for him, like my great-grandmother was in her life. My grandfather was a first child, and for this reason my bisnonna (great-grandmother in Italian) gave the necklace to him.

During my debutante party, my nonno (grandfather in Italian) gave me the jewelry as a gift to me. He told me about all the stories from it. I was so glad! I have a twin sister and an older sister, and he chose me to keep the family's stories moving on. Oh! I have no words to describe exactly what I felt in that moment...but I will try to do it. It was as if all the cells in my body were full of happiness like what happens right after we eat sugar.

The next week, I went to the social club in my hometown. My friends and I loved going there to play volleyball, swim, and take a sauna. I was using the Lily (necklace's name) and showing it to everyone there. I told all my girlfriends about how my nonno had given me the gift. Right after, we jumped in the pool and the unexpected happened...I lost Lily! The swimming pool was Olympic-sized. I went to talk to the

cleaning staff to ask when the pool would be vacuumed. Also, I dived several times trying to find Lily. I had dived not only into a deep pool, but I had also dived deeply into the desire to find my bisnonna and everything she represented in my grandfather's life, and that somehow, he found in me too. I Lost Lily! That was as if I had lost my grandfather and all the trust and confidence, he gave me with this gift. ■

## SLEEPING BEAUTY

By Tatiane R.

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*Once upon a time, a beautiful girl lived with her parents inside a castle. She was being raised to be a princess. Her house was amazing! There are a lot of rooms and bathrooms in it, and people working to make everything go well. Her life was supposed to be very comfortable. She was so kind and adorable, that any prince would fall in love with her. Blond, tall, blue eyes, lovely voice...under the concept of beauty for many, the princess was perfect! Concepts are particular, aren't they?*

The king and queen were concerned parents and they protected their daughter a lot. The protection is like a poisonous snake, in the right dosage it turns into a medicine. However, if you get an excessive dose, it can be extremely dangerous for your life. But the preservation of their beautiful girl had a justification: an evil witch had placed a curse on the girl. If the princess got hurt and bled, she would fall into a deep sleep that could only be awakened by true love.

Fearful, the princess' name, grew up scared of everything. She

pushed herself in a blind life just to be protected from a curse, just to be protected by her parents from a wicked woman. Even all those concerns about Fearful, the chance that she would have an issue was too high. Yes, it was!

Life can be good or bad. It can hurt you a lot, otherwise it can make you grow a great deal, if you are not hiding yourself from a wicked witch! The king and queen made plans about Fearful, but all of them came down at the same moment that the princess hurt herself, because she thought she would like it. She lived in the darkness and putting herself in danger was a way to avoid real life.

Princess Fearful, learned that every time we feel afraid or want to protect ourselves from life, we can get hurt, bleed, fall into a deep sleep, and that someone who is supposed to be your true love will come to save us. However, true love comes within us and what saves us is our self-love. It can bring the princess and us to real life, facing our fears and ourselves. And you, my dear reader, what makes you fall into a deep sleep? ■

# EASTER CAKE

By Tetiana B.

*I am Tetiana B., and I am 48 years old. After the outbreak of war in my home country, Ukraine, I came to the United States with my daughter. Making this decision was very difficult for me due to my lack of knowledge of English. For almost thirty years I worked in Ukraine as a correctional teacher at a school for children with disabilities. Communication and speech, the ability to find the right words have always been my strong point. I taught and educated, explained, and helped to develop, supported, calmed, and motivated... After moving to the United States without knowing the language, I felt limited in many life opportunities. Therefore, I strive to learn English as quickly and efficiently as possible, so that I can freely understand people, talk about my thoughts, feelings, desires, and share knowledge and experience. Professional, patient, friendly employees and volunteers of the Literacy Council of Frederick County have been helping me with this for a year and a half. Now my main goal is to achieve the required level of English proficiency so that here in America I can do my favorite thing: teach children with disabilities.*

Probably my favorite food is Easter cake. This is a holiday sweet bread (known as Kulich). It is prepared in the spring, once a year, for Easter. A good, tasty Easter cake is the pride of every housewife. My mother-in-law taught me how to cook it. There is a sign: if the cakes turn out well, then the year will be successful. First, you need to



prepare the dough. To do this, mix flour, yeast, sugar, a little salt, eggs, soften the butter, and add the milk. Then the dough is thoroughly mixed until smooth. You can add raisins

and candied fruits. To make the cake especially flavorful, you can add rum, lemon zest, or vanilla extract. Next, the dough is left for a certain time so that it rises. When the dough has risen, it is mixed again and placed in a cake pan. Now the cake needs to be baked in the oven. Each housewife decorates Easter cakes in her own way. Housewives coat many dishes

with egg white whipped with sugar and sprinkle with colored sugar peas. Easter cakes are made large, medium, and very small for children. I often cook something from yeast dough, but only Easter cakes have such a unique taste. Kulich is not just a sweet delicacy, it is a family tradition, part of the culture that is passed down from generation to generation. ■

## THE STREET OF MY HOMETOWN

By Tetiana B.

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The central street of my hometown, Sumy in Ukraine has a unique history and atmosphere. It is in the historical center of the city; therefore, it is rich in architectural monuments. This is a favorite place for walks for all residents. Everyone can find something for their soul here. There are cathedrals and churches, a cinema and a dramatic and musical comedy theater, a children's creativity center, and a stadium. The

ancient buildings house local history and art museums. There are shops, restaurants, and cafes along the street. On the large area of this street, all major city holidays are organized. In winter, a central Christmas tree is erected. In summer, there are international festivals of military bands, concerts of artists, and shows. I really love this street! ■

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